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Muslim Yeshiva or Hebrew Madrasa? The Muslim Leadership Initiative

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Religious Studies

by

Jessica Lee Rehman

June 2022

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Melissa Wilcox, Chairperson

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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For Leena and Shelly ...

you are the light at the end of all my tunnels!

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Muslim Yeshiva or Hebrew Madrasa? The Muslim Leadership Initiative

by

Jessica Lee Rehman

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Religious Studies

University of California, Riverside, June 2022

Dr. Melissa Wilcox, Chairperson

This dissertation is the result of four years of ethnographic research with the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI). MLI is a network of North American Muslim leaders who engage with North American and Israeli Jews to learn about Judaism, Jewish peoplehood and the centrality of Israel to Jewish peoplehood. This engagement violates the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) call to action to end the occupation of Palestine. MLI seeks to find an alternative pathway to advocate for Muslim minorities living in Western contexts as well as continue support and allyship of the Palestinian fight for self-determination. MLI and its participants have adopted and internalized certain aspects of their Jewish education that they hope to implement within their own local, national, and transnational Muslim communities. Additionally, MLIs and the Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI) that hosts this Jewish learning program, both engage racialized parallel logics that betray an oppressed oppressor mindset that reinforces white supremacist ideologies. MLIs, through their advocacy efforts to fight Islamophobia are problematizing racial structures by claiming a whiteness sought through intra-Muslim

Arab supremacy. This white adjacency is a rejection of the racialization of religion imposed by Islamophobia. MLI's racialized maneuverings take different gendered forms as women MLers navigate intra-Muslim patriarchy and Western patriarchal structures. The ways women MLers are pushing back against these dual patriarchies sheds light on how gendered, racialized religious minorities are trying to obtain full social citizenship within the North American contexts they have chosen to call home.

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Introduction: The Tie that Binds

Stuck, trapped. Barbed wire.... metal turnstiles, locked, flashes of Nazi death camps, of being in the sorting lines, nowhere to go, can't breathe. Why won't they unlock the gates? They have my passport and the Mokdan¹...under special protection of the Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., thanks for nothing Michael Oren. They did warn us, they did say al-Khalil is where all hope dies. Can't breathe... stop pointing your M16s at us, at me....eighteen-year-old, in full camouflage military gear, you could be one of my students back home, but you are here in Hebron, pointing a gun at me. There are so many of you, only twenty of us, but I am one of you too, how can you do this, just buzz us through the gate. It's my hijab isn't it, should I take it off, let them see, maybe I can help get us through, or it might upset them. I don't know what to do.

These are but a few of the thoughts that furiously ran through my mind when I visited Hebron during my first Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI) trip to Palestine/Israel in 2017. It was my first time in Israel, and I was there as a Muslim scholar and activist.... I always thought I would come to Palestine as a Jew. Such mixed feelings, how to explain? I am Jewish, or I was Jewish, but I am still a Jew, a half Jew anyways, Jew

¹ A Mokdan alludes to security check procedures initiated by Israeli host entities and institutions. Before travelling to Israel, companies, corporations, and institutions in Israel that are hosting foreign travelers, initiate an extensive security check for their foreign guests by submitting the guests' national credentials. After successfully passing these security checks, each foreign national is electronically messaged with a printable certificate that each traveler must print and carry with them at all times upon departure to Israel. The Mokdan does not exempt anyone from undergoing security checks at Ben Gurion Airport or while in Israel. It is meant "to ensure that you receive special attention from the security management." This disclaimer is printed on the document itself. I have not included an image of the Mokdan I received as it would violate security protocols. Obtaining a Mokdan signals to the security services that you have already passed multiple security checks done by the Israeli government and prompted by a trusted Israeli entity that is responsible for you while in country. Mokdan's are not easy to get, and usually involve a lengthy negotiation process between the host entity and Israeli Security Services.

enough to be thrown in the camps. But life took some twists and turns, I needed some answers, and I found Islam, so I converted at the age of nineteen. Fast forward almost twenty years and I am a Muslim activist fighting Islamophobia, a rape scholar trying to stop sexual violence, and an auntie helping to raise two Jewish children, my now ten-year-old niece and four-year-old nephew. And I was stuck, stuck behind the partition gates in al-Khalil at al-Haram al-Ibrahimi (the Ibrahimi Mosque, the cave of the patriarchs, the Sanctuary of Abraham, Me'arat ha-Machpelah). Why won't the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) let us through? We just want to get to the bus. Two and half hours later the twenty of us finally made it through the gates. On the other side of the gates, thirty feet or so up the road stood our bus; you could hear our silent sighs of relief. As we turned towards the bus, the fifteen or so IDF soldiers started shouting at us, "Stop, stop, no, no, not that way, you must go this way, this way." We were herded to the right, made to walk completely around the other way, all the way around the sanctuary. Escorted by those fifteen IDF soldiers, casually pointing their M16s at all of us, we eventually made it to our bus. We were given no explanation as to why we were made to walk the other way around, there were no signs, no instructions, no reasons any of us could see. It was simply because the eighteen-year-old power drunk IDF soldiers could, and so they did.

Needless to say, choosing to be part of MLI was a serious decision. My family remains Jewish, and I keep my Muslimness to myself when in that familial reality. I go for Jumma prayers, celebrate Eid with my adopted Pakistani friends and family, who always introduce me with a tag line, "Yes she is White and a fake blonde, but inside she

is Desi, and she is Muslim, so she's ok, don't worry." I always find this hilarious, but I get it. So I'm an Ashkenazi Muslim and a Jewish Desi! I grew up with Holocaust survivors, witnessed their terrible flashbacks, listened to their stories. The Holocaust was and is a tremendous part of my Jewish identity as it is for most Jews including the Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI), the host institution for the MLI program. The prevalence of the Holocaust within Judaism and my own identity formation process has clearly driven my scholarly interests, as I am a genocide studies scholar as well as a rape scholar. I had dreams about the camps as a kid, which is a common phenomenon among Jews.²

During my youth, Conservative Judaism was very Zionist. Making Aliyah,³ going on heritage trips, writing letters to the Israeli Defense Forces, thanking them for maintaining and fighting for our real home where we would be safe, was all part and parcel of being an American Jew. "Assimilation is the next Holocaust," "Marry a nice Jewish boy and have at least three children so that the Jewish population grows" "Must support Israel no matter what, otherwise there will be no safe place to go when they come for us again." God is in there a little, traditions and rituals ever-present, but survival was always the real message, and our survival was directly tied to Israel's. This survival messaging was and is not unique to me, but pervasive within the global and transnational

² Janet Jacobs, "The cross-generational transmission of trauma: Ritual and emotion among survivors of the Holocaust," *Journal of contemporary ethnography* 40, no. 3 (2011).

³ Aliyah is the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to the Land of Israel. Making Aliyah is one of the most basic tenets of Zionism.

Jewish community and is directly reflected by the SHI pedagogy taught through the MLI program. “The Arabs are attacking us again, they won’t let us live in peace, they want to wipe us from the face of the planet. Palestinians treat our land like crap, throwing trash all over, living like animals. Muslims everywhere hate the Jews, so you can’t trust them. Be afraid, be on your guard, don’t be loud about being Jewish...they hate us.” The message was very clear and continuous: “Be smart, be quiet, be afraid, and survive so you can give us Jewish babies.” Arabs, Palestinians, Muslims.... all are our existential enemy; they hate us just for existing and so we must protect ourselves from them. I was indoctrinated with this fear of Arabs, Palestinians, Muslims; it was a fear that was constantly reinforced, but I didn’t know who or where Arabs, Palestinians, Muslims were, save for our Moroccan Israeli Jewish neighbors, but they weren’t Arabs, they were Jews. Even then, it was my Italian American converted mother who taught them about Judaism, because they didn’t have a clue. This irrational, unfounded hatred fueled by fear I was supposed to feel for Arabs, Palestinians, and Muslims never sat well with me. My discomfort was echoed by my fellow Muslim MLIs as they navigated and digested the Jewish and Zionist logics conveyed by the course materials and pedagogy of MLI’s host institution SHI.

After I converted to Islam, I experienced the very same blind hatred and fear embedded within the South Asian and Arab Muslim communities in the U.S. as well as Morocco, Turkey, and Cambodia. Slight slips of the tongue degrading historically Jewish medinas, conspiracy theories about how the Jews were responsible for 9/11...the list goes on and on. But just as I had never known any Arabs, Palestinians, or Muslims before, my

Muslim communities had never met a Jew either. There were baseless fears of the unknown on both sides, so much so that even in Southern California, which hosts large communities of Jews and Muslims, many have managed to avoid ever setting eyes on one another. Please do not think I am making light of these hatreds and fears.... On both sides, people willingly die and kill because of them. This existential fear and hatred embedded in both the global Jewish and Muslim communities make dialogue between both groups difficult at best and more pervasively non-existent. In the U.S. these tensions become more strained as anti-Semitism and Islamophobia remain deeply entrenched within the U.S. American Christian psyche. In the midst of this reality, the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI) was born. MLI is an educational program founded in 2014 by a Turkish Muslim American Imam living in North Carolina and an Ashkenazi New York Jew who is an Israeli journalist and retired IDF soldier currently living in Jerusalem. MLI is hosted by an Israeli and American Jewish institute (SHI) that indoctrinates/educates Jewish clergy, youth, and the Israeli Defense Forces about Jewish history, peoplehood, and religiosity. I was part of the fourth cohort, which was formed in 2016 and consisted of twenty other U.S. American Muslim leaders. MLI aims to teach U.S. American Muslims about global Jewry, Judaism, peoplehood, and the place Israel holds in the collective Jewish consciousness. The mandatory educational components of the MLI program consist of two two-week trips to Palestine/Israel and attendance of the two semi-annual retreats, each lasting three to four days, which occur between the two trips to Palestine/Israel. Upon completion of these mandatory components MLIers have access to a plethora of continuing learning experiences offered by SHI. These continuing learning

experiences consist of lectures, podcasts, workshops, conferences, and formal and informal discussions with other MLI cohort members and SHI instructors and hosts based in Jerusalem and New York. Each cohort engages in a one-day orientation, where they meet the other members of their cohort who will be travelling with them throughout the entirety of their MLI journey. My cohort met in late 2016 for orientation, and then embarked on our first trip to Palestine in 2017. We attended the two semi-annual retreats, the first hosted in New York, and the second in Washington D.C. in 2017. As we rang in the New Year in 2018, my cohort boarded our flights to head to Palestine for our second two-week trip.

A primary component of MLI is that the MLI founders, Imam Abdullah Antepli and Yossi Klein Halevi, do not consider MLI as a traditional interfaith dialogue program. This is due to the founders' mutual assertion that traditional Jewish-Muslim interfaith dialogue efforts fall short of engaging the Israel/Palestine conflict in any meaningful way. Different from many interfaith dialogue programs, MLI is a one-way learning experience. Muslims agree to undergo an education in Jewish and Zionist curricula. To be clear, the MLI program does not include any Islamic curricula for Jewish SHI instructors and hosts. Perhaps most interesting of all, participation in MLI constitutes a violation of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement, which currently holds a monopoly on U.S. and global advocacy efforts in and on behalf of Palestine.⁴ These realities inform the main questions and arguments I offer in this project.

⁴ Sriram Ananth, "The politics of the Palestinian BDS movement," *Socialism and Democracy* 27, no. 3 (2013); Lev Topor, "The Covert War: From BDS to De-legitimization to Antisemitism," *Israel Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2021).

BURNING QUESTIONS

This project, in its infancy, aimed to ask questions about the status and state of U.S. American Muslim women. Like many ethnographic projects, my field site and informants dictated and displayed far more pressing concerns and questions, which included my initial questions, but far exceeded the initial scope. As such, this project reflects the questions, concerns, and agendas expressed by MLers themselves and revealed through my analysis of the interactions and encounters I experienced and observed during my time in MLI. The following are some of the burning questions that guide my analysis in this project.

Failure of Interfaith Dialogue

This project sheds light on a group of influential U.S. American Muslims who participated in a Jewish educational program with the agenda of learning from the Jews how to be successful as a racialized religious minority. The Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI) is a group comprised of North and primarily U.S. American Muslim leaders not necessarily recognized within Muslim American institutions or by non-Muslim organizations, but part of an unofficial American Muslim activist network. This group is composed of moderate to left-leaning U.S. American Muslims, as opposed to mainstream conservative organizations that have long dictated ideal Muslim practices, identities, and community relations, such as the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and other mainstream U.S. American Muslim organizations detailed elsewhere. This is not to say that this group of U.S. American Muslims only exists on the periphery of their respective communities, nor that they have never been or are not members of mainstream U.S.

American Muslim organizations. In fact, these American Muslims are part of this group because they are important voices within their communities. One of the primary goals of MLI is to educate Muslims about Jews and Judaism. As stated, the education within MLI is one way and top down. MLI centers around educating Muslims about Judaism, but does not involve education for Jews about Muslims or Islam. This setup is the result of frustration with previous attempts at interfaith dialogue, which aims to foster understanding between peoples of different religions but shies away from the hard questions.⁵ The hard questions within the context of Muslim-Jewish engagement include the Israel/Palestine conflict and Islamophobia and anti-Semitism as they manifest intra-communally, inter-religiously, and are hegemonically externally imposed. Imam Abdullah's frustration with interfaith dialogue was evident in his repeated criticism that Jewish-Muslim interfaith dialogue never goes any further than rallying around benign similarities in diet, such as an affinity for hummus, and religious patriarchal overtones about how all of us are the children of Abraham.⁶ Imam Abdullah and many MLIs hope that by engaging in a program structured without a dialogue component, which educates Muslims about the importance of Israel to Jewish peoplehood, that these new Jewish

⁵ Sarah Markiewicz, "Interfaith on the World Stage: Much Ado About Nothing?," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 16, no. 3 (2018); Serena Molina, "A Study of NewGround—A Muslim Jewish Partnership for Change: An Ethnographic Analysis of Interfaith Dialogue at a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)" (CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE, 2021).

⁶ Daniel S Brown, *A communication perspective on interfaith dialogue: living within the Abrahamic traditions* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, George Chryssides, and Usama Hasan, *People of the Book: An Interfaith Dialogue about how Jews, Christians and Muslims Understand Their Sacred Scriptures* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018); Marcel Poorthuis, *Rituals in interreligious dialogue: bridge or barrier?* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020).

knowledges will somehow unstick the stalled interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Jews in Israel/Palestine and in U.S. American contexts. A main goal of this project is to illustrate the multiple contexts that motivated the founding of a program like MLI, and what MLI's existence demonstrates about local, national, and transnational Muslim-Jewish communal engagement.

Islamophobia

MLI was forged in the fires of Islamophobia; as such, one of the main questions I ask in this project is how MLI is both the result of Islamophobia and a response to this oppressive structure as it manifests in local, national, and transnational contexts. Muslims on a global scale are navigating Islamophobia in ways that reveal the localized processes of becoming social citizens within Western contexts.⁷ For MLIsers these processes of becoming are occurring within the local and national landscape of U.S. America. Sexual politics is at the forefront of these processes on a transnational scale. The frontline engagement of Islam with sexual politics in U.S. America is playing out on a global stage due to an international rise of Islamophobia and religious nationalism. How Muslim communities extend and retract inclusion of ideas and peoples based on gender and sexuality is often the measure of where Muslim communities appear to be in their process of becoming trustworthy citizens in our 'civilized' world. MLI's existence is indicative of these Muslim efforts to achieve national belonging and to gain access to U.S. American halls of power. Access to halls of power is an SHI phrase used to describe Jewish success

⁷ Saher Selod, "Citizenship denied: The racialization of Muslim American men and women post-9/11," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015).

in U.S. America. MLIers have internalized this understanding of success through the Jewish education they undergo via their participation in MLI and their interactions with SHI instructors and hosts in Israel/Palestine and the U.S. These processes of becoming are driven by socio-national structures that dictate acceptable individual and collective identity. As Jasbir Puar notes after 9/11 in response to hate crimes against turbaned Sikh men, assumed to be Muslim, Sikh communities across the United States “went to exacting pains to enact a performance of allegiance to the nation, one bolstered by the display of heteronormative model minority ideals.”⁸ Puar points out that these performative acts of allegiance are typically assimilative, but self-preservationist. This project presents a unique opportunity to probe the intersections of Muslim identity, sexual politics, national belonging, and transnational gendered human rights.

Muslims in the U.S. are negotiating their national belonging through sexual politics, no doubt as a strategy to combat the often-hurled criticisms that Islam is inherently anti-modern and incapable of gender egalitarianism. Current research in U.S. America shows that some mainstream Muslim institutions are opening their doors to cisgender, gay men, as well as offering public platforms for hijabis that fit a particular mold.⁹ This is a demonstration of Muslim Americanness, in an effort to subvert Islamophobic sentiments centered on accusations that Islam and Muslims are inherently

⁸ Jasbir K Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times* (Duke University Press, 2018).

⁹ Timur Yuskaev and Harvey Stark, "The American 'ulama' and the public sphere," in *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West* (Routledge, 2022); Miriam F Elman, "Islamophobia," *Israel Studies* 24, no. 2 (2019).

sexist and homophobic.¹⁰ This loosening of exclusionary boundaries is admirable, and it appears that cisgender gay Muslim men and mainstream Muslim institutions,¹¹ largely controlled and run by heterosexual Muslim men, have found a way to bridge their differences, primarily through bonding over maleness and masculinity.¹² This is further evidenced by the policing of Muslim femininities within mainstream U.S. American Muslim institutions.¹³ As many of the female MLers expressed, this effectively allows “Islam” to bypass women’s rights issues within the Muslim community, while continuing on their journey of becoming U.S. American through the acceptance of the right kind of “gay Muslim” man and the right kind of Muslim woman. Again Puar’s discussion of Sikh communal responses to post-9/11 turban attacks becomes relevant. These Sikh communal responses seek to address the education of ignorant U.S. Americans about Sikhism, and how they are not Muslims, not terrorists, “functions as a rite of initiation and assimilation

¹⁰ Anjali Arondekar, "Border/line sex: Queer postcolonialities, or how race matters outside the United States," *interventions* 7, no. 2 (2005); Alisa Perkins, "Muslims at the American Vigil: LGBTQ Advocacy, Faith, and Public Mourning," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 36, no. 4 (2019).

¹¹ Mainstream Muslim American institutions include: Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), Muslim American society (MAS), Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), Fiqh Council of North America, and Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV). These are the organizations that are labeled and identified by my informants as mainstream American Muslim institutions and organizations that govern the public Muslim arena in U.S. America.

¹² Deniz Kandiyoti, "The paradoxes of masculinity: Some thoughts on segregated societies," in *Dislocating masculinity* (Routledge, 2016); Roxanne L Euben, "Humiliation and the political mobilization of masculinity," *Political Theory* 43, no. 4 (2015); Lahoucine Ouzgane, *Islamic masculinities* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008); Gul Ozyegin, *Gender and sexuality in Muslim cultures* (Routledge, 2016).

¹³ Linda Sarsour, *We are not here to be bystanders: A memoir of love and resistance* (Simon and Schuster, 2020).

into U.S. heteronormative citizenship.”¹⁴ As a new wave of sexual politics is washing over the West, U.S. American Muslims are engaged in this assimilatory heteronormative American display. This process appears inclusionary; however, under the surface it maintains the sex-gender binary, conforming to heteronormativity that buttresses patriarchal mentalities and structures that impede efforts towards gender egalitarianism. All this under the banner of fighting Islamophobia while simultaneously trying to gain access to U.S. American halls of power. Essentially, MLers are seeking to be legible in ways that signal a communal internalization of Western values because they feel this is the most direct and advantageous route to ending Islamophobia. My analysis shows that many MLers, interestingly, primarily the women MLers, believe one route to ending Islamophobia is the implementation of Muslim pluralism, a concept internalized and adapted from the Jewish tenets and pedagogy taught through MLI. MLers have observed intra-Jewish dynamics of solidarity and inclusion, regardless of differences of opinion and/or level of religious observance; this is what SHI instructors and hosts term Jewish pluralism. MLers associate Jewish pluralism with Jewish success, primarily in how Jews navigate and maintain access to halls of power within the U.S. American landscape. For Jews, as expressed by SHI instructors and hosts, obtaining, and maintaining access to halls of power is how the global and transnational diasporic Jewish community combats anti-Semitism and ensures Jewish survival. MLers, through their contact with Jews as well as their internalization of SHI knowledges, parallel these strategic Jewish communal

¹⁴ Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*.

behaviors in an effort to combat Islamophobia and ensure Muslim existence within Western contexts. The goal of implementing Muslim pluralism is also an MLI response to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement and how the BDS movement gatekeeps Palestinian advocacy efforts while also silencing dissenting voices. While many supporters of BDS are more than happy to ostracize those critical of the movement's tactics and/or corruption, MLers are seeking a way to build a Muslim pluralism that can house all Muslim voices. In short, MLers, through their mimesis of Jews, are discouraging infighting in order to build an inclusive solidarity that combats Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

MLI-SHI Parallelisms & Internalizations

My research illustrates MLer navigations of social hierarchies that render Muslims (and Jews) as a racialized religious minority. These navigations betray some of the overarching racist, sexist, and Christian-centric logics that dictate and necessarily limit the terms of engagement for any oppressed person in the U.S. I show that these oppressive logics have been internalized by MLers and how these internalizations impact intra-group dynamics and interreligious engagement. My analysis sheds light on the futility of using racist, sexist, and xenophobic logics to maneuver towards success in the U.S. and transnationally.

Interestingly, this futility reveals itself within the context of the Israel/Palestine conflict, and the significance it holds for Jews and Muslims globally. Palestinians and Israelis alike are hampered by genocidal logics that vilify anyone seen as outsider or other. This demonstrates some of the flawed logics that contribute not only to the

ongoing Israel/Palestine conflict, but additionally reveal intra-group mentalities of both Israelis and Palestinians that malign one another as the perceived "enemy." The perpetual inability to solve this conflict, especially since the advent of the nation state of Israel, illustrates the tragic reality that oppressed peoples cannot fully achieve liberatory social mobility when their status relies on the oppression of others. Although Jews remain an oppressed community globally, Zionist Jews, such as SHI instructors and hosts, have internalized oppressor logics, evident in Israeli state policies towards Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims. Therefore, my research and analysis expose parallel oppressor logics that SHI Jews and MLI Muslims have both internalized. MLI is further emblematic of the failures and successes of pluralism in the U.S. That Muslims are willing to sit at the table with Jews and learn about Zionism, for many MLI participants, is akin to engaging in legibly U.S. American multicultural values. However, as my analysis divulges, despite all these efforts to be successfully 'American' and to be 'successful' in 'America,' Muslims (and Jews) in the U.S. are never accepted as fully, normatively 'American.' This is due in equal parts to the racialization of these peoples in a White-dominant milieu, and the marginalization of these religions in a Christian-dominated society.

Advocacy efforts on behalf of Palestinian self-determination and intra-Muslim sexual politics are important aspects of some MLI maneuverings that signal a reinforcement of U.S. American democratic values and offer an opportunity to uncover how national belonging is accomplished or unobtained.¹⁵ In the case of minorities,

¹⁵ Michael T Rock and Soli Ozel, "Democracy, development and Islam," in *Research Handbook on Democracy and Development* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021).

specifically Muslim communities who, on principle of religious pluralism and democracy, are due a seat at the table, this project unearths collective stratagems that aim to gain and maintain access to U.S. American halls of power and social citizenship. I show how MLers negotiate for a seat at America's table by engaging in racialized and gendered politics of respectability that posture ideals of inclusion yet reinforce the patriarchal orders entrenched within U.S. and transnational contexts.¹⁶

Why Join Up?

Why would Muslims willingly participate in a program that not only violates BDS but also exposes Muslims to an intensive and one-way Zionist education in Israel? This is in part due to the fact that MLI hinges on the mutual impression between Jewish SHI instructors and hosts and Muslim MLI participants that Jews have been successful in diaspora as a religious minority in the U.S. Muslim MLers and SHI Jewish instructors and hosts envision diasporic Jews, especially in the U.S., as a model community, while simultaneously acknowledging their outsider status and the limits that status places on access to halls of power.

To date, no official insider research has been conducted within MLI. This is primarily because of the highly confidential nature of participation in MLI. Violating BDS within Muslim communities has grave consequences; this has been demonstrated by the backlash for the few MLers who have outed themselves or been outed as MLI

¹⁶ Margot Dazey, "Rethinking respectability politics," *The British Journal of Sociology* 72, no. 3 (2021); Sylvia Chan-Malik, *Being Muslim : a cultural history of women of color in American Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

participants. The stakes for Muslims who choose to participate in MLI are quite high as the program and all its affiliates are embroiled in local, national, and transnational conversations that engage debates about genocide. This project certainly does not presume to undertake the entirety of the Palestine/Israel conflict or minority status of Jews and Muslims in the U.S. Instead, I offer a rare insight into the internal logics of a variety of intersectionally oppressed communities, and some of their failures and successes in grappling with their own histories, oppressions, and activisms.

The following project is “what I saw happen” within MLI. Observing and participating in MLI was and is like watching my two worlds, my pasts and present, my personal and academic worlds repeatedly collide and smash each other to bits—it’s a Muslim Jew girl being corralled by Israeli soldiers who behave like Hitler Youth, it’s the marginalization and ejection of Brown Desi women because they are too Desi, too Brown, and too Muslim—these are the communal twists and turns taken by religious minorities with the hope of becoming and belonging. Overall, my mother the convert, and her three perceived half-breed daughters, were the best Jews I knew, but in truth, no matter what we did, we would never be Jewish enough. Too Jewish to escape the camps, too Muslim to be American, too American to be a real Muslim, these are the socially imposed conditions in which I sit. These inner conflicts mirror the strife and contempt between Jews and Muslims globally, as well as the internal fractures within the American Muslim Ummah.¹⁷ It is these fractures that this project aims to understand.

¹⁷ Ummah refers to a community bounded by Islam.

MY ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

MLI and its participants are a small example of how Muslims in the U.S. are navigating to obtain access to U.S. American halls of power. It appears that caught in between mainstream U.S. American society and mainstream American Muslim society is MLI. Amidst these symbiotically oppressive American, Muslim, and American Muslim structures, women in MLI navigate their environments in interesting ways: by pushing back against the multiple patriarchies staking claims to their bodies, minds, and futures. The MLIs I engaged with for this project are part of a loosely organized local, national, and transnational activist network and are recognized and self-describe as leaders within their respective Muslim communities. The information and analysis presented in this project was gathered over a period of approximately four years of fieldwork. This project is multi-sited, taking place in several U.S. American regions, Israel/Palestine, as well as online. The fieldwork included an orientation day in late 2016 to prepare for the two two-week trips to Palestine, one in early 2017 and the other in early 2018, semi-annual retreats hosted between and after the trips to Palestine in either Washington D.C. or New York, several meetings and events in Southern California, and multiple online learning sessions.

To maintain confidentiality, my findings are presented in the form of composite identities. These composites draw attention to patterns, paying homage to the importance of community within U.S. American Muslim lives, without detracting from the individuality and uniqueness of the participants. All aspects of these identities are representative of a total of approximately 150 participants across all cohorts and

including MLI leadership. Of these 150 participants, approximately twenty participants are part of my specific cohort. To maintain confidentiality, all identifying respondent information has been changed. Additionally, respondent identities are protected by the construction of composite identities, which represent no single person.¹⁸ The composite identities ensure the integrity of the collected data without risking the identification of any one person. The following is a list of the public members of MLI as well as composite characters and their relevant biographic and demographic information. Public members of MLI are those members who have chosen to make their affiliation and participation in MLI public, while the composite characters are compilations of members who have chosen to keep their participation in MLI confidential.

Composite Characters

Abbas is a first-generation Pakistani U.S. American and a professor emeritus of engineering who lives in the U.S. American South. He is approaching seventy and visibly Brown. He is married and has four adult children.

Alper is a first-generation Turkish U.S. American Muslim affiliated with the Hizmet Movement. He is a full professor at a prominent West Coast university in the Humanities and Social Sciences. He is White passing, in his mid-forties, and divorced with two children.

Aminah is in her early thirties and a second-generation U.S. American Muslim Pakistani from Texas. She is a hijabi, visibly Brown, and married with children.

¹⁸ Jennifer MJ Yim and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, "Composite actors as participant protection: methodological opportunities for ethnographers," *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* (2021).

Amir is a second-generation Pakistani U.S. American from the U.S. American South. He is in his early thirties, recently married, and a new father. He is visibly Brown and works as an engineer.

Badiyah is a second-generation Pakistani U.S. American Muslim who lives in the U.S. American South. She is approaching her forties, a hijabi, visibly Brown, and married with two children. Badiyah is also an attorney specializing in family and contract law with political aspirations.

Fawad is a second-generation Pakistani U.S. American in his early forties. He is visibly Brown and lives on the East Coast with his wife and two children.

Gamila is a visibly Brown Arab U.S. American Muslim hijabi. She is approximately forty years old, recently divorced, second generation Egyptian Muslim living in the Midwest and has no children. Gamila is heavily involved in advocacy for victims of child sex abuse and sexual assault within her U.S. American Muslim community.

Ibrahim is a third-generation Black U.S. American Muslim and the only Black member of my cohort. He is approaching his forties and is divorced with two children. He resides on the East Coast, holds a Ph.D. in African Studies and is an assistant professor at an ivy league university.

Ismail is the only Palestinian Muslim, who significantly, is half Palestinian and half European. He is a first-generation Arab U.S. American, White passing Muslim. Ismail is an attorney, in his forties, married to Nasreen, and lives in the Midwest with her and their three children.

Jalal is a first generation Punjabi Pakistani U.S. American who self-identifies as a secular Muslim, meaning a cultural Muslim not a religious Muslim. He is visibly Brown, in his mid-thirties, and lives on the West Coast with his wife and two children.

Javed is a first-generation Pakistani U.S. American Muslim in his mid-forties. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science. He is a well sought-after consultant and analyst who is extensively published. He is White passing, married with two children, and resides in the Midwest.

Kamillah is an ivy league tenured professor in the social sciences. She is a visibly Brown first-generation Pakistani U.S. American Muslim who resides on the East Coast. She is divorced, recently remarried, and mother of one.

Khalil is a first-generation Pakistani U.S. American Shia Muslim. He is in his mid-thirties, grew up on the West Coast, but currently resides on the East Coast. He is White passing, depending on his shaving frequency, has never been married and has no children.

Laila is a first-generation Turkish U.S. American Muslim affiliated with the Hizmet Movement. She is a hijabi that would be White passing if she did not wear hijab, is in her mid-twenties, never been married and has no children. She currently lives on the East Coast.

Manahil is a first-generation Pakistani U.S. American Muslim woman approaching her sixties. She lives in the U.S. American South where she is the top medical administrator of a world-renowned university hospital, at which she is also a practicing physician. She is White passing, married, and has four adult children.

Nadine is a White, freckled, red-headed convert to Islam from the U.S. American South. She is in her forties, divorced, and has one adult son. Nadine converted to Islam when she was nineteen years old, comes from a very poor background, and is still economically struggling.

Nasreen is a White passing first generation South Asian U.S. American Muslim hijabi. Nasreen is in her early forties and married to Ismail. They live in the Midwest, have three children, and are both highly engaged in social justice work.

Sarah is a U.S. American White convert in her early fifties who has marriage ties to the Hizmet Movement. She is a director of a large East Coast based interfaith organization. Sarah is married and has no children.

Yasra is a South Asian Brown Muslim woman. She is approximately forty years old, a first-generation Pakistani immigrant, and a California transplant from Texas. Yasra is visibly Brown and often mistaken as Indonesian or Malaysian. She is not a hijabi, has never been married, and has no children.

Yazmine is a first-generation Bengali U.S. American Muslim who lives in the U.S. American South. She is visibly Brown, married, and recently became a mother.

Yousef is a first-generation Pakistani Canadian in his late twenties. He is visibly Brown, unmarried, and has no children.

Public Members of MLI

Imam Abdullah Antepli is the Muslim founder of the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI). He is a first-generation Turkish American and although not a member of Hizmet himself, is indirectly affiliated with Hizmet through his family ties who still live

in Turkey. Imam Antepi is in his mid-forties and seemingly White passing. He is married and has children. Imam Antepi is Chief Representative for Muslim Affairs and adjunct faculty of Islamic Studies at Duke University. He is on the faculty at both Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy and Duke Divinity School, where from 2008-2014 he served as the university's first Muslim chaplain, one of only a handful of full-time Muslim chaplains at U.S. colleges and universities. He was recognized in 2019 as one of the most influential Muslims in U.S. Higher Education.¹⁹

Haroon Moghul is a second generation visibly Brown Punjabi Pakistani U.S. American Muslim born and raised in New England. He is a published political commentator and writer. He comes from an affluent socioeconomic background; his father is a retired orthopedic surgeon, and his late mother was a physician. He has one older brother who is an attorney. He is approximately in his early forties, divorced, and has no children. He is the author of several books: *My First Police State* (2003), *The Order of Light* (2006), *"Prom, InshAllah," in Salaam, Love: American Muslim Men on Love, Sex, and Intimacy* (2014), *How to Be a Muslim: An American Story* (2017), *Two Billion Caliphs: A Vision of a Muslim Future* (2022).

Rabia Chaudry is a visibly Brown first generation Pakistani-American Muslim lawyer, famed host of the podcast *Serial*,²⁰ and a New York Times best-selling author for

¹⁹ Paul Clolery, "Special Report: NPT Power & Influence Top 50 (2019)," *The Non Profit Times* (August 12, 2019 2019). <https://www.thenonproffitimes.com/report/npt-power-influence-top-50-2019/>.

²⁰ Kelli S Boling, "True crime podcasting: Journalism, justice or entertainment?," *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media* 17, no. 2 (2019).

her book *Adnan's Story: The Search for Truth and Justice After Serial* (2016).²¹ She is the powerhouse attorney behind the Adnan Syed re-trial.²² She has been a fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace and the New American Foundation. She is founder and president of the Safe Nation Collaborative, a project that offers education on Islamic faith, dialogue between law enforcement and Muslim communities, and countering violent extremism. Rabia is in her late forties, a hijabi, divorced and remarried with several children.

Wajahat Ali is a visibly Brown Pakistani-American Muslim lawyer, journalist, and playwright. He frequently appears on television and podcasts for his insightful political commentary. Born in the Bay Area, California to Pakistani immigrant parents. He graduated from UC Berkeley with an English major and became a licensed attorney. His essays, interviews, and reporting have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and *New York Review of Books*. Ali has spoken at many organizations, from Google to Walmart to Princeton University to the United Nations. He is married with three children.

Yossi Klein Halevi is the Jewish founder of the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI). He is a senior fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. Halevi is a Brooklyn born and raised Ashkenazi Jew whose father survived the Holocaust. Halevi is

²¹ Rabia Chaudry, *Adnan's story : the search for truth and justice after Serial*, First St. Martin's Griffin Edition. ed. (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2019).

²² Adnan Syed is a Pakistani American Muslim who lived in Baltimore and was convicted of first-degree murder in the year 2000 for the alleged killing of his ex-girlfriend. He has been in prison, made countless appeals, with his lawyers, including Rabia Chaudry working towards a re-trial. Tucker Higgins, "Supreme Court won't give Adnan Syed new trial in 'Serial' podcast murder case," *CNBC* (2019). <https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/25/supreme-court-wont-give-adnan-syed-new-trial-in-serial-podcast-case.html>.

a former disciple of political extremist Rabbi Meir Kahane. In 1982 Halevi made Aliyah to Jerusalem.²³ He worked as a journalist and is now a writer and lecturer. Halevi also served in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) after making Aliyah. He is approximately seventy years old, married with three children, and living in Jerusalem, with a view of the security barrier wall from his backyard. He is the author of several books: *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist: The Story of a Transformation* (1995), *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden: A Jew's Search for God with Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land* (2001), *Like Dreamers: The Story of the Israeli Paratroopers who Reunited Jerusalem and Divided a Nation* (2013).

Each participant was formally interviewed twice, each interview lasting anywhere from one to two hours. I used the questions below as the starting point for these face-to-face interviews, which each MLer participated in. These formal sit-down interviews aimed to uncover individual and group perceptions about the confrontations experienced during the MLI program and the motivations, impacts, and hopes that initiated their interest in the MLI program, inform their current perceptions, and affect their future goals. In future chapters when I refer to interviews with my informants it is these sit-down face-to-face interviews, which evolved into dynamic conversations, that I am referencing. Each respondent was asked the following questions:

1. What is the state of American Muslim women in the country right now, within and outside the American Muslim community?
2. Where do you see yourself within the community? Outside the community, in the broader American context?

²³ Yossi Klein Halevi, *Memoirs of a Jewish extremist: an American story* (Little Brown & Company, 1995).

3. How and what goals is your activist work striving towards?
4. What is most important to tackle right now?
5. Where do you think you and your community are headed?
Converging? Diverging?
6. How would you describe “progress” for American Muslim women?

The answers to these questions led to an open conversation that lasted approximately four years, about where MLers see themselves and women within their respective communities. In addition to formal sit-down interviews, the data I compiled include personal conversations via text, email, and face-to-face interactions and group discussions via WhatsApp and Zoom. To review, face-to-face communications include an initial orientation day in late 2016, both two-week trips to Israel/Palestine in 2017 and 2018, and semi-annual three-day retreats between 2017 and 2020. In the case of personal interviews I recorded our dialogue with verbal consent from the subject, but did not record any identifying information. I also kept handwritten notes about daily activities and interactions occurring at retreats and trips to Palestine. I include much of this data in Chapters 2 and 3 that respectively review and analyze the Jewish pedagogy presented to MLers while in Israel/Palestine and MLer reactions, rejections, and internalizations of this curriculum. The pedagogical materials we received in Israel/Palestine, which are detailed in Chapters 2 and 3, are non-copyrighted fair use materials distributed freely to MLers, and are compilations of source materials from Jewish religious and national literature. When notetaking was not possible, such as during our day-trip to Hebron in 2017 while in Palestine/Israel, I captured photos and images that act as a visual archive. Additionally, my fellow MLers shared their own photos documenting their happenings and experiences during these trips, and which I utilize as part of my visual archive.

Images that I share within this dissertation have been included with full consent from my informants and do not reveal any confidential information. After compiling and transcribing all of these data sources, I searched the materials for key words and themes, employing an intersectional lens that brought to the surface concerns about race, gender, class, color, ethnicity, and nationality. I enjoyed unfettered access to MLI participants within my cohort and members of other cohorts that were willing participants in my research. I want to be clear that the voices in this project are but few among many in relation to the entirety of the U.S. American Muslim Ummah, and all participants seamlessly voiced that they are in no way speaking monolithically on behalf of U.S. American Muslims and/or Muslim women. They are simply expressing their perspectives from their lived positionalities. That being said, the informants in this study offer profound and meaningful insights into how some gendered, racialized religious minorities navigate multiple oppressions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Racialization of Muslims

This project broadly explores the racialization of religion within the U.S. American context, specifically focusing on the racialization of Muslims, and the particular effects this racialization has had on MLIs and the local, national, and transnational communities they serve.²⁴ The racialization of Muslims is directly tied to

²⁴ Valérie Amiraux and Pierre-Luc Beauchesne, "Racialization and the Construction of the Problem of the Muslim Presence in Western Societies," in *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam* (Routledge, 2020).

the rising sentiments of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.²⁵ Within many circles race and religion are often treated as separate.²⁶ This is clearly demonstrated through MLier reactions to SHI's pedagogy that describes Jews as both a race and a religion. I elaborate on MLier confusions surrounding the intersections of race and religion in future chapters. In that vein, recently, there has been a call for a deeper theorization of race and religion.²⁷

One method of doing this is employing an intersectional lens to gain a more accurate understanding of minority experiences.²⁸ This call is in part a response to the barrage of scholarship produced after 9/11 about Muslims in U.S. America that largely ignores the racial dimensions of Islamophobia.²⁹ This kind of scholarship collapses all Muslims into a monolith, which reinforces Islamophobic mentalities about Muslims as the terrorist Other.³⁰ Similarly, immigration scholars have approached U.S. American

²⁵ Selod, "Citizenship denied: The racialization of Muslim American men and women post-9/11."

²⁶ William W Maxwell, "Race and religion: the elixir of separation," *CrossCurrents* (2007).

²⁷ Gerardo Martí, *American blindspot: Race, class, religion, and the Trump presidency* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019); Malory Nye, "Race and religion: Postcolonial formations of power and whiteness," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 31, no. 3 (2019).

²⁸ Louise Cainkar and Saher Selod, "Review of race scholarship and the war on terror," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 4, no. 2 (2018); Christopher M Driscoll and Monica R Miller, *Method as identity: manufacturing distance in the academic study of religion* (Lexington Books, 2018); Kimberlé W Crenshaw, *On intersectionality: Essential writings* (The New Press, 2017).

²⁹ Erik Love, "Islamophobia: The Racial Paradox and the Racial Dilemma," *Political Theology* 21, no. 5 (2020); Nazita Lajevardi and Kassra AR Oskooii, "Old-fashioned racism, contemporary islamophobia, and the isolation of Muslim Americans in the age of Trump," *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 3, no. 1 (2018); Andrew Shryock, *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: beyond the politics of enemy and friend*, Indiana series in Middle East studies, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

³⁰ Louise Cainkar, "Fluid terror threat: A genealogy of the racialization of Arab, Muslim, and South Asian Americans," *Amerasia Journal* 44, no. 1 (2018); Asena Karipek, "Portrayals of Jihad: A Cause of Islamophobia," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020).

Muslim communities through an assimilationist model that measures success in tandem with integration.³¹ This approach contends that Islam is a barrier to complete integration into mainstream North American and European society. Throughout this kind of scholarship, religion and race are treated as separate, and racialized structural barriers meant to prevent said integration are ignored.³² MLers display an internalization of the separateness of race and religion. This is demonstrated through MLer confusion surrounding the status of Jews as both a religion and a race as well as intra-Muslim MLers' bewilderment concerning their own racial identities.

More thorough scholarship incorporating race and Muslim experiences can be found across several disciplines. These include anthropologist Junaid Rana's interrogation of the global racial system made visible by tracing the transnational experiences and treatment of Pakistani laborers. Rana states, "...the Muslim is understood not only as a totalized biological body but also as a cultural and social entity constructed within a number of discursive regimes, including those of terrorism, fundamentalism, patriarchy, sexism, and labor migration."³³ Cultural anthropologist Nadine Naber approached the war on terror as a racial project, shedding light on how the

³¹ Richard Alba and Nancy Foner, *Strangers no more: Immigration and the challenges of integration in North America and Western Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

³² Cainkar and Selod, "Review of race scholarship and the war on terror."

³³ Junaid Rana, *Terrifying Muslims: Race and labor in the South Asian diaspora* (Duke University Press, 2011).

racialization of Arab identity encompasses the intersections of race, religion, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship.³⁴

The research and analysis I present in this project joins this important scholarly conversation that approaches race and religion as intertwined identity categories. The layered complexities of race, religion, and the racialization of religion are confounded by MLI participants as they move through Jewish pedagogy and histories while concomitantly processing and applying those logics to their own identities, individually and collectively. This is to say that, for MLers, as for many racialized religious minorities, religion does not neatly map onto race.³⁵ MLers' confusion about race and religion is two-fold: they are confused about how their Jewish comrades qualify as a race and a religion, and they are confused about how they themselves as Muslims fit into racialized schemas.³⁶ In conjunction with these dynamics, gender identity further problematizes raced and religioned identity formation processes.³⁷ The preeminent location of race is the body, whereas the primary location of religion, as influenced by

³⁴ Nadine Naber, "The rules of forced engagement: Race, gender, and the culture of fear among Arab immigrants in San Francisco post-9/11," *Cultural Dynamics* 18, no. 3 (2006).

³⁵ Herbert J Gans, "Racialization and racialization research," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 3 (2017).

³⁶ Nasar Meer, "Racialization and religion: race, culture and difference in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia," *ibid.* 36 (2013/03/01 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.734392>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.734392>; Nuray Karaman and Michelle Christian, "'My Hijab Is Like My Skin Color': Muslim Women Students, Racialization, and Intersectionality," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 6, no. 4 (2020).

³⁷ Sabrina Alimahomed-Wilson, "The matrix of gendered Islamophobia: Muslim women's repression and resistance," *Gender & Society* 34, no. 4 (2020).

Western Enlightenment thought, is rooted in belief.³⁸ This Christian-centric understanding of religion as faith and belief divests religion from the body and embodied experiences. Race and the experiences of racism are inherently rooted in the body as the concept of race is dependent on outsider perceptions of physical characteristics, traits, and skin color.³⁹ The notion that religion can be tied to the body and embodied experiences, which conjoins race and religion within the physical body, is contrary to embedded Western values.⁴⁰ Scholarship that addresses the racialization of religion and the religionization of race is an effort to acknowledge and understand that religion and race are conceptually intertwined and that both are experienced by and through the body. This project is an addition to that effort, specifically to shed light on the embodied experiences and responses to Islamophobia and anti-Semitism as racialized religious violence.⁴¹ Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are often oversimplified as a fear of Muslims and Jew hatred; however, this oversimplification ignores the multiple oppressive structures that work in tandem to buttress racialized religious violence. In order to stop

³⁸ Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David, and Dominic Thomas, *The Invention of Race: Scientific and popular representations* (Routledge, 2014); Mariam Rawan Abdulla, "Culture, religion, and freedom of religion or belief," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 16, no. 4 (2018); Thomas M Franck, "Is Personal Freedom a Western Value?," *American Journal of International Law* 91, no. 4 (1997); Peter L Berger, "Pluralism, protestantization, and the voluntary principle," *Democracy and the new religious pluralism* (2007).

³⁹ Gargi Bhattacharyya, John Gabriel, and Stephen Small, *Race and power: Global racism in the twenty-first century* (Routledge, 2016).

⁴⁰ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁴¹ Haim Bresheeth, "Zionism, Islamophobia and Judeophobia in Contemporary Europe and Beyond: Realities and Propaganda," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 17, no. 2 (2018).

these violences, each of these contributing oppressive structures must be dismantled. Specific to this project, MLI offers interesting insight into the creative ways some Muslims and Jews are navigating these structures in order to grapple with their own oppression in the multiple arenas they inhabit.

Queer theorist Jasbir Puar's contribution of the conceptual frame of *homonationalism*—an analytic used to illuminate how the acceptance and toleration of queer subjects is a metered standard that signals the license to and readiness for national sovereignty⁴²-- cannot be overstated. Puar's apt assertion that the incorporation of queer persons into the national fold is premised on the condition of their participation in racializing Muslims, Sikhs, and Arabs to frame them as an existential threat to both the nation state and White queer persons is an amazing demonstration of the current sexual politics being played across the globe.⁴³ Puar explains that homonationalism has gone global, "...as it undergirds U.S. imperial structures through an embrace of a sexually progressive multiculturalism justifying foreign intervention."⁴⁴ This dissertation is in line with Puar's work, as I examine how some U.S. American Muslims are playing these very same racialized sexual politics, hoping to signal their readiness for complete incorporation into to the U.S. American milieu. Puar explains that within the context of queer communities, "homonationalism is fundamentally a deep critique of lesbian and

⁴² Jasbir Puar, "Rethinking Homonationalism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 2 (2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43302999>; Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*.

⁴³ Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

gay liberal rights discourses and how those rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to citizenship—cultural and legal—at the expense of the delimitation and expulsion of other populations.”⁴⁵ While Puar examines how the nation state and queer communities engage a sexual politics that hinges on racializing religious minorities, I interrogate the racialized sexual politics of MLers, as they are confronted with the ideals, status, and histories of another racialized religious minority, their SHI Jewish instructors and hosts. This sheds light on how minorities intra and inter-communally react to racialization within local, national, and transnational contexts. This expansion of Puar’s work applies her geopolitical scope to MLI, uncovering the intra-communal stakes of engaging racialized sexual politics to achieve socio-cultural citizenship.⁴⁶ I explore the costs and benefits of these racialized sexual politics for MLers in Chapters 4 and 5.

To provide more context for how I theoretically conceptualize race, an understanding that is echoed by many of my informants, I turn to some of the scholarly frameworks of race and racism. Common contemporary conceptualizations of race are inaccurately thought to have a specific timeline, arising out of the remnants of the Atlantic slave trade.⁴⁷ In contrast, sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant place

⁴⁵ Puar, "Rethinking Homonationalism."

⁴⁶ Selod, "Citizenship denied: The racialization of Muslim American men and women post-9/11."

⁴⁷ Katharine Gerbner, *Christian slavery: Conversion and race in the Protestant Atlantic world* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Justin Leroy and Destin Jenkins, *Histories of racial capitalism* (Columbia University Press, 2021); Devin Vartija, "Racism and Modernity," *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 7, no. 1 (2019); Annie Woodley Brown, "Racism and the Christian church in America: Caught between the knowledge of good and evil," *Social Work in Public Health* 34, no. 1 (2019);

the origins of race at the rise of Europe and the European colonization of U.S. America.⁴⁸ Omi and Winant's racial formation theory firmly places the conception of race and therefore racism at the moment of European supremacy. Their theory therefore suggests that religious bigotry occurring before that moment was a mere mock practice session of racial formation. In other words, for Omi and Winant, racism did not become systemically entrenched and crystalized until this moment in history. Thus Omi and Winant fail to account for race, racism, racialization, and racial formation processes present throughout pre-European supremacy histories.⁴⁹ Omi and Winant's racial formation theory captures the machinations and processes of racialization. I engage scholarly discussions concerning race and racialization through the inclusivity of religion and gender in conjunction with race, as all equal and simultaneously performed national identity components. Race and religion are inherently connected, and the racialization of Jews and Muslims predates settler-colonialism. This necessitates a more encompassing history of race and racism as existing in various forms, prior to colonialism.⁵⁰ Some of

Ryan Lavalley and Khalilah Robinson Johnson, "Occupation, injustice, and anti-Black racism in the United States of America," *Journal of Occupational Science* (2020).

⁴⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial formation in the United States* (Routledge, 2014).

⁴⁹ Andrew Wells, "Race and racism in the global European world before 1800," *History Compass* 13, no. 9 (2015); Izak JJ Spangenberg, "The religious roots of racism in the Western world: A brief historical overview," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019).

⁵⁰ Lindsay Kaplan, *Figuring racism in medieval Christianity* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2018).

these histories inform the raced and religioned identities of my MLer informants, who are the main subjects of this project.⁵¹

Sociologist James M. Thomas challenges racial formation theory and its pitfall of periodization through an examination of medieval Jewry, stating: “Most scholars still conceive of race as a post-Enlightenment ideology built upon the Atlantic slave trade, hinged upon observable phenotypical human differentiation... Yet, discourses of modern racism not only antedate the social taxonomies arising out of nineteenth-century scientific thought, but it was Christianity which provided the vocabularies of difference for the Western world, and even for secularized science.”⁵² In the same vein, I am in agreement with Sociologist Nasar Meer’s understanding of race, that “the category of race was co-constituted with religion, and our resurrection of this genealogy implicates the formation of race in the racialization of religious subjects.”⁵³ By unearthing this older pedigree of race, a precedent for the racialization of religious subjects was set, and thus this project inherits and continues this lineage, adding clarity to current religious racisms that are part of reconstructing race, and by continuously pointing out that race is always sexed, sex is

⁵¹ This is to say that the modern advent of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism is rooted in histories of racism that predate settler-colonialism. For more see Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the age of discovery* (Columbia University Press, 2000); James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (Columbia University Press, 2016).

⁵² James M Thomas, "The racial formation of medieval Jews: a challenge to the field," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 10 (2010).

⁵³ Meer, "Racialization and religion: race, culture and difference in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia."

always raced, and so forth.⁵⁴ This project sheds light on how religious subjects are attempting to reconstitute racial categories, in response to racialization, and as an effort to relocate themselves at the zenith of current racial hierarchies. In short, the hegemonic powers that be, and religious minorities, are both race-making.

With the understanding that the fabrication of race occurs within the racialization of religious subjects, we can move to how processes of racialization are being instituted, and more precisely, minority community responses to this racialization.⁵⁵ The constitution of race occurs through the process of racialization that is “a process of attribution which has been unfolding historically, and continues to unfold.”⁵⁶ By understanding that race is a product of racisms, realized through processes of racialization, we de-center race as the issue and correct a resulting tendency to focus on minority populations as the source of racialized enmity.⁵⁷ Instead, conceptualizing racialization as co-constitutive with race and racism focuses our attentions on racial processes that ascribe meaning to physical components in a way that infers a social

⁵⁴ Crenshaw, *On intersectionality: Essential writings*.

⁵⁵ Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, "Refutations of racism in the 'Muslim question'," *Patterns of prejudice* 43, no. 3-4 (2009).

⁵⁶ Tony Kushner, "Racialization and 'white European' immigration to Britain," *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice* (2005).

⁵⁷ Stephen Small, *Racialised barriers: The black experience in the United States and England in the 1980's* (Psychology Press, 1994).

psychological theory which elucidates the nature and kinetics of the process of race-making.⁵⁸ This articulation makes clear the inherent reciprocal binary of racialization.

Sociologist Robert Miles explains: “Racialization is a dialectical process of signification. Ascribing real or imagined biological characteristics with meaning to define the Other necessarily entails defining Self by the same criteria.”⁵⁹ This derivation of race and racialization addresses both theoretical and structural propensities, as well as their interplay, and its resulting facets that furnish institutional racism.⁶⁰ Sociologist Karim Murji offers an insightful historicization of the term institutional racism, tracing its origins to the Black Power movement in 1960s U.S. America, stating that members of the movement “introduced the term ‘institutional racism’ to account for attitudes and practices that led to racist outcomes through unquestioned bureaucratic procedures. They treated individual and institutional racism as comparable to the distinction between overt and covert racism. While individual racism could be seen and heard, institutional racism was a more subtle process that could not be reduced to the acts of individuals.”⁶¹ Conceptualizing racialization as we have reveals the unseen collective sentiments and attitudes embedded within our invisible structures that maintain institutional racism.

⁵⁸ Robert Miles, *Racism* (Routledge, 2004).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶⁰ Meer and Modood, "Refutations of racism in the 'Muslim question'."

⁶¹ Karim Murji, "Sociological engagements: Institutional racism and beyond," *Sociology* 41, no. 5 (2007).

Racialization adjusts the spotlight onto people, groups, and minorities who comprise the habitats of racial etchings.⁶²

The habitats of racial etchings for this project are broadly U.S. American Muslims and the internal activist networks, organizations, and leaders guiding U.S. American Muslim agendas. Specifically, the field site of this project is an insular and confidential Muslim leadership network, the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI). Within the confines of MLI I uncover several interrelated responses and reactions from MLIs as they engage with their SHI Jewish instructors and hosts. The interactions that occur within MLI as they are confronted by Jewish knowledges as well as other MLIs' understandings of these Jewish materials illuminates complex intra-Muslim and interreligious positionalities that grapple with race, racism, and racialization.

Interestingly, one way that MLIs grapple with issues surrounding their own racial identities is by claiming Whiteness, and displacing Brown and Black associations with Islam, as I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5 in greater detail. They bypass these racial minority statuses by claiming they are "White adjacent" and/or "White" and therefore not people of color. MLIs who claim Whiteness strategically use Arabness as a steppingstone to White privilege in an effort to gain access to U.S. American halls of power. They self-identify as White adjacent to expand the category of Whiteness and its privileges. More interestingly, it is not just Arab Muslims who are claiming Whiteness, but many MLIs who are ethnically South Asian and/or North African are opting into

⁶² Tariq Modood, *Multicultural politics: Racism, ethnicity, and Muslims in Britain*, vol. 22 (U of Minnesota Press, 2005); Meer and Modood, "Refutations of racism in the 'Muslim question'."

White adjacency to gain social citizenship. In many ways, the ethnicization/racialization of U.S. American Muslims is mirroring the ethnicization/racialization of Jews, which is clearly reflected within the racial dynamics of SHI and MLI. This parallel is realized in the Palestine/Israel conflict; just as SHI seeks to explain to MLIs the centrality of Israel within Judaism, so we see that Palestine is central to Muslim identity,⁶³ regardless of the racial or ethnic composition of Muslims, and the U.S. American Muslim Ummah in particular. Within this context of claiming White and White adjacency, other surging trends within MLI begin to make sense. These trends include the belief among Muslim clergy and leadership that divorce rates have skyrocketed, and the increase in interracial marriages, as well as support for a certain type of Muslim woman in the public arenas of politics and activism.⁶⁴

⁶³ Nicholas E Roberts, "Making Jerusalem the centre of the Muslim World: Pan-Islam and the World Islamic congress of 1931," *Contemporary Levant* 4, no. 1 (2019); Stewart Reiser, "Islam, Pan Arabism and Palestine: An Attitudinal Survey," in *Pan-Arabism and Arab Nationalism* (Routledge, 2019); Louise Cankar, "Palestine—and Empire—Are Central to Arab American/SWANA Studies," (Taylor & Francis, 2021); Khaled Hroub, "Palestinian Nationalism, Religious (Un) claims, and the Struggle against Zionism," *When Politics Are Sacralized: Comparative Perspectives on Religious Claims and Nationalism* (2021); Meir Litvak, "The Islamization of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: the case of Hamas," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 1 (1998).

⁶⁴ Julie Macfarlane, *Islamic divorce in North America: A Shari'a path in a secular society* (Oxford University Press, 2012); Nailah Dean, "The Hidden Racism of the Muslim Marriage Market: We Cannot Defeat Racism if We Continue to Allow Cultural Biases to Govern Who We Love or Who We Let Our Children Marry," *Al Jazeera* (San Francisco) August 20, 2020; Zareena A. Grewal, "Marriage in colour: race, religion and spouse selection in four American mosques," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 2 (2009/02/01 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870801961490>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870801961490>; Samana Siddiqui, "Divorce Among American Muslims: Statistics, Challenges & Solutions," in *Sound Vision Conflict & Divorce*, ed. Abdul Malik Mujahid (Chicago: SoundVision.com, 2009). <https://www.soundvision.com/article/divorce-among-american-muslims-statistics-challenges-solutions?page=1>; Ilyas Ba-Yunus, "How do Muslims in North America divorce," *Muslim family in a dilemma: Quest for a western identity* (2007).

Sexual Politics Within Muslim Contexts

Sexual politics is a complex arena inclusive of gendered power dynamics that manifest in the public sphere. I employ an intersectional lens conjoined with the theoretical and analytical tools present in sexual politics that draw attention to gendered identity-making mechanisms in both the private and public spheres, as they relate and operate within MLI. Sexual politics inherently problematizes what is public and what is private. Liberal feminism, starting in the mid-1800s, drew attention to the embedded discourse of gender within public spheres, using the doctrine of rights, given by citizenship, to demonstrate how the state's governance of public arenas was not neutral in its treatment of women, but rather a system dominated by cisgender heteronormative men and their patriarchal values.⁶⁵ Thus, agendas of correction spiral out from these notions: women must reclaim the public sphere, rights denied because of flawed citizenship must be corrected to gain full citizenship, and if public apparatuses are packed with men the course corrective response is to pack those apparatuses with women. As R.W. Connell iterates, "Liberal feminism has brought to the surface the suppressed truth that the state is gendered, and has used this truth to inspire a formidable and sustained politics of access."⁶⁶ Nonetheless, following this line of logic, patriarchy is an unhappy accident, seeing sexism as a baseless prejudice in the minds of men, that liberal feminists can

⁶⁵ R. W. Connell, "The state, gender, and sexual politics," journal article, *Theory and Society* 19, no. 5 (October 01 1990), <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00147025>, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00147025>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 513.

change. So the liberal feminist agenda can be boiled down to changing men's minds, whose sexism is born from ignorance, not from the collective self-interest of men.

While liberal feminists try to remedy sexism, radical feminisms are grappling with a social system, patriarchy. Patriarchy is a term loaded with baggage that has been much debated and criticized; however, patriarchy is the terminology that MLers, specifically women, tend to use when speaking about their own individual and collective oppressions. As a Western term, patriarchy has been peddled as a universality, and used as a neo-imperialist tool that exports and imposes "modern Western patterns of men's domination over women to the rest of the world and the rest of history."⁶⁷ If this connotation is abandoned, then patriarchy "is a serviceable term for historically produced situations in gender relations when men's domination is institutionalized."⁶⁸ Patriarchy as a social system, and not a false universality, ensures the entrenched social supremacy of men in the systems (social settings) we must navigate on a daily basis, such as the workplace and family, the dynamics of which are replicated over time by the seemingly routine functions of media, schools, and masjids/ synagogues/churches. Sexism is part of this institutionalization, but only a small component of the entirety.⁶⁹ I use the term patriarchy as part of an intersectional analysis with the understanding that there is not one patriarchy, but many patriarchies due to the varied experiences of oppressed persons and

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing patriarchy* (Basil Blackwell, 1990); Kalwant Bhopal, *Gender, 'race' and patriarchy: a study of South Asian women* (Routledge, 2019).

their multifaceted positionalities.⁷⁰ The effects of patriarchy cannot be collapsed, the lived variations of oppressed persons within patriarchal systems cannot be delineated as one Truth. One thing is made clear through all these critiques of patriarchy, and that is patriarchy is embedded in procedure, in how the public sphere functions. R.W. Connell highlights the importance of understanding the ways the state and patriarchy are fundamentally entangled, saying, “It allows us to acknowledge the patriarchal character of the state without falling into a conspiracy theory or making futile searches for Patriarch Headquarters. It locates sexual politics in the realm of social action, where it belongs, avoiding the speculative reductionism that would explain state action as an emanation of the inner nature of males.”⁷¹ My use of the term patriarchy here is to draw attention to how systems of social inequality intersect and synergistically maintain the status quo.

Some have nuanced the term patriarchy by separating it according to the public and private spheres, demonstrating how private patriarchy and public patriarchy may manifest differently, but are co-constituted and reciprocally sustain one another.⁷² I make no such distinction, as sexual politics is demarcated by anything having to do with sex, gender, and sexuality (often conceived of as private) being pulled into the public sphere. Connell’s definition of sexual politics is as follows: “Sexuality is part of the domain of

⁷⁰ Cynthia H. Enloe, *The big push : exposing and challenging the persistence of patriarchy* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017).

⁷¹ Connell, "The state, gender, and sexual politics."

⁷² Sylvia Walby, "From private to public patriarchy: the periodisation of British history" (paper presented at the Women's studies international forum, 1990).

human practice organized in part by gender relations, and 'sexual politics' is the contestation of issues of sexuality by the social interests constituted within gender relations. 'Gender politics' is a broader term embracing the whole field of social struggle between such interests."⁷³ The specificity with which Connell attributes the "sexual" in sexual politics to the meaning of sexuality is perhaps dated, and so I do not hold with Connell's specificity. Sexual politics could be defined as an arena comprised of the interplay of gender relations and state/public dynamics. "The state as an institution is part of a wider social structure of gender relations."⁷⁴

The ambiguity of "sexual politics" and/or "gender relations" reflects the social ambiguity of sex, gender, and sexuality, their differentiation from one another, and their interrelatedness. Thus sexual politics is a catchall term for anything having to do with sex, gender, and sexuality in the public sphere, and this is how I use the term throughout this project. I use the term "sexual politics" because the large swathe of my field site does not acknowledge the difference between sexual politics and gender relations/politics and they collapse those distinctions. Sex segregation in Islam as well as activist efforts to subvert some of these norms and be inclusive of non-normative sexes, genders, and sexualities both operate in the same framework.⁷⁵ This framework collapses sex with gender and presumes heterosexuality and cisgenderness as the normative or at least

⁷³ Connell, "The state, gender, and sexual politics."

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Toseef Azid and Jennifer Ward-Batts, "Dimensions of Women Empowerment and Gender Inequality: A Muslim World Perspective," in *ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD: Theory and Practice* (World Scientific, 2020).

dominant identities and frameworks for the majority of Muslim communities. This is not to say that some Muslims are not critical of the sex/gender binary and patriarchy as they relate to sexuality; however, the vast majority of my subjects approach sex and gender as a singular identity component within the frameworks of mainstream U.S. American Islam. Sexual politics and all that it encompasses is the lens I use to honor and analyze the data compiled during the four years of fieldwork I conducted within MLI.⁷⁶

Sexual politics is inherently interdisciplinary, as is the approach I take in this dissertation. Some of the theoretical approaches I adopt in my analysis of the sexual politics at play in MLI include gender and sexuality, ethnic, and religious studies discourses. From gender and sexuality studies I adopt strategies both from the theories critical of gender essentialism within gender and sexuality studies proper as well as the field of women's studies, which envisions women as a political albeit dynamic and imperfectly constructed category. In line with Judith Butler, I operate under the assumption that just because a category is socially constructed does not make the sociopolitical effects of that category any less impactful.⁷⁷ Women remain an oppressed group and as a scholar of genocide, I am aware of the pros and cons of recognizing women as a distinct political category.⁷⁸ As I observed throughout my participation in

⁷⁶ Evren Savci, *Queer in translation: Sexual politics under neoliberal Islam* (Duke University Press, 2020).

⁷⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender trouble* (routledge, 2002).

⁷⁸ Deborah A Prentice and Erica Carranza, "What women and men should be, shouldn't be, are allowed to be, and don't have to be: The contents of prescriptive gender stereotypes," *Psychology of women quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2002); Carol Lee Bacchi, *The politics of affirmative action: 'Women', equality and category politics* (Sage, 1996); Bonnie G Smith and Nova Robinson, *The Routledge Global History of Feminism* (Routledge, 2022); Butler, *Gender trouble*.

MLI, although some members tried to be more LGBTQ-inclusive, the majority are cis- and heteronormative. In this project I am critical of patriarchy as oppressive to all non-dominant groups, including LGBTQ people and cisgender women. Gender and sexuality and women's studies is useful to this part of my analysis.⁷⁹ I further engage masculinity studies, which I also view as a subset of gender and sexuality studies.⁸⁰ Gender and sexuality, women's and masculinity studies intentionally decenter White, cisgender, heterosexual men, who have constructed the majority of our historical narratives.⁸¹ In this project I am critical of these narratives and use masculinity studies to frame my critique of patriarchy and dominant masculinities.⁸² My critical analysis employing these important nuances is driven by the lived realities of my informants who demonstrate through their experiences how their sex/gender and sexuality are ultimately defined against dominant masculinities that buttress systemic patriarchal values within the multiple arenas they inhabit. Importantly, many of my informants also show that by acknowledging the reality of these limitations they can find meaningful ways to subvert them.

⁷⁹ Sady Doyle, *Dead blondes and bad mothers: Monstrosity, patriarchy, and the fear of female power* (Melville House, 2019); Clementine Ford, *Boys will be boys: Power, patriarchy and toxic masculinity* (Simon and Schuster, 2019).

⁸⁰ Lucas Gottzén, Ulf Mellström, and Tamara Shefer, *Routledge international handbook of masculinity studies* (Routledge, 2019); Miriam Kurz, "Protectors, Statesmen, Terrorists? Gender and Masculinities in Muslim Texts and Contexts" (paper presented at the God's Own Gender?, 2018).

⁸¹ Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana, "Critical thinking about inequality: An emerging lens," in *Feminist Theory Reader* (Routledge, 2020).

⁸² Robert William Connell, *Masculinities* (Routledge, 2020).

Transnational Muslims

Critique of race as a social construct is also vital to this project, and I view race through the prism of patriarchy. I adopt critical race theory, which I perceive as a subset of ethnic studies in my approach to understanding race as a power structure.⁸³ I further engage ethnic studies which is similar to area studies, but instead of studying a particular area, in keeping with ethnic studies, in this dissertation I share my research on a particular group of minoritized people.⁸⁴ To that end, the primary locus of my research is not a geographical location, but a group of primarily U.S. American Muslims who are transnationally traversing real and imagined boundaries. Additionally, my research and theoretical analysis are essentially transnational. This is because MLI engages a group of U.S. American Muslim leaders that engage in transnational advocacy work, and who

⁸³ Robert L Reece, "Color crit: Critical race theory and the history and future of colorism in the United States," *Journal of Black Studies* 50, no. 1 (2019); Sina Saeedi and Elaine Richardson, "A black lives matter and critical race theory-informed critique of code-switching pedagogy," *Race, justice, and activism in literacy instruction* (2020); Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, "Critical race theory," in *Critical Race Theory (Third Edition)* (New York University Press, 2017); Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Critical race theory—What it is not!," in *Handbook of critical race theory in education* (Routledge, 2021); Edward Taylor, "A primer on critical race theory: Who are the critical race theorists and what are they saying?," *The journal of blacks in higher education*, no. 19 (1998); Michael A Peters, "Critical race matters," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36, no. 2 (2004); Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Twenty years of critical race theory: Looking back to move forward," *Conn. L. Rev.* 43 (2010); Caroline Mala Corbin, "Terrorists are always Muslim but never white: At the intersection of critical race theory and propaganda," *Fordham L. Rev.* 86 (2017).

⁸⁴ Ella Shohat, "Gendered cartographies of knowledge: area studies, ethnic studies, and postcolonial studies," in *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Duke University Press, 2006); Philip Q Yang, *Ethnic studies: Issues and approaches* (SUNY Press, 2000); Nolan L Cabrera, "Ethnic studies in an age of expansion: An introduction," (Taylor & Francis, 2019); Deen Sharp, "Difference as practice: Diffracting geography and the area studies turn," *Progress in Human Geography* 43, no. 5 (2019); Elliott C Child and Trevor J Barnes, "American imperial expansion and area studies without geography," *Journal of Historical Geography* 66 (2019).

through the MLI program gain first-hand experience of Israel/Palestine.⁸⁵ Moreover, the relationship between Muslims and Palestine, and MLI and Palestine/Israel, transcends the arena of area studies and necessitates attention to multiple communities in diaspora.⁸⁶

Furthermore, transnationalism is a necessary component to any study that engages the issues at stake in this dissertation in order to understand the structural and therefore global implications of racism, sexism, xenophobia, and patriarchy. I define transnationalism here as loose networks that cross national borders.⁸⁷ Part of the problem with a transnationalist outlook is that it legitimizes concepts of nation and nationality, and therefore nationalism. Nationalism often requires a monolithic worldview that supports a national supremacy that cannot allow for inclusionary social citizenship within and across national borders. This is to say that nationalism mandates a singular loyalty in order to maintain full social integration and acceptance.⁸⁸ This assumption replicates social

⁸⁵ Bren Carlill, "The One-State Solution?," in *The Challenges of Resolving the Israeli–Palestinian Dispute* (Springer, 2021); Cherine Hussein, *The re-emergence of the single state solution in Palestine/Israel: Countering an illusion* (Routledge, 2015); Ian S Lustick, *Paradigm lost: From two-state solution to one-state reality* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Jim Zanotti, *Israel and the Palestinians: prospects for a two-state solution* (DIANE Publishing, 2010); Cankar, "Palestine—and Empire—Are Central to Arab American/SWANA Studies."

⁸⁶ Ilan Zvi Baron, *Obligation in Exile: The Jewish Diaspora, Israel and Critique* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Neil Caplan, *The Israel-Palestine conflict: contested histories* (John Wiley & Sons, 2019); Ameer Fakhoury and Mohammed Khalaily, "Internationalizing the Status of the Arab-Palestinian Minority in Israel," *Israel and Its Palestinian Predicament*; Ayal K Feinberg, "Homeland Violence and Diaspora Insecurity: An Analysis of Israel and American Jewry," *Politics and Religion* 13, no. 1 (2020); James L Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: A History* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Ananth, "The politics of the Palestinian BDS movement."; Lisa Bhungalia, Jeannette Greven, and Tahani Mustafa, "The shifting contours of US power and intervention in Palestine," *Middle East report (Spring 290)* (2019).

⁸⁷ Thomas Faist and Başak Bilecen, "Transnationalism," in *Routledge international handbook of migration studies* (Routledge, 2019).

⁸⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Verso books, 2006).

hierarchies impacting one's positionality based on race, class, gender, and other social markers.⁸⁹ This apparent failure of transnationalism, the reinforcement of oppressive national identity politics, points towards questions about transnational and/or what I refer to as partitioned identity.⁹⁰ MLIers' transnational positionalities result in a misunderstanding about their perceived loyalties to U.S. America as their national home, because they engage in advocacy efforts on behalf of their diasporic 'homelands.' My understanding of diaspora, within an MLI context, is related to feelings of solidarity and kinship with those dwelling in their previous home country, not necessarily coupled with a desire to return to that home country.⁹¹

To be clear, the MLIers who are the subjects of this study, do not see their national loyalties to U.S. America as in contradiction with their advocacy efforts on behalf of those in other national contexts. They may not actually hold sentiments of national loyalty to their previous homeland.⁹² What they have expressed is an obligation and duty to advocate on behalf of those individuals and groups within other national contexts that do not have the privileges and status they personally enjoy as U.S. Americans. Thus we see a replication of the reality of transnationalism and its failures within MLI identity formation processes. Even so, transnational is a useful term to

⁸⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: a derivative discourse?* (Zed Books, 1986).

⁹⁰ Vijay Prashad, *The karma of Brown folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The souls of black folk* (Yale University Press, 2015).

⁹¹ Jonathan Grossman, "Toward a definition of diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 8 (2019).

⁹² Anne Norton, *On the Muslim question*, vol. 19 (Princeton University Press, 2020).

understand not only the physical boundaries and borders that MLers traverse, but also an apt description in terms of their mindset.

An additional component to understanding the MLI mindset, in terms of national loyalty, diasporic positionality, and transnational advocacy work, are MLers' understandings of pluralism. I understand pluralism in this context as a national ideal that posits that many different religious groups can exist within the same national borders while simultaneously engaging in a collective national identity.⁹³ Multiculturalism is similar to pluralism, but attempts to move away from pluralism's explicit ties to religions, and espouses that many different ethnicities and cultures can exist within the same national borders while upholding a cross-cultural national identity. Pluralism and multiculturalism, as ideals, are unobtainable goals, to be ever sought after but never fully achieved. Pluralism and multiculturalism remain elusive because they are essentially tied to assimilatory processes that indoctrinate diverse groups of people into a monolithic national identity, often replacing and erasing ethno-religious distinctiveness.⁹⁴ This is especially true for racialized religious minorities in the U.S.

This pluralist ideal is something most MLers completely embrace and is part of the driving force for their transnational advocacy efforts. They see pluralism as a U.S. American privilege that allows them to move through the world with a certain amount of

⁹³ Diana L Eck, "American religious pluralism: Civic and theological discourse," *Democracy and the new religious pluralism* (2007); Yvonne Yazbeck; Ricks Haddad, Robert Stephen, "Claiming Space in America's Pluralism," in *Muslims in Western Politics*, ed. Abdulkader H. Sinno (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁹⁴ Arjun Appadurai, "Multiculturalism And Dialogue in a Globalizing World," *Multiculturalism and Dialogue in a Globalizing World* (2013).

status. They hope to operationalize this advantage to advocate for other members of the global Muslim ummah who do not have access to the same entitlements.

TYING THE KNOTS...OR PULLING THE THREADS? AN OUTLINE

Through my ethnographic research in MLI and subsequent analysis, I have produced the following five chapters. My first chapter, “Enter MLI,” locates MLI within its local, national, and transnational contexts. I explain the scope MLI operates within, in relation to their SHI hosts and instructors, which encompass both SHI headquarter locations, New York and Jerusalem. MLI itself has no official headquarters and exists primarily but not exclusively in Israel/Palestine while MLiers undergo their mandatory Jewish education. MLiers are primarily located in their daily lives, in U.S. America. They belong to a number of overlapping organizations and institutions that operate locally, nationally, and transnationally. Given the multiplicity of these locales, I take time in Chapter 1 to unpack the multivalent positionalities of the members of my field site. As iterated above, my field site is not geographically anchored, though physical location is included in my analysis as MLiers enter, traverse, and exit multiple physical geographical locales. This chapter details the intra-Muslim gendered and racialized dynamics encountered by myself and my fellow MLiers during our orientation day. This detailed account of orientation day, which includes initial interactions between members of my cohort and MLI leadership, suffices as a foray into the complex identities and positionalities of MLiers. This acts as an introduction to the internal social dynamics present within MLI in relation to other U.S. American Muslim organizations, the transnational advocacy networks they are a part of, and MLier concerns about the risks

involved in their association with the MLI program. With the positionality of MLI in place I then turn to discuss the official MLI curriculum delivered during the two two-week trips to Israel/Palestine in 2017 and 2018.

My second chapter, “The Curriculum,” delves into the pedagogical materials compiled by the Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI) that compose the MLI curriculum mandatory for all participants during their initial thirteen months as an MLier. Additionally, I explain MLI’s unique structure, as a one-way learning experience, that is meant to transcend the stagnant and superficial confines of interfaith dialogue organizations and scripts. The course materials were engaged over the two two-week trips to Israel/Palestine in 2017 and 2018. I move through these curricula covering first how Israeli Jews understand democracy, their own collective diversity as Jews, and how these ideas relate to the nation state of Israel and Jewish pluralism. The curricula then address the centrality and importance of Jerusalem within the Jewish collective imagination, main precepts of Zionism, and modern Jewish dilemmas of power and powerlessness for Israeli Jews and diasporic Jews.

These above course materials were delivered within the first two-week trip to Palestine in 2017. I then detail the curricula delivered during our second two-week trip to Palestine in 2018, which focus on the following: Jewish responsibility for past violence within Israel/Palestine and the world, justice and compromise within the State of Israel, Zionism and minority rights in the State of Israel, and Arab Israelis in the State of Israel and the occupied territories. Through this examination of course materials, I demonstrate the extent and depth to which Zionism features as a common teaching topic in MLI, and

as SHI instructors suggest, this focus on Israel is central to Jewish identity for many if not most Jews.⁹⁵ My analysis of these curricula illustrates how SHI, and indeed many Zionist Jewish organizations argue that anti-Zionism and/or pro-Palestinian advocacy is an act of anti-Semitism and therefore an act of violence. By design, the curriculum and setup of MLI leaves Muslims voiceless, and subject to overtly Zionist agendas and materials that overlook Israeli state violence towards Palestinians, which is a reproduction of Nazi logics. The overt and covert agendas revealed through my analysis of these curricula serves to contextualize the Muslim MLier responses to these course materials and learning experiences collectively and individually, which I detail in Chapter 3.

In my third chapter, “Processing Sessions: Muslims Processing Jewish Pedagogy,” I detail MLiers’ acceptance, rejection, and internalization of the course materials and curricula, as well as their reactions to their lived experiences while in Israel/Palestine. My analysis shows that the culmination of this learning in conjunction with digesting the many confrontations MLiers experienced while in Israel/Palestine is a traumatic event for its participants. The combination of MLI curriculum, which asserts and conveys the primacy of the Holocaust within Jewish identity formation, and the Islamophobic provocations experienced by MLiers while in Israel/Palestine, illustrate the centrality of genocide embedded within MLI, SHI, and more broadly transnational and diasporic Jewish and Muslim communities. Through MLier encounters with SHI Jews and pedagogy, MLiers demonstrate how important the Palestinian fight for self-

⁹⁵ Judith Butler, *Parting ways: Jewishness and the critique of Zionism* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

determination and survival is to their own Muslim identities. This in turn mirrors the primacy that Palestine holds within transnational diasporic Muslim communities, as well as mirroring Holocaust centrality within Jewish identity formation.

We see MLers' frustrations as they are confronted by what they understand as an inherent Jewish contradiction; the importance of "Never Again" as a driving force for violent Israeli state policies that MLers perceive as Palestinian genocide.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, MLers also find great value in their Jewish learning, adopting and internalizing certain SHI doctrines that they find useful and hope to bring to their own local, national, and transnational Muslim communities. As we will see, one of these main doctrinal adoptions is that of Jewish pluralism. I demonstrate that MLers, through their mimesis of their SHI hosts and instructors, seek to create a Muslim pluralism that they hope leads to greater intra- and inter-communal acceptance and access to U.S. American halls of power. My analysis of these MLI processes reveals parallelisms between hegemonic SHI Jewish logics and Muslim MLer racialized positionalities within localized and global contexts. The remaining two chapters delve into these internalizations and how MLers accept, reject, and adopt parallel logics in racialized and gendered ways.

MLI, as it exists under the SHI umbrella, displays the racialized religious realities both Jews and Muslims must navigate as Islamophobia and anti-Semitism persist. My fourth chapter, "Color Lines," details the importance of race, racism, and racialization

⁹⁶ Yechiel Klar, Noa Schori-Eyal, and Yonat Klar, "The "Never Again" state of Israel: The emergence of the Holocaust as a core feature of Israeli identity and its four incongruent voices," *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 1 (2013); Eve Spangler, "Four Frames: Israeli Self-Defense, Genocide, Apartheid, Settler Colonialism: Ethnic Cleansing/Sociocide," in *Understanding Israel/Palestine* (Brill, 2019).

within the identity formation processes of MLers as they are confronted with Jewish racial logics and the racialized socio-cultural structures present within local, national, and transnational arenas. MLers are provoked by racialization within multiple contexts, such as Israel/Palestine as well as the U.S. American contexts in which their daily lives occur.

For MLers, and the broader global Muslim Ummah, the events of 9/11 catalyzed global Islamophobia, couching this prejudice in national security concerns about terrorist Islam. It is within this Islamophobic context that the majority of MLers came of age. While certain forms of Islamophobia pre-date the events of 9/11, current globalized Islamophobias present different and escalating challenges for Muslims living in Western contexts today. Chapter 4 details and analyzes the interesting and racialized ways MLers are navigating Islamophobic waters. I demonstrate how these navigations reinforce oppressive racial structures, and how MLers aim to expand certain racial categorizations which from some MLers' perspectives appear to unmake the racialization of their religion. The culmination of this analysis is that MLers, as leaders within a racialized religious minority, adopt White supremacist logics by claiming racial identities geared towards obtaining Whiteness.

To be clear, these maneuverings towards Whiteness, in order to gain access to U.S. American halls of power, are an attempt to survive within Islamophobic and White-dominant contexts. The conditions and positionalities in which this racial maneuver can exist are not open to all Muslims living in Western contexts. As we see within MLI, claiming Whiteness and/or its precursor Arabness, is limited by gendered and colorist presentations of self. Through the acceptance, rejection, internalization, and imposition of

White supremacist racial logics within MLI, we see interesting, meaningful, and varied efforts by MLIs that combat intra- and inter-Muslim colorism, racism, and sexism. Some of these efforts aim to create a Muslim pluralism, as well as help Muslims gain access to U.S. American halls of power. These endeavors desire to combat Islamophobia and advocate for not only themselves, but other minorities as well.

Throughout my time in MLI, I observed unique and impactful ways that many members of MLI negotiated and pushed back against hegemonically imposed oppressive structures. My fifth chapter, “Mimesis and Gendered Maneuverings: Building Muslim Pluralisms,” details the gendered racialized maneuverings occurring within MLI. More succinctly, I demonstrate how MLIs have internalized their Jewish learning experience by mimicking certain Jewish logics and strategies, namely the SHI concept of Jewish pluralism. MLI mimicry of the Jewish pedagogy and knowledges delivered by SHI instructors and hosts is rooted in shared perceptions of Jewish success within U.S. American contexts. SHI itself defines success as control over one’s individual and collective destiny, which SHI envisions as access to “American halls of power.” We see how this shared perception of Jewish success, and the opportunity to learn from such a successful racialized religious minority, is a main motivator for seeking and maintaining participation in MLI.

MLIs, through their engagement and subsequent mimicry of Jewish logics, hope to better advocate for racialized and gendered religious minorities within their local, national, and transnational arenas. The sexual politics I examine in Chapter 5 reveal an added structural layer that affects Muslims of all genders, but affects women the most

disproportionately. This additional structure is encompassed within the term patriarchy, a term I qualify in this project. My analysis of these sexual politics illustrates how some women MLers are navigating dual patriarchies. Meaning women MLers are navigating both intra-Muslim patriarchal oppressions that include racialized sexism and misogyny, as well as imposed U.S. American structures that racialize, sexualize, and oppress Muslim communities. My analysis shows that through the ways women MLers choose to engage and confront both intra-Muslim patriarchy and U.S. American patriarchy, they are the ones building Muslim pluralism. Ultimately, the entirety of this project demonstrates how MLers offer new pathways for engagement that address multiple forms of oppression within and without the global Muslim Ummah.

A main contribution of this project is that it draws awareness to the fact that an organization like MLI exists. The fact that the MLI program exists directly contradicts the widely-held belief that one must be anti-Semitic to be pro-Palestinian.⁹⁷ These identity politics that collapse nuanced positionalities into monolithic narratives stall advocacy efforts aimed to help Palestinians and end Islamophobia. Shedding light on MLI acts as a counter-narrative to normative U.S. American Muslim blind support for the BDS movement. As my field work shows, MLers were confronted with blatant corruption within the BDS movement. This major barrier to Palestinian advocacy efforts remains unresolved as BDS still holds an unchallenged monopoly over the Palestinian plight. Many pro-Palestinian advocates within the U.S. American Muslim community

⁹⁷ Tahseen Shams, "Successful yet precarious: South Asian Muslim Americans, Islamophobia, and the model minority myth," *Sociological Perspectives* 63, no. 4 (2020).

remain silent about BDS corruption out of fear of being labeled a Muslim Zionist and subsequent ostracization from their local, national, and transnational Muslim communities. MLers are willing to risk ostracization for the mere hope of a possible way forward for both U.S. American Muslims as well as Palestinians.

An additional contribution of this project is an illumination of the constraints created by the colonizer's quandary within the lives of racialized religious minorities. Carolyn Dean refers to the colonizer's quandary as "the paradoxical need to enculturate the colonized and encourage mimesis while, at the same time, upholding and maintaining the difference that legitimizes colonization."⁹⁸ MLI is proof positive that the colonizer's quandary is fully operational within post-colonial contexts. The logic of White supremacy dictates that no perceived Other can ever fully ascend to Whiteness. The terms of colonization and White supremacy dictate that minoritized peoples will fail, usually at the cost of their most vulnerable members.

We see a parallel manifestation of these logics within MLI as well as within SHI and more broadly within U.S. American and Israeli systems of oppression. The engagements that occur within and through MLI, meaning intra-Muslim encounters, as well as interreligious interaction between Muslims and Jews, demonstrate various levels of internalized sexist and racist logics that simultaneously acknowledge the oppression both Jews and Muslims experience and impose. In other words, MLI and SHI display how Jews and Muslims are oppressed oppressors. A real problem facing MLI and a

⁹⁸ Carolyn Dean, *Inka bodies and the body of Christ: Corpus Christi in colonial Cuzco, Peru* (Duke University Press, 1999).

number of Muslim communities is the threat of being divided not only from the outside with the imposition of harmful governmental policies and cultural Islamophobia, but they are also splitting themselves and their communities apart in an effort to be legible and respectable under these inherently problematic and limiting terms. Considering the constrained choices MLers are faced with, it is not surprising that the women within MLI are more acutely aware of their contentious positionality, and it is from them we see the most creative strategic maneuverings towards a Muslim pluralism that leaves both U.S. American and Muslim patriarchy behind. The additional analysis I offer makes clear, as evidenced by the success and failures of MLI and SHI, that oppression cannot be escaped through oppressing others.

Chapter 1: Enter MLI

In this chapter I aim to unfurl MLI's positionality within several intersecting contexts. First, I disclose the many confrontations I encountered during my MLI orientation seminar. My account of this day functions as an orientation to the many divisive issues that occupy MLI participants. During this recount of orientation day, I introduce some of the themes that MLI participants organize their Muslim identities around, themes that I expand on in proceeding chapters. This rundown of orientation day is not only about what occurred during that particular initial information session but is also concerned with illustrating the complex parallel and intersecting identity formations that comprise MLI. The transnational contexts that MLIsers navigate compound the situational politics confronted by both Jews and Muslims engaged in the MLI program.

This chapter acts as a window into the unique and layered processes that MLIsers voluntarily undergo. This chapter is an initiation of sorts into all of the conflicts and confrontations that diasporic and/or transnational minority Muslims are navigating at this moment in time and in this particular space. It serves as a way to break down potential biases on my own part as well as the part of non-experts, such as assumptions about monolithic minority identity, especially considering Islamophobic presence in hegemonic structures. These normative assumptions inform MLIsers' own perceptions about minority and dominant cultures in the U.S. and transnational contexts.

This chapter also sheds light on the lack of progress that has been made between Jews and Muslims living in western contexts through what Abdullah Antepi and Yossi Klein Halevi pejoratively refer to as "interfaith dialogue." For Antepi and Klein Halevi,

interfaith dialogue encompasses a critique of failed interreligious ventures between Jews and Muslims, especially in the U.S. While this project often discusses confrontations between Muslim MLI participants and SHI Jewish instructors, it is through these confrontations that intra-Muslim tensions have been revealed. I also aim to demonstrate the inherently complex and messy context within which MLIs and MLI is situated. The contexts and histories unloaded below provide a background landscape that informs the themes I expand on in proceeding chapters involving the curriculum, Muslim receptions thereof, and the dual processes of internalization and performance of social hierarchies such as race and gender.

My analysis below draws on fieldwork I conducted between late 2016 and mid-2020 in multiple locations including Israel/Palestine, Chicago, Washington, D.C., New York, and California. These interactions occurred in MLI's compulsory program, with two two-week trips to Israel in 2017 and 2018, bi-annual retreats in the U.S., and written, in-person, and virtual interviews with my informants. I highlight my initial induction into MLI in this chapter to reveal the complex and unique setting to which MLIs are abruptly initiated into.

My overall themes that form the following chapters are the salient themes brought to the forefront by MLIs themselves since my time of orientation/introduction into the program. I specifically analyze MLIs' aims to engage with Jews and their personal learning journeys concerning Judaism. Muslims hope to find solidarity with another American religious minority, the Jews. They also hope to learn how Jews have gained access to halls of power in American and Western contexts, especially given the

existential outsider-ness concomitant with long and complicated histories of Jewish persecution, culminating in the Holocaust and the subsequent advent of the nation-state of Israel. These journeys are tied to their transnational advocacy interests, such as the Hizmet movement and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which are concerned with Muslim minority communities in non-Muslim majority countries. MLers are also tangentially concerned with the effects of the Israel/Palestine issue on Muslim-minority status and positionality in western contexts.

I start by offering the basic demographics and makeup of MLI participants, the majority of whom are affiliated with a number of transnational organizations. I proceed to undertake an investigation of the contextual underpinnings of these and other organizations and histories that impact MLers, providing a history of Hizmet and how it influenced the founding and ethos of MLI. I then turn to the Desi-majority demographics within MLI, and offer a summation of intra-Muslim, racialized and gendered histories between and among South Asian nations and peoples. An added layer to these contexts is the Israel-Palestine conflict, which is divisive for Jews and Muslims in Palestine, diaspora, and transnationally. I investigate some of the undercurrents of this issue as it presents itself within MLI, which entails a total of four weeks of educational programs in Israel. The contexts, histories, and themes below foreground the remaining chapters of this project, and are necessary for understanding the complex positionalities that MLers inhabit and that I analyze and explore throughout this dissertation. These contextual underpinnings offer an essential framework for understanding the layered collective and individual identities present within MLI.

SITUATING MLI AND ITS PURPOSE

The primary goal of this chapter is to untangle the multivalent positionalities and contexts that encompasses MLI and its participants. I argue that MLI is a contentious space because it acts as a dissenting voice within dominant Muslim ideologies that essentialize Muslimness as pro-BDS, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. Situating MLI within its proper context reveals diverse agendas and complexities concerning anti-Islamophobic efforts in non-Muslim majority countries such as the U.S. MLI is a conglomerate of North American and primarily U.S.-American Muslims with ties to a variety of transnational organizations. This ties into MLI's transnational concerns about Muslim minority communities locally and globally.

On the surface MLI presents as a basic diversity and inclusion effort that signals western and democratic values of multiculturalism, pluralism, and an active effort towards displacing long engrained mutual bias. For MLIs, these signals are meant to be received by hegemonic power structures that rule North American halls of power.⁹⁹ I have learned that subversively, Jewish and Muslim members of MLI engage in parallel self-serving agendas. The point of detailing these encounters is to contextualize MLI's position on the transnational stage to shed light on why an organization such as MLI came into existence and how its very existence demonstrates and lives out Muslim integration questions, tensions, and successes for its members, objectors, and hosts.

For many Muslims, MLI serves as an opportunity to extract tactics of survival from what Muslims view as a successful minority religious group. Jews, on the other

⁹⁹ Haddad, "Claiming Space in America's Pluralism."

hand, benefit from the optics of participating in efforts to cross religio-political lines. Muslim members of MLI consistently revealed these additional, more covert agendas throughout processing sessions. These processing sessions took place daily after official Hebrew Madrasa learning sessions were over. Occasionally, multiple processing sessions per day were necessary given certain collectively traumatic events, such as our visit to Hebron. Given the centrality and intensity of these processing sessions I detail them in Chapter 3.

The one-way learning experience built into the educational structure of MLI allows Jews to benefit from the optics without engaging in the identity work Muslims are required to undergo by design. Through the pedagogical structure of MLI, Muslims are voluntarily forced to examine their own individual and collective biases towards transnational Jewish communities and Israeli Jews. This pedagogical structure, as it is a one-way learning experience, does not require Jewish instructors or the Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI) to introspectively examine their own biases towards transnational Muslim communities or Arabs and Palestinians living in Israel/Palestine. Even though at face value MLI is a meeting of the minds of two global religious minority groups, intra-group power dynamics perpetuate broader social hierarchies including racialized gender dynamics that bring to the forefront oppressed oppressor identities. While Jews in Israel occupy majority religious positionality, they exist as a minoritized and racialized religious collective within transnational/global contexts. Similarly, while there are many Muslim-majority nation-states, MLI Muslims primarily live within western contexts that

render them a racialized religious minority.¹⁰⁰ This is further complicated by the fact that SHI is headquartered in Jerusalem and New York, as well as the fact that Muslim MLers inhabit several different regions in the U.S./North America. Add to that that the bulk of the MLI educational program involves two two-week long mandatory trips to Jerusalem. All these locales and positionalities inform the interwoven contexts of MLI and MLers.

After situating the inherently transnational and complicated milieu in which MLI locates itself, I then account a short history of the Palestine/Israel conflict that leads to the origin story of MLI. From there I move to explore MLI's foundations and its positionality in relation to mainstream U.S. American Muslim organizations. MLI participants are engaging in racialized politics of respectability in order to address Muslim integration issues in the Western contexts they have chosen to live.¹⁰¹ Racialized politics of respectability involve assimilatory processes concerned with an ascension to whiteness that enables minority access to halls of power. These assimilatory processes deal directly with Western national anxieties about Muslim citizen loyalty to what are largely considered Western values such as democracy versus the stereotypical association of Muslimness and theocratic Islamic rule.¹⁰² The founding and existence of MLI is a reaction to these anxieties. Given the Islamophobic realities of mainstream American society post-9/11, a plethora of Muslim organizations were founded in the U.S. with the purpose of gaining a fuller incorporation into American mainstream society. The

¹⁰⁰ John Corrigan and Winthrop S Hudson, *Religion in America* (Routledge, 2018).

¹⁰¹ Dazey, "Rethinking respectability politics."

¹⁰² Erdem Dikici, "Integration, transnationalism and transnational Islam," *Identities* (2021).

outpouring of these organizations is due to two complementary agendas: combatting Islamophobia, and in turn, gaining additional access to mainstream halls of power within the larger American milieu. MLI is a result of the collaboration between Muslim and Jewish leaders in North American contexts who expressed dissatisfaction with interfaith bridge-building efforts, especially between Muslims and Jews, a main point of contention that will be explored in future chapters.

On the Muslim side of this equation, the following organizations have been home for many MLIs previous to their participation in MLI and therefore influence MLI politics. I briefly address some of these networks to provide context for the organizational lineage MLI comes out of. The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) founded in its current form in 1982 in Indiana, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) founded in 1994 in Washington D.C., and the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) founded in 1988 in Los Angeles are the three largest and most well know Muslim organizations in U.S. America. CAIR and MPAC focus specifically on Muslim civil rights and advocacy, whereas ISNA is a Muslim American institution that houses many Islamic organizations that aim to better the U.S. American Muslim community and society at large. This is the primary aim of many Muslims who participate in MLI.

ISNA has millions of members, CAIR and MPAC are nationally recognized as the two most influential and effective Muslim advocacy organizations in the country, employing numerous experts and professionals in multiple offices across the nation. In contrast, while SHI is headquartered in New York and Israel, MLI itself has no headquarters, no offices, no president, no real infrastructure at all apart from its host SHI.

Abdullah, the only official MLI leader/spokesperson/Imam somewhat arbitrarily selects additional MLI leaders on a case-by-case basis in order to liaise between Shalom Hartman leadership and Muslim MLers. Our chaperones and other official posts are selected by SHI/Jewish leadership. The only official required aspect of MLI in terms of receiving a program certificate are the two two-week educational programs in Jerusalem for each cohort. There is no official application form or process; the only requirements to become an MLer are that you self-identify as a North American Muslim and that you know someone who's already part of MLI who will vouch for you to Abdullah. MLI has about 150 participants in total; it is minuscule in comparison to these other organizations. However, many MLI participants were and are high ranking administrators and leaders within ISNA, CAIR, and MPAC. I would not describe MLI as "well-known," but it is certainly notorious.

MLI's exclusivity and anonymity has garnered scrutiny, suspicion, and rejection from these mainstream U.S. American Muslim organizations. To state things more clearly, BDS supporters often accuse MLI of being a Muslim organization whose participants actively support Israel's genocide against Palestinians for economic gains. This is due to MLers' willingness to engage with Jews in Israel and an institution (SHI) that the Israeli government utilizes to educate the Israeli Defense Forces on Jewish peoplehood and the perceived necessity of the state of Israel for Jews.

ORIENTATIONS: THE FIRST DAY OF HEBREW MADRASA

After a long conversation with Imam Abdullah that sufficed as my vetting process via my cell phone while we were both coincidentally vacationing in Greece at the same

time during the Summer of 2016, I was accepted and invited to be a part of the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI) Cohort IV: A New Hope. I met most of my cohort late October 2016 in Chicago for an orientation before our departure to Jerusalem scheduled for December 31st, 2016. Cohort IV was and still is the largest cohort within MLI, it is also the cohort that has had the most married couples. Walking into that orientation room in the Four Points Sheridan felt exactly like walking into that first class on the first day of school, or what I have come to think of as a type of Hebrew Madrasa, what I perceive as Hebrew school for Muslims. The orientation felt like any school orientation: nervous, alone, not sure who the popular people are, not sure who the bullies are, hoping to make friends, praying you are not the only single lady, overall wanting to be noticed but also invisible.

MLI: A TRANSNATIONAL, AMERICAN ORGANIZATION?

Perhaps one of the most challenging tasks of this dissertation is unraveling the complexities of MLI, an extremely and necessarily opaque organization. This is easily demonstrated by the e-mail sign-off signature note of MLI's co-director, "P.S. As always, please do not forward this email. As a community, we work together to maintain the confidentiality of those in the MLI network." This complexity is due in part to the extremely secretive nature of MLI, as well as the fact that MLI operates simultaneously and equal parts as an explicitly North American and explicitly transnational organization. While SHI may advertise and/or transparently reveal the educational programming MLI offers, Muslim participant identities are highly confidential and inaccessible by the public and/or other Muslim advocacy networks.

Muslim participation in MLI can only be revealed in two ways, the first of which is individual voluntary disclosure to the public, and the second is akin to being outed through backchannel reporting within intra-Muslim organizations and communities. In short, names of Muslim MLier participants are withheld from the public and are only available via coming out or being outed. As I discuss later, there have been instances of members being outed, and in these instances the backlash from the wider American Muslim community was visceral and lasting. Participation in MLI has caused a disenfranchisement of advocacy efforts as well as professional standing and a literal loss of employment in conjunction with death threats. The stakes of participating in the MLI program are loaded to say the least, and have caused tension and fracture within intra-Muslim communities and the organizations they support. The reverberations of these repercussions are felt by Muslim MLiers within both local and transnational contexts.

Situated within North American milieux and contexts, MLI is also a transnational network. This is due in part to MLI's ties to Hizmet, as well as to the stake that most American Muslims have in the Palestine/Israel conflict and BDS. The primary ties between Hizmet and MLI are via the Muslim founder, Abdullah's connections to Hizmet, as well as many MLiers' affiliations with the organization. We will see in what follows that Hizmet's focus on education and building social capital in nations where there are diverse Muslim minority communities directly influences MLI goals and foci. Many leaders of Hizmet organizations are also MLI participants, which combined with Abdullah's personal familial connections to the Gulen movement, makes for strong ties

between MLI and Hizmet as they both operate within transnational contexts and seek to advocate for Muslim minority communities across the globe.

Hizmet is a charitable society that is also referred to as the Gulen Movement.¹⁰³ The “Gulen Movement” is considered by some members to be derogatory, which is why I use the term “Hizmet,” which means service, and is the term by which Hizmet members identify. Gülen’s followers describe their purpose as: “seeking God’s good pleasure through serving humanity,” “to bring peace to the world through dialogue,” “to build bridges between different communities, faiths, and traditions,” and “to create islands of peace in order to bring about a better world.”¹⁰⁴ Dr. Sophia Pandya, a prominent religious studies academician, accurately describes the movement and its goals: “To achieve positive social change by furthering universal values of tolerance, dialogue, and peace through their educational and other secular ‘service’ activities.”¹⁰⁵ While Imam Abdullah Antepli, the founder of MLI, does not personally identify as a member of Hizmet, some of his family that still resides in Turkey are members of the Hizmet movement. The movement on a whole is involved in many undertakings, with multiple representative organizations around the globe, each containing their own structure as there is no centralized authority within the Hizmet movement.

¹⁰³ Sophia Pandya and Nancy Gallagher, *The Gulen Hizmet Movement and Its Transnational Activities: Case Studies of Altruistic Activism in Contemporary Islam* (Universal-Publishers, 2012).

¹⁰⁴ Joshua D Hendrick, *Gülen: the ambiguous politics of market Islam in Turkey and the world* (NyU Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁵ Pandya and Gallagher, *The Gulen Hizmet Movement and Its Transnational Activities: Case Studies of Altruistic Activism in Contemporary Islam*.

The mission of Hizmet within U.S. American contexts as well as transnationally, is to foster peace through education as well as to garner social capital within multiple national contexts in order to improve the standing of Muslim minority communities living in non-Muslim majority nations.¹⁰⁶ Hizmet works towards these goals by building educational and inter-faith organizations around the world. A few organizations that exist within North America and each organization's advocacy focus include: The Pacifica Institute, which principally focuses on interfaith outreach and dialogue; the Anatolian Cultures and Food Festival Organization, which is tasked with reaching out to other Turkish Muslims and ethnically Turkish Americans; and the Tolerance Foundation, which is consumed with introducing Turkish culture to American society and educating people about the universal values of friendship, love, faith, solidarity, and respect for diversity. In addition, the Turkish Language Institute offers education in the Turkish language here in the United States and in Turkey with the purpose of creating friendship and understanding through a common medium of communication.¹⁰⁷ The founders of these Hizmet organizations and several of their members, are among the first participants of the MLI program. Hizmet's underlying goal is to create social capital for Turkish Muslims and initially was intended to boost Turkey's reputation as a nation-state within western contexts and amongst the Western elite.

¹⁰⁶ Margaret A Johnson, "Glocalization of the Gülen education model: an analysis of the Gülen-inspired schools in Indonesia" (paper presented at the International Fethullah Gülen Conference at Indonesia, 2010).

¹⁰⁷ Sophia Pandya, "Introduction: The Hizmet Movement Abroad," in *The Gülen Hizmet movement and its transnational activities : case studies of altruistic activism in contemporary Islam*, ed. Sophia Pandya and Nancy Elizabeth Gallagher (Boca Raton: BrownWalker Press, 2012).

This idea of creating social capital through interfaith education is simultaneously the frustration and motivation for the framework and founding of MLI. Hizmet's framework and goals are in line with Gulenist tenets of peace and tolerance, which have informed Abdullah's interfaith work, which eventually led him to create MLI as an effort to build bridges with Jews in North America and Israel, the two primary locations of SHI. Abdullah, a Turkish Imam, highly involved in interfaith efforts within his local North American community, was frustrated by what he perceived as a lack of success in terms of bridge-building with Jewish communities, and decided to look for another alternative to interfaith models used by Hizmet and similar organizations. Hizmet and its global efforts are additionally perceived as part of transnational agendas to fight against Islamophobia.¹⁰⁸ This synopsis of Hizmet's agendas: education, peace, tolerance, interfaith dialogue and anti-Islamophobia advocacy, greatly inform Imam Abdullah's personal and professional positionalities, and provide context as to how MLI came about. Additionally, it is worth noting that multiple Hizmet leaders residing in North America are also MLI participants. While Hizmet is an entirely different and Turkish centric transnational organization, we can see through these loose connections how MLI has in part been mapped over Hizmet's goals, successes, as well as its failures.

Hizmet started when the AKP Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, The Justice and Development Party) came to power.¹⁰⁹ This event was a pact between Fetullah Gulen and

¹⁰⁸ Ozcan Keles, Ismail Mesut Sezgin, and Ihsan Yilmaz, "Tackling the twin threats of Islamophobia and puritanical Islamist extremism: Case study of the hizmet movement," in *Islamophobia and Radicalization* (Springer, 2019).

¹⁰⁹ Hendrick, *Gülen: the ambiguous politics of market Islam in Turkey and the world*.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan. They rose to power on the platform of bringing Islam back into the public sphere in Turkey and dealing with Turkish secularism, meaning no religious symbols are allowed in the public sphere.¹¹⁰ Particularly within the Turkish secularist model the hijab was outlawed within public spaces, meaning public servants, such as teachers, were prohibited from wearing hijab in Turkey.¹¹¹ Turkish secularism was and still is about Westernization, originally as a way to stave off colonization of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. Ataturk militantly and genocidally forced what he termed Turkification to make an Eastern Muslim country palatable to the Western Christian first world.¹¹² These processes point toward Western democratic ideals that establish an anti-Islam pattern.¹¹³

Approximately ten years after the foundation of Hizmet, Erdogan and Gulen fell out over the predominance that Hizmet was garnering within official Turkish structures and within educational arenas. Access to advanced higher educational institutions within Turkey became dominated by Hizmet members and their educational programs focused on preparatory national exams that led to college acceptance and placement. These Hizmet inroads in education, led to increased government job placement and military advancement. This of course was accompanied by higher salaries and an elevation in

¹¹⁰ Marshall GS Hodgson, *The venture of Islam, volume 3: The gunpower empires and modern times* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹¹¹ Hasan Aydin, "Headscarf (Hijab) Ban in Turkey: The importance of veiling," *The Journal of Multiculturalism in Education* 6, no. 1 (2010).

¹¹² Ira M Lapidus, *A history of Islamic societies* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹¹³ Chris Hann and Mathijs Pelkmans, "Realigning religion and power in Central Asia: Islam, nation-state and (post) socialism," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 9 (2009).

class status. Hizmet members increase in education and class status directly led to an escalation of global mobility. Hizmet members and the educational organizations they built and supported within Turkey were then exported to other nation-states, giving Hizmet and its members transnational presence and power on the world stage.¹¹⁴ In essence, Erdogan became concerned with the power and momentum Hizmet was gaining.¹¹⁵ The issue of education is essential to how Hizmet became so powerful.¹¹⁶ Hizmet promotes a message of education as an avenue of doing service. The problem with Hizmet's educational platform is due to unequal access. Thus, the more educated you are, the more access you have. Essentially, Hizmet creates pipelines of students starting as early as junior high and high school as well as teachers throughout every level of education. This leads to more university placement for children and young adults, and thus leads to more jobs. This lack of access creates a correlation between more education and economic class elevation, along with access to more resources. Hizmet's goal was to open up education for Turkish Muslim citizens who wanted to be visibly Muslim in the public sphere.¹¹⁷ They additionally wanted to garner global social capital in powerful western societies and to aid other ethnic minority Muslim groups around the world through education.

¹¹⁴ Hendrick, *Gülen: the ambiguous politics of market Islam in Turkey and the world*. Johnson, "Glocalization of the Gülen education model: an analysis of the Gülen-inspired schools in Indonesia."

¹¹⁵ Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Timothy Seidel, *The Hizmet Movement and peacebuilding : global cases* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018).

¹¹⁶ Johnson, "Glocalization of the Gülen education model: an analysis of the Gülen-inspired schools in Indonesia."

¹¹⁷ Pandya and Gallagher, *The Gulen Hizmet Movement and Its Transnational Activities: Case Studies of Altruistic Activism in Contemporary Islam*.

Because of these goals, Hizmet also has presence in places such as Cambodia and Thailand and other Global South regions. The goal of these operations is to give Muslims in minority communities in the Global South better avenues out of poverty and to make them more part of the global Muslim ummah and to build social capital on the global stage. One of the fundamental questions Hizmet asks is what are the avenues to elevate a society that is downtrodden and oppressed? Hizmet is additionally concerned with how Muslims can keep their religious symbols in a Turkish secularist environment. Thus the goals of Hizmet also become about making Islam visible while also tying it to an elevated class, elevated status of education, and also global mobility. These concerns with Muslim minority communities in non-Muslim majority countries and secularisms that marginalize Islam make Hizmet an exceptionally transnational Islamic network.

As stated in the introduction to this project, the problem with a transnationalist outlook is that it legitimizes concepts of nation and nationality.¹¹⁸ I argue that the tension between MLIers who grapple with how to be U.S. Americans and maintain their ties to transnational networks, including but not limited to Hizmet and the Muslim Ummah in general, creates a sort of partitioned identity for many MLI Muslims. These partitioned identities, perhaps both ironically and coincidentally, mirror the partitioned states many MLI Muslims come from. These states are perpetual conflict zones, and include Israel/Palestine, India, Pakistan, and Kashmir. The many Turkish Muslims and Turkish Hizmet Muslims that participate in MLI do not share this bifurcated partitioned consciousness. Turkey holds a significant anti-colonial positionality within the greater

¹¹⁸ Chatterjee, *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: a derivative discourse?*

Muslim Ummah because it staved off possible colonization after its loss of World War I.¹¹⁹ Due to the fact that the first cohorts were made primarily of Abdullah, the Turkish founder's associates, the first cohorts of MLI had high numbers of Hizmet members. As a result, the overlap between Hizmet and MLI is extensive. For example, my inductors into the Hizmet movement are also part of the first three cohorts of MLI. Due to these ties between Hizmet and MLI members, Abdullah, the founder of MLI, has essentially tapped into a transnational network in order to sell the idea that American Muslims should be engaging with American and Israeli Jews. Whether intentionally or incidentally, MLI has become a transnational network for advocating a series of ideologies which include elements from Hizmet as well as western ideals of secularism, pluralism, and democratic values. I collate and analyze MLIs' espousals of these ideals in later chapters.

Because Hizmet provides disproportionate access and education to certain communities, the mid-2010s started to see Turkey getting onto the world stage with their new form of Turkish secularism. The problem with Turkish secularism is that while it purports to be secular, it is actually more Islamic-leaning. Tension arose because Erdogan became concerned about Gulen's simultaneous rise to power through Hizmet.¹²⁰ People affiliated with Hizmet began to rise through the ranks and have positions in the government. Because of this rise to power, Erdogan eventually seized control from Gulen and started to round up Hizmet members.¹²¹ Because members of MLI have ties to

¹¹⁹ Nicholas Danforth, "Multi-purpose empire: Ottoman history in republican Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 4 (2014).

¹²⁰ Hendrick, *Gülen: the ambiguous politics of market Islam in Turkey and the world*.

¹²¹ Abu-Nimer and Seidel, *The Hizmet Movement and peacebuilding : global cases*.

Hizmet, these issues of class and access replicate themselves within MLI. We start to see then how MLI replicates many broader patterns related to Hizmet and Muslim politics of respectability not only in U.S. America but also in global arenas. For example, when this fallout occurred, many MLI members were concerned about family members living in Turkey and their possible extermination and/or jailing. For instance, one MLier drafted a letter directly to President Erdogan about their security concerns for their family and anyone who was Hizmet-affiliated. This letter was circulated amongst all MLiers with a plea to sign and petition local congresspeople to intercede on behalf of Hizmet members that may be in danger in Turkey. Alper circulated this letter within my cohort with the following message: “It’s a letter that we can use to send to President Erdogan to protest his government’s violence against minority communities, minority ethnicities and Hizmet members that are being targeted in Turkey and abroad.” The majority of Hizmet members not only circulated this letter within their broader Muslim American communities, but also rallied in support of Turkish Hizmet MLiers by way of calling congresspeople and engaging in communal activities to help draw attention to the human rights abuses occurring under Erdogan’s regime. Part of the reason I was introduced to MLI was through my affiliation with Hizmet within academic circles. The person who recommended me is a professor who is also affiliated with Hizmet. These tangled webs of engagement make MLI’s purported mission and its actual impacts all the more complex.

As a member of Cohort IV, which was formed and recruited at the end of 2016, I observed and intently listened to member ethnic origin stories. Based on this data, I

conclude that the majority of MLI participants are Desi, Turkish, or Arab. This is in addition to the somewhat covert role that Hizmet plays in MLI. These varied commitments converge within a network that operates from the U.S. and is comprised of people grappling with what it means to try to attain Americanness. By this, I mean people who are trying to elevate their status in the numerous hierarchical structures that are operating within U.S. American contexts, with the ultimate goal of having access to halls of power, the way that Yehuda Kurtzer, president of the American SHI in New York, describes and summates Jewish success in diaspora.¹²² These struggles are compounded by inter- and intragroup conflicts that revolve around racism, sexism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other forms of structural oppression. In my observation, members of MLI both impact and are impacted by systemic racism and xenophobia in the U.S. based on their levels of privilege and oppression, often simultaneously. In these ways, MLI is dealing with highly politicized topics that operate on a global stage and also locate themselves within a U.S. American context that likewise sees the coming-together of these global, structural issues. Due to these overlapping issues, conflicts such as those between Palestine and Israel, India and Pakistan in Kashmir, and public Islam presence in Secular Turkey, and the genocides of Indian Muslims and Muslims in China and

¹²² Yehuda Kurtzer delivered a lecture in New York to MLIers titled “Our Nationalist Century: The Jewish People and the Paradoxes of Nationalism” in February 2017 during one of the two annually held MLI retreats, an event that includes all cohorts and happens each year. During this lecture Kurtzer discussed the different national contexts Jews are currently navigating, one of which is the U.S. American context. Kurtzer explained in this lecture that the success of Jews in America can be summed up as having access to “halls of power,” which he has defined during this lecture and others as access to governing national and local institutions. Kurtzer addresses some differences in structural positionalities between diaspora Jews living in U.S. America versus Israeli Jews living in Israel. He notes that while diaspora Jews may contain collective insecurities about Jewish safety in the U.S. American context due to anti-Semitism, diaspora Jews also enjoy success and security in that very same diasporic context. Kurtzer, “Homeland Violence and Diaspora Insecurity: An Analysis of Israel and American Jewry.”

Myanmar are all brought to the forefront within MLI. As I argue, the ties that bind these seemingly disparate peoples, politics and commitments together are the ways they operate within the context of structural violence in the U.S.

MLI: A RELATIONSHIP FORGED IN MISTRUST

The intended mission of MLI is made complicated by the fact that in addition to being a network based almost solely on word of mouth, MLI has no bylaws and very little by way of explicitly set agendas or mission statements. Most of the officialdom surrounding MLI comes from SHI, which is to say that Shalom Hartman, the Jewish institute that hosts MLI, as an embedded institution in Israel and America, offers a set infrastructure within which MLI exists and operates. MLI as a standalone program remains relatively autonomous and unorganized apart from the annual trips to Israel and retreats held in the U.S. That being said, one of the primary goals of MLI is to educate Muslims about Jews and Judaism. MLI centers around educating Muslims about Judaism, but does not involve education for Jewish people about Muslims or Islam. This setup is the result of frustration with previous attempts at interfaith dialogue, which tries to foster understanding between peoples of different religions but according to Abdullah and Yossi, shies away from the hard questions. A pragmatic question then becomes, what do Muslims get out of participating in MLI?

Imam Abdullah's frustration with interfaith dialogue was evident in his common usage of the phrase "We aren't here to sing Kumbaya and eat hummus." This was in reference to his often repeated criticism that Jewish-Muslim interfaith dialogue never goes any farther than rallying around benign similarities in diet, such as hummus, and the

oversimplification that we are all People of the Book. Abdullah's repetitive quips about hummus ironically ended up shedding light on some of the racial dynamics within MLI, which I analyze in this project. Case in point, many Desi MLI participants would quip back at Abdullah's hummus joke saying, "We don't even eat hummus, we eat curry." This witty reply is emblematic of the geo-socio-political tensions within MLI and the participants' diasporic ethnic origins, for example the large majority of MLI participants being non-Arab and from South Asia, as opposed to the typical association of Jewish-Muslim cultural tropes rooted in the Middle East.¹²³ This seemingly benign exchange of quips sheds light on common Western conceptions that all Jews are Israeli, all Muslims are Arabs, thus excluding Black Jews and Muslims and Desi Muslims, to name only a few groups that are ideologically excluded within western conceptions of Jews and Muslims.¹²⁴

As Abdullah bluntly pointed out, interfaith dialogue has many shortcomings. Interfaith dialogue, broadly construed, – as the name suggests, attempts to find ways to start conversations between various religious groups, including ones that may historically find themselves in conflict with each other. The critique of interfaith dialogue, as expressed by the founder and some members of MLI, lies in the fact that interfaith dialogue stops short of interrogating deeply heated and problematic issues such as the

¹²³ Cankar, "Fluid terror threat: A genealogy of the racialization of Arab, Muslim, and South Asian Americans." Doug Rossinow, "'The Edge of the Abyss': The Origins of the Israel Lobby, 1949–1954," *Modern American History* 1, no. 1 (2018).

¹²⁴ Shereen Yousuf and Bernadette Calafell, "The imperative for examining anti-Muslim racism in rhetorical studies," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 15, no. 4 (2018). Earl Raab, *Attitudes toward Israel and Attitudes toward Jews: The Relationship* (Routledge, 2021).

conflict between Palestine and Israel.¹²⁵ Interestingly, during the several years I've spent with MLI, I've uncovered a number of implicit agendas that inform many MLIs' participation.

For many, MLI represents an opportunity for collaboration between different groups who are both oppressed by white supremacy and/or other western supremacist halls of power. Of course, the racial politics here become tricky when one considers that many participants of many different ethnicities self-identify and/or are identified as white via dominant racial logics such as the U.S. census. Even so, the majority of members of MLI acknowledge the role that Christianity – which is tied for many of them to whiteness and Americanness – can be recognized as the common hegemon or enemy.¹²⁶ This sentiment was voiced to me by Laila when I interviewed her about her experiences in MLI. During this interview she explained how she was feeling about all the Jewish friends she was making: “You know they are really great! And I really think if we (meaning the Jews and the Muslims) could get the Christians to stop butting in, or at least relinquish just an inch of their power, we might be able to move forward together.” In addition, for many MLIs, their participation is a tactical choice involving optics. Muslims and Jews, who are both minoritized in the U.S., benefit from the appearance of multiculturalism, as the U.S. is a state famously regarded as “multicultural,” “pluralistic,”

¹²⁵ Markiewicz, "Interfaith on the World Stage: Much Ado About Nothing?." Mindy Wynn Tauberg, *Emotionally Vulnerable Storytelling as Peacebuilding: Muslim/Jewish Interfaith Activism in the United States* (University of California, Irvine, 2019).

¹²⁶ Khyati Y Joshi, *White Christian Privilege* (New York University Press, 2020). Warren J Blumenfeld, Khyati Y Joshi, and Ellen E Fairchild, *Investigating Christian privilege and religious oppression in the United States* (BRILL, 2019).

or a “melting pot.”¹²⁷ Engaging in efforts to form cross-cultural coalitions, then, may be seen as inherently multicultural and therefore a legibly U.S. American practice. Also relatively covertly, for some participants, MLI is an opportunity for Muslim and Jewish members to get up close and personal with a group with which they have historically and to varied degrees been in conflict: a chance for them to know their enemy, so to speak.¹²⁸ For some MLIers, the explicit reasons they join may be more due to their politics of respectability in the American milieu. Covertly, some members also have a vested interest in furthering their own intragroup agendas more-so than some of the inter-group agendas explicitly accepted as part of the MLI ethos. These subversive agendas began to reveal themselves on the first day of orientation.

MLI ON THE SURFACE

Orientation day was the first day I was introduced to my cohort. A day that would kick-off nearly four years of fieldwork in multiple locations including Palestine/Israel, Washington D.C., New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and many virtual spaces that hosted a plethora of continuing education opportunities. On my first day of a program that is set up like a Hebrew Madrasa, I noticed that by design, the Jews were not at orientation, and the Muslims were not sure if I am one of them yet. These insights were confirmed throughout the day as my fellow cohort members started to disclose that they thought I was one of the Jewish hosts and then proceeded to ask me about my conversion to Islam

¹²⁷ Eck, "American religious pluralism: Civic and theological discourse."; Appadurai, "Multiculturalism And Dialogue in a Globalizing World."

¹²⁸ Daniel J Schroeter, "'Islamic Anti-Semitism' in Historical Discourse," *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (2018); Hatem Bazian, "The islamophobia industry and the demonization of Palestine: Implications for American studies," *American Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2015).

story. I grabbed a welcome folder, from an unattended table in the foyer area, looking around for the main table, and there were about four to five women crowded around a small table listening to what sounded like talk radio, or some kind of specialized news cast. I could not make out what the news program was talking about, but I walked over, smiled, nodded, and said a quick “hi.” Two of the women quickly glanced up at me, politely smiled but said nothing, one looked up and rolled her eyes shook her head, and the other four or so women did not acknowledge me at all.

Turns out that the women intensely listening to talk radio are who I refer to as the “Chicago Crew.” The CC is comprised of the popular kids and the bullies, they are the ones you want to know, the inside of the inside crowd. They are each, in and of themselves, forces of nature to be feared and admired. The three women I met that day who in part comprise the Chicago Crew are Gamila, Nasreen, and Samar. They were short a member that day, Rabia Chaudry, who was part of MLI Cohort I, and so would not be joining us. However, Rabia was certainly there in spirit, as I would come to find out, since the radio program the Chicago Crew was obsessively listening to was actually all about Rabia, MLI, and some kind of scandal with The Council of Islamic Organization of Greater Chicago (CIOGC).

I moved to the bigger room where there were a couple other people, each one seated on a separate side of the u-shaped formation of tables. I sat on the last totally unoccupied side, as radio/pod cast blips casually floated into the room along with more participants who silently took their seats. Some of them started chatting with each other as the room began to fill up. No one had sat down beside me yet, and there was another

woman who had been solitarily standing at the entrance to the large room for a few minutes. She studied the room, glancing left to right, taking stock of who was talking to whom, and who was sitting with whom. The people in the room were mostly Desi, a few Turks, an almost even mix of men and women, various shades of light and medium browns, and two white female converts, one engaged in what looked to be a rather serious conversation with an Indonesian woman, and the other me, arguably the whitest due to my bleach blonde hair, which most people think is natural (though it is not), or is often mistaken for a wig because of its curliness (which is natural). These personal features are what many MLers later expressed as my most noticeable traits. I looked up to see the solitary woman, who was scanning the room, start walking towards me. I could feel myself staring, forced myself to blink, as I came face to face with the woman who would later describe herself to me as “the living breathing version of Princess Jasmine!” She sat down next to me and introduced herself saying her name is Yazmine and she is from Miami. I introduced myself, “Hi, I’m Jess from SoCal.” The room quieted a bit as Yazmine leaned in and asked me “Are they staring at me, at us?” I replied yes with a head nod, and she leaned in closer saying “I hate this first day shit, I don’t know anyone, and Desis, you know they don’t like my color, I’m too dark for them, and honey you are too white and gold with your hair...by the way you are gorgeous.” I shyly smiled and said thank you, and replied, “You are quite stunning as well.” Yazmine politely touched my arm smiling and saying “Thank you sweetie, and you know that’s why they will hate us,” as she gestured to the rest of the room with her head. No one else attempted to talk to

either one of us for the rest of the day, unless forced into conversation because of a group activity. As Yazmine said in so many words, we had certainly started our journey through Hebrew Madrasa.

INTRA- AND INTERGROUP CONFLICT: OPPRESSED OPPRESSORS

Yazmine turned out to be right about our lack of popularity within the group, and was voicing a continuous problem within Muslim communities and Desi communities across the globe, that of colorism. Mark E. Hill's research on the perception of beauty and skin color among African Americans describes the behavioral attributes inscribed through "colorism." He states, "Whiteness is idealized with all that is civilized, virtuous, and beautiful; blackness, in opposition, with all that is lowly, sinful, and ugly."¹²⁹ In her above comments, Yazmine is alluding to the belief that Bengalis are dark, like Indians, like Hindus who are considered to be the arch enemy of Pakistani Muslims. Relatedly, Andrea Smith explains the link between "darkness" and rapability during the American Indian Genocide: "Because Indian bodies are 'dirty,' they are considered sexually violable and 'rapable.' That is, in patriarchal thinking, only a body that is 'pure' can be violated."¹³⁰ Therefore, brown bodies, dark bodies do not possess bodily personhood or boundaries, thus anything done to them is not perceived as a violation according to these patriarchal logics. The connection between darkness and rapability can also be applied beyond the context of the American Indian genocide. This also directly applies to the

¹²⁹ Mark E Hill, "Skin color and the perception of attractiveness among African Americans: Does gender make a difference?," *Social psychology quarterly* (2002); *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Andrea Smith, *Conquest: sexual violence and American Indian genocide* (Duke University Press, 2015).

sexualized and gendered violences employed and suffered during the 1971 War for Bangladeshi Independence. These loaded racialized sexual politics are one of the many larger historical conflicts always present in the room in MLI.

Colorism is something Yazmine and I have both experienced in polar opposite ways, I benefit from my white privilege whereas she is disadvantaged due to her dark skin. Yazmine is Bengali, not Pakistani, and it is Pakistani Muslims that comprise the majority of MLI. The historical baggage between Pakistan and Bangladesh cannot be understated, carrying with it genocidal condemnation of Pakistan and Hindu/India sympathizing Bangladesh. Yazmine's embodiment as well as our reception in MLI illustrates some of the transnational geopolitical underpinnings present amongst MLI members. It is worthwhile to explore a short history of Pakistani and Bengali tensions which directly inform the consciousness of most Desi Muslim members within MLI.

At its founding, Pakistan strictly adhered to the ideal of a Muslim nation, denying membership to any non-Muslims. In West Pakistan this was a non-issue because after Partition very few non-Muslims remained. This was not the case in East Pakistan where twenty percent of its inhabitants were non-Muslim, mostly Hindu.¹³¹ This fact caused intra and inter-group religious conflict to rear its ugly head whenever unrest occurred. West Pakistan contended that it was the influence of India, and of the Hindus in East Pakistan, who they believed were stirring up trouble and trying to sabotage the Islamic regime. This view of East Pakistan as a Hindu infiltrated, and poisoned territory prevailed

¹³¹ Amit Ranjan, "Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971: Narratives, Impacts and the Actors," *India Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2016).

in the thinking of West Pakistanis. This contributed to the 1971 war and the creation of Bangladesh.¹³² This conflict is ever present in Yazmine's positionality within Pakistani dominated MLI.

While West Pakistan was the larger territory, East Pakistan constituted 54 percent of Pakistan's total population. The two territories comprising the Islamic Republic of Pakistan were geographically and ethnically divided. The ethnic divide is appropriately summed up by historian and genocide studies professor Ben Kiernan: "West Pakistan's military-dominated Islamic elite comprised mostly ethnic Punjabis¹³³ and Pathans,¹³⁴ who considered East Pakistan's Bengali Muslims to be insufficiently martial, insufficiently Islamic, and overly influenced by India's Hindu culture."¹³⁵ This sense of superiority in the western region was present since the birth of Pakistan and the source of the inequitable distribution of resources, economic exploitation, restrictions on Bengali speech in public, and the lack of Bengali representation in Pakistan's parliament.¹³⁶

¹³² Richard Sisson and Leo E Rose, *War and secession: Pakistan, India, and the creation of Bangladesh* (Univ of California Press, 1990).

¹³³ The term "Punjabis" is a reference to peoples from the province of Punjab which is centrally located within Pakistan. This province is home to the nation's capital, Islamabad. The original territory of the Punjab was split in half during Partition, with a borderline cutting straight through its major city Lahore. As such, Punjab suffered great violence on both sides of the border during the mass migrations when both countries became independent from British rule.

¹³⁴ The term "Pathans," also known as Pashtuns, is a reference to peoples with Afghan ethnic origins. Pashtuns have Diasporas in several different countries; dominating Afghanistan and its ruling class, the Taliban. However, Pakistan has the largest Pashtun community, which is in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). Pathans also distinguish themselves through language, speaking Pashto, in addition to the other dominant language in Afghanistan Dari (Persian).

¹³⁵ Ben Kiernan, *Blood and soil: A world history of genocide and extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (Yale University Press, 2008).

¹³⁶ Yasmin Saikia, *Women, war, and the making of Bangladesh* (Duke University Press, 2011).

Pakistan's parliament chose Urdu as the official language of the nation, a language foreign to Bengalis. Bengalis were unwilling to accept Urdu as their official language and riots ensued. However, this did not change the parliament's decision. The language divide meant that Urdu-speaking West Pakistanis had greater access to state power structures, including the military. Largely because of these histories, in Desi culture within MLI, a colorist hierarchy exists that is inflected with geopolitical, socio-religious bias.

These hierarchies came to a head on March 25, 1971, when West Pakistan declared war against East Pakistan. On the evening of the 25th of March, the Pakistan Army attacked specific dormitories at Dhaka University killing over 200 students and faculty.¹³⁷ It is well known by Bengalis that during the Dhaka University Massacre, the rape of female Bengali students was widespread. However, this fact is vehemently denied by the Pakistani Government.¹³⁸ The death toll of Bengalis ranges anywhere from 26,000, according to the Pakistani Government,¹³⁹ to reports of 3,000,000 according to the Bangladeshi Government. However, R.J. Rummel, a political scientist specializing in collective violence, estimates the death toll at 1,500,000.¹⁴⁰ It is estimated that the West

¹³⁷ Jag Mohan, *The Black Book of Genocide in Bangla Desh: A Documentary Book* (New Delhi: Geeta Book Centre, 1971).

¹³⁸ Saikia, *Women, war, and the making of Bangladesh*.

¹³⁹ Farhana Akter Shoovra, "Perpetrations of 1971 An Analysis in Light of Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report," *Arts Faculty Journal* (2010).

¹⁴⁰ Rudolph J Rummel and Irving Louis Horowitz, *Death by government: genocide and mass murder since 1900* (Routledge, 2018).

Pakistani military raped anywhere from 200,000 to 400,000¹⁴¹ women.¹⁴² During the war men abused women on all fronts: this included the invading Pakistani Army, the Bengali Militia, also known as the Mukti Bahini,¹⁴³ and the civilian neighbors who took advantage of the chaos of war. The Pakistani Army systematically kidnapped Bengali Muslim women and built rape camps, holding women for months on end as sex workers. The Mukti Bahini were driven underground when the war started, so they were unable to set up camps like the Pakistani Army. However, that did not stop them from terrorizing and raping Bihari¹⁴⁴ women, or anyone suspected of collaborating with the Pakistani Army.¹⁴⁵ A ceasefire agreement was reached on December 16, 1971 with the Pakistani Army's full surrender. Historians Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose appropriately describe a religious dimension of the surrender: "Ironically, it was here too that General Niazi, commander of the forces of Muslim Pakistan, surrendered his arms to three generals of 'Hindu' India -one a Parsi, another a Sikh, and the third a Jew."¹⁴⁶ This surrender is emblematic of the ensuing intra-religious conflicts present within Desi dominated Muslim population of MLI.

¹⁴¹ Susan Brownmiller, *Against our will: Men, women, and rape* (Ballantine Books, 1993).

¹⁴² Shoovra, "Perpetrations of 1971 An Analysis in Light of Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report."

¹⁴³ The large forces of the East Pakistan Army that were disarmed by the West Pakistan Army organized themselves into the Mukti Bahini. They became militarized freedom fighters violently and politically advocating for Bangladesh's independence (Saikia, 221).

¹⁴⁴ The term "Biharis" is in reference to a variety of Urdu-speaking people who migrated from India to East Pakistan during Partition.

¹⁴⁵ Nayanika Mookherjee, "'Remembering to forget': public secrecy and memory of sexual violence in the Bangladesh war of 1971," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 2 (2006).

¹⁴⁶ Sisson and Rose, *War and secession: Pakistan, India, and the creation of Bangladesh*.

After the ceasefire, the People's Republic of Bangladesh was now an independent nation; however, the destruction of the war produced a new country in a dilapidated state. The mass rapes left many women pregnant; therefore, one of the first decrees of the new government was to order mass abortions across the country, to root out any "bastard Pakistani blood."¹⁴⁷ Some 25,000 abortions were documented by international agencies.¹⁴⁸ This number does not include the back-alley abortions or self-inflicted abortions that occurred in the months following the war. In an effort to reintegrate these women into society the Bengali Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, declared them Biranganas, meaning "female heroes."¹⁴⁹ After using the female heroes to gain international sympathy and aid, the Bangladeshi government destroyed any documentation that identified and/or reported the plight of these women. The government claims that this was done in an effort to protect the Biranganas, but in truth it was intended to silence this national source of shame.¹⁵⁰

Yazmine embodies this shameful and violent history, simultaneously inhabiting shame and honor for both Pakistan and Bangladesh. This reflects Yazmine's observation of our initial reception at MLI, when she pointed out that we both were simultaneously

¹⁴⁷ Yasmin Saikia, "Overcoming the silent archive in Bangladesh: Women bearing witness to violence in the 1971" liberation" war," in *Women and the Contested State: Religion, Violence, and Agency in South and Southeast Asia* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

¹⁴⁸ Brownmiller, *Against our will: Men, women, and rape*.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

admired and resented. When I interviewed Yazmine about her participation in MLI, during our first trip to Jerusalem, she alluded to these loaded Desi histories saying:

I know they all look at me in that way, cause you know they are mostly Pakistani and mostly Punjabi, so they had a lot to do with the military over there. They act so superior, and I remind them of what they did to us (Bengalis), how they treated their own countrymen and what they did to us women. My mom told me about it, and I know they hate me. But I don't care, I am not gonna bleach my skin to be like them, always using their 'fair and lovely' creams. Its good we are all here (MLI) together, focusing on helping, otherwise all us Desis would be at each other's throats.

According to colorist logics stemming from historical Desi conflicts, Yazmine was admired and despised for her simultaneous beauty and dark skin. At the same time, my white privilege embodied something many Desis in the room both subconsciously aspired to but resented because racist logics dictate that for Desis whiteness is unattainable.¹⁵¹ Yazmine understands that what she looks like conjures up this deep chasm as she is quite dark-skinned, which should disqualify her from being beautiful, according to hegemonic Desi beauty standards that prize light-skin. Yazmine is too beautiful to be disqualified, she is literally the exception, an anomaly that garners "hate" because she upsets the colorism hierarchy. She is fully aware of this, hence her comment "that's why they will hate us." Yazmine forms one side of the colorism binary, and I form the other, she is too dark, I am too light, one being undesirable for mainstream Desis, and the other being unachievable. Yazmine wasted no time reading that room, and she was right. Before the formal orientation started Yazmine leaned in again to say "Don't worry, I don't give a shit what they think. They will come around eventually, but we have each other, don't

¹⁵¹ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (ERIC, 1995).

worry sweetly.” I perceived her words as a type of silent pact, a way of her extending friendship with full transparency, and the benefit of her knowledge on how to navigate within the group. I was grateful for Yazmine’s straight forwardness, and her strategic decision to sit with me. I was relieved and welcomed her boldness. She understood the colorist logics, she was not sure if I did, and was basically offering to take care of me, to be my guide, my friend, and to provide the blunt truth about the group dynamics.

This detailing of Yazmine’s positionality within Desi dominated MLI is but one example of the multiple inter and intra-group conflicts within MLI. In addition to colorism, another palpable tension within MLI is not only the historical intergroup conflict that has existed between various groups of Jews and Muslims, but their own layers of oppression that exist within each group respectively. At face-value, it is quite obvious that MLiers face parallel forms of Islamophobia and/or anti-Semitism. Looking more closely, several other social hierarchies operate within MLI. At times, there are more differences among different Muslims or Jews than there are between Muslims and Jews. This is particularly true when comparing the experiences of Arab Muslims and White Jews as compared to the racism that Desi and Black Muslims experience writ large as well as within Muslim communities. The reverse can be true as well: Often, Arab Muslims, who benefit from white privilege, are less likely to be overtly anti-Semitic than Desi Muslims, who have less racial privilege and subsequently feel more compelled to try to operationalize non-Semitic privilege within U.S. American halls of power. These halls of power can and often do include an agenda that pits Desi Muslims against Jews.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Schroeter, ““Islamic Anti-Semitism” in Historical Discourse.”

This trend within Western situated diasporic Desi Muslim communities, is exactly the trend that MLIers circumvent through their participation in a program hosted by Jews, designed by Jews, and concerned with conveying Jewish identity and peoplehood pedagogies. As Javed expressed, when I interviewed him in 2017 about why he chose to join MLI, “Back home I don’t have Jewish friends or contact with the Jewish community, most Desis don’t know Jews, and don’t like them, which always seemed backwards to me, especially in America. MLI is a unique opportunity to change that.”

Jasbir Puar describes this process as “disaggregation.”¹⁵³ Disaggregation involves various marginalized groups attempting to disassociating from one another, in order to try and ascend oppressive hierarchies based on orientalist white supremacist logics. In other words, we see Desi Muslims distancing themselves from Jews to benefit from existing anti-Semitic structures.¹⁵⁴ Conversely, we see Jews distancing themselves from Brown Desis to gain potential White privilege.¹⁵⁵ This parallels David Valentine’s theory of social hierarchies. Although Valentine is primarily concerned with transphobia, he astutely observes a number of other social hierarchies that relate to gendered, sexualized, and racialized structures at play within MLI. He succinctly points out that transgender people, or more to the point, persons viewed as other “provide a foil against which... implicitly white, middle class, respectable, private, dependable, and most deeply, male—

¹⁵³ Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*, 39.

¹⁵⁴ Navras J Aafreedi, "Antisemitism in the Muslim Intellectual Discourse in South Asia," *Religions* 10, no. 7 (2019).

¹⁵⁵ Samuel J Tanner, "Jewishness and Whiteness," in *Encyclopedia of Critical Whiteness Studies in Education* (Brill, 2020).

can define itself.”¹⁵⁶ Disaggregation explains how, Arab Muslims, specifically Arab Muslim women, opt into Whiteness, especially within Desi Brown dominated MLI. This is evident in how Arab Muslim women within MLI are the quickest to recognize my Muslimness over my Jewishness.¹⁵⁷ This is likely due to their racial privilege coupled with the gender segregation common within their communities.¹⁵⁸ Within gender segregated societies gender co-mingling is negatively perceived, and so women have continued and unfettered access to my person whereas contact with male members in these contexts is largely discouraged. Therefore, the combination of having less of a need to jockey for power within the racial hierarchy and having more gender access results in Arab Muslim women being the most accepting of my Muslimness and perhaps the least threatened by my dual and perceived conflicting identities. As Gamila put it “We are all white Muslim women at the end of the day.”

These tensions are further inflected by the fact that many Muslims and Jews within MLI and at large are not only affiliated with transnational networks; they are also in diaspora. Diaspora is at the heart of the stakes that many Jews and Muslims have in their holy lands/homelands. Muslims and Jews alike have been the subjects of xenophobia-fueled accusations that view them as a nation within a nation, unable to

¹⁵⁶ David Valentine, *Imagining transgender* (Duke University Press, 2007), 109.

¹⁵⁷ Atiya Husain, "Moving beyond (and back to) the black–white binary: A study of black and white Muslims’ racial positioning in the United States," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 4 (2019).

¹⁵⁸ Alimahomed-Wilson, "The matrix of gendered Islamophobia: Muslim women’s repression and resistance."

assimilate into Western societies.¹⁵⁹ These fears of never being viewed as part of the national fabric within the Western societies they chose to call home were often voiced when news reports about defacements of synagogues and mosques hit the headlines. Our Jewish instructors in Jerusalem recurrently remarked “That’s why I made Aliyah,” “I am happy my parents made Aliyah,” or “Israel really is the only safe place where Jews can be Jews.” Or when a “terrorist” attack in a Western nation occurred, many MLers would repeat this incantation, “Please don’t let him be Muslim, please don’t let him be one of us.” These xenophobic anti-integration perceptions bring to light the ethnonationalist roots of the nation state. Jewish and Muslim loyalties are questioned, due to their ties to other imagined communities known as nations/homelands.¹⁶⁰ We start to see then that Muslims are subject to a type of Muslim Question. This parallels the Jewish Question and is perpetuated by some Jewish people themselves who simultaneously suffer from anti-Semitism and therefore perpetuate Islamophobia. The reverse is of course true as well. This is why some authors critique tactics of integration, because they can be seen as forced assimilation to a colonially established nation state. During my interview with Laila in 2018, she told me about an incident she once had with her parents in their New Jersey home when she was about twelve years old:

So it was like early December 2007 and my parents, because of all the post-9/11 hate, were going to put up a Christmas tree. I was like shocked cause we are pretty religious. And I asked them why they want to, and they were like ‘Cause we are American, and this is what Americans do and we want to show we are American, just as American as the rest of them.’ I couldn’t believe it, but I knew it would keep us more safe.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Mandaville, "Islam and Exceptionalism in the Western Policy Imagination," *Overcoming Orientalism: Essays in Honor of John L. Esposito* (2021).

¹⁶⁰ Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*.

Forced assimilation can and does result in genocides, including genocides that have impacted Muslims and Jews within MLI and globally. These are just some of the threads within MLI that I attempt to unweave in my analysis here. The dynamics concerning Muslim integration and assimilation into western societies was and is ever-present within MLI. Addressing concerns about how to assimilate or how to integrate into Western societies while keeping intact a unique Muslim identity is a parallel agenda that Muslim MLers share with their Jewish SHI hosts, especially those Jewish SHI hosts and instructors that are based in New York. The navigations of Islamophobic and anti-Semitic American milieux creates common ground between MLers and their SHI host institution.

Seeking out this common ground began on that first orientation day, where Cohort IV was prompted with questions about their dual Muslim-American identities. These intersectional identities are more fully explored in Chapters 4 and 5. I now turn to several other complex themes I encountered during my initiation to MLI, and which remained salient throughout my four plus years of ethnographic fieldwork.

With our friendship firmly established Yazmine and I were able to brave our isolation together. We sat quietly as the official orientation began after the Chicago Crew had finally taken their seats at the table with the rest of us. Imam Abdullah welcomed everyone, introduced us to one another as the “best” cohort ever, expressing his enthusiasm at being part of such an amazing group of Muslim Leaders. Abdullah was warm, inviting, and set the room at ease while also revving up the excitement for our coming journey. After everyone had taken a deep breath, we dove right into several

prescribed icebreakers, the first of which asked each of us to name “my people.” Not ethnically, tribally, or nationally, but people who are like us in activity and character. Many responded with “activists, teachers,” and Nasreen added “those who take no shit, and get shit done!” Gamila’s list of people ended and began with “Survivors,” as the majority of women in the room nodded their heads affirmatively and in support of Gamila’s courage. Yazmine and I never got the chance to shout out who our people are due to time constraints, and after a quick fifteen-minute break, just enough time to go to the bathroom and grab another cup of coffee, we moved onto the next icebreaker.

We were asked to draw a timeline of our lives, plotting our formative experiences, those moments that made us who we are today. We all started drawing our lives out on the 8.5 by 11” hotel paper. Ten minutes later we were counted off to form five groups, we all stood and awkwardly made our way to our numbered groups. At my group destination I met Kamillah, Ismail, Nadine, and Alper. After the room settled, we all shared our formative experiences. Kamillah took charge and offered to share first: “Coming here to America when I was very young definitely changed my life. In Pakistan I don’t think I would have been as educated as I am. Nor would I be aware of how brown I am.” Kamillah went on to explain her journey through higher education, culminating in her obtaining a doctorate in anthropology that she utilizes as an ivy league professor. She continued,

Getting my doctorate was definitely a formative experience. Before that though, in my teenage years, at sixteen, I was sexually assaulted by one of my cousins. Moving through that, the shame, the expected familial silence, and a general lack of justice, are the things that still motivate me today. Surviving my first abusive marriage, from which my beautiful daughter was born, also definitely makes me who I am.

All of us were a bit shocked and impressed with Kamillah's candor about her sexual assault and the domestic violence she had endured. She certainly set the tone for the rest of our shares. In the spirit of Kamillah's honesty Nadine volunteered to share next:

Thank you so much Kamillah for breaking the ice the way that you did. Obviously, I am a white convert and I'm from the South, but more importantly, I was also raped, at the age of fourteen, by three boys I went to school with. Finding Islam, surviving my short not so great marriage and raising my son alone, have all impacted me in so many ways. I haven't ever fully dealt with those traumas, but as a writer these experiences fuel the stories I am trying to tell through my writing.

We all thanked Nadine for her share, expressing our sincere heartache over all she had been through. Other groups were laughing and smiling as they got increasingly louder.

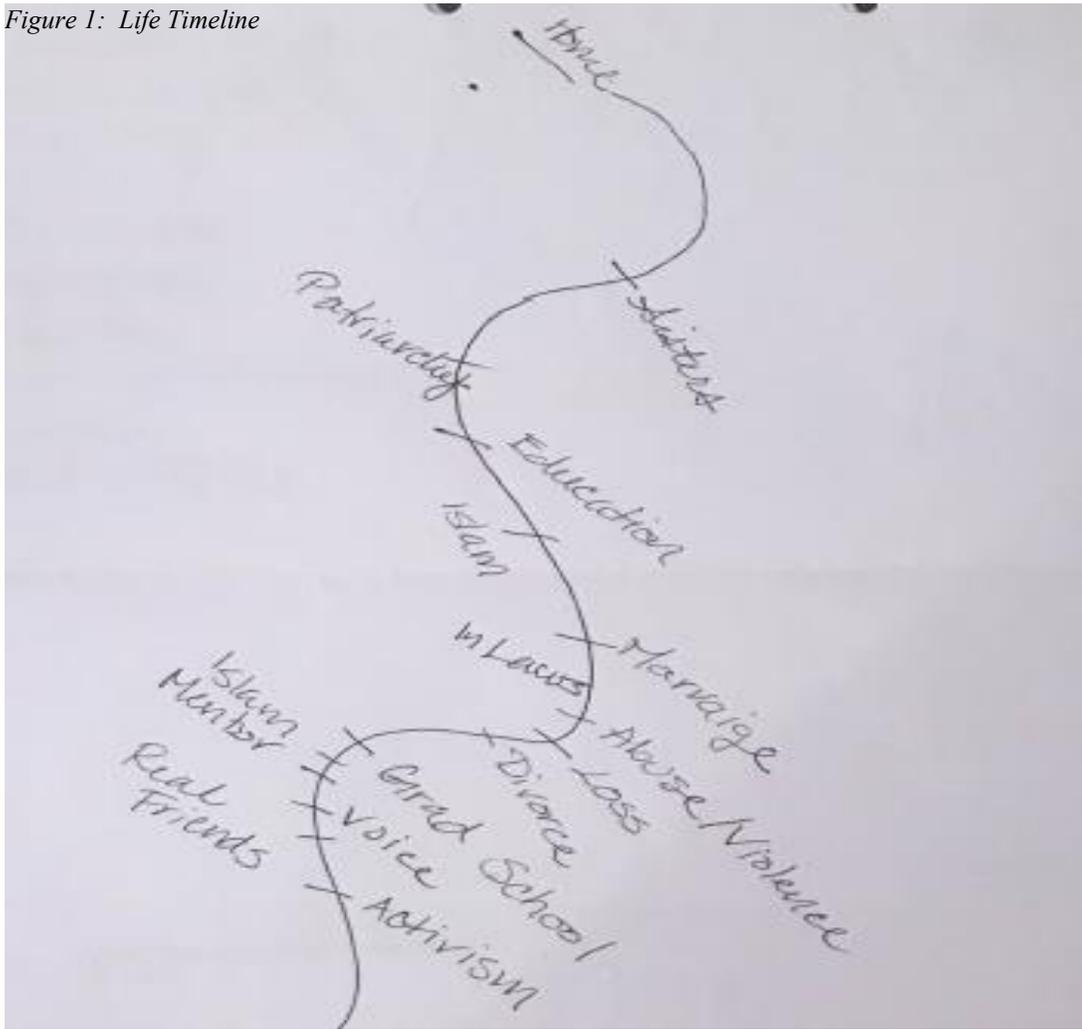
Ismail and Alper both gestured towards me, so I took my turn:

Thank you both for sharing, I like Nadine am a white convert as well. I am also a rape survivor. I was assaulted by a co-worker when I was seventeen. After which I went searching and found Islam. Unfortunately, I wound up in a violently abusive marriage, and lost two pregnancies because of that violence. But all that eventually led me to grad school, and now I am trying to get my PhD.

Alper and Ismail were speechless, Kamillah grabbed my hand and Nadine put her arm around me, the three of us embracing in a silent understanding of the weight of what we had shared. Nadine broke our silence saying, "I'm so grateful for you both." We three took a deep breath, released one another, and settled back into our individual chairs.

Below is an image of the timeline of my life that we were asked to plot in order to engage in what resulted in that difficult conversation:

Figure 1: Life Timeline



Ismail and Alper took a long look at all three of us, then Ismail began to speak:

I just don't know what to say except I'm sorry, and that I am struck by the fact that every woman in this group is a rape victim. I'm just in shock, and this is horrifying, and I want to thank you all for being so honest, and also thank you for trusting me, us (gesturing to Alper) with such painful experiences.

Alper chimed in "yes yes it's just unbelievable, and you are all so strong and I'm so sorry..." Abdullah loudly announced "we have two minutes to finish." Ismail sat up straight and said, "Well, I'm just a lawyer...Alper?" Alper jumped in "Oh, I am a

teacher, a professor.” Before we got a chance to ask them more probing questions, Abdullah announced that the activity was over and it was time for lunch.

It had only been three hours, not a lot of time, but on the first day of Hebrew Madrasa, the subjects of colorism, racism, domestic violence, and sexual violence had already been broached. Not to mention intra-Desi conflicts leading back to the 1971 Bangladesh War of Independence. It was only noon, and we had not even yet started talking about Palestine, Israel, or the Jews.

THE ABCDS – AMERICAN BORN CONFUSED DESIS¹⁶¹

The second half of the orientation schedule mysteriously read: Session 3: Itinerary, Session 4: Private and Public, which were executed in reverse order. For Session 3: Itinerary we were all handed a previous cohort’s preliminary schedule of their first Jerusalem trip which had just taken place over the summer of 2016. Every day on the schedule was jam packed, starting at 7:30 in the morning and ending between 9:00 and 10:00 in the evening. However, this schedule only reflected the official study sessions and tours organized by the Shalom Hartman Institute. In reality our days would start before dawn as many of the cohort participants did not want to pass up the opportunity to pray Fajr at al-Aqsa each morning. After perusing the rigorous schedule, our cohort was formally introduced to Haroon Moghul, Cohort I participant, and at the time the Fellow in Jewish-Muslim Relations at the Shalom Hartman Institute North America.

¹⁶¹ This acronym is directly quoted from my informant Jalal who explains the meaning of ABCDs, American Born Confused Desis, in greater detail in the proceeding section.

For most of the day Haroon had sat quietly in a corner, not saying much and not interacting with any of the new MLers, but most seemed to know who he was. I was quite surprised when he stood up in his quiet corner and proceeded to the front of the room, to address matters of the “Private and Public.” The instant he stood up explained why he had been so silent and confined, because Haroon is rather hard to ignore as he looms well over 6’ 5” tall. As we watched Haroon walk his sleight and lanky frame towards the front of the room, Yazmine leaned over and whispered in my ear “where the hell did he come from, has he been here this whole time?” I shrugged and replied, “no clue.” Yazmine, under her breath with eyes wide muttered “that is one tall Punjabi.”

Haroon’s looming physical presence was offset by his friendly and comedic personality, along with his token slogan that he used to set our minds at ease, “Don’t worry, you’ve already sold out the Ummah” or some variation of that, “we are all sellouts here” “we have all sold out the Palestinian people” “relax I’m a sellout too.” The witty quips are in relation to how MLI transgresses the tenants of the BDS movement. His sarcasm was nervously accepted by the room as it broke some of the tension surrounding the controversy of MLI, which he himself has been at the center of from the beginning.

Haroon is a Pakistani American academic, political commentator, and writer. He and his family are Punjabi Pakistanis, his father hailing from Rawalpindi and his mother from East Punjab. Punjabi Pakistanis are a hegemonic force within Pakistan, as well as the Desi U.S. American Ummah.¹⁶² Haroon was born and raised in New England. He is a

¹⁶² Hassan Javid, "Class, power, and patronage: the landed elite and politics in Pakistani Punjab" (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012).

'90s kid, with an affluent upbringing and status. Haroon's familial prosperity is a condition shared by the majority of the Pakistani diaspora here in the U.S.¹⁶³ This elevated degree of economic status is a bone of contention within the U.S. American Muslim Ummah, as other American Muslim ethnic enclaves generally inhabit a more modest echelon.¹⁶⁴ However, this chasm of wealth between Desis and Arabs in the U.S., is offset by the whiteness some Arab Americans identify with.¹⁶⁵ Haroon's respectability in terms of his ivy league education, affluence, and academic publications, shed light on some of the commonly held values of Desi Muslims within MLI, which I explore throughout this project.

The question then, is where are Desi Muslims situated within MLI, and what do these kinds of tensions reveal about how MLI is situated within U.S. American as well as transnational contexts? Desi Muslims are typically more identifiably different from Arab

¹⁶³ Aminah Mohammad-Arif, "Pakistanis in the United States: From Integration to Alienation?," *Pakistani Diasporas: Culture, Conflict and Change* (2009).

¹⁶⁴ Pew Research Center, "Muslims in America: Immigrants and those born in U.S. see life differently in many ways," (April 17, 2018 April 17, 2018). <https://www.pewforum.org/essay/muslims-in-america-immigrants-and-those-born-in-u-s-see-life-differently-in-many-ways/>.

¹⁶⁵ The wealth disparity between Desis and Arabs is due to several factors: immigration policies including refugee and asylum policies. The majority of Desis on U.S. America fulfill the "brain drain" requirements of immigration policy. Arabs in the U.S. America, on the contrary, often enter the States under different circumstances, with less education and financial resources than their Pakistani Muslim brethren. This wealth disparity is easily illustrated by the nice suburban homes and masjids inhabited and frequented by Desi Muslims. While Arab Muslims tend to inhabit more urban settings with lower-income housing. Ronald H Bayor, *The oxford handbook of American immigration and ethnicity* (Oxford University Press, 2016). Paul D Numrich, "Recent immigrant religions in a restructuring metropolis: New religious landscapes in Chicago," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 17, no. 1 (1997). Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram, "South Asian immigration to United States: A brief history within the context of race, politics, and identity," in *Biopsychosocial approaches to understanding health in South Asian Americans* (Springer, 2018).

Muslims than Arab Muslims are from White Jewish communities.¹⁶⁶ That is, although Desi and Arab Muslims may have religion in common, their social positionality is drastically different than the social positionality of someone who identifies or is perceived as White. The role of Desi Muslims in MLI reveals a lot about the different and at times overlapping arenas of power in which these systems play themselves out. For example, while Desis are subject to typical global racial hierarchies which prioritize Whiteness, they also suffer from intragroup racism within the context of Islam. This is due to the central role that Arab and Arabness plays within Islam.¹⁶⁷ Arabs are privileged within Islam to the extent that they have closer cultural, geographical and linguistic ties to the Prophet Muhammad. Gamila summarized these sentiments during an interview where she explained that she enjoyed a type of Arab supremacy within Muslim diasporic communities.

Muslims who look, sound and speak Arab are higher on the Muslim social hierarchy than those that do not. One of the outcomes of these micro and macro levels of racism is that Desis are forced to work harder to legitimize themselves as properly U.S. American. As mentioned, the hegemonic ideals that inform U.S. Americanness dictate that even though U.S. America hosts a variety of races, ethnicities, religions, cultures,

¹⁶⁶ Khaled A Beydoun, "Between Muslim and White: The Legal Construction of Arab American Identity," *NYU Ann. Surv. Am. L.* 69 (2013); Kristine J Ajrouch and Amaney Jamal, "Assimilating to a white identity: The case of Arab Americans," *International Migration Review* 41, no. 4 (2007); Abdalwahid Abbas Noman, "Diaspora and multiculturalism in reconstructing the cultural identity of Arabs in America," *Cross-Cultural Communication* 15, no. 1 (2019); Amy Kaplan, *Our American Israel* (Harvard University Press, 2018).

¹⁶⁷ Mohamed Bernoussi, "The supremacy of the Qur'anic sign and its impacts on the Arabic Muslim culture," *Mediation and Immediacy: A Key Issue for the Semiotics of Religion* 62 (2020).

and so forth, U.S. Americanness ultimately cannot be separated from the supremacy and ascendancy of Whiteness.¹⁶⁸ Our SHI Jewish hosts and instructors in Palestine/Israel completely avoided the issues of race as it connects to color, focusing on racialized dynamics of Jewishness. However, there was slight acknowledgment of intra-Jewish racism and colorism as we were taught about the ill-treatment of Arab Jews who have made Aliyah, as well as the ill treatment of Ethiopian Jews.¹⁶⁹ Racist and colorist logics are a parallelism between SHI Jews and MLI Muslims. Desis, due to their lack of racial or color privilege, therefore work harder on the whole to be legibly and acceptably U.S. American. They are quicker, then, to undergo processes of de-Muslimification and/or sanitize their Islams so that they are more palatable to hegemonic U.S. American ideals of what is acceptable religiosity. Ironically, Arabs, although they face their own struggles within the context of White and U.S. American supremacies, embody American stereotypes of what a Muslim is or should be. Although they are subject to Islamophobia in unique ways because of this tension, they sometimes are afforded more legitimacy in terms of generalized understandings of who Muslims are and should be.¹⁷⁰ I have witnessed these tensions play out and experienced them myself, as someone who is always not Jewish or Muslim enough in some circles, and too Jewish or Muslim in other

¹⁶⁸ Richard T Hughes, *Myths America lives by: White supremacy and the stories that give us meaning* (University of Illinois Press, 2018).

¹⁶⁹ Adi Shouach and Uri Ben-Eliezer, "Intergenerational dialogue and positioning change in dealing with racism: Ethiopian Jews in Israel, thirty years after the immigration," *Identities* (2021); Yehouda A Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A postcolonial reading of nationalism, religion, and ethnicity* (Stanford University Press, 2006).

¹⁷⁰ Shryock, *Islamophobia/Islamophilia : beyond the politics of enemy and friend*.

circles. These dynamics are the result of rigid and binaried ways of thinking that inform and are informed by colonially influenced transnational racial politics.

Haroon exemplified these dynamics on orientation day when he gave us the lay of the land as it were, and addressed explicit concerns about how confidentiality of participation in MLI would be ensured and maintained. But he was also there as a sort of guide, as a kind of older brother who had wisdom beyond us as participants, but who also served as an intermediary between MLIs, and the founders Abdullah and Yossi, if we had problems, concerns, or issues with the program. Haroon told us bluntly “you’re a sellout...I’m a sellout...accept it now.” He plainly told us what MLI is and what it most certainly is not:

MLI is not interfaith dialogue, it is not faith-washing the Occupation,¹⁷¹ as that would only avoid the hard issues, and the hard issues is what MLI is. Yes we will learn about Judaism, Israel, and Zionism, Yes we will do it in Jerusalem at a blatantly Zionist institution that is funded in part by American anti-Muslim activists Robert Spencer, Pamela Geller, and the Russell Berrie Foundation.¹⁷² Yes you are violating BDS. Yes we will do everything we can to uphold the confidentiality of your participation, but there are no guarantees, so if you are not ready to be labeled a sellout by our community, then you should not be in the program.

Haroon was not mollifying anything, he was giving us an extensive preview of the reality we would soon face in the U.S. if we were to participate in MLI. Haroon lives at the nexus of U.S. American and Muslim, and through his writing displays a transparency

¹⁷¹ Faith-washing the Occupation is related to trying to infuse religious elements to justify violence towards Palestinians and/or violence towards Jews. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (University of California Press, 2017).

¹⁷² Corey Saylor, "The US Islamophobia network: Its funding and impact," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (2014). Wajahat Ali et al., "Fear, Inc," *The roots of the islamophobia network in America*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress (2011).

about how he holds those two identities in tandem. After his first trip to Palestine/Israel with MLI he intentionally outed himself as an MLI participant in a self-authored article published online by Huffington Post. In this article Haroon explains why he chose to be a part of MLI, his main motivation being “America – and the Iraq War.” He continues the article as follows:

Back in college, I was the very picture of the earnest activist: “Enough demonstrations and we’ll change the world!” I helped bring tens of thousands to the streets to stop a belli without casus.¹⁷³ Forget the Arab street: This was the American street. But Operation Iraqi Freedom, a war as unnecessary as it turned out tragic, proceeded as if our numbers meant nothing.¹⁷⁴

Haroon learned a hard lesson as he tried to bridge what he thought U.S. America was and how U.S. America actually worked, in that “numbers” do not equal power. With this new understanding, Haroon pushed forward to the following conclusion:

We were steamrolled. Ignored. Disregarded. Even though we were right, even though we could’ve saved our country so much harm – and Iraq so much more. I wondered what I might do to prevent this from happening again. For one thing, I needed to contribute to the conversations that led to these kinds of decisions. That meant I needed to be in the rooms where they happened. But I also needed to bring more than my identity to the table.¹⁷⁵

Haroon started on a journey to amass as much knowledge as possible, with the aim of gaining access to U.S. American halls of power, to “be in the rooms” where critical life

¹⁷³ Casus Belli is Latin for “Cause of War” and in this context Haroon is stating that the Iraq war was a war without cause.

¹⁷⁴ Haroon Moghul, “Why I Went to Israel,” *Huffington Post* (2015), https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-i-went-to-israel_b_6507540.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

changing events were decided on a national and global level, and of course to transcend the singular identity label constantly imposed on him, as he explains: “Because I was usually reduced to an identity. Muslim. Pakistani. Foreign. Other. Which meant biased. Partial. Insufficient. This is why Reza Aslan¹⁷⁶ gets challenged over his ‘right’ to write a book about Jesus, while Duck Dynasty¹⁷⁷ gets to pontificate about radical Islam while looking like radical Islam.” Haroon goes on to share how he sought out to educate and be educated, enrolling at Columbia University, working for several noteworthy think tanks, trying to open a dialogue, but kept hitting the same brick wall: “But time and again, Israel and Palestine stopped the conversation, especially when it was between most American Muslim and American Jewish communities. It was the giant rampaging elephant in the room, sucking up all the oxygen and destroying the furniture.” Haroon’s frustrations are shared by many MLI participants, who describe MLI as the natural next step after exhausting interfaith dialogue arenas. Haroon, being a member of the first MLI cohort, as well as a mentor to all of the following cohorts, plays an instrumental part in translating Jewish curricula to MLIs, as well as relaying Muslim concerns to SHI instructors and leadership. Haroon’s frustrations with the limits of inter-faith dialogue is a frustration he shares with MLI founder Abdullah who articulates these limits as follows:

Jews and Muslims in America only talk to each other in two ways – either about hummus, halal and kashrut or they debate and throw their own facts and UN resolutions at each other. After the shouting match that ensues,

¹⁷⁶ Bob Smietana, "Reza Aslan defends controversial new book on Jesus," *The Washington Post* (August 2, 2013 2013). https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/reza-aslan-defends-controversial-new-book-on-jesus/2013/08/02/b09a0fde-fb96-11e2-89f7-8599e3f77a67_story.html.

¹⁷⁷ Holly Willson Holladay, "Reckoning with the “Redneck”": Duck Dynasty and the boundaries of morally appropriate whiteness," *Southern Communication Journal* 83, no. 4 (2018).

there is no relationship left. In the post-9/11 era, all the schmoozing efforts, interfaith meetings and ‘Kumbaya’ singing weren’t making any difference.¹⁷⁸

In wanting to tackle the elephant in the room, MLI came into Haroon’s life at the exact right time. Haroon succinctly explains why Israel/Palestine is so integral to U.S.

American identity and policy:

Having spent the previous few years working in American foreign policy, I recognized that there could be no productive change without taking into account my country’s relationship with Israel, and lack of relationship with Palestinians. Indeed, Israel remains inseparable from much of what our country does, says, and wants, in a very important part of the world. Every time I spoke about Islam and Muslims, and I did (and do) that a lot, I was challenging many in the audience to turn their worldview upside down.¹⁷⁹

Haroon did not feel comfortable challenging his audiences unless he was willing to challenge his own views and perspectives. Haroon knew he needed firsthand knowledge of Israel and Palestine in order “to be a more effective participant in critical American conversations.” Haroon’s coming to MLI story is reflective of many of the MLI participants’ journeys that brought them to similar conclusions and frustrations.

Haroon casually and succinctly introduced us to the stakes we would face at home because of our participation in MLI. But what about what we would face in Palestine and Israel? Haroon was very blunt and direct about the challenges we would face during our weeks in Palestine. The checkpoints, blatant racial profiling, police/military presence everywhere, the overwhelming devastation, poverty, hopelessness among Palestinians in

¹⁷⁸ David Brinn, "Erasing the Red Lines Between Muslims and Jews in America," *The Jerusalem Post* (Jerusalem), February 8 2018, Diaspora.

¹⁷⁹ Moghul, "Why I Went to Israel."

the West Bank, and the gut-wrenching pain we would witness on both sides of the wall as Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims told us their stories. Haroon warned us, tried to prepare us, but the truth is we were volunteering to be uninvited interlopers, which for many of us meant we were treading on someone else's open wound.

MUSLIM SPLINTERS

This section explores the ways in which Muslim and Jewish participants in MLI dilute their usual factional commitments in intergroup situations. I define factionalism here as internal, intragroup camps based on slight nuances in opinions or perspectives. Factionalism remains pervasive in a room full of only Muslims, or a room full of only Jews, where intragroup conflict between reform and conservative Jews or Sunni and Shi'a Muslims remain sources of conflict. For all intents and purposes MLI is its own kind of faction, because MLI violates BDS, in contradiction with many mainstream Muslims that equate BDS with pro-Palestinian perspectives and sentiments.¹⁸⁰ While we see a breakdown of Jewish and Muslim factions in interreligious contexts in MLI, factions and splinters remain a source of intra-group conflict. Haroon speaks to these intra-group conflicts as he charts his journey towards MLI. Haroon, unlike most of us, had been to Israel/Palestine several times before joining MLI. In his book he talks about flying to Tel Aviv from Cairo at the age of twenty-one where he was studying Arabic. He thought maybe visiting Islam's third holiest place, might bridge some of the cognitive dissonance he seemed to be plagued with: his public self—a Muslim student leader who gave

¹⁸⁰ Jennifer Hitchcock, "Social media rhetoric of the transnational Palestinian-led boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement," *Social Media+ Society* 2, no. 1 (2016).

sermons regularly to his fellow NYU goers—and his inner private self that walked the path of non-traditionalism. In Cairo he decided to take a break from his somewhat self-selected Arabization and headed to Israel. Once the plane landed one bus came to take the majority of the passengers to the main terminal. The four remaining passengers included Haroon himself, and three Palestinians. The four of them were put on a different bus and taken for questioning. On the bus the four of them chatted a bit, exchanging personal information and making casual conversation, as Haroon states “Like me, they were students--studying in Egypt. Unlike me, they called this place home. Unlike me, they had a harder time getting in. For I was Muslim but also--and this confounded one Israeli soldier after another--American.”¹⁸¹ This exchange offers a window into the complex and multiple global perceptions about what/who is acceptably American and/or Muslim, a common tension that MLIers continuously navigate. Identity categories often color the intra-group factions within faith traditions. Haroon’s encounters in Egypt highlight some of these factions rooted in privilege and/or bias dependent on these identity categories: citizenship, national origins, and ethnicity. Indeed, this exchange lends insight into the simultaneously North American and transnational underpinnings of MLI/SHI and both its Muslim and Jewish members.

Haroon was also questioned in Cairo at the ticket counter before boarding his flight, an interrogation that ended when Haroon named his “friends.” Haroon understood, as he states in his book, that the names of his friends needed to be White. Thus he names Bradley, Jeremy, Jacob, and James, childhood friends, teenage buddies if you will, who

¹⁸¹ Haroon Moghul, *How to be a Muslim: An American Story* (Beacon Press, 2017), 105.

are not in his immediate everyday circle of friends. Haroon survives his questioning in Tel Aviv stating, “several hours later I was judged nonthreatening enough to enter. The lonely planet guide to Israel hadn’t bothered to include a section for traveling while indigenous¹⁸² or sharing the religion of the indigenous.”¹⁸³ Haroon continues to illustrate his life’s journey as a search for a Muslim American identity that felt authentic and thus bridged the gap of his own double consciousness.

Haroon’s double consciousness is the result of him embodying stereotypical Eastern tropes, such as being a Punjabi Pakistani Muslim, while attempting to assimilate to U.S. American centric ideals of success in tandem with successfully appearing U.S. American in and of himself. In an effort to build this authentic American Muslim identity, Haroon travelled to Jerusalem in order to fortify his Muslim roots. This sheds light on the meaning and centrality that Jerusalem holds for many Muslims. Haroon as a Desi U.S. American Muslim, with no apparent connection to Palestine other than his Islam, describes Jerusalem as almost unleaveable saying, “...what I found behind checkpoints and past interrogations made it (Jerusalem) nearly impossible to leave. Many places matter. Rarer is that place that feels deeply, truly holy...Palestinians had created here a religiosity that breathed through ancient stones. I felt like God was here, in a way

¹⁸² Haroon is using “Indigenous” in this context to refer to Palestinians. Haroon’s usage of this term in this way is a subtle pro-Palestinian maneuver, as Israeli Jews also claim indigeneity to Israel/Palestine. For more on this debate about indigeneity see Ilan Pappé, "Shtetl colonialism: First and last impressions of indigeneity by colonised colonisers," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012); Ilan Pappé, "Indigeneity as Cultural Resistance: Notes on the Palestinian Struggle within Twenty-First-Century Israel," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (2018); Mark Rifkin, "Indigeneity, apartheid, Palestine: On the transit of political metaphors," *Cultural Critique* 95 (2017).

¹⁸³ Moghul, *How to be a Muslim: An American Story*, 106.

I've rarely felt God."¹⁸⁴ Haroon's feelings about Jerusalem are complex and bound up in the collision of U.S. American imperialism,¹⁸⁵ its subsequent interference in the Israel/Palestine conflict, and what Haroon and some Muslims refer to as the fall of Muslim Civilization¹⁸⁶ that has left Muslims like Haroon feeling powerless and questioning their place in society.

Haroon, in part, offers an explanation as to why he and so many Muslims have such strong feelings about Jerusalem and by extension Palestine, by retelling the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem in 619. During this passionate retelling Haroon also illustrates its meaning, saying: "At the edge of the Noble Sanctuary, Muhammad led every one of the prophets in prayer—one of the most powerful images of Muslim universalism, because prophets were sent to all peoples."¹⁸⁷ Haroon continues the story, talking about the Prophet's ascent to heaven and his subsequent negotiation with God about the number of prescribed prayer times, eventually settling on five prayer times each day. Haroon persists, "Moses insisted that even this (praying five times a day) was overly much, but Muhammad couldn't bring himself to return for another reduction. Every time Muslims pray, something of Jerusalem stirs within our hearts. It was from Jerusalem that Muhammad went up to God, after all, not Mecca or Medina. And each prostration—when the Muslim touches her forehead to the floor—is deemed a

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 108.

¹⁸⁵ Bhungalia, Greven, and Mustafa, "The shifting contours of US power and intervention in Palestine."

¹⁸⁶ Moghul, *How to be a Muslim: An American Story*; Hodgson, *The venture of Islam, volume 3: The gunpower empires and modern times*.

¹⁸⁷ Moghul, *How to be a Muslim: An American Story*, 107.

reproduction of Muhammad's ascent, the closest she can get to God."¹⁸⁸ This powerful imagery of Muslim universalism points to the dissipation of factionalism we see within intergroup religious engagement in MLI. This Muslim universalism is illustrative of an internalization of Muslim pluralism, which is an SHI/MLI parallelism conveyed to MLIs through SHI's curriculum, which upholds the ideal that Israel is a home for any and all Jews; Jewish pluralism. Haroon, through his engagement in MLI, has adopted this tenant of intra-religious pluralism as way to articulate a type of transnational Muslim solidarity, inclusive of issues concerning the Occupation. Furthermore, this dissipation of factionalism solidifies Muslim glocal¹⁸⁹ ties to not just Jerusalem, but to Palestine, Israel, the conflict, and Global Jewry.

Muslim and Jewish stakes in Israel/Palestine are emblematic of broader patterns of the collapse of Muslim and Jewish factionalism. It's important to understand MLI as a nuanced community full of many different perspectives. These include pro-Palestinian, pro-BDS, anti-BDS, Shia exclusionary, anti-West, anti-racist, with various spectrums of racist underpinnings, to name but a few. The tie that binds MLI, however, is an optically moderate approach to politics that manifests due to respectability, the urge to avoid extremism, as well as an undercurrent of unease within multi-religious contexts and the

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Glocal is a word mash up that deals with thinking globally while simultaneously acting locally. I use this to describe the multiple geopolitical commitments most MLI members hold. For example, MLIs from Chicago often buy household items from Palestinian owned convenience stores that charitably support Palestine's self-determination efforts.

possible appearance of disunity.¹⁹⁰ In short, Muslim and Jewish participants of MLI largely share a common interest in optics. This concern for dominant perceptions of MLI members' Muslimness, Jewishness, politicism, and so forth influences at times the breakdown and at other times the reconstitution of factionalism within either group. As much as many members of MLI feel compelled to present a united front, as it were, in front of other religious groups, MLI simultaneously brings to the forefront long-stemming sources of conflict between and among Muslims.

There is a constant tension between intra-group conflicts and inter-group optics and politics of respectability. The factions within Islam tack between several positionalities. There are hyper-conservatives who want to return to the Golden Age of Islam and there are pro-Western assimilation Muslims who want to completely lose their distinctive Muslim flavor, and there is no central authority within Islam to mandate which approach is best.¹⁹¹ The call to bring back a living breathing Caliphate is an attempt to quell this infighting.¹⁹² The lack of centralization in terms of authority in Judaism and Islam has forced the community to centralize in interesting ways; the centralization of authority in both Judaism and Islam is a constant battle and a constant problem. Javed expressed these intra-Muslim tensions during our interview when he explained some of his motivations for joining MLI:

There has been an increasing disappearance of moderate Muslim political positions, and that is where I see MLI as a possible fix for these differing

¹⁹⁰ Carl Morris, "Islamic Cosmopolitanism: Muslim Minorities and Religious Pluralism in North America and Europe," in *Emergent Religious Pluralisms* (Springer, 2019).

¹⁹¹ Hodgson, *The venture of Islam, volume 3: The gunpower empires and modern times*.

¹⁹² Mona Hassan, *Longing for the lost caliphate* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

schools of thought within our community. MLI is a space for different kinds of Muslims to engage with Jews, yes, but also to engage with one another. To bridge the gaps between how we move through the world and America as Muslims, without creating more radical factions.

The rise and fall of factionalism in different contexts is a form of strategic essentialism.¹⁹³ In intergroup contexts both Jews and Muslims perform unity on all fronts, however, in intra-group contexts factionalism rears its head behind closed doors. Haroon's journey to MLI and his inhabitation of MLI illustrate these tensions and motivations.

For Haroon, being in Jerusalem, feeling God while witnessing the deplorable treatment Palestinians face every day, magnified his feelings of incompetence, not just in relation to Palestine, but in relation to Muslim oppression and suffering, those instances of Muslims and Muslim regimes violently silencing other Muslims, Muslim misogyny towards its own women,¹⁹⁴ as well as the several genocides occurring around the world against Muslims; the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar,¹⁹⁵ the persecution of Uighurs in China,¹⁹⁶ and the invasion and occupation of Kashmir by the Indian Army under Modi's Hindutva regime.¹⁹⁷ The knowledge of these current atrocities collides with Haroon's

¹⁹³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The spivak reader: selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (Psychology Press, 1996).

¹⁹⁴ Farid Esack, "Islam, feminism and empire: A comparison between the approaches of Amina Wadud and Saba Mahmood," *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 21, no. 1 (2015).

¹⁹⁵ Nehginpao Kipgen, "The Rohingya crisis: The centrality of identity and citizenship," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 39, no. 1 (2019).

¹⁹⁶ ARM Imtiyaz, "Mapping Crisis and Solutions in the Uighur National Question," *Peace Review* 32, no. 1 (2020).

¹⁹⁷ Nitasha Kaul, "India's obsession with Kashmir: democracy, gender,(anti-) nationalism," *Feminist Review* 119, no. 1 (2018).

knowledge of Islam’s grand past, which is referenced by Haroon and other Muslims as the fall of Muslim Civilization, prompting the following line of questioning: “What is it about modern Muslims that made us so unable to live up to our ancestors’ achievements, or our contemporaries of other backgrounds? To be Muslim is to be the stunted descendants of giants, to live in the ruin of your own civilization...If Islam is so great, why are Muslims doing so badly?”¹⁹⁸ While Haroon is an extraordinarily introspective person and Muslim, his thought process mirrors and echoes the thoughts, feelings, and turmoil that the majority of MLers grapple with daily. Jalal, a fellow MLer, during one of our casual hangouts, explained to me the very same condition Haroon meticulously spells out in his book concerning his own journey and that of the U.S. American Muslim Ummah, except Jalal is a bit more direct and far less careful in his descriptions:

You know Jess, we are here, we are trying, but we are just a bunch of ABCDs—you know ‘American Born Confused Desis.’ Like are we Desi, Pakistani, Punjabi, Muslim, Qadiyani, American, white, brown and all that. Where do we fit, where do we belong? And I think the problem is that we don’t belong anywhere anymore, so we are starting from square one, we have to build a place we can and want to belong to. And we are doing it, but we also can’t let go of our old country, and we can’t quite believe that America doesn’t have room in its heart for our kind. So we are running around, trying to build, trying to open America’s heart, while still being loyal to our roots. But we are lost, and we are confused, like teenagers trying to adult. But it’s ok cause regardless of all that, we will keep trying, isn’t that the whole bloody point, to try!

Jalal’s understanding of who MLI and the broader U.S. American Muslim Ummah is comprised of, and what they are trying to accomplish, iterates a minority’s journey through integration processes that perceived outsiders undergo. These processes parallel

¹⁹⁸ Moghul, *How to be a Muslim: An American Story*, 109.

the ways other marginalized communities grapple with racial and other social hierarchies active in Western national contexts, with the goal of full social citizenship. Citizenship is often thought of as national loyalty coupled with official identity documentation that proves this loyalty. However, official documentation does not necessarily mean or guarantee social acceptance as a fellow loyal citizen. Citizenship is inherently exclusionary and tied to racialized colonial ideals of Europeanness.¹⁹⁹ Processes of American chattel slavery have crystalized euro-centric social hierarchies which have culminated in an even more reductive social hierarchy based on perceived color that places Whiteness at the top of these hierarchies.²⁰⁰ However, Haroon's personal journey speaks to a need for reconciliation within the individual heart and mind. For Haroon, this exercise of reconciling identities is work that is meant to get easier with time, eventually resulting in exactly what Haroon was searching for and is accurately demonstrated via the title of his book *How to Be a Muslim: An American Story*. For Haroon, and those like him, resolution is always just one step away. But for Jalal there is no serenity to be sought; the condition of being ABCD is incurable, a result of surviving in a country not your own, a condition that is the U.S. American Desi Muslim version of W.E.B. Du Bois' double consciousness²⁰¹ and Vijay Prashad's Desi Hindu spiritual patina.²⁰² Knowing

¹⁹⁹ Smith, *Conquest: sexual violence and American Indian genocide*.

²⁰⁰ Danielle Marie Dempsey, "THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM AND THE REGULATION OF GENDER IN NORTH AMERICA," in *The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Gender and Society*, ed. Emma Tomalin and Caroline Starkey (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge Publishing, 2021).

²⁰¹ Du Bois, *The souls of black folk*.

²⁰² Prashad, *The karma of Brown folk*.

this, Jalal is content to exist within the never-ending loop of trying to solve the unsolvable. Haroon and Jalal form the poles of the MLI spectrum in relation to U.S. American Muslim identity.

As MLIs navigate their way to social citizenship, internal communal issues cause anger, strife, and fracture. One major fault line among American Muslims in MLI is the Palestine/Israel conflict. Where individuals, communal leaders, and institutions stand on this issue is often used as a litmus test of authentic Muslimness and Americanness.²⁰³ Ironically these are often perceived as in conflict with one another, therefore making it impossible for U.S. American and Muslim MLIs to be legibly American or Muslim within assimilatory contexts. Unpacking all that encompasses the Israel/Palestine issue is difficult. However, the broad strokes are necessary in order to understand how this regional issue is operationalized for and against American religious minorities, particularly U.S. American Muslims & Jews, specifically MLIs.

PALESTINE/ISRAEL

MLI revolves around disseminating particular types of knowledges about the Palestine/Israel conflict and tangential issues such as the importance of Jerusalem to Jewish peoplehood. Therefore, understanding the broad strokes of the primacy of this regional disputed territory for both Muslims and Jews in MLI is essential to understanding MLI in and of itself and how Muslim positionalities on the global stage grapple with internationally charged politics. I further explore MLI's overt and ulterior

²⁰³ Sina Arnold, "A Collision of Frames: The BDS Movement and Its Opponents in the United States," in *Boycotts Past and Present* (Springer, 2019).

agendas in a following chapter where I analyze MLI's official curriculum. Here I unpack the expressed highlights of the Israel/Palestine conflict as told through the eyes of the founders of MLI and its first cohort members, one of them being Haroon. As Haroon describes the impacts of this conflict, it permeates all temporal realms for Muslims and Jews around the world. It is a battle of collective narratives, written in blood, inherited through pain, and with hopeful promises of belonging, safety, and self-rule.²⁰⁴ It is a conflict that demonstrates how deep genocidal wounds cut, and how collective trauma and fear contort victim into perpetrator. The origins of this conflict are perspectival and thus the beginning is indeterminable, just as an end to this conflict is unforeseeable. The Israel/Palestine conflict is inherently concerned with self-determination and nationhood. To shed light on this issue I start with *The Jewish Question*,²⁰⁵ the initial discussion about whether or not Jews can be loyal citizens in Christian, Western European contexts. The synopsis and retelling of these important Jewish and Muslim histories was preemptively delivered to all MLIs through an assigned reading list that was to be completed before we made our first trip to Palestine in 2017. Below is the prescribed list of readings.

²⁰⁴ Moghul, *How to be a Muslim: An American Story*.

²⁰⁵ Enzo Traverso, *The Jewish question: History of a Marxist debate* (Brill, 2018).

Figure 2: 1st Jerusalem Trip Reading List



Within these prescribed readings are the histories I recount below that are imperative to understanding the contextual underpinnings of MLI. One of the many issues prompted by these readings is the origins of Zionism as they relate to the Jewish Question. The Jewish Question originates from anti-Semitic contexts in Western Europe. These national founders also referred to The Jewish Question as The Jewish Problem. The constructed “problem” within the “Jewish Problem” is the notion that Jewish people comprise their own nation, and therefore constitute an obstacle to the socio-religious and ethnic cohesion that modern nation states pursue and demand with vigor. In the mid-1700s, French and German national leaders raised the Jewish Question: can the Jews be Englishmen, Frenchmen, truly part of the German Volk? Essentially, can the Jews be part

of the perceived “us” or will they always be the perceived “them?”²⁰⁶ The answer is sometimes, maybe, and often, no. Some Jews responded to this problem by proposing the Zionist project. Zionism proposes that one way to solve or rid Europe of its “nation within a nation” issue is to support self-determination for Jews through their own sovereign state.²⁰⁷ These Zionist logics are more fully explained and conveyed through the MLI curriculum, which I analyze in Chapter 2.

In these early stages of Zionism, European Jews and Christians negotiated potential territories for a Jewish state in different locations such as Uganda and Argentina. But the case for a Jewish homeland took root in Palestine, in Jerusalem, as a place with special significance to the Jewish People.²⁰⁸ Efforts to obtain and build a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine, as opposed to the other territories, were continuous from that point on. In the meantime, the Jews of Western and Eastern Europe began assimilating and/or separating themselves from their country folk as a way to combat pervasive anti-Semitism. The Jewish Question violently resurged with the rise of Nazism and was accompanied by a definitive answer: The Final Solution--the systematic extermination of the Jews--the Holocaust. The results of these atrocities culminated in a collective trauma and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, framed by this then

²⁰⁶ Thomas Pegelow, ““German Jews,”“National Jews,”“Jewish Volk” or “Racial Jews”? The Constitution and Contestation of “Jewishness” in Newspapers of Nazi Germany, 1933–1938,” *Central European History* 35, no. 2 (2002).

²⁰⁷ Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the ground of Jewish identity," *Critical inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1993).

²⁰⁸ Peter Beinart, *The crisis of Zionism* (Macmillan, 2012).

popular slogan: “A land without a people, for a people without a land,”²⁰⁹ with no mention of Palestine’s current inhabitants.

Israel’s War of Independence, the war that established a Jewish Sovereign State, is known by another name by Palestine’s Arab inhabitants: The Nakba, النكبة, meaning The Catastrophe/Disaster. During the Palestine War of 1948 (Israel’s War of Independence) over 700,000 Palestinians were expelled and/or fled from their homes; about half of the pre-war Palestinian Arab population was displaced.²¹⁰ Many of these displaced Palestinians settled in refugee camps in neighboring countries and after the war attempted to return to their homes, but were prevented by Israeli laws and defense forces that classified Palestinians trying to go home as infiltrators of the State of Israel. The denial of the “right of return” is captured visibly by numerous displaced Palestinians holding keys to their family homes that they were forced to leave behind. The Nakba created the Palestinian Refugee Crisis, which includes the original Palestinians that experienced the Nakba firsthand as well as their patrilineal descendants. More simply put, Palestinian refugee status is inherited, passed from generation to generation. Currently, according the UNWRA (The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) there are over five million registered Palestinian refugees.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Adam M. Garfinkle, "On the Origin, Meaning, Use and Abuse of a Phrase," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 4 (1991), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283461>.

²¹⁰ Ahmad H Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the claims of memory* (Columbia University Press, 2007).

²¹¹ Riccardo Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees: a history within history," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 2-3 (2009).

The understanding of the highlights and nuances of this conflict are central to understanding the engagement between Jews and Muslims in MLI. The continued strife between Israel and Palestine is due to the constant clash between the Jewish dream of a homeland and the Palestinian dream of statehood: two tribes seeking security, safety, self-determination, and self-rule. This fight has resulted in each side approaching the other with continued violence and harm. Examples include: the 1950 Law of Return giving all Jews globally the right to Israeli citizenship and return to the homeland, additionally gifting Jews everywhere an inheritable stake in Israel's sovereignty and future. Territorial encroachments violating the 1949 Armistice agreements resulted in Israeli Occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Israel seized these territories during the Six Day War, also known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Israel's continuous building of settlements that violate the Green Line²¹² has resulted in several revolutionary movements, termed Intifadas.²¹³ The first and second Intifadas were attempts to shake off Israeli Occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. In order to contain the revolutionary backlash of Palestinians, Israel built a security barrier in the West Bank. This security wall is a physical partition that is both a practical tool of subjugation employed by the state of Israel and a symbol of apartheid.²¹⁴ The 2005 Israeli withdrawal from Gaza removed IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) presence and all settlements; however,

²¹² The Green Line is another term used to address the 1949 Armistice Borders that were undone by the 1967 War.

²¹³ Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: A History*.

²¹⁴ Gal Ariely, *Israel's Regime Untangled: Between Democracy and Apartheid* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Israel continues to maintain direct control over Gaza's air/maritime space, six of seven land crossings, Palestinian population registry, the maintenance of a no go buffer zone, as well as Gaza's water, electricity, telecommunications and other utilities.²¹⁵ This withdrawal also ultimately left Gaza under Hamas²¹⁶ control, thwarted peace processes, ignored accords, proposals and rejections of a two-state solution²¹⁷ and/or a one-state solution,²¹⁸ and multiple atrocities that have ended lives and instilled fear, hatred, and distrust.²¹⁹ This fear, hatred, and distrust is at the heart of many MLers' consciousness. These particular hurts and harms are central to the MLI curriculum, which I discuss in Chapters 2 and 3.

The aforementioned violences are additionally matched by cultural erasures attempted by both sides and hotly discussed within MLI as well as transnational Muslim and Jewish communities. These forms of denial include Palestinian Holocaust denial and Temple denial (الهيكل المزعوم), Israeli claims that the Nakba never occurred because Palestinians voluntarily left their homes with no pressure from Israel, or initial Zionist

²¹⁵ Jasbir K Puar, *The right to maim* (Duke University Press, 2017).

²¹⁶ Hamas is an acronym for a Palestinian Islamist resistance movement, *Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-'Islāmiyyah*. Hamas and its leaders act as a de facto governing body within Gaza. They provide vital resources such as education and medical care. Hamas is also a militarized resistance movement engaged in defense and protection of Palestinians living in Gaza. Their militarized actions and attacks are more often defensive than offensive, however they are categorized as a terrorist organization by many other nation-states. Yonah Alexander, *Palestinian religious terrorism: Hamas and Islamic jihad* (BRILL, 2021).

²¹⁷ A two-state solution proposes two geographically independent nation-states: Israel for the Jews and Palestine for the Palestinians, with the two territories' borders following the established Green Line. Lustick, *Paradigm lost: From two-state solution to one-state reality*.

²¹⁸ A one-state solution proposes full integration of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza into Israeli society as full legal and social citizens. Ibid.

²¹⁹ Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (Routledge, 2014).

claims that the land of Palestine was empty. Each tribe lives with a deeply traumatic history of oppression, colonization, and genocide. Since 1948, violence has governed the interactions between Israel and Palestine, garnering international attentions, with each side drawing support from the Jewish diaspora and the global Muslim Ummah. Israeli sovereignty and security are global Jewish concerns, and Palestinian statehood and freedom is a global Muslim issue. This is reflected in the contentious conversations within MLI.

CONCLUSION: ORIENTED

Throughout this chapter I have discussed some of the glocal push and pull among and between Jewish and Muslim participants of MLI/SHI. Muslim members of MLI mark a diverse array of Muslims throughout the U.S. U.S. American Muslims are racially, ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and politically multifarious. MLI participants are a small yet representative sample of the manifold varieties of the U.S. American Muslim population. Broadly speaking, these Muslims are confronted daily with the task of negotiating both their U.S. Americanness and their Muslimness. MLI is one of many organizations engaged in these identity negotiations. MLI is more of an educational and networking resource. Its lack of structure means that there are no set agendas, no mission statement, and no rules or rigidity. The one rule that is absolute is anonymity. Beyond that MLI is a unique yet typical group of U.S. American Muslims willing to engage in an educational program about Jews, Judaism, and Jewish peoplehood: Unique because these Muslims are willing to violate BDS to engage with Jews; typical because the demographic makeup of MLI mirrors the distribution of Muslims living in the global

North and West. The aim of this educational program is to build lasting relationships between U.S. American Jews and Muslims, to move beyond interfaith dialogue that ignores the hard questions for the comfort of a shared plate of hummus. Once MLers complete this educational component, there are no other expectations; only a hope that what MLers have learned will impact how they move through their daily lives. Many MLI participants are involved in local and national institutions via their occupations, religious social networks including interfaith dialogue programs, and ethnic/national advocacy organizations. The participants presumably employ their newfound knowledge about North American and global Jewry to further advance personal, professional, and advocacy agendas.

The above discussions concerning the motivations for joining MLI as well as the multifarious positionalities at play within MLI situate MLI and its participants on the transnational stage and amongst overlapping Muslim Ummahs. In the following chapter I unpack the ways that the official curriculum of MLI reflects these multiple positionalities in conflict. Each MLI participant is often part of several arenas pushing for change in areas concerning social justice, gender equality, combatting Islamophobia, Muslim representation at all levels of government, human rights, international aid and services, climate change, education, sex education, security services, and many other areas in need of policy changes and implementation, such as immigration, health care, foreign policy, police brutality, and disaster relief. MLI participants are connected to a plethora of powerhouse organizations and institutions that include positions in universities, government administrations, news-media outlets, and major non-profits that have a global

presence. Many MLI participants are medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, and university professors and administrators. There are two things that all MLIs have in common: 1) they self-identify as Muslim and 2) they are engaged in some type of Muslim advocacy/activism. Of these two things, the first is a mandatory requirement in order to be part of MLI, and the second commonality naturally occurs because of MLI's foci: Jewish and Muslim relations in U.S. America and social justice in U.S. America and Palestine/Israel. U.S. American Muslims not engaged in any social activism are completely unaware of MLI's existence, and since recruitment into MLI relies on participant referrals only, anonymity and exclusivity remain intact, with only a few exceptions.

In what ways does MLI complicate the deeply entangled and personal characteristics of the global, transnational communities of Muslims? Exactly where is MLI on this communal spectrum? Somewhere in the middle: liminal, peripheral, elusive and almost imaginary save for its critics whose condemnations put MLI center-stage. MLI reflects the oppressed oppressor dynamics of many minority communities, which remain simultaneously ignored and scrutinized. I now turn to disclose and discuss the MLI curriculum that is meant to educate Muslims about Jews, Judaism, Zionism and Jewish peoplehood. It is important to note that the delivery of this curriculum occurs in country, meaning in Israel/Palestine, which is a non-negotiable aspect of joining MLI. It is this aspect, travelling to Israel/Palestine to learn from and with "Zionist" Jews within a blatantly Zionist institution that violates the BDS movement and makes MLI controversial.

Chapter 2: The Curriculum

The curriculum of the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI) is produced by the Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI),²²⁰ and is a carbon copy of the curriculum taught in the Rabbinic Leadership Initiative (RLI)²²¹ and the Christian Leadership Initiative (CLI).²²² Abdullah Antepi and Yossi Klein Halevi, the founders of MLI, pitch the MLI program as a way for Muslims to peer through a window into how Jews educate each other and teach Judaism, Jewry and Israel to Jewish people. MLI makes a point of not tailoring or censoring the curriculum or source information to make it more palatable to Muslim audiences. This apparent offer of transparency is the main point of attraction for Muslim MLIs. This educational process offers Muslims a unique view into the main stalemate between Muslims and Jews, which is the centrality of Israel. For Muslims, access to these otherwise relatively insular educational materials answers some questions many Muslims have about why Israel is central not only to Jews in Israel but also Jews in America and elsewhere in diaspora. This approach makes SHI unique in its focus as well as its pedagogical approach. For one, this gesture of transparency offers an inventive

²²⁰ "The Shalom Hartman Institute: About Us," accessed May 8, 2020, https://hartman.org.il/About_Us_View.asp?Cat_Id=187&Cat_Type=About&Title_Cat_Name=About%20Us.

²²¹ The Rabbinic Leadership Initiative is the original learning initiative created by The Shalom Hartman Institute to educate Jewish leaders around the world about Judaism, Jewish peoplehood, Zionism, and the importance of Israel within Jewish identity. "Rabbinic Leadership Initiative (RLI)," The Shalom Hartman Institute, 2022, <https://www.hartman.org.il/program/rabbinic-leadership-initiative/>.

²²² The Christian Leadership Initiative is an adaptation of the Rabbinic Leadership Initiative that utilizes the RLI curriculum in order to educate Christian leaders from around the world about Judaism, Jewish peoplehood, Zionism, and the importance of Israel within Jewish identity. "Christian Leadership Initiative (CLI)," The Shalom Hartman Institute, 2022, 2022, <https://www.hartman.org.il/us-christian-leaders-in-israel-to-begin-yearlong-study-of-judaism/>.

workaround to the Palestine/Israel problem. The concept is the brainchild produced by Abdullah's and Yossi's frustrations at other interfaith attempts within which Palestine/Israel is a non-starter. Interestingly, and perhaps indirectly, MLI's pedagogy does not reside neatly within either typical religious studies or theological approaches to religious teachings. The attempt to be even-handed with the presentation of materials and to set their own biases aside was often apparent on the part of the Jewish MLI instructors. However, there was also self-reflexivity about the instructors' own support or belief in many of the materials. This liminal approach to the curriculum was eye-opening for me, as I felt that I was observing at least two or three different layers of pedagogy simultaneously: The intended teaching materials, the subconscious bias, and of course, the Muslim MLIs' takeaways from the learning modules. The location of the education which takes place in Jerusalem is a palpable reminder of the Jewish instructors' commitments to Israel. This chapter is not a chapter on Israeli-Palestinian relations. Rather, it is a chapter on the flattening of a complex series of interrelated power dynamics within the context of a Jewish-led Muslim learning initiative.

In this chapter I aim to unpack the main curriculum of MLI that all participants must complete. First I explain the circumstances that led both MLI founders to implement such a program. Second I disclose the background of both founders to reveal their personal agendas wrapped up in the structure and pedagogy of the MLI program within its host institution SHI. Thirdly I detail the rigorous schedules and learning materials from both the first two-week trip to Israel/Palestine in 2017 and from the second two-week trip to Israel/Palestine which took place in 2018. This combined four-week

immersive learning experience provides the bulk of the mandatory official Jewish education that all MLers must complete. In addition to these four weeks, MLers are required to attend two mandatory annual retreats, that occur between the two two-week trips to Israel/Palestine. These retreats are usually three days long and hosted on the East Coast, normally in upstate New York, close to SHI American headquarters. These retreats are packed with new educational material and often attempt to address current events that impact both Jews and Muslims globally. I focus on the curriculum delivered in Israel/Palestine from both trips. I move through this curricula covering first how Israeli Jews understand democracy, their own collective diversity as Jews, and how these ideas relate to the nation state of Israel and Jewish pluralism. My examination of the curriculum then turns to explain the centrality and importance of Jerusalem within the Jewish collective imagination, which then leads to notions and Jewish dreams of a homeland. The curriculum naturally flows from this point to the main pillars of Zionist thought, and then to the modern Jewish dilemma of power and powerlessness for Jews in Israel as well as Jews living in diaspora. In the second half of the chapter I aim to examine the course materials delivered during our second mandatory two-week trip to Israel/Palestine. This curriculum picks up where trip one curriculum ended, posing questions about Jewish responsibility for past violence both enacted and visited on Jews globally and Jewish Israelis. Next this curriculum attempts to address issues of justice and compromise within the State of Israel, which organically flows to how Zionism and Zionist thinkers have grappled with Palestinians as well as with issues concerning minority rights within the State of Israel. Lastly, this curriculum addresses Arab Israelis,

meaning Arabs/Palestinians living within the State of Israel, and then turns to address those Palestinians living across the security barrier in the occupied territories.

I focus on the recurring pervasively and aggressively Zionistic materials. This curriculum, for many Muslim MLers, is the first in-depth introduction to Judaism and Jews, and serves simultaneously as an introduction and a deep-dive into Judaism and Jewish existence. My goal in part is to demonstrate the extent and depth to which Zionism features as a common teaching topic in MLI, and as SHI instructors suggest, this focus on Israel is central to Jewish identity for many if not most Jews.²²³ While not all Jews in diaspora support Zionism and/or the state of Israel, SHI's underlying hypothesis and approach to the curriculum operates under the assumption that Jewish peoplehood and the centrality - and even necessity - for the state of Israel are essentially inseparable. My interest in this chapter is to underscore this common essentialization of the nation state of Israel within Jewish discourses and organizations such as SHI. While the curriculum in SHI is quite common, the structure/or delivery mechanism of this curriculum, which is the one-way engagement with Muslims, is unique. Few if any Muslim-Jewish dialogue organizations address the centrality of Israel and/or the Palestine/Israel conflict with such candor.²²⁴ As stated previously, it is the nature of this engagement, and more directly, Muslim willingness to violate BDS, that makes MLI both

²²³ Butler, *Parting ways: Jewishness and the critique of Zionism*.

²²⁴ Akbar Ahmed and Edward Kessler, "Constructive dialogue: A Muslim and Jewish perspective on dialogue between Islam and Judaism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Muslim-Jewish Relations* (Routledge, 2016).

unique and for many, controversial. An in-depth exposition on these materials is necessary to illuminate the primary thesis of this chapter: SHI, and indeed many Zionist Jewish organizations argue that anti-Zionism and/or pro-Palestinian advocacy is an act of anti-Semitism and therefore an act of violence. While the stakes of the Holocaust should not be underscored, the setup of MLI reveals complicated power dynamics that SHI leadership largely ignores or tries to circumvent. By design, the curriculum and setup of MLI leaves Muslims voiceless, and subject to overtly Zionist agenda and materials that largely ignore Israel's complicity in state-sanctioned violence towards Palestinians, that is a replication of Nazi logics. As I observed, for many Muslim MLers, participation in MLI's curriculum, and especially the two-week trips to "Israel," a disputed territory, serves as a traumatic event. I examine the stakes and curriculum in this chapter, which serves to contextualize the Muslim MLer responses to these curricula and experiences collectively and individually in Chapter 3.

KOSHER MUSLIMS?

Rabbinic Oversight of Muslim Judaica Education

The local/regional Israel/Palestine conflict is globally entrenched in the identities of Jews and Muslims everywhere.²²⁵ Enter the Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI). The SHI's self-described mission is as follows: "The Shalom Hartman Institute is a leading center of Jewish thought and education, serving Israel and North America. Our mission is

²²⁵ Saul Jihad Takahashi, "The Ummah: Guardian of Muslims in an Age of Weakened Citizenship Rights," *TAFHIM: IKIM Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 14, no. 2 (2021); Feinberg, "Homeland Violence and Diaspora Insecurity: An Analysis of Israel and American Jewry."; Beverly Milton-Edwards, "Political Islam and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict," *Israel Affairs* 12, no. 1 (2006).

to strengthen Jewish peoplehood, identity, and pluralism; to enhance the Jewish and democratic character of Israel; and to ensure that Judaism is a compelling force for good in the 21st century.”²²⁶ SHI was started in 1971 by Rabbi David Hartman when he and his family made Aliyah²²⁷ to Israel from Montreal. As stated in our course material binders, which we received for each of our two two-week trips to Palestine, the first trip in 2017 and the second in 2018, SHI focuses on five areas: Judaism & Modernity, Religious Pluralism, Jewish & Democratic Israel, Jewish Peoplehood, and Judaism & the World. SHI is comprised of four independent, yet interrelated divisions: The David Hartman Center for Intellectual Leadership, The Kogod Research Center for Contemporary Jewish Thought, The Center for Israeli-Jewish Identity, and The Shalom Hartman Institute of North America.²²⁸

SHI conducts programs in 130 secular Israeli high schools, and a gap year for Israelis and North Americans; it trains rabbis in North America, over 1,000 so far and counting; it co-directs and operates an Israeli rabbinic school for men and women of all denominations. SHI provides curricula for Hillel²²⁹ educators on US college campuses; it

²²⁶ The Shalom Hartman Institute, "The Shalom Hartman Institute: About Us," [https://hartman.org.il/About Us View.asp?Cat Id=187&Cat Type=About&Title Cat Name=About%20Us](https://hartman.org.il/About%20Us%20View.asp?Cat%20Id=187&Cat%20Type=About&Title%20Cat%20Name=About%20Us).

²²⁷ Aliyah is the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to the Land of Israel. Making aliyah by moving to the Land of Israel is one of the most basic tenets of Zionism. Shoshana Neuman, "13. Aliyah to Israel: Immigration under Conditions of Adversity," *European migration: what do we know* 459 (2005).

²²⁸ Institute, "The Shalom Hartman Institute: About Us."

²²⁹ According to the Hillel website, Hillel is "the largest Jewish student organization in the world, Hillel builds connections with emerging adults at more than 550 colleges and universities, and inspires them to direct their own path. During their formative college years, students are challenged to explore, experience,

engages senior Israeli army officers in a continuing education program focused on Jewish and democratic values and military ethics; over 1,000 Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) officers have studied at SHI, and it hosts a sex-segregated Orthodox high school with 700 students. It offers many virtual seminars and intellectual programs that engage thousands of lay leaders across North America, Israel/Palestine, and throughout the rest of the world. Additionally, the institute administers extensive programs for Christian and Muslim leaders in North America as well as Arab educators in Israel. It is this particular program for Muslim leaders in North America that is the ethnographic subject of this project.²³⁰

MLI, the Muslim Leadership Initiative, is the product of Imam Abdullah Antepli and writer Yossi Klein Halevi's voiced mutual frustrations and passions concerning interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Jews that ignore the Israel/Palestine issue.²³¹ Imam Antepli is Chief Representative for Muslim Affairs and adjunct faculty of Islamic Studies at Duke University. He is on the faculty at both Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy and Duke Divinity School, where from 2008-2014 he served as the university's first Muslim chaplain, one of only a handful of full-time Muslim

and create vibrant Jewish lives." "What is Hillel," Charles and Lynn Schusterman International Center, 2022, 2022, <https://hillel.org/about/faqs>.

²³⁰ Shalom Hartman Institute, "SHI Hevruta Gap-Year Program: A pluralistic program for North American and Israeli young adults," (2020). <https://www.hartman.org.il/program/hevruta-gap-year-program/>; Institute, "The Shalom Hartman Institute: About Us."

²³¹ For more on how the Israel/Palestine conflict is treated within interfaith dialogue see Ahmed and Kessler, "Constructive dialogue: A Muslim and Jewish perspective on dialogue between Islam and Judaism."

chaplains at U.S. colleges and universities. He was recently recognized as one of the most influential Muslims in US Higher Education.²³² Imam Antepli is of Turkish origins and has ties to the Hizmet movement, but is not a member of the movement himself. Yossi Klein Halevi is a senior fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. Halevi is a Brooklyn born and raised Jew whose father survived the Holocaust. His adolescent rage about the tragedies his people survived sent him searching for some kind of retribution, which he found as a disciple of Rabbi Meir Kahane, leader of the Jewish Defense League (JDL) in the 1970s. In 1982 Halevi made Aliyah to Jerusalem.²³³ He, his wife and three children live in Israel, with a view of the security barrier wall from their backyard. He is the author of several books: *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist: The Story of a Transformation* (1995), *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden: A Jew's Search for God with Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land* (2001), *Like Dreamers: The Story of the Israeli Paratroopers who Reunited Jerusalem and Divided a Nation* (2013). Antepli read *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden* and sought Halevi out, looking for a partner to help teach American Muslims, as Antepli explained his adventures through interfaith dialogue only led to group discussions about shared cultural tropes, such as a mutual love of hummus, or the similarities between halal and kosher kitchen restaurant hunts, which eventually devolved into arguments rooted in anti-Semitism and

²³² Clolery, "Special Report: NPT Power & Influence Top 50 (2019)."

²³³ Halevi, *Memoirs of a Jewish extremist: an American story*.

Islamophobia, culminating in absolutely no progress.²³⁴ Antepi was concerned about the growing anger and resentment within the American Muslim Ummah, and how that manifested in anti-Zionist rhetoric often morphing easily into anti-Semitism. When Antepi approached Halevi, Halevi replied: “Are you sure I’m your right partner? Go find some nice left-wing Jew who will agree with you.” And Antepi said “No I want your voice there...I want them to hear a Jew like you—an unapologetic Jew.”²³⁵ They launched MLI the Summer of 2013.

MLI is a thirteen month educational program, comprised of two two-week trips to Israel/Palestine, one at the beginning of the program and one at the end, with two cohort/MLI retreats, three days each, usually in New York, the home of SHI North America. All of these trips are fully funded by the Shalom Hartman Institute. Recruitment for Cohorts I-IV was done completely through word of mouth, no application, no vetting process, just a reference from an already graduated MLI fellow. A lengthy conversation with Imam Antepi ensues to assess broadly your Muslimness in America and your feelings about The Occupation.²³⁶ Then there is a quick trip to meet all your fellow cohort members, and a reading list of materials to help prepare fellows for their first immersive two-week program in Jerusalem. The curriculum is the same for

²³⁴ David Brinn, "Erasing the Red Lines between Muslims and Jews in America," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 8 2018.

²³⁵ Brinn, "Erasing the Red Lines Between Muslims and Jews in America."

²³⁶ The Occupation is another way to refer to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. Using the terminology “The Occupation” is a way to call attention to the settler-colonial tactics the State of Israel engages towards the Palestinian/Indigenous inhabitants of the lands referred to as Israel/Palestine. Julie Peteet, "The work of comparison: Israel/Palestine and Apartheid," *Anthropological Quarterly* (2016).

Rabbis and Shalom Hartman's Christian Leadership Initiative and is titled *Encountering Israel: Foundations of Peoplehood and Faith and Dilemmas of Power*. MLIers have the additional opportunity of visiting Israeli Arab communities and cities outside of Jerusalem, the West Bank, and to meet with Palestinian Officials, students, and activists. This academic program invites American Muslims to learn about Jews, Judaism, Israel, and Jewish Peoplehood, to understand how Israel is part of the Jewish collective identity for Israeli & American Jews. The hope is that along with this education, the interactions between American Muslims and Jews in America and Israel will grow and foster trust and respect between American Muslims and American Jews. This is not a program looking to solve The Occupation, nor is it an interfaith dialogue program, Antepi explains: "MLI is not a dialogue – it's a one-way education engagement, an invitation by a confident, unambiguously Zionist-Israeli organization that is asking 'Do you want to understand the Jewish collective consciousness?' We focus on Judaism as a religion, Jews as a people, Zionism as a form of national ideology, and Israel as a secular nation state."²³⁷ Halevi is adamant that the program is not trying to produce pro-Israel Muslims: "I'm not trying to convince participants to give up their Palestinian loyalties, I want them to stretch their understanding of the conflict to accommodate some place for my narrative."²³⁸ MLI's structure is unique within the Jewish-Muslim interfaith dialogue arena as most interfaith dialogue efforts engage in a two-way educational experience with

²³⁷ Brinn, "Erasing the Red Lines Between Muslims and Jews in America."

²³⁸ Ibid.

Jews learning about Islam and Muslims learning about Judaism. As stated above, this is not the structure of MLI, as it is a one-way educational program. Additionally, MLI is unique in that it directly engages the Israel/Palestine conflict, as opposed to the majority of Jewish-Muslim interfaith efforts that adamantly avoid discussing the conflict or any related issues. Avoidance of The Occupation within interfaith dialogue arenas is usually accomplished through structural rules that name political debates as off limits to participants.²³⁹ There are now eight cohorts, over 100 participants and alumni MLers. The growth of MLI is surprising considering the intra-communal conflict that MLI inherently embodies in relation to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) pro-Palestinian and Palestinian led movement. In what follows, I explore the controversy that the BDS question raises within MLI. This discussion sheds light on the necessarily secretive nature of MLI. BDS' lack of impacts and its intentions are also at the heart of why Antepi and Halevi chose to found MLI. For Halevi BDS stops Jews from talking to Muslims, and for Antepi BDS stops Muslims from talking to Jews; MLI was founded to counteract those tenants. The discussion about BDS that I include below is not widely available due to the inherent secrecy of MLI's position on the BDS movement.²⁴⁰ This is because for many Muslims, BDS serves as an unofficial litmus test for the authenticity of one's Muslimness. For this reason, the social stakes for any Muslim who violates BDS

²³⁹ Molina, "A Study of NewGround—A Muslim Jewish Partnership for Change: An Ethnographic Analysis of Interfaith Dialogue at a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)."; Ahmed and Kessler, "Constructive dialogue: A Muslim and Jewish perspective on dialogue between Islam and Judaism."

²⁴⁰ Bina Ahmad, Ben White, and Phyllis Bennis, "Shrinking Space and The BDS Movement," (Amsterdam: Transnational institute. [https://www.tni.org/en/publication ...](https://www.tni.org/en/publication...), 2018).

are very high.²⁴¹ In fact, MLI for the most part has been so successful in its secrecy that very little to no scholarship on MLI exists to date.

The MLI program technically, and for some morally, violates the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) Movement. BDS is the largest and most longstanding Palestinian-led movement fighting for freedom, justice, and equality in Palestine.²⁴² It was started in 2005, and calls on global citizens to act in solidarity with Palestinians living under the Occupation. BDS was inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement.²⁴³ It is a non-violent call to action that aims to put pressure on the State of Israel to comply with international law. The Boycott calls for withdrawing support from all Israeli sporting, cultural, and academic institutions, and all international companies that are complicit and/or active participants enforcing the Occupation and violating Palestinian human rights. Divestment calls on financial, religious, educational, and local community institutions to retract any and all invested monies in the State of Israel and international companies that bolster the Occupation and Israeli apartheid.²⁴⁴ Sanctions solicit governments, international forums such as the UN and FIFA, to stop all aid, assistance, and maintenance to the State of Israel, specifically by outlawing business with

²⁴¹ Controversy surrounding MLI, as it violates the BDS movement, has resulted in dire stakes for those who choose to participate in this unique program. For more on these controversies and repercussions see Sheila Musaji, "Controversy Over American Muslim Leadership Trip to Jerusalem," *The American Muslim (TAM)* (July 1, 2015 2015). <http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/controversy>.

²⁴² "BDS: Freedom, Justice, Equality," <https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds>.

²⁴³ Michal Hatuel-Radoshitzky, "BDS & AAM: More of the same," *The Delegitimization Phenomenon: Challenges and Responses. The Institute for National Security Studies* (2017).

²⁴⁴ the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), "BDS: Freedom, Justice, Equality."

illegal Israeli settlements, ceasing military trade, dissolving free-trade agreements, and revoking Israel's membership within any international assemblies until Israeli apartheid ends.²⁴⁵

Israel's compliance with international law that would end Israeli apartheid includes the following: End the Occupation of the West Bank including East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Syrian Golan Heights, dismantle the Wall (the security barrier), recognize and give full citizen rights to Arab/Palestinian Israelis who live in Israel and are 1/5 of Israel's population,²⁴⁶ and abide by and enforce UN Resolution 194 that grants Palestinian refugees the right of return.²⁴⁷ The BDS Movement has garnered a huge global following, with supporters like Angela Davis who stated the following after a delegation visit to Palestine: "Each and every one of us—including those members of our delegation who grew up in the Jim Crow South, in apartheid South Africa, and on Indian reservations in the U.S.—was shocked by what we saw. We issue an urgent call to others who share our commitment to racial justice, equality, and freedom and we unequivocally

²⁴⁵ Ananth, "The politics of the Palestinian BDS movement."

²⁴⁶ Ian S Lustick, "The Red Thread of Israel's "Demographic Problem"," *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 1 (2019).

²⁴⁷ The enforcement and compliance with UN Resolution 194 would allow Palestinian refugees, including their descendants, to return to their ancestral homes and lands within Israel Palestine. For more on the issues surrounding this UN resolution see Rami Siklawi, "The Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon post 1990: Dilemmas of survival and return to Palestine," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2019).

endorse the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Campaign.”²⁴⁸ Many actors, academics, journalists, unions, and corporations endorse the BDS Movement.²⁴⁹

For American Jews and Muslims, support for or against the BDS Movement is the litmus test of communal loyalty. Supporting the BDS Movement is framed within the American Muslim community as the only legitimate and legal way to fight the Occupation. Other efforts in support of the Palestinian people are seen as indirect threats that undermine BDS, decenter Palestinian voices, and prolong the Occupation.²⁵⁰ For American Jewry, supporting BDS is often understood as simultaneously a fulfilment of American civic duty and a betrayal of Jewish peoplehood and Israel as a Jewish State that is the only real safe place for Jews to exist.²⁵¹ American Jews that support BDS are perceived as making an underlying statement: we do not need Israel, America is safe for the Jews.²⁵² As Halevi has stated on multiple occasions, he perceives the BDS Movement as an anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist movement that wants to annihilate the Jewish people, akin

²⁴⁸ the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), "BDS: Freedom, Justice, Equality."

²⁴⁹ Omar Barghouti, "BDS: Nonviolent, Globalized Palestinian Resistance to Israel's Settler Colonialism and Apartheid," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 50, no. 2 (2021).

²⁵⁰ Yara Hawari, "seven| The academic boycott and beyond: towards an epistemological strategy of liberation and decolonization," *Enforcing Silence: Academic Freedom, Palestine and the Criticism of Israel* (2020).

²⁵¹ Fiamma Nirenstein, "Jews and the Left," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 31, no. 1/2 (2020).

²⁵² Dov Waxman, "As Israel turns 70, many young American Jews turn away," *The Conversation* 3 (2018).

to the Nazi boycott of Jewish goods and services.²⁵³ He understands his perception of the BDS movement as one shared by the majority of Jews.

The Shalom Hartman Institute, specifically Donniel Hartman and Yossi Klein Halevi, have on more than one occasion expressed their disgust and contempt for the BDS Movement. In a 2013 article in the Times of Israel, Donniel Hartman stated the following: “BDS is repulsive to me and alien to my Jewish consciousness. My love and loyalty to my people and my country obligate me to fight my country wherever I believe it to be flawed. I fight it, however, through speech and advocacy, and at the ballot box. The coercive and punitive dimensions of BDS I find both arrogant and inappropriate to a debate amongst brothers and sisters. The right of Israel to be a Jewish state is also self-evident to me, and I am always amazed at the duplicity of the one-statists for whom the only nation state which is morally flawed and illegitimate is the Jewish state.”²⁵⁴ Hartman’s feelings about BDS collapse its supporters into one-dimensional caricatures uncontrollably shouting for the total destruction of Israel, and by extension, the Jews. Any action or values that may question Israel’s policies and politics are framed as irrational anti-Semitic efforts to annihilate all Jews everywhere. Donniel Hartman’s perceptions and feelings about the BDS movement were fully and repeatedly articulated to Muslim MLIs during their trips to Jerusalem, as Donniel Hartman was often a lecturer as well as a vocal and present host with MLI classrooms.

²⁵³ Michiel Bot, "The right to boycott: BDS, law, and politics in a global context," *Transnational Legal Theory* 10, no. 3-4 (2019).

²⁵⁴ Donniel Hartman, December 18, 2013, 2013, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/boycotting-the-boycotters/>.

Similarly, on several occasions, Yossi Klein Halevi explained that the BDS Movement triggers the Jewish people because it is akin to the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses in 1933 as an initial step of Hitler's regime towards the Final Solution.²⁵⁵ Halevi demonizes the BDS Movement, imbuing its supporters with genocidal intent, saying, "The real threat of BDS, though, is more subtle than economic pressure. BDS creates an atmosphere in which Israel is solely to blame for the failure of peace between Jews and Arabs, and it negates the very idea of a nation state for the Jewish people... The movement to criminalize Israel is itself a crime. Rather than Israel, it is the BDS movement that must be exposed and ostracized for its bigotry and hatred."²⁵⁶ Halevi and Hartman as American born Israeli transplants, are part of a generation that struggles to acknowledge Israel's power in the region and on the global stage. No amount of power, military prowess, or international support will ever assuage their fears, and the BDS movement is those fears come to life. As Yehuda Kurtzer, president of SHI America explains: "The most imminent anti-Semitic threat to the safety of Israeli Jews is in the still-widespread libelous rhetoric throughout the Arab world, and especially in governments and school systems that are connected to violent nuclear capacities or are otherwise still engaged in violent conflict with Israelis. Many Israelis, as a result, believe that the organized BDS movement in America and Europe constitutes an existential threat

²⁵⁵ The Final Solution was Hitler's answer to the Jewish Question/Problem, namely the question of Jewish loyalty to the secular nation states they inhabited in Europe. Hitler's "Final Solution" was the Holocaust, meaning the total and complete annihilation of all Jewish persons. For more on the Final Solution see George L Mosse, *Toward the final solution: A history of European racism* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2020).

²⁵⁶ Yossi Klein Halevi, "Op-Ed: Why the Anti-Israel Boycott Movement Is an Immoral Threat to Peace," *Los Angeles Times*, June 29 2016.

to the lives and the livelihoods of Israelis, especially as it sometimes employs classic and new forms of anti-Semitism in its rhetoric and methods. BDS affirms a deep psychological instinct of Jewish loneliness for many Israelis and Jews—us against the world—that in its own internal logic sees itself responding to Israeli politics but is experienced by many Jews as a form of ontological hatred.”²⁵⁷ Support for or against the BDS movement is a polarizing issue within Jewish and Muslim communities around the world. Given this context, the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI) is not merely a controversial educational program; it is a scandal for the global Muslim Ummah.²⁵⁸ When it comes to the Palestine/Israel issue, the subjects of this project, MLI participants--American Muslims that are viewed as having social capital within the American Muslim community--opt into a two-year educational program run by a Jewish-Israeli theological institution that violates BDS. Their participation in this program is kept confidential until each participant individually decides to “go public,” facing ridicule, ostracization, harassment, and expulsion from their community locally and more broadly from American Muslim society. Though MLI as an organization has garnered international attention, most of its participants choose never to go public with their involvement and participation in MLI. Of the current approximately 150 participants in MLI, I only know of five people who have gone public or been outed about their participation in MLI. This fear of exposure became an official part of the curriculum by the time I was inducted into

²⁵⁷ Yehuda Kurtzer, "Anti-Semitism, and the Inconvenience of Collective Identity," in *Medium* (2018).

²⁵⁸ Homayra Ziad, "Why I Left the Muslim Leadership Initiative," *Muslim Matters* (2018). <https://muslimmatters.org/2018/06/06/why-i-left-the-muslim-leadership-initiative/>. Musaji, "Controversy Over American Muslim Leadership Trip to Jerusalem."

the fourth cohort of MLI. Haroon, who was in charge of our orientation, participated in the first cohort of MLI. He used previous negative experiences with former cohort members who faced ostracization for their involvement in MLI and made a point to stress the importance of respecting confidentiality for all MLI members across all cohorts. Haroon explained that MLI participants from the first cohort have faced many challenges because of their involvement in MLI. Some have intentionally outed themselves, while others were somehow found out. Wajahat Ali, Pakistani-American Muslim lawyer, journalist, and playwright, was among the first cohort participants along with Pakistani-American Muslim lawyer, author, and famed podcast host Rabia Chaudry. At orientation, the women I refer to as the Chicago Crew were listening to the radio about Rabia Chaudry, cohort one member, having an award rescinded based on her participation in MLI. On May 30th 2018, Wajahat Ali published an article in *The Atlantic* addressing some of the backlash he and Rabia have received for their participation in MLI.

Ali writes:

On Tuesday, I was disinvited from the 55th annual conference of the Islamic Society of North America, which proclaims itself one of the leading American Muslim organizations. My crimes? Talking to Zionists, writing an article about it, and thanking God for a bowel movement. In a one-page letter, the program committee chair wrote that “our Muslim speakers” are “expected to support broadly our values,” including “our community’s support for the Palestinian people of all faith traditions, in their struggle against Occupation and dispossession.” He added that he found my “recent work ... troubling.” He also objected to my “continued use of language referencing Allah in manners not befitting His Majesty, whether in jest or otherwise.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ Wajahat Ali, "I Talked to Zionists—Then I Was Disinvited by a Major Muslim Group," in *Ideas*, ed. Yoni Applebaum (Boston: The Atlantic, 2018).

Ali explains that this disinvitation is a “culmination of a years-long campaign by some online activists and religious leaders to limit the range of voices at such events.”²⁶⁰ Ali goes on to explain the source of his ostracization from the American Muslim Ummah:

The controversy stems from my involvement with the Shalom Hartman Institute and its Muslim Leadership Initiative—a program that promotes engagement between American Muslims and Jewish scholars, both in Israel and in New York City, to learn how diverse Jewish communities debate and discuss Israel, Zionism, and Judaism.²⁶¹

Ali attempts to assuage fears about his MLI participation by humorously proclaiming the type of Muslim he is not: “I am neither a Zionist nor a supporter of Israel’s Occupation. Neither am I an agent of Mossad and the CIA forged in a Tel Aviv lab and sent to infiltrate and destroy American Muslim communities—although that would be an awesome plot for a TV show.”²⁶²

The article continues with Ali iterating other incidents of disinvitation as well as mentioning how Chaudry has also received significant backlash for her participation in MLI:

But that has not kept these activists from pushing organizations to disinvite me, and other MLI participants, from communal events. They use words like ban, stop, marginalize, and remove. Their boycott has been largely unsuccessful, but I give credit where it’s due: They successfully had me disinvited from a CAIR-NYC function last year. (In fact, my presence caused CAIR-NYC to cancel the entire program, a Thanos-level act of destruction.) And I’m not alone. Rabia Chaudry, of *Serial* podcast

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

fame, had a “Top Muslim Achievers” award rescinded in Chicago, and she was recently disinvited by Harvard’s Islamic Society.²⁶³

As stated, the radio chatter from orientation day was about how BDS was able to convince the Council of Islamic Organization of Greater Chicago (CIOGC) to rescind Rabia Chaudry’s “Top Muslim Achiever” award because she is an MLier. Chaudry is a lawyer, *Serial* podcast host,²⁶⁴ and a New York Times best-selling author.²⁶⁵ She is the powerhouse attorney behind the Adnan Syed re-trial,²⁶⁶ and is engaged on several fronts concerning security. In response to the CIOGC’s letter rescinding her award, Chaudry wrote and publicly posted a thoughtful numbered list addressing concerns about her MLI participation, in the last numbered paragraph she stated the following: “To those who harangued the CIOGC into rescinding the award, I am not the enemy. MLI is not the enemy. We have real enemies, but none of the people involved in this program, having dedicated collective dozens of years to service for the Muslim community, are your enemies. One day I hope you understand that.”

MLIers have faced ridicule, exclusion, and even death threats for their participation in MLI. One cohort IV participant lost his job, as a community network liaison for non-profit organizations focused on feeding the homeless and underprivileged

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Boling, "True crime podcasting: Journalism, justice or entertainment?."

²⁶⁵ Chaudry, *Adnan's story : the search for truth and justice after Serial*.

²⁶⁶ Adnan Syed is a Pakistani American Muslim who lived in Baltimore and was convicted of first-degree murder in the year 2000 for the alleged killing of his ex-girlfriend. He has been in prison, made countless appeals, with his lawyers, including Rabia Chaudry working towards a re-trial. Higgins, "Supreme Court won't give Adnan Syed new trial in 'Serial' podcast murder case."

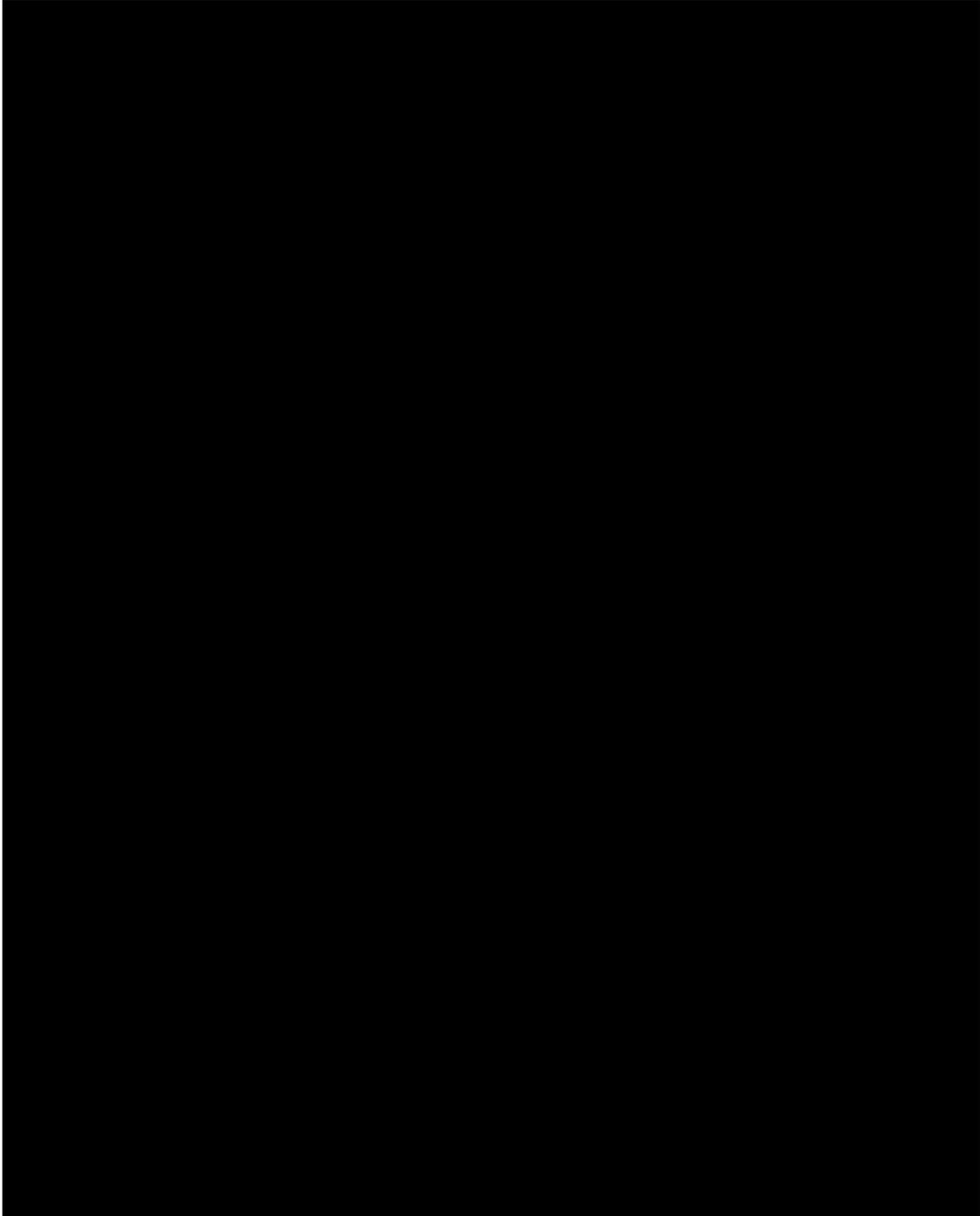
Muslim youth, because the Muslim businesses who regularly donated food and monies refused to work with a “sell out” that betrayed his own people. This is the reality that MLI participants face when they choose to join MLI. I dwell on the backlash received by MLers to demonstrate the divisiveness of the Palestine/Israel conflict within the American Muslim Ummah, as well as to point out the risks MLers are exposed to for attempting to forge stronger relationships with American Jewry. This is by virtue of the fact that MLI is simultaneously an American organization with transnational stakes in Palestine/Israel.

THE CURRICULUM: PART I: ENCOUNTERING ISRAEL

Foundations of Peoplehood and Faith

In this section I explore the official curriculum of the MLI program at the Shalom Hartman Institute. This curriculum is the same across three different programs hosted by SHI, which are the Muslim Leadership Initiative, the Christian Leadership Initiative (CLI), and the Rabbinic Leadership Initiative (RLI). This curriculum is what SHI uses to teach Rabbis, Christians, and now Muslims across the world about how to maintain Jewish identity within multi-faith contexts. Central to this curriculum is the role of Israel. Below is the cover for the binder I received on my first trip to Palestine/Israel with Cohort IV.

Figure 3: Course Binder Cover 2017



As the above image indicates, a primary function of MLI is to center Israel in the understanding of Jewish people globally, and to explain why Israel is central to many

Jewish communities, even those who do not live in Israel. This presents an obvious tension for the Jewish instructors and Muslim participants of MLI, as both victims and perpetrators of different oppressions and atrocities. The Holocaust is ever present within the hearts and minds of many if not most Jews in Israel as well as those living in diaspora. Jewish history of oppression coupled with the power Israel now holds, puts Jews in the precarious position of being oppressed oppressors, especially in the case of Israeli Jews.²⁶⁷ Muslim supremacy in the Middle East region, buttressed by Arab supremacy within Islam, is demonstrated by violent attacks enacted by Muslim majority nation states in that region against the State of Israel.²⁶⁸ Simultaneously, Muslim minority communities living in Western contexts as well as Palestinians and Arabs living in Israel are racialized, oppressed, and in the case of Israel denied basic human rights and dignity.²⁶⁹ The centrality of Israel as an imagined homeland is inherently tied to the modern nation state of Israel within the curriculum, necessitating a pedagogy riddled with issues concerning the Israel/Palestine conflict. In what follows I include images of schedules, agendas, and course materials that comprise the MLI curriculum.

²⁶⁷ Yaacov Yadgar, *Israel's Jewish Identity Crisis: State and Politics in the Middle East*, vol. 11 (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

²⁶⁸ Avraham Zilkha, "History of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," in *The Struggle for Peace* (University of Texas Press, 2021).

²⁶⁹ Amiraux and Beauchesne, "Racialization and the Construction of the Problem of the Muslim Presence in Western Societies."

Figure 4: Shalom Hartman Institute Values



The above is a synopsis of MLI's host institution's scope of work. Shalom Hartman's scope of work consists of four nodes as indicated above. As explained previously SHI is a larger institution of which MLI is one facet. SHI uses the same curriculum and scope of work for all their educational programs. The curriculum was originally designed to teach Jewish leaders and rabbis how to teach Jews about Judaism and Jewish peoplehood. According to SHI, they use the same curriculum for MLI and CLI that they developed for

RLI. Although there is overlap between MLI and its founding institution and aforementioned learning initiatives, participation in MLI is specific in its relation to BDS, and the primacy of the Palestinian plight within Muslim communities. This is why although information about SHI is publicly available, participation in MLI is much more opaque. While MLI has no official mission statement or overtly stated public agenda, SHI's public teaching materials offer a skeletal structure to what MLI as an educational program is attempting to accomplish.

As we see from the above, SHI and official MLI curricula perceive Israel as the center for Jewish learning, as well as an essential immersive component to understanding global Jewry. This brief foray SHI offers us into MLI curriculum immediately reveals a primacy of Israel that is also connected to Jewish diaspora. Note that in the short description offered by SHI about their scope of work Israel is named no less than three separate times. This creates a hierarchy of Jewish geographical primacy, with no mention of the other largest concentration of Jews in the world, U.S. America.²⁷⁰ This is significant considering Shalom Hartman has two offices, one in Israel and Shalom Hartman America in New York. Despite this, no mention of that second office or community is made. As President of Shalom Hartman America Yehuda Kurtzer explains, the concentration and success of Jews in America serves as a foil to Zionist agendas that insist Israel is necessary for Jewish safety and survival.²⁷¹ That is, the presence and

²⁷⁰ Sergio DellaPergola, "World Jewish population, 2018," in *American Jewish year book 2018* (Springer, 2019).

²⁷¹ Beinart, *The crisis of Zionism*.

relative success of Jews in the U.S. potentially negates the argument for the necessity of Israel as the only safe place for Jews.²⁷² This goes to show that SHI is not merely sharing internal Zionist logics with Muslim MLers, but is itself a Zionist institution, which is a difficult reality for many Muslim MLers to accept despite their voluntary decisions to join MLI. Like many Israeli-Zionist institutions, SHI seems unwilling to account for the negative impacts this agenda has on MLers and other Muslims. It is interesting to note that Israeli Democracy is a salient point of interest for SHI in all of its teaching initiatives. Here is an additional course material source from the second trip to Palestine in 2018:

Figure 5: Tal Becker Interview Excerpt



As this source demonstrates, pre-occupation with righting past wrongs is an endless obsession that leads nowhere according to MLI leadership and instructors. The way forward is to embrace democratic ideals that do not jeopardize Israeli Jewish policies that

²⁷² Herbert Frank Weisberg, *The Politics of American Jews* (University of Michigan Press, 2019).

ensure the survival of global Jewry.²⁷³ Two separate entities (Israel and global Jewry) are inherently connected through Zionist logics tied to Jewish survival in a Holocaust experienced reality.²⁷⁴ The cherry-picked U.N. statutes equivocate Israel with democratic values and a global Jewish agenda that seemingly supports both as they are inseparable.²⁷⁵

Israeli democracy has a twofold subliminal meaning: Jewish and democratic. Israeli democracy dog whistles²⁷⁶ to Western democratic societies as a way for Israel to present itself as the only democratic nation in the Middle East and thus preferred to other forms of governments in the area.²⁷⁷ This signaling poses as a potential foothold for Christians in Western nations and alludes to a perceived alignment with Christians and Jews while also signaling a perceived juxtaposition between Judaism, Christianity, and

²⁷³ Alan Dowty, "Democracy in Israel," in *The Oxford Handbook of Israeli Politics and Society* (Oxford University Press Oxford, 2018).

²⁷⁴ Michael L Morgan, "To seize memory: History and identity in post-holocaust Jewish thought," in *Michael L. Morgan: History and Moral Normativity* (Brill, 2018).

²⁷⁵ The 1947 U.N. Partition Plan for Palestine would have been implemented after the end of British rule, referred to as the British Mandate, in November 1947. This plan would have split Palestine into two separate and independent states, one for Jews and one for Arabs, with a special international regime to preside over Jerusalem specifically. Jewish leaders in Palestine at this time were willing to accept this proposed plan, however, Arab leadership was unwilling to accept any territorial divides. For more see Gideon Biger, "The Partition Plans for Palestine—1930–1947," *Israel Studies* 26, no. 3 (2021).

²⁷⁶ Dog whistling is a term that refers to the coded language employed by groups or people to signal like minded values and beliefs that would otherwise be offensive and/or unacceptable to mainstream society or the broader population. For more see Prashanth Bhat and Ofra Klein, "Covert hate speech: White nationalists and dog whistle communication on twitter," in *Twitter, the public sphere, and the chaos of online deliberation* (Springer, 2020).

²⁷⁷ Rock and Ozel, "Democracy, development and Islam."

democracy on the one hand and Islam and Muslim states on the other.²⁷⁸ This overtly Zionist agenda was difficult for my Muslim informants to swallow. As my informant Ibrahim expressed in one of our many processing sessions during our 2017 trip to Palestine: “Do they really expect us to just sit here quietly as they idealize their Jewish democracy that is actively committing genocide against our Palestinian brothers? Ya rab [Oy Vey/Oh Lord] this is too much!” I delve deeper into these processing sessions and their contents in Chapter 3.

How Israelis Understand a Jewish and Democratic State

Figure 6: How Israelis Understand a Jewish and Democratic State Course Materials



²⁷⁸ Dietrich Jung, "Globalization, State Formation and Religion in the Middle East: "Is Islam Incompatible with Democracy?,"" *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2004).

The sources referenced in the above image were presented by the instructor as how Jews won Israel, or how Jews established a nation state of their own with international support and guidance following the Holocaust.²⁷⁹ The instructor explained that this collection of sources for this learning module, taken together as a whole, make up a modern legal narrative that establishes a Jewish right to the land of Palestine,²⁸⁰ rooted in modern Western values and international sentiments concerned with self-determination and human rights, ideas and notions developed after the gross atrocities committed during the Holocaust.²⁸¹ These protections and rights, born out of such violence, interestingly do not extend to the Palestinian people, as is evidenced by Israeli State policies that subject Palestinians to genocidal violences.²⁸² This is the double standard that MLers were continually faced with throughout their time in Israel/Palestine. Throughout my time in MLI, I observed our SHI hosts and instructors' common tendency to engage in Holocaust exceptionalism logics, that in turn justified Israeli state violence towards Palestinians, couching these logics in terminologies of protection, security, and safety.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Jon Kimche and David Kimche, *A Clash of Destinies: The Arab-Jewish War and the Founding of the State of Israel* (Pickle Partners Publishing, 2019).

²⁸⁰ Ran Ukashi, "Zionism, Imperialism, and Indigeneity in Israel/Palestine: A Critical Analysis," *Peace and Conflict Studies* 25, no. 1 (2018).

²⁸¹ Gerald M Steinberg, "Jewish Internationalism and Human Rights after the Holocaust: by Nathan A. Kurz (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 429 pages," (Taylor & Francis, 2021).

²⁸² Nadim Khoury, "5. Holocaust/Nakba and the Counterpublic of Memory," in *The Holocaust and the Nakba* (Columbia University Press, 2018).

²⁸³ Holocaust exceptionalism is not only a Jewish mentality but is also the position of many genocide studies scholars. The tendency to centralize the Holocaust within this academic arena leaves atrocities suffered by countless other minorities, historically and currently, overlooked, and understudied. For more on this issue see Frank Schumacher and Karen Priestman, "Reflections on Exceptionalism: A Preliminary Assessment of Teaching the Shoa in Canadian Universities," *ZfGen Zeitschrift für Genozidforschung* 14,

Figure 7: Proclamation of Independence of the State of Israel, 14th May 1948



This document discusses the historical establishment of Jews in Palestine. SHI understands this excerpt as a method for establishing historical longevity in terms of a religious and geopolitical right to the land of Israel. Interestingly, the document in question uses universalist language modeled after the UN and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.²⁸⁴ On the one hand, this connection is straightforward in terms of the connection between the events of the Holocaust and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. More subliminally, this language might be seen as a dog whistle for Westernized politics and an accompanying desire to be perceived as legible within Jewish contexts. Our instructor noted that the language in the excerpt establishes the Bible as not only a literary but also an historical document that "proves" Jewish right to Israel.²⁸⁵ The term "pioneer" also connotes Manifest Destiny and colonial mentalities that similarly

no. 1-2 (2019); Robert Gerwarth, "The Problems of Genocide—A debate on A. Dirk Moses' book on permanent security and the 'language of transgression'," *Journal of Modern European History* 19, no. 4 (2021).

²⁸⁴ David Kretzmer and Eckart Klein, *The concept of human dignity in human rights discourse* (Kluwer Law International The Hague, 2002).

²⁸⁵ Rachel Havrelock, *The Joshua Generation: Israeli Occupation and the Bible* (Princeton University Press, 2020).

romanticize the American frontier.²⁸⁶ The instructor pointed out the capitalist overtones are also present in its reference to "making deserts bloom," direct reference to "economy and culture," and "blessings of progress."²⁸⁷ The passage in question also establishes Jewish people as a unique, discrete culture with its own languages and customs. This interpretation differentiates between Jews and Judaism because Jews are a people, not just a religion but a people accompanied with language, culture, and Western values.²⁸⁸ The subliminal insertion of Western values represents an appeal to perceived "respectable" Western entities such as the UN and U.S.; it also repeats the Zionist trope that Jewish culture is superior to Palestinian (read: more Eastern) culture, which this type of narrative also essentializes and reads as monolithic.

Note that the Law of Return is also included in this learning module. The Law of Return feeds the narrative for a need for the state of Israel.²⁸⁹ It also ensures that Israel remains heavily emphasized as part of Jewish diasporic life. This emphasis inserts Israel into the consciousness of Jews worldwide and makes it difficult if not impossible to extricate Zionist logics from Jewish peoplehood. These stakes are of central interest to Muslim MLI participants, who seek to understand why the Palestine/Israel conflict has

²⁸⁶ William Pfaff, *The irony of manifest destiny: The tragedy of America's foreign policy* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2010).

²⁸⁷ Oded Nir and Joel Wainwright, "Where Is the Marxist Critique of Israel/Palestine?," *Rethinking Marxism* 30, no. 3 (2018).

²⁸⁸ Sammy Smooha, "Is Israel Western?," in *Comparing modernities* (Brill, 2005).

²⁸⁹ Hassan Jabareen and Suhad Bishara, "The Jewish Nation-State Law," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 2 (2019).

proved to be so insurmountable thus far. Amir, a thirty something Desi Muslim from the American South expressed an “aha” moment during this learning module saying “Now I get it! I never understood why Jews back home continued to support Israel and justify its violence. It always seemed odd to me, like cause we are American sitting in America, like why do they care so much. But now it makes sense.” Several MLers expressed similar sentiments to those stated by Amir, however, this understanding was not followed by acceptance of Israel’s violent state policies. In fact many MLers acknowledged a newfound understanding of the connection between global Jewry, existential safety, and the existence of Israel while simultaneously wondering why more Jews in diaspora did not want to hold Israel accountable for its horrific acts, as Israel’s policies are a direct reflection on global Jewish ethics if the connection stated between the state and global Jewry is in fact true.

The Tribes of Israel, Part 1: Jewish Secularists, Israeli Secularists

Figure 8: The Tribes of Israel, Part 1 Course Materials



This telling of the Tribes of Israel and secularism purported a definition of secularism that implies a Jewish necessity to be hospitable to non-practicing Jews.²⁹⁰ This is told in the relatively obscure Story of Aher, which tells a story of a Jew not observing the Shabbat. This behavior is somewhat acceptable and was interpreted by our instructor as the existence of cultural Jews who have nothing to do with the religious aspects of Judaism but are still accepted as Jews. The story also expresses a disdain for secular Jews that indoctrinate their Jewish children with secularism instead of observance of Jewish

²⁹⁰ Ela Luria and Yaacov J Katz, "Parent-child transmission of religious and secular values in Israel," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 41, no. 4 (2020).

law. As our instructor explained, the presence of secular Jews is acceptable, however, the indoctrination of new generations of Jews with secularism in lieu of Jewish traditions and religiosity is unacceptable. The concept of "secular" Jews nods towards Judaism as a people and not merely a religion.²⁹¹ Interpretations of these "secularist" stories are used to preserve the necessity for a nation of Jewish people, supporting notions of Jewish Pluralism.²⁹² Jewish pluralism in the context of the State of Israel, means a state safe for all kinds of Jews regardless of levels of observance. This safe haven ideology is directly related to the racialization of the Jews that culminated in the Holocaust.²⁹³ The legacy of this racialization in the context of Jewish survivalism simultaneously upholds the necessity and importance of the indoctrination of Jewish religious tradition in future generations to concretize choice when it comes to observance, and the reality of the non-choice of having Jewish blood.

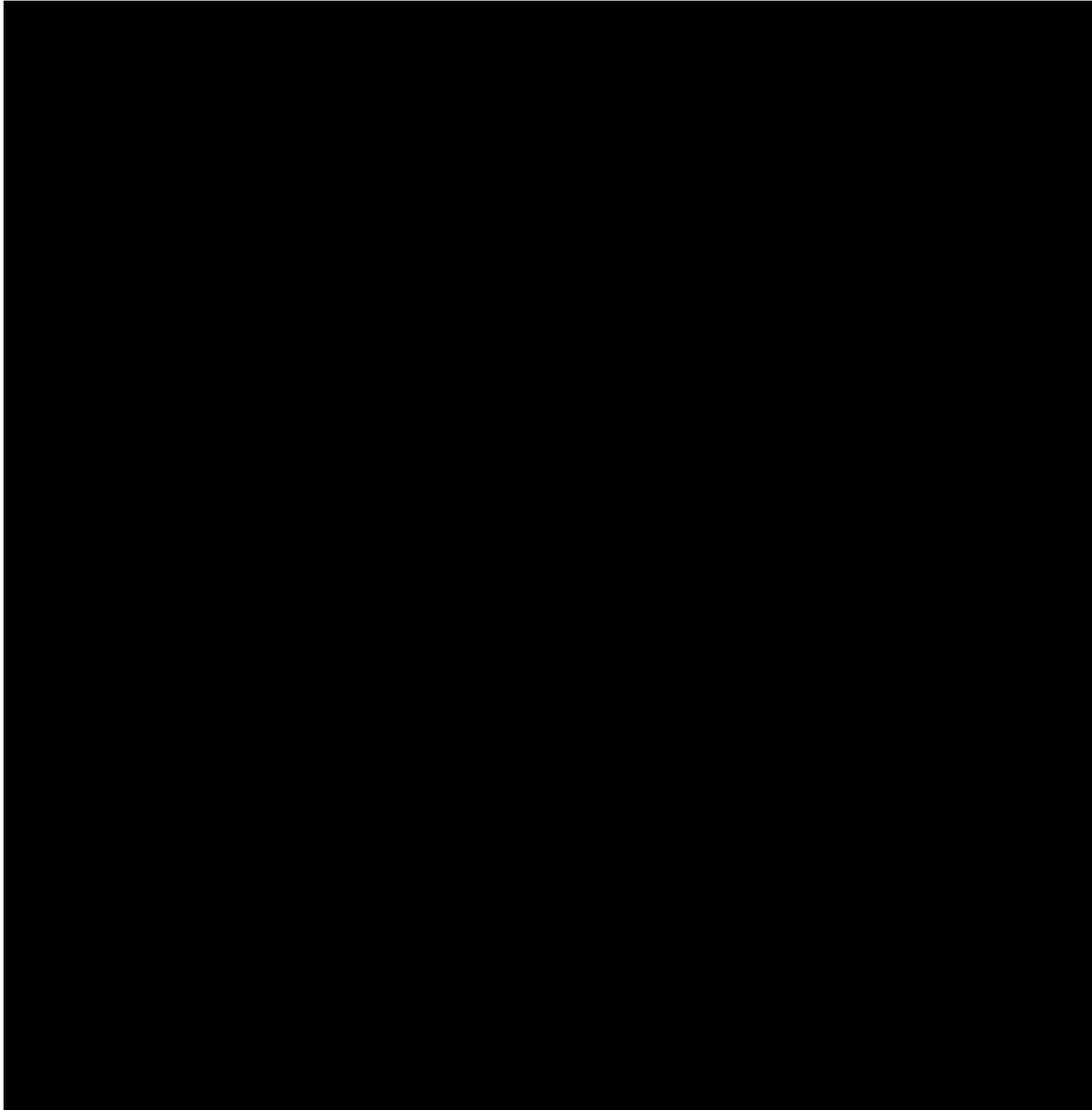
²⁹¹ Yolande Jansen and Nasar Meer, "Genealogies of 'Jews' and 'Muslims': social imaginaries in the race-religion nexus," *Patterns of Prejudice* 54, no. 1-2 (2020).

²⁹² Keenan Davis, "Pluralism in the Jewish Ethical Tradition," *The American Journal of Bioethics* 20, no. 12 (2020/12/01 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2020.1832613>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2020.1832613>.

²⁹³ Warren S Goldstein, "The Racialization of the Jewish Question: The Pseudo-Secularization of Christian Anti-Judaism into Racial Anti-Semitism," *Religion and Theology* 27, no. 3-4 (2020).

The Tribes of Israel, Part 2: Ultra-Orthodox and Religious Zionists

Figure 9: The Tribes of Israel, Part 2 Course Materials



This learning module included another overt discussion of the relationship between Judaism, modernity, and perceived "Western" values.²⁹⁴ The instructor of this

²⁹⁴ Shivdeep Grewal, *Habermas and European Integration: Social and cultural modernity beyond the nation-state* (Manchester University Press, 2019).

learning module gave a lengthy introduction before delving into the specific sources. As seen from the notes I took as a Muslim MLer on the day of this lecture during our first trip to Palestine in early 2017, the instructor felt it necessary to neatly but quickly overview Western European history in relation to the rise of the modern nation state, and perceived this history as importantly connected to Israel and its European Jewish foundations.²⁹⁵ Secularization and assimilation of Jews in Europe necessitated a Jewish nation state in order to preserve the future of Judaism.²⁹⁶ This fear was inspired not only by a fear of secularization and assimilation representing an erasure of Jewish culture and customs, but also a fear of Christianization.²⁹⁷ This fear of Christianization resulted in State support of the Ultra-Orthodox faction of Jews, who are perceived as preserving "authentic" Jewish traditions, values and laws.²⁹⁸ This lecture makes a distinction between Ultra-Orthodox peoples that don't support Zionism and highly religiously observant Jews who are Zionists.²⁹⁹ This is due to interpretations of Jewish law and scripture, specifically the Ultra-Orthodox interpretations of the Babylonian Talmud that

²⁹⁵ Irena Kalhousová, "Our Jews, our Israel! Origins of the foreign policy of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary towards Israel" (The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 2019). Don Peretz and Gideon Doron, *The government and politics of Israel* (Routledge, 2018).

²⁹⁶ Peter L Berger, "Secularization and de-secularization," *Religions in the modern world: Traditions and transformations* 336 (2002).

²⁹⁷ Michelle Mart, "The "Christianization" of Israel and Jews in 1950s America," *Religion and American culture* 14, no. 1 (2004).

²⁹⁸ Samuel C Heilman, *Defenders of the faith: Inside ultra-orthodox Jewry* (Univ of California Press, 2000).

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

asserts, through Rabbinic law, the belief in the permanence of Jewish exile.³⁰⁰ Because Ultra-Orthodox Jews reject aspects of modernity, they are thought of as preserving authentic Judaism.³⁰¹ This is somewhat ironic in light of Ultra-Orthodox rejections of Zionism; this apparent paradox is resolved via Jewish pluralism, which values blood over observance. Interestingly and problematically, this fixation on Jewish blood replicates Nazi logics.³⁰²

Like many of the learning modules, there seemed to be a tension between pandering on the one hand to perceived Westernized/modernized audiences, while also stressing the preservation of cultural and religious Jewry. These passages also demonstrate Jewish pluralism and its importance for the future preservation of both Judaism, the State of Israel, and Israel as a Jewish nation state. The party line described here within SHI's explanation of Jewish pluralism is: The full spectrum of Jews, from secular to ultra-Orthodox, are essential to the survival of Jewish peoplehood. As many Muslim MLIers noted, this take on "pluralism" includes only intra-community pluralism, once again succinctly skirting the problem of Israeli treatment of Palestinians.

SHI Values:

Below is another graphic from the course materials provided during the second MLI trip to Palestine in 2018 expressing the same Shalom Hartman values discussed

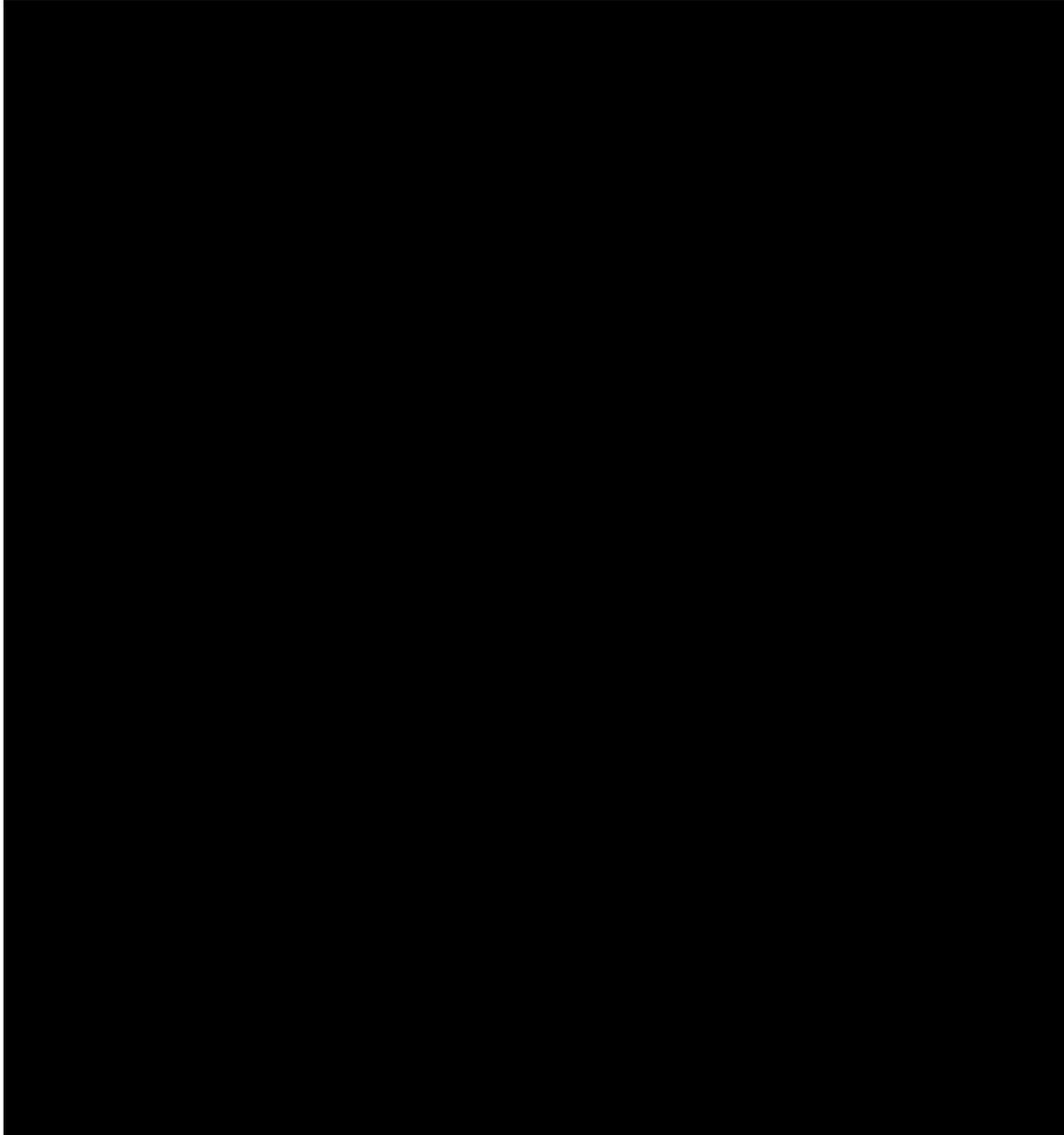
³⁰⁰ Michal Shaul, *Holocaust Memory in Ultraorthodox Society in Israel* (Indiana University Press, 2020).

³⁰¹ Shlomo Hasson, "Territories and identities in Jerusalem," *GeoJournal* 53, no. 3 (2001).

³⁰² DAVID GOODMAN, "Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law," (JSTOR, 2018).

earlier. The repetitive inclusion of these core SHI values is a statement in and of itself about SHI's perceptions concerning global Jewry and Israel's place within the collective Jewish consciousness. The redundancy of these core SHI values is startling and rather aggressive considering the subversive Zionist agenda embedded within all the course materials. This is an agenda that cloaks itself in the survival of Jewish peoplehood in Israeli nationalism that ignores the plight of Palestinians.

Figure 10: Shalom Hartman Institute Restatement of Values



The Schedule:

The below schedule from my cohort's first trip to Jerusalem in 2017 is included here, so that the reader can get a feel for the pace of MLI as an immersive learning experience. I provide the schedule below to also demonstrate the sheer volume of course materials provided, and that MLers moved through during their trips to Palestine. The

schedule also illustrates the pervasive and consistent themes embedded within the pedagogy; I expand on the primary themes in this chapter. Participants for two years in a row signed up to miss New Year's Eve celebrations with family and friends in order to board a plane, travel for close to eighteen hours, only to land in a place generally inhospitable to "their kind." However, the promise of insider knowledge about those who consistently were framed and set themselves up as existential enemies was too great a call to ignore.³⁰³ In an interview during this trip with my informant Gamila, she explained, "MLI is the natural next step and evolution in education for anyone who really cares about interfaith relations. It was a natural evolution for me and one that I couldn't ignore. I mean there is no compulsion in religion, but that isn't applicable when it comes to activism." For Gamila, MLI was an opportunity to gain access to information that would help her engage in advocacy in her Muslim community: an opportunity for one insular community to learn about another insular community.

³⁰³ Carlill, "The One-State Solution?."

Figure 11: 1st Jerusalem Trip Schedule p.1

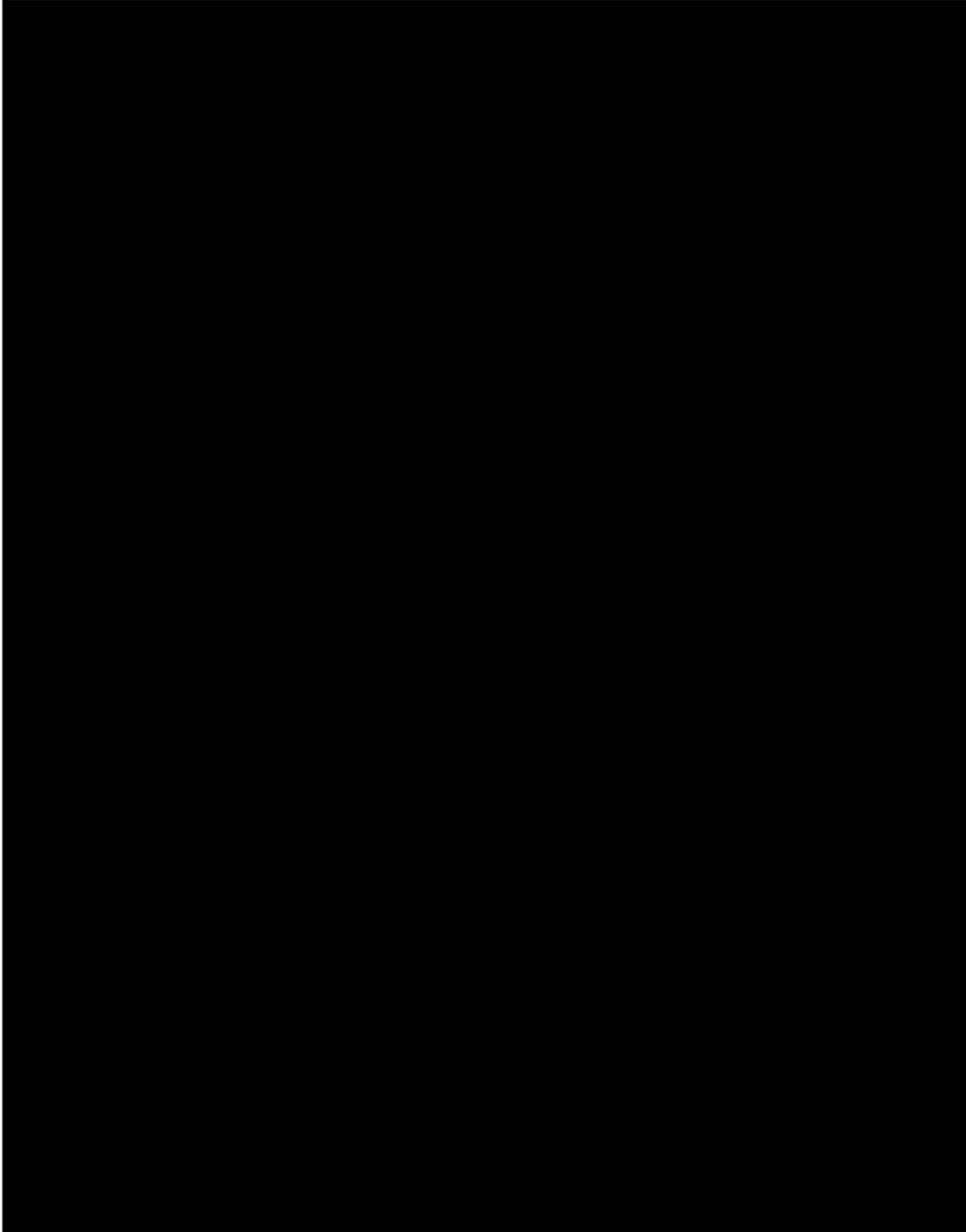


Figure 12: 1st Jerusalem Trip Schedule p.2

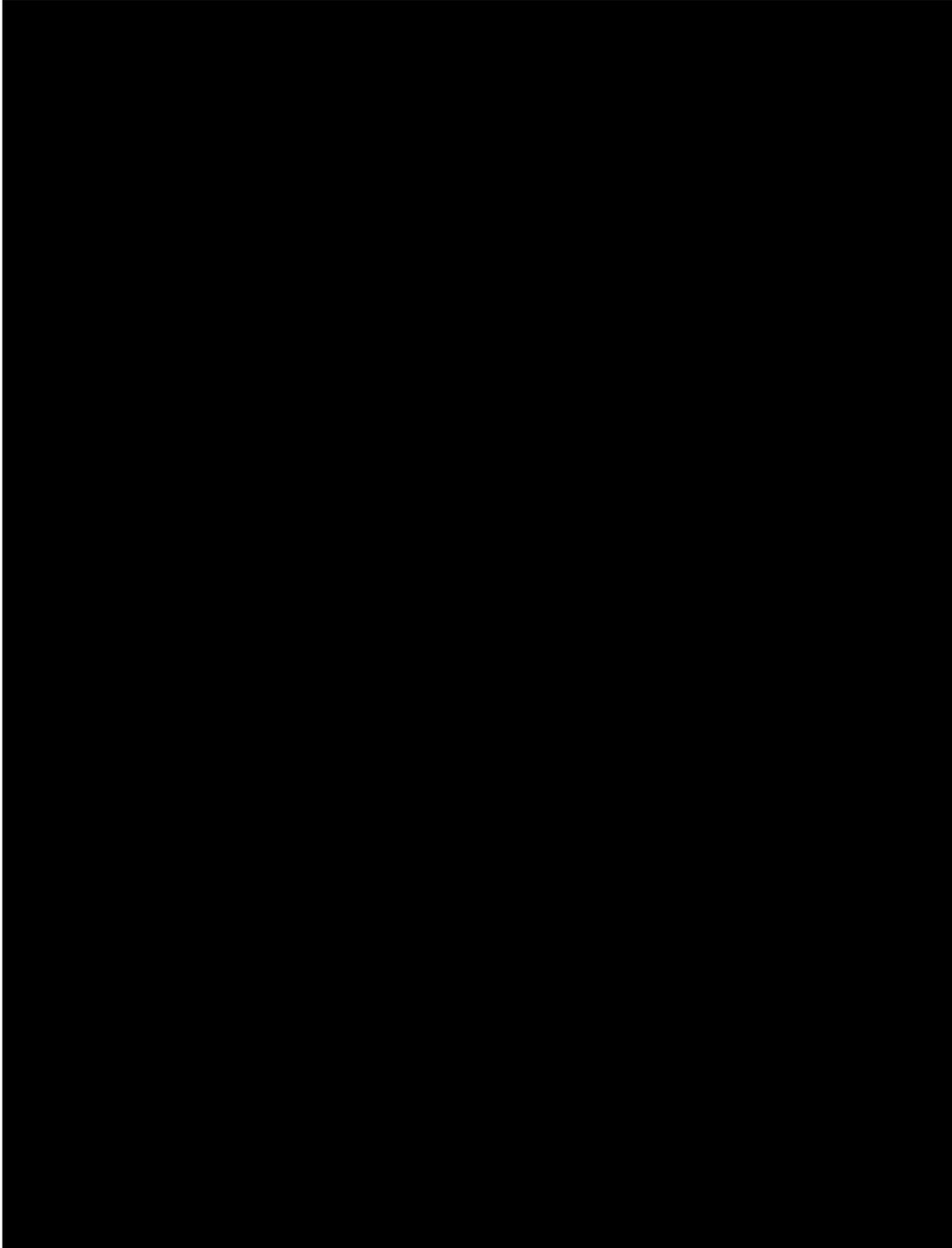
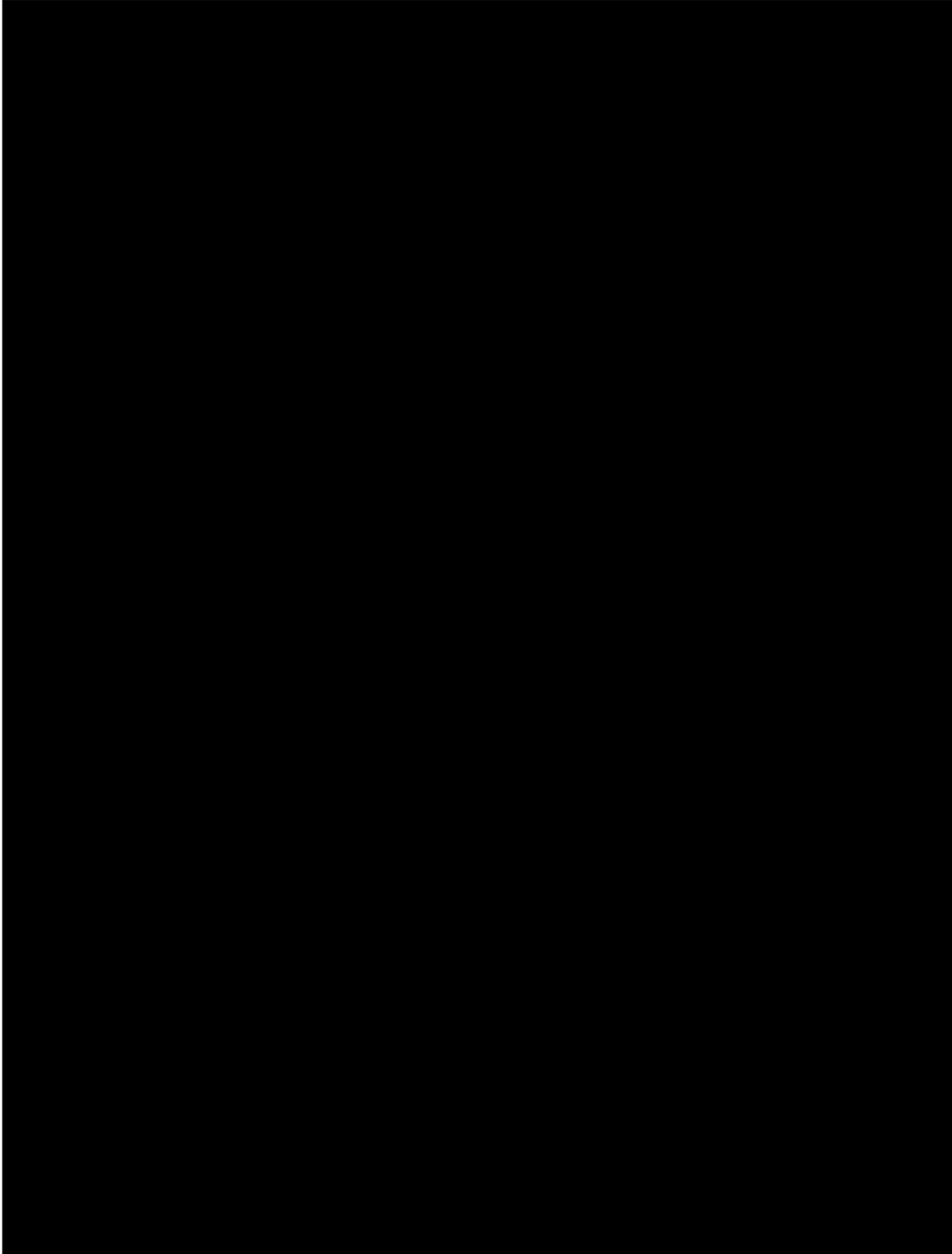
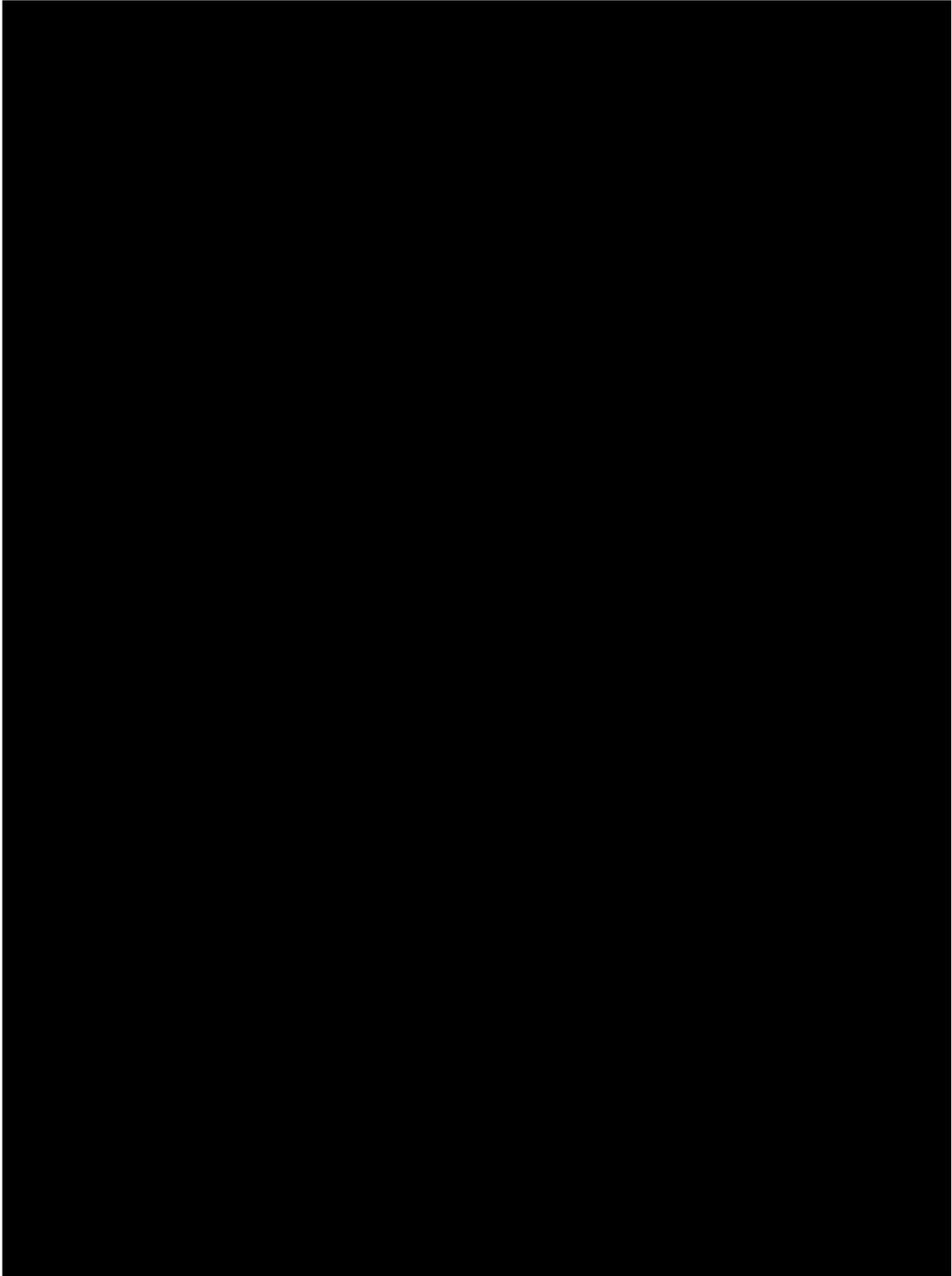


Figure 13: 1st Jerusalem Trip Schedule p.3

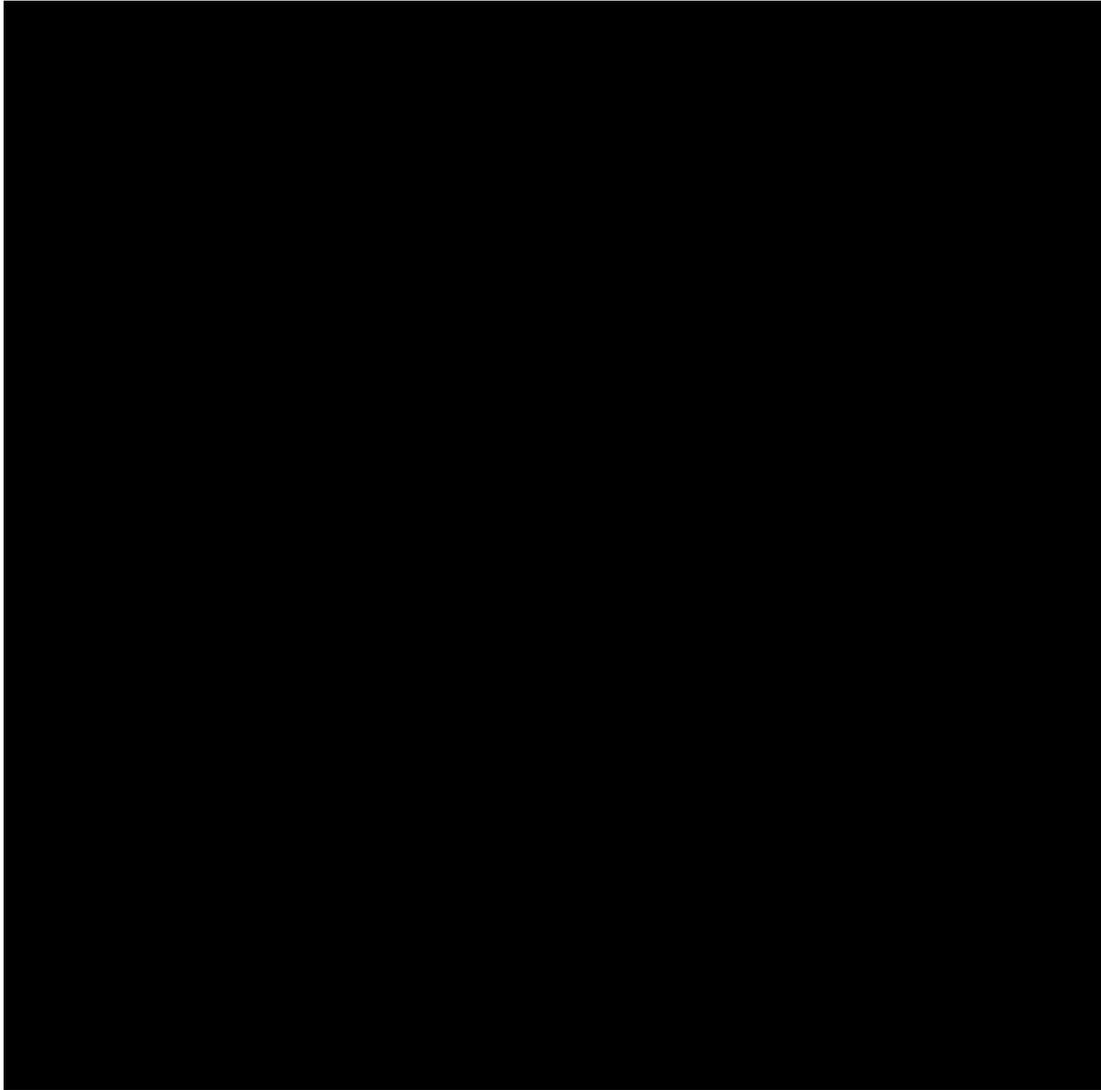


The image below is of the index of sources from the first Jerusalem trip in 2017. It provides a short synopsis of the formal learning lectures and their prescribed topics. It is once again illustrative of the demanding nature of the MLI program, as well as the salient and pervasive Zionist tropes prevalent throughout the course materials.



Jerusalem in the Jewish Imagination

Figure 15: Jerusalem in the Jewish Imagination Course Materials



The above is the cover for one of the mandatory seminars for all MLI participants during their first two-week trip to Jerusalem in 2017. These seminars took place at the main SHI campus in Jerusalem, in an intimate, moderately sized classroom setting. There was no assigned seating, and the tables were organized in a large rectangle, forming a type of enclosure, with MLIs seated on all sides, surrounding the instructors who were

usually seated at the front of the room. In the corner large containers of coffee, along with fruit and sweet snacks like cookies and a platter of assorted tea bags was always fully stocked. The free-flowing caffeine and sugary snacks were yet another indication of the rigorous pace MLers were expected to maintain throughout this course work. Turning to the content of this particular seminar, the title clearly shows the importance of Jerusalem/Israel within the Jewish imagination. Note that the workshop pulls from traditional rabbinic biblical sources such as Psalms, Kings, and Micah, which it combines with Israeli authors and politicians that discuss the primacy of Jerusalem-as-holy-homeland to contemporary Jewry.³⁰⁴ This setup and span of documents is significant because they serve to nationalize biblical sources. It colors the interpretation of these biblical sources as justifying contemporary or even anachronistic sources that imply that Jews have a divine right to the nation state of Israel.³⁰⁵ This is reflected most obviously by #4 on the agenda, which calls for a daily prayer for a rebuilt Jerusalem, excerpted below. This prayer for Jerusalem and Israel is often recited in religious services held for major holidays, such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, throughout Jewish diasporic communities.³⁰⁶ Often, newer generations of Jews living in diaspora, remove themselves from the synagogue/temple when this prayer is recited as a sign of solidarity with the Palestinian plight and in recognition of Israel's violent policies and transgressions against

³⁰⁴ Avi Shveka, "The Bible and the Sources of Rabbinic Law," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law* (2019).

³⁰⁵ Gregory B Kaplan, *The Origins of Democratic Zionism* (Routledge, 2019).

³⁰⁶ Ruth Langer, "Turning to Jerusalem from the Exile," *The Oxford Handbook of the Jewish Diaspora* (2021).

Palestinians and Arabs.³⁰⁷ This is a relatively new phenomenon occurring in Jewish diasporic communities, and is a departure from the monolithic Zionism adhered to by many Jews globally. Even so, these small departures have not affected SHI's, and similar Zionist organizations' perceptions of monolithic Jewish diasporic support of Israel.

Figure 16: Daily Prayer for a Rebuilt Jerusalem



The learning modules agenda above, that include the Daily Prayer for a rebuilt Jerusalem, amongst ten other sources, as a whole tie Jewish memory to the physical geopolitical space of Jerusalem, and Israel more broadly. This curriculum is being taught to Muslims who understand Israel and Jerusalem as part of the Middle East, an Arab- and Muslim-dominant geopolitical space.³⁰⁸ Disputes over Jerusalem-as-Jewish vs. Jerusalem-as-Muslim inform the central interreligious conflicts within MLI. Intra-religious conflict is also present within this multi-faceted discourse. The table of contents for this particular seminar reflects not only Jewish primacy of Israel, but also a politics of respectability

³⁰⁷ Ari Y Kelman and Ilan Zvi Baron, "Framing conflict: Why American congregations cannot not talk about Israel," *Contemporary Jewry* 39, no. 3 (2019).

³⁰⁸ Mick Dumper, "Holy Cities in Conflict: Jerusalem in a Broader Context," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 78 (2019).

surrounding what kind of Jews/Judaism can or should lay proper claim to Jerusalem. This has to do with the Right of Return Law, which, like Nazi logics, uses blood to determine Jewishness. Therefore, even accounting for Jewish pluralism, which accepts multiple levels of Jewish observance, the tie that binds in terms of perceived legitimate claims to Jerusalem and Israel is Jewish blood. Reformed Jews become a major source of contention within this discourse due to the higher prevalence of interfaith marriage in those circles as compared to other branches of Judaism.³⁰⁹ The internalization of Nazi logics has led Israeli Jews, specifically through the way the Right of Return Law works, to engage in their own racism based on a type of blood purity. This informs and drives anti-miscegenation sentiments reminiscent of Nazi Germany but of wider patterns of White supremacy in order to maintain Jewishness in general as well as specifically in the nation state of Israel.³¹⁰ These internalized logics that support endogamy are also justified as a way to stave off assimilation and Christianization in diaspora and in the State of Israel. However, Israel taking up a position to protect global Jewry also devolves into perpetrator logics that have negative impacts on all outsiders, including Jews who the State of Israel deems "not Jewish enough," specifically Jews that convert or have interfaith marriages, as well as Palestinians and their claim to Palestine/Israel. Israel's positionality as global protector of all Jewish blood everywhere provides a justification

³⁰⁹ Jonathan Weisman, "American Jews and Israeli Jews are headed for a messy breakup," *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com [dostęp: 4 I 2019] (2019).

³¹⁰ Ronit Lentin, *Traces of racial exception: Racializing Israeli settler colonialism* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

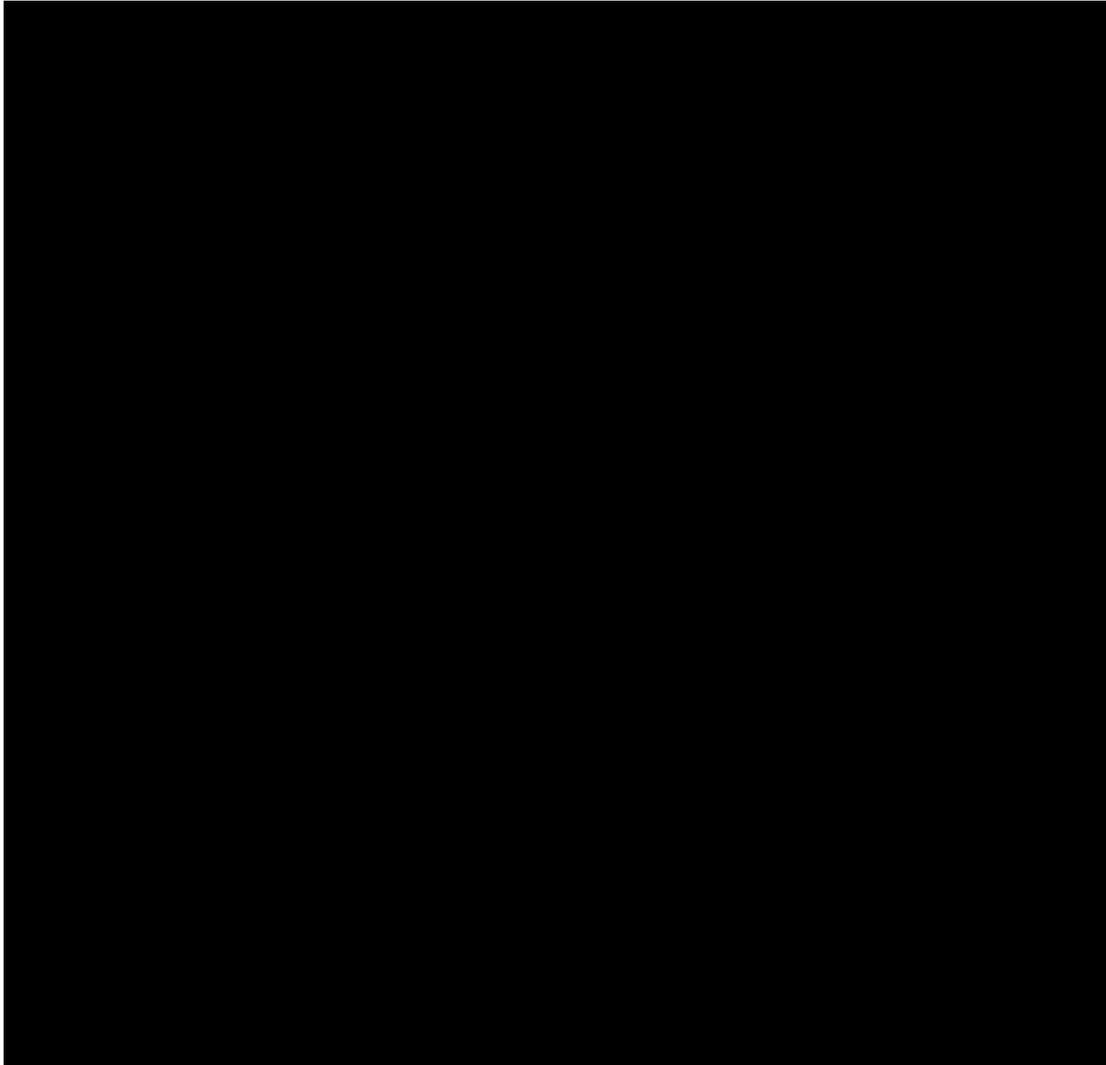
for its own militarization and its expectation that those who carry Jewish blood will in turn militarily defend it as well.³¹¹ Interestingly there are exceptions to these national demands.

#11, in the seminar agenda above, refers to ultra-orthodox exemption from compulsory military service in Israel. We see once again a grounding of ancient sources of authority within geopolitical discourse over the modern nation state of Israel, which is blatantly described as not only a religious but a military state. The curriculum makes it apparent that Jewish leadership in SHI has an overtly religious *and* political agenda, centering on inculcating these views into their Muslim MLI audience. SHI purports to dispel these Jewish knowledges in the spirit of transparency; however, there is an undercurrent of hopeful persuasion that SHI instructors betray. This also presents via discourses on Zionism, which is central to debates around Palestine/Israel. Official MLI curriculum demonstrates the importance of Israel and especially Jerusalem not only conceptually but also physically and geographically. The discussion in favor of serving the Israeli military shows that this investment is also literally militaristic. Through this curriculum, SHI is suggesting that not only every Israeli but every Jew should be willing to die for a space that is both existential in Jewish imagination, but also physical and tangible in today's transnational world. Ties to the physical importance of Jerusalem/Israel can be further seen below.

³¹¹ Karina Shklyan, "Disillusioned defenders? The integration challenges of American Jewish return migrants in the Israel Defense Forces," *Nations and Nationalism* 28, no. 1 (2022).

Judaism and the Land

Figure 17: Judaism and the Land Course Materials



The above collection of sources binds Torah and Rabbinic literature, to Talmudic commentators from Arab lands, as well as modern nationalist poets and composers.

These sources move from an in-homeland Jewish world contextualized in the Torah,³¹² to

³¹² Neil Gillman, *Doing Jewish Theology: God, Torah & Israel in Modern Judaism* (Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010).

the exiled Jewish community in the Babylonian Talmudic context,³¹³ and then move to a contemporary source within the modern nation state of Israel, suggesting a return from the long exiled Jewish identity and memory.³¹⁴ Exile for postmodern Jews is directly tied to diaspora, which through the rhetoric above directly ties not only to longer histories of Jewish persecution but also explicitly to the Holocaust.³¹⁵ This speaks to the vulnerability of living in diaspora/exile from one's perceived homeland, especially as a result of histories of violence and oppression.³¹⁶ The Holocaust is a justification for why Jewish diaspora and living in exile is unsafe and untenable, hence the necessity for the nation state of Israel, at all costs. The other side of this coin, of course, is the tragic irony of the plight of Palestinians in Israel today. The cost of the nation state of Israel is Palestinian lives, a price which Israelis continue to be willing to pay. This ongoing conflict is brought to the forefront via SHI's overtly Zionist curriculum, as explicitly shown below.

³¹³ Daniel Boyarin, "The Babylonian Talmud as diasporist manifesto," *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies* (2018).

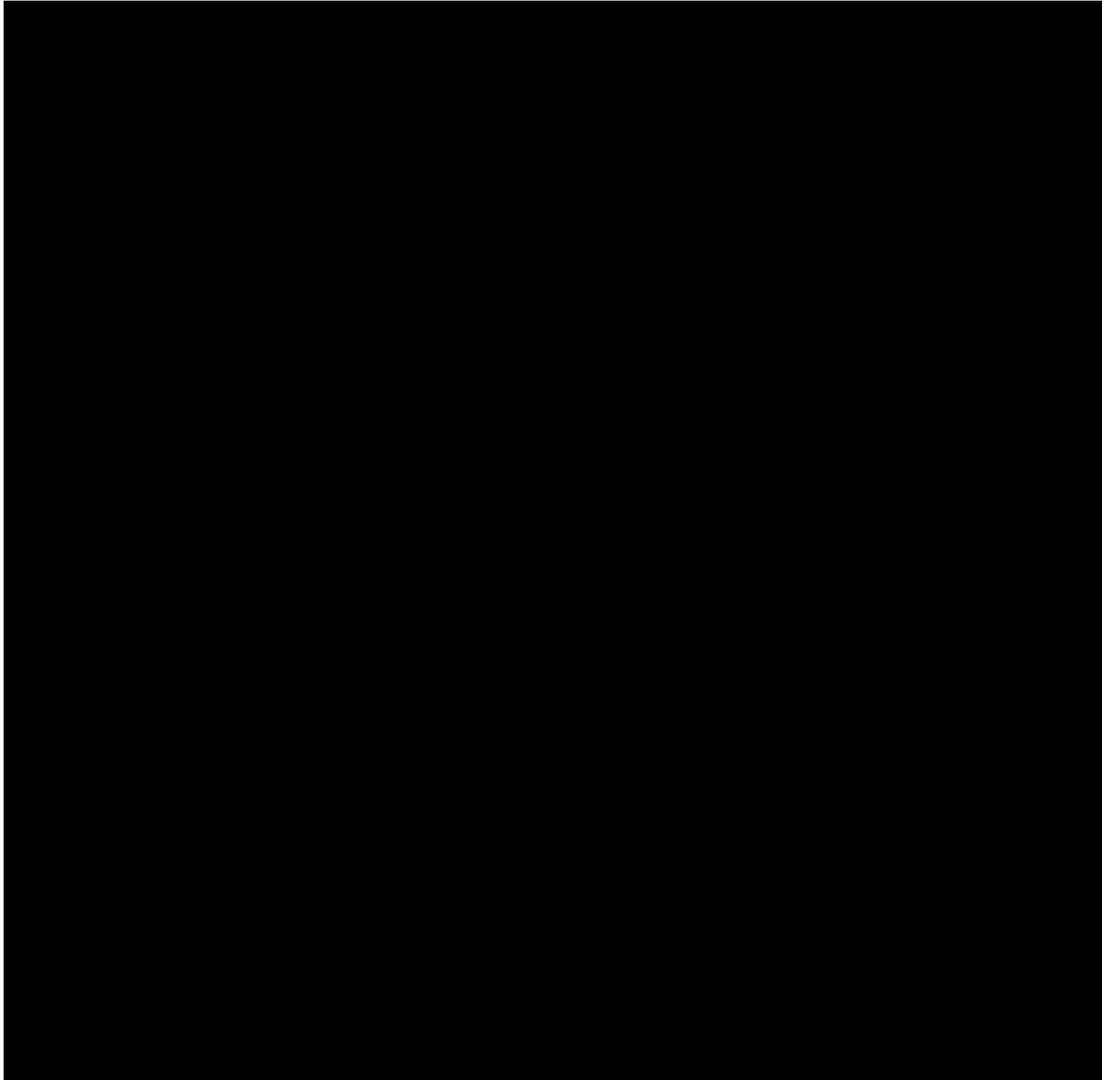
³¹⁴ Jason A Staples, *The idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism: a new theory of people, exile, and Israelite identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

³¹⁵ Efraim Sicher, *Re-envisioning Jewish Identities: Reflections on Contemporary Culture in Israel and the Diaspora* (Brill, 2021).

³¹⁶ Daniel Goldberg, "Eternal Outsiders: A Historical and Present-Day Reflection on Anti-Semitism in America," (2019).

Three Pillars of Zionist Thought

Figure 18: Three Pillars of Zionist Thought Course Materials

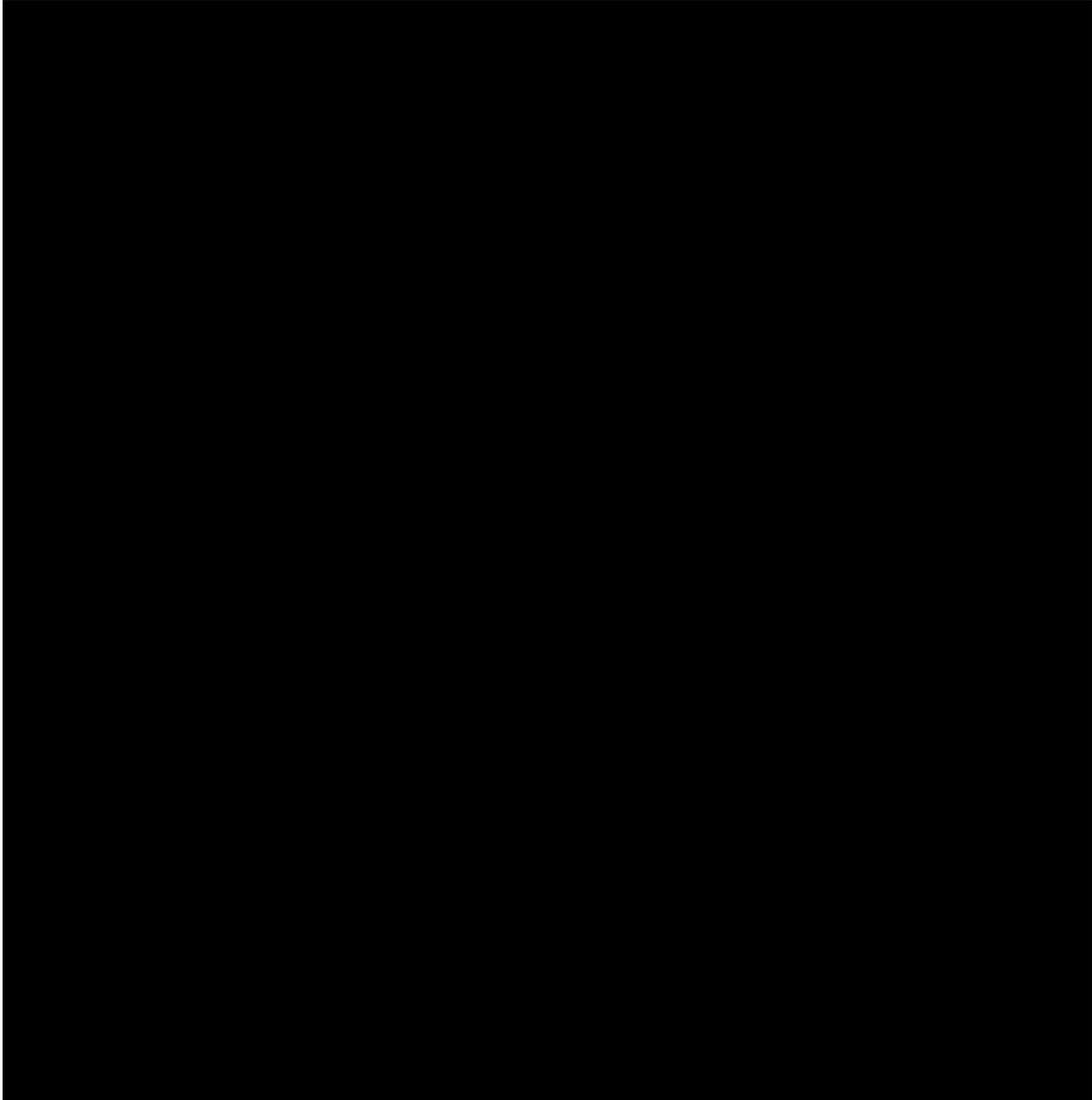


The excerpts above address the mindset of the diaspora Jew from the time of exile to 19th century Europe and the trauma of the Holocaust. The collective Jewish memory of traumas and persecutions throughout history culminates in the necessity for a modern

Jewish nation state to ensure a Jewish future.³¹⁷ The last source, titled “Passover in Jerusalem,” is particularly illuminating in that it shows how every year, Jews in diaspora invoke Passover liturgy that yearns for a future Passover in Jerusalem. The above sources all necessitate what SHI instructors call “Jewish pluralism,” a form of pan-Judaism that calls for Jews from all four corners of the world to make Aliyah, or migration to Israel. The purpose of this invocation is to ensure the success of Israel as a Jewish nation state and perhaps can even be perceived as a consolidation and centralization of Jewish power. Note that also amongst the sources featured above is the Israeli Declaration of Independence, which is Zionistic political speech. The declaration of independence excerpted in SHI’s binder curriculum is as follows:

³¹⁷ Yadin Dudai, "Persistence of collective memory over 3000 years: The case of ancient vs. modern Israel," in *National Memory in a Time of Populism* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2020).

Figure 19: Israeli Declaration of Independence Excerpt

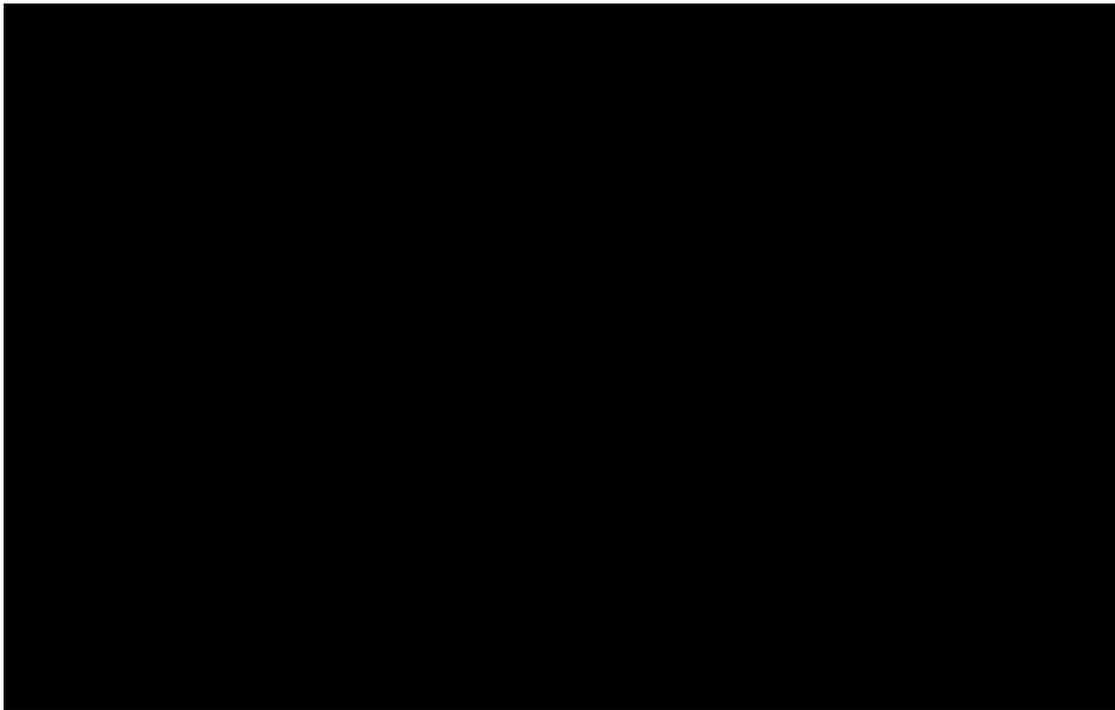


Significant to the selected literature is the simultaneously religious and political aspects of these materials. This sentiment makes the case that Israel is a land of opportunity for Jews everywhere and overlooks Israeli complicity in the current Palestine-Israel occupation, which renders Palestine and Israel an ongoing conflict zone. The mixture of excerpts from these various sources brings forward the notion that modern political rhetoric is on sacred par with ancient religious wisdom. The values of freedom, justice,

equality, and pluralism speak not only to an Israeli or Zionist audience but also share parallels with certain Western values more broadly, thus speaking to the simultaneously transnational but explicitly American MLI audience.³¹⁸ In these senses, the curriculum at MLI can be seen as being infused not only with Jewish religious education, but also with Israeli nationalist agenda.³¹⁹

Zionism and the Dilemma of Power

Figure 20: Zionism and the Dilemma of Power Course Materials



The first item on the above refers to the birth of the synagogue. During the period of Babylonian exile, Jews had to live under non-Jewish rule amongst non-Jews. In order to

³¹⁸ Haddad, "Claiming Space in America's Pluralism."

³¹⁹ For more on nationalism and competing conceptions of nationhood see Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*.

keep Jewish traditions alive while living in diaspora, the conception of the synagogue was born, which is discussed in the first Talmudic passage featured above.³²⁰ In the context of diaspora, a synagogue is a way to preserve a Jewish way of life, and provides socio-linguistic-cultural centers for Jews in exile.³²¹ Before the advent of the synagogue, there was only the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, because Jews were living under Jewish rule. Diaspora and exile necessitated physical and multiple loci for centers designed to preserve Jewish law, traditions, and culture as a minority group.³²² Keep in mind that the Babylonian Exile is just the starting point of Jewish exile, which lasted from the fall of King Solomon to the foundation of the state of Israel.³²³ This timeline is contingent upon the belief that the founding of the state of Israel ended Jewish exile. As depicted in this and other literature offered by Jewish SHI teachers, this poses a dilemma in terms of interpreting Talmudic law. This is because according to some interpretations of the Talmud, Jews will always live in exile and will never be able to sustain a living dynasty again.³²⁴ This is attributed to abuse of power under David and Solomon.³²⁵ This apparent

³²⁰ Matthew Goldstone, "The Babylonian Talmud in its cultural context," *Religion Compass* 13, no. 6 (2019).

³²¹ Erich S Gruen, "Judaism in the Diaspora," *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* (2020).

³²² Sergey R Kravtsov, "Preserving a Synagogue: Cultural, Material, and Sacred Values," *Polin Studies in Polish Jewry* 33, no. 1 (2021).

³²³ Jacob Neusner, "Exile and Return as the History of Judaism," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (Brill, 1997).

³²⁴ Baron, *Obligation in Exile: The Jewish Diaspora, Israel and Critique*.

³²⁵ David Biale, *Power & powerlessness in Jewish history* (Schocken, 2010).

abuse of power, according to this interpretation of Talmudic law, prohibits Jews from ever re-establishing self-rule. The founding of the modern nation state of Israel is therefore seen from certain perspectives to violate Talmudic law.³²⁶ Varied interpretations of the Talmud have subsequently influenced debates surrounding Israel's right to exist. This debate was the subject of this particular teaching session, "Zionism and the Dilemma of Power," during our 2017 trip to Jerusalem. During this session, the instructor made her positionality clear as a staunch supporter of Israel's right to exist, and that its existence effectively ended God's decree of Jewish exile. What was particularly interesting to me about this and other sessions during both our two-week trips to Palestine was that while the instructors framed much of this Jewish education as an objective religious studies style course on Judaism, Muslim participants constantly left these sessions making remarks such as "Do they really think we're going to leave here being Zionists?" This internal Jewish debate about Israel's right to exist clearly struck a chord with the Muslim members of MLI.

The second item on the above agenda, another excerpt from the Babylonian Talmud, deals with communal and personal cost for transgressing against others. This is all tied together because of Jews having to live in diaspora or amongst non-Jews and under non-Jewish rule and is also only necessary due to Jews living in non-majority Jewish contexts.³²⁷ Interpretations of these teachings suggest that one living under non-

³²⁶ Shaul, *Holocaust Memory in Ultraorthodox Society in Israel*.

³²⁷ David A Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and secular culture* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

Jewish or secular law follow the laws of these lands. The instructor of this session stipulated that in Israel and for Jews in diaspora, Jews are obligated to respect non-Jewish personhood, while also protecting Jewish existence.³²⁸ This caveat once again provides for a way to justify Israeli aggression while seemingly not violating Jewish teachings. These two Talmudic passages taken together act as a formula for the existence of global Jewry and tying together Jewish diaspora and Zionist ideologies.

³²⁸ Baron, *Obligation in Exile: The Jewish Diaspora, Israel and Critique*.

Memories of Powerlessness and Isolation in an Age of Jewish Power

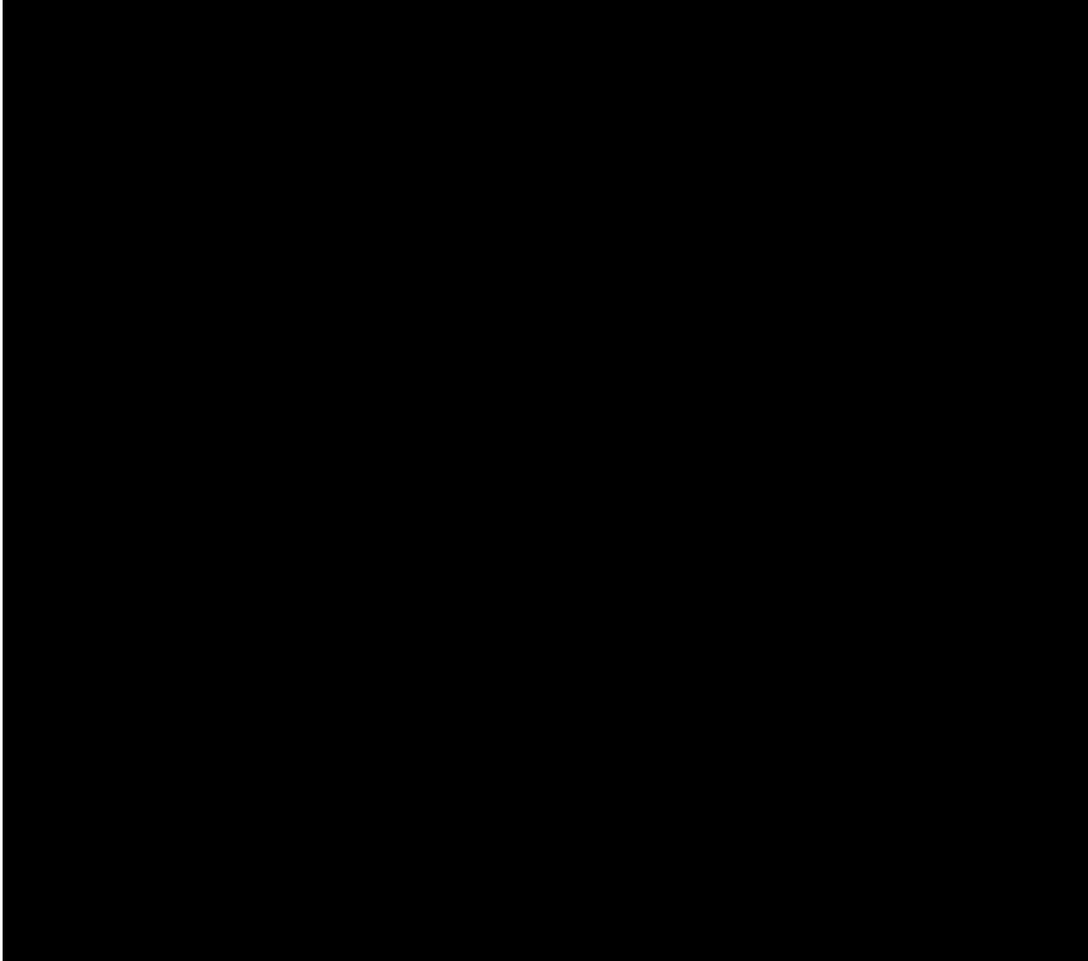
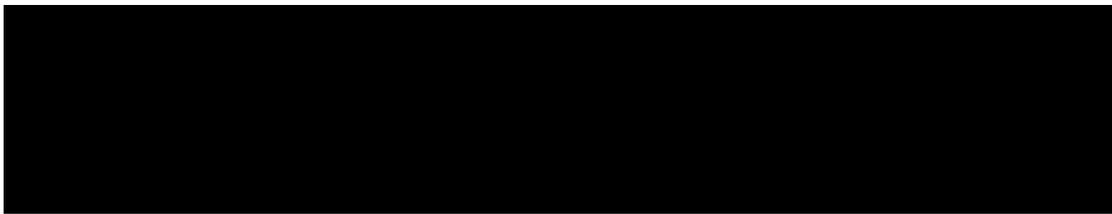


Figure 21: Memories of Jewish Powerlessness Course Materials

In what follows, I delve into some of the scripture excerpts that Yossi Klein Halevi, the Jewish founder of MLI, used in his lecture on Jewish memory and power during our first trip to Jerusalem in 2017. This section is not meant to be an exhaustive dive into biblical literature, but rather an analysis of the ways that Yossi and other SHI teachers of the MLI

curriculum used specific excerpts to present their worldview and their place in it.³²⁹ The following analysis is not meant to be a close reading of biblical literatures, but an analysis of the agendas and voices present in my field site; those who chose these teaching materials, how to present them, and of those who received these excerpts as outsiders to Jewish knowledges.

Figure 22: Deuteronomy 25:17



This first source included in the *Memories of Powerlessness and Isolation in an Age of Jewish Power* is pulled straight from the Torah, from the book of Deuteronomy, and addresses the genocidal intent of who Yossi called the “natural enemy” of the Jews throughout the scriptures, the Amalekites.³³⁰ The Amalekites are a tribe that the Torah describes as trying to wipe out the Hebrews; this is the narrative Yossi adopts in the content shown above. Yossi used this as an example of the long histories of hatred and persecution towards Jews.³³¹ Like many Jews, Yossi and the rest of the Jewish leaders in

³²⁹ For more on Torah exegesis see Ben Witherington III, *Torah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Fortress Press, 2018).

³³⁰ Gili Kugler, "Metaphysical Hatred and Sacred Genocide: The Questionable Role of Amalek in Biblical Literature," *Journal of Genocide Research* 23, no. 1 (2021).

³³¹ Yossi's interpretation of this excerpt is a pervasive and accepted interpretation within many Jewish communities. However, not all Jews accept the assertion that Arabs are the living embodiments of the Amalekites and their biblical genocidal intentions towards the Jews. There are differing narratives and interpretations of this excerpt. For more on these divergent interpretations see Hannah White, "Jewish Bible

SHI view these histories as a cornerstone of Jewish peoplehood and how many Jews form Jewish tribal identity.³³²

The perceived inescapability of hatred from others holds many Jews together; the Holocaust is a primary recent example of the realities of this anti-Semitism. In combination, the curriculum MLI uses largely points to the necessity of Israel's existence and by extension, its oppressive policies, which like-minded Jews view as an assurance of the safety of Israel and therefore Jews.³³³ During this particular study session with my Muslim group Havruta³³⁴ members, Abbas blurted out, "Wow so all the Arabs just naturally hate the Jews, so Israel gets to do whatever they want...what a great way to justify horrifying acts!" Abbas was voicing a common back and forth that occurred in our Havruta and processing sessions, that of MLI Muslim members having to digest multiple justifications for violent Israeli policies towards the Palestinians, and more commonly the general Jewish justification that all Muslims hate Jews and therefore all Jews must violently protect themselves from Muslims everywhere, but specifically from Arab

Interpretation and the War on Amalek: A Discourse of the Evolution of the Interpretation of Deuteronomy 25: 191," *DOROT*.

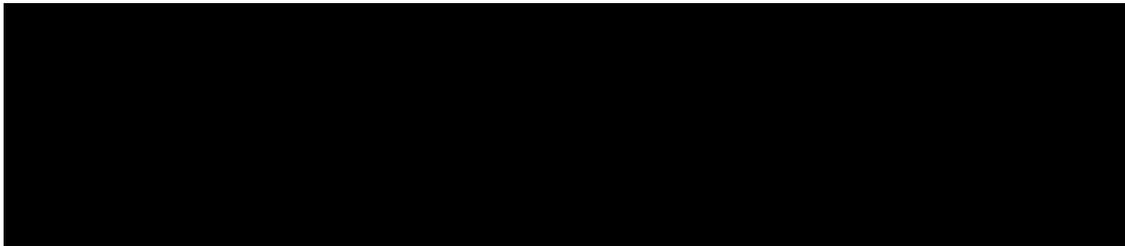
³³² Christopher MacDonald-Dennis, "Understanding anti-Semitism and its impact: A new framework for conceptualizing Jewish identity," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39, no. 3 (2006).

³³³ Morgan, "To seize memory: History and identity in post-holocaust Jewish thought."

³³⁴ According to the Shalom Hartman Institute "Havruta" is a Jewish learning methodology: "Havruta is an Aramaic word similar to the Hebrew haver, friend. It refers to the study of traditional Jewish texts in pairs or groups, whether in the beit midrash study hall, after the Shabbat meal, or even over lunch at a deli." This Jewish methodology for learning allows groups and partners to question the source material as well as the instructor and each other. It's a beautiful way of engraining an ideology of skepticism that forces dialogue. , <https://www.hartman.org.il/havruta-unique-new-journal-now-available-from-shalom-hartman-institute/>.

Muslim neighboring countries that border Israel.³³⁵ What was interesting about this response and many others like it throughout my time in MLI was that Abbas, a Desi Muslim man, continuously defended Arab identity and Muslim solidarity through advocacy for Palestine and criticism of Israel. The curriculum as well as Muslim responses to it demonstrate how the Palestine/Israel conflict is not just an issue in the Middle East, but a transnational conflict that exceeds the geographical bounds of the nation state of Israel and its occupied territories.³³⁶

Figure 23: Exodus 22:21



This second source from the Book of Exodus is a sentiment repeated over thirty-five times in the Torah, as pointed out in the notes I took during this session in 2017 while in our classroom at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.³³⁷ Yossi's explanation of the prolific mentioning of this prohibition against being an oppressor points to the Jewish perception of eternal victimhood.³³⁸ The passage states that regardless of strangeness or

³³⁵ Steven R David, "Existential threats to Israel," in *Contemporary Israel* (Routledge, 2018).

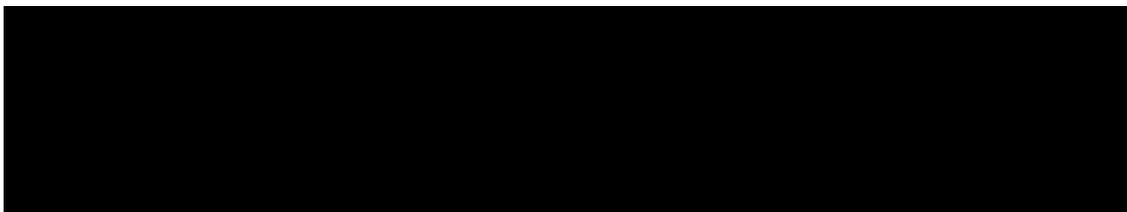
³³⁶ Fakhoury and Khalaily, "Internationalizing the Status of the Arab-Palestinian Minority in Israel."

³³⁷ Shani Tzoref, "Knowing the heart of the stranger: Empathy, remembrance, and narrative in Jewish reception of Exodus 22: 21, Deuteronomy 10: 19, and parallels," *Interpretation* 72, no. 2 (2018).

³³⁸ Daniel Navon, "Embracing Victimhood," *Victimhood Discourse in Contemporary Israel* (2019).

the presence of the “Other,” Jews are not to engage in the oppression of those that are different from them. The reasoning for not taking up the mantle of the oppressor is explicitly stated in the passage Yossi taught: Jewish experience is that of the oppressed, and since Jews understand oppression and what collective otherness feels like, engaging in the oppression of others would simply be wrong. This is why we see Jewish peoplehood and support for Israel framed as defensive protection of Israel and Jews and not active oppression of Palestinians and by extension, Muslims.³³⁹ Yossi and other teachers’ pedagogical slant, as exhibited here, is tantamount to tying Jewish identity to victimhood while obliterating logical connective tissues between Israeli state policy and oppressor identity. Indeed, the emphasis on this history of persecution in tandem with the apparent prohibition against oppression allows for a cognitive dissonance that believes the oppressed (Jews) can never be oppressors.

Figure 24: Numbers 23:9

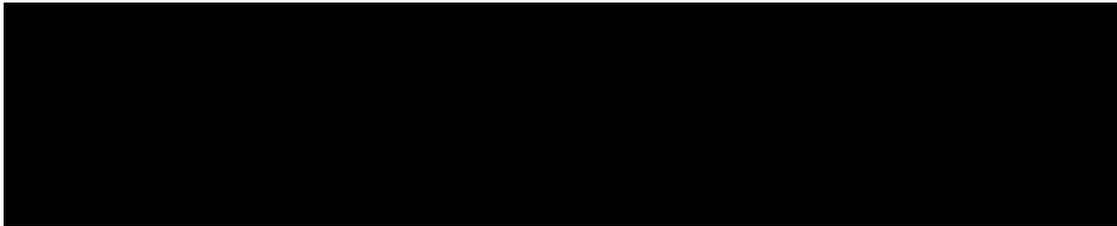


This third installment from the Torah addresses Jewish otherness and rejection from the biblical transnational stage: As the passage indicates, Jews are ostracized from the other biblical nations. As a people, as a nation without territory, the Jews are set apart, in an

³³⁹ Spangler, "Four Frames: Israeli Self-Defense, Genocide, Apartheid, Settler Colonialism: Ethnic Cleansing/Sociocide."

eternal non-belonging.³⁴⁰ As Yossi suggested in his lecture, this ostracization necessitates a nation set apart for Jews. This historical non-belonging was fully brought to fruition when the Jewish Question was posed at the foundation of the modern nation state in Western Europe. The Jewish Question was posed by Western Europeans as follows: Can Jews ever fully be our countrymen? Can they be Frenchmen, can they be part of the German Volk? Or will they only ever just be Jews.³⁴¹

Figure 25: Genesis Raba 21:4



This fourth source acts as a justification for preemptive violence based on historical ostracization and oppression of Jews. It iterates the idea that given a history of bad blood and violent interactions, Jews should preemptively kill their historical enemies before those enemies have a chance to kill Jews. This statement draws a distinction between “strangers” that Jews are not supposed to oppress, and “others” that have an established violent interactional history with the Jews. There is an explicit difference between “strangers” and “enemies” being drawn out through these sources.³⁴² This once again

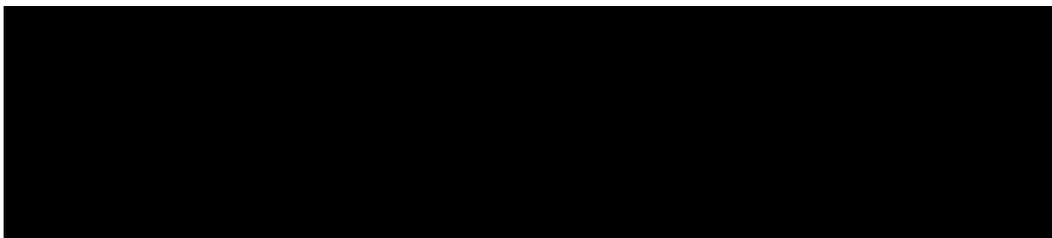
³⁴⁰ Martin Sicker, *Judaism, Nationalism, and the Land of Israel* (Routledge, 2019).

³⁴¹ Karl Marx, *On the Jewish question* (Routledge, 2014).

³⁴² Zalman Kastel, "Love the Stranger: Looking to the Torah for Guidance on Immigration Policy," *Tikkun* 28, no. 3 (2013); David Patterson, "A Jewish Perspective on Ethical Issues Surrounding the Refugee Strangers," *CrossCurrents* 67, no. 3 (2017); Norman Solomon, "Judaism and the ethics of war," *International review of the Red Cross* 87, no. 858 (2005).

provides a rationale for Jewish teachings emphasizing fair treatment of others as distinct from the conflict between Israel/Palestine. Rhetorically, Yossi and like-minded Jews attempt to solve the seeming contradiction of these teachings in comparison with violent Israeli state policies by bifurcating “strangers” from enemies such as the Amalekites and Midianites. Notably, the Amalekites and Midianites, all being from the Middle Eastern region, are cast as Arabs that Zionist Jews perceive as Muslim.³⁴³ This rhetoric, which can be understood as overtly anti-Muslim and anti-Arab, was rampant and indeed a key component of SHI’s teaching agenda.³⁴⁴ SHI’s overt statements that correlate MLI Muslim participants with the Jews’ natural enemies, the Amalekites and Midianites in the Torah, begs the question: Why would Muslims voluntarily participate in such a program? This is one of the main questions that I explore throughout this project, and in more detail in Chapter 3.

Figure 26: Excerpt of “A Child of the Century” by Ben Hecht



Continuing with the official SHI Jewish curriculum in MLI, this quote from American Jewish novelist, playwright and Zionist, Ben Hecht chronicles the effects of the

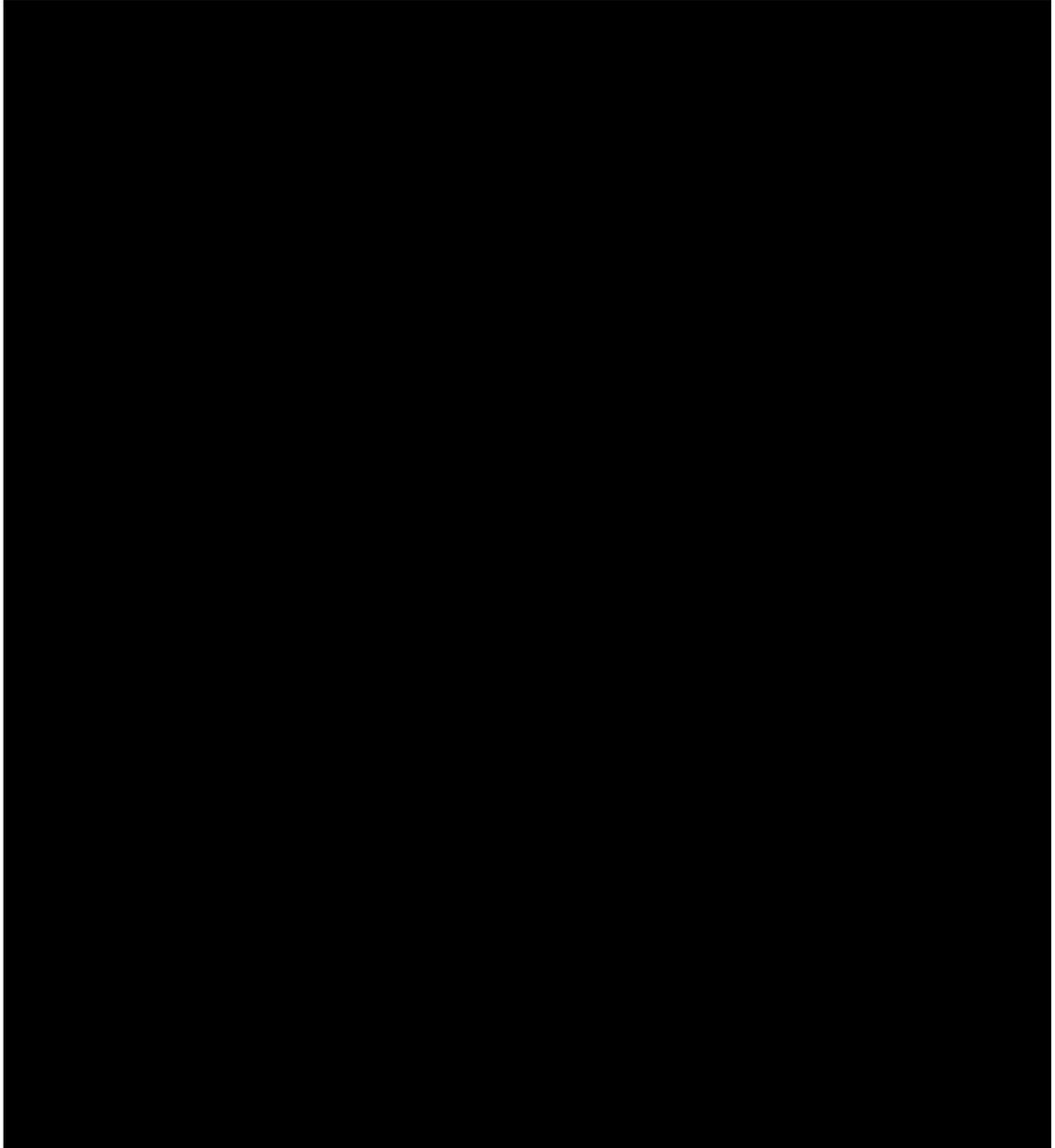
³⁴³ Gordon D Newby, "The Jews of Arabia at the birth of Islam," in *A history of Jewish-Muslim relations* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

³⁴⁴ Elly Bulkin and Donna Nevel, "Follow the Money: From Islamophobia to Israel Right or Wrong," *Alternet. Org.* Accessed 25 (2020).

Holocaust on his people, the Jews of Europe, calling our attention to the utter aloneness that the Jewish people inhabit “without a friend in the world.”³⁴⁵ This lack of friends, advocates, and standing within the many nation states of Europe, and the lack of a nation/safe place to inhabit of their own, is, as I’ve explained above, a cornerstone of Zionism. My analysis of MLI’s Jewish pedagogy uncovers the seamless layered identity that collapses Jewishness with Zionism. This reveals sets of parallel questions, involving not only the relationship between Israel and Palestine, but also between global Jewry and the Muslim Ummah, and Zionism and Islamophobia. Collective memory about the Holocaust once again reinforces eternal Jewish victimhood that negates the ability to oppress.

³⁴⁵ Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (Yale University Press, 2020).

Figure 27: Chaim Herzog U.N. Address about General Assembly Resolution 3379



The above excerpt is in reference to the United Nations passing of Resolution 3379.³⁴⁶

Originally U.N. Resolution 3379 was passed in 1975 drawing the conclusion that

³⁴⁶ Islah Jad, "The Anti-Zionism, Antisemitism, Anti-Racism Controversy Revisited—Controversially?," *Feminist Review* 126, no. 1 (2020).

Zionism is a form of anti-Arab racism. Chaim Herzog responds to this U.N. assertion drawing on the otherness of the Jews as evidenced by the atrocities they suffered during the Holocaust.³⁴⁷ These atrocities necessitate a Jewish nation state as the only safe place for Jews. This space is found in the Middle-East, as Jerusalem is and has been the capital of a Jewish Homeland since King David's reign as noted above. Herzog effectively correlates a conceptual Zion with that of the current-day existing geographical city of Jerusalem, solidifying the concept of Jewish self-determination within the Middle East, specifically Jerusalem as the center point of Jewish peoplehood.³⁴⁸ Additionally, Herzog draws a clear connection between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, making them one in the same.³⁴⁹ Collapsing anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism deflects complicity in human rights violations and other atrocities Israel is actively committing, by painting supporters of Palestine as Jew haters.

³⁴⁷ Chaim Herzog was Israel's permanent representative to the United Nations at the time he wrote this address. Herzog eventually went on to become the sixth President of Israel. For more on his life and thoughts see Chaim Herzog, *Living history: A memoir* (Plunkett Lake Press, 2019).

³⁴⁸ Stephen Spector, "This Year in Jerusalem: Prophecy, Politics, and the US Embassy in Israel," *Journal of Church and State* 61, no. 4 (2019).

³⁴⁹ Shlomo Sharan and David Bukay, *Crossovers: Anti-zionism & Anti-semitism* (Routledge, 2018).

Figure 28: Prime Minister Rabin's Inaugural Speech 1992



In this 1992 speech we see Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin trying to change previous mentalities that turned into state policies. Rabin addresses the idea that Jews are without transnational friends and advocates, the idea that Jews are utterly and devastatingly alone, urging the State of Israel to move on from this mentality to recognize its own power and global presence, to accept that the world has changed and that the State of Israel as a nation and Jews as a people must move towards peace with

Palestinians and its Arab neighbors.³⁵⁰ The subsequent assassinations of Rabin and Arafat destroyed any hopes of peace talks in the Middle East and have led to an additional thirty years of fraught relationships between Israelis and Palestinians locally and globally.³⁵¹ This has fueled animosities between Israel and its neighboring Arab nations. As MLI's attention to these histories additionally demonstrates, these conflicts are on the minds of Jews and Arab Muslims transnationally. As the last statement in this collection of sources, there is a hint of despair as recent history shows that Rabin's words fell on deaf ears as Israeli policies demonstrate a refusal to shed these collective feelings of aloneness. Israel's refusal to accept their transnational power and standing within the global community has led to a continuation of the Occupation. Yossi, while teaching this history and reading Rabin's words, became very emotional, and along with many of the other SHI Jewish teachers, expressed hopelessness following the assassinations, saying "This was the last time we had any real hope for real peace." However, these expressions of devastation and hopelessness were short lived as Yossi continued to speak, saying "But what can be done, we have to protect ourselves." The Desi Muslim majority of MLI did not quite understand the gravity of this event in the hearts and minds of Jews and Arab Muslims across the world and with whom they shared the room.³⁵² However,

³⁵⁰ Jacques Neriah, "Yitzhak Rabin, the Oslo Accords, and the Intelligence Services," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 30, no. 3/4 (2019).

³⁵¹ David Makovsky, *Making Peace with the PLO: The Rabin Government's Road to the Oslo Accord* (Routledge, 2018).

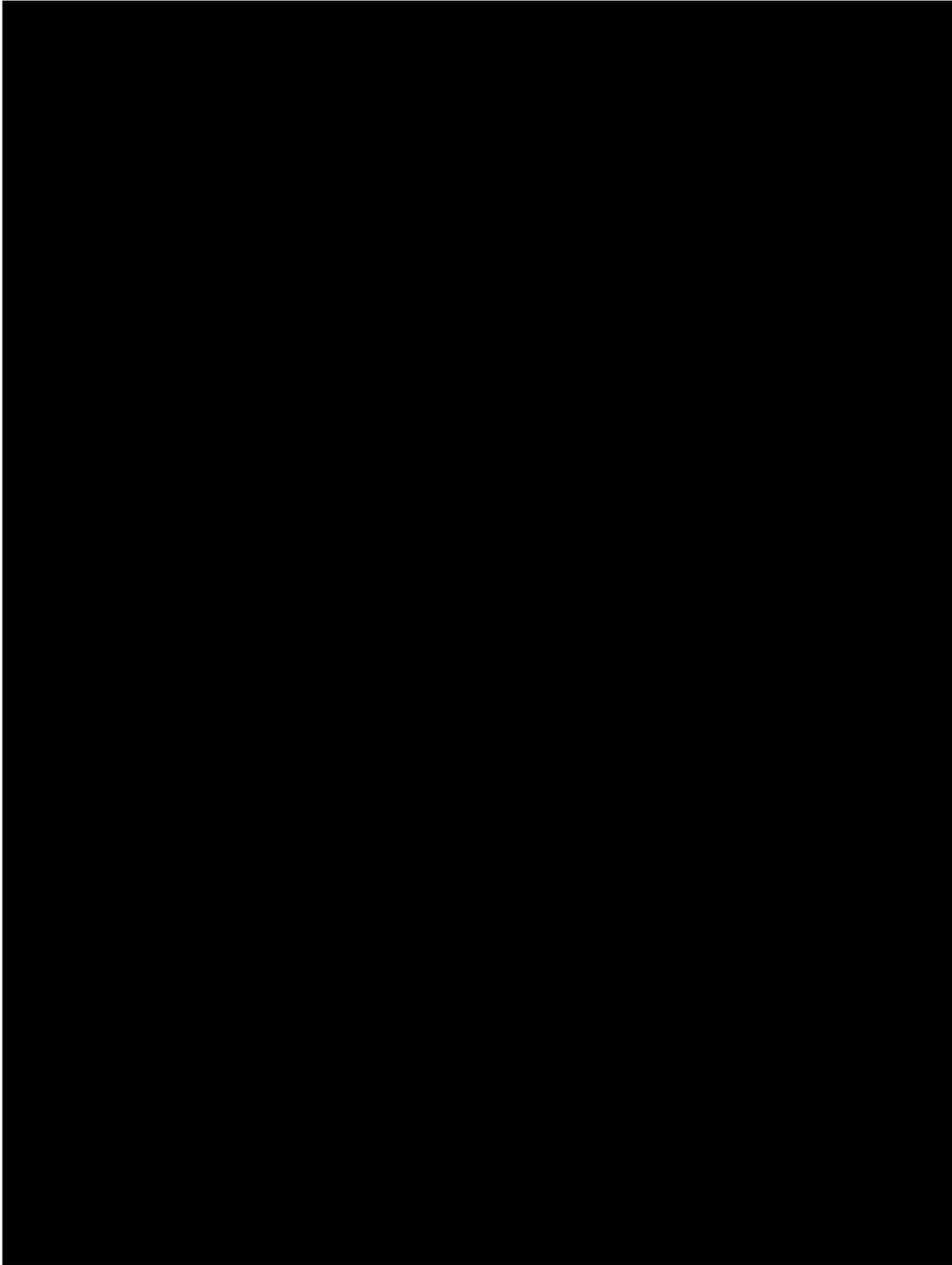
³⁵² Itamar Rabinovich, "The Rabin Assassination as a Turning Point in Israel's History," *Israel Studies* 23, no. 3 (2018); Rory Jones, "Decades After Oslo Accords, Peace Remains Elusive," *Wall Street Journal (Online)* (2016).

Kamillah stepped in to translate, explaining that this devastating loss of “peace in the Middle East” was akin to the 1971 war between East and West Pakistan in terms of internal feelings of betrayal and loss.³⁵³ The Desis immediately understood as Kamillah explained the collective pain many Pakistanis expressed throughout the years over the world’s ignorance and aid to Pakistan, and the collective pride, horror and shame claimed and broadcasted by newly formed nation state Bangladesh. The two historical incidents are incomparable, but the collective mixed feelings of betrayal, loss, and eventual fortitude were successfully translated and internalized.

³⁵³ The 1971 war between East and West Pakistan is also known as Bangladesh’s War of Independence. For more on the collective traumatic memory of these event see Sisson and Rose, *War and secession: Pakistan, India, and the creation of Bangladesh.*; Saikia, *Women, war, and the making of Bangladesh.*; Ranjan, “Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971: Narratives, Impacts and the Actors.”

THE CURRICULUM: PART 2: DILEMMAS OF POWER

Figure 29: Course Binder Cover 2018



Second Trip Agenda & Program

Included here is my cohort's schedule for our second trip to Jerusalem in 2018. In between the trips, retreats were also necessarily attended in order to complete this two-year certificate program, including a completion ceremony and diploma. The schedule below is included here again to demonstrate the rigorous nature of the MLI curriculum, as well as to demonstrate the commitment MLers have to the program and their Jewish learning in addition to their commitment to other covert and subversive agendas I more closely examine in the coming chapters.

Figure 30: 2nd Jerusalem Trip Schedule p.1

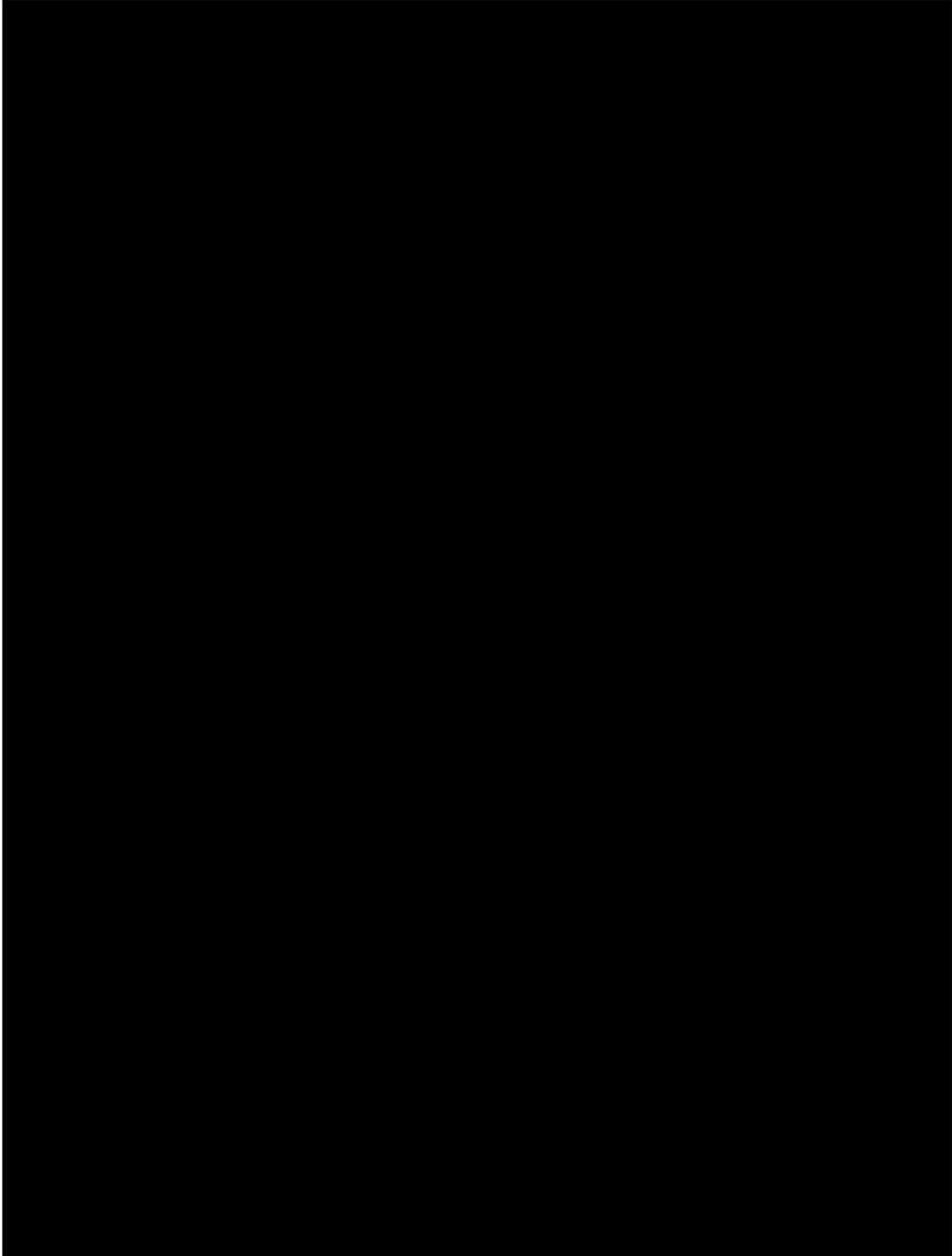


Figure 31: 2nd Jerusalem Trip Schedule p.2

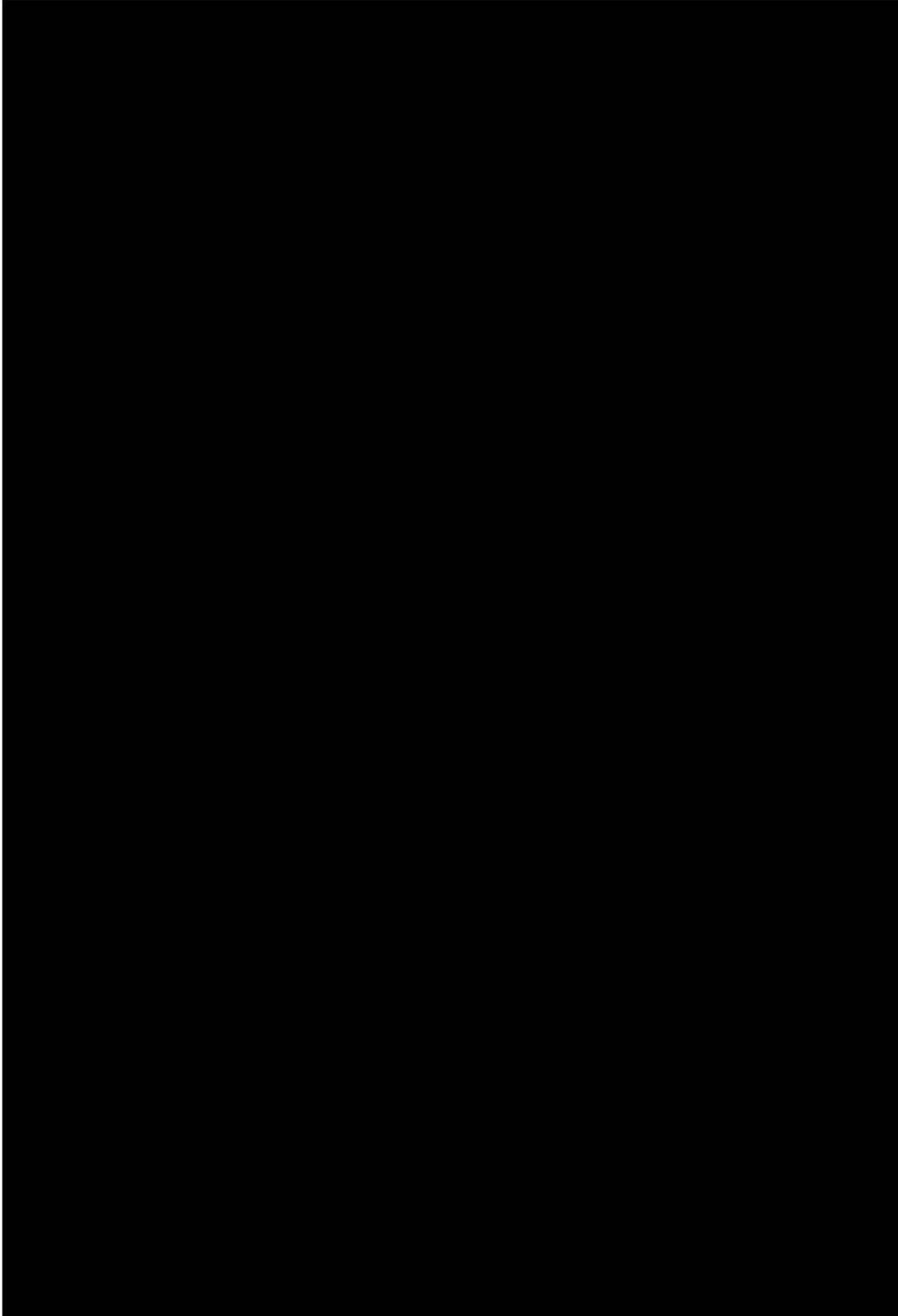


Figure 32: 2nd Jerusalem Trip p.3

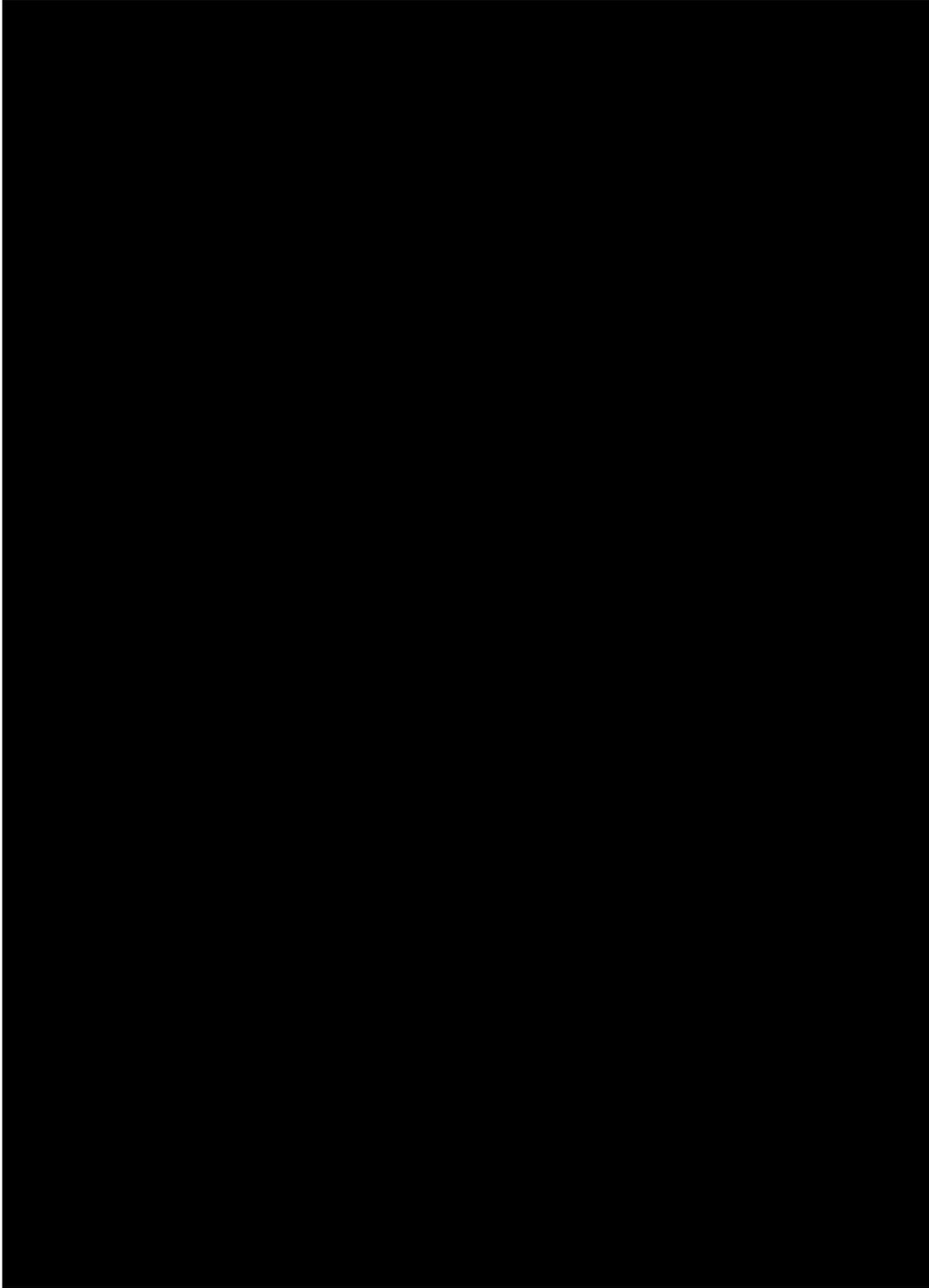


Figure 33: 2nd Jerusalem Trip p.4

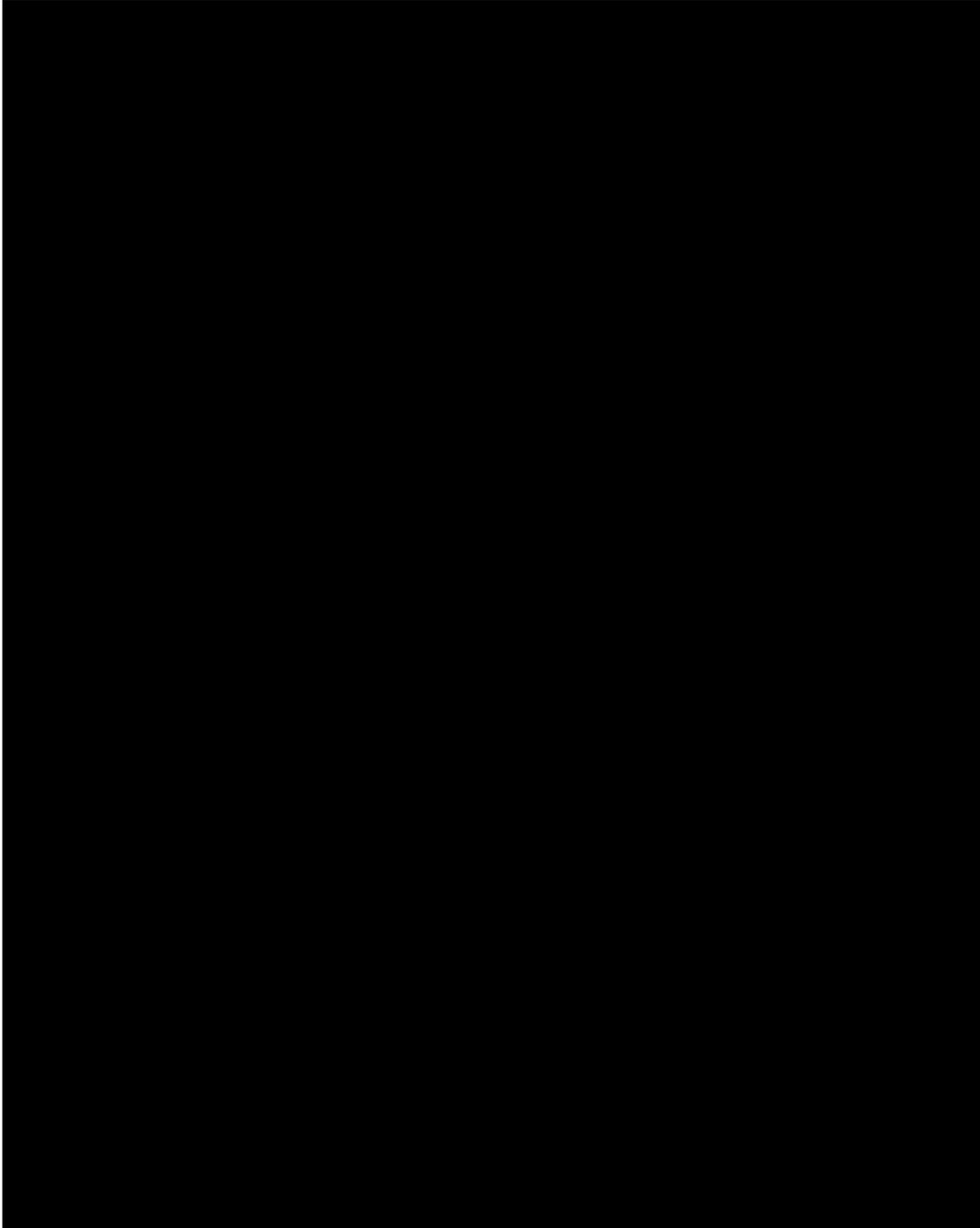
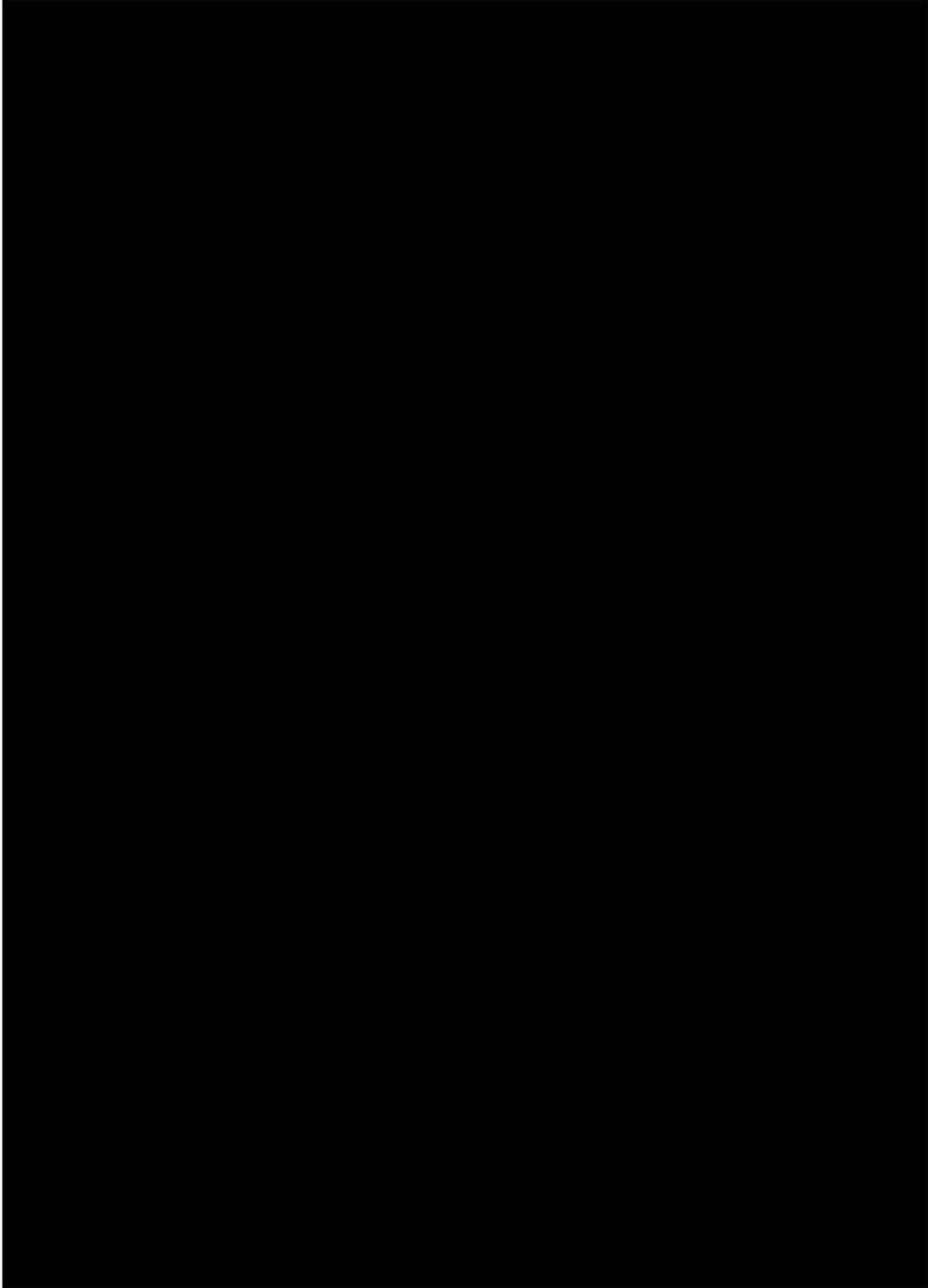


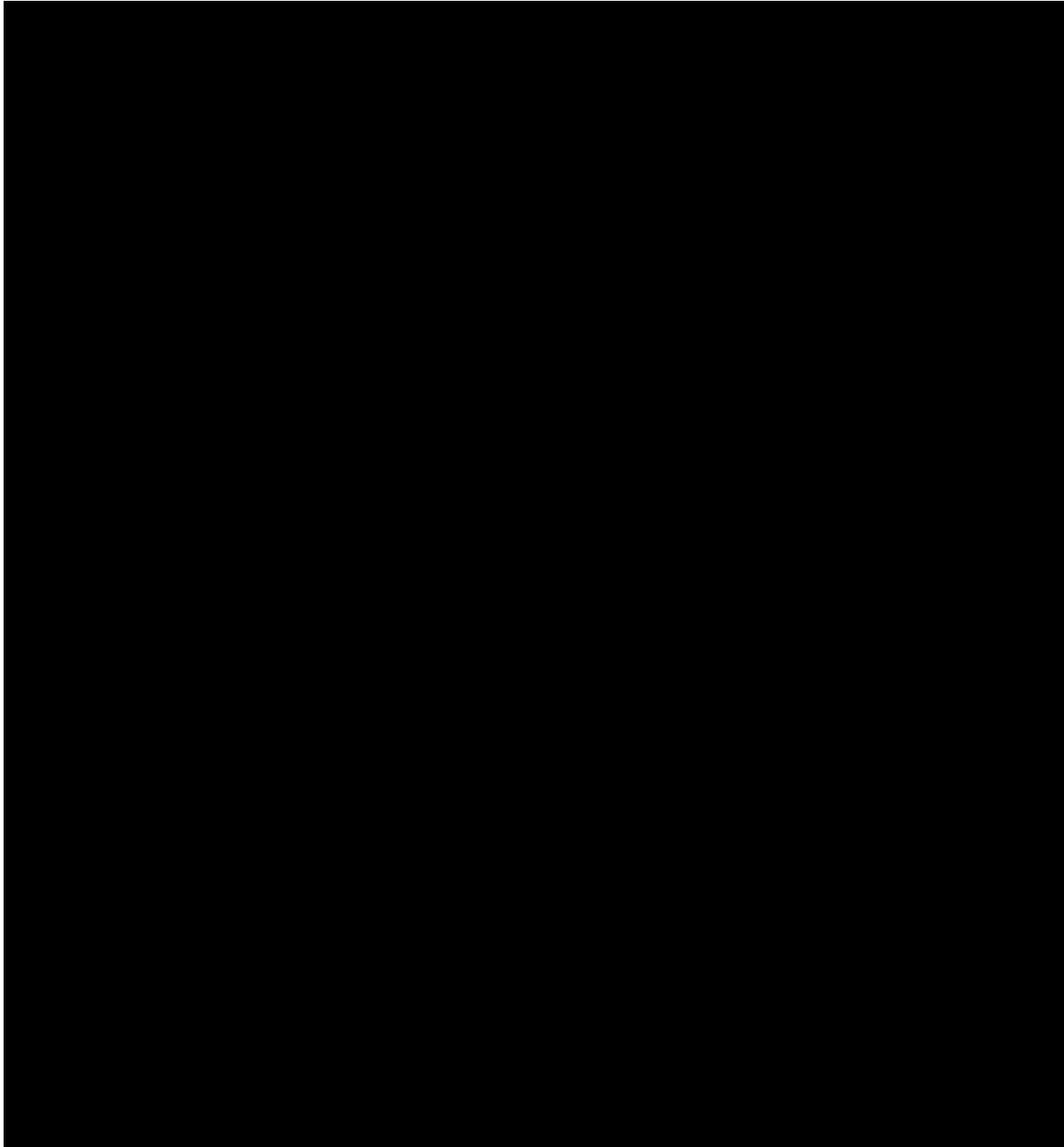
Figure 34: 2nd Jerusalem Trip p.5



The second trip to Israel in 2018 focused even more heavily on theological justifications for the (often violently culpable) role of Israel within the Palestine/Israel conflict. While the second-year curriculum included recognition of unequal power dynamics in Palestine/Israel, other Muslims and I perceived a simultaneously apologist tone. The more obvious overtones of year two of the program produced added skepticism on the part of Muslim MLers. Laila and Khalil expressed these skeptical sentiments in one of our processing sessions, with Laila saying, “It’s like they can never get there. These Israeli Jews know they are wrong, know they are doing the same horrible things to the Palestinians that were done to them in the Holocaust, but then they turn around and justify it because of the Holocaust. Like that is some twisted fear-based logic...I just can’t trust it.” Khalil responded in agreement stating, “We understand the Jews feel unsafe, but how can we or they completely ignore all of their successes? This isn’t the way to build trust, they can’t just stop at acknowledgment and take no responsibility.” This constant push pull between acknowledging Israel’s violence but never taking responsibility for any of these violent acts reinforced distrust between Muslim MLers and their Jewish instructors/hosts. Muslim MLers were grateful for the insider knowledge about Jewish/Israeli perspectives on nation state agendas and policies; however it was most certainly and consistently accompanied by feelings of frustration and defeat in terms of Muslim MLer advocacy for their Palestinian brothers and sisters. As expressed previously by Gamila, many Muslim MLers enter the program hopeful for an opportunity to engage in two-way, more equitable dialogue on these issues. Instead, Muslims felt disempowered in their pursuits to advocate for Palestinians. The Jewish

party line in MLI consistently acknowledged some of the problematic aspects of Israeli policy, but were unwilling or incapable of capitulating to overt criticism of violent and racially charged Israeli state policies.

Figure 35: 2018 Index of Sources for Course Materials

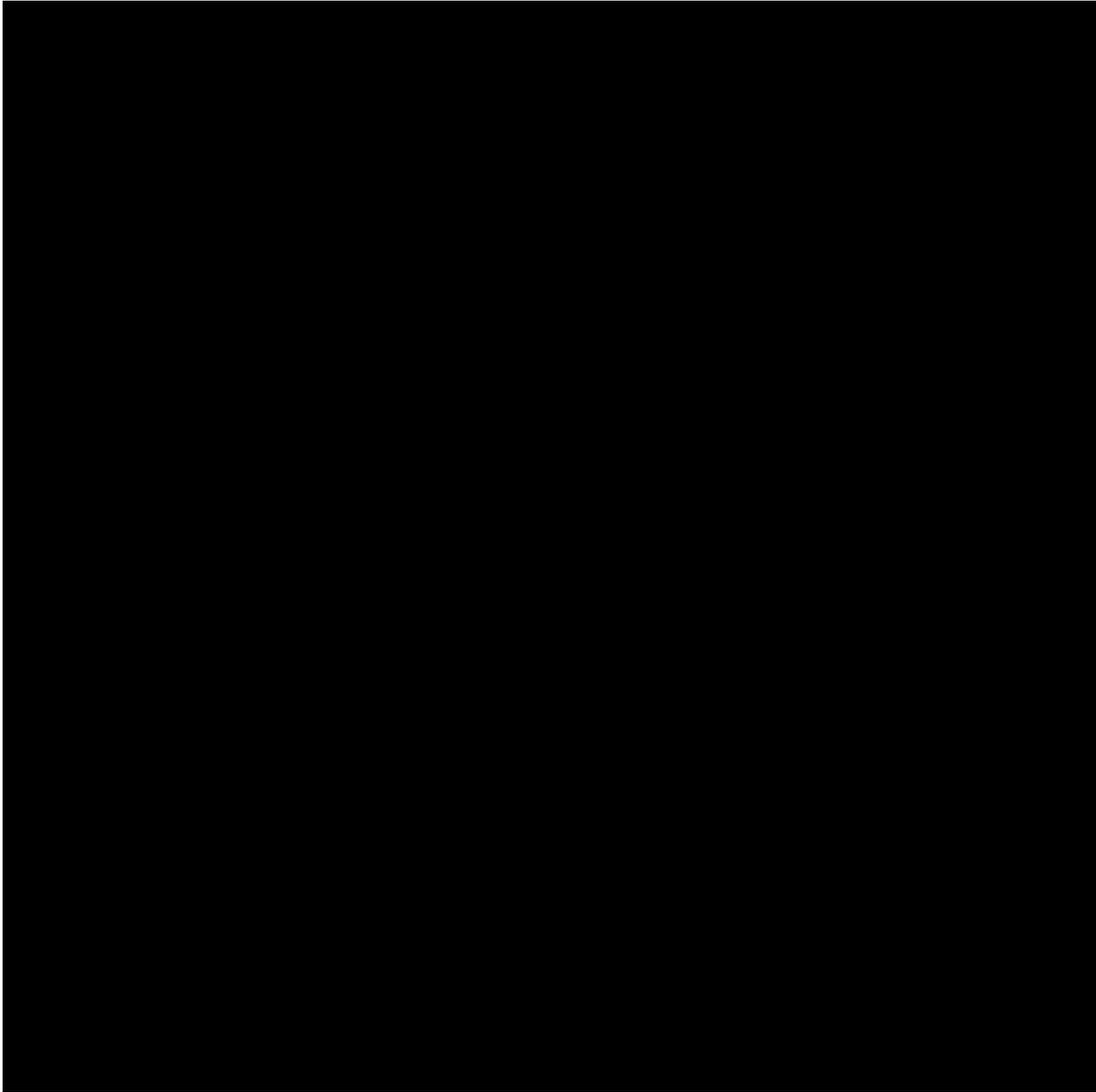


The above learning module table of contents highlights SHI's aims to include more materials that address the Palestinian Problem within the context of Jewish and Zionist geo-politics. Some recurring themes include: contextualizing Israelis and Israel within minority rights discourses; Jewish pluralism as expressed through the representation of Arab-Jewish Israelis and Mizrahi Jews; justice and democracy within the state of Israeli and transnational Jewish communities; and Israel on the world stage. Additionally, this second trip to Jerusalem was also focused on highlighting Jewish Pluralism. The representation of Arab and Mizrahi Jews within the course materials was presented in a way that seemed to breach the difficult topic of Ashkenazi Jewish hegemony within the state of Israel and on a transnational stage.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁴ Hilla Dayan, "Neozionism: portrait of a contemporary hegemony," *Settler Colonial Studies* 9, no. 1 (2019).

Confronting Responsibility for the Past

Figure 36: Confronting Responsibility for the Past Course Materials

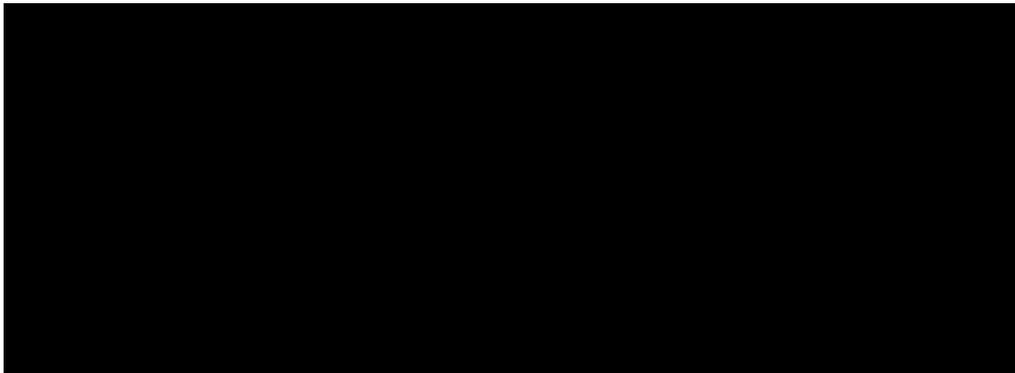


This above learning session discusses the two-state solution to Palestine/Israel. In this scenario, Palestinians would get their own state next to Israel.³⁵⁵ SHI describes this option as a moral imperative because it supports Palestinian self-determination, which in

³⁵⁵ Zanotti, *Israel and the Palestinians: prospects for a two-state solution*.

the minds of these proponents signals a support of democratic Western values as modeled by the UN and other modern entities.³⁵⁶

Figure 37: Ambassador Abba Eban, Aggression by Arab States 1958

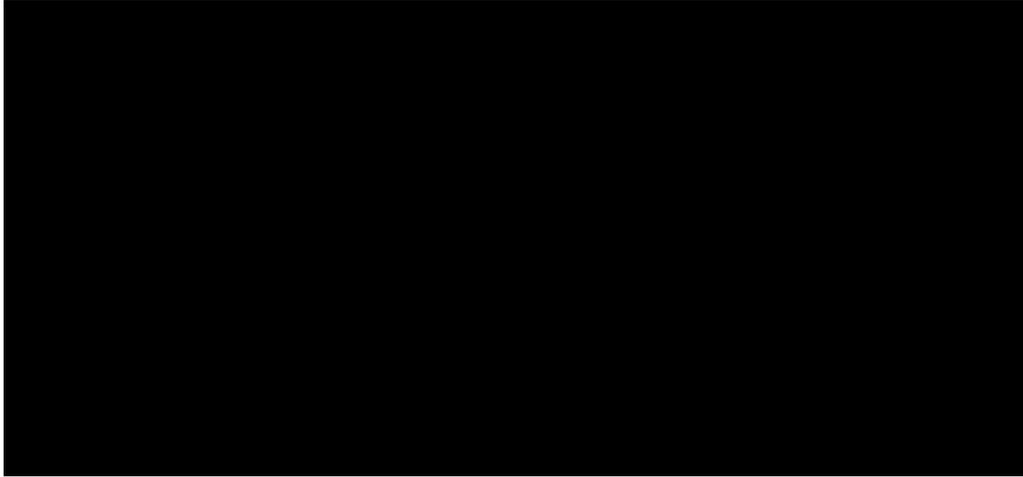


The inclusion of several United Nations dicta draws our attentions to how the UN's positionality has recently shifted from post-Holocaust support of Israel to current advocacy for the self-determination of Palestinians.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ Daniel C Thomas, "International NGO's, state sovereignty, and democratic values," *Chi. J. Int'l L.* 2 (2001).

³⁵⁷ Ardi Imseis, "Negotiating the Illegal: On the United Nations and the Illegal Occupation of Palestine, 1967–2020," *European Journal of International Law* 31, no. 3 (2020).

Figure 38: UN International Law Commission Article 35: Restitution



SHI weaves a particular narrative with the selections they include from UN documents. The first excerpt blames the Palestinian refugee crisis on Arab nation states that attacked Israel, placing Israel in a state of perpetual victimhood. The selection is therefore framing Palestinian refugees as an Arab rather than an Israeli problem. #7, just above, is conceding to some amount of responsibility to Palestinian peoples, while also pointing out that - according to this UN document - responsibilities are limited such that they must not be a burden or a threat to the nation state of Israel. The underlying message here asserts that while Israelis may be obligated to establish a Palestinian state, they are not obligated to jeopardize a Jewish majority nation state. In one breath these UN sources exonerate and condemn Israeli existence and state policies. Importantly, even this apparent support of a Palestinian state is couched in the centrality of Zionism. A two-state model, while espousing support for Palestinian self-determination, also therefore supports Israeli self-determination, in terms of supporting a Jewish centered nation

state.³⁵⁸ Within the political context of Palestine/Israel, a two-state solution proposes what amounts to de facto religio-ethno-states because a two-state solution preserves Israel as a Jewish majority nation, and Palestine as an ethnically homogenous nation. This is an overtly one-dimensional approach to Palestine/Israel. Notably, SHI's model of a two-state solution completely ignores the presence of Palestinian Christians, and perceives them as Palestinians/Arabs disconnecting Muslimness when convenient to do so.³⁵⁹ This foray into SHI Jewish leadership's understanding of Jewry, Islam, nationhood, and peoplehood, is among the many complexities that my participation in MLI revealed. The absence of Palestinian Christians within MLI contexts was completely normalized.³⁶⁰ The pluralistic tendencies of the U.S. American Muslim MLI participants would frequently rear their heads commonly encapsulated by the often uttered phrases by Kamillah, Ibrahim, and other MLIs, "and what about the Palestinian Christians?" "And where do we put the Palestinian Christians, on the border between the two-states?" In a later chapter I address some of these tensions between how MLIs approach pluralism in accordance with their Western positionality, as opposed to SHI's understandings of pluralism within Israeli contexts. The transnational positionalities of both MLI Muslims and SHI Israeli Jews inform overlapping dissonances within complex global social hierarchies.

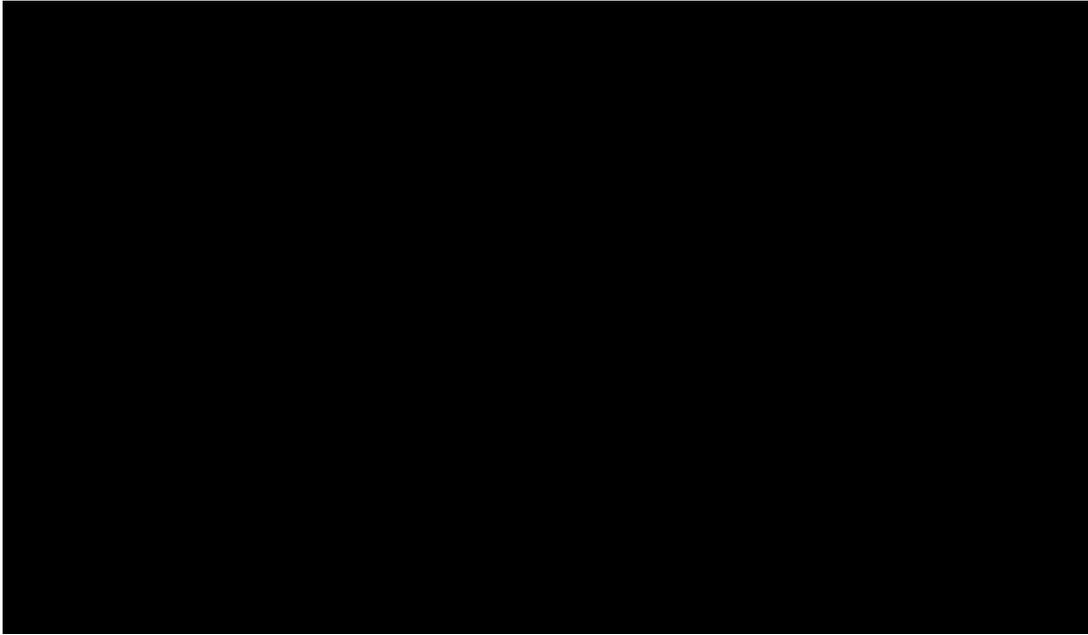
³⁵⁸ Hussein, *The re-emergence of the single state solution in Palestine/Israel: Countering an illusion*.

³⁵⁹ Una McGahern, *Palestinian Christians in Israel: State Attitudes Towards Non-Muslims in a Jewish State* (Routledge, 2012).

³⁶⁰ Bård Kårtveit, *Dilemmas of attachment: Identity and belonging among Palestinian Christians* (Brill, 2014).

Classical Zionist Thinkers and Palestinians

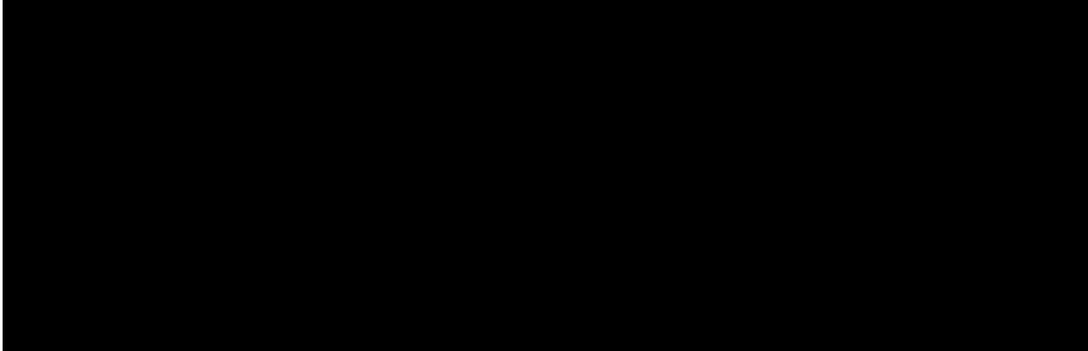
Figure 39: Theodore Herzl and Palestinians



The above excerpts are from a learning session titled “Classical Zionist Thinkers and Palestinians” taught by SHI instructor Yael Gouri during our second trip to Israel/Palestine in 2018. Here we see several passages by Theodore Herzl, famed classical Zionist thinker, that assert the idea that a Jewish nation state, acting within the bounds of Jewish law, is safe for both the wolf and the lamb.³⁶¹ Who the wolf and the lamb are, within the Palestine/Israel context, is up for constant debate in MLI.

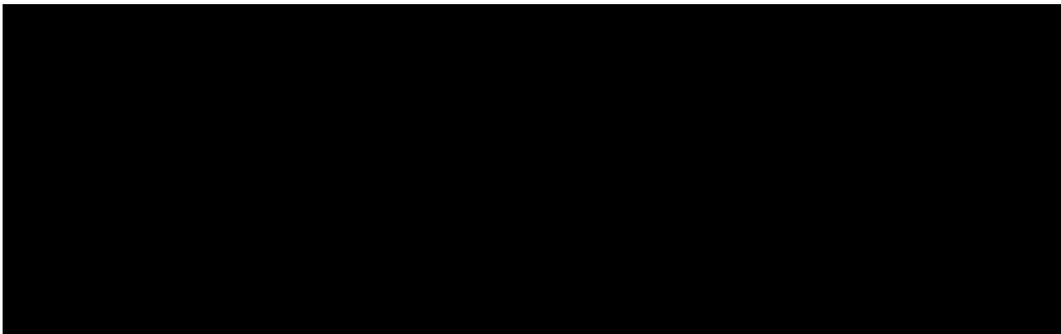
³⁶¹ Theodore Herzl, "Culture, Nation, and Socialism in the Administration of Public Lands," *Land Law and Policy in Israel: A Prism of Identity* (2022).

Figure 40: Ze'ev Dubnov 1882



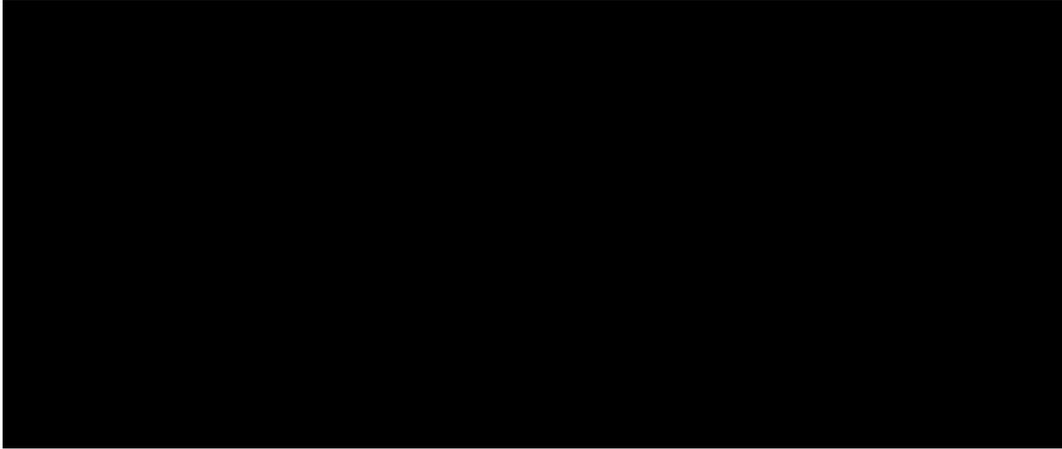
The above excerpt, from classical Zionist philosopher Ze'ev Dubnov, presents the totalitarianism of a Jewish state in order to safeguard not just the safety of Jews in real time but to ensure Jewish control over all aspects of life and death.³⁶² Dubnov's assertions from the late 1800s are being presented here to a twenty first-century audience, while grounding his foundational Jewish statehood ideologies within 2000 years of Jewish ostracization from multiple global and historical contexts. This effectively uses prophetically grounded logics of oppression to justify violent military control over not just the land but over commerce and industry as well.

Figure 41: Excerpt 1 from "Derekh Hayyim" by Ahad HaAm



³⁶² For more on Dubnov's writings see Zohar Shavit, "Cultural translation and the recruitment of translated texts to induce social change," *Translation, Interpreting and Transfer* (2020).

Figure 42: Excerpt 2 from "Derekh Hayyim" by Ahad HaAm



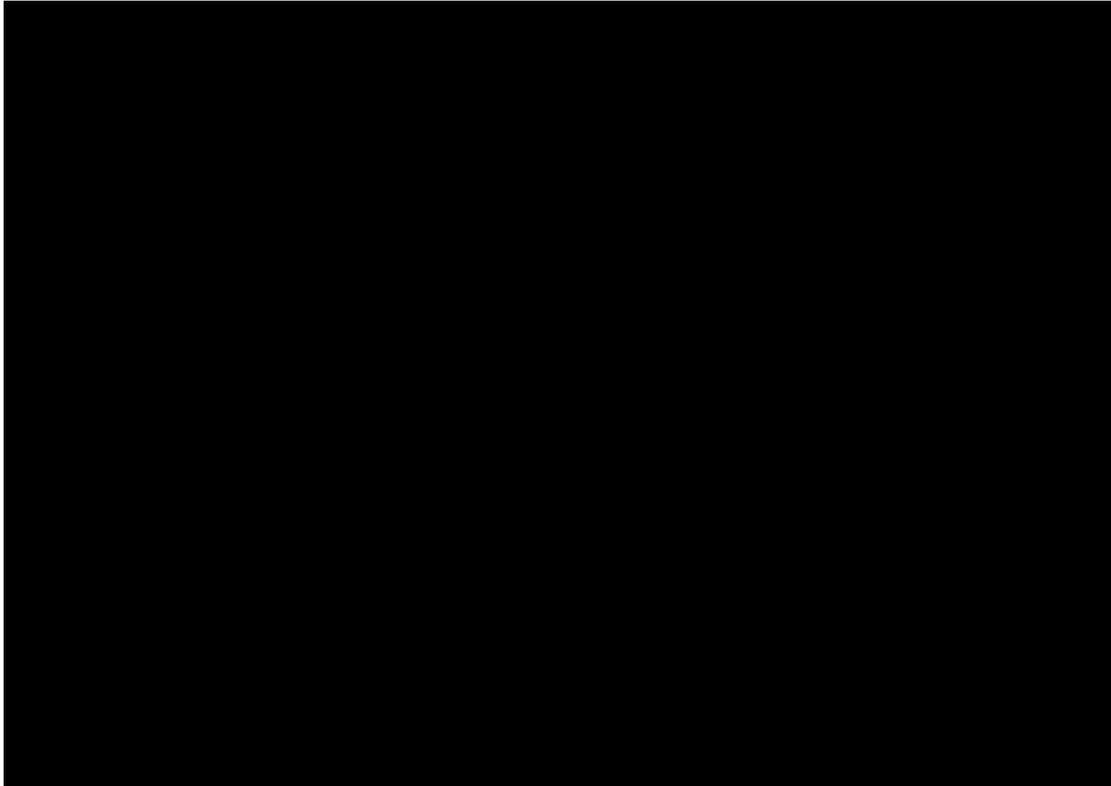
The excerpts above by Ahad HaAm assert that Jews are the most fitting stewards of Palestine. Note that the same excerpts make a blatant defense of nationalism.³⁶³ This usage asserts "Nationalism" as an ethical mandate. For pro-Palestinian readers, this take on nationalism as an ethical ideal ironically - and problematically - draws on nationalist ideologies that in their most extreme cases have resulted in genocides, such as the Holocaust.³⁶⁴ The multiple sources from this learning module tack between Jewish right to stewardship over Palestine due to anti-Semitism and Jewish right to stewardship due to ethical superiority grounded in traditional Jewish laws and scriptures. Taken as a whole, the sources connect Jewish oppression and suffering to a righteous morality that justifies Jewish control and rule over Palestine and its inhabitants.

³⁶³ Nouri Sadat Shahanghian and Jirsarai Bahare Zamiri, "An Internal Critique of the Herzl Foundations With Respect to the Views of Ahad Ha'am," (2018).

³⁶⁴ Epifanio San Juan Jr, "Nation-State, Postcolonial Theory, and Global Violence," *Social Analysis* 46, no. 2 (2002).

Minority Rights in Israel

Figure 43: *Minority Rights in Israel Course Materials*



The above excerpt on minority rights in Israel explains that Israeli democracy does not equate to equal rights. However, the state of Israel is set up to privilege Jewish representation.³⁶⁵ Once again, just as Jewish pluralism refers to a plurality of Jews, Israeli democracy only addresses minorities within Judaism, rather than religious minorities apart from Judaism. This is a primary source of contention between Palestinians and Israelis in Palestine/Israel. Note that this creates a supremacy of Ashkenazi Judaism

³⁶⁵ Guy Ben Porat and Dani Filc, "Remember to be Jewish: Religious Populism in Israel," *Politics and Religion* 15, no. 1 (2022); Alan Patten, "The idea of Israel as a Jewish state," *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 21, no. 2 (2020).

specifically, as Arab Jews are considered Arabs first and Jews second.³⁶⁶ Arab Christians are not considered at all within these excerpts.³⁶⁷ Once again, there is an uncomfortable replication of Nazi logics here, where the Palestinian Problem seems to have replaced the Jewish Problem. The justification some Israelis use is the fact that the majority of Arab Jews were not in the camps.³⁶⁸ The rhetoric presented in MLI continuously demonstrates the lengths that Zionist Israelis go to justify an Ashkenazi Israeli-dominated state.

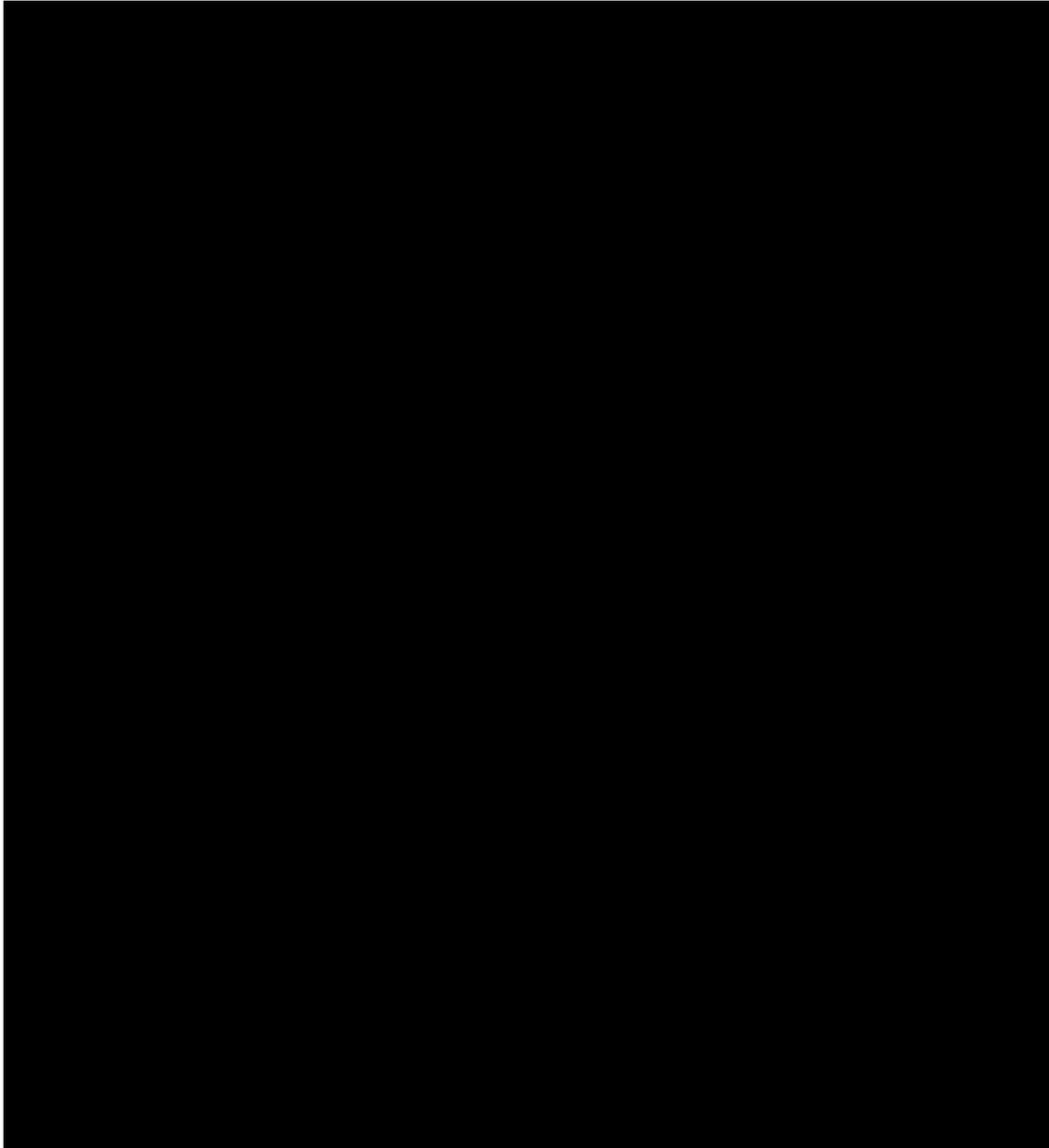
³⁶⁶ Aviad Rubin, "Challenging Jewish hegemony in difficult times," *Routledge Handbook of Minorities in the Middle East* (2018).

³⁶⁷ Ilan Troen and Carol Troen, "Indigeneity," *Israel Studies* 24, no. 2 (2019); Ahmed Baker Diab, Ilan Shdema, and Izhak Schnell, "Arab integration in new and established mixed cities in Israel," *Urban Studies* (2021).

³⁶⁸ Isaac Jack Lévy and Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, *The Sephardim in the Holocaust: A Forgotten People* (Jews and Judaism: History and, 2020).

The Palestinian Israeli Community Today

Figure 44: Palestinian Israelis Today Course Materials



The above content included in this learning module was presented to us by our one and only Palestinian Muslim instructor, an Arab Israeli guest lecturer not regularly employed as faculty at the Shalom Hartman Institute. That fact in and of itself is an interesting

tactic that forces the perception that Shalom Hartman is invested in inclusionary politics or is at least engaged in the optics of diversity and inclusion. Initially, Muslim MLers were very excited at the prospect of having an actual Muslim as one of our instructors; however, that excitement quickly deflated once the learning session was over. As Kamillah remarked once we were comfortably in the courtyard smoking a much needed cigarette, “Well that was BS Jewish apologist crap, and from one of us no less...not sure how much more of this shit I can take.” Kamillah’s comments reflect the deflation of Muslim MLers’ hopes that dissenting voices of Palestinian representation might actually have some traction within Shalom Hartman as an institution. While the instructor did mention issues of access to education and capitalist enterprise in order to uplift Palestinian people, he also took the stance that borders were necessary in order to separate Israeli citizens from non-citizens (read: Palestinians). The instructor was also more focused on Israeli Arabs that were already citizens, and touched very little on the occupied territories.³⁶⁹

Letters to my Palestinian Neighbor

This learning module titled *Letters to my Palestinian Neighbor* was, at the time, Yossi Klein Halevi’s new work in progress, which was published later that very same year. *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor* is a book Yossi wrote about his experiences living next to the security barrier, which is a physical wall that separates the West Bank

³⁶⁹ Lana Tatour, "Citizenship as domination: Settler colonialism and the making of Palestinian citizenship in Israel," *Available at SSRN 3533490* (2019).

on the Green Line.³⁷⁰ Yossi's book contemplates what the thoughts of the Palestinian inhabitants on the other side of the wall might be. Yossi heavily engaged with the token half Palestinian MLer in my cohort, Ismail, sending him an advanced copy asking for his explicit critique and input. Muslim members were concerned about the somewhat transparent opportunity Yossi took to get 'the Muslim opinion' on his book project. Nasreen, wife of Ismail, was quick to weigh in on Yossi's literary achievement saying, "Yossi I think you have done an excellent job attempting to sit with Palestinians, however, the bulk of your writings are still very one-sided in that they put Jewish aggression on par with Jewish existence. But what about Palestinian survival." This particular learning module betrays MLI's overtly top-down agenda. The centrality of the Palestinian Problem within the curriculum serves two purposes. Because SHI is the host institution of three education programs tailored to teaching Jews, Christians, and Muslims, holding Israel as primary in their agenda is necessary to maintain the logics of Zionism. The emphasis on Palestine despite the lack of actual Palestinians in the room betrays a supremacy of Zionism within SHI curricula. The Zionist agenda embedded in SHI curricula across all three education programs brings forward the primacy of Israel rather than the base assumption that SHI has honed their curricula to speak to its Muslim participants within MLI. The boiling down of Jewish-Muslim conflict to an Israeli-Palestinian conflict is telling. On one level it is an intentional move to stop ignoring Israel/Palestine relations. This results in the perception of an equivocation of Jewish-

³⁷⁰ The Green Line is another term used to address the 1949 Armistice Borders that were undone by the 1967 War.

Muslim relations to Israel-Palestine relations, which is an attempt to correct meaningless exchanges within interfaith dialogue circles that deem the Israel-Palestine issue off limits. However, it also obliterates the many Jewish-Muslim interactions on the transnational stage that have nothing to do with the Israel-Palestine issue. The majority-Desi Muslim members of MLI read this move as a reduction of Muslim-Jewish relations to an Arab-Middle Eastern issue. Amir and Abbas, both Pakistani Muslims, Amir in his early thirties and Abbas in his golden years, each remarked on the Middle Eastern centrality of the program, commenting about Jewish lack of knowledge about the Kashmir issue in South Asia, or Indian President Modi's human rights violations against Indian Muslims.³⁷¹

CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed the curriculum of MLI in hopes of demonstrating the subversive agendas of SHI as seen through Jewish pedagogical choices and Muslim tensions surrounding them. The schedules for both consecutive trips to Jerusalem in 2017 and 2018 reveal the rigor and hyper emphasis of the Zionist materials, betraying the tenacity of Zionism embedded within Jewish pedagogy in Israel and in diaspora. As we have seen from the above course materials and analysis, the curricula of SHI: collapse anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, devolve Jewish-Muslim relations to Middle Eastern centric Arab-Israeli relations, and employ Nazi logics that justify Israeli state violence towards Palestinians and other aforementioned minorities. The curriculum as situated within MLI also precludes any kind of two-way dialogue, rendering silent the Muslim

³⁷¹ CJ Werleman, "Rising Violence against Muslims in India Under Modi and BJP Rule," *Insight Turkey* 23, no. 2 (2021).

MLI members. The curriculum further shows that the intention of MLI is to move away from interfaith dialogue. In fact, as the curricula reveal, there *is* no dialogue. Instead, SHI leadership draws Muslims in with a promise of a chance for future dialogue upon graduation. In Chapter 3, I explore the Muslim processing sessions that occurred in the wake of this two-year educational program. As my fieldwork and analysis in Chapter 3 demonstrate, many Muslim MLers ultimately felt as though this promise was never effectively fulfilled.

Chapter 3: Processing Sessions: Muslims Processing Jewish Pedagogy

This chapter delves into Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI) participants' gradual and incremental absorption and rejection of Jewish educational materials and experiences presented and taught through the MLI program hosted by the Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI). Throughout the processing sessions during my initial two-year mandatory educational program in MLI, Muslim participants expressed frustration around feeling voiceless throughout their participation in MLI, especially during our two two-week trips to Palestine/Israel in 2017 and 2018. Processing sessions were scheduled so that Muslim participants could have a safe space to gather privately outside of Jewish influence, participation or interference. In short, processing sessions entailed Muslim MLIs gathering together and effectively kicking the Jews out of the room. Processing sessions frequently involved a proverbial word vomit or downloading of the visceral reactions many Muslim participants had to the Zionist, top-down education offered through MLI by SHI. Throughout the portions of MLI that included mixed religious audiences, Muslim leaders within the Muslim MLI contingent such as Haroon would remind the rest of us (Muslims) to remember to be on our best behavior, as SHI paid for our participation in the program as well as the trips to Palestine/Israel. This pressure to be courteous, considerate, and gracious throughout the program, in combination with the Zionist agenda being continually asserted, necessitated an outlet for Muslim members to voice our frustrations, concerns, and misgivings about the program as well as its curriculum, which I analyzed in Chapter 2. Common concerns, in addition to the general frustration with the one-sided curriculum, included discomfort surrounding Muslims' decisions to

violate the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement. This ambivalence presented itself often due to the centrality of Israel throughout the program. The reality of being in the country that is the source of these palpable tensions hit Muslim participants extremely hard. Our visit to Hebron, known to Arabic speakers and Palestinians as Al-Khalil, included multiple scheduled processing sessions, as many Muslim participants expressed trauma due to the physical manifestation of internal conflict that this visit represented for many. In what follows, I examine the content of these Muslim processing sessions, focusing on specific sessions as well as recurring topics across multiple sessions. These processing sessions, in tandem with the previous content from SHI's Zionist curriculum in Chapter 2, reveal religio-racial tensions between different Jewish SHI instructors and leadership and Muslim members of MLI, who grapple in different ways with Jewish and Muslim identities in relationship to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This chapter focuses primarily on Muslim MLIs' interpretations of Jewish teachings presented by the SHI curriculum. There is a double filtration process in the reporting of this data, the first being the Jewish source material strategically chosen and presented by SHI instructors, and the reception of those materials by the Muslim MLI audience. The accuracy in relation to Jewish scriptures and theologies is less important in this context than the pedagogical choices of Jewish SHI instructors presenting and translating their own religious tradition to a Muslim MLI audience, that in return receives and interprets this data. What follows is not a conversation between Judaism and Islam. Rather, this chapter effectively relays the game of telephone that occurred as Muslim MLI members grappled with the Jewish and Zionist materials SHI presented throughout

the two-year program. This chapter maps numerous formal and informal conversations and interactions exclusively among the Muslim MLI participants. These conversations and interactions form a corpus of hidden reactionary dialogue that completes the broader discourse between both the Jews and Muslims interacting within the MLI program hosted by SHI. While the previous chapter focused on SHI/MLI Jewish pedagogy, discourse, and perspectives, this chapter focuses on Muslim reactions, responses, and fears that encompass MLI Muslim experiences. The following data are the culmination of the formal scheduled processing sessions, informal side conversations, as well as formal interviews with Cohort IV Muslim MLIs. This collection of data sheds light on the salient issues, as well as the subversive motivations that prompt Muslims to participate and continue their affiliation with the MLI program and the Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI), an overtly Zionist institution. Additionally, the following data reveal the mental, emotional, and physical struggles that Muslim MLI participants undergo as they volunteer for this rigorous and controversial program, as Haroon explained in Chicago during our Orientation Day in October 2016:

This is a really intense trip and involves some very complicated emotions and experiences. It's heavy. There's a reason we have processing sessions every day and there's a reason Abdullah and I are there with you all the time. But that said please don't stress out too much. Sometimes we stress out and get overwhelmed and that's totally fine and understandable. But you guys aren't going to be alone. We will be there and so will Hartman staff. We will make this trip as comfortable as possible Inshallah. But the difficult topics are the purpose of it in effect and we are there to face it together.

Days before we left for our first trip to Jerusalem, Haroon issued this blanket message in a group chat for only the Muslim members of Cohort IV. The Whatsapp chat was created

as a primary source of communication for all Muslim members, and was also used specifically to be able to contact Muslim members and confirm their whereabouts. This was necessary in order to check on the safety of the Muslim participants, whose identities posed a specific and increased risk during our trips to Palestine. On each trip to Israel/Palestine multiple terrorist attacks occurred in the city of Jerusalem while we were there, which necessitated the creation of a check-in system and emergency protocols. Haroon received multiple communications from my cohort expressing nervousness and concern about all the potential risks and scenarios that could occur while we were in Palestine/Israel. Questions spanned from “Do they have soap and water” to concerns about being stopped by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and threats to Muslim members of MLI while in Israel.³⁷² This group chat also offered Muslim MLI members an unsupervised forum to discuss and react to the top-down Jewish education they were receiving.

There was some definite anxiety about being Muslim and travelling to Israel, especially concerns about making it through security, as demonstrated by the following exchange:

Gamila: “Can I bring knitting needles on the plane?”

Haroon: “I would recommend against it. Just be extra cautious.”

Gamila: “Jewish grammas don't knit?”

Haroon: “You're not Jewish, habibti :)”

³⁷² Rabab Abdulhadi, “Israeli Settler Colonialism in Context: Celebrating (Palestinian) Death and Normalizing Gender and Sexual Violence,” *Feminist Studies* 45, no. 2-3 (2019).

Knitting needles are long pointy metal objects, that for the average air traveler would not be a concern. However, Gamila, a visibly Brown presenting Arab Muslim Hijabi, was concerned that her knitting needles might be seen as weapons and thus she would be seen as a security threat.³⁷³ Haroon confirmed that her concerns were warranted, and that for the safety of all involved it would be best to leave the knitting needles at home. Additionally, Gamila comedically processes the apparent anti-Muslim bias airlines and airports, specifically Ben Gurion Airport, have demonstrated in the past, drawing attention to the fact that a Jewish grandmother travelling to Israel/Palestine with her knitting needles would have no reason to worry about making it through security.³⁷⁴ But as Haroon's reply demonstrates, Gamila is not Jewish and therefore does not have the privilege to frivolously pack whatever she wants. His quip additionally refers to Gamila as "habibti"³⁷⁵ with a smiley face, drawing attention to her Arab status, despite himself being a Punjabi Desi.³⁷⁶ This seemingly casual back and forth is significant in that it

³⁷³ Leda Blackwood, "Flying while Muslim: Should we be concerned about Islamophobia at the airport?," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia* (Routledge, 2019).

³⁷⁴ Badi Hasisi et al., "Mitigating the consequences of invasive security practices: a quasi-experiment in an international airport," *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 17, no. 4 (2021); Mieka Forestal, "The Ugly Side of the Unfriendly Skies: Is Airport Security Violating 4th Amendment Rights?," *J. Race Gender & Poverty* 11 (2019).

³⁷⁵ Habibti is an Arabic female gendered term of affection that loosely translates to "dear" in this context.

³⁷⁶ Punjabi Desi is a compound regional and continental identity reference. Desi, a cross linguistic term from Urdu, Hindi, and Bengali, refers to peoples ethnically from the Subcontinent which includes Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Desi loosely translates to "countryman" and is a colloquial term employed by those persons who live in these countries, or are diasporically affiliated with these countries. Punjab is a province within Pakistan. Provincial identities speak to the many hierarchies at play within the Subcontinent. See Tanvir Aeijaz, "Desis divided: the political lives of South Asian Americans," (Taylor & Francis, 2019); Kriti M Shah and SUSHANT Sareen, "The Mohajir: Identity and politics in multiethnic Pakistan," *Occasional Papers* (2019).

reveals the intricacies of dealing with intra- and intergroup religious, racial and gender politics. The subtext of this exchange points to the group's possible concern that Gamila, a 5'3" hijabi Arab Muslim woman, would garner undue scrutiny by security. The intersectionality of race and gender within the complex contexts faced by MLers is more fully discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

This chapter focuses primarily on salient and subversive themes of MLI as experienced by its Muslim participants. Salient themes are the obvious points of contention: the visibly problematic aspects of MLI that everybody knew about going in. There was intentionality on the part of the SHI instructors and their pedagogical choices to include these salient points of conflict that stall interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Jews, as MLI overtly attempts to find an alternative way to move past these non-starters. These points of contention include Zionism, Muslim voicelessness, by which I mean the one-way educational structure implemented within the MLI program by SHI, and the centrality of the Holocaust as justifications for state violence.³⁷⁷ These are issues that are generally considered off limits to Muslim-Jewish audiences, and are often summed up as part and parcel of the "Palestine-Israel Conflict."³⁷⁸ As my participation in MLI showed, these issues point to deeper-seated, transnational tensions that have generally proven insurmountable thus far for both Jewish and Muslim global

³⁷⁷ Michael Shammass, "World War II & the Holocaust: Necessary Conditions for Modern Israel?," *Available at SSRN 3517579* (2020).

³⁷⁸ Mohammadreza Maleki and Farzad Mohammadzadeh Ebrahimi, "Critical Studies and the Middle East Peace Process," *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs* 9, no. 28 (2018).

communities.³⁷⁹ The one intra-group Muslim (as opposed to the other inter-group, meaning Jewish-Muslim themes) salient theme has to do with the absence of Palestinians within Muslim advocacy networks. Apart from BDS, Palestinians have very few allyship networks within the context of the global Muslim ummah.³⁸⁰ MLI contributes to this lack of actual Palestinian voices within Muslim Palestinian advocacy networks. This is an unintentional consequence of the juxtaposition of MLI in relation to BDS. This is a pervasive and salient issue because BDS is an overt deterrent in terms of recruiting Arab and Palestinian participants to MLI: hence why MLI is dominated by Desi Muslims. This issue with BDS and lack of Palestinian representation was one of the more overtly-discussed issues among Muslim MLIs: Why are we here? Where are the Palestinians? Are we listening to them (Palestinians), because that's our job; our job is to bring Palestinians into the room. This is one of the myriad ways that the Israel-Palestine conflict remained at the forefront of MLI. In addition to these more openly-discussed themes, I observed a number of subversive or covert topics and patterns that occurred between and among Muslims participating in MLI. These topics were often unintended impacts in terms of the stylistic and structural choices SHI makes with regard to how MLI functions. These can be summarized as questions such as Why are we here? Why are we violating BDS? Arab Israelis don't even help the Palestinians so why should we?

³⁷⁹ Caplan, *The Israel-Palestine conflict: contested histories*.

³⁸⁰ Michelle I Gawerc, "Endeavoring to change history: Palestinian-led transnational coalitions in the occupied West Bank," in *Bringing Down Divides* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019); Barghouti, "BDS: Nonviolent, Globalized Palestinian Resistance to Israel's Settler Colonialism and Apartheid."

Can we even actually effect any real change for Palestinians or for transnational Muslims in non-Muslim majority countries? Even large powerful bodies like the United Nations can't effectively advocate for Palestinian rights, as demonstrated by the illegal settlements that violate international law.³⁸¹ This left an overall if unintentional feeling of hopelessness for the vast majority of Muslim MLers. It is noteworthy that the demographics of MLI are composed of competitively-selected participants who are major intellectuals, advocates, and human rights activists in their respective communities. MLers were jarred by their own impotence, especially in relation to their normally perceived proficiency in both intellectual and advocacy arenas, as Muslim leaders. These salient and subversive themes and impacts stayed with Muslim members long after their completion of the MLI two-year certificate program. I discuss formal and informal processing of these overt and covert themes below.

SALIENT THEMES

Where are the Palestinians?

The concerns Muslim MLers expressed prior to and throughout our first two-week trip to Palestine in 2017, as expressed through questions posed in our WhatsApp chat, ranging from airport security concerns to access to clean water, were both pragmatic and philosophical. During one of our initial sessions while on our first trip to Palestine in 2017, the following comments and concerns were voiced amongst myself and three other academics that participated in MLI. In the group chat exchange below as well as

³⁸¹ Imseis, "Negotiating the Illegal: On the United Nations and the Illegal Occupation of Palestine, 1967–2020."

throughout the wider program, Muslim MLers remarked about the irony that despite the centrality of Israel/Palestine within MLI curriculum, there were and are almost no Palestinian participants. Below is a side conversation that occurred live on WhatsApp while we were physically together during a learning session. The chat group consisted of myself, a Desi man, a Desi woman, and one Black American man. Significantly, Kamillah, who created the chat group, named it the “Private Intellectual Chat.” Also significantly, the chat excluded any Palestinian and Arab members of our cohort. I was seated across the table from Kamillah when she texted, “So like there are no Palestinians in this room. So what's the point of this? Other than Ismail of course but he's the only one?”

Javed replied: “Really...Ismail is the only one? I hadn't realized that Palestinians were rare in MLI. This is not good for the future of this program.”

Ibrahim chimed in: “Product of inter marriage according to rabbinical analysis from earlier. He isn't fully Palestinian based on their framing....Yes, we need more Palestinians.”

Kamillah: “some 50 Muslim people sitting listening to this. That's a special kind of power. Who cannot express themselves in the same blunt terms right now.”

Javed: “....the reality of the asymmetrical power relationship.”

The above exchange is indicative of a common concern many Muslim MLers expressed: the fact that MLI has almost no Palestinian participants. This concern is directly and uniquely related to the fact that MLI violates BDS and focuses primarily on the centrality of Israel to Judaism. This focus sets MLI apart from other interfaith and/or Palestinian

rights advocacy groups. Additionally, MLI is hosted by an overtly Zionist institution (SHI), thus violating BDS. I was struck by the demographics of the four members of our chat and the fact that Kamillah wanted to converse privately with the other perceived Muslim academics of the group. Even more telling was the content that precipitated Kamillah's creation of the group chat. The conversation discusses the lack of Palestinian voices represented within MLI and the responsibility Kamillah feels to advocate for Palestinian inclusion. The conversation also points to the fact that Palestinian and Muslim are not interchangeable, meaning two Desis, one White woman and one Black man cannot replace Palestinians, who should have been included in MLI. More to the point, MLI has unsuccessfully tried to recruit Palestinians into the MLI program. The conversation could then also be read as an indictment of MLI's approach if it is not deemed safe or desirable for Palestinian Muslims they wish to recruit. All of that is rendered secondary to the fact that Muslim MLIs expressed voicelessness in terms of the one-way education that MLI offers. In short, Kamillah and other members like her were frustrated that these kinds of conversations were not being had in an open forum. Javed responded to Kamillah's observation suggesting that this lack of Palestinian representation was untenable in terms of MLI's success or longevity if MLI was not able to bring Palestinians into the conversation and program that center Palestine/Israel. Revealingly, the conversation also discusses Ismail, the only Palestinian MLier, who significantly, is half Palestinian and half European. The conversation thread alludes to this when Ibrahim points out that according to Jewish logics, a replication of Nazi logics,

Ismail would not “count” as “fully” Palestinian due to the intermarriage of his parents.³⁸² Kamillah further comments that Jews can successfully gather fifty plus Muslims in a room and engage them in top-down Zionist education points to the power and allure that Jewish success signals to Muslim MLers.³⁸³ Within this comment and Kamillah’s comment on power asymmetry we also see her feelings about the perceived “bluntness” of MLI’s curriculum and her own frustration with the Muslim voicelessness woven into MLI’s format. Notably, Kamillah later left MLI because Ibrahim was asked to leave MLI due to the fact that he took a job with a security company that MLI perceived to be Islamophobic. Imam Abdullah Antepli, the Muslim founder of MLI, asked Ibrahim, the only Black member of our cohort, to leave out of concern about potential surveillance of MLers due to this connection.³⁸⁴ As a result, Kamillah made the decision to leave MLI out of frustration towards what she perceived to be a lack of solidarity or support of Muslim participants. As Kamillah reflected, Ibrahim had been struggling to find employment and was the only Black and one of the only non-Desi Muslim MLI members, so Kamillah became disillusioned with the classist and racist implications of

³⁸² J David Bleich, "VALIDITY OF DNA EVIDENCE FOR HALAKHIC PURPOSES (PART 4): THE "JEWISH" GENE," *Tradition* 52, no. 3 (2020).

³⁸³ Daniel Ian Rubin, "Whiter shade of pale: Making the case for Jewish presence in the multicultural classroom," in *The Jewish Struggle in the 21st Century* (Brill Sense, 2021).

³⁸⁴ Nicole Nguyen, *Suspect communities: Anti-Muslim racism and the domestic war on terror* (U of Minnesota Press, 2019).

Abdullah's decision. Anti-Blackness within Muslim communities is an ongoing source of tension, and clearly MLI is no exception to these broader patterns of racism.³⁸⁵

The Palestinian Boy

During one of the lectures/workshops run by Donniel Hartman, the president of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, there was a particularly disturbing incident. This incident occurred during our first two-week trip to Jerusalem in 2017. Donniel was speaking about a military report describing soldier activities and perspectives. This report included many things about IDF attitudes concerning engagement, tactics, and mindsets towards Palestinians. In the middle of this lecture a darker-skinned boy, of about seventeen years, wandered into our classroom. He was rather thin, quite sleight, stood about 5 feet 8 inches tall, and was all smiles. Muhammad had heard that there was a group of Muslims from the West studying at SHI, and so he stumbled into our room with an indescribable excitement. Muhammad is a Palestinian Muslim from the other side of the Wall, meaning he lives in the occupied territories.³⁸⁶ He somehow managed to gain acceptance into SHI's youth Havruta gap year program. The gap year program is a year-long program between high school and college that teaches youth about Jewish peoplehood, community engagement and leadership. The gap-year Havruta program, for Israeli Jews, serves as a way for them to hold off their mandatory military service for

³⁸⁵ Iskander Abbasi, "Anti-Blackness in the Muslim World: Beyond Apologetics and Orientalism," *Maydan: Politics & Society* (October 4, 2020 2020). <https://themaydan.com/2020/10/anti-blackness-in-the-muslim-world-beyond-apologetics-and-orientalism/>.

³⁸⁶ Raja Shehadeh, "Israel and the Palestinians: Human Rights in the Occupied Territories," in *Echoes of the Intifada* (Routledge, 2019).

another year.³⁸⁷ These were the young adults that Muhammad was in a program with, those seeking to thwart their military service, but who would all eventually become IDF soldiers. He was effectively sitting in a classroom with other youth who would eventually police him and his community in their capacity as Israeli military. As Haroon accounted later after having a conversation with Muhammad, the trauma that Muhammad was willingly sitting through in order to have a mere modicum of hope of getting out of his situation was astronomical.³⁸⁸ Like us, Muhammad was learning about Judaism, Jewish Peoplehood, and the centrality of Israel & Jerusalem to Jewish identity. Muhammad had entered our classroom from the rear side door, presumably so as not to disrupt Donniel's lecture. Unfortunately, Muhammad's politeness was lost on our instructor, whose demeanor and tone immediately changed once he detected Muhammad's presence. Donniel stopped mid-sentence, and raised his voice in Muhammad's direction, more or less shouting "You can't be here. You aren't allowed here, get out! Leave now, you aren't supposed to be here. Just get out!" Muhammad quickly exited, smile obliterated by fear, shoulders hunched with disappointment. Haroon quickly followed Muhammad out, and Donniel went immediately back to lecturing without skipping a beat. We were all visibly shocked and horrified. Finally break-time hit and we all had an opportunity to chat about the incident.

³⁸⁷ Merav Perez, "State, resistance, and class reproduction: the case of military service avoidance in Israel," *Critical Military Studies* (2018).

³⁸⁸ Hafsa Bennis et al., "Human rights and democracy in the Arab World in 2017: Hopeless within, doomed abroad," (2018).

As we huddled outside in the courtyard the cohort expressed a spectrum of emotions, ranging from confusion to disgust. Fawad simply asked the group “Why would Donniel react that way? What the hell is going on?” The majority of the group shrugged with clueless shock blankly displayed on their faces. Nasreen replied “Maybe Donniel was concerned about the content of the lecture, maybe it’s a bit too adult and he was just trying to protect Muhammad?” Kamillah quickly chimed in, “That’s bullshit, you know that’s crap. Donniel just didn’t want a Palestinian in the room. I mean this kid is living under the occupation, there isn’t anything too adult for him. Donniel just didn’t want a Palestinian hearing about how Jews justify the occupation. Did you see how Donniel looked at him, like he was some kind of alien or animal. This is deplorable. How are we supposed to sit there and listen to him when we see him treating our kind like this?” Here, Kamillah’s words illustrate a common pattern within transnational Muslim communities, regardless of race or ethnicity, and that is to claim all Muslims as one of “us” or one of “our kind.”³⁸⁹ Later on during that first trip in 2017, I interviewed Javed who brought up this particular incident, saying “Well this shows us how they really feel about the Palestinians. No matter how much they talk about wanting peace and all that shit, look how he treated him, like a non-human.” Ismail spoke in agreement with the majority of feelings being expressed in our courtyard huddle, adding “Yeah Donniel was pretty harsh, he’s just a kid.” Yazmine echoed Kamillah’s sentiments: “This is repulsive, and Donniel is an asshole. I bet that’s how he really feels about the rest of us too.” Laila

³⁸⁹ Babayo Sule, "The State of the Muslim Ummah in Contemporary World," *Randwick International of Social Science Journal* 1, no. 2 (2020).

added “There is just no excuse to treat a student like that, no excuse.” And then Badiah said what all of us were thinking, “I’m not sure we should be here.” Defeated and disillusioned, the cohort went back to the classroom. Badiah’s anxious words about “being here,” here meaning not only in the MLI program, but sitting in Jerusalem, thus violating BDS, to receive this Jewish education, draws our attention to the layered and contentious space MLers and Muhammad, the Palestinian Havruta gap year SHI student, inhabit.

The Havruta gap year program website succinctly explains why SHI insists on holding educational programs such as the gap year and MLI and all its other programs in Jerusalem, stating:

Havruta is based in Jerusalem and the city plays a key role in the program. Our location affords participants access to the heart of Jewish history, exposing them to the many complexities – including religious, socioeconomic and intellectual diversity – that characterize Jerusalem. Jerusalem also serves as a laboratory in which the essential challenges facing the Jewish people as a society and as a nation can be closely examined.³⁹⁰

There is an added emotional layer of being present in the city where historical conflicts between Palestinians and Israelis, Muslims and Jews, occupier and occupied have collided. This tension was palpable for Muslim MLers who constantly doubted their decision to willingly subject themselves to Zionist curricula.³⁹¹ Despite these layered

³⁹⁰ Institute, "SHI Hevruta Gap-Year Program: A pluralistic program for North American and Israeli young adults."

³⁹¹ Arthur Hertzberg, "Zionism as Racism: A Semantic Analysis," in *Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* (Routledge, 2021).

traumatic experiences, one of the main takeaways that Gamila expressed during one of our interviews in 2017 after returning from Palestine to the United States, was “Jerusalem also belongs to us.” That may have been an unintended impact of the program and opposed to SHI’s hopes, but Gamila’s feelings about Jerusalem also being a home for Muslims across the world was continuously echoed by other members of my cohort. Enter Muhammad, the only Palestinian from Palestine that any MLI cohort has encountered on the SHI campus while in country/program. This incident and Donniel’s overtly hostile treatment of this young Palestinian student of SHI became the perfect storm that brought to the forefront all the fraught internal conflicts that Muslim MLIs were grappling with, concerning violating BDS and all the stakes and connotations wrapped up in being what Haroon affectionately refers to as a Muslim who “sold out.” The emotional weight of participating in a program that not only violated BDS but also entailed digesting Zionist ideologies in a disputed territory for two weeks – and with a commitment to doing so two years in a row – was stifling. Many MLIs began to feel betrayed on both an ideological and practical level. Witnessing Donniel, the president of SHI’s aggression towards a Palestinian child, technically under his institution’s care, laid bare the deep-seated power dynamics and prejudices of the institutions MLIs volunteered to be a part of. This quick but jarring incident exacerbated the concerns that Kamillah and other MLIs had already expressed about the historical exclusion and oppression of Palestinians in Israeli contexts as well as their lack of representation and participation within MLI. The irony of this incident was not lost on Muslim MLIs who had just witnessed a charged moment in which praxis, ideology and real-time geo-politics

collided. Understandably, Donniel's harsh treatment of a Palestinian boy attending an Israeli Zionist institute reinforced Muslim MLers' concerns that SHI does not care about Palestinians.

After the day had come to a close, Haroon sent the following message in our group WhatsApp chat:

You all met Muhammad today, the Palestinian kid from the Havruta program. Such a sweet, bright and ambitious kid. I really think he needs a positive identity as a Muslim and getting to know us could be really beneficial for him and vice versa. If you see him please go out of your way to say hello. Imagine how much it would mean for someone his age to experience different perspectives on Islam. But imagine what it feels like to be him. We are all and sometimes reasonably enough worried about how we will face blowback for MLI. But for this kid -- this is his life right. He even expressed how exhausting and overwhelming and depressing it is to be a Palestinian in a Jewish state with no room for him. And yet he's doing this program even as he struggles with it. What it means to him, how he deals with it. It was just a lot on his mind. And now on mine. Thanks for listening.

Haroon's above appeal to our cohort to reach out to Muhammad, demonstrates in some ways the responsibility many Muslim MLers feel towards their Palestinian brothers and sisters. His commentary on Muslim identity formation refers to the reality that Muhammad is in an environment where Muslims are seen as bad, even animal or inhuman, and Islam is seen as terrorism and representative of a threat.³⁹² Haroon also reveals the problematic collapse of Palestine and Islam via Israeli Zionist logics.³⁹³

³⁹² Lorenzo Veracini, "Islamophobia, Antisemitism, Zionism, Settler Colonialism," *For social studies* 10, no. 38 (2021).

³⁹³ Al Ja'bari and Shahd Hamad Abdelmo'Ti, "Islamization of social identity in East Jerusalem: a response to identity threat" (Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, 2018).

Effectively, we as MLers cannot help Muhammad figure out how to be a Palestinian: we're not Palestinian. What we can do is help expand Muhammad's perceptions of how and what Islam is and how to be a Muslim in a more transnational context: how to cultivate an Islam and a Muslim identity that is not exclusively in juxtaposition to Israeli Jewish Zionist identity.³⁹⁴ In many ways, being a Muslim Palestinian is solely defined against Israeli Jewish identity and the occupation.³⁹⁵ In this way, being a Palestinian might be understood as metaphorically fulfilling the Covenant of Being – based on existence, as explained and defined in Chapter 2. Haroon interestingly uses MLI language about positive identity formation – explained by Donniel as the Covenant of Becoming for Jews– to try and make sense of how transnational Muslim MLers might connect with Muhammad and affirm his Muslim identity.³⁹⁶ Haroon's comparison of MLers' concerns about blowback for their participation in MLI, to the reality that Muhammad lives 24/7 sheds light on the structural differences between living in occupied Palestine

³⁹⁴ Brian Calfano, *Muslims, Identity, and American Politics* (Routledge, 2018).

³⁹⁵ Sherna Berger Gluck, "The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern and Reclaiming Memory," (Taylor & Francis, 2019).

³⁹⁶ The Covenant of Being, as explained in Chapter 2, is part of SHI's MLI curriculum that asserts one of two ways of living as Jew in the world. The Covenant of Being states that basic existence, in the face of anti-Semitism and its manifested atrocities, meaning living in the world carrying and comprised of Jewish blood, is sufficient to fulfill God's wishes for the Jewish people as a community. This is a collective identity formation solely based on outsider hatred of Jews. The Covenant of Becoming is the second way SHI's MLI curriculum defines as a way to move through the world as a Jew engaged in processes of positive identity formation, so as to transcend identity formations solely dictated by the presence of anti-Semitism and its many violences. See Gilad Hirschberger, "Collective trauma and the social construction of meaning," *Frontiers in psychology* (2018).

versus being a Muslim living in the West.³⁹⁷ The reality that “there is no room for Muhammad” in a Jewish State conjures images of caged minds and limbs. Our cohort was grateful we were able to meet Muhammad, and humbled by his daily struggles that reminded MLers of their privilege and duty to advocate for oppressed Muslim communities everywhere, as Gamila and other MLers often expressed. Manahil similarly expressed this sentiment when she replied to Haroon’s message with the following: “Thank you for sharing him with us. We need to hear more of this. Isn’t that why we are here??” A succinct and stark reminder that Palestinians and their lack of representation locally and globally was on the minds of many Muslim MLers.

Digesting Zionist Logics

In addition to the stress inducing environment of actually sitting in Israel/Palestine, another source of discomfort and concern was the overtly Zionist curriculum of the MLI program itself. Processing sessions focused heavily on the ways Muslim participants tried to make sense of these Zionist logics. Below are some excerpts from conversations during a processing session after a learning module entitled “Foundations of Jewish Peoplehood,” part of the 2017 Jerusalem curriculum. This learning session was taught by Donniel Hartman, the president of the Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI) whose father founded the institute. During and after the lecture, Abdullah, the Muslim founder of the MLI program, reiterated what he thought were the main points and take aways from Donniel’s lecture, which are as follows: “What you feel is shaped

³⁹⁷ Gada Mahrouse, *Conflicted commitments: Race, privilege, and power in solidarity activism* (McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2014).

by what you do... not the other way around. We (meaning the Jews) are a people who are struggling and trying to figure things out. The Covenant of being and the Covenant of becoming.” The Covenant of Being is a phrase that refers to the Jewish identity component of simply existing as a Jew and a member of a Jewish community. The Covenant of Becoming refers to an elevated status of Jewish identity, mainly living under God’s law, keeping the Ten Commandments, which transcends the Covenant of Being. The Covenant of Becoming prescribes a way of life, not just mere existence as a Jew. According to Donniel the Covenant of Becoming is about engaging a future state of mind geared towards the preservation of a Jewish way of life, an “exemplary” life, as opposed to the Covenant of Being which reduces Judaism and Jewishness to the base survival of Jews.

Another Abdullah extrapolation from Donniel’s lecture, “Judaism came way after Jews... Judaism is a religion given to Jewish people unlike Christianity and Islam.” This quotation came up in a conversation about origins and the foundation of Judaism. Being a Jew is not faith-based in the same way as Christianity and Islam.³⁹⁸ The quotation in question is the interpretation that Abdullah, the Muslim founder of MLI, took away from the session on central components of Jewish peoplehood. In other words, Jews are a racially, ethnically distinct group, that because of the influence of Christianity and Western conceptions of religion, developed into a legible “religion.” Whereas Jews birthed Judaism, Christianity birthed Christians. To the Jews, this difference signifies that

³⁹⁸ Jansen and Meer, "Genealogies of ‘Jews’ and ‘Muslims’: social imaginaries in the race–religion nexus."

Judaism, unlike Christianity and Islam, is not something you can opt in or out of. The Muslims MLers responded to these expressed Jewish identity explanations by asking questions about conversion and race along with speculations about the “Jew gene” and how that borders on eugenics, mirroring Holocaust logics. Significantly, Abdullah interpreted this workshop to mean that Judaism, unlike Christianity or Islam, can accurately be described as a race or ethnicity rather than a religion anchored primarily in faith or belief.

Abdullah also pointed out Donniel’s statement of a Jewish motto of sorts, while simultaneously naming it in Islamic terminology: “The Jewish Shahadah: Your people are my people... Your God is my God.”³⁹⁹ Abdullah comically translates Donniel’s statement about what holds the Jewish people together as a community, the pledge like words of “Your people are my people...Your God is my God,” as the Jewish Shahadah. The Shahadah is the Muslim declaration of faith, the statement said when people convert to Islam, and a phrase that upholds the two non-negotiable tenets of Islam: “There is no God but God, and Muhammad is God’s messenger.”⁴⁰⁰ Abdullah points out in the below paragraph a key difference between Islam and Judaism, mainly that Jewish collective identity is not about belief or faith, it is about loyalty to the Jewish community and other Jews. Whereas Islam is absolutely based on individual faith and belief in the oneness of

³⁹⁹ This particular phrase comes from the Book of Ruth in the Hebrew Bible. See Timothy L Decker, "Contrastive Characterization in Ruth 1: 6-22: Three Ways to Return from Exile," *Old Testament Essays* 32, no. 3 (2019).

⁴⁰⁰ John L Esposito, *What everyone needs to know about Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

God. The Jewish Shahadah, as Abdullah called it, upholds the Covenant of Being, which Donniel explained is preserved and realized by the existence of the State of Israel: a nation state that allows for Jews to exist as Jews. Donniel further explained that Zionism is what ensures the Covenant of Being, which Abdullah further reflects on below:

My paraphrasing of his explanation of who is or is not a Jew: In some ways it is impossible to be Kafir⁴⁰¹ in Judaism... technically you are always a Jew regardless of what you believe, not believe or what you do and not do... When you feel you are a victim,...often you are not aware of your own racism... The real moral txt for any society is what you do when your being is under threat... Alternative to Zionism is North America... North America is the only place where increasing number of Jews reject covenant of being and imagine working for a covenant of becoming. Covenant of becoming only works if you actually do something (This is quite telling about the future of Islam and Muslims in America. Some people pray for “good anti-semitism:” ...like in France... How to shift conversations!? How do you add different conversations !? (This is a crucial challenge and question for Muslims in North America). Fear is a vision modifier.... (wow!) Moral critique of power....⁴⁰²

Abdullah’s above synopsis of Donniel’s lecture brings several issues to the forefront in relation to how Muslim MLers are thinking about the information presented within multiple transnational contexts to an American-majority Muslim audience: Jews in Israel, throughout the world and history, Islam and Muslims in the West, and global realities of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. What Donniel was lecturing about, and what Abdullah understood from that lecture, is that existential threat arrests development in terms of the

⁴⁰¹ Kafir is an Arabic term meaning non-believer, or outsider.

⁴⁰² Abdullah’s comments here about “good anti-Semitism...such as that in France” is in relation to French anti-Semitism that effectively keeps French Jewish collective identity intact. This anti-Semitism is being coded as good because it ensures the existence of a collective Jewish community. See Marc Weitzmann, *Hate: The Rising Tide of Anti-Semitism in France (And What It Means for Us)* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019).

Covenant of Being and the Covenant of Becoming being diametrically opposed: existence vs. praxis; being vs. doing. The Covenant of Being is inherently limited in that it emphasizes the mere existence of Jewish blood and people and does not focus on prescriptions surrounding Jewish presence and how Jews should move through the world. SHI explains the Covenant of Becoming as positive identity formation vs. Covenant of Being as negative identity formation; the former focusing on what Jews can/should/get to do vs. external factors including the threats of anti-Semitism and extermination in many forms including genocide and assimilation, aspects Donniel touched on in the session. This is the identity crisis that SHI and its instructors continuously brought to the forefront. For many Jews, living under the Covenant of Being, which means merely existing and surviving as a Jew in the world, is exhaustively occupying, so much so, that Israeli Jews have not had a chance to engage in positive communal identity development. In effect this means Jewish collective identity exists as a response to anti-Semitism. The threat and realization of anti-Semitic violence necessitates Israel's existence as a nation state, while also justifying the state of Israel's overt genocidal violence towards Palestinians. Employing these logics, Zionism is absolutely viewed as a positive and self-protective collective stance for Israeli Jews because it ensures Jewish existence per Covenant of Being logics.

The presentation of Zionism in such a positive and constructive vein was quite shocking to many MLers, demonstrated here by Gamila's statement to me when I interviewed her while we were in Jerusalem in 2017: "I have to say this now. I don't mean to disrespect. But hearing Zionism talked about so positively is a mindcuss."

Gamila was expressing the literal mental turmoil she was experiencing as she learned about how Zionist logics safeguard collective Jewish identity and existence, while ignoring the genocidal violence carried out in the name of Jewish safety. During a processing session, Nadine asked a poignant question while extrapolating a complex conclusion, “So...Zionism can't function without external threats?” What Nadine was asking/stating is that anti-Semitism necessitated the foundation of the State of Israel. That is, Zionism is the movement/political ideology that Jews have a right to a State of their own to ensure Jewish safety and existence is Zionism. Alper responded to Nadine’s questioning conclusion, saying “Yes that is what they are saying. Israel needs anti-Semitism, otherwise there is no reason for Israel to exist.” According to this collapsed logic that equates Judaism, Israel, and Zionism, anti-Semitism becomes foundational not only to the State of Israel but also to global Jewry. During this same processing session, Laila shyly raised her hand to speak, “So Israeli Jews don’t want anti-Semitism to stop?” After a long dramatic and contemplative pause Yasra spoke up saying, “It doesn’t matter cause it won’t stop. Anti-Semitism isn’t going anywhere, just like Islamophobia isn’t going to disappear.” Ibrahim chimed in affirming Laila’s confused sentiment, “No you’re right Laila, they need it and don’t want it to stop, otherwise they would lose their specialness and protected status.” It is clear from this processing session that Muslim MLIs feel confronted by the equivalencies presented within the MLI curriculum. Namely the circular reliance between Judaism, anti-Semitism, and Zionism. However, self-admittedly, Donniel understands that these Zionist logics keep Israeli Jews from engaging in the Covenant of Becoming. Abdullah notes that while North American

Jews may ascribe to these same Zionist logics, their identity crisis is one of becoming not being. As Donniel explained in his lecture, North America is an effective foil to Zionist logics as Jews have successfully not only maintained their survival outside of Israel, but have managed to integrate into North American society while also gaining access to halls of power.⁴⁰³ Abdullah accepts Donniel's assertion, underlining Jewish success in North America as they engage the Covenant of Becoming, and how this occurrence holds promising insights into how Islam and Muslims might reach similar levels of acceptance and prosperity in Western contexts. Abdullah is iterating a main motivation for Muslim MLers: to learn from the Jews how to navigate towards success as a religious minority in Western contexts.

During this conversation we landed on a tangent about the limitations of defining Judaism by blood or more to the point, by using Nazi logic to determine who is or is not a Jew. In trying to explain the racial dynamics of Jewishness, Donniel started to discuss Nazi logics surrounding blood purity in conjunction with various forms of Jewish law involving intermarriage, blood purity, and the difference between rabbinic Judaism and Torah law.⁴⁰⁴ Torah law, according to Donniel, states that if either parent is Jewish then the child is Jewish, however, as Judaism developed, Rabbinic law narrowed this assertion stating that a child is only Jewish if the mother is Jewish, Jewish via matrilineal

⁴⁰³ Sara Tahir Aleskerova, "Jewish lobby as an overlooked power which leads to political transformations in US foreign policy," (2021).

⁴⁰⁴ Anne Perez, "Social inclusion and legal exclusion in a Jewish or democratic state: intermarriage in the Zionist movement and the early State of Israel," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 5 (2021).

descent.⁴⁰⁵ Interestingly, Israeli State law follows the original Torah law, and therefore any child with a Jewish mother or father has the “Right of Return,” the right to return to Israel and become an Israeli citizen. However, it is Rabbinic Judaism that rules the majority of Jewish communities around the world.⁴⁰⁶ These complex explanations of who is a Jew and who is not, were all an effort on Donniel’s part to explain the racialized components of Jewish identity. Donniel called attention to the internal and external factors that govern both racial and religious aspects of Jewish identity. This called forth tensions between the racial and religious aspects of Jewishness. This caused Haroon to point out that in the U.S., Jews are afforded religious protection on the one hand while also having their own nation state, which for Haroon, constitutes protections based on religion as well as being perceived as a racial, national, and/or ethnic group. These stakes are further compounded by the fact that Ashkenazi Jews often benefit from White privilege in the U.S., where they are not categorically perceived as members of a racial minority.⁴⁰⁷ Haroon expressed these confusions and tensions in the following group message:

I often ask my audiences to accept that Muslims be allowed the right to define themselves. I also want Muslims to transcend secular and theocratic forms of political organization that seem to be dying off anyhow. And yet here we are being asked to accept a definition of religious community that relies on bloodline and insularity. And that's really hard to know what to

⁴⁰⁵ Ari Z Zivotofsky, "MATRILINEAL DESCENT: A BACKGROUND CHECK," *Tradition* 53, no. 2 (2021).

⁴⁰⁶ Lawrence A Hoffman, *Covenant of blood: circumcision and gender in Rabbinic Judaism* (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁴⁰⁷ Sander L Gilman, "Are Jews White?: Or, The History of the Nose Job," in *Theories of Race and Racism* (Routledge, 2020).

do with. Because what defines a religion? I do find it awkward as an American to be told to accept that a religion can also be a race and yet still a religion; you get to be a state and then also back in America freedom of religion too.

Haroon's perception that religion can be neatly dissected from other conceptions of peoplehood founded on race, ethnicity, nationality, and so forth, points to American and/or Western-centric attitudes towards religion and other sociocultural factors being necessarily separate.⁴⁰⁸ Ironically, Jews and Muslims alike are racialized in Western contexts thanks to settler colonial as well as Holocaust logics.⁴⁰⁹ Haroon's assessment of the stakes of Jewish peoplehood reflects the multiple identities and positionalities of Muslim MLers, the majority of whom are American in addition to being Muslim, Desi, Arab, Brown, etc. We see in MLI that religious and often racial minorities in the context of the U.S, which is where MLI is based, a group of people whose identities, at least in part, consist of jockeying for position within imposed and internalized social hierarchies.

Pedagogically Imposed Silence

During a lecture on Jewish "chosenness" during our first trip to Jerusalem in 2017, a few messages were quietly being exchanged by Muslim MLers in response to Jewish explanations of exceptionalism.⁴¹⁰ Covert conversational exchanges among Muslim MLers were common and a reaction to the top down, no dialogue, pedagogical

⁴⁰⁸ Meredith B McGuire, "Contested meanings and definitional boundaries: Historicizing the sociology of religion," *Defining religion* (2003).

⁴⁰⁹ Hadi Khoshnevis, "The inferior white: Politics and practices of racialization of people from the Middle East in the US," *Ethnicities* 19, no. 1 (2019).

⁴¹⁰ Abigail Green, "Chosen, destined, but not superior: The disputed intellectual territory of Jewish exceptionalism," *TLS. Times Literary Supplement*, no. 6152 (2021).

structure of the MLI program. This structure imposed a silence on Muslim MLers that disallowed them from bringing Islam into SHI rooms and lectures. Abdullah was constantly reminding multiple MLers NOT to engage in typical interfaith dialogue scripts like “Oh, we do that too, Oh we have that too” in Islam. As a result of this imposed and mandatory voicelessness, exchanges like the one below commonly occurred. Gamila expressed confusion over Jewish explanations about chosenness, which was being connected to God’s favor of the Jews and how God’s preferential treatment of the Jews made Jews and the State of Israel exemplary models for other communities and countries.⁴¹¹ Gamila therefore asked the following in our cohort’s group chat: “Am I missing something? Aren’t Muslims exceptionalist? Don’t we have the way? And everyone else is going to hell? The prophet ﷺ being a lamp?”⁴¹² Nadine confirmed Gamila’s “Islam Too” question, saying “We totally are. We say Islam was brought to all humanity.”⁴¹³ Yasra additionally echoed Nadine’s confirmation with the assertion, “We are the light for all Nations.” Gamila and others in the conversation are trying to make sense of how Muslims are situated within Jewish worldviews, as well as frustration at not being able to ask these kinds of questions during the learning sessions at MLI.

⁴¹¹ Ilan Pappé, "The discourse of exceptionalism: Civil and human rights in Israel," in *The Condition of Democracy* (Routledge, 2021).

⁴¹² Mandaville, "Islam and Exceptionalism in the Western Policy Imagination."

⁴¹³ Not all Muslims believe that non-Muslims are going to hell. For more on Muslim eschatologies see Sebastian Günther, "Eschatology and the Qur'an," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies* (2020).

BDS & Bethlehem

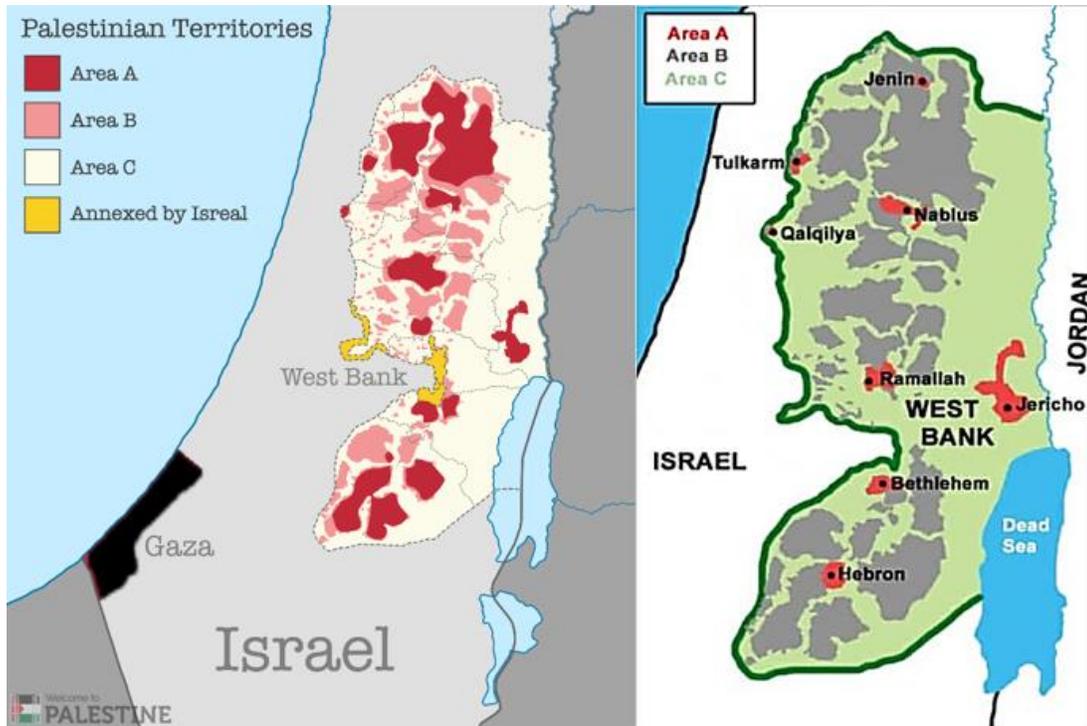
The confrontation between MLI and BDS came to a head during our visit to Bethlehem on our second trip to Israel/Palestine in 2018. Bethlehem is a major hub and supporter of the BDS movement as well as what is supposed to be a central distribution hub for BDS funds earmarked to help actual Palestinians.⁴¹⁴ The West Bank, where Bethlehem is, is split into three sectors, A, B, and C. A and B are under the governance of the Palestinian Authority (the PA), whereas area C, which makes up sixty percent of the actual territory of the West Bank, is under complete Israeli military control.⁴¹⁵ Area C is the area that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised to annex into the official state of Israel during his last election.⁴¹⁶ The maps below show the locations of Areas A, B, and C, prominent cities located in the West Bank, the location of the security barrier wall, as well as illegal settlements which are the territories referred to as land annexed by Israel.

⁴¹⁴ Philip Marfleet, "Palestine: Boycott, Localism, and Global Activism," in *Boycotts Past and Present* (Springer, 2019).

⁴¹⁵ Elisha Efrat, *The West Bank and Gaza Strip: A geography of occupation and disengagement* (Routledge, 2006).

⁴¹⁶ Dana Busgang, "Sovereign Exception No More: The Impact of Israel's Potential Annexation of the Jordan River Valley on Israel's Obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," *Am. UL Rev.* 70 (2020).

Figure 45: Map of the West Bank Area Zones



During our second trip to Israel in 2018, we visited and met with the mayor of Bethlehem. On our way to Bethlehem we toured the Palestinian side of the security barrier wall. MLers took pictures of some of the resistance art in that area, which are included below.

Shared by Laila:

Figure 46: MLK Quote, Security Barrier Wall



The above features a quotation attributed to Martin Luther King, Jr. during his visit to the Berlin Wall in September of 1964.⁴¹⁷ The second part is from his famous “I have a Dream” speech from 1963.⁴¹⁸ This is an example of how Palestinians find solidarity with

⁴¹⁷ Christopher J Oldenburg and Adrienne E Hacker Daniels, "Martin Luther King Jr. in East Berlin," *Reframing Rhetorical History: Cases, Theories, and Methodologies* (2022).

⁴¹⁸ James M Washington, "The essential writings and speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.," *New York: HarperOne* (1986).

other freedom movements that have occurred in a transnational context, particularly the Civil Rights Movement that historically grapple with the oppression of racialized minorities.⁴¹⁹ This sheds light on the reality that Palestine-Israel is not merely a religious conflict. It is also interesting that they are using an American Christian Black pastor to engage in a stitched-together form of liberation theology that speaks across the multiple ethno-religious divides that exist within the region as well as within the occupied territories.⁴²⁰ The use of MLK also calls attention to the ties between American imperialism and Israeli occupation.⁴²¹ The fact that Palestinians have American knowledges speaks to the transnational contamination of racial logics within Middle Eastern contexts.⁴²² The particularly American racial hierarchical logics that present themselves here as well as throughout Muslim-Jewish MLI discourse alludes once again to the transnational, local, and global contexts in which the Palestine-Israel conflict is situated. The montage of images on the security barrier wall in the photo above includes a call to make art, not war, depicts a blindfolded martyr captioned “no surprises,” a helicopter dropping bombs that explode into a rainbow, a reference to Banksy the artist,

⁴¹⁹ Mayumi Sato and Sarah Moser, "# FromFerguson2Gaza: Spatialities of Protest in Black-Palestinian Solidarity Movements," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 21, no. 1 (2022).

⁴²⁰ John R Pottenger, "A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict," *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies* 28, no. 1 (2018); Shahzad Qaisar, "Jinnah and Palestine Question," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 56, no. 1 (2019); Laura C Robson, "Palestinian liberation theology, Muslim-Christian relations and the Arab-Israeli conflict," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21, no. 1 (2010).

⁴²¹ Jamil Hilal, "IMPERIALISM AND SETTLER-COLONIALISM IN WEST ASIA: ISRAEL AND THE ARAB PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE," *Utafiti Journal* 1, no. 1 (2018).

⁴²² Here I am referring to the internationalization and globalization of U.S. American racial hierarchies and logics, which I unpack in Chapter 4.

and a key that represents the Nakba.⁴²³ The Nakba is the Palestinian Arabic word for the initial expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in 1948 by the newly established Israeli nation state. The Nakba is also known as The Palestinian Catastrophe.⁴²⁴ The below image was also shared by a fellow MLier in our group chat as we made our way to Bethlehem.

Picture shared by Fawad:

Figure 47: Trump, Security Barrier Wall



The above features a picture of then-President of the U.S., Donald Trump. Note that Trump is wearing a yarmulke. We were in Jerusalem in 2018 when Trump announced that he had decided to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.⁴²⁵ Trump and his administration's geopolitics within the region were ever-present throughout the

⁴²³ Banksy is an anonymous social justice artist. For more on Banksy see Mafalda Young, "The art of resistance: art and resistance in Palestine," *Janus. Net-Thematic dossier-The Middle East. Local dynamics, regional actors, global challenges* (2022).

⁴²⁴ Doctor Nahla Abdo and Nur Masalha, *An oral history of the Palestinian Nakba* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

⁴²⁵ Spector, "This Year in Jerusalem: Prophecy, Politics, and the US Embassy in Israel."

entirety of our second stay in Palestine. The depiction of Trump in a yarmulke serves as an indictment of American foreign policy in its friendship and aid to the state of Israel.⁴²⁶ Bethlehem is a Christian-Palestinian center in addition to being a center for BDS, pointing to the ways in which several historic cities in Palestine-Israel feature a confluence of religio-cultural backgrounds. The Mayor of Bethlehem, Anton Salman, who we visited during our day trip in 2018, is a Palestinian Christian. We visited Bethlehem shortly after New Years, and Fawad captured a picture of a Christmas tree in Bethlehem's town square:

⁴²⁶ Miriam Eve Mora, "Our American Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance by Amy Kaplan," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 14, no. 1 (2021).

Figure 48: Christmas Tree, Bethlehem Town Square



Our visit to Bethlehem reinforced positive feelings about Muslim MLers' choices to participate in the MLI program, mainly because our visit and meeting with the mayor of Bethlehem revealed large-scale corruption within the BDS movement and its handling of funds, according to the Palestinian families we met living in Bethlehem.⁴²⁷ The

⁴²⁷ Scholarship about the BDS Movement is almost always biased, meaning either hyper-critical and thus pro-Zionist, or intensely apologist and thus uncritical of the limitations and/or innerworkings of the BDS Movement. The firsthand ethnographic knowledge about the embedded corruption within the BDS Movement comes directly from my interactions in the West Bank with actual Palestinians living in the

messaging we got from the mayor was that BDS is effective; BDS is the only way to go if you want to support Palestinians; however, after our meeting with the mayor, we visited with several local Palestinian families whose children had been martyred and they spoke candidly with us about how the BDS Movement has no real connection to actual Palestinians living under the occupation. Namely, that funds collected by the BDS Movement are eventually supposed to end up in the hands of actual Palestinian families that have lost lives and property to the occupation. However, those funds, as we were told by one father who had lost three Palestinian sons, are continuously withheld by administrators and local government officials such as the Mayor of Bethlehem. Historically, the Mayor of Bethlehem is always a Palestinian Christian.⁴²⁸ While Bethlehem's mayor is Christian, the city itself has a Muslim majority population.⁴²⁹ Javed left the mayor's office and snarkily commented, "That guy is corrupt AF." Later during this trip I interviewed Alper who expressed similar sentiments to that stated by Javed above, saying, "I couldn't believe what we saw in Bethlehem. A typical politician stealing from his own people. It's deplorable and typical. And also the Christmas decorations everywhere. What a crack up. But after that I didn't feel like a sell out anymore." For many, this information about the corruption of BDS in Bethlehem

Occupied Territories. An aim of this project is to offer a critical analysis of the BDS Movement within a pro-Palestinian framework.

⁴²⁸ Tom Selwyn and Rami K Isaac, "14 Towards the future of tourism and pilgrimage in Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Palestine," *The politics and power of tourism in Palestine* (2015).

⁴²⁹ Raymond J Webb and Fatma Jamal Asa'd, "The right to life: A perspective of young Palestinian Muslims," in *Euthanasia, Abortion, Death Penalty and Religion-The Right to Life and its Limitations* (Springer, 2019).

assuaged some of their guilt about violating the BDS Movement, and reinforced their commitment to MLI.

Below is a picture of Abdullah, the Muslim founder of MLI, and the Mayor of Bethlehem in his office, captured during our 2018 day trip to Bethlehem. Note the Christmas tree:

Figure 49: Mayor of Bethlehem



There was even Santa Claus shaped candy in the Mayor's office for all his visitors:

Figure 50: Santa Claus Candy, Mayor's Office, Bethlehem



Below is a picture of Yasser Arafat in the Mayor of Bethlehem's office, that multiple MLers paused at to take selfies with:

Figure 51: Yasser Arafat Poster, Mayor's Office, Bethlehem



In addition to all the Christian paraphernalia throughout the mayor's office, there was this very large picture displayed, at the entrance/exit of the mayoral office, of Yasser Arafat. Arafat was the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which represents

the last unified political party that the majority of Palestinians supported.⁴³⁰ After Arafat's assassination, the PLO fractured into several smaller offshoots.⁴³¹ Interestingly, Arafat is a famed Muslim leader, whereas the Mayor of Bethlehem is historically a Christian. The presence of this picture brings to the forefront previous failed attempts at peace in the Middle East.⁴³² Arafat was the last real hope that all Palestinians, regardless of their Christian or Muslim identity, had for Palestinians and relations in the Middle East. It was entertaining to MLers to be surrounded by Christian paraphernalia while posing for pictures next to a life size photo of a historically prominent Muslim leader. We left the mayor's office and headed to Bethlehem's town square where Alper captured and shared the below picture:

⁴³⁰ Joshua Teitelbaum, "The Palestine Liberation Organization," in *Middle East Contemporary Survey* (Routledge, 2021).

⁴³¹ Meng Shu and Aftab Hussain, "Transformation of the Palestine Liberation Organization: Goals and Means," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 12, no. 3 (2018).

⁴³² As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, the assassinations of Rabin and Arafat are a traumatic touchstone for Jews and Muslims transnationally.

Figure 52: Boycott Israel, Bethlehem Town Square



This image was captured in Bethlehem's main town square. The graffiti's presence in Bethlehem draws our attention to the pervasive presence and support that BDS holds within Bethlehem. After talking to local Palestinians, we were told that the bulk of support for BDS comes from Bethlehem's government and administration, and less from

actual Palestinians.⁴³³ This is significant because of the way that BDS presents itself as the mouthpiece and premier advocacy network for the majority of Palestinians everywhere.⁴³⁴

After leaving the mayor's office and passing through Bethlehem's town square, we went to visit the house of a father whose three sons had been killed/martyred by the IDF. Upon entering the house, many MLers were hit with the palpable sadness and grief that this Palestinian father lived every day. The entire house was decorated as a death shrine with pictures of his sons wearing keffiyeh, the traditional Palestinian tribal-printed scarf that is worn as a symbol of resistance to the occupation.⁴³⁵ The pictures and drawings were decorated with ribbons along with multiple photographs of local Palestinian boys engaging in resistance efforts. Even the outside of the building of this father's house included a full mural of one of his son's faces, clearly within public view. The words beside this boy's face, roughly translated say: "A candle on the grave of the martyr, is a rose on his chest, hear the mountainous call from afar of this hero." The father's house was full of images and phrases such as these, paying homage to the lost lives of his sons and other Palestinians who gave up their lives in efforts to end the occupation. The intentions of this day trip to Bethlehem and meeting the father who had lost so much at the hands of the occupation had two contradictory impacts on MLers.

⁴³³ Scott Altman, "Are Boycotts, Shunning, and Shaming Corrupt?," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 41, no. 4 (2021).

⁴³⁴ Marfleet, "Palestine: Boycott, Localism, and Global Activism."

⁴³⁵ Evan Renfro, "Stitched together, torn apart: The keffiyeh as cultural guide," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no. 6 (2018).

The first impact was a reinforcement of MLers' decisions to break BDS. The second and indirect impact was the witnessing of grief and loss this father had suffered at the hands of the Israeli occupation. There was also a third consequence of seeing how BDS funds never reached this father that was living in abject poverty, cluing us in to the corruption within the BDS Movement. The mural of this father's son, located on the outside of the building where he lives, is featured below.

Figure 53: A Palestinian Son's Mural



We were invited to go up on the roof of the father’s dilapidated house, featured below, to see the view, as it was quite a nice clear day. However, we were advised to only go in groups of two, and to kneel or squat very low once on the roof to avoid being shot at by the IDF that was across the fence line. Shots being fired by the IDF across the fence line, for no apparent reason, was and is a common occurrence: yet another stark reminder to us MLers about the harsh conditions in which Palestinians are living. Below is a picture of the view from that roof.

Figure 54: View from a Palestinian Roof



For many of us, the simultaneity of beautiful scenery such as this and the squalor in which the father and other Palestinians in Bethlehem are living was unsettling, to say the least. These encounters were and are intentionally woven into the fabric of the MLI experience, which teaches Judaism and Zionism to Muslims while “in-country,” and

foregrounds the in-person component of that experience. Israel-Palestine is at the heart of the SHI curriculum as well as a primary source of inner and external conflict for Muslim participants. In the next section, I undertake some of the more indirect topics and feelings Muslims expressed about their participation in MLI. This includes conversations questioning individual and collective reasoning for their (Muslims') participation in MLI, and frustration with the almost tokenistic inclusion of Palestinian individuals in the MLI curriculum and scheduling, many of whom, to add insult to injury, turned out to be, in the eyes of Muslim MLIs, traitors to the Palestinian cause. These subversive undercurrents of hopelessness and powerlessness were manifest in visits to Al-Khalil/Hebron and a visit to a settlement that is operating illegally according to international law. I explore these covert themes and events below.

SUBVERSIVE UNDERCURRENTS

As Muslims, Why Are We Here?

As I move to discuss the subversive and covert themes embedded in the MLI experience, I want to make clear that these themes are not consciously or purposely withheld. They are rather the result of subconscious and collective understandings, positionalities, and reactions of MLIs and their experiences of Israel/Palestine, SHI, and its curriculum. In conjunction with these subversive undercurrents, one of the more obvious questions regarding the one-way education of Muslims, about Zionist Judaisms that violate BDS is: Why are any Muslims interested in participating in such a program? This is a question that came up frequently during processing sessions. During one of these processing sessions during our 2017 trip to Palestine, Gamila expressed her

particular mindset in relation to her motivations for joining MLI, and the effects the materials were having on her outlook. She stated, “I’m just wondering how Jewry will respond to this crisis in moving towards not being hated by the rest of the world. And just wondering how we can take and apply the ideas of ‘being’ to our community.” Gamila made this comment in response to the learning session “Foundations of Jewish Peoplehood” featured in Chapter 2. The crisis she is referring to is the question as to how Jews form a collective Jewish identity that is not held together by the external force of anti-Semitism. Hartman explained global Jewry as being in the midst of an identity crisis caused, ironically, by the perceived increased acceptance of Judaism in many parts of the world.⁴³⁶ Because Jewish identity has been grounded for so long in responses to anti-Semitism, Jews, according to Donniel Hartman, are struggling to maintain Jewish collective solidarity in the face of a changing religio-cultural landscape that no longer denigrates Jews in ways that make sense to former Jewish identity logics. Gamila correlated Hartman’s explanation of Judaism’s identity crisis to the global Muslim ummah’s issues with Islamophobia. Gamila, in conjunction with the materials presented by SHI, perceived Jewish people as a successful religious minority in America, and wanted to learn from these perceived successes in ways that would benefit the rest of her Muslim community back home in the Midwest. The potential for advocacy and activism within Muslim communities was a common draw for Muslim participants.

⁴³⁶ Yadgar, *Israel's Jewish Identity Crisis: State and Politics in the Middle East*, 11.

In conjunction with learning from the Jews about accessing halls of power in Western contexts, another component of the indirect effects of the SHI curriculum and setup on Muslim participants involved an effort to present materials more inclusive of Arab-Israeli (Muslim) leaders and inhabitants. SHI's desired optics of inclusion somewhat backfired as meetings with Arab Israelis demonstrated how unwilling minorities within the state of Israel were to advocate for Palestinian rights. This proved an added layer of disappointment – and even devastation – in realizing that Arab Israelis, at least those who interacted with MLI, have abandoned Palestinians in order to secure their own positionality within the Israeli hierarchy. In addition to the top-down Zionist approach that unsettled many MLIs, this shallow attempt to be more inclusive of non-Jewish voices added another layer of disappointment towards the MLI program. Many MLIs expressed anger, hopelessness, and betrayal at encountering other Muslims just across the wall who had abandoned the Palestinians, and guilt over not having proximity or power to hold Muslim communities accountable for the Palestinians' plight. MLIs expressed many of these kinds of feelings on a day trip to see the Qadi in 2017.

The Qadi of Jerusalem

During our first trip to Jerusalem in 2017, Muslim MLIs embarked on a trip to Ramallah for an informal lecture/discussion with the Qadi of Jerusalem. A Qadi is a Shariah judge and the senior-most jurisprudence position held by a Muslim in Israel.⁴³⁷ Iyad Zahalka, the Qadi of Jerusalem, oversees family law issues for Arab Israelis. He acts

⁴³⁷ Delfina Serrano Ruano, "Qadis and muftis: Judicial authority and the social practice of Islamic law," in *Routledge Handbook of Islamic Law* (Routledge, 2019).

as a sort of liaison between Israeli government officials and the Arab Israeli community living in Israel. Technically the Qadi is an Israeli government position that while operating autonomously in some capacities, is an office maintained at the behest of the state of Israel. This duality understandably raised a lot of concerns about Zahalka's positionality with regard to the Palestine/Israel conflict. During this informal meeting/discussion many MLers were asking the Qadi questions about his political views concerning advocacy for Palestinians in the occupied territories, his opinions about two-state and one-state solutions, and how he is using his power to improve the situation of Arab Israelis. The Qadi's answers and responses to these confrontational questions were often vague and superficial, while also apologetic of violent and prejudicial Israeli state policies, which left Muslim MLers dissatisfied. Haroon tried to explain the Qadi's reluctance and ambiguity: "FYI folks. He's in effect an employee of the Israeli government. He's not going to stray very far from a narrow range of points on politics. He doesn't have the freedom to. He's a bureaucrat. He can't and won't answer these questions. It would jeopardize not only his career but the whole structure he oversees and the autonomy of Muslim and Palestinian life in Israel. He's not going to risk that." As Haroon explains, the Qadi is worried about offending his employer, the Israeli government. Many Muslim MLers viewed his apparent willingness to toe the Israeli line as a sort of betrayal of Muslims and Palestinians.

At one point, the Qadi explained that Palestinian Israelis statistically commit fewer acts of violence than Jewish Israelis. Someone asked a question about what kinds of cases the Qadi rules over and how he could use his position to advocate for Arab-

Israelis. This line of questioning was related to the overall impression many non-Israeli Arabs have about Arab-Israelis being unwilling to advocate for Palestinians in occupied territories. The language used to describe Palestinian-Israelis as Arab-Israeli is a linguistic indication that there is an overall hesitancy to address the issue of Palestine and Palestinians directly. In response to these questions, the Qadi explained that he is only responsible for dealing with internal violence within the Arab-Israeli community, and his purview does not include Arab Israeli violence against Jews, and even so these instances of violence are extremely low. In response to Haroon's explanation about why the Qadi was unwilling to engage many MLIer questions and concerns, Ismail asked Haroon, in our group chat, if he could ask the Qadi about right of return. To which Haroon replied:

You can ask whatever you like. He's actually very right about violence by Palestinian Israelis. Instances of violence against Jewish Israelis are extremely low. Actually surprisingly low and much lower than you expect...But when you ask him a question keep in mind his position. You'll get a more productive answer. He focuses on shariah legislation after all.

Here you see Haroon making apologist remarks about the Qadi's involvement and possible alignment with the state of Israel, an association that made many other MLIers uncomfortable. Ismail replied with "Lol. No easy convo in MLI." Ibrahim commented more directly about his thoughts on the Qadi's tactics, saying "He is co-opted. Sell out like us." The Qadi's unwillingness to have a candid conversation with MLIers was beautifully boiled down to economic motivations by Laila who replied to Ibrahim by saying "He just wants bread." Laila's astute observation garnered the quippy reply from Gamila "Give him flowers," an expression akin to "let them eat cake" or in other words,

let him starve.⁴³⁸ Her retort was indicative of the general disdain MLers were feeling towards the Qadi in that moment.

Later, Haroon commented once again about the need for security surrounding Muslim participation in MLI. While we were with the Qadi, a Muslim MLer recorded a portion of the meeting for a participant who was sick and had missed it. In response, Haroon stated,

I'd like to make it clear to everyone that there is to be absolutely no recording of any sessions at all. We take that extremely seriously and it violates the trust of MLI. Please remember that these sessions and our participation is extremely confidential. Anyone can accidentally lose control of their data and can cause serious harm to people's work and careers.

In this case, the geopolitical positionality of an Arab Israeli Muslim mirrored the broader concerns for Muslims who participate in MLI; the impulse to protect the Qadi parallels MLers' concerns about maintaining anonymity about their participation due to backlash from BDS and the transnational Muslim community. As stated, many Muslim MLers expressed disappointment at their interactions with the Qadi. Fawad reflected, "I was expecting a truth to power moment like we saw at Aqsa," to which Gamila replied, "That wasn't truth to power... That was helplessness and anger."

Al-Khalil: Where All Hope Goes to Die

Continuing with MLer interactions in the occupied territories, during our first trip to Israel in 2017, we went on an excursion to Hebron, a partitioned city in the West Bank,

⁴³⁸ Hussein Agha and Ahmad Samih Khalidi, "A Palestinian Reckoning: Time for a New Beginning," *Foreign Aff.* 100 (2021).

where the patriarchs of Judaism and Islam are buried.⁴³⁹ Haroon refers to Hebron as the city where all hope goes to die because Hebron is completely occupied by the IDF and the Masjid itself is partitioned: only Muslims can go to certain parts of the Mosque and only Jews can go to certain parts. Hebron is a stark reminder of the gravity of the Palestine-Israel conflict: a partitioned holy place, a partitioned town under military occupation. The streets are overrun by eighteen to twenty-one year old Israelis who are compulsorily required to enforce this divide, which serves as a mirror for the overarching conflict. The combination of occupation, partition, and the added weight of the holy people buried in Hebron, leaves a feeling of an obliteration of any human dignity, leaving anyone who enters at the mercy of the Israeli youth who comprise the IDF. The security measures required to enter the city call to mind Nazi Holocaust camps. The chicken-wire gates, the fences, the guards, all the barbed wire: a cage geared explicitly towards controlling the entry and exit of Arabs and Muslims.⁴⁴⁰

As we prepared to embark on our trip to Hebron, Abdullah, the founder of MLI, sent a message to Muslim participants:

Make sure you will have your passports on you. Hope all are ready for a rich day. Please be on the bus at 8 am sharp. I will join you at 2:00 inshallah. First stop is a Muslim college and talk with its very impressive female dean. When our tour guide shares today's itinerary, please read carefully and see each experience as you mentally prepare yourself. One of the highlights will be meeting with Ramy Younis who will basically say

⁴³⁹ Tamara Neuman, *Settling Hebron: Jewish fundamentalism in a Palestinian city* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

⁴⁴⁰ Ilana Maymind, "Settling Hebron. Jewish Fundamentalism in a Palestinian City," *Journal of International and Global Studies* 10, no. 2 (2019).

just the opposite of what we heard from the Qadi yesterday. He is a BDS activist who usually does a good job in explaining Palestinian suffering.

Abdullah echoed and amplified the concerns on the minds of all of us Muslim MLers: practical concerns about our safety and about being stopped by the IDF, and our continued ideological misgivings about the Palestinian apologetics to which we had been subjected, once again signifying the multiple layers of physical and emotional labor Muslim MLers endure as part and parcel of the MLI experience. Yasra further reflected on the reality for Muslim MLers, which is that our presence in MLI/Israel necessitates that we exercise extreme caution to safeguard our own people and wellbeing. Yasra quipped, in response to Abdullah's reminder to bring our passports, "But Abdullah- we always have them on us except for the shower."

On our way to Hebron, we had an Arab tour guide named Ramy, who gave us a perspective of the breakdown of the three sectors of the West Bank, the different groupings of Palestinians in Israel, Palestine, and diaspora, and the overall lay of the land. His intel shed light on some of the geopolitical stakes that all MLers were already thinking about. Gamila reflected: "OMG tour guide is awesome.. This is just the context we need. The break down of the five groups was really helpful. 1. Palestinian Israelis 2. Palestinians in E. Jerusalem 3. Palestinians in the Occ Territories 4. Refugees/Diaspora 5. Christians. The druze⁴⁴¹ fit in there somewhere." The five groups Gamila refers to here are the primary ethnic divisions that the state of Israel recognizes. Funnily enough,

⁴⁴¹ The Druze are a small ethnically and religiously distinct tribal group that exist throughout the Middle East. Mordechai Nisan, "The Druze in Israel: Questions of identity, citizenship, and patriotism," *The Middle East Journal* 64, no. 4 (2010).

Gamila's takeaway was an inaccurate summary of what Ramy actually told us. Ismail then chimed in to correct her: "The fifth category was not Christians. It was: 1. Palestinian Israelis 2. Palestinians in E. Jerusalem 3. Palestinians in West Bank under the PA 4. Palestinian In Gaza under Hamas 5. Refugees in the Diaspora."⁴⁴²

This breakdown of communication interestingly demonstrates the fact that Palestinians do not hold space in much of Palestinian discourse. It further reflects the disconnect between the apparent "facts" presented in MLI, and the numerous ways Muslim MLIs digest and interpret the data with which they are inundated over the two two-week trips to Israel: In short, another round of "telephone" occurred as members of MLI attempted to understand the ethnic and religious composition of Palestinians. Related to these multiple levels of communication, reception, and (limited, often peripheral and unofficial) feedback, Muslim MLIs shared photos they took while on the tour, some of which are included below. The corresponding captions were created by the participants who posted the photos.

⁴⁴² Howard Litwin and Eliyahu V Sapir, "3.4 Israel: Diversity Among Population Groups," *3The SHARE Respondents* (2008).

Figure 55: Vandalized Arabic on Israeli Mile Marker



This photograph that Abbas provided is of a highway restoration marker that was vandalized. The Arabic portions of the marker have been crossed out, leaving the charitable marker defaced.⁴⁴³ Muslim MLers were struck by this vandalism, as

⁴⁴³ Ami Pedahzur and Yael Yishai, "Hatred by hated people: Xenophobia in Israel," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 22, no. 2 (1999).

apparently, even the language of Arabic was intolerable and unsightly for Israelis: another concrete reminder of the conflict. Abbas also sent the photo below of a Palestinian cemetery.

Figure 56: Trashed Palestinian Cemetery



Palestinian cemetery next to King David's tomb
full of trash.

As Abbas's caption points out, in the above photo, only the Palestinian side of the cemetery is littered. Fawad, a Desi Muslim, tellingly responded to this picture saying "Typical of Muslims today." There are two primary ways to interpret his statement. Fawad may have meant his comment facetiously to suggest that Israelis stereotype Palestinian Arabs as dirty creatures incapable of taking care of the land. His statement could also be interpreted as his own internalization of Islamophobic attitudes that

Muslims are careless. Either way, Fawad’s reaction to the photo reflected the visceral weight of Palestinian-Israeli and Muslim-Jewish tensions throughout the trip.

Interestingly, Fawad did not consider another likely cause of garbage being on the Palestinian side: That Jews were using the Arab cemetery as a dumping ground. His comment reflected the assumption that in any case, Muslims – and in this case Palestinians – were responsible for their own fate.

Related to Israeli vandalism of Muslim and Arab places and items, on one of our free days during our 2018 trip to Palestine, Nadine decided to take a solo walk around Jerusalem. She stated and shared the following: “I went to a Muslim graveyard today in Mamila where the Museum of Tolerance is being built on destroyed Muslim graves. See picture:”

Figure 57: Israeli Holocaust Museum Construction on Palestinian Graves



Nasreen replied: “Looks like museum of tolerance isn’t very tolerant.” Followed by a reply from Ismail saying “Museum of Intolerance!” Then Gamila replied to Ismail with the following quip: “That's an intolerant thing to say.”

Returning to our 2017 trip to Hebron, Ibrahim later reflected, “It's very interesting to see how the use of Judea and Samaria is used instead of West Bank. It's all over the news and even American commentators (who don't sound very competent at all trying to use it).” The West Bank is comprised of Judea and Samaria, but when people use these terms instead of the West Bank, they are drawing attention away from the occupation by using the historically biblical names for the area, reinforcing Jewish claims to the West Bank.⁴⁴⁴ Ibrahim notes that usage of Judea and Samaria is pervasive throughout U.S. American media, which demonstrates American-Israeli solidarity to Ibrahim. More broadly, Ibrahim is pointing to the ways in which euphemisms are an effective tactic of erasure and a way to assert dominant truth claims. If you don’t call the West Bank the West Bank, how can it be occupied?⁴⁴⁵

In addition to these religio-political tensions, practical concerns about safety were of primary importance when we entered occupied territories. When we were on our tour Abdullah once again reminded us in the group chat, “MAKE SURE YOUR PASSPORT WILL BE WITH YOU. Please double check as we will go to RAMALLAH [an occupied territory] tonight to meet with Salam Fayyad. We will have a dinner conversation with

⁴⁴⁴ AJ Caschetta, "Mapping Israel, Mapping Palestine," *Middle East Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2020).

⁴⁴⁵ Ahmad Barclay, "Mapping Palestine: Erasure and Unerasure," *Sharpening the Haze: Visual Essays on Imperial History and Memory* (2020).

the former prime minister and have a tour of Ramallah afterwards depending on the weather we may even hang out a bit.” As we made our way to Hebron/Al-Khalil our bus took a pit stop before arriving at the West Bank border and check point. Our tour guide, Ramy, casually asked all the White female converts to switch to window seats, so that the IDF soldiers manning the check point would be less inclined to hassle an entire bus full of visibly Brown Muslims. Nadine, Sarah, and I quickly complied with Ramy’s request. Both Nadine and Sarah expressed anxiety about the actual effectiveness of this tactic, while simultaneously being delighted that they could contribute to the group’s safety by operationalizing their Whiteness. Ramy thanked us all as Nadine replied, “Happy to do it. Glad my pale skin and freckles are useful for something.” Sarah added a nervous “Hope this works,” as we settled into our new seats and headed for the checkpoint. As we rolled up to the occupied territories border, we were met with this sign:

Figure 58: West Bank Area A Israeli Checkpoint Sign



As the sign states, the sector of the West Bank we were about to enter is legally under the control of the Palestinian Authority (PA).⁴⁴⁶ The warning issued on the sign, that this entrance is “forbidden” to Israeli citizens, and is illegal for them due to the imminent threat and danger to their lives was jarring for many Muslim MLers. Alper expressed confusion, “Why would their lives be in danger, they are the occupiers.” Javed responded saying “It’s a fear tactic, they probably just don’t want Israeli’s seeing what happens under the Occupation.” Kamillah quipped back, “That makes no sense, they have

⁴⁴⁶ The Palestinian Authority (PA) is an interim Palestinian government that was established as a result of the Oslo Accords that were signed in 1995. The PA was granted limited powers of governance in areas A and B of the West Bank occupied territories. Area C is under complete Israeli governmental control and is 60% of the total territory that comprises the West Bank.

mandatory military service, they all know what's going on because they all did the same thing while they were serving.” Ramy jumped in to explain that while Areas A and B of the West Bank may officially be under the control of the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli government and military are still in control of external security matters. However, as Ramy continued to explain, Israeli military presence in Areas A and B are minimal, therefore this lack of military presence makes these areas “dangerous” in Israeli eyes. Ramy additionally stated, “The illegality of crossing into the occupied territories is also to limit communication and advocacy efforts between Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis, and Palestinians living in occupied territories.” Kamillah chimed in, “Now that makes sense! Divide and conquer colonial tactics!”⁴⁴⁷ As we were waved through the check point unharassed, Ramy cheerfully remarked “And thank you to our fair lady friends for our smooth transition into PA territory! Well done!” Immediately after we cleared the check point we pulled over at a rest stop to pick up four additional passengers and to change our attire. As Haroon stated in a previous preparation message to the group: “Folks. You'll be going to the Ibrahimi Mosque today. That means you should plan to dress and prepare accordingly. That means dressing appropriately to a mosque. Thanks!” At this pit stop, all the women in our cohort were instructed to put their abayas and hijabs on, which we did. Ramy further explained how this would ensure our continued safety, which was also now being guaranteed by the four Palestinian Authority Security Services officers that were now with us and would remain with us for the duration of our time in the West Bank.

⁴⁴⁷ Laura A Lewis, *Hall of mirrors: power, witchcraft, and caste in colonial Mexico* (Duke University Press, 2003).

We finally arrived at Al-Khalil/Hebron. I have already recounted the events that I myself and my fellow MLers underwent in Hebron in the introduction to this dissertation, and so I will not recount them here, except to relay the experience summed up through the words of Gamila: “Well if we weren’t all trauma bonded before, we are now.”

Immediately below is a picture of our tour guide Ramy stuck at the IDF controlled exit of Al-Khalil. What is not in the photo are the twenty-five MLers also stuck in the preceding caged corral, in which we stood for two hours with M16 rifles pointed at us.

Figure 59: Ramy Trapped in Hebron Gates



Ramy stuck exiting from the Hebron old town.

Below are a few photographs of the Israeli controlled entrances and exits that MLers were stuck and held in when we visited Hebron on our 2017 trip to Palestine/Israel.

Figure 60: IDF Controlled Hebron Gates 1



Figure 61: IDF Controlled Hebron Gates 2



Hebron/Al-Khalil, being a partitioned and occupied city has garnered a nickname “Ghost Town.”⁴⁴⁸ The below photograph, captioned and shared by Yasra, shows how deserted the streets of Hebron are on a daily basis, very different from the crowded bustling streets and markets of Jerusalem:

⁴⁴⁸ Sophia Goodfriend, "A Street View of Occupation: Getting Around Hebron on Google Maps," *Visual Anthropology Review* 37, no. 2 (2021).

Figure 62: Ghost Town



Ghost town

There was also resistance graffiti throughout the town, captured and shared in the following image by Yazmine:

Figure 63: Fight Ghost Town



This resistance graffiti states “Fight Ghost Town: Open Shuhada Street.” Shuhada street was the main thoroughfare to the Ibrahimi Mosque and the location of the central market.⁴⁴⁹ In 1994 the street was closed by the Israeli government, all Palestinian shops were closed, and no foot or vehicular traffic by Palestinians was allowed.⁴⁵⁰ The central

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Feras Hammami, "Rupture in heritage: strategies of dispossession, elimination and co-resistance," *Settler Colonial Studies* (2022).

bus station that was located on Shuhada street was also repurposed as an Israeli Army base. There is a nearby market; however it is located on a Jewish settlement and therefore closed to Palestinians. There have also been incidents of Jewish settlers attacking and assaulting Palestinian inhabitants of Hebron.⁴⁵¹ With a Jewish Settlement so close and such a strong IDF presence, Hebron is a ghost town, what Haroon described as “where all hope goes to die.” But there was no time to process or wade through our raw emotions, as we all had a date with the President. We piled back into the bus and headed to Ramallah. Ramallah is in the same area as Hebron, closer to the border and approximately twenty-five miles from Hebron. Coming from Hebron, our entrance to a very high-class hotel in Ramallah, where we were to engage in an informal learning session with former Palestinian President Salam Fayyad, was shocking. Amir casually remarked “Well isn’t this swanky! Quite a difference from Ghost Town!” Laila irritably stated “I bet no real Palestinians can afford to stay here.” Kamillah could not hide her disgust as she emotively waved her hand in the air and said, “This makes me feel gross. Knowing those people are sitting in abject poverty wasting away in Hebron, and we are here indulging in lavishness that they will never know in their own fucking country.” To demonstrate these MLers sentiments I have included some pictures of the Ramallah hotel we visited.

⁴⁵¹ David Shulman, *Freedom and Despair: Notes from the South Hebron Hills* (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

Figure 64: Ramallah Hotel Lobby 1



Figure 65: Ramallah Hotel Lobby 2

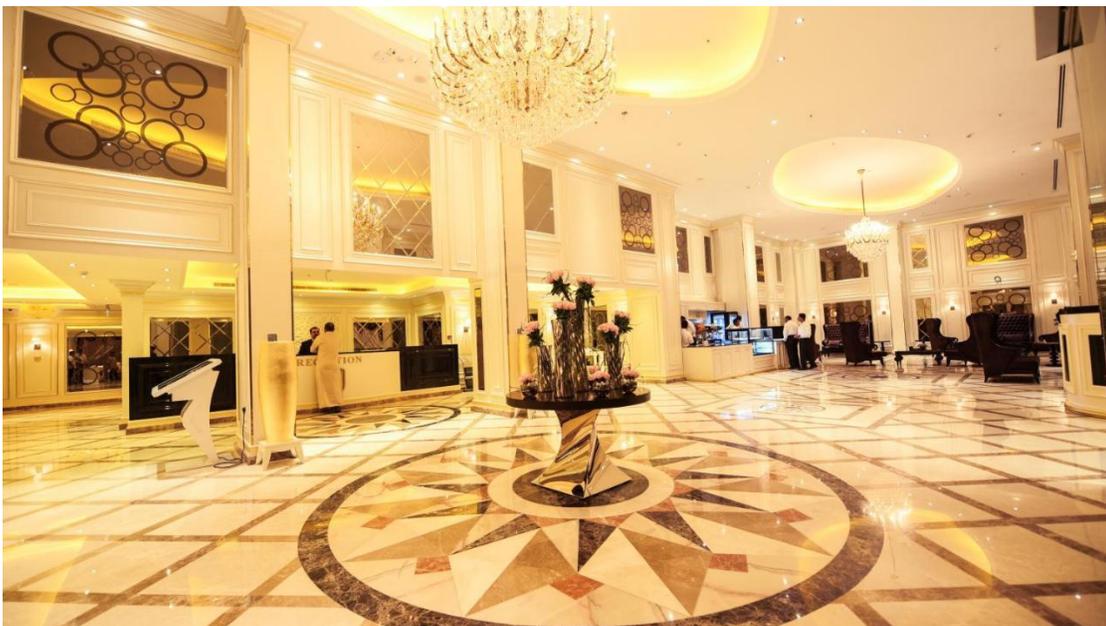


Figure 66: Ramallah Hotel Lounge



Former President Fayyad spoke candidly with us about internal Palestinian issues, his belief that a two-state solution is possible if rooted in Palestinian empowerment, and the infighting amongst Palestinians themselves, which he expressed as the most pressing hurdle that needs to be overcome.⁴⁵² MLIer reactions to Fayyad's political stances varied quite starkly. Ibrahim agreed with Fayyad saying "Fayyad is right. Palestinians need to help themselves, take care of their own, and stop dividing themselves." Javed echoed Ibrahim's assertions, but with one caveat saying "Fayyad is right about Palestinian empowerment and stopping the infighting, but a two-state solution is not tenable. It's never going to happen, so he needs a new goal." Kamillah curtly commented "He's an apologist for the Occupation. He basically said Palestinians aren't capable of self-rule. What kind of colonial bullshit is that!" Gamila was quick to confront Kamillah, replying

⁴⁵² Alexei Abrahams, "Strategy, unity and coercion: Lessons from the Palestinian struggle," *Mediterranean Politics* 24, no. 1 (2019/01/01 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2017.1379587>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2017.1379587>.

“That’s just too extreme and not true. I mean he is right, they need to find ways to lift themselves up and decide what they want. Like how are we supposed to help them if they don’t even know what they want?” Ismail chimed in saying “At least he is trying to find a positive way forward, it feels hopeless, especially after Hebron, and after hearing about all the infighting...I just feel hopeless.” And it was with this hopelessness that we exited the hotel and filed back onto the bus to head to the checkpoint to get back into Jerusalem. Without any prompting the three White female MLIs disrobed, removing their abayas and hijabs, revealing blonde and red hair, mindfully placing ourselves in window seats on the bus. We sailed through the check point in silence.

We returned to the Jerusalem hotel, some of us going straight to our rooms, while others chose to gather for an informal processing session of all the things witnessed and experienced throughout the day. What follows are excerpts from those conversations.

Abbas: Can't shake the images of Hebron and the plight of Palestinians in occupation. Sadly, Palestinian rights and humanity has been gradually and deceitfully eroded. They are worse off today than they ever were. Their destiny is fast moving toward apartheid and complete occupation of their land, first by war and then for security and biblical justifications. We, the American Muslims, are among the fading hope of keeping the Palestinian aspirations alive. But we have also been craftily put on the defensive and being duped into neutrality in the guise of common cause. What a shame and tragedy of historic proportion. For Palestinians, their houses have been burned down and we can't even think of sending a care package to their children. If we have forgotten Hebron, we have left behind our humanity too.

Zainab chimed in: “It’s really tough to process.”

Javed responded: “Yeah this partnership becomes a challenge under these circumstances.” Here Javed refers to the partnership between MLI and SHI, or more to the point, between Muslims and Jews.

Manahil expressed, “Really a very sad day, and all the innocent lives lost.”

Nasreen was so overcome she wasn’t sure she could participate: “Honestly, I’m not sure I can process with a group tonight. But I will sit with you all.”

Sarah commented on Haroon’s Hebron adage: “Haroon was right, Hebron kills hope, I’m just hopeless.”

Gamila reflected on the high stakes we experienced that day: “Let’s be honest...that was fucking scary! I was scared. I mean we were trapped. Literally trapped. And I couldn’t breathe.”

Yasra similarly expressed feelings of dehumanization: “I was freaking out. We were being treated like animals. I felt like a cow that was about to be slaughtered.”

The reoccurring topics related to racialized religious socioconstructs between and among Palestine and Israel came up several times during this informal session. Kamillah stated: “To them we are the animals, but they are barbaric.” Ibrahim reminded us of the racial hierarchy operational within our own community: “Ain’t nothing new for me! But I’m a Black man.” Nadine commented on her own White privilege, indirectly pointing to the ways in which many non-Muslims, including the IDF, racialize Islam, presuming the White women were not Muslim: “It was fun using my Whiteness today, but honestly I’m just not sure how to feel. I know I feel heavy. The weight of today is going to be with us for a long time. I don’t know if the Hartman people realize the effects?”⁴⁵³

⁴⁵³ Sohail Daulatzai and Junaid Rana, *With stones in our hands: Writings on muslims, racism, and empire* (U of Minnesota Press, 2018).

Nasreen, despite her exhaustion, chimed in: “I agree....I think they include Hebron as an effort to be transparent...but don’t fully understand the impact.”

Kamillah: “Oh yes they do! And its fucking disgusting. I wasn’t shocked or scared. What I am now is pissed and questioning being a part of this whole program.”

Kamillah’s comments were a foreshadowing of her future decision to leave MLI.

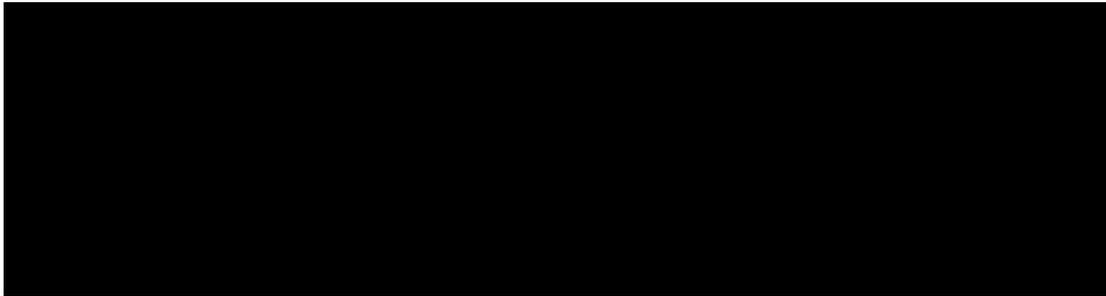
Gamila responded: “Yah but we aren’t here to solve Hebron! We aren’t even here to solve or help the Palestinians at all. We are here to learn about them (Jews/Israelis) and their perspectives. Clearly they think the security measures in Hebron are necessary. Are we here to ask why? Or to just try and understand that for Israelis this is what makes them feel safe?” Gamila pointed to the structure of MLI, which is intended to teach Muslims about Jewish peoplehood in relation to Israel, not Muslim people in relation to Palestine.

Kamillah chimed in with a common parallel that critics of Israel draw between the Holocaust and the current genocidal policies of Israel: “Committing genocide is what makes them feel safe? They talk so much about the Holocaust and their own fucking genocide, but they turn around and do it to the Palestinians? That’s bullshit...and that’s what Hebron felt like, a fucking concentration camp.” Had the stark imagery, lack of population, and overall harsh living conditions not been enough, we were reminded that Hebron acts as an actual cage when we were literally physically trapped trying to exit the city.

It is interesting to note that the night before leaving for our day trip to Al-Khalil we engaged in a scheduled learning session about the Holocaust and its impacts on

Jewish identity. Below is a snippet of the schedule that shows this learning module preceding our trip to Hebron.

Figure 67: Hebron and the Holocaust on the Schedule



The connections drawn between our experience in Hebron and the Holocaust may not have necessarily been a natural occurrence, had the curriculum not been ordered in this way. The centrality of the Holocaust in connection to Jewish fears of extermination are a main justification for the partition and IDF presence in Hebron. The pedagogical choice of SHI to put those themes back to back was to instill in MLers the possibility of the necessity for that type of security/violence and control over a seemingly contentious area given its holiness to both Jews and Muslims. Jewish leadership in SHI may well have been trying to show that their security measures and violence are justified by anti-Semitism and genocidal fears.⁴⁵⁴ The curriculum and schedule were set up that way with the hope that MLers would have some understanding and sympathy for what Donniel terms the consistent and constant “loneliness of the Jews.”⁴⁵⁵ This is a phrase that

⁴⁵⁴ Alon Confino, "The Holocaust and the Nakba: Memory, National Identity and Jewish-Arab Partnership," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 24, no. 3/4 (2019).

⁴⁵⁵ Louise Katz, "Narratives of Violence and Hope in Israel/Palestine," *Literature & Aesthetics* 30, no. 2 (2020).

conjures up the original Jewish Question asked during the early formation of the Nation state.⁴⁵⁶ The Jewish Question essentially asked questions along the lines of: Who wants the Jews; who will deal with the Jews; can the Jews be us? The Jewish Question left Jews with the feeling that they were and are alone in the world, which informs state policies when dealing with Palestinians and other neighboring nations.⁴⁵⁷ Jews only have Jews, which is why they uphold self-reliance and only depend on themselves to ensure their safety. Otherwise, as history has shown, Jews are left at the mercy of Nazi logics and in contemporary contexts, the possibility of being overrun by anti-Semitic neighboring nations.⁴⁵⁸ As Muslim reactions to this combination of scheduled events show, this approach to justify Israeli state policies as necessitated by the suffering of Jewish peoples often backfired. Muslim participants instead continued to take issue with the one-sided approach and format of MLI.

Yasra continued the back and forth debate about whether the treatment of Palestinians constitutes an actual genocide: "I don't think that's the impact they were after. I mean I agree I did not feel all safe and secure, but it's not comparable to the actual Holocaust."⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁶ Dmitry Shumsky, *Beyond the Nation-State* (Yale University Press, 2018).

⁴⁵⁷ Lawrence Davidson, "On the 'new anti-semitism' and its political and religious consequences," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 17, no. 2 (2018).

⁴⁵⁸ Schroeter, "'Islamic Anti-Semitism'" in *Historical Discourse*.

⁴⁵⁹ The issue of the uniqueness of the Holocaust is up for debate within oppressed communities as well as Genocide Studies discourses. For more see Donna Robinson Divine, "The gatekeepers," *Israel Affairs* 26, no. 3 (2020); Marouf Hasian, "Introduction: Critical Genocide Studies and the Need for Twenty-First-Century Decolonization Debates," in *Debates on Colonial Genocide in the 21st Century* (Springer, 2020);

Zainab similarly tried to wade through the heavy political undercurrents that ruled our day: "I think we are tired and traumatized and there's a lot wrong on all sides when it comes to this place. But it's clear we can't solve any of it." On that note, we all went our separate ways. Later that evening Haroon sent the following message to the entire cohort via our group chat:

Salam folks.

I was happy I was able to speak to many of you this evening, and sincerely apologize to the many I wasn't able to get to. I know today was really hard, but I ask you to hold this thought in your minds for our last two days.

We recruited you to join a program that does something very rewarding even as it's very challenging. We ask you to engage in a learning experience with Zionists. To feel free to push back, yes, and ask hard questions -- but at the same time, and critically, this is not an engagement program.

It is our chance to learn how a significant number of American and Israeli Jews understand themselves and their relationship to their peoplehood and Israel. It's a chance to inhabit that perspective both for the value of that engagement and to empower more sophisticated conversations back in North America.

That is a challenging exercise, and something I hope we can all think about for tomorrow and Thursday. What does a successful cohort look like? What does it mean to understand a narrative you may not agree with at some of its most fundamental levels? How do we engage people over significant and critical differences of opinion? There's a lot there, and a lot to process.

But I hope all of us can see the value of being here, of Hartman's willingness and desire to see some of the rawest wounds in this land, and in creating a group of Muslim leaders who can find ways to build trust with those we are so very different from. It's only on the basis of that trust,

Gavriel D Rosenfeld, "The politics of uniqueness: Reflections on the recent polemical turn in Holocaust and genocide scholarship," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13, no. 1 (1999).

mutual regard and respect that we will be able to channel our anger and frustration into productive outcomes.
Just my two cents.

Apologies for any disturbance.
Warmly wa salam,

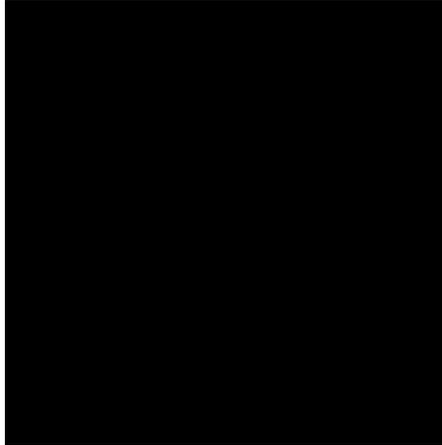
Abdullah sent a consecutive message that closed out the day: “Salams friends, I pray you all rested after a difficult, long but rewarding day. Thank you Haroon for your thoughtful and helpful reflections and suggestions. We will unpack the raw realities that we witnessed today among ourselves and with our Hartman friends inshallah.”

Visit to an Illegal Settlement: Efrat

The feelings and tensions expressed above about our experiences during our first trip to Israel/Palestine in 2017 were never resolved and only further compounded by our second visit to Israel/Palestine in 2018. On our second trip to Palestine we took a day trip that included visiting one of Israel’s many illegal settlements, Efrat. According to the United Nations, these settlements are illegal because of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which discusses the necessity of protecting non-combatants during war time.⁴⁶⁰ The founder of Efrat, and its current Mayor is Oded Revivi, pictured below.

⁴⁶⁰ Nadia Ben-Youssef and Sandra Samaan Tamari, "Enshrining Discrimination: Israel's Nation-State Law," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 1 (2018).

Figure 68: Oded Revivi, Founder of Efrat



Upon entering the settlement office, we were given pamphlet materials enclosed in a folder, with a picture of the cover below. Enclosed in this folder was a myriad of reading material that described the population composition, individual and social resources such as housing and community buildings, along with information about annual allocated budgets and their utilization. Additionally, a short biography of Efrat's Mayor, Oded Revivi, was enclosed along with the other materials. I have included a snapshot of his biography below.

Figure 69: Efrat, Illegal Settlement Information Folder Cover

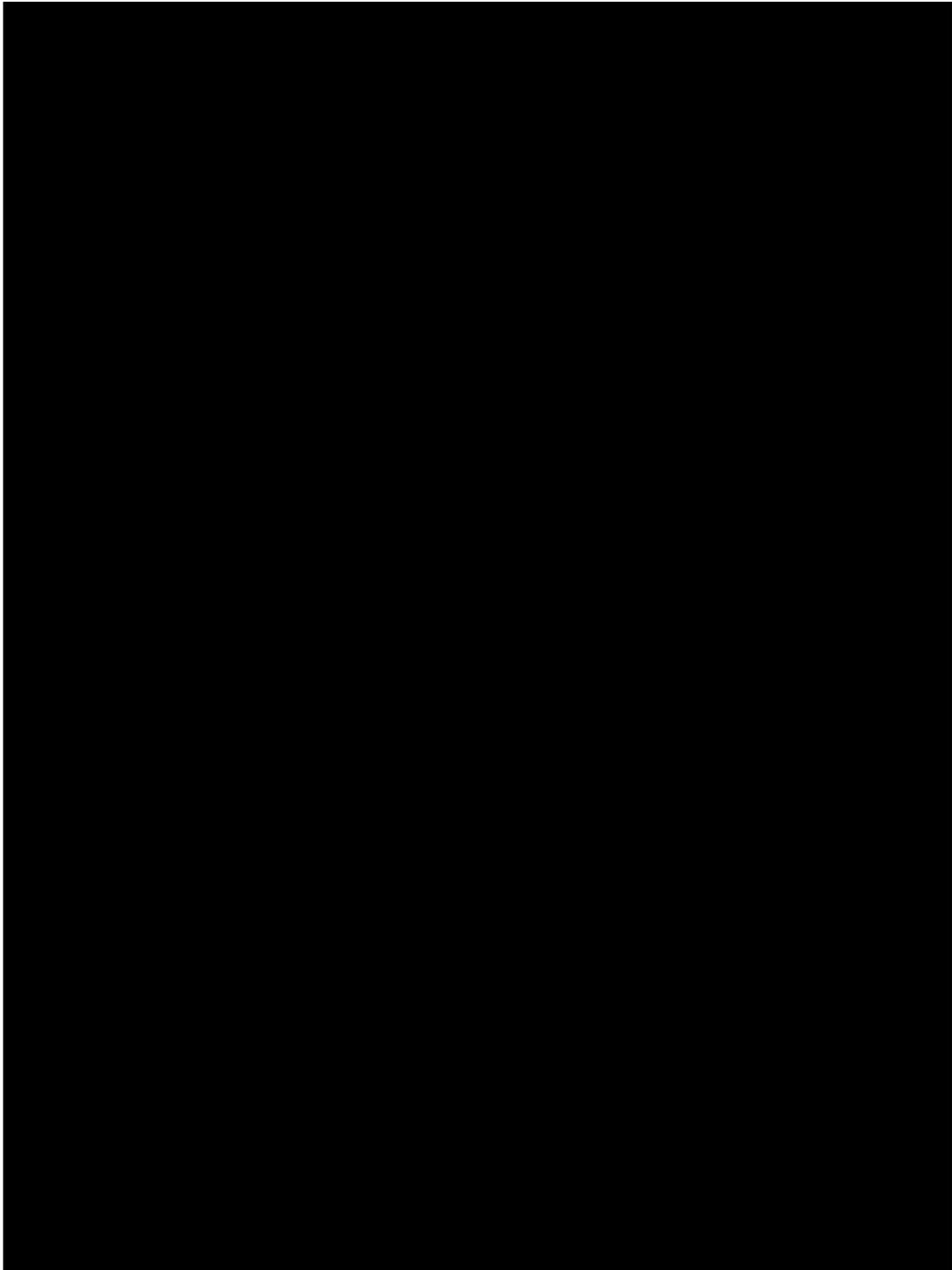
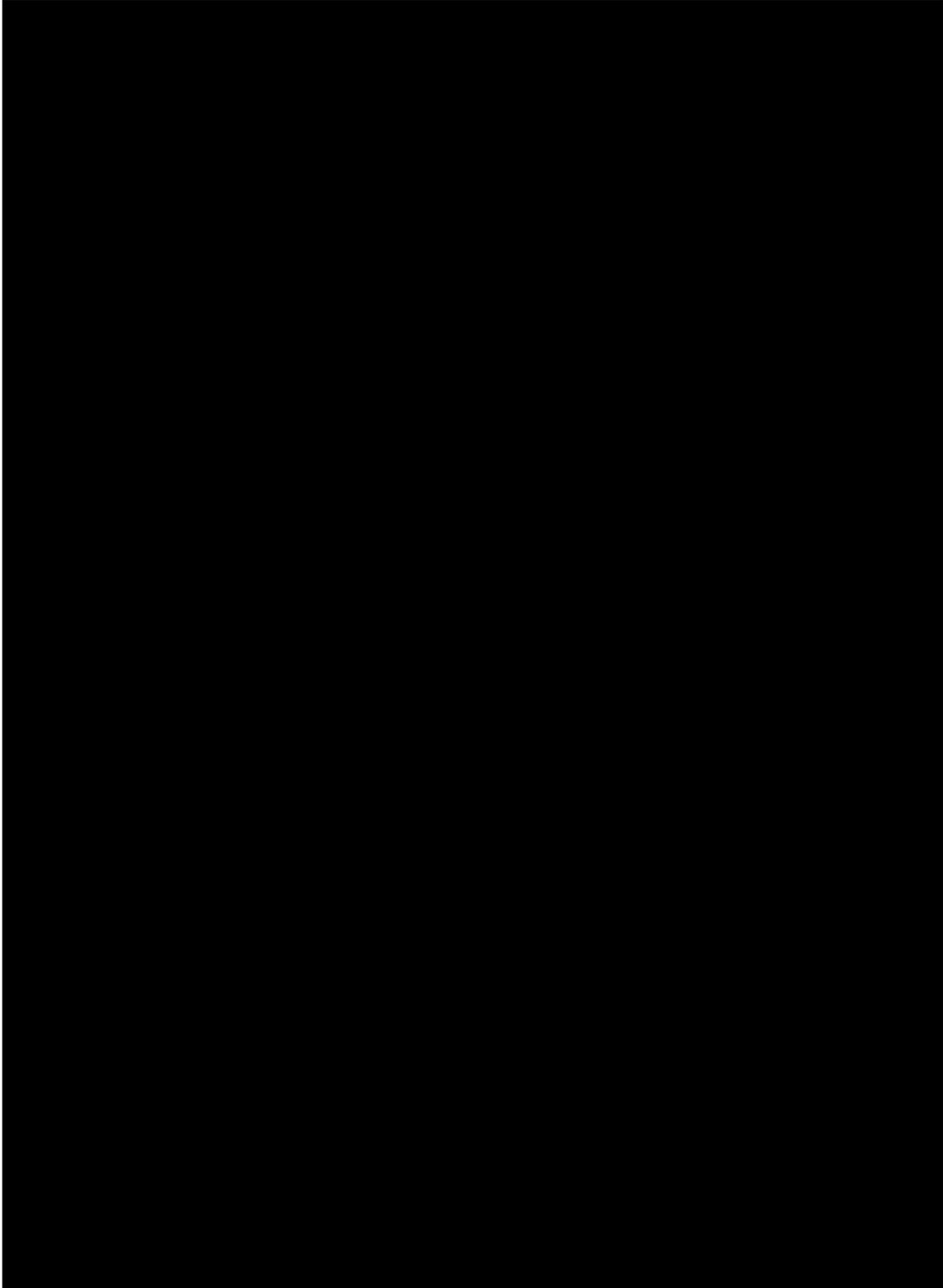


Figure 70: Oded Revivi Biographical Data



Apart from his extensive military service, another interesting portion of Revivi's biography touches on the fact that he is involved in "religious pluralism in Israel." The language used here mirrors the language that Shalom Hartman employs as part of their main mission and motto, which talks about fostering democratic Israel and instilling pluralistic values. However, from my previous analysis of Shalom Hartman's pedagogy in Chapter 2, it is clear that pluralism in reality means Jewish pluralism only, reinforcing the idea that the state of Israel, or what it considers to be Jewish land, is to be inhabited by a variety of Jews, but only Jews. Revivi's military background and connections are important to how illegal settlements exist and survive in the occupied territories, meaning wherever there is an illegal settlement, there is a considerable battalion/IDF base nearby.⁴⁶¹ So while Israeli government officials may play at the politics of respectability by denying that illegal settlements are being built and/or protected by official governmental aide, the reality is that the IDF ensures the safety and protection of Israeli settlers. During the visit we met with several settlers; a visit to the illegal settlement was SHI's attempt once again at transparency: to share with Muslims some of the more uncomfortable realities of Israel state policy. Upon meeting the settlers, we discovered that many of them described their settlement as "a return home." The settlers we spoke with were primarily of eastern European descent, some of whom had migrated to the U.S. and then decided to make Aliyah to the illegal settlements. Some settlers had migrated to the settlement from somewhere else inside Israel. What they all had in common was that

⁴⁶¹ Yagil Levy, "The Israeli military: imprisoned by the religious community," *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 2 (2011).

they felt a moral obligation to settle in their “indigenous” land to further efforts of the expansion of the state of Israel. Below are excerpts from MLers’ reactions to some of these conversations with settlers.

Kamillah: “The way 'indigenous' was used in the settlement to self-describe a Latvian immigrant. A 'rose' by another name might not be a rose. Just sayin'.” Nasreen replied, “We are in the twilight zone!” Here, Kamillah and Nasreen point out the perceived hypocrisy of a Latvian, or more to the point White settler self-identifying as indigenous to the land of Palestine, a land this particular settler was not born in, had never visited, whose language was not his own, and who was perceived by MLers as an embodiment of settler colonial privilege.⁴⁶² In the next chapter, I unpack in more detail these issues of inter- and intra-racism as they overlap with the sociocultural and religious positionalities of all those embroiled in the Palestine-Israel conflict. As Kamillah’s and Nasreen’s reactions to the trip to an illegal settlement indicate, the positionality of oppressed oppressors is central to understanding the ideological underpinnings of the multiplicity of attitudes towards Israel/Palestine. Our visit to the settlement was simply stifling in terms of our quickly diminishing hope that change might be possible, and how we might contribute to that effort. MLI, in total, once having completed the curriculum in Jerusalem, is meant to open new lines of communication based on human-to-human understanding of the complex positionalities that Jews and Muslims transnationally inhabit. However, the exploration of these new avenues seemed impossible as we left

⁴⁶² Ukashi, "Zionism, Imperialism, and Indigeneity in Israel/Palestine: A Critical Analysis."

Jerusalem behind to return to our real lives. Due to the emotional gravity of the MLI experience, I conclude my chapter with some of the aftermath participants continued to experience while trying to reacclimate to everyday life outside of Israel/Palestine.

Post-Processing: The Aftermath

Related to the subversive, indirect, and/or unintentional effects of the structure of MLI, many MLIs described and/or exhibited trauma as the result of their participation. Below is a collection of exchanges amongst MLIs after we returned home from Israel/Palestine in 2017 and 2018. Several MLIs shared that they were experiencing bad dreams.

Yasra: "I've been having the craziest settler/west bank/Israeli/Palestinian dreams."

Gamila: "My dreams are crazy too."

Yazmine: "Mine too"

Manahil: "Same here!! Like some apocalyptic stuff"

The pervasiveness of nightmares and general unease show that these MLIs experienced collective trauma as a result of their participation and their trips to Israel/Palestine.⁴⁶³

What is interesting is that even with this trauma, or perhaps because of it, there is also a pervasive yearning as a group to return to Jerusalem as Gamila previously expressed when she asserted that Jerusalem was "ours," too. Hopelessness, and specifically, hopelessness as a result of socio-religio-political ongoing in the U.S. and abroad, remained a primary takeaway throughout these conversations.

⁴⁶³ Hirschberger, "Collective trauma and the social construction of meaning."

Nadine: “I am struggling with how small and insignificant I feel in America. I had forgotten about that feeling. I'd rather battle djinn than the next 4 years of Trump. 🗨️”⁴⁶⁴

Nadine here is comparing her feelings of insignificance in Israel and her inability to effectively make positive change for the Palestinians to how insignificant and powerless she felt under the Trump Administration in the U.S.⁴⁶⁵ Note Nadine, the White, freckled redhead’s use of the Black Power fist in her text message sent to our group WhatsApp chat, clearly conveying that although current feelings of powerlessness were ruling her, she was not about to give up the good fight.⁴⁶⁶ She also, if unintentionally, racializes herself in relation to her Muslim identity, indirectly pointing to the ways that many people perceive Islam and Whiteness as mutually exclusive.

In response to Manahil, Yasra replied: “Yes. Apocalyptic and all really stressful. Secrets, lies, helplessness,” here again echoing the weight and hopelessness many MLers exhibited during and after their trips.

Nadine tellingly reflected, “This experience isn't just giving me a language in Jewish-Muslim relationships -- it's providing a new language in how to be a human being.” Here Nadine indicates that the difficulties and hard conversations we were subject to in Palestine were fruitful in that they engaged MLer empathy. Regardless of

⁴⁶⁴ Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the intelligent world of the jinn* (Syracuse University Press, 2009).

⁴⁶⁵ Lajevardi and Oskooii, "Old-fashioned racism, contemporary islamophobia, and the isolation of Muslim Americans in the age of Trump."

⁴⁶⁶ Kyle Davidson and Jennifer Blair, "Semiotic analysis of the raised fist emoji as a sign of resilience," *Semiotics* (2018).

agreement, all MLers walked away from the program with new understanding about Jews, Judaism, and how Jews feel about Israel. This firsthand knowledge was novel for most MLers and left a standing impression.

Zainab commented on her preoccupation over the privilege and comforts many Muslim minorities in the transnational context and especially in Palestine do not have access to, stating, “Everything feels off. I am feeling guilty for having comfort and uneasy about returning back to the routine.”

Yasra contributed her own feelings of trauma: “Thx for sharing this...I went to my first major event last night and people kept asking - did you have so much fun? I couldn't Answer that question as I didn't see our trip as ‘fun.’”

Sarah echoed prior comments with regard to the conditions for Palestinians in Palestine as well as her own strange dreams, a phenomenon that the women in particular expressed: “Ahhh the dreams... I miss you all dearly... trying to reconcile our reality here with the reality(s) we left over there and am having a tough time... I am also afraid of forgetting -this reality has a way of seducing that I find hard to escape...”

The comments about feeling traumatized and displaced were staggering, and continue below:

Yousef: “I've already got some of my co-workers asking and I don't know what to say - I can't really talk about everything. It's gonna be weird tomorrow at work.”

Nadine: “I know! And I'm heading to a Palestinian wedding in a few hours...”

Kamillah: “I've been telling people that I'm still processing. Not ready to talk.”

Javed: “Yep. Caught in a daze of too many different thoughts and emotions. At some point I may lay them all out in a travelogue of sorts.”

Nasreen: “I’m glad I’m not the only one having crazy dreams.”

The impacts, intentional or otherwise, of participation in the MLI program are clearly lasting and deep. MLI organizers and leaders, having been through the program themselves, understand the layered and multifaceted impacts that the curriculum causes for its participants. The scheduling of processing sessions during the trips is evidence of MLI leadership’s awareness of the intensity of the program. These processing sessions, while conscientious, are not enough to mitigate the total effects of the program. This is why MLI retreats are scheduled twice a year, so that new topics and tensions can be breached, but also to continue to help MLIs frame and reframe the information and experiences visited on them while in Palestine. These retreats also offer an opportunity for experienced cohorts to prepare new cohorts that have not yet embarked on their MLI adventure. In short, the post-Jerusalem format of MLI builds in a working mentorship network amongst Muslims while maintaining access to Jewish resources. The scope of my work does not allow further attention to the retreats and the several years of aftermath to which I have been privy in the wake of my participation in MLI, but the retreats and the ongoing communication between members in the five-plus years since we embarked on our first trip as a cohort highlight the ongoing work MLIs must engage in in order to healthily process their experiences in Palestine. Of primary interest here and elsewhere is the reality that the SHI curriculum starts to take on a life of its own as it is processed and adapted by Muslim participants, despite SHI’s imposed Muslim silence. When all is said

and done, many Muslim MLers continue to view MLI as a coveted opportunity to learn from a religious minority group that SHI leaders and Muslim participants alike view as a model for minority success in America and transnationally. In the next chapter, I conduct an analysis of the complex perspectives Muslim MLers hold towards inter and intra-racialized religious structures and positionalities. These underlying assumptions about race, religion, and social hierarchy revealed themselves as Muslim members discussed and maneuvered the MLI/SHI network.

Chapter 4: Color Lines

This chapter unpacks race as a premier social organization schema impacting and operational within the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI). Chapters 2 and 3 focused on the Shalom Hartman Institute's pedagogy and Muslim MLIs' receptions of these pedagogical materials. It is important to reiterate here that the MLI experience recounted in the previous chapters is primarily situated within the Israel/Palestine context physically as well as educationally. The primacy of Israel within the SHI pedagogy delivered to MLIs in conjunction with physically sitting in Israel while receiving this Jewish and Zionist education brought to the surface multiple racialized dynamics. It is these structurally racialized experiences and dialogues that I aim to unpack in this chapter. Muslim MLIs and Jewish SHI hosts and instructors, who operate within transnational as well as primarily U.S. American contexts, exhibit patterned approaches with their understanding of dominant racial and other social hierarchies as well as the ways in which they attempt to maneuver within these stratifications. As previously stated, MLI and its participants are recruited as Muslim leaders in North America, are primarily from the U.S. and are recognized as leaders within their local U.S. American Muslim communities. It is here that I turn to a primary argument of my project. MLI on the surface may appear to be an organization that centers on Israel/Palestine and related histories of conflict. In reality, MLI in essence is a group of North American Muslims and North American Jews engaging over issues revolving around this conflict as it affects Muslims and Jews transnationally. This point is crucial, as MLI must be understood as an organization that is explicitly transnational *and* North American. For these reasons, this

chapter examines racism and racialization MLers experience and enact within Israel/Palestine, the U.S. and North American contexts. Whereas Chapters 2 and 3 discuss racism and racialization as they occurred in Zionist teachings and while "in country" in Palestine/Israel, I now necessarily turn to the U.S. North American social milieux that influence how Muslim MLers perceive, combat, and at times enact racism. The U.S. component of this conversation is crucial as both Jewish SHI hosts and instructors and Muslim MLers offer and engage in MLI as a potential avenue for success in North American arenas.

The unique history of race in the Americas has culminated in a racial hierarchy that collapses religious, ethnic, and national identities into a seamless identity encompassed by color.⁴⁶⁷ These overlapping hierarchies are at the forefront of MLI both explicitly and implicitly. The processes by which race collapses identity are often referred to as *racialization*. *Racialization* refers to a macro-mechanism for identity formation, a dual reciprocal process that establishes the racial and religious boundaries that simultaneously produce the dominant group and then define a hierarchical group of non-dominant communities in juxtaposition with this norm.⁴⁶⁸ MLers grapple with these identity categories in different and complicated ways. One unifying factor across religious lines in MLI and SHI is that Muslims and Jews both, on the whole, identify as religious minorities transnationally and in Western national contexts. This chapter walks

⁴⁶⁷ Kathryn Gin Lum, *Heathens: Religion and Race in American History* (Harvard University Press, 2022).

⁴⁶⁸ Gans, "Racialization and racialization research."

through the assumptions and understandings of race operational in MLI and SHI, reflected both within and across religious lines in this context. Many MLers maneuver the imposed hierarchies of racial categorization in complex ways. These maneuverings reflect their perceived and lived religious minority status. MLers sidestep, internalize, and enforce racial ideologies that preserve and/or elevate their individual and collective positionalities. To shed light on these maneuverings, I first extrapolate how race and racism interlock with color and colorism to produce multi-layered oppressive hierarchies present and operational within MLI, SHI, and the transnational arenas they inhabit. This leads to a pertinent discussion about how Whiteness is used and understood by MLers within the many contexts and confrontations experienced by MLers while in Palestine/Israel, their local home communities in the U.S., and the multiple transnational activist networks they are part of. Within this discussion of Whiteness I tackle issues of Arab supremacy within MLI as well as Ashkenazi supremacy within SHI as they reflect and inform one another in relation to White supremacist racial logics. I then address how Whiteness is operationalized through Arabness. This is related to Desi MLers' racialized navigations that encompass an overarching goal of obtaining upward social mobility for themselves as well as the transnational and diasporic communities they serve. These navigations reveal complex collective identity processes such as White adjacency, Muslim mainstreaming, and strategic essentialism. In conjunction with these revealed processes, I analyze their effects in overlapping arenas that uncover issues of internalized oppressions and double consciousness.

As we will see, many of these navigations are constrained choices that force MLers to support – whether directly or inadvertently - the very hierarchies of their own oppression, all in the hope that they are climbing their way to the top of real and imagined racial hierarchies. I envision this process as a perpetual game of hopscotch, which is to say that unlike climbing a ladder, this game of ascendancy cannot be permanently completed or won.⁴⁶⁹ Understanding the constraints that limit these choices sheds light on the costs of existing as a racialized, gendered religious minority, and makes visible the flimsy myth of social mobility. I now turn to some of the ways in which MLI participants and SHI hosts and instructors understand and enact these concepts.

RACIAL SPECTRUMS

After returning home from the first two-week trip to Jerusalem in 2017, MLers were faced with the Trump administration’s “travel ban,” which many MLers and members of the broader U.S. American population referred to as the “Muslim Ban.”⁴⁷⁰ In response to this new reality, Kamillah sent the following poem to our cohort via our WhatsApp group chat:

Autopsy
Last night, I dreamed that my passport bled.
I dreamed that my passport was a tombstone
For our United States, recently dead.
I dreamed that my passport was made of bone—

That it was a canoe carved out of stone.

⁴⁶⁹ Peter E. Hopkins, "Young people, masculinities, religion and race: new social geographies," *Progress in Human Geography* 31, no. 2 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132507075362>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0309132507075362>.

⁴⁷⁰ Mohamed Arafa, "A question to the President of the United States, Donald Trump: is it a travel ban, or a Muslim ban, or a travel Muslim ban?," *Revista de Investigações Constitucionais* 5 (2018).

"But I can't swim," I said. "I will drown
If I can't make the shore. I'll die alone
In the salt. No, my body will be found

With millions of bodies, all of them Brown."
I dreamed that my passport was a book of prayers,
Unanswered by the gods, but written down
By fact checkers in suits. "There are some errors

In your papers," they said. Then took me downstairs
To a room with fingernails on the floor.
I dreamed that my passport was my keyware,
But soldiers had set fire to the doors,

To all doors—a conflagration of doors.
I dreamed that my passport was my priest:
"Sherman, will you battle the carnivores
Or will you turn and abandon the weak?

Will you be shelter? Or will you concede?"
Last night, I dreamed that my passport was alive
When it entered the ICU. It breathed, it breathed,
Then it sighed and closed its eyes. It did not survive.

© Sherman Alexie 2017⁴⁷¹

This poem that Kamillah sent is by Sherman Alexie, a Native American novelist and poet who wrote the above poem *Autopsy* in the wake of the USA's executive orders referred to as the travel ban, immigration ban, and the Muslim ban. Alexie's poem illustrates the convergence of race, national identity, and citizenship, whose hierarchies complexly overlap, necessitating a mosaic of concerned and questioning responses from MLers. Kamillah is a subject who lives in the intersections of activism and the academy. As a Brown, female, Muslim, academic living on the East Coast, she cannot help but notice

⁴⁷¹ Sherman Alexie, "Autopsy," *Early Bird Books* (January 31, 2017 2017).
<https://earlybirdbooks.com/autopsy-poem-sherman-alexie>.

the absence of race and gender from the topics that continue to occupy this activist network she had just joined, and which later caused her to leave MLI. She voiced some of these frustrations during an interview in 2017:

I mean come on, I'm Brown, we are all mostly Brown! There are no Arabs, one Black guy, and looking at us none of us are poor, and obviously none of us are gay. But how are we going to sit here and advocate on behalf of Muslims in the States and abroad if we don't start talking about color? I mean we are sitting across the table from Jews, who are White, but don't know they are White, who claim to be a race, a people, but they are a religion... how are we supposed to grapple with this. We are just gonna go with 'we are Muslim' that's it...that is all that we are? I don't think so!

The distance between Kamillah's positions on gender and race and that of MLI's is demonstrative of the multiplicity of social hierarchies replicating themselves within this activist network. Muslim MLIs inhabit a contentious space; Islam is a religion, diverse in form and follower, but has also been racialized, especially in the post-9/11 era.⁴⁷² So, as part of their advocacy, most Muslim MLIs, the vast majority of whom live in the United States and operate as members of a minoritized and racialized religion, work towards maintaining religious freedoms that are also tied up in the fight against racism. This advocacy is even more complicated by the fact that Muslim MLIs are for the most part economically prosperous. The complex positionalities that MLIs inhabit are comprised of multiple arenas and hierarchies that place MLIs tacking between advantaged and disadvantaged ranks. Political scientist Abdelkader H. Sinno sheds light on these multifaceted positionalities, as he explains,

⁴⁷² Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Nazir Nader Harb, "Post-9/11: making Islam an American religion," *Religions* 5, no. 2 (2014).

American Muslims have been quite successful in the socioeconomic field but have been targeted extensively and discriminatorily in the legal and law enforcement spheres. Laws passed by Congress [the so-called Patriot Act] make it easy to target them and others....The most worrisome trend across Western countries is that Islam has become racialized and that Muslims have become an 'other' to whom it is acceptable to apply exceptional, and otherwise or even illegal, treatment.⁴⁷³

Kamillah's words reveal some of the tensions demonstrative of this current context within which Muslim MLers are situated. That is, Muslim MLers navigate racialized structures within transnational contexts as well as within local raced hierarchies that affect their daily lives both within and outside of MLI. Kamillah is concerned about race, advocacy for anti-Black racism, and how the blanket label of Muslim ignores race altogether: a concern raised by a number of other Muslim MLers, including the other two White convert women, Sarah and Nadine. Kamillah makes an interesting distinction between herself, as a Brown (Desi) Muslim, and Arabs, also pointing out that there is only one Black man, Ibrahim, that is part of MLI.

Kamillah's perceptive comment offers insight into the racial dynamics of Muslim MLers and their perceptions of Jews in relation to self-perceptions of Muslims. To summarize the above statement, Arabs are not Brown or Black, Muslims are mostly Brown, some Muslims are Black, and Jews are White but do not know they are White. Kamillah unintentionally, succinctly sums up the racial politics operational within MLI. She also points out the lack of interest and discussion about sex, gender, and sexuality, firmly pointing out that all the members of this activist network are

⁴⁷³ Abdulkader H. Sinno, *Muslims in Western politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 3. Table of contents only <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0817/2008019717.html>.

heteronormative/heterosexual, once again signaling the ways in which religion is raced, gender is assumed, and all of these categories overlap and inform one's positionality within social hierarchies. Kamillah's frustrations are our starting point because she draws attention to who and how MLI is comprised of and how MLers play racial and sexual politics by reaffirming as well as disrupting normative assumptions about race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, etc. I now turn to uncover where Muslim MLers, most of whom are U.S. American, but with transnational ties that vary as well as overlap with one another, place themselves. Or – as Kamillah's succinct description reveals - how some Muslims have racialized or unraced themselves. As we will see, many Muslim MLers conflate concepts of race, religion, and possibilities for social maneuvering. In part, the MLI program hinges on Muslim MLer perceptions of Jews as one of the most successful religious minorities on the transnational world stage.

MLers and their SHI hosts and instructors, much to Kamillah's dismay, very rarely engaged explicitly in discussions about racism, despite racism's influence on their own positionalities. However, on occasion, members made illuminating statements that reveal a perception of Muslimness that hinges on the racialization of Islam – meaning that Muslim, for MLers, is often an identity category inclusive of race but not definitive of any one race. This was exhibited often in indirect or perhaps even unconscious ways, including the example I discussed in a previous chapter in which Nadine, a White, freckled, red-headed Muslim, used the Black power fist symbol to discuss her own positionality as a racialized – if not raced – minority. Additionally illustrative of this phenomenon is the following communication from Kamillah: “Hearing all the ways that

'immigrant' is being used today, as if it's somehow about people who move here, versus hatred towards BROWN and BLACK and MUSLIM people who travel for work/family/etc., reminds me of the way 'indigenous' was used in Efrat to self-describe a Latvian immigrant. A 'rose' by another name might not be a rose. Just sayin'." Here Kamillah refers once again to her shock that an Eastern European immigrant with no ties to Palestine claimed illegally seized territory as his indigenous homeland.⁴⁷⁴ Although Kamillah identified as a Brown Muslim previously, in this communication, written as a response to anti-immigration policies and the travel ban, it is clear that she sets Muslims apart from Brown and Black people, which was a common problem for MLers: uncertainty as to where and how to place "Muslim" within racial as well as religious categories. In short, Muslims grapple with externally-imposed and internally reinforced color hierarchies that are religioned, and religious hierarchies that are raced – a paradoxical social construct perpetuated in the U.S. and transnationally. These paradoxes bubbled to the surface as MLers were confronted by the raced and religioned hierarchies at play in Israel/Palestine as well as at home in the U.S. in conjunction with their diasporic transnational interests and ties. Kamillah felt the need to categorically bind "Muslim" as something distinct yet obviously racial.

Similarly, in the wake of Hurricane Florence in 2018, informant Nadine, the White middle-aged female convert mentioned above, responded to several messages of support and offers of help on our group WhatsApp chat: "We may need you here. 😊 We

⁴⁷⁴ Imseis, "Negotiating the Illegal: On the United Nations and the Illegal Occupation of Palestine, 1967–2020."

know the federal gov't doesn't have FEMA money left for recovery since they took it to deport Brown people.” Her acceptance of these offers from fellow Muslims coupled with her acknowledgment that the American government may not be able to help because they are diverting numerous federal funds to “deport Brown people” tells us that she does not include herself or her Muslim compatriots as part of the possible Brown deportees.⁴⁷⁵ In Nadine’s eyes, Muslims, although they are raced as Brown the majority of the time, they are still separate from other racialized Browns: revealing attempts and/or assumptions that Muslims are higher on the racialized religious hierarchy, that Muslims are raced but ‘not as Brown’ as ‘other’ Brown people. Nadine is shedding light on Muslim MLers’ nuanced self-perceptions of Brownness. Many MLers are first- and second-generation immigrants from South Asian and North African countries, whose immigration was contingent on “brain drain” policies of Western nations.⁴⁷⁶ This means that many MLers and their parents had to meet educational requirements in order to be eligible to immigrate to the U.S. In relation to other ethnic immigrant groups raced as Brown within U.S. American racial logics, Muslims often form a more educated group that enjoys a higher socio-economic status, setting them apart from other ethnically raced Brown communities that immigrate from Central and South America.⁴⁷⁷ Nadine’s framework for understanding race and Islam is particularly impacted by her Southern upbringing, as she

⁴⁷⁵ Kevern Verney, "Bad hombres: The Trump administration, Mexican immigration and the border wall," in *The Trump Presidency* (Springer, 2019).

⁴⁷⁶ Bayor, *The oxford handbook of American immigration and ethnicity*.

⁴⁷⁷ David Reimers, "The Impact of Immigration Legislation: 1875-present," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Immigration and Ethnicity*, ed. Ronald H Bayor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

explained in an interview in 2017: “The South is Black or White, and all Christian. The Bible Belt is an accurate name. As a Muslim in the South, I am clearly not White anymore, and my translucent skin clearly makes me not Black. So I am something completely different, I am an outsider, I fit nowhere.” Nadine converted to Islam when she was nineteen years old; at this point in her life she understands that for many she is the ‘exotic other.’ Her Whiteness within Muslim communities sets her apart and her Muslimness as a White person makes her exotic to everyone else; as she explains: “I realized last night, I’ve been a Muslim my entire adult life, and it is part of who I am, but it is no longer the most interesting thing about me. For so many years, I guess it was. Now, when I have so many other complexities, the Muslim thing still gets the attention.” Nadine grapples with her own exceptionally visible Whiteness – both within Muslim communities and at large - particularly since she stopped wearing hijab.⁴⁷⁸ People assume she is a White Christian, and so she is working hard to operationalize her Whiteness, and her knowledge of Christianity as a convert, to make some space and advocate where she can for minorities, Muslim or not. Her recognition that Brown people in general are under threat of deportation, and that she and her Muslim network are not, is an acknowledgment of her White privilege, but also a coded class message. When she says, “Brown people” she in fact means “poor Brown people,” which is why she does not include those in this

⁴⁷⁸ Karaman and Christian, ““My Hijab Is Like My Skin Color”: Muslim Women Students, Racialization, and Intersectionality.”

network of strategically selected Muslim leaders.⁴⁷⁹ In this case it is their money that makes them different from the Brown people for whom Nadine fears deportation, or at least not Brown enough to deport. MLI is mostly composed of upper-class Desi Muslims, many who claim Whiteness, some who do not, and many of whom, like Nadine, point, if indirectly, to the limitations of racial and religious logics operational within MLI. For Nadine, Islam is not associated with Brownness; it is associated with affluence, hence the disconnection of Brownness from MLI Muslims. Additionally, Nadine comes from a very poor background, and is not wealthy. Interestingly, the White converts within MLI are consistently at a lower income status than the Desi-majority Muslim members of MLI. This exhibits some of the slippage between racial and socioeconomic privilege. That is, it seems within MLI that racial privilege can cancel out lack of class privilege, and socioeconomic privilege allows for a certain level of racialized advantages. Of course, all of these are mitigated by visibility, as Nadine's experience wearing hijab has indicated. During one of our many conversations in 2018, Nadine very shyly told me that she was looking to pick up a second job:

I love writing, and running the book shop, but it's not steady or nearly enough...I am up for a kind of promotion to help organize this book festival, I hope I get the job, I really need it. No one here (MLI) gets that, they are all globetrotting, lawyers and doctors, I am just a small community activist, and yeah I write, but I cannot keep up with their lifestyle...I actually have to work for a living.

⁴⁷⁹ Samantha L Moore-Berg and Andrew Karpinski, "An intersectional approach to understanding how race and social class affect intergroup processes," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 13, no. 1 (2019).

Nadine's personhood encapsulates both the patterns and limitations of how Muslim MLers encompass a variety of classed, raced, religioned, gendered positionalities, all of which are affected by dominant logics of hierarchy. There is a telling association that many MLI participants exhibit: the association of Brown with poor, which equals, in the context of Nadine's and others' comments especially in the wake of the Trump Administration, the Latinx community.⁴⁸⁰

During our cohort's 2017 trip to Jerusalem, Nadine was approached by a group of American Evangelical Christians, an encounter which eventually led to a short conversation prompted by one of the evangelicals asking Nadine why she had rejected Jesus. Nadine classically responded by saying that Muslims have Jesus too (akin to the common interfaith responses that Abdullah cheekily describes as the "we eat hummus too" phenomenon).⁴⁸¹ This encounter took place at the hotel during breakfast, and someone from the group of American Evangelical Christians asked her where the bacon was, to which Nadine responded that there was no bacon as they were in Jerusalem and Jews and Muslims do not eat pork, so stop looking for it. Nadine relayed this interaction to our group, which was followed by several hilarious replies. Abbas, an older Pakistani man, a professor emeritus of engineering who lives in the South, upon hearing Nadine's story, replied with the following: "A bunch of Brown Muslims have escaped to the Land

⁴⁸⁰ MLer association of Brown with the Latinx community is made visible through their active dissociation of Muslimness, including their own Muslim identities, with Brownness as seen by Nadine's assumption that Brown Muslims were not threatened by the aspects of deportation wrapped up in the Trump Administration's executive orders. Kevin R Johnson, "Trump's Latinx Repatriation," *UCLA L. Rev.* 66 (2019).

⁴⁸¹ Mark Beaumont, *Jesus in Muslim-Christian Conversation* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018).

of Christ - with our women. Anyone watching? POTUS T.” There are several interesting nuggets in this one statement, and take note that Abbas’ message is written as if composed by one of the evangelical Christians. The assertions are that Muslims, particularly Muslim MLers, are Brown, they have somehow thwarted the American travel/immigration/ security policies and escaped from America, Palestine/Israel is the land of Jesus Christ (not the Jews or the Muslims) so it is a Christian state,⁴⁸² Nadine as a White woman is one of theirs (the evangelical Christians’),⁴⁸³ and all of these messages are being monitored by then American President, Donald Trump. Since Abbas’ satirical statement is written through the perspective of one of the Evangelical Christians, reverse engineering these logics reveals illuminating underlying assumptions about Abbas’ self-perceptions as they relate to Muslimness: Muslims are seen as Brown, Israel/Palestine is not the land of Christ, White convert women are proper Muslims, not defective Christians, and the American government is not going to intervene on behalf of every White evangelical Christian. The ultimate conclusion here is that Muslims are Brown *and* White.

On the very same trip in 2017, one of the informants snapped a photo of the program founders, an Ashkenazi rabbi and a Turkish Imam, inside of a mosque, with the following tag line: “Interfaith alliance threatened by shady Brown Muslim lurking in the

⁴⁸² Neil Rubin, "The Relationship Between American Evangelical Christians and the State of Israel," in *Israel and the United States* (Routledge, 2018).

⁴⁸³ Tina M Harris and Rebecca J Steiner, "Beyond the Veil: A Critique of White Christian Rhetoric and Racism in the Age of Trump," *Journal of Communication & Religion* 41, no. 1 (2018).

background ...” Another group member was hovering in the background of this photo, and automatically stood out next to the seemingly White rabbi and Imam, as he is very visibly Brown being of South Asian descent. What is even more telling is that the photo and tag line were both generated by Ismail, an Arab, White passing,⁴⁸⁴ Muslim, who was jokingly racializing members within our own cohort. Ismail’s intent was merely to poke fun at one of his compatriots who fits the stereotypical physical description of what America says a terrorist looks like.⁴⁸⁵ These type of lighthearted exchanges, while in Jerusalem, were a way for the group to blow off some steam, to release some of the tensions that arose while in a location that employs copious amounts of racial profiling, thus increasing safety concerns for the entire group.⁴⁸⁶ Ismail’s joke is a way of saying to the darker members of the group that he understands their visibility; the humor Ismail and others employed may also have been a way to signal that more visibly minoritized members of MLI are not alone, and you are one of us so don’t worry. The group responded with hilarious anti-terrorism and anti-CVE⁴⁸⁷ comments like “Spot the mole”

⁴⁸⁴ Passing, specifically White-passing as it pertains to this project, is an identity negotiation. Many participants of this project identify as White, believe they are White, but are not White-passing. More simply put, they do not look White and are thus not White-passing. Other participants identify as racially Brown and/or desi, but they are White-passing, meaning they look White. Passing often implies an intentional dishonesty; however, that is not how the term is used or understood in this project. White passing is understood here as being externally defined and driven by social perceptions of Whiteness. María Carla Sánchez and Linda Schlossberg, "Passing : identity and interpretation in sexuality, race, and religion" (2001).

⁴⁸⁵ Todd H Green, *Presumed Guilty: Why We Shouldn't Ask Muslims to Condemn Terrorism* (Fortress Press, 2018).

⁴⁸⁶ Guy Ben-Porat and Fany Yuval, *Policing Citizens: Minority Policy in Israel* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁴⁸⁷ Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is an anti-terrorism initiative, originally announced in 2014 with pilot programs in Boston, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles. CVE programs aim to root out violent extremism

and “Of course, all terrorists wear Black hoodies.” Ismail was simply play-acting some of the more problematic logics surrounding race, especially as reflected post 9/11 and during the Trump Administration. Clearly it is Brownness that is dangerous and undermines intra-racial friendships between White Jews and Muslims.

To add another layer of complexity, Ismail is married to Nasreen, a White-passing South Asian Muslim who sometimes identifies as Brown. In terms of her complexion, Nasreen is roughly as light-skinned as Nadine, the red-headed, freckled, White convert. Nasreen and Ismail live in the mid-west and are both highly engaged in social justice issues. Nasreen made the following comments in relation to her engagement in anti-Black racism and police brutality in 2018:

Salam Friends - Just checking in. It's been a rough few days (months?) on this side of the border. We got a guilty verdict for Laquan McDonald's murder in Chicago today. And even though it's "justice," it seems blah. That boy isn't going to come back. Hearing a guilty verdict on "aggravated battery with a firearm" sixteen times in a row will never leave me. I heard it in my car, while waiting to pick up my Brown son from his school, which happens to be down the street from the courthouse.⁴⁸⁸

Nasreen bridges racial differences through the shared traumas of police brutality, identifying her son as Brown and therefore a target, just as Laquan McDonald, a Black

by bringing religious leaders, community leaders, and law enforcement together with health and educational professionals in order to combat terrorist radicalization of U.S. residents. Sarah Chaney Reichenbach, "CVE and Constitutionality in the Twin Cities: How Countering Violent Extremism Threatens the Equal Protection Rights of American Muslims in Minneapolis-St. Paul," *Am. UL Rev.* 69 (2019).

⁴⁸⁸ Nausheen Husain, "Laquan McDonald Timeline: The Shooting, the Video, the Verdict, and the Sentencing," *Chicago Tribune* (2019).

teenage boy, was targeted.⁴⁸⁹ Interestingly, despite her fair skin, Nasreen is in many ways far more visible than her husband Ismail because she is a hijabi. While they are both more or less White passing in terms of skin pigmentation, Nasreen's hijab signals her Muslimness, her difference, making her a visible target of discrimination and police scrutiny, which she obviously regards as the Brownness she has passed on to her son: According to these wrapped up logics, hijab is a symbol of religion, but also of race.

The Imam and co-founder of MLI, Abdullah Antepli, an American immigrant from Turkey, points to some of the other complicated ways that MLIs inhabit raced religious identities. Abdullah is himself White passing (Abbas indicated this perception in the above facetious exchange); however, Abdullah clearly does not associate Whiteness with his fellow Muslim MLIs, as illustrated in the following message he sent out to the network on Eid⁴⁹⁰ 2017: "Salams and Eid Mubarak, Eid Kareem, Bayraminiz Mubarek Olsun and Salamat Hari Raya from stunningly beautiful Aspen, CO. Celebrating Eid with a sea of old White people in absolute plainness instead of my colorful and savory people.... Hope all is having a delightful and joyful Eid." hilariously, Imam Abdullah associates Whiteness with being plain, and Muslimness with a colorful and spicy, flavorful disposition. Yet, as Kamillah indicated by her outrage at Abdullah's treatment of Ibrahim – and the fact that he was the only Black member of our cohort – MLI also

⁴⁸⁹ Stephan A Schwartz, "Police brutality and racism in America," *Explore (New York, NY)* 16, no. 5 (2020).

⁴⁹⁰ Andy Williams, "The practice of Islam in America," *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy & Civil Society* 2, no. 2 (2018).

contends with the existence of rejection, ostracization, and racism directed at Black Muslims, not only within MLI but globally. Anti-Black racism has created fissures within Muslim communities, which is reflected in MLI. When I asked Nasreen during an interview in 2017 how Islam's color-line has played out in the Midwest, this is what she said:

I think it definitely comes up...it's very prevalent in a lot of the internal discussions. A lot of the African American Muslim community is based in the city, so there is a pretty decent Nation of Islam community, a pretty predominant Wahid Mohammed community,⁴⁹¹ a lot of the mosques that are immigrant mosques are in the suburbs and they are all considerably wealthier. So, there is definitely a lot of disconnect in terms of socioeconomic issues, there's a lot of disconnect in terms of political issues, you know all of that stuff plays a role. They are mostly segregated in terms of not really working together on anything particularly interesting, and at the same time it's like wrangling sheep that don't necessarily want to be brought together.

Nasreen's breakdown of race relations within Muslim communities in the Midwest takes note of cultural and class divides between Black Muslims and immigrant Muslims, noting that immigrant Muslims tend to live in wealthy suburban areas, while Black Muslims remain within the inner-city.⁴⁹² This geographical dispersion of urban Black Muslims and suburban immigrant Muslims is not the only divide; Nasreen talks about socioeconomically and racially integrated areas within the city of Chicago that still maintain racial degrees of separation via masjid choice:

⁴⁹¹ The Wahid Mohammed community is in reference to a particular faction within the Nation of Islam. See Steven Tsoukalas, *The Nation of Islam: Understanding the "Black Muslims"* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021).

⁴⁹² Janet L. Smith, Zafer Sonmez, and Nicholas Zettel, "Growing income inequality and socioeconomic segregation in the Chicago region," in *Urban Socio-Economic Segregation and Income Inequality* (Springer, Cham, 2021).

So in the Southside, by the University of Chicago, because of the University it is very integrated. And the Muslim community here is fairly integrated in terms of both racially and socioeconomically. It's a pretty multifaceted community. But the community that we're from...we go to Eid prayers at the University, which is a fairly diverse space. We don't go to Eid prayers four blocks away from us at the inner-city mostly African American storefront mosque. So things like that are things that I think we have to think about. These things that are still very prevalent in the Muslim community here as well.⁴⁹³

Nasreen, who also spoke about her social justice engagement in anti-Black racism and police brutality, who expressed fear about the possibility of her Brown son being a target of discriminatory police violence, admits here that neither she nor her family go to a predominantly Black masjid only four blocks away, even though it is the closest mosque to her home. Instead, she travels farther to the university to engage in religious observance. This history of division and racism that excludes Black Muslims from the broader Muslim community has directly affected American Muslims within the post-9/11 context. Ibrahim, one of the two Black Muslims in MLI in its entirety including all four cohorts, and the only Black member from our cohort, addressed this lack of solidarity during our interview in 2017 shortly after our first two week trip to Palestine/Israel:

I come from a community that was downright disrespected and my community's leaders and teachers were treated with hostility. So, in a balanced perspective part of the narrative of some is like, the hell with the larger Muslim community. Racism, classism, etc. has rocked us. And so folks are like we can collaborate when we can but the blame goes to those who did nothing when we needed help. Part of my argument is that the indigenous American Muslim community which includes even the Nation of Islam and those who made the transition to mainstream Islam are at this moment like, Muslims need to fend for themselves because Black Muslims have been on their own.

⁴⁹³ Garbi Schmidt, *Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago* (Temple University Press, 2004).

It is interesting to note that Nasreen’s social justice work dealing with anti-Black racism and police brutality is contained within the non-Muslim Black community, truly giving credence to Ibrahim’s statement that the Black Muslim American community has been on their own. Nasreen’s activism seems to indicate that she and her Muslim community are engaging in the fight against anti-Black racism, but only on non-Muslim fronts, drawing a clear if unintentional line that maintains Muslimness as apparently not Black. Nasreen and Ibrahim, who are visibly on opposite ends of the color spectrum, represent the ways in which some MLers feel various degrees of pressure to choose which aspect of their identity becomes more salient in particular situations.⁴⁹⁴ In addition to their comments during interviews, it is worthwhile to note that Abdullah later forced Ibrahim out of MLI, while Nasreen went on to become part of MLI leadership. The racialized interactions and occurrences within MLI tug at a broader and pervasive race framework at play amongst Muslim MLers and their Jewish SHI counterparts.

ARAB WHITENESS?

We see that conceptions of race within MLI are complex, to say the least. Racial dynamics within MLI are further complicated by the simultaneously White and nonwhite status of Arabness. Arab, for many MLers, is a type of White or being White-passing, depending on outward visible displays of Muslimness. Arabness appears to be a sticking point within MLI, and difficult to pair with a racial designation: this is demonstrated by “Arab” and “North African” being White designations on the U.S. census, but also being

⁴⁹⁴ Spivak, *The spivak reader: selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*.

categories that are heavily racialized, especially since 9/11. Case in point, in 2019, I asked one of my subjects, Gamila, to share with me some of her unique experiences as a Brown Muslim woman in post-9/11 America and this is how she replied:

I never really thought of myself as a Brown Muslim woman. I worked very hard to convey an American Muslim identity and I always enjoyed the privilege of being an Arab Muslim. I think as an Arab in and among Brown Muslims we are kind of the privileged class. I think it's because of speaking Arabic. Arabs don't see themselves as Brown, especially immigrants. I think it's a color thing and a race thing, maybe a little bit of Arab supremacy in there.

Gamila is a forty-year-old recently divorced second generation Egyptian Muslim from the Midwest. Visibly, she presents as dark-skinned/Brown, once again showing the problem with using color to define race; she is Arab, sometimes perceived as White – but is in fact darker than her Desi cohort mate Nasreen. However, Gamila's Arab status transcends this markedness in terms of self-perception and communal reception.⁴⁹⁵

During a previous interview in 2017, I similarly asked another informant, Yasra, if as a South Asian (Desi) Brown Muslim woman, she saw a difference between Desi and Arab Muslims in America. She responded as follows:

Oh there's a huge difference. I think it comes down to, cause usually, well there's lots of similarities, like the whole marriage, doctor, engineer, like my kids becoming doctors, engineers it's all there. Um I also think there's a different level of religiosity because we're not Arabs, Arabic speakers, there's a whole other relationship with the Quran and Islam. I think there's a lot of Hindu cultural influence on Pakistani Muslims. Like so when I was at my cousin's wedding, he did this thing, where you know he touched his in-laws' feet. And my other cousin was like 'I can't believe he did that, it's such a Hindu thing.' So there are these different ties. I also think there's an issue because we don't come from a land that's in such turmoil. I mean we do, Pakistan is in turmoil, but the thing is that for most

⁴⁹⁵ Beydoun, "Between Muslim and White: The Legal Construction of Arab American Identity."

Pakistanis they don't really know what's going on in Pakistan. There's not like a direct effect, um, its corrupt and there's a lot of issues, but it's not like the Arab peninsula, or the Middle East where it's like the Arab Spring and dictators ruling the countries, um I don't know, it's just different.

Once again, these comments reveal a complex intra-Muslim racial framework. As socially constructed identities do not exist in a vacuum, MLers are employing localized and transnational racial logics that have impacted their identities in many arenas, within MLI and beyond. In addition to these complex ways that MLers identify and perceive categories such as race, religion, and gender, to name only a few, many MLers are distinctly interested in using MLI as a vehicle for upward social mobility. This is exemplified by the fact that SHI and Muslim MLers alike view Jews as a quintessential example of being successful as a religious minority. In the next sections, I discuss narratives of success as they frame and are informed by the racial and other social logics of MLers.

MLIER LOGICS

The majority of MLers come from the United States, with a handful of Canadian participants. This means that generally speaking, the average MLer's identity is anchored in part by their North American locale. It is worthwhile to understand the makeup of Muslim communities in the U.S. to understand how this composition reflects and deviates from the demographics of MLI. 35% of American Muslim adult immigrants come from South Asia; overall, this means that 20% of the total American Muslim population is South Asian (Desi), holding the majority of ethnically self-identifying American Muslims, only outweighed by the 29% grouped together as "other." Racially, according to the Pew Research Forum, 41% of American Muslims identify as White,

28% as Asian, 20% as Black, 8% as Hispanic, and 3% as other/mixed.⁴⁹⁶ This ethnic and racial data again calls us to question the overlap of racial and ethnic categories while bringing into view the disparities between how Muslims self-identify and how they are perceived by non-Muslim Americans. Outsider perceptions of MLers discussed in this chapter include Jewish teachers and hosts of SHI and encounters with Israelis during our cohort trips to Palestine in 2017 and 2018. MLers encounter these disparities within MLI and in their home lives and attempt to make sense of them in different ways. For many MLers, these disparities seem specifically to do with Whiteness and the stakes involved in gaining social citizenship for their Muslim communities. More specifically, why and how Desi Muslims and Arab Muslims in America are equating success with dominant groups, such as White Christians as well as non-dominant minorities, such as Ashkenazi Jews, who many Muslim MLers see as successful in both Western and pluralistic transnational contexts. This section analyzes the gains and/or costs of these racial and social maneuverings with an intersectional lens. The following is aimed at unpacking the political and social tactics many MLers use to achieve upward social mobility in these varied but overlapping contexts.

In terms of how MLI participants self-label – consciously and/or unconsciously, this is where we are: Muslims are sometimes Brown, sometimes White, never Black, and sometimes Arab, which is a type of White or being White passing depending on Muslim

⁴⁹⁶ Besheer Mohamed, "New Estimates Show U.S. Muslim Population Continues to Grow," (January 3, 2018 2018). <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/#>; <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/demographic-portrait-of-muslim-americans/>.

visibility: case in point, the racialization of hijab. Continuing with the American Muslim demographic landscape, 58% of American Muslims were born in other parts of the world; the other 42% of U.S.-born American Muslims are descendants of Muslim immigrants, Black American converts, and the children of those converts. Racially, 45% of immigrant Muslims identify as White, while 41% identify as Asian. Of U.S.-born 2nd generation American Muslims 52% identify as White. This Pew Research data makes a point to vaguely unpack the broad ethnic origins included in White: "... [A] substantial share of both foreign-born and U.S.-born Muslims identify as White, a category that also includes people who identify racially as Arab, Middle Eastern or Persian."⁴⁹⁷ Asian as a racial category is also explicitly explained as including people of Pakistani or Indian descent. These racial categories are based on the U.S. Census categories that broadly place anyone who identifies as Arab, Middle Eastern, or North African as White, and additionally Persian is also classified as White. In total 41% of American Muslims, foreign-born and U.S.-born, identify as White. To restate: 4/10 American Muslims identify as White. 3/10 are Asian, 2/10 are Black, 1/10 is Hispanic. Compared to the numbers available for Muslims in the U.S., MLIers according to the above categorization schema, some 8/10 MLIers would be categorized as Asian, 1/10 as White/Arab, and 1/10 (maximum) MLIers would be African American/or Black or "other." This is approximately the racial makeup of all the cohorts of MLI combined. Of course, the racial identities of MLIers deviate from how they are perceived by these stratifications. With full awareness of the

⁴⁹⁷ Center, "Muslims in America: Immigrants and those born in U.S. see life differently in many ways."

imposition of these racial categorizations, many MLers cultivate complex racialized identities that simultaneously transcend and reinforce these hierarchies.

Returning to the ways MLers mirror and differ from the U.S. Muslim landscape, these newer data from the Pew Research Center, when compared to previous studies on pocket communities of Arab Muslims add quantitative weight to the fact that Muslim Americans in MLI and more broadly self-identify as White, despite the messiness of these racial categories and the ways many Muslim MLers are viewed due to racialized logics. As Shryock and Lin explain: “[T]he racialization or ‘otherization’ of Arabs and Muslims in mainstream American culture represents the way religion and ethnicity are used interchangeably in discussions on race and racialization without distinction of the uniqueness each identity contributes to this process, or how they may intersect.”⁴⁹⁸ The distance between how people self-identify and how they are perceived and identified by others/outside is starkly demonstrated within MLI. MLers, via their activism and advocacy work within their local and transnational communities, are knowledgeable about the advantages and disadvantages that are attached to certain racial categories. This knowledge manifests in how MLers navigate racial logics in order to gain access to racialized privileges that aid their advocacy efforts within their local and transnational Muslim communities. In certain instances MLer maneuverings can be understood as part of assimilatory practices that allow themselves and their communities to thrive within

⁴⁹⁸ Shryock, *Islamophobia/Islamophilia : beyond the politics of enemy and friend*; Selod, "Citizenship denied: The racialization of Muslim American men and women post-9/11."

imposed racialized socio-cultural structures. However, these strategic tactics do come at a cost to both MLers and the broader Muslim communities they serve.

Racial maneuverings by MLers entail multi-layered processes. Arabness proves a common avenue for this process. Within Muslim contexts, this means learning Arabic and strengthening theological Islamic knowledge that mirrors mainstream Middle Eastern practices as opposed to hybrid forms of Islam that exist in Pakistan,⁴⁹⁹ which is seen as being influenced by the neighboring Hindu culture: Yasra noted this quite bluntly in my sit down interview with her in 2017; the awareness of the racialization of Islam was further evidenced by our Palestinian guide asking myself and the other White Muslim women to sit by the windows of our tour guide bus to pass more easily through the Israeli checkpoints enroute to and from the West Bank. This maneuvering laid bare Israeli logics enacted by state policy, which also racializes Islam. The tour guide's request, and the fact that we did sail easily through the checkpoint, reveal how Islam is racialized via dark/Brown skin as well as visible Islamic symbols such as hijabs and abayas. It is also interesting to note that the visibly marked Muslim symbols are simultaneously symbols of femaleness. These intersecting racialized logics that address gender in conjunction with race are further unpacked and analyzed in Chapter 5. Note that Israeli racialized logics mirror racialized logics in the U.S., with both relying on Nazi racial logics. These logics attempt to equate Muslimness with Brownness in order to reinforce racialized hierarchical systems. While I am emphasizing the constructedness of White racial

⁴⁹⁹ Samina Nasir, "Effects of Hindu Civilization on Muslim Culture and Civilization: A Review from Pakistan's Context," *Al-Milal: Journal of Religion and Thought* 2, no. 1 (2020).

identity in terms of how MLers understand these identities, I want to state that this constructedness, even if subversively tactical, makes the self-identification with Whiteness no less real or authentic to those Muslims who identify as White. As political theorist Jacob T. Levy explains, “Too much emphasis on the constructedness of identity and cultures perhaps leads some postmodernists to forget how real they can feel and how much they matter in the decisions people make, the actions they take.”⁵⁰⁰ MLers’ conscious and unconscious engagements in the construction of their racialized identities are grounded in efforts to find pathways that allow MLers to be both authentically Muslim and authentically American.

Within MLI, as Gamila previously explained, there is a type of Arab supremacy, due to socio-linguistic proximities to the Prophet Muhammad and therefore Islam. These perceptions manifest in Desi Muslim MLers’ attempts to perform Arabness, not only within MLI but within the broader communities they serve. Additionally, Haroon demonstrated these Desi Muslim maneuverings in his book when he ran down his family’s history tracing his own lineage directly back to the Prophet Muhammad, thus giving Haroon Arab ethnic origins.⁵⁰¹ If the first step towards racial privilege is Arabness, what does that look like? Where, within the context of MLI, do Israeli logics of race fit in? As it turns out, these are not easy questions to answer. The reality of any conversation

⁵⁰⁰ Jacob T. Levy, *The multiculturalism of fear* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.
Publisher description <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0610/00031356-d.html>
Table of contents only <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0610/00031356-t.html>
Contributor biographical information <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0723/00031356-b.html>.

⁵⁰¹ Moghul, *How to be a Muslim: An American Story*.

surrounding race must necessarily examine dominant racial logics. For MLers and globally, “race” is influenced by a number of sociohistorical factors, including, but not limited to chattel slavery and the extermination of Native people in the Americas, and, more recently, and perhaps equally significantly for my field, racial logics as imposed by Nazis during the Holocaust. I undertake an examination of some of these contributing factors, as they consciously and unconsciously shape MLers’ understandings and performances of race.

The racialization of Muslims, especially but not exclusively in a post-9/11 context, effectively disqualifies Muslims from Whiteness; MLers grapple with this reality at times critiquing it, especially by pointing out the ways in which MLers perceive Jewish people as a group who is White but does not see themselves as White. At other times, MLers attempt to ascend racial and other social categories by their performances of race as well as by trying to learn from Jews, who they view as a successful religious if not an entirely racialized minority. Some MLers, including those that claim Arabness as an expansion of Whiteness are in effect disassociating themselves from racialization. Recall that whether consciously or unconsciously, a number of MLers during our trips to Jerusalem in 2017 and 2018 and elsewhere disassociated both White and Black from Muslimness, pointing to complicated internalized racial logics. This disassociation is easily seen when we look at the most vulnerable and visibly marked Muslims, Muslim women and especially Muslim women of color, which I more fully examine in Chapter 5. I now turn to discuss MLer understandings of Whiteness in

relation to themselves and the multiple local and transnational communities with which they identify and serve.

Whiteness to MLers

To understand the maneuverings of a racially diverse religious minority as they hope to gain access to racialized social halls of power, we must look at what Whiteness is. In 2018, one of my informants, Nadine, a White convert from the South posted these thoughts to her Facebook page:

Some Notes On #Whiteness

I spent two decades mostly in the company of Muslims. I spent twelve of those years in a cross-cultural marriage, partially overseas, and in hijab, When I was abroad in the Muslim world, few assumed me to be White and American. I was covered, so people thought I was Chechen, Iranian, Syrian, Turkish. In some ways, I felt lighter not having to carry the burden of Americanness, or the mark of being a White American. Few White Americans have the chance to "exit out" of that identity.

I returned to America and eventually left my marriage. I took off the hijab and, suddenly, I was just another basic White woman, now operating in the larger American society where Whiteness felt thicker than before. Obama was President. Trayvon Martin was murdered and #BlackLivesMatter started. I knew Whiteness carried incredible privilege at the expense of everyone else. This, I never doubted or argued, and I knew that I now fully enjoyed all of those privileges without the hijab. But I didn't understand Whiteness anymore. It felt like a flat, one-dimensional thing, a riddle that I couldn't quite solve. A bubble into itself.

I still don't always understand American Whiteness. It is such a self-reflexive thing, a dangerous fiction. I fully operate in White circles -- this is part of the privilege -- but I never feel fully in. I feel like I'm always code switching.

When I ask White people what "Whiteness" is, no one can really tell me. It is the vacant thing around which all other things circulate.

Nadine is precisely expressing her uncomfortableness with Whiteness because she is Muslim and therefore is not “really White.” She understands that by taking off the hijab she is no longer religiously marked as other, and her pale skin means she is White or at least White passing. The code-switching she mentions is her shifting between identity performances.⁵⁰² She performs Whiteness as best she can, curtailing her Muslimness which is unacceptable in White circles, and she turns her Muslima identity on in Muslim spaces, downplaying and rejecting her Whiteness. In response to Nadine’s post, someone replied with a link to an article posted on the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre website titled “Whiteness.”⁵⁰³ The article states that most people employ the word White as a sort of “shorthand for the privileges/power that people who appear White receive because they are not subjected to the racism faced by people of colour.”⁵⁰⁴ The privileges/power mentioned here are more accurately termed Whiteness. The article outlines several definitions of Whiteness in an attempt to make seen what is invisible. These definitions of Whiteness are quickly summarized as follows: 1. An invisible social construction linked to dominance and power. 2. Norms surrounding Whiteness “become the standard against which all other cultures, groups, and individuals are measured and

⁵⁰² Code-Switching is a term rooted in linguistics analyses. However, it is used here to signal multiple processes of identity presentation and performance that signal acceptability to the dominant culture salient within any given circumstance. For more see Saeedi and Richardson, "A black lives matter and critical race theory-informed critique of code-switching pedagogy."

⁵⁰³ Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, "Whiteness," (2021). <https://www.aclrc.com/whiteness>.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

usually found to be inferior.”⁵⁰⁵ 3. Whiteness operates to preserve its own power by keeping others on the margin.⁵⁰⁶ The predominance of Whiteness rules U.S. American racial logics as Whiteness exists at the top of all the hierarchies that are buttressed by racial logics, such as gender and class.

Unpacking these definitions gives us a clearer picture of why many Muslim MLers view race as a necessary component of upward social mobility. As described by some MLers, opting into Whiteness is a way for American Muslims to upset processes of racialization and to gain access to resources that are denied to people of color and other marginalized groups. Access hinges on the unarticulated power and privilege implicit in Whiteness, as scholars Ajrouch, Jamal et al. explain in relation to how Arab Americans view Whiteness: “Whiteness represents a sociological category that demarcates unspoken privilege and power. Its existence derives from the construction of ‘otherness’; in other words, the Designation of those groups held in lower esteem, possessing less power and fewer resources in society.”⁵⁰⁷ Arab identity is often studied as a culture, ethnicity, and/or socio-linguistic grouping; religion is commonly pushed aside as an important aspect of diasporic and immigrant experiences in host countries. This absence of religion from scholarly discourses paints an incomplete picture of how social hierarchy ignores how racialization of religion impacts Muslims such as those in MLI.

⁵⁰⁵ F Henry and C Tator, "The colour of democracy: Racism in Canadian society (3rd edn.) Thomson Nelson: Toronto," (2006): 46-47.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ajrouch and Jamal, "Assimilating to a white identity: The case of Arab Americans."

This is all to say that religion is an important analytical lens in terms of how it impacts the Muslims in my fieldwork in relation to how they perceive race.

Racial Logics of MLers

MLers' conflicted approaches to racialization also reflect broader patterns affecting Muslim communities in the U.S. Anna Mansson McGinty argues this point, stating that "a prevalent counternarrative to Islamophobia, promoted by the leaders and representatives of major national Muslim organizations, constructs a 'mainstream American Muslim' identity," a concept which many MLers seem to adopt, whether consciously or indirectly.⁵⁰⁸ McGinty asserts that Muslim mainstreaming is a politically strategic response to Islamophobia. She asserts that some aspects of mainstreaming are part of assimilatory processes that every minority grapples with, but that it is Islamophobia that is uniting the American Muslim Ummah, forcing Muslim identity politics of sameness within the American landscape. Javed illustrates these processes of assimilatory politics in his call for Muslims to engage in non-Islamic advocacy organizations, as he explained during an interview in 2018:

Yeah, the Muslim aspect is an important but much broader discussion that American and Western Muslim communities need to have urgently. And it has to do with the need to move from behaving communally to operating in the mainstream. So far we disproportionately organize largely at the communal level – emphasizing our Muslimness rather than our American or Canadian identities. Our orgs described as Muslim or Islamic.

⁵⁰⁸ Anna Mansson McGinty, "The 'Mainstream Muslim' Opposing Islamophobia: Self-Representations of American Muslims," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 44, no. 12 (2012): 2958, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a4556>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1068/a4556>.

Interestingly, McGinty's observation mirrors SHI's explanation that Jewish identity is currently in crisis due to Jewry being defined by anti-Semitism. Javed's above explanation of how U.S. Americans need to start organizing is in part an internalization of his Jewish education within MLI. Javed understands that Jews are in the midst of an identity crisis and hopes to avoid this crisis for U.S. American Muslims by suggesting that they organize around shared American/Western values as opposed to blanket identity solidarity that puts Islam and Muslimness above Americanness, which is referred to by McGinty as Muslim mainstreaming.

Muslim mainstreaming is directly tied to Whiteness, which dominates racial structures, relegating Blackness to marginalized realms. In relation to Blackness, we once again see scholars as well as MLIs struggle to understand where Blackness fits into Islam as well as where Islam fits into Blackness. This is evidenced by Sylvia Chan-Malik's arguments that Islam, particularly American Islam is intertwined with Blackness and therefore a politics of difference, an identity construction rooted in againstness.⁵⁰⁹ Relatedly, recall that Nasreen discussed Nation of Islam as being apart from her own understanding of what constitutes her type of Muslimness. Anthropologist Su'ad Abdul Khabeer argues much of the same as Chan-Malik, coining the term "Muslim Cool" as a shorthand to describe the ties between Islam and Black American Culture. Interestingly, Khabeer's book made an appearance among MLIs during our 2017 trip to Jerusalem. When Haroon reached out to our cohort in an effort to take Muhammad, the young

⁵⁰⁹ Chan-Malik, *Being Muslim : a cultural history of women of color in American Islam*.

Palestinian boy enrolled in SHI's Havruta Gap-Year Program, under our wing, Ibrahim, the only Black person in our cohort, responded to Haroon's call to action with the following: "Yes! Thank you, I have a book for him. I brought with me the new book, Muslim Cool, just published, that deals with ways to express Muslimness. I'll make sure to get one-on-one time with him to give the book to him and talk about it. Appreciate you letting us know."⁵¹⁰ Chan-Malik, in contrast to Khabeer, contends that Islam, as part of Black America, offers a liberatory identity, a counter-narrative rooted in racial difference that synonymously associates American, Christian and White, and thus Islam becomes synonymous with Black and Unamerican. Khabeer argues the opposite, asserting that Islam's deep ties to the Black Community, are precisely what makes Islam both American and "cool." Khabeer explains "Muslim Cool" in a video as one of CNN's twenty Influential American Muslims project in 2018:

So the first 'Saturday Night Live' after the 2016 presidential elections, right, you had—it was hosted by Dave Chapelle and A Tribe Called Quest was the musical guest, sort of the kind of mainstream media narrative after that show really was talking about, you know, this kind of political critique. But what they didn't talk about was the fact that there were five Black Muslim men on 'Saturday Night Live' [...] they didn't talk about them as Muslim men, not because their Islam is hidden, because it isn't, you know, but because Islam doesn't look like what they think Islam should look like. If you think Islam is a 'Brown person' with a beard who doesn't speak English, then you're not seeing Islam when A Tribe Called Quest were at the Grammys, right?⁵¹¹

⁵¹⁰ Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool : Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (New York, UNITED STATES: New York University Press, 2016). <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucr/detail.action?docID=4500679>.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

Khabeer finds Muslim Cool at the intersection of hip hop and Islam, defining it as a Muslim identity foundationally rooted in Blackness constructed through the interconnections of Black and Muslim, rather than their divergences. This way of being Muslim, says Khabeer, is “to challenge White supremacy and the anti-Blackness found in Arab and South Asian U.S. Muslim communities.”⁵¹² Khabeer sees Muslim Cool as an intervention that problematizes the meaning of race in America by challenging anti-Blackness through ideas, dress, and social activism.⁵¹³ Taking Chan-Malik and Khabeer as a whole, the ultimate conclusion is that Islam is Black, liberatory, and therefore classically American. However, those perceived as the “real Muslims” the ones that Khabeer hints at as the stereotype, the Brown bearded foreigner with no English, the ones that navigate the Islamophobic seas of America, staunchly resist associations with Blackness. Despite Chan-Malik’s and Khabeer’s and other similar projects that offer a corrective history rooted in Americanness, Blackness and Islam, it appears that the majority of “mainstream Muslims,” at least those in MLI, apart from Ibrahim and other Black MLIs, are rejecting this corrective history and the association of Islam with Blackness.

Anti-Blackness is often spoken of as a stand-alone hatred; however, within the context of our current conversation, it needs to be coupled with its immediate opposite, pro-Whiteness. Pro-Whiteness is a subtler version of White supremacy. It is more covert,

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

less loud, and a more polite version of hate wrapped in White entitlement. White supremacy is associated with groups like the American Nazi Party, the United Skinhead Nation, or the Klan, groups organized around their hate for others.⁵¹⁴ Pro-Whiteness is more about positive White identity cultivation and protection. In her book *White Identity Politics*, Sociologist Ashley Jardina contends: “Most Whites understand that they are afforded certain privileges—but they believe they have a right to them, and they don't want to give them up. At the moment, they feel their privileges are under attack, so they begin to use the language racial and ethnic minorities have used, describing themselves as being under attack and victims of discrimination.”⁵¹⁵ Jardina argues that pro-Whiteness, or feeling solidarity with other Whites, is not necessarily accompanied by anti-Blackness. Gamila’s adoption of Whiteness as an Arab Muslim woman might be seen in this light. Structurally speaking, pro-Whiteness needs to be understood within the context of power dynamics. Namely that as pro-Whites jockey and maneuver to maintain their position of privilege and power, we must remember that power is relational and by definition is always power *over* another individual or group. Individuals and groups that are pro-White may not consciously acknowledge that their perspectives can only exist as one side of racial identity formation, as the other aspect of this formation is anti-Blackness and the haphazard, almost casual exclusion of Black Muslims that MLI and MLIs exhibit. I am interested here in the internal tactics, beliefs and understandings being employed to

⁵¹⁴ Hughes, *Myths America lives by: White supremacy and the stories that give us meaning*.

⁵¹⁵ Ashley Jardina, *White identity politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

navigate racialized and gendered dynamics of success and progress. Gamila's understandings of race within the Muslim world are insightful to this point:

We are not Brown, we don't see ourselves as Brown, especially those of us from the heart of the Middle East. We are Arabs, and as an Egyptian, Brown doesn't make sense and it wouldn't make sense to Arab immigrants. There is definitely a color issue, and actually it probably has to do with proximity to Africa. Like I am Egyptian, technically part of Africa, but Africa is Black. But Egypt it's not Black or Brown, it is hardcore Middle Eastern, it is White. We have a lot of Arab pride.

Gamila's racial logic points us to two different but interlocking social structures: race and color.

In America race and color often become one in the same when assessing the racial hierarchy as a suprastructure. However, in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries and South Asia, "race" is not a factor due to ethnic homogeneity in conjunction with other social organizing schemas, such as caste, provincial origins, and sayyid status.⁵¹⁶ These other social structures are tied to colorism—a biased and prejudiced social structure that attaches value and beauty to light (fair) skin and devalues dark(er) skin tones, and a bias that speaks to the experiences of MLers whose lighter or darker features do not match stereotypic assumptions about their race.⁵¹⁷ To translate this more seamlessly for our framework here, colorism is pro-lightness and anti-darkness, and operates within ethnic/racial groups, not across them. When colorism and race come together, social stratification vastly multiplies, creating hierarchies within hierarchies. To

⁵¹⁶ *Sayyid* is an honorific title denoting people accepted as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

⁵¹⁷ Reece, "Color crit: Critical race theory and the history and future of colorism in the United States."

give a more illustrative example and to echo Gamila's point, Arabs at times do not place themselves and at other times are not afforded space within the American racial schema. That is, some Arabs think of themselves as White, and within their Whiteness there may be several shade variations, but most Arabs strive to be light/fair and would never associate themselves with "darkness."⁵¹⁸ This contrasts with Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib and other proponents of adding MENA to the official U.S. census, pointing out their feelings of different-ness from European White peoples.⁵¹⁹ This is precisely why my initial question to Gamila, to share some of her unique experiences as a Brown Muslim woman, did not make much sense to her, and so she replied by saying she never considered or saw/currently sees herself as Brown. As a MENA Muslim, Gamila is Arab, therefore White, and of a light/medium shade; being Brown or Brownness never entered her sphere of self-understanding, despite the way others might frame her.

Interestingly, Gamila has coined a term that addresses both her race and her color, *White adjacent*. Gamila explained her adoption of this terminology in a 2019 interview: "White Adjacent to me means that I see myself like White people, as a White person in American society, and I am Muslim with foreign parents, so not exactly British Christian White." Gamila acknowledges that there are various types of White, and that in America she is not the pinnacle of Whiteness, due in large part to her religious otherness. But she

⁵¹⁸ Sarah Alsaïdi et al., "'Arab, brown, and other': Voices of Muslim Arab American women on identity, discrimination, and well-being," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* (2021).

⁵¹⁹ Michael Minta, "Rashida Tlaib: A Symbol and Champion for Detroit," in *Historic Firsts in US Elections* (Routledge).

also equates her Whiteness, or her White adjacency with privilege and a supremacy tied to her Arabness, saying, “I always enjoyed the privilege of being an Arab Muslim. That’s why it’s so easy to be White adjacent for me, because I think as an Arab in and among Brown Muslims we are kind of the privileged class. I think it’s because of speaking Arabic.” Here we once again see the transnational underpinnings of racial logics within MLI/Islam: Arabs experience a certain type of supremacy within global Islam, while also experiencing a qualified kind of privilege in their wider communities in places such as the U.S. As Gamila unpacks her Whiteness, her race and her color, trying to clarify her positionality, she throws out yet another hierarchical schema within the Muslim world, one based on language, specifically proficiency in Arabic.⁵²⁰ Because she is a fluent Arabic speaker, she can read the Qur’an, no translations or transliterations necessary; she speaks the Prophet’s language. She does not just recite the Qur’an, or memorize its words without knowing their meaning, all of which is usually the case with who Gamila terms “Brown Muslims.” These Brown Muslims, who are the majority of Muslims in America and in MLI are Desi Muslims—Muslims from South Asia—whose indigenous languages range from Pashto to Malayalam, with most fluent in Urdu and/or Hindi.⁵²¹ There is a heavy reliance on imams and mullahs to interpret the Qur’an as many Desis can read the Arabic script, but do not understand the meaning of the words they recite.⁵²² This

⁵²⁰ Bernoussi, "The supremacy of the Qur’anic sign and its impacts on the Arabic Muslim culture."

⁵²¹ Braj B Kachru, Yamuna Kachru, and Shikaripur Narayanarao Sridhar, *Language in South Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵²² Jamal Shah, Zahir Shah, and Muhammad Saleem Qazi, "The Role Of Religion In The Political System Of Pakistan," *The Discourse* 6, no. 1 (2020).

linguistic disadvantage translates into Arab supremacy, which for Gamila buttresses her Muslim Whiteness.

One of the questions that arose during and after my cohort's trips to Jerusalem in 2017 and 2018 was the question of constructing a positive American Muslim identity; this came up, as mentioned previously, in response to SHI curriculum that discussed positive Jewish identity formation. Relative to understanding their own Muslim identities, it is essential to understand the differing approaches Muslims have to Whiteness and Arabness. Members of the MLI network brought this up when the 2020 U.S. census was circulating. As stated earlier, the previous 2010 census had no specific racial/ethnic category for those of Middle Eastern North African (MENA) descent; they were funneled into the White racial category. The census bureau endeavored to fix this "problem" at the urgings of community activist organizations lobbying to have MENA as a racial/ethnic category on the 2020 census. Reactions to these efforts were mixed. In December 2019, Gamila, a MENA MLier texted me the following:

Fuck them. First they won't let us be different and they shove us into this White category! Now they are treating us like we are Brown! No way, that's why I will always claim Whiteness, cause fuck them, now they don't want us to be part of their identity....hell no. That's why I do it, just to piss them off. Why should they get to say who or what is White. First we are in, now we are out....but no, now I choose, and I am White.

Gamila hopes that by opting into Whiteness, she can change what Whiteness means, expand it to include Arabs and Arab American Muslims. She sees her Whiteness as a small effort towards changing American racial structures and racism.

Considering that the majority of the Muslims in MLI and the U.S. are South Asian (Desi), meaning not Arab, Middle Eastern, or North African, it is clear that the internal

racial hierarchy within MLI places MENA Muslims at the top, Desis in the middle, and Black Muslims clearly on the bottom: These hierarchies seem to mirror patterns in the U.S. This stratification is clearly following American racial structures, with one major difference: many Desis self-identify as White. So, some MENA Muslims think they are White, some Desi Muslims also think they are White; the only thing the two groups really agree on is that they are not Black.

When talking about the American Muslim community broadly and her own community specifically, Gamila steered our conversation to address the obvious White elephant in the room, White converts:

My encounter with White converts growing up was through the spouses of uncles and family friends, and then in college. And college for me was when I was opened up to Muslims other than my family and immediate community. The dream for me was to marry a convert so that I could get the best of both worlds, and I now don't think that's the case anymore. And by the best of both worlds I mean getting the American who is also Muslim if that makes sense.

Clearly Gamila directly associates American with White, to the point that they are almost interchangeable identifiers. However, with converts that embody Americanness and Muslimness there arises this need to explicitly state the Whiteness of the American Muslim convert she hoped would be her ideal mate. While explaining her past predilections, and their current impossibility, Gamila interestingly echoes many of her American Muslim male comrades, as she explains: "Muslim men, especially the Brown Muslim men, are always looking for the fairest sister in the room, they are always trying to hook up and marry the Whitest looking women. Some say it's because that's what they are attracted to, but honestly they are just being a bit racist with their 'attractions.' I don't

do that anymore cause really I am looking for a good person, not just a trophy.” Gamila illustrates a common point of tension within transnational Muslim communities as well as MLI. She draws attention to racialized aspects of marriageability within MLI that have a profound effect on intra-Muslim gendered relations, asserting that her brethren are still currently holding on to “preferences” for Whiteness in their partners, something she dismissed twenty years ago.⁵²³ This gender swap time warp is something Gamila and many non-White Muslim women are aware of, and while some women might choose to isolate and ostracize White converts, especially female White converts, Gamila explains and expresses the double bind that White female converts are trapped in: “I also saw a bit of DV [domestic violence] in my experience with White women converts from their spouses, or them becoming more practicing than their husbands. I think White converts used to enjoy more perks before than they do now. I think in general converts are held up like trophies and then just put on a shelf and left to fend for themselves.”

Gamila offers some very important insight into how race and gender, specifically Whiteness and gender, create very different lives and situations for White converts. This becomes clear when we unpack Gamila’s insights with an intersectional lens: we see patriarchal tendencies resurge, mainly with the rise and prominence that White male converts seem to consistently achieve, so much so that they are held up as national voices that represent the American Ummah. Religious studies scholar Mahdi Tourage helps

⁵²³ Grewal, "Marriage in colour: race, religion and spouse selection in four American mosques."

explain why White - in this case, White American - converts have and are a powerful social commodity, saying:

That is why all things being equal a Lebanese-born Muslim for example, who could more than 'pass' for a 'White' American, cannot signify belief the same way that a White American convert can (an important factor here is the latter's conversion narrative). This is because the referent for Whiteness is not simply the colour of skin or physical racial features. In the context of the racial and colonial history of Europe and the Americas, Whiteness is about assigned privilege and cumulative power that while remaining unmarked and invisible continue to 'colour' the politics of representation—something that the idealization of White converts is evidently not immune to.⁵²⁴

For White female converts, as Gamila explained, they are held up as trophies, as beautiful White dolls presented and used to unmake the myth of Muslim misogyny.⁵²⁵ This assertion is somewhat jarring when we understand that it is this invisible structure of racialized logics within some Islams that frames Gamila's identity as an American Muslim woman. This is especially true as she holds two opposing positions on Whiteness in tandem: aspirations to an ideal Whiteness and the current state of identity politics and minority rights that are pushing back against the conflation of White with good and American. Gamila discusses her own reasons for claiming Whiteness as our conversation continued:

Now with an American Islam that looks very different than the immigrant Islam that I grew up with we are seeing things very different. Plus in a post 9-11 world, things are just different as we spend a lot of time expressing and trying to convince Americans that we are also American.

⁵²⁴ Mahdi Tourage, "Performing belief and reviving Islam: Prominent (white male) converts in Muslim revival conventions," *Performing Islam* 1, no. 2 (2013): 221.

⁵²⁵ Umaymah Mohammad, Isa Naveed, and Dennis L Rudnick, "Radical rejections of violence: Resisting anti-Muslim racism," *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis* 8, no. 1 (2019).

That is where my White adjacent insistence comes in. I can never really explain to people why I insist to embrace my Whiteness because people just jump down my throat. White is a bad word now and no one wants to be White. I think it's important that we expand what it means to be White so that it doesn't get conflated with American. White is default American, and everyone else is hyphenated. That's not fair.

Gamila's understanding of Whiteness is quite brilliant; she inhabits the invisible with her visibility! The invisible is about Whiteness, White being the unmarked racial category, often seen as a racial category absent of race and latent with invisible privilege and power. It is a masterful stroke in navigating the American racial systems thrust upon her and her community. Gamila's insistence of her White identity is a tactic she hopes will expand Whiteness and therefore her hopes for social mobility in the context in which she lives. In effect she is unmaking invisibility by tying it to her markedness; she is marking Whiteness and therefore making it visible, which is a positive maneuver from her perspective. However, this provokes questions about reciprocal consequences: Is Gamila's White adjacency making White visible, expanding Whiteness? In other words, is Gamila's strategy changing race in America, or is she actually in the process of becoming White and therefore invisible? And are these possibilities exclusionary of one another?

The invisibility that being White offers is a natural fit for Muslims like Gamila who are Arab. Arabness within Muslim contexts comes with its own privileges and mobility. Gamila explains how being an Arab Muslim American garners a specific status. She says, being Arab "gives me more credibility, and I think people take what I say more seriously, maybe with more authority. It also allows me to move through other ethnic groups freely. I think I feel closer to the history of Islam, even though I'm Egyptian and

not from the Arabian Peninsula.” Gamila discloses that within the American Ummah she has an unspoken authority tied to her Arabness; people take her more seriously as an inhabitant of Islam; she is understood as having special knowledge about Islam and its Middle Eastern origins, as she shares in the Prophet’s Arabness. She also states that her elevated status allows her to move freely within other different ethnic enclaves of Muslims. Whereas other ethnic outsiders may provoke notice, and/or be unwelcome, Gamila is mostly unnoticed, invisible, even a welcome addition bringing credibility, acceptance, and approval of different ethnic Islams and ethnic practitioner variations.⁵²⁶ In other words, Arab equals authority and ethnic/racial invisibility, which seemingly mimics White privilege. Through this analysis, we can understand how for non-Arab (read Desi, in the case of MLI) Muslims in America, claiming Arabness to gain access to Arab privilege which in turn is a steppingstone to Whiteness, makes an odd kind of sense for a racialized religious minority.

Desi Racial Logics for MLers

Gamila’s Arab privilege encapsulates her White adjacency, but how do Desi Muslims, who comprise the majority of Muslim MLers and the American Muslim Ummah, gain access to Arab privilege, White adjacency, and then eventually Whiteness – apparently a prerequisite for many Muslim MLers’ perceived avenues for success? How can Desi Muslims gain access to halls of power? How do these halls of power gatekeep based on raced and gendered assumptions? Especially when we are not so sure

⁵²⁶ Haleema Welji, "Interrogating the " Good" Muslim: Challenging Representations of Muslims through Linguistic Analysis," *Prompt: A Journal of Academic Writing Assignments* 6, no. 1 (2022).

what Desi Muslims are categorized as in the first place. Sociologist Nazli Kibria, a self-described Bangladeshi American, recounts the following after she asked her race and ethnicity class, “Well, what race am I?”⁵²⁷

“Aren’t Indians Caucasians? I remember reading somewhere that Indians from India are from the same racial stock as Europeans. Their features are White; except for their skin color they’re basically White.”

“But the skin color is what matters. Asian Indians have dark skin. No one in America would ever look at Professor Kibria and say that she is White.”

“The only thing I know about this is from watching Mississippi Masala. And from that it seemed to me that Indians don’t see themselves as Black.”

“As far as race, it’s clear that you’re not White or Black or Asian. So what does that leave us with? How do you feel about Latino?”

(Laughter)

“It’s a ridiculous question. I don’t see why we have to put these labels on people. We don’t have to accept the system.”

That was 1996, and from this dialogue we can see that South Asians, Desis, are seen as ambiguous non-Whites. MLers sitting across the table from their White Jewish comrades were constantly confronted with the complexities of their own racial categorizations, especially in juxtaposition with another – if not Whiter – racialized religious minority. Historically, in America, one of the locational axes for many MLers, Desis have been legally barred from inhabiting Whiteness, affecting miscegenation laws and property rights. The Census Bureau from the beginning, since 1910 when South Asians first popped up on the Census Bureau’s radar, consistently classified them as “non-White

⁵²⁷ Nazli Kibria, "Not Asian, black or white? Reflections on South Asian American racial identity," *Amerasia Journal* 22, no. 2 (1996).

Asiatics.”⁵²⁸ The 1923 Bhagat Singh Thind Supreme Court case firmly established Desis as non-Whites. Bhagat Singh Thind lobbied to reclassify himself as a “free White person” to obtain citizenship under the Naturalization Act of 1906. Thind self-identified as Aryan, stating that Europeans and Indians shared this common ancestry, and he was therefore White. Thind’s argument was immediately rejected with the court stating that regardless of ancestry, Indians did not meet a “common sense” definition of White.⁵²⁹ The only exception to Desis being designated as non-Whites was in the 1970 Census when they were classified as “White,” but in all the following decades were again reclassified as “Asian Indian.”⁵³⁰ Before 1970 the Census Bureau categorized Desis as “Hindus,” and/or “Other/Hindu,” clearly tying religion to race in the early 1900s, and then later tying race to ethnicity and therefore by extension geography. However, there is some truth within some Desi circles about claiming Whiteness because of shared ancestry within the Caucasian designation. These Desi circles generally claim ancestry from districts and provinces of India and Pakistan, some asserting lineage of the “Aryan” race, and others drawing on Persian, Arab, Roman, and Greek ancestry due to encroachments on the Subcontinent by major empires of the past.⁵³¹ The difference between claiming Aryan vs. Turkic/Persian/Arab origins in modern race debates is bifurcated along religious lines;

⁵²⁸ Susan Koshy, "Category crisis: South Asian Americans and questions of race and ethnicity," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 7, no. 3 (1998): 293.

⁵²⁹ Reimers, "The Impact of Immigration Legislation: 1875-present."

⁵³⁰ Koshy, "Category crisis: South Asian Americans and questions of race and ethnicity."

⁵³¹ Nitasha Tamar Sharma, *Hip hop desis* (Duke University Press, 2010).

with Indian Hindus in America associating Aryan with upper-caste Brahmans, and Desi Muslims claiming ties to the Mughal Empire specifically Arab/Persian heritage.⁵³² Interestingly, Arab and Persian ancestry qualifies as Whiteness broadly in the Desi collective consciousness. These tensions draw our focus to the “problem” non-White Whites pose for racial structures in America. The accuracy of these claims is not my concern at all, but the belief in these claims as true by their proponents is an essential question of this project.

Historian Vijay Prashad writes about the ambiguous racial state of Desis in America saying the following:

My argument is that though Desis are seen as nonWhite, they are also seen as bearing an especially spiritual patina, one that is sometimes seen as worthy and other times seen as undesirable. Both intellectual and popular culture approach the Desi as something fundamentally different from the ‘American’ (a word that is often used to indicate Whiteness); and both subscribe to the belief that though the latter is practical and worldly, the former is spiritual and ethereal.⁵³³

This spiritual patina that Prashad refers to has most definitely been worn down and scraped off in post 9/11 America. Furthermore, this spiritual patina never fully applied to Desi Muslims, unless they were confused for Indian Hindus.⁵³⁴ For the past two decades there has been no confusion about the race, ethnicity, or religion of the Desi in the

⁵³² Ramin Raza, "Whiteness as Escapism & the De-Romanticization of the Brown Body," *NU Writing*, no. 12 (2021).

⁵³³ Prashad, *The karma of Brown folk*, x.

⁵³⁴ Prashad, x

American psyche, as all those designations have been boiled down to one: terrorist.⁵³⁵

There have been massive efforts by non-Muslim Desis to distinguish themselves from Desi Muslims, with the agenda of stopping hate crimes against their kind, as opposed to standing in solidarity with Desi Muslims as Americans. The fight to be the right kind of “other” took center stage, leaving Desi Muslims without the protection of a spiritual patina. Prashad, almost prophetically, addresses the dissonance of Desi believed Whiteness and lived Brown reality:

There is an additional reason most Desi migrants disregard the fact of racism in civil society. Many tend to follow an old tradition that groups Indians with Whites in a racial family called ‘Aryan,’ believing that if they are joined in this racial fantasy and can only explain this to the bulk of the population, then they will be accepted. The acts of violence against us, Desis seem to say, are in error; hit the real people of color, not us.⁵³⁶

While Prashad does not separate out Desis on religious lines, the American evolution on terrorism and its proponents have veered towards Islam, leaving the spiritual and ethereal Hindu Indian intact. The harmless Hindu is now juxtaposed to the Muslim terrorist, without concretizing either’s racial designation. Prashad makes the following statement with regards to Desi racial logic: “Desis realize they are not ‘White,’ but there is certainly a strong sense among most Desis that they are not ‘Black.’”⁵³⁷ My own research concurs that many Desis in MLI do not see themselves as Black and are not seen as Black;

⁵³⁵ Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*.

⁵³⁶ Prashad, *The karma of Brown folk*, 93.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

however, Prashad's preceding words, that Desis realize they are not White is hard to accept based on the data from my field.

Prashad is partially correct in that Desis are not *perceived* as White and they realize this; however, it appears that many Desis do generally believe they are White, self-identify as such, and additionally Desi Muslims in America enact their Whiteness in many ways, one being through hating the Brown Indian Hindus that they are often confused with. This mutual hatred is driven by diasporic temperaments that demand loyalty to homeland politics and divisions in conjunction with wanting to keep collective identity in America exclusive and distinct. Therefore, as Prashad explains: “[T]he cleavages created between peoples from the different subcontinental states has widened on religious lines as Indians are pressured to be aggressively Hindu and Pakistanis are asked, in turn, to be publicly Muslim.”⁵³⁸ The ambiguity attached to Desis in America has forced group distinctions based on religious differentiations, a problem that replicates itself within MLI. Many Muslim MLIs are asking implicitly or explicitly, which religions are White? American? How can/do Muslims fit into these categories? Does social mobility in the U.S. hinge upon whether I am perceived as White or non-White?

CONFRONTATIONS OF RACIALIZATION IN MLI

This section encompasses raced relations amongst SHI Jews and MLI Muslims in several transnational contexts. This conversation is not only about what is overtly said, but encapsulates an ethnography of silences with regard to naming identity categories that

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 137.

may prove self-contradictory within the pedagogically structured SHI/MLI program. Meaning that race as it is tied to colorism for Muslims and Jews was not openly discussed or brought to the forefront of any official interactions or learning sessions. Nonetheless, these issues were consistently present throughout my participation in MLI. Some of the salient themes this section discusses in relation to how race is lived and understood by many MLIs include: Judaism and Jews as a race, confrontations of the formations of Jewish peoplehood in terms of a raced religion or a religion that operates under racial logics, and Jewish Whiteness vs. Muslim Brownness in Israel/Palestine.

Collective Traumas & Fears

The relationship between racialization and Islam in the twenty first century cannot be understood without discussing the events of 9/11. This infamous day is a touchstone for America and transnationally and especially for Muslims in non-Muslim majority countries. The majority of MLIs are from this generation of Muslims whose early adult years were highly impacted by the events of 9/11 and how they shape non-Muslim perceptions of Islam and Muslimness. Policies enacted after 9/11 have resulted in the racialization of Islam within local and transnational contexts that not only racialize Muslims but in different ways paint Arabs, Muslims, and Brown people as terrorists. These conflation, confusions, and at times, contradictions, have muddied the waters for MLIs who grew up in a post-9/11 world. 9/11 not only affected Muslims but also put religious minorities in the spotlight, forcing racialization of religion across religious

enclaves.⁵³⁹ This includes the re-racialization of Jews, the increase of hate crimes against Asians, Sikhs, and people perceived as “Muslim.” Over the past years, this event has increased the scrutiny of religious minorities across a number of traditions. This has impacted MLers’ lived experiences and in some ways their decision to join MLI in the first place. As discussed in Chapter 1, this also perpetuates the phenomenon of oppressed oppressors, as seen with the fraught relationships between and towards Israel/Palestine. While in many ways, MLI was founded as a way for religious minorities to address this racialization and profiling of their respective religions, we see that the state of Israel perpetuates its own racialized logics towards Arabs, Palestinians, and Muslims. I now turn to discuss some of the complicated relationships MLers have to modern conceptions of race and racism, and how these views both reject and reinforce logics of racism.

The reality of the racialization of religion, especially as evidenced by the Jewish and Muslim Questions previously discussed, is that members of minority religions are often reduced to one or few aspects of their identities. The reductionism embedded within these racialized logics robs minorities of the possibility of dimensionality in terms of a multivalent identity that includes national, ethnic, religious and linguistic variations.⁵⁴⁰ This reductionism has resulted in instances of violence such as Nazi logics that reduced Jews from various ethnic and national origins to an unacceptable race incompatible with

⁵³⁹ Arthur G Neal, *National trauma and collective memory: Extraordinary events in the American experience* (Routledge, 2018).

⁵⁴⁰ Farid Hafez, "Shifting borders: Islamophobia as common ground for building pan-European right-wing unity," *Patterns of Prejudice* 48, no. 5 (2014).

German volk/citizenship.⁵⁴¹ Similarly, the state of Israel has employed these very same Nazi logics, denying citizenship to Arabs, Palestinians, and Muslims, based on the perception that they are incompatible with the Jewish state.⁵⁴² Additionally, in a post-9/11 world, Western nation states enacted policies framing Muslims as non-loyal citizens who must be treated as threats to national security regardless of their proven years of loyalty and citizenship and their contributions to the community.⁵⁴³ The reinforcement of this binary asks questions about whether a “real” Muslim can exist within a non-Muslim state. Many scholars, secular and theological, domestic and abroad, voiced their opinions and worries about problems for Muslim identity in Western contexts; however this debate was not part of the daily lives of many Muslim MLers living in North America. For many MLers there was no debate; they were American fully and Muslim fully, there was no choice to be made, no argument to be had. Yazbeck et al iterate these states of being: “While the new immigrants and the foreign ‘experts’ continued to debate the legitimacy of living in a non- Muslim state, other Muslims had no qualms: they were American. They included those who had emigrated between 1870 and the 1950s, as well as converts who appeared to be comfortable and able to maintain the imperatives of Islamic life and practice in the United States. They believed that America and its institutions have room

⁵⁴¹ Junaid Rana, "The story of Islamophobia," *Souls* 9, no. 2 (2007).

⁵⁴² Bazian, "The islamophobia industry and the demonization of Palestine: Implications for American studies."

⁵⁴³ Pnina Werbner, "Folk devils and racist imaginaries in a global prism: Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in the twenty-first century," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013).

for Muslims.”⁵⁴⁴ This tension between perceived possibilities for Muslims to be fully Westernized, and more specifically, tensions between perceived Muslimness and perceived Americanness tie directly into the foundation story of MLI. MLI exists at the cross-section of inhabiting both Americanness and Muslimness in ways that signal full social citizenship within North American contexts. MLI in effect is an effort to uphold the American ideal of pluralism. Throughout the MLI program, after participants complete their initial two-year educational curriculum, MLIs have access to a plethora of educational opportunities, as students and instructors within Israeli/Palestinian and North American contexts. One such course offering, designed by Haroon and two other MLIs, titled *Transitions in North American Islams*, is described as follows: “We will explore, how the concepts of Ummah and Shariah have been affected by the traumas of colonialism and the different circumstances of Islam in the Muslim-majority world and North America. Individual sessions will explore questions such as: What does it mean to belong to a Muslim community in the modern age? What’s the relationship between religious law and secular citizenship in a pluralistic democracy?” This course creation and description are an example of the pervasive questions that are constantly on the minds of MLIs.

In many ways, these questions about Americanness and the role of Islam within Westernized contexts reflect broader patterns of discourse and thought within and about Islam. Eventually this debate among American Muslims – a pattern later reflected in MLI

⁵⁴⁴ Haddad, "Claiming Space in America's Pluralism," 19-20.

- shifted from whether or not one would exist in America as a Muslim, to how much engagement with the broader American society was required, desired, and necessary as Americans and Muslims. This turn in the 1980s laid to rest the idea that American Muslims essentially needed to live within an Islamic state to fully be Muslim, adjusting the discourse to focus on creating space for Islam in America. Center-stage Islamic institutions such as the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), in 1986, started to encourage its members to fully engage with secular and religious America.⁵⁴⁵ Muslim organizations in the eighties urged more engagement in American society. That engagement necessitated and/or morphed into many interfaith efforts involving Muslims reaching out primarily to Jews and Christians in order to better solidify a Muslim place within America. Some of the more famous examples include ISNA's inter-faith dialogue program Children of Abraham, MJAC the Muslim Jewish Advisory Council, the Chicago Coalition for Interreligious Learning, CAIR the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the El-Hibri Charitable Foundation. MLI is the result of the perceived failure of these interfaith dialogue organizations to make progress towards a stronger relationship between Muslims and Jews in American contexts. These concerns about pluralistic possibilities and maneuverability in predominately North American contexts drive leadership and participation in MLI.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 20.

Islamophobia & anti-Semitism

Understanding that MLI operates in large part as a pluralism project meant to improve the status of Muslims in American and transnational contexts, we must understand how Islamophobia and anti-Semitism operate both within MLI and in a post-9/11 world. The repercussions of 9/11 bring into full view the otherization processes of Muslims around the world. As previously discussed, this otherization is demonstrative of processes loosely summed up as *racialization*. The reality that 9/11 created is evidenced by MLier confusion, discomfort and rejection of imposed racial categories that center on othering Muslims and perpetuate problematic tropes involving terrorism. The conscious concerns for MLI and other post-9/11 Muslim activist networks are also affected by the increased surveillance of American Muslim religious organizations and worship centers. As many MLiers complain, the caricaturization of Islam-as-race and Muslims-as-terrorists collapses all Islams and Muslims into a one-dimensional identity box that reinforces the idea that Muslims are all categorically similar, requiring just that descriptor “Muslim.” An additional component of this caricaturization imagines a necessarily un-Western Muslim who is also extremely religiously observant. MLI similarly grapples with the multiplicity of Muslims and Muslim identities that truly make up the American as well as the global ummah. Haddad aptly explains the multiple approaches to Islam in the context of the U.S., and the fact that despite stereotypic ideas, many Muslims are in fact not devout. Haddad states,

The majority of Muslims (estimated between 70 and 80 percent) in the United States are not active participants in mosques or Islamic religious institutions. They have embraced the fact that they are part of American society and have little concern for what the compromise might cost. Many

refer to their children as ‘real’ Americans, not just citizens. They look with disdain at organized Islamic mosques and centers and believe that non-practicing Muslims are just as ‘good’—if not better—than those who attend regular mosque services.⁵⁴⁶

For many MLers, along with many Muslims in Western contexts, racialization is an external problem about which they are concerned, but ironically, racialization is sometimes also perpetuated within Muslim communities themselves. In other words, some MLers seem to have internalized these binarisms that resulted from American and other foreign policy responses to 9/11 that pitted Islam against America, freedom, democracy, and so forth. Haddad extrapolates the strategic juxtaposition between Islam and Western values here:

In the post- 9/11 world, American policy makers and those in the administration have tended to depict the world in binary fashion with poles of good and evil, civilized and uncivilized, democratic and despotic. At the same time they have insisted on policies that in reality are the antithesis of the American ideals of democracy, tolerance, and civilization—the very ideals, ironically, that the American political elite claims the terrorists aim to destroy. Many political analysts believe that in the two decades since the collapse of the Soviet empire the U.S. has been searching for another evil to be vanquished. Now it appears that the enemy has been identified, and “terrorist Islam” rather than communism is portrayed as the enemy of freedom, godliness, civilization, and all that is good. Some seriously question whether such an enemy can be part of American civil society, even one that proclaims itself to be multicultural and/or pluralistic.⁵⁴⁷

The necessity of an ultimate Other mirrors the identity crisis that Donniel Hartman described in terms of positive vs. negative identity formation: the necessity of

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 23.

an existential enemy in order to maintain collective identity and coherence is something Jewish, Muslim, and seemingly American communities are struggling with now in a post-9/11 world. Ironically, this causes a convergence of identities that historically have found themselves in conflict, but which are all dependent on each other. This manifests not only in the question as to the compatibility of Islam and Muslims in the U.S. and other Western contexts, but also in the conflict in Israel/Palestine. This is something that MLers grapple with in their attempts to advocate for their respective Muslim communities. Some reject the premise and process of racialization outright, while others attempt to appear respectable according to externally imposed logics. MLI holds in tandem multivalent positionalities concerning the racialization of Islam because its members inhabit a variety of American ideals with various intervals of intensity. Some MLers uphold assimilatory practices that displace visual markers of Muslimness from the American public sphere, such as Nadine choosing to take off her hijab after her divorce. On the other hand, some MLers voice a moral imperative to engage in critical analysis of harmful oppressive structures, such as Ibrahim's confused criticism about how Jews simultaneously have access to a protected racial identity on a global stage, while also enjoying the protections of a religious minority within the American context. Regardless of their approaches to the agreed-upon problem of racialization, MLI, by virtue of its place within a lineage of pluralistic, predominately American Muslim networks, cannot directly or adequately address the structural problems reinforcing the otherization of Muslims. That is, MLers by virtue of their participation in the program are operating within a pluralist framework. In short, MLers accept, albeit to varied

degrees, the premise that pluralism is a suitable corrective for problems facing American and transnational Muslims. I question this assumption primarily due to the way that MLI's notions of how to advance Muslim causes (whatever they may be) are rooted in systems that oppress Muslim and other minority religions and communities.

This is demonstrated by the tendency of MLIs and other Muslims to respond to the otherization and caricaturization of Islam by defining Islam and Muslims as the exact opposite of these negative caricatures: Muslims aren't terrorists; Muslims aren't fundamentalists; Muslims are properly Western, American, democratic, etc. This tendency to appear respectable according to racist logics is understandable; however, the overall effects of the internalization of racism and Islamophobia are far more damaging. As Muslims in many parts of the world prop up Islam and Muslimness as the essential embodiment of values of freedom, pluralism, and civilized goodness, they engage in the otherization/demonization of other Muslims, reinforcing the binary thinking that disenfranchises Muslims in non-majority Muslim countries in the first place. In other words, a real problem facing MLI and a number of Muslim communities is the threat of being divided not only from the outside with the imposition of harmful governmental policies and cultural Islamophobia, but they are also splitting themselves and their communities apart in an effort to be legible and respectable under these inherently problematic and limiting terms. These tensions and contradictions were succinctly articulated when I interviewed Sarah in 2018, who stated, "This is why we need an American Islam." We were in the sitting area outside the elevators of the second floor of our hotel in Jerusalem when there was an alleged terrorist attack perpetrated by Muslims.

In response to this news, messages from MLers started to fly back and forth, expressing fear and concern about possible backlash against Muslims in the West. By stating this, Sarah alludes to the transnational ties many Muslims living in diaspora continue to maintain in the U.S., which in Sarah's eyes cause questions about Muslim loyalties to their Western hosts. Because most Muslims come from non-White national origins, that continuous connectivity to other nation states is often seen as hostile to Western values. For Sarah, this association taints American Muslim communities. Sarah is a White convert, and so in response to her call for an American Islam, many MLers protested that what Sarah really wanted was a White Islam. They read this statement as Sarah's attempt to retain her White privilege and her Muslim status simultaneously.

As discussed, maintaining Whiteness and Muslimness simultaneously proves difficult if not impossible due to imposed logics of racialization. Political scientist Amaney Jamal eloquently sums up this point: "The racialization process essentially sees Muslims and Arabs as different than and inferior to Whites, potentially violent and threatening, and therefore deserving of policies that target them as a distinct group of people and criminalize them without evidence of criminal activity."⁵⁴⁸ The racialization process is a macro-mechanism for identity formation, and by this I mean that the racialization of American Muslims is a dual, reciprocal process that establishes the racial and religious boundaries that simultaneously produce White Christian America and the Muslim Other. This logic and reactions to it are evidenced by MLI's premise that Jews

⁵⁴⁸ Amaney Jamal, "The Racialization of Muslim Americans," *Muslims in Western politics* (2009): 203.

and Muslims can and should work together to improve their positionality in what they perceive as overtly Christian, Western contexts. Othering initially occurs because a group feels the need to create/re-establish the boundaries that make them feel distinct. It is a dual process of affirmation and nullification: We are White [affirmation], we are NOT Arab [nullification]; and so on until all of the components of a group's affirmed identity collapse into a seamless label: in this case, American and/or the ever-problematically general term Western are pitted against "Muslim," "Arab," "Jew" and a number of other racialized marked identities. Jamal is pointing out that Muslims are different, thought to be outwardly marked in some way that sets them apart, and this difference is framed by racialized tropes that tie difference to potential threat and violence without evidential cause. Jamal continues instructively, "[I]n a society that is already constructed along racial lines, any perceived difference between the dominant mainstream and a minority Other tends to conform to the racist framework... This form of racism is not contingent only on differences in appearance but also on differences in cultural attributes."⁵⁴⁹ These racist frameworks are a manifestation of what I previously described as binarism, the logics that create an "us" vs "them" mythology used to organize our real and imagined pluralistic American society.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 204.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 203.

The ultimate conclusion of the racialization of Muslims in non-Muslim majority countries is that religion is now raced.⁵⁵¹ The idea seems obvious, yet extremely uncomfortable for many American MLers to accept. The confusion regarding what religion is and does results from Western concepts of religion-as-faith. Religious studies and understandings of religion in Western-dominated fields center on faith and belief, rather than elements such as practice, tribe, blood, and so forth.⁵⁵² The reconciliation of a faith-based religion vs. a closed tribal loyalty based on blood ties is evidenced by how racialized religious minorities adopt universalisms in order to assimilate to hegemonic Western ideas of religions being faith-based only.⁵⁵³ So if religion is faith, an unseen quantity, then how can it be tied to race? Recall Ibrahim's confusion when SHI described Jews as an identifiable racial *and* religious group. Haroon responded to Ibrahim's point by saying, "I do find it awkward as an American to be told to accept that a religion can also be a race and yet still a religion; you get to be a state and then also back in America, freedom of religion too." Haroon is expressing confusion because Jewish bodies are seemingly White, and therefore their race is unmarked; however, historical circumstance has proven otherwise. The confusion stems from race being about color, about being outwardly marked; it is rooted, especially in twenty first century American consciousness, in the physical, meaning appearance. But it would seem that the

⁵⁵¹ Steve Garner and Saher Selod, "The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514531606>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0896920514531606>.

⁵⁵² Franck, "Is Personal Freedom a Western Value?."

⁵⁵³ Abdulla, "Culture, religion, and freedom of religion or belief."

racialization of Muslims – and of Jews - completely contradicts Western understandings of religion and race as seemingly neatly separable. This is clear from MLers’ confusion about the racialization of Jews as well as their own racialization. Garner and Selod illuminate this conundrum: “Embracing [the racialization of religion] means giving up the conjoined twin false binaries underpinning the fixation that religious affiliations are never to do with the body, and that ‘race’ is only to do with the body.”⁵⁵⁴ Conceptualizing race and religion in this way is simultaneously an expansion and contraction of both terms. Race is not limited to derivations of phenotypes and has historically been defined by both physical and cultural characteristics. These ascribed traits are not limited to skin-tone/pigmentation and have historically included language, clothing, and religious practices. With the understanding that religion is raced, theoretical questions about whether people can be phobic of a religion are avoided and irrelevant: religion, by popular standards, is internal, and supposedly, therefore, unmarked. The body is still the preeminent location of racism, even when the road approaching these bodies is beset by religious and cultural topography. Garner and Selod illustrate these navigations: “[W]e see how people read Muslim-ness onto individuals by using a combination of ideas about culture and appearance. If the markers of Islam (hijab, jilbaab, a Muslim name, nation of origin, etc.) are absent, ‘passing’ as a non-Muslim is possible for those without conspicuous names, accents or dress, and those who do not ‘look like’ a Muslim (which

⁵⁵⁴ Garner and Selod, "The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia," 11.

means different things in different places).”⁵⁵⁵ Understanding that religion is raced results in a deeper understanding of Islamophobia, not one that superficially paints Islamophobia as an individual’s aberrant reactions, but Islamophobia as the consolidation of a matrix of socially shared ideas and practices that collapse all Muslims into one group and ascribes “innate” qualities to Them, such as: violent, misogynistic, disloyal, and inherently opposed to Western values.⁵⁵⁶

Racialization is an act of power. By understanding it this way, its agents, such as the state, the media and other authorities are laid bare by their actions in service of racialization.⁵⁵⁷ As an active demonstration of power, racialization can also be operationalized for resistance: We see some MLers attempt to use this tactic, such as Gamila’s expansion of Whiteness to include Arabs, which she terms as White-adjacent: In this way, she attempts, theoretically, to expand definitions of dominant categories and therefore include currently marginalized peoples. Sociologist Robert Miles similarly contends that racialization can be positively internalized as a political strategy:

[T]he Other may adopt the content of the racialised discourse to identify itself as Self. Thus, populations that were racialised and excluded by the European discourse of race have appropriated and legitimated that discourse as a means by which to identify Self and Other. In so doing, the evaluative content has usually been changed from negative to positive: what for Europeans was once a sign of inferiority has been transformed into a source of pride.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 11-12.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁵⁸ Miles, *Racism*, 102.

Groups can racialize themselves, or more simply stated, flip the script: what theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to as strategic essentialism. Scholar Elizabeth Eide succinctly sums up Spivak's concept: "[S]trategic essentialism in this sense entails that members of groups, while being highly differentiated internally, may engage in an essentializing and to some extent a standardizing of their public image, thus advancing their group identity in a simplified, collectivized way to achieve certain objectives."⁵⁵⁹ Of course, these strategic essentialisms problematize while also reinforcing the hegemonic logics at play. The key to strategic essentialism is its temporary deployment to undermine current political narratives. When the limited shelf life of strategic essentialism is ignored, and essentialized narratives turn long-lasting, internalized oppression takes root.

Here DuBois's concept of double consciousness, as intergenerational survival and existence, rather than a temporary political strategy, becomes the reality of racialized groups that engage in strategic essentialism for too long.⁵⁶⁰ Double consciousness occurs when minorities—the marginalized, the racialized—perceive and understand themselves through the eyes and mindsets of the majority - their oppressors - and are often forced to learn to codeswitch and alter their behaviors in accordance with those perceptions as a survival and safety tactic. Double consciousness is necessitated by non-dominant persons being forced to navigate oppressive hierarchical structures that place them in disadvantaged and often highly threatening positions. American Muslims have similarly

⁵⁵⁹ Elisabeth Eide, "Strategic essentialism and ethnification," *Nordicom Review* 31, no. 2 (2010).

⁵⁶⁰ Du Bois, *The souls of black folk*.

acquired this double consciousness, as Garner and Selod explain: “[A]ll over the West, Muslims are deploying brands of ‘double consciousness’ to manage the risks of discrimination, confrontation and abuse.”⁵⁶¹ Double consciousness is an unavoidable effect imposed by racial structures that disadvantage racialized minorities, and strategic essentialism is a constrained choice some non-dominant communities use to navigate these hierarchies. Racialization of American Muslims, according to Selod, effectively blocks their social citizenship by undermining the three components that allow groups to gain and maintain their membership: nationality: identifiability as a member of a particular nation; standing: perceived responsibility and capability as members, and allegiance: perceived loyalty as members. Selod explains how racialization undermines these avenues of social citizenship:

Having any of these traits contested because of one’s skin tone, cultural traits, language, nation of origin, or religious identity counters the ideals of universalism and reinforces barriers to inclusion in American citizenship based on such differences. This arises when bodies are subjected to exclusion from a sense of belonging within the nation because they are racialized as perpetually foreign, bad for society and disloyal to America.⁵⁶²

MLIers maneuver based on these perceptions that Islam and Americanness are incompatible.

This chapter has examined the racial logics employed and imposed on MLIers and the multiple contexts in which they navigate. These examinations, while not exhaustive,

⁵⁶¹ Garner and Selod, "The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia," 17.

⁵⁶² Selod, "Citizenship denied: The racialization of Muslim American men and women post-9/11."

point to the predominate concerns and realities for my cohort. The multivalent hierarchies that these seemingly affluent American Muslims move through shed light on the importance of social citizenship within pluralistic contexts such as the U.S. Within these complex racialized hierarchies, there is an additional component yet to be discussed: gender. I now turn to unpack this additional layer as it relates to MLer identity and the socioeconomic racialized structures that dictate gendered maneuverings.

Chapter 5: Mimesis & Gendered Maneuverings: Building Muslim Pluralisms

This chapter deals with the different ways Muslim MLers navigate dominant social hierarchies and norms embroiled in their perceptions of what it means to be “Muslim” and “American.” One primary strategy MLers use to do this involves mimesis. Mimesis for MLers is an internalization and mimicry of the Jewish tactics and strategies conveyed through the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI) educational program. Meaning that through close contact with transnational Jewish communities in Israel/Palestine and the West, MLers have learned new tools and strategies for negotiating the many social hierarchies that govern Muslim positionalities within these contexts. Muslim mimicry of Jewish collective identity strategies is ultimately a sign of respect for the perceived status that Jews have cultivated and maintained within a plethora of landscapes. The Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI) views the MLI program as an opportunity to gain access to another insular community that has historically been disinterested in engaging with Israeli Jews and Jews living in diaspora. SHI Jews see this access as an opportunity to convey their own struggles and successes with obtaining personhood and the effects these struggles and successes have had on collective Jewish identity. The respect Muslim MLers have for these knowledges in no way cancels out the responsibility Muslim MLers feel with regard to their pro-Palestinian advocacy. In fact, it is learning Jewish strategies that many MLers believe will unlock new pathways to peace that return dignity and territory to their Palestinian brothers and sisters. In conjunction with the internalization of these Jewish tools, Muslim MLers are learning to maneuver within intra-Muslim and interfaith pluralisms that problematize but also

reinforce predominant racialized and patriarchal structures. The culmination of mimesis and maneuverings results in the solidification of a collective MLier goal: the institution of Muslim pluralism.⁵⁶³ In what follows, we will see how MLiers have internalized their Jewish training and how the deployment of these new knowledges is at once making and unmaking Muslim Americanness.

I begin by demonstrating how MLiers have internalized key methods and ideals employed and taught by Shalom Hartman hosts and instructors. In what follows I explain how this mimesis of Jewish learnings and navigations by MLiers reveals the motivations behind participation in the MLI program. I then engage in a critical analysis of these mimetic maneuverings of SHI teachings to shed light on racialized and gendered power dynamics latent and reinforced through such processes. The detailing of these motivations is followed by an intersectional analysis of the ways women MLiers are creatively adapting and adopting Jewish learnings to build a Muslim pluralism that deconstructs American and Muslim patriarchal systems of oppression. Through this analysis I disclose how women MLiers' adaptations and adoptions act as a refusal to play the patriarchy game, while tackling various forms of intra and inter-Muslim oppression.

MLIER NAVIGATIONS TOWARDS SUCCESS

This section reveals the ambitions of MLiers in conjunction with the effects MLI participation has caused within MLier self-perceptions individually, collectively, and transnationally. In large part, Muslim MLiers view MLI as a tool for upward social

⁵⁶³ René Girard, *Violence and the sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). Kader Konuk, *East West Mimesis* (Stanford University Press, 2020).

mobility within Western and especially North American landscapes. MLI and its participants are embroiled in a contentious effort to obtain “progress” and or “success,” words I use loosely to describe Muslim concerns about improving the status of Muslim collective identity.⁵⁶⁴ MLI notions of progress are wrapped up in several understandings of success. We see in what follows that Muslim MLers, through their participation in MLI, specifically through their contact and dialogue with transnational Jewish communities, and their mimesis of Jewish strategies and identity logics, Muslim MLers hope to obtain fuller social citizenship within the national fabric of the local North American communities in which they live and serve.⁵⁶⁵ Muslim MLers have taken to heart SHI Israel President Donniel Hartman’s understandings of power as control over one’s destiny, individually and collectively, as well as SHI America President Yehuda Kurtzer’s understandings of self-determination being dictated by access to halls of power. The internalization of these Jewish conceptions obtained during the MLI program have profoundly affected MLer beliefs concerning the tactics and strategies that will lead their American Muslim communities to a fuller integration into American civil society. Achievement towards this goal of total incorporation is part of how MLers frame their success. These success narratives are directly tied to advancement within racialized,

⁵⁶⁴ Nasreen Sadaf Shah, *Islamophobia and the Muslim American identity: An exploration of gender, SES, and self-esteem* (Washington State University, 2018).

⁵⁶⁵ Jonathan Weisman, *(((Semitism)))*: *Being Jewish in America in the Age of Trump* (St. Martin's Press, 2018).

classed and gendered social hierarchies that are constructed and imposed on minorities living in nation states dominated by Western values.

Choosing MLI?

One of the primary questions that came up for Muslims during my participation in MLI was Why are we here? Is it to advocate for Palestinians? Is it to advocate for Muslims in Jewish circles? Is it interfaith dialogue? What will we get out of voluntarily digesting Zionist logics for two weeks for two years in a row? Why are we risking our safety abroad and our standing within our own Muslim communities to do so? This section reveals some of the motivations that drive Muslims to join and participate in MLI. For MLiers this is typically not merely an altruistic attempt to build bridges between Muslim and Jewish communities. In addition to the opportunity to engage with Jews in order to advocate for Palestinian rights, Muslim participants in MLI are looking to gain tools that help their local Muslim communities battle Islamophobic ideologies prevalent in their local contexts. MLI's existence as well as the continued participation of some Muslims in this educational program is in part a response to Islamophobia. Additionally, as a component of Islamophobia, MLiers are responding to the association of Islam with misogyny, sexism, and a lack of progressive gendered attitudes.⁵⁶⁶ MLI and its participants are responding to external ideologies of Muslim incompatibility with Western pluralistic values, and specifically the stereotypic assumption that Muslims and pro-Palestinians are inherently anti-Semitic and sexist. MLI efforts to address anti-

⁵⁶⁶ Hannah Mason-Bish and Irene Zempi, "Misogyny, racism, and Islamophobia: Street harassment at the intersections," *Feminist Criminology* 14, no. 5 (2019).

Semitism, sexism and misogyny within the transnational Muslim communities they inhabit are bound up in agendas to create a type of Muslim pluralism that mirrors the Jewish pluralism exhibited and taught to Muslims through the MLI program. Some Muslim MLiers additionally perceive Jewish communities in diaspora as a model for how to successfully navigate being a religious minority group, that is composed of several differing voices and positionalities, especially in the U.S.⁵⁶⁷ Jewish pluralism, as previously discussed in Chapter 2, is a Shalom Hartman tenant that seeks to build a Jewish people that respects and celebrates diversity. This type of pluralism is intra-Jewish and not interreligious. The point of this type of pluralism is to ensure membership is irrevocable regardless of positionalities. In a more direct way, no one can revoke someone's Jewish card or Muslim card according to these intra-religious logics. This idea of the irrevocability of religious peoplehood is a main tenant of SHI, and one that some Muslim MLiers hope to adopt, especially with increasing tensions between pro-BDS (The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement) Muslims and Muslims whose participation in MLI which violates BDS. Muslim MLier perceptions of Jewish success in terms of building a faith community capable of housing a plethora of mainstream and dissenting voices is a driving force of MLI participation, and a key example of the program's effects on MLier identity formations and communal agendas.

⁵⁶⁷ Gerald Sorin, *Tradition Transformed: The Jewish Experience in America* (JHU Press, 1997). Amandine Desille, "Jewish Immigrants in Israel: Disintegration Within Integration?," in *Politics of (dis) integration* (Springer, Cham, 2020).

The perception of Jewish power within Israel/Palestine as well as within Western pluralistic contexts left Amir saying “I want me some Jewish friends.” The context in which this was said was in relation to when we all met with the Qadi of Jerusalem during our 2017 trip to Palestine/Israel.⁵⁶⁸ MLers were frustrated with the Muslim Palestinian Qadi’s vague answers, and what appeared to be a lack of solidarity with his Palestinian brothers and sisters. Amir is referring to the Qadi’s lack of loyalty while still being able to maintain his position of power within the very same circles he seems to betray. And this is all possible because he has the support of the Israeli government, his “Jewish Friends.” This speaks to the perception Muslim MLers have of the power that Jews wield within Israel/Palestine and transnational contexts.⁵⁶⁹ These perceptions of Jewish power and success go to the heart of why Muslims living in Western contexts as minorities would choose to join MLI. MLI offers an opportunity to make “Jewish friends” and to learn from another religious minority that is recognized by Muslim MLers as having successfully navigated the complex and imposed racialized and gendered hierarchies at play within U.S. American and Western national contexts.⁵⁷⁰ The navigation of these complex hierarchies has made Muslim MLers acutely aware of Islamophobia and its gendered assumptions. Their involvement in MLI has brought to

⁵⁶⁸ Recall from Chapter 3 that Iyad Zahalka, the Qadi of Jerusalem, oversees family law issues for Arab Israelis.

⁵⁶⁹ Rebecca Kobrin, "American Jewish internationalism, Laura Margolis and the power of female diplomacy, 1941–1943," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* (2021).

⁵⁷⁰ Bresheeth, "Zionism, Islamophobia and Judeophobia in Contemporary Europe and Beyond: Realities and Propaganda."

their attention the reality that anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are inherently connected especially in non-majority contexts for either/both religions.⁵⁷¹ Muslim MLers' awareness of the connections between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism was illustrated by Nadine's assessment of the effects of these racist logics, which she relayed to me in an interview in 2017, saying, "Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are destructive forces that endanger targeted Jewish and Muslim communities while destabilizing larger civil society. There is nothing gracious or heroic in either sentiment." MLers are also cognizant of the anti-Semitism that is often present within their own local and transnational communities.⁵⁷² One goal of the MLI program is to battle Muslim anti-Semitism through contact with Jewish communities living in diaspora in Western nations as well as through education about Judaism and Jewish peoplehood which is received through the two-year MLI certificate program. Concerns about anti-Semitic sentiments within transnational Muslim communities is clearly iterated by MLI's Muslim founder, Imam Abdullah Antepli, who states, "I love my community, but this community is increasingly becoming vulnerable towards various forms of subtle and unsubtle anti-Semitism in the name of pro-Palestinian activism." Abdullah draws a direct connection between Muslim anti-Semitism and the Israel/Palestine conflict. Abdullah sheds light on

⁵⁷¹ Elman, "Islamophobia."

⁵⁷² Ethan B Katz, "An Imperial entanglement: Anti-semitism, islamophobia, and colonialism," *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (2018). Gudrun Krämer, "Anti-Semitism in the Muslim world: A critical review," *Die Welt des Islams* 46, no. 3 (2006). Hussein Solomon and Arno Tausch, *Islamism, crisis and democratization: Implications of the world values survey for the Muslim World* (Springer Nature, 2019).

widely held beliefs within transnational Muslim communities, that anti-Semitism directly correlates to pro-Palestinian advocacy and solidarity.⁵⁷³

The fact that the MLI program exists directly contradicts the widely-held belief that one must be anti-Semitic to be pro-Palestinian.⁵⁷⁴ Ismail, the half-Palestinian member of my cohort, highlighted in one of our many conversational interviews in 2017, how MLI carefully divests anti-Semitism from pro-Palestinian advocacy: “I think that protest and engagement are not mutually exclusive. I think one of the points of MLI is engagement so that we can protest (in a fashion). We engage so that we can move the dial on things like normalization of Muslims in America, pushing back on Islamophobia, and also pushing against pro-Israeli agendas that further the occupation.” Participation in MLI, as Ismail states, helps Muslim MLIs separate prejudicial notions that conflate anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism. By engaging in this type of education, MLI participants are able to take this knowledge back to their local communities and in turn educate Muslims out of their anti-Semitism while still engaging in pro-Palestinian advocacy. This allows local and transnational Muslim communities to shed anti-Semitic notions that keep them from building relationships with Jewish communities who are powerful allies that also experience marginalization and oppression within diasporic contexts.⁵⁷⁵ Here

⁵⁷³ Schroeter, “Islamic Anti-Semitism” in Historical Discourse.” Topor, “The Covert War: From BDS to De-legitimization to Antisemitism.” Geoffrey P Levin, “Before the New Antisemitism: Arab Critics of Zionism and American Jewish Politics, 1917-1974,” *American Jewish History* 105, no. 1 (2021).

⁵⁷⁴ Shams, “Successful yet precarious: South Asian Muslim Americans, Islamophobia, and the model minority myth.”

⁵⁷⁵ Rachel Higgins, “Allyship Project: The Importance of Religious Diversity,” *Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research* 9, no. 1 (2021).

Ismail is also talking about the separatism that Islamophobia has caused in conjunction with the tendency of racialized religious minorities to be insular.⁵⁷⁶ He is alluding to the efforts of a more complete social integration into broader, non-Muslim North American contexts and communities. Ismail expresses a common lived experience of MLers and other American Muslims, which is that external structures perceive and present Islam as something out of place within the North American landscape. This interest in more cohesive integration is a primary goal for Ismail and many MLers. MLI supports additional efforts in terms of bridge-building with Jewish communities as part of these efforts for Muslims and Jews alike; one result of these efforts on the part of many Muslim MLers is an adoption of strategic tools and tactics that Jewish communities have employed in order to navigate racialized and gendered hierarchies and anti-Semitism in Western contexts.

Mirroring the Jews

Muslim MLers' adoptions of what they view as advantageous Jewish strategies is unpacked in this section. If we recall Haroon's message after my cohort's challenging day in Hebron in 2017, he succinctly sums up what he thinks MLers are supposed to be taking away from their interactions with Jews: "It is our chance to learn how a significant number of American and Israeli Jews understand themselves and their relationship to their peoplehood and Israel. It's a chance to inhabit that perspective both for the value of that engagement and to empower more sophisticated conversations back in North

⁵⁷⁶ Khyati Y Joshi, "South Asian Religions in Contemporary America," *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Race in American History* (2018).

America.” In short, Haroon, a leader of MLI, views this engagement as an opportunity to make similar strides for Muslim communities in North America, not just in their outreach to Jewish communities, but also in how Muslims deal with one another internally.

Haroon’s impression of Jewish pluralism is that it allows Jews to engage in solidarity in the midst of disagreement.⁵⁷⁷ Solidarity is demonstrated by politics of respectability that Jews play out in public arenas when addressing dissenting voices that are part of their transnational Jewish community.⁵⁷⁸ This engagement in the politics of respectability presents the world with a Jewish united front that upholds Western pluralistic values, thus creating the impression of a unified community that is not monolithic in its ideological approaches to geopolitics and local engagements.

In response to tensions within the wider North American Muslim community between BDS supporters and MLI participants, Haroon engaged in a comparison of his own community and the Jewish community to which he has been privy through his participation as an MLier and an SHI instructor, saying: “I’ve been inside Hartman for two plus years and never seen any prominent Jewish personality speak in this kind of tone about any fellow Jewish leader. It’s embarrassing. It’s like a cross between a trashy reality show and a Trump rally. We eat each other alive. It’s so weird to see. It’s just really nasty. I don’t know why we are so keen to massacre one another. My whole social media mode of engagement the last year plus has been asking myself: ‘Would Yehuda

⁵⁷⁷ Jonathan A Jacobs, "Judaism, Pluralism & Public Reason," *Daedalus* 149, no. 3 (2020).

⁵⁷⁸ Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*.

post this? It's helpful to step outside of the bubble." Here Haroon is saying look at how Jews treat one another in public arenas: We can learn from this in order to stop North American in-fighting and create more solidarity between Muslims, in effect create a Muslim pluralism that allows for dissent without divesting from the broader Muslim communities that MLers inhabit. We also see an overt imitation of what Haroon perceives to be positive collective Jewish behavior and leadership. What Haroon has learned through his MLI participation he is trying to harness in order to mold the North American Muslim community to mirror the perceived successes of Jewish North American communities as exhibited by SHI.

While Haroon is making efforts to mold internal Muslim politics after intra-Jewish interactions, Kamillah adopts the traditional pedagogical framework of Judaism, which she was introduced to through the MLI program, Havruta:⁵⁷⁹ "Just reading up on the origins of Havruta since I'm incorporating it into my course as a style of learning texts together. (Thanks, MLI.) And I came upon this: While an individual may choose to study Talmud alone, it is strongly discouraged. In the Talmud, R. Yosi b. R. Hanina is quoted as saying that "scholars who sit alone to study the Torah ... become stupid" (Berakhot 63b). I just found that insistence to study together to be so powerful, and useful to think about both ways, when MLI reaches that point. Like for my class, we're not reading the

⁵⁷⁹ Recall that according to the Shalom Hartman Institute "Havruta" is a Jewish learning methodology: "Havruta is an Aramaic word similar to the Hebrew haver, friend. It refers to the study of traditional Jewish texts in pairs or groups, whether in the beit midrash study hall, after the Shabbat meal, or even over lunch at a deli." This Jewish methodology for learning allows groups and partners to question the source material as well as the instructor and each other. It's a beautiful way of engraining an ideology of skepticism that forces dialogue. Institute, "SHI Hevruta Gap-Year Program: A pluralistic program for North American and Israeli young adults."

Talmud of course, but that model might be really great for students grappling with abstract concepts. My driving question for teaching this semester is how can I take the best from Havruta, about using shared group study to understand multiple sides of an argument, and reorient this approach for critical study of texts that deal with "Muslim youth in schools." While Kamillah found the one-way pedagogical structure of MLI disconcerting to say the least, she found great value in traditional Jewish learning structures and methods. Muslim MLers were broken up into Havruta groups with a designated instructor that would be our instructor for both of our trips to Jerusalem in 2017 and 2018. We would use Havruta to critically engage in original source materials that would later be discussed as a cohort. The pedagogical structure of Havruta is one that allows for dissenting voices, disagreement, and dialogue, which makes it diametrically opposed to insular, monolithic ideologies. To be clear Havruta is an intra-Jewish pedagogical methodology used to foster and contain diverse Jewish voices and positionalities within the transnational and diasporic Jewish communal world. Havruta, as a Shalom Hartman methodology, coupled with its tenant of Jewish pluralism, is not about making space in Jewish circles for Muslim voices or the voices of any other faith communities. Havruta coupled with Jewish pluralism is about creating a Jewish space that allows for all Jewish voices to exist in relation to one another while maintaining Jewish collective identity.⁵⁸⁰ Kamillah understands the insular nature of these SHI tenants and learning models, but she still iterates a faint hope for the future of MLI with her

⁵⁸⁰ Jacobs, "Judaism, Pluralism & Public Reason."

“when MLI reaches that point” quip. Her hope is that eventually the pedagogy of MLI will evolve in a way that allows Muslims to fully engage in a Havruta-guided dialogue about Judaism, as well as for Muslims to mentor Jewish learning about Islam using this very same Jewish methodological approach. Her whispered hope hints at how MLIs are mirroring Jewish efforts and structures, in their agenda to create a Muslim pluralism. This Muslim pluralism allows Muslims across the world to critically engage with one another about Islam and the collective issues their transnational communities are facing, absent the fear of losing their Muslim status within the Ummah.⁵⁸¹ This speaks to the evolution that MLIs are trying to push American Muslims towards, in terms of the allowance of dissenting voices within the Muslim communities that exist on a global stage: Muslim pluralism. Kamillah’s adoption of Havruta in her formal work as a scholar and professor demonstrate her respect for how Jews engage in the education of themselves as well as others. This goal is completely in line with Haroon’s observation of how Jewish intellectuals and public figures behave in the public sphere towards one another. Another example of how MLI participants have internalized Jewish navigations of the world is in how Jews are a non-proselytizing racialized religious tradition.⁵⁸² Gamila connects the non-universal ideologies of Judaism to their success in pluralistic arenas.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ Hilary Pilkington and Necla Acik, "Not entitled to talk:(Mis) recognition, inequality and social activism of young Muslims," *Sociology* 54, no. 1 (2020).

⁵⁸² Samuel Lebens, "Proselytism as epistemic violence: a Jewish approach to the ethics of religious persuasion," *The Monist* 104, no. 3 (2021).

⁵⁸³ Sydney Levine et al., "Religious affiliation and conceptions of the moral domain," *Social Cognition* 39, no. 1 (2021).

Taking this hint, Gamila translates her new Jewish knowledge to her Muslim community by suggesting that they disengage in dawah, which she defines loosely as “inviting people to convert to Islam, or being an ambassador of Islam.”⁵⁸⁴ Gamila posted the following in 2019: “Dear American Muslims, I want us to rethink dawah, and making Muslims (or Islam) look good. Maybe we should think about a moratorium on old school (mission like) dawah. I invite you (and me) to be a good person, think good thoughts and do good in the world. And just focus on that. Also try not to harm people, and if you're a leader in the community try not to break the law or do unethical things. If you want to really succeed, maybe go out of your way to help people a little. It's a really simple solution to a really complicated problem. That might do more for American Islam (and Muslims) than we think. Sincerely, Gamila.” Here Gamila is asking MLers and the broader Muslim ummah to critically engage with internal Muslim issues first and foremost as a way to displace Muslim missionizing efforts that are often used as a primary tactic in the fight against Islamophobia. Gamila understands that Islamophobia as a barrier to full social citizenship cannot be solved through a mere swelling in the ranks of Muslim members through dawah. Nadine responded: “I totally agree with this statement, Gamila. We tend to perform way too often at the expense of being normal, gloriously normal, humans. Dawah is performance.” Here Nadine seems to suggest that dawah engages in a type of Islamic supremacy posturing, asserting Muslim exceptionalism as a way to move through the world; however, dawah, when enacted as a primary aspect of Muslim identity, draws

⁵⁸⁴ Ishfaq Ahmad and Bilkeesa Anjum, "Globalisation and Quran: Challenges and Prospects," *mankind* 25, no. 1.

focus from critical engagement within the Muslim community. This is part of signaling or engaging in optics that dog-whistle Western values in terms of critical analysis of one's own faith tradition.⁵⁸⁵

Nadine's response sheds light on Islamic mandates that bind Muslimness to missionizing efforts, meaning bringing more people into an Islamic way of life. Nadine, as a convert to Islam herself, understands how dawah may interfere with bridge building efforts with other faith communities.⁵⁸⁶ Nadine recognizes that efforts to bring others to Islam may interfere with the cultivation of an empathy of difference and thus reinforce Muslim identity formations based on sameness that lead to an intolerance of the "other." It is clear that Gamila's plea for a pause in dawah activity in conjunction with Nadine's sentiments about displaying real humanness instead of disingenuous missionizing efforts, underpin MLer goals focused on obtaining a more complete social citizenship within Western pluralistic contexts. Nadine continues in this vein: "MLI is positioning us to be powerful agents of civic engagement in the larger society. If we become more visible, I think the majority of Muslims are going to respond. Maybe not the ones who are gatekeepers at the mosque, but the majority of Muslims are looking for a new language in which to discuss their identity and participation in American society." Nadine here articulates the reality that there are barriers to creating a robust Muslim pluralism, namely

⁵⁸⁵ Najwan Saada and Haneen Magadlah, "The meanings and possible implications of critical Islamic religious education," *British Journal of Religious Education* 43, no. 2 (2021).

⁵⁸⁶ Yufeng Chen and Saroja Dorairajoo, "American Muslims' Da'wah work and Islamic conversion," *Religions* 11, no. 8 (2020).

“gatekeepers at the mosque.” This euphemism, employed by Nadine, is in reference to the Aunties and Imams that uphold models of Muslim separatism within Western pluralist contexts.⁵⁸⁷ Nadine clearly articulates one of the major ambitions that drive Muslims to participate in MLI: mainly to seek out new pathways of engagement within North American discourses that lead to a fuller incorporation of Muslims in mainstream Western societies.

Nadine continues her thoughts on participating in MLI:

Lately I’ve realized that MLI isn’t just about Muslim-Jewish relations: it is one of several indications that Muslim identity in America is dramatically shifting. MLI indicates a philosophical change regarding how many Muslims have defined our collective identities. I think more American Muslims are thinking globally rather than Ummah-centric.

Specifically, here, Nadine is addressing the insularity that minoritized Muslim communities often uphold within pluralistic landscapes.⁵⁸⁸ This insularity is what Nadine refers to as “Ummah-centric,” meaning Muslims only concerned with Muslim issues instead of broadening that scope of self-determination to include Muslims in a broader conversation concerning human rights and dignity.⁵⁸⁹ This directly mirrors Jewish

⁵⁸⁷ Muna Ali, *Young muslim america: faith, community, and belonging* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁵⁸⁸ Amin Asfari and Anas Askar, "Understanding Muslim Assimilation in America: An Exploratory Assessment of First & Second-Generation Muslims Using Segmented Assimilation Theory," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 40, no. 2 (2020).

⁵⁸⁹ Anjabeen Ashraf and Sylvia Nassar, "American Muslims and vicarious trauma: An explanatory concurrent mixed-methods study," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 88, no. 5 (2018).

conceptions of Tikkun Olam,⁵⁹⁰ meaning bringing goodness or enacting peace within a global context.⁵⁹¹ This also echoes SHI's explanation of positive Jewish identity formation within the context of the Covenant of Becoming. So in this way, the above MLiers' comments put American Muslim communities on par with Jewish communities in America that are grappling with the Covenant of Becoming.

This tendency to adopt Jewish mindsets is illustrated by Yasra's abhorrence of American intolerance.⁵⁹² While sitting in an airport on her way back to Los Angeles from Jerusalem in 2017, she quipped: "I'm sitting with Americans and kinda appalled by their comments – How Jewish am I now?" Critical awareness of her difference seems to hint at a repeated SHI Jewish sentiment that Jews are alone in the world.⁵⁹³ Yasra's internalization of Jewish aloneness translates directly to the effects Muslims in Western contexts are feeling due to Islamophobia and lack of inclusion into mainstream/dominant American society.⁵⁹⁴ Manahil builds on Yasra's sentiments of Muslim aloneness, further

⁵⁹⁰ Tikkun Olam is a Jewish concept that addresses how to bring about a just world through positive behaviors and good works. Rabbi David Osachy, "TIKKUN OLAM," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, no. 290 (2019).

⁵⁹¹ James E Bowley, "Fixing a God's Mess: Jewish Tikkun Olam and Interreligious Action," in *Post-Christian Interreligious Liberation Theology* (Springer, 2019); Sabrina Worch, "The Contribution of Religions to the Common Good in Pluralistic Societies: A Jewish Perspective, Exemplified by the Concept of Tikkun Olam," in *Public Theology, Religious Diversity, and Interreligious Learning* (Routledge, 2018).

⁵⁹² Erika Lee, *America for Americans: A history of xenophobia in the United States* (Basic Books, 2019).

⁵⁹³ Vered Sakal, "Jewish Identity in an Individual Age: A Theoretical Analysis of Interpersonal Religious Connections and Commitments," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 14, no. 1 (2021).

⁵⁹⁴ ZAINAB ARAIN and ABBAS BARZEGAR, "The Structure, Impact, and Power of the American Islamophobia Network," *Islamophobia and Acts of Violence: The Targeting and Victimization of American Muslims* (2022).

demonstrating the internalization of MLI's Jewish education and offers a possible path towards limiting the effects of Islamophobia or at the very least holding fellow citizens accountable for the harm they direct at Muslim communities. Manahil's suggested pathway utilizes and engages official legal structures that seemingly uphold American legislative methods for securing rights and protections for marginalized communities.⁵⁹⁵ Manahil messaged our cohort in 2018 via our WhatsApp group chat in relation to an Islamophobic current event, saying: "Muslims in North America have a lot of work to do starting with anti-harrassment laws." This comment was in response to protests outside of a masjid located in Washington, D.C. These protestors held signs with Islamophobic slurs while yelling at mosque-goers about how all Muslims are terrorists.⁵⁹⁶ Manahil is making a comparison between the lack of protections Muslims have in the U.S. in relation to the protections that Jews enjoy in that very same context.

Yasra chimed in with the following response: "This is also when Muslims need to build bridges with other communities." Yasra's reply speaks directly to Nadine's call to move from ummah-centric advocacy to a more global mindset rooted in human rights for all discourses. That is, Muslims should be engaging in advocacy for oppressed groups everywhere, not just Muslim minority communities across the globe. This is evident in her bridge-building call to action. This shift in mindset is indicative of an evolution

⁵⁹⁵ Nazita Lajevardi et al., "The Paradox between integration and perceived discrimination among American Muslims," *Political Psychology* 41, no. 3 (2020).

⁵⁹⁶ Caleb Elfenbein, "Ministering to Other People's Fears: Effects of Anti-Muslim Hostility on American Muslim Participation in Public Life," *J. Hate Stud.* 15 (2018).

created by the MLI program. The program in and of itself is demonstrative of Jewish efforts to obtain and maintain presence and power within transnational pluralistic milieux. The evolution is the incorporation of a mindset akin to Tikkun Olam: Thinking about how Jews can help move global society forward by advocating for not just Jewish rights and recognition, but through advocacy efforts focused on humanness and human dignity. Yasra's gentle demand that Muslims build bridges with other communities is a mirroring of Jewish ideologies to make positive change for a global society inclusive of Jews instead of a focus on Jewish rights amongst and within differing socioreligious and racialized contexts: Yasra clearly is trying to elevate the Muslim mindset to think and engage in the same way. Abbas continues in this same vein:

As Muslims we need to unite, engage, and work harder to create an American Muslim American Identity empowered by our core values of peace, justice, equality and inclusiveness. Only in America, narratives can change and perception corrected. This is an opportunity not to be squandered. Yes, we can regain respect and dignity and build a legacy for generations to come. It starts from today.

Note Abbas's double usage of the term American, emphasizing the responsibility of Muslims in America to rise to the task of creating an American identity that can be inhabited and understood as both Muslim and American. Abbas is squarely placing the task of positive Muslim identity formation in America and other Western contexts on the shoulders of MLiers and the broader American Muslim Ummah. Inherent in Abbas's tasking of American Muslim identity formations is his position that American Muslims cannot and should not rely on other Islamic leaders or communities living outside Western contexts to impose a Muslim identity on American Muslims.

Abbas's comments above bring to the forefront a lack of Muslim pluralism that allows for Americanness. His desire for American Muslims to engage in the cultivation of an American identity directly reflects Jewish identity formation processes that are inclusive of not only American Jews but Jews in multiple transnational contexts. Abbas addresses his concern over the lack of space within the global Muslim ummah for minority Muslim communities living in Western contexts. Abbas further asserts that American perceptions of American Muslims are within the control of Muslim communities themselves. Here we see an incorporation of U.S./Western values such as the exceptionalism of America, which Abbas sees as positive values that are useful tools for forming an American Muslim identity that will lead to full social integration for American Muslims.⁵⁹⁷

Like Nadine and Yasra, Abbas whole-heartedly believes that Muslim outreach to other faith traditions is essential to ending Islamophobia and gaining access to halls of power. Access to halls of power is the literal definition that Yehuda used to explain Jewish success in America. Abbas's emphasis on cultivating an "American Muslim American Identity" speaks directly to Muslims that live in America and uphold ideals of segregation from the larger American national fabric in order to maintain false presumptions about Muslim authenticity. He pushes back against this tendency by suggesting that Muslims who live in America must form an identity fully rooted in both Islamic and American values. Again, this speaks to a pervasive MLier belief that Islam is

⁵⁹⁷ Mandaville, "Islam and Exceptionalism in the Western Policy Imagination."

absolutely reconcilable with predominate Western values, and that as Muslim leaders, MLers are responsible for carving out these formative identity spaces within the American fabric.

Access to Halls of Power

As mentioned above, SHI and MLers frame participation in MLI as an opportunity for Muslims to learn from Jews about how to gain access to halls of power within a primarily North American setting. One way in which this agenda was internalized by MLers is the understanding that Muslims in America need to build inclusive organizations that address not just Muslim minority issues, but issues facing the general American public as well. By creating these inclusive institutions, Muslims obtain a sort of institutional standing within the broader American landscape. In 2020 and similarly to Nadine's call to shift from Ummah-centric mentalities to more inclusive advocacy efforts, Javed in a group message further explored and suggested a more pluralistic and global mindset: one that cultivates an American identity inclusive of Muslimness instead of efforts to maintain Muslimness in the face of American intrusions.

As Javed reflects,

This is one of the conscious decisions I took when I began to work to develop the Center for Global Policy. Unlike ISPU I did not want CGP to be seen as a Muslim group advancing communal causes. It has been a long and hard five-year struggle but we have alhamdulillah been successful at emerging as a mainstream think tank. In fact, a couple of days ago we were listed by UPenn's 2020 Think Tank Index as among the best new think tanks in the world. The point is if we want our place in the national fabric then we must step forward and assume national responsibilities and not just demand our communal rights. It requires a regime change in the normative sense within Muslim communities and to jettison the fear of 'losing my religion' (or identity).

Javed's comments allude to a strategic maneuvering away from the politics of representation to the politics of respectability. The politics of representation relegate minority populations to a type of dogfight over rights that are framed as a scarce resource.⁵⁹⁸ In effect, this pits minority groups against one another instead of solidarity as minorities in order to fight marginalization together. Efforts to fight against oppression and marginalization through solidarity are encompassed by the Western values of pluralism and multiculturalism. By Javed building an institution based on solidarity across racialized faith lines inclusive of multiple marginalized communities, he is signaling an upholding of these values. This shift from intra-Muslim advocacy to inclusive institution-building is an engagement in the politics of respectability as Javed's institution upholds values legible to the average Western audience.⁵⁹⁹ In Javed's view, the formation of organizations that only advocate for Muslim interests pens the Muslim community into isolated enclaves that operate apart from larger mainstream American society. What Javed is asking is that Muslims cultivate and build organizations that are geared towards universal ethics engaged in human rights advocacy as a global mission geared towards upholding all human dignity, not just Muslim representation in public spheres. Abdullah addresses both Manahil's call for intra-Muslim advocacy in addition to Javed's call for participation in the American public sphere by stating the following in

⁵⁹⁸ Shirin M Rai, "The good life and the bad: Dialectics of solidarity," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 25, no. 1 (2018). Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, "Ideology and the Politics of Representation," in *The Critical Media Literacy Guide* (Brill, 2019).

⁵⁹⁹ Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*.

reference to a continuing learning MLI Session offered to all MLIs in 2020 on Citizenship as a Minority Faith Community. The title of this learning session is reflective of the main topics and goals MLIs are embroiled in. As Abdullah stated:

We will ask some of the larger questions about our roles as minority faith communities in American Civic life and how we can most effectively work towards a democratic society in the United States while also advocating for the interests of our communities. If anything moves the needle in American politics, it is the size of your voting bloc and the size of your wallet.

Here, Abdullah naturally marries intra-Muslim advocacy and interreligious allyship as a way to become more fully American. As the setup of MLI indicates, many MLIs perceive American values as integral to potential paths forward for their respective Muslim communities.

The necessity to find new pathways forward was pressurized during the Trump Years. The Trump Administration's policies instituted a resurgence of Islamophobic ideals that cascaded through legal and social systems in the U.S.⁶⁰⁰ The reverberations of Islamophobia that the Trump Administration caused garnered reactions from American Muslims that reasserted their Americanness and their contributions to the broader American society. In response to Trump's Muslim Ban in 2017, Yasra voiced her frustrations about American perceptions of Muslims: "I feel like I'm screaming all the time 'I'M AN AMERICAN! BACK UP!'" Here, Yasra reminds us of Gamila's previously articulated journey after the events of 9/11. If we recall, Gamila explained that

⁶⁰⁰ Arafa, "A question to the President of the United States, Donald Trump: is it a travel ban, or a Muslim ban, or a travel Muslim ban?."

after 9/11 she was very occupied with signifying her Americanness, as Yasra also is here. The time lapse between 9/11, its subsequent policies and the Trump administration's targeting of Muslims demonstrates the pervasive and long-lasting reality of Islamophobia in the twenty first century. This marks a shift away from previous trends on the part of some Muslim communities who in response to Islamophobia felt compelled to retreat from American civic society. This isolationist move by some Muslim communities regurgitates old debates about Muslim engagement in non-Islamic societies.⁶⁰¹ Often support for separatist mentalities within the Muslim community rests on the presumption that Western values are often less moral than Muslim values, and encourages disengagement from Western and American contexts.⁶⁰² Abbas reflects on his views about Muslim exceptionalism in a secondary interview in 2018: "The hard part for some is the devastating realization that Muslims are like everyone else. We aren't special, nor are we magically exempt, because of our faith. So many depend on their version of 'exceptionalism' and it's hard to accept that we are just like all others. Just messy folks with lots of contradictions. Such is the state of being in the world." Abbas's comments go to the heart of the debates over whether Muslims should engage in political life or should segregate themselves in Western contexts where they are not living under an Islamic regime.⁶⁰³ Abbas is speaking to those Muslims unwilling to engage in American life

⁶⁰¹ Adis Duderija and Halim Rane, *Islam and Muslims in the West* (Springer, 2019).

⁶⁰² Mandaville, "Islam and Exceptionalism in the Western Policy Imagination."

⁶⁰³ Sharmin Sadequee, "Surveillance, secular law, and the reconstruction of Islam in the United States," *Surveillance & Society* 16, no. 4 (2018).

stating that Islam and Muslimness simply do not cancel out civic responsibility. Javed echoed Abbas' sentiments when I interviewed him in 2018: "My faith is in the power of self-interest that transcends ideologies and partisan alignments." Coupled together Javed and Abbas are laying bare the reality that Muslims have to advocate for themselves and that it is this advocacy that will garner and instill Americanness, which for Javed, Abbas, and other MLiers provides a possible avenue to full social citizenship and an end to Islamophobia in the U.S.

Based on the data provided above, MLiers have taken Jewish commiserations about navigating American hierarchies to heart. Yehuda and Donniel explain Jewish success and power as 1. Having control over one's destiny and 2. Having access to halls of power. We see these ideals reflected in MLiers' conversations and efforts surrounding fostering an American Muslim identity. Additionally, these comments reflect MLiers' desire over their own collective destiny and that in order to obtain that goal, gaining access to American systems of power is necessary. In what follows, I examine women's navigations and attempts to access these same halls of power in ways that reflect their religioned, racialized, and gendered positionalities.

MLIERS GENDERED SEXUAL POLITICS

As a minority religious group living in a predominately White, Christian country, MLiers and Muslims in America often try to perform Americanness in ways related to their perceptions of raced, religioned, and gendered social hierarchies. For those Muslims who are religious this performance means drawing on shared Abrahamic origins, calling attention to the venerated positions that Jesus and Mary hold within Islam, and constantly

reminding Jews and Christians that we are all People of the Book. Many MLers exhibit their Americanness by mimicking hegemonic cultural norms and trends, such as drinking alcohol, wearing Western-style three-piece suits, and owning dogs. Some of this ability to mimic their perceptions of physical embodiments of Americanness is mitigated for women who wear hijab. I witnessed a conversation that Gamila had with a fellow MLer participant, Jalal, who is of the secular Desi Muslim variety during one of the semi-annual MLI retreats in 2019. Jalal is first generation Pakistani American, rather tall, 6'1", very lean, good looking, and of dark complexion. Jalal and Gamila were meeting for the first time, and unbeknownst to us, we all snuck out of the same panel discussion to take a smoke break. Gamila does not usually smoke, but she desperately needed a break in order to medicate herself with some marijuana, which she uses to treat her anxiety and PTSD. Huddled in the cold, cigarettes lit and puffing away, Jalal and Gamila had the following exchange: Jalal: "So what's with the hijab?...I mean you are out here smoking weed and all that, and it's cool, I mean you are cool...But I've never seen a hijabi smoking weed or cigarettes just out in public." Jalal, although he self identifies as a secular Muslim or culturally but not religiously Muslim, betrays his own Muslim bias, in indicating that Muslim women should not be seen smoking in public, a common prohibition in many Muslim-majority areas. He is also equating hijab with religious observance, which is a commonly-held perception by many non-Muslim Americans.

Gamila: "Well I mean I'm not just a hijabi...that may be all you see, but I am a person, a woman, like a whole person. Hijab is just part of who I am."

Jalal: "But are you religious? You look religious, but you don't act like it."

Gamila: “Wearing hijab isn’t only about being religious. It’s how I was raised, and I don’t feel like myself without it.”

Jalal: “Well ok I am not judging or anything, it just seems strange to me.”

Gamila: “Look you are used to wearing pants, right? You wouldn’t leave the house without pants, would you?”

Jalal: “No, I guess I wouldn’t.”

Gamila: “Hijab is the same for me. Your pants don’t tell me anything about how Muslim you are, how religious you are. My hijab can’t tell you that either.”

Jalal: “Well ok I guess...I mean God Bless America!”

This curt and hilarious exchange is demonstrative of the choppy waters that visibly Muslim women in America must navigate on a daily basis. Since Jalal is Desi, and not Middle Eastern, North African, or Arab, for him, hijabis signal very religious women. In Pakistan, where Jalal was born and raised until he turned twenty, wearing hijab is not the norm; in fact it is seen as a very Arab and/or Persian practice that is often forced on the daughters of very religious families, and feels foreign to him.⁶⁰⁴ Smoking, let alone smoking marijuana, is also something that is unacceptable for women to do in public in Pakistan.⁶⁰⁵ A woman smoking in public on the street in Pakistan would be assumed to be a sex worker looking for business. For Jalal, meeting Gamila the way he did, causes his conceptions of the Muslim World and its women to collide with his understanding of

⁶⁰⁴ Iffath Unissa Syed, "Hijab, niqab, and the religious symbol debates: Consequences for health and human rights," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 25, no. 9 (2021).

⁶⁰⁵ Abdul Hakim and Azra Aziz, "Socio-cultural, religious, and political aspects of the status of women in Pakistan," *The Pakistan development review* (1998); Syed Muhammad Mubeen, Martha Morrow, and Simon Barraclough, "Medical students' perspectives on gender and smoking: A mixed methodology investigation in Karachi, Pakistan," *JPMA-Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association* 61, no. 8 (2011).

America, seen by his apparent praise of what he perceives to be a pluralistic country in which hijabi women are allowed to smoke weed in public. Gamila is an Arab-American, who is not religious, and is five years older than Jalal, but unmarried, and not forced to wear hijab, but voluntarily does in a country that codes hijab as a symbol of misogyny, women's oppression, and terrorism.⁶⁰⁶ Jalal is overwhelmingly confused by Gamila, especially given the dynamics of Americanness since Gamila is a second generation American, with no accent who speaks better English than I do and sounds like one of the girls from the movie *Clueless*. Jalal's parting words "God Bless America" are a quiet acceptance of both his confusion and Gamila's Americanness. In Muslim contexts, Gamila simply outranks Jalal; in terms of age, Muslimness, which rests on her Arabness and her hijab, as well as her status as an American. Slight changes in these aspects of a woman's seniority would have changed that exchange dramatically. If Gamila was younger than Jalal, perhaps he would have asked her to stop smoking and go inside; if she was Desi, he may have told her that it is not right for her to wear hijab and smoke and she should take it off; if he was second generation and she was first generation American he may have quietly told her "beti you do not need to wear hijab here in America if you do not want to, you are free here."⁶⁰⁷ These are some of the exchanges I have witnessed within MLI and other members of their/our communities. Gamila's responses are demonstrative of Muslim MLIs creating space within their own communities for

⁶⁰⁶ Amina Easat-Daas, "Muslim women's experiences and responses," *Misogyny as Hate Crime* (2021).

⁶⁰⁷ Claudio Bolzman et al., *Competition-and identity-based roots of anti-immigration prejudice among individuals with and without an immigrant background* (2018).

Muslim pluralistic values, or values that allow Gamila to wear her hijab while smoking a cigarette. Gamila and Jalal's exchange along with the other similar encounters I witnessed additionally serve as a window into larger intersectional logics of oppression involving the racialization of Islam and Muslims: a process which is equally raced and gendered.

To understand the gender dynamics within MLI, we must understand the ways in which Islam, like any religion, is impacted by patriarchy and sexism. Feminist writer Cynthia Enloe explains the beginning of her journey with the term patriarchy that I see as encompassing issues of gendered violence and oppression: "*Patriarchy*. It sounded so heavy, so blunt, so ideological. I wasn't interested in ideology, at least not in employing it myself. Instead, I was interested in nuances, in gritty realities, in the mundane workings of everyday sexism as it crept into policy and actions."⁶⁰⁸ What Enloe describes is very much accurate in relation to many academic reactions to the term patriarchy that I have encountered throughout my research. Patriarchy is thought of as a dead universalism, a term used by those not concerned with real people or the multivalent oppressions and struggles they survive under the sex-gender binary. There is no need to hold on to this dichotomy: Patriarchy/Sex-Gender Binary. Again, Enloe's words are illustrative of how I use and understand this contentious term:

Patriarchy does not blot out nuance. Patriarchy does not overlook the mundane.... the concept of patriarchy is not a club with which to batter complexity into simplicity. Patriarchy is a searchlight, a concept that can enable us to see what we otherwise might miss: the connective tissues

⁶⁰⁸ Enloe, *The big push : exposing and challenging the persistence of patriarchy*.

between large and small, subtle and blatant forms of racialized sexism, gendered misogyny and masculinized privilege.⁶⁰⁹

It is this understanding of patriarchy I employ in this project. Patriarchy draws our attention to the sinew, to the raw materials of real bodies that tie the multiple oppressive structures we live in together. This section sheds light on those connective tissues, while giving voice to but a few women who navigate multiple patriarchies within and outside of Islam and MLI.

Progress narratives impose top-down, neo-imperially influenced ideologies on much of the rest of the world. In relation to the “Muslim” world, including MLIs and other American Muslims, progress is imposed and measured not only via racially charged logics of success but also via women’s rights. It is important to consider that conceptions of women’s as well as LGBTQIA+ rights⁶¹⁰ are often measured using a metric that is rooted in Western and colonial forms of discourse.⁶¹¹ The liberation of Muslim women wrecks of White man’s/woman’s burden and in the past twenty years, robust efforts have been made to bring freedom, democracy, and modernity to the East. This is part in parcel of orientalism.⁶¹² The Orient is also a moral geography; exotic and inferior, weak, depraved, irrational, and domestically embodied in American Muslim communities that must be civilized. As a moral geography, American Muslims constitute a physical and

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*.

⁶¹¹ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim women need saving?* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁶¹² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

imagined space for dominant values, influenced by colonial European and now American Christianities, to impose and promote their moral values.⁶¹³ Many MLI women, the majority of whom are American women, express and/or exhibit a perennial state of being caught in the crosshairs of oppressive structures impacting multiple parts of their identities. Progress narratives transpose their bodies into warzones, where simultaneous forms of patriarchy, colonialism, oppression (and oppressedness) exist. 9/11 has created a paradigm in which Muslims are marked by a re-racialization – and a re-genderization – of Islam. Due to the global transmission of post 9/11 foreign policies, women in the U.S. and transnationally are marked differently than Muslim men in terms of the threats they embody. Saher explains the following about U.S. American Muslimness today:

When American men are identified as Muslim they are treated as if they are a threat to national security while American women who are identified as Muslim are treated as if they are a threat to Western cultural values. Thus, private citizens racialize Muslim men and women by acting as gatekeepers to citizenship through repetitively contesting their status as Americans. Muslims are denied privileges associated with social citizenship by continuously being questioned and challenged about their nationality, allegiance and standing in American society; they are racialized.⁶¹⁴

Interestingly, some of these logics are operational in their own ways via Israeli state policy. This was keenly illustrated, as I previously explained, when my cohort and I were in Jerusalem in 2017. Our Palestinian tour guide Ramy asked White, female members of

⁶¹³ Amy DeRogatis, *Moral Geography: Maps, Missionaries, and the American Frontier* (Columbia University Press, 2003); David C. Rapoport, "The importance of space in violent ethno-religious strife," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 2, no. 2 (1996/06/01 1996), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537119608428470>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537119608428470>.

⁶¹⁴ Selod, "Citizenship denied: The racialization of Muslim American men and women post-9/11."

our cohort to disrobe from their hijabs and sit in window seats of our tour bus. This was a successful attempt to de-racialize the other inhabitants of our bus in order to escape the scrutiny of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers operating the checkpoint at the West Bank. If we, the White female MLers had refused Ramy's request and continued to wear our hijabs, we likely would have been racialized as Muslim, Brown Palestinians. This is exactly what happened when the entirety of our cohort, with all women, dressed in abayas and hijabs, visited the Ibrahimi mosque. As recounted in previous chapters, we were held at the IDF-controlled exit of the mosque. In other words, hijab is racialized in Israel in ways that parallel and perhaps reflect the racialization and genderization of hijab in the U.S. These kinds of racialization give warrant to patriarchal conceptions of Muslim women as an obstacle to true national belonging. Racialization is also astute for understanding how unmarked, or White-passing American Muslims still navigate treacherous waters when it comes to proving their national loyalty. Selod is insightful here: "Racialization provides a theoretical explanation of how racial meanings are applied to cultural symbols and signifiers, such as the hijab or a Muslim name, illuminating why some Arabs are treated and therefore self-identify as the 'other' instead of 'White'."⁶¹⁵ Racialization of religious symbols creates a dire situation for American Muslim women regardless of ethnic origins.

Again, my usage of patriarchy here is not an attempt to collapse the many nuances embedded in the invisible oppressive structures that dictate our lives. The goal in

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

asserting patriarchy as the parent system that houses racism, sexism, heterosexism, cisnormativity, orientalism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, is to grasp the common thread that binds these structures together, creating a network of systemic hatreds that support one another. My understanding of patriarchy as the progenitor of the other named oppressive structures above is not about hierarchically ordering types of oppression, a task which would fall in line with the Western Enlightenment obsession with taxonomy.⁶¹⁶ Understanding that these very systems work together to achieve and maintain oppression of all kinds is the objective. This is not about discovering the “origins” of oppression either; that is a fruitless ambition that assumes if we find the beginning, we will be able to institute an end, a very false assumption.⁶¹⁷ And this is not about letting anyone off the hook for their active or complicit contributions to these oppressive structures because they hold any kind of minority status. A Feminist can be racist, a Black man can be misogynistic; the very point of this project is to point out the fact that oppressed oppressors exist, one of many realities that allows structural mechanisms of oppression to remain in place.

Patriarchy has fractured America in general, as well as the American Muslim community in particular. This reality has been reflected casually as well as overtly during my time in MLI. This came up in response to a misogynistic 2019 post that Manahil angrily shared, titled “How to be Muslim Wife Material.” This post stated, “1. Pray your

⁶¹⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Univ of California Press, 2008).

⁶¹⁷ Alexander A Goldenweiser, "Religion and society: A critique of Emile Durkheim's theory of the origin and nature of religion," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* (1917).

five on time. 2. Don't be a feminist. 3. Don't be a Salafi. 4. Be a hijabi. 5. Be a virgin. 6. Be thin. 7. Be feminine. 8. Be modest. 9. Be obedient to husband. 10. Be a good cook. 11. Be religiously literate. 12. Be a student of Islam." Alper responded with a well-crafted reply: "How to be a Good Husband Material: 1. Be mentally stable and don't be a jerk. That will eliminate most of these types." Javed additionally commented, "This is outrageous! But the sad reality is that there are SO many American/Western Muslims who subscribe to this B.S." Yasra quipped, "He forgot: Be fair (light-skinned), be highly intelligent, but never show it, except to teach the kids." Nasreen responded with a meme saying, "Your mom didn't wait nine months for your dumb ass to come out and say this shit." As we can see, MLers struggle within and against these imposed assumptions about how to be a Muslim woman and move through the Western world. These fracturing/divisive responses to Islamophobia and sexism are compounded by race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality, to name only a few axes of power. This is to say that intersectionality is paramount to understanding how MLers grapple with multiple hierarchies of oppression. Muslim women in MLI and in the communities of which these women are a part are continually and constantly impacted by intricate and intersectional forms of power.

Feminist theorist Kellie Bean explains anti-Feminism in America as simultaneously alleviating and articulating "the fear that as patriarchy is forced to accommodate more Feminist demands, men themselves—those who occupy the privileged class, race, and gender positions within patriarchal culture—risk irrelevance,

or, the undifferentiated status of equality.”⁶¹⁸ A resurgence in anti-Feminist rhetoric and overt pro-patriarchal dispositions in the U.S. recently culminated in support for former President Donald Trump. Historian R. Marie Griffith articulates this trend:

Huge numbers of his supporters apparently saw his open sexism as refreshing. ... For many, Trump, the avatar of a patriarchal and largely White Christian right, was distinctly preferable...In fact, sexism and outright misogyny seemed to be undergoing a resurgence amid Trump’s campaign...because he shared, in the coarsest fashion, a worldview shaped by fear of women’s empowerment and a determined opposition to gender equality, the majority of conservative Christians trusted him to defend their moral outlook in the political realm.⁶¹⁹

As mentioned previously, the then-recent election of Trump when I started the MLI program in January 2017 was on the hearts and minds of Muslim MLers, many of whom were immediately impacted by his administration. Support for traditional patriarchy is not the sole reason for the outcomes of the 2016 election; however, it is important to understand patriarchy as used here articulates fear of this continued trajectory, rather than hope or reassurance that patriarchy is an event that has/is coming to its inevitable conclusion. The Trump Years are useful to understanding the ways MLers perceive Whiteness, Christianness, patriarchy and colonialism as intertwined oppressive powers. This means that American Patriarchy is intertwined with White and conservative Christian identity. This entanglement demonstrates the tensions and disagreements about what it means to be American, Christian, White, male/female, to say nothing of other

⁶¹⁸ Kellie Bean, *Post-backlash feminism : women and the media since Reagan-Bush* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2007). Table of contents only
<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0721/2007027053.html>.

⁶¹⁹ R. Marie Griffith, *Moral combat : how sex divided American Christians and fractured American politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

sexes and genders, and how these identities are synonymous or differentiated. Yasra noted the divisiveness she perceived along gendered and racialized lines in the current political climate of the U.S. in response to minority and racial social justice organizations such as Black Lives Matter choosing not to participate in the Women's March. She reflected in an open letter in 2017 that she shared with our MLI cohort, "As a Muslim woman of color who considers herself an ally for LGBTQ equality and all kinds of social justice, I began to wonder if their objection shines a light on what may be truly a problem in our country: That people of color feel the weight and pressure of our current climate while White people think it's a party of empowerment." The weight and pressure Yasra describes here refers to the problem of externally-imposed logics of racism and sexism that some minority groups feel divisive about in terms of how to approach their activism within these restrictive terms. Yasra made additional comments about these strategic but divisive and constrained choices, asking, "Was [the Women's March] becoming yet another place for White women to be seen and *feel* woke while truly not understanding how grave the situation is on a daily basis for people of color? Immigrants? People of Muslim faith? The unemployed? The uninsured? Etc.?" The multiple oppressive structures at play within American and transnational contexts make advocacy efforts politically charged. To be sure, MLIs' respective positionalities, identities and communities are varied: they are ethnically and racially diverse; MLIs are grappling with their own relationships to sectarianism, pluralism, and multi-culturalism, all the while struggling to combat Islamophobia that is constantly on the rise.

Marriageability?

Women's rights advocacy efforts within the Muslim community and within the broader society draw into conversation issues concerning marriageability, specifically with regard to the status and stigma of divorced women. Debates about marriageability are directly connected to internalized racial logics coupled with ambitions to achieve full social citizenship in the U.S./Western contexts. MLI leadership mirrors broader Muslim communal concerns about the prevalence of divorce and collective Muslim identity within non-Muslim countries. Divorce rates within the American Muslim community seem to be on the rise. In the 1900s, sociologist Ilyas Ba-Yunus conducted research on rates of divorce within the American Muslim community. Ba-Yunus calculated a 31.14% divorce rate among American Muslims, which is almost triple that of the Muslim world's two highest divorce rate countries, Turkey and Egypt, which as of 2007 both had a divorce rate of approximately 10%.⁶²⁰ "Divorce is on the rise in the Muslim community," said Imam Mohamed Magid quoted in a 2009 Sound Vision⁶²¹ article. Magid is the Executive Imam of All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) Center in Sterling, Virginia, and former president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). Magid explains, "We have seen an increase in divorce from people married for a while and those married for a short time," adding that Muslims overall are divorcing in higher numbers,

⁶²⁰ Ba-Yunus, "How do Muslims in North America divorce."

⁶²¹ Sound Vision Foundation is a not for profit organization serving Muslims and their neighbors through developing content on the applied aspect of Islamic living in the contemporary context. They host MuslimFest, produce the Muslim Sesame Street, Adam's World, help create guidelines for Imams on issues such as domestic violence, offer interfaith activist training, and provide youth education.

and that "It is not among a particular race or ethnic background or class or only among the religious or non-religious."⁶²² Imam Ziya Kavakci of the Islamic Association of North Texas and former member of the Fiqh Council of North America believes divorce is a "rampant problem" in the Muslim community and that "the Ummah is a mess when it comes to marriage."⁶²³ Divorce has many causes and according to Rutgers University's National Marriage Project, America's drift towards secular individualism is one of those causes.⁶²⁴ This individualism results in what is referred to as the "Burger King Syndrome," because of the company's slogan "you can have it your way."⁶²⁵ Within the context of marriage and divorce, Burger King Syndrome erases the possibility of compromise.

According to the Sound Vision article about divorce among American Muslims, there are roughly nine reasons why American Muslims are divorcing: In-laws, adultery online and offline, incompatibility, fairy-tale expectations, secular individualism, abuse, complete lack of preparation, money, and lying/hiding vital information.⁶²⁶ In-law issues mostly stem from tensions between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, rooted in jealousy over closeness to son/husband. Imam Ziya Kavakci elaborates, saying, "The

⁶²² Siddiqui, "Divorce Among American Muslims: Statistics, Challenges & Solutions."

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "The state of our unions: The social health of marriage in America 2007," *New Brunswick, NJ: The National Marriage Project at Rutgers University* (2005).

⁶²⁵ Macfarlane, *Islamic divorce in North America: A Shari'a path in a secular society*.

⁶²⁶ Siddiqui, "Divorce Among American Muslims: Statistics, Challenges & Solutions."

husbands are chicken! Unable to protect their own nuclear family unit for fear of their mother's displeasure."⁶²⁷ Edmund Arroyo, a clinical social worker who counsels Muslims and non-Muslims, and Shahina Siddiqui, President of the Canadian branch of the Islamic Social Services Association, both agree that adultery is the leading cause for divorce and that there are clear gender differences in how adultery affects marriage. Women blame themselves when their husbands have affairs, wondering what they must have done to drive their husbands away. Men blame their wives for having affairs, disputing their character. Arroyo states, "It's difficult emotionally for a guy to get over that, it's much easier for a woman to forgive her husband than a man to forgive his wife."⁶²⁸ Emotional affairs in cyberspace and pornography addiction are also prevalent. Arroyo asserts that the negative impacts of pornography are two-fold,

First, wives become self-conscious of their body image. They feel inadequate in the face of the airbrushed perfection of the women featured in such movies. Then, since most Muslim wives do not approve of their husbands consuming pornography, which is also disallowed in Islam, they lose respect for their spouse. This, along with the feeling of being unloved are a clear recipe for divorce.⁶²⁹

Instructors and leaders at Shalom Hartman as well as our own Imam Abdullah are often preoccupied with the issues of marriage and divorce. SHI leadership often framed interfaith marriage especially among North American diasporic Jews as a new type of Holocaust that would eventually guarantee a Jew-less world. Similarly, Imam Abdullah

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

held a special processing session in 2018 with us MLers. This session began with a plea from Abdullah to halt any interfaith relationships/marriages as they would dilute/are diluting the authenticity of future Muslim generations. Note that the audience included several divorced female converts, women who had been abandoned by their Muslim husbands and still managed to retain their faith and be embroiled in raising Muslim children. Abdullah's plea considering his audience felt quite insulting, implying convert versions of Islam/or interfaith marriages that include a Muslim parent would somehow obscure and corrupt the futurity of Islam and Muslimness. This plea brought one man to tears, as he had married a Black convert, and spent the bulk of his professional life counseling interfaith Muslim couples. His comments seemed to allude to the possibility that Abdullah was also implying interracial and not just interfaith marriage would somehow negatively affect the status of the Muslim ummah. Nasreen also boisterously chimed in, saying, "Abdullah, if you are so concerned about the state of our marriages, why aren't you counseling Muslim men to marry divorcees? To marry non-hijabis? To marry older women?" In reply, another MLer, a male east-Asian American, stood up and said, "We're willing to marry you all! Except you keep telling us there are no 'quality men' in our community." Nadine as a White divorcee, snarkily replied, "The truth is the truth. Be better." Abdullah, reading the room with all the charged emotions, immediately apologized. This heated back and forth serves not only as a window into issues related to marriageability and divorce as they are hotly contested within Muslim communities, especially in the West, but also the mimesis of Judaism that happens among some MLI Muslims, who admire Jewish collective identity within pluralistic and diasporic contexts

transnationally and throughout the U.S. As this misstep by Abdullah indicates, Jewish tribal logics are not easily translatable to a universal, transnational faith-based community.

Related to the charged conversation Imam Abdullah and other MLers had about divorce, the gendered and racialized dynamics of marriageability are important to understand how MLers are trying to overcome imposed disadvantaged positionalities within these social hierarchies. Divorce is on the rise and so are other trends within the American Muslim Ummah. Manijeh Danishpour, professor of marriage and family therapy, and Elham Fathi, professor of counseling, reviewed research conducted on marriage within Muslim communities in the West over the past ten years. They found interfaith and intercultural marriages, non-arranged marriages, and marriages through internet match-making processes were and are rapidly rising.⁶³⁰ Historical anthropologist, Zareena Grewal concludes that interracial marriages are also increasing, while reifying preferences related to skin color and shade. Grewal explains, “Just as the skin colour of a spouse becomes a statement about social mobility and prestige among Black Americans, the same phenomenon emerges in the overlooked cases of Arabs and Desis in the US.”⁶³¹ Grewal ties this preference for lightness and Whiteness to intra-racism... “a term describing the phenomenon of a racialized group that internalizes White supremacy and

⁶³⁰ Manijeh Daneshpour and Elham Fathi, "Muslim marriages in the Western world: A decade review," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 10, no. 1 (2016).

⁶³¹ Grewal, "Marriage in colour: race, religion and spouse selection in four American mosques."

redirects it at its own members.”⁶³² As MLers within the American Muslim Ummah attempt to garner elevated status positions within the imposed oppressive structures they navigate daily, Whiteness/lightness is seen as an advantage that aids in upward social mobility. Additionally, choosing fair skinned, light skinned, and White spouses opens the possibility of being White passing, a status that may be inherited by any children produced through the marriage. Intra-racism offers a deeper understanding of colorism, illuminating the complex relationship that Desi and Arab Muslim Americans have with Whiteness and lightness. These preferences for lightness disproportionately affect women and perceptions about their marriageability, as their value as a partner is usually measured by their beauty, while men are evaluated in terms of education and earnings. The internalized White supremacy, “a tragic scar left by systematic racism,”⁶³³ says Grewal, is concurrently self-harm and strategic self-help for navigating the racial and economic stratifications of American society. Grewal is correct in stating that preferences for lightness/Whiteness go beyond superficial beauty standards, and are driven by socio-economic mobility as well as a strategic avoidance of dark skin and the stigma it carries.

It is not just Imams and religious leaders such as Abdullah that are concerned or aware of the divorce phenomenon currently occurring in American Muslim communities. Yasra talks about the main topic of discussion at the leadership conference she attended in 2018:

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Ibid.

So when I was at this Muslim leadership conference there were about twenty-one of us there, seventeen women, so only four men, and of the seventeen women, I think half were divorced. A couple were remarried and then most were single. So we started talking about divorce and the community and how rampant it is right now. I mean it's like so much divorce. And I know this country is like 51% divorced and now the Muslim community is starting to mimic the country, but I feel like it hadn't in the past.

Interestingly, Yasra connects divorce to non-Muslim American behavior and links the rising divorce rate within the American Muslim community to Muslims mimicking Americanness: Yasra's perceptions of "Americanness" here seem interlocked with understandings of not only success but survival; that is to say, Yasra's perceptions of how Muslims are trying to thrive and/or survive under the imposed logics in this U.S. American context. This is very telling of the assimilatory processes that Yasra understands her community to be engaging in. Following this thread, it appears that divorce is the hidden cost of national belonging and/or social citizenship. But who is being divorced and who is doing the divorcing? This is not easy to see, especially when no data are being collected about divorce rates that use an intersectional lens to understand the innerworkings of the American Muslim community. However, the anxiety about general divorce rates within the community is a primary concern of Imams and Muslim faith leaders both inside of MLI and beyond. Sometimes this anxiety rears its head by religious advisors trying to keep couples together no matter the cost to parties involved. These approaches include counseling women to stay in abusive marriages, or counseling men to divorce their Brown wives and marry someone more in line with mainstream American Muslim characteristics. In either example, it is evident that these tactics are designed to reinforce a system detrimental to women.

Agency

Marriageability is governed by patriarchal logics. Patriarchies, whether American or Muslim or transnational in variety, operate by maintaining binaries: male/female, masculine/feminine, private/public, and so on. The maintenance of these dichotomies operates subversively in terms of unspoken social conformity, in tandem with overt policing. Gender is an example of one identity category, and each identity category must be continually accomplished. Gender identity is not simply, "I wore a dress on Tuesday, performed femininity correctly, and now I am a girl/woman, so I will just stop worrying about gender now." The same goes for nationality, ethnicity, race, sexuality, class, religion, and so many other unnamed aspects that compose a person. One is not simply American or Muslim or Brown or Gay just by stating so. There are gatekeepers to the communities we wish to enter; these gatekeepers judge and gauge our performance and then decide whether we are American enough, Muslim enough, woman enough, and man enough to be a part of normative, mainstream membership to a given group. As law professor Sahar Aziz explains:

Muslim women of all races and levels of religiosity face unique forms of discrimination at the intersection of religion, race, and gender because the September 11th terrorist attacks transformed the meaning of the Muslim headscarf. The debate no longer centers on whether the "veil" serves to oppress women by controlling their sexuality and, by extension, their personal freedoms and life choices or if it symbolizes choice, freedom, and empowerment for Muslim women. Rather, the Muslim headscarf now "marks" women as representatives of the suspicious, inherently violent, and forever foreign "Terrorist other" in our midst.⁶³⁴

⁶³⁴ Sahar F Aziz, "From the oppressed to the terrorist: Muslim-American women in the crosshairs of intersectionality," *Hastings Race & Poverty LJ* 9 (2012).

Every moment, every encounter, is an opportunity to massively succeed at being one of US or fail and be cast out as one of THEM. This is communal identity work, the very real process that manifests based on the positive valuation of sameness. Ethnic studies scholar Evelyn Nakano Glenn iterates this continual process of becoming as it relates to national citizenry and the many intersecting hierarchies contained within a state:

Citizenship is not just a matter of formal legal status; it is a matter of belonging, including recognition by other members of the community. Formal law and legal rulings create a structure that legitimates the granting or denial of recognition ... the maintenance of boundaries relies on 'enforcement' not only by designated officials, but also by so-called members of the public. Social interactions between citizens shed light on how private citizens protect boundaries of social citizenship by validating certain ascriptive attributes associated with nationality such as race, religion, ethnicity, and gender.⁶³⁵

Policing identity categories is often an internal job. What I mean by this is that the powers that be, those whom the system benefits, those who have power, cannot be in all places at all times; they are not omnipresent. It is their very limitations that necessitate the system⁶³⁶, as well as their conscription of insiders. While men police masculinities and femininities, traditionally, women also police femininity: women police women. In this way, many women are agents of the patriarchy, enforcing the boundaries that demarcate the box into which they themselves are forced. It is horrifying to think about, but completely reasonable when considering the stakes: Agents of the patriarchy are women whose identity hinges upon the current system staying intact. There are many

⁶³⁵ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "From unequal freedom: How race and gender shaped American citizenship and labor," *Global dimensions of gender and carework* (2006).

⁶³⁶ Michel Foucault, "Discipline and punish," *A. Sheridan, Tr., Paris, FR, Gallimard* (1975).

ways patriarchally oppressed persons buy into the very same system responsible for their oppression.

Some American Muslim women are refusing to do that, refusing to police themselves and other women on behalf of the patriarchy. These women undermine racialized patriarchies by strategically speaking up, staying silent, taking up space and relinquishing space depending on particular situations and moments. Aminah is a 32-year-old, second generation American Muslim Pakistani woman who was born and raised in Texas. She is a hijabi, visibly Brown, wears jeans, plaid, and stands statuesquely tall at 5'9". While participating in an ice-breaker exercise at an MLI retreat in 2018, Aminah and other members of her group were asked to express what she finds to be "American" about herself. Aminah, the first member of the group to respond, loudly proclaimed, "I'm loud.... oh, and I'm pushy, that is what makes me American." This blunt first encounter is telling of what Aminah understands as American, and what she perceives as being American in terms of her positionality within the American Muslim community: and, importantly, her ability to help not only herself but fellow Muslims navigate and survive these structures. When Aminah talked about the state of American Muslim women, she was also very quick to narrow her field of representation and to loudly express her frustration:

I don't think I can speak for all American Muslim women, but those of us living in the South, living in Texas... WE ARE FED UP!!!! The leadership is just awful, we just either have crappy leadership or no leadership at all. I go to the masjid a lot, with my children and such, and every time I go to pray the Auntie is there motioning us to the back, checking our hijabs, our abayas, our nail polish. She makes sure we are quiet, we don't take up too much space, and that we are all 'appropriately' covered for prayer time. I hate it, I just hate it, like is this seventh grade and we are kicking people,

women, out of prayers because they are a distraction with their halal nail polish!!! Just get out of my relationship with Allah, stop policing my body and my space, that's right MY space too. I mean, I'm a Muslim, I should be able to take up space in my own Masjid. And the Imams, the leadership, they say nothing, whether they are old or young, the men on the masjid councils, they say nothing...they do nothing.

What Aminah is referring to is a pervasively common phenomenon in mosques across the world. An older woman—an Auntie—acts as a sort of usher inside the prayer space, making sure women attending prayer leave enough room for the men by lining up in the last two rows, and then proceeding to pray behind them. Some mosques are sex-segregated side by side instead of front to back. In other mosques, there are actual partitions that create a temporary wall, or there is a separation barrier that creates a room within the prayer space, so that women are completely sequestered and unseen. In all these scenarios, the Auntie police is a constant fixture.

Aminah's boisterous protestations about the policing of women within the masjid led her to ultimately create a different space for women and people who are "fed up" with being policed inside their own religious spaces. Aminah details this space:

It's enough already, I had enough. I wanted to be in a Muslim space, a space where I could feel the comfort of my faith and the comradery of other Muslims. A place that was safe for me to be Muslim, without me looking over my shoulder or being afraid, but they couldn't give that to me, even my own community, they did not want me to be unchecked. So they could not make space for me, so I made my own space. Anyone can come, the only requirement is that you self-describe as Muslim, that's it. There is no policing, all are welcome...wear a hijab or don't, come on in...jeans, yoga pants, or abayas, come on in...tatt'ed up, pierced, come on in...come and pray, come and learn, come and be, just be with other Muslims, be with your community, without fear, without shame...You are Muslim enough for us, you are one of us.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁷ Aminah's third space is akin to the Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI) founded in 2012 in London, and the Women's Mosque of America Founded in 2014 in Los Angeles, California. The IMI mainly operates in

Aminah's third space is demonstrative of a well-known pattern that religions follow, especially when existing on American soil or inhabiting a predominately U.S. audience, which is a fracturing pattern.⁶³⁸ While the splintering of American Islams is well demonstrated through Aminah's third space, it is also a telling demonstration of regional difference within America and Muslim communities around the country, once again reflecting the multivalent positionalities that MLIers and other Muslims inhabit locally and transnationally.

In overhearing Aminah relay the motivations for opening her third space and its revolutionary inclusion, another informant, Yasra, felt compelled to respond:

You know, this is why I really hated Texas...they are so behind the times. An inclusive third space...please girl, that is not revolutionary, we've already been at that for a decade here in L.A. (Los Angeles). I mean, we have the women's mosque already, and it's like finally Texas is catching on. But it's too little too late.

Yasra is a 40-year-old female, 1st generation Pakistani migrant and California transplant from Texas. Yasra is visibly Brown and often is mistaken for being Indonesian or Malaysian. She is not a hijabi, and she is unmarried and has no children. She loves

Great Britain, but they have a sister organization, Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV), that has multiple chapters in America. Aminah's third space is a unique combination of the goals and elements championed by the aforementioned organizations. IMI focuses on inclusivity within the Masjid, Women's Mosque of America is dedicated to creating and maintaining female prayer spaces absent the Auntie police, and MVP orchestrates dialogue and outreach that fuses Islamic values with social justice efforts. Aminah's third space is not solely about prayer spaces, female led or otherwise, and is not only interested in social justice and activist liaising. Aminah's third space is more of an inclusive community center, focused more on bringing Muslims of all kinds together, instead of trying to assert new and/or different boundaries for Islam.

⁶³⁸ Mathijs Pelkmans Chris Hann, "Realigning Religion and Power in Central Asia: Islam, Nation-State and (Post)Socialism," in *Religion in Today's World: Global Issues, Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Melissa M. Wilcox (New York: Routledge, 2013).

wearing short skirts with Vans, and owns two small dogs.⁶³⁹ Yasra goes on to explain her frustration with Aminah's goals:

Even though we have the women's mosque, it is still not really helping LGBTQ Muslims in terms of bringing them back to their Muslim community. It is not bridging gaps between ethnically distinct masjids or with Black Muslim communities like places in Chicago. The goal can't just be to open a third space...we need to open up the traditional spaces we already have, that is inclusion. The whole "oh well, I guess we will just go somewhere else" doesn't help our community as a community. It just breaks us apart.

In expressing her frustrations, Yasra is offering keen insight into the harsh futures that additional if not still partitioned spaces in Texas and other states are going to face, which is best described as marginalization or ostracization from the rest of the mainstream American Muslim community, which Yasra and her colleagues have personally experienced in their activism as allies for LGBTQ Muslims. She further explains her struggle and some misgivings about Aminah as the "spokesperson" for this kind of third space:

Sure now it seems great, but out of sight out of mind, what kind of community will we have if we do not recognize one another as Muslims...this is separate but equal? And we all know that means it's not equal. And who are we leaving behind? No we have to stay put and make them deal with us, we have to show up, these are our spaces too. And it's so interesting that Aminah is so loud about her Texan progress, of course she is loud, shouting about inclusivity...they tolerate her, give people like her a platform, allow her to be loud, of course because she is a pillar of Muslim society. She is a hijabi, has produced Muslim children, and is married. She is the right kind, I am not, that's why I love L.A., I get to have a voice.

⁶³⁹ Yasra owning two dogs is quite untraditional for Muslims, since there is a widely held belief that dogs are ritually impure. This belief is so pervasively held that on August 17, 2020 Egypt's Grand Mufti Swaky Allam just declared that contact with dogs does not restrict the ability to pray because dogs are ritually pure animals and therefore it is perfectly Islamic to own dogs as pets.

Yasra is addressing several highly important national conversations currently happening inside the American Muslim community centered on who Muslim Americans are and who gets to represent them. Yasra's stern reply to Aminah's third space efforts illustrates a lack of Muslim pluralism that Yasra finds imminently necessary. Yasra's demand that hijabis, non-hijabis, yoga-pants wearing women and divorcees, to name but a few, have a right to Muslim spaces that exist in the mainstream Muslim community is an insistence for Muslim pluralism. In this context, Yasra's Muslim pluralism illustrates her strong belief that American Islam and more broadly speaking, Islam does have room for those non-traditional Muslims that have been ostracized and marginalized by their own communities and leaders. Namely, those Muslim women of non-dominant races, sexes, genders, sexualities, ages, and marriage status. Yasra is also broadly addressing the inherent issues attached to the ideal of inclusivity. I asked her to elaborate on why she is not the right kind:

I mean...I am not married, never been married, no children, not a hijabi, I live alone with my dogs and I hang out with Jews. I mean there is a running joke among me and my friends, that inside I am actually a gay Jewish man! They can't have me representing us Muslim Desi women, I am all the wrong things. But you know what...I am Muslim and I am loud about it. I show up to everything, all the interfaith stuff, all the LGBTQ stuff, all the Muslim stuff and I will continue to show up. I don't want to exist in a third space, I want this space. Every place just needs to be more like L.A.

Yasra's work with Jewish communities in America is groundbreaking. She once said she spent so many Friday nights in a row at Shabbat services with different Jewish communities that her mother repeatedly asked her if she was going to convert and leave Islam, which would then of course be the shame of the family. Yasra's work with Jewish

communities combined with her advocacy for LGBTQ American Muslims and her loudness about both are what in her eyes define her as a Muslim American, particularly an *Angeleno* (inhabitant of Los Angeles), and the “wrong” kind of representative for the broader Muslim American community. Yasra’s positionality is demonstrative of the politics of representation and respectability occurring currently within MLI and throughout many of their various Muslim communities. Yasra’s lack of formal male protection in the form of a husband, or ever-present father with whom she lives, leaves her exposed to old critiques of the “Westernized” Muslim girl, more American than Muslim, and therefore not Muslim at all anymore. She is hyper-aware of this stigma, but chooses to remain within the Muslim community as a dissenting yet unpopular voice.

Nasreen, in a 2018 interview, explains how the confrontation detailed above between Yasra and Aminah, is being played out on the national stage through the mainstream Muslim American institution ISNA, the Islamic Society of North America who holds an annual national conference:

If you look at ISNA’s lineup of speakers, there are some interesting intersections of conflict. I think it’s interesting that somebody like Linda [Sarsour] is getting such a big stage, even though she is for LGBTQ rights and has not spoken out against gay marriage and is fairly supportive of it, although she would never speak of that publicly at ISNA. But the fact that she is even being given a stage is a pretty interesting turn for the Muslim community. I think in some ways we are comfortable with them in the limelight because they sort of fit the Muslim, the religious Muslim mold in some sense.

Nasreen elaborates on this religious Muslim mold that certain American Muslim spokespeople fit:

Like Aminah, they wear hijab, can speak the religious language, they are, on a political front, super pro-Palestinian, they are conservative in a

personal way, even if they have liberal views. I question if Linda didn't wear hijab, would she still be on stage in multiple sessions at ISNA? I don't think so. I don't even think she would be considered, she wouldn't even be part of the conversation.

Nasreen and Yasra draw our attention to the overlaps and distinctions of some of the positionalities facing Muslim women in MLI. This distinctiveness has to do with speaking Arabic which leads to an affinity for Arab American Muslims, in terms of representing Islam on the national and global stage. But both Nasreen and Yasra are frustrated with the championing of gendered values that undercut other women. Yasra, during our 2017 interview, talked about this shift as she recalled her perceptions of an archetypal American Muslim female pervasive during her youth in the 1990s:

When I was growing up all our leaders were telling the community not to get involved in American politics, don't get wrangled into it because America is not an Islamic nation, it is not a Muslim country, it doesn't follow our rules so there is no reason to get involved. It was all about keeping ourselves separate, keeping to our own, marrying our own. As girls we put on the hijab, we wore skirts and baggy sweatshirts so no one could make out our figures, we understood this to be the only way we could maintain our Muslimness in America.

Yasra continued, talking about how the support for this old archetype by American Muslim leadership directly impacted American Muslim girls and women:

In the 90s it was super religious, and modest, and separate, don't be outspoken, be submissive and modest, all the old tropes. But that did not help American Muslim girls find husbands or partners because when you have the leadership saying "this is the type of woman that is a real Muslim" then no American Muslim girl is going to be Muslim enough for a Desi Muslim son. So American Muslim boys and their families were doing marriage tours back in Pakistan to find a real Desi Muslim girl that lived up to this old standard. No matter how Muslim I was, no matter how tight I wrapped my hijab or how baggy my clothes were, I was still too American.

What Yasra is describing is the double bind within which many women in MLI exist.

Gamila, during a 2018 interview, talked about her time working for ISNA, and its harmful tactics towards women:

Can I say ISNA sucks and I'm going to Houston but boycotting ISNA. They suck because they harbor perpetrators. Even after several women asked for him to be removed, they supported NAK (Nouman Ali Khan). Even though rumors were swirling for years. I quit because the perpetrator scrubbed Google after running two women out of town, after holding them hostage for days. But what do I know? I'm a woman. And if I didn't wear hijab I wouldn't be allowed on stage. It used to be a rule. I used to enforce it. Unwillingly, against my will.

Gamila is addressing a major conflict that is happening right now within American Muslim communities over protection of sex offenders and subsequent ostracization of victims. Additionally, she tells of the unofficial policy of ISNA to neglect and deny a platform to any Muslim woman who does not wear hijab. As a hijabi herself, she is ashamed that ISNA used her as a tool to police other women: “Yes I choose to wear hijab, but that doesn’t make me more Muslim than any other Muslim woman. I hate that they (ISNA) use my religious choice to shame other women or force them into the hijab. It’s disgusting, but that’s what they do, they use us.” Here, Gamila brings to the forefront the need for Muslim pluralism that is inclusive of hijabis and non-hijabis, a pluralism that does not force women to police other women’s religiosities and/or outward symbols of Muslimness. Gamila is an Arab American Muslim, is trained as a social worker and has worked with victims of molestation and sexual assault within the American Muslim community to remove protected perpetrators. She has seen first-hand how the institutional protection of perpetrators aids them in their sex crimes against Muslim children and women. Her disdain for ISNA is directly linked to their use of institutional

power to protect sex offenders. In this moment, Nouman Ali Khan⁶⁴⁰ is at the forefront of this issue as there has been backlash against American Muslim women that came forward with accusations of sexual harassment against Khan. Gamila directly speaks out against this backlash and victim-blaming within the American Muslim community: “This is what happens when people don't speak up. Women. Get. Harmed. Muslim men - this is on their shoulders. And I'll be told to focus on my recovery when I speak up.” Given her history of policing other women, Gamila refuses to stay quiet or to be used again to subject women to serving as archetypal objects. For her, the cost of enforcement and imposed silence is simply too high, as these forms of violence directly result in the harm of other victims of abuse. Gamila is engaged in a dual process of expansion and contraction in relation to Muslim pluralism.

The racialization and genderedness of post-9/11 Islams converge at the public display of modesty, which is especially embodied in the wearing of hijab. The hijab is a thread that has remained constant, even while other markers of Muslim femininity have changed over time. In a post 9/11 America, the weight of the hijab is considerable, just as its absence also leaves a great dearth. Law professor Nadine Strossen aptly sheds light on the dual patriarchies that American Muslim women must navigate:

Further objectifying Muslim women are the predominantly male Muslim spokespersons responding to the polemic, as well as physical, attacks on

⁶⁴⁰ Nouman Ali Khan is a Pakistani-American Muslim and renowned religious speaker and scholar. In late September 2017, several allegations of inappropriate sexual advances were brought against Khan. These allegations were widely substantiated by Khan's staff, colleagues, friends, and family. It appears that Khan's inappropriate behavior with his female followers was well known, with only a few of the multiple allegations being made public in 2017 because Khan breached a contract. Due to the publicity ISNA conducted an investigation, which resulted in Khan's confession and a mandate that he take a break from public life.

Muslims in America. Notwithstanding that the headscarved woman equally bears the brunt of the government's harsh counterterrorism tactics and the public's distrust of Muslims, her voice and perspectives are notably absent from the discourse. Yet again, she finds herself an object within a grander political conflict between two patriarchies different in form, but similar in substance.⁶⁴¹

While attending the same intensive Muslim leadership conference mentioned above, Yasra relayed the following encounter she had with other cohort members during a group discussion about being Muslim in America:

This man gets up and he makes a comment: “you know I just wanna say I’m so honored by my Muslim sisters who face the daily challenges of being a hijabi. You all are so brave and how you go through so much, I just have so much love and respect for you” ... and he went on and on. Then another woman stands up, interrupts him and says, “How dare you. Yeah, no, just because I don’t wear hijab doesn’t mean I’m not as honorable or brave and that is what you are implying. I go through a lot too, I have the issue of how to tell people I’m Muslim because people don’t know I am.” He immediately responded with “I didn’t mean that”.... And she cut him off again with, “you don’t get it you just don’t even get it because you’re putting hijabis up here.” It was such an interesting interaction to witness, because that never would have happened when I was growing up, no woman I know would have clapped back so loudly. It was pretty amazing, and most of the women, hijabis or not, were super supportive of her.

The interaction that Yasra witnessed corresponds with Aminah and Gamila’s sentiments about American Muslim women being fed up with patriarchal leadership that requires them to police fellow American Muslim women. They are categorically refusing the patriarchy by rejecting praise for their personal religiosities that maintain an archetypal standard informed by American Islamophobia, a standard which results in the

⁶⁴¹ Nadine Strossen, "Leo C. Goodwin Symposium: Tilting the Scales: The Changing Rules of Women in the Law and Legal Practice," *Nova L. Rev.* 31 (2007).

ostracization of other women locally and nationally. MLI women, and more broadly, American Muslim women, are finding additional ways to refuse the dual patriarchies thrust upon them. These multifaceted refusals build trusted resource networks that enable these women to maneuver marriage, divorce, and a plethora of situations, with support and solidarity.

Intra-Muslim Advocacy: Building Muslim Pluralism

So far, we have seen the ways MLers and the broader American Muslim community use Muslim pluralism, or an expansion of Islam with a model of inclusivity, to navigate racist and Islamophobic structures in the U.S. The added layer of Muslim pluralism for women also includes expanding Muslim pluralism in ways that combat sexist normative impositions of ideal Muslim femaleness and femininity. Gendered Muslim pluralism creates space for nontraditional gendered identities such as the non-hijabi, the divorcee, the LGBTQIA Muslim, and the survivor of domestic and/or sexual violence. Nasreen in her advocacy work is on the frontlines of creating American Muslim spaces for these nondominant American Muslim women. Nasreen, in our 2017 interview, discussed rising divorce rates in the American Muslim community, and also shed light on how American Muslim leadership is responding:

Muslim divorce rates are probably catching up with the national divorce average. Because that's part of integration, it's part of coming into your own as part of a national community. Also in some Imams' responses I am hearing the same argument we have heard before, which is "why are so many Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men?" And to me, it's because our men are stupid. And I feel kind of bad just dismissively saying that, but I think it comes down to the patriarchal concepts that we are so engrained with. A physically healthy, emotionally healthy, sexually healthy relationship, we don't have that. We don't have a concept of a healthy marriage really, that is egalitarian, that has a current understanding

of our time and space, that isn't sitting in a view of marriage from the old country. And I think that all of this is negotiable depending on who the people are in the relationship, but those overarching attitudes definitely have an effect.

Nasreen aptly points out the unforeseen consequences of American Muslim leaders in MLI and elsewhere championing assumptions that praise women for their perceived marriageability. Divorce is a difficult process under any circumstances, but for American Muslim women, just as they must navigate dual patriarchies, American and Muslim, they must navigate both the American legal system and their religious legal system simultaneously. This navigation is tricky and requires trusted guidance. Yasra, during a 2017 interview, explained how American Muslim women are again bypassing some of the systems restricting many of the Muslim women she knows:

Well what kind of resources are provided to Muslim women? The Imams are trying to “keep couples together” and they are focused on that in a way that when divorce does happen there is a ton of shame surrounding the woman of course. And then there is no development of actual resources for a woman who is getting divorced. So my older sister was in this very situation and secretly a friend of hers told her that there is a secret Muslim women’s group for divorcees online ... yah know some of these states like Michigan, Chicago, Texas, the Islam is so conservative, it’s a very subtle conservancy and you can fall into this trap of conceding all your rights. But I feel like divorced women may have broken free from that so they can see clearly, and this group has female lawyers and advocates, all Muslim that help divorced women with the American legal system as well as the Islamic family codes. It is a support group also, without the judgment or assumption that the woman did something wrong to garner a divorce. It is a shame that these women cannot trust their own local communities, they don’t want to risk their reputations and they don’t trust that they are being given good advice.

This secret online group for American Muslim women who are divorced or divorcing is an amazing example of how these women are creating the very resources they are actively denied by their own communities where Islamophobia is constantly on the rise.

Instead of women remaining silent or complicit and being used as tools to keep other women towing the patriarchal party line, they are secretly self-organizing and supporting one another.

Additionally, some American Muslim women are refusing to stay in marriages where their needs are not being met. As Nasreen suggests above, there is really no model within the Muslim community of a physically, emotionally, sexually healthy marriage. American Muslim women are living repercussions of there being no wholistic understanding of mutual partnership within the vast majority of American Muslims. Gamila recently went through a divorce herself; during one of our many conversations in 2018, she explained why she made the decision to go forward with the separation and the divorce: “My husband wasn’t attracted to me at all...nor was he interested in sex...I didn’t understand what it meant to be desired. I’m just sad and mad and happy at the same time... and scared.” Gamila refused to stay in a marriage that was emotionally and sexually not meeting her needs. This is quite a leap forward as divorce within American Muslim circles in the past was only contemplated in the face of severe physical abuse.

Sexual gratification, and for that matter sex in general, is entering American Muslim discourse in relation to women’s needs. Yasra also mentioned that sex was a major topic at the Muslim leadership conference:

A lot of things about sex were coming up too, like the post that Manal Omar made. So Manal Omar is an activist scholar, in DC, but now lives in Saudi I think, so she is starting this initiative to discuss women and sexuality, and so she posted this question on her Facebook page, “Tell me a sentence that you would use at the dinner table to talk about sex.” And I was like Wha What ... Muslims are commenting back. It was weird, I’ve never seen that, Muslims don’t talk about sex.

Manal Omar is one of a few voices that are bringing women's sexuality to the forefront for the American Muslim community. Another organization, Health Education Advocacy Research Training, HEART Women & Girls, is also grappling with women's sexual health and sex education within an Islamic framework. HEART is an MLI-adjacent organization as several of its founding members are also MLI participants. HEART is a great resource for women and girls that offers online educational tutorials about women's health, sexual health, and helps religious faith communities address sexual violence. This organization employs an Islamic framework rooted in the Arabic word *rahma*, which means mercy. One of the founders of HEART, Nadia Mohajir, who is related to one of my informants, explained to me in 2018 the origins of this organization:

The Qur'an instructs Muslims to stand up for justice, even if it means challenging one's own community. For years, we have heard Muslims share their struggles with body image, depression, unhealthy relationships, sexuality, and all too often, sexual violence. They have spoken to us about not having access to culturally-sensitive information and resources, and feeling apprehensive of seeking out these tools because of the shame associated with discussing sex and sexual violence in Muslim communities. While these individuals were different ages, ethnicities, and education levels, they all had one thing in common: **They navigated this world, often times, alone, and in silence. This silence is unjust and contributes to the gender inequities and violence in our communities.** HEART was founded to break this silence. It seeks to provide a safe space to come together—both virtually and physically—to learn about their bodies, exchange health information, and become resources of health information for each other and their communities.

Nadia's statement directly articulates the current moment that American Muslim women are in. Becoming and providing resources and breaking the silence about taboo topics within the Muslim community is paramount to combating both the American and Muslim

patriarchies that continue to barter national belonging through their control over women's personhood and bodies.

The Muslim voices above articulate the current and multiple fronts that these women are engaged in as they work to build a Muslim pluralism without patriarchy. Their tricky navigations of both the religious and secular patriarchies offer a lit path for women and activists pushing their communities towards human rights. While the broader American Muslim community and its leadership within and outside of MLI seem all too keen to sacrifice Muslim women in order to gain national belonging, these women refuse to be the collateral that secures social citizenship. They do not want their personal religiosities used to police or marginalize other women, they do not want to be traded in for newer models, and they do not want to stay in relationships that deny them sexual fulfillment and personhood. They do not need saving, and they do not need to leave their Muslimness at the gates to become socially legible. They are refusing both patriarchies, American and Muslim, they are playing sexual politics on their terms with the understanding that they themselves are the resource they need, that they are American already, and have always been Muslim enough.

This chapter addressed the mimetic processes I observed between MLIs and their Jewish hosts. MLIs internalize Jewish approaches to success. Jews, as a successful diasporic religious minority community in America, engage in politics of respectability to obtain control over their collective destiny and to gain access to halls of power. The MLI program is viewed by MLIs as an opportunity to learn from Jewish successes, to battle Islamophobia, as well as advocate for Palestinian self-determination. Women in MLI are

on the frontlines of these efforts to build a Muslim pluralism that mirrors and mimics the Jewish pluralism so adeptly translated through the MLI pedagogy. As discussed in this chapter, women MLIs, in service of this goal to build a pluralistic Muslim community, are maneuvering in ways that challenge both American and Muslim patriarchy. Women's navigations of these dual patriarchal oppressions are one mechanism in which all MLIs are engaging. The constraints and successes within inherently limited and oppressive structures are felt most strongly by non-dominant Muslims and especially women.

This chapter additionally highlighted some big topics of conversation occurring within the multiple communities that MLI women inhabit, but these women understand that these issues flow from minor happenings. As Yasra said: “We are talking about the simple things, how it was when we were kids... like the women and girls having to go make chai and the young boys didn’t. And that simple act starts this avalanche of just a male superiority that I don’t think even they understand. So um yeah, that’s what I think the state of American Muslim women are in.” Women members of MLI have captivantly carved out interesting and new spaces within the multiple communities to which they belong. They are simultaneously adapting and changing while upholding boundaries that they themselves have chosen instead of compromising to uphold the collective boundaries imposed on Muslims and especially Muslim women.

Conclusion

This dissertation has shed light on the ways some North American Muslims grapple with identity, belonging, and transnational social commitments and advocacy. The Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI) is a project designed to encourage U.S. American Muslim understanding of the centrality of Israel to collective Jewish peoplehood and identity. As someone raised with the collective memory of Jewish trauma, and as someone who studies genocide, I understand this importance. As someone who has now been Muslim for as long as I was Jewish, MLI, was a confrontation space, abstractly and concretely, where my many identities collided; these confrontations and collisions are certainly echoed by my fellow MLIs as we have seen throughout this project. There is a bit of a running joke about my conflicting identities among colleagues, friends, family, and MLIs. When asked about the risks related to my scholarship and activism, I respond with the phrase, “Either way I am in the camps!” This phrase is telling of how central the collective trauma of the Shoah is within my own psyche. It also points to a lack of choice, choice that is blotted out of existence by blood. The reality is according to Hitler’s rules I would have been sent to the camps because half of my blood is Jewish; additionally, as a Muslim I would have been raced as not Aryan and thrown into the camps anyways. This is not to make light of the catastrophe of the camps, but to point out two important things: that my identity has never been uncontested and that I have real skin in this game, knowing genocide may be around the corner. My status as a scholar of women in Islam, my access to the ivory tower, my tokenism as a White convert and a spokesperson for U.S. American Muslim women are a few of the markers

that made me eligible for participation in MLI. I intentionally and strategically used my markers of privilege as well as oppression to conduct a similarly intersectional analysis of the complex lived realities of some of the U.S. American Muslims I met throughout that process.

My ethnographic research reveals that MLI is embroiled in larger dynamics of power and oppression; dynamics that operate within local, national, and transnational contexts. Specifically, my research reveals parallel identity formation processes in service of racialized religious minorities' efforts to obtain full social citizenship. The primary understanding within SHI and MLI of what it means to achieve full social citizenship, as a racialized religious minority living in diaspora, is to obtain and maintain access to halls of power. My ethnographic research illustrates how MLIs are emulating their SHI instructors and hosts in their pursuit to manage and navigate Islamophobia by way of gaining access to halls of power. Similarly, SHI Jews articulate maintaining access to halls of power as how they collectively navigate anti-Semitism. Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are not understood here as unique and separate oppressions, but rather multifaceted manifestations of the racialized religious hierarchies that govern the lives of non-dominant peoples and groups. The logics that rule these intertwined hierarchies of oppression are, therefore, mutually influential. MLIs grapple with how to navigate these multiple oppressions that honors their multidimensional identities.

The members of MLI, whose stories I have attempted to give voice to here, demonstrate the ways in which oppressor power dynamics self-replicate within minoritized communities, as seen within the U.S. American Muslim Ummah as well as

Israeli state policies. Due to the extremely pervasive systems of racialized sexism, sexualized racism, which is also religioned, gendered, and so forth, the vast majority of my informants are forced to choose between remaining subordinated to these oppressive hierarchies or engaging costly politics in order to ascend their ranks. At times the price of engaging oppressor logics to navigate oppression comes at the cost of a community's most vulnerable members, women of color. As such, as I have demonstrated, it is women MLers that are most creatively pushing their communities in new and hopeful directions.

My informants both internalize and combat these power dynamics in diverse and complex ways. Many of the women who inform this project creatively navigate the dual patriarchies they inhabit. MLers are active in struggles to dismantle Islamophobia as well as other oppressive structures afflicting fellow minority communities locally, nationally, and transnationally. At the same time, my ethnography of MLI also revealed how privilege and oppression exist simultaneously. MLers are faced with the problem of becoming an oppressed oppressor: that is, even oppressed people are capable of replicating oppressive structures. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, MLers perpetuate racial dynamics of oppression to mitigate Islamophobia and obtain full social citizenship. Belonging, in this case, equates to access to halls of power, which is viewed as an escape hatch from racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia. I have designed this dissertation to highlight the meaningful ways in which MLers resist systems of oppression, but also to critique the ways in which many members of MLI can, and at times have, also become the oppressor as they attempt to ascend the ladder to social belonging. This process of attempted ascendancy is a tragic reality, that puts on display

the untenability of imagined U.S. American pluralism, and the resiliency of the dual patriarchies present within U.S. American social structures as well as the local, national, and transnational Muslim communities they are a part of. The multivalent power dynamics exhibited by MLI fully demonstrate the colonizer's quandary, which ultimately states that for racialized religious minorities, full assimilation to hegemonic norms is not possible. Rather, the process of ascendancy is used as a colonial tactic to encourage members of a minoritized group to betray their own and to commit to divisive, oppressive behaviors that benefit the oppressors.

I have also attempted to show how patriarchal oppression is a matrix on which MLIs specifically and U.S. American Muslims broadly, like so many other minoritized communities, find themselves mapped. I have used my ethnographic data to demonstrate the ways my informants perpetuate this matrix of power, as well as the ways they use their agency to disrupt and work against it. In addition to offering an ethnographic study of a group of North American Muslim leaders, this dissertation is ultimately one of hope. My own hope and the hope of MLIs as well as SHI instructors and hosts, is that racialized religious minorities stand in solidarity with one another against the oppressive structures that plague all non-dominant peoples.

For me, and for people who have experienced individual or collective trauma, it is a foregone conclusion that there is no such thing as a bystander. In line with many of the activist-scholars I have cited throughout this dissertation, I have tried not only to give witness but also to critique the logics of oppression to which MLIs are continually subjected, and to which, tragically, they often subject each other. Importantly, in this

project, I have tried to show that analysis of any oppressed community must be committed to that community's liberation. To that end, this dissertation has been intentionally anti-racist, feminist, and intersectional. This is because no group can achieve liberation through the oppression of another. This dissertation serves in no small part as a call to action to end cycles of oppression and discrimination within our own communities.

As I have noted, my participation in MLI and the ensuing research that developed was – and is – extremely personal. I am caught in the middle of the very conflict that MLI seeks to interrogate. As a survivor of rape and domestic violence, I was once told by a member of the Academy that I was too personally involved to conduct an official study of subjects related to patriarchy; sexism; structural violence. It has taken me several years to realize that these very reasons make me the perfect person to conduct an intersectional analysis of an as yet unstudied community. Especially in U.S. American and Western discourses, Muslims – both individually and collectively – remain simultaneously underrepresented and over-scrutinized. Rarely are they afforded the opportunity to provide their own narratives. This project is intended to give voice to those of us who are often prevented from speaking for ourselves.

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