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Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Emotionally Vulnerable Storytelling as Peacebuilding:
Muslim/Jewish Interfaith Activism in the United States

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Anthropology

by

Mindy Wynn Tauberg

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Leo Chavez, Chair
Professor Victoria Bernal
Professor David Snow

2019

In loving memory of Norman Tauberg, whose stories taught me that being a hero means living by example no matter the cost.

“Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.”

~Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

“The day is short, and the work is plentiful, and the laborers are indolent, and the reward is great, and the master of the house is insistent. You are not obliged to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it; if you have learned much Torah, great shall be your reward, for He who hires you will surely repay you for your toil; yet the requital of the pious is in the future.”

~Rabbi Tarfon in Pirkei Avot 2:15-16

“Verily, the Sharia is founded upon wisdom and welfare for the servants in this life and the afterlife. In its entirety it is justice, mercy, benefit, and wisdom. Every matter which abandons justice for tyranny, mercy for cruelty, benefit for corruption, and wisdom for foolishness is not a part of the Sharia even if it was introduced therein by an interpretation.”

~Ibn al-Qayyim in I'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn 3/11

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In addition, I would not have made it this far without the support of Leah Zani, Megan Neal, and the anthropology department graduate representatives, Melissa Begey, Charlie Curtis, Ellen Kladky, and Emily Matteson. I would also like to thank all of my friends and colleagues in the One Hamsa community, whose generosity made this research possible in the first place and whose faith in me ensured that this dissertation came to fruition. I am also indebted to all of the doctors who provided me with the care I needed to be able to finish my work: Yuli Liu, Jessica Eldridge, Anthony Mascola, Julie Osborn, and Lynn Yudofsky.

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Finally, thank you to my amazing husband Scott Hollingsworth and our enchanting cat, Stormageddon, who were there to boost my morale and curtail my heart rate every day in the writing trenches. Stormy, you are a pretty cat and a good cat. Scott, you are immeasurably patient and encouraging and I appreciate every minute of your pep talks and writing workshopping. You're a stellar partner and teammate, and I can't wait to see what the next chapter holds for us.

Mindy Wynn Tauberg

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Education

University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA

Ph.D. in Anthropology with Graduate Feminist Emphasis, June 2019

M.A. in Anthropology, 2014

Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY

M.A., Elementary Inclusive Education, May 2010

Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH

B.A., Anthropology with High Honors and East Asian Studies/Japanese, International Studies Concentration, May 2008

Research Experience

PhD Researcher

June 2017- present

- Conducted participant observation and interviews
- Transcribed and coded data according to categories derived from research questions.
- Presents findings at local and national seminars and conferences

Project V-LIFE

January 2015- October 2016

(Virtual Language Immersion in Foreign Languages)

- Worked with team members to design curricula for second year German language students to participate in virtual language immersion through the video game, World of Warcraft.
- Collected qualitative data during pilots of these curricula and analyzed results.
- Iteratively revised curricula to better meet student needs based on research results.
- Co-presented findings with Principle Investigator at Digital Media & Learning Conference (see Invited Presentations and Writing Contributions).

Senior Honors Thesis in Anthropology

September 2007-May 2008

“Choosing Identity: Children of Interfaith Marriage”

- Interviewed children of interfaith marriages and researched religion and ethnic identity in America.
- Awarded High Honors (see Awards).

U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Sixth Session

May 2007

- Research assistant to a professor conducting participant observation. Attended and took notes on various workshops and discussions.

East Asian Studies Capstone Project

January 2007

- Translated and analyzed Japanese folktales.
- Awarded Newton Prize (see Awards).

Achill Island Archaeological Field School

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- Contributed to the excavation and documentation of House 23 in the Deserted Village of Slievemore.

Invited Presentations and Writing Contributions

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Teaching & Learning Anthropology Journal, Web Resource.
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- “Wow! It’s Immersive: Designing Language Learning Experiences in World of Warcraft.”** October 6, 2016
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- “Racialization of Muslims and ‘Muslim-Looking People.’”** June 3, 2014
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- “Can There Be Mutual Avowal Between FEMEN and Muslim Women Against FEMEN in the Debate over Equality for Women?”** April 17, 2014
Fifth Annual Islamophobia Conference, Latent and Manifest Islamophobia. Boalt School of Law, University of California, Berkeley.
- “Muslim Girl Problems as a Dispersed Powwow Peg Community.”** March 18, 2014
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Awards

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- Comfort Starr Prize** Spring 2008
Department of Anthropology at Oberlin College. Selective award for excellence in the study of Anthropology.
- Newton Prize** Spring 2007
Department of East Asian Studies at Oberlin College. Selective award for promoting better understanding between East and West. Awarded for Japanese folktale translation and research project.
- Kansai Gaidai University Merit Scholarship** Fall 2006
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Training and Certifications

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Certification in Basic Mediation

UC Irvine and Orange County Human Relations Commission.

September 2014

Muslim-Jewish Interfaith Fellow

Engaged in a year-long program with Muslims and Jews to build relationships and conflict resolution skills. Southern California.

September 2013- June 2014

IFYC Interfaith Leadership Institute

Learned strategies for building interfaith leadership on college campuses and built relationships with other interfaith leaders. Los Angeles.

February 2014

Massachusetts Teaching Certifications

Initial Certification in Elementary Education for Grades 1-6, Effective January 3, 2011
Initial Certification in English as a Second Language for Grades PreK-6, Effective April 8, 2011
Initial Certification in Mathematics for Grades 1-6, Effective April 8, 2011

New York State Teaching Certifications

Initial Certification in Elementary Education for Grades 1-6, Effective September 1, 2010
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UC Irvine School of Social Sciences

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American Culture

Social Sciences

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- Media Writing International Studies Winter 2017
- Online lower-division writing course of eighty students. Graded twenty students' work and provided them with feedback for improving their writing skills in the genre of news media.
- Conflict Resolution in Cross-Cultural Anthropology Spring 2016
Perspective
- Designed and implemented lessons for three discussion sections with a total of sixty students and graded short answer and essay-based assignments and exams.
- Introduction to Language and Culture Anthropology Winter 2016
- Four hundred student introductory course. Designed and implemented lessons for three discussion sections with a total of ninety students and graded essay-based exams.
- Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Anthropology Fall 2015
Contemporary World
- Designed and implemented lessons for three discussion sections with a total of sixty students and graded final papers.
- Majors Seminar: The New Second Generation Sociology Fall 2014, Spring 2015
- Upper-division course required of all sociology majors. Graded and gave feedback on research papers throughout the course for thirty students.
- Introduction to Sociology Sociology Winter 2015
- Three hundred student introductory course. Led lessons according to plans provided by the instructor of record for three discussion sections with a total of ninety students and graded essay-based assignments.
- Introduction to Race and Ethnicity Political Science Winter 2014
- Two hundred student introductory course. Designed and implemented lessons for two discussion sections with a total of sixty students, graded essays.
- Introduction to Sociocultural Anthropology Anthropology Fall 2013, Spring 2014
- Three hundred student introductory course. Designed and implemented lessons for three discussion sections with a total of ninety students, graded short-answer assignments and scantron exams.
- Introduction to Biological Anthropology Anthropology Fall 2012, Spring 2013
- Three hundred student introductory course. Designed and implemented lessons for three discussion sections with a total of ninety students, graded short-answer assignments and scantron exams.
- Adjunct Faculty, Department of Anthropology, Sociology, and Women's Studies** August 2016- December 2016
- Taught Introduction to Women's Studies to a class of thirty at Santa Ana College, Rancho Santiago Community College District.

California Community College Intern

August- May 2016

- Shadowed Professor Sandra Wood's Introduction to Cultural Anthropology classes and department meetings at Santa Ana Community College.
- Offered study sessions to students enrolled in Introduction to Cultural Anthropology.
- Delivered an invited presentation (see Invited Presentations and Conferences).

UC Irvine Pedagogical Fellow

January 2016- December 2016

- Designed and delivered the pedagogical training curriculum for incoming graduate students with teaching assistantships.
- Completing a three-quarter series of courses focused on effective pedagogical techniques in higher education.

Elementary and Informal Sector Teaching Experience**After School Tutor**

September 2011- June 2012

Tutored two fourth grade students living in different parts of Manhattan twice per week each.

- Picked each student up from school and walked them home, then helped with homework and provided test preparation.

Teacher of English as a Second Language

September 2010- June 2011

Taught ESL, English Language Arts, and Social Studies to children in grades PreK-5 at PS 147 in Brooklyn

- Designed and implemented a push-in/pull-out ESL program to improve reading and writing skills of native Spanish speaking students.
- Fulfilled administrative duties associated with the ESL position including test administration.

Curriculum Design Project Collaborator

January- May 2010

Collaborated with 3 fellow graduate students to design a 2 year curriculum on American immigration,

- Determined philosophy underpinning curriculum: students construct knowledge through experience, teacher facilitates learning, assessments are holistic.
- Reinforced teamwork skills throughout the creative process.

Student Teacher

September 2009—May 2010

Fourth Grade placement

- Observed and provided differentiated instruction for struggling students 3 ½ days per week.
- Fostered awareness of social issues and encouraged critical thinking.
- Prepared students for ELA and Math standardized tests.

First Grade placement

- Observed and practiced Responsive Classroom approach 3 ½ days per week.
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Relevant Skills

- High technological proficiency using the internet for research and collaborative education, word processing programs, educational activities, and creating multimedia presentations.
- Languages Other than English: conversational Japanese, fair reading and listening in French, some reading in Hebrew.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Emotionally Vulnerable Storytelling as Peacebuilding: Muslim/Jewish Interfaith Activism
in the United States

By

Mindy Wynn Tauberg

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Irvine, 2019

Professor Leo Chavez, Chair

How do American Muslim-Jewish interfaith activists use emotionally vulnerable storytelling in service of their goal of realizing a pluralistic society in which minority groups with histories of conflict support one another as allies? As with many groups in conflict, American Jews and Muslims often grow up with truth perspectives that differ so radically that they are unable to find a narrative whose truth value can be agreed upon by members of both groups. How do Jewish-Muslim interfaith activists learn to communicate and reconcile differences in the truth values of their respective group narratives? What is the role of this kind of knowledge production in constructing a collective identity as interfaith activists?

In order to answer these questions, I spent four years conducting participant observation at One Hamsa (a pseudonym), an interfaith organization aimed specifically at bridging Muslim and Jewish communities in Southern California. Using an engaged feminist activist approach to conducting and writing ethnography, I attended meetings, formal and informal events, and conducted interviews of One Hamsa leaders and

participants. I argue that through emotionally vulnerable storytelling, Jews and Muslims challenge master narratives about their communities and co-construct a third narrative that all participants can agree upon as true. Through this process, One Hamsa community members build a collective identity as interfaith activists. Practices like community agreements help to create safe spaces where ideally, all participants feel safe sharing vulnerably. Even when such practices are used, sometimes activists are unsuccessful at avoiding replicating harmful societal power structures within their community. Like engaged scholars, activists should and often do recognize the contradictions inherent in their project. Both engaged scholars and activists must continue to prioritize interrogating power structures and ensuring that the benefits of their projects outweigh the harms.

INTRODUCTION

In the hours and days following the shooting at the Tree of Life in Pittsburgh that left 11 congregants dead, one of the things I found most comforting was the way my Facebook newsfeed was filled with outpourings of sympathy from Muslim friends and acquaintances near and far. A solicitation for donations was circulated widely and kept popping up on my timeline for days. I grew up in Pittsburgh, and I was raised in the Jewish community there. I have happy memories of attending the B'nai Mitzvot of my friends and classmates at temple Tree of Life. Though I now live thousands of miles from Pittsburgh, this shooting shook me with how close to home it felt. It was hard for me not to be able to gather with other Pittsburgh Jews and show solidarity with them in a physical way. I felt distanced from my support networks, except for the one I had built in Southern California through One Hamsa.¹ In the fraught days following the shooting, one of the most heartwarming messages of support came in the form of a Facebook message posted by a close friend and leader in the Muslim community. She wrote,

I am so so sorry for the shooting at the Members of the Tree of Life synagogue Pittsburgh. Crazy, terrible, painful, senseless and baseless violence and hatred seems to be creeping in more and more. People are hurting. Lives are being lost. Fear is becoming too common, too real, danger coming too close. Suffering is getting intensified. How do I deal with it?! How do I respond?! I want to numb it out. Block out the ugliness. Go about life as normal. I want to be free of my "heart breaking open" because it is painful. But I choose not to. This is the time to open up, not to shut down.

I am going to stand with my Jewish friends who have time and time again stood by me and the Muslim community. I am going to stand with my Interfaith leaders and friends who stand in integrity with their values and religious aspirations to unite, to serve, to hold with compassion and to fight for justice. I am here. I am not going anywhere. My spirit won't let me break. And It is in my spirit I trust that together we shall get through and even prosper.

¹ I use a pseudonym for the name of the organization and all other identifiable names.

Please take care! Reach out. You are not alone.

This was not the only time members of the One Hamsa community reached out to one another in the aftermath of an antisemitic or Islamophobic hate crime. How did this community of Muslims and Jews come to be? One Hamsa was founded in 2006, and offers year-long professional fellowships through which Jews and Muslims learn about one another's faiths, build lasting relationships, and learn conflict resolution skills. Two facilitators, always one Muslim and one Jew, lead 14 three-hour evening meetings that are held roughly twice monthly over the course of nine months. In addition, fellows are expected to attend two retreats, one in fall and one in spring, and their graduation at the Annual Community Iftar held during the month of Ramadan.² The program concludes with twofold capstone experiences: during the spring retreat, the fellows are facilitated through in-depth dialogue about the conflict in Palestine/Israel, and they work together on community projects that are oriented towards bringing together Jews and Muslims. One Hamsa has received recognition from the governor of California as the state's Faith-based Organization of the Year, as well as repeatedly being named one of America's Top Innovative Jewish Organizations in the annual Slingshot Guide, a resource that funders look to as a seal of approval.

In 2013, when I first learned of One Hamsa, the organization had not yet received much public recognition. I found it while googling interfaith efforts in Southern California, but later I learned that almost everyone else who joined the program that

² The program's calendar has shifted to accommodate the fact that the Islamic calendar is strictly lunar, and thus, Ramadan occurs a little earlier each year reckoning by the Gregorian calendar. To illustrate: In 2013, the year I was a One Hamsa fellow, the program began in mid- October and the iftar was held in late June. In 2019, the program began in early September and the iftar was held in mid-May.

year had learned of One Hamsa through word of mouth. At that stage, I knew I was interested in interfaith as a potential area of research, but I didn't have any specific expectations of my experience with One Hamsa other than the hope of making connections in the local interfaith community as well as local Muslim and Jewish communities. I was also interested in learning conflict resolution skills and pedagogical activities or strategies that I might be able to implement in the classroom.

When I arrived for my first One Hamsa meeting, I felt excited to learn more about the other fellows, strangers who I hoped in a few months would be my friends. The meeting was at the mosque³ where I had been interviewed by the program's co-directors. Though I had been in other masjids, this particular one was unfamiliar to me at the time. Over the course of my years working with One Hamsa it became a place that feels welcoming, like coming home. This sense was constructed not only by making my own memories in that space, but through learning how much that space was a home to the Muslim fellows who were active in this masjid's community. Over the years the faces of the mosque's security guards became familiar, as they were usually the only ones still at the masjid when One Hamsa meetings ended at 10pm. It wasn't a few times that we had to relocate an animated post-meeting conversation to a nearby café to let the security guard lock up. My first few times visiting the mosque, I felt a little lost. The security guard saw my confusion as I lingered in the entryway and directed me upstairs⁴ to the room where One Hamsa held many meetings.

³ "Mosque" and "masjid" are synonymous; I observed Muslim members of the One Hamsa community using both words interchangeably, so I do as well.

⁴ In later years, the meeting room was switched to a street level room in order to be more accessible.

After an introduction from the organization's co-founders, who were also helping to facilitate at that time, the first activity was a name game. But it was a name learning activity unlike any I have participated in before or since, and the experience stuck with me in a way that helped me remember names better than any other name game. The instructions were to find a partner, and then tell them the story of your name. It was up to us to interpret that as only our first name, only our last name, or whatever combination we wanted to talk about. We were instructed to listen carefully when it was our turn to hear our partner's story, because after talking as partners, the whole group would come together, and we would be asked to share with the group the story of our partner's name. Every year this activity resulted in mostly Jewish/Muslim partner pairs, even though finding an interfaith partner is not part of the instructions.

Since I first participated in this activity, the story behind my last name has become a staple of my "getting to know you" small talk. Before my ancestors left Romania, the clan decided to split into three and adopt three different last names as a strategy to avoid conscription into the army. They had no interest in serving a country that would not recognize them as citizens because of their faith. As the story goes, "Tauberg" was an invented name that was supposed to sound more Germanic than Jewish. As a result, anyone with the last name Tauberg is said to be able to trace their ancestry back to this split in Romania.

I listened attentively as my partner shared the story of her name with me. When we rejoined the group and shared one another's stories, I took care to include as much detail as I could, and I was impressed at the level of detail my partner remembered about my story. As other partners shared, the cohort already began to bond over shared

traditions. Fellows would delight in learning that certain Arabic names popular among Muslims have popular Hebrew equivalents among Jews, or vice versa. One interfaith partner pair had different sounding names, but were excited to learn that their names had the same meaning. Many stories, like mine, reflected the particular histories and legacies fellows carried as Muslims or Jews. Some included anecdotes about the fellows parents' and other family members.

After all the fellows had shared their partners' stories, the facilitators asked fellows whether or not they felt their story had been shared accurately. Most years, the response to this question was mixed. The facilitators would use this response to segue to the next order of business, creating a community agreement. "Thank you for the trust you have already shown by simply being here," one facilitator said one year. "We will do everything we can to maintain that trust, to cherish that trust, and to have you all deepen that trust amongst yourselves. And the community agreement is an essential piece to that." She explained that the fellows now had the opportunity to define what community they want to create together.

We are not just here as individuals, we are coming together as a community, and that means we get to create our community. We get to create what that community looks like, and what our parameters are. So we are going to take as much time is necessary to create that safe space, so we can trust each other, we can have fun, we can support each other, we can hold each other accountable, and everything else that we want to do as a community together.

Since the community agreements are so specific to each cohort, they do change from year to year, but they always include certain tenets such as "remember that we are all

here to learn,” “be respectful,” “when you feel triggered, take a deep breath before responding,” and “speak with ‘I’ statements.”⁵

The story of your name and community agreement activities together set the tone for the fellowship. In the name activity, fellows are asked to share personal stories that were important to them with relative strangers. They also have to trust those strangers to convey their story more or less accurately to other fellows. Having to share another fellow’s name story requires participants to draw on their prior active listening skills. This also gives facilitators a baseline estimate of what communication skills that particular group of fellows brings to the experience. The community agreements help to establish the fellowship meetings as a safe space in which fellows are expected to share vulnerably, and to respond with sensitivity when others do so. And, as the facilitator mentions above, the act of creating community agreements together itself establishes a shared identity as members of a single community. Fellows come to the program with disparate identities as Muslims, Jews, activists for various causes, faith leaders, laypeople, and so on. The community agreement is the first step toward fellows coming to think of themselves as a unified group of interfaith activists with shared goals.

Faith Based Community Organizing as Peacebuilding

The interfaith movement may be broadly understood as an outgrowth of grassroots peacebuilding efforts. Interfaith activists are mostly people of faith, and some without faith, who see their work as contributing to establishing and preserving peace by embodying a pluralistic ideal of cooperation across intractable difference. Until recently

⁵ See Appendices B and C for specific examples of community agreements.

in the literature on peacebuilding, there has been a lack of emphasis on grassroots efforts as opposed to efforts at the state level. The concept of bottom-up peacebuilding was first popularized by Paul Lederach (1997), who argues that transforming relationships and learning to better manage conflict at the local level is a prerequisite for peace at the national and international levels. Hemmer et al (2006) identify a “two track approach” to peacebuilding studies; Track One includes peacebuilders who work at the national and international levels, while Track Two includes citizen peacebuilders who work with small, local organizations. The authors argue that more emphasis on Track Two is needed, because they “expect that peacebuilding is most effective and sustainable when a wide selection of citizens from each side of a conflict becomes active in creating their own peace on many levels and in many locales” (Hemmer et al 2006, 132). Further, peacebuilding “should be nurtured first at the community level, with organizations that have amassed some legitimacy in the community” (157).

While some scholars might argue that Track One is deserving of more emphasis because its outcomes are more substantive and measurable, Hemmer et al point out that “this is the easiest place to start...Activities at this level...can begin quietly in private spaces, slowly becoming more public as participants feel more confident, in steps small enough not to mobilize opposition” (2006, 148). The authors observe that grassroots peacebuilding organizations benefit from some advantages of specializing in Track Two exclusively, because they are more readily able to work on sensitive topics and include fearful or vulnerable individuals. They also more easily avoid alienating participants with a distaste or fear of politics, and activate mid-level leaders, including clergy and other faith leaders, who might be overlooked by Track One organizations

(Hemmer et al 2006, 150). Indeed, the founders of One Hamsa have designed the organization to take advantage of these strengths of specializing in small scale local peacebuilding.

Hemmer et al. write that social movements play an important role in peacebuilding “as citizen peacebuilding becomes politically engaged” (142). The literature on social movements focuses primarily on organizations that aim to make some kind of policy intervention. However, not every social movement organization aims to make policy change their main target. Some social movement organizations, like One Hamsa, situate themselves as “Track Two” organizations. Their primary goal is “a transformed relationship between the parties rather than simply solutions of particular issues,” because that focus “empowers the parties to continue solving future problems themselves” (Hemmer et al. 2006, 133). Another primary goal of Track Two social movement organizations is the transformation of public discourse around a particular conflict in a way that both resonates with existing ways of thinking and opens new paths to conflict resolution.

In the interfaith movement, such organizations focus on building trust between people from different faith backgrounds, and on being schools of democracy that offer people of faith an opportunity to practice civic engagement. One major goal of the interfaith movement is to mobilize people of faith to work together successfully in other movements and other civic contexts. Interfaith activists embrace ideal contact theory, which “shows that cooperating on joint goals with the approval of authority figures under conditions of equality is ideal for overcoming stereotypes and reducing prejudice” (Hemmer et al 2006, 142).

Efforts among Americans to build bridges between Muslim and Jewish communities tend to be local outgrowths of the interfaith movement and often draw on established mediation and peacebuilding strategies. Interfaith activists point to George Washington's 1790 letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island as the earliest record of an American leader emphasizing the importance of goodwill toward those of different faiths. It wasn't until over a century later, at the first Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in 1893, that interfaith activists consider the movement to have begun. For most of the twentieth century, an uneasy peace held with the tripartite agreement that Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Americans should all be granted freedom of religion. The notion of religious pluralism, the theological idea that all faiths are equally valid paths to the divine, as well as the political idea that a diverse democracy must protect religious freedom for people of all faiths, has faced its greatest test since 1965. The Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, was passed that year, and resulted in greater numbers of immigrants of faiths other than Christianity and Judaism than the country had ever seen before. Since then, the number of organizations oriented toward interfaith bridge building has grown exponentially.

As the interfaith movement in the United States has grown most noticeably since the early 2000s, a body of research has emerged that focuses specifically on organizations that build interfaith bridges. FBCO stands for faith based community organizing, and this term encompasses both congregational and non-congregational organizations working on interfaith efforts. According to Brad Fulton and Richard Wood, non-congregational organizations like One Hamsa now make up 22 percent of FBCOs,

and 70 percent of coalitions of FBCOs include at least one non-congregational member (2017, 35-6). 15 percent of those coalitions have at least one Jewish and one Muslim congregation (37). Jack Delehanty writes that FBCOs “comprise one of the largest fields of grassroots participatory democracy in the U.S. today” and goes so far as to say that “they are emerging as leading moral voices in the anti-Trump resistance” (2018, 249). The boards of FBCOs are much more racially and ethnically diverse than those of most corporate and nonprofit organizations, “and their member base is more diverse than most schools, neighborhoods, and congregations. In this way, the field’s ability to bring Americans together across racial and ethnic divides is extraordinary within American political culture and institutions” (Fulton and Wood 2017, 40).

Because of these attributes as well as the fact that they have grown so quickly over the last decade, studying FBCOs has the potential to help answer myriad questions that are central to social movement studies, not least, the question of how organizations can successfully navigate the tensions that might arise from the diversity of their members. This also has broader implications for American civic life in general, as a nation that has always struggled to live up to its ideal as the land of equal opportunity for all, regardless of race, sex, religion, or any other axis of identity.

Most FBCOs focus on action rather than dialogue. As a result, “participants seldom focus on their religious differences,” and the majority of FBCOs report discussing religious differences only “rarely” to “sometimes” (Fulton and Wood 2017, 42). Religion does not guide planning or meetings. Instead, participants emphasize the intersections of their religious teachings when it comes to helping vulnerable populations. The emphasis is not on understanding religious differences, but on

upholding values that are already shared. In her ethnography of religious political groups in the United States, including one called Interfaith, Ruth Braunstein observed that these shared values “were not viewed simply as powerful sources of shared motivation to act; by linking them to American values, Interfaith also sought to project them outward into public debates about how to achieve the common good” (2017, 8). This is a common approach for interfaith organizations to take, including One Hamsa, which includes a strong focus on learning which values are shared between American Jews and Muslims. However, One Hamsa goes beyond the interventions offered by the majority of FBCOs by making religious and other differences salient, and leaning into the conflicts caused by these differences rather than attempting to gloss over them.

In addition to emphasizing the American civic values that are shared across faith communities, most FBCOs include regular reference to specific religious values, teachings, and symbols in order to illustrate the shared connection people of different faiths have to a common cause. Yet, religious tenets are usually not discussed outside of that context. Fulton and Wood found that “over 90 percent of the coalitions reported that they often open and close their meetings with a prayer, and over 75 percent often have discussions about the connection between faith and organizing” (2017, 44). When it comes to the content of these prayers, care is taken to avoid giving preference to one faith over others.

This last point certainly holds true for One Hamsa, not only when it comes to prayers, but in every aspect of planning. Meetings are held alternately at a Jewish locations⁶ and Muslim locations⁷. When possible, the biannual retreats that are a part of

⁶ For example, temples, Jewish community centers, or at a Jewish college or University

the fellowship curriculum are held at neutral locations, although due to logistics (including concerns about dietary restraints among members of both faiths) they are occasionally held at a Jewish camp or university.⁸ Often snacks are provided, and care is always taken to ensure that everything offered is both halal and kosher. At the large ceremonial events described above, food is catered by a halal service, with glatt kosher⁹ food made available to those who request it. Any time the curriculum includes discussion of one faith, there is an equal amount of time dedicated to discussion of the other faith.

As I have discussed above, while One Hamsa is a faith based community organization and shares many of the characteristics of FBCOs, there are also certain traits that set it apart from other interfaith organizations. Like an organization observed by Gary J. Adler, Jr., One Hamsa's work straddles the line between education and activism, "using experiential education as a moralization and mobilization tactic" (2017, 322). While this educational approach is not especially common among FBCOs, "the belief in experiential education to lead to social change, and for social reality to be grasped through 'real' education, is a hallmark of progressive action" (Adler 2017, 323). The One Hamsa curriculum is designed not simply to educate participants across religious difference, but to transform them through the kind of experiential education that evokes a deep emotional response.

⁷ Mostly masjids.

⁸ Many Muslims, including most One Hamsa fellows, include kosher food among foods that are halal, but Jews cannot eat halal food unless it is also certified kosher.

⁹ Here I use the colloquial definition of glatt kosher as strictly kosher, without any leniency, though the literal definition of this term is meat from an animal whose lungs are smooth, without any adhesions or defects.

Research Questions

In this dissertation, I ask, what emotional approaches are progressive activists using to strengthen alliances between American minority groups with histories of conflict? As with many groups in conflict, American Muslims and Jews often grow up with truth perspectives that differ so radically that they are unable to find a narrative whose truth value can be agreed upon by members of both groups. How do One Hamsa participants learn to communicate and reconcile differences in the truth values of their respective group narratives? How do interfaith activists use narrative and emotion in service of their goal of realizing a pluralistic society, and how do these strategies differ from other activists' strategic uses of narrative and emotion?

The interfaith movement and particularly interfaith efforts between Muslim and Jewish communities has been for the most part overlooked in social science literature. What little research has been done on interfaith issues has focused mainly on interfaith marriage, relationships, and families in the United States (Heaton 1990; Myers 1996; Bartkowski et al. 2011); the impacts of those relationships on faith communities (Brown and Brown 2011, Thompson 2013); and interfaith dialogue more generally (Morgan 1995, McCarthy 2007). While there is a robust body of research on emotion in social movements, a focus on emotions is lacking in the smaller body of literature that focuses specifically on FBCOs. Delehanty's research does focus on "what roles...emotions play in progressive religious organizations' cultural negotiation of structural challenges, and to what effect" (2018, 249). However, his research is very recent and remains an outlier. I hope that this dissertation will prove useful to future researchers writing about the ways in which interfaith activists respond to the strong emotions raised by the work they

do. This body of research will enrich the larger body of research that already exists on the role of emotion in social movements.

Several scholars of social movements have noted the close relationship between collective identity and emotion (Collins 2001; Jasper 1998; Taylor and Rupp 2002; Polletta 2006), but many of them have taken a sociological approach that emphasizes structure over agency. Some anthropological scholars who have investigated emotions from different perspectives (Lutz and White 1986, Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990, Leavitt 1996) have produced useful frameworks for thinking about emotions from an anthropological standpoint. Still, these frameworks have not been taken up consistently by scholars of social movements. This project's anthropological approach to understanding the role of affect in grassroots activism will highlight the role of the individual in utilizing emotional narratives to bridge communities in conflict through the construction of a collective identity, in this case as interfaith activists. As Francesca Polletta puts it, "stories, like other cultural forms, both reproduce the existing and provide tools for changing it. The key, of course, is to understand how and when they do each" (1998b:155).

Polletta argues that because of its ability to make meanings, narrative is what

made the quotidian act of sitting down at a lunch counter and ordering a cup of coffee—what should have been a non-political act—a dangerous and unpredictable epic...The sit-in narrative thus transformed a too-common story of humiliation into one of triumph. (1998b, 147)

The ontological properties of narrative make it transformative. Thus, as Polletta observed, narrative was able to yield a transformation of a particular strategy of activism during the Civil Rights Movement. Interfaith activists like One Hamsa participants are

less concerned with developing strategies for their activism; for them, in many ways the goal is the transformation itself. Polletta points out that “movements in which the goal is self-transformation as much as political reform may see personal story-telling as activism” (1998b:154) and this does seem to be the case among interfaith activists.

I intend for this dissertation to be in part a response to Polletta’s recommendation that scholars address further questions about activists’ use of narrative:

In what circumstances do movement activists tell stories rather than, say, make causal arguments, expressive pleas, or lists of costs and benefits? Are stories always motivating of collective action? And are people more likely to tell stories in movements than they are during periods of political stability, or than when they’re in school or at home? (Polletta 1998a, 420)

These specific questions posed by Polletta are best answered with larger scale methods than those employed in this study. Since my approach is ethnographic, I avoid posing questions about how emotions contribute to the structures of social movements, or making large generalizations about how, when, and why activists use storytelling. The questions that have guided my research are aimed at understanding how vulnerable storytelling impacts activists on an interpersonal level. How does participants’ willingness to be emotionally vulnerable impact their experiences of the fellowship? What emotions are generated by the One Hamsa curriculum, and how do these emotions contribute to the construction of a collective identity? What (if any) emotional transformations do participants experience over the course of the program? Further, what emotional coalition building approaches are progressive religious activists using to become more effective at organizing? Are activists able to enact these approaches without compromising their ideal of pluralism? Underlying all these questions, my central research question is: How are Muslim-Jewish interfaith activists in

Southern California using emotionally vulnerable storytelling to forge a collective identity, and to what extent does this approach enable activists to uphold their pluralistic ideals when it comes to forming diverse coalitions that include members of communities with differing levels of access to power and histories of conflict?

Because little research has been done on interfaith dialogue between two faith groups in conflict, this project stands poised to be an important prototype. My research on Muslim-Jewish interfaith activism, and One Hamsa in particular, will advance the understanding of the processes at work in the interfaith movement from an interdisciplinary perspective. The themes this project will address overlap with anthropological problems, but I find that by also drawing on other disciplines I can increase the potential for this project to produce new knowledge that will be useful to both anthropologists and my colleagues in the field.

Methods

My approach to this research did not begin with these research goals, but rather, I used an engaged approach, which I discuss more in Chapter 1. I allowed these research questions to emerge based on the overlap of what was most important to my interlocutors and what bodies of literature yielded the most fruitful insights about One Hamsa. After learning of One Hamsa over the summer of 2013, I applied and was accepted to the program as a member of One Hamsa's seventh cohort during the year of 2013-14. By the end of that year, I had decided to make One Hamsa a field site for my dissertation research. I continued to learn about different interfaith efforts across the country, including participating in the Interfaith Leadership Institute (ILI) in Los Angeles

in early 2015. ILIs are held multiple times a year in different cities by Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), founded by Eboo Patel, one of the foremost leaders of the interfaith movement in the United States. Through my experiences, it became clear that One Hamsa was different from other interfaith efforts in a number of significant ways. While it is no longer novel to find interfaith or even specifically Muslim-Jewish groups across the country, One Hamsa features some substantial differences from any other Jewish-Muslim interfaith group I have come across. Following Flyvbjerg's analytical approach of the "paradigmatic case" (Flyvbjerg 2006, 230), the aspects of One Hamsa that make it different from other interfaith organizations make it particularly useful for understanding the interfaith movement.

Most apparently, One Hamsa is specific to Muslims and Jews, whereas most interfaith efforts are either Abrahamic, including Christians, Jews, and Muslims, or do not specify any particular faith. IFYC and many other interfaith organizations deliberately also include people who live without faith. The aim of many such interfaith efforts is exposure to people with different backgrounds than one's own, and participation in community efforts that embody values¹⁰ shared across faiths. In practice, this usually means coming together for community service projects or for opportunities to learn about one another's holidays, but usually nothing more substantial than that. It is telling that while organizations aimed at laypeople like IFYC exist all over the United States, the vast majority of interfaith organizations nation-wide are for clergy. Additionally, because Christianity is the majority faith in the United States by a large margin, interfaith efforts that include Christians can become inadvertently Christian-

¹⁰ Most often, these are shared progressive values.

centric. Members of minority faiths are often poorly represented in such organizations, even among interfaith organizations that are very diverse along other axes of identity.

One Hamsa's first and foremost emphasis is on building relationships between community members from different faith backgrounds. The fact that One Hamsa focuses specifically on two faiths means that the relationships and histories between those two faith communities can be fully unpacked. One Hamsa specifically focuses on laypeople who may be leaders in their faith communities, but they need not be clergy members. Most importantly, as I mentioned earlier, the approach to conflict at One Hamsa is not to ignore or resolve it, but to lean into it as a learning experience. One Hamsa is also unlike many other Muslim-Jewish encounter groups around the world, including in the region of Palestine/Israel itself. Alumni of One Hamsa report high rates of satisfaction with the program and often choose to continue their involvement with bridging Jewish and Muslim communities and with One Hamsa specifically.

Other examples of Muslim/Jewish interfaith groups with so much reported satisfaction are few and far between. Those I have found are mostly on college campuses; for example, the Olive Tree Initiative is an organization with chapters at seven different universities that sponsors study abroad trips to Israel/Palestine. The curricula of these trips are designed to teach conflict analysis and resolution through experience. While programs like these are certainly of value to campus communities, the fact that members can only be involved for a few years before moving on to a different community limits the potential for sustained involvement, especially among alumni. Thus, One Hamsa is the most favorable such group for studying the potential for Jewish/Muslim interfaith activism to have a sustained and lasting impact on the local

community, without the added variable of college graduates leaving the community after a few years. This study will be one of the first to be focused on interfaith activism specifically between Muslims and Jews, and stands to make a significant contribution to the understanding of what makes an encounter group between two populations in conflict most effective.

The weaknesses of encounter groups designed for Israelis and Palestinians illustrate the fact that social movements are at risk for reproducing dominant social structures even as they seek to reinvent them. Joyce Dalsheim puts it, “the recognition of ethno-national identity in peacemaking efforts can help reproduce the hegemonic order by abandoning what we know about the social construction of difference...Peacemaking itself is a product of conflict, but it can also work to *produce* enmity” (2014, 62). That is not to say that differences between Israelis and Palestinians are entirely socially constructed. Indeed, Zvi Bekerman (2009) tried introducing this concept to a dialogue group between Palestinian and Jewish students. Bekerman observed border patrolling and a focus on discerning “who counts as what” among participants. Yet when Bekerman attempted to counter this tendency by encouraging students to deconstruct essentialist approaches to national identity, Jewish students engaged while Palestinians did not due to power differences. Israeli students were able to be comfortable deconstructing national identity thanks to their own secure identities as members of the state of Israel, while Palestinians still struggle for recognition of their national identity in the first place. As a result,

the Jewish quest to de-essentialize national identities had the effect of silencing the voices of the Palestinian participants in the dialogue process, and of treating them as objects rather than as subjects...Hence it became apparent that the

effects of this effort at post-national discourse were detrimental to the encounter because they silenced dialogue. (Bekerman 2007, 31)

The tendency of participants with minority identities within an interfaith group to be treated as objects rather than subjects [is?] the same problem I mentioned hearing about in other Muslim-Jewish interfaith dialogue efforts in the United States, and I observed it to some extent at One Hamsa as well. Is this problem inevitable in peacebuilding and conflict-resolution oriented encounter groups? While boundary patrol as a component of collective identity leads to the risk of essentialization, it is not always clear how to counter essentializing tendencies effectively. Has One Hamsa found any methods for countering this essentialization? I argue that transforming the master narrative and replacing it with alternative narratives about how Jews and Muslims relate to one another is one such method. However, this goal can only be accomplished if there are mechanisms in place for participants to identify and interrogate the power imbalances at work within their group. Even then, the occasional reproduction of overarching power structures may be inevitable.

In addition to its uniqueness in the field of interfaith organizations and dialogue efforts in the United States and Palestine/Israel, I have deliberately chosen to conduct an ethnographic case study of One Hamsa because such an approach offers several strengths that larger sample methods or even multi-sited ethnography do not. Most pressingly, interfaith activism is a recent grassroots movement, and thus it is practical to conduct a project with a small sample size that represents the zeitgeist of the movement. My research questions focus on interpersonal relationships, which makes

ethnography the best choice for answering these questions.¹¹ During a discussion with One Hamsa fellows about whether One Hamsa is an effective way to change the nature of relationships between Muslims and Jews, one person said, “There are many levels of activism, and having this kind of conversation with your friends and family is one of them.” Because conversations with friends and family are so important to the activists themselves, participant observation of a small, localized sample was necessary. Since I had no need to plan my research around trips to observe organizations in different parts of the country, I was available to attend spontaneous events hosted by people in the One Hamsa community in addition to regularly scheduled meetings.

After having spent a year as a participant in One Hamsa’s fellowship, I gained permission from the board of directors as well as both executive directors to continue attending fellowship meetings in subsequent years as a “flower on the wall,” as one executive director thoughtfully described my role. I observed the three cohorts that followed mine: 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17.¹² In order to obtain this access, I had to agree to certain constraints on my role during fellowship meetings. I was permitted to observe and record, but was asked to limit my participation in order to preserve the integrity of the One Hamsa process.

Because I couldn’t participate in the relationship building exercises that were part of the curriculum, I made an extra effort to arrive early and stay late on meeting days, and to use that time as well as break time to establish rapport with One Hamsa fellows. I also attended as many formal events and informal gatherings as I could. These

¹¹ In Chapter 1 I discuss how I define ethnography for the purposes of this project.

¹² In this dissertation, I use the cohort’s year of graduation to identify that cohort. For example, I use “the 2017 cohort” to describe the final cohort I observed.

included One Hamsa's annual events that are open to the public: Spotlight, a storytelling event that uses a similar framework to NPR's The Moth; the Annual Community Iftar which also serves as a graduation celebration for that year's cohort; and various fundraising events. Informal gatherings I attended included brunches and dinners with One Hamsa fellows and/or alumni, holiday gatherings such as interfaith Passover seders at one fellow's home, carpooling to and from meetings and retreats; and an interfaith solidarity march.

I found that having participated in the program myself usually put fellows at ease, and many of them enjoyed asking me about my experience of and thoughts about the program. I had strong relationships with One Hamsa leaders, which also helped put fellows at ease. Although my role was unique, several of the cohorts I observed welcomed me and treated me as a full member of the cohort. For the most part I was treated the way fellows treated one another, to the extent that fellows would forget my status and ask me to join activities that One Hamsa leaders had requested that I observe only. For example, I occasionally had to decline an invitation to jump into a photograph that One Hamsa leaders intended to use for promotional purposes with a gentle reminder that I was not a fellow. I often volunteered to take such photos so as to help out while also preventing confusion.

The conversations I had with One Hamsa fellows and alumni were invaluable for me in terms of developing this thesis. I often sought feedback on whatever line of thought I was pursuing at the time, and the responses I received shaped everything from what aspects of meetings I focused on while taking notes to what questions I asked in interviews to the topics I chose to discuss in this dissertation. For example,

once in 2014 when a fellow noticed me vigorously taking notes during a meeting, a fellow asked me if I write down every detail. I told her that I was still at the beginning of the process and I was taking notes on everything I could because I wasn't sure yet what was important and what wasn't. Since she had expressed an interest, after that I bounced ideas off of that fellow to gauge whether or not what I was identifying as important was also important to fellows. There were several fellows with whom I developed this sort of relationship. When I hit on the idea of emotional vulnerability through storytelling, my interlocutors responded enthusiastically, and I knew I had found a topic that was worth investigating both as an academic and as an interfaith activist.

I conducted interviews during the 2016-17 year. Interview questions can be found in Appendix A. I interviewed ten fellows, half the cohort. I set out to interview as many members of the cohort as possible; the ten I interviewed were the ones who were willing to participate. Of those, six were men and four were women; five were Jews and five were Muslims. I tried to seek out interview participants from a wide range of ethnic and faith backgrounds, though because the Muslims in the 2016-17 cohort were predominantly South Asian, four of five Muslim interviewees were South Asian. Most Jewish halves of One Hamsa cohorts are predominantly Ashkenazi, as were three of the five Jewish interviewees. I also interviewed One Hamsa leaders, including founders, directors, and facilitators. I had originally planned to conduct a series of interviews with each respondent, so that I could get a picture of how fellows felt about each part of the fellowship curriculum. Due to practical matters of flagging interest and scheduling conflicts among participants, I was able to do multiple interviews of five respondents. The other five fellows were interviewed only once, and in those interviews I asked about

as many aspects of the fellowship as I could up to that point. In total, I conducted twenty interviews. Because I wanted them to be as comfortable as possible, I allowed participants to choose the setting of the interviews. Most opted for phone interviews, although one was held in a cafe and two were held during a long car ride on the way to One Hamsa meetings.

Structure of the Dissertation

I begin the body of the dissertation with a more in depth discussion of my approach to conducting this research. In Chapter 1, I contextualize my understanding of what it means to do ethnography in literature from the fields of engaged anthropology and feminist activist ethnography. I then discuss the power dynamic between Jews and Muslims in the United States as it pertains to peacebuilding efforts, and contrast it with the power dynamic between Israelis and Palestinians as it pertains to conflict resolution efforts. To conclude the chapter, I present one example of how the knowledge production that occurs at One Hamsa is impacted by existing social power structures, a theme that recurs throughout the dissertation.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the relationship between religion and civic engagement in the United States, particularly as it is understood by progressive interfaith activists. I examine the ways in which progressive interfaith activists challenge the popular perception that American religious activists are all conservative Christians and that no American progressive activists are religious. I argue that progressive activists of faith use prayer to strengthen the impact of their activism.

In Chapter 3 I provide a more in-depth analysis of the dynamics between different religious communities in the United States. In particular I argue that Muslims and Jews share certain experiences as members of religious minority groups in the United States. I argue that One Hamsa participants use narrative to create an interfaith activist identity that emphasizes shared experiences as victims of discrimination. This shared identity makes it possible to replace the master narrative of Jews and Muslims as enemies with a new one in which Muslims and Jews are allies.

In Chapter 4, I address a question that has long puzzled scholarly and activist thinkers alike: Does objective truth exist? If so, how can we agree on what it is without reproducing harmful power structures? If not, how can we reconcile carrying out activist and research projects in a world that contains multiple conflicting truths? I present feminist theories that have been offered to answer this question and illustrate how they influence the ways in which One Hamsa participants understand their project. I illustrate my discussion with examples from the second One Hamsa retreat, during which fellows share and unpack the conflicting truths they have been raised to believe about the conflict in Palestine/Israel.

In Chapter 5, I focus on the ways in which One Hamsa members are creating a new collective identity as interfaith activists, both in the actual world and online. I argue that safe spaces and community agreements are central to the success of One Hamsa's goal of facilitating difficult conversations in which participants feel safe leaning into discomfort. To support this argument, I present evidence from One Hamsa fellows' narratives of transformation at the end of the fellowship, as well as from the One Hamsa Alum group page on Facebook.

Chapter 1: Scholarly and Activist Approaches to Addressing the Power Dynamics of Knowledge Production

My approach to practicing ethnography is based in engaged feminist anthropology. Literature in both of the areas of engaged anthropology and feminist activist ethnography guided my decision making as I navigated the ethnographic research process. Both of these bodies of research emphasize the fact that knowledge production is a process that is not value neutral, but one that replicates existing power structures. In order to avoid being complicit in replicating harmful inequalities, researchers must not only learn to identify and examine their own biases, but also to recognize that knowledge production can never be unbiased. Sometimes it is impossible to avoid replicating societal power structures, and in those cases the researcher has a responsibility to weigh the ethical drawbacks of the project against the potential benefits. The activists I observed at One Hamsa are also cognizant of the fact that the project of knowledge production, which is one of their goals, is subject to the same power dynamics that pervade American society.

Engaged Ethnography

Absent a common self-descriptive term, engaged scholars share certain common goals for their research. Charles Hale proposes that what they have in common is a commitment to the idea that

research that is predicated on alignment with a group of people organized in a struggle, and on collaborative relations of knowledge production with members of

that group, has the potential to yield privileged insight, analysis, and theoretical innovation that otherwise would be impossible to achieve. (2008, 20)

In his foreword to this same volume, Craig Calhoun adds that two reasons for activist scholarship are that it has potential for making science useful in that it can improve the world, and that it can make science better, by keeping social scientists from becoming too complacent, relying too heavily on the existing order (2008, xxv). George Lipsitz argues that engaged scholarship is about more than “merely adding on new research objects to existing methods of study,” but that “we need to change the culture of learning as well as its conditions and contents. We need to initiate open-ended processes of exploration and experimentation designed to traverse old boundaries and bring new polities into being” (2008, 100). Engaged scholarship is not just about critiquing the old ways that have reproduced power hierarchies, but about creating new ways that foster possibilities for a more equitably shared project of knowledge production.

One way these goals can be accomplished is through rethinking the “participation” aspect of that method ethnographers hold dear, participant observation. What does it really mean to be an active and authentic participant? For Robin McTaggart it means “sharing in the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life-world. It means ownership—responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice” (1991, 171). I have attempted to provide my interlocutors with as much agency as has been practical; however I was disappointed to find that practicality was more of a constraint than I was expecting. Giving interlocutors agency means asking for their time: time to read

research proposals and paper drafts, time to discuss alternative ideas and offer suggestions, time to learn about unfamiliar concepts.¹³ My interlocutors had already generously offered me a window into some of their most vulnerable moments. I did ask for interlocutors who had independently expressed interest in reading my writing to give me feedback, which I plan to incorporate when I transform this dissertation into a book. Informal conversations I have had with One Hamsa community members about my ideas regarding this research project have been vital as I strive to ensure that my interpretations of data are consistent with interlocutors' understandings and intentions.

In asking for favors of my interlocutors, I was also very aware of the power disparity between us when it comes to producing academic knowledge. Being an engaged ethnographer also means being aware of the power differences inherent in being a "participant observer," and never merely being involved but always actively participating. Calhoun adds that when researchers are participants in an activist movement or organization, their interlocutors are colleagues (2008, xxii). In the case of studying One Hamsa participants with levels of education and cultural capital similar to mine, and with expertise in areas about which I know little, I have taken care to give credit where credit is due. I recognize that my interlocutors are also highly educated in both academic and activist settings. They possess a toolbox of professional skills that includes the kind of critical thinking that is vital to any research project. Still, crediting the expert knowledge of interlocutors doesn't eliminate the difference in power: to

¹³ It is a goal of mine as an engaged ethnographer to write without excessive jargon in a way that is accessible to my interlocutors. Even so, certain ideas require time to be dedicated to ensuring that my understanding of a concept matches the understandings of my interlocutors.

paraphrase Christa Craven, the researcher is still the one holding the proverbial pen (2013, 105-106).

The phrase “studying sideways” was first used by Laura Nader in her 1972 piece, “Up the Anthropologist—Perspectives Gained from Studying Up.” In that essay, she argues that although anthropologists have traditionally studied poor and marginalized groups, the discipline would benefit from the study of wealthy groups who wield the power. Studying up, Nader writes, would turn many of the discipline’s problems on their heads:

Instead of asking why some people are poor, we would ask why other people are so affluent? How on earth would a social scientist explain the hoarding patterns of the American rich and middle class?...How has it come to be, we might ask, that anthropologists can be more interested in why peasants don’t change than why...the Pentagon or universities cannot be more organizationally creative? The conservatism of such major institutions and bureaucratic organizations probably has wide implications for the species and for theories of change than does the conservatism of peasantry (1972, 289).

This essay became quite well known, and studying up has since become much more commonplace in anthropology than it was in 1972. Nader made only a passing reference to “studying sideways,” writing that “we need simply to realize when it is useful or crucial in terms of the problem to extend the domain of study up, down, or sideways” (1972, 292). Scholars like Ulf Hannerz (1998) and Ursula Plesner (2011) have since taken up the mantle of studying sideways, arguing that it can be just as beneficial to the discipline as studying up.

Hannerz defines studying sideways as “looking at others who are, like anthropologists, in a transnational contact zone, and engaged there in managing meaning across distances, although perhaps with different interests, under other

constraints” (1998, 109). Hannerz takes a condescending view of non-anthropological co-inhabitants of transnational contact zones, describing them as people who purport to be able to explain the full complexity of cultural difference to their clients as quickly as possible (despite how lengthy and intensive their own training may have been). While there certainly are people like this, these “interculturalists,” as Hannerz calls them, do not represent the full breadth of people who anthropologists can be said to study sideways. If the people we study sideways engage in intercultural activities, as is true in the case of my own project, it is important to maintain a critical stance if they seem to be oversimplifying “the Others and how to deal with them” by explaining such complex matters “through videos, diagrams, checklists, and simulation games” (Hannerz 1998, 113). At the same time, in engaged research it is always important to treat interlocutors as co-creators of knowledge.

To me, studying sideways goes hand-in-hand with engaged research. The anthropologist collaborates in the production of knowledge with other professionals, who in some arenas hold more power than the anthropologist (such as influence over other activists) but in other arenas hold less (such as the ultimate authority in what gets published as research). Such interlocutors are also likely to be highly educated and to possess a toolbox of professional skills, including the kind of critical thinking that is vital to any research project. These participants are often able to speak our academic language, as are most members of the One Hamsa community.

Samuel Martinez also speaks to the benefits of this kind of studying sideways: “Among the many imaginable venues for activist anthropology, few engage the special skills of anthropologists better than collaborating with not-for-profit organizations

dedicated to formulating effective responses to social, health, and economic development problems” (2008, 192). Many of our skills, such as grant writing, adaptability with unstructured time, knowledge of and flexibility with local communities, can “be put to good use in working with an NGO” in the process of collaborative research, Martinez goes on (192). Studying sideways is one way to address the hierarchical relations inherent in conducting ethnography: though there can never be a perfect power balance in such a situation, when studying sideways there are many opportunities for the kind of collaboration that promotes more egalitarian relations. I did offer my expertise to One Hamsa directors when possible, suggesting grants to apply for and reviewing the applications before they were submitted.

Working with interlocutors who share expert academic knowledge also can have its drawbacks. Community members are more likely to be distrustful of members of the academy, reflecting “the more general disengagement of academic social science from practical social action” (Calhoun, xx). I encountered this myself the first time I met the leaders of One Hamsa in my interview to become a fellow in 2013. I was forthcoming about my interest in eventually conducting a research project involving One Hamsa. My interviewers (who were one of the organization’s two co-founders and its current executive director) responded that they had had academics participate in the fellowship before, and that the one thing they always ask of such fellows is their full participation. They were understandably concerned that those from academia are more likely to fall into a role as detached observer than as active participant. After I completed the fellowship, One Hamsa’s leaders continued to allow me to attend meetings, but they preferred that I fill the role of detached observer, so as not to cause confusion for

current fellows as to my role in the group. I balanced this detachment with full participation outside of formal meetings, where I engaged as fully as other One Hamsa participants in aforementioned activities like fundraising and attending events.

When I transitioned from being a fellow myself to being a participant-observer, I encountered a just measure of gatekeeping from One Hamsa's board of directors. The aspects of my IRB that were flexible from the perspective of the academy were largely defined by the wishes of the board of directors and participants in the study. From the board's point of view, the protection of fellows' privacy rightly receives highest priority, and there were a few occasions when I was not granted the access I had requested, such as not being permitted to view cohort group emails. So while ultimately I do hold the power of the pen, some factors served to make the researcher-subject relationship less hierarchical than it otherwise might have been.

I have found that many alumni of One Hamsa's fellowship claim to have really been changed by their experience, and at least some of them maintain the cross-cultural relationships that provide evidence supporting these claims. While the central focus of this project is academic in nature, offering One Hamsa constructive information about their reach and efficacy is one of my goals. Which elements of One Hamsa's programming are most likely to lead to a transformative experience? To that end, I propose a slightly different definition for studying sideways which is more along the lines of what Calhoun advocates: "It is important to foster collaboration and communication with those who work in NGOs, social movement organizations, businesses, legal advocacy, and other arenas that can be improved by social knowledge—and challenge social scientists to keep improving their own understandings" (2008, xiv).

Many scholars conducting engaged research draw on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which advocates for many of the same ideas espoused by engaged scholars. As Dani Nabudere puts it, "action, reflection, questioning, researching hunches, drawing conclusions, evaluating options, and planning further action based on the learning that has been generated" are key to both approaches (2008, 70). Recognizing the commonalities between approaches helps break down what Nabudere calls "the anthropological 'participant/observer' dichotomy...There is no distinction between the researcher and the researched subject; all are involved in the research, dialogue, action, reflection, and further action" (2008, 70). Orlando Fals Borda was an early advocate of participatory action research (PAR), an approach to research that includes participation, observation, and action which was inspired in part by Freire's work. Fals Borda argues that the "essence of participation" is to break up the asymmetrical relationship present in research: the subject/object relationship "must be transformed into subject/subject" (1991, 5). While PAR originated mostly as a way to address problems facing the global periphery, John Gaventa argues that it can also be of use to scholars studying North American groups in certain cases: "In groups where dominant knowledge has been a force for control but in which there is little access to sympathetic expertise...[and in] groups concerned with education of the people" (1991, 122). One Hamsa's mission can be understood as an educational one in that fellows intimately learn about one another as individuals and as parts of their faith communities. The dominant knowledge that One Hamsa challenges is the narrative of Jews and Muslims as enemies, and the aim is to increase the number of people in each faith

community who have sympathetic expertise when it comes to the Other¹⁴. While I don't feel that at any time my relationship with my interlocutors was subject/subject, there were certainly times when we participated in action together as comrades with common goals.

Engaged anthropology has come to encompass scholars studying groups representing a wide range of differences in terms of not only geography but levels of power. Engaged research is not about a particular demographic or geographic area, but about bringing “non-scientific constituencies for scientific knowledge into the conversation earlier. Those who potentially use the results of social science in practical action, and those who mediate between scientists and broader publics, should be engaged as social science agendas are developed” (Calhoun 2004, 14). Engaged approaches are process rather than product oriented, with an emphasis on including all of those who will be affected by the research in the process. Shannon Speed elaborates that a focus on dialogue and collaboration is “ethically and practically warranted” and that this kind of research moves us toward “creating knowledge that is empirically grounded, theoretically innovative, and mutually beneficial. It also makes use of productive tensions, grapples directly with unproductive ones, and strives for more just relations in our discipline and our world” (2008, 233). Engaged anthropology is about the coproduction of knowledge for the sake of social justice both in the field and the academy. Like One Hamsa community members themselves, my project emphasizes

¹⁴ Throughout this dissertation, I use “the Other” to refer in an emic way to Muslims from a Jewish perspective or Jews from a Muslim perspective. This is the terminology used most often by my interlocutors as shorthand for encounters across difference, and specifically encounters between Jews and Muslims. Myself and many of my interlocutors appreciate that speaking about “the Other” in this way can potentially reify the false narrative that Muslims and Jews are opposites, yet this is often the most concise way of expressing a cumbersome concept.

understanding how engaging rather than avoiding conflict and discomfort can be a tool for better fulfilling both interfaith and ethnographic aims.

Like any academic approach, despite all the benefits it can yield, engaged anthropology is not above critique. Early in *Engaging Contradictions*, Hale addresses what in his experience constitute the three biggest questions engaged scholars must face:

First, how can activist scholarship claim methodological rigor while rejecting the positivist notion of objectivity that has been the lynchpin of such claims throughout the twentieth century? Second, once political engagement has been established as a defining feature of one's scholarship, doesn't this mean relinquishing the control necessary to ensure a high-quality outcome? Third, isn't activist research more accurately portrayed as the "praxis" side of the theory-and-praxis combination, which in turn leaves it poorly suited to yield theoretical innovation? (2008b, 4-5)

I address the first question in detail in Chapter 4. To foreshadow, rigor and new ways of conceptualizing objectivity need not be mutually exclusive; in fact, in many cases a situated objectivity can help lend *more* rigor or truth value to a research project. As Hale puts it, activist research has a "built-in test of validity that is much more demanding and stringent than conventional alternatives: Is it comprehensible to, and does it work for, a specific group of people who helped to formulate the research goals to begin with?" (2008b, 12). The answer to Hale's second question is tied up in this same facet of engaged research. Behind the question of whether political engagement means relinquishing the necessary control over research parameters lies the privileging of institutional knowledge over other knowledges. Part of conducting engaged research is producing knowledge not just for other scholars in the academy, but for those with whom we collaborate in the process of defining and answering research questions. Hale

points out that one goal that has emerged within engaged scholarship is to “call into question any neat dichotomy between inside and outside academia” (2008b, 16). The confrontation of false dichotomies is also important in response to the third question. Engaged scholars write against the theory/praxis dichotomy; they strive to incorporate theory into practice and vice versa, blurring the boundaries between the two. Davydd Greenwood argues that these “punishing dualisms...make activist research unthinkable” (2008, 323).

Of course, these answers are not to say that engaged anthropologists can do no wrong. Lipsitz reminds us that “anything worth doing can be done badly” (2008, 92). So, how does one go about evaluating what makes a successful engaged research project? Speed urges us to avoid the temptation to identify immediate outcomes as an indication of the success of a project. Instead, she argues that

a better criterion for evaluating the success of activist research undertakings would be to ask ourselves whether they address the critical questions directed at the discipline. Do they address neocolonial power dynamics in our research processes? Do they seek to engage rather than to analyze our research subjects? Do they maintain a critical focus even as they make explicit political commitments, thus creating a productive tension in which critical analysis meets (and must come to terms with) day-to-day political realities? Might we gain more robust analyses as a result? (2008, 230)

This is a satisfying starting point for assessing engaged anthropology, although more specific questions should be tailored to each particular project. For my purposes, I offer the following questions for the assessment of my project’s success: How do I engage my One Hamsa and interfaith colleagues and include them in the research process at each point in my timeline and do everything I can to make my relationship with them equitable? When our goals do not align, how do I proceed in a way that maintains as

much as possible the goals of maintaining a rigorous research project and authentic and equitable relationships with my colleagues? How can I produce findings that both add to anthropological knowledge and contribute useful knowledge to my interlocutors? I would like to include Speed's question about critical focus and productive tension in my assessment as well. These questions represent still more of the contradictions we must confront as engaged scholars. We accept that the conclusions generated from these confrontations will always be partial and situated, as all knowledge is.¹⁵

Anthropology as a discipline also stands to benefit from the inclusion of engaged research. Nonetheless, the prioritization of “theoretical” as opposed to “applied” anthropology dates at least as far back as 1941, when the Society for Applied Anthropology was founded “as a reaction to the disdain for applied anthropology demonstrated by the ‘pure’ anthropologists who ruled the American Anthropological Association” (Greenwood 2009, 321). This is ironic, given that many social science disciplines, including anthropology, “had strong roots outside the universities as well—in social reform movements, social welfare projects, local efforts at poor relief, and international missionary activity. Before the twentieth century most social scientists worked outside universities” (Calhoun 2008, xvi). In their piece, “What Will We Have Ethnography Do?” Luke Lassiter and Elizabeth Campbell (2010) argue that anthropologists should embrace a Boasian imaginary as opposed to putting Malinowskian-style fieldwork on a pedestal. In the Boasian style, they say, we can

imagine ethnography not as a solo student performance of knowledge accumulation but rather as well-peopled ethnographic projects and partnerships that reach for social and political change...[Boasian] ethnography inspires community involvement, cocitizenships, and collaborative modes of local and

¹⁵ A thorough discussion of the situated nature of knowledge can be found in Chapter 4.

community-based change. (765)

Whereas Malinowski and his adherents championed the idea of ethnography-as-objectivist-science (Malinowski 1932[1922]), Boas and his students engaged in ethnography as an apparatus of social change (to name just a few, Boas 1974[1906]; Boas 1974[1911]; Benedict 2005[1934]; Mead 2001[1928]; Mead 2001[1935]).

Ethnography imbues its practitioners with “professional listening skills and respect for the tenacity and multiplicity of individual and shared vantage points,” vital skills for those conducting engaged research (Kingsolver 2013, 664). Martinez (2008) outlines several elements that complement engaged research, and ethnography bolsters them. He argues that activist research depends on the establishment of trust between researcher and activists, which must be developed over the course of months or years. Of course, building this kind of relationship is what ethnography is predicated on. Additionally, Martinez recommends that the “visitor” participates in activist projects not only as a researcher but also as a fellow activist (2008, 204). As I mentioned earlier, the fact that I first participated in the One Hamsa fellowship solely as a participant and not as a researcher was crucial to my ability to build trusting relationships with One Hamsa fellows in subsequent years.

In her 2003 article entitled “The Perils and Prospects for an Engaged Anthropology,” Louise Lamphere argues that the discipline of anthropology *needs* engaged research. There are too many critical social issues anthropology can contribute to solving for us to sequester our knowledge away in the academy. Lamphere proposes three things we can do in order to foster a more engaged anthropology: First, we must overcome our public stereotypes as boring and out-of-touch and transform our

relations with the public to more accurately depict our discipline; second, we must transform our relationships with the communities we work with by including them in the research process from start to finish; and third, we must “work out effective ways of doing research on critical social issues that will expand the influence of anthropology in political arenas and policy debates” (Lamphere 2003, 153). This is exactly the transformative power engaged research holds for anthropology, and why engaged scholarship has deeply informed my approach to conducting research.

Feminist Ethnography

It is telling of the zeitgeist of the time that just a couple of years apart, both Judith Stacey (1988) and Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) unwittingly each published an essay entitled, “Can There be a Feminist Ethnography?” Stacey’s answer is decidedly more cautious about the possibilities for feminist ethnography. She concedes that there is a tendency in feminist scholarship to “assault the hierarchical, exploitative relations of conventional research, urging feminist researchers to seek instead an egalitarian research process characterized by authenticity, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity between the researcher and her ‘subjects,’” and that this tendency appears to mesh well with ethnography (1988, 22). But, Stacey warns, the very nature of ethnography makes it especially risky: “precisely because ethnographic research depends upon human relationship, engagement, and attachment, it places research subjects at grave risk of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer” (1988, 22-23). The stronger the relationship between researcher and research, Stacey argues, the greater the peril. She maintains that this danger is an inevitable part of the nature of ethnography, since the ethnographer is in a

position to use the tragedies of informants to their advantage. My own research has not been exempt from the perils of being in a position where I experience personal gain from the broken hearts of my interlocutors.¹⁶

Engaged anthropologists like myself would agree, writing ethnography requires scholars to “engage contradictions” like this one, so much so that Hale (2008a) used the phrase as the title of his aforementioned edited volume on the subject. How can ethnographers be loyal both to their research pursuits and to their personal commitments in the field? How can a scholar who aspires to a less hierarchical world enter into such an inherently hierarchical project as ethnography? How can an engaged anthropologist both support and critique a movement or organization?

Still, in spite of these contradictions, Stacey writes that “rigorous self-awareness of the ethical pitfalls in the method enables one to monitor and then to mitigate some of the dangers to which ethnographers expose their informants” (1988, 26). Stacey concludes on a reserved note: she believes that there cannot be a *fully* feminist ethnography, but that there can be *partially* feminist ethnographies. The contradictions exist, and they are too substantial for Stacey to be able to consider any ethnographic project to be capable of being fully feminist. But for her, reflexivity and an awareness of the partiality of all knowledge are the keys to reducing the dangers of undertaking

¹⁶ For example, in Chapter 5 I analyze a discussion that occurred during one summer when hostilities increased between Israel and Palestine. At that time and others, violence was a catalyst for impassioned conversations that strongly informed my analysis. While I was an observer at One Hamsa, I treated heightened emotional exchanges as a cue that something important was happening, and nearly all of those exchanges ended up somewhere in this finished dissertation. This dynamic wasn’t missed by my interlocutors. On one occasion, after a particularly emotional conversation, a fellow asked me if I had gotten some “juicy” pieces of data for my research. As my research project progressed I began to recognize the fact that the situations that caused the most distress to my interlocutors also yielded the most useful analytical insights. I am now benefitting from those insights by using them to earn a professional qualification that I expect to open doors in my career.

ethnography; despite the treacherous costs, the benefits such projects yield make them worthwhile, even if they can only be partially feminist.

I have taken Stacey's warning seriously. In interactions with my interlocutors, I have tried my best to be cognizant of my potential for harm, and have done whatever I could to mitigate it. For the most part, this simply meant adhering to the terms of my IRB for the project. However, in some cases I decided to take extra precautions because of the nature of my particular project. One of the biggest challenges of this project has been ensuring that the privacy of the participants is adequately protected. One Hamsa is a small community of just a few hundred fellows, alumni, and leaders. Not all alumni know one another, especially if they do not regularly attend public One Hamsa events, but many of them do, if not through One Hamsa, then through their masjid or temple. Thus, information that might not be enough to identify someone in the context of a different project might still be enough for One Hamsa alumni to recognize. There are several alumni and leaders who could be easily identified by others in the community through only a couple of particular identity markers. As such, when I quote fellows, I am as vague as possible about who said it and provide only what identity markers are necessary for making my point. While I have tried my best to address all possible ethical concerns, I recognize that the project of ethnography itself is inherently hierarchical, making it impossible to execute without encountering ethical quandaries.

When it comes to the question of whether or not these dilemmas are enough to make feminist ethnography impossible, I am myself more inclined to argue along the lines of what Ruth Behar wrote in her book, *The Vulnerable Observer*: "Anthropology that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing" (1996, 177). Stacey's definition of

feminist research seems to be so strict that no research project could adhere to it; while engaged ethnography may be more prone to contradictions than other forms of research, can there ever be a research project that is completely without contradictions? Must a research project be contradiction-free in order to be considered fully feminist? Like myself, Abu-Lughod would answer that question with a “no.” In comparison with Stacey, Abu-Lughod’s answer to the question of whether there can be a feminist ethnography is much more optimistic—and flexible. In her paper, she argues that feminist ethnography is not only possible, but desirable. In explaining why a feminist ethnography had not already emerged, she poses the problem: “If objectivity is the ideal of anthropological research and writing, then to argue for feminist ethnography would be to argue for a biased, interested, partial, and thus flawed project” (Abu-Lughod 1990, 9). Abu-Lughod’s answer is that anthropology and feminism can find common ground on questions of self and other.

Specifically, anthropology can benefit from strains of feminist thought that challenge dichotomies that have become entrenched in ethnography. Feminist thought challenges all dichotomies that are associated with feminine/masculine (for example, subjective/objective, personal/impersonal, emotional/rational), many of which have become ingrained in anthropology, to its detriment. Feminist ethnography is particularly well situated to challenge the self/other dichotomy. Abu-Lughod argues that “anthropological discourse...is the discourse of the self” and “defines itself primarily as the study of the other, which means that its selfhood was not problematic” (1990, 24). Meanwhile, “feminist discourse, in a sense, begins from the opposite side” in that women have been “the other to men’s self. This has meant...[that] feminists could never

have any illusions about the innocence with regard to power of a binary like self/other. They knew that this system of difference was about hierarchical power” (1990, 25). Bringing feminist ethnography to anthropology, then, can help begin to “move beyond the impasse of the fixed self/other or subject/object divide” (1990, 25).

This approach is particularly appropriate for studying people like interfaith activists, whose project revolves around encountering the Other and redefining the self in the process. Despite this reiteration of “the Other,” One Hamsa blurs the boundaries between self and other by asking fellows to consider otherness as both a way we think of others and a way others think of us. Further, through the process of One Hamsa’s curriculum, fellows are asked to begin to think of the Other as part of the self. By the end of the program, fellows still identify strongly as Jews and Muslims, but they have also forged new identities as members of a shared interfaith community.

As is already clear, Abu-Lughod is far from the only feminist writer to make the argument that a feminist approach to ethnography should be at least considered if not embraced. Jane Collier and Sylvia Yanagisako (1989) have argued that feminist thought can help scholars steer clear of the impasses resulting from dichotomies that have been generated by Emile Durkheim’s sacred/profane, considering that this original dichotomy is itself deeply gendered. Khiara Bridges argues in her contribution to the volume, *Feminist Activist Ethnography*, that due to the “mutual constitutive nature of ethnographer and field, the subject (anthropologist) and object (field) dichotomy collapses entirely” (2013, 140). Kamala Visweswaran calls this mutual constitutive nature and the subsequent “identification(s) of feminist anthropologists with their subjects” a defining component of “the very genre conventions of feminist ethnography”

(1997, 615). This is not just a recent phenomenon; women ethnographers have long been pioneers in “unsettle[ing] the central divide between Self and Other on which anthropology usually rested. This was not because of any essential, cross-cultural sameness of women but because feminist anthropologists had to recognize that womanhood was only a partial identity” (Abu-Lughod 1995, 347).

In addition to being extra sensitive to dichotomies, experiencing womanhood as a partial identity has enabled women ethnographers to “consider how identities are multiple, contradictory, and strategic” (Visweswaran 1994, 50). Because we don’t have the option not to situate ourselves with regard to gender when we conduct research, we are more likely to take other partial identities into consideration. Feminist ethnography encourages those involved in the production of knowledge to account for the role identity plays in that process. We must “see how identities are determined by the political exigencies of history, compelling us to take sides,” so that we can “exhibit and examine our alliances in the same moment” (Visweswaran 1994, 132). Experience, autobiography, or identity are all “stories we tell about history...community refracted through self” (Visweswaran 1994, 137). Visweswaran argues that such an approach is empowering to both speakers and listeners, and also constitutes a radical departure from the way anthropology is traditionally practiced.

This is not to say that we should put aside any kind of general statement about a community, but that in order to understand a community it is vital to take experience and identity into account—and feminist ethnography provides a framework for doing so. At its heart, ethnography has always been about valuing individual experience and identity over accumulating large amounts of general data about a population, but in practice,

there have been times when the pendulum has swung towards ethnography of generalizations about universal or cultural traits. Like reflexivity more generally, feminist ethnography offers a corrective to that tendency, a corrective that many engaged anthropologists eagerly embrace, myself included. Not only should experience be granted legitimacy as ethnographic data, but ethnographers should resist the impulse to separate theory from experience, because such a separation “loses sight of the fundamentally restitutive value of feminism, and the potential of a feminist ethnography that has yet to be expressed: locating the self in the experience of oppression in order to liberate it” (Visweswaran 1994, 19).

Feminist ethnography also offers a corrective for the tendency to allow questions of power to go unasked. We are forced to confront questions of whether “speaking for others [is] ever a valid practice, and, if so, what are the criteria for validity? In particular, is it ever valid to speak for others who are unlike me or who are less privileged than me?” (Alcoff 1991, 7). Is it better or worse for the project of producing what Sandra Harding (1997, 383) calls “less false accounts” to work within our own communities without claiming to be neutral observers? Ultimately, I argue that both speaking for one’s own communities and speaking for others carry methodological and ethical pitfalls. We must accept that there can be no anthropological project free from these pitfalls, and the best way we can respond to this paradox is to do our best to navigate around such dilemmas as we produce new knowledge.

Deborah Gordon points out that while this tendency to question power relations is not unique to feminist anthropology; indeed, as I mentioned earlier, engaged anthropology is also full of contradictions and dilemmas like these. Feminism is

particularly well situated to help answer questions pertaining to power by providing a point of intersection. Given that “feminism is nothing if not a set of political practices,” Gordon argues,

feminist ethnographers who have connections with women's movements can learn from the discussion of experimental ethnography and add to it because they are aware of the difficulty and complexity of politics when boundaries are both necessary and constantly challenged, being recreated in daily practices of resistance. (1988, 11)

Feminist Ethnography's Contributions to Engaged Anthropology

One strength of feminist ethnography, as I have discussed, is that it offers grounds on which to counter damaging dichotomies. But that isn't the only strength of feminist ethnography when it comes to engaged anthropology in particular. Since feminist ethnography became generally accepted as a subgenre, more and more writers have been identifying what they do as feminist *activist* ethnography. Feminist activist ethnography arguably falls under the umbrella of engaged anthropology, though engaged anthropologists do not always recognize the actual and potential contributions of feminism to their work. In this section I discuss the specific contributions feminism stands to make to engaged anthropology and how these ideas apply to my own feminist activist ethnography.

To begin with, feminist ethnography and engaged research share common aims, which Jennifer Bickham Mendez expresses as the reconfiguring of “knowledge production so as to shift power and control into the hands of the oppressed or marginalized, privileging ‘subjugated knowledges’ and transforming oppressive social structures” (2008, 139). Feminist scholars and engaged anthropologists ask similar

questions about whose voices are privileged over others in the production of knowledge. Both groups challenge the dichotomies of theory/praxis and subject/object. In the introduction to their book, *Feminist Activist Ethnography*, Christa Craven and Dána-Ain Davis define feminist ethnography as “a project committed to documenting lived experience as it is impacted by gender, race, class, sexuality, and other aspects of participants lives” (2013, 1). This definition could be used almost as-is for engaged anthropology, with the added caveat that the goal is not just to document such experiences but also to do what Craven and Davis later argues is essential to feminist ethnography: “putting research to use in the service of organizations, people, communities, and issues” (2013, 10). In an earlier piece, Craven and Davis also argue that feminist ethnography should be put to use “intensifying efforts toward social justice” (2011, 191). Patricia Maguire goes so far as to argue that “there cannot be truly emancipatory participatory research or participatory research advocates without explicit incorporation of feminist perspectives” (1996, 106). It seems to me that the greatest difference between feminist ethnography and engaged anthropology is their distinct but overlapping and convergent scholarly lineages. But to reference Hale (2008b, 20) again, feminist activist ethnographers and engaged scholars alike (myself included) are less interested in delineating the boundaries of their field than scholars of other disciplines might be.

Because their aims are so closely aligned, feminism has strong contributions to make to engaged anthropology.

One of the most significant contributions of feminist thought is the reconceptualization of power as intersectional, multisited, and existing in multiple forms...A view of power as intersectional helps us reflect on scholar activists’

institutional and social position within the academy, a site of global privilege that reproduces international race, class, and gender inequalities. (Mendez 2008, 155-156)

Feminist scholarship lends an awareness of the situatedness of all knowledge, including that produced from the privileged position of the academy. This kind of approach is crucial to engaged anthropology, which aims to empower communities without reproducing the very power inequalities that resulted in their marginalization. As Christa Craven writes,

there is no intrinsically 'equal' ethnographic encounter...Further, the researcher always holds the pen—or the computer keyboard, as it were—and makes the ultimate decision about whose stories to include and how to frame them...[This] is a key feature of both contemporary feminist methods and feminist scholars' engagement as activists. (2013, 105-106)

Since there can be no equal ethnographic encounter, it is our responsibility as engaged scholars to be critical of our own desire to "give voice to the voiceless."

Feminist epistemology helps scholars attend to institutional changes that are needed to sustain activist projects like engaged anthropology within the academy.

Academics must push the boundaries of what is deemed "legitimate scholarship," and the currency of peer-reviewed publications may need to be broadened or changed. To create new public spheres scholars and activist must work to establish forums for the presentation of research that will be accessible and of interest to other publics beyond the academic community. (Mendez 2008, 156-157)

This echoes Behar's argument that ethnography should not be like the elite lounges in the airport. Especially if we are producing knowledge with the aim of empowering communities, it is not in the best interest if anyone involved if the knowledge remains cloistered within academia. It is toward this end that I aim to write using accessible and not overly jargon-laden language, take interlocutors' ideas into account in my writing,

and plan to make this dissertation available to members of the One Hamsa community who helped make this piece of writing possible.

Another contribution of feminism(s), Mendez argues, is the second-wave principle of personal as political.

Ultimately the development of strategic practices of activist research must emerge out of relationships and dialogue...between the scholar activist and collaborators...This kind of research practice requires collaborative social relationships that must be rethought from outside conventional approaches to research. (2008, 156)

The personal is political in engaged anthropology not just in terms of research relationships, but in terms of the researcher's choice of field site. Often engaged anthropologists have deeply personal reasons for choosing the topics of their research, as I do, and many have been involved in the activist movement they study for years before ever initiating a research project.

There has been a lot of critique and angst about the effect political involvement has on the legitimacy of research. But I strongly agree with Faye Harrison that "the more serious a person's commitment is to helping some group obtain the information or skills it needs to improve its situation, the greater care and accuracy to research and support service *should be*" (2013, xi). In line with the arguments of feminist scholars, Harrison elaborates that a researcher's being up front about their personal and political involvement in their research project leads to better understandings than does a vain attempt at neutrality.

Like everyone, my personal experiences have shaped my perspective, and I have biases to which I am blind despite my best efforts to identify and account for them. For this reason, I include the following information about my personal relationship to the

topic I have chosen for this dissertation project. I was raised in a mostly Jewish environment, attending a Jewish private school and participating in after school programs at the local Jewish Community Center. Our community was predominantly Ashkenazi, including most of my family, friends, and acquaintances. The narratives I learned with regards to Israel, Muslims, and the Arab world were mostly one sided, aligned with what I describe in Chapter 4 as one-eyed narratives. I internalized stereotypes not only about the Arab other, but also about who could or couldn't be Jewish. As I grew older I began to question these ideas I had grown up around. I moved to a more diverse area and made friends who were Arab and/or Muslim for the first time. I became close enough with a few of them to discuss religion together, a topic I've always found fascinating. Over the many hours we spent learning about one another's faiths, ethnicities, and heritages, I came to understand how much we had in common—down to the harmful narratives of one another's cultures.

When I participated as a fellow in One Hamsa, it was the first time I had ever had the opportunity to hear multiple perspectives on the topics we discussed from not only Muslims of diverse backgrounds, but from Jews with very different backgrounds from mine. And while some fellows come to One Hamsa already having had interfaith experiences elsewhere, my experience of hearing different perspectives for the first time was not unusual among both Jewish and Muslim fellows. Also like some other fellows, for me One Hamsa served as a gateway to other forms of activism, as it provided me with personal connections to activists working on a variety of issues. For me, One Hamsa is a welcoming community of activists and other grassroots leaders. I plan to continue my involvement with interfaith activism well after the conclusion of this project.

The personal transformations I experienced both before and during my engagement with One Hamsa have deeply influenced the way I experience and interpret the world, including when I conduct research. In this dissertation, I have tried my best to represent Muslim and Jewish perspectives equally and to be transparent about how and why I interpret data in the ways I do. But as an activist feminist scholar, I know that my life experiences have also bestowed me with biases that, despite my best efforts, are invisible to me. I have relied on the invaluable advice of my advisors and colleagues to help me identify any biases that are invisible to me, but even that strategy is not failsafe. In writing this ethnography, I accept that I am choosing to engage the contradictions inherent in the project of social science, because if I have met my goal for this dissertation as I believe I have, the benefits of conducting such research ultimately outweigh the harms. I take my responsibility seriously to mitigate potential harms as much as possible.

Since feminist ethnography became generally accepted as a subgenre, more and more writers have been identifying what they do as feminist activist ethnography. Feminist activist ethnography arguably falls under the umbrella of engaged anthropology, though engaged anthropologists do not always recognize the actual and potential contributions of feminism to their work. This means that feminist ethnography is susceptible to many of the same weaknesses I discussed regarding engaged anthropology. In discussing how the contradictions inherent in feminist activist ethnography might be addressed, Scott Morgensen argues that

feminist activist ethnography carries a capacity to act as a corrective *upon itself*. At times, the activism that will need to be critically investigated and evaluated by feminist activist ethnography will be the very activist commitments that drive

feminist research. The work must be ready for its own activist commitments to be exposed to critical ethnographic analysis. (2013, 73)

Feminist activist ethnography does not simply mean accepting the situated positionality of conducting research on an activist project in which the researcher is invested, but also being willing to offer ethnographic critique of that very project. Bell hooks offers insight into the conundrum of embodying power differences even as we seek to dismantle them:

I was just a girl coming slowing into womanhood when I read Adrienne Rich's words, "This is the oppressor's language, yet I need it to talk to you." This language that enabled me to attend graduate school, to write a dissertation, to speak at job interviews, carries the scent of oppression... Dare I speak to oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination- a language that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you? (2004, 154)

Until a great deal of institutional changes are accomplished, we will continue to face this conundrum. But feminist activist ethnography helps us to reflect on this problem and the issues it generates in our research with its potential to act as a corrective on itself.

The Power Dynamics of Knowledge Production in Interfaith Dialogue

Michel Foucault argues in "Two Lectures" that power and truth are intertwined. "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (1976, 93). Part of the project of interfaith activists at One Hamsa is to come to a shared understanding of the truth. Critics of such interfaith dialogue point out that it has the potential to obscure and reproduce existing power dynamics, even when the goal is to deconstruct them. How do interfaith activists understand the impact of existing societal power structures on the knowledge that they

aim to produce? I begin to address that question in this section, but it is a theme to which I return throughout the dissertation.

Because there is not much extant research on other layfolk interfaith encounters, I use as a springboard research that has been conducted on Arab-Jewish encounter programs in Israel/Palestine. By comparing and contrasting these efforts with those of One Hamsa, I begin to illuminate the ways in which One Hamsa has avoided replicating the power imbalances that detract from the success of such encounter programs, and also the ways in which One Hamsa still falls short in addressing the power dynamics at play between Muslims and Jews in the United States.

These encounter programs usually bring Arab and Jewish participants together for a brief period of time, usually several intensive days in a row. Often the participants are students and teachers from Jewish and Arab schools, and the organizations are regularly led by Israeli-Jewish directors and funded from sources in the United States (Abu-Nimer 2004). These features are mostly in contrast with One Hamsa, which is based on a model of long-term relationship building and was co-founded by two community organizers, one Muslim and one Jewish. While the current executive director, who is Palestinian American, constantly strives toward balance between faiths in every aspect of the organization, from funding to participation, it is of note that it tends to be more difficult to recruit Muslims both as participants and as donors.

Zvi Bekerman, a long time scholar of the educational methods used by these programs, opines that though definitive data regarding the outcomes of these programs is hard to come by, his sense is that they do not seem to work (2007). The primary explanation Bekerman offers for this observation is that while the Palestine/Israel

conflict requires structural change to solve, encounter programs focus on interpersonal coexistence. Ella Ben Hagai, Phillip Hammack, Andrew Pilecki, and Carissa Aresta concur that encounter groups fail to achieve their goals because they replicate power imbalances that exist between Israelis and Palestinians outside the space. Although Palestinian participants try to discuss structural change, “members of the Jewish group often assert their hegemony...by shifting the conversation from structural change to interpersonal coexistence” (2013, 297).

To some extent, power imbalances also exist within One Hamsa cohorts. Despite the best efforts of its leaders to recruit as diverse an applicant base as possible, Jewish participants are predominantly Ashkenazi and at least second or third generation Americans. Muslim participants come from more diverse ethnic backgrounds, but are predominantly people of color and are much more likely to be immigrants or children of immigrants. Bickham Mendez argues that scholar activists must “reflect on the ways in which they both benefit from and are oppressed by global capitalism...Though it is uncomfortable to acknowledge, using research as part of an overall political strategy must entail an awareness of this contradiction” (2008, 156). This is another area in which it is important for both scholars and activists to be able to practice reflexivity. Again, while reflexivity is not a silver bullet and structural inequality must still be addressed, it is one important way to move closer to the goal of producing less false knowledge.

While there are in general structural power differences between Jews and Muslims in the United States, which I discuss in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3, those differences are less severe than those in Palestine/Israel. Further, they result primarily

from external factors that characterize the American scene, as opposed to resulting from one group exerting control over the other. Muslims and Jews in the United States both understand their positioning in the American milieu from the perspective of minority religious groups, while Israel has the institutional authority to control what resources Palestinians can and can't access and wields that power broadly. Ben Hagai et al. write that while it is difficult to create equality in a contact situation when the groups involved are part of asymmetrical power structures outside the space, "a more equal dynamic can be achieved through the involvement of a high-status third party" (2013, 308). In the context of interfaith activism in the United States, Christianity in some ways acts as a high-status third party, even without having any Christian participants in a given space. Because both Muslims and Jews experience life in the United States through the lens of practicing a minority religion, each group can relate to the other's feeling of powerlessness. As I discuss in Chapters 2 and 3, Jewish and Muslim Americans share experiences of living in a country where their holidays are rarely days off, where they may have been bullied for dressing or praying differently, and where they frequently find themselves dispelling misconceptions about their faith communities.

The Role of Gender in Constructing Knowledge for Peacebuilding

Although One Hamsa is not an explicitly gendered organization, I found that the approaches to peacebuilding used at One Hamsa are consistent with findings about women's peacebuilding efforts in general. Although One Hamsa strives toward equal representation of as many identity markers as possible, women are overrepresented among One Hamsa leaders, fellows, and alumni. Both of One Hamsa's first directors

are women, as are the others who have taken on top leadership roles since the organizations' founding. Two out of the six facilitators I worked with during my time at One Hamsa are men, and whereas the men facilitated for one year each, three of the women have facilitated for two or more years. Out of One Hamsa's 12 board members, only four are men. Cohorts tend to be more gender balanced, since leaders are able to choose from among many applicants. Still, very few cohorts have been gender balanced; most have a few more women than men. What kind of impact, if any, does this gender imbalance have on One Hamsa's approach to peacebuilding? How might my observations of One Hamsa contribute to a more robust understanding of the relationship between gender and peacebuilding?

Before addressing those specific questions, one overarching question scholars of conflict resolution and peace-building efforts wrestle with is what role gender plays in these efforts. A common theme appears in the literature on these topics, in which women are painted as inherently peaceful and resistant to violence, giving them a special role in creating and maintaining peace. This has particularly been the case since the year 2000, when the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, which

reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. ("Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security")

Though this theme may seem benign, feminist scholars (McKay and Mazurana 2001, El-Bushra 2007, Charlesworth 2008) have pointed out that if biological

determinism can be used to argue that women are peaceful, it also can be (and has been) used to dictate what roles are and aren't permissible for women when it comes to war and peace. Yet, much research has been published illustrating that there is indeed correlation between femininity and peace. The causes of this correlation are still poorly understood, but the better we come to understand the relationship between gender and peace, the more effective we will become at creating and maintaining the latter. As Judy EI-Bushra phrases these questions for investigation:

Are men inherently territorial and aggressive and women inherently nurturing and peaceable? Or are their roles in war explainable entirely in relation to the social and cultural context? Do we have to choose between these positions, or can we accept both as containing elements of truth? (EI-Bushra 2007, 133)

Most of the authors I mention in this section who have already contributed to answering these questions acknowledge the need for further research disentangling the relationship between gender and peace.

In the meantime, what can the research tell us about how women approach peace differently than men? In his research on a peace education program for Palestinian and Israeli students, Yaacov Yablon (2009) found that

while the Jewish and Arab males presented only more positive feelings after participation in the peace programme, the Jewish and Arab females presented more positive willingness to interact, more positive feelings, attitudes, and social distance than before they participated in the peace programme. The female youths were generally more positive than the males before the onset of the peace programme and gained more from it than the males. (697)

Yablon reports that these findings are consistent with previous research on how men and women respond differently to peace workshops. His literature review revealed that women are "more open to discuss emotionally loaded issues than men," "were more able to listen to one another and develop empathy," and were satisfied with their ability

to establish relationships with the Other (698). The author offers a variety of explanations for possible causes of this difference. Perhaps, since research has shown that women's friendships are more intimate and emotional than men's, women are better prepared to participate in peace workshops. Perhaps the pedagogy of peace programs is presented in a way that is more accessible to learning styles shared by women. Yablon concludes by pointing out that further study establishing a better understanding of what makes women respond so positively to peace workshops would contribute to creating a peace pedagogy that enables men to respond just as positively.

El-Bushra (2007) and McKay and Mazurana (2001) discuss the ways in which women's peace agenda setting differs from men's. Women tend to focus on the grassroots efforts that emphasize nonviolence, recognition of and respect for human rights, intercultural understanding, and women's empowerment (McKay and Mazurana 2001, 345). Reconciliation is also often emphasized, an approach that "includes bringing together former enemies to make peace, learning to coexist in peace, and defusing enemy imaging" (348). Women also tend to emphasize coalition building as a part of the process of building peace, which is emphasized more than specific outcomes. "Peacebuilding is thus approached as a dynamic and complex process made up of roles, function, and activities involving interactions of many actors with varying skills (McKay and Mazurama 2001, 351). Overall, women emphasize inter- and intrapersonal aspects of peacebuilding, understanding their project as a process rather than a specific goal to be accomplished (356). El-Bushra (2007) agrees with McKay and Mazurana that women's peace activism "addresses the psychosocial, relational, and spiritual as well as the political and economic dimensions of conflict transformation" and

tends to “have deep roots in the local context and in cultural specificity” (138).

Elisabeth Porter (2003) argues that women peace activists are more likely than men peace activists to participate in informal peace-building practices like “meditation, dialogue, advocacy, conflict management, and reconciliation” (256) as well as “the gradual building of relationships through trust, storytelling, sharing common experiences, networking, and working together on common goals” (258). As such, “women redefine the parameters of peace-building to include all processes that build peace” in a way that, while not inconsistent with the UN’s understanding of peace-building, focuses on the opposite end of the spectrum from the UN’s formal processes such as diplomacy, sanctions, and peace negotiations (Porter 2003, 256). Further, many women understand peace-building in a broader way than do UN officials (257). To put it another way, the UN’s approach to peace is to work towards a negative peace, defined as the absence of direct violence, while women peace activists tend to strive toward

an alternative vision of “positive peace” that is explicitly idealist in striving towards “peace as the absence of exploitation and the presence of social justice.” Positive, sustainable peace requires the resolution of the root causes of conflicts in order to remove violent manifestations. Such root causes include political, social, economic, gender injustice, inequality and oppression, hence the need for comprehensive ongoing peace-building. (Porter 2003, 258)

What of the role of gender in interfaith settings, which often embrace peacebuilding as a central goal? Several scholars of interfaith studies, including Diana Eck (1993), Ursula King (1998, 2007), Jeannine Hill Fletcher (2006), and Kate McCarthy (2007) have written about the ways in which the patriarchal structures that exist in many religions are reproduced in interfaith settings. I would add the caveat that these works

are mostly consistent with my earlier observation that until the last few years most interfaith research has focused on clerical interfaith efforts as opposed to grassroots ones. It is unsurprising that patriarchal religious structures lead to a predominance of male clerics. As a result, men are overrepresented in this sort of interfaith organizing, another of its weaknesses. All the more reason that more research needs to be done on the “track two” (Hemmer et al. 2006) grassroots sort of interfaith work that is the focus of this dissertation. Additionally, King’s observation that “there has been little of a feminist reception or critique of the interfaith movement and theological debate about dialogue so far” (2007) provides further support for my argument that it is important to include feminist critique in the burgeoning field of interfaith studies.

Yet, even McCormack (2015), who focuses on grassroots interfaith organizations led by women, asserts that “the interfaith movement has historically been ill-equipped for addressing nonreligious dynamics, as focused as it has been on addressing just one facet of the individual person’s identity” (100). He concludes that even grassroots organizations tend to replicate patriarchal structures that exclude women from leadership roles. Further, this weakness in the interfaith movement at addressing non-religious identities occurs not only with regard to gender but also to sexual orientation, race, class, and other facets of participants’ identities, as I touch on in the next chapter. Thus, interfaith activists’ understandings of and practices around intersectionality is an important area for future research.

It should be clear from what I have written thus far that One Hamsa is closely aligned with other scholars’ observations about women’s peace building efforts. It also seems that female led grassroots interfaith organizing like One Hamsa potentially offers

a corrective to the patriarchal impulses that have been transmitted to interfaith activists through pre-existing patriarchal structures within their faiths. How do the people who are involved with One Hamsa talk about the relationship between gender and interfaith activism? For the most part, they don't. Most fellows regardless of gender agreed that One Hamsa is an equitable space when it comes to gender.

On one rare occasion, a facilitator posed a question to the cohort regarding how they viewed the relationship between their gender and their experience of One Hamsa. The facilitator decided to pose the question during a debriefing discussion for a listening activity. The initial question was about what it was like to listen or be heard, and at first only women offered responses. Then the facilitator recalled a recent event at which she had shared One Hamsa's approach with an audience from the general public, and one man had asked, "Well what about the men? How do they listen?" The facilitator went on, "The intention was, that women are better listeners, or more used to it or they love it...I would like to create just a moment to hear from the men in the room." This prompt resulted in a long pause. Some giggling filled the silence. Eventually, a few men offered their perspectives. One said, "I'm a really bad listener usually. Just, I'm a guy I guess...I'm about to get married so I need to work on that." This fellow seemed to agree with the public audience member that men are worse at listening than women.

The man who had the most to say in response to the question of what it is like to work on listening as a man spoke about how for him, at the intersection of being a man and being Muslim are a lot of assumptions about violence, some of them rooted in fact. He describes how learning to listen and to share vulnerably offers a corrective to violence:

I think my thoughts are twofold. One is that, being able to talk about this experience has been one of the most liberating and healing experiences of my life. I'm really thankful for that. I think my other reflections are like, you know they say Muslims are terrorists, but when I think of the word terror and I look at who commits the most terror in the world it's usually men. So for me, men cause most terror in people's lives and it's because of discrepancy, because we don't let men talk about their feelings or train them to talk about their feelings and so we smash things, you know? I think it's twofold, one is that people are afraid to talk to violent men about their feelings, or people they perceive to be violent, so men usually, especially young men, especially young men of color they just get content knowledge and never actually engagement. And also most people don't want their men to be soft right so if your guy's like "Oh I'm feeling really," it's like, oh well I'm looking for a MAN. [Another fellow groans.] I don't need another woman in the relationship, so we want men to show feelings but we also don't because then they're out of their gender box.

For this fellow, societal expectations of men to be stoic and not share their emotions lead men to act out violently. What he is voicing here is very much aligned with findings from peace building efforts spearheaded by women: the belief that one of the most effective ways to counter violence is to educate people, particularly men, in emotional intelligence. One of One Hamsa's central goals is to increase the emotional intelligence of all fellows, because the premise that sharing vulnerably builds relationships cannot be brought to fruition unless fellows are first able to identify and name their feelings. This form of experiential education has an important role to play in the bigger picture of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Chapter 2: Progressive Interfaith Activism and Changing Perceptions of the Role of Religion in American Civic Life

Popular rhetoric about American government emphasizes the separation of church and state. Thomas Jefferson is credited with coining the phrase in an 1802 letter:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. (Jefferson 1802)

Jefferson here offers his own interpretation of the First Amendment, which he quotes, as it pertains to the appropriate relationship between church and state. Today, the phrase itself is often misattributed to the Constitution, and while those exact words do not appear in the First Amendment, Americans generally agree that it is unconstitutional for the government to establish a state religion or to prohibit or restrict religious practice in any way. This leaves a substantial grey area when it comes to governmental bodies making references to religion or shared religious values, as well as when it comes to the degree to which religion can or should influence private groups' and individuals' political activities.

Whatever one believes about how dilemmas in that grey area should be resolved, Western society¹⁷ has become increasingly secular since the Great Enlightenment. Braunstein observes, "the public authority and relevance of religion

¹⁷ I recognize the problems inherent in the label "Western civilization," particularly that it reifies a false dichotomy of East vs. West. I use the term for lack of a more precise one for nations in which Christianity's influence is deeply rooted and intertwined with political history and philosophy, particularly in Europe and the Americas.

within society as a whole has declined” (2017, 16). However, this does not mean that religion has disappeared altogether from public life. In her analysis of the similarities and differences between a conservative group and a progressive one, Braunstein writes that “both groups fundamentally rejected the liberal secularist notion that there is no place for religion, or God, in the public life of a diverse democratic society,” (2017, 83). Activists who come to civic engagement through their faith must come to terms with the meaning and implications of separation of church and state. For many activists of faith, leaving religious beliefs at the town meeting door is anathema.

Religion naturally informs the way people of faith approach public life. Religion is not only about theology, the nature of God or the afterlife, but also about how best to live life in the here and now. Beliefs across religions pertain to structuring relationships from the interpersonal to the societal, what sorts of values to embrace, and what rules and norms should apply to whom. Judaism in particular includes certain specific teachings about social ethics. The concept of Tikkun Olam, or “repairing the world,” originates in Kabbalah, or Jewish mysticism. Although it is not mentioned in the Torah, progressive American Jews in particular use this concept to explain their approach to ethics: we as progressive American Jews study the ethics taught by our faith not only to become better people personally, but to make the world a better place for everyone. This can only be done through some kind of public engagement, including civic involvement and political activism.

In *Religion and Progressive Activism*, Todd Nicholas Fuist notes how commonly he observed religious progressives express that “their political theologies reflect a common-sense moral application of the core beliefs of their faith.” Many of the Jewish

activists Fuist observed used the framework of Tikkun Olam to describe the connection between their faith and their political engagement. One interlocutor told him that “there is no neat separation of politics from other areas of your life” and that “Judaism is a ‘great fit’ for her because it provides a moral framework for her politics and desire to enact social change” (2017, 341).

Likewise, many American Muslims who participate in civic engagement understand that engagement through the lens of their faith. To illustrate, the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), one of the oldest and largest national American Muslim advocacy organizations in the country, is guided by Islamic values. The “About MPAC” page of the organization’s website describes their guiding values, mercy, justice, peace, human dignity, freedom, and equality for all, through six quotations from the Quran. For example, the value of justice is presented with passage 4:135:

O you have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in upholding equality, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against your own selves or your parents and kinsfolk. Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God’s claim takes precedence over (the claims of) either of them.

Thus, while we often think of the separation of church and state as a central tenet of what it means to be American, for many people of faith it is impossible to keep religion bounded to the private sphere. One attorney who litigates cases involving Orthodox Jewish and other religious groups points out that the First Amendment protects more than the right to choose your faith and to worship freely. “Religion is a way of life for Orthodox Jews and thus [it] spills into the so-called secular realm...There is a lot more to religion...than simply worship” (Wuthnow 2005, 86). This is true not only for adherents to faiths like Orthodox Judaism that include strict edicts about proper

conduct in public life, but also for followers of all sorts of religions who see their activism as being a part of practicing their faith.

Activists of faith often use religious beliefs and practices as a part of their regular strategic toolkits. Some scholars, such as Sharon Nepstad and Christian Smith (2001) and Laura Olson (2017), have argued that being people of faith lends a specific advantage to activism in the United States. Olson argues that “having a progressive religious outlook drives certainty of movement effectiveness much more powerfully than having a progressive political outlook” (2017, 104). Nepstad and Smith give a name to this observation of the power behind religious activism: they write that having already been engaged in a community building effort like religion makes activists “subjectively engageable.” In their words, this means that “the cultural and social values connected to a group identity may infuse [activism] with a sense of urgency and a compelling need to respond” (Nepstad and Smith 2001, 166).

For example, members of one of the groups Braunstein observed approached their activism in terms of prophecy, an important fixture of their Christian faith. One member explained, “We are prophets, and we have a different way of looking at this—not as partisan politics and not through fear, but through relationships” (Braunstein 2017, 46-47). Nepstad and Smith found that Christians and Jews¹⁸ are particularly subjectively engageable as compared to non-religious activists because they already embrace “social teachings that emphasize peace, justice, and political engagement as essential expressions of religious commitment” and because “their common collective

¹⁸ Nepstad and Smith generalize their findings to all people of faith, but for reasons I discuss more in depth later in this chapter, I think it is an important distinction to make to point out that their research focused on Christian and Jewish groups.

identity as people of faith took greater precedence over their identity as Americans” (2001, 166).

Moving Beyond the Culture War Narrative

Since about the middle of the twentieth century, the religious activists who have been the most successful at influencing policy in the United States have been mostly conservative Christians. Over time, a narrative¹⁹ has emerged of a culture war between these conservative religious activists on one side and progressive secular activists on the other. In her 2017 book, Braunstein writes extensively on the ways this narrative has influenced understandings among both activists and scholars of the relationship between religion and politics. According to the culture war narrative, says Braunstein,

religious conservatives resisting societal secularization and rising religious diversity face off against liberal secularists, who responded to conservatives’ lack of concern for the rights of religious minorities by both disengaging from religious life and promoting a stricter separation of church and state. (17)

While this narrative has a foundation in truth, it is a vast oversimplification of the realities of religious activism in the United States. Unfortunately, this narrative seems to have influenced not only the public in general but also scholars of religious activism. Only in the last few years have scholars begun to focus specifically on progressive religious activism. As I mentioned earlier, until recently, writing on progressive religious organizing in the United States was mostly limited to African American Christians during the Civil Rights Movement. But progressive religious actors have been a part of the fabric of American civic life for as long as conservative ones have.

¹⁹ Here I would like to clarify that, as I argue later in this section, this culture war narrative is an oversimplification that erases important actors, including religious activists who have been involved in movements on the political left in the United States, such as peace/anti-nuclear proliferation activists in the 1960s through the 1980s.

Like most false dichotomies, including theory/practice and Muslim/Jew, the culture war narrative obscures important nuances and creates an illusion of polarization that often solidifies into real polarization. Williams critiques,

the very construction of the culture wars idea had room for only two 'sides' (offering a certain clarity in analysis, if sacrificing accuracy), and as such aligned nicely with the American notion of the 'two-party system' and our cultural fondness for military and sports metaphors. (2017, 351).

Many American progressives are also religious, and not all religious Christians are conservative or resistant to the secularization of the public sphere, yet, “when most Americans think of someone who is both religious and political, one image comes to mind—a Republican voter that is against same-sex marriage and abortion” (Sager 2017, 56). This perception is not entirely inaccurate, as from the 1970s through the 2000s, the Republican party appealed to Christian family values as a central part of the party’s national agenda. Democrats often rebuffed conservative arguments based on Christian values by arguing that separation of church and state requires us to approach the public sphere as a purely secular realm. But during this time, as shown by contributors to Braunstein et al’s (2017) volume, *Religion and Progressive Activism*, progressive religious activists continued the work of previous generations of religious leftists to improve their communities, in part through interfaith bridge building.

In the spirit of complicating oversimplified binaries, as scholars of religious activism in the United States move beyond the narrative of a culture war between the religious right and the secular left, care must be taken not to replace it with a new false dichotomy about religious activists at either end of the political spectrum. To clarify, some important commonalities do exist between progressive and conservative activists

of faith. Frank Lambert (2008) points out that in addition to each enjoying moments of influence while the other has been relegated to the sidelines, “each has shaped its present coalition and agenda in response to dissatisfaction with secular politicians’ lack of regard for spiritual sensibilities and moral concerns” (218-219). Further, all activists of faith must present their spiritual message in a way that has broad appeal. (Lambert 2008, 224). But while comparisons between the two groups can be useful, progressive religious activists have their own unique characteristics that must be studied and understood separately. In particular, why is it that the religious right is so much more visible and effective at mobilizing than the religious left?

How Can Progressive Religious Activists Mobilize More Effectively?

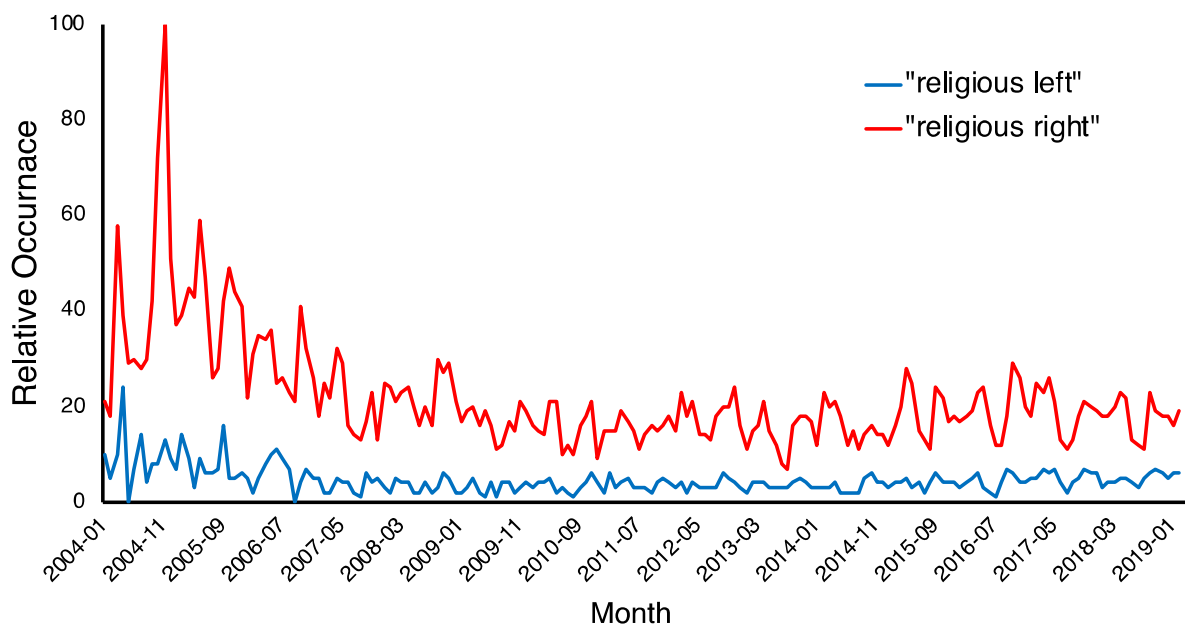
As I have mentioned, historically in the United States, the religious left has not always been less influential than the right. Laura Olson contends that “for most of the twentieth century, the dominant faith-based impetus in American politics was in fact a progressive one” (2017, 97). What caused the pendulum to swing so far in favor of conservative religious activists, and what can progressive activists do to swing it back their direction? Progressive interfaith activists have a practical interest in the answer to this question, which requires further historical context to begin to address. In his book, *Religion in American Politics: A Short History*, Lambert writes that “for most of the twentieth century, spanning the period from the Progressive Era of the early 1900s to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the Religious Left was the dominant religious voice in the public square” (2008, 221). This period of mobilization on the religious left brought together white Protestants and Catholics, African Americans, Jews, and people

who identified as spiritual but who were unaffiliated with a particular organized tradition. Several scholars, including Lambert (2008), Fulton and Wood (2017), and Fuist et al (2017) have noted the strong influence of progressive religious activism during the Civil Rights Movement. Interfaith activists themselves look to leaders of the Civil Rights Movement like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Dorothy Day, and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel as models for progressive religious changemaking. Polletta writes of activists who invoke famous civil rights leaders, “by narrating King's activism as part of an earlier phase of struggle, as past, they represent their own careers as its proper successor” (Polletta 1998a, 436).

During the decade following the Civil Rights Movement, the American political environment began to swing towards the right, and progressive religious activism lost some of its influence. At the same time that the country was becoming more religiously diverse, secularism was on the rise: with record numbers of Americans disavowing religion, the moral authority of the faithful was on the decline (Braunstein 2017, 16). Lambert writes, “since the 1970s, the Religious Left has been marginalized by the rise of the Moral Majority and other conservative Christians on the right, and by ‘the rise of a secular, liberal, urban elite’ on the left ‘that was not particularly comfortable with religion’” (2008, 221). By the early 2000s, the culture war narrative described above had been solidified in the American imagination. But then, religious activism on the left started gaining attention. To illustrate, Rebecca Sager points out that “between 2000 and 2004 the New York Times only mentions the ‘religious left’ eight times. Between 2004 and 2008 this jumps to 78 times” (2017, 61). Still, Figure 1 shows that while the term “religious left” showed some spikes in usage during the early 2000s, overall use

has remained relatively stable at a level substantially below use of the term “religious right.”

Figure 1: Number of Times the Terms “Religious Left” and “Religious Right” Appeared in Publications, 2004-2019²⁰



A 2006 report from the Pew Research Center also illustrates that in the early 2000s, interest in the religious left was higher than it had been in previous decades, but still lower than interest in the religious right. About seven percent of the public reported identifying with the “religious left” political movement, compared with about 11 percent who identified with the religious right. Still, a much larger number, 32 percent, reported identifying as “liberal or progressive Christians” (Pew Research Center 2006, 2). In the same report, 69 percent of Americans said that liberals had gone too far in separating

²⁰ I created this figure using data retrieved from trends.google.com.

church and state. 26 percent said that the Democratic party was friendly to religion, compared to 47 percent who said that the Republican party was friendly to religion (1). Subsequent Pew reports show that attitudes about the friendliness of each party to religion have remained steady over time, with a slight increase in the perception of Democrats' friendliness and a slight decrease in the perception of Republicans' friendliness since 2006 (Pew Research Center 2016, 35). To summarize, while interest in religious activism on the left is increasing relative to 1970s-1990s levels, it remains far lower than on the right, and most Americans consistently perceive the Republican party to be more welcoming of religious values than the Democratic party.

What accounts for these differences, if not a culture war? At the current political moment, the most visible difference between progressive and conservative religious activists is efficacy. As a result, much ink has been spilled to suss out the cause of the inefficacy of the religious left. Fulton and Wood (2017) offer three factors that they think have contributed most to the reduced efficacy of progressive religious activism. The first is that overall American politics has shifted right since the Reagan administration. The second is that religious conservatives have mobilized so effectively that religious voices supporting alternative policies have been crowded out. The third is that secular voices increasingly dominate the discourse on progressive policy making (30). Sager agrees that the secular-leaning nature of the progressive movement likely contributes to the low degree of the religious left's engagement in politics. She points out that when the numbers of progressives in the pews are shrinking, it's difficult to mobilize effectively. Delehanty attributes the difference in mobilization on the religious right and left to the fact that the right targets electoral politics, while the left has "established a strong

tradition of organizing around local issues and building power to sway the decisions of officials already in office,” (2018, 252).

Often scholars endeavoring to explain the religious right's influence focus mainly on the second factor, reasons for its successful mobilization, especially compared with the religious left. Fuist et al. hypothesize that “when compared to conservatives, progressive religious activists are less committed to specific organizations and are less mobilized behind a coherent public agenda” (2017, 16). Those religious activists who do join or form progressive organizations tend to be committed to values like inclusion and equality, and importantly, they derive political legitimacy by being so committed (Braunstein et al. 2017, 28). But, Braunstein points out in her contribution to the volume she helped edit,

making it possible for everyone to hear one another — not to mention listen to one another, and then eventually speak with one voice — [is] a central challenge for [progressive religious groups] marked by such a high level of internal diversity. Collective action among such diverse constituencies requires compromises. (Braunstein 2017, 67)

Many other scholars of religious activism in the United States concur that cohesiveness is the most influential factor in explaining the differences in mobilization on the religious right and left (Delehanty 2018, Fuist et al 2017, Lichterman and Williams 2017, Olson 2017, Williams 2017, Yukich 2017). Olson points out that the religious right is more homogenous and focuses on a narrow agenda, while “the religious Left instead has tended to pursue a broad, sometime inchoate agenda. Moreover, the religious left is a diverse, loosely knit web of religious people who do not just tolerate, but celebrate, differences in opinion” (Olson 2017, 98). As a result, it is difficult to mobilize effectively on any one issue, because resources must be spread

thinly to address the concerns of all coalition members. Olson argues that even beyond religion-oriented organizing, as a result of focusing mostly on counter-mobilization rather than mobilization after the last few decades, activists on the left have a clearer idea of what they stand against than what they stand for. To illustrate a similar point, Lichterman and Williams note that during their fieldwork, Lichterman once asked at a meeting of churchgoing activists why the group rarely spoke in religious terms about the public issues that concerned them. One activist responded, “That’s what fundamentalists do” (2017, 123).

Yukich points out one more potential snafu in mobilizing the religious left: Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and members of other religious minority groups have arrived in substantial numbers only since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, and thus “often do not have the cultural and social capital they need to form genuine partnerships with followers” of Christianity and Judaism (2017, 229). Additionally, these faiths tend to be less congregational, meaning that the strategies Christians and Jews have used to organize lay members may not work for followers of other faiths. Further, the Muslim congregations that do exist are often internally diverse in terms of national origin, culture, and other axes of identity. This makes it difficult to build consensus around particular social and political issues (Yukich 2017, 237- 8).

Delehanty (2018) likewise argues that the unity of the religious right derives from a shared white identity, while progressive religious activists make a point of embracing diversity and pluralism. Not already having a shared collective identity means needing to forge one in order to create a synthesized movement of multiple religious (and other) traditions. Delehanty’s main argument, and one on which I build in this dissertation, is

that one successful strategy activists have used to forge common identities is emotional management.²¹ He writes,

the complexity of the emotion work taking place in progressive religious activism matters because scholars and activists alike are looking to this field as the potential source of a compelling story of peoplehood that can stir progressives' emotions in similar fashion to how Trump's decline narrative captivated conservatives (Delehanty 2018, 268)

Like Delehanty as well as Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp (2002), James M. Jasper (1998) has observed that emotions play a central role in the construction and maintenance of solidarity, a key component in effective movement building. There seems to be a feedback loop between emotion and identity, and while various scholars have studied one side of the loop or the other, few have studied the system as a whole. Emotions are complex and must be understood in a holistically situated context. Movement actors may feel both negative and positive emotions simultaneously in their work. Jasper argues that indeed, this is necessary: "activists must temper the pleasures of accomplishing an impact with a continued sense of fear, anger, and threat that demands continued action...The emotions that maintain energy and confidence will be undermined by too great a sense of accomplishment" (2011:291).

Praying for Progress

How do progressive activists understand the role of religion in their civic engagement? There is very little extant research on this topic. As recently as 2005, very little research had been done on "how ordinary Americans are responding to religious diversity. And, for that matter, we know little more about how religious leaders are

²¹ See Chapter 5 for more discussion of the importance of shared identity construction in social movements.

dealing with diversity” (Wuthnow 2005, 4). Wuthnow’s book, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, is the earliest comprehensive work I could find that provides an overview of survey responses from Americans of a variety of faith backgrounds to American religious diversity up to and including recent interfaith organizing. Still, Wuthnow’s congregation-oriented approach covers only a part of the picture. I attempt to fill in what’s missing by turning subsequently to a variety of contributions to Braunstein et al.’s volume, published more recently, in 2017.

I attribute the dearth of information about the interfaith movement in Wuthnow’s volume not to any deficiency in his research, but to the fact that in 2005 the movement was just starting to gain notoriety, and there was far less interfaith organizing occurring outside of congregations than there is today. Because interfaith work from the 1893 Parliament until only the last decade or two fell mostly under the purview of clergy, Wuthnow’s approach was not only appropriate but necessary for constructing a baseline understanding of the state of interfaith efforts at the national level. The researcher surveyed religious leaders nationwide, asking about what kinds of interfaith-related activities their congregations were involved with. He found that most interfaith activities are quite superficial:

Usually, interfaith activities happen once or twice a year, are voluntary, and involve bringing one or two representatives of another religion to the church, rather than requiring members to travel to another location, or else they are performed by the pastor in a way that does not involve the congregation at all. (Wuthnow 2005, 243)

This kind of interfaith involvement has little capacity for impacting faith communities in any meaningful way.

Further, Wuthnow found that the vast majority of congregational interfaith activities are what he calls a “ceremonial form:”

Congregations’ interaction with organizations representing other religions are typically abbreviated, well-defined, ceremonial events that do not occur very often...Ceremonies are by no means devoid of content; yet it is noteworthy that many of these events focus more on religious practices or customs than on beliefs and teachings. (248-9)

For example, many clergy reported offering an annual service of tolerance to which community members from outside the congregation were invited. Some Christian congregations invite Jewish or Muslim community members to visit, sometimes as speakers, sometimes just to share a meal. On page 100 of her 2017 book, Braunstein provides a more detailed illustration of such ceremonial interfaith activities from her fieldwork at member congregations and meetings of an interfaith coalition. Meetings were typically opened with what Braunstein calls “prefigurative prayer,” a common practice across interfaith meetings she observed. At one such meeting, Father O’Donnell, the priest of one member parish, began with a call for people to pray “to the God of your understanding.” Another priest directed participants more explicitly to use their own faith languages to pray together: “If you are Jewish, stand for Adonai. If you are Muslim, stand for Allah. If you are Christian like me, stand for Jesus.” At larger events, clergy representing multiple faiths would each be asked to offer prayers.

Why include prayers, which may potentially remind interfaith participants of their differences rather than their commonalities? “This kind of prayer referenced the group’s shared values and goals, as well as how the group’s work together modeled the kind of society they sought to bring about through their actions” (ibid). At a different event than the one mentioned above, Father O’Donnell paraphrased psalm 133, saying, “it is good

and it is pleasant when people come together in unity.” This psalm is and it is set to a repetitive tune that is familiar to many Jews as “Hinei Ma Tov,” and at some interfaith gatherings Jewish participants taught it to non-Jewish ones and invited them to sing along. Often the prayers that are selected for prefigurative prayer serve as reminders that each faith includes injunctions to be good neighbors. These prayers build a connection from disparate faiths to the shared value of working together through differences. Clergy also draw on secular sources such as recent news articles or poetry when leading prefigurative prayers. These contributions remind participants that they are co-members of a shared secular community as well, be it as Americans or as members of their particular region or town. One cohort at One Hamsa decided together that they would close each meeting with a poem, and the most frequently represented author was Rumi, whose style of writing about spirituality has proven to be appealing across faiths.²²

Of all the settings in which members of the One Hamsa community gather, prayer is invoked most often during the Annual Community Iftar, an event where people of all faiths are invited to break the fast together during Ramadan. This event also serves as a graduation celebration for the cohort that has just completed the program. The iftar is usually held at a large synagogue, and both kosher and halal options are available. Before the meal, the evening begins with a program inside the sanctuary, during which One Hamsa leaders speak and that year’s graduates are honored. The

²² One Rumi poem in particular was shared on multiple occasions by different participants: “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I’ll meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass the world is too full to talk about.”

2016 iftar began with a moment of silence because that day's headlines had included a car bombing in Istanbul that had taken 11 lives. The speaker said,

We want to start the program this evening by first acknowledging and stopping for a moment of silence, of prayer, of reflection to recognize the tragic loss of life that's taking place around the world...[We] pray that we can help be the next changemakers that create a more peaceful coexistent tomorrow.

One of the speakers later that evening was a rabbi who framed her audience as sharing a common identity as people of faith without specifically mentioning faith at all. She said, "In times of tragedy and despair in the world, it's so important to remember that our world, every part of it is filled with good and loving and compassionate and righteous people who are the majority. This is part of what One Hamsa does for our community." The word "righteous" is a cue to other pluralists that here she is talking about people of all faiths and non-faith who embrace shared pluralistic values.

During the part of the iftar that takes place in the sanctuary, there is often a section in the program for an explicit prayer that sets the interfaith tone. Usually, one Muslim leader and one Jewish leader are each invited to offer a prayer from their own faiths. For example, one Jewish leader read, "From the Hebrew Book of Psalms. Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness, I fear no harm, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You set before me a table in the face of my enemy. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over." Then, a Muslim leader read, "From the Quran, Surrah 41, verse 34. Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel evil with what is better. Then will he between whom and thee was hatred, become as it were thy friend an intimate." Together, they chanted the recitations in Hebrew and Arabic, the disparate voices and melodies intermingling. When I heard this kind of auditory

embodiment of the project of Jewish-Muslim interfaith, I felt a sense of peace and unity that stuck with me through whatever I did next.

While there is no officially organized Passover event at One Hamsa, that holiday is another time when members of the One Hamsa community gather over food to share their religious traditions. It was common every year for some of the Jewish fellows to invite Muslim members of their cohort to their homes for Passover seders. For many Jews, including some of these fellows, part of the importance of Passover is not only reciting the story of the Hebrews' exodus out of Egypt amongst ourselves, but sharing it with those who are unfamiliar with the story. At the interfaith seders I attended, Muslim attendees were often full of questions about the reasons behind each part of the ritual meal. Many such questions generated engaging discussions, because as the saying goes, among two Jews there are three opinions on any given topic, and explanations of traditions are no different.

For example, the hosts of one seder served three different charoset²³ dishes originating from different Jewish traditions around the world. This generated a discussion amongst the Jews about different regional variations in charoset recipes, which led one of the Muslims present to ask about the meaning behind the charoset and whether or not that varies regionally as well. When a Jewish participant explained that the textual reason for eating charoset is to remind us of the mortar that enslaved Hebrews were forced to labor at making, the Muslim participant asked why it's sweet if

²³ A traditional food eaten as part of the Passover ritual meal. It is often made with fruit, nuts, wine, and spices. The recipes vary widely based on local taste and tradition. Most commonly, only one kind is served at a seder, using whichever recipe the host's community usually uses.

it's supposed to remind us of enslavement. This led to a conversation during which the Jews present offered different explanations and interpretations for this conundrum. Such discussions spurred by sacred practice and curiosity gave Jews an opportunity to delve more deeply into their traditions and to reflect on them in a way that they wouldn't have among only other Jews. Like many Muslim participants' reported experience of the Community Iftar, many Jews told me that through sharing sacred rituals with someone who can see the traditions through new eyes, they came to understand their faith better themselves. When fellows told me that an outcome of their experience in the fellowship was a better relationship with their faith, they often referenced this sort of exchange.

One Hamsa events that are infused with the sacred, like the annual community iftars, serve several purposes. They bring the community together, and are also an opportunity to grow the community. The iftars are One Hamsa's biggest annual event, and they have grown substantially each year, with over 400 people in attendance in 2017. This makes the iftar additionally one of One Hamsa's greatest fundraising opportunities, as well as an opportunity to recruit future fellows. These are important components of the work One Hamsa does, but they are not enough on their own without opportunities for more sustained involvement.

I agree with Wuthnow that while ceremonial approaches to religious diversity like interfaith seders and iftars have great potential for building connections across faith backgrounds, without other interfaith components the result is often the exotification of the religious other. Like superficial celebrations of other aspects of diversity, ceremonial occasions do not provide enough opportunity to share deeply about how life experiences and access to privilege differ across religious, racial, gender, and other

identities. Potential areas of conflict remain unaddressed. Instead, “gaining temporary exposure to an exotic religion is like taking a vacation to a strange part of the world: one learns just enough to temporarily escape boredom and then desires to return home” (Wuthnow 2005, 255). At the One Hamsa iftar, leaders have introduced a new component of the event in recent years that helps to reduce exotification and encourage strangers who have just met to broach challenging topics. But One Hamsa leaders recognize that however well designed, these one-off activities are not enough to promote relationships between members of different communities, let alone ones that are in conflict. What is really necessary in order to build interfaith coalitions is extended periods of time over which members of different faiths can engage in “soul-searching discussions about the similarities and differences among their respective traditions” (253). Yet, only 43 percent of the nation’s congregations report engaging in even the superficial sort of interfaith encounter afforded by ceremonial events (233- 4). To put this into perspective, Wuthnow points out that this rate is similar to the prevalence of other social service activities offered by American congregations.

It is the content rather than the prevalence of interfaith service activities that is falling far short of its potential. No comprehensive survey has been conducted to measure the content of congregational interfaith programs. In 2001 Carl S. Dudley and David A. Roozen conducted a national survey of congregations with a wide scope. It included only one question about interfaith social outreach, and one about interfaith worship. Only eight percent of congregations reported that they engage in social outreach with religious groups outside of their own faith²⁴ (50). Interestingly, nearly the

²⁴ This number excludes ecumenical efforts, which are much more common.

same proportion, seven percent, also report worshipping together with members of other faiths. These numbers show a stark difference from Wuthnow's, indicating that many of the congregations in Wuthnow's report who responded that they engage in interfaith activities were referring to something that did not involve outreach to another community. In any case, neither Wuthnow's nor Dudley and Roozen's findings specifically addresses the form or content of the interfaith outreach. These findings are also limited by a fact that I mentioned earlier: while Christianity and Judaism are congregation-based faiths, many other faiths in the United States are not. This makes it difficult for congregations to know who to reach out to for interfaith activities, and also for researchers to gather national data on the kinds of interfaith efforts that take place beyond the bounds of the congregation. These problems with large-scale research on interfaith efforts are all the more reason that the field of interfaith studies needs more ethnographers.

I turn now to an ethnographic example of a One Hamsa project that was effective at using prayer to build connections between members of diverse faith backgrounds, both interfaith and intrafaith. The Shoulder to Shoulder project carried out by one of the One Hamsa cohorts I observed illustrates the additional work that needs to be done to effectively transform a one-off ceremonial event into a direct action with a long term impact. Each cohort is charged with carrying out a project that bridges Muslim and Jewish communities. The project assignment is deliberately very open-ended, and several fellowship meeting sessions are dedicated to brainstorming and planning. Most cohorts break into groups of around three to five fellows who carry out several projects.

But this cohort was strikingly unified, with only two fellows deciding to work on a different project instead of Shoulder to Shoulder.

The seeds of the project were planted at the cohort's fall retreat, during which the Jewish half of the cohort teaches the Muslim half about Friday evening²⁵ prayers, and the Muslims teach the Jews about Isha²⁶ prayers.²⁷ The half of the cohort leading each presentation then engages in their prayer practice, and in most cohorts, Muslims are invited to join in the Jewish prayers and vice versa. This experience was particularly moving for the fellows who eventually brought Shoulder to Shoulder to fruition. During the debriefing discussion following all of the presentations and prayers, one Jewish fellow reported that she and her Muslim debrief partner imagined together "a new spiritual center where Jews and Muslims come and pray side by side because it's better for everybody." The Muslim fellow in this partnership added, "You guys make me want to get closer to God, make me want to practice my religion, but practice it *with you*. Side by side. With peace. And I never thought that I could have this experience."

At regular One Hamsa meetings, time is set aside for Muslims to pray, because the long meetings coincide with the Maghrib²⁸ prayer. At one meeting after the fall retreat, the cohort decided to use this prayer break to recite their respective prayers together simultaneously. Instead of going downstairs to the mosque's designated prayer

²⁵ This service celebrates the beginning of Shabbat.

²⁶ The fifth prayer of the day in Islam, recited each night, often at bedtime.

²⁷ Occasionally fellows mention that these two prayers do not seem to be equivalent because one is daily and one is weekly, and they serve different functions for members of each faith. However, this choice makes the activity as accessible as possible, because they are some of the prayers that members of each faith are most likely to participate in regularly. No two sets of prayers are perfectly analogous in Islam and Judaism because of the two faith's different orientations toward prayer. One of Islam's pillars is reciting five daily prayers, and while Judaism features prayers that are to be recited daily, much more emphasis is placed on observing Shabbat. Among One Hamsa participants, less observant Muslims are more likely to drop the prayers recited at dawn or during the workday, while less observant Jews are more likely to drop weekday prayers.

²⁸The fourth prayer of the day in Islam, recited just after sunset.

space, the Muslim fellows laid out a sheet that functioned as a prayer rug, so that men and women (still separated but only by a few feet), Muslims and Jews could all pray together without disturbing non-One Hamsa affiliated worshippers. I joined them, borrowing one fellow's LGBT siddur, and reflected that this was one of the most inclusive prayer experiences I had ever had. I participated in such shared prayer experiences at One Hamsa whenever I was invited to. When I did, I felt that it was much easier to find a sacred headspace than it usually is when I pray. For me, it was the invitation that made the difference between shared prayer and the other settings in which I pray, which are usually with other Jews or solitary. The invitation to pray together infuses the experience with the intentionality of creating a welcoming space for sharing our relationships with God.

The Jewish fellow who had talked about a spiritual center for shared prayer at the fall retreat elaborated on what made her experience of praying side by side so special.

Her friend, a Muslim fellow,

came up and aligned herself with me, shoulder to shoulder. She was speaking to me in her prayer language with full trust that I would understand. And something happened to my prayer. It became more intentional. Her prayer was her prayer, only bigger, and my prayer was my prayer, only bigger. That's a gift from One Hamsa. The closer we get to one another the more space we have.

This story resonated deeply with many members of the cohort. I have similarly found praying together with people whose faith backgrounds are very different from mine to be a great comfort. In interfaith settings, my prayers take on a different sacred quality. The moment of shared prayer that stands out to me the most when I look back on my time at One Hamsa happened during one of the retreats with this particular cohort. My grandfather had passed away two weeks before the retreat, and I was saying the

mourner's kaddish for him daily. My thoughts were with him and it was difficult for me to concentrate on retreat activities. On Saturday, instead of saying the kaddish alone to myself as I usually did, I asked the fellows if they would be willing to join me, and several gladly volunteered. They eagerly helped find a minyan, the minimum number of Jewish adults needed for certain prayers. Even though praying with a minyan isn't an important part of my own spiritual practice, it made me feel cared for. Afterward, I was particularly touched when a Muslim fellow said to me, "may your prayers for him be heard." In the moment, I felt the support of my One Hamsa friends strengthen my prayer and help me connect with my grief more deeply than I was able to alone. Afterwards, I found it a little easier to focus, knowing that this community was here for me in my moments of weakness and suffering.

Later in the course of the fellowship, when it was time to start planning projects, the cohort chose to pool their resources in order to have the best chance at their project reaching as wide an audience as possible. During a brainstorming phone call, the plan for carrying out the project emerged cooperatively. Shoulder to Shoulder would be a one day event that would be recorded on video, which would be made into a resource that could be shared widely via social media. The fellows would do the five daily Muslim prayers, with Jewish fellows praying by their side, at five different public locations. One fellow pointed out that to her, the most important part of the project was the public aspect, and she argued that their strategy should take into account what would make it easiest to get media coverage. Since it would be difficult to have media representatives follow the cohort throughout the day, they decided that the fourth location would be City

Hall. Not only would they invite the media, but also the general public, for a more inclusive and participatory shared prayer.

On the day of the event, the project went ahead as planned. One fellow reflected on arriving at the beach in the early morning twilight after not having gotten much sleep. “Those initial hugs of welcoming gave us this energy that we didn’t have ourselves, it was very contagious. And that energy resonated with me and lasted with me throughout the day...and I forgot about my tiredness.” Throughout the long day, fellows relied on one another to bolster their energy. While not many onlookers from the public were there to witness the first prayer of the day, some gathered during subsequent prayers to watch and ask questions after the fellows were finished.

In the afternoon, the cohort had arrived at City Hall and begun to prepare for the public to arrive, when one of the fellows began to receive a barrage of texts from friends and family in his hometown of Garland, Texas. During an anti-Islamic rally hosted by Pamela Geller that featured a “Draw Muhammad” contest, two shooters opened fire. This fellow had already agreed to lead the Maghrib prayer, and with support from the other fellows, he followed through on his responsibility despite the circumstances. In a later interview, the fellow from Garland told reporter Tess Cutler that although it was difficult to stay focused, he felt that in that moment the Shoulder to Shoulder project was more important than ever. “I truly understood the importance of this moment and to show our freedom of speech, per se, and show that Muslims and Jews can get along for one, and kind of curb Islamophobia. And it was crazy that this was happening concurrently, all around the same time.” At his cohort’s last formal meeting, this fellow

shared that he felt a responsibility to bring what he had learned and experienced at One Hamsa back to Texas.

One fellow reflected on how she processed the moment at City Hall when the fellows heard the news from Garland. She described it as “one of those mind-body-soul-spirit moments” that are rare for her but that she experienced occurred several times during the fellowship.

All of a sudden my heart just dropped. Here we were trying to do something, to make some kind of change or spark love in people’s hearts and there was just so much hatred happening at that moment, and I just, at that moment I didn’t know, how am I going to complete this day? How am I going to keep this energy up? But this little bird came into our circle, and he hopped around, and I couldn’t help myself but smile. And he hopped around for like two minutes, really looking at every direction of the circle, and I just thought to myself, “This can’t be a coincidence. This is really God’s blessing.” And to me it was just what I needed to feel to really give me that energy and I left that circle feeling capable. And like I have a responsibility to carry this out and to really spread the message.

To this fellow, the bird became a prophetic messenger. After sharing this story, one fellow summarized, “Your story was about finding energy and hope in our connections to each other and to God.” Then two fellows remarked that that summed up the whole experience of One Hamsa and Shoulder to Shoulder for them.

In the weeks after the Shoulder to Shoulder event, the fellows edited and distributed their video, and a number of media outlets, including ones based in Egypt, Israel, and Pakistan, published stories about it. At subsequent One Hamsa fundraising events for years afterward, Shoulder to Shoulder has been touted as going viral and being a success that illustrates the best of what One Hamsa has to offer the local Muslim and Jewish communities. At the final session, many fellows in this cohort chose their project as the topic for their story about their most transformative moment at One

Hamsa. One Muslim fellow shared about how, when her young son had asked why she was praying with Jews, she had told him “I believe in tolerance, in pluralism and coexistence.” Another fellow told the following story about her experience of the Shoulder to Shoulder project.

The first time we prayed side by side, I was standing there with my siddur, with my prayer book, and I was hyper observant of my own prayers. I was kind of watching myself pray and watching myself say all these words and just kind of vaguely aware that there was some other stuff going on next to me, and then something happens. And the people to my left did this [she acts out the way Muslims bow during prayer]. And just at the same moment, I did this [she bows the way Jews bow during prayer]. And each of us was bowing. And yet we were bowing differently. We were bowing in our particular ways. And there was this sameness and this particularity that were happening at the same time. And as suddenly as that moment came, as suddenly as this moment came with the straight legs and the folding over at the hips, and as suddenly as I was bending my knees, that moment passed. And we were in different positions again. I believe that prayer is full of these moments. Full of these moments of connection. And they're opportunities for connection and we don't necessarily take those opportunities all the time and sometimes they just unfold before us. And that's, I mean that's essentially what One Hamsa is about. It's about connection. And that's the gift that we have shared with one another, we have in some way or another if not on an individual level then on a kind of group level we have connected. But that's not all that One Hamsa is about, and that's not all that happened in that moment in which we bowed together and yet distinctly. What it's about is the power within connection. It's not, One Hamsa is not connection for its own sake. It's not connection to get around a table and talk about how we feel although that's also really important. We have to work those pieces out. One Hamsa is about realizing that in being connected with one another, that we have a power to envision the world we want to live in together and then make that vision a reality. And we did that. We took bowing next to each other and we turned it into a possibility of connection not just for us but for, and I'm not exaggerating, millions of people seeing Upworthy and Egyptian Streets, and news, I'm not gonna get all the names of these [media outlets that covered Shoulder to Shoulder], Jerusalem Post and Huffington post and all these different sites in all these different countries across the world. And now that possibility, that connection that we had, is a seed in someone else's mind. Is a seed in possibly millions of other minds across the world. And that's what One Hamsa is about. It's about the power of connection.

Shoulder to Shoulder was at its heart a ceremonial event. But the cohort ensured that the event would have an impact that reaches far beyond the limits of who was physically present for one short event.

The cohort who carried out Shoulder to Shoulder as their project were not the only ones who experienced a deeper connection as a result of praying with the Other. Several members of other cohorts looked back on the prayer sharing during the first retreat as one of their most transformative moments of the fellowship. One Muslim fellow recalled the Havdalah service the Jewish fellows invited the Muslim fellows to join: “The bread and the singing and the dancing. It was very touching, and the image stays with me. It was a great feeling and everyone’s face was beaming as we enjoyed the evening. Judaism became a lived experience for me.” This fellow described his book knowledge of Judaism as being qualitatively different than the knowledge of Judaism he acquired by participating in Jewish traditions and rituals. This is one way in which I noticed One Hamsa participants reflecting on the difference between theory and practice.

Another Muslim fellow recalled the same evening:

The candle light was the only light in the room, and we were all praying and chanting,²⁹ and I could also join in even though all the other prayers, I didn’t know...My best friend, we were so close, shoulder to shoulder, hugging and chanting, winding down, remembering God, appreciating each other. It was such a nice bonding experience.

This fellow went on to explain that one of the reasons it so moved her was that unlike Muslim prayer, during which worshippers stand touching but facing forward, during this

²⁹ She is referring to singing a nigun, which in Judaism is a repetitive melody usually sung on nonsense syllables. The Jewish fellows chose to begin their Havdalah service with a nigun because they knew it would be an accessible way for the Muslim fellows to participate.

service she stood both touching and facing fellow worshippers. Seeing the candlelight reflecting off her friends' smiling faces lent an element of the sacred to her prayer that this fellow had not experienced before. Jewish fellows also described shared prayer as the moment that stuck with them the most at the end of their fellowship. One woman shared:

I often describe religion as experiential education for adults. You stand, you sit, you sing, you read, and interact. So it's no surprise to me that a moment of One Hamsa that stands out is when I was able to participate in Muslim prayer beside my Muslim fellows, when I was able to wear a hijab and felt how embracing it was to have Muslims join us in circle for Shabbat. Although we were not in traditional prayer spaces, in the classroom of a university under fluorescent lights, we created a space where our communities could create the sacred experience. I was glad I stood beside my new friends, virtual strangers, in what they saw as a moment of peace. Of meditation, of connection, and Farah³⁰ whispering prayers in my ear.

While sharing prayers with the Other was a more common theme across cohorts, sharing intrafaith prayers with co-religionists from different traditions was also transformative for some participants. In particular, several fellows from different cohorts reflected on the experience of developing the prayer presentation for the first retreat as the memory that has stuck with them the most. One fellow was struck by "the realization that even within Muslims there is so much diversity of opinions about prayers." He described the disagreements that arose when the Muslim fellows were trying to decide how they wanted to present their prayers to the Jewish fellows. "Even though I can feel the conflict that we have within our team members, I recognized that there is something very personal to everyone and that's why we were so opinionated about it." Other fellows echoed similar perspectives. Several told me in interviews that the process of deciding how to present not only how they pray, but what praying means or doesn't

³⁰ A Muslim fellow who stood beside the narrator during their prayer

mean to them personally, helped them both recognize the diversity within their own faith and better understand their relationship with their faith.

Two Jewish fellows had a transformative shared prayer experience outside of the structured space of meetings. Shira, who is Modern Orthodox, and Gabriel, who is much less observant and more of a cultural Jew, took on the responsibility of shooting, editing, and producing the video for the Shoulder to Shoulder project. At the end of the fellowship, Shira related that before their first meeting to work on the project, she had been anxious about figuring out a shared vision of what the video should be like. “Except we didn’t figure out our vision. We had one vision.” She was relieved to find that they were already on the same page.

But when the footage came back, they were disappointed that the quality of the recording was nothing like what they had envisioned.

We were both having the same mental breakdown about it...Part of my mental breakdown was that, maybe God didn’t want us to pray together. How could it be that we spent all day praying, praying our hearts out, and the footage came back *terribly*? I was like God is punishing us and crying on the floor and so was Gabriel after midnight, and he just said I’m going to tell you a little story about Job. And we had an impromptu text study, which, the only thing that ever consoles me when I get to that dark mental space is text study. So not only was he a good filmmaking partner, but religiously we were bound to each other. Even though we arguably came from two very different Jewish perspectives.

A while after that, Shira went on, during a meeting with Gabriel after a day that had been particularly long and difficult for both of them, Gabriel said something unexpected. “I want you to talk about the prayer to restore your soul in the morning. Can you teach it to me?” Shira obliged. She concluded her story,

I realized that in this whole process, that’s what we’re doing. We’re restoring each other’s souls, we’re building friendship, that bond that can exist on so many

levels. On levels I didn't expect and levels I didn't know I needed. That really touched me to the very core of how I exist.

Chapter 3: Members of American Religious Minorities Building Relationships through Storytelling

One element that is commonly found in the toolkit of the activist of faith is storytelling. Research has “shown that religion can provide narratives, identities, and ideas that can be useful in making sense of the political world” (Fuist 329). Religion already serves a role as a way of knowing about and making sense of the world through the stories we tell about ourselves and others. This makes it a particularly fruitful avenue for contributing effective activism strategies. Some of the strength of the narratives that people of faith use in their activism comes from the relative moral authority of the faith in question. What role does moral authority play in the stories activists of faith tell, and how do members of minority faiths use storytelling in their activism?

Abrahamic faiths in particular rely on storytelling as a way of making sense of the world, in that they each rely on a central body of scripture and followers are referred to as “peoples of the book.” In his research on religious progressives, Delehanty points out that personal testimony, a common religious practice, is effective in activism not only because it is a storytelling technique derived from faith practice, but also because it centers the emotions of the storyteller. He observed that discussing emotions “provides a means of endowing political critique with moral meaning. Hence, emotions are salient in nearly every personal story told” at his field site (Delehanty 2018, 257). Other researchers focusing on religious activists also found that storytelling was common among their interlocutors (Delehanty 2018, Lichterman and Williams 2017, Braunstein

2017). However, these stories were for the most part not religious but secular in content. Braunstein (2017) interprets this approach as being a strategy through which activists reframe policy debates in moral terms, drawing on their moral authority as religious practitioners to lend authority to their claims (292-293).

Braunstein has observed that although appeals to moral authority are usually associated with causes on the right, both the conservative and progressive religious groups she studied “asserted that religion offers values, lessons, and notions of ‘the good’³¹ that can help solve the country’s most pressing problems” (2017, 180).

Wuthnow also found that people of faith across ideological divides agree that a desirable goal to work towards is a world in which religious people were known for their peacebuilding abilities instead of warmongering. One religious leader told him,

I would love to see a society where religion was not a bad word, where the riches of our religions and spiritual traditions were seen as great gifts for humanity, where we had moved through deepening our religious and spiritual roots into a new stage of being human that reflects Isaiah’s vision of a world at peace, where religion is a force to create a moral and ethical society. (2005, 294)

Few would argue that religions have no claim to moral authority. But in the context of political activism in the United States, do religious activists of all faiths benefit from this ability to claim moral authority? Whose moral authority is regarded highly and whose is not? The answers to these questions are consequential for activists of faith, particularly non-Christian ones, who hope to understand the most advantageous role for

³¹ While certainly most (perhaps even all) activists believe that they are doing good, it is not my goal here to pass judgement on the inherent moral goodness of particular activist project. Even with the best of intentions, it is possible and perhaps even common for movement outcomes to benefit some while harming others. This is most clearly evident in cases where activists frame their movements as oppositional, such as Pro-Life and Pro-Choice activists, or LGBT+ activists and activists who argue that laws protecting LGBT+ rights infringe on their religious freedom. Additionally, a movement’s moral authority is not necessarily equivalent to that movement’s moral goodness. Evangelicals enjoy strong moral authority in the United States, but many activists, myself included, consider their stances on issues related to gender and sexuality to be immoral.

faith to play in their activists toolkits. In her contribution to the tome by Braunstein et al. (2017), Grace Yukich highlights the fact that much of the research on faith and politics focuses on Christians and overlooks religious minorities, particularly those that are relative newcomers to the US. She argues convincingly that the public moral authority enjoyed by many Christian organizations is not shared by groups like Buddhists and Hindus. Further, “prejudice against Muslims might actually make their support of a cause seem less, rather than more legitimate in the public eye” (232). I agree with Yukich that more research on the religious left is needed that de-emphasizes Christianity, because different religious groups navigate activism with different levels of various resources, including moral authority. Which conclusions from this literature are generalizable to all faith groups, and which are limited to Christian activists, or even more specifically, Mainline Protestants (on whom most of the literature focuses)?

Because some religious groups have more tenuous claims to moral authority in US politics than others, these groups face greater challenges to political engagement and coalition building. Yukich points out that for these groups,

advocating for a place in the public religious landscape is a motivating factor for their engagement in social change efforts...[Progressive] causes may take a backseat to the need to create more acceptance of and legitimacy for their own religious traditions in a sometimes hostile environment. (2017, 240)

While still not equivalent with Christians, Jews have slowly been able to achieve more than a modicum of moral authority in the US, while Muslims are the religious group that arguably has the lowest level of moral authority in the current political climate. This imbalance, which largely results from differing histories of immigration and discrimination in the United States, can complicate Muslim-Jewish interfaith efforts. On

the one hand, Jews are uniquely situated to help Muslims improve their moral authority and overall visibility in the context of progressive activism. On the other hand, Jewish activists risk becoming paternalistic in this endeavor, and many Muslims are understandably apprehensive of accepting aid from Jews because of both sociopolitical relations in Palestine and Israel and socioeconomic and race relations at home.

Christian-centrism in American Civic and Religious Life

Although Jews in the US enjoy a relatively high degree of moral authority today,³² historically the United States is a culturally Christian nation in which Christian values, particularly Mainline Protestant values, are upheld as the highest moral authority. There is continuing debate among historians and other scholars of religion in the United States about whether the nation was founded on Christian principles (Fea 2016; Hecl 2007; Merino 2010; Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 2018). Whatever the founders intended, many Americans perceive their nation to be a Christian one. In 2005, 55 percent of Wuthnow's survey respondents agreed that "Our democratic form of government is based on Christianity," and nearly four Americans in five agreed that 'The United States was founded on Christian principles' (78 percent) and that 'America has been strong because of its faith in God' (79 percent)." (80). 32 percent strongly agreed that the United States is a Christian society. A more recent survey from Pew Research Center reinforces Wuthnow's results. 32 percent of respondents agreed that "Being a Christian is very important for being truly American." Among respondents who consider religion to

³² See discussions of 2014 and 2017 Pew reports on Americans' warm attitude towards Jews on pages 106-107.

be very important to them personally, more than half (51 percent) agree that being Christian is important to being American (Stokes 2017, 22).

Christianity's centrality to American culture has also influenced the research conducted on American religion and its relationship to the public sphere. Several scholars of progressive religious activism observe that before very recently, most of the research on the topic focused on the involvement of African American churches in the Civil Rights Movement (Morris 1984; Gahr and Young 2017; Fuist et al. 2017). Further, much of the current work focuses on Mainline Protestants. This is understandable, as Christian activist groups are so much more plentiful than minority religious activist groups.³³ However, scholars must work to offset this imbalance by conducting more research on the progressive religious activism of non-Christians. A more robust body of work in this area would enable us to answer questions regarding the extent to which patterns that have been observed among Christian activists are generalizable to non-Christian ones. What different approaches to activism are taken by non-Christian groups? Activists of all stripes stand to benefit from a better understanding of what tactics are most effective for specific populations, and what tactics are useful across the board.

One Hamsa's founders took the Christian-centric state of American civic life into account when conceiving the organization. When asked why not an organization dedicated to dialogue between all three Abrahamic faiths, or an organization for people of all faiths and non-faith, leaders explain that there already are many organizations like that doing great work, but that they often foreground Christian experiences simply by

³³ As referenced earlier, Fulton and Wood (2017) found that only 15% of faith based community organizations in the United States include a congregation that represents a minority faith (2017, 37).

virtue of the fact that Christianity is such a large and powerful majority in the United States. Creating a faith-based organization that excludes Christians provides participants with the opportunity to address the specific conflicts that exist between Muslim and Jewish communities. Further, it ensures that participants can discuss their shared experiences of discrimination as members of American minority faiths without having to be concerned with how such discussions will come across to Christian participants.

Pluralism: The Preferred Approach to Religious Diversity among Interfaith Activists

Based on the findings from his survey as well as historical research, Wuthnow concludes that “American Christians have thought of themselves as the reigning power and the dominant cultural influence” and that “tolerance proceeded without having to carry the burden of genuine interreligious understanding or interaction” (2005, 35). For most of the twentieth century, tolerance was the primary approach to religious diversity. Wendy Brown writes that tolerance “reduces conflict to an inherent friction among identities and make[s] religious, ethnic, and cultural difference itself an inherent site of conflict, one that calls for and is attenuated by the practice of tolerance” (2006, 15).

Tolerance is implicitly unidirectional. As it relates to religion in the United States, tolerance has meant that the overwhelmingly Christian majority tolerates non-Christians, who are implicitly presumed incapable of practicing tolerance. Conversely, the tolerant do not need to be tolerated. According to those who embrace tolerance as their preferred approach to diversity, liberal societies, as bastions of perfect and uniform tolerance, are superior to intolerant societies, which are cast as homogeneously and

obdurately intolerant. Further, in this formulation, liberal societies are the ones that decide what is tolerable and what is not, furthering injustices rooted in imperialism and colonialism.

As Brown would agree, aspirations to religious tolerance fell short of what interfaith activists envisioned. In the last few decades, pluralism has become the primary lens through which interfaith activists understand religious diversity in the United States. These activists contend that tolerance and coexistence are not enough. Ignorance about the religious other must be confronted directly through not only education about American minority faiths, but through forming relationships and partnerships across religious divides. Diana Eck, director of the Pluralism Project at Harvard, defines pluralism as “not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity...Not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference...Not relativism, but the encounter of commitments...based on dialogue” (pluralism.org).

I must offer some clarification here, as pluralism has connotations among interfaith activists beyond Eck’s definition. Religious pluralism as a term has a history in religious studies that is distinct from definitions of pluralism that stem from multiculturalism. It was used alongside calls for tolerance as Catholics and Jews were coming to be included in the “triple melting pot” (Herberg 1954). Religious pluralism referred to a theological position “that holds that no one religious tradition can be said to have unique access to religious truth, and that all religions are potentially equally valid paths to salvation” (McCarthy 2006, 26). It makes sense that in order to make room for Catholics and Jews in a religiously diversifying society, theological allowance would

have to be made for the faiths of neighbors and colleagues to be considered valid. After all, believing for example that your children's teachers' faiths are ethically corrupt causes a cognitive dissonance for which religious pluralism is one solution.³⁴ While the understanding of pluralism deriving from religious studies is mostly a theological position, and thus one that is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to understand that, as Wuthnow puts it, "how people think about pluralism is influenced by their religious convictions. And religious convictions are influenced by their experiences with pluralism" (2005, xii).

Aziza Hasan, a prominent interfaith leader in Southern California, published an article in the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* in which she offered some reflections on the meaning of pluralism in interfaith work. To Hasan, pluralism entails working respectfully alongside the Others who are our neighbors. This kind of cooperation is "crucial to the success of today's and tomorrow's world," and to the success of the United States in particular, which is slowly but surely becoming a majority-minority nation (2015, 5-6).

Still, Hasan, like One Hamsa affiliates, is aware of the critiques and possible pitfalls of pluralism. "Certain academics," she writes, "argue that plurality is more of an

³⁴ Even so, Wuthnow found that among American Christians, 34 percent could be classified as Christian exclusivists, meaning that they consider Christianity to be the one true path to salvation (2005, 190). This classification was determined by responses to the following statements: "Christianity is the best way to understand God" and "All religions are equally good ways of knowing about God" (2005, 131). Exclusivists agree with the first but disagree with the second. Wuthnow terms those who disagree with the first but agree with the second as "spiritual shoppers." They made up 31 percent of respondents. The remaining 23 percent of respondents who are Christian are termed as inclusivists, agreeing with both statements. Additionally, Mark McCormack found that there is a "statistically significant gender difference" in responses to the items, "All religions are equally good ways of knowing about God" and "All religions basically teach the same thing" (2015, 90). In other words, women are less likely to be religious exclusivists, making them more likely to embrace pluralism and engage in interfaith activities, which is consistent with my discussion of the role of gender in interfaith settings in Chapter 1.

ideal that audaciously tosses aside the political, economical, and social realities that are marred by inequality and inequity” (6). To provide an example of one such critique, Paul Lichterman and Rhys Williams point out that in practice, pluralism often maps onto existing power inequalities; most notably, Mainline Protestant customs are still centered among interfaith activists (2017, 124). Braunstein et al. have also argued that “without mechanisms in place to manage [challenges related to diversity], high levels of religious, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity can generate internal power imbalances, distrust, and disagreement within groups, all of which can threaten organizational stability” (2017, 115). The implication here is that pluralism without intersectionality is not pluralism, or at least, not the kind that lives up to the ideals of the interfaith movement.

Hasan goes on to say that if interfaith activists do not attend to these limitations of pluralism, the project can potentially undermine itself. She points out that interfaith activism must be guided by the phrase, “interfaith not done well can do harm,” and adds that this phrase “was born out of the failures of interfaith events and projects that, though well-intentioned, led people to walk away resentful of the experience” (2). My observations suggest that one important reason for the high degree of satisfaction One Hamsa alumni report with the program is the fact that the curriculum includes mechanisms for addressing pluralism’s potential shortcomings. If the racial, class-based, and other power inequalities that are relevant to more than one of the groups’ relationships with one another are overlooked, the project is more likely to do more harm than good; if power differences are accounted for and addressed, the program is more likely to result in satisfaction among its participants.

Pluralists confronting Islamophobia and Antisemitism

As I have mentioned, immigration patterns have contributed a great deal to shaping American attitudes toward religious diversity, because immigration is the primary mechanism through which religions other than Christianity have become widespread in the United States. Based on data from this same survey³⁵ I discuss above regarding American attitudes about Christianity, Wuthnow (2005) found that 86 percent of respondents agreed that “religious diversity has been good for America” (75). About half strongly agreed that “America owes a great deal to the immigrants who came here” (200). On the question of whether “foreigners who come to America should give up their foreign ways and learn to be like other Americans,” 46 percent agreed, with just over half of those strongly agreeing (200). However, while a slim majority of Americans don’t mind immigrants maintaining cultural practices from their countries of origin, they remain unfamiliar with these practices. Thus, even while cultural practices, including religion, become Americanized, they tend to continue being perceived as foreign. Further, many Americans do have outright negative perceptions of unfamiliar religious beliefs and practices.

In the early 2000s, only 18 percent of Wuthnow’s respondents reported being influenced by Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim teachings. More specifically, 17 percent said Judaism has had an important influence on their thinking about religion or spirituality,

³⁵ Wuthnow’s survey addressed negative attitudes toward minority religious groups, but since the survey was conducted and analyzed in the years just following 9/11, it is possible that Wuthnow’s findings about attitudes toward Muslims are more negative than they are today. In order to provide a more complete context for American attitudes toward minority religious groups, I present Wuthnow’s findings on negative attitudes toward religious minorities in conjunction with survey data from Pew surveys conducted between 2014 and 2017.

and only 7 percent said the same of Islam. For comparison, over a third of respondents reported being influenced by science, philosophy, or Native American, New Age, and holistic health practices; over half by music, poetry, literature, or art; and 68 percent were influenced by Christian teachings (202). These findings underscore my point that religious beliefs and practices that are perceived as being foreign are either unknown or unimportant to many Americans. Familiarity with non-Christian teachings was also low. “About half the public claimed to be somewhat familiar with Judaism and about one person in seven claimed to be very familiar with these teachings...Only 5 percent of the public said they were very familiar with the basic teachings of Islam,” and 33 percent had some familiarity with Islam (Wuthnow 2005, 205).

Despite (or perhaps because of) this lack of familiarity, many of Wuthnow’s respondents said that “fanatical” is a word that applies to Muslims (47 percent), compared with 25 percent who would describe Hindus as fanatical and 23 percent who would describe Buddhists as such. Other words that Wuthnow found to be most strongly associated with Islam as compared to other religious minorities included “violent,” “backward,” and “closed-minded.” While 63 percent of respondents thought Buddhists were peace-loving and 53 percent thought Hindus were, only 40 percent would say the same of Muslims (216). 7 percent more respondents would strongly object to a child wanting to marry a Muslim partner (22 percent) than a Hindu partner (15 percent), and six percent more respondents would be bothered by a large mosque being built in their community (41 percent) as compared to a Hindu temple (35 percent) (219).

Even beyond strong negative perceptions, many of those sampled by Wuthnow supported unconstitutional treatment for religious minority groups, particularly Muslims.

38 percent of those sampled supported “making it harder for Muslims to settle in the United States” and 23 percent supported “making it illegal for Muslim groups to meet in the United States” (2005, 219). Surprisingly, it seems that 9/11 may not be the main motivation for this latter number, as comparable numbers of respondents (20 percent) also supported making it illegal for Buddhist and Hindu groups to meet (219). A whopping 60 percent favored “the US government collecting information about Muslim religious groups in the United States” (90). This number seems most likely to have been influenced by 9/11, as the numbers for the same question about Buddhists and Hindus are significantly lower (though still surprisingly high), at 48 percent for the former and 51 percent for the latter.

Pew’s oldest project explicitly measuring American attitudes toward different religious groups was conducted in 2014. The survey asked respondents to rate their feelings toward eight different faith denominations on a “thermometer” scale from 0 to 100, with zero being the coldest or most negative and 100 being the warmest or most positive. Tellingly, the study’s sample included 1,509 Protestants, 629 Catholics, 100 Jews, 703 unaffiliated respondents, and seemingly no respondents from other minority faiths. Meanwhile, the eight faiths respondents were asked to rate were Evangelical Christians, Catholics, Mormons, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Atheists. This reveals some inherent Christian-centrism in the study’s design: the results are heavily weighted toward the Protestant majority, but non-Protestant respondents were not given the opportunity to rate their perception of the majority faith. Jews received the warmest rating at 63, similar to Catholics (62) and Evangelical Christians (61) while Muslims received the coldest rating at 40, similar to atheists (41) (Pew Research Center 2014).

Respondents were also asked whether or not they personally know someone from each faith being rated. Respondents were least likely to know a Hindu or a Buddhist, at 22 and 23 percent respectively. Knowing a Muslim was the next least likely, at 38 percent. 61 percent of respondents reported knowing a Jew. I am particularly interested in these numbers because of the common assertion among interfaith activists that knowing a person of a particular background is a strong predictor of having a warm attitude toward that group, whereas not knowing anyone from that background is associated with more negative perceptions. The fact that these three faiths (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam) were both rated among the coldest and were among the faiths of which respondents were least likely to know a member offers some support for this assertion.

In 2017 Pew conducted a similar survey using the same methodology as the one above except that Mainline Protestant was added as the ninth faith that respondents were asked to rate. Again, respondents felt most warmly towards Jews, at 67, followed closely by Catholics at 66 and Mainline Protestants at 65. These ratings are even higher than in 2014. Attitudes toward Evangelical Christians remained the same, while ratings of non-Jewish minority faiths and atheists increased remarkably but remain much lower than attitudes toward Christians and Jews. The rating for Muslims increased from 40 to 48. The percentages of respondents who reported knowing someone who is Hindu, Buddhist, or Jewish remained unchanged, while the number of those who reported knowing a Muslim increased from 38 to 45 percent since the 2014 survey. (Pew Research Center 2017). In other words, between 2014 and 2017, there was a significant increase in both the number of respondents who know a Muslim and the

temperature rating of Muslims. On the other hand, relatively few people know a Hindu or a Buddhist and that number did not increase from 2014 to 2017, while the ratings for those groups increased about the same amount as the rating for Muslims. This suggests that while knowing someone of a particular faith does seem to increase the warmth of attitudes toward that group, greater cultural pressures are at work here.

At the end of the fellowship when fellows are asked to reflect on their most transformative session or moment, the sessions that focus on personal experiences of discrimination are common choices. One year a facilitator introduced these sessions by telling fellows, "Today's event is what we've built up to... This is one of those events where we're gonna have some pretty strong emotions come up." The fact that fellows often describe these emotional sessions as their most transformative moments of the program demonstrates how many of them embrace the idea of leaning into discomfort. How do One Hamsa community members approach discussing antisemitism and Islamophobia? What kinds of transformations result from members of religious minority groups sharing these painful moments with one another?

The curriculum includes one session for each form of discrimination. Both sessions begin with an invited speaker who is an expert on either antisemitism or Islamophobia giving a talk that is intended to provide fellows with some common historical and sociopolitical context and act as a springboard for further discussion. The fellows get an opportunity to ask the speaker questions. After the speaker leaves, there is a fishbowl discussion, or a discussion in which some people talk in an inner circle while the rest listen quietly from an outer circle. During the session on antisemitism, the Jewish half of the cohort starts in the middle of the fishbowl, and they respond to the

speaker amongst themselves while the Muslim half of the cohort listens. Then, the Muslim fellows are invited to join the circle and ask questions of the Jewish fellows. During the session on Islamophobia, the Muslim half of the cohort starts in the middle of the fishbowl, and then the Jewish fellows are invited to come into the circle and ask questions. The fellows in the center circle are prompted to respond to what was said and what they felt was left out, and how they relate personally to the ideas presented. Often, though not always, fellows take this opportunity to share vulnerable personal narratives of discrimination.

During these sessions and other conversations amongst One Hamsa participants, Islamophobia is sometimes framed as an irrational fear, and sometimes as a systemic problem. In the meeting during which fellows learn about Islamophobia, the invited speaker, Zara, described Islamophobia as “a phenomenon that’s more broad than simply fear, ignorance, or hate or bigotry, it encompasses all of those things.” In her talk, Zara drew a line between those who exhibit Islamophobia out of ignorance and fear, and those who exhibit it out of hatred. She argued that Muslims have a lot to learn from the LGBT+ community’s fight for their rights: the power of coming out and being unapologetically oneself created a cultural shift in attitudes toward LGBT+ folks. In this setting and others, Zara encourages other Muslims in her community to reach out and get to know non-Muslims in order to create a similar shift.

Part of this emphasis on the interpersonal aspect of Islamophobia rather than the structural aspect is strategic. Sometimes focusing too much on structural problems has the unintended consequence of discouraging activists. In order to be effective changemakers, activists must believe that their own actions have the potential to create

the desired change. Indeed, the Islamophobia speaker herself put it thus: “You can’t recruit people to a movement with the biggest, most difficult problem. You recruit them with that balance of hope and urgency, not with a sense that this is so much bigger than us that it will take decades or longer to change, even if that’s the case.” And while Zara chooses to emphasize fellows’ agency, she does also teach them about what she calls the “cottage industry of Islamophobia” that works to influence US attitudes and policies, and points fellows toward resources such as the Center for American Progress’ reports, “Fear, Inc.” (Ali et al. 2011) and “Fear, Inc. 2.0” (Duss et al. 2015). She argues that if we are to end the structural problem of Islamophobia, we must first be able to have conversations across conflict, and that this is the role One Hamsa plays in countering hate.

Regarding interfaith activists’ goal of decreasing Islamophobia in the United States, it may be necessary for more non-Muslims to get to know Muslims, but it is certainly not sufficient. The results of the Pew surveys I discuss above suggest that Islamophobia is more insidiously ingrained in American culture as compared to the xenophobia directed towards other minority faiths like Hinduism and Buddhism. Interfaith activism is a promising avenue for combating both the xenophobia directed at religious minority groups in the United States in general and its specific strain of Islamophobia. It offers the rare venue for people of different faiths to not only get to know one another, but to specifically discuss religious commonalities and differences. Further, studying and understanding the dynamics of such interfaith encounters can help activists better identify strategies for overcoming xenophobia that reach beyond merely getting to know people of different faiths.

As I mentioned, during the parallel One Hamsa session focusing on antisemitism, a different expert speaker is invited to teach fellows a brief history of antisemitism. A major sticking point about the nature of antisemitism that often comes up during this session is the question of the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. When one fellow asked the invited speaker, Joseph, for his opinion about this relationship, he responded that on the one hand, demonizing Jews by conflating them with Israeli policy and denying Jews' right to self determination are clear examples of antisemitism. On the other hand, many define antisemitism to also include applying double standards to Israel or arguing that Israel should not be *exclusively* for Jews, but Joseph was not convinced that these are clear examples of antisemitism. In addition, Joseph said that he is wary of the fetishization of Israel and that it is dangerous for Jews to put all of our eggs in one basket, so to speak. He opined that antisemitism and Israel as our refuge from it is only one aspect of who Jews are.

Several Jewish fellows across cohorts said that because of the complicated dynamic between antisemitism and Anti-Zionism, they are reluctant to discuss Israel even with other Jews for fear of being labeled "self-hating" because of their pro-Palestine opinions. One such fellow said of this internal conflict, "Part of the reason why I joined this program is because I feel there's a need to talk about [Israel]. It has to be in an environment where there is trust, there is humor...I am in a complicated place with my own views." The co-founders designed the program to fill just this need, and during the sessions on antisemitism and Islamophobia, fellows have ample opportunity to share vulnerably with one another and build trust in one another.

Often, One Hamsa leaders and speakers contribute their own personal stories at the beginning of these sessions, which sets the tone for fellows to share vulnerably. In 2017, Zara shared a story from her past with the fellows, which contrasted with her talks I observed in previous years. She described a scene when she was in high school during the unit about Islam. Zara told the fellows how she had been required to “learn” how to pray so that she could teach the rest of her class, and then, on another day, the teacher showed the class the film “Not Without My Daughter.”³⁶ The speaker recounted beginning to sweat in her seat as the movie went on, feeling sick and having to work hard not to leave the classroom. Although she had been raised Muslim, the speaker did not personally connect with Islam until college, and she recalled this scene as having led her to reject Islam even more strongly than she already was at that time in her life. In a different year, the Muslim facilitator shared his memories of 9/11 and the days following it, which included not only having to cope with discrimination against himself at his workplace but also having to tend to his father after he was beaten in an Islamophobic attack. When facilitators begin the session by sharing their own painful experiences with frankness, fellows follow suit.

One Muslim fellow recounted that when a client found out she was Muslim, he gifted her a book about some Muslims who had converted to Christianity. She said, “I didn’t know whether to take it as an insult or a gift of love because in his eyes I was so good and maybe he thought, how could I be a Muslim and be this good?” Another Muslim fellow who is Palestinian American reflected that for her, Islamophobia is difficult

³⁶ This film is based on an autobiographical book by an American woman whose Iranian husband brought her to Iran to meet his family and then refused to let her leave, becoming more and more abusive until she was able to escape back to the United States with her daughter. While it may be true to the author’s experience, Zara felt that sharing it in the context of an introductory lesson on Islam reinforced stereotypes about her and her family.

to suss out from racism or anti-Palestinian sentiment. This reflection prompted an African American Muslim fellow to remark that many Palestinians come to her masjid because they don't feel welcome elsewhere, whereas black American Muslims see parallels in the struggles facing both Palestinians and their own communities. "We never had the luxury of blending into the melting pot," one fellow described her intersecting experience of Islamophobia and racism.

During the Jewish fellows' discussions of their experiences of antisemitism, one fellow illustrated how antisemitism and Anti-Zionism are intertwined for her. Before telling her story, the fellow gave some context by describing the following perspective, which she encounters often in her community: today's threat of terrorism is comparable to the threats that occurred leading up to the Holocaust and Jews must always be on guard because the current level of terrorism may be just a trickle of what's to come. The fellow described her own position as more moderate but said that the following situation gave her pause.

I was responsible for Jewish children [on a tour] in Israel, and they were supposed to walk through a gate in Jerusalem where someone was murdered an hour and a half before they were scheduled to be there. And I made young people vulnerable to an act of terrorism.

Another Jewish fellow told a story about being involved with a show in which middle school girls portrayed women from history. The fellow invited a friend of the family who is also a Holocaust survivor to the show. While the fellow was backstage, the fact that this friend was in the audience came up, and the fellow told the girls that the friend is a Holocaust survivor. One of the girls didn't know what the Holocaust was, so the fellow explained it to her and introduced the girl to the survivor.

I told [my friend] later, I said one good thing happened was that this girl someday is going to go to college and they're going to tell her the Holocaust never happened and she's gonna go, well wait a minute, I once met a lady who really was there. At least we did something, you know, could you believe there's a kid in eighth grade who doesn't know what the Holocaust is?

After hearing this story, one of the Muslim fellows remarked that one thing she had gotten out of the fellowship up to that point was understanding how recent the Holocaust really was and how it still impacts the lives of many Jews.

Occasionally, the fellows in the outer circle would not just ask a question or make an observation, but would share a story of encountering Islamophobia or antisemitism within their own community. For example, toward the end of the session on Islamophobia one year, a Jewish fellow described getting into a fight at Thanksgiving with someone who responded with hostility when he found out that the fellow was in a program with a Palestinian. She ended the story by affirming that it's important to her to learn about the life experiences of Palestinians, and that the Palestinian fellow is an asset to the group. As with stories of personal experiences, the tone set by One Hamsa leaders is part of what makes fellows feel safe sharing their own stories. At one meeting, a Muslim facilitator shared about how even knowing fully this facilitator's involvement with Jewish-Muslim activism, a relative of the facilitator made some antisemitic comments to her. But when she introduced a Jewish One Hamsa leader to the relative, the two of them bonded over their shared ideas about feminism. The facilitator concluded her story, "It was just amazing and it was one of those stories where, yes, if you know a Muslim and you know a Jew things show. So, [have] that courage to speak up even with the people that you love the dearest."

The category of story fellows shared during the antisemitism and Islamophobia sessions that took the most digging to get to was stories of how those prejudices get enacted in the Muslim and Jewish communities. Again, fellows were more likely to share stories like this if a One Hamsa leader modeled first. One year, the Islamophobia speaker shared with the fellows that for her, one of the biggest struggles when it comes to Islamophobia is

how much of the organized Islamophobia, the anti-Muslim bigotry, especially as it's appeared since 9/11 [she sighs] sorry to say it, is initiated by right wing Jews. And so that reality complicates the dance that we do as American Muslims and American Jews standing up for each other. And crossing those lines is where one of those complications is around why we can't stand up for each other. This is one of those things that makes it potentially present a barrier or complication. Or that if, as I've seen happen, in some circles if a Muslim raises this issue as this pocket industry seems to be dominated by this type of voice, then they could easily be accused of antisemitism. Do you see what I mean?

This opened the door to fellows to raise similar concerns later in the meeting, after the speaker had left. One fellow shared that in her Arab immigrant family, antisemitism is

ingrained in language. So it's not, 'Oh, there's a Jewish person, I hate them.' That's not what I grew up around. It's stuff that, sometimes just the Arabic language, like if something bad were to happen, there's like a phrase and it includes like putting down Israel or putting down Jews. And it's not like they're thinking of this as related to Jews or Israel. It's a language thing. And it's so hard for me to hear because I hear it growing up and it's not like, this is so uncomfortable for me...I don't even know how to articulate this because it's not like, it's not hatred. It's literally the way that people think. Israel and Jewish are really hard to separate in the Muslim world. It's so hard to separate. It was hard for me to separate until I went to college and I learned and I went to classes...That was hard for me and I just started learning that. So it's just interesting for me that my family, everybody, even my stepdad, he has so many Jewish friends, even til now still speaks Hebrew, so open to the Jewish community, but it's still ingrained in his language too. So it's not associated with whether or not you're friends with Jews or not or whatever it is. It's so ingrained, it's really scary.

Here, this fellow grapples aloud with the antisemitism she has noticed not only in her own family, but in herself, and how prejudice is not only expressed in explicit hatred for another group, but also can be so embedded in cultural institutions that we don't notice it until and unless it is pointed out to us. A Jewish fellow responded to this story that she grew up hearing similarly prejudiced remarks about Arabs and Muslims and that we aren't individually to blame for the contexts and contours of race and religion in which we were raised.

One fellow reflected that regarding ideas about the Other among Muslims and Jews, "there's a certain sense of, the facts seem different. That is it seems like we're working with different sets of facts like as if we lived in different realities. But it makes perfect sense that it would be that way." Another fellow shared her unique perspective as someone with strong connections in both the Jewish and Muslim communities. She described being in the uncomfortable position of having to remind her white Jewish colleagues that Jews of Color exist, or having people forget themselves in front of her, saying things like how they suspect that Obama is a secret Muslim. She concluded her story with an acknowledgement of how many complicated layers there are to prejudice: "We're talking about onions here."

The session during which the stories above were shared was one of the most successful discussions I observed in terms of both Jewish and Muslim fellows being able to interrogate their own prejudices vis-à-vis the Other without any participant becoming defensive. This same cohort later had several conversations about race and prejudice become derailed. In reflecting on what made these conversations turn out so differently, I think that One Hamsa leaders play an important role. The fact that one

leader modeled sharing a contentious observation made fellows not only feel safer doing so, but it also gave them a framework for how to approach sharing something potentially incendiary in a way that made the audience most likely to be able to hear it. She reminded fellows, “That’s exactly what One Hamsa is about, right, figuring out how to have those conversations so that you’re not questioning yourself as much about you know, am I crossing that line, what does that actually look like.”

As it happens, this cohort’s year was also the last year that facilitators rotated annually. Whereas during the earlier years I observed, the facilitator team was different each year, in the later years two particular facilitators were hired to lead fellowship meetings and retreats each year. Over time I observed them working to improve their skills as facilitators. Early on, they were not always certain when it was the right time to jump in and when it was better to sit back and let fellows hash out a discussion. As time went by, these two facilitators became more adept at offering gentle reminders of the community agreements, which made fellows more likely to adhere to them and less likely to escalate conflicts into heated arguments.

While interrogating one’s own prejudices was a less frequent outcome of the program than its leaders might like, a common theme that did come up in every cohort’s antisemitism and Islamophobia sessions was the fellows’ shared experiences of suffering as a result of others’ prejudice. Often when a Jewish fellow told a story about experiencing antisemitism or a Muslim fellow told a story about experiencing Islamophobia, they would frame the experience as one common not only to others in their own faith community, but as one common to all American Muslims and Jews. Again, this theme emerged after being modeled by One Hamsa leaders. The

Islamophobia speaker responded thus to a fellow who asked how Islamophobia and antisemitism are related:

If somebody is antisemitic, they're eight times more likely to be Islamophobic. If you are a person out there in the world who feels hostility or hate or suspicion towards one group of people, you tend to feel hate and suspicion towards multiple groups of people. So on the one hand, how Islamophobia and antisemitism are related is that we're in it together. The alt-right, as Aziz Ansari called them on SNL, the "lower case KKK," this alt right, do you think that they hate Muslims and don't hate Jews? No. Or that they hate Jews but not blacks and LGBT folks? No...And so it's related, they're related to each other on that side, and on the other side is the much more complex picture.³⁷ I struggle and this is a safe space and One Hamsa is my home so I hope you can figure this out with me, let me put it that way.

Later that session, after the speaker had left, a fellow who had converted from Christianity discussed his understanding of oppression in terms that emphasized the shared experience of American Jews and Muslims:

When I was growing up I went to Catholic school, and in eighth grade they would tell us about how Christians were fed to the lions...and I was so sad until we got to Constantine, and then it was like, he had a dream, and realized he was Christian and we were like so excited in eighth grade for Constantine and I felt so relieved, I felt so relieved my whole life that Constantine stopped the oppression of us being fed to the lions, and then I realize now that history is told by the victors because I had no idea that Constantine then oppressed Jews. So that was a huge a-ha moment, the victors always get to tell your story, "and then we won and all was well." And I think in that story, which was my second a-ha moment, is that, cause I'm all, I'm engaging people in dialogue around oppression and diversity all the time and the thing I've realized over and over again is if you have an identity that's a target, even if you have privilege in all your other identities, maybe like white male Jews or white male Muslims, like we have to stomach so many attacks on our identity that are minimized and that we just have to ease, and they're really validated that what you went through was a form of violence of whatever scale, whether that was verbal. And that there's really times like this when somebody validates that that was messed up and then you get to talk about it. And it's just like, I find it's for so many people healing to hear validated. And one thing I tell people is if it feels like it might be a form of oppression then it is. Because we're so oftentimes told to doubt ourselves that it's oppression, so just like, believe yourself that that that was and that it's

³⁷ Here she is referring to the complexity of addressing Islamophobia within the Jewish community and antisemitism within the Muslim community.

messed up. Even if I'm not there I got your back. You know like that's just something that I continually see is just how much we have to stomach that, and it breaks my heart.

Another fellow went so far as to say that not only do oppressed peoples have something in common with one another, but that sometimes we as oppressed people have something in common with bigots. "Someone doesn't even have to say anything. I'm always on edge waiting for it to happen. But I remember that deep down that bigot is afraid of something, and so am I. We can't cure other people's fear, but we can be aware of how our own influences us." One more common theme that emerged from stories that emphasized common suffering was the idea that we all have experienced discrimination from within our own faith communities. Many fellows shared stories of being told by members of their faith community that they weren't behaving in a way that was Muslim "enough" or Jewish "enough." Being othered by one's own people was an experience shared by fellows from all backgrounds.

Another common theme that arose from the antisemitism and Islamophobia sessions was finding the silver linings in otherwise negative experiences. The speaker at the Islamophobia sessions shared a video that showed people responding to a hate crime by showing up to a mosque that had been targeted to show love and support.

Afterward she said to the fellows,

Those things are happening all around us and we have to stress that, because it's in those acts of knowing that people are able to express love and support and look through the fear and division. So a weird silver lining that is emerging from Trump is that Trump has actually changed Americans' views of Islam for the better. Can you believe it?

A Muslim fellow later echoed the speaker's sentiment during the fishbowl discussion, and once the Jewish fellows were invited into the circle, one added:

When you were talking about the opportunity Islamophobia recently has posed there were a lot of squeamish looks around the room. And I was actually the person that was like, exactly what I've been trying to say this entire time cause if it wasn't for the Islamophobia in the last five years, Islamophobia in Israel when I was there, the Islamophobia we are facing [here] on the television, I would never be in a group like this...I just knew I had to do it because it was hard to be mad. And I would have been doing something totally different if it wasn't for the surge in Islamophobia. And so I don't think, some people say Islamophobia is negative, I don't think of it as negative, it is terrible, I'm not saying Islamophobia is a good, yay Islamophobia now we can get Muslims on television, that has nothing to do with it, but now...for the first time they're talking about the Muslim people in the Oscars, that wouldn't have even been a conversation five years ago. And so you know, it is a negative aspect, it is changing...With antisemitism it's like one hundred antisemitism institutes in California [some other fellows laugh]. Ok, you see what I'm saying...So when we're trying to find resources and find professors that are teaching Islamophobia, I looked online this morning, there are classes on Islamophobia, there are conferences on it, there aren't fifty institutes in California for it. And so, I'm not saying that's an ok thing or that's right or there isn't those things but...that could be changed.

Establishing Shared Narratives of American Religious Minority Experience

A major goal of One Hamsa is to deconstruct the master narrative of Muslims and Jews as mortal enemies and replace it with alternative narratives about how Jews and Muslims can relate to one another as allies. Narrative is important in the context of peacebuilding, because “each narrative affords individuals within the collective the ability to interpret the conflict...The agent's intentions, context, and action are interwoven in a continual causal chain of events that explains why things happened and continue to happen the way they do” (Ben Hagai et al. 2013, 296). Polletta points out that the subjective truth value of activist narratives is a quality that can be employed by social movement actors to achieve certain goals: “With the old master narratives now suspect, stories—particular, local, claiming only verisimilitude, never absolute truth—may be all that we trust” (Polletta 2006, 2).

How does troubling the waters by adding layers of complexity to the narratives of Muslims and Jews enable more effective accomplishment of the movement's goals?

Joyce Dalsheim (2014) calls this adding the voices of "spoilers," since those marginalized voices that complicate right and wrong are seen as spoilers to the peace process by proponents of a more essentialized approach. So let us ask,

How can we account for all the stories and be accountable for them? What would it mean to be responsible for...the countless tales yet untold? One way to be accountable would simply be to pay attention to them...and recognize their importance...There we find the stories of "spoilers," whose tales undermine some unspoken norm or taken-for-granted assumption about peace, peacemaking, and order in the world. There we find stories that point to different moral orders where popular sovereignty takes a back seat to other pressing concerns. There we find people who want to live on the land that is their land, speak their language, practice their traditions, and uphold the promises of their faiths. We might find these stories unsettling because they challenge the episteme that gives rise to our normative moral and political order. (Dalsheim 2014, 171-173)

But, I hypothesize that those are the stories that will enable us to overcome damaging essentializing master narratives.

Tammy Smith observed the centrality of master narratives in transforming relationships between communities in her study of the narratives Italian and Croatian Istrian immigrants to New York. Smith found that such narratives successfully resolved ethnic conflict between these two groups. She conducted life history interviews with Istrians in Croatia, Italy and New York. Participants were aged from their early 30s to early 70s, so as to provide different generational perspectives on relations between the two ethnic groups. In this instance,

conflict was once hardened through narrative but can also be resolved through narrative...Narratives of identity may tend to, but need not, become hardened. Consequently, ethnic and religious conflicts whose sustenance is in part derived

from such narratives though tending to, need not be, correspondingly hardened. (Smith 2007, 23)

Against a background of conflict in the old country, Croatians and Italians who immigrated to New York with competing narratives of identity created a shared historical narrative as they interacted in New York communal spaces such as churches and restaurants. In their new home these two communities “have created the possibilities for overall narrative change that have enabled Istrians in New York to overcome the conflict that separates their cousins in Italy and Croatia” (Smith 2007, 43). Smith argues that it is this narrative change that allowed this side-by-side peaceful coexistence of these two ethnic groups.

How was this possible? Smith attributes this peace building success story to the shared elements of both Croatian and Italian narratives, which enabled their respective narratives to be bridged. In particular, by analyzing data from interviews in the form of narratives about their relations with the ethnic Other, Smith found that all Istrians were able to bond over the notion that they were all victims regardless of ethnicity. Despite differences in the reasons for their respective victimizations, Italian and Croatian Istrians shared and identified with the concept of what it means to be a victim. Together these New Yorkers were able to move past the master narrative of Croatians’ and Italians’ being at fault for one another’s’ suffering and create a third narrative, in which both groups were able to see their suffering as something they had in common. Smith writes that this third narrative is

based on their common ‘Istrian-ness.’ To achieve this, New York’s Istrians have learned to tell their stories without the polarizing aspects of each of their respective original narratives...Istrians living in New York have integrated their

identity narratives through transformations in the meaning of boundary elements. (2007, 39)

The New York Istrians Smith observed embraced a redefinition of boundaries between in-group and out-group. “In subscribing to a common collective narrative, individuals recognize in-group similarities, as well as out-group differences” (2007, 24). This new collective narrative encourages Smith’s interlocutors to focus on what they share as New York Istrians, and redefines the out-group from Croatians or Italians to non-New York Istrains. Thus, the creation of a collective narrative also contributes to the creation of a collective identity, which I discuss in depth in Chapter 5. Smith argues that while boundaries may seem to be a site of difference, they can also function to produce a link between two narratives.

By creating links that did not exist before among events in the original narratives, this boundary element has become a means through which the New York Istrian narratives have been able to integrate each of the opposing narratives and smooth over differences between Italian and Croatian Istrians. (Smith 2007, 39)

At One Hamsa, I observed leaders and facilitators urging fellows to recognize a similar third narrative. During the sessions on antisemitism and Islamophobia and in other contexts, facilitators pointed out shared experiences of discrimination between Jews and Muslims, and established these groups as being allied in a desire to end all discrimination. This third narrative emerged in many different situations, whether fellows were discussing specific examples of times they faced discrimination, or speaking more generally about the discrimination faced by their faith community. I observed this narrative throughout my observations, but it became particularly salient after the 2016 election.

During the 2017 meeting on Islamophobia, Zara, the invited speaker, added to her usual talk:

standing up for ourselves and standing up for each other is the greatest power we have. This regime, I never thought I'd use "regime" in my own country, wants to silence us. Wants to make us feel like as long as they don't come after us, we're safe.

She went on to paraphrase the poem "First They Came" by Martin Neimöller³⁸ in order to illustrate the importance of speaking up when we witness the oppression of others in our community. Zara finished her talk that evening by asserting that "a weird silver lining that is emerging from Trump is that Trump has actually changed American's views of Islam for the better" through the backlash to his Islamophobia. "With everything that we're seeing the challenge is now, how do we continue to stand up, raise our voices, and fight for each other, stand up for each other? Because it's all of us on the line, ultimately." Joseph, the speaker during the session on antisemitism, expressed similar sentiments.

As the well known Levitic phrase has it, none of us has the luxury of desisting, abstaining from efforts to complete the work of the giants that precede us... The ultimate task is to go out into the world and change your community. Never has there been a more urgent time to do that. I needn't tell you how this is a time of high anxiety and fear.

This speaker went on to argue that antisemitism is something of a canary in the coal mine when it comes to what he calls group-based discrimination, and that when we see antisemitism begin to rise, we must take that as a call to vigilance and action to protect our society's vulnerable groups.

³⁸ A poem commonly circulated in Jewish communities in particular as a reminder that atrocities like the Holocaust only become possible when members of a community fail to stand up for one another.

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, during the antisemitism and Islamophobia sessions, many fellows related painful and personal stories of experiencing discrimination. At the end of the fellowship, Cordelia, a Jewish fellow, reflected on something that happened during the Islamophobia and antisemitism sessions as the most transformative part of the experience for her. When she shared a story of being harassed with antisemitic slurs on the street one Shabbat evening, Cordelia related that Aya, the Muslim fellow to whom she was speaking “surprised me because she understood. Not in the sympathetic ‘poor thing’ kind of way, but in an empathetic way.” Aya shared her own experiences with people shouting slurs, and for Cordelia, sharing the pain of being discriminated against with a non-Jew who had also experienced discrimination was revelatory. Recognizing their shared experiences of discrimination helped these two women connect, and they were close friends by the end of the cohort. “One night at the start of one of our last meetings,” Cordelia recalled,

Aya greeted me with the words ‘as-salaam alaikum.’ It was an accident, those are words every Muslim says to another Muslim. They mean peace be unto you. She smiled when she realized her mistake. So I said to her, ‘shalom,’ which means hello, and also means peace... To paraphrase the poet E. E. Cummings, now we carry each other’s hearts inside of our own, and what a wonderful blessing that is.

Occasionally, fellows volunteered stories like the one above without being prompted. These stories embody the third narrative, in which Muslims and Jews are oriented as standing shoulder to shoulder against common enemies as opposed to being oriented as going head to head to eliminate Islamophobia among Jews and antisemitism among Muslims. On one occasion, a Muslim fellow asserted that “in this political climate it’s not like Muslims are the only ones struggling, we are all in this fight

against bigotry together.” Another fellow shared a story of attending an unfamiliar church with a friend only to be shocked by the pastor’s disturbing diatribe conflating Islamophobic and antisemitic ideas. After describing how hearing the pastor’s hateful sermon made her skin crawl and relating how she and her friend made their escape, she concluded, “All of this is wrong, and I need to tell as many people why they’re wrong as soon as possible. Because this is a matter of urgency and time. So everything that we’re doing is so fucking important. It is people’s lives.” Her words landed so heavily that one fellow applauded, despite the community agreement that fellows not applaud one another.³⁹

At the end of discussions like the ones during which these stories emerged, facilitators thank fellows for sharing and sum up some of the main themes of what was said. In response to fellows sharing their stories of experiencing antisemitism and Islamophobia, the facilitator recapped, “what I hear especially is the pain of the loss of opportunity for connection any time somebody’s putting these stereotypes on all of us, all of you, it precludes, it makes getting connected that much harder.” One response to the challenge of connecting with those who may stereotype you is to recognize the shared experience of being hurt by stereotypes. As with the Istrians of New York, One Hamsa participants use the strategy of reframing their narratives of discrimination as shared ones.

In some ways, progressive religious activism is an experiment in forming diverse coalitions. Fulton and Wood point out that

³⁹ This rule was agreed upon because fellows in this cohort thought that such reactions go against the intent of One Hamsa to make everyone feel safe to share even when others do not agree with them or like what they have to say.

because religious commitment reaches widely across the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic divides that bedevil American society, and reaches deeply into most communities and social strata, faith-based progressive politics can create precisely the kind of bridging social capital that transcends the cleavages that are used to prevent policy reform that strives to address our nation's challenges. (49)

While Fulton and Wood focus mainly on the ways in which single faith progressive organizations have the potential to bring together people from different backgrounds around their shared faith, interfaith activism has even greater potential to bridge social divides. Progressive activism in general tends to be coalitional and embrace diversity, and this internal diversity can cause frictions that conservative activist groups are less likely to encounter. Thus, as Rhys Williams puts it, "there is thus an increased need for...intra-movement practices and discourses—that can accommodate more voices from more traditions." (2017, 356). Since the interfaith movement treats practicing pluralism as a goal of the movement that individual activists must work at to make a reality, it is particularly well situated to provide models for what such an etiquette might look like.

Chapter 4: Triangulating Truth

As I mentioned in the introduction, reflexivity emerged in the 1970s as a corrective to the problem of the power disparity between ethnographers and the communities they study. As ethnographers, we make knowledge claims regarding the representation and interpretation of the perspectives of our interlocutors to a scholarly audience, yet we cannot claim to have complete knowledge of those perspectives. As Paul Lichterman puts it, “reflexivity communicates to readers our recognition that knowledge claims are conditioned and partial...Often, being reflexive means exploring the question of how our social positions may influence our knowledge claims” (2015, 36). Since reflexivity became a standard component of ethnography, several schools of thought have emerged regarding best reflexive practices.

In this chapter, I argue that reflexivity and various subsequent approaches to truth claims are not only crucial to the honest and responsible production of scholarly knowledge, but also to the knowledge and meaning making practices in which activists themselves are engaged. Activists have their own approaches to such reflexivity. What can both scholars and activists learn from the ways in which truth claims are addressed at One Hamsa? To contextualize my investigation, I first discuss several specific approaches to practicing reflexivity that have emerged over the last few decades of ethnographic scholarship. Because One Hamsa participants are generally highly educated, and some have specifically studied feminist and other activist scholarship, these scholarly approaches inform their understandings of truth and knowledge

production. I then illustrate how One Hamsa fellows apply their interpretations of these scholarly concepts during meetings.

Standpoint Theory and Situated Knowledges as Progressive Ways of Knowing

How interfaith activists approach truth and knowledge is important to understand, because such a large part of their project is constructing a shared identity. As such, they need to come to shared understandings about their histories, at least to some extent. Participants do not aspire to homogeneity, but they do recognize that if certain truths are not commonly understood, it is difficult to move forward in any substantive way. Like many members of communities in conflict, Muslims and Jews in America and elsewhere have grown up with completely opposing “true” narratives about their peoples’ histories. One Hamsa community members are highly educated, as I have mentioned before, and many of them bring philosophical understandings of the nature of truth with them, which they use to make sense of the fact that their narratives about what is true are so different. For that reason, I begin this discussion with the epistemological approaches that One Hamsa members have mentioned during meetings: standpoint theory and the idea of situated knowledges.

Through these theoretical approaches to knowledge and truth, feminist scholars have made substantial contributions to answering the question, What kinds of approaches to truth lead to the production of “least false” knowledge? In her essay on “Why Standpoint Matters,” Alison Wylie offers a definition of the theory as

an explicitly political as well as social epistemology...[whose] central and motivating insight is an inversion thesis: those who are subject to structures of domination that systematically marginalize and oppress them may, in fact, be epistemically privileged in some crucial respects...by virtue of what they typically experience and how they understand their experience. (2004, 339)

According to feminist standpoint theorists, gender is one dimension that may make such an epistemic difference, by countering the partiality of androcentric and sexist authoritative knowledge. Sandra Harding, a vocal proponent of standpoint theory, says that the theory “was intended to explain the surprising success of emerging feminist research... ‘surprising’ because feminism is a political movement and, according to the conventional view...politics can only obstruct and damage the production of scientific knowledge” (2004b, 1).

Conventionally, scientists aspire to the production of knowledge that is objectively and empirically true. Yet, while purely objective knowledge may be a defining goal⁴⁰ of quantitative sciences, the question of what kinds of truths qualitative sciences can or should aspire to producing is a matter of debate. This question has troubled ethnographers in particular almost since the method’s conception. Bronislaw Malinowski’s “Argonauts of the Western Pacific” (1932[1922]) is one of the earliest comprehensive attempts to define ethnography as a scientific method. Malinowski argues for a fully objective, empiricist ethnography. At the other end of the metaphorical pendulum’s arc, “Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,” edited by James Clifford and George Marcus (1986), is a more recent and no less comprehensive effort to define ethnography. The editors and contributing authors argue that ethnographers can no longer avoid questions about who has the power and authority to determine what is “truth,” and as such, anthropologists cannot claim to hold the whole truth or the only truth about the people we study.

⁴⁰ But also one that needs to be interrogated and reflected on, as Emily Martin (1991) has influentially written.

As these critics of the concept of pure objectivity have written, the problem with the empiricist approach to knowledge is not that it is partial; all knowledge is. The problem is that the scientific method provides no rules, procedures, or techniques for even identifying, let alone eliminating, social concerns and interests that are shared by all (or virtually all) of the observers, nor does it encourage seeking out observers whose social beliefs vary in order to increase the effectiveness of the scientific method. Thus culturewide assumptions that have not been criticized within the scientific research process are transported into the results of research, making visible the historicity of specific scientific claims to people at other times, other places, or in other groups in the very same social order (Harding 2004a, 128-129).

Harding goes on to outline some of the ways in which standpoint theory offers a corrective to empiricist knowledge. First, in standpoint theory, the subjects of knowledge are “embodied and visible” as opposed to claiming to hold a view from nowhere (2004a, 132). I discuss this corrective in more detail later in this section. Second, this fact that the subjects of knowledge are embodied means that the objects of knowledge are not fundamentally different from them—a corrective to the subject/object and self/other dichotomies mentioned in previous chapters. Third, it is not lone individuals who produce knowledge, but communities, another concept to which I will return in Chapter 5.

Influential though it has been, standpoint theory is not without its weaknesses, or critics.⁴¹ Susan Hekman voiced many of the critiques of standpoint theory in her essay, “Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited,” originally published in *Signs*

⁴¹ These help to account for the term “standpoint theory” falling out of vogue in academia, though it is still familiar among activists, particularly those with connections to radical feminism

in 1997 with responses from proponents of standpoint theory Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, Patricia Collins, and Dorothy Smith. One strong point Hekman makes is that standpoint theory glosses over the differences that exist among members of the group being represented; in the case of standpoint theory in its original formulation, differences between women. Hekman asks rhetorically, “If we abandon a single axis of analysis, the standpoint of women, and instead try to accommodate the multiple, potentially infinite standpoints of diverse women, do we not also lose the analytic force of the argument?” (1997b, 227). Hekman argues that standpoint theory has fallen out of favor and that its greatest strengths are still preserved in feminist postmodernism. Even in 1997 Hekman says “younger feminist theorists [regard] feminist standpoint theory...as a quaint relic of feminism’s less sophisticated past,” mostly because it is at odds with the third-wave’s emphasis on difference (1997b, 225). I agree that this particular aspect of standpoint theory is outdated, but that does not mean other aspects of the theory are not still useful, particularly to progressive activists. I now move on to the responses of standpoint theory’s advocates to Hekman’s critique in order to highlight more of those useful aspects.

Hartsock, Collins, Harding, and Smith make their responses to Hekman’s critique of standpoint theory on a variety of grounds. One argument that Harding and Smith both put forth is that Hekman incorrectly treats “standpoint” as a synonym for individual perspective, while that is not the intended meaning of the term. Harding and Smith each have slightly different ideas about the nuances of what that term really does mean. Harding conceptualizes a standpoint as a process that “makes visible a different, somewhat hidden phenomenon that we must work to grasp” (2004b, 8). The aim of the

standpoint scholar is not to present every possible individual viewpoint, but rather to choose a standpoint that will enable them “to create a different kind of decentered subject of knowledge and history than was envisioned either by Enlightenment or Marxian accounts” (Harding 2004b, 8).

Smith similarly argues that “standpoint” pertains not just to the object of knowledge, but to the subject as well. The experiences of the subject of knowledge play as much a role in the production of knowledge as do the object’s;

the sociologist’s investigation of our directly experienced world as a problem is a mode of discovering or rediscovering the society from within...She aims not at a reiteration of what she already (tacitly) knows, but at an exploration through that of what passes beyond it and is deeply implicated in how it is. (Smith 1974, 12)

In my understanding, standpoint theory is more useful in thinking about the subject of knowledge than the object. It is most useful to think with not in order to be able to arrive at the most complete truth, but in order to understand how subjects’ standpoints influence the truths at which they arrive. This applies to both scholars and activists who participate in processes of knowledge production.

Smith’s interpretation is most closely aligned with subsequent theories that inform my own approach to knowledge production. “Standpoint” does not refer to any individual perspective, but to an understanding of knowledge production that differs from the empiricist approach stemming from Enlightenment thought. Standpoint theory accounts for the situatedness of all knowledge production. This implies that taking into account the positionality of one’s interlocutors in the field is crucial, and that their knowledge is just as valuable as the knowledge of one’s colleagues in the academy; these ideas are shared by engaged anthropologists. Both scholars and activists

contribute useful standpoints to the production of knowledge: scholars contribute a broad understanding of relevant phenomena based on other research that has been conducted and knowledge that has been produced; interlocutors in the field contribute experiential and specific knowledge of their practices and beliefs.

Harding, Collins, and Hartsock agree on a different angle in response to Hekman: that Hekman has failed to account for power dynamics in her critique of standpoint theory. Hekman argues that it is counterproductive for standpoint theorists to claim that certain standpoints offer better accounts of reality than others. Collins responds that

standpoints may be judged not only by their epistemological contributions but also by the terms of their participation in hierarchical power relations... [Standpoint] theory exists primarily to explicate these power relations. Thus, attempts to take the knowledge while leaving the power behind inadvertently operate within the terrain of privileged knowledge. (2004, 252-3)

The reasoning behind this argument is that some standpoints are already privileged over others, and empiricist epistemology worsens this problem by making that privilege invisible. Standpoint theory aims to illuminate the fact that there are many standpoints and that not all of them are granted equal weight when it comes to the institutional production of knowledge. In this vein, Collins points out that the privilege of a given standpoint does not lie in some inherent truthfulness, but in “the power of a group in making its standpoint prevail over other equally plausible perspectives” (2004, 252). Since Hekman completely overlooks this aspect of standpoint theory, Collins rather scathingly states that the former author “simply misses the point of standpoint theory over all” and that she “essentially depoliticizes the potentially radical content of standpoint theory” (2004, 247). This potential of standpoint theory to illuminate power

differences between different groups is precisely what makes it useful in thinking about One Hamsa. Jews and Muslims come from different standpoints in American society, with different relationships to privilege and power, which I touched on earlier.

Harding is in agreement with Collins that “Hekman’s account loses the point that standpoint epistemologies and methodologies were constructed in opposition to the all-powerful dictates of rationalist/empiricist epistemologies and methodologies (‘positivism’)” (Harding 2004a, 256). Hartsock takes this line of thinking even further, maintaining that feminist and other marginalized knowledges should be privileged, because they “offer possibilities for envisioning more just social relations” (1997, 373). This point raises an interesting conundrum of standpoint theory. On the one hand, it seems that arguing that one type of knowledge has a better truth claim than another, and thus should be privileged over other types, is counter to the spirit of standpoint theory as a way of de-centralizing knowledges that have previously been privileged over others. If empirical knowledge is not superior to other forms of knowledge and privileging it over other knowledges has caused harm, why argue for privileging a different form of knowledge in its place? It does no good to replace one hegemony with another.

On the other hand, the next step in the line of thinking that no form of knowledge should ultimately be privileged over others is that anything is admissible as knowledge, no matter how it was produced, a particularly startling claim in an era of rampant propaganda⁴² and competing claims to truth. I suggest that in order to reconcile these two extreme versions of standpoint theory, we must consider the evidence on which a

⁴² Propaganda itself is premised on the idea that the distributor of the propaganda can sway public opinion by reframing certain narratives, repackaging false claims as truth.

given body of knowledge is based and the purposes that knowledge is intended to serve. Individual experiential knowledge is good for some things, like understanding the Other, or better serving a particular community that shares that experience. Knowledge based in a wide and deep pool of data is good for different things, like determining national or global policies, or developing broadly generalizable theories. Because my project is more concerned with the former issues, I consider individual experiential knowledge to be a very important consideration, as do my interlocutors associated with One Hamsa.

Overall, I interpret standpoint theory as suggesting that we consider all knowledge as valid and potentially useful, and that we avoid dismissing or privileging any one kind over another until we have determined what kinds of knowledge will be most useful to a particular project. While all knowledge is situated and valid, not all knowledge is equally useful in all situations. We should be open minded when determining what kinds of knowledge might be useful to us in drawing particular conclusions, and consider including forms of knowledge we might have initially overlooked. This is particularly important when it comes to the fact that some knowledges have historically been privileged over others, and in order to level the playing field, marginalized knowledges should be brought to the forefront—not because they are more true, but because in order to have a more complete understanding of reality, many standpoints are necessary, especially the ones that have long been obscured by positivist standpoints.

Harding illustrates her own concept of standpoint theory well with a pond metaphor. She describes an exercise where a teacher asks students to look at a stick

poking out of the water in a pond, and then to walk around the pond and observe how the stick moves. From different locations around the pond, reality appears different. Like viewing the stick in the pond,

although all knowledge claims are determinately situated, not all such social situations are equally good ones from which to be able to see how the social order works. Dominant groups have more interests than do those they dominate in not formulating and in excluding questions about how social relations and nature 'really work.' (2004a, 257)

This metaphor does not sit quite right with me; there is one point along the edge of the pond from which the stick looks the way it actually is, unbent. Harding implies that the analogy for that point is the feminist standpoint, perhaps with room for the inclusion of other marginalized standpoints. To her, from an empiricist standpoint, the stick looks bent. Again, this is a weak formulation of standpoint theory: no standpoint has a truth value advantage over any other, and to argue that it can is counter to the spirit of my interpretation of standpoint theory.

I propose a revision of the pond metaphor: instead of being told to look at a stick, the students are merely instructed to observe their own slice of the pond, and then to describe the pond in its entirety. One student sees leaves and detritus on the bottom of the pond; another sees frog eggs among some reeds; a third sees nothing but tall cattails. Some students can look up and see across the whole pond and for others the view is obscured, but none can see every detail of every slice of the pond. In this analogy, students whose views are obstructed represent dominant groups who may benefit from excluding parts of the picture. Students with a clear view of most of the pond represent groups whose oppression has enabled or required them to see more

clearly than others. Only by coming together and sharing their standpoints can the students construct a representation of the pond that accurately reflects reality.

Again, different pieces of this puzzle may be useful for accomplishing different goals. The person standing behind the cattails may consider that to be the only important part of the picture for accomplishing their goals regardless of what the rest of the pond looks like. As scientists we aspire to constructing the bigger picture of the pond in its entirety, but we too can only stand on one particular part of its edge. As such, it's important that we consider the views of all the people standing around the edge of the pond as we construct the bigger picture, though we might eventually decide that some standpoints are more useful than others in constructing that picture.

A different metaphor apt here for offering further clarification; a story that is not my own but that is occasionally shared in interfaith settings. The story is a popular parable that is supposed to have originated in India that illustrates the importance of recognizing one's limitations when it comes to accessing the truth. In the parable of the blind men and the elephant, four blind men encounter an object they cannot identify. One man reaches out a hand and feels the trunk. "It's a snake!" he announces to the others. Another man reaches out and feels a leg. "Nonsense, this is a tree!" The other two men feel different parts of the elephant and also reach different conclusions about what object is before them. While this parable is in need of some updating to correct for sexism and its uncomplimentary portrayal of people with disabilities, its underlying lesson remains relevant. We all have weaknesses of which we are unaware. When we fail to account for these deficiencies when making conclusions about what is true, we end up with a skewed perception of the truth. In order to come to more complete truths,

we need to reflect on what aspects of our perception might be compromised, even without our awareness. But we also need to recognize that we will never be fully aware of all of our weaknesses, and that the only way to come to as complete a picture of the truth as possible is to combine what we are able to learn with what others are able to learn. Perhaps if the men had approached the elephant a little differently, working as a team and combining information rather than taking turns as individuals, they could have come to a conclusion that more accurately represented the reality before them. Still, this story presumes that there is some objective reality to be discovered, when often that is not the case.

Hekman may have been right about the decline of standpoint theory: it is less frequently invoked and debated than it was in past decades. Still, the concepts at the heart of the theory have remained undercurrents in engaged anthropology. However, one theory that might be considered a branch of standpoint theory, Donna Haraway's "situated knowledges," has remained explicitly influential in the work of engaged anthropologists. This is another theory that some activists know by name, particularly if they have connections to feminist activism. Hartsock identified the most important part of both standpoint theory and situated knowledges when she wrote that "to claim that we can understand the totality of social relations from a single perspective is as futile an effort as to claim that we can see everything from nowhere" (2004, 244). The aim of the concept of situated knowledges is to counter that very claim, which Haraway calls "the god trick" (1988, 581). "Only partial perspective," she writes, "promises objective vision" (1988, 583). Any perspective that claims to be a view from nowhere cannot be truly objective; it is a "conquering gaze...that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies that

makes the un-marked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation” (1988, 581). For Haraway, this is an issue of achieving objectivity, which she accepts as not only a possibility but something to aspire to. In her view, the objectivity to which we should aspire is not an empiricist “view from nowhere” kind of objectivity, but an “embodied feminist objectivity” that accounts for the situatedness of knowledge.

Through her concept of situated knowledges, Haraway offers correctives to several of the aforementioned weakness in standpoint theory. Haraway resolves the issue of whether or not it can or should be argued that feminist epistemology be privileged over other ways of knowing. While there is no single feminist standpoint, she writes, standpoint theory is still useful in its “goal of an epistemology of engaged, accountable positioning...The goal is better accounts of the world, that is, ‘science’” (1988, 590.) In order to achieve that goal, it makes sense to attend to the standpoints of the subjugated, not because they are “innocent,” but because “they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge,” since they have been so harmed themselves by knowledges that claim to see from nowhere.

The subjugated have a decent chance to be on to the god trick and all its dazzling—and, therefore, blinding—illuminations. “Subjugated” standpoints are preferable because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world. (1988, 584)

While situated knowledge is regarded by many activists and engaged scholars as one of the best concepts we have for addressing problems of objectivity, researchers and activists alike cannot assume that even the most ideal form of reflexivity alone is sufficient for addressing the ways in which our positionality influences our

interpretations of events. Alexander Koensler, an engaged scholar whose work focuses on Arab-Jewish activism in Israel/Palestine, echoes Harding when he writes, “it is not simply a matter of which account of reality best matches the ‘reality’, with the one that is closest being the least biased and therefore the best” (2016, 158). Activist researchers do not attempt to produce the “truest” account of events, only the “least false” version. Koensler takes this idea one step further by invoking Mikhail Bakhtin’s polyphonic concept of truth (1981; 1986). Not only do we not aspire to produce an account which best matches reality, but as I pointed out earlier, there really is no single reality to most accurately represent. “Truth is a number of mutually addressed, albeit contradictory and logically inconsistent statements that require a multitude of voices to emerge” (Koensler 2016, 160).

Michael Fischer offers a particularly useful framework for making sense of this multitude of voices, particularly in the contexts I observed at One Hamsa. He proposes that among the narratives that are considered true to a given conflict transformation participant, there are single-eyed, two-eyed, and triangulated stories. Single-eyed stories often focus on a single cause or identity and are often couched in the past. “One-eyed narratives are often romantic and nostalgic claims to an identity of land and people” (2006, 167). Two-eyed or stereoscopic stories feature mutual recognition and alternative realities and are rooted in the struggles of the present. Triangulated or polyvocal narratives are

stories of coevolution, cooperation, and experimentalism which allow for, and protect, multiple channels of information, perspective, and institutional possibilities. These are stories of worlds to come, of possible and alternative futures worth struggling to bring into being. (162)

These three categories are not mutually exclusive and may overlap or coexist within narratives. Fischer argues that understanding the reasons for employing a narrative from a given category is important in order to move beyond understanding conflicts in terms of zero-sum games. No one type of narrative is inherently better, but each may serve different purposes. One-eyed narratives may cement us versus them dichotomies, but they can also serve as important and strategic reminders of a perspective that has not been adequately accounted for. Two-eyed narratives can also reify dichotomies or “merely index the relative power of players secure enough to at least see or acknowledge the other side’s point of view and anxieties, but two eyed-stories can also work as genuine dialogue or exchange of knowledges” (177).

According to Fischer, based on his research on pro-Palestinian activists in the West Bank, triangulated narratives hold the most promise for identifying and overcoming deadlocked positions. However, the goal of communicating triangulated narratives across conflict is not easily achieved.

Mutual recognition is not some easy touchy-feely process. It is all too often a quite painful opening to the experiential resources and ghosts of the past, in the hope that they can work themselves out productively, rather than developing into encrypted and repressed land mines that will become destabilizing and unexpectedly eruptive in the future. This is not only a utopian formulation, but also a psychiatric one. (Fischer 2006, 170)

Based on my own observations as well, the processing of narratives in order to arrive at some mutually recognizable truth is fraught with emotional land mines. On several different occasions, One Hamsa fellows from different cohorts have mentioned how similar One Hamsa meetings sometimes feel to psychiatric therapy.

In the broader context of interfaith activism, what is the importance of

understanding how triangulated narratives are produced? Like many scholars of social movements (Calhoun 2008; Casas-Cortés et al 2008; Kurzman 2008; Lipsitz 2008; Koensler 2016), I argue that producing new ways of thinking about conflict, new forms of knowledge, is a critical part of the work done through movements. According to renowned scholar of social movements Alberto Melucci, activists “act as new media: they enlighten what every system doesn’t say of itself...Through what they do, or rather through how they do it, movements announce to society that something ‘else’ is possible” (1985, 812). Triangulated narratives are one form that this something “else” takes: previously unimagined ways of thinking about particular narratives. The new knowledges activists produce are not universal truths, but rather movements are “about producing truth in particular contexts and making knowledge useful in particular projects. [They are] about the way the world looks different from particular perspectives” (Calhoun 2008, xx). Again, there are strong echoes of standpoint theory in this approach to the kinds and uses of knowledge produced through social movements.

At One Hamsa, it is accepted that there are few if any universal truths that all parties can agree on when it comes to the Palestine/Israel conflict. Instead, the focus of their interfaith project is about producing knowledge that is useful to American Jews and Muslims for the sake of forging stronger alliances. Through what processes and practices do One Hamsa participants and other activists create these new knowledges? How does it become possible for narratives to be triangulated in the first place? Melucci argues that since conflicts take place on symbolic grounds, the changes needed to transform conflicts are likewise symbolic. “The mere existence of a symbolic challenge is in itself a method of unmasking the dominant codes, a different way of

perceiving and naming the world” (1988a, 248).

In the next section I discuss the ways in which the concept of truth is used by One Hamsa fellows and facilitators, using one of the most emotionally fraught portions of the One Hamsa curriculum in order to understand how participants are able to arrive at such mutually recognizable truths. Through the theories presented above, I discuss what kind of weight these truths might be given, not in terms of evaluating their truth value but in terms of understanding the purposes which they serve in the context of interfaith activism.

Approaches to Truth at One Hamsa

One Hamsa fellows come to the program with differing understandings of the facts of the Palestinian Israeli conflict. As I have touched on, these understandings come from the different settings in which fellows learned about the conflict. What some fellows perceive as familiar truths are perceived as propaganda to others. How can people with differing understandings of a conflict have a productive conversation about that conflict when they don't have any shared facts on which to base that conversation? What approach to objectivity makes the most sense in such a situation? In this section, I examine some of the ways I observed One Hamsa participants wrestling with their relationship to truth and the roles they think truth should play in peacebuilding.

One Hamsa fellows are urged not to discuss the Israeli Palestinian conflict until the spring retreat, because the curriculum of that retreat is completely dedicated to guiding fellows through that conversation in a productive way. Fellows come to the retreat with the understanding that the goal is not to come to a hypothetical solution to

the conflict, like a model UN might. Instead, the goal is to be able to discuss the conflict when it comes up without having it be a landmine or an elephant in the room in relationships between American Muslims and Jews. As such, the fellows are instructed to approach retreat activities differently than they would approach a debate. One Hamsa facilitators encourage fellows to frame their contributions in terms of feelings rather than facts.

During one cohort's spring retreat, an initial misinterpretation of this instruction opened up a revealing conversation about the fellows' attitudes towards the role of facts and feelings in their interfaith conversations. The facilitator told fellows not to use facts

to give people a general history lesson so that they know you have all the facts and their facts are wrong. Make sense? Where the context is you need people to understand *you*, share facts that *you* understand to be facts, you know, they may not be facts for other people.

This approach to the nature of truth is similar to standpoint theory. One Hamsa facilitators understand truth as contingent on a person's unique perspective and point out that what one person holds to be true may not ring true for another. There is not an objective truth out there that would result in one person being right and the other being wrong, but rather, conflicting truths that may be equally true. Some fellows pushed back against this proposed framework, using arguments similar to those that have been used against standpoint theory. One woman pointed out that she does enjoy learning facts from other fellows who are more knowledgeable about the conflict than she is. In some cases, there *are* objective facts that everyone can agree on and there is value in identifying and sharing those facts. Another fellow articulated that keeping conversations grounded in facts helps keep her from getting so angry and frustrated

that she can't continue the discussion. For this fellow, the ability of facts to balance feelings is not a false dichotomy but an affective truth.

The facilitator clarified that she didn't mean fellows should avoid talking about facts at all, just that they need to be balanced with reflection on how those facts have impacted the speaker, "connecting your personal feeling and perspective and experience...not competing as if this is an indisputable fact." She reiterated that facts are important to this conversation not in and of themselves but because of how they influence one's feelings and beliefs, and she suggested that fellows use phrases such as "growing up, I learned..." to frame facts, so that fellows present them not as unequivocal but as narratives couched in a particular context. For the most part, fellows agreed that this was a desirable goal in terms of the role facts would play in the upcoming discussions. One participant commented that conversations based on facts tend to devolve into "trying to one-up each other with our facts," armed with cell phones and Google. Factual debates have their place, but most fellows agreed that One Hamsa is not that place. Instead, this fellow articulated that to her, "it's about our relationships and our connections to the conflict." Situating conflict-laden discussions in terms of feelings helps diffuse arguments, because while two sets of truths might be in conflict, the way a person feels about their interpretation of the facts cannot be negated.

While fellows seemed to agree that they had not come to One Hamsa to have factual debates, they understandably had some suspicion towards wholehearted acceptance that all truths are relative, especially those at the 2017 spring retreat. The 2016 election results illustrated how the idea that truth is relative can be taken to an extreme, with some Americans arguing that because self-proclaimed truth bearers in

the news media cannot be trusted, personal experience is a more reliable source of truth. The political environment of hostility towards the media also contributed to putting some of the Jewish fellows on edge, as in some contexts “liberal media” has become a dog whistle for “Jewish media,” an old antisemitic trope.

One fellow expressed her frustration with this hard standpoint theory interpretation of truth, in which every experience represents its own truth.

There’s so many truths...there are just so many different realities because every individual has their own reality and these are so complicated...There’s too many different narratives. There’s no such thing as objective truth anymore because there’s so many different experiences.

The concept of truth itself loses its value when anything can be true based solely on someone’s perspective. Another fellow shot back that “the facts are the facts and even if the facts are muddled...this is a human rights issue.” In some cases, it’s important to recognize that everyone’s experiences and interpretations of objective facts are different, while in others, there is enough evidence of abuse that differing interpretations of the abuse become moot. In such cases, it is more important to respond decisively to violence than it is to understand all actors’ interpretations of the facts. Indeed, perpetrators of human rights violations sometimes use the idea that facts are relative to justify their crimes, and in such cases, there needs to be some kind of mutually agreed upon, shared narrative of events.

Constructing Shared Truths

Over the course of the spring retreat, fellows share their narratives of the truths about the Palestine/Israel conflict as they understand them, identify the common ground

between these narratives, and arrive at narratives that can be shared despite their very different perspectives. To use Fischer's framework, fellows shared their one- and two-eyed perspectives, and collectively were able to construct a triangulated narrative of the issue in question. For my purposes, I do not find the distinction between one- and two-eyed narratives as useful as between those and triangulated narratives. Most One Hamsa participants come to the fellowship with an understanding that one-eyed narratives are often oversimplified and stereotypical. They understand that while one-eyed narratives can be deployed to great effect in certain contexts, One Hamsa is not the appropriate context. Some have beliefs that are firmly rooted in two-eyed narratives, while other fellows express understanding that there are more than two perspectives in the conflict. I lump one- and two-eyed narratives together in this discussion, partly because they both feature a dichotomization or an us versus them outlook on the conflict, and partly because one-eyed narratives are usually discussed in terms of "this is what some people in my community believe" as opposed to fellows presenting their own beliefs that way.

For the following analysis, I coded discussions which took place during the 2015, '16, and '17 spring retreats according to what kind of narrative they represented: pro-Israel, pro-Palestine, or triangulated. To provide transparency for how I made these coding decisions, in Table 1 I list the types of recurring narratives that fit each category. In 2015 and 2017, fellows presented triangulated viewpoints from the very beginning of the retreat, to the extent that facilitators had to encourage fellows to share one- and two-eyed viewpoints to ensure that possible points of conflict were addressed. In these two cohorts, by the end of the retreat, most of the fellows agreed that they had been

able to share their stories, that they felt they had been heard, and that what they had heard from others helped them think differently about the conflict. I discuss these two cohorts first, and turn to the 2016 cohort on page 153.

Table 1: Categorization of One-Eyed, Two-Eyed, and Triangulated Narratives

Pro-Israel One- and Two-Eyed Narratives
• Why don't Palestinians build their own infrastructure or otherwise make peace happen nonviolently?
• Israel is a tiny country surrounded by enemies
• Arabs/Palestinians/Iran want(s) to wipe Israel off the map
• Judaism and Zionism cannot be pried apart → Critique of Israel is anti-Semitic
• Why don't Muslims take more responsibility for the actions of terrorists?
• 1948: Israeli Independence and the end of Jewish diaspora
• Holocaust → Need for a safe place, Israel's right to exist is about protecting Jews' right to exist
• Israel is the only place Jews can be a cultural majority, insulated from the most dangerous forms of antisemitism
• Why pick on Israel when there are so many other human rights violations in the world?
• Accusations like "ethnic cleansing," "apartheid," and "Palestinian Holocaust" are overblown and hurtful after what Jews went through
• Jews are oppressed too; the way Palestinians are treated in Israel is qualitatively different than other forms of oppression like racism because Israel does not represent an imperial power but another oppressed group
• Jews in the interfaith space are already liberal, already on your side, stop attacking
• Others incorrectly assume Jew = Israel = oppression of Palestinians
• Muslims aren't connected to the land the way Jews are
Pro-Palestine One- and Two-Eyed Narratives
• Trigger words like occupation, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, human rights violations, anti-Zionism
• Jews accuse us of anti-Semitism just for critiquing Israel
• Dialogue is pointless; Palestinians aren't in spaces like this because they are out taking real action
• Uneven playing field/acknowledgement of power differences, similarities with racism and other international power struggles
• Palestinians don't have freedom of movement within and between Palestine and Israel
• Palestinians in diaspora don't have Right of Return
• 1948: Nakba and the beginning of Palestinian diaspora
• Examples of Israeli and IDF abuses of power
• People of color are silenced and oppressed in Israel, even if not Palestinian, even if Jewish, and this racism influences the way Israelis treat Palestinians
• Israel is so in need of security because of the way they have treated Palestinians and other Arabs
• Palestinians aren't recognized as having peoplehood let alone nationhood
• Having been oppressed doesn't make Jews immune from oppressing others
• For Muslims, caring about Palestine is not a religious issue, it's a human rights issue

- Pinkwashing⁴³ is a distraction from Israel's human rights violations

Triangulated Narratives

- We (both Muslims and Jews) all feel pressured to take a side that is predetermined by our community
- I'm afraid that the nuance I'm trying to express won't be heard
- There are not two sides, there are many sides. There is a huge diversity of perspectives within each community, and we must learn to stop assuming that the Other holds the most extreme one-eyed perspective
- I grew up with a particular narrative but gained nuance as I learned more
- Everyone deserves to have self-determination
- It's so complicated that it makes me want to disengage
- It's so hard to discern the truth with so much propaganda on both sides
- Both sides have missed opportunities to make peace
- Jews do not equal Israel
- A better world is possible
- We all need to be able to challenge our narratives
- Muslims and Jews have to be able to talk about our narratives without damaging relationships
- I hear you but I don't know what to do about it
- Both Israelis and Palestinians will have to give up some security for peace to happen
- Palestinian Jews and Muslims used to be friendly before 1948
- This conversation takes time to untangle
- I'm coming from a place of curiosity, I won't judge you even if I disagree
- Any loss of life is a tragedy
- Stories that counter or complicate stereotypes- what Dalsheim (2014) calls "spoilers"
- It was hard for me to hear that

The discussion about fellows' different understandings of Zionism⁴⁴ is one specific example of this process. The context of this discussion was a trigger word activity, during which fellows discuss their most raw responses to a predetermined set of words that often come up as buzzwords in discussions about the conflict in Palestine and Israel. For example, trigger words included "terrorist," "IDF," (the Israeli Defense Forces, Israel's military) "BDS," (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, a movement intended to bring attention to Israel's abuses of power) and "Zionism." At a session a couple of weeks in advance of the retreat, fellows are shown this list of words and

⁴³ This term is shorthand for using Israel's friendliness toward LGBT+ folks, especially as compared to its neighbors in the region, to excuse or deflect from the way Israel treats Palestinians.

⁴⁴ To define this term as neutrally as possible (a losing battle), Zionism is the movement to (re)establish a Jewish homeland in the Holy Land.

prompted to write down their initial gut reaction, without any intellectualizing. The reactions are kept anonymous and placed into envelopes which only the facilitators open. Between that session and the retreat, the facilitators transfer the reactions onto large pieces of butcher paper that serve as visual aids during the discussion.

The discussion itself is more of a round robin than a conversation. Addressing one word at a time as a group, each fellow is given one minute to speak. They may either voice their reaction to the word itself, or to the other reactions listed on the visual aid. One Hamsa's executive director, who was then also acting as a facilitator, explained the reasoning for the inclusion of the trigger word activity as "an opportunity to take in that strong meaning" that these words hold for different parties to the conflict. I chose the word "Zionism" as the word to focus on for this discussion because it was one of the most consistently triggering for both Jews and Muslims. Additionally, both Muslims and Jews experienced transformations in terms of their understanding of what "Zionism" means to the Other. By contrast, most of the other terms in the trigger word discussion were much more triggering for one "side" than the other. Discussions of Zionism and anti-Zionism came up in other settings I observed where the Palestine Israel conflict was being discussed, not just among One Hamsa participants. Zionism is a key example of a concept that people from different backgrounds understand in ways that are completely contradictory, and I have seen an inability to agree on what Zionism means end conversations about the conflict. By focusing on only one of the trigger words, one of the most contentious ones, I am able to go into depth describing the diversity of opinions and illustrating how understandings of the term did or didn't shift for participants.

During the 2015 cohort's discussion during this activity, four of the Muslim fellows described Zionism using nearly the same phrasing as "a good idea that went very bad." Two Jewish fellows who self-identified as "cultural Zionists" agreed, and one went on to say that she feels the original idea has been co-opted by the religious right in Israel as a political tool. Another Jewish fellow explained that to her, Zionism is another word for nationalism, a belief that a people is entitled to self-determination, and that that means not only that Jews are entitled to a homeland in Israel but also that Palestinians have the right to their own land and self-governance. One Muslim fellow remarked that thanks to this cohort, she learned that in some contexts anti-Zionism can also be antisemitic. A couple of other Jewish fellows described the origins of Zionism and pointed out that the ideology well predates the state of Israel. Two Jewish fellows pointed out that to them, anti-Zionism has sinister echoes of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the notorious antisemitic text that was widely distributed internationally during the decades leading up to the Holocaust. The book describes the supposed secret plans of the Jewish people to achieve global domination, in part by fomenting violent conflict. To these fellows, anti-Zionism overstates the power of the Jewish people and misunderstands Zionism's central aim as oppression of others.

After the 2015 cohort finished their trigger word activity discussion, two different fellows remarked on how it had been transformative for them. One Muslim fellow said,

I think it's impressive how much we've grown. Take the word Zionism for example, it had a very negative connotation before most of us, well, I shouldn't say most of us but walked in with, right? And I just learned more about it, the Jewish fellows explained it, and it's powerful, it helped us change.

Later during the same debriefing conversation, the facilitator asked, “Have any of these words literally when someone has spoken them made you stop listening in any way, or hear something different that you understand now maybe differently today?” A Jewish fellow who had lived in Israel herself replied,

Yeah, a couple of people said, when I saw the thing with Zionism, a movement that went really bad, a good idea gone really effing bad I was like, I’m not gonna absorb that or agree with that. Because obviously they don’t know the whole story. But then there were like maybe three or four people who said it and by the third or fourth person I was like, ok, I could see how you would think that. You know? I’m not really ready to say that I agree necessarily but I think, ok. Ok, I could play with that idea. Whereas I think that if anybody had told me before yesterday you know, Zionism is a really good idea that went really effing bad I went ok, I’m not gonna talk to you again. We’re gonna stop, I would have been like ok, let’s just not go there. And now I’m saying, Ok, you definitely have some evidence for that point of view, I could talk about that. Even if we don’t agree.

Other members of the 2015 cohort concurred that the discussion of the word “Zionism” had been transformative for both Muslims and Jews. Both fellows who considered themselves pro-Israel and those who considered themselves pro-Palestine came into the conversation with preconceived notions of what Zionism means, both to others on the same side of the divide and those with whom they disagreed. Through a discussion focused on sharing each fellow’s personal understanding of Zionism, the cohort was able to come to a mutual understanding of this divisive term, without any need for consensus on the definition of the term itself.

In contrast to the 2015 and 2017 cohorts, the 2016 cohort stands out as one in which the conversations at the beginning of the retreat leaned more heavily towards one- and two-eyed narratives on both sides, and gradually became more triangulated towards the end. By the end of the retreat, this cohort expressed less satisfaction with the experience than other cohorts I observed. In the two sessions following the 2016

retreat, fellows mostly expressed triangulated narratives, but feelings about the fellowship were still more mixed than they were in other cohorts. I hypothesize that the difference was due to the ways in which each cohort both did or didn't adhere to community agreements, and addressed or didn't address power differences between Israelis and Palestinians and between Muslims and Jews.

By the end of the first full day of the 2016 spring retreat, I counted nearly equal numbers of pro-Palestine and triangulated narratives (26 and 27, respectively), but far fewer pro-Israel narratives (17). For the most part, Jewish fellows expressed pro-Israel narratives and Muslim fellows expressed pro-Palestine ones. Two members of each faith expressed the "other side's" narrative, and roughly equal numbers of Muslims and Jews expressed triangulated viewpoints.

During the 2016 cohort's trigger word discussion, which is always scheduled on the Saturday of the retreat weekend, the conversation became more heated over the differences in reactions. The last two "words" in the trigger word exercise are actually images which the fellows are asked to respond to. The first image is a close up on a bloodied arm on the ground that is wrapped in tefillin, an accoutrement of prayer primarily worn by Conservative and Orthodox Jewish men. It was meant to index Jewish victims of Palestinian terrorist attacks; however it was presented with no context and Jewish fellows had to explain it to Muslim fellows in order for them to understand the image. In particular, most Muslim fellows were unfamiliar with tefillin and thus missed the fact that the man had been praying when he was killed. The second image was meant to index IDF violence committed against Palestinian civilians and was also

presented without context. The intent of not providing context was to encourage fellows to write down their initial gut reaction and not try to rationalize what they were seeing.

For the image indexing Palestinian suffering, different images were used during different years of the fellowship. The year I was a fellow, 2014, the photo was one that apparently had circulated in some pro-Israel circles as an example of suspected photoshopping in order to create anti-Israeli propaganda. One fellow raised his suspicion during the conversation and the focus became whether or not the photo was real, and whether or not it mattered when there was so much of the same kind of suffering occurring. A new photo was used in 2015 and again in 2017, one of a man holding a child in his arms with an anguished look on his face, and the responses mostly consisted of fellows of both faiths expressing sorrow and disgust at both photos equally.

In 2016, the photo indexing Palestinian suffering led to a discussion that highlights the ways in which different narratives about the conflict and different experiences of power influence conversations about Palestine and Israel. The subject of the 2016 photo was a man wearing military fatigues, holding a crying boy. Those who were familiar with photos of the IDF's abuses of power were able to correctly identify it as an Israeli soldier putting a boy in a headlock. The boy is crying because he is frightened, and one fellow said that she had seen a full video of this encounter and the boy had been so terrified that he had soiled his pants.

The image of the Jewish man's arm was discussed first. The first person to respond, a Jewish fellow, explained the religious symbolism of the tefillin. After that, the only mentions of the context of this photo during the discussion were from one Jewish

fellow saying that it's always difficult to interpret images without their full context, and one Muslim fellow saying that both of the images are propaganda when presented without context. They are both emotionally manipulative. Other responses mostly expressed sorrow for any loss of life, and an appreciation for the first speaker's explanation of the tefillin.

The round robin discussion of the second image went very differently. The first person who spoke, a Muslim fellow, said that she was triggered by the number of comments on the visual aid that mentioned context. In her words, it was similar to "the way people respond to black and trans women...You see someone in pain and you're like 'Well I really would like to know more about the oppressor's side of things.'...There is legit no reason for anything, for anyone to be holding a child in that way." In the round robin conversation that followed, two Muslim fellows echoed this sentiment, and another described what she had seen in the video of the encounter from the image. One of the people who echoed the first speaker added that she noticed that none of the Muslim fellows had questioned the context of the previous photo in their written responses, even if they didn't know what the tefillin was. They saw suffering and responded to it.

Five Jewish fellows said something along the lines of not being able to respond to the photo without more context. Only one Jewish fellow expressed sympathy for the child without any qualifiers relating to context or lack thereof. The Muslim who had said both photos were propaganda without context restated his point, and the remaining three Muslim fellows' comments expressed sympathy for the child.

The day after the trigger word discussion, on Sunday of the retreat, the schedule includes intrafaith conversations early in the day. Each faith group has a discussion led

by the facilitator of the same faith in separate, private spaces. In the 2016 Jewish intrafaith meeting, fellows expressed frustration and disappointment that their perspective was not being represented.⁴⁵ The facilitator pushed back, suggesting that they were the ones who needed to step up and represent those views. Two fellows in particular responded that they did not feel safe sharing their views without judgement from others in the group. They felt that the pro-Palestinian narrative that there is a power imbalance that shares a lot in common with racism in other contexts was brought up over and over in a way that precluded them from disagreeing with any pro-Palestinian narrative. They felt that a trap was being set wherein if they expressed their true opinions, they would be accused of racism and oppression, which they could not argue with as liberals. As one fellow put it, “there was a lot of dialogue that made me feel like, by talking out I was defending these things that I actually really disagree with.”

When the Muslim and Jewish groups reconvened together, each facilitator gave a general summary of the discussion their group had had. The Jewish facilitator pointed out that several Jewish fellows hadn't felt heard and felt that they were being shut down. One of the Jewish fellows volunteered to begin the conversation by presenting the narrative of the conflict she had grown up with. By the end of the day, pro-Israel and triangulated narratives were roughly equally represented (22 and 21 respectively), with pro-Palestine narratives numbering about 14. Again, roughly equal numbers of Muslims and Jews spoke for the “other” narrative and roughly equal numbers expressed triangulated narratives. By the end of the entire retreat, pro-Israel narratives were the most represented (56) and pro-Palestine narratives were least represented (42). In the

⁴⁵ As I mentioned on page 154, the evidence supports the Jewish fellows' claim that by Sunday morning, the Palestinian point of view had been better represented than the Israeli point of view.

weeks following the retreat, one of the two Jewish fellows who had felt least heard expressed that it had been a learning experience for her, while the other felt that not all of her concerns had been addressed by the end of the fellowship.

Bert Klandermans and Conny Roggeband write that movements create a culture that “deliberately distinguishes itself from the dominant culture of the society it aims to change. But often, it will also in certain respects echo this dominant culture” (2007, 229). Even when interfaith leaders make their best effort to break free of the inequities that exist in the dominant culture, some power imbalances are so deeply ingrained that without constant vigilance, they may be replicated incidentally. Koensler (2016) also argues that through the process of establishing a sense of belonging, activists both redefine and reproduce pre-existing social divisions. When it comes to Jewish Muslim interfaith activism, both Muslims and Jews orient themselves as being outside the dominant American culture. But, both Jewish and Muslim participants recognize that relative to one another, Jewish Americans as a group enjoy more cultural and economic capital than Muslim Americans. To offer one measure of this difference, the number of Jews in US congress peaked at 51 in 1993 and is currently 34⁴⁶, while the current congress has the largest number of Muslim representatives in US history at just three, including the first two Muslim women to ever serve in that role. To offer another measure, although the exact numbers are difficult to ascertain, there are many more Jewish non-profit organizations in the US than there are Muslim ones. According to GuideStar’s directory of US charities and non-profits, there are 4,421 Jewish

⁴⁶ This amounts to 6% of congress, whereas Jews only make up less than 2% of the US population.

organizations and 1,271 Muslim organizations (“Directory of Charities...” 2019). For comparison, GuideStar lists 84,706 Christian organizations.

So while the influence of both minority faiths is dwarfed by that of Christianity by both of these measures and others, American Jews have more influence than American Muslims. To be clear, this difference is not due to anything inherent to either of these groups, but is more a result of the differing trajectories of immigration and discrimination these two groups experienced. Many influential national Jewish organizations in America got their start in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when there was a large influx of Jewish immigrants from European nations. Muslims, on the other hand, were not permitted to immigrate to the US in large numbers until after the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965. Though it is growing faster, the Muslim population in America is still smaller than the Jewish population, and the former have only had a few decades in which to establish powerful national organizations like the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) for example, which was founded in 1988.

Returning to discussion of the 2016 One Hamsa spring retreat, I would like to reiterate that unsatisfying outcomes like this one⁴⁷ were the exception, not the rule. Fellows usually felt that all perspectives, including their own, had been heard equally. Still, the examples shared in this chapter illustrate how power discrepancies are occasionally inadvertently reified at One Hamsa. Triangulated narratives have many strengths, but one weakness of that approach is that One Hamsa’s process of triangulating narratives does not include any built-in mechanism for addressing power differences between narratives. Sometimes fellows came on their own to triangulated

⁴⁷ Which even in this case was still only unsatisfying to one or two of eighteen fellows.

narratives that account for power differences between groups. But I argue that addressing power differences is crucial to the project of building solidarity across groups with histories of conflict, and that whether power differences are addressed at One Hamsa or any other progressive space should not be left to chance. Sometimes the overabundance of triangulated narratives (accounting for power differences or not) was taken as evidence that fellows were avoiding the conflict they expected to result from sharing one- and two-eyed narratives. While the kind of person who is drawn to One Hamsa tends to be one who does not shy away from conflict, in any setting it is most likely to be the people with the least power who feel the most trepidation about sharing their narratives.

For example, one Palestinian fellow in the 2016 cohort, Salma, felt conflicted during and after the spring retreat. It wasn't until the second to last session that Salma was able to reconcile what the fellowship had meant for her, when she heard Rachel, a Jewish fellow, share what an impact Salma's words at the retreat had had on her. Before the discussions of the Palestine-Israel conflict at the second retreat, Salma hadn't felt that her Palestinian identity was salient to the fellowship. She participated as a Muslim, like the other Muslim fellows did. But at the retreat, where Palestine was being discussed front and center, Salma felt put on the spot. Looking back on the feeling, she said, "Realizing that I now had to somehow speak for the entire Palestinian population but also remember my own voice and opinion, I became overwhelmed with feelings of responsibility, confusion, anger, and pride."

She wondered why it was that she was the only Palestinian in her cohort, and the answer became clearer to her during the trigger word discussion of the IDF. In Salma's

words:

When the term IDF was brought up, many Jews in the room expressed feelings of pride, gratitude, and love. I didn't expect that to upset me the way that it did. I had seen the IDF in person, I had spoken with an IDF soldier, I even took a picture with a soldier, although I don't know where the picture is or who took it. But none of those experiences did to me what this small moment did. It was as if all of a sudden I couldn't contain myself and all I could think was, "Where are our soldiers? There is no one protecting us."

Salma tried her best during the retreat to express her feelings that a double standard was being applied to Palestinian actions as opposed to Israeli actions. But on the last day of the retreat, when Salma heard Jewish fellows continue to ask questions that reflected double standards, she felt "hopeless, and like they just couldn't see it. I began to shut down and I started to question my involvement with One Hamsa." Salma described her thought process during the month and a half between the second retreat and the session when she experienced a change of heart. As a Muslim American, One Hamsa had given her a platform to explore her own Islamic identity while also learning about Judaism and the Jewish American experience. But, "as a Palestinian I wasn't really sure what I had gained yet, or if I was even supposed to gain anything. I decided to let it go and just enjoy the connections I had made with my Muslim and Jewish fellows. There was no reason to complicate things."

Then, at the penultimate session when fellows were asked to share stories of their most challenging moment during the fellowship, Rachel shared a story that changed the way Salma thought about her experience. Rachel shared that she had lost a close friend to a Palestinian suicide bomber. Though she knew it wasn't rational, when Rachel learned that Salma was Palestinian early in the fellowship, it made her heart race and her palms sweat. Over the next six months, Rachel got to know Salma better,

and they grew to be close friends. Then Rachel described what it was like to hear

Salma talk about Palestine at the spring retreat:

“What should we do?” Salma repeated, “What should we do?” She asked the group for ideas on how to move the situation forward in a way that would cause no further harm. “What should we do?” She asked it over and over. I don’t know, Salma. I have no answer. But we’re together now. We’ll figure it out.

When Salma heard Rachel tell her story, she shared with the group how it had moved her.

I realized that I was heard and it didn’t matter if she changed her mind or not. That wasn’t my goal or my intention. It was the fact that it made an impact to her...A month and a half later she wrote about it. That was really powerful to me and made me feel like this entire experience was really worth it. Really.

Later, after having a chance to reflect and write about her experiences more, Salma added,

Listening to Rachel made me feel heard and appreciated as the only Palestinian in this group...It’s so easy for people to agree in the moment and to nod their heads in agreement while we’re in our little retreat bubble. But to still think about it a month and a half later, and to write about it, well, I’m still trying to find the words of how to describe how that makes me feel. I don’t know yet if this fellowship is for every Palestinian, but at least now, I know that it was for me.

Chapter 5: Constructing a Collective Identity as Members of a Community of Interfaith Activists

Interfaith activism is definitionally the work of creating a collective identity that not only bridges different faith groups, but creates a new pluralistic community. Participants in the interfaith movement imagine an identity that did not previously exist, and become a part of a community of fellow progressive activists of faith. In order to contextualize this discussion of identity and community work in interfaith activism, I begin with definition of terms. Rogers Brubaker (2004) argues that “identity” really comprises two different phenomena: collective identity, or “the emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specified outsiders,” and individual identity, the looser, more open self-understandings held by individuals (46). In their article reviewing literature on the subject, David Snow and Catherine Corrigan-Brown articulate the most basic definition of the concept of collective identity as

the observation that interaction between two or more sets of actors minimally requires that they be situated or placed as social objects. To do so is to announce or impute identities...This process holds for both individuals and collectivities, and it probably has always been a characteristic feature of human interaction...Discussions of the concept invariably suggest that its essence resides in a shared sense of ‘one-ness’ or ‘we-ness’ anchored in real or imagined sets of ‘others.’ (2015, 174-175)

As such a basic facet of human interaction, collective identity is not a new topic in social movement studies. Snow and Corrigan-Brown point out that collective identity also has an action component: “Embedded within the shared sense of ‘we’ is a corresponding sense of ‘collective agency’...[which] not only suggests the possibility of collective action in pursuit of common interests, but even invites such action” (2015,

175). Just as collective identity invites collective action, collective action in the form of social movement mobilization requires collective identity. “At the turn of the century, the concept of collective identity came to be seen not just as a precondition for successful social movement mobilization, but as part of the process of mobilization” (Kurzman 2008, 9). Around that time, one scholar of social movements, Terre Satterfield, writes of identity as “an essential ideological tool through which people become collective actors” and “a means of taking action against those who stand in the way of an imagined, better world” (2002, 9). Creating an identity as collective actors taking action to bring about a better world is an arduous process that requires emotional openness. Melucci writes that in part, collective identity can be defined by a certain degree of emotional investment. “Passions and feelings, love and hate, faith and fear are all a part of a body acting collectively, particularly in those areas of social life that are less institutionalized, such as the social movements” (1996, 71). The One Hamsa collective identity is contingent on participants’ willingness to share vulnerably. Further, Melucci argues that collective identity helps ensure the continuity of a movement. Like the fabled Ship of Theseus, individual actors in a movement may come and go, but the movement retains a single collective identity that ensures continuity.

Since the early 2000s, identity construction has come to be understood as not just a part of the process of mobilizing a social movement, but as a key outcome.

According to Koensler, the success of a movement

derives not from the achievement of its stated goals, but from the ability of activists to act by themselves, to create new subjectivities. In other words, this research has shown how many movements have been able to produce broad long-term changes despite a failure to achieve their declared objective. (2016, 20)

Most scholars of social movements generally avoid discussing the objects of their research in terms of success, because what constitutes “success” varies so much from movement to movement, organization to organization, and actor to actor. Even if success can be defined in a given context, it is difficult to measure using qualitative methods, and such analysis is not the forte of ethnography. Further, many goals of social movements are utopian, and participants recognize that even if the ultimate goals cannot reasonably be achieved in the near- or middle-term, they are still worth working towards. Instead, many social movement scholars focus on outcomes.

Daniel M. Cress and David Snow (2000) argue that social movement studies tend to focus on easily measurable outcomes like legislation, but that this leaves out an important part of the picture, rendering invisible the accomplishments of activists whose goals do not include legislation, like the interfaith activists I observed. They go so far as to say that “the neglect of framing processes in understanding movement outcomes is one of the more glaring oversights in the social movement literature” (1101). I aim for this dissertation to offer one small corrective to that oversight. The narrative triangulation I described in Chapter 4 is, at its core, a process of reframing. In this dissertation, the outcomes I am most interested in understanding are the ones that One Hamsa participants articulate as their goals. These goals, which include framing processes, are largely qualitative and difficult to measure. While large scale, quantitative studies are ideal for measuring major measurable outcomes like legislation, when it comes to understanding qualitative local outcomes, ethnography is a better choice of methodical approach. I suggest that more anthropological and ethnographic contributions to the study of social movement outcomes would provide a needed

corrective to the problem in the literature identified by Cress and Snow (2000).

One Hamsa leaders consider success for the organization to be evidenced in its continued growth both in numbers of participants and in donations, and more importantly, in improved relations between the Jewish and Muslim communities locally. Measuring relations between communities is a tall task that I do not intend to take on. However, if creating new subjectivities can be considered an important long-term change, then One Hamsa has been successful in that sense. In this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which One Hamsa participants go from being strangers with a common interest in learning about the Other to being a group so tightly bounded that members of several different cohorts have characterized their relationship as being “like family.” Which processes have the most influence over forming this bond? Once formed, how do One Hamsa participants characterize their collective identity as a community? What are the outcomes of the process of building an interfaith community?

Collective Identity in Social Movements

Scholars of narrative in social movements acknowledge not only its capacity for building identity, but specifically its capacity for constructing a shared collective identity. Collective identity is important in social movements, because the sense of solidarity it creates enables activists to transcend boundaries that might exist between their other identities. For Jewish/Muslim interfaith activists, whatever boundaries exist between Muslims and Jews transnationally, at One Hamsa they form a sense of solidarity through narratives about being an ethnic minority and victims of discrimination in

America, and about their shared dedication to overcoming the boundaries that exist between other facets of their identities.

Narrative is particularly important for a group like One Hamsa, the interfaith movement in general, and probably many grounded utopian movements, or GUMs,⁴⁸ since talk is the means through which they aspire to affect change. Stories, like the cultural artifacts of music and song in Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison's 1998 study, play an important role in the construction of a collective identity through "supplying actors with the sources of meaning and identity out of which they collectively construct social action," (162). Throughout the program, One Hamsa participants are encouraged to tell stories about themselves, and eventually they begin to do so unprompted. Through storytelling, participants not only get to know one another (and thus come to a better understanding of the Other), but forge a community of shared collective goals and values.

The storytelling process, as a social transaction, engages people in a communicative relationship. Through identification and "cocreation" of a story, the storyteller and reader/listener create a "we" involving some degree of affective bond and a sense of solidarity: told and retold, "my story" becomes "our story"... Interpretive communities come together around stories, constituting and reaffirming themselves as groups with particular attributes. (Davis 2002, 19)

This work constitutes a transformation of what Margaret Somers calls a "public narrative." "Public narratives are those narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand, micro or macro-stories" (1994, 619).

⁴⁸ Charles Price, Donald Nonini, and Erich Fox Tree (2008) argue that within the movement literature, GUMs (like One Hamsa) tend to be overlooked because they do not seek recognition from capitalist institutions or from nation-states. Instead, they "set out to establish alternative ways of living which their members find more just and satisfying than at present" (127).

The fact that interfaith activists aspire not only to create but to transform a pre-existing public narrative complicates the work that has already been done on narrative in social movements. There is already a narrative about Jews and Muslims sharing little if anything in common and being perpetually at odds with one another. This narrative is perhaps nowhere stronger than in certain Muslim and Jewish circles. Thus, it takes Jewish/Muslim interfaith activists even more work to establish a shared collective identity, because they must first address this narrative within their own identity groups that such a thing does not and cannot occur.

Indeed, by some perspectives, a collective identity is a central goal of One Hamsa, as opposed to other social movement organizations for whom establishing collective identity is a means to the end of mobilization and enacting political change. As Kevin McDonald puts it, narratives that establish collective identity “create the possibility of feeling something together” (McDonald 2002, 124), a primary goal of One Hamsa participants. Narratives about a collective identity not only provide an opportunity to feel something together, but through the very use of a “we” in telling a story, the narrator helps bring that shared identity into being (Polletta 1998a, 423). In light of the fact that for Muslims and Jews, there is a pre-existing public narrative of being at odds with one another, how does One Hamsa accomplish the construction of a collective identity, and what is the role of storytelling in that process?

As Scott Hunt and Robert Benford observed when they categorized one type of identity narrative as “associational declarations,” part of the work necessary for building a collective identity is for participants to align their individual identities with the new collective one (1994, 494). Their interlocutors “would often claim that their personal

identities meshed with the organizations' collective identity" (Hunt and Benford 1994, 495). David Snow and Doug McAdam have also written about the need for personal and collective identities to jibe, writing that "the link between a movement's collective identity and the personal or individual identities of movement adherents has received almost no attention in the literature" (2000, 62). One Hamsa is an especially fertile site for investigating the connections between individual and collective identity, due to the nature of the project: participants often experience a strengthening of their individual faith identities even as they forge a collective identity that bridges individual differences. Francesca Polletta has argued that narrative has the capacity to transform reality. Thus, I ask, What kinds of narratives do One Hamsa activists tell that enable them to link their individual and collective identities, even among those with whom their individual identities conflict? Narrative is a primary strategy through which individual identity and collective identity are reconciled, due to its ontological nature.

Narratives of Transformation

One thing a One Hamsa fellow said to her cohort has stuck with me over the years, because it struck me as a great encapsulation of the work One Hamsa community members are trying to do. She said, "when you learn someone's story you can't help falling in love with them a little." In addition to the many opportunities to share personal stories throughout the fellowship, the year-long curriculum is bookended with storytelling-centered activities intended to build relationships. The last two sessions of the fellowship are set aside for fellows to reflect on what their One Hamsa experience

has meant to them, and to develop a narrative of how it impacted them that they can share with others after their experience has ended.

In 2016 a professional writer, Laura, was hired to lead these workshops, after one Muslim One Hamsa leader, Farah, had a particularly transformational experience working with this writer. Farah was having trouble developing a talk in which she ultimately shared a painful memory of being called a traitor for visiting her family's former home, which is now located in Israeli territory. Farah said of the experience,

As we continued to unpeel the different pieces of the story, and I dug deeper into what it is that moved me...I was just like a ball of emotions and Laura helped me get to those deeper places and deeper meanings. And when I got onto the stage it felt right. Because I was real, I was bringing myself to the table, and I wasn't just telling a superficial story. I was telling something that really meant a lot to me and I was taking a lot of risk doing it. And I remember thinking, "Oh my god, this is a heavily Jewish audience, they're gonna reject me and kick me right out the door." And I've been in this work for, at that point nine years doing One Hamsa, and I was surprised yet again of the embrace that I received from the strangers in that audience, was incredibly remarkable. And they connected to things in my story that were the most vulnerable pieces of the story. And that was an incredibly moving and transformational journey for me. And so Laura has been integral into helping more than one One Hamsa alumni help peel away the different layers of their story and get to that place that is most raw and most difficult to share with everybody else.

Farah went on to explain why it is that she feels it is so important to share personal narratives in the style that Laura teaches.

And so I say that especially because right now with One Hamsa, and with the world as it is, your stories, have been in a protected safe space for a series of months now. And to whatever degree you are willing to share those stories, we need them. We don't just need them as to tell what One Hamsa does. We actually literally need them in a ridiculous political cycle⁴⁹ that is just exacerbating fear on an exponential level. And to the degree that you're willing to tell the story whether it's even with a friend who is antisemitic or Islamophobic, that matters, and it matters in a really big way. And you're only gonna be able to connect with that person if you're able to share who you are. Without all the extra armor. And I hope that you will be willing to continue to develop those and share them in

⁴⁹ Farah said this to the cohort about to graduate in Spring 2016.

different ways, whether it's in the one on one or in front of people or telling people about your projects...I think it's really important for us to have relationships and connections and for us to know how to share each other's stories.

During the One Hamsa writing workshop sessions, fellows are asked to reflect on a particularly challenging or transformative moment during the year, and to write it up as a short personal narrative. The purpose of this activity is multifaceted. The workshop leader explained:

You're trying to really dive into meanings, find yourself somewhere where you didn't expect to go. Dive into places that might feel uncomfortable. Because you had the privilege of extraordinary experiences together, and it's those things that we want to find a way to share in a compelling way outside of One Hamsa.

The specific wording of the prompt for this activity varied from year to year. The most concise version was: "Think of a moment during One Hamsa that really challenged you. What was it like? Describe the surroundings, what you felt, what pushed you to the edge. How did you overcome the challenge? What shifted in you or in the Other? What did you take from the experience?"

However the prompt was worded, fellows often needed extra clarification during the workshops as to what kind of tone they were being asked to aim for. When one fellow asked what audience they should be envisioning, the workshop leader answered,

It's a way of processing and naming what you've been through. But also we're sharing it in a way that is useful...If you can speak personally from that experience in a way that's compelling and clear, then it's of great use...We're looking at the possibility of podcasts and anthologies, those kinds of things, just in order to mark that moment and this particular moment in time on the planet. Just as an antidote to fear.

Because they knew these stories might possibly be used to represent One Hamsa publicly, occasionally fellows would present stories that oversimplified difficult

challenges they had faced and came across as saccharine and predictable. When this happened, the workshop leader offered clarification.

For example, as I have discussed, one cohort encountered more conflict than others, and many of these tensions were still unresolved by the last two sessions. During the first session, a few fellows shared honestly about their dissatisfaction, while several others glossed over the specific conflicts they encountered in favor of telling a narrative that portrayed One Hamsa in a positive light. The workshop leader sensed that fellows still had some internal knots they were working through. She told them,

At this point don't worry about tying things up in a knot. Or tying things up in a bow I should say. Because we all know how it feels to receive something that we already knew what it was about from the very beginning. Right? "Thank you very much, that was very nice." What you want to do is find a way to unpeel something about where you've been that nobody has ever been.

The following week, the fellows had an opportunity to share a revised version of their story, or a new story entirely. Most of them took advantage of this opportunity by presenting stories that were more honest and less intended to be shared publicly.

I present these narratives not as factual representations of One Hamsa experiences, but to illustrate what kinds of narratives fellows use to make sense of their year in the fellowship. To again harken back to scholars of narrative in social movements like Polletta and Jasper, activists understand personal narrative to be a powerful tool. From the perspective of One Hamsa leaders, one goal of workshopping these narratives is to produce at least a few that can be used to mobilize the One Hamsa community and to draw new members into it. Fellows understand this and often make an effort to compose a narrative that helps serve this purpose. On the other hand, fellows also understand that their narrative will only be used in this way if they consent

to it. Some fellows compose their narratives never intending to share them publicly, and take the opportunity to engage in personal reflection in order to better understand what their experience has meant to them. In practice, most fellows incorporate a little of each of these approaches in their writing.

A number of themes recur in the narratives that fellows presented about their most challenging One Hamsa moments, which underscore the same themes that came up again and again during meetings and interviews. The most frequently repeated theme among all participants was that of transformed perspectives. For example, one Jewish fellow described how her perspective had changed through intrafaith discussions with other Jews.

When I came to One Hamsa, it was at a moment in my life where I was feeling really displaced from the Jewish community...And so when we were working together as an intrafaith group, as a group of Jews to figure out how we were going to present Shabbat to Muslims, I tried to keep a lid on it but I felt pretty prickly a lot of the time. I felt like we were all kinda anxiously fighting for control over whose vision of Judaism we were presenting but didn't know each other well enough to be honest about what was really happening so we were kind of like sort of politely elbowing each other's version of Judaism away...[During one intrafaith discussion] I was listening and there were people in the group who I perceived as belonging more than I did, either because they were more religious than me or because their relationship with the Jewish community broadly seemed really secure and untroubled. And I kind of hated this, it really got under my skin. And I was sitting there listening, and what I heard was these people in the group who I'd decided they were the lucky authentic belonging ones. They started talking about their own insecurities in the group. For being a professional woman who is also religious and getting a lot of flack for that. Or feeling a lot of anxiety about making sure Judaism was presented well to outsiders because of anxiety about perceptions of Judaism. And they spoke about this as if it were totally normal for everyone to have insecurities but it had never occurred to me. [she laughs] Because of sort of the strength of my own stuff around this that other folks could be also feeling insecure about different things having to do with their Jewish identities. And so, what happened was, first it all helped me calm down a bit. And secondly it opened up the possibility of having more compassion for myself and for other people.

She concluded by saying that because of this experience, she was able to gain more from the second retreat than she otherwise might have, because she was able to understand that conversations about the Palestinian Israeli conflict are not just about factual context, but about a person who has their own insecurities and emotional life.

Both Muslim and Jewish fellows described transformations that occurred through intrafaith conversations. Also very common were narratives describing transformations that occurred through interfaith conversations. One Muslim fellow described how his theoretical knowledge of Judaism came to life when he was able to experience and participate in Jewish traditions for the first time. His experience meeting Jews through One Hamsa inspired him to join events in his local Jewish community, and further, his experiences learning about Judaism deepened his connection to his own faith.

When I hear anything related to Jews it comes to life through the stories and experiences I've had. Being able to witness things first hand has been amazing and those Shabbat dinners have been touching...I was even able to find my local synagogue and attend a few events, meet Jewish families in the area, and I was even given a Hebrew name by the rabbi at the synagogue. When I read the Quran it means a lot more to me now than before...I feel like every day, my perspective widened and my world widened.

Another Muslim fellow shared that the most important transformation she experienced was gaining a new awareness of her blind spots. "I went to this program thinking what an open minded person I was, interfaith friends aren't a new experience for me, I probably know everything. And after spending time with you guys I learned so much that I have thought, 'Oh, I didn't know what I thought I knew.'" This same fellow also reflected that it was transformative to hear that Jewish fellows also experienced a change in perspective. She said that by the end of the spring retreat, she was feeling discouraged.

It's not as easy as I thought. It is very hard to change yourself and especially change how you feel about things that you're very attached to. It's hard to change your opinion. Then while I was packing my bag and thinking, I heard someone say something that completely changed how I was feeling. And I felt it was worth it. What I heard someone saying was, a Jewish person, an Orthodox Jewish person saying to a Muslim that, "Through you I learned my religion." And that moment, I had tears in my eyes just hearing that. And I thought, it was worth it. It was worth spending that day, it was worth spending this year with you guys.

The fact that fellows experienced both intra- and interfaith interactions as transformative reflects what I understand to be more of a semantic matter than a substantive one. Interfaith activists recognize the incredible diversity within any given religion, and One Hamsa fellows are selected based on creating a cohort that is as religiously diverse as possible. Thus, even when interfaith activists are conversing only with co-religionists, they are often still conversing with people from very different religious backgrounds than their own. The transformativity of both intra- and interfaith interactions also illustrates the salience of political identification among One Hamsa community members. In other words, it is often easier for progressive Jews to find common ground with progressive Muslims than with politically conservative Jews.

Many fellows who talked about how their perspective changed attributed this change to the personal connections they built with other fellows. "Being in close contact helps build empathy for the Jewish experience and a different side of the story," said one Muslim fellow. He and several others mentioned in their narratives that now when they hear news about Jews and Muslims in the US or about the Palestinian Israeli Conflict, they consider what their friends of the Other faith might say about it. As I have discussed elsewhere, former fellows often acted on this change by getting in touch with friends from their cohort when upsetting news broke, or by organizing an alumni

gathering across cohorts to discuss a particularly difficult topic with facilitation. Additionally, like the Orthodox Jew one fellow overheard telling a Muslim fellow, “through you I learned my religion,” some fellows reflected on how their relationship with their own faith had grown stronger through the experience of sharing it with people outside their faith community, with whom they otherwise would never have broached the topic of religion.

Another very common theme in these end of year narratives was the idea of leaning into discomfort. Several fellows discussed how the most challenging transformation for them was learning to embrace their vulnerability. One said they learned that “it’s ok to let others into your safe space.” Another said, “This fellowship has opened up the door to being vulnerable and inquisitive.” One Jewish fellow shared vulnerably in her end of the year narrative itself, which was met with appreciation from the rest of the cohort.

The moments of difficulty were moments when I felt that my reality was so very different from how I and other Jews seem to be perceived. Moments I felt so misunderstood or when I felt the truth somehow distorted. What I found most difficult was the haunting question of whether or not we could truly shed our prejudiced views. Perceptions we have of one another based on what we’ve been told or experienced or just assumed. I felt saddened and even somewhat indignant when asked questions that I felt had antisemitic overtones. “Do we really believe we’re better than everybody else?” “Do we really feel allegiance to the country we live in given our support of Israel?” These are questions that have such strong echoes of years of baseless accusations. What have I or any Jew done to specifically be asked these questions? How or why are these questions still asked [today] in the United States? Did I or other Jews in this group do or say anything to evoke these questions? And is it possible that people in this room think this of me? And yet. These difficult moments were also moments of inspiration, and really what I was seeking by joining this fellowship. I really wanted to get at the hard questions....I wanted to know what the Muslims really think of Jews and I wanted someone to be honest. During those moments we peeled away at our façade of unbiased liberal progressivism, and admitted that yes, we hold some prejudiced views. We all have prejudiced views, myself

included. It might even be part of human nature. And I'm sure I showed some prejudice in my questions to Muslim fellows. But perhaps the only way we can move forward is to address these head on. Our challenge as global citizens is to address those biases. Try to unmask them and name them. I hoped in this fellowship to do that. I masked my own hidden prejudices and addressed prejudiced views others have of me. And we did it a little, and maybe not enough. So reflecting back to those moments, I realized that they were among the most meaningful for me in this fellowship. I also realized that I also truly appreciated being asked those questions. I respect those of you who had the courage to ask honest and difficult questions. I recognize the good intentions even if some questions were painful for me to hear. I'm so grateful for the friendships that allowed those hard questions to be asked without fear. I think I learned that you can have prejudiced views and good intentions at the same time. And maybe the only way to deal with prejudice is to ask these questions of someone you admire, someone you trust. I think if we accomplished anything, it was to build this trust that allows us to ask the hard questions of each other. The questions we might otherwise be too embarrassed or afraid to ask. I can't promise that I won't elicit any emotion with being asked those questions or asking them myself. I think you all know that this is one of my major weaknesses. But I've learned to give the benefit of the doubt, remembering good intentions is of utmost importance...I'm reminded of the famous words of Rabbi Tarfon, a Rabbi quoted in the oral Torah in the third century. "מְמַנֶּה לְבַטֵּל חוֹרֵין בֶּן אֶתָּה וְלֹא, לְגַמֵּר לְאַכְהֶמָּה עָלֶיךָ לֹא." "It is not your duty to complete the work, not up to you to finish it, but neither are you free to desist from it." We should keep talking to each other and understanding each other despite these open ended and unanswered questions.

The centrality of vulnerability to the One Hamsa experience had another kind of outcome as well, according to fellows' end of year narratives. One fellow reflected on the experience of witnessing the vulnerability of others. He said that this approach helped him understand that conflict is not only about a difference of opinion, which are sometimes irreconcilable, but "also about a person and their emotions and their insecurities."

Another recurring theme was the idea that in order to make change and address conflicts productively, the focus should be on building relationships across conflict. As opposed to thinking of conflict as something that needs to be avoided or resolved, these narratives frame conflict as an inevitable part of the human experience. The clearest

example of this sort of narrative comes not from a fellow, but from Farah's talk that she developed with help from Laura, the writing workshop leader. Farah implored the audience to ask themselves what would happen if they responded to conflict with curiosity.

That has been my life's work. Helping people uncover the potential of curiosity, so when they're in that charged moment, they take a moment, and they think, and ask what it is that they really, really want. Because ultimately, tension clouds our judgement. It doesn't allow us to get to a deeper place. The deeper place of where we're really responding. At One Hamsa, we treat conflict as natural and inevitable. It's just part of human relationship, neither good nor bad. Rather, an opportunity to get to a deeper place.

One 2016 fellow shared that for him, a turning point in the fellowship was the session after the spring retreat. At the beginning of the first session after the retreat, many fellows expressed to the facilitators that they had not felt satisfied with the note on which they had ended their retreat, and that they still needed to work through the feelings and conflicts that had come up. In response, the facilitators decided to scrap some of the planned activities for that meeting and instead made space for a listening circle. "I felt that was exactly what we needed," the fellow said.

It was a way for us to unload our tension and begin to trust, be vulnerable, and open our hearts once again. The listening circle allowed us to hear and to be heard and created space to express and release. It reiterated for me that the work we are doing is not in the content, it's in the relationships. It's in the engagement. And even in times of high stress and in disagreement, when we stay committed to the process of relationship building, we always come out the other end with growth.

In both of these narratives, the speakers emphasize the relational aspect of conflict resolution and illustrate that relationships across conflict are in themselves one of the primary desired outcomes of interfaith activists.

Among narratives that fit this theme, some express gratitude for the conflict resolution toolkit the fellowship offered. Several expressed a desire to bring what they have learned back to their faith communities while others shared about already having done so. Several expressed their hopes for the future in general, pluralistic terms. For example, one fellow concluded her narrative: “We are the changemakers. And changemakers are the revolutionaries. Those are the people who are able to make differences and they are the ones who believe the past does not define the future.”

Many fellows also expressed the strong bond they felt as a cohort and stated their intentions to stay in touch. For one fellow, it was the relationship building aspects of the program that enabled her to buy into the rest of the fellowship.

I was struggling with feelings of being an outsider during the [first] retreat, but I told myself, I made a commitment to participate in One Hamsa and I was going to push past my discomfort and be present and participate fully regardless of how I was feeling. I'm glad I forced myself out of my comfort zone and trusted the process, because to my surprise, all the random exercises and games that to my previously jaded and cynical self would have thought was stupid and pointless and which I wouldn't have participated in, started to slowly bit by bit make me feel less and less like an outsider. And more and more comfortable and happy to be there...I left the retreat knowing how open, vulnerable, and trusting we all were with each other and I was amazed I could feel so supported by people I was so scared of before.

Another fellow who was initially skeptical of the program said that for him it was also the relationship building on a retreat that made him realize the importance of “showing love and gratitude for humanity,” his main takeaway from the fellowship.

At the very end of one cohort's final session, each fellow was asked to share one word that summed up their feelings about the fellowship. The fellows shared the following words: Warm memories, connection, coziness, friendship, memories, powerful, appreciation, sisterhood, insight, grateful, small revelations, unity, gratitude,

warmth, bonding, thought provoking, remembrance, community. One fellow said in her narrative,

I have come to trust my One Hamsa friends and be able to hold space for each other, even in our contradictions and disagreements. We have developed a bond that transcends politics and religious differences, a bond that has taken time and open-heartedness to build. A bond that's almost like family, and like family sometimes we do or say things that hurt one another even when we are not intending.

This fellow was just one of many to compare their cohort to a family. One fellow responded to this idea by pointing out that as a cohort they have something that families don't- a shared vision. The shared vision this fellow goes on to describe is a vision of interfaith pluralism. But he clarifies that this pluralistic vision is not an unrealistic, pie in the sky vision, but a vision that fellows are already bringing into fruition.

It's not this hippie interfaith vision of goodness and purity. None of us strive to win the war, or end racism, or find world peace. Instead we seek wholeness in this shattered world, a world argued by philosophers and clerics to be shattered by design. Each fellow here at One Hamsa seeks to gather the broken and scattered pieces of our world and strives to constantly make our world whole. Wholeness seekers...We are an allied force for wholeness...A force awakened, a force for good, and I promise the life and work I have ahead of me, we have ahead of us, is a force to be reckoned with.

Not only do fellows think of the One Hamsa community as a family, but leaders do as well. At the final session of the 2016 cohort, a facilitator told the fellows that she was amazed by their intellectual and emotional growth.

I really am amazed by all of you. For being here and pushing through everything. It's just an incredible, incredible investment that you've made and I thought about that a lot this week, I'm just so in awe of all of you. And I hope that you all keep investing in yourselves that way, loving yourselves and having the spirit to reach the finish and have the kind of time in your lives to grow, to change, and to be together, just to care about something for the sake of caring about it.

Another leader ended a different final session by saying, “This is really specially, the best place to be. I’d rather be here than anywhere else.”

Constructing and Maintaining Collective Identity Online

One intervention I hope to make in the literature through this project is to illustrate the ways in which community is constructed in both actual and virtual space. As David Bell (2007) has pointed out, much of the literature about online community is “an argument about either (a) the fate of community today, or (b) the effects of technology on social relations” (254). The former usually follow in the steps of Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* (2000), arguing that technology heralds the end of community in its “traditional” sense. But Bell argues that even before the internet, Americans had already reoriented their communities from the actual world to a virtual one.

This mythic RL cosy community no longer exists (if it ever did) for lots of us—our communities are already virtual, sustained by phone calls, car trips, airmail, photo albums. Mobility makes a nonsense of the image of slowly-built-up, densely interwoven communities: more and more people are patching together something-like-community as they move through space. (2007, 255)

The “traditional community” imagined by Putnam is not an option for most Americans, and as a result, people have turned to those outside their geographical location for a sense of community. The internet has opened up new possibilities for the formation of communities. And while these new communities have their own drawbacks unique to virtual communication, they also offer particular advantages that were not previously possible.

Virtual communities are augmenting or standing-in for RL communities, even improving on them—where RL membership was related to accidents of geography, virtual membership is elective and selective, meaning we can each

make our own perfect community, a patchwork of our interests and affiliations...In this regard, virtual communities might be thought of as *more* durable and sustainable, since membership can be retained in spite of movement, or even because of movement. (Bell 2007, 255-256)

Some scholars critique this definition of community, arguing that “community” as a concept should not include looser virtual ties that don’t require durability or longevity. For example, Kevin Robins critiques the idea that communities can exist online at all. At best, he argues that online communication erases aspects of interaction that are necessary to build a strong community. He writes,

With its well-intentioned belief in sharing, collaboration, mutuality, and so on, virtual communitarianism is a stultifying vision – an absolutely anti-social and anti-political vision. Cyberspace, with its myriad of little consensual communities, is a place where you will go in order to find confirmation and endorsement of your identity. And social and political life can never be about confirmation and endorsement-- it needs distances...Encounters with others should not be about confirmation, but about transformation. (Robins 2007, 234)

I think these concerns are well placed and should be considered in a discussion of cyber communities. Recently, there has been much discussion in the media of the dangerous propensity of online communities to become echo chambers, especially in light of the influence of online echo chambers on the 2016 election and the general political atmosphere since then. I would put forth that like any new technology, the ability to form insular online communities is not inherently negative; such communities have great potential as hush harbors (Byrne 2008) for people who are not able to congregate in person, either because they are too few and far apart, or because it would be too dangerous. Further, the risk of communities becoming echo chambers is not a new one, and the tendency to surround oneself with only likeminded others should be resisted in both actual and virtual reality.

Bell's theory of "webs as pegs" (2007) serves as a useful framework for understanding the nature of online communities. His argument is posed in response to arguments like that of Robins who argue that cyber communities are not real communities, are bad for real communities, or both. Rather than understanding their ephemerality as a threat to community itself, Bell argues that we should understand online communities as "collectives entered into with eyes-wide-open, not stumbled into blinded by tradition and obligation" (258). Participants in online communities understand what they are entering into, and do not expect their experience of online community to mirror their offline experiences.

Victoria Bernal's work on online communities formed by members of the Eritrean diaspora is particularly illustrative here. She approaches online communication as being not only about sharing information, but "also an emotion-laden and creative space" for inventing new forms of community and identity (2006, 161). She critiques the existing literature on online communities as failing to "explore the relationships between online activities, virtual community and experiences of belonging" (164). For users, posting and commenting in an online community is not purely about sharing information and being entertained, but also about reflecting, reinforcing, and validating their experiences and identities. Together, members of online communities define what it means to be a member of that community. The Eritrean online community Bernal observed "serves not simply as an outlet for the expression of identity and culture...but, rather, as a public sphere in which identity, community, and citizenship are constructed collectively through processes of contestation and debate" (2005, 669).

One failing Bernal points out in the literature on virtual communication is the treatment of online communities as existing in a vacuum. Thinking beyond the actual/virtual dichotomy is helpful here, particularly in the case of One Hamsa sites of cybersocialization. One Hamsa's online community centers around the Facebook group for alumni. Additionally, many cohorts have their own private Facebook groups or groups on other social media platforms. These online spaces are intended to augment, not replace, in person connections; still, there are members of the One Hamsa community who only interact with one another online. Some participants know each other in person, while others are tied together as members of the imagined community of One Hamsa alumni and other interfaith activists.

How does the community work members carry out in actual space affect their interactions in cyberspace, and vice-versa? What role do cyber communities play in the formation of Jewish and Muslim American identities among One Hamsa participants, and in the formation of a shared identity as Muslim-Jewish interfaith activists? In the discussion that follows, I illustrate that online communal spaces need not always become echo chambers. I have found that the online One Hamsa community is able to engage in respectful online discussions of hot topics under certain circumstances. In particular I found that One Hamsa's community agreements, which are enforced both online and in actual world discussions, increase the likelihood that members will share dissenting views respectfully. As Bernal observed among Eritreans, among interfaith activists, "identities are constructed not simply out of sameness or consensus, but through conflict" (2005, 669).

Safe spaces for sharing vulnerably

For Eritreans in the diaspora, online community offers a forum in which the displaced can construct a shared understanding of their transnational identities. Bernal writes that “the importance of such sites where relative freedom of expression and tolerance of opposing viewpoints are practiced becomes even greater when the larger political context lacks those possibilities” (2006, 167). While Americans do have relative freedom of expression, many One Hamsa fellows feel that they are unable to share their opinions freely in certain settings, especially when it comes to discussing the Palestinian Israeli conflict. In particular, many fellows mentioned that before they participated in the program, when they knew they were in the presence of someone who had an opposing view when it came to that topic, they made a point of giving the conflict a wide berth. And while they know that debates online have a tendency to quickly become inflammatory, members of the One Hamsa community are committed to leaning into the discomfort of those conversations.

Is it possible to engage in a conflict online without it becoming destructive to the relationships of the participants? Bernal answers this question by writing that in online communities,

conflict emerges as a central dynamic and one that is not only destructive but also productive of identity, community, and the public sphere...Although the ways in which external threats can serve to unite nations and communities are well recognized, the ways in which communities are themselves united through conflict are less obvious (2005, 662).

Members of One Hamsa would agree with Bernal that conflict has just as strong a capability to unite communities as to divide them. What factors determine whether conflict, online or off, contributes more to strengthening a community or tearing it apart?

At One Hamsa, the primary tool community members use to ensure that their community is strengthened, not weakened, by conflict is the community agreement.

As I mentioned in the introduction, One Hamsa facilitators guide each cohort through the process of crafting a community agreement during the very first meeting of the year. Through this agreement, participants co-determine what will thereafter be considered the “common sense” of their interactions both in and out of the program itself. In other words, facilitators and fellows construct an intersubjective common culture, or what Harold Garfinkel calls “common sense knowledge of social structures,” (Garfinkel 1969, 76). This common sense is the “socially sanctioned grounds of inference and action that people use in their everyday affairs and which they assume that others use in the same way,” (Garfinkel 1969, 76).

The community agreement is the way in which One Hamsa fellows’ interactions with one another are organized, with the assumption that all community members will adhere to these rules, which govern the practical affairs of the group and are designed with members’ interests in mind. Garfinkel points out that common sense guides the ways in which participants make meanings from correspondence with others who are assumed to share the same common sense. “Correct correspondence is the product of the work of investigator and reader as members of a community of cobelievers,” (Garfinkel 1969, 96). The primary reason One Hamsa leaders give for carving out time in the curriculum for each cohort to develop community agreements is to establish a safe space in which participants are able to share vulnerably. As one facilitator explained to a new cohort just before discussing community agreements,

Because we're going to be talking about things that are sometimes uncomfortable, our goal is to help you be comfortable being uncomfortable... We'll try to create a safe space, help you create a safe space together, where you can share those vulnerable things, you can share feelings and thoughts. So there's a sort of emotionally sensitive way that we're gonna be with you.

Her co-facilitator added,

Thank you for the trust you have already shown by being here... We will do everything we can to maintain that trust, to cherish that trust, and to have you all deepen that trust amongst yourselves as well. And the community agreement is an essential piece to that... So we're gonna take as much time as is necessary to create that safe space so we can trust each other, we can disagree, we can have fun, we can support each other, we can hold each other accountable, and everything else that we want to do as a community together.

One Hamsa is not alone among social movement organizations that make a deliberate effort to establish shared norms. One of Braunstein's interlocutors describes establishing safe spaces as a way for communities to "get unstuck." He tells her, "These are sacred conversations when we get to those lower levels" that can only be reached when community members feel comfortable sharing vulnerably (2017, 43).

It was only by going beneath the surface in this way that we could "move from private pain to public action." People often got stuck, he stated: "They're afraid. They're paralyzed. They don't know what to do." Yet, he explained, when "you come along, and you invite people to talk about what's happening for them, and you begin to create the opportunity for them to band together with other people and do something about it...they get unstuck. And things can begin to happen. (Braunstein 2017, 43)

Mia Diaz-Edelman writes more in depth about the ways in which she observed her interlocutors establishing a safe space. Through what she calls multiculturalist activist etiquette, or MAE, movement participants facilitate trust and emotional vulnerability with one another. Diaz-Edelman's interlocutors used MAE "to establish a culture of interaction that respected their unique identities" (2017, 156) through

awareness, inclusive openness, and sensitivity to the needs of vulnerable immigrant communities rooted in progressive religious and liberal values...Meetings could not be conducted without sincere consideration of religious, ethnic, and national differences. (144)

Diaz-Edelman argues that upholding MAE resulted in “mutual respect, trust, and productivity toward realizing movement goals” (157). When all participants felt respected and valued, they were more likely to collaborate effectively on shared goals. On this basis, many activists formed personal friendships with one another in addition to their more effective professional relationships. This reflects what I observed at One Hamsa. Many participants formed strong friendships that they maintained well beyond their cohort’s graduation through weekend and holiday get togethers and group chat apps. When violence in Palestine and Israel escalated, One Hamsa alumni often reached out to their friends from the program for emotional support. In one case, just after the terrorist attack on the Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris in 2015, an alumni posted in the One Hamsa alumni group on Facebook that he was “feeling pretty Islamophobic” and wanted to meet with other alumni. Several alumni volunteered to help, and the following weekend a facilitated session was held at a fellow’s home to unpack feelings about the attack.

Delehanty observes that when participants in the interfaith organization ELIJAH are able to share vulnerably, the emotional testimonies they are able to share help to provide a basis for solidarity and collective action across substantial social difference...Personal testimony is effective in ELIJAH because it connects social critique with an emotionally powerful religious practice that appeals across many backgrounds. (2018, 259)

Because of the power of sharing vulnerably, one strategy that ELIJAH leaders use is “emotional management,” defined as “leaders’ intentional use of emotions to mitigate

the challenges imposed by social difference” (250). Delehanty describes two specific narratives that emerged from this management style, lived injustice narratives and failed covenant narratives. In the former, activists describe personal experiences of injustice, highlighting their emotional repercussions. In the latter, activists reflect on their privilege and try to “make sense of their roles in producing and contesting the problems from which other people suffer. It focuses on the guilt and anger that privileged people feel about living in a society that violates God’s sacred trust by allowing deep inequalities to persist” (250). I also observed these types of narratives emerging during discussions in which One Hamsa fellows adhered to the community agreement they had made.

What happens when activist etiquette is not upheld and activists are unable to share strong emotions? At Diaz-Edelman’s field site,

when MAE was ignored, it jeopardized trust, caused rifts among activists and between organizations, and diverted energy away from productivity and toward repairing injured relationships—all of which took the focus off of movement goals and weakened the movement base. (2017, 157)

I turn now to a discussion of how adherence to the community agreements plays out in conversations among One Hamsa fellows and alumni. What is the role of the community agreements in facilitating vulnerable sharing, and what happens when these agreements are not upheld? As with in-person interactions, One Hamsa fellows and alumni are expected to adhere to a community agreement when they post in One Hamsa Facebook groups. Each year when the current fellows graduate, they are invited to join the One Hamsa Alum group. In theory, the community agreement is revisited and updated in order to reflect anything the new alumni might want to add, but in practice it has not been substantively altered since 2014. On Facebook, the community agreement

exists as a file linked from the group's main page, which anyone can view or edit at any time. This document was originally created during the final meeting of the 2013 cohort. It was brainstormed by that year's cohort and posted by the organization's executive director.

Points on cohort community agreements and the community agreement on Facebook reflect many similar goals (see Appendices B and C). In both cases, points on the agreement emphasize the importance of respect, taking a moment if one is upset or angry, and using "I" statements (speaking for yourself rather than phrasing your comments as speaking for a whole community). Both also emphasize that everyone in the community is there to learn and create positive change, and to give others the benefit of the doubt. Differences between actual and Facebook community agreements largely involve logistical concerns. For example, the actual agreement contains rules about the use of cell phones during meetings and encourages participants to be aware of time constraints. The Facebook agreement has many points that are geared towards ensuring that the flame wars that seem to be so common on Facebook do not break out in the alumni group. For example, one point suggests that participants "introduce each article [they] post to help readers digest the content—which may be emotionally charged." In case a back-and-forth dynamic does develop, the two participants are encouraged to talk on the phone or, even better, in person, so that they can better understand one another's point of view. Moderators have been appointed whose job it is to gently remind participants who become involved in such a back-and-forth dynamic that they should take it off Facebook and talk to each other in the actual world if possible. What then happens when one or both parties breach their community's

common sense? What does “incorrect correspondence” look like in the One Hamsa Alum Facebook group?

The 2014 Gaza-Israel conflict was a particularly tense time for Jewish-Muslim relations in the United States (and all over the world). It galvanized disagreements and sometimes arguments among Muslim-Jewish interfaith activists, but it also provided an opportunity for interfaith activists to be a model of what peaceful relationships between Jews and Muslims can look like. During this time there was a huge spike in posts to the One Hamsa Alum Facebook group (see Figure 2). In June, the 2014 One Hamsa cohort graduated and was invited to join this group, and 15 members were added to the group during that time, which may have contributed somewhat to the increased numbers. Even accounting for the increased number of members, the enormous increase in posts from June to July is undoubtedly due to current events at that time.

Figure 2: Numbers of Posts to the One Hamsa Alum Facebook Group by Month

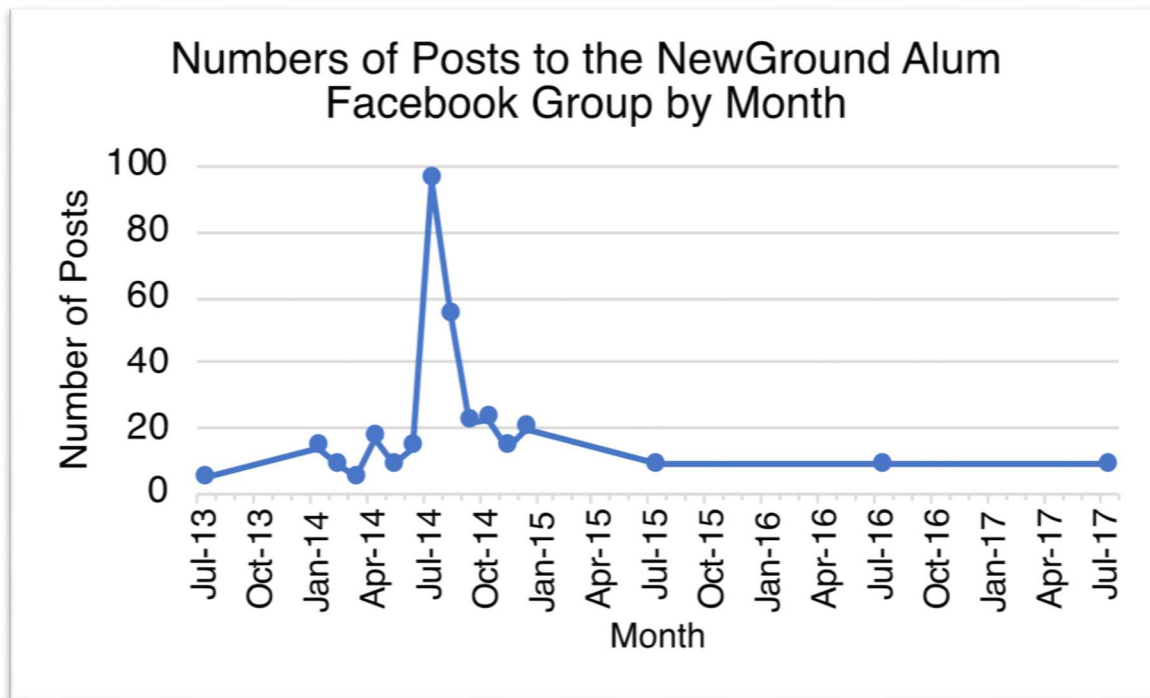
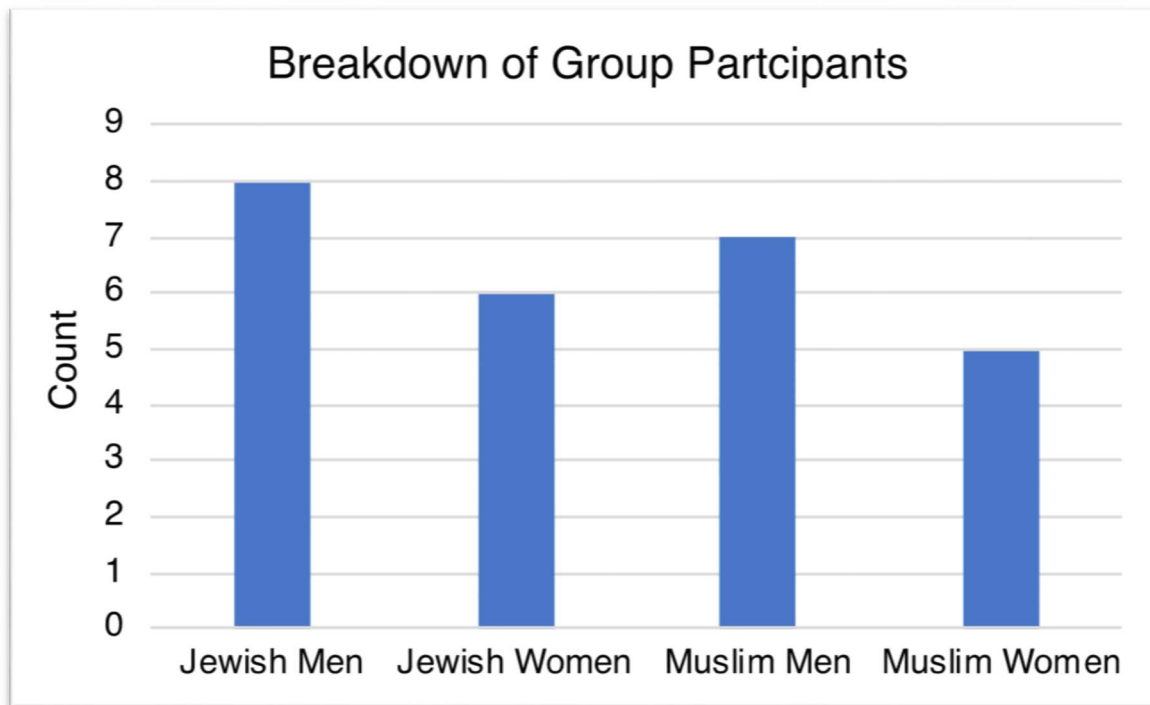


Figure 3: Breakdown of Group Participants

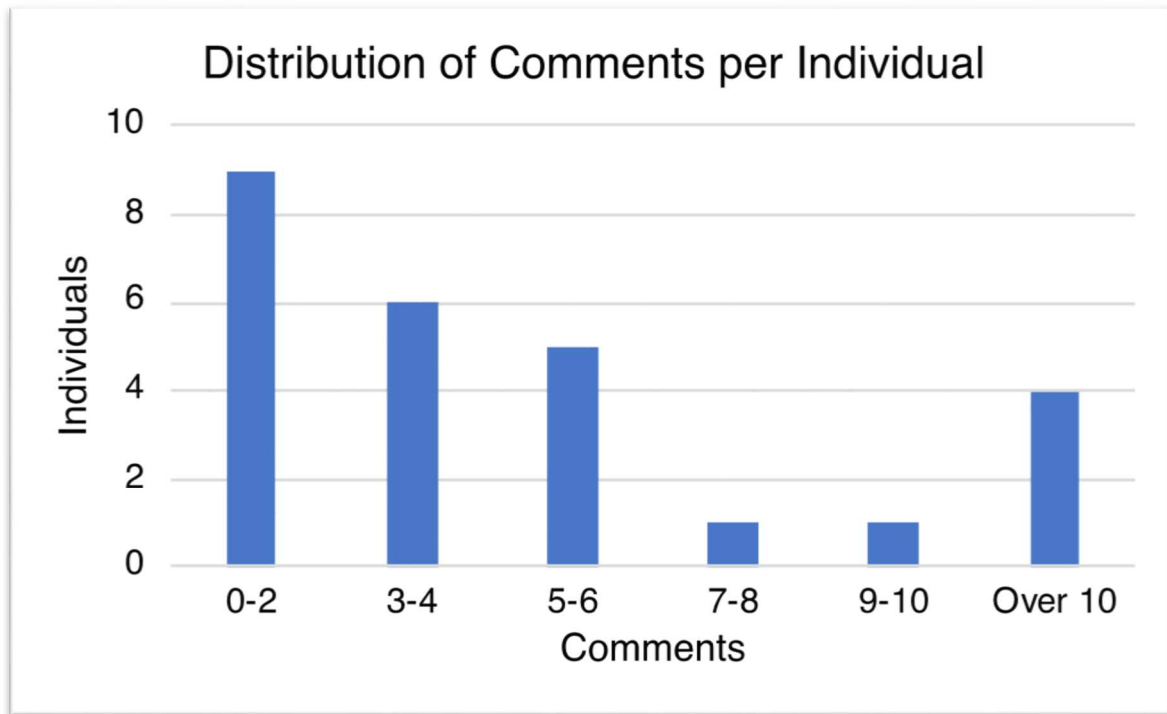


On June 12, 2014, three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped and murdered while traveling to their homes in Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Suspicion immediately fell on Hamas, and by June 26th the names of two suspects were released, both members of a “rogue Hamas branch,” (Eldar 2014). Israel responded with Operation Brother’s Keeper, a crackdown on Hamas in the West Bank, which lasted until July 2nd. The bodies of the teens were found on June 30th, and they were buried on July 1st. That evening, Israeli mobs called for revenge, and the next day, a Palestinian teenager was kidnapped and murdered in a suspected revenge attack (JTA). News of his death spurred clashes between Palestinians and police in East Jerusalem (Ma’an). On July 7th rockets were fired from Gaza, for which Hamas assumed responsibility. This attack prompted the IDF to immediately initiate Operation Protective Edge, which lasted 50

days, ending August 26th. These events explain the spike in number of posts in July; although the galvanizing events of the conflict began in June, the gravity of the situation did not become apparent to many of us in the United States until July.

Who is it that posts on the One Hamsa Alumni Facebook group page, and who reads the posts? During July and August 2014, there were 78 members in the group. From late June until mid-July, Facebook's "seen by" tool indicates that about 60 people viewed each post. This only indicates how many people looked at a post and does not reveal how closely those people read the post; however, it does seem to indicate that a high percentage of the group was at least checking in to follow posts regularly. By the end of August, this number had dropped slightly to about 53 views per post, but remained a majority of the group. Of all group members, 26 posted at least once during July and August 2014. Of those, the numbers of Muslims and Jews, men and women are fairly balanced (see Figure 3), reflecting the overall demographic makeup of the Facebook group. Figure 4 shows how many participants posted with differing levels of frequency. The greatest number of group members posted infrequently. The general trend is for there to be fewer posters posting at the highest frequencies, with a few outliers who post *much* more frequently than anyone else. It is worth mentioning that of the seven most frequent posters, only two were women, and one of those women is not an alumna but the executive director of One Hamsa. This is consistent with studies of gendered oral speech which indicate that men tend to dominate conversation, both in actual and online spaces. One area for future research is more analysis of how participation on Facebook differs by gender, particularly whether or not topics selected by men are more often pursued in discussion.

Figure 4: Distribution of Comments per Individual



I turn now to an analysis of deviant cases of conversation in the One Hamsa Alumni Facebook group, in which one or more of the community agreements is breached. I am particularly interested in identifying what kinds of breaches are most likely to lead to the arguments that occur in this Facebook group. Out of a total of 153 posts during July and August 2014, 53 of which were commented on, about eight resulted in an argument in the comments. Breaches of certain points on the community agreement are difficult or impossible for me to ascertain, since they have to do with what was going on in the poster's head at the time (e.g., "Take the time to be thoughtful and consider your audience" or "Pretend you are physically in front of the person you are communicating with"). But clear breaches of the community agreements occurred

25 times during July and August 2014. Of those, seven resulted in arguments; meanwhile posts without breaches of the community agreement never resulted in arguments. I thought it important to highlight the gender issue above, because of the seven people who participated in those arguments, only one was a woman. This discrepancy might be a fruitful avenue for future research. Here, I focus on addressing the questions, Why did breaches only sometimes result in an argument? What kind of breach of the community agreement does it take to result in an argument?

In order to address these questions, I first examine the cases where a breach did not lead to an argument (see Table 2). Of those 18 cases, four were missing “I statements,” ten did not have an introduction, and four were framed in ways that might be interpreted as attacking (of those four, three instances were the same person on different occasions). Of the 18 cases, only two led to a discussion in the comments. There are a few ways these data may be interpreted. One possibility is that no one took the time to read these posts and comment, or read them and had nothing to say about them, although considering that overall about 1/3rd of all posts in the sample were commented on, only two discussions is low. Another possibility is that people deliberately avoided commenting on these posts. Perhaps commenters choose only to post in response to a person who they think is likely to respond to them by following the community agreement.

Table 2. Occurrence of Breaches and Whether or Not they Led to Arguments

	No Argument	Argument	Totals
No Introduction	10	1	11
No “I” Statements	4	3	7
Framing Issue	4	7	11
Totals	18	7	25

A few more factors worth mentioning are the nature of the respective breaches. A lack of introduction was the most common breach by far, perhaps because many posts were self-explanatory. Participants may have forgotten to include introductions so often because this is one of the points on the Facebook community agreement that did not exist on the actual cohort community agreements, which they have had more practice following. In a post reminding everyone how to have productive discussions in the Facebook group, the One Hamsa executive director said,

On the One Hamsa alumni page, if you choose to share a link, you will need to offer a SPECIFIC question that will help explain why you are posting it AND especially help others offer constructive feedback on the subject you need their insight on. Connecting to each other with compassion and kindness in order to attain a greater sense of understanding is what this forum is for-- and yet this will be lost if individuals simply post links back and forth and respond with talking points instead of how the post personally affecting them.

This helps illustrate that introductions are most important when the post is something potentially inflammatory, especially a link. Often, the posts that were lacking an introduction were something self-explanatory, like photos from a recent event or an image commemorating that date (for example, wishing Eid Mubarak or memorializing the Bosnian genocide). Links to articles that would likely be agreeable to everyone in the group also often lacked an introduction; for example, a link to a story about an Arab-Jewish couple who started a viral campaign of people celebrating similar relationships. In a couple of cases where "I" statements were left out, the poster used "we" or "us" not to refer to their faith community, but to refer to the interfaith community to which everyone on the group belongs. It is still a breach of the agreement not to make generalizations about any community, but the use "I" statements is most important in

cases where one speaker is presenting the views of a group to which they belong to someone who does not belong to that group.

The two times a post resulted in a non-argument discussion that contained a breach of the community agreement, those who replied to the comment containing the breach brought the conversation back to the community agreement. In the examples that follow, all original spelling and syntax is retained. Participants are identified by letters; the same letter in different examples indicates the same participant across examples. In my choice of examples, I had hoped to present a mix of faith and gender identities; however due to the small sample size I instead chose the most succinct and illustrative examples. I would like to point out that both Muslims and Jews were involved in both spurring and de-escalating conflicts. Further, arguments in One Hamsa settings are not always between a Muslim and a Jew; as I have touched on, some of the most heated arguments I observed were intrafaith.

Example 1

A (Initial Post): I wish that Tzipi Livni was the Prime Minister of Israel...I like this plan. "Livni Presents Plan to End Conflict with Hamas, Restart Talks with PA. Justice Minister: Israel should not give in to terror group's grandiose demands, must operate militarily as long as needed. Timesofisrael.com."

B: Pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeease. She is as hawkish as Natanyahu. She is a wolf in the sheep clothing.

A: Its just my personal opinion B and you of course are entitled to your own

B: A, let's agree to disagree on Livni.

Here, B's long drawn out "Pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeease" is a breach of the agreement to write thoughtfully and comes across as condescending. Then he does not use "I" statements when presenting his opinion of Livni. But, rather than responding defensively, A brings the conversation back to the community agreements by reminding B that these are just opinions, using both an "I" statement and a reframing of the

conversation. B responds with agreement. The conversation continues after that with A, B, and three others presenting their opinions and agreeing to disagree about them.

The power of steering the conversation back toward the community agreement is also evidenced when arguments occurred. In two of the seven arguments, one of the commenters was able to end the argument with this strategy.

Example 2

B: Hmmm. An interesting approach by Jewish World War II Survivor and Sociologist Peter Cohen.

“The Root Cause of the Never-Ending Conflict in Palestine; and How to Fix it. The notion of Jewish nationhood is a 19th-century invention, and like many other 19th-century inventions it is taking a long time to unravel and lay to rest. Huffingtonpost.com.”

C: B, what does “Hmmm” mean? I think we’re trying to use this page to present articles with a contextualized “I” statement, to highlight why this is meaningful to you and give a clue what might be useful for dialogue. If a lengthy article is worth it to you to post, may I ask that you also take a minute to think about how and why to present it to us? I won’t expect to agree with you, but it will be easier for me to accept it as dialogue and not provocation.

...

B: Hmmm = Interesting read. Enough with personal attacks. Sorry you were hypersensitive to my “humming”. My humms are succinct and to me this article was thought provoking. And sorry that a leading Jewish sociologist was not to your expectations. I can’t control Peter Cohen, as one of his students I revered his objectivity. Yes, he taught me one of the summer course on Anti-semitism in the 19th century Europe when I was doing my minor in Jewish Studies. As a visiting scholar I connected with him with scientific and sociological level. He had a focus of the relationship of ‘social constructions’ of western culture, based on complex prejudice and ideology.

...

C: ...

There isn’t the slightest personal attack above, I’m trying hard to hew to [One Hamsa] principles of posting and discussing (we can’t always hit the ideal, but it’s worth reminding each other – sorry if it wasn’t gentle enough) so that it’s worthwhile to participate. I’m quite interested in your story – and I’d love to hear the entirety sometime, but meanwhile the bits and pieces are good to hear.

All subsequent posts in this thread follow the community agreement. Two more people chime in with their own opinions, and B expresses agreement with one of them.

In this example, B’s initial post does not follow the community agreement. He states

what the article is, but doesn't ask a question or use an "I" statement to express his opinion about it. C responds with a request that B remember the community agreement. B initially responds to this by getting defensive and offering justification as to why he would post something by Peter Cohen. C then clarifies that he was just trying to bring the conversation back to the community agreement, which successfully ends the back-and-forth dynamic that was starting to occur and leads to a productive conversation.

What kind of breaching does it take to result in the kind of back-and-forth flame war that the community agreement is designed to help participants avoid? Two of the arguments, Examples 3 and 4, were essentially a continuation of the same argument between the same two participants.

Example 3

B: I am so hopeful because of Israelis who share with me the values of peace and justice for all.

"Thousands of Israelis have gathered in Tel Aviv to protest the war in Gaza. Police let the protest go ahead after initially cancelling it two hours before it was set to start."

D: It is widely known that many Israelis are pro the establishment of Palestinian state. Many Israelis are involved on regular basis in an effort to end the conflict. Israelis have founded numerous organizations that focus on the rights and suffering of Palestinians. This is not new that Israelis want and work towards having a peaceful life for the Palestinian people, it is something I know many Israelis work on daily basis, it just doesn't seem to be in the news very often, because it's not news. It happens every day.

B: D, that's not the case, many right wings orgs and settlers are systematically trying to silence the voice for peace among ordinary Israelis. In many incidents, when settlers torched our crops and set them on blaze or attached our village under the protection of the IDF, often our Israeli neighbors that we lived together in peace before the evolution of the settlers movement are the ones who stood by us and served as human shield. It's bin Netanyahu best interest that peaceful Israeli are not in the spot light, it weaken his support base among his allies in the right wing members of the Knesset

D: I can post here many organizations that I happen to be on their mailing list who devote their time to bettering the life of Palestinians. I will do that for you:

A list of five links to such organizations follows. In this example, B starts out by posting in accordance with the community agreement, using an "I" statement to

contextualize his post. D replies without the use of “I” statements. Phrases she uses such as “it is widely known” and “this is not new” give her comment a defensive tone without any contextualizing gestures or facial expressions that she might use to soften her comments in person. B, unlike C in the example above, does not return to the community agreement but takes a defensive stance in which he does not use “I” statements (e.g. “that’s not the case”). B’s comment about how his family’s Israeli neighbors stood by them was an opportunity to ground the conversation using the community agreements, but instead both participants continued in this defensive mode. Later in the conversation, D does make an attempt to do just that.

Example 3 (Continued)

D: B I appreciate that you have a lot of opinions and feelings about the situation towards many on both sides, that’s your human right. I am trying to share some facts with the hope of helping you in some way.

B: D, I have valid opinions and valid feelings based on my real experience on the ground. What I am here are facts and not merely random thoughts.

Here D calls on the community agreements of using “I” statements and remembering the shared common goal of learning. B responds dismissively; his adjective “real” to describe his experiences seems to imply that D’s experiences are less real, although both of them have spent time in Israel/Palestine. B attempts a few more times to show appreciation of D’s opinions, but D continues with both defensive and attacking framing. The conversation finally ends with the following exchange:

Example 3 (Continued)

D: To me the two sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are not Israel and Palestinian, but those who are seeking a solution and those who are focusing on who is to blame.

B: I agree.

The exchange might have ended there, with the two participants finding some common ground after 27 comments posted over one hour and 45 minutes, but the next day D posted the following as a new thread, which resulted in 11 more comments:

Example 4

D: To me the two sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are not Israeli and Palestinian, but those who are seeking a solution and those who are focusing on who is to blame.

B: I agree

B: Btw. Solution is simple. 1. Israel needs to start treating Palestinians like humans and their lives as valuable as Israeli lives. 2. End occupation. 3. Stop building illegal settlements 4. Let Palestinians handle their crap among themselves. 5. Israel needs to start listening to the moderate voice among its citizens.

D: I noticed this is a list of all the things that Israel needs to do, and what do the Palestinians need to do?

B: You tell me?

D: Make a list for what they think they need to do.

B: You tell me.

This example starts where the previous one left off, with both participants adhering to the community agreement. Then B posts his “simple solution,” which is not presented with any “I” statements and contains generalizations presented as fact. This sets D on the defensive, and while there are no more verbal breaches in this part of the example, there is an underlying sense of tension in the aftermath of B and D’s previous argument. It seems that rather than having this conversation as an opportunity to learn about what each of them expects from Israelis and Palestinians in order to resolve the conflict, they are each trying to egg the other on to say something heated. The conversation continues with D framing her thoughts on what Palestinians can do with an “I” statement:

Example 4 (Continued)

D: It is my opinion that as long as one believes that the situation that they are in is the responsibility of another, they are then giving away the power over their own destiny to the other. Start by taking responsibility for one’s situation. Make a list of constructive

action that “can” be done, label what feels like “can’t be done” as a possible “can be done at a later date.” This are a few humble suggestions.

B: All I mentioned are action plans. Tell me what you want from the Palestinians? Isreal is in control of even the number of calories intake of Palestinians.

D: Start taking responsibility and make a list of constructive actions to be taken by Palestinians. This is my advise: I would not be so presumptuous to think I know what Palestinians need to do within their own society.

B: I am interested to see what do you think Palestinians should do. And please stop using undermining terms and phrases like “Take Responsibility”

D: I am going to stop wasting my time on this exchange, I will keep my energies on more constructive endeavors. Best of success to you

B does not accept D’s thoughts on what she wants from Palestinians, a clear breach of the community agreement to be respectful of the thoughts and feelings of others. The argument devolves into what appears to be a passive aggressive use of smiley emojis and a saccharine tone from both participants and with D giving up on the exchange.

Based on the examples presented above, a reminder to follow the community agreement can be an effective way to end an argument, but both participants must accept the community agreement as the preferred common sense to use in a particular conversation. If one person, like D in Example 4, continues to breach the community agreement, the argument will be unlikely to reach a civil conclusion. One Hamsa alumni are aware that Facebook is not an ideal platform for discussing these heated topics, and many of the posts to the group in July and August were reminders to have these discussions in person. Occasionally alumni would spontaneously organize a get-together for discussing the conflict in Palestine/Israel, and of the meetings I observed, no arguments occurred. At one such meeting, a few participants voiced concern that even after having gone through One Hamsa, some alumni still do not follow the points on the community agreement when posting to the alumni Facebook group. As I mentioned earlier, there are a handful of alumni who are frequently embroiled in

arguments, while many others who post frequently do not argue. At the meeting, the consensus for how to respond to such people was to accept that they are at whatever stage of dealing with the conflict that they are at, and cannot be rushed. Rather than taking the bait and arguing with them, it is better to stick to the community agreement and post things with a positive, inclusive message in the meantime.

While Facebook conversations have the potential to turn toxic more easily than actual world conversations, Facebook groups have the potential to become safe spaces for pluralistic groups to discuss divisive issues under certain circumstances. In order to determine exactly what those circumstances are in terms that are generalizable to other Facebook groups and other virtual spaces where activists gather, more comprehensive research is needed. For example, one fruitful avenue for future research on a larger scale would be a study of a wide variety of online activist groups that use community agreements or a similar framework for establishing shared norms. Meanwhile, I can conclude based on this evidence that the community agreements do play an important role in nipping toxic online arguments in the bud. Community agreements help preserve participants' ability to engage safely in disagreements. In turn, this ensures that in communal One Hamsa spaces both online and off, Muslims and Jews can co-construct a shared narrative about their collective identity as interfaith activists.

Conclusion

In a recent interview of Ta-Nehisi Coates, Chris Hayes wonders aloud whether part of what is so difficult about this historical moment is that “enduring multiracial pluralistic coalitions in democratic politics in moments of universal suffrage in American history” have been so uncommon that many activists today feel like they are “rolling the rock up the hill” (Hayes 2018). Coates agrees that while there have been many instances of pluralistic coalitions in American history, for the most part they were quickly squelched. Coates elaborates that only in the twenty-first century has it become necessary for left-leaning candidates to address black voters and protect their rights.

If you can't go to South Carolina and talk to black people, you're done. You're not going to be president. You're just not. It's just tremendously, no matter whatever else you may have, if you don't have that, you're in trouble...We get all excited and you know, Stacey Abrams might win, Gillum might win. And we forget how far of an advance the 'might win' conversation actually is...I mean, it was like, this is tremendous. This is Georgia, dude. (Hayes 2018)

Over the last half a century or so, and arguably especially since the Obama coalition, pluralistic coalitions have transitioned from being fringe projects to being necessities in American mainstream liberal politics. As a result, the until now uncommon skill set needed to unite coalitions whose constituents are not only diverse but occasionally experience conflicts with one another has become crucial to movement building.

The ability to communicate clearly among groups whose participants come from many different backgrounds with different experiences of oppression and access to power does not come naturally. Increasingly, progressive activists are realizing that in order to be able to have productive conversations, they must cultivate a particular skill set. They must be able to listen actively, share vulnerably, identify their own triggers,

and lean into discomfort, to name just a few fundamental skills. Central to all of these skills is emotional intelligence: the ability to identify and understand one's own emotions as well as the capacity for empathy. Historically emotional intelligence has been coded as feminine, but increasingly progressive activists are recognizing the need for people of all genders to nurture these skills.

Because the ability to communicate across levels of privilege and oppression comes only with practice, it is important to conduct research on One Hamsa and other organizations like it that show promise for being able to successfully educate progressive activists in these skills. I have found an engaged feminist approach to writing ethnography to be a fruitful approach to understanding the role of emotions in social movements. Greater dialogue between scholars of social movements and emotion from various disciplines and feminist ethnographers would benefit all involved. In particular the field of anthropology would benefit from more research specifically examining the role of emotion in social movements.

Like many discussions of pluralism in both academia and the public sphere, Hayes' and Coates' conversation focuses on race and multiracial coalitions. But as I have argued in this dissertation, religion is another important aspect of pluralism that deserves careful study and analysis alongside race, class, and gender. Politics in the United States has always had religious undertones. Among liberal white Christian Americans, twentieth century responses to increases in both racial and religious diversity were similar: they plastered over important differences with narratives that likened equality, color-blindness, and secularism. But in the twenty-first century, and especially since the election of Donald Trump to the nation's highest office, progressive

Americans from dominant groups are increasingly realizing that equality can only be reached through deep understandings of the differences between us. It is not enough to assert that our commonalities override our differences and to avoid conflict. If we wish to build successful pluralistic coalitions, we must learn to lean into conflict.

Since this realization—which is long overdue and only came about thanks to hard work on the part of marginalized groups that I do not intend to overlook—progressive Americans with the power to do so have increasingly sought to incorporate principles of pluralism into their civic lives. Progressive activists have begun to realize that just as the concept of color-blindness is counterproductive, pure secularism is not the most effective response to the inequality that arises from America’s Christian-centric political life. Activists of faith have access to many tools that benefit progressives and conservatives alike, such as moral authority, familiarity with storytelling and parables, and facility with the power of prayer.

In order to fully interrogate and offer solutions to problems of inequality, it is necessary for people from diverse faith backgrounds to be able to communicate with one another about their shared goals and their experiences of being marginalized (or not). Occasionally through this work, inequalities are inadvertently reproduced, but activists recognize the need to work through the contradictions that are inherent in any progressive project. Pluralistic progressive leaders, including the ones I observed at One Hamsa, are often aware of these contradictions themselves, and like engaged and feminist activist scholars, they choose to take on the contradictions for the sake of making a positive change.

This embrace of pluralism among progressive Americans has not been without

conflict, even among those groups who excel at education. Communicating with others whose narratives of what is true conflict with one's own can lead to intractable disagreements even under the best of circumstances. Progressive activists like those at One Hamsa emphasize the importance of acknowledging that people's situatedness influences their perceptions and interpretations of reality; however, they also recognize the pitfalls of allowing for infinite truths. This, along with the benefits of studying sideways, makes sites of progressive activism especially fruitful for considering questions of epistemology. In particular, in this dissertation I have offered an analysis of how activists navigate questions of epistemology and eventually arrive at shared truths that can serve as the basis for working towards shared goals.

As an avenue for future research, I recommend ethnographic work analyzing the ways in which both progressive and conservative activists understand the concept of intersectionality. Like standpoint theory, intersectionality is a concept that originated in the academy and has found new life among activists. How has the concept of intersectionality morphed as it has moved through different segments of American society? What can activists' understandings and uses of the term teach us about the term as it is understood by academics, and vice versa?

Part of what makes it possible to establish shared truths is a sense of community. I have illustrated how One Hamsa participants from disparate faith backgrounds use emotionally vulnerable storytelling to create a sense of shared identity as interfaith activists. Both online and offline, One Hamsa participants work to make their communal spaces safe ones for sharing their stories vulnerably. As coalitions become increasingly diverse along all axes of identity, the importance of activists

sharing a strong common identity increases. The safe spaces like the one established at One Hamsa through community agreements serve as the crucibles in which these shared identities as activists can be forged. The fact that Facebook groups can become safe spaces is heartening, considering the fact that due to privacy concerns, Facebook itself is urging users to participate more robustly in groups. Facebook has deservedly earned a reputation as being a place where propaganda spreads like wildfire through commenter flame wars. But I have shown that when users have the right tools, Facebook also has the propensity to be a place where people from communities with histories of conflict can communicate safely and effectively. Further research on social media should address questions of how to curtail violent and misinformative posts without infringing on the aspects of such platforms that promote the creation of hush harbors. What strategies besides community agreements are successful for maintaining the safety of online communal spaces?

Activists who are a part of the interfaith movement tend to be more open and experimental in their approach to forging shared identities in part because the movement emerged relatively recently and has grown quickly, borrowing best practices from various other movements. Over the last few decades, the interfaith movement has gained such momentum that it has gained international recognition and support. In 2008 former UN Under-Secretary General Anwarul Chowdhury discussed the need for interfaith dialogue at a forum on the topic that was a part of the UN's commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Then in 2010, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the first World Interfaith Harmony Week. President Barack Obama highlighted interfaith activism in 2011 by issuing The President's

Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge. The most recent Parliament of the World's Religions on 2015 was attended by nearly 10,000 people representing 80 countries and 200 different spiritual backgrounds (“The 2018 Parliament...”).

Still, very little research had been conducted on the interfaith movement before the last few years. As the field of interfaith studies blossoms, engaged anthropologists and feminist activist anthropologists should make their contributions heard. The latter two fields stand to contribute to interfaith studies on many levels, most importantly through the ability to reflect on and engage with contradictions both in their work and in their field sites; and through these fields' established bodies of literature regarding truth value, knowledge production, and emotional vulnerability. Additionally, scholars of interfaith studies should take care not to overlook American minority religious groups or field sites outside of congregational settings.

In today's world, no conflict fails to affect others beyond the physical range of violence. Jews and Muslims feel the effects of the conflict in Palestine/Israel all over the world. This holds true for those of us living in the United States, not only because of our religious ties, but because peace in that region is critical to US political interests. Because many of my findings in this dissertation are bound by the context of American politics, some aspects of One Hamsa's success may not translate well to peacebuilding in other cultural contexts. But I think that the more important distinction is the one between peacebuilding and conflict resolution strategies. The strategies that are effective for peacebuilding, creating solidarity between groups who are not currently in conflict, and conflict resolution, ending violent conflict between groups, are different.

Scholars of encounter groups in Israel/Palestine such as Zvi Bekerman, Fatma

Kassem, Dan Bar-On, and Ifat Maoz have noted that while dialogue, relationship building, and storytelling seem helpful in resolving conflicts between Palestinians and Israelis, overall these groups do not seem to be as effective as their proponents hope. The consensus has been that dialogue is not enough to create change in a situation in which one group is abusing its power to oppress another group. This is consistent with an observation made by Hemmer et al, that “in situations of violent conflict, peacebuilding is often equated with treason, making it initially difficult to attract members. It this requires strong ideals, and those who are attracted may be stronger on ideals than practicality” (147).

This is an appropriate assessment in the context of violent conflict and ongoing oppression, but it begs the questions: What can dialogue groups accomplish in the context of peacebuilding, as opposed to conflict resolution for ongoing violence? Is there a kind of dialogue that can help promote self-reflection among members of the group holding more power? While opponents of the tactic of dialogue fairly criticize it for erasing power differences, is there a way to facilitate dialogue that instead addresses the narratives that reinforce power differences and seeks to change them? My research at One Hamsa suggests that while it is impossible to completely mitigate the ethical dilemmas that arise in peacebuilding dialogue groups due to structural inequality, some practices may help such groups become more productive and less damaging for those who already experience marginalization. Most importantly, dialogue groups should not shy away from interrogating the differences in the narratives that they hold as true. Facilitators should encourage members of powerful groups in particular to reflect on the ways in which their positionality has influenced their perceptions of truth, while striving

to avoid treating members of minority groups as objects there for the enrichment of the majority.

The strategies that One Hamsa community members use to mitigate conflict seem to work best in contexts where at least some members of each community in conflict have shared goals they are motivated to work towards. The greater the difference in power between the groups in question, the greater the risk that emotionally vulnerable storytelling will lead to reproducing rather than addressing inequality. Further research should be conducted in order to assess the extent to which the strategies used by interfaith activists are effective for peacebuilding in other situations. For example, might a similar group be able to bridge differences between American progressives and conservatives, or would such an approach result in a reification of inequality? I suspect that the answer depends largely on participant buy-in and ability to identify shared goals. In any case, emotionally vulnerable storytelling is best suited to small, intimate settings in which participants have an opportunity to build relationships with one another over time.

At its best, interfaith activism and One Hamsa in particular demonstrate “by example what a diverse and inclusive moral community could look like, and [prefigure] a society in which diverse communities could pursue a shared vision of the common good, even while respecting differences in individual beliefs and values” (Braunstein 2017, 114). Ultimately, it is my hope that this research will help move the United States towards realizing its potential to become what Eboo Patel calls a “healthy religiously diverse democracy,” (Patel 2018). A more robust understanding of effective coalition building methods will be beneficial not only in the United States, but globally in

situations where communities engaged in conflict could benefit from a pluralistic coalition dedicated to not only bridging their communities but creating new, shared communities of knowledge.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview Questions for One Hamsa Fellows

How did you first hear about One Hamsa?

What made you decide to apply?

What were you hoping to get out of the experience?

Have you been involved in:

-Interfaith work?

-Conflict resolution work?

-Other similar fellowships?

-Your faith community?

Please describe the nature of your involvement in each.

What role do you usually take on in groups?

Have you ever felt at the margins of your faith community?

Are you getting what you'd hoped to out of the One Hamsa Fellowship so far?

What's missing, if anything?

How are you feeling about what's happened so far and what's to come?

Have you done any of the fall retreat activities before?

What stands out to you most looking back on the first retreat?

When did you feel the strongest emotions?

Did you get out of the first retreat what you'd hoped to? Why or why not?

Looking back on the sessions between retreats, what stands out the most to you?

What moments were most emotional for you?

How was it to share your experience regarding Islamophobia and anti-Semitism?

How was it to hear about the Others' experiences?

What stands out most from the second retreat?

What moments were most emotional for you?

What was the highlight of the second retreat for you?

Was there anything you wish had gone differently, either from a planning perspective or in terms of how the conversations went?

Do you feel there is still something important that hasn't been addressed? If so, what?

Did you feel you were heard by the others in the group? Why or why not?

Did anything shift for you? If so, what and when?

Did you get a sense that things shifted for others in the group?

Did you get out of the second retreat what you'd hoped to? Why or why not?

Given the goal of bridging Muslim and Jewish communities locally, what do you think is the point of spending a weekend talking about the conflict in Israel/Palestine, if any?

What are you feeling looking ahead to the remaining few sessions? What are you hoping to get out of them?

Do you have any reflections you'd like to share on the final sessions after the second retreat?

What stands out the most from the end of the fellowship?

What moments were most emotional at the end of the fellowship?

Interview Questions for One Hamsa Founders/Leaders⁵⁰

Can you tell me about where your career was at when One Hamsa was first conceived/when you first got involved?

What other interfaith and conflict transformation have you been involved with? Generally, how does One Hamsa compare and contrast with them?

Tell me about the atmosphere in local Jewish/Muslim community relations at the time of One Hamsa's founding/when you first got involved. What wasn't working and why? How

⁵⁰ I made slight changes to this list of questions depending on who I was talking to, but all questions I asked are included here.

did you see One Hamsa as addressing those weaknesses?

How did you first get involved in One Hamsa?

Where did/does One Hamsa find its funding?

Tell me a little about the breakdown of where funding currently comes from and the demographics of donors. Has the composition changed over the years?

What was your role at first? How has it changed over time?

What were some of the biggest hurdles of getting One Hamsa off the ground?

What were the biggest criticisms?

How did you answer these challenges?

How was/is the fellowship's curriculum designed? How has it changed over time and what has influenced those changes? What resources do you use for revision?

One piece of feedback I've heard from fellows is that they wish there was more time devoted to learning about Islamic and Judaic texts and precepts. What drove the choice to put the fellowship's emphasis on interpersonal connection instead?

What do you see as your overall role with One Hamsa now?

Briefly describe an average day at the office.

What role do you play in the recruitment of new fellows? What do you look for in a successful applicant? How many applicants get turned away each year, and how has that number changed over time?

I've noticed that it's often more difficult to recruit Muslim fellows than Jewish ones. Any insights as to why?

What do you think is the biggest challenge for One Hamsa currently?

What is One Hamsa's greatest accomplishment up to this point?

What do you think is One Hamsa's greatest potential contribution to improving the present political climate?

Where do you hope to see One Hamsa five to ten years from now?

Appendix B: One Hamsa Alumni Facebook Group Community Agreement

In the summer of 2014 during the Facebook conversations discussed in Chapter 5, the following community agreement was pinned to the top of the group. As of April 2018, it had been moved to the “Files” section of the group, making it less visible. The text remains mostly unchanged, aside from minor edits updating the number of cohorts belonging to the group. As of May 2019, the group had 144 members.

One Hamsa Alumni Facebook Community Agreement

Ten different cohorts are now on the One Hamsa alumni group—which means ten groups of people who have had similar and yet different experiences.

One Hamsa set up the facebook group as a place to:

1. Connect the greater network of alumni
2. Hold a space where members can seek greater insight into different communal/individual perspectives on a variety of issues
3. We can share projects related to Muslim-Jewish dialogue that we are engaged in
4. Alumni ambassadors can apply their relationships and skills of problem-solving and community-building to self-moderate this space.

During the final official internal session of the cohort of 2013, the group brainstormed the beginnings of a new community agreement for this facebook forum. Please review and add or offer suggested edits to the agreement by adding it to this document.

Facebook Community Agreement

Take time to be thoughtful and consider your audience

Pay attention to framing

Be proactive not reactive (water not soda, from “7 Habits of Successful People”)

Engage in respectful dialogue [refrain from name calling or labeling of others]

When you are being triggered, take a moment to frame your response to make sure that you aren't attacking the person, and instead focusing on the problem. A good way to do this is to not use the word "you" when you respond on a post.

This forum is a place for learning

People should engage in the group to the level they are comfortable—without feeling pressured to comment constantly

Speak with “I Statements”

No posting candidate or political party endorsements

If 2 people are having a conversation (via posts) back and forth—move the conversation offline (private message, phone call, or face-to-face)

Introduce each article you post to help readers digest the content—which may be emotionally charged

Share references and sources where applicable

Pretend you are physically in front of the person you are communicating with

Be specific

Be mindful with people you do not know (6 different cohorts are members of this group)

Be mindful that not all people in this group speak English as their first language
We all have different emotional vocabulary
Realize we are all in this to create positive change

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELPING MOLD THE COMMUNITY AGREEMENT FOR
THIS SPACE!

Appendix C: One Hamsa Cohort Community Agreement

2013-14 Cohort Community Agreement

Practice respect and mindful listening
Do not use derogatory terms
Put yourself in the others' shoes
Be open to new ideas and new perspectives
Call out negativity and negative energy
Ask questions
We all are here to learn from each other
Explain references and language
Do not assume "Don't put baby in the corner"
Use snapping to express agreement
Take care of one another
Practice and honor vulnerability
Be tolerant of mistakes
Understand mistakes as part of the process
Pause when you become angry or upset
Be self-aware and aware of time
Step up and step back
Remind each other of the community agreement
Think before you speak