3

The Religious Turn

American Muslims for Palestine

May 17, 2014 dawned crisp and bright as I drove west on East 87th Street toward Bridgeview, a near southwestern suburb. American Muslims for Palestine (AMP) was staging its Nakba Day commemoration in the Aqsa School parking lot across from the Mosque Foundation. Every year, Palestinians honor this day to mark their dispossession in 1948. In Palestine, they fly black flags and recount the events of that formative "catastrophe" (the literal meaning of "*nakba*") through commemorative displays, gatherings, and speeches.

In the United States, activist groups use Nakba Day to raise awareness about the Palestinian situation and cause. Two days prior to the AMP event, for example, Students for Justice in Palestine chapters held remembrances on university campuses across Chicago featuring historical photographs of the eras of 1948 and 1967 and also a large replica of the wall that Israel had built in the West Bank and around Jerusalem. Members passed out flyers advocating the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign and talked with fellow students about Israeli repressive measures in the Occupied Territories. AMP's commemoration featured a comparable photographic display as well as a similar wall replica.[1] There were also speeches by the imam of the Mosque Foundation, who invoked the Prophet Muhammad's *isra'* (journey from Mecca to Jerusalem on the back of the winged steed Buraq) and his *mi'raj* (ascent from the Haram al-Sharif platform through the heavens to the foot of God's throne). With the mosque's dome and minaret as a backdrop, the link between Islam and the Nakba in AMP's commemoration was hard to miss. To remember "the catastrophe" at this particular event was simultaneously to assert the centrality of Islam to the Palestinian territorial claim, narrative of dispossession, and demand to return.

Secularists, as seen in the previous chapter, claim that the religious turn in the suburban Palestinian enclave is superficial. The core national problems—

dispossession, occupation, and the necessity of liberation—inescapably define the Palestinian condition. Putatively religious groups like AMP, as the argument goes, respond to this condition: behind the Islamic construal is the secular predicament of a nation in exile in search of a free and independent existence within a territorially bounded state in its ancestral homeland. The seeming turn to religion signals disillusionment with the historical secular national liberation movement: Palestinians are searching for alternative solutions to their collective predicament and Islamic groups have stepped forward to offer them. In Chicago, moreover, the failure of the secular community centers to relocate to the suburbs has created a gap in Palestinian organizing that AMP and the mosques have filled. Islam has become influential, secularists say, not because of Islam's predominance in Palestinian society but rather because of secularism's institutional absence. Secularists also point to the anti-Muslim backlash that has frequently erupted in American society, for example, after the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995 or following the September 11 attacks. The apparent Islamic turn, in addition to indicating disillusionment and secular absence, is a collective reaction, they claim, to the vilification of Islam and not an indication of a thoroughgoing restructuring of identity per se.

Taken together, these arguments, aside from the analytical validity they might have, minimize the extent to which religious, specifically Islamic, revitalization has transformed how individuals understand themselves as Palestinian. In doing so, they implicitly reinforce secularism as a normative condition and value of collective Palestinian life and, correspondingly, construe religion as a type of false consciousness: that is, the turn to Islam is not really about religion but rather about something else. A religious shift, however, has undeniably occurred. And it has contoured Palestinian identities in important ways in both Palestine and the diaspora. This shift certainly responds to the national predicament and to secularism and its vicissitudes. But to claim that it is merely an effect of secularism's absence or failure or of the seemingly secular conditions of Palestinian life or of anti-Muslim sentiment in the wider US society is to miss its positive, constructive character. As the next two chapters will show, the religious shift constitutes a distinct and deliberate standpoint grounded deeply in narratives and practices that relate the Palestinian situation to divine imperatives and promises.

At the center of that standpoint is the salvific drama in which God confers restitution on those who hold fast in faith and suffering (the believers) and chastisement on those who refuse the divine commandments and oppress the innocent (the unbelievers). In the Palestinian context, holding fast to faith entails the selfsacrificial, divinely mandated, and just struggle to redeem the Holy Land, which God, in Islamic perspective, has granted to those who bear witness to his exclusivity and to the fact that Muhammad is his final messenger. This perspective appears within the ideological formulations of the Muslim Brotherhood and its Palestinian offshoot, Hamas (Nüsse 1998). A Christian variation of this

standpoint—as articulated, for example, in the writings of Palestinian liberation theologians—draws on prophetic discourse in the Bible to cast the national struggle as enactment of the divine commandment to free the oppressed and establish "justice and only justice." Only through an end to the occupation, restitution of the dispossessed, and creation of equality for all can there be "a new heaven and a new earth"—a new peace among peoples—in the Holy Land (Ateek 1989; Ateek, Ellis, and Ruether 1992). Understanding how standpoints like these have textured Palestinian identities, especially during and after the 1990s, requires close attention to the religious discourses, practices, and institutions of Palestinian communities.

This chapter, the first of two detailing the religious shift in Palestinian Chicago, undertakes this task through an in-depth focus on AMP. Established in 2006 during "Operation Summer Rains," Israel's euphemistic code name for its bombardment of the Gaza Strip that year, AMP has become one of the most prominent groups advocating for the Palestinian cause in the United States. Significantly, it goes out of its way to emphasize its American identity. Its Statement of Principles says that AMP "is an American organization founded by Americans" for the purpose of "educat[ing] the American public and media about issues related to Palestine."[2] The statement further insists:

> We are a strictly an American [sic] organization working for Americans in America. We are donor-funded. All of our fundraising is conducted within the United States; all of our funds and work is [sic] kept within the US. We are an independent, American organization and not affiliated with any foreign entities or organizations.

The repetition of the descriptor "American" is noteworthy in two respects. First, it aims to deflect questions about ties to proscribed Islamic political movements and about reliance on foreign funding sources and foreign government control. After the September 11 attacks, US government agencies targeted Muslim organizations, freezing the assets of large charities like the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, whose leaders were convicted of providing material support to designated terrorist organizations, principally Hamas.[3] Well aware of this past and its continuing relevance for any Muslim organization, AMP stresses its specifically American identity, mission, and funding streams.

The second main significance is the consequent cultural positioning of Muslims and Palestinians as Americans above all else. In this positioning, AMP fuses these three terms, "American," "Muslim," and "Palestine," within a comprehensible American identity idiom that hyphenates immigrant belonging (for example, as Muslim American, Iranian American, Arab American, Jewish American, Mexican American, German American, Irish American, African American, and so on). In doing so, it performs a type of assimilation that nevertheless preserves critical identity distinctions, for example, from "white" or "Christian."

The second term in the organization's name, "Muslims," establishes these distinctions with the majority culture. The choice of term imposes a second important

difference, however: the stress is on "American Muslims" and not "Palestinians" or "Palestinian Americans" or even "Arab Americans." The phrasing, in other words, defines the unit of solidarity in sectarian-religious rather than ethnic-national terms. This shift mirrors the way American Jewish organizations that focus on Israel, among other concerns, project identity (Jewish Voice for Peace, J Street, the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Federations of North America, etc.). It also reflects the transformation of "Muslim" into a religious transethnic identity inclusive of the wide range of groups comprising Muslim communities in the US (African Americans, whites, immigrants of varying national origin, Latinx, and so on). "Jewish" functions in a similar manner as a category that incorporates an equally diverse range of backgrounds (European, Iraqi, Yemeni, Moroccan, Iranian, Ethiopian, South Asian, etc.). Strategically, the choice to frame solidarity in religious-sectarian terms allows AMP to expand the Palestine advocacy community beyond the particular Palestinian and Arab context. This recontextualization is not just strategic, however: it entails a shift in subjectivity, too. By centering "Muslim," AMP changes the discursive frame from a nationalist to a religious-nationalist emphasis. This alteration simultaneously transforms Palestinian and American Muslim self-understanding by making the two identities central to one another.

AMP counts eight chapters in New Jersey, California (Bay Area and Southern California), Michigan, Missouri, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Wisconsin. The chapters do not maintain a formal membership base. Its organizational model is that of a nonprofit advocacy group that maintains a paid staff and relies on donations and volunteer support. Headquartered nationally in the Chicago suburb of Palos Hills, it also has an office in Washington, DC, to facilitate Congressional lobbying. Its activities include the production of carefully researched and documented publications on the Palestinian issue, media outreach, advocacy training, community education, and participation in public protests.

Given its local and national prominence, AMP affords a particularly useful and important perspective on the religious turn in Palestinian Chicago. In this chapter, I provide a close look at two events: AMP's sixth annual conference in 2013 and its Nakba Day commemoration in 2014.[4] These events illustrate how AMP fuses the identities of "Muslim" and "Palestinian." They also reveal important tensions that persist within the fusion. My analysis is primarily an outsider one. Unlike the other chapters, this one does not draw extensively on interview data but relies, instead, on my direct observations as recorded in my notes. The perspective inevitably skews, therefore, toward my subjective experience and interpretation of these events. The voices that speak directly in the next chapter help, however, to balance and expand the perspective I present here. The two chapters, therefore, should be read together. The questions and insights that arise within them, moreover, carry forward into chapters 5 and 6.

THE 6TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE FOR PALESTINE IN THE US (NOVEMBER 28–30, 2013)

"A Blessed Land, A Noble Cause"

AMP holds a conference every year during the Thanksgiving holiday that draws thousands of participants from Chicago and across the country. AMP leaders say they choose this day to take advantage of cheap hotel rates, but the scheduling choice also implicitly resists affirming the settler colonial Christian past. AMP thereby signals that Muslims active on Palestine refuse assimilation of the US cultural mythos and rites that resonate with the form of domination they resist in Palestine. Not everyone necessarily agrees with ignoring Thanksgiving, however. At its 6th Annual Conference for Palestine in 2013, attendees in an open forum questioned the timing, asserting that many community members observe the holiday and therefore organizers should have chosen a different date. In this way, AMP's boundary-marking encounters counterconceptions of the diaspora and its relationship to US society and culture. Such contestation suggests a plurality within the community that has already become apparent in the previous chapter on secularism and secularists and will continue to emerge in the chapters ahead.

The theme of the 2013 conference, held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel near Chicago's O'Hare Airport, was "A Blessed Land A Noble Cause [sic]." The publicity included, in Arabic, the Qur'anic gloss "*al-ladhi barakna hawlahu.*" This phrase, which translates as "the surroundings of which We have blessed," comes from the Qur'anic passages traditionally considered as describing Muhammad's *isra' wa al-mi'raj,* his nocturnal flight from Mecca to Jerusalem and his subsequent heavenly ascension from the Haram platform (Qur'an 17:1). The surroundings that God blesses refer to an area extending around al-Aqsa Mosque. Islamic religious scholars have debated the spatial extent and the theopolitical implications of the blessing. But the fact of the Qur'anic reference and the resulting status of Jerusalem as Islam's third-holiest site, after Mecca and Medina in present-day Saudi Arabia, have become central to Islamist discourse in the Occupied Territories and abroad.

The image on the conference logo and poster, which appeared also on the conference badges, showed the Old City in the middle distance with the Qubbat al-Sakhra, the Dome of the Rock, rising above it in the center.[5] At the top of the poster was the AMP logo and a heading stating "The Conference for Palestine in the US: A Blessed Land A Noble Cause [sic]." Beneath this banner was the Qur'anic slogan referring to how God had blessed the area around al-Aqsa. These words were superimposed over a map of the Middle East. The map floated faintly in the background sky above the barbed wire and dome. Iraq and Syria, labeled in English, appeared centrally. Palestine, too, appeared, in bold capitalization. Israel registered in its utter absence of mention even though the boundaries marking

the West Bank and Gaza Strip in relation to the area in which Israel proclaimed its sovereignty following the 1948 war were nevertheless visible in the map.[6]

This same imagery provided the backdrop for the stage in the main plenary hall. In the stage backdrop, the golden dome predominated, deemphasizing and excluding non-Muslim (Christian and Jewish) sacred landmarks.[7] The only reference to Jewish presence in the conference imagery occurred implicitly, for example, in the foregrounded loops of barbed wire that framed the Dome of the Rock. These unmistakably evoked Israel's domination of the city and its use of walls and fences to exclude Palestinians, specifically Muslim Palestinians. The barbed barrier marred the image of the Old City and the Dome, although olive trees still appeared within the compound. The greenery suggested that the signs of the divine blessing (the *baraka* said to pervade and surround the Holy City)—which, according to the *tafsir* literature (scholarly Muslim commentary on the Qur'an), consist of the flourishing of flora and fauna—persisted even as Islam's enemies had disfigured the land.[8]

"Give Me a Break for [sic] Your Hypocrisy, Dear Brothers and Sisters"

The gesture toward Iraq and Syria in the map background of the poster and badge image hinted at the reasons for emphasizing Jerusalem and the divinely blessed land surrounding it as the conference theme. In the bulletin's welcome note, the organizers made these reasons explicit:

> [P]alestine does not exist in a vacuum. What happens in Syria, Egypt and elsewhere in the region also has an impact on the future of the Palestinian people. With the tragedies occurring in Syria and unrest in Lebanon and Israel's continual grinding military occupation of Palestine, it is important to remind ourselves that this is the Holy Land. This is the land, [sic] which Allah swt [*subhanahu wa ta'ala,* "Glorious Is He and Most High"] has blessed.

The references to the turmoil in Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon and its effects on Palestine evoked the Arab Spring uprisings and the profound political changes they had produced. The conference program note explicitly underscored the allusion, asking, "How do we move forward? How do we relate our work for Palestine to the struggles for freedom and democracy throughout the Middle East?" After brutally suppressing massive nonviolent demonstrations demanding democratic reform in 2011, the Syrian regime had become mired in a devastating armed conflict in different regions of the country. In 2012 and 2013, the al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra, which had drawn in foreign fighters and was known to receive money from Qatari sources, carried out a series of devastating attacks targeting Alawite, Christian, and Shi'a communities.[9] These attacks deepened sectarian divisions in Syria and increasingly mired the Lebanese Hezbollah movement, a client of Syria and Iran, in the fighting. The violence extended into Lebanon itself. In August

2013, for example, bomb attacks targeted two Sunni mosques in Tripoli (Saad and Hubbard 2013). Thousands of Syrian refugees also had crossed into Lebanon.

Egypt, too, had experienced a mass uprising that forced President Hosni Mubarak, in power since 1981, to step down. Unprecedented elections brought the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, Mohamed Morsi, to the presidency in June 2012. Thirteen months later, the military, riding a wave of protests opposing Morsi's declaration of emergency powers, deposed the newly elected president, massacred more than eight hundred of his supporters in Rabaa Square, and installed Field Marshal 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi in his place (Human Rights Watch 2014).

Locally, in Chicago, these cataclysmic events generated a number of fissures. Syrians, Lebanese, and Egyptians were influential in the leadership of the Mosque Foundation, the largest predominantly Palestinian mosque in the southwest suburbs. The Mosque Foundation provided substantial support for AMP, hosting annual Ramadan fundraisers for the organization and providing space for events. Just two months before AMP's 2013 conference, the head imam of the Mosque Foundation publicly called upon the Obama administration to use military force against Syrian regime targets in response to a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus suburbs.[10] The demand reflected the sympathy of the Mosque Foundation's leadership for the victims of Syria's civil war and for Syrian opposition movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which the Assad regime had brutally targeted. This endorsement of US bombing, however, did not receive universal support in the wider community. The head of another, smaller, predominantly Palestinian mosque, whose leadership sympathized with the type of revolutionary Islamic anti-imperialism that the Lebanese Shi'i Hezbollah movement, an ally of the Assad regime, had pioneered, issued an opposing statement that declared any such intervention an attack on Muslims and Islam. God prohibited Muslims from killing one another, he said. Calling for an attack against Syria was tantamount to the unpardonable sin of *fitna* (destroying Muslim unity through violence against fellow Muslims).[11] The target of these remarks—the Mosque Foundation—was unmistakable.

Tension would again break out in public a year later in October 2014. In this instance, AMP found itself at odds with Syrian Muslim leadership in the city. The instigating event in this case was the forcible entry by religious Jewish settlers onto the Haram al-Sharif compound to commemorate Sukkot (Chag HaAsif, the biblical Festival of Tabernacles). This provocative act, from the Palestinian standpoint, violated the status quo concerning the Haram. In an email communication, AMP declared "Aqsa in danger" and demanded the Obama administration censure the State of Israel for allowing the aggressive intrusion to take place. A prominent Syrian-American activist, Dr. Zaher Sahloul—past president and board chairman of the Mosque Foundation; former board member and chairman of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago; and president of the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)—stated in a Facebook post shared publicly on October

14, 2014, that al-Aqsa was indeed in danger and that Muslims must defend it. But, then, in the same statement, he asserted that over the course of three and a half years not one large Muslim demonstration had occurred in Chicago to protest, in his words, "the criminal regime's" destruction of Syrian lives and holy places. "We condemn Israel!" he wrote. "[But] give me a break for [sic] your hypocrisy dear brothers and sisters."[12]

Two years later, in 2016, Syrian-Palestinian tension again burst into public, this time along lines extending beyond the Islamic context. Sahloul, now an immediate past president and senior advisor of SAMS, again took to social media—Twitter, this time—to accuse prominent Palestinian and Jewish Palestine solidarity activists of serving traitorously as a "fifth column who have been [sic] promoting war criminals, supporting the genocidal politics of Assad and Putin, promoting idiotic conspiracy arguments, disregarding the sacrifices of the Syrian people and probably getting paid by Russian and Assad PR firms. They are the equivalent of the propaganda machine of Hitler." In the same tweetstorm, Sahloul asked bitterly, "How can they claim that they care about Palestinian children in besieged Gaza while they ignore the suffering of Syrian children in besieged Aleppo?" The targets of this attack were Ali Abunimah, co-founder of *The Electronic Intifada,* and Max Blumenthal, a well-known Jewish American writer.[13] Both individuals were relentless critics of Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories. They also had taken uncompromising stands against purported Palestinian National Authority corruption, misrule, and connivance with Israel's occupation. Abunimah advocated a single democratic state of Israelis and Palestinians (Abunimah 2006). Blumenthal embraced a similar position, earning sharp rebuke from Jewish commentators who saw in his views a dangerous Jewish self-loathing abetting anti-Semitism.[14] Both activists also had expressed concern for the violence in Syria—Blumenthal explicitly denounced the Syrian regime—but had come to oppose US intervention.[15]

By 2016, the question of intervention in the Syrian civil war was dividing the Islamic, secular left, and Jewish anti-Zionist activist circles that had previously shared a common opposition to Israel's repression of the Palestinians.[16] On one side were individuals and groups categorically opposed to US military intervention. Drawing lessons from the United States's invasion and occupation of Iraq, they argued that US action could only result in even greater misery in Syria and in expansion and consolidation of US and Israeli hegemony in the region. Supporting intervention was backing Zionism and imperialism and consigning Syria to complete ruin. On the other side, those advocating intervention pointed to the Assad regime's indiscriminate violence against its own people, including deliberate bombing of civilians, rampant use of torture in its prisons, and use of chemical weapons. They called for international solidarity in support of the grassroots forces seeking to overthrow the regime and establish a new democratic order in the country. To oppose intervention was, in effect, to back Assad, sell out the opposition, and abet wholesale destruction of Syria and Syrian lives.

Sahloul's tweets reflected the increasing bitterness of the divide, as did Blumenthal's writings, to which Sahloul was responding. Blumenthal, in particular, had authored a damning Alternet exposé in 2016 that linked Sahloul, SAMS, and other anti-regime Syrian activist groups like the White Helmets to US government agencies; Turkish and Qatari intelligence services; Jewish organizations that supported Israel's hard line on the Palestinians and on Iran; and Syrian Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda-linked groups (Dot-Pouillard 2012; Giovani 2018; Jay 2012; Blumenthal 2012, 2016, 2018). Blumenthal also asserted that SAMS was a key participant in the effort to pressure the Obama and Trump administrations into launching military reprisals against the Syrian regime. This campaign, he alleged, used sensationalist accounts of Syrian government atrocities and the supposed use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime to create this pressure (Blumenthal 2016, 2018). To Sahloul, these accusations smacked of slander and of abject support for the murderous and criminal Syrian regime.

Abunimah's response to Sahloul's flurry of tweets was blistering. He stated that Sahloul's assertions were baseless and, tag teaming with Blumenthal, accused SAMS of collaborating with the "anti-Palestinian group [Jewish United Fund of Chicago]." Abunimah took aim, as well, at Sahloul's supporters, especially Ahmed Rehab, the Egyptian American Executive Director of the Chicago office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), an organization that benefited from the support of groups that Sahloul had headed at different points, including the Mosque Foundation. Abunimah was especially critical of Rehab for describing Blumenthal, a friend and collaborator of Abunimah, as a Nazi, which Rehab denied doing.[17]

This embittered breach cut especially close in Chicago. Abunimah, Sahloul, and Rehab lived and worked there. In response, a number of AMP representatives attempted to intervene in the dispute, calling on the belligerents to recognize the damage they were inflicting on Muslim and Arab unity.

Expanding "The Holy," Transcending the Schisms

The AMP conference in November 2013 endeavored early on to transcend these incipient tensions and return the focus to Palestine. It attempted both of these maneuvers through its call to remember, in the midst of the horrendous violence, that Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, as well as Iraq and Egypt—as indicated in the map image in AMP's conference publicity—constituted the very lands that God, in the Qur'an, had blessed and made holy to Muslims. The inclusion of these other countries beyond Palestine, an interpretive move that expanded the limits of the Holy Land well in excess of its traditional, historical, and religious boundaries, served the unifying purpose of the conference. By recalling the centrality of the Holy Land, and by seeing their respective countries included in this central focus, Arab Muslims, in particular, were to step back from the divisions that had sundered their solidarity in the United States and in the Middle East. The semiotics of the conference publicity

achieved this refocusing by redirecting attention to Israel as the foremost threat. The barbed wire that cut off the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa—a reference to Israel's domination of these sacred Islamic sites—symbolized the repression of all believing Muslims in the region. The implication was hard to miss: to free Jerusalem, to return it to Muslim suzerainty, was to free Muslims throughout the Middle East. In this way, the symbolic logic of the conference publicity forcefully returned Palestine to the center of Muslim American concern even as it acknowledged the suffering in the surrounding countries in the region.

The compelling force of this symbolic move derived from a long history in which Jerusalem and the Holy Land had served as symbolic proxies for Arab and Muslim anti-colonial struggles.[18] During the 1920s and 1930s, for example, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni (c. 1895–1974) made Jerusalem central to an appeal for global Islamic support for the Palestinian cause as part of the shared resistance to European imperialism. The crowning moment in this effort was the World Islamic Conference, which he convened at al-Aqsa Mosque in 1931. Islamic solidarity focusing on Palestine also inspired ʻIzz al-Din al-Qassam (c. 1881–1935), a Syrian pan-Islamic preacher whose clandestine organizing of armed cells provided a precedent and network for the 1936–39 Arab Revolt against Zionist settlement and the British Mandate. Hasan al-Banna (1906–49), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, also made Palestine a core theme in his public preaching. Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, which have long argued that the key to reestablishing a unified and free Muslim umma lies in the struggle to liberate Jerusalem and indeed the entirety of Palestine, appeal directly to the memory of al-Qassam and al-Banna (Kupferschmidt 1988; el-Awaisi 1998; Swedenburg 2003; Schleifer 1993; O. Khalidi 2009; Milton-Edwards and Farrell 2010; Euben and Zaman 2009).

The claim here, to be absolutely clear, is not that any sort of direct organizational or material link exists between AMP and Hamas or Islamic Jihad—I have no evidence of any such link and was not searching for it—but rather that AMP draws on a set of tropes that are common to Palestinian Islamism generally. In doing so, AMP does not simply reproduce these discursive figures but instead adapts them to the diaspora. In contrast to the Islamist movements in Palestine, for example, AMP does not directly invoke jihad discourse and does not explicitly refute the legitimacy of Israel through open references to Palestine as an Islamic patrimony or *waqf*.[19] Rather, it hews to the international consensus that has deemed Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to be illegal. It adopts the language of international covenants and rights, a discourse that suppresses particularistic national and religious claims. It also refrains from advocating any specific end-of-conflict scenario, whether one state or two, and remains silent on whether or not the objective should be the creation of a *shariʻa*-based state, the explicit longterm goal of Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.[20]

Still, AMP's invocation of Qur'anic rhetoric and symbols resonates with Islamic conceptions of jihad and the "Holy Land." This complex discursive framing, explicit

and implicit, elides non-Muslim territorial claims primarily through an implied reference to Palestine as an Islamic religious endowment (*waqf*). The endowment concept, elaborated within Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence), renders the Holy Land an inalienable Islamic trust bequeathed to Muslims in perpetuity. As recipients of this God-given trust, Muslims, especially those for whom Palestine is their national home, incur the responsibility of care and defense of the land, that is, of vigilance and struggle in the face of non-Muslim encroachment. The 2013 conference implied these themes—it did not state them explicitly—by linking the idea of Palestine and the Sham (Levant) as a blessed land to advocacy for Palestine as a "Noble Cause." This phrase, "Noble Cause," resonates with the Qur'anic conception of jihad as a struggle undertaken *fi sabil illah,* "in the cause [literally, path] of God." Such struggle encompasses a wide range of actions: verbal denunciation of oppression; steadfast persistence under conditions of suffering; nonviolent protest and advocacy; armed resistance; internal spiritual effort to overcome the ego so as to achieve unity with divine reality and purpose; and giving of time and money to causes of charity and justice (the spending of one's wealth in the cause of God).[21] AMP's discursive framing situates its advocacy within this spectrum of activities. In AMP's framing, the duty to struggle for the Holy Land through nonviolent public advocacy and protest actions expands to become incumbent upon all Muslims in the United States. American Muslims are to work together to free Palestine as a core concomitant of their submission to God.

Calling the Murabitun

The primary purpose of AMP's annual conference is to educate Muslims about their duties toward Palestine, stir a passionate reaction that can lead to mobilization, and channel action toward participation in AMP's organizational structures. The conference performs this work by instilling a sense of the special role of diaspora Muslims in the struggle for Palestine. It does so in several ways, including by warning against participation in interfaith activities that purposefully deemphasize or suppress the Palestine issue and by instructing attendees about the conflict and about their distinctive responsibilities.

This issue of interfaith forums that de-prioritize Palestine was a particular focus of one of the 2013 conference sessions. Just three months prior, the Shalom Hartman Institute had launched a major initiative to bring Muslim leaders to Israel.[22] The goal of this program was to expose these leaders to Judaism and Jewish life and to Israeli experiences and viewpoints. The AMP session focused on the motives of outreach efforts like this one. The convener pointed to statements by pro-Israel groups concerning the importance of interfaith work as a strategy to entangle US Muslim organizations into cooperative relations and thereby reduce or eliminate their potential to become critics of Israel. He lamented that Muslim leaders had participated in these activities without fully realizing the implications for solidarity with Palestinian Muslims.[23] Any interfaith undertaking, he argued,

had to occur strictly on the basis of a prior agreement to oppose Israel's occupa-
tion. Palestine had to be prioritized. Collaboration without such shared under-
standing, especially with Jewish groups, could led to Zionist co-optation. Diaspora
Muslims had to be on their guard.

Before the start of this session, two members of Neturei Karta, an anti-Zionist
Jewish Orthodox movement, seated themselves in the front row. In the discussion
that followed the presentation, these individuals stood up to denounce Israel and
proclaim solidarity with Palestinians. Neturei Karta grounds its solidarity in an
exclusivist theological agenda. The organization objects to Israel because its exis-
tence is the consequence of human initiative and not the result of the Messiah's
coming. Jews true to God's commandments are to remain in the diaspora until
the Messiah's arrival. Jews who support Israel are in active rebellion against God
and therefore sinners. Essentially, Neturei Karta affirms the Jewish claim to ter-
ritorial sovereignty in Eretz Israel but disputes the Zionist mode of implementing
it. This affirmation implicitly contradicts Islamic claims to suzerainty in the Holy
Land. The AMP–Neturei Karta convergence thus has less to do with a shared sense
of injustice toward Palestinians than with having a shared enemy. Neturei Karta's
orientation differs radically, it should be noted, from Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP),
whose members also have attended AMP's conference. The anti-Zionist stance
of JVP proceeds from an understanding of Judaism rooted in universal values
of justice that find expression in support for human rights. JVP is deeply critical of
Israel for its perceived failure to enact those principles. Unlike Neturei Karta, it
acts in solidarity with Palestinians in response to injustice and the moral neces-
sity to oppose it. On these grounds, JVP comes into alignment with AMP's stated
moral and political positions.

The participation of JVP and Neturei Karta, notwithstanding the significant
differences between them, produces a common, incidental effect that is useful
to AMP: it inoculates the organization against charges of anti-Semitism. Jewish
groups that support Israel have leveled such charges in an effort to delegitimize
AMP's advocacy. AMP can point to the attendance of Jewish groups that oppose
Zionism and Israeli policies as evidence that its activism is not racist toward Jews
but rather is a principled stance, shared with Jews, against the repression of Pales-
tinians. The participation of anti-Zionist Jewish groups also provides a model for
AMP of proper interfaith solidarity. It poses this model against the cross-religious
initiatives of other groups that intentionally deprioritize the Palestine question.

In addition to warning against interfaith alliances that de-emphasize Palestine,
the 2013 conference also sought to imbue Palestinian Muslims, especially, with
a sense of their Islamic duty to Jerusalem. One of the sessions that emphasized
this theme focused on youth. Born in the United States, these youth were at risk
of losing touch with the Palestinian cause and of assimilating into US society
and culture. They also had to contend with anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism.
Impressing on them their Islamic duties to the homeland could perhaps stem the

assimilation danger and reinforce a sense of religious and national self-worth. Young people also represented, if properly educated, potential future activists and supporters of AMP's mission.[24]

The special session for youth featured a young *shaykh* who spoke of the importance of Palestine in Islam. Adept at popular culture references—he compared, for example, Abu Jahl, one of the Prophet Muhammad's great nemeses, to President Snow in the book and film *The Hunger Games*—the *shaykh* emphasized the special status of Palestinian Muslims as the *murabitun,* those believing men, primarily (the term has a collective connotation but is in the masculine plural form) who are "tied" to or "garrisoned" within the land and tasked with remaining steadfast in its defense. He did so while also reminding the gathered youth that Palestine belonged to all Muslims, not just to Palestinians. He conveyed both messages by recounting the centrality of Palestine as the site of the second holiest mosque and as the land of a succession of prophets culminating with Muhammad. Being tied to ("stationed" within) the land (*murabitun*), the *shaykh* said, engendered a deep connection with the Prophet Muhammad. The link was not just to land and lineage and cultural background but the actual Islamic heritage that ties all Muslims, and especially Palestinians as guardians of the Holy Land, to the Prophet. The *shaykh* reinforced this point about the particularity of the Palestinian Islamic binding to the Holy Land by referring to the establishment of Muslim rule of Jerusalem under 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab in 637 CE and the restoration of Islamic control following Salah al-Din Ibn Ayyub's successful retaking of the city from the Franks in 1187.[25]

Beyond its affirmation of the unique Palestinian Muslim status, the *shaykh*'s message, wittingly or not, carried a subtle, implicit critique of those Palestinians, especially in the diaspora, who neglected the duty of being garrisoned or tied. *Murabitun* status entailed physical presence—as posted, forward defenders—in the land. Implicitly, however, those who had immigrated to Chicago had relinquished this duty to remain in place. They could ameliorate this condition, presumably, if they dedicated themselves to advocacy, for example, through AMP.

The *shaykh*'s remarks conveyed a second underlying message: men, primarily, properly retained the duty of "being tied." This message was the result of an elision. The shaykh did not discuss the *murabitat* (the feminine plural form of the term). In Palestine today, this second term now refers particularly to women who hold vigil through regular prayer and other activities in defense of al-Aqsa Mosque.[26] The *shaykh*'s omission indicated a presumption that the status of being tied ("garrisoned") flowed from religious (prophetic) and political (caliphal) leadership—domains that have traditionally belonged to men and were originally integrated within the person and office of the Prophet Muhammad. The *murabitat*, however, demonstrated that women, too, were very much engaged in the political and religious work of "being tied" or "garrisoned." Their invisibility in the *shaykh*'s remarks indicated—at least, within this particular space and moment—a persisting patriarchal ordering of political work that privileges men in the public sphere.

As its 2013 gathering illustrates, AMP's annual conferences create a narrative, symbolic, and performative context within which to articulate Palestinian diaspora identity through an Islamic nationalist idiom. The organization replicates and reinforces this articulation in other ways, too. A particularly important mode is public memorialization of key historical events of Palestinian national memory. AMP's commemoration of the Nakba in May 2014 sheds an especially clarifying light on how the organization appropriates the national past as part of its identity work in the Chicago and national diaspora.

AMERICAN MUSLIMS FOR PALESTINE'S NAKBA COMMEMORATION: PALESTINE THROUGH AN ISLAMIC LENS

Commemoration and Contestation

A commemoration is a summons to remember, indicate, and acknowledge through ceremony or observation. A large public commemoration "constitutes the event as an objective fact of the world [. . .] with a social significance and emotional implication of objectively large magnitude" (Frijda 1997, 111, quoted in Damico and Lybarger 2016, 15). The meaning and significance of a commemorative act are open to dispute and resistant to resolution, which are features of any public occurrence (Connerton 1989; Shotter 1997 [1990]; J. Hall 1992; Halbwachs 1992; Confino 1997; Kansteiner 2002; Frost and Laing 2013). The Nakba event that AMP held in May 2014 constituted a commemoration in this sense. As an act of commemoration, it unavoidably intervened within and generated a disputed space of memory. This occurred most obviously in relation to, and against, dominant Zionist and Israeli interpretations of the conflict with the Palestinians, but it also unfolded within Palestinian debates about the symbols and meanings of the national past. AMP melded religious and ostensibly secular political symbols and narratives. It did so in the context of a diaspora community that was and is negotiating its place within US society and culture and in relation to the fraught question of religion and nationalism in Palestine itself.

Nakba in the Suburbs

As I approached the Mosque Foundation and the Aqsa and Universal Schools on that bright May morning in the southwest suburb of Bridgeview, I noticed the parking lots were full. A city police officer pointed at me and then swept his arm to the left. I followed a line of cars south past the mosque. I then turned right, passing again in front of the mosque. I saw a Palestinian flag flapping from the balcony of a large Italianate-style villa. I turned left at the next corner and found parking on the street. A woman with three children had just pulled her large silver Nissan Murano to the curb in front of me. She was dressed in a pink hijab scarf and black 'abaya (formal/literary Arabic, 'aba'a; an ankle-length robe) and was wrangling a stroller out of the back of the vehicle as I angled into the parking spot behind her.

On foot now, I headed toward the mosque. I could see groups of people congregating in the parking areas. As I approached, the atmosphere of a very large, carnival-like family reunion came into focus. A man with a tall brass tea dispenser on his back was pouring out small cups of the sweet black liquid to families strolling about the grounds. The tea man was dressed in a red pantsuit with white gaiters and an embroidered red tarbush-style cap on his head. Wired to the top of his dispenser was a bouquet of red and white roses. Just beneath the roses at the top of the tea dispenser was a black and white *hatta*—a traditional nationalist symbol hearkening to the peasant past—tied around the three brass posts and extending upward from the main vat containing the liquid. The man had wound another *hatta* of the same color and pattern around his waist. Men, women, and children stopped him as he walked amidst the crowd. After accepting a dollar from them, he took a small white plastic cup from the stack sitting in a brass holder attached to his belt, bent at the waist, and poured the beverage.

The tea vendor hearkened to the traditional past, stirring nostalgia in older Palestinians and instilling in younger individuals a tangible sense of connection to the *bilad* ("back home"). Significantly, his outfit and every one of the signs appearing at the different venues and displays in the parking lot featured the same red and white color scheme. Red and white were the hues of the AMP logo, and they appeared in all of AMP's signage and in every one of its publications, print and electronic. The signs were lettered in red and black ink against a white background; the font sizes were uniform; and the AMP logo appeared beneath the signs and placards. This event, focusing on the Nakba and invoking longing for the lost peasant past, was also, in practice, a sophisticated strategy to market the AMP brand and organization as the primary institutional expression and framework for Palestinian identity and politics in the very center of the suburban diaspora community and also beyond it. AMP now claimed the symbols and mantle of the Palestinian national cause that once had been the sole possession of the secular nationalist movements.

Projecting the Nakba: Times Square

During the 2014 Nakba event, AMP's framing of Palestinian identity registered consistently across diverse platforms. The organization, as its name suggests, has sought to project a national presence through its various chapters in different states and through its Washington, DC office. The annual Nakba event provided an opportunity to coordinate cross-chapter initiatives and to project a unified presence. AMP's action in New York during the 2014 commemoration exemplified how this occurred. Real-time and follow-up communications connected the New York action to the commemorations occurring in other cities, including Chicago.

The New York chapter's commemoration on May 16 involved two elements: the projection of an image on a giant screen in Times Square and a silent vigil.[27] The image appeared with the accompanying text "Take a moment of silence for

Palestine." The image persisted for thirty minutes. It also appeared on posters at the simultaneously occurring silent rally in the square. The image, duplicated on screen and street, was then sent with two other photos in a subsequent email message from AMP to its subscribers.

The dominant feature in this multiply replicated image was a young woman's face. She appeared wearing a tight-fitting under-scarf in the traditional checkered black and white pattern of the *kufiya*. Over this scarf was a red hijab—again, the AMP attention to cross-platform branding was evident in the color scheme— which enveloped and framed her head, leaving only her face visible. Across her forehead a string of beads appeared, a gesture perhaps to the gold coins and beads that Bedouin and village women might have worn as signs of family wealth. A gag covered her mouth, a wide adhesive bearing the hastag "#NakbaMSP."[28] This took the viewer to a Twitter feed that on May 19, 2014, was "following" 1,990 accounts, had 503 "followers," and had made 315 tweets. One of the postings in this feed showed photographs of AMP events, including the Chicago event as well as the Times Square televised image. On the posters and on the screen image in Times Square, the AMP logo and the words "Commemorating 66 years of Al Nakba/ Take a Moment of Silence for Palestine/#NakbaMSP" filled the space to the right of the face. In small font beneath this text was an invitation to "post your MSP picture and join the cause." On the other side of the text, in the Times Square televised image, were thin, vertical swooshes of green, black, red, and white, the Palestinian national colors.

The following day, May 17, the AMP website posted an explanation of its Nakba events. The statement declared:

> The New Jersey chapter of the American Muslims for Palestine, supported by AMP-Bronx, took the standard for commemorating the Nakba to the stratosphere in New York City's Times Square with an electronic screen bearing the message: Al Nakba: A Moment of Silence for Palestine.
>
> The message was visible to New Yorkers for 30 minutes during the height of rush hour Friday night. More than 250 people from AMP-New Jersey, AMP-Bronx, Al Awda and other groups turned out to pass out AMP's Palestine 101 brochure and to hold a silent rally to commemorate 66 years of dispossession and occupation of the Palestinian people. The New Jersey chapter also placed a billboard with the same message and launched a successful Thunderclap social media campaign with the hashtag #NakbaMSP.
>
> 'All of our Nakba events are geared toward educating the public about Palestine and its rich cultural and historical heritage,' said AMP Chairman Dr. Hatem Bazian. 'What the New Jersey chapter accomplished was extraordinary. And AMP-Chicago's outdoor event not only educates but it helps our youth take pride in their Palestinian and Islamic heritage in the Holy Land.' AMP held events in New Jersey, New York, Chicago, Milwaukee and Minnesota. Another daylong event, which includes two panel discussions, a film screening and Palestine heritage celebration is slated for

May 24 at the Muslim Community Association in Santa Clara, Calif. The *Middle East Monitor*, a news outlet based in the Great Britain [sic] that covers Palestine globally, a Ramallah-based newspaper, *Al Hayat Al Jadeeda*, and other local news organizations covered AMP's events.

The projection of the AMP image in Times Square was a complex event with diverse audiences. A main audience, as the website posting indicated, was non-Muslim New Yorkers as well as tourists. For this audience, likely possessing little knowledge of the Palestinian situation, the image fused "Palestine," for which one was to pause in silence, with the image of the gagged, hijabbed woman. Palestine was a silenced female Muslim. Other possible conceptions of "Palestine" notably did not register. For example, Palestine has also been home, historically and currently, to Christian and Jewish communities, and secularists envision a multisectarian national society governed through secular democratic institutions. Although, as an organization, AMP acknowledges this diversity and remains non-committal on the form of governance that Palestinians should institute, none of this complexity surfaced in the Times Square image. Also, by presenting the hijab as taken-for-granted, normative practice, the image elided the fact that many Muslim women contested reformist understandings of sartorial orthopraxy.[29] They advanced alternative readings of the Qur'anic hijab passages, arguing that there was no direct requirement to wear a scarf. Moreover, some women rejected the scarf entirely as an expression of their critical stance toward religion. Palestine, Islam, and the hijab were thus not as straightforwardly intertwined, historically or in the present, as the Times Square image seemed to suggest.

A second main audience included AMP's own activists, the US Palestinian community that AMP claimed to represent, and Palestinians globally. To this audience, AMP communicated the success it felt it had achieved. The web posting bragged especially about the exploits of the Bronx chapter. Other chapters, too, received commendation, but the Times Square event was the real achievement because, like a graffiti artist tagging a major public site, AMP's guerrilla-like media action forced Palestine (figured as Muslim) into US public awareness. The organization likely had to pay a fee to project the image, but the fact that it even appeared in a society in which Palestine and Muslims were so deeply marginalized amazed. This was a victory, and AMP celebrated it, passing out congratulations to its partisans and urging donations—a "Donate" button appeared prominently next to the website statement—from supporters.

Displaying the Nakba: Bridgeview, Illinois

In Bridgeview, the AMP Nakba event, which the web posting also noted, took the form of a series of commemorative displays and a formal program. Structured as a series of tents, a symbolic evocation of the Red Cross shelters that Palestinian refugees were forced into in 1948, the displays, aimed entirely at the immigrant

community, served a didactic purpose. In the diaspora, where assimilation and the passing of generations born in the United States threatened the continuity of memory, there was a felt need to educate the young, especially. The pedagogical practice that AMP enacted in its event revealed not only this primary emphasis on instilling the core narratives of unjust expulsion, exile, and ongoing suffering but also a specifically religious and nationalist rejection of *tatbiq* ("normalization") and of *taqsim* ("partition," aka the two-state solution).

Public remembrances of the Nakba encode a refusal to relinquish the lands lost in 1948. Indeed, they signify a demand to return. In Islamized contexts, Nakba commemorations connect this demand, typically cast in relation to nationalist claims and international human rights law, with the religious assertion that the usurped patrimony is God's land, which belongs properly under the suzerainty of those who have submitted to God and his messenger, the Prophet Muhammad. Those who have submitted possess a divine right to the land but also incur the duty of struggle to defend it. The appeal at the AMP event, then, was to Palestinians as Palestinians but also to Palestinians as Muslims.

Tent Displays

Except for the main event tent—which featured a large Palestinian flag lying across a blue and white striped top, ironically the colors of the Israeli flag—all of the other tents were white. The attempt to replicate and reference the tents that housed the refugees in large camps in the immediate aftermath of the war of 1948 was unmistakable. The tents also created a distinct contrast with the suburban surroundings, featuring multistory houses, expensive automobiles, and the recently renovated and expanded Mosque Foundation premises. Each white canopy featured small Palestinian flags stuck into the tops of the supporting poles. Inside, thin mattresses and sackcloth were spread on the gravel. Posters with the distinctive red and white AMP colors and logo featured images of Palestinians crowding the narrow alleys in the devastated Yarmouk Camp in Syria.[30] Other images showed the post-invasion destruction of Iraq. Additional posters featured maps of Palestine, pictures of Israeli helicopters and soldiers, and images of destroyed buildings.

Repeatedly, the Islamic framing of the Nakba confronted the onlooker in the tents. One tent featured a poster with an image of al-Aqsa and the appeal to "defend" the iconic mosque by "support[ing] AMP." Behind the tent that displayed this poster was the Aqsa School for Girls, and from another direction the domes and minaret of the Mosque Foundation became visible. The layering of these visual references was striking. The Aqsa School and the Mosque Foundation as built forms purposefully invoke the institutions of the Holy City, the center of the Palestinian cause and global Islamic attachment. To be focused on the Mosque Foundation in one's daily and weekly activities was also to be oriented toward al-Quds (Jerusalem)—as the name of the Aqsa School signaled. Events such as the Nakba commemoration, which took place in the Aqsa and Mosque Foundation

parking lots, reinforced the association. The direct funding appeal—"Defend al-Aqsa, Support AMP"—followed seamlessly.

At the same time, however, the schools, mosque, and events such as the commemoration entailed a distinctly American ethos of voluntarism. The AMP's insistent money-raising pitch was evidence of this fact. The annual Ramadan fundraisers at the Mosque Foundation, featuring nightly auction-style pledge drives for the institution and for other charities and organizations the mosque sponsored or approved of, were another example. In the United States market economy, organizations devoted to one cause or another had to compete for the attention and purse strings of potential contributors. In emails, bulk mail, and social media campaigns they conveyed the latest atrocity, positioning the Donate Now button strategically within or beside the text and images conveying the "breaking news" that sought to enrage or elicit sympathy within the target audience. In its Nakba event signage, AMP appealed to the individual moral conscience—al-Aqsa in danger!—and, in the same moment, urged the viewer to join the cause, providing scannable codes on its posters for its Facebook and Twitter sites. In a capitalist society that transformed causes into commodities, al-Aqsa and Palestine had to be marketed. In this context, the degree of one's commitment, one's piety and patriotism, registered in the amounts donated. The success of organizations had also become publicly quantifiable in the number of retweets and site visits—thus the scannable codes—which in turn served as evidence of "influence" for prospective donors. In all of this, AMP differed little from any other US nonprofit organization, cause, or campaign seeking to build a donor base.

A second characteristic of American voluntarism is identification in hyphenated terms with various associations (religious, ethnic-national, political, charitable). At the Nakba event in Bridgeview, this hyphenation was on display through the well-established symbols and paraphernalia of Palestinian nationalism. These symbols carried over from the secularist milieu of the "revolution," which had become an object of memorialization. At a table in one of the tents at the Bridgeview Nakba event, an AMP volunteer sold posters and car pendants featuring Naji al-ʿAli's "Handala" figure along with *hatta* (*kufiya*) scarves fringed with the Palestinian national colors and keychains attached to brass cutouts of the map of Mandate Palestine. Prayer beads in the national colors, which, as lettering on their plastic wrapping indicated, were made in China, also were available for purchase. One of the keychains featured the Dome of the Rock. A sign hanging from the table showed the Handala figure with the words, "Palestine, We Will Return," the ubiquitous AMP logo stenciled beside it. The revolution lived on here as postrevolutionary ornaments, some of them now Islamized, which the successful diaspora middle class could exhibit from rearview mirrors and around shoulders as fashion accessories. Through these manifestations, Palestinian suburbanites marked identities within the multicultural milieu of a major US city in which assertions of ethnic pride—such as displays of Mexican flags on Mexican Independence Day—

established one's membership in the spectrum of hyphenated American (associational) belonging. To be American, even a white American now, is to feel the need for an identifiable ethnic location (Gitlin 1996). This is not to denigrate the nationalist feeling that these symbols convey but rather to remark on the other kinds of identity work they do in contemporary US society.

Other expressions of national culture at the event included a tent with Bedouin rugs and pillows. Gesturing to an Americanization and commercialization of tastes, a "Box of Joe" containing brewed "American" coffee sat on the rug next to a short table. In a Bedouin home, the host traditionally roasts, hand-grinds, and boils the coffee on coals to produce a bitter liquid served in small *finjan* cups. In the US suburbs, under the canopy of a recreated Bedouin shelter, the coffee came in a cardboard container from a chain cafe. In this way, as well, Palestine—in the sense of a key Palestinian practice of offering coffee to a guest—had given way to commodification, to a type of consumerist, middle-class Americanization.

Perhaps the most dramatic display was the large replica of the wall that Israel had constructed in the West Bank. Such displays appeared on college campuses elsewhere in the city during Nakba Day events. The DePaul SJP, for example, erected a similar wall in 2014 to commemorate the Nakba. Symbolic of a recurring history of dispossession, expulsion, and exile, the wall conveyed the message of the Nakba's continuing relevance. Each of the panels of the wall served as a medium of communication about the "catastrophe" of 1948. One panel, for example, below the slogan "Free Palestine!," listed the "Impacts of the Wall: limiting Palestinian water supplies; curtails [sic] access to medical facilities; divides [sic] Palestinian farmland and communities." Unsurprisingly, given its attention to branding, AMP's color messaging remained consistent across the display: red and black lettering conveyed the information on the various panels and an enlarged rendering of the abbreviation "AMP" appeared alongside the sizeable, red-colored block lettering running along the top of the wall, calling on the world to "End Israeli Apartheid."

A significant feature of these displays—as well as of the displays in the tents and of the occurrence of the event as a whole within the parking lots of the Mosque Foundation and Aqsa School—was the inward focus. The intended audience was the enclave itself, not the city beyond the enclave. Effectively, the community was mirroring itself to itself through the medium of AMP's brand-conscious displays. The panels explaining the different aspects of Israeli rule in the Occupied Territories—prisoners, land confiscation, settlements, "refugee facts," and the social "impacts of the wall"—indicated this internal pedagogical orientation. In our interview together in October 2013, Kristin Szremski, an AMP staff member, commented on the need to educate Arabs and Muslims who had grown up in the United States. They were as reliant on the "biased US media" as were non-Muslim Americans. AMP therefore saw part of its mission as correcting misunderstandings among US Muslims and Arabs concerning Palestine.

The Formal Program

In addition to the tent displays and the wall, AMP's Nakba event also featured a formal program. At approximately 5:00 p.m., a young man initiated the ceremony with a five-minute-long recitation from the Qur'an. A female moderator then took the stage and called out, "*Takbir!*" ("Magnification [of God's name]!"). The audience responded, "*Allahu Akbar!*" (God is greater!). This ritualized invocation framed the program in Islamic religious and communal terms. In doing so, it cast the nation and its struggles, consciously or not, as an extension of the Islamic *umma* and its duties toward God and toward believers in this one God.

The moderator, a heavyset middle-aged woman in hijab, then came to the stage to speak about the importance of the day and about AMP's work. She also introduced the first speaker, a young man dressed in dark aviator sunglasses and two scarves that combined the *hatta* patterning with the Palestinian national colors. Pacing across the stage, his amplified voice filling the tent, the young activist launched into a review of the key events of Palestinian history, arguing that the Nakba was not a single occurrence in 1948. Rather, it was an ongoing process of dispossession that began with the arrival of Zionist settlers in the 1890s; continued with the British occupation and Mandate; and crested with the wars of 1948 and 1967. It continued today, moreover, in each Israeli attack. Indeed, the persisting Palestinian exile itself was testimony to the Nakba's unending reality. He then remarked on the festive, carnival-like atmosphere of the event in the parking lot, linking it to the somberness of the Nakba memory. Nakba Day marked "our terrible catastrophe" but it also was a celebration of the continuation of the Palestinian people, who remained committed to returning someday, he said. But return would only happen if Palestinians understood their history and got involved to change their situation.

Shaykh Jamal, the head clergyman at the Mosque Foundation, was next on the stage. A powerfully built man with a regal bearing, he came forward in long black robes fringed in gold embroidery. His sartorial display evoked the style of a village headman, a *mukhtar*, and also of an *imam*, or religious functionary, in a Jordanian or West Bank mosque. He wore a white *kufi*-style cap on his head and had a thick, black-streaked grey beard. In a sonorous voice, the *shaykh* spoke of the centrality of the Palestinian question for Muslims. He asserted that Palestine would return to its proper owners one day, but he also stressed—and here he struck a longstanding reformist theme—that the key to this eventual occurrence lay in the return of individual Muslims to Islam. By strengthening their piety, Muslims would hasten the day of their repatriation. The message fit well with the entrepreneurial, small-business, and professional ethos of the suburban middle class. This ethos validated individual empowerment primarily through individual success, wealth accumulation, and moral-ethical rectitude. The *shaykh*'s message reinforced the assumptions underlying this value orientation, adding to it the Islamic imperative

to distribute a percentage of one's wealth through charity. Only individual reform, self-discipline, and charitable giving would save the nation ("*umma*"—the Islamic community but also the Palestinian people as part of this community). There was no mention of liberation through social movement, class struggle, and revolution, an idea that had animated Marxist and pan-Arab nationalist activists in previous generations. Still, the notion of individual reform and commitment to the *umma* did contain a sense of the collective beyond the individual. The difference between "the revolution" and the individual turn toward piety, however, lay in the priority that the latter placed on individual morality. It was this morality, the *shaykh* implied, that provided the key to collective success.

After Shaykh Jamal completed his remarks, Shaykh Amin from the Islamic Community Center of Illinois was invited to the stage. Striking a contrast with Shaykh Jamal, Shaykh Amin wore white robes with gold fringe and a white cap on his head. Younger than Shaykh Jamal, Shaykh Amin was from Jordan and had only been in the country for a few years. Like Jamal, he spoke in Arabic and sounded the theme of individual religious return as the necessary prerequisite to political and territorial restitution. He began by emphasizing that Palestine was an Islamic issue. Muslims needed to unify, he said. Only through their individual commitment to Islam would the necessary collective solidarity exist to bring the Nakba to an end.

In the absence of such unity, *nakbas* of all kinds had proliferated among Muslims. Shaykh Amin pointed to the regime-perpetrated atrocities against Syrian civilians. Every hour, he said, five Syrians lost their lives to regime violence. This violence was a "continuing *nakba*." He mentioned as well the ongoing war in Iraq and other parts of the Arab and Islamic world. But Syria was of a different order. The atrocities there constituted a "*nakba* and a half." Shaykh Amin also spoke about the necessity of patience and commitment to the struggle to bring such disasters to an end. And he spoke about the media, saying that it was biased and that through it these *nakbas* were declared to be an irreversible, accomplished fact, simply to be accepted. He noted that the media spoke about how the Syrian regime had conquered different cities and that the opposition was on the run. However nothing could be further from the truth, he contended. "We can't believe the media," he said. If one did so, one would lose hope. The only solution in the face of these ongoing disasters in Palestine, Syria, and Iraq was to bind together as Muslims and to struggle to overcome the situation.

The final speaker, Don Wagner, was a non-Palestinian advocate of the Palestinian cause. At the time, Wagner, an ordained Presbyterian minister, was serving in a national leadership capacity for Friends of Sabeel North America. This organization coordinated a network of largely Protestant churches and individuals who advocated for Palestinian self-determination and who supported Sabeel, a Palestinian liberation theology organization based in Jerusalem. Dressed in dark

sunglasses, black pullover, and blue jeans, he reminded the audience of the many non-Muslims working on behalf of Palestine. These others, he said, included Jewish activists, SJP groups on campuses, and many US churches working to divest from Israel and to boycott Israeli products. Wagner ended by invoking the shared point of resistance uniting them across religious and ethnic-national divides: Zionism and the Nakba it produced. It was Zionism above all else, he said, that required their sustained, critical attention. Supporters of the Palestinian cause had to work together to "deconstruct" Zionist claims and support the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign.

CONCLUSION

Wagner provided the sole Christian representation at the AMP event, an exception demonstrating the fact that the public expression of Palestinian nationalism in Chicago's suburban diaspora had taken a decidedly Islamic cast in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Wagner's non-Palestinian status heightened this impression: Palestinian Christians were not present in any visible way. This fact did not mean that the Islamic turn had entirely sidelined non-Muslim and secularist voices. Antiochian Orthodox Archbishop Theodosios Attallah Hanna of Jerusalem, for example, addressed AMP's fourth annual conference in 2011. The well-known Palestinian American intellectual Rashid Khalidi, holder of the Edward Said Chair of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University, had also keynoted the annual meetings. Activists connected to the Arab American Action Network and the national Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign regularly held workshops at the conference as did leaders and public figures associated with Jewish Voice for Peace, Friends of Sabeel North America, and Neturei Karta.

The presence of these individuals and groups at AMP's conventions, however, occurred within the symbolic and discursive terms that AMP had set. Sectarian and interreligious solidarity, not a desectarianized secular nationalism, now served as the dominant integrating structure for action and identity in relation to the question of Palestine. This was not a mere surface phenomenon, not simply a shuffling of interchangeable symbols on the deck of an essentially secular Palestinian nationalism. Rather, it signaled a substantive change that registered profoundly not only in acts of public commemoration but also in the trajectory of individual lives. These trajectories tracked with the development of the religious institutional presence in Chicago's diaspora community. The next chapter explores the narratives of several individuals who have participated in the institutions constituting the religious milieu in its Muslim and Christian segments. The analysis reveals the mechanisms of the religious turn as well as its dialectical character: the Islamic shift has spurred and reinforced interacting and mirroring Christian sectarian solidarities.