# "This Is Just Where We Are in History"

## Jewish-Muslim Dialogue, Temporality, and Modalities of Solidarity

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I met Tarik at a Muslim community conference after he made a presentation about his involvement in an initiative in Jewish-Muslim dialogue. The conference was organized by a UK-based Muslim cultural association and brought together a range of speakers addressing issues of interest to British Muslims. While the latter were the primary intended audience, the conference was open to everyone and was publicly advertised. I was there almost by chance. I was exploring different examples of Jewish-Muslim collaboration in the UK, and the conference was generously brought to my attention by a colleague who was working on the same topic and suggested that there were going to be talks on the programme that I would find interesting. Tarik's was certainly one of them.

After the presentation I approached Tarik, introduced myself and asked if he would be free for a longer conversation at some point in the future. I soon learnt that Tarik was not just a presenter at the conference, but also one of its organisers. He later shared with me that he had been involved in a number of initiatives in Jewish-Muslim dialogue for many years. Tarik believed that Jews and Muslims represented religious and cultural traditions that were very close to each other. He also felt that engaging with Jewish communities and organisations could provide his co-religionists with fruitful possibilities for learning. 'I was once invited to talk about my work at a conference organized by and for Jewish communities, and felt that this was exactly what British Muslims needed,' he said. 'We are a minority group too, and that event was a good example of what one can do to support one's community.'

By the time I met Tarik I had been for several years beginning from 2013 conducting interviews with participants of different initiatives of Jewish-Muslim dialogue in the UK, as well as following the meetings of one specific interfaith network based in a UK city. Tarik's words immediately reminded me of the network's mission and the spirit of its message, which was to bring Jews and Muslims together to address common challenges that they faced in the UK as minority groups. I also could not help but notice that Tarik's analysis of the

circumstances that had determined his involvement in the organization of a conference for British Muslims mirrored the words of a wide range of Muslim interlocutors that I had encountered in my fieldwork, who would point out that they were eager to 'learn' from Jewish communities whom they would often describe as being 'more established,' 'successful' and 'ahead' of British Muslims in terms of setting up community-based organizations, engaging in national politics, and combating prejudice, even though this narrative hardly ever explicitly transpired in any of the interfaith meetings and events that I have observed throughout my fieldwork.

To what extent is this conceptualisation of the positions of different minority groups congruent with a commitment to solidarity? What kinds of theoretical reflections on the minority condition emerge at the intersections of empathy, comparative thinking, and expertise through dialogue and by experience? At first blush, this narrative may appear to suggest that my Muslim interlocutors conceptualized their Jewish compatriots as being in a comparatively advantageous position in relation to British social and political structures. This account may even be seen as contributing to a thematization of European Jewish communities that essentializes them as 'successful' in very damaging, even if deceptively positive, terms and/or subsumes their difference under the umbrella of white majorities – a thematization a recent example of which came to the surface in the British media, when a BBC channel convened a panel tasked with reflecting on whether the 'success' that some Jewish citizens had achieved in British politics meant that Jews should no longer be classified as 'an ethnic minority.' The discussion was prompted by a tweet made by a UK politician in February 2021 congratulating the new Scottish Labour leader as "the first ever ethnic minority leader of a political party anywhere in the UK", a statement which attracted criticism on account of leaving UK party leaders of Jewish origin, and, by implication, all British Jewish citizens outside the conceptualisation that would see British Jews as an ethnic minority (Steinberg 2021).

In this paper I will demonstrate that drawing on varying experiences and public imageries, my Muslim interlocutors indeed at times read their community as being in some historical time-frames in a position of relative disadvantage in comparison with their Jewish co-citizens. However, I will argue that further analysis of my interlocutors' understanding of the positionalities of British Jews and British Muslims reveals a theorization that conveys a strong sense of solidarity with British Jewish citizens and unequivocally conceptualizes them as a political minority. I will also suggest that it is not only that their comparative reflections on the minority condition do not take any analytical mileage away from their overarching theorization of British Jews as a minority

group, but also that they bear a productive potential for drawing public attention to specific challenges that different minority groups face.

In trying to elucidate the complexity of my interlocutors' engagement with the topic of the relational positionalities of Jews and Muslim in the UK I hope to both build upon and contribute to the following bodies of literature. I suggest my fieldsite offers an important ethnographic and analytical prism for the growing research on Jewish and Muslim experiences in Europe that has emphasized the overlapping histories of antisemitism and Islamophobia, and sought to complicate and unsettle accounts that polarise European Jews and Muslims (for instance, Anidjar 2008, Atshan and Galor 2020, Everett 2018, Everett and Gidley 2018, Katz 2015, Klug 2014, Mandel 2016, Meer 2013, Özyürek 2018, Renton and Gidley 2017, Romeyn 2017, Sheldon 2016, Silverstein 2010).[1] It also offers a fruitful site for the scholarship at the intersection of Jewish Studies and postcolonial theory that has examined the differing dimensions of what I describe as a comparative theorization of the minority condition (Cheyette 2013, Goetschel and Quayson 2016, Guttman 2013, Mufti 2009, Rothberg 2009, 2011).

More specifically, the paper will engage the following sets of problematics. Firstly, I suggest that an analysis of my interlocutors' reflections about their experiences in relation to those of their Jewish co-citizens can usefully draw on the theory of multidirectional memory developed by Michael Rothberg, which focuses on the intersection between remembrance of the Nazi genocide of European Jews and of other forms of mass violence, bringing attention to the multiple ideational transfers taking place in acts of remembrance and arguing against a logic of competitive suffering. Rothberg suggests that the rise of Holocaust memory on a broader scale provided a conceptual horizon for the articulation of other histories of persecution, discrimination and violence, even if public attention to some of these histories remains deficient and points out that 'a multidirectional framework can allow for specificity and comparison without necessarily lapsing into a competition' (2009: 100). In this paper I draw inspiration from the multidirectionality framework in examining the space that emerges in the narratives of my Muslim interlocutors at the

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1  There is also a wider range of literature in anthropology that focused on one particular community in Europe (Jewish or Muslim), but still addressed the question of Jewish-Muslim interactions and overlapping histories of antisemitism and Islamophobia in important ways. See, in particular, Arkin (2013) and Silverstein (2018) for the context of France and Mandel (2008) and Özyürek (2014) for the context of Germany. For a discussion of the conceptual relationship between antisemitism and Islamophobia against the backdrop of wider conceptualizations of racism, see Lentin (2020).

intersections of comparative thinking about the minority condition, articulations of differing experiences of marginalization, and a commitment to intergroup dialogue, and propose that the multiple conceptual constellations that stem from this space could all be described as solidarity based, even if in different cases solidarity transpires through differing modalities.

In deploying the notion of solidarity I draw on the definition of this concept suggested by Barbara Prainsack and Alena Buyx in the context of bioethics. According to this definition, solidarity is 'an enacted commitment to carry 'costs' (financial, social, emotional or otherwise) to assist others with whom a person or persons recognize similarity in a relevant respect' no matter whether these costs are large or small (Prainsack and Buyx 2017: 52). The authors suggest that this definition enables us to distinguish solidarity from related concepts, such as, for instance, empathy or friendship, through its emphasis on a commitment to carry cost to help those with whom one feels solidarity, which goes beyond mere recognition of similarity in some domains. I suggest that this definition is particularly congruent with the material that I present in this paper, which will attempt to demonstrate that against the diversity of different modes of comparative engagement with the topic of Jewish and Muslim experiences in the UK, my Muslim interlocutors not only identified and empathized with their Jewish co-citizens, but also manifested a strong commitment to invest time and effort in engaging with and supporting them through participating in inter-community activities and challenging anti-Jewish prejudice, even if some of them felt that in some respects they were not yet in a position to carry, in their own conceptualization, significant financial, social or political costs to do so. The differing modalities of solidarity that they display may converge in some respects and diverge in others in ways that would not position any one of them either at the conceptual core of the notion of solidarity or at its periphery, but rather convey multidirectional thinking intersecting with a wide range of experiences and understandings of the position that one's community may come to occupy in society in relation to its political structures.

Secondly, drawing on Jonathan Boyarin's discussion of the conceptualization of time in the context of Jewish memory, I will suggest that what can assist our understanding of the complexities of my interlocutors' views is an analysis of their theorization of temporality in European history. In the accounts of my Muslim interviewees, the vulnerability of their Jewish co-citizens emanates both from the current challenges that Jewish minorities face in the UK and from their historical conditions of discrimination, which my interlocutors refuse to relegate to the past of European Jewry, and, instead, theorise as constitutive not only of the experiences of their Jewish contemporaries but also of those of their own community. In this theorization, solidarity with Jewish

British citizens thus encompasses both self-understandings of disempowerment, and a strong sense of empathy with British Jews, who are thematised as another minority group who on the broader conceptual plane are just as vulnerable as British Muslims, even if in specific historical moments they appear to be in a different position in terms of the imageries associated with them in the public discourse or their overall attainment in relation to some socioeconomic demographic characteristics.

My discussion is based on fieldwork carried out intermittently from 2013 to 2020 in the UK, in the cause of which I was attending events in Jewish-Muslim dialogue and conducting semi-structured interviews with Jewish and Muslim participants of different inter-faith initiatives, focusing in more detail on one group based in a UK city.[2] Materials referenced in this paper draw on a wide range of interviews, conducted in different locales in the UK throughout the entire period of fieldwork. In relation to occupation, my interlocutors were mainly professionals and students. For the purposes of protecting their anonymity, I have refrained from giving more detail about their occupation. I have also changed their names and avoided giving the specifics of their place of domicile. In terms of their experience of inter-community work, they range from those who, like Tarik, were actively involved in different Jewish-Muslim networks for several years to those who were involved in them only occasionally but had a broad interest in inter-community dialogue with a focus on Jewish-Muslim relations.[3]

## 1       Solidarity and Experience

I met Maulana Ali at the very beginning of my fieldwork at an event in Jewish-Muslim dialogue. Ali had been involved in interfaith work for a long time and was open to commenting and reflecting on his life history of working with his

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2   I owe a debt of gratitude to Fiaz Ahmed and Ben Kasstan for introducing me to a range of important interlocutors in the field of Jewish-Muslim interfaith dialogue in the UK. In 2013–2014 Fiaz Ahmed and I were conducting research together, which resulted in the publication of Egorova and Ahmed 2017. This work was funded by Durham University and I am grateful for this support. My analysis of this material strongly benefitted from discussions with Ben Gidley and Sami Everett, and from my involvement in the ESRC-ORA funded project 'Muslim-Jewish encounter, diversity & distance in urban Europe: religion, culture and social model (ENCOUNTERS)' led by Ben Gidley (ES/V013637/1).

3   Some quotes noted in the paper were reproduced from memory and therefore are not exact. Other quotes were reproduced from recordings but sometimes the exact wording was changed to protect my research participants' anonymity.

Jewish counterparts. Throughout our conversation, Ali emphasized the simi-
larity between the Jewish and the Muslim religious traditions, and at first firmly
(though very politely) refused to engage with any comparative frameworks
that would go beyond the commonalities of Jewish and Muslim experience.
When I invited him to reflect on the question about whether antisemitism and
Islamophobia were equally pronounced and visible in the UK – a question that
would often come up in my conversations with other research participants –
he interpreted it in a way that re-focused it on Jewish and Muslim subjectiv-
ities, and left little room for competitive narratives. 'For me, personally, it is
difficult to identify the level at which both communities suffer,' he said. 'But
I definitely know that there are issues where Muslims and Jews are being tar-
geted together, for instance, as it was the case with animal stunning before
slaughtering.' Ali's response thus referenced debates about whether the animal
welfare legislation in the UK, which requires animals to be pre-stunned before
slaughter, should continue to carry an exemption for Jewish and Muslim com-
munities allowing them to meet the requirements for the production of kosher
and halal meat. The question of animal pre-stunning would often come up
in the interviews at the beginning of my fieldwork (2014), as at that time the
types of religious slaughter that would allow for the production of kosher and
halal meat were effectively banned in Denmark, an issue that was widely dis-
cussed in the media (see, for instance, Withnall 2014).[4] The question of ani-
mal stunning would oftentimes be described by my research participants as an
example of a challenge that Jews and Muslims should face together, and there
was nothing in Ali's depiction of it that would imply that he did not see the
two communities as working as equal partners in this collaboration. However,
when I later in the conversation invited him to look back on his experience
of Jewish-Muslim interfaith activities, and to reflect on whether the two sides
appeared to be equally engaged in them, he proposed that he would expect his
Jewish counterparts to take a lead in these initiatives:

> In terms of coming to this country Jews are an older community than
> Muslims, and for that reason they are comparatively well-established,
> more mature … As a result of their sacrifices, they are more involved in
> the politics of this country. Muslims, comparatively, are a new commu-
> nity … For those reasons I think that I would expect that more initiatives
> be started by the Jewish community, although I would expect the Muslim

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4    For a discussion of ritual animal slaughtering and animal rights movement in France see
     Bergeaud-Blackler (2016).

> community also to take initiative. I would encourage my own commu-
> nity also to get involved, to interact, to take initiative; but the present cli-
> mate of social, political, intellectual, and infrastructural situation I think
> makes the Jewish community slightly more forthcoming …

Ali did not in any way imply that the challenges faced by British Jews were less
significant than those faced by British Muslims, nor did he suggest that his co-
religionists were not in a position to play an equal role in initiatives of Jewish-
Muslim collaboration. However, he opined that the experiences that their
Jewish counterparts had already had in negotiating the challenges of living in
the UK as a minority group put them in a relatively stronger position to initi-
ate this type of collaborations. Ali's entire life history suggests a strong com-
mitment to inter-community dialogue, however his call for solidarity between
Jewish and Muslim British citizens was still marked by a sense of scepticism
about the degree to which his co-religionists were structurally empowered to
play a leading role in it.

Some of the other commentators, who, like Ali, advocated a solidarity-based
approach to fighting challenges that different minority groups faced in the
UK, conveyed a stronger sense of scepticism about the possibility of British
Muslims playing a significant role in interfaith initiatives, particularly where
engagement with the political establishment was needed. For instance, Said, a
Muslim student in his early twenties who was involved in the work of a Jewish-
Muslim youth group, throughout our conversation emphasized to me that he
was very supportive of the Jewish community and aware of the common chal-
lenges that Jews and Muslims faced in the UK. At the same time, he told me
that his Jewish counterparts were better placed to initiate these collaborations.

> My impression is that … I know this is probably a stereotype, but one can
> say the Jewish community is much more established, better organised
> and has more political influence in this country than the Muslims have
> … It's complicated, but, in my experience, I don't think that Muslims are
> well placed to initiate such collaborations … From what I can see, Jewish
> communities are probably slightly better placed to be reaching out to
> Muslims. Though the issues we face are the same and I would strongly
> encourage my community to work with Jewish organisations. But I am
> not quite sure if we are in a strong enough position to take the first step
> … Maybe it is just the way I see it, and maybe I am going on a perception
> … But I think the Jewish community is like a model group for us and we
> need to take time and learn from them.

Said thus came to occupy a space of conceptual ambiguity drawing attention to British Muslims' position of exposure to structural inequalities and other forms of direct and indirect discrimination which in his analysis both overlapped with and diverged from those experienced by his Jewish compatriots. It may be argued that Said's comparative conceptualisation of the two communities' positions arises from this place of divergence, though, in his account, their differing experiences are not necessarily thematised as being either in conflict, or in competition with each other. In this respect, one could draw on Esra Özyürek's discussion of the notion of empathy proposed in her work on the way Muslim minority Germans engage with memory of the Holocaust (2018). Building upon Husserl's notion of the intersubjective nature of empathy, Özyürek argues that past experiences and positionality of the empathizer shape their empathetic process, and I suggest that while the memorialization of the Holocaust offers a very different context for a discussion of the way European Muslims relate to Jewish history and experience, on a broader theoretical plane this theorization could also be applied to solidarity in the study of which we need to pay attention to the experiences of the subjects expressing solidarity with others. Drawing on Özyürek's insight, I suggest that my interlocutors' conceptualization of the comparative experiences of European Jews and European Muslims and their assessment of the extent to which they can offer support are partly shaped by their own experiences of living as Muslims persons in the UK. In some cases, these experiences have led them to suggest that their opportunities for taking a lead in initiatives in Jewish-Muslim collaboration and dialogue are limited, but I would argue that this assessment does not take away from the strength of their commitment to carry costs to support their Jewish counterparts.

Indicative of the complexity of Said's engagement with the topic of the societal standing of British Jews in relation to British Muslims, his reflections emerge from a place of hesitation rather than certainty. A comparative conceptualization which describes a Jewish community as being more 'successful' or 'ahead' unavoidably conjures anti-Jewish stereotypes interlaced with falsely positive essentializing imagery of Jewishness. I will return to this important question and the way it is theorized by some of my Muslim interlocutors in the conclusion, though it also strongly merits to be explored in a separate contribution. Some of Said's reflections evoke this imagery; however, throughout our conversation, he would qualify his statements by suggesting that they were based on a perception that, in his own words, he might have inadvertently borrowed from the public discourse. In other terms, rather than claiming the existence of any 'reality' behind the imagery of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the societal position of British Jews and British Muslims,

he drew attention to the existence of this imagery and its potentiality in rela-
tion to, for instance, engaging national political structures in fighting inequal-
ity. Said thus momentarily engages with narratives drawn from what Gidley,
McGeever and Feldman (2020) have theorised as a reservoir of antisemitic
ideas and stereotypes (for instance, about Jewish people being able to exer-
cise 'influence') only to immediately disavow and challenge them, questioning
both his own and wider societal thematization of British Jews as a community
in a position of power.[5]

Said's discussion of the possibility of Jewish-Muslim collaboration is at once
a critical reflection on the processes of antisemitic stereotyping and an affir-
mation of a strong perception of the subaltern status of Muslim communities
borne out of not only his expertise by experience, but also of wider societal
imageries associated with Jews and Muslims. These imageries also appear to
intersect with stereotyping current in European public and political discourses
that reads Jews as a model minority. Important academic studies of Western
constructions of Jewishness in relation to whiteness discussed the history of
assimilation of Jewish populations that has led to their gradual (and argua-
bly only partial) integration into the normativity of the majority (Gilman 1991,
Goldstein 2006). Focusing specifically on British Jewish history, scholars have
explored in-depth how under the conditions of British assimilationist mono-
culturalism, by the middle of the nineteenth century Jewish communal lead-
ership had to stress loyalty and sameness with the national mainstream in the
representations of Anglo-Jewry (Kahn-Harris and Gidley 2010: 16–17) and how
the Jewish community has become to be portrayed as a paradigmatic 'suc-
cessful' minority (Sheldon 2016: 22). This deceptively 'positive' stereotyping
of European Jews, which in recent decades has come to position them as an
example that Muslims should emulate (see Meer and Noorani 2008 for the
context of the UK) not only draws on antisemitic imageries, but also, as I have
discussed in the context of South Asia (Egorova 2018), underscores the perme-
ability of the boundaries between different group-specific forms of prejudice.

Returning to my Muslim interlocutors, it is noteworthy that while they often
engaged a comparative perspective when talking about the positionalities of
Jewish and Muslim communities in the UK, with most, similarly to Said, seeing
their Jewish co-citizens as being in a stronger position in relation to British
Muslims in specific contexts, they did not conceptualise them as being 'more
successful' either than the majority society or than British Muslims, in absolute

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5  For a discussion of a wide range of complexities involved in the engagement with antisemitic
   discourses among young European Muslims see Silverstein 2010. For an examination of this
   problematic in relation to the context of the Middle East see Achcar 2010.

terms. Instead, they theorised their Jewish compatriots not only as another community who were a demographic minority, but as a group in a subaltern position in relation to the majority society.

I suggest that their view of the status of the Jewish community thus heavily converges around a notion that to use Saba Mahmood's analysis, could be described as that of a minority in a political sense of this term. In her discussion of the term minority, Mahmood examines different attempts at defining it, beginning from the Versailles Peace Conference (2016) when it began to signify a category of citizens in a state to which they did not denominationally belong, and observes that these attempts connected two separate processes – the consolidation of a group's collective identity on the basis of specific characteristics, and the process through which the group becomes aware of its marginalized status. Mahmood concludes that '[m]inority in this important sense is a *political* term in that it registers hierarchized difference (and not simply difference) despite the state's claim to ensure equality of all its citizens' (Mahmood 2016: 54, emphasis original). I suggest that the responses of my Muslim research participants indicate very clearly that they strongly conceptualize their Jewish compatriots as another minority group precisely in this political sense, as they see them as another group who are not only non-dominant in numerical terms, but are also marginalized and discriminated against.

It is noteworthy that the accounts of my Muslim interlocutors could hardly be described as homogenous, a topic that merits being explored at length in a separate paper. For instance, some commentators engaged the comparative perspective on Jewish and Muslim experiences by entirely refusing to construct difference along community lines and focusing instead on the relationship between minority marginalization and the specifics of varying modalities of religiosity. Thus, Razak, who strongly identified as a person of faith, opined that Orthodox Jews and religiously observant Muslims were subjected to similar levels of discrimination on account of their sartorial practices, which were marking them as 'visibly' Jewish or Muslim. Razak then recounted his experiences of marginalization that he ascribed to being a Muslim who could be recognized as such because of his attire, the way those Muslims who adhered to a different dress code would not be. Conversely, others talked about divergent experiences of discrimination based on their perceived physicality. Some suggested that both communities should be conceptualised as ethnic and/or racial minorities and pointed out that in this respect the Jewish community were in an advantageous position because, unlike Muslims, they were seen as an ethnic group in legislature and were therefore protected by laws directed at race-based hate speech.

At the same time, my interlocutors never collapsed the positionality of British Jews with that of white majorities and framed their analysis of the racial discrimination of both groups in a multidirectional way, doing so on two registers. Firstly, many emphasized that even if the Jewish communities were better protected from racial abuse through legislation, and/or, due to the longer history of their presence in the UK had a stronger community-based support network than British Muslims, on the whole, the level of stereotyping that they were subjected to in British society to begin with was comparable to that that Muslims were experiencing. Secondly, they suggested that while there was more room for Reform and secular Jewish citizens to avoid race-based negativity than there was for most Muslims in the UK, this was not in any way an indication of overall levels of anti-Jewish hostility being lower, as, in their view, anybody who was not in a position to 'hide' their Jewishness was just as likely to experience abuse as a Muslim British person was.

Moreover, my interlocutors would often strongly theorise the cause of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim hostility as stemming from the same source and relegate the very question of whose societal position is 'better' in Europe today, to the realm of particularity that could not compete in relevance with the broader discussion about the nature and causes of nationalistic prejudice. In doing so, they often engaged the question of the past histories of discrimination and violence that Jewish people had faced in Europe, and, as I discuss in the following section, did it in ways that allowed for significant convergencies not only between the past and the present of their Jewish co-citizens, but also with the experiences of their own.

## 2 Time and History

Like Ali, Nadeem was actively involved in activities in Jewish-Muslim dialogue for many years and was very open to talking about his experiences. In one of our earlier conversations, I asked Nadeem, just as I had asked Ali, to comment on the view that at the time (2014) antisemitism appeared to be more latent in the UK, while Islamophobia was more visible. Nadeem replied that he would probably broadly agree with this view; however, he felt that this was not the most pertinent question for a discussion of Jewish and Muslim experiences,

> … the point to understand for me is, what is the force which drives this, because the force is the same. It's this deeper idea of superiority, the idea of the extreme nationalism which drives it. The victim may be different, they may be Jewish or Muslim, but the force that actually drives it, I think

is the same … Muslims are at the forefront, they are the feared people
now … but it's just where we are in history.

Other interviewees, in discussing this question would often refer to the specifi-
cities of the historical experiences of Jewish communities, referencing the his-
tory of discrimination and extreme violence that they had suffered in Europe,
as well as the pressure to assimilate that British Jews had faced in the UK. In
these accounts, the relative 'success' that they had achieved in British society
was seen as an outcome of a long and difficult history – a view that already
transpired in my conversation with Ali, who opined that British Jews were
more involved in national politics than British Muslims, but that they had to
make sacrifices to achieve this position. In other terms, British Jews were thus
often theorized by my interlocutors as a community who had had more time
than British Muslims to 'learn' how to succeed in the UK, but had also been
subjected to the pressure to assimilate to British society for longer.

Moreover, the particularity of the historical experiences of British Jewish
constituencies, far from being relegated to the past, was conceptualized in some
interviews as constitutive of Jewish persons' positionalities in the UK today.
They thus shatter the linearity of what Bryan Cheyette (2017) has critiqued
as the supercessionist portrayals of Jewish and Muslim histories in Europe
and articulate a strong concern for the current well-being of their Jewish co-
citizens. For instance, Nazeemah, who had been involved in interfaith activi-
ties both in the UK and abroad, pointed out that while British Jewish commu-
nities could be seen as more 'established' in the UK in comparison with British
Muslims, this did not in any way imply that they were less likely to become vic-
tims of xenophobic hostility and hate crime. During our conversation (which
took place in a café in Whitechapel, a district in East London which at the end
of the nineteenth century became home to Ashkenazi Jews fleeing pogroms
in Eastern Europe, and in the second half of the twentieth century, and par-
ticularly after the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, saw a wave of migration
from South Asia),[6] she both drew parallels between the history of British Jews
and British Muslims and directly referred to specific examples from European
Jewish past:

You know the history of this neighbourhood … Jews and Muslims are
both migrant communities … The Jewish community has faced a long

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6   For a more detailed discussion of the two waves of migration and an analysis of Jewish-
    Muslim encounters in the area see Everett and Gidley 2018. For a comparative analysis of
    commemoration of victims of fascist and racist violence in the area see Visser 2020.

history of persecution that in this country goes all the way to the thir-
teenth century and even earlier … And then in the 19th century there was
a wave of Jewish migration from Eastern Europe … They came to England
with nothing and barely received any support. And then of course the
experiences of European Jews in the twentieth century …

Thus, on the one hand, Nazeemah made references to very specific historical
events, going all the way back to the persecution of the Jews and their expul-
sion from England in the thirteenth century.[7] Nevertheless, her answer was
given in response to my rather direct question about the position of British
Jews in the UK today. In Nazeemah's view, today British Jews are still just as vul-
nerable to xenophobic prejudice as British Muslims. While the evidence that
Nazeemah offered in support of this view seemingly came from the past, in her
understanding, these experiences are not relegated to the past, but instead,
thematized as completely constitutive of the British Jewish communities'
present. Moreover, in the theorization of Nazeemah and Nadeem, the past of
European Jews is constitutive not only of their present, but also of the present
of British Muslims.

I suggest that this conceptualization of the subaltern status of European
Jews, in which the spatial dimension of stigmatization converges with the
temporal one, is congruent with the analysis addressing the time and space
nexus of othering offered in Jonathan Boyarin's discussion of the trajectories
of Jewish memory. Boyarin argues that the subsumption of Jewishness within
categories perceived as dominant leads to the silencing of discourses about
Jewish difference (1992: 101) and that the silencing of this difference, and all
its productively subversive critical power in the contexts of anti-colonial and
anti-imperial struggle, is particularly starkly pronounced when the temporal
dimension of European othering is ignored. Writing about the importance
of paying attention not only to the spatial, but also the temporal dimension
of domination, Boyarin suggests that 'if the vast preponderance of Jews who
resisted imperialism culturally or militarily and the vast preponderance of Jews
who were victimized by imperialism are dead, rather than elsewhere, their
relevance to the struggles of postcolonial people against (neo)imperialism is
impossible to discern. The question then arises whether those who are not in
a position to be interlocutors (of anthropology, literary criticism, or any other

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7   The first Jewish people arrived in England with the Normans in 1066 and were expelled in
    1290 under King Edward I. Jewish communities started living openly in Britain again in the
    seventeenth century.

form of contemporary critical thought) because they are dead cannot *also* be a source of critical discursive power' (Boyarin 1992: 81–82, emphasis original).

I suggest that my Muslim interlocutors' conceptualisation of Jewish difference is congruent with an affirmative answer to Boyarin's question, as, in their account, this difference is imbued with critical discursive power, from which other minority groups can derive liberatory potential, and this power in many ways originates from the temporal dimension of Jewish difference. Indeed, and to draw on Rothberg's analysis of multidirectionality, awareness of modern Jewish history within and outside the UK appears to have provided my Muslim research participants with a horizon to articulate their concerns about the pressures and challenges that their own constituencies face, as well as to reflect on the possible strategies for developing community support and empowerment, as, for instance, Tarik's life history demonstrates.

Let me now return to the main argument of the paper, and attempt to sum up my analysis of the way my interlocutors' commitment to solidary with a community whom they see as another minority group intersects with comparative thinking and their differing experiences of marginalization.

## 3      Conclusion

During one of my visits to Ibrahim's home city, he drove me through his neighbourhood, pointing out the house where he grew up and the school that he attended. 'As you can see, the school is quite a distance away from the house,' he said. 'My mother wanted a better life for me, and she sent me to a school farther away from our home, because it was known to be better than the one in our district … She would drive me all the way here every morning, so that I would have a better life. Several of my teachers were Jewish. I learnt so much from them … And it makes me so happy to see such a vibrant neighbourhood that Jewish people have in our city, after everything that their community had been through in Europe …'

I suggest that the conceptualization of the comparative standing of Jews and Muslims in British society that Ibrahim's words poignantly convey is imbued with a recognition of a plethora of histories and social realities that have been and continue to be traumatic for both groups, and in this paper I endeavored to use the material from my fieldwork to illuminate this particular mode of theorizing the minority condition. It is not at all my contention that this is how Jewish/Muslim relational positionalities are thematised by all participants in initiatives in Jewish-Muslim dialogue in the UK, however, I suggest that this conceptualization represents a prominent thread in the overall body

of responses of my Muslim interlocutors. This theorization combines solidarity with comparative thinking which contextualizes relational subalternities in ways that offer an emancipatory potential rather than lapse into competitive accounts of the minority experience.

Indeed, my interlocutors' portrayal of British Jews as being 'ahead' of British Muslims in respect of, for instance, setting up support organisations does bear a strong comparative tonality. However, I suggested that in their reflections on Jewish and Muslim positionalities in the UK my interlocutors refrain from thematizing these experiences in a de-contextualized way and stay at a safe conceptual distance away from what Rothberg has described as the logic of competitive suffering. When they portray the minority condition of British Jews as divergent from their own, it is still foregrounded and celebrated as a basis for establishing multiple forms of solidarity. The distinction that they make between Jews and Muslims when talking about the specificities of the latter 'learning' from the former does not incorporate either antagonistic accounts of minority experience or conceptualizations that would read one group as being more 'successful' than the other in absolute terms.

Importantly, within the overarching framework of comparative reflection on the structural inequalities and other challenges that Jews and Muslims faced in the UK as minority groups, the narratives of my Muslim interlocutors diverged on many registers. They would draw on different sources of knowledge of Jewish and Muslim positionalities in the UK (from demographic data, to imageries of Jewishness and Islam circulating in the public discourse, to lived experiences), bring in different contextual material to support their analysis, and display different measures of certainty in making their argument. Indeed, in discussing the question of Jewish and Muslim experiences, my interlocutors displayed a wide range of approaches, as each of them theorised the intersection of Jewish and Muslim positionalities against their own life histories and knowledge archives. For instance, Tarik, building upon his experience of inter-faith work and participation in Jewish community-based events, would be very likely to challenge Said's view about British Muslims being in a weaker position than their Jewish counterparts in matters of inter-community dialogue. I once described this view to Tarik in one of our conversations when he asked me to share with him some of my initial findings, and he challenged it very strongly, contending that nothing should be stopping his co-religionists from being the first ones to reach out to their Jewish counterparts or any other group in need of support, as doing otherwise would be un-Islamic. Moreover, he noted that given the particularities of anti-Jewish stigmatization, any thematization of specifically Jewish citizens as being more 'empowered' or 'successful' than any other community evoked antisemitic imageries irrespective

of the intentions of the speaker. In fact, the importance of not only avoiding but actively challenging latent antisemitic assumptions about the perceived 'success' of Jewish people had been pointed out to me by a number of Muslim interlocutors who critically commented on the presence of these assumptions in the wider society.

Notwithstanding the important differences in the views of commentators such as Tarik and Said, I suggest that the varying modes of the comparative conceptualization of the minority condition in the UK that they display, which emerge at the multiple intersections of empathy, exposure to public discourses about European Jews and Muslims, situated knowledge and lived experience, all belong to the domain of solidarity and could be described as constitutive of its differing modalities. I also argue that while the latter may diverge from each other in some respects and overlap in others, they should not be theorized in a hierarchical way on account of these differences, but understood as solidarity-based in equal measures without staking a claim either to its conceptual core or to its periphery. As Prainsack and Buyx point out, an enacted commitment to carry 'costs' to assist others with whom a person recognizes similarity is solidaristic no matter how small these costs are. I would add that my interlocutors are often prepared to carry significant costs to support their Jewish compatriots, and this commitment should be seen as solidaristic, even if they feel that, to paraphrase Nadeem, at this moment in history they are not yet in a position to carry them to the extent that they would like to.

I also argued that in the analysis of my interlocutors, the claim about Islamophobia and antisemitism being more pronounced in relation to each other in specific historical eras calls for a more complicated reading of their conceptualization of temporality in the history of European minorities. In these accounts, multiple narratives, histories and experiences coexist with spatial and temporal dimensions of discrimination intersecting with each other in ways that confirm Boyarin's insight about the importance of taking into consideration the temporal dimension of othering. They are also strongly congruent with Talal Asad's observation about the way individuals in diverse societies live by multiple and differing temporalities which shape their political responses and often go well beyond the homogenous understandings of time promoted by the state (Asad 2003: 5). Indeed, in the conceptualization of many of my Muslim interviewees the trope of their Jewish co-citizens being 'ahead' and 'more established' first and foremost implies a long history of anti-Jewish discrimination, displaying a theorization of the comparative standing of Jews and Muslims in British society which understands the past of European Jews as co-constitutive of their present. I contend that when my Muslim interlocutors note that their Jewish co-citizens are 'ahead' of them in

terms of setting up and seeking support to combat prejudice, what they suggest is that British Jews have lived through a longer history of marginalization, and are 'ahead' of British Muslims in terms of the sheer volume of challenges that they have had to face in the UK. In this respect, their conceptualization of Jewish history echoes Kahn-Harris and Gidley's insight about the challenges that Anglo-Jewry faced in relation to the monoculturalism of the earlier twentieth century Britain (2010: 16–17) and David Cesarani's observation about the 'antisemitism of tolerance' in the UK that conditioned British Jews to minimize their differences, privatizing Judaism and shedding many aspects – especially those most visible – of Jewish culture and tradition' (quoted in Kahn-Harris and Gidley 2010: 17).

To conclude, in this paper I attempted to demonstrate how solidarity can often go hand in hand with a comparative reflection on the minority condition, including the forms of reflection that in some contexts see one's community in a less advantageous position in relation to the group with whom solidarity is felt. I also argue that this mode of comparative theorization has a strong productive potential for elucidating the lack of attention that public discourses and societal structures pay to the conditions of disadvantage of specific groups. Indeed, I suggest that the case that I considered here illuminates not only the conditions of disempowerment as they are experienced by British Muslims, but also the lack of attention paid in the public discourse to the minority condition of British Jewish communities, as it transpired, for instance, in the public and media debates that I noted in the introduction and that undoubtedly merits its own detailed discussion.

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