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Terrorists in the Village?

Negotiating Jewish-Muslim Relations in South Asia

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In 2010, Pakistani-Canadian writer and journalist Tarek Fatah published a book under the title *The Jew Is Not My Enemy: Unveiling the Myths that Fuel Muslim Anti-Semitism*. The book aims to explore why Judaism and Islam are polarized in the contemporary world and offers a provocative critique of anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist rhetoric in Muslim communities. Fatah was prompted to embark on his project examining Muslim anti-Semitism by the Mumbai attacks of 2008, when the Chabad-Lubavitch Jewish Center was taken over by members of a Pakistan-based extremist organization, and an Israeli-born rabbi, Gavriel Holtzberg, and his wife, Rivka, were murdered together with other hostages. Fatah asks why Muslims who are not involved in the conflict in the Middle East would resent Israel or the Jews and suggests that in the late 1940s and 1950s there was no anti-Semitism in Pakistan, where the Jewish communities of Peshawar and Karachi had enjoyed peaceful relations with their Muslim neighbors (Fatah 2010, 175–177). To support his position, Fatah quotes a former officer in the Pakistan army who is adamant that even the establishment of the State of Israel did not cause local Muslims to change their attitudes toward local Jews: "Of course, we were on the side of the Arabs, but it did not cross our minds to target the Jews of Peshawar" (Fatah 2010, 176).

These words reminded me of a conversation I had in Mumbai with a member of the Bene Israel Jewish community who knew the rabbi assassinated in 2008. "These attacks were committed by terrorists from abroad who saw the rabbi as a symbol of Israel," he said. "This is no reflection on the relations that we have here with local Muslims who have always been friendly toward the Bene Israel. In fact, the local Jews of Mumbai have never been targeted." And yet, a few months later, the leaders of another Indian Jewish community, the Bene Ephraim of Andhra Pradesh chose to seek police protection in case Islamic terrorists were to attack their synagogue and instructed community members to wash off Jewish symbols from the walls of their houses. The idea that South Asian Jews have never been the target of Muslim violence was also challenged by Bene Israel commentator Levi Sankar from Toronto who, commenting on Fatah's statement about the absence of anti-Semitism in the

early history of Pakistan, stated that local Jews felt threatened and after the Partition had to leave for India, Israel, and other countries. Referring to the experiences of his family, he argues that "in the late 1940s the Jew-hatred spread from the Middle East to Pakistan and the Pakistani Jewish community became refugees fleeing persecution or assimilated" (Sankar 2010).

Who is right in this debate? Did anti-Zionist sentiments of Pakistani Muslims develop into "Jew-hatred," as it is suggested by Levi Sankar, or were they just perceived as such by his community? Did the Mumbai attackers see Rabbi Holtzberg and his family purely as a symbol of Israel and not of Judaism? Were the fears of the Bene Ephraim leaders regarding possible hostility from either "Islamic terrorists" or local Muslims completely justified or were they based on Islamophobic prejudices propagated by the mass media?

This paper seeks to call attention to the fluid, processual, and context-dependent nature of Jewish-Muslim relations. I will focus on a number of historical and ethnographic episodes pertaining to the mutual perceptions of Jews and Muslims in South Asia to explore tropes of collaboration and conflict that are present in the accounts of both communities of the subcontinent and to reflect on the intricate and complex ways in which issues in local and global politics, such as Indian caste relations, the rhetoric of the "war on terror," and the conflict in the Middle East, affect these relations.

In doing so, I will engage with wider debates about the meanings of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia—two notions that have acquired a wide range of meanings and have not been immune from controversy. As Andrew Shryock has observed, Islamophobia has become a unifying concept bringing together differing and diverse sentiments and practices into one framework. Acts of violence directed against Muslims or legislature criminalizing particular forms of Islamic practice have been variously conceptualized as racist, secularist, nationalist, or anti-immigrant (Shyrock 2010, 2). Writing specifically about the context of Europe and North America, Shryock points out that oftentimes people who exhibit anti-Muslim prejudices have only minimal knowledge of Islam, and he suggests that we can hardly be sure that Islamophobia is ultimately about Islam at all (2010, 3).

Anti-Semitism is an equally complex concept the meanings of which have been discussed by scholars from a wide range of disciplines. The issue that has produced particularly heated debates both in public and academic domains is that of the relationship between anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli/anti-Zionist attitudes. As Matti Bunzl observes in his discussion of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Europe, anti-Semitic violence has resurfaced in recent years, which gave rise to a debate about what became to be known as the "new anti-Semitism." On one side of this debate, Bunzl argues, is a group who has been labeled by some as the "alarmists." They see recent resurgence of anti-Semitism as a situation where Israeli policies toward the Palestinians are used as

a new pretext to openly express resentment of Jewish populations. For the alarmists, Bunzl argues, any criticism of Israel carries the baggage of time-worn, anti-Jewish hatred. Their opponents in this debate, called by some the "deniers," reject the idea that criticism of the Jewish State is inherently anti-Semitic and draw attention to the relatively comfortable life that Jewish communities lead in Europe. They recognize that individual Jews and Jewish organization are increasingly becoming target of abuse, but they tend to view them as part of the larger trend of violent attacks directed against Europe's minorities (Bunzl 2007, 1-3).

The question of Jewish-Muslims relations looms large in the debate about the new anti-Semitism with the alarmists calling attention to those cases of anti-Semitic violence where the perpetrators are Muslims, and the deniers focusing on the anti-Semitism of the extreme right (Bunzl 2007, 25). Bunzl suggests that as far as the anti-Semitism of the extreme right is concerned it does appear to be a continuation of the old project of excluding the Jews from the national body of Europe. However, when we consider the Islamic component of recent violence directed against Europe's Jews, we have to admit that it is based on a very different idea. Bunzl argues:

> When young, disenfranchised Muslims attack French Jews, they do not do so in the interest of creating an ethnically pure France. Nor are they asserting that French Jews do not belong in Europe. On the contrary, they are attacking Jews precisely because they see them as part of a European hegemony that not only marginalizes them in France, but, from their point of view, also accounts for the suffering of the Palestinians. In the Arab world, Israel, after all, is understood first and foremost as a European colony. (2007, 26-27)

Bunzl suggests that to explain attacks on the Jews as an example of anti-colonial struggle is not to offer an apology for this phenomenon, but to highlight the difference between the realities of the old and the new anti-Semitism: "While the former sought to exclude Jews from the nation-states of Europe, the latter targets Jews precisely because of their Europeanness" (Bunzl 2007, 27). Brian Klug argues in a similar vein that though anti-Semitism is indeed becoming more visible in the public discourse on Israel, "whether in the salon, on 'the street', in the mosque, in the UN or in the media" (2003, 121), it has to be recognized that anti-Semitic propaganda and attacks directed at the Jews intensify when the situation in the Middle East worsens, and "the longer Israel is at loggerheads with the rest of the region, the more likely it is that anti-Semitism will take on a life of its own" (Klug 2003, 134). Indeed, this phenomenon has been well documented historically. Thus Bernard Lewis suggests in his discussion of published anti-Jewish materials circulating in the Arab world that anti-Semitism in the Middle East significantly intensified following the Sinai War of 1956 and the Six-Day War of 1967 (Lewis 1991, 349). Drawing on the example of contemporary Arab interpretations of the Quranic references to the Jews, Suha Taji-Farouki demonstrates how the political climate of confrontation with Israel influenced the way

Quranic constructions of the Jews were discussed by authors from the Middle East (Taji-Farouki 1998).

The argument about the impact of Arab-Israeli conflict on the emergence of anti-Semitism in certain Muslim circles is supported ethnographically by studies in the social sciences. For instance, Paul Silverstein argues in his discussion of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in France and North Africa that the younger generation of French Muslims draws parallels between such phenomena as the occupation of Iraq and of Palestinian Territories and their own condition of discrimination in France, and that their response to the French state can take on the form of both anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism (2010, 143–144). At the same time, he problematizes the nature of Jewish-Muslim relations in contemporary Europe even further by demonstrating that while in some cases the state oppression that North African immigrants and their children encounter in France is responded to with violence directed against the Jews, in other cases Muslim populations in France and North Africa, such as Berber activists, identify with persecuted Jews and espouse "philo-Semitic" and pro-Israeli attitudes, which shows that the mutual animosity of Jews and Muslims in France as differently positioned subjects is not by any means inevitable (2010, 144).

This chapter continues academic discussions about Jewish-Muslim relations in the contemporary world by looking at the example of South Asia, where, like in Europe, Jews and Muslims constitute "minority" communities—Muslims representing the largest and Jews being one of the smallest. The histories of their formation as well as relationship patterns that the two communities developed with their neighbors in South Asia are rather different from those of Jewish and Muslim diasporas overseas. In Europe, the Jews have had a long and difficult history of being perceived as the "ultimate other" (Gilman and Katz 1991, 1); in India, they have always constituted only a tiny, though very diverse, community, one among many other religious groups. Muslims, on the contrary, have for a long time represented a numerically strong population in South Asia, but within Europe became numerically and politically significant only in the second half of the twentieth century. I argue that an analysis of Jewish-Muslim relations in South Asia can illuminate a number of nodal points in Jewish-Muslim collaboration and conflict in the contemporary world, such as the impact of the situation in the Middle East and of the local structural settings on the two communities' mutual perceptions and attitudes, and the interaction of complex and conflicting processes which are at work in the production of such phenomena as anti-Semitism/philo-Semitism and Islamophobia/Islamophilia.

The remainder of this chapter consists of two parts. In the first part, I highlight the main themes in the mutual perceptions of Indian Jews and Muslims as they were reflected in the printed sources of the Bene Israel Jewish community of the Konkan coast.[1] These sources, which come from the later British period (end of the nineteenth

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1   Konkan coast is a section of the western coast of India in what is now the state of Maharashtra

through the first half of the twentieth century), index key issues in the relationship between the two communities, such as the impact of the Zionist movement and the situation in Palestine, and tropes of Jewish-Muslim cooperation in a country where both communities constitute a minority. In the second part of the chapter I focus on an episode from my recent fieldwork conducted among the Bene Ephraim of Andhra Pradesh to demonstrate how the issues mentioned above continue to inform Jewish-Muslims relations in India today having incorporated discourses on Israel's defense, elements of Dalit activism, and the rhetoric of the "war on terror."

Jews, Muslims, and India

The Jewish communities of India consist of three main groups: the Jews of Cochin, the Bene Israel, and the Baghdadi Jews.[2] The Jews of Cochin, resident in the Indian state of Kerala, represent the oldest Indian Jewish community, whose documented history dates back to the Middle Ages. The Baghdadi Jews comprise the descendants of Arabic-speaking Jews who came to India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and settled mainly in the cities of Bombay and Calcutta. The Bene Israel, at the same time, became known to some Western audiences only in the eighteenth century. According to a Bene Israel legend, their ancestors arrived on the Konkan coast of western India in 175 BC after they fled ancient Palestine to escape the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes. Their community originally resided mainly on the Konkan coast, where it was "discovered" by a Christian missionary back in the eighteenth century. Their early practices were reminiscent of Judaic ones, and in the course of the nineteenth century the Jews of Cochin, the Baghdadi Jews, and Jewish visitors from Europe gradually introduced the community to a wider spectrum of the Jewish religion. After the establishment of the State of Israel the majority of Indian Jews made an *aliyah*.[3] At the moment there are about four thousand Jewish people left in India, most of whom belong to the Bene Israel community resident in and near Mumbai. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the development of two Judaizing movements[4] on the subcontinent—that of the Bene Menashe (also known as Shinlung), who emerged in the early 1950s from the Christianized tribes settled in the Indian states of Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, and the plains of Burma, and of the Bene Ephraim of Andhra Pradesh, who come from the community of Madiga Dalits (untouchables) and established their first synagogue in 1991.[5]

2   For research on the Bene Israel, Cochini and Baghdadi Jews of India, see, for instance, Isenberg 1988 Katz 1999, Katz et al 2007, Roland 1999, and Weil 2002; 2005

3   *Aliyah* (Hebrew for ascent)—immigration of the Jewish people to the State of Israel.

4. For a wider context of Judaizing movements, see Parfitt and Trevisan Semi 2002.

5. For more information on the Bene Menashe, see Samra 1996 and Weil 2003; for the Bene Ephraim, see Egorova and Perwez 2012

The community that has had the closest documented contacts with Indian Muslims is probably that of the Bene Israel. Community sources from the later British period suggest that the relations between the two groups had been good and involved instances of cooperation. Moreover, according to one narrative, the very first synagogue of the Bene Israel community owes its existence to an Indian Muslim. Thus, D. J. Samson writing in a Bene Israel periodical in 1919 observes the following:

> It is very important to note that the Mohomedans in India have treated the Bene Israel with great consideration; in fact they have all along looked upon them as brethren Such treatment was very noticeable in the native regiments of the British in India. From personal knowledge gained in my early days I can vouch for the correctness of the above statement. It is also important to point out that Mohomedans have allowed the Bene-Israel dead to be buried in a portion of their cemetery in town where no separate Bene-Israel cemeteries existed. (Samson 1919, 33)

The trope of cooperation through ritual appears to be an important theme of South Asian Jewish-Muslim relations throughout the past century. Caste Hindus in India cremate their dead, which, in part, distinguishes them from Indian Christians, Muslims, or Jews. Use of the Muslim cemetery when the Bene Israel did not have one of their own was likely to create a bridge of collaboration and to draw attention to the similarities of the two traditions. The author then goes on to remind the reader about how the first Bene Israel synagogue emerged (Samson 1919, 33–34).[6] According to the community's narrative, the synagogue, constructed in Bombay in 1796, was founded by Samuel Ezekiel Divekar, a commander in the British Native Infantry regiment. During the Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780–1784) he (and, according to some versions of the story, a number of other Bene Israel soldiers) was captured by the forces of Tippu Sultan, the Muslim ruler of the Sultanate of Mysore. Divekar made a vow that if he survived captivity he would build a synagogue. The story goes that when Tippu Sultan's mother learnt that one of the prisoners was a Bene Israel, she asked her son to free him on the grounds that his community was often referred to in the Qur'an.[7] As a result of this intervention, Divekar was set free and returned to Bombay, where he constructed the first Bene Israel synagogue.[8]

This narrative shows that the Muslim community of the subcontinent was an important reference point for the Bene Israel. At the same time, community sources from the later British period point out that local Muslims viewed the Bene Israel differently from other Jews. For instance, D. J. Samson finishes his story about Divekar's rescue in the following way: "This incident shows that the Mohomedans in India have

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6. Ibid., 33–34

7. There are 43 references in the Qur'an to Banu Israel (Arabic for The Children of Israel), one of the Arabic names used to describe the Jews

8 For a discussion of different versions of this narrative. see Roland 1999. 309–310

always treated the Bene-Israel with great consideration. In fact Mohomedans make a distinction between the Bene-Israel and the Yehudies."[9]

Other Bene Israel sources of the same period corroborate that some Indian Muslims were not entirely free from anti-Jewish prejudice and that one of the reasons why they treated the Bene Israel well was precisely because they categorized them differently from other Jews. For instance, a Bene Israel historian Haeem Samuel Kehimkar[10] observes at the end of the nineteenth century that in 1882 a Muslim periodical *Kassid-i-Bombay* published an article accusing the Jews in Persia of killing a Muslim boy and using his blood for ritual purposes. According to Kehimkar, following this publication, some Muslims "had commenced murmuring at the Bene-Israel" (Kehimkar, 1937).

Blood libels have a long and tragic history involving extreme violence toward the Jews, and their history is firmly rooted in the European anti-Jewish discourse. Sander Gilman and Steven Katz have observed that "[t]he role of the Jew as the essential Other in the Christian West . . . must be raised in any discussion concerning the history of anti-Semitism" (1991, 2). Blood libels are one vivid example of European anti-Semitic imagery transferred to other parts of the world. As Lewis notes, blood libels were not known to Muslim history until the Ottomans learnt about them from their Christian subjects, and European consular and clerical missions played a part in the propagation of these ideas as well (1991, 348). The accusation of ritual killing published in *Kassid-i-Bombay* is an example of age-old European anti-Semitic propaganda finding its way into a Muslim publication, but its consequences, which could have turned out to be disastrous, appear to have been mitigated by the generally peaceful nature of Jewish-Muslim relations in Bombay. A representative of the Bene Israel community requested the editor of *Kassid-i-Bombay* to apologize and the latter expressed his regret for the publication (Kehimkar 1937, 96–98).

At the same time, it is noteworthy that both sides in this brief dispute distinguished between the "Jews" and the "Bene-Israel." Kehimkar notes that this event generated "every possibility of a riot being raised against the Jews and Bene-Israel." The editor of *Kassid-i-Bombay* writes in reply, "We are indeed sorry if the feelings of the Jews and Bene-Israel community are thereby offended; and if, with reference to this, a Jew or Bene-Israel should be pleased to forward any correspondence we will gladly publish it in our Journal" (Kehimkar 1937, 97–98).

What caused this distinction? Kehimkar observes elsewhere in his book that the ancestors of the Bene Israel took this name "during the time when the Mohamedan power prevailed in India," precisely out of fear of being persecuted by the Muslims

9   Samson 1919, 34. Yehudi is Arabic and Urdu for Jewish.

10 Haeem Samuel Kehimkar (1831-1908) completed his manuscript on the Bene Israel in 1897, but was unable to publish it during his life-time. The manuscript was eventually published by Immanuel Olsvanger in Palestine.

who supposedly were prejudiced against the name Yehudi. The historian even argues that in the course of time the members of his community "made it a point to deny that they were 'Yehudim' [Hebrew, pl.] or Jews and felt insulted if any one called them by that name, for a reproachful rejoinder, such as the word Kufree (heretic) was sure to follow the use of this word" (Kehimkar 1937, 74–75).

However, it appears from the same sources that though local Muslims may have had negative perceptions of the Jews in general, these attitudes were never directed at the Bene Israel. Indeed, as we saw above, the blood libel accusation never resulted in anti-Jewish riots in Bombay and the editor apologized for the publication. Gilman and Katz suggest that in Europe different and seemingly separate episodes of anti-Jewish prejudice built upon a common perception (Gilman and Katz 1991, 5). The episode described above illuminates both the continuous and context-dependent nature of anti-Jewish prejudice. On the one hand, it builds upon a medieval European myth. On the other hand, local Muslim attitudes toward the Jews appear to have bifurcated into prejudices directed against the "Jews" in general and a much more positive perception of the Bene Israel community, who were their immediate neighbors. Klug has suggested that anti-Semitism could be described as "the process of turning Jews into 'Jews,' a category of people with a set of stereotypes associated with them" (2003, 124). It may be suggested that for the editor of *Kassid-i-Bombay* the Bene Israel were Jews as a people, while other Jews—particularly those based abroad—were "Jews" as a category, and he clearly distinguished between the two.

How did the Bene Israel relate to instances of anti-Jewish prejudice like the one involving the blood libel? The fact that these negative sentiments that some local Muslims may have harbored against the Jews never led to any violence was probably one of the reasons why Indian Jewish sources from the turn of the twentieth century were so positive about local Muslims and tended to emphasize the good aspects of this relationship and to stress the similarities of ritual between Judaism and Islam. The same sources indicate that the Bene Israel identified very strongly as Jews, however, they were ready to invoke the specificity of their Bene Israel rather than general Jewish background when describing local Jewish-Muslim relations. On the one hand, as the incident with the blood libel publication demonstrates, they were prepared to challenge anti-Jewish prejudice. On the other hand, they were happy to build upon a narrative that distinguished them favorably from the rest of the Jews in the eyes of their Muslim neighbors.

In the first half of the twentieth century Indian Muslim attitudes toward the Jews and Judaism were affected by the Palestine issue when many Muslims adopted a negative attitude toward Zionism. After the First World War, M. A. Ansari and the Ali brothers launched the Khilafat movement, which argued that Palestine must remain under Muslim rule (Roland 1999, 84). The movement disintegrated in 1924, but the tradition of anti-Zionist sentiments among Indian Muslims survived. For instance,

in 1933, the twenty-third session of the All-India Muslim League, a political party which advocated the establishment of an independent Muslim nation on the subcontinent, passed a resolution criticizing British policy in Palestine and requesting the Viceroy of India to convey to the British government the demand of Indian Muslims that the Balfour Declaration be rescinded (Pirzada 1970, 225–226). In the 1930s, the anti-Semitism associated with Muslim sentiments about the situation in Palestine was exacerbated by Nazi propaganda. Hitler's Germany made a concerted effort to promote its ideology among the Muslims in the Middle East (Lewis 1991, 348) and the Muslim community of India appears to have become targeted by this campaign, too. In this respect, one could quote a letter sent to the Indian Jewish periodical *Jewish Tribune* by an Indian Muslim sympathetic to the Jews urging support for the victims of Nazism. He observed with regret that many Indian Muslims had turned out to be susceptible to Nazi propaganda and were "happy to hear that the Jews were being persecuted in Germany and Austria" (*Jewish Tribune* 1938, 23).

To return to the theoretical debates about the relationship between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism with which I started the chapter, it can be suggested that the negative attitudes toward the Jews described in this episode appear to intersect with anti-Zionism and may have partly been produced by the conflict in Palestine. It is clear that they were directed against the Jews—the victims of Nazi persecutions in Europe—rather than specifically against Zionism.[11] However, it also seems that they did not affect the local Jewish communities. Interestingly, almost foreseeing current debates about the nature of the "new anti-Semitis," a contemporary Bene Israel commentator suggested that it could only be expected that the situation in Palestine would have a negative impact on Jewish-Muslim relations in the diaspora. In 1923, the *Israelite* published an article observing that "in countries ruled by Islam, autonomous existence of aliens has not often been disturbed" and that Christendom had produced more outbursts of faith-infused violence that the Muslim world. Writing about local Muslims, the author revisits the main narratives of Indian Jewish-Muslim relations and suggests that the Palestine issue is likely to adversely affect them:

> . . . for us in India our Muslim neighbours have proved particularly kind. No distinction has ever been shown and help has been rendered even at burials wherever we happened to be few and isolated. It is yet fresh in memory, that some of our ancestors, to whom is partly due our status in India, owed their lives to the mother of Tipoo Sultan. . . . Will the Muslims of India be the same to us, as they have been, if our brethren in Palestine irritate their brethren there! (*Israelite* 1923, 103–104)

For the author of this quote, an anti-Jewish backlash aimed directly at the Bene Israel would be an expected and almost justifiable reaction to the conflict in Palestine.

11. For an in-depth discussion of the Indian attitudes toward the Holocaust, see Sareen 1999. For the Indian responses toward European Jewish refugees in India, see Weil 1999.

He suggests that anti-Semitism may become an unavoidable outcome of the structural tensions to be produced by the Zionist effort if the interests of the Muslim population of Palestine were not safeguarded. By reminding the reader about the Divekar episode and the help that the Bene Israel had received from local Muslims in matters of burial, the author also explicitly promotes the idea of a special connection between the two communities. As we will see in the following section, nowadays, almost a century later, the trope of Jewish-Muslim similarities is still supported by Indian Jews; however, it has to share space with images produced by global discourses of Islamophobia.

Caste between Judaism and Islam

When I first visited the village of Kothareddypalem in the Guntur district of coastal Andhra in 2001, Sadok Yacobi, the leader of the Bene Ephraim—a small community of former Madiga Dalits—took me to the local mosque to talk to his friends. Both Sadok and his Muslim companions stressed that the two communities had a special connection and that, in the conditions of India, where both represented "minority" communities, this connection was particularly important.

Nine years later, during Shahid Perwez's fieldwork in the village, he noted that Sadok's Muslim friend provided catering for the festivals in the synagogue. When we later interviewed this person and asked him what he thought about the Bene Ephraim tradition, he replied that he had a lot of respect for their leaders and did not object to them practicing Judaism, but that he was not convinced that they had always been Jewish. When we inquired about what in his opinion had prompted them to embrace Judaism he laughed and said, "Israel needs people to fight for her."

This brief statement contains a number of implicit assumptions about Judaism, Jewishness, and the relationship between the Jews and the State of Israel. It suggests a denial of agency for the Bene Ephraim, and an implicit denial of the possibility of a community embracing Judaism on its own accord, without interference from Israel and without a promise of material gain. Such assumptions, which are not limited to the Muslim discourse but are demonstrated by a number of local commentators, build upon age-old anti-Semitic stereotypes about perceived Jewish wealth. What comes here anew is a reference to the conflict in the Middle East and an explicit suggestion that if the Bene Ephraim were to succeed in their attempt to immigrate, they would be fighting Israel's neighbors. Here the Jewishness of the Bene Ephraim, which in one context—the reality of Judaism and Islam being "minority" religions in India—is seen as a positive identity marker, in the context of the conflict in the Middle East is construed as a threat.

Similarly, the Bene Ephraim perceive Indian Muslims as friends in the general course of Indian religious life and as a potential threat in the context of synagogue

security. In 2004, the community made headlines when the police of Hyderabad (the capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh) uncovered a plot by alleged agents of a militarist organization based in Pakistan Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (later implicated in the Mumbai attacks of 2008) to attack Americans in Hyderabad and the Jewish families in Guntur. According to the *Times of India*, it was the first time that anybody in Andhra Pradesh realized that there were Jews in this district (*Times of India* 2004). After this incident and subsequently after the Mumbai attacks, the community applied to the police to increase security measures for them in the village of Kothareddypalem where they built a synagogue.

When I visited the community a few months after the Mumbai attacks, I was shown faint traces of the Star of David and other Jewish symbols on the huts of the Bene Ephraim that had to be washed off for some period of time. This was explained as a strategy to avoid a possible terrorist attack on Jewish houses. I also witnessed the community leaders, Sadok and Shmuel Yacobi, communicating with local newspaper reporters and stressing their need for more protection.

When talking about their fears of terrorists, community members kept stressing that their relations with the Muslims in the village were exceptionally good, as their religious traditions were similar. They said that they respected the Muslim religion, but at the same time were fearful about the possibility of Islamist terrorist organizations attacking the synagogue. In a different episode, the leaders of the community associated the perceived threat of terrorism with Islam much more explicitly. When Shahid Perwez, who conducted fieldwork among the Bene Ephraim, first met the Yacobis face-to-face, the latter initially expressed concern about his Indian Muslim background. Shahid had to offer a long explanation regarding the nature of this research, as well as his attitude toward terrorism, after which the Yacobis granted him a permission to continue with our work and welcomed him into the community. Once Shahid settled in the village, the Jewish signs and symbols reappeared on the Bene Ephraim homes. He was fully accepted in the community and doubts about his intentions were never raised again.

What caused the community to apply for enhanced protection and make their concerns known to the mass media? The Bene Ephraim were of course bound to feel that the Mumbai attacks, which involved what was probably the first organized violent attack carried out on Indian soil against Jewish people on account of them being Jewish or Israeli, were too close to home. However, their perception of the community's security issues also appears to be intertwined with their experiences and accounts of discrimination. The Judaization of the Bene Ephraim could be seen as a protest against caste inequality, in the process of which the community developed narratives comparing their condition of discrimination to that of the Jewish people. It is not surprising then that for the Yacobis portraying their community as victims of international terrorism meant re-asserting their Jewishness and establishing a connection

with the Jewish communities worldwide. It was also supposed to attract the attention of the Israeli government and of international Jewish organizations. That is not to say that their fears of potential attacks on the synagogue are unfounded, but to highlight the very special nature of the community's discourse on "Islamic terrorism" which in an unusual interplay of collective historical memories reflects both the reality of anti-Jewish attacks worldwide and the character of the Indian social system.

It is noteworthy that their inclination to describe caste discrimination in terms which would be more familiar to wider audiences mirrors the attempts of other Dalit groups to internationalize their condition. To give one such example, some Dalit leaders have tried to equate caste discrimination with racism. They argued that the severity of their oppression is comparable to, if not worse than, that of Black communities in the West. This issue was debated in the preparations for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, which was held in 2001 in Durban. The Dalits argued that caste discrimination should be considered racism and put on the agenda of the conference, while the Indian government insisted on it being unconnected to race (Sabir 2003; Hardtmann 2009).

In the case of the Bene Ephraim, emphasizing the possibility of becoming victims of Islamist terrorist attacks was also a way of attracting the attention of the wider international community and establishing an extra link with the Jewish State. Just like the Dalits who participated in the preparations for the conference in Durban and felt that they could not succeed in their fight against discrimination without support from overseas, the Bene Ephraim are more hopeful about the possible support of Israel and Jewish communities worldwide than about getting help from the local authorities or the Indian government. Shmuel Yacobi once explicitly told me that the only hope for the Dalits to improve their social position was to seek help outside of India. It is not surprising then that the community's self-representation as victims of caste domination had to give way to expressions of concern about the possibility of becoming victims of terrorist attacks. Or, to draw on Shryock's insight, the Islamophobic sentiments that the community exhibited in relation to Indian Muslims ultimately has very little to do with Islam, and is embedded in the wider problematics of caste discrimination, the reality of security issues facing Jewish communities around the world and the politics of Jewish identity arbitration in the State of Israel.

Conclusion

In the episodes described above Indian Jews and Muslims appear to be going beyond simplistic constructions of "bad-Jews/Muslims" versus "good-Jews/Muslims."[12] The Bene Israel of Bombay of the turn of the century had to take up the issue of the blood libel with an Indian Muslim editor and admit that they preferred to call themselves

12 For a discussion of this dichotomy in respect of Muslims, see Shryock 2010

Bene Israel as opposed to Jews for fear of persecution, but they nevertheless described their relations with local Muslims as very positive. A contributor to the *Israelite* suggested that though Muslims were very supportive of the Bene Israel, they could be expected to turn against them if the situation in Palestine exacerbated. The Muslim friend of the Bene Ephraim leaders sees the community as a potential threat to the Muslims of the Middle East, and yet, he respects their religious beliefs and helps the Bene Ephraim during synagogue functions. Andrew Shryock suggests in his discussion of the relationship between Islamophobia and Islamophilia, that what presents a real challenge in countering Islamophobic sentiments is the danger of reinforcing them by cultivating images of the opposite: "When friendship is subordinated to the demands of sameness—whether conceived in national or human terms—it can be just as coercive, just as prone to misrecognition, as the sentiments of hostility it is meant to correct" (2010, 9). In the examples considered here, the relationship between Jews and Muslims has witnessed tropes of sameness sharing space with images of uncompromising difference, and the realities of local social organization intersecting with issues of international politics.

To paraphrase Brian Klug, both parties turn Jews into "Jews" and Muslims into "Muslims" in some contexts, but still relate to them as individuals or groups not associated with any stereotypes in other contexts. Moreover, as we saw in the examples from Andhra Pradesh, even when local Jews and Muslims engage in using stereotypes which are explicitly anti-Jewish or Islamophobic, they carefully negotiate the boundary between a Jewish or Muslim person as a person and as a symbol of the perceived threat associated with their religious affiliation. The "Jews" and "Muslims" that they fear are categories produced by the realities of Indian and international politics and on many levels both communities make an effort to ensure that their attitude toward these categories does not affect the actual relationships between the people. However, it is not hard to see how under different circumstances their hostility toward "Jews" and "Muslims" as symbols can develop into hostility toward Jews and Muslims as people. As we know only too well, animosity toward the State of Israel has resulted in numerous instances of anti-Jewish violence, and the Bene Ephraim may not be immune from it. Similarly, though the numbers of Indian Jews and Muslims are such that it would be hard to imagine an anti-Muslim riot organized by the Jews, their rhetoric of the "war on terror" contributes to the general vilification of Islam, which may lead to anti-Muslim communal violence of which independent India has a well-documented and tragic history.

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