LOOKING AWAY FROM INVISIBLE BORDERS: RECONSIDERING THE COMPLEXITY OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION THROUGH THE INTERACTIONS OF IDENTITY, PEER RELATIONS, EMOTIONS, AND GAZE

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ABSTRACT

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RECONSIDERING THE COMPLEXITY OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION THROUGH THE INTERACTIONS OF IDENTITY, PEER RELATIONS, EMOTIONS, AND GAZE

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This study explored interrelationships among identity, experience, and learning that undergraduate students from the U.S. attributed to participation in study abroad programs that traveled to the complex and contentious setting of Palestine/Israel. The findings offer a robust scholarly contribution that addresses social and emotional complexities of experiential education, which are often flattened in evaluative studies about program impact. Using narrative inquiry as a methodological approach to consider how eight students talked to me about their programs, I used membership categorization analysis to understand how they positioned themselves and others in their small stories.

Consistent among their reflections was the emergence of a context-based "outsider" identity vis-à-vis the issues they understood as central to this region. This identity was informed by their sociocultural identities and it shaped their experiences during and after the program, as well as their relationships with the places and people therein. More than a year after studying abroad, these students' outsider gaze continued to frame their stories about their programs with an emotionally detached focus on objective fact-finding. As a contrast, their stories about interactions with peers often carried an emotional charge. The interviewees considered a select subset of their peers to be connected to the focal issues of the programs; these peers figured prominently in the stories that positioned people into certain membership categories. Furthermore, interpersonal dynamics within the peer groups highly influenced the interviewees'

overall perceptions of their programs, both positively and negatively. The interviewees' different kinds of stories about their various experiences drew attention to important distinctions in experiential learning. Namely, their stories implied that they processed information differently when they were positioned as outsider observers, than when they learned through direct engagement in interactive, affective, and action-oriented experiences.

There are three practical, interconnected implications from this study concerning learning opportunities on short-term study abroad programs: 1) the effect of participants' context-dependent and topical outsider/insider identities on their uptake and processing of information; 2) the importance of peer relationships and group dynamics on students' learning in cohort-based programs; and 3) new considerations about how the different kinds of experiences involved in experiential learning engage a rich assortment of cognitive, affective, and relational processes. These insights encourage educators to integrate established neuropsychological theories of learning into models that inform intercultural and experiential education.

Mom,
You made me promise that I'd finish this.
This promise — along with your belief in me — has carried me through,
especially when I didn't fully believe I would do this, myself.
As ever.
Thank you.
I love and miss you.

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Throughout this process I have felt loving guidance from several of my ancestors whose spirits have been cheering me along, including:

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- My Grandpa Manske, who I never knew well enough to ask about his commitment to universal access to quality education, his PhD research about educators' influence on their students' attitudes about race, his time studying with John Dewey, or his study tours biking around Europe. Reading his dissertation during my first year in this doctoral program was eye-opening, especially for the ways I saw my interests rhyme

with his, albeit in such different contexts and eras. My current work reminds me of how connected I am to him.

- My dad, who was as proud of me when I was accepted to medical school as when I declined that very acceptance to work a minimum-wage job in a theme park. If he were still here, I know he would be bragging about me now, with his characteristic embellishments and storytelling flair… although I am sure he would still resist wearing anything green and white.
- My mom, my first and lifelong teacher, who taught me above all else how to find joy anywhere and everywhere. As an educator, her commitment to excellence instilled in me a respect for the profession and a passion for the craft of teaching. In her final weeks with us, she made me promise to finish this degree. Truly, I am completing this doctorate not only because of her, but also very much for her.

To my dear and beloved friends and neighbors from my favorite corner of the world, I could never express how grateful I am for all the profound ways you have welcomed me throughout the past decade. Because of you, the space around my eyes is etched with many precious laugh lines, and the space inside my heart is expanded with a commitment to show up for justice with love. I appreciate all the ways I continue to feel challenged and embraced by you.

Wa shukran kteer kteer, ya فلسطين, for encouraging me to unlearn everything I thought I knew. While holding space for the profoundly sacred within that which is utterly human, you hold up a mirror that shows the sacred and the human tangled up in each of us. May we someday honor you by honoring the sacred humanity within one another.

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CHAPTER I

STUDY ABROAD AND THE NATURE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Prior to the global coronavirus crisis that began in March 2020, study abroad had been a central feature of the internationalization plan for many colleges and universities in the United States. Of course, educational travel seems like a natural way to learn about global issues by "experiencing them firsthand." International travel is appealing to many people for its touristic characteristics, and assumptions about exposure provided study abroad programs makes international experiences a highlight on a resume, if not an increasing expectation in some fields. U.S. universities and colleges have made study abroad opportunities more accessible to students through a shift from exchange programs that last a semester or a full academic year, to short-term programs that last just a few weeks. According to the data from the U.S. Institute of International Education, of the nearly 342,000 students from U.S. institutions who studied abroad in the 2017/18 academic year, 61.6% participated in short-term programs that were eight weeks or less (IIE, 2019). That proportion has been increasing steadily for years; a decade ago, approximately 50% of all U.S. students who participated in study abroad programs were in short-term programs.

This change has necessitated quality assurance for education abroad programs. Whereas studying abroad used to imply solo immersion into a culture, often requiring adjustment to new languages and cultural norms, the move to short-term programming has required efforts to ensure that even brief exposure can result in learning — if not for the sake of learning and personal development, then at least for the ability to grant course credits and market oneself as having "international experience" in job interviews. Naturally, this shift has presented a number of challenges. For example, program designers face the logistical task of replacing intercultural

immersion with intercultural exposure by way of speakers, tours, and presentations. Also, there is a categorical difference in the nature of experience and nature of learning between, on one hand, participating in a program with predetermined itinerary in a controlled and insulated environment with a cohort of peers from your home institution, and on the other hand, taking classes while navigating a new community in a novel cultural context.

Expectedly, there has been a corresponding proliferation in scholarship to account for and incorporate learning that takes place in these study abroad programs that use such different modes and models of learning. Early STSA scholarship often compared dissimilar programs as if their short duration were the only relevant factor to consider when assessing whether learning outcomes were achieved. Later, authors attended to particular components of a program that may contribute to intercultural, transformational, disciplinary, or language-related learning outcomes. Much of this scholarship endorses the efficacy of STSA programs, contingent on the inclusion of certain educational interventions. Numerous researchers have advocated for the meaningful impacts that studying abroad can have on a person and their life trajectory (c.f., France & Rogers, 2012).

I, too, have a personal story of transformation from international experience. From my experiences living overseas, I can add to the scores of anecdotes and soundbites with my own personal testimony about enormous personal growth and profound changes in my beliefs, values, and worldview. Indeed, I believe that this kind of learning is valuable and worthwhile and have taught as an intercultural educator in international contexts for years. From this role, I have accumulated plenty of anecdotal evidence attesting to the powerful and transformational learning that studying abroad can inspire. Nevertheless, I have noticed a gap between my experiences and most literature about intercultural and international education. For example, my time facilitating

has led me to question the intersections between education and tourism, emotional resistance to cognitive information, racialized impacts of (mis)trust of various sources of knowledge, and many complex implications of short-term study abroad programs on a host community. My time living overseas has not only disrupted but altered many aspects of my identity and has challenged many of my core beliefs, especially layers of assumptions surrounding U.S.-American exceptionalism and concepts like freedom and democracy. Moreover, I have considered and reconsidered the complexities of long-term implications about social responsibility, solidarity, and activist interventions. Simply put, much of the scholarship falls short of capturing important and complex elements of my learning trajectory, as well as the experiences of many of my participants and colleagues. Notwithstanding the limitations inherent to publications imposed by word counts and the importance of narrowly-focused analysis, scholarship in this field tends to flatten the rich experiences of intercultural learning through oversimplification.

Scholarship on STSA largely offers simplistic observations that recommend vague interventions that could ostensibly lead to positive outcomes. On the whole, this literature seems to oversimplify the complex experiences and interactions that take place before, during, and after study abroad programs. Idealistic yet nondescript recommendations include pre-trip preparation, opportunities for reflection, interactions with local people and cultures, and supportive group cohorts (Stone & Duffy, 2015). Merely including these elements would hardly guarantee positive, much less consistent, outcomes. The ambiguous suggestions found in STSA scholarship gloss over myriad pedagogical considerations and logistical contingencies within each of these interventions.

Again, based on anecdotal evidence I've collected throughout the years, there are many students who return from study abroad programs with shallow takeaways and little understanding of the complexities of the context they visited. Although they, too, often adopt the discourse that they were "outside of their comfort zones" and so "their lives have been changed" (c.f., Dockrill et al., 2016; Dolby, 2004; France & Rogers, 20102), they sometimes explain that this is the case because they learned how to read a map, used public transit, saw regional-specific animals in a zoo or a safari, visited a site where a popular movie was filmed, or went bungee jumping. Similarly banal learning metrics are reported as successful outcomes in the literature. For example, Bai et al. (2016) found that participants on a three-week program in China reported changes such as increased confidence to try new foods and one student's realization that they could have fun without their romantic partner. Czerwionka et al. (2015) claimed that students' "intercultural knowledge" gains from six weeks in Madrid involved observations about Madrileño city life and daily schedules. I mean no disrespect to the tangible ways that these experiences can shift prior narrowly ethnocentric worldviews, and I do, in fact, believe that any kind of experience can inspire some kind of learning. However, these kinds of realizations are categorically different than those that are accompanied by critical questioning about forces that reshape worldviews, or reconsideration of how cultural socialization impacts people in certain ways (e.g., Bruckner & Johnson, 2005; Du, 2018; France & Rogers, 2012; Gambino & Hashim, 2016; Gambrell, 2016; Goldoni, 2015; Jackson & Oguru, 2018; Jones & Miles, 2017; Namaste, 2017; VeLure & Roholt, 2013).

I argue that when complex humans travel together to new places in order to learn about social complexities within multidimensional communities and multicultural societies, nothing is simplistic. Indeed, it is because of social and emotional complexity that intercultural exchange

holds the potential for valuable and enduring learning. In order to continue advancing STSA research, the complexity of these programs requires a qualitative approach to explore multiple dynamics of how participants talk about their experiences and reflect on their memories well after a program concludes.

Accordingly, this study addresses the complex, and sometimes contradictory, narratives of eight undergraduate students who participated on a short-term study abroad program to Palestine/Israel that aligned with many "best practices" in the field, and still elicited complex social and emotional challenges to intercultural learning. For this research, I asked students to share their stories about what they remembered and learned from a short-term study abroad program more than a year prior after they had participated. In addition to noticing evidence of lasting impacts for these students, I also attended to how students told stories about their experiences, which revealed insights about how they learned, and the gaps between what they learned and the stories they told about their experience.

In this chapter, I begin with a review of scholarly literature about attempts to understand the various impacts of short-term study abroad programs on undergraduate participants. Then, I consider literature about experiential education more broadly, particularly focusing on critiques of the most ubiquitous but overly general model that serves as a conceptual foundation for many experiential approaches to learning. Next, I review literature that considers the social and emotional impacts of peer interactions during cohort-based experiential programs. I then position my research questions from this study among these bodies of extant literature and relate the purpose of this study to the setting of Palestine/Israel. I end this chapter with a brief overview of contextual information about contemporary circumstances and complexities of this region, which

had figured prominently in the participants' stories about their observations, their experiences, their peers, and their identities.

Positioning Within Scholarly Literature

This exploratory research is situated in the field of study abroad, and addresses questions about experiential learning more broadly. I consider psychological, social, and neurobiological theories of learning that are well established in their respective fields, but not often considered in relationship to most forms of experiential education, intercultural education, or education abroad. In addition, this study addresses a gap in the experiential educational literature about the socioemotional influences of peer cohorts not only on participants' intercultural learning, but also related to their understandings of context-dependent identities.

Study Abroad

There is no shortage of research about education abroad. Indeed, in the past several years, scholarship has proliferated about its impact on postsecondary students who travel outbound from institutions around the world, especially in short-term sojourns. A cursory search will point to hundreds of articles, many that start with the premise that "global learning" is a "High Impact Educational Practice" (AAC&U, 2008; Engberg, 2013; Kilgo et al., 2015; Kuh, 2009) because students report that it is "engaging" and "deepens their learning." Two common threads in this research seek evidence for transformational learning (Stone & Duffy, 2015) or intercultural learning (Covert, 2014), sometimes as standalone outcomes in their own right, and sometimes in conjunction with other cognitive and/or professional learning goals such as learning a language or student teaching in a different cultural context. Most articles attempt to prove that some sort of learning transpired, seeking evidence from quantitative Likert-type scales, analysis of written course assignments, or qualitative interviews through which students can confirm that their lives

have been changed by their experience (France & Rogers, 2012). Also, many articles assert that spending time in another part of the world bestows some sort of "global competence" according to a variety of metrics and interpretations. Indeed, as scholars are increasingly noting, there is plenty of similar-yet-different terminology to express ideas about variably defined intercultural outcomes (Barkin, 2018; Wagner, 2018). For example, among the many are "intercultural competence" or "cultural competence" (Bennett, 2004; Covert, 2014; Deardorff, 2006; Dorsett et al., 2019; Jackson, 2015; Salisbury et al., 2012); "cross-cultural learning" (Chwialkowska. 2020); "global competence" (Cushner, 2009; Dockrill et al., 2016; Hunter, 2004; Olson & Kroger, 2001; Zeichner, 2010); "global citizenship" (Duerden, et al., 2018; Landon et al., 2017; Stoner et al., 2014); "global perspective-taking" (Duerden et al. 2018; Engberg 2013); "global mindset" (Nguyen, 2017); "global mindedness" (McGaha & Linder, 2014); "global literacy" (Scheurholz-Lehr, 2007); and "intercultural maturity" (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Opengart, 2017). Similarly, many researchers base their findings on one or more of a number of quantitative psychometric testing instruments that make claims about measurable increases in one or more of these competencies (e.g., Chwialkowska 2020; Engberg, 2013; Hammer, 2012; Lee & Negrelli, 2018; Nguyen, 2017; Salisbury et al., 2012). All of this lack of clarity, specificity, and consistency can detract from useful findings and conclusions.

Many articles include a litany of positive effects of studying abroad, without offering sufficient information about the details of the programs or research that determined the plethora of growth and development (Coker et al., 2018). The following list of purported benefits was taken from a paragraph by Nguyen, Jeffries, & Rojas (2018, pp. 119-120) in their literature review for their study about intercultural competence and short-term study abroad, in support of their claim that "A recent literature review reveals that students benefit tremendously from their

experiences studying abroad, especially in the areas of personal growth, intercultural competence, and academic performance" (p. 119):

- "personal growth, intercultural competence, and academic performance" (p. 119)
- "higher self-confidence, increased autonomy, greater sense of initiative, better communication skills, more cultural openness and sensitivity, and greater success obtaining a job and achieving professional goals" (p. 119)
- "they attribute this personal growth to learning another culture and learning outside the classroom" (p. 120)
- "greater flexibility (e.g., higher tolerance for ambiguity)" (p. 120)
- "better critical thinking skills (e.g., thinking outside of one's own cultural framework)" (p. 120)
- "more concerned about international politics" (p. 120)
- "more interested in cross-cultural issues" (p. 120)
- "more culturally cosmopolitan" (p. 120)
- "less prejudicial" (p. 120)
- "less ethnocentric" (p. 120)

Presented collectively and without conditions, these many claims are simultaneously generic and miraculous, and altogether defy belief. When lists like this are presented as a foundational premise upon which a research study is founded, this seems to imply that study abroad is inherently and overwhelmingly positive. Scholarship that relies on flawed assumptions and premises such as this is not uncommon, and it collectively serves to weaken the field.

Short-Term Study Abroad

As short-term study abroad (STSA) programs continue to grow in number and popularity, attracting diverse students who may not otherwise consider education abroad, skepticism about beneficial learning outcomes has also grown. Not only do these programs' short durations limit students' access to intercultural experiences, but they also vary greatly in their design and implementation. Over a decade ago, Michael Woolf (2007), while president of the nonprofit Foundation for International Education, published his concerns about the ascent of STSA:

> Perhaps the largest expansion has been in the standard 3- to 4-week (frequently shorter), faculty-led programme, where the quality of academic provision is rarely a priority. The attraction for faculty is obvious, but this category of programming blurs the distinction between education abroad and educational tourism. There is certainly a place for educational tourism, but to give academic credit for these activities seems to me to weaken the credibility of our field and, strangely, take us back to those preprofessional days when study abroad was more akin to a "floating crap game" than an endeavour worthy of serious respect. (p. 503)

Some scholars have questioned the superficial learning that takes place on STSA programs due to superficial intercultural contact with the host community, which is widely assumed to be a condition for meaningful intercultural learning. For example, Cubillos and Ilvento (2018) criticize the common "island" model of STSA in which the students are insulated in their self-contained program cohort and act as "passive tourists on holiday, students often experience the study abroad site from the protective comfort of an air-conditioned bus" (p. 260). Countering practitioners like Naka (2016) who purported that important intercultural learning resulted from passive listening to a series of local speakers, Cubillos and Ilvento argue that such

meetings offer insufficient intercultural contact to produce meaningful intercultural learning, similar to the inadequate passive nature of cultural tourism visits to museums, monuments, and other sightseeing attractions, which are staples of many STSA programs. Overall, they asserted that the nature of STSA programs tends to limit intercultural interactions to the superficial, thereby precluding deep intercultural learning.

Many articles promoting STSA programs include recommendations about best practices for design and facilitation in order to maximize impact (e.g., Chwialkowska, 2020; Foronda & Belknap, 2012; Intolubbe-Chmil et al., 2012; Nguyen, 2017; Stone & Duffy, 2015; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). To be sure, interventions such as pre-program orientation, promotion of critical reflection, and engagement activities have the potential to enhance a program. However, if implemented poorly, nonspecific recommendations could be meaningless, if not harmful. For example, there is a difference between asking students to "reflect" about their observations in their travel journals and talk about their experiences with their friends and family (Opengart, 2017; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011), and guiding students through iterative processes of critically conscious reflective writing (Bruckner & Johnson, 2005; Jackson, 2015; Namaste, 2017). The former may result in reifying stereotypes or validating notions of cultural superiority, whereas the latter has the potential to challenge students' epistemological assumptions.

In much STSA literature, authors have a tendency to advocate their program with a defensive stance (as also noted by Barkin, 2018), while glossing over important and relevant complexities. From my reading, there is a good deal of redundancy in this literature, which reinforces the sense that these authors are attempting to justify the validity of their work. This may be in response to growing disparities between STSA programs that use intentional interventions to promote intercultural and transformative learning, and those that are handed off

to prepackaged for-profit tour providers who may privilege exciting tourism experiences over meaningful learning opportunities (Barkin, 2018).

There are certainly many examples of study abroad scholarship that explore and critique various approaches to intercultural learning, critical analysis of power dynamics, thoughtful and challenging reflection practices, and thorough assessment (Bruckner & Johnson, 2005; Gambino & Hashim 2016; Goldoni 2015; Kiely, 2005; Jackson & Oguro, 2018; Jones & Miles 2017; Namaste, 2017; VeLure Roholt & Fisher, 2013). Such approaches to critical research have included increased scholarly attention as to how students' identities influence their experiences abroad with regard to certain aspects of sociocultural identity like race, gender, and nationality (Dolby, 2004; Dolby, 2005; Dolby, 2007; Du, 2018; France & Rogers, 2012; Gambrell, 2016; Gieser, 2015; Green, 2017; Goldoni, 2107; Jessup-Anger, 2008; Lee & Negrelli, 2018; Quan, 2018; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995). Much of this literature offers evidence of complex learning processes that students engage and negotiate while studying abroad. Because identity is multifaceted and context-dependent, continued research is warranted to address the dynamic and intersectional ways that intercultural exchange affects changes to various aspects of participants' understandings of their identities.

A different strain of scholarship about education abroad comes in the form of critiques, particularly with regard to many programs' noncritical stances and failures to critique dominant cultural systems and hegemonic epistemologies in which they are embedded. I value such critiques for the important issues they raise about the neocolonial nature of education abroad (Andreotti, 2011, 2014; Pluim & Jorgenson, 2012; Rotabi et al., 2006; Woolf, 2006); tendencies for education abroad to reify and replicate cultural hegemony (Andreotti et al., 2018; Doerr, 2013, 2017; Gambrell, 2016, 2018; Jotia et al., 2020; Zemach-Bersin, 2007); neoliberal appeals

to students (and instructors) as consumers of tourism that privileges comfort over education (Bamber et al., 2018; Breen, 2012; Shubert, 2007; Wagner, 2018); and the potential of exploiting others through extractive encounters in the name of intercultural learning (Guiney, 2017; Rotabi et al., 2017). In some cases, these pieces offer practicable recommendations for study abroad educators (Dockrill et al., 2016; Hartman, 2016; Hartman et al., 2014; Pipitone, 2018; VeLure Roholt & Fisher, 2013), but often, the critiques are sufficient in themselves to draw attention to various problematic practices and oversights, which may prompt contemplative change by scholar-practitioners (Barkin, 2018).

These two dominant approaches to scholarship seem to present a dichotomy between cheerleading and critique. On one hand, scholarship promotes and endorses the practice of studying abroad with uncritical and oversimplified endorsements of transformational learning opportunities from any travel. On the other hand, much of the critique is purely critical, suggesting that the field of study abroad may be problematic at its root. However, as a critical scholar-practitioner, I am interested in scholarship that investigates the very real problems alongside the very real promise that international education offers.

This study is a contribution to do just that. I consider the complex ways the students experienced their programs, as well as the limited and contradictory ways they talked about how their programs impacted them. Moving beyond assumptions that well-run programs are generically successful, my research investigates divergent outcomes from students who participated in critically-oriented programs that exemplified STSA best practices. Exploration of students' narratives about themselves and their program allows for scholarly consideration of their critical and ongoing engagement with what they remember and learned from their experiences with respect to their individual identities. Further, this study recognizes the complex

social and emotional challenges that these students faced during and after their program, in light of their analysis that filtered their experience through the lens of personal identity.

Experiential Education

Study abroad is one form learning that falls under the umbrella category of experiential education due to its active, place-based pedagogies. That said, learning experientially is not an inherent outcome of having an experience in an educational program abroad; it relies on undergirding principles that may emerge naturally but often benefit from the support of intentional facilitation. Scholars including David Kolb himself have advocated for principles of experiential learning to be taken up in education abroad (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012), as have other scholars such as Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich (2002) and Jackson (2015), who have proposed that principles of experiential education be taken up by study abroad practitioners.

As an educator who has attested to the power of "experiential education" for decades, there was a lot that I took for granted in the practice: in accordance with the foundations of the field, I understood that learning resulted from having an experience, reflecting upon that experience, conceptually connecting it with other information, thoughts, and ideas. However, upon some consideration, I realized that the word "experience" does a lot of heavy lifting in this equation. What does it mean to "have an experience"? Although the literature reveals some attempts to address these questions, by and large the understanding of "experience" is unclear and inconsistent. For example, Elon University categorizes the following to be "multiple forms of experiential learning" towards their Core Curriculum's "experiential learning requirement": study abroad, undergraduate research, internships, service-learning, or leadership experiences (Coker et al., 2017). Arguably, each of those experiences could encompass a range of different forms of experiential learning.

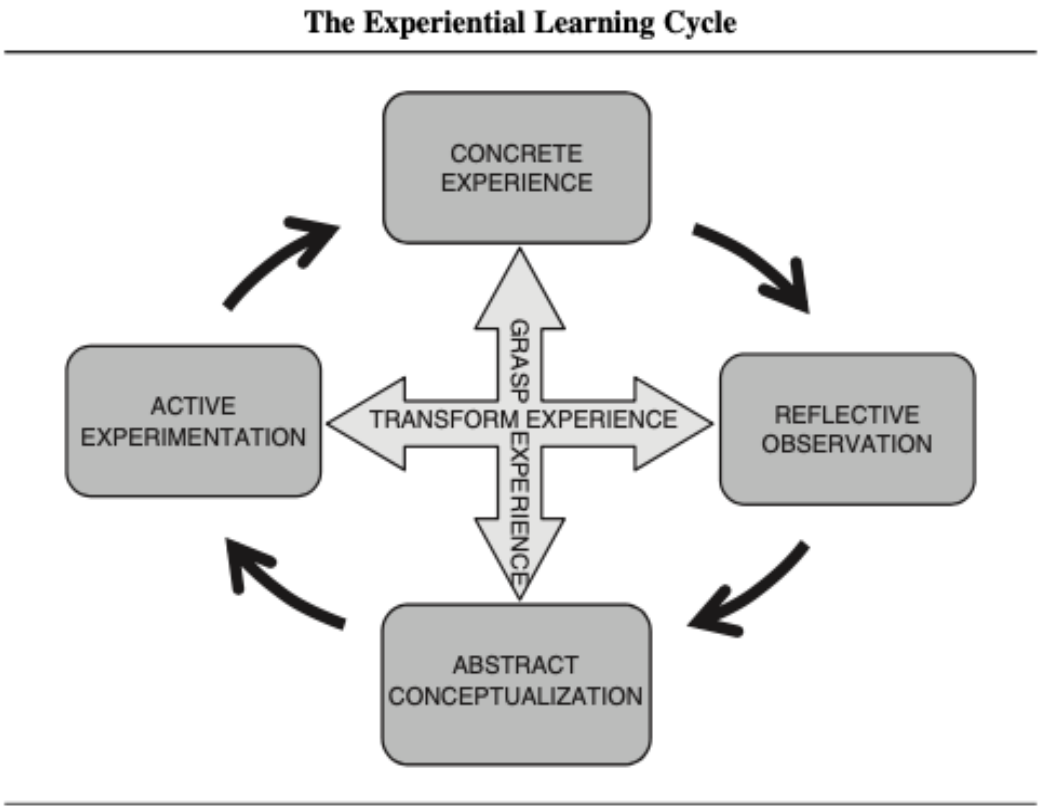
Kolb (1984) conceptualized Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which has been foundational in the field. In its oft-cited definition, "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 138). Among the six core characteristics of ELT spelled out by Passarelli & Kolb (2012, pp. 138-139), the following are most relevant to this dissertation: a) learning is a process of understanding, testing, and refining beliefs and ideas about a topic; b) learning is driven by conflict, differences, disagreement, and tensions that are resolved by moving between opposing modes of reflection and action, and thinking and feeling; c) learning is more than cognition, and integrates thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving; and d) learning is influenced by characteristics of both the learning context as well as the learner's subjective stance and preexisting concepts. These elements underscore the constructivist notions that an individual's learning process is dependent on contesting and refining their previous beliefs and ideas through cognitive thinking, emotions, multisensory perceptions, and actions. Learning is shaped not only by the setting where it takes place, but by the person who is engaging in the learning. Furthermore, ELT claims that knowledge results from "grasping and transforming experience" (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012, p. 139). The use of the verb "grasping" indicates that one does not take in information passively, but actively, as if requiring some degree of attention and intention.

The Experiential Learning Cycle, as depicted in Figure 1.1, offers a durable visual reminder that experience alone is insufficient for learning, and requires additional forms of thinking and processing in order to incorporate an experience into meaning that is actionable or consequential in some way. The impact of this theory is reflected in the literature. For example, using purely quantitative metrics, it is clear that it has had significant reach and has been cited thousands of times across several disciplines; the 2008 version of the Experiential Learning

Bibliography had 2,453 entries (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p. 298). As this theory has been practiced and tested over time, many scholars from different disciplines have critiqued the model and suggested adaptations, modifications, and opportunities for new ways of conceptualizing and utilizing ELT and the learning cycle.

Figure 1.1

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle



Note. This graphic was found in Kolb, A. Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2011). The learning way: Meta-cognitive aspects of experiential learning. *Simulation Gaming, 40*; p. 299 (https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878108325713).

Recently, Schenck & Cruickshank (2015) argued that developments in neuropsychology and cognitive neuroscience can offer insights that both complement and challenge the model. For example, there is biological evidence that can explain how and why experiential approaches to learning are effective:

> Experiential learning integrates different neural networks during the learning event (Piaget, 1950/2001), resulting in multiple memory pathways (Hebb, 1949) and connections between abstract concepts. For example, having students provide personal explanations or demonstrations of the concepts through multiple modalities produces higher retention. (p. 76)

Memory formation is also prompted by novel experiences because they stimulate a person's attention along with their limbic/emotional systems. Emotional connection to an experience, person, or place can also release dopamine, which aids in forming and retaining memories.

On the other hand, Schenck & Cruickshank (2015) contest ELT due to its neglect of cognitive processes that are foundational to the science of learning. They argue that the concepts that need to be addressed involve salience, the way that the brain uses multiple neural networks, including the emotion-oriented system, in order to select and sort information from an environment full of stimuli. In addition, ELT does not take into account the concept of cognitive load, when new information overwhelms the brain such that it cannot process additional information (p. 7). In spite of the impact of these psychological learning theories in other fields of education, and the emergence of these concepts in the field of experiential education, I did not encounter any literature concerning education abroad that acknowledged these kinds of neuropsychological effects with regard to how the participants attended to, processed, retained, and learned from their study abroad experiences.

As another example or a line of ELT criticism, Vince (1998) offered a modification along with his critique. He noted that ELT's understanding of an "experience" is unrelated to social power dynamics and inequalities, and also neglects the impact of learning from and along with the experience of others. Furthermore, Vince challenged the notion that people are always necessarily conscious of their experiences (p. 310). In light of subconscious defense mechanisms that may be triggered by strong, unwanted emotions such as fears, anxieties, and doubts, he modified the model to depict how anxiety can divert a person from learning altogether (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2

Vince's (1998) depiction of the effect of emotions on a learning cycle

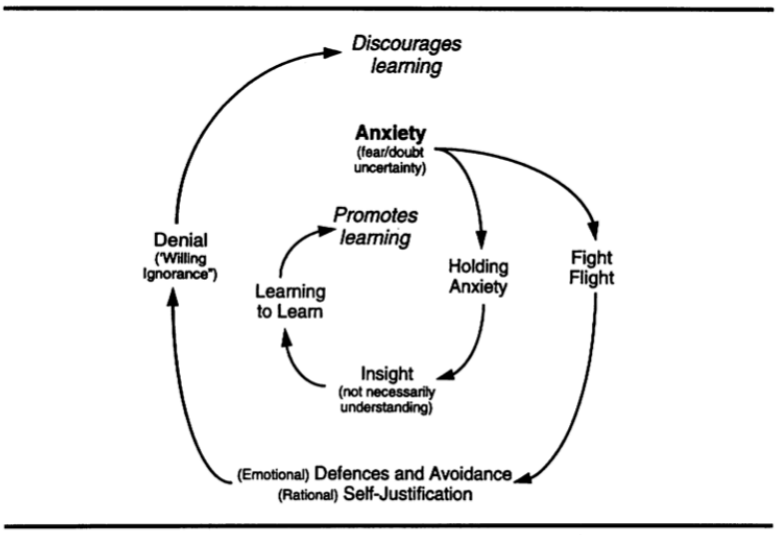


Figure 3: Developments in Kolb's Learning Cycle on the Theme of Anxiety

Note. This graphic was found Vince, R. (1998). Behind and beyond Kolb's Learning Cycle. *Journal of Management Education, 22*(3), p. 311.

I appreciate the important consideration of how emotions can impact learning, although I contend that emotion does not divert from learning, but may enable or prompt a different kind of learning. Consistent with Kolb's generalized model, I maintain that an emotional reaction itself can be considered as an "experience" in themselves that can be processed. (To use Vince's example, perhaps a person with anxiety learns about their preferred coping tendencies from the consequences of their avoidant tactics.) Moreover, my research in this study considers how emotions serve to direct a person's attention to something in their environment, which contributes to framing what they perceive, experience, and learn from in a given situation. In any event, Vince's modification provides a good example of how scholars and practitioners have different understandings about the nature of what is considered to be an "experience."

The Nature of Experience

The English language is partially to blame for the confusion about what an "experience" is. According to Duerden et al. (2015), other languages have multiple words to describe different kinds of experiences; citing Highmore (2002), they provided an example from German words that distinguish between lived experiences (*erlebnis*, for which Google Translate also suggested "adventure"), and what is gained from lived experiences (*erfahrung*, for which Google Translate also suggested "practical knowledge"). Duerden et al. also noted that different academic disciplines treat experience differently, such that those in the life sciences consider "experience" to be objective, whereas those in social sciences consider "experience" to be subjective.

The first step of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle uses terminology of "concrete experience," which is vague. In his 1984 book, however, Kolb addressed the dual meaning of the word "experience," in that it can refer to one's internal, subjective state, or it could alternatively relate to something he referred to as "objective and environmental," as in having "20 years of

experience on the job" (p. 35). To ground his reasoning, he quoted the philosophical exposition of John Dewey (1938, p. 39, as cited in Kolb, 1984), who claimed that experience is dually internal in that it "influences the formation attitudes and purpose," and also external in that it "has an active side." He further explained that experiences involve interaction

> between an individual and objects and other persons. The conceptions of situation and of interaction are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject talked about being also a part of the situation; the book he is reading (in which his environing conditions at the time may be England or ancient Greece or an imaginary region); or the materials of an experiment he is performing. The environment, in other words, is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had. (Dewey, 1938, pp. 42-43, as cited in Kolb, 1984, p. 35)

This description illuminates some reasons why the word "experience" is a catch-all in colloquial English usage, as well as in the field of experiential education. However, the experience of reading a book is unlike the experience of walking through a new city, or having a conversation with someone about their work, or taking action to solve an engineering problem, or being surprised by the mismatch between expectation and firsthand perception. All of these experiences are substantially different and engage different methods of learning.

This concept has been addressed within several fields of experiential education, including outdoor/adventure education (Houge Mackenzie et al., 2014), international service-learning (Kiely, 2005; Larsen, 2017), and short-term and long-term study abroad, programs (Pipitone &

Raghavan, 2017). In a response to critiques that call for stronger empirical foundations to ELT, Morris (2019) conducted a systematic literature review that revealed five themes that constitute "concrete experience" as per Kolb's model: "learners are involved, active, participants; knowledge is situated in place and time; learners are exposed to novel experiences, which involves risk; learning demands inquiry to specific real-world problems; and critical reflection acts as a mediator of meaningful learning" (p. 1). His findings also noted the role of emotions in experiential learning, which have been gaining more scholarly attention recently (Houge Mackenzie et al., 2014; Larsen, 2017; Pipitone & Raghavan, 2017; Sewell, 2020).

For the purposes of understanding different processes associated with different kinds of learning outcomes, distinctions among different kinds of experiences are useful. For example, within the field of education abroad, participants are exposed to a wide array of experiences that range from passive intake through observation, to active decision making and problem solving.

Education Abroad and Firsthand "Experiences"

There is a strain within the study abroad literature that does not discuss experiential learning per se, but focuses on the experience of observation during programs, and the subsequent learning from dedicated attention to paying attention. For decades, some programs have utilized practices of ethnographic observation and inquiry in order to encourage participants to consider cultural practices in a a methodological, thoughtful way. Scholar-practitioners have attested to and studied the meaningful learning that students have gained from engaging in ethnographic fieldwork while studying abroad in both short-term (Jackson, 2006; VeLure Roholt & Fisher, 2013) and long-term (Jurasek et al., 1996; Lee, 2012) programs. Intentional participant observation enabled students to inquire about the setting around them, test their assumptions, and engage directly with local hosts and educators.

Using ethnographic inquiry as a theoretical framework for their research, Langley & Breese (2005) offered insights on distinctions among learning through observation as opposed to learning through more direct forms of experience. In their study, they interviewed participants of a two-semester program. These students had not been briefed about ethnography, nor was ethnographic inquiry a part of their study abroad program. Through interviews and focus groups, Langley & Breese classified the students' differential approaches to experiential learning using three categories pertaining to different kinds of experience: *participant observer* learning occurred through passive observation, *interacting sojourner* learning occurred through socializing with locals, and *traveler* learning occurred through navigating travel on their own. The participants in this study reported enhanced intercultural learning from their active interactional experiences as independent *travelers* because they were more engaged in their surroundings as they explored on their own terms.

Generally speaking, categorizing different degrees of direct experience with respect to learning suggests differential learning outcomes. Learning carries different implications when a person's actions seem to be consequential, so they make decisions with the understanding that they will face a personal impact from the aftermath of their choices. Furthermore, active engagement can invoke emotional reactions, which could thereby spur further investment in the experience and resultant learning. This line of research invites questions about how a student's identity might lead them to one kind of experience over another in various scenarios and environments. Accordingly, my research considers how these distinctions and choices appeared in the narratives of the participants in this study.

Disorientation, Disruption, Discomfort, and Dissonance: Experiences That Trigger Learning

Across the experiential educational literature, scholars recognize that when an incident is perceived to be disruptive in some way, it presents an opportunity for memorable learning. There are several theories along these lines, each which uses different terminology for the sort of moment that catches a person's attention because it was not what they had expected.

Disorienting dilemmas initiate the process of learning that has the potential to shift a person's frame of reference, according to Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 2000). Along with Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, TLT is used frequently in the development and assessment of study abroad programs (Jackson & Oguro, 2018, pp. 7-8). Mezirow identified ten stages in his TLT framework; although he asserted that these stages are not sequential, the disorienting dilemma comes first as the catalyst. Just as measurement of transformative learning is debated by scholars and practitioners — there are numerous psychometric tests that strive to capture the transformation according to the ten stages — the understanding of "transformative" is varied, as is the scope of what can be classified as a "disorienting dilemma." Trilokekar & Kukar (2011) considered disorienting experiences to include discomfort according to one of four broad categories: acts of racism, feeling like a "cultural outsider," taking a risk outside one's comfort zone, and recognizing privilege. In a recent study, Dorsett, Larmar, & Clark (2019) understood this concept rather broadly from the qualitative self-reports written by participants of a two-week STSA in India:

> Accounts of disorientating dilemmas were the most commonly reported student experience. Students used words like "being out of my comfort zone," "challenged," "confronted," "shocked," "unprepared," "overwhelmed," and experiencing "strong emotional reactions" to describe the disorientating nature of their experiences. Some of

> the observations that triggered these reactions were poverty, child labor, gender inequality, and the reality of slum living. (p. 570)

Criteria such as these occur regularly in experiential education programs and other travel experiences, so it is unsurprising that TLT is used so frequently as a conceptual framework (Stone & Duffy, 2015).

Other theories of learning also refer to a disruptive initial stimulus that occurs outside of what one had expected or had previously taken for granted. Sensemaking theory, initially conceived by Weick (1995) within the field of organizational studies, is increasingly used within educational studies as a framework for exploring learning processes (Colville et al., 2016; Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2016; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Mitchell, 2014). Sensemaking is an ongoing process that describes *how* meaning is made, rather than *what* meaning is made (Mitchell, 2014). It is framed through cognitive, social, and discursive processes that are set in motion when expectations are interrupted (Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2016). Such interruptions cause people to become highly aware and notice what else is happening, and then reconcile their previous ideas to adapt to the new information they noticed (Mitchell, 2014).

Some scholars addressed the issue of disruptive experiences by modifying other concepts and invoking similar but distinct terminology. Building on TLT, Chwialkowska (2020) organized their research around cross-cultural *discomfort* and used a psychometric testing instrument to gauge changes in student comfort levels on the first and tenth day of a study abroad program. Thomson et al. (2002) "developed a working definition of a '*critical moment*' as an event described in an interview that either the researcher or the interviewee sees as having important consequences for their lives and identities" (p. 339); the use of "critical moments" has been taken up by other scholars such as Gieser (2015). According to Lutterman-Aguilar &

Gingerich (2002), this terminology is used at the School for International Training as a prompt for students to choose a particular experience for analysis that could illuminate things they may not have seen on their own. VeLure Roholt & Fisher (2013) also used the term "critical incident" to refer to disruptive moments during their short-term study abroad program that presented opportunities for reflecting upon power, privilege, and oppression.

A number of scholar-practitioners referred to a disrupting experience as *dissonance.* Namaste (2017) used this term to summarize Mezirow's (2000) core components of transformative learning. Intolubbe-Chmil et al. (2012) similarly used dissonance as a theme to interpret their participants' talk about "experiences and ideas experiences and ideas which challenged a previously held frame of reference" (p. 172), including the experience of confronting their own neocolonialist, deficit-based ways of thinking. Mitchell & Paras (2008) paralleled dissonance with TLT's disorienting dilemma, but clarified that "cognitive dissonance" is a psychological concept with a slightly different meaning: rather than being an instigating experience, it is the subsequent "process of reducing inconsistencies between cognitions and experience, which serves to drive a change in attitudes or behaviours" (p. 327).

Kiely (2005) distinguished among different kinds of dissonance described by the participants in his qualitative study following a short-term international service-learning program. He noted that dissonance occurred frequently for students because so many things that they observed and experienced were new and incongruent with their prior frame of reference or worldview. He classified six different types of dissonance that had emerged from his qualitative data: historical, political, cultural, spiritual, social, communicative, and technological (pp. 10-11). He also distinguished that deep learning resulted from high-intensity dissonance that was not easy for students to reconcile by reflecting on their existing knowledge. Strong emotional

responses accompany such dissonance, and are often associated with personalized learning that it feels meaningful to the person who engaged in this learning process. Furthermore, a person that undergoes learning from high-intensity dissonance may personalize the learning in that they may start to connect otherwise abstract notions to tangible, concrete examples from their encounters during their program (p. 12).

Given this body of literature, my research explores not only how students told stories about disrupting events during their travels, but also how their expectations about their travel destination mitigated what they considered to be disruptive. That is, this research considers how effective pre-program preparation may inadvertently reframe how the students learn from — or overlook — certain observations and experiences.

Peer Influences

Scholars of the development of young adult undergraduates in the U.S. have recognized the importance of peer relationships on psychosocial development and intrapersonal learning (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). As emerging adults continue personal development and identity exploration that expand beyond the influences of their immediate family (Arnett, 2006), peer relationships may gain more influence.

Considering the expansion of STSA programming, it is surprising to find so little literature about how peers impact the experiences of study abroad participants. Several studies do note that peers have an influence on a student's overall study abroad experience (Dirkx et al., 2010), usually in terms of relational support for cross-cultural stress (Davis & Coryell, 2019; DeJordy et al., 2019; Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Gleeson & Tait, 2012; Pitts, 2009; Savicki, 2010; Tian, 2019). Some advocate for educators to develop the peer group into a “healthy learning community” (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002) with “strong bonds” (Duerden et al., 2018),

and others suggest that peer cohorts can serve as "communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In 2013, Jessup-Anger and Aragones found a similar paucity of research regarding peer influences on cohort-based travel programs, noting that there was just one study by Ransbury and Harris in 1994 that found that the presence of peers influenced behavior within the group. In their research about roles that students took on within an STSA cohort, Jessup-Anger and Aragones "found that most students spent considerable time and energy concerned about the cohort and their role in it, as revealed by observation notes, journal entries, and interviews" (2013, p. 27). They suggested that, as a result of being presented with daily social decisions about who to sit with on the bus, eat, and room with in the hotels, the students' learning was impacted by the various ways they enacted particular interpersonal attributes.

In the case of a long-term study abroad program in which a group of Chinese students traveled together to study in Canada, Bodycott (2015) described conflict that arose within this group, which resulted in interpersonal learning and incentives to interact less with their peers in the cohort and more with local Canadians. Czura (2017) noted that five of 22 interviewees referred to intergroup issues when they had been asked to describe a "critical incident" that occurred during their STSA, indicating that interpersonal issues persisted in the memories of some participants, and may have eclipsed other incidents more aligned with the program's content. Similarly, in a study with nursing students who participated in an STSA, Foronda & Belknap (2012) noted that some had expressed frustration and exasperation with their fellow group members.

Importantly, articles about minoritized student participants notice the impact that race has on interactions within their peer cohort groups. Talburt and Stewart (1999) examined how race

and gender were central topics for students while debriefing their experiences during a study abroad program in Spain, particularly in response to reflections shared by the one African American woman in the group. However, research demonstrates that peer groups are not solely sources of peer support for racialized students who contend with racist incidents in the host culture; some scholars note that students also dealt with racism from others within their peer group. For example, racialized students from Willis's (2015) study reported racial microaggressions and macroaggressions from their peers. On the other hand, Dean (2017), Jackson (2006), and Lee and Green (2016) noted that students of color valued having peers of color in their cohort groups for several reasons, including the ability to process experiences from the program with these new friends who had similar backgrounds and perspectives. When researchers attend to participants' sociocultural identities such as race and ethnicity, they often include peer impacts in their analyses.

Outside of the context of study abroad, there are also few articles that address the impact of peer social relationships on learning more generally. While scholars and practitioners describe and advocate for cohort-based models of learning for undergraduate students in spite of their complications (Kuh, 2009; Maher, 2004; Masika & Jones, 2016; Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2020; Radencich et al., 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Tinto, 2003) — an essay by Jaffee (2007) cautioned fellow instructors of first-year cohort programs to be aware of the possibility that same-aged groups of postadolescents "can also re-create a mutually reinforcing high school-like environment with the associated demeanors and behaviors, characterized by excessive socializing, misconduct, disruptive behavior, and cliques" (p. 67). Nevertheless, there is little practical evidence or speculation that addresses why or how cohorts affect learning processes or outcomes.

This limited body of research on peer influence suggests the need for a study like mine, which begins to explore critically the dynamics among students within STSA cohorts, and endeavors to shed light on how peer interactions affect experience and subsequent learning.

Research Questions

As I reviewed the literature about short-term study abroad programs, it became evident that many international educators tend to flatten complex learning process and outcomes into simplistic and overgeneralized assertions as if they were two-dimensional. While such work has contributed to foundational scholarship that has established basic precepts and best practices of intercultural education, the field of education abroad is poised for studies that explore experiential learning with a higher degree of sophistication. This study aims to deepen understanding about how experiential learning transpires in relationship to students' self-ascribed identities. In addition, I am curious about how peer relationships within the group cohort may impact an individual's understanding about their identity, and their overall experience with a short-term study abroad program. Furthermore, I seek to explore how a participant's identity may have an effect on the nature and quality of their experiences during a study abroad program. In this study, I use participants' narratives to consider the various ways they positioned themselves in relation to the program content, the destination site(s), and the people they encountered along the way.

Accordingly, I was guided by the following research questions:

1. How did the students' identities impact their experiences during their study abroad program? How did the students come to understand an emergent, context-dependent identity vis-à-vis these particular programs and this particular region?

2. How did intragroup peer dynamics contribute to the students ’experiences during the program, as well as to the way they position themselves within their experience?
3. How did the students’ self-ascribed identities impact how they talked about their experiences and their learning more than a year later? How did the students imply distinctions between learning through indirect observation, and learning through direct personal experience?

Through this exploratory study, I endeavor to consider complex interactions related to identity and experience vis-à-vis interpersonal interactions, in the context of critical considerations of multicultural intergroup relations. My research offers depth to the following common yet superficial principles in professional discourse and scholarship about study abroad, which align with my research questions:

Superficial Principle #1: Students learn about themselves and their own identities while in a new cultural context.

Superficial Principle #2: Peer relationships within the cohort group provide a supportive community for individuals to process their experiences together, so facilitators should develop a sense of community prior to traveling or at the beginning of a program.

Superficial Principle #3: Concrete experience, together with reflection and thinking, generates learning.

With respect to the first superficial principle above, this study explores our understanding of what kinds of identities students ascribe to themselves (and their peers) as they make sense of their relationship to the people and places they encounter when they travel to places outside their home communities. These places include destinations overseas and geographically distant from

their national home context, where students may be especially aware of certain aspects of their sociocultural heritage and identities that usually go unnoticed in familiar contexts.

In contrast to superficial principle #2, this study also investigates the kinds of influence that peers can have on a student's experience. Peer dynamics may be especially relevant on a short-term "island"-style travel program that has a predetermined itinerary that precludes individual agency, and which insulates the group from many organic external interactions. Beyond categorizing peer influences according to a binary of either "supportive" or "distracting," I inquire about the complex ways that participants understand their identities and their surroundings based upon interactions with their peers. Furthermore, it reminds us that these interactions with peers can be the source for powerful learning, sometimes eclipsing the intended content-learning related to a program's destination.

Finally, in response to superficial principle #3, this study draws attention to the different kinds of "experiential" learning that occur when we travel with groups to new places. Participants' identities and positionalities shape the ways that they attend to their surroundings, literally framing what and how they see and perceive the many stimuli they encounter. I explore these interviewees' narratives to consider the differences in how they took in information that they experienced in an embodied, agentic, action-oriented sense, from the information they observed during program components that toured them around notable sites and cities, and information introduced to them by local speakers who recited their personal stories of pain, resilience, and hope. In addition to considering different kinds of learning outcomes from different kinds of experience, I also consider different kinds of experiential inputs that are made possible or limited by their identities and positionalities.

Theoretical Framework: Positioning Theory

The scholarship on short-term study abroad and intercultural education have raised questions concerning experiential learning and peer influences that have largely been neglected in the literature. At the center of my inquiry are issues of identity and experience that align with positioning theory.

Positioning theory has shaped and guided my inquiry and analysis. This research relies on a poststructuralist understanding that individuals construct their identities in ways that are dynamic, multivoiced, contingent, agentic, and context-dependent (Norton, 2013). In order to adequately address the complex ways that students told stories about their identities, and how they understood them to shape their thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors, this study draws upon positioning theory as conceptualized by Davies & Harré (1990) and operationalized by Bamberg (1997) and Depperman (2013a, 2013b), informed by De Fina (2013) and Georgakopoulou (2006, 2013; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Further, my analysis is consistent with how Stokoe (2012) related positioning theory to narrative discourse analysis using small stories, membership categories, and talk-in-interaction.

Positioning theory provides a framework through which to analyze how individuals position themselves and others through their use of language. Davies & Harré (1990) considered the construct of “roles" to be static and formal, whereas a “position” accounts for dynamism of identity in various encounters and environments, and even in the context in which a story is told. It relies on reflexivity and acknowledges an individual’s subjectivity, especially with respect to their ability to choose how they construct and perform their stories in order to convey certain aspects from among their multiplicities of self” (p. 47). Once someone takes up a particular position, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms

of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned" (p. 46). In this sense, positioning explains the way that a person frames both how they experience a particular environment, and how they later talk about themselves when describing their experience.

At the foundation of positioning is Foucault's notion of subject positions that he considered to be constrained by societal discourses concerning power. In addition, this theory builds from Wendy Hollway's (1984, as cited by Depperman, 2013b, p. 2) introduction of "positioning" into psychoanalytic social psychology, emphasizing that people have the agency to choose among identities in light of their prior biographical positions and the overarching discourses available. Davies and Harré (1990) introduced positioning into the field of narratology when they made the case that positioning activities were central to the discursive construction of a coherent self through storylines.

In order for a person to justify their actions in the framework within a storyline, positioning can be understood as the construction of self within such stories (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Storying and discursive acts connect people emotionally, practically, and epistemically to particular identity categories as they tell stories that lend coherence to their disparate and multiple selves. In recognizing themselves as having characteristics associated with membership within a particular social category, they also position themselves in opposition to other categories. Analysis of identities-in-talk relies on such membership categorization (Depperman, 2013a, 2013b; Schegloff, 2007; Stokoe, 2012). This analytical approach considers how a storyteller describes and assigns people into particular identity-related categories for themselves and other characters in their narratives. These categories are used to explain and evaluate the characters' actions — including those of the storytellers themselves — according to

expectations about the duties and responsibilities determined by the category (Depperman, 2013a). Furthermore, Davies & Harré (1990) claim that this recognition creates an "emotional commitment to the category membership" (p. 47) and assigns moral systems to the categories to which they belong to, as well as to those they do not.

Narrative analysis through positioning does not take the speaker at their word. That is, the content of a person's speech is only one component of their narrative. According to Bamberg (1997), narrative is a performative act that weaves together several aspects of their conception of a person's selves within particular contexts. People will make different choices about how they tell a story about an incident based on the discursive purpose behind the telling (p. 341). For example, in the context of a research interview, a person will likely tell a story to the interviewer differently than they would to a parent, or to a friend in their social network. In constructing a narrative, a person engages "retrospective, memory- and discourse-based processes of selection, framing, interpretation, ordering, evaluation and construction of a dramatic plot with a possibly univocal morale" (Depperman, 2013b, p. 5).

Bamberg (1997) understands positioning as an active process that takes place at three levels that he formulated as three positioning questions:

1. *How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events?* At this level, we attempt to analyze how characters within the story world are constructed in terms of, for example, protagonists and antagonists or as perpetrators and victims. …
2. *How does the speaker position him- or herself to the audience?* At this level, we seek to analyze the linguistic means that are characteristic for the particular discourse mode that is being employed. …

3. *How do narrators position themselves to themselves?* How is language employed to make claims that the narrator holds to be true and relevant above and beyond the local conversational situation? (Bamberg, 1997, p. 337)

Over time, scholars elaborated on these three positions. Depperman and colleague refined the first two levels. The following list is a quotation from Depperman (2013b):

la. Level 1: Positioning of story-characters vis-à-vis each other: On the story-level, the narrator acts as an animator (Goffman, 1981): In reported dialogues, s/he lends his/her voice to the characters, indexing to render only what others have said.

lb. Level 1: Positioning of story-characters by narrative design: Characters 'acts of positioning are not uninterested renderings, but they are strategically designed by the narrator from his/her present point of view (cf. Bakhtin, 1981; Günthner, 1999).

2a. Level 2: Self-positioning of the teller by extra- and meta-narrative self-reflexive activities: Tellers may explicitly take a stance towards past events and their past self by meta-narrative, retrospective comments, argumentations and evaluations from the present point of view. Such activities do not only position the narrated self (level 1); the teller simultaneously positions his/her current self, representing biographical change.

2b. Level 2: Interactional positioning by narrative design: Tellers position them selves towards the listener performatively by their story-design, e.g., as being a skilled entertainer, having a message to teach, or being a victim in need of support.

2c. Level 2: Interactional positioning by meta-narrative activities of the teller includes formulating assumptions or asking about the recipient's knowledge and evaluative stance, seeking agreement, explaining to the recipient, etc. In this way, the narrator

can position the recipient as a representative of significant others, rivalling inner voices, authorities, etc. (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000, p. 213-215).

2d. Level 2: Interactional positioning by the story recipient's factual activities. By asking and responding, the recipient becomes a co-author and takes part in negotiating interactive positions.

(Depperman 2013b, pp. 7-8)

The third level has been refined by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008), who frame this "Who am I?" question as positioning oneself with respect to larger dominant discourses in order to establish themselves to more enduring identities along the lines of being "a particular kind of person" (p. 391). In addition, De Fina (2013) made the case that Level 3 positioning offers a middle ground between the micro-level focus of conversational analysis, and macro-level perspectives of master narratives and dominant discourse (p. 45). Depperman (2013a) notes that positioning is appropriate for attending to how people negotiate their identities in the way that they talk, without necessitating a reference to or an explanation of problematic assumptions of grand sociological and philosophical theories of identity (p. 63).

As an example of how positioning has become increasingly empirical, situated, and interactive, Depperman (2013b, p. 7) calls attention to Wortham's (2001) five types of interactional cues and linguistic choices for which positioning analysis can reveal how a speaker can deploy narrative to reveal their social positions, contexts, assessments, and ideological stances. These five types elaborate on Bamberg's Level 2 and include: reference and predication, metapragmatic descriptors (verbs of saying), quotation, evaluative indexicals, and epistemic modalization (Wortham, 2001, p.70-75, as cited by Depperman, 2013b, p. 7).

Positioning theory offers a valuable framework for my exploration of students' present-day stories about how they made sense of their past experiences, and how they continue to incorporate them into their stories about themselves. The multiple levels of analysis allow for opportunities for insights about what a participant said about her experience, in conjunction with analysis of her multilayered narrative performance that may have simultaneously corroborated and contradicted her claims. This theory makes space for the confluence of multiple selves that may be expressed through the multiple positions an interviewee may take in the course of narrating a story, which is especially useful for memories about multifaceted, emotional experiences, social interactions, and identity negotiations in a context full of its own complexities and contradictions.

The Context

The Study Abroad Programs

Over the course of two summers, Midwestern University[1] offered short-term study tour opportunities in Palestine/Israel, focusing on intercultural, political, and sociocultural narratives with respect to the regional conflict. The region in which they traveled is full of cultural, political, historical, religious, environmental, and geographic complexity. Every site they visited had an abundance of multisensory stimuli with the potential to attract attention and elicit emotional reactions.

Students were selected to participate in these study abroad programs through a competitive process that assembled cohorts of multiculturally diverse students in terms of identity and interests. Each program offered an orientation course on campus prior to three weeks of travel throughout central and northern Israel/Palestine. The travel programs included

[1] Pseudonyms are used for all names in this dissertation, including for this university.

tours of and between cities throughout the West Bank and in central and northern Israel, and visits to cultural sites of historical, religious, and political interest. These dual-narrative tours were co-led concurrently by two guides, one Palestinian and the other Jewish Israeli. The programs also included meetings with local speakers who shared their personal stories about activism, resistance, community organizing, and the challenges and joys of daily life in their communities. One of the programs toured the region for the full three-week duration of the trip; the other two toured for one week and then spent two weeks volunteering in Palestinian communities while living as homestay guests in Palestinian homes. All three programs had a strong commitment to critical reflection through daily group debriefs and frequent writing exercises. These reflection opportunities focused on the sociocultural identities of the students in light of the sociocultural narratives they were encountering in Palestine/Israel.

For this study, I interviewed eight young women who had participated in one or more[2] of these programs. These one-on-one interviews took place at least one year after the students had returned from their programs. I asked the participants to recount salient memories from their travels and reflect upon how the program had impacted them since returning to their campus and home communities. The interviewees attributed significant impact to their participation in these programs.

My exploratory form of narrative inquiry was very open and did not ask directly about "transformative experience," critical incidents, or any terminology evocative of such learning. While my questions addressed consistent themes related to precepts of various approaches to intercultural and experiential education ("What was surprising? Were there places you felt particularly comfortable or uncomfortable?"), the lack of specific questions from me allowed

[2] One participant participated in two of the programs in consecutive summers.

each of the interviewees to answer based on what was memorable or meaningful to her. That is to say, there were no prompts for post hoc reflections according to my interests, but instead centered theirs.

Palestine/Israel

Although the lessons about experiential education that emerged from the participants' narratives were not bound to the unique characteristics of the programs' site in Palestine/Israel, the narratives themselves were inextricably tied to the place and its political strife that was a central focus of their programs' content. I submit that the location was an important setting for research about STSA programs because of its sensitivity and complexity.

The focus of the study abroad programs was the regional conflict that is commonly referred to as the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. While travel to "post-conflict" zones offer opportunities to consider issues of identity and conflict transformation, the prospect of visiting a place in the midst of its ongoing conflict is particularly fraught. Regardless, it offers a great deal of exposure to complexities inherent to the human condition, perhaps more vividly than in one's home context, especially if that home context is perceived as being protected from violence.

In my original research proposal, I had figured that the actual place of Palestine/Israel would have played a much more consequential role for the students' experience, in addition to but independent of the contemporary conflict. I based this assumption on three considerations about this region.

First, this small strip of land comprises an enormous amount of multiculturalism. In addition to the ethnicities of "Israeli" and "Palestinian" and the diversity within each of those categories, there are many communities of immigrants, migrants, pilgrims, and displaced peoples, some of whom were displaced within the past few years, and some whose families

resettled in this region generations ago. Palestine/Israel is geographically a land bridge that connects the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe, and has been a strategic place of both trade and military occupations for millennia. Intercultural exchange is endemic to the region. Based on the nature of the place and the design of these study abroad programs, the student participants were inundated with multiple cultures in a small geographical space, which required that they crossed multiple boundaries on a regular basis. I had guessed that this element of complexity would factor prominently in their reflections about their experiences.

Second, this region is known as a "Holy Land" to the world's largest monotheistic religions, and is important to other religious groups such as the Bahá'í and the Druze. I had presumed that the religious significance may be a factor for how some of the participants experienced and remembered their visit.

Third, ideas about this region and the broader "Middle East" is often coupled with Orientalist ideas and stereotypes about Arabs and other ethnic identities. There is a common imaginary that the wider region is rife with geopolitical conflict, if not outright violence and danger; some might even refer to the acts of violence in terms of "terrorism." I supposed that presence in the region may elicit unlearning about such stereotypical assumptions about the region and its peoples.

The Israeli Military Occupation of Palestinian Territories

In spite of its topical centrality to these programs, and to the ways that it influenced the interviewees' emergent identity as "outsiders," details about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict are outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, there are several elements of this conflict that were important to the students' memories about their program, or at least were mentioned by the

interviewees. For the sake of clarity, I will provide a bit of contextual information for these statements and allusions.

The design of all three study abroad programs intentionally traversed Palestinian areas that were under Israeli military occupation, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The stated purpose of these programs was to expose the students to multiple and conflicting narratives about the impacts of this conflict on the lived experiences of individuals, families, and communities.

The occupation is but one of the physical and psychological manifestations of what is often referred to as the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, and includes elements that are visually imposing, such as the twenty-five-foot tall concrete Wall that forms what is sometimes called the "Separation Barrier" that surrounds many Palestinian cities and neighborhoods surrounding Jerusalem, as well as in other places within and around the area known as the West Bank.

Identification Regime: Restrictions to Movement and Access.

An identification (ID) regime is imposed by the Israeli Population Registry system that confers and denies privileges and rights for people to access certain places (or not) based on their ethnoreligious identity and the place they were born (Tawil-Souri, 2012). Jewish Israelis are citizens of the state of Israel, and their ID allows them to live in and access all areas within Israeli territory, as well as in the 60% of the West Bank that is designated as Area C. Palestinian citizens of Israel have Israeli passports and can access most areas within the state of Israel and the West Bank, but are restricted from living in 68% of all towns in Israel due to the rules of discriminatory "admissions committees" and other regulator policies. Israeli citizens have the right to vote in national elections.

Palestinian residents of Jerusalem are not citizens of any state, and do not have rights to vote for the Israeli Parliament. They hold "blue IDs" that are required to be carried in blue plastic ID holders and can access most areas within the State of Israel and the Palestinian West Bank. However, they are at risk of having their residency revoked if they live outside of Jerusalem for several years, or if they do something to raise the ire of Israeli officials.

Palestinian residents of the occupied West Bank hold "green IDs" in green plastic holders that bar them from living in Israeli territories in West Bank settlements and the entire territory recognized as the state of Israel. In addition, they need to apply for permission from the Israeli military in order to access Jerusalem and territory in the state of Israel. This permitting process is arduous, expensive, and requires coordination among several institutions. Furthermore, the permitting process involves interrogation and surveillance by Israeli authorities that can adversely affect the permit-requesters and their families. Many people are ineligible to apply for permits. For those who do receive permits, the permit restricts access to only certain places during certain timeframes. In essence, permits are what grant access to cross militarized checkpoints, which often involve dehumanizing experiences of waiting in queues and fenced-in areas, and subjection to further interrogation. With very few exceptions, West Bank Palestinian residents are not allowed to drive vehicles inside Israeli territories under almost any circumstance. Furthermore, they are not allowed to vote in any Israeli election.

Palestinian residents of Gaza are essentially barred from living outside of Gaza, and are rarely granted permission to leave Gaza to visit any other areas within Palestine/Israel. (They are also heavily restricted from leaving through the border with Egypt, although that is their route to travel anywhere else in the world.) It is not possible for citizens or residents of any other part of

Palestine/Israel — and also citizens of other countries — to visit Gaza without highly restricted permission through coordination with international NGOs (Gisha, 2019).

Overall, the impact of the military occupation is pervasive in the everyday life of Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza, and in eastern neighborhoods of Jerusalem. In conjunction with the restrictions on their ability to move freely, they also face restrictions with regard to their phones and telecommunications services as a result of the Oslo Accords. Economic opportunities have been stifled for decades, and basic government services like garbage pickup, postal delivery, and infrastructure maintenance are often impeded.

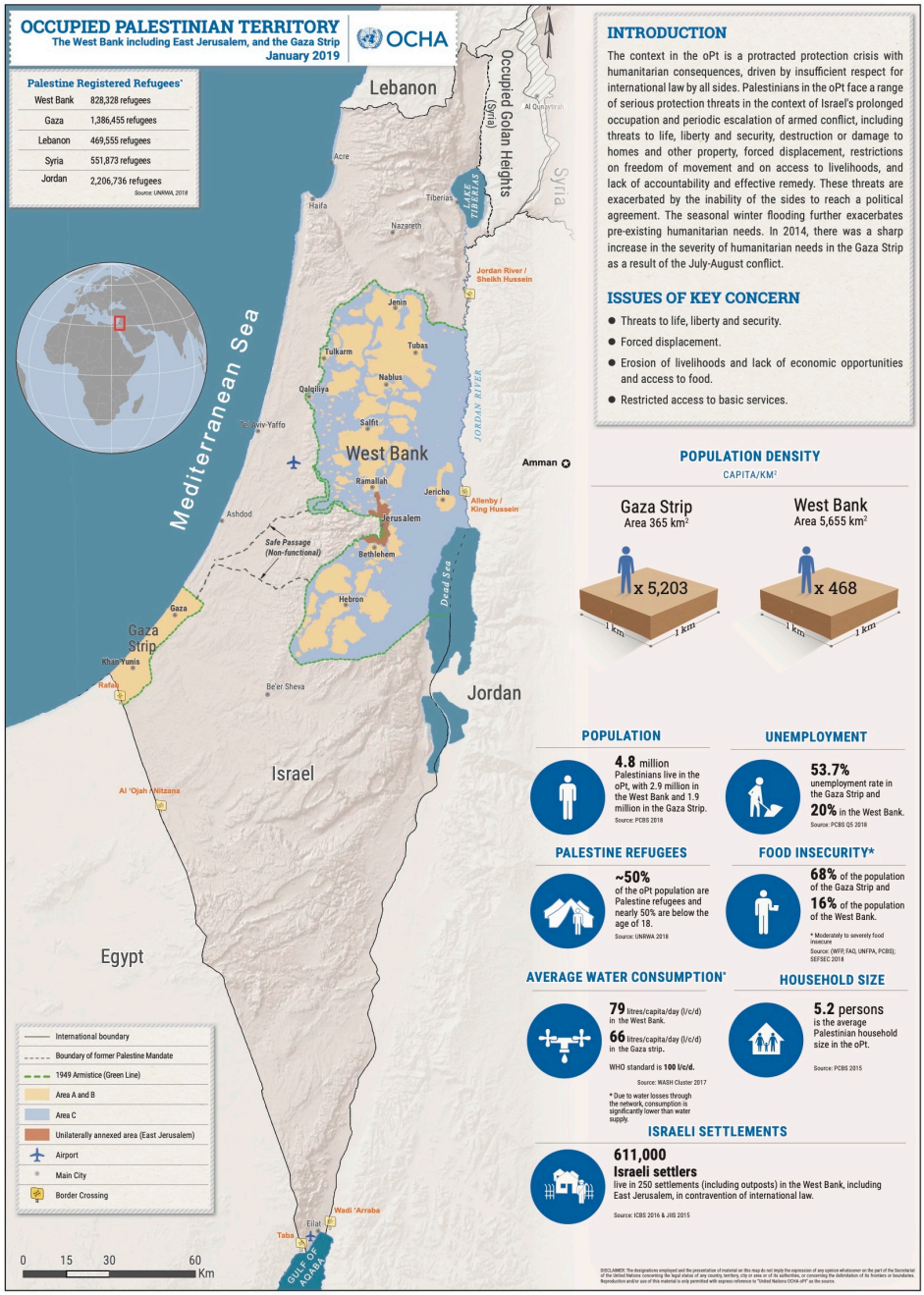
Palestinians who reside in Israel proper face similar challenges in their context. Approximately 20% of the citizens of Israel are Arab (around 1.5 million people), and these Palestinians also face challenges due to interpersonal and systemic racism that can impact their quality of life, including where they can live, whom they can marry, what jobs they can hold, and what language they can speak. Many Palestinian communities within Israel receive fewer governmental resources, including access to municipal services and funding for schools. Adalah Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel documents the laws that discriminate directly or indirectly against Palestinian citizens in Israel; in 2017, their Discriminatory Laws Database listed over 65 discriminatory laws (Adalah, 2017).

Key Locations and Sites Mentioned by the Interviewees

For reference, Figure 1.3 presents a map of Palestine/Israel from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA, 2019) that highlights the Palestinian territories and the borders around them. This map includes many of the places that the interviewees mentioned in their stories and recollections.

Figure 1.3

Map of Palestine/Israel



Note. This map includes locations and sites that the study abroad programs visited, many of which served as significant sites for the interviewees. From United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2019, May 7). Occupied Palestinian Territory: The West Bank including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. (https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/the_west_bank_including_east_jerusalem_and_the_gaza_strip_jan_2019.pdf)

"Area A" refers to one of the three categories that designates land control in the West Bank. Although the Oslo Accords of 1993 had identified the West Bank as being Palestinian territory that would eventually become a state of Palestine, these Accords partitioned the land into three designations. Area A is under the putative civil and security control of the Palestinian Authority. The major Palestinian cities in the West Bank are demarcated as Area A. These areas are noncontiguous and make up 18% of the total land area in the West Bank (Kersel, 2015). Many of these cities have adjacent Israeli military presence, who can control the access in and out of cities through both permanent and temporary checkpoints. Area B makes up 22% of the total area of the West Bank (Kersel, 2015), and is the designation for smaller Palestinian villages where the Palestinian Authority is responsible for the municipal governance, and the Israeli army exerts military control under the auspices of Israeli military law. Area C makes up the biggest proportion of the land in the West Bank, comprising 64% of the total land area (Kersel, 2015; UNOCHA, n.d.-a). These swathes of land are under full control of Israeli military, which in English is called the Israeli Defense Force, or IDF. Palestinians living in and/or owning family property in Area C have almost no say about the use of land, and live under a constant threat of dispossession and displacement. Their access to natural resources is unstable or restricted, and they largely cannot get permission to build on their own land, whether a home, a barn, a school, a well, or a tent intended to be a medical field clinic (B'Tselem, 2020; UNOCHA, n.d.-a). In addition to Israeli military installations, over 100 Israeli settlements are located throughout Area C; their residents are under Israeli legal jurisdiction (not military jurisdiction), and their communities are allowed to build homes and other buildings and get priority access to water as well as access to Israeli-only roads and other infrastructure. In 2020 there has been continued talk of full Israeli annexation of substantially more of the West Bank.

Settlements are explained in more detail in Chapter 3, because all of the interviewees talked about their group's encounter with a settler, a person who lives in a settlement. The settlements are communities that are usually exclusive to Jewish Israeli citizens, and are located in what was internationally recognized as being Palestinian territory in Area C in the West Bank, or Palestinian neighborhoods around the eastern and southern sides of Jerusalem. These communities — and some of the people who live in them — are controversial and politically contentious. This is due in part to their location within territory that is under military occupation, and which had ostensibly been earmarked for a future Palestinian state. They are also controversial because of the association between settlers and right-wing violence against Palestinian people and property.

Hebron is the most populous Palestinian city in the West Bank, and has been a commercial and industrial center, albeit one that is highly stunted due to the movement and trade limitations imposed by the Israeli occupation. The Old City of Hebron is the site of the Ibrahimi Mosque, which is also known as the Tomb of the Patriarchs, and is the traditional site of the tomb of the prophet Abraham. Because of its high significance to Jews and Muslims, the mosque has been partitioned so that approximately half of the building is a synagogue. The area surrounding the mosque has also been partitioned. H1 is theoretically under Palestinian control, and H2 settlements and surrounding area under Israeli administrative control (UNOCHA, 2020). Some settlements here are small towns, and some of which are apartment buildings. They are fortified and protected by a military presence such that there are hundreds of soldiers stationed in and around the Old City. There is a great deal of acrimony between the Palestinian residents and owners of businesses in the old market; in recent years, the settlers frequently inflict violence on Palestinians. Much of the occupation here is visually striking. For example, there is fencing in

place above the open-air market to catch the debris that settlers throw out their windows, including garbage, raw sewage, knives, and toilet brushes. Part of the old market has been closed down by the military, including the former busiest thoroughfare called Shuhada Street.

Refugee camps within the West Bank house the people and the descendants of those who were displaced from their homes and land that became the state of Israel in 1948, as well as those who were displaced in 1967. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the UN agency with administrative responsibilities in these refugee camps, nearly 1.5 million individuals live in 58 refugee camps in the larger region, in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem (UNRWA, n.d.-a). Within the territory of the West Bank (including Jerusalem), there are 19 refugee camps which housed over 800,000 registered Palestinian refugees as of December 2016 (UNRWA, n.d.-b).

The study abroad programs in this study did not enter into the Gaza strip, the perimeter of which is strictly guarded by the Israeli military around the borders it has created. Egyptian authorities also restrict access in and out of this territory from the western border under their control. Movement restrictions have been in place since the early 1990s; since 2007, the residents of Gaza have been subjected to drastic restrictions on their freedom to move and are largely unable to leave the 365km^2 strip of land (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020; UNOCHA, n.d.-b).

Place Names

Palestine/Israel is evocative in countless ways, and even the place names themselves have the power to elicit strong reactions as each name may be tied to a particular political stance. Throughout the paper I variably call this region Palestine/Israel or Israel/Palestine. My

preference is the former, in part because it is less commonly used and is therefore an inherently disruptive appellation. I use the latter in many instances when the territory or military apparatus of the state of Israel is more prominent, and occasionally for the sake of alternating. The region includes Israeli territory that is internationally recognized as the State of Israel, as well as Palestinian territory that is widely recognized as contested. In spite of these contestations about borders and sovereignty, it is not uncommon for people to refer to Israeli territory as "Israel" and Palestinian territory as "Palestine." Many places in this region are known by different names in Arabic and Hebrew; in this paper, I use the internationally conventional English-language names for most cities and districts, such as "Jerusalem," "the Galilee," and "Hebron." Whenever I include an excerpt from a student participant, of course I transcribed the exact terminology they used for all place-names.

Conclusion

An abundance of literature about short-term study abroad (STSA) programs focuses on nonspecific beneficial learning outcomes, rather than on the complexities, challenges, and opportunities of intercultural learning and cohort-based educational travel. As a whole, scholarship tends to offer a flattened, superficial perspective on these programs that, in fact, present rich opportunities for deep learning. This dissertation research aims to add depth through the contribution of a deeper exploration of students' experiences on STSA programs. To this end, I conducted narrative inquiry research with undergraduate students from a U.S. university who traveled to Palestine/Israel on STSA programs that centered themes of identity and narratives. Framed by positioning theory, my research explores questions of identity, social relationships, and the nature of experience with respect to experiential learning.

In the next chapter, I describe my research design and the process that shaped this study. I explain the rationale behind using narrative inquiry as a methodology, informed by grounded theory and Membership Categorization Analysis, which aligns with positioning theory. Chapter 3 features my findings about the emergence of a context-based identity, presenting evidence from the interviewees' narratives about how they came to understand a construct of "connectedness" to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, primarily in relation to their peers from their STSA cohort. This chapter also addresses ways that this "outsider" framing influenced their gaze, their learning, and their stories. In Chapter 4, I present my findings from the students' stories about crossing checkpoints during their travels throughout the region. I analyze how these narratives illuminate differences in the nature of experiences that prompt experiential learning, drawing distinctions between awareness gained from detached observations and learning that arose from emotional investment through actions and interactions. In Chapter 5, I summarize these findings with respect to my research questions, and I offer supplemental findings that indicate that these students used multiple pathways to arrive at transformative learning. Considered all together, I propose an expanded understanding of experiential learning pathways and cycles that incorporate inputs and outputs that are often overlooked in experiential education. I conclude this dissertation with implications for educators and recommendations for future scholarship exploring complexities in intercultural and experiential education.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter, I discuss why I chose narrative inquiry methodology. I review the process I used for collecting data, and the strategies I employed when analyzing the narrative data. I describe how the ethnomethodological analytic approach of Category Membership Analysis informed the themes that emerged from the data. I introduce the study participants and provide context about my positionality as a researcher and as an interlocutor in the interviews.

Methodology

My research questions seek to explore the relationship between personal identity and experience, and consider relational and emotional influences that frame experiential learning. In order to elucidate how student participants understood their identities, emotions, and relationships with respect to their memories and reflections about their short-term study abroad (STSA) program, I collected qualitative data using a narrative inquiry approach, and analyzed the findings by coding themes using methods informed by grounded theory, meso-level narrative analysis, and membership categorization analysis.

This research considered the story-based processes through which students revealed how their intersecting identities impacted their experiences and perceptions of their time overseas. Consistent with constructivist understandings that identity is constituted in discourse and constructed in stories (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 137), the performance of storytelling during these interviews allowed these students a chance to reify and reconstruct their identities as they told their stories. According to positioning theory, the interactional nature of the interview provided a setting for them to co-construct elements of their identity in an effort to be seen by me in particular ways. While describing and evaluating their memories about their programs, the

students' editorial choices in their narratives revealed further insights about how they presently positioned themselves in their stories and in the world (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Although this kind of analysis has traditionally been done with biographical "life story" narratives, it is also appropriate for the sorts of small stories (Georgakopoulou, 2006) that comprised the students' narratives about memories related to these study abroad programs.

Research Design and Rationale: Narrative Inquiry

In order to elicit full, rich descriptions of the ways the participants may have made meaning from their experiences, I conducted interviews using narrative inquiry methodology. Consistent with my focus on experiential learning, the philosophical underpinning of narrative inquiry is Dewey's theory of experience (1938, as cited by Clandinin, 2013, p. 12). This approach centers how participants situated their own learning outcomes from their experiences overseas, in light of the overarching grand narratives that informed their perceptions and evaluations about these experiences. Further, the act of crafting personal narratives allowed each interviewee to metacognitively reconsider her past experiences or observations through her own informal self-reflective practices, while performing and editing a version of herself in the process (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

Narrative inquiry seeks out participants' present-day constructions of their past experiences, with the understanding that the story they tell is framed by their present-day values and beliefs. In this way, accurate recall of particular experiences is irrelevant, as this methodology privileges interviewees' current recollections and interpretations of past events (Trahar, 2009). As such, the focus of the study is on the meaning made by participants *after* their programs; it was never intended to compare or quantify changes between a point before the program to a point afterward. After all, according to the precepts of narrative inquiry, the

participants ’present-day perceptions of their experiences are paramount; the way they understand and recount their lived experience — including the temporality of looking backward and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) — provides crucial insight. This methodological approach “is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477) under the premise that humans interpret their experience through story. In this study, narrative inquiry enabled insight into students ’own constructions and reconstructions of their storied lives that gave meaning to their lives, as well as to their educational experiences overseas, thereby calling upon traditions of interpretive biography.

According to Clandinin (2013), “Narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (pp. 17-18). Consistent with the evocative questions posed by this research, it recognizes experience as a dynamic, ever-changing stream in which humans filter an environmental context through their personal lens into stories and narratives, which then causes the person to further change and develop their sense of identity. Humans process an experience in relation to their past and future storied selves, and so the narratives a person shares will illuminate how they presently position themselves along a continuum according to their beliefs, values, aspirations, and identities. Thus, narrative inquiry offers insights related to positioning theory that allow for “exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals ’experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18).

Narrative inquiry was a natural choice to address and assess the nature of how participants positioned themselves and their beliefs in light of how they understood their identities and describe their worldviews. Given their STSA programs’ focus on narrative and

identity, it was an especially apt choice. After all, these positions rise to the surface of one's consciousness when a person experiences a disruption to what they had previously taken for granted according to the coherence of a "narrative structure" of their life (Crossley, 2000, p. 528), subsequently prompting a reconsideration of their beliefs and values. As noted in Chapter 1, studying abroad is a venue for just such a disruption, particularly in a multicultural region of the world where one is confronted with identity-centered considerations due to the prevalence of historical and contemporary issues rooted in matters of ethnic and religious identities.

In identity-related studies, narrative inquiry and analysis is intrinsically connected to the concept of positioning through the use of narratives about personal experience (Bamberg, 1997; De Fina 2013; Harré et al., 2009; van Langenhove & Harré, 1994). Indeed, the use and development of positioning theory "paved the way for an understanding of narratives being a primary site of identity construction" (Depperman, 2013b, p. 1). Accordingly, it is valuable to employ some form of narrative analysis in order to explore one's positioning. To do this, I approached this study through narrative inquiry.

Participants and Site

Overview of the Programs

In the summers of 2017 and 2018, Midwestern University offered short-term study abroad programs for undergraduate students that focused on intercultural relations in Palestine/Israel. The three programs had notable differences in their design, as will be discussed below, but they were all three-week study tours that provided access to multiple local perspectives about contemporary issues concerning the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Each program consisted of approximately fifteen student participants, and was led by staff members from the university.

All three programs emphasized exposure to diverse perspectives from several people local to the region who shared conflicting and contested narratives about their relationship to this region, particularly in terms of religion, ethnicity, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict writ large. In order to accomplish this, the students traveled to various sites across the region and met with several speakers along the way. All three programs were coordinated and facilitated by the same Jewish American program leader, whom I call Lucy, who was a staff member and instructor at the university that hosted the program. She facilitated one of the programs, Program B, on her own; she co-coordinated and co-facilitated the other two programs (A and C) with a Palestinian colleague from the same university, whom I call Rania.

The programs included several days with tour guides from a local tour company based out of Jerusalem, which offers programs co-led by two guides at once, one Palestinian and one Jewish Israeli. At each site of interest, and in the interim travel between sites, guides concurrently shared perspectives from their own personal histories, as well as master narratives from their ethnic, religious, and political people-groups. Whereas each of the three programs were accompanied by different Israeli guides, the same Palestinian guide from the West Bank, whom I call Khalil, accompanied all three groups. For the duration of Program A, the two guides accompanied the group. Programs B and C used the services of these guides for the first week.

Table 2.1 summarizes relevant elements of these programs, and I provide a brief overview of each, below.

Table 2.1

The Study Abroad Programs

Program Name	When Did Program Take Place?	Interviewees From This Program	Homestay Duration And Location	Time Spent With Dual-Narrative Tour Guides	Volunteer Site	Group Dynamics (According To The Interviewees)
Program A	Summer 2017	Allison Paige	None — hotel stays the entire time	3 weeks	None	Very close during the program; remained close friends after the program concluded
Program B	Summer 2018	Allison Molly Sylvia	2 weeks with a Palestinian family in the Galilee region of northern Israel	1st week	Teacher's college for Palestinian-Israeli undergraduate students	Very fraught and occasionally divided along racial lines (students of color, and White students); one White woman in particular created tension and conflict; no collective contact after the program
Program C	Summer 2018	Bridget Diana Elizabeth Linda	2 weeks with a Palestinian family in the West Bank, near Bethlehem	1st week	Farm in the West Bank owned by a Palestinian family	Friendly and without conflict, some fraught dynamics during debriefs; little collective contact after the program

Program A

Program A took place in the summer of 2017, and consisted solely of a three-week study tour that was organized by the dual-narrative tour company and was accompanied by two tour guides for its entirety. The focus of this program was exposure to multiple perspectives about contemporary life in Palestine/Israel, as informed by recent geopolitical history.

The students traveled separately to Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv, but arrived on the same day so that they traveled together to their hostel in Jerusalem. The students stayed in hostels and hotels in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, a kibbutz near Tiberias, Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jaffa. Nearly every day they were on a tour bus that brought them to a variety of sites and speakers. They participated in two small volunteer projects, one day at an Israeli farm in the Galilee region, and the other at a family farm in the West Bank. Their two program leaders from their university led debriefing sessions on an almost daily basis.

Program B

Program B was a similar three week program that took place in the early summer of 2018. It was the culminating "field study" at the end of an on-campus semester-long course in the winter term of 2018 that introduced the context of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and issues regarding sociocultural identity and intercultural relations. Participants were responsible for arranging their own transportation in and out of Israel/Palestine, and many but not all of them flew on the same flight into Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv. Their program began in Jerusalem, where they met their two dual-narrative tour guides. Khalil the Palestinian guide was with this group for the entire week of their regional tour. In addition, this program was accompanied by two different Jewish Israeli tour guides during their first week in-country who

alternated due to scheduling issues. Their first week included visits to Tel Aviv, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Ramallah, as well as to an Israeli settlement in the West Bank.

During their second and third weeks, the students stayed with Palestinian host families in an Arab city in the Galilee region of northern Israel. Many of these families were Muslim, which was notable because their stay coincided with the beginning of the month of Ramadan. Some of the host families lived far from the center of the town, and the students staying there were unable to leave the homes in the evenings. There were apparently some tensions between some of the students and their hosts; in the middle of the program, two students were moved out of their host homes and were housed in a bunker-turned-apartment in the town.

The host families may not have had much experience hosting U.S.-Americans prior to this program; it seems that several were the families of education students at the local College of Education. This college was the site of the Program B's community engagement.[3]

Overall, this program experienced several logistical disruptions due to acts of war near Syria and Israel in the occupied Golan Heights. Because missiles were threatened and fired between Israeli and Syrian military forces, the students were required by their university to leave their homestays for a few days. They stayed in a hostel in Haifa during this time.

Program C

Program C was a three-week program that took place in the summer of 2018. The program was geared toward intercultural learning about multiple perspectives with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and included a volunteer project in order to learn about nonviolent forms of resistance to oppression. The students were responsible for their own travel into

[3] Because the interviewees from Program B did not elaborate on the nature of their volunteer project, its associated activities were unclear to me. One of the students indicated that this had been unclear to her, too, in part because this component of the program was significantly disrupted by nearby threats of military violence that greatly altered the program itinerary.

Israel/Palestine; some chose to fly into the Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv, and some chose to fly into the Queen Alia Airport in Amman, Jordan. The students who flew into Jordan met with one of their program facilitators in Amman in order to taxi together to the border with Israel/Palestine near Jericho, where they crossed together as a group. Upon arriving, all of the students spent their first days and nights in Tel Aviv, where their one-week tour around the region began. This tour was co-led by two tour guides, a Palestinian man from the West Bank whom I call Khalil, and a Jewish Israeli man from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Their tour included time in and around Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Hebron, and included visits to museums like the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem and the Yasser Arafat Museum in Ramallah. They met with several local speakers who shared their personal stories and political viewpoints, including an American-Palestinian businessman, a displaced Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem, and an Israeli settler.

During the second and third weeks of the program, the undergraduates stayed in pairs with Palestinian host families in the West Bank near Bethlehem. They were in a town that frequently hosts foreign visitors, and their host families were familiar with hosting. They also lived at homes that were relatively close together such that they felt comfortable visiting their peers at each others' host homes. During the weekdays, they volunteered at a nearby family farm that had been under threat of dispossession for decades. In addition to daily volunteer work on the farm, their group gathered every day for educational co-teaching and debriefs about their reactions to and feelings about their experiences. During these two weeks, the group also took day trips to tourist destinations in the region, including a day swimming in the Dead Sea in Israeli territory south of the West Bank, a visit to the northern West Bank city of Nablus, and a day in the seaside city of Haifa in the north of Israel.

Program Characteristics Salient to This Research

There are a number of reasons why these particular programs offered great promise for addressing my research questions about identity, experiential learning, and peer interactions. These reasons reflect what J. Clyde Mitchell in 1984 termed a "telling case study" in which "the particular circumstances surrounding [it] serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent" (as cited in Andreotti, 2011, p. 239). The programs themselves focused the students' attention on issues related to sociocultural identity and comprised students representing diverse identities, interests, and backgrounds. In Palestine/Israel, there exist multiple cultural communities that define themselves based on strong and pervasive sociohistorical narratives about how their identities connect them to the region. These identity-based narratives were a focal point of these particular study abroad programs, which solicited various perspectives while illuminating how conflicting discourses undergird contemporary geopolitical conflicts.

One way that these programs endeavored to present multiple perspectives was through the inclusion of guided tours led concurrently by two guides, a Palestinian and a Jewish Israeli. The purpose of these "dual narrative" guided tours was to simultaneously present and humanize the contrasting narratives, in order to introduce and underscore complexity. The inclusion of these dual narrative tours and the intention to present many perspectives from local people in the region made these programs especially compelling to me.

Moreover, I initially considered these programs for the simple reason that they exposed students to the direct experience of visiting — and in one case, living in — the occupied West Bank. This is not a common practice for U.S. colleges and universities to allow their students to enter the occupied territories during university-sanctioned travel to Israel, due to concerns about

security as per U.S. State Department recommendations. Based on my experience in the region, it is not only utterly safe to visit and stay in Palestinian areas in the West Bank, but it is also imperative in order to contend with the contemporary complexities and consequences of the Israeli occupation.

These programs offered a rich environment to consider peer dynamics among diverse groups of students. The cohorts comprised students with a range of sociocultural identities and social group memberships. Among their few shared identities were their status as undergraduates from the same U.S. university. Almost all of the participants on all three programs were U.S. citizens, and some also had dual citizenship with other countries.[4] Otherwise, the participants varied in terms of race, ethnicity, gender identity, socioeconomic status, academic interest, political affiliation, religious/faith identities, and a number of other identity categories. This heterogeneity was consequential to the experiences of the students because of the affordances and challenges that arose from varying perspectives within their group during debriefs and informal peer interactions. Furthermore, it provided fertile ground for new, context-based identities to emerge within the groups during the course of the programs.

My decision to only interview after the trip was intentional. Because of the nature of narrative inquiry, the only data I wanted to collect was via narrative interviews after the program. I was not interested in comparing pre-trip interviews with post-trip interviews, because their pre-trip identities were only significant in terms of how they chose to position their pre-trip selves during their post-trip interviews. In addition, I did not want to contact any students prior to their trip so that they could have a more authentic experience as participants on their program, without some notion in the back of their head about my research. I am under no delusions about what a

[4] At least one student on Program A did not travel with a U.S. passport.

minor impact my outreach may have had on their experience, but by not intervening at all, I avoided questions as to whether and to what extent a pre-trip interview may have shaped any aspect of their expectations or attention while traveling. This consideration also informed my decision to refrain from attending any of their programs as a participant observer. Not only would my presence have altered their experience with the program, but I also wanted to rely solely on the students' narratives about their memories. Had I been present, I would have had my own perspective about what had happened, as well as about the other group members. I was able to truly center their narratives because it was the only data I collected.

I was also intentional about interviewing students a year or more after they had participated in their program, in order to get a sense of how their participation in the program may have impacted their sense of identity after having returned. Many research studies about international education conduct their interviews and surveys within a few weeks after participants return to their home communities; as such, the students' memories are fresh, their emotions may be strong, and therefore there may be a tendency for people to have skewed impressions about the lasting "life-changing" impact of their experience.

Finally, and importantly, I was interested in this region because I have extensive experience living and working in this region, particularly facilitating educational tourism programs for adults of diverse backgrounds, ages, interests, and other identities. I have also worked with the dual-narrative tour company in the past, and have been part of several of their tour programs. As such, I am very familiar with not only the sites and discourses that the participants of this program encountered, but also with common ways that U.S.-Americans and others grapple with exposure to these sites and discourses. In addition, I am invested in understanding whether and how short-term visits to Palestine/Israel make any lasting imprints on

visitors. I elaborate a bit about my relationship to this region in my positionality statement below.

Communication With Program Facilitators

As I considered these study abroad programs for my research, I reached out to the program leaders in April of 2018, prior to the travel components for Programs B and C. Public information about the programs was limited on university websites, so I inquired about the program itineraries and objectives. The facilitators were gracious and forthright in the information they shared, but refrained from sharing any details. For example, I never saw an itinerary, nor did I have access to any information about the participants beyond an overview of the groups' demographic diversity.

Lucy and Rania were amenable to my interest in conducting research with their students, perhaps in part because I was not interested in conducting an evaluative program assessment, but rather I was curious about how the students conveyed their personal experiences and relayed their takeaways. These facilitators expressed curiosity about this as well. I drafted a preliminary proposal and we agreed to meet in late May. This early proposal originally suggested that I travel with Program C in order to collect data as a participant observer. When I met with Lucy and Rania in late May, in the interim between Programs B and C, they invited me to join them during the latter half of the program, after their dual narrative tour, while the students lived and worked near Bethlehem. Because of my familiarity with the Bethlehem area, the facilitators suggested that I could provide logistical assistance. Furthermore, they mused about the possibility of me facilitating occasional debriefing sessions.

Although I found these suggestions somewhat tempting, I declined for several reasons. First of all, I had been interested in the dual narrative tour component, and so it was illogical to

miss that first week of the program. Second, my status as a participant observer would be complicated, if not compromised, if I served as a co-facilitator during the program. I was uncomfortable with the prospect of volunteering as a co-facilitator while I was conducting research. Third, I was concerned about how my presence may impact the intergroup dynamics, as well as my rapport with the students as an interviewer. Relatedly, I was reluctant to introduce this research to the students prior to their program, with the concern that the knowledge of "being researched" could have impacted their experience during their travel. Finally, and most critically, as I considered my research questions, my methodological interest became increasingly aligned with narrative inquiry. Consequently, I chose to center the students' post-program narratives about their experiences. I decided to refrain from influencing the program by my presence, and from complicating my analysis of their narratives with my own memories and interpretations.

After declining the invitation to travel with Program C, I followed up with Lucy and Rania in the fall of 2018. At this meeting, they did not share many specifics of that program, and agreed once again to help me with outreach to the students about this research project. Although they still expressed interest in my eventual findings, they seemed to be somewhat ambivalent. They did not request or suggest anything in exchange for their permission or assistance with participant outreach.

Participant Selection

I had originally planned on soliciting participants from only Program C, in part based on two consultations with the program facilitators prior to submitting my proposal for this research. In June 2019, after I received approval from my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research, the facilitators agreed to forward a recruitment email from me to the

participants from Program C. However, the first student who responded had participated in Programs A and B, which I had not realized until after I began my first interview with her. Apparently, the facilitators had sent the solicitation email to participants from multiple programs. For this reason, after consulting with my faculty advisor, I decided to expand the scope of my interviewees to also include students who had participated in Program B.[5] After all, my research questions asked about how identity impacts the experience of a multinarrative study tour in Palestine/Israel, and the students from both of these programs met those criteria. Three more students responded to that first email, and I also reached out directly to a participant I had met under separate circumstances who had participated in Program B.[6]

All of the first five respondents were women, and four of them identified as White. Three of them had participated in Program C, and two had participated in Program B. In the hope of recruiting a few more students with different sociocultural identities, I sent another recruitment email through the facilitators in early October. Two more White women volunteered (one from Program B and one from Program C), as did a multiracial woman who had participated in Program A, in the summer of 2017. Once again, I was unclear as to how she had received the recruitment email, but I decided to interview her. Although her 2017 program itinerary had differed from the 2018 programs, the purpose had been similar, and the program leaders were the same. Moreover, the first person I had interviewed had participated in two of these study abroad programs — Programs A and B — and so I already had some data about that program. In the end, inclusion of participants from all three programs afforded me the ability to analyze the data

[5] Upon deciding to include these participants in this study, I requested permission from the university program that sponsored the course. In reply to this request, the director of this program informed me that my research did not require permission if I had consent from Lucy, the course instructor.
[6] I met the participant I call Sylvia in March 2019 when she and I were facilitators of a one-week leadership program with students from her university.

with cross-cutting themes that were not limited to the idiosyncrasies of one particular program. Although all eight of the interviewees had notably different experiences and takeaways from their programs, some of which were indeed strongly related to idiosyncratic events and dynamics of the particular program in which they had participated, it was the similarities across their narratives that illuminated key findings in this research. Although I had anticipated analyzing differences among participants, certain similarities across these eight were striking enough for me to dedicate my attention to these themes and patterns.

In September and October of 2019, I attempted to implement the snowball method of outreach by asking the students I was interviewing to reach out to some specific peers their program groups. Most of these interviewees seemed reluctant to do so; one of them had been quite sure that her groupmate would not want to interview with me. I emailed him directly, and also sent direct recruitment emails to three other students who had been mentioned by my interviewees. No one replied.

By early December, I had interviewed eight participants from the three programs. In accordance with the consent form that each student signed prior to their first interview, all participation was voluntary. No interviewee expected or received compensation for participating.

Considering the diversity among all the students who had participated in these three study abroad programs, I expected that there would be more racial, ethnic, and religious diversity among those who volunteered for this study. I posited some theories about why students of color may not have been interested in interviewing with me, but because these hypotheses are outside the scope of this research, I will refrain from speculating here. Nevertheless, there was a good deal of diversity among the interviewees in terms of other identity categories, as is evident in Table 2.2, which summarizes relevant information about the participants in this study.

Table 2.2

Interviewee Demographics

Name[a]	Pgm	Years In College Prior To Pgm	Gender Identity	Racial / Ethnic Identity	Religious Identity	Sexual Orienta-Tion	Disciplinary Major/Minor	Language Studied In University	Where She Was Raised	Socio-Economic Class	Prior International Travel
Allison	B & C	1, 2	Woman	White	Nonreligious	Dates men	International studies; Religion	Hebrew, Arabic	Midsize city, US Midwest	Middle class	*did not mention*
Bridget	A	2	Woman	White	Atheist/ nonreligious	*did not mention*	Comparative literature; International studies; Sustainability	did not mention	Northern & Western Europe; US Southwest & Northeast	Upper middle class	Substantial — had grown up in European countries
Diana	A	2	Woman	White	Nonreligious; family is Christian	Dates men	Economics; Latin American Studies	Spanish	Small town, US Midwest	Middle class	Family trip to Western Europe
Elizabeth	A	1	Woman	White	Catholic	Dates men	Organizational studies	French	Suburban town, US Midwest	Upper middle class	Annual family vacations and time spent living in East Asia
Linda[b]	A	1	Woman	Latinx (parents are Central American & White US-American)	Nonreligious	*did not mention*	International studies; Education	Arabic	Small towns US Midwest	Working class	Visits with family in Central America

Table 2.2 (cont'd)

Name[a]	Pgm	Years In College Prior To Pgm	Gender Identity	Racial / Ethnic Identity	Religious Identity	Sexual Orienta-Tion	Disciplinary Major/Minor	Language Studied In University	Where She Was Raised	Socio-Economic Class	Prior International Travel
Molly	B	2	Woman	White	Raised Catholic but resistant to Christianity	*did not mention*	Political science; International studies	Arabic	Small town, US Midwest	Working class	None
Paige	C	1	Woman	Multiracial (parents are East Asian, White US-American)	Nonreligious; raised Catholic	Dates men	Anthropology; Community-based social change	*did not mention*	Small town, US Midwest	Middle class	None
Sylvia	B	3	Woman	White	Nonreligious; raised Catholic	Queer	Religious studies; Museum studies	Arabic	Midsize city, US Midwest	Working class	None

[a] All names are pseudonyms

[b] Linda interviewed one time; everyone else participated in three interviews

Data Gathering Methods

Student interviews

Between July and December of 2019, I conducted a series of three one-on-one interviews with seven of the research participants; the other participant participated in only one two-hour interview. Consistent with a narrative inquiry approach, these interviews were largely unstructured, in which I asked open-ended questions in a dialogic interview process. They focused on eliciting interpretive autobiographical accounts from the participants about their current understanding and meaning taken from their experiences (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). The length of each interview was between 45 to 120 minutes. Almost all of the interviews occurred face-to-face and in person, often in coffee shops or semi-public spaces in classroom buildings or libraries on their campus. Because one of the interviewees had been in Europe during her first two interviews, those were conducted and recorded over Zoom video calls.

I designed the three-interview protocol in alignment with commonly used traditions of qualitative interview techniques as developed and used by Seidman (2013). This protocol was particularly amenable to this research, as it allowed participants to narrate their experiences on their own terms while using personalized colloquial terminology, which revealed elements of their experiences and identity that were most salient and meaningful to them. The successive interviews also helped me to gain trust and rapport with the interviewees as they progressed.

I asked open-ended questions to elicit stories about particular experiences related to their program and their subsequent return to their campus and home communities. The series of interviews were interrelated, and took place fairly close together in time, usually within one to three weeks of each other. The time between the interviews allowed participants to further reflect on their memories of the program, while also providing for some continuity and internal

consistency among them (Block, 2015; Seidman, 2013). The progression of consecutive interviews allowed for a research relationship of rapport, connectedness, trust, and collaboration, giving the participants time and space to tell their stories in ways that supported not only validity but also verisimilitude (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.7).

I began the first interview with each participant with the same question: "What do you want to tell me about your experience with this program?" From there, I asked follow-up questions based on their responses, related to the topics they mentioned, and incorporated specific wording and phrasing they used in their narratives. For the second round of interviews, I asked each student to prepare by thinking of an object from their trip that was meaningful to them. I suggested that they could bring the object, or just describe and explain it to me. The purpose of this was less to learn about the object itself, and more to open up an additional line of inquiry as to what each student had considered to be meaningful. The Appendix provides a list of representative questions that I asked many of the students throughout the three interviews.

After the first and second interviews, I reviewed each audio recording and selectively transcribed excerpts that I presented to the students during their subsequent interviews. In response, they offered clarifications and elaborations. Also, I occasionally re-asked questions I had posed in prior interviews. This technique not only established validity to their responses, but also allowed for them to give deeper thought to their answers. These organic approaches to respondent validation mitigated misinterpretation on my part. Moreover, it also enhanced the co-constructed understanding of the processes and phenomena that this research set out to explore.

Prior to each interview, as part of my introduction, I mentioned that I had spent time living in Palestine/Israel and noted that this was one of the reasons why I was interested in this topic. I had also included this information in the second recruitment email that was shared with

all of the study abroad program participants. This information impacted the way that several of the interviewees told stories. They often spoke to me with the apparent assumption that they did not need to provide geopolitical background information to support or explain the setting of their stories. Accordingly, in many cases, they did not always offer contextual and logistical background to their narratives unless I probed with follow-up questions.

Data Analysis

With positioning theory as a foundation for recognizing the co-constructed performative nature of these interview data, I analyzed the transcripts using principles and practices of grounded theory in conjunction with an ethnomethodological approach of Membership Categorization Analysis.

In many regards, my approach to analyzing and reporting the data involved a great deal of experimentation with narrative form (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 165) to find an appropriate fit to convey my findings while keeping them grounded accurately in what the interviewees said. Each interview was a pastiche of several small stories that were that often loosely connected, and ultimately reflected the sense that many details of the program had become distant in the memories of these university students who had busily filled their intervening days and months with classes, extracurricular activities, internships and jobs, and social lives. Accordingly, the transcribed excerpts take on many of these same qualities. Indeed, these qualities are reflected in the findings more broadly, as I weaved together similarities across the eight women's narratives, while noting the important differences among them.

With respect to the context of the study abroad program in question, the students negotiated their situated identities in terms of their own self-positioning and self-ascriptions, and in response to how they perceived others to position them according to certain categories. The

understanding that "identity work is often characterized by the ambivalence that individuals feel about exactly who they are and where they belong" (Block, 2015, p. 528) has informed my approach to take a dialogic/performative analysis, as per Riessman (2008, as cited by Block, 2015, p. 530), which incorporates both thematic analysis of what was said, in addition to a structural micro-analysis of how narratives were spoken. Using a dialectic multilevel approach to my narrative analysis, I considered interviewees' narratives at the micro level of their utterances, the macro level in relation to larger discourses about sociocultural identities and overarching narratives, and with a particular focus on the meso level of how the students positioned themselves in their narrative (Block, 2015, p. 532).

Transcription

The audio data from the interviews were recorded, and I transcribed each of them. Throughout the process of transcribing and subsequent analysis (Oliver et al., 2015), I have given much thought to transcription practices in an effort to be true to what the interviewees said and expressed, while being respectful of the way that involuntary filler words can seem extraneous or distracting, and could potentially misrepresent these young women as unserious or unintelligent. In addition, I considered the level of sociolinguistic analysis in which I was engaging, and I often attended more to the words that were said, rather than to nonverbal cues that shaped these young women's stories. According to Oliver et al. (2015), this is appropriate for both my grounded theoretical approach to coding, and for my ethnomethodogical approach of Membership Categorization Analysis.

I chose to transcribe the audio data sociolinguistically (Block, 2015) so the transcriptions originally included everything the participants vocalized, including filler words, false starts, laughter, response/non-response tokens, and most repetitions (Menard-Warwick et al., 2018;

Oliver et al., 2015), even though many of these nonverbal utterances were often outside the scope of my analysis. In an effort to analyze more naturalized transcripts, I also included symbols to mark pauses and audible sighs. Occasionally my field notes included notations about gestures that an interviewee made at certain moments, and I inserted these in the transcriptions accordingly. For the sake of clarity, I cleaned up many of the filler words (especially their tendency to say "um" following a complete thought, as if indicating a period to punctuate the end of a sentence), and thus I provide slightly more orthographic transcriptions in Chapter 3, in which I outline my findings about connected identities and outsider positioning. In Chapter 4 about borders, I chose to leave in more denaturalized language to convey a sense of how the interviewees talked. At the end of that chapter, I speak in greater detail about aspects of the interviewees' language, as it raised questions and revealed patterns about how the students positioned themselves.

Membership Categorization Analysis

The data in this study was well-suited to Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA). Originally conceptualized by Harvey Sacks in the 1960s (Schegloff, 2007), MCA has been developed alongside conversation analysis as an ethnomethodological approach to understanding how people talk in terms of membership in various societal categories, for themselves and in relationship to others (Fitzgerald, 2015; McCabe & Stokoe, 2004). Membership categories appear in talk-in-interaction as signifiers of social organization, and they are referenced by speakers as if they are common knowledge, or taken-for-granted (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002, 2009). As such, they are more consequential than mere labels, as membership in certain categories serves to explain and ascribe certain actions or conduct (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002; Schegloff, 2007). MCA accounts for the ways that people understand their social interactions in

light of sociocultural identity categories such as race, class, gender, and nationality, from the perspective of the people talking, rather than from the perspective of sociological theorists (Housley & Fitzgerald 2002; Stokoe, 2012). Moreover, MCA underscores the ways that expectations about membership are reliant on certain settings. In different contexts, categorial membership may carry different meanings, rights, and responsibilities. Therefore, "MCA mainly produces case studies of distinct interactional and textual settings, focusing on turn-generated 'identities-for-interaction', morality, culture and other categorial matters" (Stokoe, 2012, p. 278).

In one such case study, McCabe and Stokoe (2004) provided an example of MCA that correlated with my analysis. They used MCA to elucidate how people positioned themselves as members of a particular category of "good tourist" through small stories that contrasted their self-categorization with those of "bad tourists." In so doing, they described how people attach moral attributions according to their categorizations. In the same way, I used MCA to discern several ways that my interviewees established the categories of "connected," "not-connected," "outsiders," and "activists" in order to describe themselves in contrast with a subset of their peers in their program cohort. Moreover, MCA revealed how my interviewees told stories that categorized themselves as "objective, open-minded outsiders" who were morally superior to their peers who they categorized "intolerant, opinionated, and emotionally reactive activists." I further analyzed how they used these categorizations in order to justify and explain certain behaviors expected of members of each of these categories.

Small Stories

Positioning theory does not require full narratives that include certain structural components or Labovian features such as temporal ordering. On the contrary, Georgakopoulou (2006) and Bamberg (2004, 2006; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) have used positioning to

analyze “small stories” that occur naturally in conversations and in research interviews. Rather than relying on large narratives like biographic life histories that align with the “narrative canon” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008, p. 378; Georgakopoulou, 2006), small narratives can reveal meaning from inconsistencies, equivocations, and other fragments that can offer insights about how a person makes sense of complex multiple selves (Bamberg 2004). These stories can capture talk-in-interaction “as the sites of engagement where identities are continuously practiced and tested out,” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 379), such that identity work is being conducted in real-time.

In my study, I focused on the cues that interview participants used to position themselves in order to deduce insights as to how they filtered their experience overseas through their perceived identity categories, and how they had since made sense of how their experiences have fit into their present-day understandings of themselves. My analysis of their narration attended to two temporal layers: the past stories referred to recollected experiences that took place during their program travel, and the act of telling the stories in interaction with me at the time of the interviews. These young women’s small stories often included indications about how they perceived themselves in relationship with — and in contrast to — certain other people they encountered during and after the program, whom had influential effects on how the interviewees interpreted meaning from various spaces, places, interactions, observations, and exchanges.

Coding as per Grounded Theory

In order to identify cross-cutting themes that emerged from my data, I used coding methods common to those that are associated with grounded theory. Consistent with the pragmatic school of thought of “evolved” or Straussian grounded theory (Chamberlain-Salaun et al., 2013; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014), my exploratory analysis generated a theory of plausible

relationships about concepts regarding "outsider identity," observation, and experience that emerged inductively from the data that I collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

With the recognition that data collection is interrelated to data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 6), my thematic analysis began soon after each interview, so that I could use emergent themes as guides for follow-up interviews (van Manen, 1990). However, I did not engage in systematic theoretical sampling (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014) to the extent that I changed the focus of my interview questions or my approach to data collection in order to test nascent theories. After completing most of the interviews, I began a more dedicated analysis, and began an initial process of open coding with the transcript data. Using open coding in an iterative process, I identified 12 thematic groupings, which included themes of "identity," "empathy," "critical consciousness," "emotions," "borders and boundaries," "discourses," "connections to their lives," and "responsibility to act." Throughout my iterative re-reading of the data, I continued to sort and revise the codes through constant comparative practices in which I compared my "data with data, data with code, and code with code" (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014, p. 158). Furthermore, through the development and testing of theoretical codes that conceptualized relationships among the themes that had emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), I began to theorize between the concept of outsiderness as an identity and its impact on interviewees' recollections of emotions and empathy in certain experiences, especially at border crossings and checkpoints. This led to a sort of selective coding, with "outsiderness/connectedness" taking center stage as a "core" category (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Heath & Cowley, 2004).

Considering Similarities and Cross-Cutting Themes

In spite of the consistencies across the three programs, the students ’narratives revealed striking dissimilarities in the programs that strongly impacted their individual experiences overseas. Moreover, as expected, the individual students from within each program shared their reflections differently from one another, based on their identities, interests, and idiosyncrasies. While analyzing this diverse data, I opted to seek out the few similarities that surfaced throughout their stories. Most notable was the way that all eight interviewees noted their status as “not connected” or “outsiders” to the issues associated with the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. I applied “outsider” codes to the transcripts where the students described or alluded to connectedness and proceeded to collect these excerpts into a large spreadsheet. I color-coded the excerpts according to each interviewee and began to identify and assign subcodes to each excerpt. Many of these subcodes formed the basis of my initial conjectures about the ways that interviewees had formulated “outsiderness” as an identity category, and the meanings they attached to this identity category. I refined my analysis by comparing excerpts, and by re-reading the full interview data in order to understand how each excerpt was embedded in the overarching narratives. I further refined and revised my findings accordingly.

Another striking similarity across the interviewees was that each of them shared a story about crossing checkpoints. However, the content and tone of stories they shared were vastly different. These differences afforded rich opportunities for comparative analysis that revealed interesting insights as to how these students positioned themselves during their trip, and in the course of their interviews with me. Moreover, as I investigated the nuances of the differences in the content of their stories, I became attuned to overarching similarities about how they centered themselves in their stories. The tension between the similarities and differences embedded in

their storytelling ultimately allowed me to draw insights about the importance of emotions in experiential learning.

My reliance on similarities occasionally tempted me to project my own meaning onto the interviewees' words in order to fit my early theories and analysis. I addressed this tendency with the technique of interpreting each excerpt on a line-by-line basis, attending to specific word choices that revealed certain meaning and positioning. At times, this practice revealed disconfirming evidence that contradicted the assumptions I had made while aggregating the excerpts. I continued to situate each excerpt within the context of its whole interview in order to validate my inferences and prevent "cherry picking" only the convenient data that aligned with my premise in exclusion of disconfirming data. These strategies allowed me to refine my analysis, reconfigure my subcodes, and revise my emergent theories. After successive rounds of these iterative processes, I was able to draw comparisons across excerpts based on careful considerations of their distinctions. These exhaustive techniques are reflected in the findings in Chapters 3 and 4, where I include closely scrutinized interpretations of most excerpts in order to elucidate my thinking and thereby demonstrate the trustworthiness of my conclusions.

Selecting Excerpts to Share in the Findings

In order to establish that my conclusions were grounded in the data, in Chapters 3 and 4 I provide ample evidence by way of direct quotations. Because I developed my theories based on similarities among multiple interviewees, I support my claims by not only demonstrating that multiple students told similar stories, but also indicating how their stories differed. The purpose of narrative analysis is not to take the interviewees at their word and accept the scenarios as if they were true. Rather, I was interested in the ways that the students crafted their stories in order to position themselves in certain ways. For example, in order to draw attention to their common

understandings of "connectedness," I chose to share the language that each of them used to describe this concept. Similarly, these interviewees operationalized their outsider identities in consistent ways, and I chose to provide evidence of this in my findings.

I shared students' reflections about their impressions of Tel Aviv and meeting a settler in order to illustrate the similar yet distinct ways that many of these young women talked about their internal conflicts with their feelings about these places. These particular stories were notable for three reasons. First, nearly all of the interviewees mentioned their impressions of Tel Aviv, and almost all of them told a story about the settler. Second, several of the students told these stories in terms of an internalized emotional conflict in response to their reactions to these particular Israeli places and people. It was rare that stories about any other component of their programs prompted such grappling. As a notable contrast, the students rarely told stories about their emotional reactions to Palestinian sites. In fact, the students did not tell many stories at all about Palestinian sites. These dynamics all contributed to the significance of their stories about Tel Aviv and the settler.

I also chose to highlight two checkpoint-related scenarios in which multiple students from Program C told considerably different stories about the same instance. First were the stories about the group crossing the border into Israel/Palestine from Jordan; second were the stories about their bus getting stopped by soldiers at a checkpoint in the West Bank. The differences among the interviewees' stories revealed many interesting insights about these students' gaze and subsequent sensemaking.

Researcher Positionality and Personal Interest

After years of professional experience facilitating and administrating critical service-learning programs in the U.S., I moved to Palestine/Israel and developed educational

programming, both for local residents and later with international tourists and religious pilgrims. My work has been grounded in critical pedagogy, which encourages program participants to consider dynamics of power — from the geopolitical to the intrapersonal — as well as reflexivity and positionality as tourists, activists, and religious professionals. Consequently, I have been interested in approaches to incorporate critical pedagogy into experiential education abroad programs. More specifically, based on the notable impact of dual-narrative tours on participants of groups I have facilitated, I am curious about whether and how intentional exposure to multiple narratives — serially and/or simultaneously — promotes intercultural learning that is both critical and humanizing.

I am a White, U.S.-American, able-bodied, cis-heterosexual woman who was raised in a Protestant Christian family but has not identified with a religious or faith-based group for the entirety of my adult life. This positionality grants me an "outsider" perspective on Palestine/Israel in many ways, and notably permits me access into many spaces within both Israeli territories and occupied Palestinian territories, where I can pass as someone who is unlikely to be treated with suspicion or discrimination. My identity is also relevant because the discourses surrounding the geopolitical conflict and occupation in this region are often framed around religious and ethnic identities with which I don't identify or affiliate directly. Therefore, although I take decisive stances on political issues concerning the region, I can project and maintain a sort of distance from not belonging to an identity group that is directly implicated in the conflicts. That is, I am both connected due to my interests, relationships, and lived experiences in the region, while also being an outsider due to my sociocultural identities. This outsider identity, combined with the degree of "connectedness" that I have gained from living and working in the region for extended amounts of time since 2010, enabled me to maintain

empathetic and sympathetic connections with people across many spectra of diverse identities. At the same time, this "connected outsider" stance simultaneously allowed me to relate to my interviewees and their positionality, while occasionally resisting the impulse toward critiquing some of their claims or evaluating elements of their narratives.

Ethical and Political Considerations

While travel to this region of the world can be a political act, so too can simply speaking about it. Sensitivities can be heightened by merely mentioning the place names of this region, which are all contested in their own right by people with various political orientations and agendas. The institutional discourses about the region are transnational in scope, and are not only deeply significant to people who identify with certain religious, ethnic, and other sociocultural groups, but they are highly contentious, contrastive, and at times, combative. Even people who admit to knowing very little about the region often have been impressed upon by the widely-held discourse that it is dangerous and full of violence. Indeed, both research and education abroad programming here can elicit emotional reactivity and suspicion of one's intent.

For these reasons, a program that aspires to humanize the perspectives of many different narratives across the region is arguably important for challenging these grand discourses that instill fear and distrust. Nevertheless, such a program also necessarily takes political stances. The focal programs in this study promoted themselves as having the intention to solicit divergent narratives from many people in the region, including activists who emphasize nonviolent "co-resistance" to the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian people and land. In addition to naming the occupation (which itself signals a particular political stance), Program C included a service-learning component with Palestinians in the West Bank. These stances are not neutral, nor do they purport to be. Criticism of such a program would be expected from across the spectra

of political ideologies invested in the region, and indeed the interviewees themselves shared various critiques with me, not only about how others felt about their programs, but also about how they themselves perceived biases in their programs' facilitation, design, and philosophical underpinnings.

In addition to the political charge that a program in Palestine/Israel bears, being physically present in that region can be stressful on emotional and psychological levels for the program participants. While participants were physically safe during programs in this region, violence of many types was proximate and could be felt in various ways, which had the potential to create psycho-emotional burdens. The constant crossing of borders — cultural, national, ecological, geopolitical — may have taken an emotional toll on participants. Moreover, it may have been difficult for participants to contend with a barrage of narratives that were not only contradictory, but also that were often laden with trauma and pain. Finally, stress can manifest from the emotional toll of being in places that are bound up in personal identities, from the embodied act of visiting sites of profound religious significance, to the distress of contending with discriminatory micro- and macroaggressions, whether directed at the interviewees or at others near them. Particularly for students with a sense of connectedness to the region and its conflict, the impact of cultural trauma can carry very real consequences in how they perceived various elements of the program, and how they may have responded to their peers as a result.

Because of this potential for stress in places that are already emotionally precarious, the imposition of qualitative research could add additional psychological and emotional risks for the participants, even by simply soliciting retrospective narratives. Such risk was mitigated through steps taken to ensure that the research (and the researcher) did not impose undue stress. Importantly, all stages of participation were voluntary, and participants could choose which

narratives and reflections to share, and which to withhold. Based on earlier conversations with program leaders and narratives from the interviewees, it seemed as though the participants who experienced emotional distress related to cultural trauma and direct exposure to micro- and macroaggressions, did not volunteer to participate as interviewees in this study.

This research consisted of voluntary interviews that asked participants to reflect upon their experience traveling and the sense they made from that experience after returning from travel. The possible risks included emotional discomfort in recalling experiences from an emotionally- and politically-charged place, that may have touched upon participants 'deeply held values and identities. Again, these risks were unlikely and minimal, especially due to self-selection among the research volunteers.

The conversational nature of the interviews instead offered many benefits to those who participated in this study. Indeed, many of them expressed how much they enjoyed reminiscing about their travels, and occasionally remarked about how their interviews prompted them to learn something new about themselves as they reflected on their past experiences and continued to make meaning from them.

Ethical Issues While Interviewing

When conducting interviews with these students, I sometimes wondered how I may have indicated encouragement for what the students said along in the vein of listening with a "smiling voice," as Dong (2018, p. 343) described her reflexive observations about her own qualitative interviews. Reflecting on her role as an interviewer, Dong expressed a sense of humility upon hearing her voice in the audio recordings, fearing that her voice as well as her perceived identities may have had a leading effect for the people she interviewed. Similarly, I worry about how my identities may have been perceived by my interviewees while they talked about sensitive

topics with respect to issues concerning politics and political correctness. Not only did I have a tendency to signal attentiveness with words that could be misunderstood as signs of agreement — “Mm-hmm,” “yeah,” “right,” and “got it,” to name a few — but I also was conscious of how I occasionally said things that could easily have been interpreted as taking a so-called “objective” stance, or how I may have overcompensated by portraying a stance of acceptance with respect to ideas I might disagree with, or even find objectionable.

Relatedly, because I am an educator around critical issues surrounding identity, stereotypes, systems of power, and other topics that related to the students’ reflections, I sometimes felt challenged to sit and listen without posing critical questions for them to (re)consider. Clearly, this instinct is counter to the task of collecting their memories and attending to how they made meaning from their experiences, both overseas and back on their campus. Nevertheless, my commitments to justice, and my own personal attachments to Palestinians, presented me with an ethical challenge at times to simply listen and attend to their narratives without revealing my discontent or discomfort through my expressions, posture, tone of voice, or other signals.

CHAPTER III

MAINTAINING DISTANCE WHILE ON THE GROUND: POSITIONING THEMSELVES AS NOT-CONNECTED OUTSIDERS

The participants of the study abroad programs in Palestine/Israel experienced the trip in vastly different ways. Their experiences were shaped not only by their sociocultural identities and individual personalities, but also in relation to a new identity that had become important for them, specific to the context of this region: connectedness to The Conflict. The degree to which the students felt connected to The Conflict had a significant impact on how they approached the travel, how they took in information, how they related to other people, and how they told their stories about their travel afterward. These findings emerged from narrative analysis of how they talked, and was discerned by how they positioned themselves with respect to The Conflict and in relationship to their peers in the program.

Importantly, this research elucidates how, based on their identities and interests, participants in these programs exhibited different sensitivities and relationships to Palestine/Israel, related largely to their sociocultural and other identities. One of the more important identities was an emergent one that was relevant to the context of this region and its conflict, and relative to other peers within the group. The eight students in this study had diverse identities, interests, and backgrounds. However, among their similarities was a shared recognition among each of them that they were outsiders who were not "connected" to Palestine/Israel. This positioning had similar effects on all of them. As I will discuss more thoroughly in the following chapter, positioning themselves as outsiders allowed these students to claim and maintain an emotional distance from the people they met and from what they observed. Moreover, this outsider distance contributed to their subdued understanding about the

emotional and political charge of this highly sensitive region. More than any of their sociocultural identities, their understanding of their identity as "outsiders" informed how they approached their learning during and after the program, and how they continued to negotiate their stance about what they had learned about the conflict in the months and years after their travel.

Whereas the concept of being a "cultural outsider" is not uncommon in scholarship concerning international education (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011), the conceptualization of "outsider" that emerged in this study is quite different. Cultural outsiders feel as though they do not fit into the cultural norms of a place that is novel to them, primarily because the norms are unfamiliar. Similarly, cultural and ethnic signifiers may contribute to a person's feeling as though they stand out in some respect, such as through their style of dress. Phenotypic differences can also raise one's awareness of not fitting in. To be sure, these interviewees recalled that they felt as though they were cultural outsiders from time to time during this these programs, particularly in Orthodox religious areas in Israeli territory and initially in the Palestinian communities where they were hosted in homestays. However, their feelings of cultural outsiderness did not figure prominently in their stories, nor did they attribute significant sensemaking to this kind of outsider feeling. Indeed, this kind of outsiderness was minimal in stark contrast to the importance that they had assigned to the consequential notion that they were outsiders to The Conflict and the Palestine/Israel region.

Naturally, the interviewees' intersecting identities provided a lens through which each of them gazed upon their program overseas. Indeed, their program facilitators foregrounded the relevance of sociocultural identities with respect to The Conflict at the heart of these programs. While these women's identities encompassed an array of diverse sociocultural backgrounds and

personal interests that informed their individual lenses — socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, hometown of origin, academic concentration, racial identity, and LGBTQ+ identity — they all had positioned themselves as being "outsiders" to this region. More specifically, they had come to understand themselves as being "outsiders" who were not connected to this region's conflict. As it happens, this context-dependent identity was critical in shaping the way they experienced and processed their time in Palestine/Israel.

These outsiders' descriptions of their experiences and their positionalities were strongly informed by their stories about remembered interactions with, and feedback from, their peers whom the interviewees categorized as being more "connected" to the region. According to the reports of these interviewees, it was clear that the students who were categorized as "Connected" and the students categorized as "Not-Connected" had vastly different experiences of, and reactions to, the program.

To illuminate how these students positioned themselves such that they gazed upon Palestine/Israel as "outsiders" to The Conflict, I begin by providing evidence that they foregrounded The Conflict as central to their understanding of the region. In addition, I suggest that these students considered The Conflict to be central to the purpose of their study abroad program, along with a focus on sociocultural identity. Then I offer evidence of how they took up the construct of "connectedness" to The Conflict vis-à-vis particular sociocultural identity groups, as it had been presented and reinforced for them from several sources. Next, I explore how the interviewees described connectedness as occurring along a continuum, such that the more personal investment a person has to the issue and the people who are impacted by The Conflict, the more emotionally connected they become. Then, I share excerpts in which these students positioned themselves as being outsiders to The Conflict, in opposition to peers in their

groups categorized as outspoken "activists" whose outspoken perspectives both provided important perspectives for many of the interviewees, while also discouraging them from contributing to program debriefs and discussions.

First, I will briefly review the most salient aspects of from Positioning Theory that informed my narrative analysis.

Positioning Themselves With and Against Other Characters

In order to discern how the interviewees ascribed new, context-dependent identities to themselves through their narratives, I analyzed their interviews by attending to how they positioned themselves in their stories, as well as in the overarching narrative arcs that they relayed. In order to discern the ways that the interviewees positioned themselves and their identities through their narratives, I especially focused on Bamberg's Level 1 and Level 2, as expanded upon by Lucius-Hoene and Depperman (Depperman, 2013b, p. 7-8) and summarized here:

Level 1a: Positioning of story-characters vis-à-vis each other; can lend voice to other characters via reported dialogues

Level 1b: Positioning of story-characters by strategic narrative design

Level 2a: Self-positioning of the teller by extra- and meta-narrative self-reflexive activities about the past from the present point of view

Level 2b: Interactional positioning by narrative design and performativity

Level 2c: Interactional positioning by meta-narrative activities between the teller and the recipient — formulating assumptions about the recipient's knowledge and evaluative stance, seeking agreement, explaining to the recipient, etc.

Level 2d: Interactional positioning by the story recipient's factual activities. By asking and responding, the recipient becomes a co-author and takes part in negotiating interactive positions

As per Level 1a, the interviewees often referred to other characters they deployed in their small stories that established how they came to understand themselves as outsiders who were not connected to The Conflict. In addition to telling stories about these other people in the third-person past tense, the interviewees frequently engaged in the performative narration technique of inserting supposed remembered dialogue with other characters in order to emphasize or validate their points. By ostensibly speaking in the voice of other characters, the interviewees would underscore their points with the supposed validation of other characters. Furthermore, this dramatization highlighted elements of their narratives that the interviewees considered to be particularly important, in addition to offering insights about emotions that they attached to these stories and lessons they took from them.

In light of how frequently the interviewees incorporated elements of narrative performance into their stories — often eliciting laughter from me in response to their entertaining presentation and meta-narrative commentary — much of my analysis relied on Lucius-Hoene and Depperman's 2b and 2c levels. In addition, in accordance with Level 1b, the interviewees were selective about which other people they included as characters who made appearances in their narratives, and were strategic about how they cast them in these stories. Collectively, they only referred to a select few people by name: their facilitators, their tour guides, a couple of their host family members, and their peers who were "most connected" to The Conflict. Otherwise, most people were nameless and obliquely positioned as background characters or as props in scenes that often centered attention onto the narrator herself. This was a consistent practice for

all of the interviewees throughout their narratives. Nevertheless, their nameless peers also often played significant roles as members of an "activist" category that served counterexamples that shaped how the interviewees constrastingly positioned themselves. This will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

In the process of discerning the properties of the identity categories that emerged for these interviewees in relation to their programs, my approach to narrative analysis was inspired by elements of Membership Categorization Analysis as exemplified by McCabe and Stokoe (2004) in their research on identity categorization with respect to touristic places. Using this ethnomethodological perspective, I drew upon clues about "the practical reasoning that members draw upon as they display their situated identities in ongoing interaction" (p. 607) through talk in interactional narrative interviews. Moreover, I attended to the ways in which "identity-categorizations worked in the ongoing construction of the 'social and moral order' in accounts and activities" (p. 607) of my interviewees, in accordance with McCabe and Stokoe's example. As I will discuss below, the interviewees in my study positioned themselves in morally "good" categories, in direct contrast to other characters who they positioned in morally "bad" categories, utilizing particular characters as their foils in service of positioning themselves in positive ways.

Before I analyze excerpts from the interview transcripts in order to explore the ways the interviewees' positioned themselves with respect to Palestine/Israel, I will first discuss narrative evidence that the region's conflict had been central to understanding the context-dependent identity categories that emerged during these programs.

Establishing Connectedness to The Conflict

By all accounts, The Conflict loomed large in these students 'imaginaries of Palestine/Israel; indeed, the *raison d'être* of their study abroad programs had been to travel to a

"conflict zone" in order to hear various perspectives about the roots of said conflict, as well as about its contemporary impacts on the daily lives of Palestinians and Israelis. Accordingly, the interviewees talked about The Conflict as if it were central to the region, such that I felt compelled to capitalize it as a proper noun in their transcripts; I will use this convention throughout this paper.

These students frequently used "The Conflict" as an abbreviation for "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," which is sometimes also referred to as "The Israeli-Arab Conflict." This shorthand not only bypasses the politically contentious implications in the choice between the terms "Palestinian" versus "Arab" in this context, but it also nods to the sense that conflict is so entrenched in this region such that it can be referred to as a proper noun. Considered from another angle, this choice of terminology lends a neutral gloss on the political conditions, since "conflict" does not point to power differentials or domination of one group over another. As a contrasting example, the conditions in Palestine/Israel could alternately be referred to as a "military occupation," terminology that reveals a stance that implicates a forceful Israeli imposition of control over Palestinian people, land, and property. As I will discuss in greater detail later in this dissertation, these students 'language choices — conscious and subconscious — reinforced their position as outsiders whose emotional distance enabled them to discuss and consider the region with an air of neutral objectivity.

Centering The Conflict

Although the interviewees shared a range of retrospective ideas about the intended objectives of these study abroad programs, they all identified a central theme of learning about The Conflict from multiple perspectives. For example, at one point Allison asserted her straightforward declaration that "we were sent there to think about The Conflict, look at The

Conflict, like, figure things out." In the interviews, I asked almost all of the students what they thought their program's purpose had been; the following excerpts offer two representative answers from Elizabeth and Molly that demonstrated how central the notion of The Conflict had been to the ways they framed their experiences.

> Elizabeth: And the purpose, I guess, even for just students overall, why they offered the trip is to, like, bring light to The Conflict, I would say. And, like, show people that what we know and see here in America, what we're told, isn't necessarily true. Or is not always the most accurate.

According to Elizabeth here, the point of the trip was to teach about The Conflict. Projecting her own viewpoint onto a generic U.S.-American perspective of "what we know and see here," she implied that what she had learned about The Conflict from physically visiting Palestine/Israel had been more "true" or more "accurate" than what she understood to be prevalent in U.S.-American discourse.

When I asked Molly to summarize her program, she said that they had prepared for the trip by studying The Conflict in relationship to other conflicts in other places or times.

> Molly: So there was a class component that went over, not just social issues in Israel and Palestine, but also in other, like, genocides and conflicts, a little bit. And focused more on The Conflict itself. And a little bit of the history, 'cause that's, you know, important.

The degree to which she had been attuned to conflict may have been reflective of her academic research and interests in sociopolitical histories of 20th century genocides. That said, this focus on conflict in general was also echoed by other interviewees who suggested that what they learned in the specific setting of Palestine/Israel could be applied to other conflict settings

elsewhere. For instance, because these programs emphasized hearing multiple perspectives from different sides of a conflict, several students noted that this practice would be useful, if not requisite, when learning about any kind of conflict scenario.

Contending With Misconceptions About The Conflict.

During their time in Palestine/Israel, the interviewees confronted stereotypes and misconceptions they had about visiting a place known as a "conflict zone." For example, they had received messages about violence endemic to The Conflict before, during, and after their programs. Among other things, their understanding that they were traveling to a dangerous place had been reinforced, in part, by their interpretations of the heightened security protocols and safeguards that their university had imposed on their trips.

> Sylvia: … the definite underlying feeling was, this [every component of the program] is for safety measures. This hostel has been vetted. This is what [the university] is allowing us to do. Like, we weren't allowed to go through a couple different gates [leading into the Old City] of Jerusalem … where there'd been stabbings years prior. And, it just — once we were there and they were like, "Oh that's the gate." You know, we're like looking around, and it's like, people are walking around everywhere.

She had recognized the degree to which every element of their program had been scrutinized in the name of safety and security for the students, from pre-approval of their hotel accommodations, to restrictions on certain public spaces. She specifically recalled that the university had forbidden her group from entering or exiting the Old City of Jerusalem through Damascus Gate, which had led her to believe that it was particularly dangerous. However, she remarked upon the contrast she felt when she had been in Jerusalem at the Damascus Gate: the

area seemed unremarkable and safe, since people were "walking around everywhere." From this story, Sylvia positioned the university as having been overreactive to exaggerated fears about threats of violence due to The Conflict.

Indeed, many of the interviewees revealed the degree to which their imaginary of Palestine/Israel (as well as "The Middle East" more broadly) was consumed by various forms of violence and oppression due to their preconceptions of The Conflict. This was particularly evident when they remarked about their surprise at how "normal" life was for local residents, as Sylvia had done in the excerpt above.

Allison had been quite forthright in describing how her assumptions about the prevalence of oppression due to The Conflict had been disproved by her experience meeting and living with Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Allison: I don't know, so like — when you come to like Israel and Palestine, you're thinking about all The Conflict, or like that's what you're focusing on. And so, you mainly think that this is what they think about all the time. But they have their own lives. So like, it's different. So it was really interesting to like, see, kind of like, how just a regular Palestinian family — within Israel — works. … And then of course we did all, like, the normal things. Like, we went grocery shopping, and we went to, like, the malls there. Kind of saw, like, daily life, as my host family lived it.

JM: … Let's start with your host family, and other things that might not have been expected, or if you can explain a little bit more about what you meant, with like "normal life."

Allison: Yeah. I think — maybe with like certain groups that are traditionally seen as oppressed or something like that, you think, like, when you see anything about their life in the news, or like even just learning about it, you don't learn about the everyday life of them, you learn about The Conflict and how that's influencing their lives. So I was really really surprised, like, people just live like us, and like, things are going on in their country, but it's like — that's not the only thing they think about. And that was really really interesting to me, because you have to realize that, like, that's just a facet of their lives, and they actually have, like, all this other stuff going on as well.

Allison had a tendency to universalize her perspective by using a grammatical second-person point of view. In this excerpt, she employed this rhetorical tactic with respect to what she apparently had assumed prior to her program, in effect attenuating her responsibility for her past beliefs that relied on stereotypes. Because she herself had been focused on conflict, oppression, and strife, she admitted to having been surprised upon realizing that her host family's daily lives were not consumed by The Conflict. In the second part of this excerpt, she attributed her prior misconceptions about Palestinians to what she had seen on the news, and from what she had learned about in classes. Because these sources had centered The Conflict, she had assumed that it had been a defining factor of people's lives in Israel/Palestine. Interestingly, she had also traveled to Palestine/Israel as a participant with Program A the prior year, but had stayed in hotels instead of in the homes of local hosts. Apparently without the quotidian interaction with a local family, that program may have also fed her imaginary about The Conflict being central to life in the region. At any rate, she reported having been "really really surprised" that people "live like us" and did "normal things," and did not solely think and talk about The Conflict.

Elizabeth had also expressed surprise about her Palestinian host family in the occupied West Bank because they had not appeared to be consumed with thoughts about the ways that their daily life was materially impacted by the restrictions of the occupation.

> Elizabeth: Like that's what surprised me, like my host dad, my host sisters, who I still keep in touch with, they don't think about it as deeply — you know, I can't say that. Like, it's their life. So they're used to it. So they don't sit there daily and think, "Ughh. I have no water. This conflict, it's terrible. Like, Israelis, we hate them. Like, we need to do something." Like — 'cause like, it's — I don't know, you can't live that way, constantly thinking about it. I mean, of course it's probably something that always goes on in their mind, but um, I don't know.

In this example, Elizabeth spoke with authority about the thoughts of her host family, based on the fact that their conversations with her were not exclusively about their problems related to The Conflict and the occupation. It seemed as though she projected her own thoughts onto her host family members, and rhetorically voiced what she had not heard them say. However, after correcting herself for making an authoritative claim about the depth of their thoughts, she proceeded to make another authoritative claim about their thoughts based only on her memory of what they might have said out loud to her. Indeed, they may or may not have had daily thoughts about how hard it was to have their water shut off, or about what they needed to do in response to the occupation and its restrictions. They may or may not have been constantly thinking about it, but because it was woven into their daily lives, as she had suggested, they did not speak about it constantly to their houseguest. Regardless, she had been surprised that the

family had not indicated that their thoughts had not been consumed by the challenges of living under occupation.

Bridget also lived with a family in the occupied West Bank, and also shared an anecdote about being surprised at the intersection of "normalcy" and a historical context of conflict. However, while her story approached conflict from an opposite angle than the others', it still underscored the tendency for these students to compartmentalize "normal life" from "conflict zone." She told me about a time when her Arabic-speaking facilitator, Rania, had joined her host family for dinner. Afterwards, Rania shared in English some summaries of the stories the family had told her in Arabic. Bridget had been very surprised to hear that her host "mama and baba" — Arabic for mom and dad — had lived through harrowing stories of hunkering down in their home with their kids and nearly getting hit by bullets that the Israeli army had shot into their living room.

Bridget: The next day, she [Rania], like, told us all these stories that we just didn't have access to because of the language barrier. And some of the more, like, incredible, like, there was one about how it was during live conflict, um, they were— it was night, and it was winter, and like, there was a hole in their wall. And our host mom and host brother were in a corner, hiding from the fire. And our host brother said that he was cold and asked for a blanket, and so his mom ran across the room to get a blanket, and tripped. And felt something go through her hair. And then she got back to him, and they escaped the house that night. And the next day they came back, and there was a bullet in her son's pillow, and that's what had gone through her hair when she had tripped. And it was just, like [pause] mind-blowing, kind of, like, that these, like,

> people who just — we were witnessing such normal lives with them, had these, like, intense stories. … So it was just so weird that we didn't have access to these stories, but that we were living so intimately with these people who, like, we called them mama and baba, and like, it was so sweet. But, yeah, it was, like, those things that I wouldn't be surprised in class hearing that kind of story. But then seeing — getting to know them just as, like, normal people, and then hearing those kinds of stories, was a completely different perspective on it.

Because she had come to know her hosts as "normal people," Bridget had been shocked to learn that they had lived through such dramatic, life-threatening violence. She said that the story itself may not have shocked her had she heard about it in the context of a class about The Conflict. However, because she had not met her host family under the pretext of being" victims of violent conflict," and instead met them as her sweet hosts, she had been surprised. It is worth noting that she had not expressed surprise about the fact that this family had endured such intense violence, indicating that she had maintained awareness of the violent context of The Conflict. Instead, the aspect that had surprised her was that she had not had access to these stories, even though she had been "living so intimately" with them. In this regard, her story was less about the family, or even about The Conflict, but about Bridget herself.

These interviewees' observations of the normalcy of their Palestinian homestay hosts and Israeli city life suggested that their encounters in both Palestinian and Israeli territories challenged their previous stereotypes about the region being awash in conflict, strife, overt oppression, and acts of violence or war. It also may have challenged their presumptions about how protracted conflict impacts people and their communities. These anecdotes and recollections

also underscored the ways that The Conflict had been a central focus for these students with regard to how they understood and related to the region and their study abroad program.

Positioning Vis-à-Vis Connectedness to The Conflict

Based on what all the interviewees shared, an identity construct emerged within the groups that positioned people according to the notion of their "Connectedness"[7] to The Conflict. Although the interviewees identified several psychological elements of Connectedness through the way they talked during their interviews, the preeminent determinant associated with Connectedness was membership in certain sociocultural identity categories. There were five specific ethnocultural identities that interviewees discussed as inherently bestowing a person with Connectedness to The Conflict, and therefore to the region more generally. As I will discuss at length in this section, the participants received many direct and indirect messages about how these ethnocultural identity memberships were considered to be particularly salient to this region and its conflict, and about the meaning and implications of positioning oneself as "Connected" or "Not-Connected."

The students 'constructed centrality of The Conflict played a defining role in how they positioned themselves while describing their experiences before, during, and after their program. In addition, their study abroad programs placed a strong emphasis on sociocultural identity, especially in light of the programs' exploration of multiple and contested narratives about the region and its conflict, many that were rooted in the following sociocultural identities: being Arab, Israeli, Jewish, Muslim, and/or Palestinian. Accordingly, belonging to one or more of these identity groups imbued a person with an assumed affiliation with The Conflict.

[7] From this point forward in this dissertation, I will capitalize Connected and Connectedness in order to distinguish this construct vis-à-vis a relationship to the region and The Conflict from other types of connection.

Assumptions about how these particular sociocultural identities are bound up in The Conflict abound and are widespread well beyond the curriculum of these study abroad programs. Indeed, many of these students received messages from encounters throughout Palestine/Israel and in their home communities about how these identities confer Connectedness on some, while otherwise being positioned as Not-Connected invites its own set of assumptions.

Because the interviewees understood their sociocultural identities to lack connection to The Conflict, as well as to the prevalent cultures in the region, they described themselves alternately as being "not connected", or as being "outsiders." In fact, five of the eight interviewees used the term "outsider" when referring to themselves in relation to Palestine/Israel and The Conflict. Likewise, all eight participants positioned themselves and others along a continuum of Connectedness, primarily according to membership in the five sociocultural identities that were widely deemed to convey personal connection to the region; to this end, most of them used terminology of "connection" or being "connected," as will be evident in excerpts throughout this chapter. Although these terms were used frequently, they did not have clear, agreed-upon definitions. Rather, they were constructed through talk (McCabe & Stokoe, 2004), and their meanings emerged based upon how the students used these terms to position themselves and others within their narratives. As such, narrative analysis inspired by Membership Categorization Analysis and Bamberg's (1997) levels within positioning theory (as revised by Lucius-Hoene and Depperman according to Depperman, 2013b) discerned the nuances of these terms according to the ways that the interviewees used them to position themselves and others, including and especially their peers in their cohort.

This Not-Connected positionality was imbued with meaning. It not only had an impact on how they described their experiences and subsequent learning from the program, but it also had

implications for dynamics among peers within their program group. In addition, positioning themselves as Not-Connected outsiders also shaped particular limits and opportunities with regard to how they chose to engage with issues relevant to Palestine/Israel upon returning back to the U.S., including the ways they described and framed their actions, activism, or lack thereof.

Understanding The Conflict Through the Lens of Sociocultural Identity

The Conflict is predicated on narratives related to ethnic and religious identity, namely among ethnic groups that include Israelis, Arabs, and Palestinians, and religious and ethnoreligious identities that include Muslims and Jews. It is important to note that there are many additional ethnic, religious, and ethnoreligious identity groups that are implicated in and impacted by The Conflict. However, the two primary people-groups associated with this modern-day conflict, Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, ground their collective narratives in millennia of connection to the region, with respect to religion, family heritage, and other forms of ethnic identity. In addition, the contemporary conflict that relates to the founding of the state of Israel has involved other regional Arab ethnicities and nationalities, beyond those who identified as Palestinians. Furthermore, The Conflict is often misunderstood as an oversimplified religious contention between Jews and Muslims over holy sites and religious history.

According to these and other common (mis)conceptions about Palestine/Israel, the interviewees associated five sociocultural categories with Connectedness to The Conflict. They came to understand that a person is presumed to be Connected if they belonged to one or more of the following categories:[8] Arab, Israeli, Jewish, Muslim, and/or Palestinian.

The interviewees indicated that their understanding about Connectedness came from many sources over a range of time before, during, and after their program. Several of the

[8] These are listed in alphabetical order, and are not mutually exclusive

interviewees acknowledged that their study abroad programs themselves centered issues of sociocultural identity, in general and also with respect to their significance to Palestine/Israel and The Conflict. For example, Allison said that they had discussed the collective identities of Israelis and Palestinians, as well as their own sociocultural identities.

Allison: …actually we talked a lot about identity, too …

JM: On the trip?

Allison: Yeah, yeah. But like, I mean, we talked about Israeli identity, like, Palestinian identity. And what that entails. But, yeah. Also our identities, 'cause like, we talked about coming in someplace and being very different.

She did not elaborate on what Israeli or Palestinian identity "entails," nor did she offer specific examples of how these ethnic identities related to The Conflict. As for the program participants' identities, she claimed that these discussions had often pertained to considerations of intercultural competence as visitors — and cultural outsiders — to a place with culturally different norms and expectations. Her choice of using the word "we," here, revealed that she had projected her own Not-Connected identity onto the entire group, even though her group had comprised a variety of sociocultural identities such that some students may not have felt "very different" while in Palestine/Israel.

Molly also learned that sociocultural identity was important to The Conflict because of how her program had been framed.

Molly: … identity is a big thing. Like, in this Conflict.

JM: Can you say more about that? What you mean when you say that?

Molly: Well, OK so, this is also kinda framed by the class that Lucy taught [as a precursor to the trip], was very identity-based. And a lot of the conversations

> we did have [during the trip] were very identity-based. … And she also did ask us, like, what is … your identity related to this Conflict. And like, what are your biases based on your experience as X, Y, and Z [identity categories]?

These study abroad programs were geared toward identity in that the student participants considered their own sociocultural identities through discussion and writing activities prior to the trip. Molly in particular had described how transformative it had been for her to recognize that she had biases, generally and with respect to Palestine/Israel. She and other students also noted that debriefs and reflections during their trip had often focused on sociocultural identity, especially in relationship to the overarching narratives of Israelis and Palestinians that animated The Conflict.

Positioning Peer Group Members as Connected

The ethnic and religious identities of their colleagues and peers in the program played a large role in shaping their understanding of Connectedness. The interviewees used terminology of Connectedness to describe their peers in the group, and often noted their peers' Connectedness as a contrast to their own Not-Connectedness. For example, in the following excerpt, Molly noted her own lack of Connectedness in comparison with her peers who were of Lebanese or Palestinian descent.

> Molly: I didn't have a personal, like, connection, like some of the people who did talk a lot, like, of Lebanese descent, or of Palestinian descent.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, Molly noted that these peers in her group — in this case with ethnic identities that were considered to be Connected to The Conflict — spoke a lot in their group discussions. This excerpt is also notable in that she directly associated these sociocultural ethnic identities with a personal connection to the issues at hand.

Another illustrative excerpt came from my first interview with Allison, when I inquired about her assessment of the program cohort.

JM: Can you tell me more about the group? Like, kind of generally, collectively?

Allison: Yeah. There was actually a Palestinian whose parents grew up — or, grandparents I think — grew up and lived in Israel now. Or — I think Israel? I'm not sure. Israel or whatever. Like, they were there. Israel or the West Bank. I know it's a big difference, but they were there. [laugh] And so she was definitely connected to it.

When I asked about the group as a whole, Allison began her answer by specifying a particular student from her group. Almost as a non sequitur, she shared that this student's grandparents were living in historic Palestine at the time of their program. Then, based on this information about this person's family, albeit imprecise, she positioned this particular student as "definitely" Connected to the region. Through this unprompted sharing about this groupmate's family, Allison alluded to varying degrees of Connectedness: according to Allison's assessment, this particular student was not only Connected through her ethnic identity, but also through her relatives who live in the region, so Allison positioned her as being so Connected to the region that it was unquestionable.

Several of the interviewees noted that the program facilitators from their university were Connected. Rania was a Palestinian who lived and worked in the U.S., and Lucy was a Jewish American. When Elizabeth had discussed her facilitators' identities, she also articulated her implicit understanding about what Connectedness entailed beyond simply ethnicity. Here, she elaborated about how Connectedness indicated a personalized lived experience of The Conflict.

Elizabeth: I mean, it's their story. You know, 'cause Lucy is Jewish, has been to Israel, lived there for a little bit. Rania is Palestinian, her family's from the land, like I told you, [a significant place in Israeli territory] is her family's land. … I mean, this is their lives and their stories. … Like I said, they're so closely connected with this that they probably, like, experienced that suffering that we were witnessing. … It's not namsy-pamsy kinda people, or, random Americans taking us over there to, like, sightsee and stuff. 'Cause they don't know what's— I mean, they might know what's goin' on, but like, they don't, like, *know*. Like, they don't *live* what's going on. Every day through their identities.

Elizabeth imagined that these kinds of purported identity-based connections to this land equated to "living what's going on" in relation to The Conflict. In this excerpt, she suggested that the facilitators' sense of connection to the region went beyond simply their identities. Rather, she acknowledged that their identities conferred Connectedness, which therefore implied that they experienced suffering due to The Conflict, according to her logic. On the other hand, she contrasted this perspective with her own, in which she had merely witnessed what her Connected facilitators had more fully experienced. This distinction between observation and experience will be explored later in this chapter and in the next.

Discerning Their Own Not-Connectedness

Some of the interviewees shared anecdotes about instances when people external to their program had reinforced the notion that their sociocultural identities were attributed with Not-Connectedness. These interactions often involved a challenge as to why the student would be interested in a region to which they were Not-Connected. As per Level 1a of positioning theory

as described by Lucius-Hoene and Depperman (Depperman, 2013b), these students chose to quote others in order to reiterate their own assumptions with respect to Connectedness.

Messages about Connectedness from Local Palestinians and Israelis

A few of the students recounted instances when local Israeli and Palestinian residents questioned their motivations for participating in a study abroad program in Israel/Palestine. These recollections not only reinforced the notion that certain sociocultural categories conveyed Connectedness, but they also informed the interviewees' self-positioning as Not-Connected. An underlying assumption behind these anecdotes seemed to be that people with a Connected ethnic identity had a reason to be interested in visiting and studying the region, whereas people without Connected identities needed to justify their interest. As in the excerpt below from Molly, this assumption was often implied when people had expressed confusion about why these students would be interested in the region if they were not Connected to it.

> Molly: And also people would ask us, they were like, "You're not Jewish, you're not Arab, like, why are you here?" Like, "Why are you studying this?"

Presumably, Molly felt that people scrutinized her presence in the country because she had no ethnic connection to the region to the extent that she was not Jewish nor Arab. By including these two ethnic descriptors in her quotation intended to exemplify common questions she had been asked, she recalled that these had been the two identity categories that others had associated with connectedness to that region.

A few of the interviewees expressed the notion that "being American" was not sufficient to justify their interest in The Conflict, much less their presence in the region. Linda noted that she had felt as though some people she met in Palestine/Israel had been confused about why a group of U.S.-American students were visiting.

Linda: One of the more beneficial things, I think, of our trip was hearing people, like meeting people, talking to people. And like. At that point, we had met our host families, I had met some other host families, too. We had, like, met random people who were just like, "Why are there a bunch of Americans here?"

As she had listed some of the people she had encountered while traveling, she said that it had been important for her to meet and interact with local people, especially the families who hosted the students. Then, as a tangential remark, she added that they had met "random people" — apparently the people who had not been their hosts or speakers — whom she had perceived as having wondered why U.S.-Americans would be visiting. By framing her group as "a bunch of Americans," she elided the sociocultural diversity within the group. Indeed, by overlooking Connected students here, she emphasized the point that "U.S.-American" was a Not-Connected sociocultural category, and claimed that it was their U.S.-Americanness that had elicited confusion and questions from locals about their collective presence in Palestine/Israel.

Sylvia centered her U.S.-American identity as well, positioning it as a Not-Connected identity that had made her feel unwelcome. She too had talked about feeling as though local Palestinians and Israelis had raised questions about why her group was in the country, and what they had been studying. However, she attributed that confusion to the group as a whole and to the program itself, and had not indicated that local people had challenged her individual presence.

JM: Were you ever told, directly or indirectly, that you shouldn't be there?

Sylvia: … Then there are passive things, like people are like, "Well why are you here? What are you doing? Oh, conflict education." They were just kinda, like, in a normalized society, people are like, "What do you mean? Like, are

you here to study us?" Like, my host family never quite understood why we were there. So [pause] maybe, like n— like, yeah, so directly, I *was* told that I shouldn't be there. And then like, the lack of being able to justify why I was, and then people got confused, like, that is a different kind of off-putting, like to have to talk about it.

JM: Yeah. And those were both collective, right? Like, the program, why is the program here? Or, you shouldn't be here, 'cause—

Sylvia: Right, right. Like, no one looked at me and they were like, no— like, I never — [sigh]. No one ever, like, came up to me and was like, "Hey. You. American girl. Get outta here."

JM: Right. You specifically

Sylvia: Yeah. No one ever really said that to me

Sylvia insinuated that locals had questioned her presence because she did not identify with one of the Connected sociocultural identity categories. Then, she was questioned about the topic of her program, and suggested that her answer of "conflict education," was not a satisfying answer for her local interlocutors. She reasoned that they were in a "normalized[9] society" — perhaps meaning that The Conflict had been so entrenched that it was normal in their context — and so they had been confused to be positioned as objects in such a study. Sylvia reinforced this sense of discomfort from being objects when she voiced a quote on behalf of these generic local people: "Are you here to study us?" This further supports her positioning as an outsider who studied the locals without a good reason to "justify" her presence. Instead of focusing on how

[9] "Normalization" is a word that is commonly used in discourse concerning Palestinian-Israeli partnerships and dialogues. A few of the students used variants of this term during their interviews, but in inconsistent ways that were not aligned with its use in more broad discourse. As such, it is difficult to discern Sylvia's intended meaning in this case.

this may have made her local hosts uncomfortable, she focused on her own discomfort when she reiterated her point that she found these kinds of questions to be "off-putting" such that she had the impression that she should not be there.

Messages about Connectedness from People on Their Campus

Molly received similar messages about Connectedness from people in the U.S., especially on her campus. While reflecting on her re-entry back to campus after traveling, she said that people in the U.S. had made comparable assumptions about her sociocultural identity when they heard that she had studied abroad in Israel/Palestine. She noted that many people had asked if she were Jewish.

Molly: 'Cause a lot of people didn't even know what The Conflict was. Or they'd be like, "Are you Jewish?" And I was like, "No, I'm not Jewish." [laugh] Like, come on. [laugh] And, like [pause] yeah, that was always a question, that was interesting.

JM: Oh yeah?

Molly: It was like, no other reason to go to Israel/Palestine unless you're Jewish. Or like, or Palestinian, like. Yeah.

JM: Yeah, interesting. That's what other people would assume or ask or?

Molly: Yeah! Yeah, yeah. It was like, "No I'm just studyin'. [laugh] Learnin'." [laugh]

According to the questions she remembered being asked after returning from her travel, Molly got the impression from several people — "that was always a question" — that they had assumed that interest in traveling to that region was tied to one's Jewish identity. This assumption carried the implication that Jewishness is not only Connected to Israel, but also to

interest in that region. Moreover, Molly suggested that people conveyed a sense of disbelief that someone who is not Jewish would be interested in that region; her exasperation with this common assumption was expressed in her response, laughing as she said, "Like, come on." Although it seemed as though most people questioning her in this way assumed she were Jewish, by adding "or Palestinian" to her recollection of people's assumptions about reasons to travel to this region, she acknowledged the notion that Palestinianness would also justify travel to Palestine/Israel in the minds of others, and that this identity category could also be interpreted as Connected.

Interest in The Conflict Without Self-Interested Connectedness

By including small stories that recounted times when unnamed characters questioned the interviewees' presence in spite of a lack of sociocultural Connectedness, the women who told these stories used them not only to establish their Non-Connectedness, but also to share that they had been asked to justify their interest in a region in which they had no apparent self-interest, at least by way of assumptions related to their their ethnoreligious identities.

In fact, a theme throughout several of the the interviews was that, because the interviewees did not identify with any of the Connected ethnic or religious categories, they felt as though they needed to explain or prove their interest in the study abroad program, as well as their interest in the region and its conflict more broadly. While this was implied by several students, Molly was the interviewee who told the most stories about being challenged in this way. When I asked her to elaborate, her answer shed light on why she thought this may have been the case. In her first interview, she talked about how her own Not-Connectedness was reinforced by Jewish Americans from her university who confronted her.

JM: I'm curious about what you just said, too, about feeling like you're not, like, strongly connected. … Where do you feel like you got that message?

Molly: Mostly from the people — I mean, like, Jewish people who I have heard talk, or I've talked to. Or people, usually that side of The Conflict, are like, being like, "Oh, are you gonna solve The Conflict?" Like, like, "Why do you care?" And like, stuff like that.

Conversations that she had overheard and participated in since returning from the trip had reinforced her lack of sociocultural Connectedness, especially when she was asked to justify her interest in the region. She recalled that Jewish people or other supporters of Israel ("that side of The Conflict") had reiterated this message by questioning her interest in the region as if they were mocking her. To illuminate this point, she quoted two common questions she appeared to resent: being asked if she was interested in The Conflict with an intention to "solve" it, and being asked simply why she cared. When she voiced the question about "solving The Conflict," her tone implied other people considered her interest to be silly or worthy of derision. That is, she framed this dialogue as if these questions were not asked out of earnest curiosity about her interests, but instead were a technique others used to dismiss her interest in the region as an outsider. Perhaps this assumption also implied that outsiders tended to focus their attention on The Conflict, and that people with Connected identities might have different perspectives on the region that are not Conflict-centered.

Because so many of the interviewees mentioned their impulse to defend their interest in studying abroad in Palestine/Israel and in learning about the region, it seemed that this was a collective response to frequent challenges about their Non-Connected identities that they had faced before, during, and after their programs. Because they were repeatedly asked to justify

their interest in Palestine/Israel, these questions reinforced the ways that students understood their ethnic and religious identities to be Not-Connected to this region and its issues, even after they had returned from programs that increased their sense of connection to Palestine/Israel due to firsthand observations, experiences, knowledge, and bolstered opinions about The Conflict.

It was not just other people who assumed that identity predicted and presumed interest in the region; the students themselves talked as though they believed that Connected identity was sufficient to validate a person's interests in the region. In part because these Not-Connected students felt pressure to account for their own interest in The Conflict, they received the message that Connected people had legitimate concerns that were motivated by their identity-based self interests. Accordingly, these students believed that, as outsiders, they needed to legitimate their interest and opinions about the region and its sociopolitical issues.

Accordingly, when some of them explained their interest, they did so as if they were interested in spite of their Not-Connected identity. For example, Allison volunteered the following identity-based caveats when she told me about how she had become interested in these issues.

> Allison: I definitely, like, found it very interesting and it became like one of the things in the world that I cared about the most. So like I'm [studying] international relations. So I'm really interested in international conflict. And that's the conflict that I am really really interested in. Even though I have no real connection with it. Like, I'm not Jewish, I'm not Palestinian, I'm not Muslim. Like, any of these things.

Allison seemed to subscribe to the notion that a Connected identity would, in itself, justify interest in The Conflict. Therefore, when she told me about her special interest in this

particular conflict, she decided to add that her interest was strong in spite of the fact that she was not a member of a Connected identity group.

Similarly, Diana shared that she surprised herself by becoming interested in The Conflict, even though her identities would imply that she is Not-Connected.

Diana: So one of the students in our group was Palestinian. And the rest of us were of, you know, different backgrounds. So it's kind of a weird feeling, like, being so passionate about the subject, but not having, you know, the physical, like genetic ties to it. You know, I wanna talk about it, learn about it. And like, be active about it. But, I never would've expected, like, something that wasn't — you know I'm not a part of either of these communities. I never would've expected it to matter that much to me.

JM: So you feel like it does, though?

Diana: Definitely! Yeah.

Like many of the other interviewees, Diana positioned herself in contrast to a person with Connected identity; in this case, a Palestinian peer from her program group. Then, she used the term "background" to describe identity categories such as ethnicity or nationality, based on her comparative reference to Palestinianness. Next, speaking in the present tense, she described caring about "the subject" as a "weird feeling" because she considered herself an outsider to the two communities, presumably meaning Palestinians and Israelis. Reflecting back to her expectations prior to participating in this program, she suggested that her interest in The Conflict had been an unanticipated surprise.

Referring to Connectedness as being "physical, like, genetic ties" to Palestine/Israel, Diana alluded to the idea that this sense of connection may be deeper than one's ethnic heritage,

and instead was more along the lines of a connection through biological heritage. While this may expose her misunderstanding about the definition of ethnicity, she made her point: she was interested in talking and learning about this Conflict even though she considered herself to be an outsider.

Sociocultural Identities That Were Not Positioned to Confer Connectedness

Despite being positioned as Not-Connected, many of the interviewees' sociocultural identities were arguably connected to the conflict in Israel/Palestine to varying degrees. The U.S.-American government has had tremendous involvement in The Conflict for decades, as have U.S.-American interest groups including Christian Zionists. The Orientialism of imperial interests and colonists from Europe implicates notions of White supremacy that are present in contemporary politics in the region. Apart from the framing of conflict, this area is considered to be historically important and holy for Christians, as well as for other religions like the Bahá'í Faith. This corner of the world has been inhabited by people and ruled over by empires for millennia, and so it is special to people with academic or lay interests in history, architecture, geopolitics, and archeology. In addition, this small region contains vast ecological diversity and so people with related interests may also feel a sense of connection. Nevertheless, based on the many messages that students got about this region and its conflict, they did not associate any other sociocultural identity group with an automatic sense of Connectedness. I will discuss three sociocultural groups that could ostensibly be candidates for conferring Connectedness, but that were rejected or neglected by the interviewees.

U.S. Citizenship

As the students positioned themselves as Not-Connected to The Conflict, some of them offered one primary exception as to how their identity was bound up in The Conflict: their U.S.-

American nationality. Four of the students mentioned said that, as U.S. citizens, their interest in the region was warranted because of U.S. governmental support of the Israeli government. Based on the accounts of several of interviewees, their program facilitators and speakers had discussed the role of U.S.-American involvement in the Conflict from a geopolitical perspective. Also, these students were cognizant of privileges afforded by their U.S. passports, as I will discuss at length in the next chapter. However, perhaps due in part to the aforementioned feedback they had perceived from people who questioned U.S.-Americans' presence and interest, they ultimately did not consider their national identity as U.S.-Americans to be an element of Connectedness. Overall, their analysis of this was limited, and also stopped short of motivating them with a sense of responsibility to take action or interrogate the extent of their own Connectedness to The Conflict.

For example, Molly dismissed a meaningful connection from her U.S. citizenship, even while admitting that it bestowed some degree of association with The Conflict:

> Molly: When I was there, I also was like, I'm not really a part of this Conflict, other than I'm an American citizen and America funds a lot of this situation.

While this statement acknowledged a U.S. connection, her emphasis was her belief that she was "not really a part of this Conflict." Her focus on the governmental role of "funder" served to shift responsibility away from her as an individual citizen.

Although Diana shared a bit about her reaction to learning that the U.S. "gave Israel a lot of weapons," she did not make any claims about her U.S. citizenship as an element of Connectedness to The Conflict.

> Diana: So I remember … one of our learning sessions on the farm, we'd talked about U.S. involvement. It's so interesting! And convoluted. I guess everything is.

Yeah, they talked about how we gave Israel a lot of weapons, things like that. And we're so advanced, like, military-wise? And so in my opinion, unnecessarily so? Like, why are we giving them these crazy weapons? I remember, thinking about that a lot more, I hadn't thought about it, you know, previous to that conversation, where they told us about it. Because our tax money, you know, crafting these weapons and then giving them very strategically to different, [sigh], nations around the world. And all of that. Yeah, and I just think the thought of, like, war and weapons and all of that just makes me uneasy generally, and it makes— especially so when it's, you know, like, taxpayer money.

In this small story, Diana described that she had first learned about geopolitical connections between the U.S. and Israel during her program, and her memories about weapons exchange stood out the most for her. Although she speaks about the U.S. in terms of "we" and "our," she conveyed her general unease with taxpayer money funding "war and weapons" without connecting herself to these acts, much less to the consequences for people in Israel/Palestine (or elsewhere). This analysis was not self implicating, perhaps in part because she did she seem to identify strongly with her U.S.-Americanness.

Paige claimed a somewhat stronger personal complicity as a taxpayer in the midst of her narrative about her perceptions of the limits of boycotting U.S.-American businesses and institutions that profit from the occupation.

Paige: Like, it's just— it's all around me all of the time, and whether I like it or not, I'm connected to it because I'm an American citizen, because my tax dollars

go to Israel and they go to the IDF.[10] I am responsible for what happens, in some way. Even if it's a small way, I'm still responsible.

Of all the interviewees, Bridget had indicated that her U.S. citizenship may have instilled some sense of responsibility vis-à-vis The Conflict. She repeatedly credited her realization about this connection to an American-Palestinian speaker who had spoken to her group.

Bridget: The American-Palestinian who we talked to, who lives there, said the U.S. has a huge stake in this, and that because I'm partly[11] American, I do have some sort of responsibility for what's going on.

Like the others, she acknowledged a relationship between the acts of a state and the attendant responsibilities of its citizens, which may further imply assumptions about the ways in which citizens of democratic nations bear some responsibility for the actions of their governments. Nevertheless, she did not claim that such a "responsibility for what's going on" changed her ideas about not being connected to The Conflict, nor her positionality as an outsider. Moreover, by claiming only partial U.S. citizenship because of her dual citizenship status, she seemed to relieve herself of a sense of full responsibility.

Christianity

As another interesting omission, the interviewees rarely referenced their personal Connectedness to The Conflict in terms of their own religious identities. Most of these students did not identify strongly with a religious affiliation, although many of them mentioned being raised in a family that affiliated with a denomination of western Christianity, either as Catholics or Protestants. In fact, several of the students made it clear that they, personally, were not religious at all. Regardless, none of them suggested that any sort of affiliation with Christianity

[10] IDF is the English-language abbreviation for the Israeli Defense Forces, the military forces of the State of Israel.
[11] Bridget had dual citizenship.

was Connected with The Conflict, even though Christians refer to this region as "the Holy Land" due to its religious and historical significance. The participants were not unaware of the Christian sites in the region; after all, they spoke of their visits to Christian churches, and four of these students even stayed in the homes of Christian Palestinians near Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity. A couple of the nonreligious interviewees even remarked about how fortunate they felt to have the opportunity to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem because of its importance to believers. So it would have been reasonable for them to conceptually link Christian identity to Israel/Palestine. Nevertheless, none of the interviewees associated Christianity with Connectedness, nor did any of them offer analysis of the role of Christians or Christianity vis-à-vis The Conflict. This seemed to reflect the notion that Connectedness was related less to the region and more to The Conflict and its common (mis)conceptualization as a territorial and religious dispute between Jews and Muslims.

Whiteness

Finally, none of the interviewees attributed any sense of Connection to their own racial identity, whether they identified as White or multiracial. Although many of them referred to their respective race during their interviews, thus not denying their racial identity, none of them offered analysis of how Whiteness may be connected to the history or contemporary circumstances of The Conflict or the region writ large. Granted, this may require a sophisticated analysis of global Whiteness that may be unfamiliar to these women. However, it is not uncommon for discourses of Israeli settler colonialism and U.S. imperialism to appear in critiques of The Conflict, as well as in discussions of Orientalism more broadly. That said, it is likely that these very short three-week programs were already saturated with intellectual and emotional stimulation such that the complicity of Whiteness was not a topic that was broached.

Regardless, the interviewees did not associate their racial identity with any implication of Connectedness.

Implications of Connectedness

Due to the various messages the students had gleaned from multiple sources, all of the interviewees talked about how they were personally Not-Connected to this region and The Conflict. That said, based upon narrative analysis of their talk, their collective understanding of Connectedness seemed to extend beyond the outwardly-apparent level of not belonging to the five sociocultural identity categories associated with Connectedness. Indeed, these sociocultural categories were proxies because they implied various underlying elements of understanding — or personally experiencing — the impact of The Conflict upon people's lives. These interviewees offered hints and allusions to these elements as they described their own interests in The Conflict, in spite of not belonging to any of the Connected sociocultural identities.

According to the ways that the interviewees talked and thus revealed how they positioned themselves and others, a notion of Connectedness emerged as if it were a continuum along which a person could progress. These students ultimately positioned themselves as becoming more Connected due to their participation in the program, based on certain elements of Connectedness that they had indirectly identified. I derived the elements listed in Figure 3.1 from the excerpts in this chapter, through which interviewees indirectly described what Connectedness entailed when they talked about why they themselves were Not-Connected. Some of these elements were also offered up to describe their ideologically committed peers who did not identify with one of the five Connected sociocultural identities.

Figure 3.1

Continuum of Connectedness to The Conflict

Not Connected ⟷ More Connected

Elements of Connectedness

- Informed, knowledgeable about The Conflict
- Emotional, embodied sensitivity to sites, issues
- Self-interest, personal consequences from developments related to The Conflict
- Familiarity with cultural norms of people-groups within the region
- Time spent visiting or living in the region
- Relatives in or from Palestine/Israel
- Relationships with people in or from Palestine/Israel
- Personal investment in issues related to The Conflict (e.g., psychological, emotional, material, financial)

Even though the interviewees sometimes used terminology of Connectedness as if it were a binary construct, through their speech about being more or less Connected, and also about becoming more Connected over time, they actually revealed that they thought of it more as a continuum. They implied that they could become more Connected over time as they accumulate elements of Connectedness. These elements of Connectedness do not represent an exhaustive list. Rather, this list represents elements that had been indexed in the narratives of the interviewees, often implicitly.

It is worth noting that each of these elements exists along its own spectrum; that is, a person is not either knowledgeable or not knowledgeable, but can have different degrees of knowledge about many different aspects related to The Conflict.

I envision these elements as discrete but overlapping such that they confer Connectedness in a cumulative sense. This list is not intended to imply prescribed stages of progression or any order of importance. One element does not necessarily precede another.

One of the more direct expositions of this distinction was noted in the following example, when Bridget named certain elements that Connected her to The Conflict, such as knowledge about and relationships with people from the region.

> Bridget: I think I also struggle with not having a personal connection to the situation. Like, I do have friends from there, and opinions, and like, studied the situation a lot. But not having, like, not being Jewish, or Palestinian, or even religious, I feel like I'm kind of an outsider, which both makes me much more conscious of, and careful with what I express or say.

According to Bridget's analysis, she was aware of her positionality as an "outsider" when she spoke about The Conflict. She first associated a "personal connection to the situation" with Connectedness via ethnic and religious sociocultural identities. She then retracted this when she listed some ways that she had, in fact, developed a connection to The Conflict, through opinions about the conflict, knowledge from studying the issues, and having friends from Israel/Palestine.

Within a framework in which Connectedness is conceptualized across a continuum, a person may become more Connected through various routes that enhance one or multiple elements of Connectedness. Therefore, as a result of participating on the program, the interviewees increased their Connectedness to The Conflict through learning more information,

through meeting and forming relationships with Palestinians and Israelis, and through simply visiting the region.

This positioning was meaningful for these interviewees, as they had conceptualized context-dependent identities for themselves with respect to the setting and focus of this program. By positioning themselves as Not-Connected outsiders, they framed how they observed and experienced the program, and they rationalized their political stances about Palestinian human rights. Furthermore, this identity influenced their interactions with others, especially with their peers in their cohort groups. In fact, the interviewees had bolstered their outsider identities by positioning themselves in opposition to a cadre of their Connected peers, whom many of them identified as being "activists." I will address how they crafted this distinction in the next section.

Positioning Themselves as Outsiders

In addition to positioning themselves as relatively Non-Connected in comparison to some of their peers in their program, several of the interviewees also positioned themselves in opposition to a group of their more Connected peers. However, no one used the terminology of "insiders" during their interviews. Rather, they considered their outsider identities to be more in opposition to their peers they designated as "activists." This is not an intuitive move, nor does it follow logic according to linguistic meanings or the words. Instead, the moral qualities that they ascribed to these two membership categories were in opposition to each other. Whereas they positioned the so-called "activists" as exhibiting somewhat objectionable personality traits due to their beliefs that were intolerant of ideological difference, they positioned themselves as being relatively good and even noble in their intentions to humanize all sides of The Conflict. For interviewees from Programs B and C, this division within their cohort groups had significant implications for how the interviewees experienced their study abroad programs as a whole.

In a sense, positioning themselves as Not-Connected to the Conflict had been *descriptive* for the interviewees: largely because they did not belong to certain sociocultural identity categories, they therefore understood themselves as Not-Connected. On the other hand, positioning themselves as "outsiders" also had a *determinative* effect. It conveyed meaning about how they interpreted their experience and their place in the program, in addition to how they understood politics related to Palestine/Israel. The outsider position simultaneously reflected their sense of personal and emotional distance that resulted from their Not-Connectedness, while it also reinscribed a sense of distance from the issue and the people it impacted.

When they described themselves as outsiders to The Conflict, the interviewees often used the narrative strategy of positioning themselves *in opposition to* other characters in their stories, consistent with elements of Membership Categorization Analysis as described and exemplified by McCabe and Stokoe (2004). It was interesting that they did not position themselves in opposition to people who lived in Palestine/Israel, who could clearly be considered to be "insiders."[12] If anything, several interviewees suggested that local Palestinian and Israeli activists operated with more nuance than the US activists in their cohort peer groups. Accordingly, they distinguished themselves as in opposition to this subset of their peers who conveyed strong political and discursive ideologies in support of Palestine and the struggle for Palestinian liberation.

In the interviewees' stories about how they had experienced their programs, the interviewees themselves were in the starring roles. However, the next most prominent characters in these stories were their peers who had conveyed strong ideological support for Palestinian liberation politics, since they had significantly impacted the interviewees' experience and

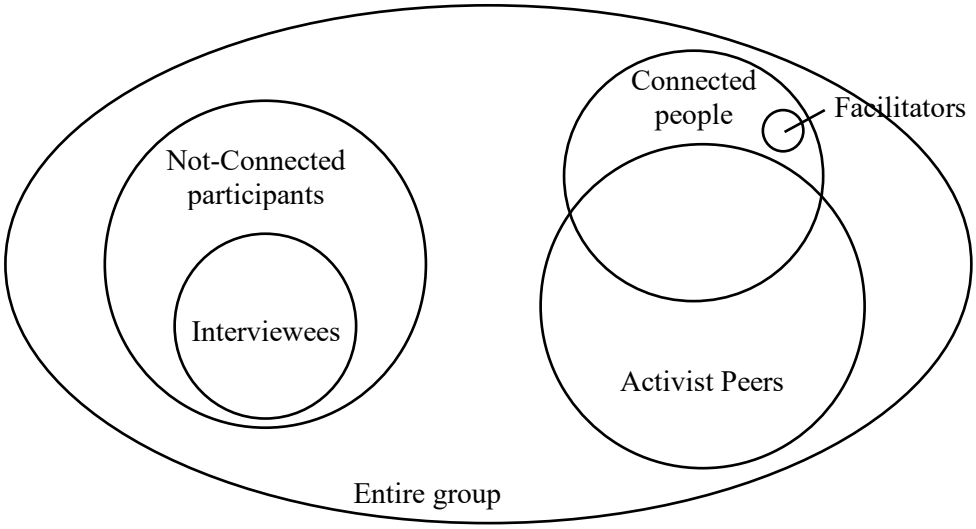
[12] The participants never used the term "insider" to describe any characters in their stories during their interviews.

memories, so much so that they often played the role of the foil. Adopting the nomenclature of several of the interviewees from Programs B and C, I will refer to this subset as the "Activist Peers." I will again use the convention of capitalizing this term in reference to these peers because the interviewees distinguished them from other activists they met in Palestine/Israel.

The diagram in Figure 3.2 provides a rough approximation of how these subsets had been perceived and described by the interviewees from Programs B and C. Although it seemed that many of the Activists did identify with Connected sociocultural identity categories, I cannot assume that all Connected peers were considered to be part of the Activist contingents.

Figure 3.2

Depiction of the Subgroups of Participants



The Activist Peers

All of the interviewees from Programs B and C[13] discussed the impact of a subset of their peers who had been especially aware of or uncomfortable from the injustices of Israeli occupation. They described this contingent of their peers as committed partisans who were unable or unwilling to hear perspectives they disagreed with, due to their strong political beliefs and/or their identities that connected them to the issues surrounding The Conflict. The interviewees positioned themselves as outsiders to The Conflict in opposition to these Activist Peers, thereby distancing themselves from this opinionated subset of students that they had perceived as being outspoken, intolerant, and aggressive.

Three of the interviewees used the word "Activists" to refer to this group of politically engaged peers. While the "Activist" classification was used slightly differently by each of them, these three interviewees used the term to portray these peers in consistent ways. Elizabeth and Sylvia were the two students who explained what they meant when they used this term. In her first interview, Elizabeth associated activists with outspoken "bleeding-heart liberals."[14]

Elizabeth: I know some of the kids on the trip were like your typical, like, bleeding-heart liberals. And I'm very passionate about the cause, and so you had, like, the range of people. How concerned they were about it. 'Cause we had a

[13] The two students who participated in Program A both described their peer group as demonstrating synergy and harmony, to an almost idealized extent. They claimed that this camaraderie had allowed for a supportive learning community during their program, and according to one of the interviewees, the entire group was still in regular contact more than two years later. So while peer influence on learning was important for this program as well, the dynamics were categorically different than that of the groups the following summer, which had reportedly experienced division.

[14] Some of the interviewees — especially Allison and Elizabeth — frequently referred to dichotomous classifications of "liberal" vs. "conservative" and "pro-Palestinian" vs. "pro-Israeli" throughout their narratives in terms of polarized continuums. They frequently positioned their ideologically opinionated and Activist Peers on the far ends of the "liberal" and "pro-Palestinian" binaries. Moreover, they attempted to delineate the more moderate positions that they maintained along these spectra. This struggle with binary classifications will be evident in the following excerpts, as the interviewees frequently wrestled with positioning themselves within the binaries that they deemed as inadequate, but nevertheless often relied upon while relaying their stories.

> Palestinian on our trip, and we had another Arab female, who's very passionate about it. And two other students that were involved in a lot of activism. So we had a big group of, like, activist people, and I was kinda nervous, 'cause I don't tend to go that kinda activist, very out-there speaking, kinda way.

In the first two lines of this excerpt, Elizabeth positions herself as being "passionate about the cause" — meaning the Palestinian cause — in contrast to some of her peers who she described as being "typical bleeding-heart liberals," a term that is often derogatory. She also positioned these as terminal ends along a range of the kinds of people on the trip based on degrees of "concern." In this way, she further distinguished her passion from the others' liberalism. She then noted two Arab peers, indicating her assumption that their connected Arab identity automatically put them in her "bleeding heart liberal" end of her spectrum. Furthermore, she noted that there were two other students, who may not have had Connected sociocultural identities, but who were "involved in a lot of activism." According to her, the "big group of activist people" included people from both Connected and Not-Connected sociocultural identities. Finally, she mentioned that they had made her nervous. Without (yet) elaborating on why this may have been her response, she reiterated her oppositional positionality to activists when she stated that she didn't speak in "very out-there speaking" ways that activists do. Notably, she used a present-tense verb here, indicating that at the time of the interview, she still did not identify as being or acting like an activist.

Minutes after having said the above, in the midst of another small story, Elizabeth interrupted herself to try to change her nomenclature for these peers: "some of the like activist-kinda people, like I was saying — or, I need a better name for them, 'cause that's just incorrect,

but — so the very passionate people." Also, near the beginning of her second interview, she made a point of correcting herself, and volunteered to amend her choice to use the term "activist" to describe this subset of her peer group.

Elizabeth: Umm. Shoot, there was something that I did want to say that I remember I forgot to last time. [long pause] Crap. [long pause]

… OK! When I was talking about the dynamics of our group, I called the people, like — what did I even call them? Like, the activists, or something?

JM: Mhm

Elizabeth: Which, I don't — I wanna change that.

JM: OK

Elizabeth: 'Cause, like, it's not like they were, like, activists. It was people that were just very aware of The Conflict, like very knowledgeable about it. And like, people had felt personally impacted by it. So people that were just, like, more politically aware than I was, at the time. So that's what I meant by, like, the activists. So I just wanted to correct that.

JM: Well, it's interesting that you even say that, just because, I just wonder, what do you mean by "activist"? And why do you want to correct it? And you'd even corrected yourself last time, too.

Elizabeth: Did I?

JM: Yeah

Elizabeth: Oh, OK.

JM: And, you know, with no judgment about whether that's good or bad, but like, what does "activist" bring up, and why do you wanna amend?

Elizabeth: Just by, like, "activist," I feel like an activist is someone that is dedicated and doing something towards a cause. And a lot— some of these people [in the program cohort] were, and other people were just very personally touched by it. Or even, if they didn't have a personal connection, they were able to connect to The Conflict, and were very vocal about their opinions of The Conflict. And for me, I was very aware of that, 'cause I wasn't that way in the beginning, 'cause I didn't have the knowledge, didn't have the personal connection. So I didn't have that kind of off-the-bat feel that they had. I think eventually I did get a little bit of it. A little bit of a bleeding heart towards the cause.

Recognizing that she may not have not been using the word "activist" correctly, she struggled to articulate the distinction she had made in her mind. After all, she repeated that an activist is dedicated to a cause, and some of these peers were indeed dedicated to a Palestinian cause. But she reconsidered by noting that the peers to whom she was referring were not necessarily active in the cause, per se; however, they were knowledgeable about the issues. For some of them, she noted, they were more aware because they "had felt personally impacted by it." She also positioned them against her own relative lack of awareness: they were "more politically aware" than she had been, so this designation was relative to her own self-positioning, and referent to her own admission of ignorance. In the final quotation in this excerpt, she noted that this subset of her peers were Connected because they were either "personally touched by it," or "were able to connect to The Conflict" and therefore speak out about it. Once again, she reiterated the notion that awareness and concern for the issues in Palestine/Israel were associated with some degree of personal Connectedness.

Sylvia had been a participant on the more divisive program, Program B. Her feelings about her outspoken peers were more pointed than Elizabeth's had been, but she used similar terminology and positioning techniques.

> Sylvia: Lucy is one of those very interesting people that creates a moral ecology that is vague enough that can be interpreted to the extremeness of the group. … And then if you were inclined to be angry, or you're reacting to what you're seeing in a very reactive, righteous, leftist sort of way, she wasn't going to stop that. She's very much the kind of instructor to light a match, throw it, and just watch what happens. And that's how her class was run, that's how group discussions always went when we were over there. … In this capacity, the people on our trip who were more activist-driven, or activism-aligned, um, did take it to the nth degree. So I think that, like, Lucy teed it up to be as [pause] aggressively pro-Palestine as we'd wanted it to be. And I'd say that, like, even the programming on the trip was kind of unbalanced. Um, towards Palestinian liberation, which I'm not against, at all, obviously.

In her description, the activist contingent within her program group had been aggressively pro-Palestinian. She attributed this to the facilitator's framing by suggesting that Lucy had invited her peers' extreme responses that Sylvia had interpreted as being "reactive," "righteous," and "leftist." When she described the activists as taking discussion "to the nth degree," she was referring to these behaviors she had interpreted to be extreme. She then suggested that the program was skewed toward "Palestinian liberation," before catching herself and clarifying that she was not against that. After sharing her exasperation with her peers and her facilitator, she critiqued the program for having been unbalanced in favor of Palestinians. In this

way, she obliquely positions herself as a person who values balance, at least in terms of hearing a balance of perspectives during the program. At the end of this excerpt, she clarified her critique: she was not criticizing the idea of Palestinian liberation, but she had been criticizing how she had perceived a lack of balance from the program and people within it.

I was curious about her choice to use terminology related to "activists," so I asked a follow-up question that invited her to elucidate.

JM: So, just kind of a definitional question. When you talk about activism and activists, and people who are "activism-aligned," can you say more about what you mean?

Sylvia: Yeah. So I think there are some people who [sigh] take their politics and activism everywhere they go with them always. And, I don't mean that in a [sigh] [long pause] Like, I have beliefs. And I do carry them with me. And I am willing to have a conversation with anybody about Palestine/Israel, really any time they want, as long as they're not being rude. But then there are people who bring the rude. There are people who have opinions and they [pause] feel so passionately and they feel so righteous that there's never a discussion. There's an explanation. And I don't know if that's like a young-person thing, I don't know if that's just a coping mechanism with some people. It's like the — it's like the stereotypical, like, [air quotes] "feminazi," like, sorta thing. Like, I got called that in high school a couple times.

JM: Oh, yeah?

Sylvia: Yeah. It's like, people [long pause] I don't, I don't know. Like, I feel like I grew out of it, kind of. It's like that defensiveness, where you have to jump

> down someone's throat and tell them about what they don't know. Even if they're not being malicious, if they said something more out of ignorance. You know, something like that.

She began by describing an activist using general terms, as someone who always takes their politics with them, but then immediately recognized that such a statement was too vague. After all, it was something she could identify with, and she admitted to carrying her own beliefs with her. Therefore, she continued distinguishing herself from these activists, suggesting that they had been so "self-righteous" as to have been "rude," such that they had shut down discussions about issues surrounding Palestine/Israel. Interestingly, she theorized that this may be a sign of immaturity, relating it to her past hardline stances on feminism. Positioning herself as being more mature than the Activists, she explained had softened as she got older and realized that her reactive responses had not been successful at changing other people's minds. In a sense, this connection to her own past defensiveness may have been an attempt for Sylvia to empathize with these peers, by recognizing what it had felt like for her to react aggressively towards people who did not agree with her strong beliefs. Through this example, she indirectly alluded back to her experience in program discussions, where she had felt as though her peers had reacted to her in ways that she considered to have been aggressive and unproductive.

At another point, in the midst of discussing her frustration with her "activist-aligned" peers and their persistent judgements, Sylvia made an effort to empathically understand where some of them might have been coming from. She recognized that, even though she didn't like their aggressive approach, she could understand their responses when considered in light of their positionality, since they and their loved ones were personally impacted by oppression.

Sylvia: I know there were people on that trip who have identities that are very underspoken for, and it makes sense why they would be thinking about it always, and why— you know, I don't know what it feels like to carry a diaspora with you everywhere you go. And I don't know what it's like to feel constantly out of place. Like, I'm White, I'm cis, I, you know, I'm not outwardly super — like, I don't present as someone you'd consider queer. It's like I glide through life pretty easily. So I don't know. I don't judge people for being like that.

In retrospect, Sylvia was aware of some of the challenges her peers had faced by virtue of their sociocultural identities that may have Connected them to The Conflict. Furthermore, in the present-tense moment of this interview, she acknowledged how her own positionality informed her perspective, and made it difficult for her to understand how her peers had experienced the trip, as people who had expressed their experience of being marginalized, feeling out of place, and being part of a diaspora away from their homeland. In this excerpt, she summarized some key distinctions between the viewpoints of Connected Activists and Not-Connected outsiders. Furthermore, she also acknowledged that her positionality affords her the privilege to "glide through life pretty easily" in multiple contexts — not only in Palestine/Israel — and that this ease has precluded her from understanding what it may be like for people who face more obstacles because of their marginalized identities.

A summary of the attributes that these two students associated with their Activist Peers is in Table 3.1 below. Each of these two students' descriptions were representative of how other interviewees from their programs spoke about the Activist Peers. It is possible to see the

similarities that were present for interviewees across these two programs, while also noting that the representation of the Activist Peers in Program B was more charged.

Table 3.1

Descriptive Terms Used to Describe Activist Peers

Elizabeth (Program C)	Sylvia (Program B)
Concerned about the cause	Extreme
Passionate	Angry
Outspoken, vocal	Reactive
Bleeding-heart liberals	Righteous
Aware	Leftist
Knowledgeable	Aggressive
Opinionated	Rude
Personally impacted by The Conflict	Explanations without discussion
Able to connect to The Conflict	Defensive, "jump down someone's throat"

Learning From Activist Peers' Insights

The interviewees tended to foreground their reactions to their peers over their interactions with the local Palestinians and Israelis they met during their programs. Some of the interviewees credited their Activist Peers for providing important reminders about the overarching context of The Conflict while they were in Israeli territory, even though they had learned about The Conflict from their pre-program class, and from various sources during their program. Likewise, several of them shared examples of times when they had been enjoying recreational or tourist pleasures like swimming in the Mediterranean Sea or shopping for souvenirs, but then their

Activist Peers had reminded them of the nearby military occupation and injustices. This contradictory stance of framing their trip around The Conflict, yet frequently telling stories about times they had forgotten about the context of The Conflict, was consonant with precepts about their distanced gaze as outsiders, as described in the next chapter.

According to stories from several of the interviewees, at the beginning of the program, the presence of Activist Peers had been important to their learning. Because these peers' perspectives had been informed by their identities as well as their prior knowledge and awareness about The Conflict, in some instances their outspokenness provided important lessons and reminders. In addition to a few anecdotes that had taken place at Palestinian sites during the programs, most of the participants mentioned the impact that their Activist group members had on their experiences in Israeli cities. Most of these stories were about times that their peers had reminded them of nearby injustices faced by Palestinians, which had prompted them to reconsider their positive impressions of seaside cities like Tel Aviv and Haifa through a social justice lens.

Some of the interviewees gave me the impression that, at the beginning of their trip, they had not fully grasped what it would be like to visit Israel/Palestine. As such, they had been vulnerable to feeling surprised by the experience of being in a region that is so rife with contrasts as well as with conflict. Several of them shared that they had essentially stumbled into this opportunity without giving it much thought before applying. In spite of attending pre-travel orientation sessions intended to prepare everyone for this program, a few of the participants confessed that they had underestimated what it would be like to travel to a conflict zone; they had focused their attention more on the "travel" excitement and less on the "conflict zone" context. Elizabeth in particular framed her overarching experience of the program as "shattering

my ignorance" about not only The Conflict in Palestine/Israel, but also hardships and various struggles for human rights throughout the world. With humor and self-deprecating flair, she laughed when describing her process of realizing that this particular study abroad program was not going to be "just a vacation."

Elizabeth: I think I started to realize it wasn't vacation on our first couple days in Israel. When, like I said, I was having a good time. Enjoying it, like wasn't really thinking about The Conflict at that point. I was just like, "Oh. Israel, cool, we're here. We're doing fun stuff, eating cool international kinda foods." And it was the other people in the group that were reminding us of what was happening. Which was good! It was good to have that reminder. Not even a reminder, for me it was like learning about what was going on. And they're like, "I just can't feel comfortable being here, knowing what's happening an hour away." And that's when I was kinda like, "OK, they're upset about something. Do I need to be upset about something too? Like, what is it that they're upset about? I'm curious to know." So it was the tensions of people in the group that kinda made me question, like, "OK, this isn't lighthearted and easy for everyone else, it probably shouldn't be for me." Well not like it probably shouldn't be for me either, but why is that the case? I was curious to know.

The Activist Peers disabused Elizabeth of her notion that their first stop in Tel Aviv — and indeed the entire study abroad trip — was merely an opportunity for a fun summer getaway. Although this message had apparently been reiterated by program leaders, hosts, and speakers

throughout the program, Elizabeth attributed the tensions within her peer group as the primary force that had so powerfully disrupted her prior assumptions.

For participants like Elizabeth, this nascent awareness was limited in its scope, perhaps because it was a lot to process. Along these lines, the interviewees did not expound on what insights they had learned from paying attention to the inequities, much less about any geopolitical connections or power imbalances between occupied territories and cosmopolitan Israeli cities. Rather, they noted the aesthetic differences (Tel Aviv seemed "modern" and comfortable, whereas Palestinian cities in the West Bank presented them with unfamiliar novelty) or the proximity among extremely different landscapes in terms of not only cultures, but also of access to resources and freedoms.

The Activist Peers' reminders about nearby oppression had impacted the interviewees differently; they had expressed a range of emotions, from gratitude to frustration to aggravation. The two interviewees who expressed appreciation for their peers' insights, Elizabeth and Linda, had participated on Program C. The group dynamics of this program had been described by these participants as being friendly yet somewhat tense due to their Activist Peers' strong opinions. In Tel Aviv, Linda described the tension as beneficial, and gratefully attributed her peers' critical perspectives for providing a generative framing her entire trip.

Linda: The [second] day, we went on a walking tour of Tel Aviv. And I remember, it was really pretty. And the whole time — so like, I didn't know anything about The Conflict, and didn't really have an opinion, I guess, before this trip. But there were some people in my trip who definitely knew a lot more, and had opinions. And a lot of them were talking, just how uncomfortable they were in Tel Aviv. We went to the beach, and went swimming, and talked about how,

> like, "Oh, we're swimming here and having fun, and we're somewhere where people *can't* do that." And that was the first time I really thought about that. And then, the whole rest of the trip, like, *that* was in the back of my mind the whole time.

According to this narrative, Linda credited her peers for her awareness of the juxtapositions between well-resourced beachfront tourist zones in Israeli places like Tel Aviv, and nearby de-developed Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Gaza (Roy, 1987). Although this information had been introduced to her in her pre-travel orientation course, she admitted that she had not "really thought about" these contours of The Conflict until she was physically in Israel/Palestine and listening to her Activist Peers' informed opinions about the underlying injustice.

"Open-Minded Objectivity": Positioning Themselves Against Intolerant Activist Peers

The interviewees described their Activist Peers as not only intimidating due to their strong ideas, but also intolerant of guest speakers with perspectives with whom they disagreed. Moreover, they depicted the Activist Peers as judgmental or dismissive of their groupmates who held different views. Whereas the participants from Program B had been intimidated, those from Program C had also felt the impact of the Activists' judgments at some point during their program, albeit less harshly. There was a sense, sometimes stated quite explicitly, that the Activists relied on dichotomous all-or-nothing thinking, conveying the implication that "either you're with me and pro-Palestine, or you're against me and pro-Israel." These examples of binary thinking were prevalent in the descriptions of many of the interviewees, several of whom provided examples that supported this idea. Although this notion was voiced by a couple of the students from both Programs B and C, the following will focus on several remarks from Allison

and Sylvia's experiences in Program B. They had both reflected openly about memories of feeling shut down by their Activist Peers. Importantly, when describing their frustrations with these peers, both used their critiques to position themselves as being different from the Activists: Allison suggested that she appreciated the ambiguity that her peers had eschewed, and Sylvia claimed that black-and-white thinking was a sign of immaturity that she herself had developed beyond.

Early in Allison's first interview, in response to my question asking her to tell me about her group in general, her attention almost immediately went to the Activist Peers, which prompted her to editorialize about why she speculated about why they had supported Palestinians.

> Allison: They were extremely extremely pro-Palestine from the very start. I think because, I think it's pretty easy to pick who's the victim and then just support that person. Instead of kind of understanding the more ambiguous stuff. And so there was always that pressure, I think, to become more and more supportive of Palestine, or like Palestinian ideas and values. And it was really hard to say anything against it. Or you felt out of place, right?

By describing these peers as being "extremely extremely pro-Palestine," she invoked a spectrum of supporting Palestine that positioned these folks as falling on one distant end. Although she had considered herself to be "pro-Palestine" as well, she associated their extreme views with being more simplistically dualistic — "it's pretty easy" — and lacking understanding of ambiguity about The Conflict. Throughout her interviews, she frequently spoke about her preference for complexity and ambiguity, especially around issues that are debated among two opposing sides. So in this excerpt, by suggesting that the Activist Peers were less ambiguous, she

was positioning herself apart from them. Nevertheless, she claimed that she had felt pressured by the Activist Peers to subscribe to their beliefs, further asserting that she had found it difficult to present alternative ideas or perspectives. Using the second-person "you" to refer to her own experience, she suggested that she had felt out of place in the group because of the extreme stance of the Activist Peers.

In her second interview, she speculated about the intransigence of her Activist Peers when she had shared a story about a time when she had introduced a controversial stance during a group debrief, by suggesting that it would be violent to displace Israeli settlers from their homes in settlements in the West Bank.

> Allison: Like, when talking about how the group I was with is very pro-Palestine, and they didn't want to hear about it, I think about how — I think if they thought about it, they would also somewhat agree. But like they don't really wanna hear about it. Right? I think it's easier to pick out who's the victim, and then you support them.

Her technique of switching between past and present tense, here, was interesting: her peers both *did* not want to hear about her suggestion, and they also "Don't really wanna hear about it." This rhetorical move indicated a presumption that these peers are fixed in their beliefs, as well as in their resistance to hearing other perspectives. She then repeated something she had said in her first interview: "it's easier to pick out who's the victim and then you support them." She appeared to reduce her peers' beliefs to willful ignorance and refusal to consider other perspectives out of fear that they would "somewhat agree" with an opposing viewpoint and reconsider their stance.

Allison did not position herself as a subject in her story who may have influenced her peers' reactions. Instead, she positioned herself as having been acted upon by her peers' intolerance. Her stories suggested that she had attempted to engage in rational debates about alternative perspectives, while her peers responded irrationally to the content of what she had said to them. She did not seem to consider how her musings as an outsider — though sincere — may have contributed to the subsequent responses she perceived from people who felt connected to her hypothetical points of debate. Indeed, during my interviews with her, I was occasionally taken aback by the brash ways she spoke about sensitive, controversial issues. Rather than "the way I spoke provoked them," she focused on the conjecture that" they didn't want to hear about it." Because of her rhetorical style and her outsider positioning, she emphasized debate over competing ideas, and did not empathize with how people may feel connected to the history and consequences of such conflicting ideas.

Sylvia also described her Activist Peers as unwilling to consider alternative perspectives, such that they had relied on binary, "you're with me or against me" lines of thinking.

> Sylvia: I think that also, going into it, it was boiled down [by others in the cohort] to "Free Palestine," or "You are a colonizer." And, like, not being prepared for that black-and-white — because it was implied [by the program] that it has been, like, shades of gray. And it was made clear to us that it was complicated before we went in. But to be around people who think, like, [their] belief system is black-and-white is, I think, a sense of underdevelopment. Like, maybe maturity-wise?

Sylvia recalled that the program had been designed to present multiple perspectives and "shades of gray" about the complexity inherent in The Conflict. However, her overall experience

had been impacted by the Activist Peers and their "black-and-white" belief system, as she described it. Again, she positioned herself as being more mature and developed, in contrast with her peers, whose dichotomous belief system may have been a sign of underdevelopment or immaturity, according to her analysis.

Sylvia described having felt a great deal of stress during her program due to her experience feeling judged by the Activist Peers in her group, because she perceived them to have labeled any contrasting or less-informed ideas as being oppositional or offensive. This was especially the case in Israeli territory and Israeli cities like Tel Aviv and the western parts of Jerusalem.

Sylvia: They [her peers in the group] really thought, they were like, "This is colonialism, this is all brand new, it's Western, it's terrible." … And then I got there [to Israel], and I felt guilty the whole time I was there. I felt guilty for existing in Israel. The whole time I was there, every coffee I bought, every transaction was scrutinized by somebody [within the cohort group].
I just— it felt like I did not belong there. From the second I was in Israel. Which really sucked! Because, like, I had a great time with my host family, and every Palestinian, or Arab-Israeli person I met, had the utmost hospitality. The utmost hospitality. But that underlying feeling of, "This is Israel, we don't support Israel." [unintelligible]

JM: Did you feel that scrutiny from local people there?

Sylvia: No. It was mainly from our group.

The way that Sylvia framed it, Lucy had encouraged the group to be conscious about supporting Palestinian vendors when they purchased souvenirs. This had created a baseline of

stress as she felt pressured to consider potential political ramifications whenever she wanted to buy anything, from a souvenir to a snack. Moreover, her peers increased her stress significantly: according to her descriptions, the vocal Activist subset of her group promoted an all-or-nothing attitude such that anything related to Israel was deemed as bad. According to this excerpt, this was because they had associated the newness, Westernness, and colonialism of Israeli cities like Tel Aviv as oppositional to Palestinian presence that predated the state of Israel. As such, according to Sylvia, her peers made it clear that they believed that the group should not engage or enjoy Israeli things to the degree that Sylvia had felt policed by them. Sylvia subsequently attributed the guilt that she felt in Israeli spaces to the beliefs and behaviors of her peers. Furthermore, she positioned her outsider identity in contrast to these peers; whereas they were intolerant Activists, her outsider positionality allowed her to be more reasonable, in her mind.

Because of the way she had experienced criticisms from the Activist Peers over the course of their program, Sylvia said her entire visit to Israel/Palestine had ultimately not felt comfortable. It is important to underscore her claim that she didn't attribute this sort of judgmental scrutiny from local Palestinians or Israelis, but from others from within her peer group. It was because of these Activist Peers that she felt like she didn't belong, which contributed to her self-positioning as outsider.

Nuanced Activists: Contrasting Perspectives From Local Palestinians and Israelis

The interviewees did not think that all activists were angry, outspoken, aggressive, or intolerant. In fact, they all used gentler terms and tones when they described Palestinian and Israeli activists who had spoken to their groups, as opposed to when they had discussed their Activist Peers. They did not describe local activists or speakers as angry people who disparaged "the other side," perhaps with the exception of the Israeli settler, which will be discussed in

detail in the next chapter. Rather, the interviewees recalled how local activists spoke in measured terms about their narrative and about injustices they faced. And often, the interviewees noted that the local people they met spoke about The Conflict with nuance. Paige had clearly articulated her reaction to this contrast.

> Paige: At the time, I didn't know a whole lot about the activism taking place, and I didn't know about the internal perspectives that people had within the region about The Conflict, you know. I knew how my Palestinian friends felt. I knew how my Lebanese friends felt. I knew how a lot of people felt in [the university town]. But I had no idea what the conversation looked like in Israel/Palestine. And I didn't know how nuanced it would be. 'Cause I— and this was just my own ignorance, but I thought it was gonna be, yeah, like, "Free Palestine," or, "No, don't free Palestine." Like, those were the only two options. I didn't know there'd be so much complexity just within that conversation. And what does freedom look like, what does liberation, what does anti-apartheid look like.

Paige confessed to a narrow prior impression of Palestinian activism from people in and around her university. She attributed this impression to her Palestinian and Lebanese friends who had apparently taken stances around the either/or binary of "Free Palestine" versus "No, don't free Palestine." She had assumed that a similar binary would be evident among people in Palestine/Israel, retroactively associating this assumption to her "own ignorance." However, she said that she heard "internal perspectives" from local Palestinians and Israelis that had demonstrated "so much complexity" about The Conflict. Furthermore, she noted that the conversations around concepts such as freedom, liberation, and anti-apartheid were also

complex, such that it was not sufficient to say "Free Palestine" without considering the meaning and outcomes of freedom. These considerations had contrasted with Paige's assumptions about the conversations among activists in her home context in the U.S., which had been consistent with how the other interviewees described the approaches of their Activist Peers.

With respect to the local people they met during their trip, many of the interviewees described them using this theme of nuance and ambiguity that had complicated their notions about angry polarities associated with The Conflict that they had associated with their Activist Peers. Indeed, by contrasting "good" local activists with "bad" Activist Peers, their stories about local activism served to reinforce the ways that they positioned the Activist Peers as being irrational, all-or-nothing, intolerant aggressors. By and large, the interviewees spoke about their interactions with local Palestinians and Israelis as being informative and enlightening. Even though the interviewees drew upon these information-based insights as they negotiated their stance about The Conflict, they did not reference local perspectives when they positioned themselves as outsiders to The Conflict. Instead, they understood their outsider identity in relation to — and in contrast to — their Activist Peers.

Feeling Silenced by the Activist Peers

The participants from Program B recalled specific instances when the Activist Peers said something during their program that had discouraged them from sharing their own experiences. Allison and Molly recalled times when one or more of the Activists had invoked discourse that had been common in social justice activist circles. For example, Allison remembered being told that "it's not a minority student's job" to help her understand etiquette during Ramadan, and to ask a White student to help her. She also remembered one of her peers saying during a debrief that the the people of color had been "taking more of the weight of the trip on their shoulders."

When she shared these memories with me, she had expressed feeling confused and even offended. Combined with other feedback she had received from peers and leaders from her group, she claimed that she eventually refrained from sharing much beyond occasional superficial comments.

Molly also shared an anecdote about a time when one of her groupmates told her something that she had interpreted as a reason to say less about her experiences with her peers. In response to other students' complaints about their homestay hosts, this other student, in turn, complained to Molly.

Molly: She was just like, "I'm so sick of the White tears," and getting very, like, aggressive about it. And I was like, "So I'm not gonna complain to you!" [laugh] Or anyone about my situation.

The phrase "White tears" was a reference to a strategy attributed to White women who cry to attract attention to themselves and thus detract attention to experiences of racialized and marginalized people. In this case, as a White woman, Molly interpreted this statement about "White tears" as a signal to refrain from sharing about her own feelings. Although this did not imply that her homestay experience had been worth crying about, per se, the message she took from this memory was that she did not feel comfortable talking about the challenges she faced during the program.

Sylvia recalled her general feelings about how unreceptive she had perceived her Activist Peers to have been toward her throughout the program.

Sylvia: So, there were types like that on the trip, who were very much ready to be like, you know, if I walked up and I said, "Oh," you know, "I feel kinda weird

about this situation right now." They'd be like, "Well maybe you should interrogate why you feel weird about that." Instead of, like, empathizing first.

This recollection evoked a sense of dismissal, disapproval, and perhaps even condescension from her peers. She conveyed that, when she had sought out support for processing what she had witnessed or encountered, she was met with unsupportive responses that lacked empathy. She had also expressed that she had ultimately felt isolated and lonely during the program, and this had eclipsed many of her memories about her interactions with Palestinians or Israelis. Indeed, without an outlet to process what she had witnessed, she maintained an emotional distance from her surroundings. Instead she focused more on her emotions from her personal experience of having been scolded by her peer.

Silencing themselves in Group Debriefs

The interviewees from Programs B and C positioned the Activist Peers as the dominant voices in their groups. While this dynamic was evident in various exchanges during their trips, it seemed to have an especially significant impact on how they had experienced the daily debrief sessions, when they came together as a whole group to collectively share and process the day's experiences. Because they interpreted the Activist Peers' all-or-nothing judgments to be harsh, the interviewees expressed varying degrees of intimidation, so they often chose to stay quiet during the debriefs.

For her part, Elizabeth framed the overall program as intimidating because of the Activist Peers. Consequently, she claimed that she had felt hesitant throughout the whole trip.

Elizabeth: So we had a big group of like activist people, and I was kinda nervous, 'cause I don't tend to go that kinda activist, very out-there speaking, kinda way. And

like that was like a theme throughout the trip for me, as well, just kinda like feeling hesitant.

In spite of having framed the program as being one where she made dynamic strides from ignorance to awareness, Elizabeth framed her response to her Activist Peers as being a static condition throughout her trip: she consistently felt nervous around them because of their outspoken activism. Her "theme" of hesitance for the duration of the trip also implied that the Activist Peers had been consistently intimidating as well. She considered outspoken intimidation to be intrinsic to her conception of the Activist identity.

The interviewees did not always directly attribute their silence in the group reflections to the dominance of their Activist Peers. For example, when Diana described her feelings about the debriefs in Program C, she positioned herself as disinterested with what her peers had shared about their feelings.

Diana: At some point, I feel like I just kinda sat there and just listened to people talk. 'Cause I think there were people that, their debriefing is just hearing themselves talk about their feelings. And that's fine, it's just not — sometimes it is what I need, and maybe it was what I needed, and I didn't know. And it's also— I mean, it's helpful for me to hear what other people think. Especially if they're thinking the same things as me, I'm just sitting there like, "Yeah. Like, I get that." Yeah, it's just kinda — it was just, I guess, every day, listening to the same people talk about their feelings, and things like that. Just yeah, by the end of it, it's like, "OK. [laugh] I get it."

Without specifying which of her peers spoke so frequently, Diana conveyed a sense of boredom from what she conveyed as redundancy from hearing her peers "talk about their

feelings" during the debriefs. Therefore, she chose to stay relatively quiet. It is interesting to note that she confessed to being more attuned to people who had feelings and reactions that had been similar to her own. It seemed as though she had valued the debriefs as a space to validate her own experiences — even though she had refrained from sharing about her own experiences — more than as a space to learn from her peers who had differing perspectives and reactions. Regardless, her strategy during debriefs had been to listen without contributing much.

Molly expressed a sense of exasperation when she recalled her group debriefs from Program B, and vacillated between speaking on her own behalf about her feelings about the group debriefs, and projecting her feelings onto her group as a whole. This excerpt was part of a response to my question about what she would have liked have changed about her program.

Molly: [The debrief], sometimes, was just like [pause] just the last straw of the day. When people were just like, "I don't — I just need to be alone." But, like, we couldn't. [laugh] So.

JM: Interesting. So *not* so many, is what you said. Like, fewer.

Molly: Like, sometimes we would have them like twice a day. … Yeah. I just remember, like, especially in Haifa [pause] that's when a lot of people were just like, "I don't wanna debrief." [laugh] Like, 'cause we had a free day, which was nice. But then we had a debrief, and we were all like, "I don't wanna debrief!" And people started, like, making jokes about debriefing, 'cause we did it so much, and it was just like [pause] I feel like some people weren't ready — I mean, OK, maybe I'm projecting. *I* wasn't ready to, like, say — or like, I wasn't fully done processing certain things. So I couldn't, like, I didn't say it. [laugh] So I didn't really talk a lot in those debriefs. I was

just like, “Hmm,” [laugh], “I’ll listen.” [laugh]

I just remember one time, Lucy made me speak, and I was just like, about to cry, ’cause I was like, “I don’t— I don’t know what you want me to say! She was like, “What do you mean by that?” And I was like, “I— I don’t know!” [laugh]

JM: I literally don't know! [laugh] You made me say it [laugh]

Molly: [laugh] I was just like, “There’s a reason I don’t talk! I’m a listener!” So yeah. And I think — I mean, I’m saying that ’cause I wasn't a big debriefer, but I think in general, that was a consensus.

Here, Molly suggested that she had not wanted to debrief because she would have preferred to be alone at the end of the long days. For what it is worth, this contradicted her earlier depiction of her homestay, in which she felt isolated and lonely in the evenings. She invoked a collective agreement in opposition to these debriefs by referring to a time when other people from her group had also complained about convening for a debrief after a free day in the city of Haifa. Recalling that debriefs had become a target of jokes among her group members, she summed up by purporting that there was an anti-debriefing consensus among the group.

She also said that she refrained from talking during these meetings because she had not had time beforehand to fully process her own thoughts and feelings enough to feel comfortable sharing them with the group. Because debriefs were intended to provide opportunities for the group members to engage in processing without requiring prior preparation, this statement indicated that she may not have felt comfortable enough to share openly and speak with vulnerability. To explain this behavior, she suggested that she embraced an identity of being “a listener” during the program, especially during the debriefs. This may have seemed like a more

acceptable explanation for her silence than discomfort, because of fear instilled by her peers of saying something wrong or offensive. Based on triangulating information from Sylvia and Allison, the other interviewees from Program B, the group interactions were fraught. According to Molly's recollection of the instance when Lucy the facilitator had put her on the spot and "made" her speak, she had been on the verge of tears from the stress of not knowing what Lucy had "wanted her to say," as if she had felt pressured to perform in a particular way. Considering the pressures she and the other outsiders felt from the Activists, which conceivably added to her sense of overwhelm, she may have relied on silence and "I'll just listen" as a stance to avoid saying the wrong thing in these fraught discussions. In fact, in her previous interview, she had discussed this pressure to perform, which came from Lucy as well as from the Activist Peers:

> Molly: And there was also things with, like, I didn't really talk a lot, 'cause we had to talk in groups a lot about our feelings and what we experienced and I was a little overwhelmed, to say the least. And like, I didn't have a personal connection, like some of the people who did talk a lot, like, of Lebanese descent, or of Palestinian descent. And so, they had a lot to say. And I — they had room to say stuff. But like, they'd be like, "Why aren't you guys talking?" It'd be like, "I don't think I have anything that great to say right now. And I'm also overwhelmed." Which, I mean, if I did it again, I could probably talk more. But like, it was just, I hadn't — it was just a lot.

In these excerpts, Molly conveyed feeling put on the spot to speak during the debriefs, while also feeling overwhelmed with the program in general, and the debriefs in particular. In response to this pressure, she tried to demurely excuse herself by insisting that she had little to contribute to the discussion. Moreover, her claim that she recalled "not having anything great to

say" implied judgment about the quality of her contribution. Especially if she had been concerned about her Activist Peers' judgments, silencing herself in group discussions would be a reasonable strategy. Although constructive debriefing could ideally mitigate feeling overwhelmed, in these circumstances, Molly instead described the debriefs as exacerbating her stress such that she opted to retreat into silence.

Molly also brought up the notion of "personal connection" as germane to the debriefs. According to her, the people who had a lot to say were those who were Connected through their Palestinian and Arab identities. Moreover, Molly mentioned that they were "given room to say stuff," as if that had been a collective choice by the group, to allow space for the Connected peers to share their feelings, perceptions, and experiences. At the same time, this acknowledgement of Connectedness may have also reflected her sense that, as a Not-Connected outsider, she did not have the same opportunity or invitation to share about her experiences.

Bridget also described feeling reluctant to share openly during her group debriefs in Program C, because of the judgmental Activist Peers in her group. In order to corroborate her claim that the Activist Peers had a chilling effect on open and honest participation from everyone during debriefs, she invoked another group member. She recalled an instance when she had been paired to reflect with a "more conservative" group member who apparently had not felt comfortable sharing his ideas with the entire group, particularly with regard to his opinions that countered those of the Activists. She then proceeded to consider why the whole-group context had been uninviting to perspectives like his.

Bridget: Well, he told me that he felt kind of like he couldn't really talk about that to the group because people were so, like — um, not pushy but, like, defensive, kind of? I definitely felt that at certain points. … And there were — people

> were strongly, like, sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. And I think, that made me less, um — I don't know, I don't talk a lot about, like, things in general, so I guess I — maybe I wouldn't have discussed it a lot more. But, um, there were fewer people that I'd discussed, like, everything I went through, with.

Because of the Activists who had reacted defensively to other people's ideas, Bridget ultimately opted out of participating in many of the group discussions. Like Molly, she excused herself by claiming that it was intrinsic to her identity to "not talk a lot about things in general." However, she did attribute her reticence to share her reactions and thoughts, to the effect that the Activists had on the group.

Conclusion

The students' narratives provided a great deal of evidence of the importance of the intergroup dynamics within their peer cohorts. Their perceptions of a subset of their peers shaped their understanding about the region, and also shaped their understanding of an emergent identity of "outsider." Their outsider positionalities were not reflective of being cultural outsiders to the people-groups in Palestine/Israel, nor even to being outsiders in the context of their peer groups themselves. Rather, based on messages that were underscored by their peers, these interviewees came to understand that their sociocultural identities positioned them as outsiders to the issues they and their peers considered to be central to the region. Their status as outsiders influenced their interactions with some of their peers, which subsequently informed the feelings they associated with their entire trip. For some of these students, stories about their negative interactions with peers largely overshadowed stories about being in Palestine/Israel altogether.

The outsider identity also provided a framing for how they experienced their time overseas, especially with regard to how they took in information about their surroundings and issues concerning The Conflict. I will further explore how the students implicitly described and operationalized their "outsider gaze" in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

GAZING FROM A DISTANCE

The Outsider Gaze

During these programs, these students' positionality as Not-Connected outsiders meant that they embarked on their trip without a personal investment in the region or connection to the people who live there. As such, they experienced their trip differently than they might have done had they felt more personally connected to the narratives they heard and witnessed. By positioning themselves as outsiders, they interpreted their experience using what I call an "outsider gaze," which directed their attention toward cues that supported their interest in learning facts and information about The Conflict. However, their gaze remained detached from the political context, as well as from the emotional reactions that their more Connected peers had expressed. As a result, positioning themselves as outsiders allowed these students to maintain an emotional distance from what they observed, and contributed to their subdued understanding about the emotional and political charge of this highly sensitive region.

Without a sense of a personal Connection to Palestine/Israel, these students spoke about their programs in ways that revealed consistent themes and strategies about how they approached their experiences overseas, and how they made sense of them afterwards. Consistent with their intent to hear multiple perspectives about The Conflict, they approached this trip as if it were a fact-finding mission. They not only positioned The Conflict as integral to the region, but also as an intractable fixture. Therefore, they spoke of gaining awareness about many of its facets, but they did not speak in terms of possibility for change or action. They emphasized information-seeking and prioritized intellectualization over emotional responses. In fact, many of them

reported the emotional responses of their peers in factual ways, rather than with apparent empathy.

As outsiders, they positioned themselves as neutral, and therefore capable of hearing multiple perspectives with detached objectivity. They maintained some degree of emotional distance from the stories they heard, which allowed them to weigh contrasting and conflicting narratives. They sought to take a stance on The Conflict and justify it with facts and reason, in part to make up for their lack of personal investment in a particular stance.

Finally, they seemed to separate what they had observed from what they had personally experienced. As outsiders, they had been attuned to things that felt familiar and comfortable. When they told stories about their trip, they often centered themselves in their narratives. Although they did not speak about other people's narratives with distrust, they were most compelled by the injustices they had personally experienced themselves.

The way that they talked about themselves and their program shaped my understanding about an "outsider gaze" as a framework to understand their collective approach to these programs. This framing builds from the influential work of the tourist gaze as conceptualized by John Urry (1990, 1992) and refined and enhanced along with Jonas Larsen (Urry & Larsen 2011).

In this chapter, I will introduce the concept of "gaze" as understood in visual culture, postmodern philosophy, and tourism studies. Then, I will highlight two cases to illustrate how the outsider gaze was employed by the interviewees. These cases demonstrate how their "outsider" self-positioning impacted their gaze upon people and places within Palestine/Israel during and after their program, and offer evidence that their depersonalized stance focused their attention on information about The Conflict with a sense of detachment about how this

information impacted people around them. The first case features these students descriptions of their experiences in Tel Aviv, where the interviewees sought out symbols of familiarity and comfort, and shut out analysis of what may have been sociopolitically uncomfortable. The second case explores the interviewees' reflections about meeting a settler with right-wing ideology. In their stories about this, their talk revealed the ways that they leveraged their outsider gaze to focus more on "objective" fact-finding, which turned their gaze away from noticing and attending to the strong emotional reactions exhibited by their peers in this scenario.

Gazes

The concept of "gaze" is rooted in psychoanalytic theory and studies of visual culture (Cartwright, 2008). Whereas visual culture scholars understand a *spectator gaze* in psychoanalytic terms of appealing to ideologies of desire and fantasy for an ideal audience (Sturken, 2008; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 73), for the purposes of my study, I have considered the notion of "looking as a social practice" (Cartwright, 2008, p. 1) with an emphasis on gaze as a means of directing one's attention. This understanding of gaze implies more about agentic choice within experiential settings, rather than as a consumer of visual media wherein an artist, director, or producer has more influence on framing one's attention. In an experiential setting such as study abroad, the concept of gaze considers how a spectator frames what they choose to see and notice, whether consciously or subconsciously. What one sees and notices (and does not see or notice) is informed by their attention, intention, sociocultural positionality, and guidance from external sources (like tour guides and educators). In terms of experiential education, the notion of learning as a spectator takes can be understood as a distinct way of learning from experience. Instead of having an experience that involves learning from active engagement with one's surroundings, a spectator has an experience by gazing at people and

objects within a setting in order to passively take in information through the filter of their sociocultural lens.

Following the thinking of Foucault, gazing is different than the physical act of seeing. Gazing is shaped by one's expectations, awareness, and focus, all of which are shaped by their previous experiences as well as by their sociocultural identities. As Urry and Larsen (2011) described it in their introduction to their conceptualization of a tourist gaze, "[p]eople gaze upon the world through a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires and expectations, framed by social class, gender, nationality, age and education. Gazing is a performance that orders, shapes, and classifies, rather than reflects the world" (p. 2).

Urry and Larsen (2011) argued that the subject of tourism offers rich terrain for research because its "practices involve the notion of 'departure', of a limited breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one's senses to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and mundane" (p. 3) Similarly, education abroad to destinations made up of novel or different cultures introduce a disjuncture from one's everyday lived experience that heighten awareness of one's surroundings. Not only do these settings attune travelers to differences, but they also create a sense of distance from one's everyday realities. Whereas the focus of leisure-oriented tourism is pleasure, educational tourism such as study abroad programs are guided by discourses of learning. Therefore, a different kind of gaze emerges as "authorized by various discourses" (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 19). In this case, destinations are not only "visually consumed" (p. 20) while collecting photographs of surface-level constructions of places, but the gaze also includes the collection of multisensory information, although still experienced on a superficial level.

The notion of an outsider gaze is consonant with several principles of tourist gaze, which Larsen (2001) described as offering

> a framed relationship to the "external" world as the window of the car and train, like the optic of the camera, which literally frames people's view of the landscape into scenes; they take control and possession of a distanced landscape with a detached look: the observer looks in, but from an "outside" position. (p. 89)

The outsider gaze employed by these interviewees afforded them with a sense of being spectators, looking out with detachment upon distanced landscapes that comprised The Conflict. Moreover, their gaze assumed that the scenes of occupation — the Separation Wall, checkpoints, settlements, refugee camps — were all part of the scenery, fixed and unchangeable.

Scholars have extended the tourist gaze analysis into cinematic metaphors that explore relationships between tourist imaginaries, distanced sightseeing, and watching films (Gibson, 2006; Larsen, 2001; Farías 2010). Such an extension seems particularly resonant to the outsider gaze. For example, while Gibson (2006) discussed the practice of people viewing films as if they were traveling, the participants in my study traveled as if they were viewing a film. Beyond the film-like montage created by the sights they saw (Farías, 2010), these students spoke about their experiences of interacting with local people from the detached stance of watching a film. Furthermore, their rhetorical detachment from the subject matter gave an impression that they had gazed at something interesting and informative, from a distanced vantage point that had precluded any intervention or action.

Gazing Upon Experience

Understanding the interviewees' perspective from the perspective of an outsider gaze illuminated two distinct ways that these students talked about their program and its aftermath.

There was a distinction between how the students talked about what they had *observed* and what they had *experienced*. Whereas they discussed the program elements that exposed them to information about The Conflict as if they had observed them as if watching a documentary film, they discussed their own embodied experiences as if they had been the starring role of their own film.

This figurative lens reflected the distance and disconnect they felt because they perceived themselves to be outsiders. It also served to maintain an emotional distance from the people they interacted with and places they gazed upon. Moreover, the nature of the short term study abroad program added an element of passivity to the gaze, as these students did not have agency with respect to their itinerary: although their schedule allowed for some breaks and free time for their own exploration, they did not have much control over where they went, with whom they met, or the pacing of the their encounters and activities. Instead, they were passive observers to what was presented to them. They focused on learning information that helped to make them more aware of issues pertaining to The Conflict. This gaze did not preclude them from learning a great deal; indeed, all of the interviewees said that the program had left a significant impact on them.

In order to explore how the outsider gaze operated for these students, I analyze two cases that illuminated the effects of distanced identities when engaging contentious issues. First, I consider how some of the students struggled with their inclination to like aspects of a cosmopolitan Israeli city in spite of being told that it was opposed to their political stance. Second, I consider how these students discussed their feelings upon meeting an Israeli settler whose views and opinion were politically oppositional to that of the interviewees, and whose rhetoric was personally hurtful to Palestinians and Arabs in their group.

Case #1: Gazing at Tel Aviv

Discussions about Tel Aviv illuminated three aspects of the outsider gaze. First, the interviewees expressed their desire to seek out familiarity in this city in the midst of traveling to an otherwise unfamiliar place. Second, because of the tension between how the outsiders and the Activists gazed upon their experiences, the outsiders were prompted to reconcile their positive affective responses to Tel Aviv with their political understanding about the context of military occupation and injustice. Third, the outsiders occasionally used neutral or vague language about The Conflict that served to distance them from vocalizing a clear political stance, further exacerbating the sense that they remained detached from addressing the injustices outside of the Tel Aviv "bubble."

The topic of Tel Aviv came up for several participants due to a tension they felt largely because the influence from their Activist Peers. These peers repeatedly prompted the interviewees to consider how they could like an Israeli city that was affiliated with occupation. This dilemma stemmed from their outsider positionality. Whereas they aspired to sympathize with Palestinians, their gaze was drawn to the parts of Tel Aviv that felt familiar and comfortable. Particularly because of their Activist Peers' politically-oriented admonishments, which reportedly ranged from gentle reminders to outright scolding, they worried that these two inclinations conflicted with each other, and they then strove to reconcile these feelings according to outsider logics of maintaining distance and supposed objectivity.

Tel Aviv is a large city that is often likened to European beachside cities (Rapoport, 2016). Developed in the 20th century along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, the city is new, compared to its surroundings that include ancient towns and structures that date back thousands of years. Tel Aviv's skyscrapers, shopping districts, tech company offices, and development

along the coast make it an appealing city for tourists that disabuses commonly-held orientalist expectations about a Middle East full of camels and deserts.

Seeking the Familiar

Many of the participants described their first impressions of Tel Aviv as positive; they had been charmed by what had been most apparent within the frame of their outsider gaze. Some of them associated this, in part, to a feeling of relief in the face of anxiety about traveling to a place that was culturally novel to them, much less a place that they had understood to be full of conflict. As they acclimated to being in a new place to which they were outsiders, they sought out the comfort of familiarity.

Diana: Tel Aviv was really cool. It's like, you know, a huge city, so — the weather was amazing. … But once we got in there, it was almost a sense of relief? 'Cause it was just a city, you know. It [laugh] was just, you know, a really cool city, lots of different types of food, and people just going about their day, like normal people things. And, you know, I honestly don't know what I expected. But that was, like, [sigh], a nice— like, I felt like I could like, [sigh], breathe a sigh of relief. I was like, "OK. [sigh] This is fine." It's just, you know, another place. Yeah, I really liked Tel Aviv. I never felt, like, unsafe there. Or anything like that.

JM: Thinking back on it now, what do you think was the relief? I think that's pretty deep.

Diana: I think, I feel like the relief for me was the feeling that I was gonna be OK. Like I — this was my first time abroad by myself. I had no idea what to expect. And then, once we got there, and it was, you know, a city with the

palm trees, and beaches, and things like that, it was like, "This is fine!" [laugh] You know, I'm gonna be fine.

Diana relayed a sense of relief to be in Tel Aviv immediately upon her arrival, especially when her gaze perceived what she considered to be "normal people things" that assured her that it was "just a city." Even though she claimed to not remember what she had expected prior to arriving, her relief indicated that she had been nervous. By mentioning that she had never felt unsafe there, she insinuated that she had previously been concerned about her safety while in Israel/Palestine. She explained that she had been nervous because it had been her first time traveling overseas by herself; however, she may also have felt anxiety because of her program's focus on conflict and cultures that were new to her. While reminiscing about feeling relief, she even reenacted her emotions by sighing a few times. Her recollection of her initial impression included vacation-like signs and symbols like nice weather, restaurants, palm trees, and beaches, all of which led her to believe that she would be "fine" in this seaside city with tourist amenities she found comforting.

Bridget also indicated her attention had been trained on what had felt "normal" to her. Her memory of her gaze upon the city included a thorough overview of diverse areas to which her group had been introduced during their tour. Beyond simply being drawn in by the beaches, she had found familiarity in multiple characteristics of the city's urban development, and even acknowledged that the less touristy and even impoverished aspects of the city felt familiar to her experiences living in other large cities in Europe and North America, and so they were also included in her gaze.

Bridget: The city felt kind of familiar, just like, modern buildings along the water. We also, the first day, I think, went to a gentrified part of it. And that felt pretty

> normal. Like, any city I would visit in Europe that had a part that was getting more and more gentrified. Or developed. And then, there was one day, I think our last day there, we went to South Tel Aviv? Or at least, where a lot of refugees come, or immigrants from poorer countries. And then we talked with people about that, and that was another layer of political issues that I was completely unaware of. Although we talked a little about racism, like, within Israel excluding [the] Palestinian and Arab issue. But even that felt, sadly, normalized. Because it was something I'm familiar with [in Europe] and in the U.S.. And it just felt like, of course there *was* a poorer part of the city. I lived in [large European city] when I was little and my parents were students, so it was like, we lived in kind of the poorer part, and, I don't know, it just felt like — I've known of that ever since I was little, so as frustrating and sad as it was, it made sense. So I think, mostly it was just, I was surprised by how much the city made sense to me. Like, it just felt like any other city. Even though it was within this bigger context that — like, I had just been looking at the bigger context [of The Conflict]. As I'd been studying it.

Having been focused on the geopolitical context of The Conflict, Bridget recalled having been surprised that Tel Aviv was a complex yet familiar-feeling city, and was further pleasantly surprised to feel a sense of understanding with its urban logics. Just as Diana had done, Bridget also used the term "normal" to describe what her gaze had been attuned to, even beyond the beaches in the "poorer part of the city." Because she had recognized elements of her former home contexts within a context she had expected to be so different due to her framing of The Conflict, she felt as though the city "made sense" and therefore considered it to be appealing.

The interviewees' outsider gaze upon Tel Aviv focused on what they considered to be familiar or comforting, so they were inclined to like the city. However, a gaze directs attention in one direction while directing it away from another. In this case, these women had initially overlooked signs of The Conflict that were outside of their immediate and selective gaze. Soon enough, because of their political ideologies about The Conflict, combined with exhortations about ethical travel from their program and their peers, this initial affinity for Tel Aviv resulted in internal conflicts. Bridget expressed this tension quite clearly:

> Bridget: And then we went to Tel Aviv, and I went in thinking, "Oh, this is like Israel, I really am politically opposed to it. I'm not going to really like it." And I, like, fell in love with Tel Aviv. And, I think it was partly because it was much more familiar than Jordan had been [where she had visited for a few days in transit to Israel/Palestine]. And it felt kind of like a European city. But it also felt foreign enough that it was really interesting, and, I don't know, I just really liked the atmosphere. And that was really difficult to understand, but for me, knowing in my head the political situation, but then feeling how great the city was.

Even though she claimed during her interview that she had not expected to like the city, or anything Israeli, she described how she had surprised herself by "falling in love with Tel Aviv." Recognizing how her sense of familiarity shaped her gaze, she detached her feelings about the city from her thoughts about the political context. Her ability to decouple her understanding about "the political situation" from her affinity for the city was a reflection of her outsider gaze upon both the city and the context of The Conflict. As an outsider, she could keep her feelings separate from her politics. Furthermore, in this excerpt, Bridget referred to her

opinion that the city was "great," stating this as if it were her subjective response to an objective fact — as if to say, "I personally felt the greatness of the city" — demonstrating an authoritative appeal to objectivity.

Naturally, the students' interpretations of what felt familiar and normal, as well as what felt foreign and uncomfortable, were informed by their identities, their families, and their individual personalities, in addition to their outsider gazes. Because these study abroad programs were attuned to issues of identity, their discussions and debriefs introduced these issues into their consciousness, and thus encouraged the students to interrogate their own positionalities and the assumptions they subsequently took for granted. According to one interviewee, the program facilitators and guides made a point of interrogating the participants' perceptions of familiarity in places like Tel Aviv.

JM: Were there other places that felt familiar to you? Or other feelings of familiarity as you moved from place to place to place?

Paige: Yeah. And I feel bad saying this, but when we went to Tel Aviv and we saw the beach, I was like— I grew up on the lake, too, so I was like, "Oh my god! The water! We're back!" But then, taking a step back to being, like, just because it's a developed city, it's on the beach, it's cute, it's still — there're still things happening. So that's what we did. And whenever there was that sort of sense of familiarity, tour guides, as well as Lucy and Rania, were really good at flipping it, and saying, "Well, wait. Is it really familiar? And if it is, why?" And just unpacking the situations as well. And being like, "Yeah, we had a fun day at the beach, but what does that really mean, to have a fun day at the beach in this particular region, in this time and setting? Like, did you

> really have fun at the beach?" And always making us think, and take the next step forward. Although it was upsetting sometimes, I think it was really important to have.

Paige prefaced her answer by saying that she felt "bad about saying this," which may have alluded to her sense of guilt for admitting to betraying her pro-Palestinian politics by initially having been attracted to something in this Israeli city. She then explained that she took a step back to reconsider the complexities lying beneath her feelings, particularly with respect to her associations of familiarity.

Paige valued this practice of questioning what may have felt familiar and why, that she remembered as being an important part of her group reflections. She recognized that what had felt familiar to her had been the "development" of the city, the beach, and its overall cuteness, and therefore these elements had been the initial focus of her gaze as an outsider. Then, with the guidance from her program leaders, she remembered having been asked to interrogate this gaze, and then to zoom out to consider the wider context that may have been outside of their purview. Paige did not explain exactly what had been "upsetting" to contend with at times, nor had she elaborated on exactly why it was important. However, she did express an appreciation for this practice of questioning how the sense of familiar had shaped their perceptions, reactions, and overall experiences. This was one element from her program that she credited for having instilled a critical consciousness that she claimed to have embraced and developed since her program concluded.

Reconciling a Cool City That Is Bubbled From "What's Happening" Nearby

In their narratives, several of the interviewees described their own reckoning between their positive initial gaze upon Tel Aviv, and the ways their feelings about the city changed they

became increasingly aware of the context and subtext of The Conflict. Although they attributed these changes to various sources, they each shared that they reached a point where they had to contend with the context of The Conflict into which Tel Aviv is inextricably embedded.

Many of the students used the terminology of "bubbles" when they spoke about the way that certain places seemed distanced and protected from surrounding harsh realities. This was a common metaphor used by the students. In fact, many of them also referred to their university as a "liberal bubble" set apart from other communities in their midwestern state, including and maybe especially compared to many of their hometowns. With regard to places within Palestine/Israel, the students mentioned that this "bubble" discourse had been prevalent in their group discussions during the programs. Tel Aviv was a city that was often given the "bubble" designation (National Geographic, 2010) not only because of its perceived modernity in contrast with its geographical proximity to places that dated back to antiquity, like Jerusalem's Old City, but also especially because it felt materially and psychologically insulated from the stark injustices in nearby places that were under military occupation or siege, like the eastern side of Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. In the context of the study abroad programs in question, this disparity was glaring to those who were aware of it. But because of the "bubble" effect, the familiarity of the modern comforts of Tel Aviv had the potential to divert the students' gaze away from the structural violence and stark injustices that are, indeed, not only nearby but also present within the city itself.

Elizabeth described the "bubble" quality of Tel Aviv when she shared her memories of her first impressions.

JM: When you're thinking about Tel Aviv now, how do you think about that city?

Elizabeth: Like I said, the analogy that we kept talking about, and what stuck with me, is the bubble. 'Cause it's this cool, international-kinda feeling town. It feels like, from my other travels, kinda like London mixed with Amsterdam, mixed with Lisbon, I'll say. I don't even know. And like it doesn't have its own kinda feel. It feels just very international. Which I mean, historically, if you look back, it's a newer town, so it doesn't necessarily have its, like, deep-rooted culture, like some of those other cities do. Or some of these other countries do. So yeah, I don't necessarily have a negative taste of it, but I just think it's living proof of, like, the bubble goes along with the ignorance. 'Cause I think it's easy to go into a town like that, 'cause I was there, like I was in that town, and not be aware of what's happening.

Elizabeth frequently dwelled on a theme of having been ignorant at the beginning of her program in Palestine/Israel. which was echoed her assertion that one could remain ignorant to the realities of The Conflict if they chose to only stay in the "cool" parts of Tel Aviv. Because it felt like other large cosmopolitan cities to which she had traveled, she referred to such "international-kinda feeling" cities with a sense of familiarity. Another participant, Allison, had put it this way: "I feel like Tel Aviv is like, you can be there for a month and not ever feel anything different" from her life in the U.S. or with respect to The Conflict. Similarly, other interviewees shared that they knew people who had traveled to Israel for beach vacations in Tel Aviv; after visiting the city themselves, the interviewees understood how people could compartmentalize their experience to one of touristic getaway, even while being in the midst of militarized conflict and occupation. In this regard, Tel Aviv represented a tempting beach escape that could allow for an

outsider to accept a strong illusion of blissful ignorance of the realities of The Conflict's violence.

In the excerpt above, Elizabeth's language choices revealed aspects of her outsider gaze. She had suggested that one reason why she had perceived Tel Aviv to be "international" was because it was "a newer town," supposedly in contrast to the European cities she had listed. Claiming that Tel Aviv had no "deep-rooted culture" suggested that her gaze had been focused on its newer elements rather than the historical neighborhoods that did not only predate the founding of the state of Israel, but also dated back thousands of years, offering evidence of connectivity to this area for various cultural people-groups. Because those areas and their stories do not align with the "bubble" discourse that informed her gaze, she had apparently dismissed them. Also, it is interesting to note that Elizabeth did not refer directly to The Conflict, but maintained her outsider's distance to the contentious topic by avoiding even that relatively neutral term, opting instead for the ambiguous phrase, "aware of what's happening."

Bridget associated her feelings about Tel Aviv with the sequence of her program. Although she had come to Israel/Palestine with an inclination to sympathize with Palestinians, she had first been surprised at how she could like an Israeli city, as discussed above. Then, after spending time in the occupied West Bank and learning about The Conflict, she ended up feeling reluctant to fully allow herself to enjoy a city she had fallen in love with just days before.

Bridget: But I think also, being there [in Tel Aviv] before we went to the West Bank, and we were talking about the things, and I had studied this Conflict, so I knew a lot theoretically, but I hadn't seen it. And I think, going there after having experienced everything else, I don't think I would've disliked the city, I

think I still would've really liked it, for the city it was, but I think I would've had more of a hard time enjoying it, or accepting that I was enjoying it.

JM: Ah. After being in the West Bank?

Bridget: Yeah, after being in the West Bank.

Here, she was contending with her experience of liking the city while addressing the contradiction between her feelings and the facts she had learned about the political situation. While maintaining her view that the city itself was worthy of being liked, she acknowledged that it would have been more complicated after having spent two weeks living in and learning about oppressed Palestinian communities. Nevertheless, she remained vague about what comprised the "everything else" from the West Bank. She did not mention the occupation directly, nor did she allude to anything that would be problematic enough for her to reconsider her feelings about being in Tel Aviv. This neutral language helped her maintain an outsider's distance to the West Bank and its issues, which may have allowed her to continue defending her desire to like Tel Aviv.

Near the end of this excerpt, she corrected herself from saying "I think I would've had more of a hard time enjoying it," by adding the suggestion that the challenge would have been *accepting* her ability to enjoy it, even after spending two weeks living, volunteering, and learning in the occupied West Bank. This seemed to capture in real-time her struggle with her feelings about Tel Aviv. The correction reiterated her belief that she would indeed still like the city, even after witnessing how Palestinians in the West Bank suffered because of the occupation. However, in this hypothetical scenario she posed, her internal conflict would not have been about whether to like Tel Aviv any less, but rather, how she would grapple with her subsequent

feelings as she tried reconciling having an emotionally positive reaction to a place she intellectually had wanted to oppose or reject.

Diana did return to Tel Aviv at the end of her program after spending two weeks in the West Bank. She described how her feelings about the city had, in fact, changed after having gained more awareness about The Conflict.

Diana: On my way out, I had to go back to Tel Aviv. … I had to go back to Israel. And I was like, uncomfortable by that. Having to go back. And like, you know, I ate my lunch there, I flew out of the Tel Aviv airport. All of that. Made me way more uncomfortable than coming in. Which is, like, fair; I guess, coming in, I didn't really know anything. Or, think about it, really? … But leaving, was like, you know, I didn't want to be back there, I guess, but I had to.

And I remember sitting down and eating lunch with, like, the other girls that were flying out of Tel Aviv, and all of that. And you know, we were back in Tel Aviv, this, like, giant, really nice, like, pretty Western-looking city, and coming straight from, like, Beit Sahour, like, earlier that day. And it was like, "Yeah," you know, "Here we are again. In Tel Aviv. Doing this." And there was just— you know, everything was different there. There were so many options for food, and all of that. And I got these, like, you know, really good, like, breakfasts. And I mean it was good, but like, [sigh/laugh], like, the whole time, I was more aware, I guess, of — you know, I got to, you know, it was the end of the program, so we could reflect on everything that happened. And

all of that. So I guess, having to do that while sitting in Tel Aviv was, like, uncomfortable. …

JM: So, even from the first time you went to Tel Aviv, at first, you felt different in the city?

Diana: Oh, definitely. Yeah. 'Cause the first time [at the beginning of the program], I knew, like, significantly less, I think. I learned, like, so much on that program. Anyway, it all changes once you see it in person.

JM: I feel like there's a lot here that you're saying around, like, why a place that you also like — Israeli places that you liked, can feel uncomfortable.

Diana: Yeah

JM: I find that really interesting

Diana: It was almost like I felt bad for liking it.

JM: Oh, yeah?

Diana: Or, like, I felt, kinda, I felt bad for liking it … So I was there, and like objectively, these are beautiful cities with a lot to offer, great beaches, you know. And I did have fun there, but, [sigh], but it was always that sense of being aware, I guess, of what was happening. And, you know, it's tough to fully let go and enjoy it.

According to Diana, it had been impossible to for her to "fully let go" of her nascent awareness about The Conflict, even in a city she described as being "really nice," pretty, and "objectively" beautiful. She refrained from describing what she had become aware of, as well as what was happening to make her feel guilty. So even with more knowledge and opinions that caused discomfort, her outsider gaze was still apparent. For example, her linguistic opacity

precluded any hint at injustice or an impact on anyone. As with Elizabeth, I assumed that her nod to "what was happening" was a reference to the oppression about which she had learned "so much on that program," from seeing it "in person" during her time living and volunteering in the occupied West Bank. However, because her language was so abstract, she did not commit to any particular stance here. She even stopped herself before describing what she had been "more aware of," and refrained from elaborating on "everything that happened" that she and her friends had reflected upon. Perhaps, as she had discussed at other points during her interviews, it is possible that she was uncomfortable with the proximity of such differential access to resources and amenities.

In contrast to Diana and Bridget, who did not attribute their contextual awareness to any external influence, Elizabeth credited her Activist Peers for prompting her to consider Tel Aviv within its larger context. Namely, her curiosity had been piqued when some members of her group had expressed discomfort.

Elizabeth: And then our first week of the trip, we started in Israel proper. We were in Tel Aviv. And it was cool, we did like a lot of reflections as a group and stuff, and we came back and would talk about our day. I remember some people were saying that they didn't wanna, like, spend any money in Israel. They're like, "I just wanna get outta here as quickly as we can." I'm like, "Oh, but why? This town seems pretty cool." Like, I thought it was like a fun, international town in Israel. And some of the students were like, "No." Like, "I just wanna get out of here, I don't like this." And they were like, "An hour away's" — 'cause you know an hour away from Tel Aviv is, like, Gaza. And they were like, "How can we sit here and even, like, enjoy this when we know, like, what's

> happening an hour away?" I'm like, "Oh." Like, "Yeah, that's a really good point, like, I didn't even think about." So like we talked a lot about how, like, Tel Aviv is kinda like a bubble.

As part of Elizabeth's overarching personal trajectory from ignorance to awareness during her time in the program, she credited her connected peers for reminding her of the context of The Conflict when the allure of Tel Aviv had distracted her gaze. As if recalling direct quotations from her internal dialogue, she revealed how she remembered her thought process to have been in response to her peers' concerns. However, these quotations still used the same ambiguous language of "what's happening" rather than anything specific about occupation or injustice that her peers may have been inclined to say during these conversations. Even as Elizabeth was explaining how her awareness had been expanded, she refrained from identifying what this awareness entailed.

In addition to coming to terms with the multisensory experience of traveling to a new destination and seeking familiarity amid the newness, the interviewees were also forced to challenge their assumptions about a context that had been framed as being saturated in conflict, but instead had felt "normal." Then, they were prompted by their experiences — as well as by some of their peers — to question the ethics of the familiar elements, because of the underlying context of The Conflict. Consequently, during and after the program, these students had considered what it meant to enjoy things that seemed "normal," but in this context were somehow complicit in problematic systems and structures that harmed Palestinians. Their positionality as outsiders in this context provided enough distance for them to begin to grapple with these kinds of issues.

Further, Tel Aviv prompted students' internal struggle of confronting what the program had introduced with respect to ethical travel in a conflict zone, in light of their political beliefs and solidarity. As outsiders, they did not feel like any component of their identities dictated their feelings, preferences, and responses to places like Tel Aviv. They had enough emotional distance to gaze at the city as outsiders who found themselves liking (or loving) the city in spite of political pressures to critique it. It was this kind of experience that invited many of the participants to reconsider their binary thinking of "like vs. dislike" into more nuanced complexities. This conundrum forced them to consider how to reconcile their views that the Israeli government is doing wrong, but everything Israeli is not inherently wrong. This conundrum presented itself to these students again when they met with a settler, which is the setting of Case #2.

An Aside About Elizabeth's Use of "What's Happening"

It is worth mentioning that Elizabeth's speech patterns often included vague phrasing. Therefore, her use of "what's happening" in reference to the occupation was not necessarily unusual, but perhaps the abundant ambiguity consistently prevented her from taking a stand with her descriptions. As such, it may be instructive to consider a longer example from the same interview as the excerpt above, in which she repeatedly used variants of the phrase "what was happening." Although this excerpt contains a great deal that is ripe for analysis — for example, with respect to the linguistics within her attempts to objectively weigh both sides — for the purpose of this section, I will attend to her repeated use of "what's going on" or "what's happening" as a reference to The Context, as well as to injustice globally. To this end, I added boldface font to emphasize each of these phrases.

Elizabeth: So like I was just amazed by how —' cause like I said, like I came in with such ignorant views, and like, I had no idea **what was going on**, I was just so amazed, 'cause **there's so much going on in the world** that **I have no idea about what's going on**. In America we live in such a bubble. And like just the way that I've been raised, I've been in such a bubble of like privilege of **not knowing what's going on**.

And like, and just, like, *still* amazed, even, that, like, **something like this could happen**, like, how is Israel, like, able to— like, **how is this able to happen**. And of course, like, you have — I do look at it from, like, both sides, too. 'Cause I don't wanna say, like, Oh, I hate the Jews, hate the Israelis, like, they shouldn't be there. Of course I'm like empathetic for, like, both sides, and like I try to look at it, like, OK, like why is it that they're not being — like, **why is it that this is being able to happen**, then of course like you see the, theee, what I would consider the [pause] what's the word I'm thinking — I don't even know what word I'm thinking about. The — like, the response, I'll say. Like the response of their people when they attack. The Israelis. And like for me, I view it as a response. **To what is being done upon them**. 'Cause then you have people say like, "Oh no, but the Israeli— the Palestinians, they're the dangerous ones, they come in, bomb and they're dangerous, they're bad people, Arabs are bad, they're terrorists." Yes, there are some bad people. Like there are in any group. And I'm not saying it's justified — I'm not saying it's justified anything that's happening. But um, like I think [pause] it's kinda hard, like, it's like chicken and the egg, like which came first. But

the way that I see it, which may be wrong, is that like Israel made the first move. And then, so like when I look at, like, the Palestinian violence, I think OK but like why are — it's a reaction. It's like, to their suppression. I'm not saying it's justified, but it's a reaction. So let's look at, like, both sides as to why are the Palestinians fighting back. I don't know. Hmmm. I don't even know if I agree with everything I just said.

JM: [laughter]

Elizabeth: Ugh. The main point was just, I'm just blown away by **how *I* personally did not know what was happening**. And I'm blown away that **I don't think the world knows what's happening**. **I don't even think people in Israel even know what's happening**. Um. **I think the Palestinians know what's happening**. 'Cause **they're the ones who it's being happened upon**.

Whereas Elizabeth's vague language may not solely have been a rhetorical strategy to avoid taking a side, its consistent ambiguity revealed a resistance to taking a stance. This may have been because her analysis had been disjointed and incomplete as she was recalling her memories of the program and the issues concerning The Conflict. However, in the middle of this excerpt, she aspired to look at The Conflict by empathizing with the positions of "both sides," which was consistent with taking the positionality of an outsider in order to weigh both sides and come at an independent, objective conclusion. Furthermore, learning about "what was happening" was the essential component to Elizabeth's argument that the program had converted her from having been ignorant to having been more aware of challenges that people faced outsider of her "bubble of privilege." Therefore, her vague language implies a possibility that she used it to avoid taking a stance in an effort to be an objective outsider.

Case #2: Gazing Past a Settler's Offensive Remarks

The interviewees' narratives about meeting a settler illuminated some ways in which they were able to describe and process this encounter without feeling personally attached to or attacked by the things the settler said. They contrasted their own responses with those of their Activist Peers, who had been personally offended by the settler's remarks. Although each interviewee presented unique perspectives about the meeting with the settler, they all illuminated different aspects of gazing upon the encounter while situating themselves as detached outsiders. Even though the interviewees positioned settlers as problematic, as outsiders, they tried to position themselves as objective listeners who could understand — and possibly empathize with — the perspective of the settler. In addition, their narratives indicated that, while they attuned their gaze toward the settler, they gazed away from the emotional reactions of peers who were personally attached and therefore felt personally attacked by what the settlers said.

Positioning Settlers as Problems

In common discourse about Israel/Palestine, the role of settlers and settlements is of critical importance to The Conflict. In this context, the term "settlement" generally refers to an Israeli community that exists in territory that had been designated by the Oslo Accords as being Palestinian, whether in the West Bank, in the Gaza Strip (until 2005), and in and around Jerusalem. Settlements can be single residences or apartment buildings, or large cities with upwards of 50,000 residents. They tend to restrict residency exclusively for Jewish Israelis, and can be fortified with armed security or military presence. As such, they are very divisive in terms of Israeli politics, especially in terms of prospects for a peaceful resolution such as the often-discussed "two-state" solution in which certain land would be designated for an Israeli state and other land would be designated for a Palestinian state. Because settlements exist on the land that

would have been earmarked for a Palestinian state, they are widely seen as an impediment to peace. Relatedly, opponents to settlements often mention that the international community considers many of these settlements are illegal under international law (Hirschhorn, 2020; UNOCHA, 2017).

People who live in these settlements are referred to as "settlers" in English-language discourse. The term "settler" also points to Israeli civilians who commit acts of violence against Palestinian people and property, since some people who choose to live in settlements include political extremists who engage in violent tactics against Palestinian people and property (UNOCHA, n.d.-c, 2017). Thus, the concept of "settler" can be conflated with this kind of extremist (Hirschhorn, 2020). Accordingly, when the interviewees discussed settlers, they often did so with the implication that they were problematic, if not inherently contemptible.

Interviewees had positioned the settlements and settlers as bad actors — both in the sense that settlers were obstacles to peace in the region, and also that they were ill-intentioned. In their understanding, they were impediments to a peaceful resolution to The Conflict. The students referred to settlements as symbols of something sinister encroaching on Palestinian land, sometimes with specific examples of settlers who acted violently towards Palestinians. The study abroad programs introduced all of the students to the topic of settlers and settlements, in part from meeting speakers who shared examples of acts of direct violence that settlers committed, of structural violence of displacement in order to build and fortify settlement communities, and of Israeli institutional complicity in allowing for or rewarding such violence to take place with impunity. So the content of their programs provided evidence to these students that settlers and settlements were a significant part of the problems entangled in The Conflict.

In their interviews, these students shared second-hand accounts about settlers that had been passed along through narrative storytelling during their trip, including from the owners of a Palestinian family farm where several of them visited or volunteered, and which had been besieged by surrounding settlements and settlers for three decades. According to recollections from Linda, during their orientation to the farm, her group was told that one of their main roles as volunteers was to contribute to an "international presence" with the intention of warding off threats from nearby settlers.

> Linda: We basically talked about how our role there, really, was to be an international presence. And how, in the past, settlers from the surrounding settlements would, like, release an invasive species into the farm, and animals, and things like that. And having an international presence made them not do that, 'cause they didn't wanna upset us Americans, or Europeans, or other people. So he basically was like, "Yeah, you guys are gonna be doing, like, some work, but like, honestly, we just want you guys to be here."

By sharing this story, and including a remembered quote from the owner of the farm, Linda provided an example of how settlers had been framed. Moreover, this account provides insight as to how she had remembered her group's role as volunteers, positioned in part as protection from settlers. She claimed that their presence would dissuade settlers from attacking because they would not want to "upset" people from the U.S. or European countries, which may have reflected her own inflated perception of her positionality as a U.S.-American in the eyes of Israeli settlers. Nevertheless, the notion that settlers were the Bad Guys was reinforced by narratives such as this one.

Visiting a Settlement

In spite of the negative role settlements had played in the imaginaries of the interviewees, only one of them spoke about her embodied experience of physically being in an Israeli settlement.

Sylvia: And also we visited a settlement. And we spoke with a settler. That was very bizarre. It was very [long pause] I don't know. Like, I'd almost say it was like an out-of-body experience. But it felt very much, like, the [pause] the energy there was different.

…

JM: So, can you talk — I think it's so interesting to go to the settlement, and you're saying, like, you came in with anti-settlement ideas. What was it like for you to *go* to a settlement, to hear this person, to sit with someone who — you weren't there to change her mind, right? Collectively.

Sylvia: Right

JM: What was all of that like for you?

Sylvia: It was [pause] surreal. … We were — I believe we were offered wine that was grown, like, made from grapes in the settlement, or made there or something like that. Like, we were offered Israeli wine. It was a beautiful, new building, this visitor's center that was set up for education, I believe. Like, it was set up for people to come. And she was, like, the spokesperson of the settlement, or something, so she knew — she was, you know, the person for it. And it was, like, very jarring to see [pause] new buildings. And new infrastructure. And, you know, like beautiful bathrooms that you'd s— like, the bathrooms kinda

struck me. Beautiful bathrooms that you'd see in, like, a nice restaurant around here [in the U.S.]. And then, you know, it's just, they felt very different everywhere else in Palestine.[15] And you know, in Palestine, like when we were in Hebron, like, you know, visited with people from the Hebron Freedom Fund? I believe? They also do education there. And like, the bathroom there, they were like, "Hey, can you guys not flush every time you go? 'Cause we don't have enough water." So we were all like, "Uh, hell yeah, we're not flushing!"

… So like, even things like that, were just very, like, just surreal. [pause] Yeah. [pause] It felt like a different planet. It really did. And like, that [pause] that parallel, that side-by-side comparison of what new infrastructure looked like, while people who've been there for generations just see it crumble around them, sometimes maliciously, purposefully, you know. … Yeah, it just felt icky. Icky and like the air wasn't quite moving right.

When recalling what it had felt like to Sylvia described her feelings as having been "like an out-of-body experience," "surreal, "icky," and "like the air wasn't quite moving right." In response to my question, she described her feelings about having been in a new building inside a settlement, namely about her discomfort that had been difficult for her to express clearly, even as she had been deliberate with her words (as evidenced by the pauses). She noted that they were in a visitor's center for the settlement and its winery, and that much of her discomfort stemmed from the fact that the building was so new and beautiful, which had been such a contrast to a building she had visited in the Old City of Hebron, a besieged Palestinian city in the West Bank.

[15] Her use of "Palestine" referred to the occupied West Bank.

The discrepancy between the bathrooms had been especially notable to her: whereas the bathrooms in the building in Hebron had lacked adequate water for the guests to flush the toilet after each use, she recalled that the amenities in the bathrooms in the settlement's visitor's center reminded her of the kind she would associate with a nice restaurant in the U.S. She then compared the new buildings in the settlement to Palestinian buildings in Hebron that had been in disrepair because of restrictions of the occupation.

None of the other interviewees shared details about being in a settlement, nor did they how they had remembered feeling while there. I had not asked other students about this directly, as I had with Sylvia. So even though the interviewees had collectively depicted settlements to be inherently problematic spaces, none of them volunteered any recollections about the experience of entering one. Their memories centered themselves, namely their thoughts and feelings about the scenario of the settler herself, and overlooked the embodied experience of being in a contentious site.

Meeting a Settler

As a component of each program, the student group visited a settlement to meet with an Israeli settler in order to hear their perspective and political views. Consistent with the multiple-narrative theme of these programs, they met with someone who was prepared to provide a monologue about their own personal narrative, as well as the narrative of their community more broadly. This meeting was mentioned by all eight of the students, and according to their stories, it apparently left a strong impact on most of them.

Many of the interviewees recalled that they had been encouraged to listen respectfully, since the facilitators had prepared the groups by predicting that they would likely disagree with what the settler said. Indeed, according to the interviewees, there were students in every group

who were so offended by what the speakers said that they voiced their opposition to some of the most objectionable claims. Some students reportedly rose their voices in anger; in fact, three of the interviewees claimed that they had been among the students who had angrily challenged the speaker. During one program, two Palestinian group members left the room during the talk because they were so upset about the disparaging remarks the settler had made about Palestinians. Based on these recollections, it seems that emotional reactivity was high, especially among the "connected" members of the group.

During the programs, the meetings with locals featured the perspectives of a speaker, with opportunities for the students to ask questions. At times, the interviewees had conveyed frustration with this one-way direction of information, because they had wanted to share their opinions and positions, sometimes with the hope of persuading the local speaker to reconsider their stance or change their mind. The meeting with the settler was no exception. For example, Sylvia expressed annoyance when she described her recollections of this meeting.

> Sylvia: But I just got a very absolutist, very defensive, very much like, "We deserve to be here, and you can't tell us that we don't" vibe from her. Even after we had *many* questions, trying to probe. Like, "Why do you think you deserve to be here? You're breaking international law by being here." And, like, just nothing fazed her. It felt very much like we weren't having a conversation. It felt very much like she was giving us her platform.

Her framing of this meeting as a "conversation" was revealing in that it contrasted the professed purpose of this meeting. As the guide reminded them prior, the meeting was not intended to be conversational or dialogic, nor was the intent to persuade anyone to change their beliefs. Rather, the intent had been for the group to collectively hear the perspective of this

representative of the settlement, who spoke to groups like this on a regular basis. In fact, just before sharing this, as an introduction to this vignette, she framed this meeting like this: "And also we visited a settlement. And we spoke with a settler." Instead of visiting the settlement to *listen* to a settler, she suggested that they went to *speak* with a settler. This is consistent with Sylvia's air of disbelief from the excerpt above that, even after all their questions and appeals to factual information, these students could not, in fact, change the settler's beliefs. Sylvia framed this encounter as an academic exercise in debate, and even though she was frustrated from the outcome, the content of the debate had not been consequential to her on a personal level. As such, she was engaging in this debate as an opinionated outsider.

Listening to the Settler

When Elizabeth talked about the settler, she positioned herself as a disengaged outsider who had been so unaffected by the meeting that she confessed to not fully grasping what transpired until afterwards.

Elizabeth: We went to a settlement in the West Bank that was, it was a vineyard. And a woman told us about, like, her views of The Conflict, and like, a lot of people — I don't think I was paying attention, 'cause a lot of people were really upset about this, and I remember being like, "I kinda don't really remember what she said." Like, there were a couple things where I'm like, "OK, what she said, like, that's not OK." Like, she — one of the other students, like, brought this up. It was the Palestinian boy that, like — she had called all Palestinians, like, terrorists. And he was, like [pause] he's like a very shy guy, so he didn't, like, say anything then to her. But like, he was really upset about it later. And so, like, that — just the whole situation kinda showed that, like — like it was

> just very problematic. And for, like, a lot of people it was problematic, and once I finally realized what had happened afterwards, like, kinda like connected everything, like, further understood The Conflict more, I was able to see how problematic a lot of the stuff she said was.

By using vague and noncommittal language in this small story, Elizabeth suggested that her memory had been blurred from her lack of attention. Meanwhile, her gaze may not have been attuned to the settler, but it was not directed toward the emotional tension among some of her groupmates. She implied that she had lacked interest at the time of the meeting, and her spotty description had indicated that she still lacked interest about this incident at the time of her interview. It was as if she had remembered that the meeting had significance because the settler had upset at least one of her peers. Beyond that detail, though, Elizabeth had generically classified "the whole situation" as being "problematic," without further rationale or analysis. Rather than explaining how additional information and understanding had helped her understand why the settler had been deemed "problematic," she just asserted that this had been the case.

She supposed that she had not been emotionally impacted by this meeting because she claimed that at the time, she had lacked knowledge about the context that would have helped her understand how "problematic" the settler's words were. This stance of being adamantly underinformed about the situation while she was in-country implied a willful effort to remain distanced from the content of the program. As an outsider who felt no personal connection to this specific incident or to the broader context of settlements in the West Bank, she had been positioned to maintain a distant gaze upon this incident that had a more personal impact on others in her group.

Elizabeth further revealed something about her outsider gaze when she shared the following conclusion about this settler.

> Elizabeth: I think she's different than someone in, in Tel Aviv, unaware of what's happening, verse someone living in a settlement, aware of what's happening, choosing to, like, be in a settlement. But then, like, I could even say, like, like maybe she doesn't *know* what's happened. Like, she was just told, like, "Oh, like, this is our land, like, let's go live in the settlement." Like — I'd like to argue that even *she* doesn't know the full extent of what's happening. If you *can* know the full extent.

Through this speculation, Elizabeth positioned herself as having more access to understand "the full extent of what's happening," more so than people who live in Israel/Palestine. On one hand, this could be a nod to the concept of how one's positionality informs their selective perception; people living in the "bubbles" of Tel Aviv or settlement communities may have the privilege to choose to not think about or learn about "what's happening" to their Palestinian neighbors. Likewise, Elizabeth's statement may have been an allusion to the ways that a person's socialization will shape their ideologies and their subsequent political choices. However, on the other hand, the suggestion that a woman who has chosen to move to a settlement lacks knowledge about "what's happening" in Israel/Palestine seemed rather condescending, especially from a student who often professed her own ignorance about the region. It insinuates that she considered herself, as an outsider, to be in a position to have better access to more complete information about The Conflict than Connected insiders.

Unsettled by (Con)Tension

All of the the interviewees framed their group's encounter with the settler in terms of tension that arose during the meeting with each of the three programs. They mentioned that people in their group were offended and angered by the hurtful, stereotypical things the settlers said about Arabs. Notably, although they all found the settler's beliefs to be objectionable, only one of them mentioned being somewhat upset by the content of what the settler said. As mentioned above, in one of the programs, two Palestinian group members were so upset by the disparaging things the settler said about Palestinians that they walked out of the room in the middle of the meeting. Linda described this in this way, while reading the notes she had taken during the meeting:

Linda: I remember — oh my gosh, I remember [two Palestinian group members] both left. Like, when she was talking. 'Cause she was, like — I remember she was talking about language, and she was saying how, like, Arabic, like sounded dangerous. Which makes no sense! [laugh] And, like, she talked about — do I have more notes about her? [sigh], I remember, it was [pause while reading her notes] Yeah, she talked about, like, she criticized Hamas a lot, and said that they were, like, giving a false hope to, like, Palestinian people and they were endangering Palestinian people's lives instead of helping. But [two Arab group members] both left the conversation, like, maybe midway through. And there was another student on our trip, who like, called out the wo— the Israeli settler, on like something she had said. And, I remember, it was *so* tense, and so awkward. … So there was a lot of tension. And then she got really defensive, like, the settler. It was *really bad.* It was

> weird! After we all left, we were all just quiet on the bus. We were all just really like, “What the hell just happened.”

Instead of focusing on the content of what the settler said — which Linda had disagreed with and even claimed it to be nonsensical — Linda’s focal memory was the tension among the group members. Deeming the tension as “awkward,” “really bad,” and “weird," she concluded this story by projecting her own confusion on the entire group, suggesting that they were all quiet because they did not fully understand what had just happened. She framed this as if the tension was baffling, more so than what had been said. Her phrasing, as if she were speaking for all of her groupmates, may have been an effort to generalize and validate her own recollections of this incident. However, her reaction was not representative of her peers, according to the reflections of the other interviewees from her program.

Questioning what had happened generally, instead of what had been said more specifically, revealed the gaze of an outsider who was not personally offended, attacked, or implicated by any of the offensive things that the settler had said. As a contrast, two Palestinian group members had been so personally impacted that they left the room. Had these two been quiet on the bus afterwards, their silence may have reflected a reaction to feeling personally attacked. Linda had recounted this episode to me with an affect that was relatively light, while she energetically reviewed her notes and reminded herself of this particular meeting. Although she spoke of her disapproval and disbelief about what the settler had said, as an outsider, she did not indicate evidence of any lasting personal impact or offense from her memories of this incident.

Similarly, Diana’s outsider gaze resulted in the settler’s speech making a relatively indirect impact on her, in contrast with its impact on her groupmates who had felt targeted due to

their sociocultural identities. When Diana shared her memory of this event, she noted how her outsider gaze provided her with some emotional distance from the offensive things the settler said.

Diana: We spoke with a settler. And it was tough. Like, that conversation. And it wasn't, [sigh], super tough on me. Just because, you know, I don't have any tie to this, like super personally. But she ended up really digging into that terrorist stereotype of Palestinian people. And we had a Palestinian guy, and you know, the Muslim girl [in our group]. The way that she would speak about, you know, Middle Eastern, like, Muslim people, things like that, was unsettling [laugh], like, to say the least.

JM: No pun intended, right? [laugh]

Diana: Yeah. Yeah! [laugh] Her, I guess, just — [sigh], I just don't understand. Her feeling of, like, "I belong here," kinda thing. Like, "This is for me." You know. "Because I say so," kinda thing. And it was, unsettling.

Even though she emphasized that the experience of hearing the settler say bigoted things had been "unsettling," Diana acknowledged that it was less difficult for her to endure that conversation than it had been for her peers who were Palestinian and/or Muslim. She had found it "tough" to hear the settler "dig into" racist stereotypes, perhaps especially because Palestinian and Muslim people were part of the program group and had been in the room. Speaking in the present tense, Diana admitted that she was unable to understand the possessive perspective declared by the settler. In fact, by summing up the settler's argument as simplistic obstinacy — "This is for me because I say so" — Diana positioned the stance as unsupported and unreasonable.

Learning From the Settler

As outsiders without a personal stake in what the settler said, some of the interviewees still took away meaningful lessons from this encounter. Most of the interviewees expressed appreciation for having met the settler, and several students acknowledged that meeting her had been an important part of their program. Just as the students could not manage to convince a settler to change her beliefs about her perceived right to live on that land, the settler also did not change the students' beliefs about settlements. Rather, their outsider gaze allowed them to filter out the hurtful rhetoric, so that they had space to make meaning from meeting a person who presented justifications for her actions that they thought were objectionable.

In her interviews, Allison shared a lot about her attempts as an outsider to empathize with people on many sides of The Conflict. With an outsider gaze that did not have personal ties to one side over another, she demonstrated a sincere effort to understand the rationales behind many people's various beliefs. In the following excerpt, she spoke about her attempts to understand the perspective of Israelis who expressed fear about acts of "terrorism."

Allison: So, I mean, I've never experienced it [terrorism], and I feel like it's really hard to put yourself into that person's place. I'm trying to think of other examples. Because of course there were so many, we met with like different settlers[16] and stuff like that. And I really, like, *so* disagreed with them. But then sometimes I like definitely understood, like, what was happening. Or even just, like, information that *I* think is incorrect, but people who grew up thinking that, like, all Palestinians, like, want them dead, or something like

[16] This student had participated in two of these programs, and met with a different settler representative each time.

that. You kind of like learn why they think that, or like how they think that, or just the fact that they think that.

Reiterating that she strongly disagreed with the settlers she had met during her programs, she had been able to understand what had informed their perspective. Her depersonalized gaze allowed her to separate the "incorrect" beliefs from a consideration of conditions and rationales that may have informed such beliefs. While thinking aloud about what she had learned from her attempts to empathize with settlers and other Israelis, Allison identified three levels[17] of potential learning: 1) what settlers think and believe, 2) how they justify their beliefs, and 3) why they held particular thoughts and beliefs. These three levels aptly categorize the lessons that had been gleaned by Allison and some of the other interviewees.

Considering "Why" and "How They Think That"

In this same small narrative, Allison continued on to empathize with the *why* and *how* behind a hypothetical settler's fear of Palestinians because selective perception of so-called terrorism.

Allison: And how can you blame someone who's grown up thinking like one thing for so long? Been told, like, all Israelis are told they can't cross over into the West Bank, because like they can't be protected. Kinda thing like that. So, when you're told that, like, you're obviously really scared. Like, you're basically being told that like you're gonna *die* if, like, this happens. And so, I mean like, I get it, like, well that's kind of demonizing Palestinians, like, I get it that the normal Israeli might be like afraid, or like think like, oh, you know, we don't go over there, because that's really dangerous.

[17] Reversed here from the order in which she said them.

She mentioned presumptive factors that could inform an Israeli to believe they should fear Palestinians, and acknowledged the limits of blaming people for forming beliefs from limited information available to them. Her outsider gaze positioned her with distance that allowed her to acknowledge that the settlers' stances were "demonizing Palestinians," but she was still able to consider what might have led this woman to believe this dehumanizing stance. This excerpt offers a clear example of Allison's tendency to intellectualize matters that may provoke strong emotions from others with stronger connectedness to identities bound up in The Conflict.

Like Elizabeth's example above, Allison's analysis ultimately diminished the settler's agency to potentially see beyond a simplistic narrative she had been socialized into. The question asking "how can you blame someone" relinquishes an individual from their responsibility to think beyond fear-based stereotypes they have been fed. Rather than critique a narrow avenue towards dehumanizing others, Allison framed this fearful socialization as a sort of excuse for dehumanizing beliefs. Moreover, like all the other participants, her analysis fell short of considering the way that the settler operationalized her harmful beliefs in her own actions of living in a community that had displaced Palestinians from their land, backed by the power of the state of Israel. Critical considerations such as this had been excluded from the gaze of these outsiders as they attempted to weigh various narratives they had encounters.

Learning "That They Think That"

Unsurprisingly, none of the students changed their minds about the problematic nature of the settlements, and concluded that this particular settler held problematic views. For some interviewees, the aspect of this encounter that had made a lasting impression was the fact that the settler held racist beliefs and shared them so openly.

Diana: … and the settler that we spoke with, who was just outright racist, honestly. Just the way that she spoke about things, I was like, wow, that's a lot. But it's also, I think, important to know that that's what people — they *truly* think that. They think with those prejudices, and things like that. I think that was important. It's important to know that people think like that, and there are real people to put a face to that opinion. It was like, wow.

This was a significant insight for Diana. Not only did she learn that there are people who actually believe such extreme — and extremely offensive — beliefs, but she met a person who professed these kinds of beliefs. From Diana's perspective as an outsider, and as a White person who had never felt targeted by bigotry, she may not have ever paid attention to discriminatory rhetoric that relies on harmful stereotypes. This encounter made racism more evident for her. Even while she disagreed strongly with the content of what was said, it had been important for her to "put a face to that opinion."

Similarly, Sylvia also talked about "putting a face" on previously theoretical concepts. She reflected on the ways this encounter changed her prior abstraction about settlers into a more tangible understanding of settlers as real people.

Sylvia: I did come to that with a very "you shouldn't be here" perspective. I did have a very anti-settlement bias. And I wouldn't say that I changed, [laugh], after meeting with her. …

Sylvia: I think through all of it, I was kind of like, in my head, settlers were an abstract idea. And then I put a face to the concept of "settler." She was just a person who really believes that she deserves to be there. And that was helpful

because, like, people are people. Maybe that was a growing moment for me, to see the quote-unquote, invisible enemy, like, *there*. …

JM: You say you learned a lot from that. Can you articulate some of what you've learned? Maybe in the moment, and since, from that particular experience, meeting [the settler]? And/or being in the settlement, maybe those are [different]

Sylvia: Yeah. I don't think I had heard someone radically speak out on the end of the Zionist spectrum. I had heard many radical people — which is a loaded term — but I had heard many people who believe very deeply in the freedom of Palestine and Palestinians speak, and she was the first one on the trip where I felt like I heard someone just be straight up like, "I don't really—" you know, she didn't say this, but the implication was, "I don't care that there were people here. I'm here now. Sucks for them." Maybe I didn't learn a ton of information, but the experience of, like I said, putting a face to that side of the struggle, was very interesting and important.

Sylvia acknowledged that her anti-settlement bias was also an anti-settler bias. Meeting a settler seemed to help her disentangle the ideologies from the person who had been sitting in front of her. By describing setters as having been an abstract idea that had only been in her head, she implied that her notion of them had previously been two-dimensional: settlers had been a concept that played the role of the "quote-unquote invisible enemy" that she had never seen, but had heard so many bad things about. It had been a "growing moment" for Sylvia to see a three-dimensional person who was more complex than simply her objectionable beliefs. Claiming that "people are people," Sylvia recognized the humanity in spite of the settler's belief that she was

more deserving of living on the land occupied by the settlement. Furthermore, until she had met this settler, she had been much more familiar with many real people who had "believed deeply in the freedom of Palestine," which had enabled her to humanize those beliefs and arguments. It seems as though she may have envisioned settlers and other radical Zionists as being cartoonishly villainous, so it had been "very interesting and important" for Sylvia to hear someone speak about their experience from that perspective.

Sylvia represented this person's rhetoric to be bluntly dismissive of the displacement of Palestinians. Therefore, Palestinian people and others with Connectedness to their cause may have had emotional reactions to her talk. On the other hand, as an outsider, Sylvia was in a position to rather dispassionately gaze upon this person beyond her rhetoric and "put a face to that side of the struggle."

Bridget's Outsider Insights — Considering "Why" and "How They Think Like That"

Bridget was the student who had expressed particular empathy toward the settler, especially with regard to the levels of learning identified by Allison (above) concerning how and why the settler justified her beliefs. As a result of her empathy, in all three of her interviews with me, Bridget talked about feeling challenged by her ability to understand someone with whom she had expected to easily and dismissively disagree. She articulated helpful analysis and insights about how her outsider perspective was different from her connected peers who had evidently become upset and defensive in response to the hurtful thing the settler said, and then responded by challenging the settler's beliefs. Bridget also reflected upon how her outsider gaze allowed for emotional distance that left room for her to listen to the settler's perspective with an intent to understand without feeling a threat to her personhood, nor to changing her own beliefs.

Bridget's upbringing and prior education had primed her to be politically sympathetic to Palestinians, particularly due to her awareness of human rights abuses of Palestinians by Israelis. Her initial visit to Tel Aviv already challenged her pro-Palestinian political stance, as discussed above; hearing a settler share her narrative similarly challenged her when she was able to understand the perspective of someone she disagreed with politically. Consistent with the way that she described her intent for participating in this program, she had been genuinely interested in hearing from people with whom she was politically opposed, a capacity that was afforded to her due to her positionality as an outsider who did not feel personally attached to or attacked by what the settler said.

> Bridget: Because I felt like I came from a position of kind of [pause] I felt kind of one-sided in my narrative that I'd heard. Especially coming from, like, a [northern European home country] perspective. So, I wanted to, I think, understand more. And try to see the settlers' side a little more. There was one day we talked to someone who is a very adamant settler, and that was really emotional because I sort of could understand her perspective, and I was kind of frustrated with myself for being able to understand it. At the same time, all these other people in our group were so outraged.

Even though she claimed that she had wanted to hear from people with differing views and standpoints as her, she expressed a feeling of surprise from actually feeling empathy with them, as if she had not expected this response. She became emotional — not in reaction to what the settler said per se, but due to frustration with herself for identifying with a perspective that she had wanted to be opposed to because of her anti-settlement political stance. Perhaps she had

been concerned about a possible conflation of *understanding* the perspective of a settler, and *agreeing with* the perspective of a settler.

This pressure may have been compounded by the contrast to her peers' outrage, which she may have considered to be a more reasonable response to what the settler had said. She had felt pressure from some Connected members of her cohort group to take a side between their dichotomous categories of good and bad with respect to The Conflict. This peer pressure likely exacerbated her feelings of unease as she felt herself understanding someone she believed was wrong. In the above excerpt, she mentioned that people in the group were outraged by the settler's words, which may have contributed to her discomfort. After all, her empathy did not only disrupt her prior notion of binary framing which posited that because the settler's beliefs were bad, then it was bad to have any positive feelings toward the setter. It also disrupted the binary that her peers had endorsed. In the following excerpt, she discusses her memories about how her peers responded to the settler.

> Bridget: And I, like, had gone into this trip thinking I wanted to understand more about why people were doing this, like, more about that side. So I purposefully went in wanting to ask questions and find out more about what she thought. But, um — and I don't wanna say the others didn't, but they— it definitely felt like a lot of people were very defensive from the start. Like, questions weren't always well articulated, in a way that would actually create, you know, conversation that we would really learn from. Which was a little disappointing.

Because she found her peers' questions and challenges to the settler to be counterproductive to her own intent to learn about the settler's narrative, Bridget had been

disappointed. She attributed her peers' poorly articulated questions to the defensive stance that they had brought into the meeting and maintained throughout. Her intent to understand the Israeli perspective may have led her to empathize more with the settler, than with the effect of the settler's stance on her peers.

This incident was significant in Bridget's memory of her program, and she continued speaking about it in response to a later question from me, when I asked about a time when she had not felt comfortable speaking in her peer group. She recalled her memories of the conversation on the bus ride out of the settlement.

> Bridget: I keep coming back to [the settler], I think I just remember it well. I think right after that, we got on the bus, and people were, like, really angry. And they were just talking about how, like, she was wrong, and how could she say these things, and [pause] part of me wanted to say, like — I mean, she's [pause] of course she was wro— or, from our perspective she was wrong, at certain points, but like, she also grew up in this kind of — this society that made these things seem OK. And, like, it was normalized for her.

Bridget remembered how angry her peers had been about how "wrong" the setter's beliefs had been. Although she was reflecting back on that moment on the bus, it seemed as though Bridget was also sharing her present-moment thoughts about the scenario. She recognized that the settler's "wrongness" was determined from the group's positionality, but that the settler had been socialized to believe that what she said was acceptable. This sentiment from Bridget revealed an effect of her outsider gaze on this particular meeting, such that she could figuratively step back from the content of what was being said because it wasn't targeting her or

people close to her. Her inquiry-oriented gaze allowed her space to grapple with the social dynamics informing the settler and the group's angry reactions.

As was the case for other aforementioned interviewees, Bridget was able to concurrently acknowledge that the settlers' positions were offensive, while also considering the reasons behind these positions. According to her memory of the post-settlement bus ride, though, she had assumed that her angry peers would not have responded well if she had spoken up to consider how the settler had rationalized her offensive beliefs.

She elaborated on her memories of what, specifically, had triggered her empathy toward the settler:

> Bridget: She talked about her history. So, like, that her parents had moved to the settlement, and then she'd moved away when she became eighteen, I think, and then — to England or something. And then, she and her husband came back to raise their kids there, becau— and, so she was explaining that this was her home. And she had grown up there. So it was just as much her home as anyone else who had grown up there. I think that struck me because The Conflict — or, this situation has been going on long enough that there are multiple generations that have this connection, even within the extreme settlements that were never really legally recognized. And that poses another issue in saying that other people have a right to this land, that got taken from them. And so I understood that a little more. But I also, like, wanted to be completely opposed to it, because of the settlement.

Bridget expressed recognition that listening to someone with the intent to understand was not equivalent to listening with the intent to be persuaded. However, perhaps informed somewhat

by her peers, Bridget struggled with the potential implications of understanding a perspective to which she was opposed. As with the other interviewees, it was clear that Bridget's desire to "see the settlers' side" was not reflective of an effort to reach an agreement with her, or even to reinforce her own preconceived ideas. Rather, it stemmed from a desire to understand.

The recognition that the settlement felt like home to the settler made a big impact on Bridget. Apparently for the first time, she conceded validity behind this Israeli claim to living in a settlement where she had been born. From her outsider position, she intellectually acknowledged the psychological attachment from multiple generations growing up in a settlement. Moreover, this also resonated emotionally for her with regard to the meaning of "home," which had seemed to touch something beyond simply being an intellectual exercise.

JM: So it sounds like — I mean and you had mentioned this before — that you had some empathy for her.

Bridget: [pause] Yeah

JM: Right? And that doesn't mean that you agree one hundred percent or

Bridget: No, no

JM: Right? But you had empathy for her. So what is — even thinking about this now — what is that like for you?

Bridget: I think it makes a situation even more complicated. And [pause] I think, like, [pause] there, like, before I felt like — Israel itself, like — it was understandable that people, like, like the foundation, or founding of it. But the settlements were something that, like, I couldn't support, like, that was unquestionable. But after hearing about that situation, I mean, she did move away, and she had the chance to start a life somewhere else. Though, if she

> opposed what happened, she *def*initely had the opportunity and resources to do that. So. I saw, like — I felt like she could've done something if she had, like, tried to see the other perspecti— or, other narratives, a little more. But at the same time, like, it was her home, where she grew up, as well. And I think, because I grew up in a bunch of different places, I don't quite understand, like, the "home home" feeling, um, or hometown. Although, like, [the city where her father lives], I've been coming back — or I lived here when I was little and I've been coming back ever since. But, like, I don't know, I felt like, because I don't understand that to the same extent that a lot of people might, that I could kind of make up what it meant in my mind, and empathize even more.

By bringing up her own feelings about lacking a strong sense of a "home home," Bridget refocused away from her outsider gaze for a moment, stepping away from the analysis of what was "understandable," what was reasonable, and what she thought that she could or couldn't support from an intellectual perspective. Rather, this glimpse of recognition of a longing for a home was enough for her to feel an empathic connection to this settler's story about returning to the place she knew as her home.

In this excerpt, Bridget had also observed that empathy made "a situation even more complicated" — or in this case, understanding the settler's perspective made The Conflict seem more complicated. Although she did not elaborate on this directly, she alluded to the relative complexity of any situation upon recognizing the positionality of many sides. On the contrary, it seemed easy — and therefore sometimes tempting — to frame conflicts in binary constructions of Good vs. Bad, or Completely Right vs. Completely Wrong. From this perspective, the outsider

gaze afforded students like Bridget the option of engaging with complexity when negotiating their stance about The Conflict.

After hearing the settler present a sincere case that countered her own perspective, Bridget also complicated her previous assumptions about the invalidity of arguments posed by Israelis. She concluded that people on the "other side" did not simply fabricate arguments as a ruse for ulterior motives, nor simply to be oppositional for the sake of being oppositional. Rather, she recognized that this settler saw things so differently because of how she had been raised and socialized.

Bridget: We saw that people don't just make things up. And it's easy to think — like, I had learned a lot from what was *supposed* to be a historically objective standpoint when I took IB [International Baccalaureate classes in high school]. I didn't really understand the settler and extreme kind of Israeli perspective. I think, it almost felt like people were just making up, like, their right to the land. And even though I understood that they felt that it was a right, I think going there and actually seeing the passion and the personal, complete conviction and belief. And that there was even historic— like, the settler that we talked to had grown up in a settlement, and she'd left and then come back, and so it was her home, she was born there and raised there. And I think that's kind of the legitimacy I guess I'm thinking of. Like, everyone has these stories that really make complete sense if you think about it from their experiences. And that it's easier from a distance to say that they're wrong. But then when you understand how they think about it, then it provides — yeah, I

guess in my mind that would be more legitimacy, because of their experiences, they think they're right.

In this excerpt, Bridget considered the role of physical distance facilitating dismissal of people whose opinions she had been inclined to intellectually disagree. That is, she found it to be more difficult to dismiss the settler after she met her in person, but from the distance of her high school classroom, she had considered it to be straightforward to reject the notion of settlements and settlers. Meeting the person behind the opinion had led her to understand that her opinion had been grounded in "legitimate" rationale informed by her positionality and upbringing, and was not just polarized politicking dissociated from lived experiences. This exercise in alternate perspective-taking contributed to developing Bridget's critical consciousness.

Again, it is important to note that Bridget's insights were possible because of her positioning as an outsider whose gaze was informed by emotional distance from the severity of the settlers' opinions and invectives. As a contrast, it had been emotionally challenging for her Connected peers to be receptive to the settler's opinions that dismissed their humanity and that of people they cared for. These emotional reactions may have been especially strong when they were physically in the same space as the transgressor. Such an emotional connection to the targets of the settler's disparaging words, may have limited the capacity of some of these connected students to empathize, much less consider the underlying socialization and selective storying.

Bridget posited her own hypothesis about the difference between her reaction and that of her connected peers.

Bridget: It feels similar to the Tel Aviv kind of thing. Like, how there were other people in the group who just, like, didn't want to — or didn't let themselves

> like Tel Aviv, or were complaining about how they didn't like it because of the political context. And then after the thing with [the settler], I was letting myself understand — or, not letting myself, I was really trying to understand her points. And [pause] I feel like, sometimes, people who are super emotionally invested from one side, don't want to understand, or let themselves understand the other side, because it somehow justifies it. Which, I don't think it does. But I definitely understand how someone can feel that way, especially when it's very personal.

Describing the outsider gaze, Bridget acknowledged that she was in a position to make an effort to understand the perspective of someone whose views were offensive because those views did not directly attack her identity. Her willingness and ability to understand someone so disagreeable was made possible because of her emotional distance due to her outsider positionality. In this excerpt, she shifted her gaze from empathizing with the settler, to displaying empathy for her peers who are more personally invested due to their connection to the issues bound up with a place and its cultural groups. While she recognizes the ways that she cannot fully relate to their experience with the settler or in Tel Aviv, she expressed an understanding about their personal connection, and how that resulted in an emotional investment in not only their political stance, but also with respect to their experiences during the program.

This recognition of differential emotional investment revealed a sophisticated analysis of positionality. Indeed it is the aspect underlying the reason why the outsider/insider dynamic was so significant to all the participants' experiences during these programs about emotionally and politically contentious topics.

Conclusion

These cases illuminated several characteristics of how the outsider gaze operated for these students. This gaze maintained a detachment from the emotional and political elements in their surroundings, and reinforced their own centrality in their stories, as their gaze focused on their grappling with facts and reconciling their feelings, at the exclusion of the feelings of others in their cohort groups. At the same time, a theme across the participants' narratives was their ability to relate to Israeli people and places, while turning their gaze away from relating to their Activist Peers. While they may have expected that people to whom they were politically opposed would resemble contemptible cartoonish villains, the interviewees' expectations were thwarted when they encountered cities like Tel Aviv, and when they met with a right-wing settler. Their narratives often focused on these situations, indicating that these people and places had disrupted these students' prior assumptions, and therefore these stories pointed to prominent learning experiences.

In the next chapter, I continue to explore how these dynamics differentially impacted students' gazes and the nature of their experiences during this program, specifically with respect to their stories about crossing over borders and through checkpoints.

CHAPTER V

INCONSEQUENTIAL BORDER CROSSINGS: STORIES ABOUT NON-EXPERIENCE

The interviewees participated in study abroad programs that intentionally crossed borders on a regular basis. Indeed, borders loom large in the context of Palestine/Israel. In addition to the international borders that are securitized by the Israeli military, countless internal boundaries are delineated and protected in ways both visible and invisible. As such, these borders are perceived and experienced in different ways by people according to their different sociocultural identities, such as ethnicity and citizenship status. The interviewees all told me stories about various encounters with borders during their programs, including and especially about crossing militarized checkpoints. Their stories indicated an "outsider" positioning that enabled them to maintain emotional distance with regard to the implications of checkpoints for other people, including local Palestinians and some of their peers from their cohort group. Furthermore, these stories revealed distinctly different kinds of student experiences during study abroad, which result in distinctly different kinds of student learning.

Some of the interviewees' most stark experiences with borders involved encounters with state systems of power that were represented by the individuals working as security guards or stationed as soldiers. These experiences often involved ethnic profiling, so the students were challenged to consider various ways that their sociocultural identities afforded them with the privilege of protection from the consequential scrutiny with which their Arab and Muslim peers and colleagues had to contend.

Although the interviewees' stories occasionally included descriptions or reenactments of the stress they felt in certain scenarios at checkpoints, they nevertheless conveyed an assured understanding that they always knew they would be allowed to cross borders with no personal

consequence. In spite of the fact that militarized checkpoints were sites with the potential to disrupt their taken-for-granted frames of reference, these students' anecdotes instead conveyed that, based on their pre-program preparation, they had expected to observe the structural violence of discriminatory policies. Accordingly, without a sense of personal investment in the injustices they witnessed at these sites, their stories did not indicate much evidence of learning from these experiences. Therefore, through these stories I consider the nature of experience that students encounter while studying abroad, in relation to their identities and their gaze. Furthermore I consider the different kinds of experiential learning that can emerge from different kinds of experience.

Mobility and Access Across Borders

Traversing all sorts of borders — official and unofficial, visible and invisible — is an inherent part of traveling around Palestine/Israel, especially in and out of occupied areas like the Old City of Jerusalem and the West Bank. On one hand is the juxtaposition of distinctly different cultural communities in close proximity, if not directly adjacent to each other. On the other hand, these communities are often segregated and separated from each other by various rules, norms, policies, and laws, which keep them disconnected and inequitable. Because these policies are backed up by militarized forces, these borders are often fortified with soldiers or armed guards who determine who gets to go where. These conditions were not only novel for the students from a U.S.-American university, but they also provided the context for the interviewees to potentially contend with issues and assumptions about identity, access, and power.

Borders have been conceptualized as liminal third spaces that can serve as contact zones for different cultures to meet. Alternatively, borders delineate between different groups, and can be fortified such that they prevent people from interacting and understanding each other. Such

fortification can include violence, which often serves to oppress people who are minoritized and thus already lack access to resources as compared to those who are enacting the violent fortification of the border. These kinds of borders serve to not only segregate, but also to reinforce existing power dynamics among people groups.

Taking Border-Crossing for Granted

Implicit throughout the interviews was these students' taken-for-granted understanding that they could travel internationally. The interviewees' identities as U.S.-Americans at a well-resourced university afforded them with the assumptions that they could be mobile and have access to just about any place in the world. Such assumptions were most clear from their descriptions of their early deliberations about studying abroad. When speaking about how they had come to their decisions about whether and where to study abroad as an undergraduate student, they spoke as if it were a foregone conclusion that international travel was possible, if not presumed and anticipated. In fact, Elizabeth and Bridget already had extensive personal international travel experience prior to their program, and Paige traveled to at least four other countries in the two years following her program. The students collectively alluded to only two types of barriers to their own overseas travels, if any: financial costs and parents' fears and anxieties. They never mentioned the process of acquiring passports, visas, and other bureaucratic permits, perhaps because these bureaucratic approvals were perceived to be so perfunctory as to be forgettable.

With this cosmopolitan mindset about easy access to international travel, many of the students were surprised to confront the reality that borders can be restrictive, or even intimidating. The profundity of this newfound awareness was revealed through their narratives

that compared their own relative ease of moving from place to place with people who did not, or could not, take such mobility for granted.

Swimming in Restricted Seas: "We're Swimming Here and Having Fun, and Like, We're Somewhere Where People Can't Do That"

The students did not need to directly witness Palestinians from the West Bank being stopped at checkpoints in order to understand that they themselves had been afforded different, preferential access to sites throughout Israeli territories. According to the interviewees, inequitable and restricted access had been a point of discussion from the first days of each program. Each of the program groups included participants who were already attuned to the injustices that the occupation imposed upon local Palestinians.[18] For example, Linda recalled one such conversation with her peers that had been particularly significant for her during her first days in Tel Aviv.

> Linda: We went to the beach, and went swimming, and [her peers] talked about how, like, "Oh, we're swimming here and having fun, and like, we're somewhere where people *can't* do that." And like, that was the first time I really thought about that. And then, the whole rest of the trip, like, *that* was in the back of my mind the whole time.

Prior to her travel, she had taken part in a brief introductory course about The Conflict, and she had also just come from a protracted border-crossing from Jordan into Israel/Palestine where her group had been delayed for hours. However, from this description, it seemed that issues of discrimination and segregation intrinsic to The Conflict did not start to make an impression on her until she was not only physically in the country, but physically in the water of

[18] In Chapter 3, I referred to these groupmates as "Activist Peers."

the Mediterranean Sea, swimming at a beach in Tel Aviv. The timing of this reminder from her peers was apparently significant, in that it had disrupted a fun activity. When she was informed that the place where she was having fun was inaccessible to Palestinians living nearby, she was pointedly made aware of the existence of borders that prevented other people from moving around the region in the way she had taken for granted. As she told it, this moment had been critical for her, and the reality of differential access was foundational for the meaning that she made from the rest of her experiences in the program.

Seeing Invisible Borders

In the short span of their three-week programs, as the students spent more time traversing the region, they all gradually became increasingly aware of the existence of many borders. As their gaze was guided to notice these bordering practices, they became increasingly aware of their own privileged positionality to cross these borders that were difficult if not impossible for others to approach. Whereas they had previously taken this privilege for granted, they offered some evidence that, as they were repeatedly confronted with the fact that they were afforded access that others were not, they began to think differently about borders, both those that they could see and feel, and those that were emerging in their consciousness through conversations with their groupmates and with local residents.

Diana provided a good example of this when she alluded to a shift in her thinking in a brief anecdote about a particular moment on a tour bus. While reminiscing to me about taking a day trip to the Dead Sea, she interjected a memory of sitting on the tour bus when her guide pointed out that they were driving along the border with Jordan. Where they had been traveling, this border was merely delineated by a relatively small fence and a dirt road in a valley, so it was

not always visible to them from the road; it could be easy to overlook when taking in the full landscape of desert and small mountains in all directions.

> Diana: I remember Khalil being like, "There's the border, right over there." And I was like, "Oh that's crazy." Just, I don't know, seeing it and knowing that, like — I don't know, people just can't go to it, it seems like so [pause] accessible, when you know, when you're like on a bus, being like, "Oh, we could just drive right over there." But, you know, so many people can't do that.

This moment on the bus was one of the few concrete memories of the tour guides' spiels that she shared with me. Mentally putting herself back on that bus, she indicated that having the international border pointed out to her had been notable — or "crazy" — because of her recognition that there were people who cannot cross it, in spite of its deceptively benign appearance of accessibility. Speaking to me in the present tense, she said that the border "seems so accessible," especially from her vantage point of having been a U.S.-American on a tour bus that had been taking her from place to place, crossing borders along the way. Not only did this indicate that she had taken her mobility for granted, but she framed this story as though she imagined that her tour bus could have taken her across that border. "We could just drive right over there" was informed by her background of having been raised in the U.S., where she did not experience limitations to her movements — she could presumably go to any place that she laid her eyes on. This notion was also informed by an imaginary in which her tour bus could take her to any place the group wished to go. After all, it carried them across multiple borders, almost seamlessly, throughout her program. Nevertheless, she was communicating to me that the part about this that was "crazy" was that she realized at that moment — and still, now — that there

are so many people with a very different perspective: they may look across a landscape and see places that are not within reach, due to restricted borders.

Seeing Borders, Yet Gazing Upon Themselves

At times, the students shared anecdotes about their recognition that they had the privilege to travel to areas that were restricted to local Palestinians. These comparisons illuminated the material realities of these otherwise inconsequential (and perhaps otherwise invisible) borders, bringing them into the frame of these students' gaze. This was especially salient for the four interviewees who had lived with host families in the West Bank. Their program's excursions to the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea helped them see these borders — aspects of the military occupation — that could have been otherwise relatively invisible to them. Their conversations and relationships with West Bank Palestinians whose freedom to move was highly restricted prompted them to contend with their own previously-taken-for-granted ability to move around relatively freely. However, according to their narratives, the interviewees varied with respect to their sensemaking about the limits to Palestinians' mobility and access. These stories illuminated differences in terms of what these young women noticed when they crossed borders, as well as how they had come to make sense of their observations and experiences. Moreover, these stories and their differences shed light on how their gazes were informed by their identity and self-positioning, as well as from guidance from facilitators and locals that pointed their gaze in specific directions.

All four of these women mentioned that, because they knew that their host families were not allowed to leave the West Bank, they felt mixed emotions about their visits to places like Haifa, Tel Aviv, and a beach on the Dead Sea. On one hand, they really enjoyed these day trips and had positive memories of their time in these cities and seas. On the other hand, those who

spoke to their host families about their excursions said they had felt sad when their families mentioned their own inability to visit the same places.

In response to my question about the difference between learning about The Conflict in academic classes and learning from physically being present in the region, Bridget recalled one of her first conversations with her host, when he had talked about his restricted mobility to places within Israel.

> Bridget: I do remember the first day, actually, we were talking with our host dad, and he talked about selling their olives to someone else because they couldn't go other places to sell their olives. And they occasionally talked about how much they'd loved — I think it was Haifa. And they'd been there for some special occasion. But they couldn't go back, yet. And our host dad actually did — he also mentioned, like, now that he was old, he could travel to Israel sometimes. But his son couldn't, 'cause he was only thirty.

This was the first of several times Bridget mentioned Haifa in her interviews; she had enjoyed her mid-program visit there, but this conversation had preceded that day trip. This anecdote struck me as a poignant element from her first day with her host, an introductory conversation that had taken place in basic English due to language limitations between them, about his inability to access Israeli territory to sell his olives. Bridget began this story with the memory of her host "dad" telling her about his challenges in selling olives. Although his story was unclear from her retelling, it seemed as though he was unable to access places where there may be a market to sell his olives. She then recalled this man's love for a city in Israel that she thought may have been Haifa. She remembered him sharing that the family had been there for a special occasion; perhaps this was related to why they loved the place. When telling me that they

could not go back, she did not offer any explanation as to why. Furthermore, and intriguingly, she added the word "yet" to that statement, suggesting that at some point in the future they may be granted access to visit again. Then she remembered a detail about being able to travel to Israel sometimes, "now that he was old." Expanding on this rule concerning one's age, she recalled that his son, at thirty years old, was too young to be allowed to "travel to Israel."

This anecdote also struck me because of Bridget's relatively detached tone about circumstances that could have elicited emotional responses like sadness, anger, confusion, frustration, and empathy. After all, she was recalling an introduction that included information about how the occupation had limited opportunities for a man she referred to as her "host dad," in terms of his work and his family's ability to simply visit a place they loved. Instead, this struck me as a matter-of-fact observation about mobility restriction that was a fixed feature of The Conflict.

Diana stayed with a different host family but had a similar story. However, her story about her host dad's limited access included some emotionality when she empathized about how frustrating it must be for her host family to live so close to sites they are not allowed to visit.

Diana: We had a little … weekend trips and stuff, and I remember going there [to the Dead Sea]. And we were telling [our host dad] about it, like, the day before. We were like, "Oh, we're going to the Dead Sea tomorrow." And he was like, "Oh, have fun." Like, "I'm probably—" Like, "It's so hard for me to go there." What, [sigh], I guess really drove me crazy about it, is it's so close, like geographically, this region is not that big, and … it's like, [sigh], so close but out of reach for them. Like, I can't even imagine how frustrating that is.

> To know that everything's so close, but you can't go. You know, you like can't get to it.

By performing a recreated past dialogue with her host, she positioned herself as having innocently told her Palestinian host dad about her program activities. The way she voiced it, he encouraged her to have fun while reminding her that "it's so hard for me to go there." Diana did not indicate any systemic rationale for this difficulty, and did not allude to the borders that she had been allowed to cross en route to this Dead Sea destination, the very borders constructed with rules to prevent this man from doing the same. Instead she talked about how she had felt upon learning that her host father could not access nearby places of interest. Emphasizing her frustration with dramatic sighs, she expressed ongoing empathy for his predicament, personalizing her reaction by switching to speak in the second-person tense when speaking about him: "you like can't get to it." She had shared with me at a different time how much she enjoyed her time at the Dead Sea, so that may have underscored her sense of frustration on behalf of her host. However, she did not acknowledge whether he expressed frustration about the unfair fact that she had been able to visit sites that he could not. Indeed, she did not acknowledge her host dad's feelings at all, and focused her gaze on herself.

This distanced anecdote alluded to the context of occupation but avoided addressing it directly. She neutralized the issue by recalling that he had said that "it's hard for me to go there," without mentioning why it was hard, much less what or who made it hard for him. Even if she assumed that I would understand the underlying systems of oppression, this is a glaring omission. In another context, her excerpt could have been a lamentation for insufficient transportation instead of for the fact that there were borders with rules that prevented West Bank Palestinians to cross. By repeating several times that things were "so close," she spoke as though

the issue was about the proximity of the places he could not go, not the structures that were in place to restrict him. Furthermore, she spoke as if this was a fixed situation, such that there was no hope for changing it; it was just a frustrating reality.

When Elizabeth told me stories about talking to her host family about her day trips, she acknowledged the context in her story, albeit obtusely. Her story about her conversation had been about a similar conversation with her host "sisters," who were close to her in age. Like Diana, she relayed a small story about telling them about her fun excursions, such as her day trip to the Dead Sea.

> Elizabeth: My host sisters are really — I got along with them. And they were just, like, normal girls! You know, but it was in those moments where I would tell them about like what we did today, places we went to, went swimming in the Dead Sea. And you know, they'd be like, "Oh, we've never been." That's when I'm like, "Oh, you're just normal teens, but at the same time, you're living under— you're living in this whole crazy world." And I just felt, like, guilty, that I could go and do those sorta things, and then just that our lives were so completely different.

By affectionately and emphatically describing these sisters as "normal" twice, she suggested that she perceived them to be like her. As if quoting them according to her memory, she recalled that they had informed her that they had never visited the nearby places that she had been enjoying as a tourist. Her narrated response to this revelation indicated what she remembered thinking to herself at that moment. Upon learning that these "normal" girls were not allowed to access the places she was visiting so easily, she concluded that the context was to blame: they were "living in a crazy world." Their normality could not grant them access. By

reiterating that they were normal, she implied that they did not deserve to be restricted like this. Perhaps this was a way of expressing that these girls defied negative stereotypes that are often put forth as justifications for imposing restrictions on Palestinians' freedom of movement. Elizabeth concluded this small story by saying that she felt guilty for having access that enabled her to cross borders that are closed to her Palestinian friends and counterparts. Expression of guilt was a common refrain for Elizabeth, and will be discussed in a later section. It is important to note here, though, that her guilt in this instance was in response to the disparity between her privileges and the oppression these girls faced. To emphasize this, she declared that, despite all their personal similarities, their lives were "completely different."

Elizabeth talked as if the conditions of "this whole crazy world" — and the border rules that reinforced them — were fixed, as if they were a given in the context of The Conflict. She may have caught herself before saying that these girls lived "under occupation," or perhaps under some other system of injustice. Nevertheless, she did not name a reason why these girls' world was "crazy." Also, she did not empathize with the experience of her hosts, or even remark on what she may have observed about their reactions to her stories, beyond their act of simply informing her that "we've never been." Rather, she focused her gaze on her own emotional experience of feeling guilty for her privilege, without any systemic analysis of the disparity between her and these girls who had been "normal" but were constrained by their Palestinian identities and West Bank ID cards.

For the most part, when the interviewees spoke comparatively about their own in-country travels in relation to their hosts' limited mobility under occupation, they maintained a narrow focus on their own emotional reactions in response to their hosts' personal circumstances that they considered to be sad and frustrating. Meanwhile, they did not mention or speculate about

details concerning their hosts' emotional states when they had shared about their inability to visit the destinations of these fun day trips. Furthermore, their stories revealed an awareness that these borders exist with different rules for who gets to cross them, but they tended to avoid any commentary or speculation about the systems and structures behind these rules. Rather, they recounted their stories as if they (and their stories) were emotionally and analytically detached from the context of injustice and occupation.

As a contrasting example, Linda provided a perspective that demonstrated empathic consideration for her hosts. According to her narrative, she had purposefully not talked to her host family about the nearby places they could not access. She mentioned that she had been uncomfortable with her peers who had talked with their host families about visiting the places outside of the West Bank, because she considered this to be insensitive. She told me that this observation about her peers had created an opportunity for her own learning, noting that it prompted her to consider how to communicate sensitively in different ways with different audiences.

Linda: It made me really consider, like, how I speak about the things I've experienced. And how what I share can affect someone else, whether I really am thinking about that or not. How, when I say things, people are gonna react. It made me think a lot about intent. There, especially, there are some people on our trip who would talk about doing all these amazing travel experiences with our host families, and I'm just like — Like talking about, like, Jerusalem. I'm just like, you're talking to people who literally can't do any of this. And that made me really think about, like, even if your intent isn't to make someone upset, or make someone uncomfortable, those feelings are still real,

and if someone's impacted by it, it doesn't matter what your intentions were, it happened.

Linda's narrative here was not about a particular experience during the trip, but her subsequent reflections afterwards about an aspect of some of her peers' insensitive behavior that had bothered her. Moreover, she connected these reflections to a more general contemplation about "intent versus impact," which related to her work on campus as a diversity peer educator.

Directing the Gaze: "If You Aren't Really Analyzing What's Going On, You're Not Gonna Notice"

In terms of not just noticing borders and other symbols of the military occupation, but processing the implications behind them, Linda attributed an "a-ha moment" to a speaker who had introduced her to the concept of "invisible borders," which thereby catalyzed her understanding about how the occupation worked in ways that may not have otherwise been readily evident to her. While flipping through her notebook that she had filled with notes during her program, she paused for some time to review what she had written when her group met with an American-Palestinian man who had relinquished his U.S. passport and its privileges in order to live in the West Bank with a Palestinian ID that restricted his freedom of movement.

Linda: Yeah, so then he kept talking about, like, "invisible occupation." How there's visible, like, you can *see* occupation. But then there's also things that are really lowkey. So, like, talking about traffic and roads. I remember, we were driving through the West Bank, and they were like, "This is a really dangerous road to drive on, and it was made that way for a reason." And like, talking about how he would try to go to work, and, between Ramallah and Jerusalem, and how roads would randomly close, and traffic would be directed another

way, and just like, how there's very concrete examples of occupation, but there's little things, like closing the roads so no one can get to work on time. And they lose out on that day of work. And just little things that, like, you wouldn't really think about. That was the thing for me, there was a lot of things I didn't think about. Until I was there seeing it.

JM: Ah. Ah! So you heard about it, saw it, and felt it, in a way

Linda: Yeah. There was, like, the concept of "invisible occupation" he was talking about. Like, the permit system. I'd never learned about permits. Like, not even in classes, really, that I've taken or my friends have taken about The Conflict. Never any talk about, like, permits and checkpoints and what that looks like. And road closures, and how roads are built, and those type of, almost, like — like, I could equate it to — not equate it, but like, similar to institutional racism, **where, if you aren't really analyzing what's going on, you're not gonna notice**. That was something for me, like, I had never thought about or considered, until I saw it, and heard about it, and felt it. And that was a really important thing for me, coming from the trip.

As she skimmed over her notes, the phrase "invisible occupation" seemed to catch her eye, and she elaborated as to why it had been so important to her to be introduced to this concept. She recalled one of the examples that he shared to explain how this invisible occupation operated with respect to traffic and roads in the West Bank. Then she related that to a time when one of her program leaders had later pointed out an example of invisible occupation, when he had noted that roads for Palestinians in the West Bank were dangerous by design. She then reverted back to another example that the speaker had shared about his own commute through a checkpoint

between Ramallah and Jerusalem. She likely echoed what he had told them as she was reading her notes, and she continued drawing connections to her memories of her own experience there, demonstrating her depth of analysis.

Linda continued listing some aspects of the occupation that had not been readily apparent to her even when she had been physically present among them. She acknowledged that she had not necessarily noticed things like highway infrastructure and road closures during her time in Palestine/Israel, nor had she been aware of the permit system that denies Palestinians permission to build on their own land, and denies them their right to move freely through checkpoints into Israeli territory. She further compared these forms of discrimination to institutional racism in the U.S. context. Although she did not equate the Israeli system to institutional racism in the U.S. per se, her comparison recognized the existence of systemic injustices that operate below the surface of the awareness of people who are not directly harmed from them.

This small story from Linda contained profound insights about the nature of the gaze in experiential education. The "invisible occupation" concept that she recalled here, described aspects of the occupation that were invisible by simple observation, but that became more visible when they were bolstered by information that pointed their attention to what may otherwise have gone unnoticed. For example, had her guides not mentioned the dangers of the road in the West Bank, Linda would not have noticed the underlying policies or neglect that allowed it to be dangerous by design. Had she merely "experienced" this road as a passenger on a tour bus, this would likely be undetectable to her. Simply experiencing something like this was not sufficient to learn from it, unless her gaze had been guided toward it. Although she stated that there were "a lot of things I didn't think about. Until I was there seeing it," she actually described that seeing alone was not equivalent to noticing.

Her example about permits continued underscoring this point from the angle of the gaze: If a person's gaze does not position them to see a thing, they cannot analyze that thing. She had not known about the Israeli system that required that Palestinians from the West Bank go through the onerous and dehumanizing process of applying for permission to enter Israeli territory. Because this system did not have a direct, adverse impact on her or anyone in her group, it would be possible that she could have been physically present in Palestine/Israel and crossed Israeli checkpoints that required permits for Palestinians from the West Bank, and still not known about these permits. Simply being in the country was not enough to see what was happening, or as she phrased it, to understand "what that looks like" beneath the superficial layer that she could see from her outsider perspective.

She also made the opposite but complementary point that analysis is not only dependent on one's gaze, but one's gaze is also dependent on priming that results from a certain degree of analytical understanding. She summarized this point very well when she said: "if you aren't really analyzing what's going on, you're not gonna notice." In other words, if you are not positioned to gaze upon scenery with sufficient contextual information, you may see symbols of injustice without noticing them. Analysis is required to transform seeing into noticing.

Finally, she laid out an important caveat about learning from experience when she said that was something "I had never thought about or considered, until I saw it, and heard about it, and felt it." In order to consider and learn from what she saw, she realized that she needed to hear about it, or have some contextual information that shaped how she understood what she saw. In addition, and crucially, she also added that consideration was related to feeling something upon encountering it. This connection between experience and emotions was significant, and is something that I will continue to explore throughout this chapter.

In the following section, I will consider the relationships between gaze, analysis, and emotional investment in experiences in relationship to the interviewees' stories about crossing checkpoints.

Outsiders Gazing Inward: Crossing Checkpoints and Gazing at Themselves

As the students traveled around the region on their tour bus, they frequently crossed checkpoints stationed along borders and in other militarily strategic locations within the West Bank. These checkpoints varied greatly, as did the groups' experiences with them. It seemed as though the groups were rarely stopped at checkpoints and were usually granted easy passage that may have gone largely unnoticed by the interviewees who, as passengers, did not need to respond to the questions posed by soldiers or guards to the bus driver and program leaders. However, on the occasions that soldiers and guards did ask the students to stop for security checks and interrogations, the interviewees paid attention in varying ways. They all told me stories about one or more of these stops while crossing checkpoints.

Israeli checkpoints represent a form of structural violence (Galtung, 1990), and intrinsically offer examples of power, control, oppression, and privilege, both in practice and through symbols. Power is expressed through discriminatory systems and policies that determine who is permitted to cross; these policies are enacted through interpersonal interactions between the people crossing and the individual Israeli guards and soldiers who implement the policies with a degree of discretion. For these reasons, they are sites that have the potential for rich sources of learning.

Over 100 Israeli checkpoints exist in the West Bank, and along with roadblocks and restricted roads leading to settlements, they severely limit the movement of Palestinians, especially those who hold Palestinian identification cards (Amnesty International, 2019). Figure

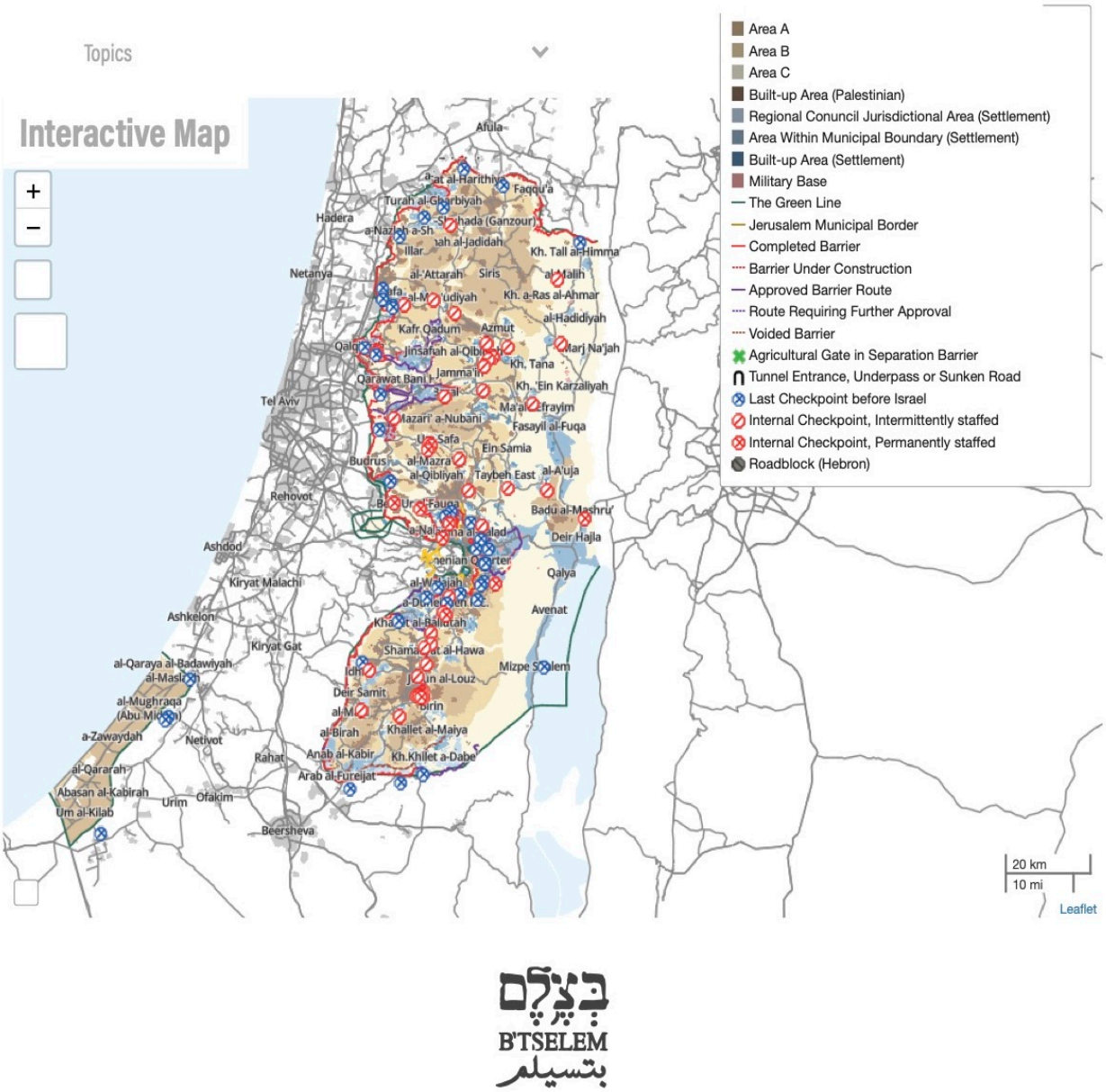
5.1 presents a map from the Israeli nonprofit organization B'Tselem (n.d.) that depicts the checkpoints throughout the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. While some checkpoints are temporary, many are permanent. It is important to note that some are positioned on ostensible borders between Israeli and Palestinian territory, such as those around the eastern perimeter of Jerusalem and those around the West Bank, but there are several that are situated within Palestinian territory between Palestinian communities.

The interviewees often crossed through checkpoints without paying attention to them. In their stories, they overlooked these checkpoints' impositions on local communities, as well as their more subtle nuances or indirect representations of power or oppression. The degree to which they learned from these sites was dependent on what they noticed, and the extent of their noticing often depended on whether and how they personally experienced a sense of disruption to what they had taken for granted. However, what they had taken for granted at these sites was informed by the expectations they had formed from their pre-travel preparation. The students' identities informed what they had previously taken for granted, in addition to providing a lens that filtered which elements they noticed in the scenes unfolding around them at a given moment.

These participants sometimes noticed systems of discrimination and micro-level effects of larger geopolitics when they crossed through checkpoints, depending on how their gaze focused their attention and analysis. Often, the occupation provided the backdrop to this setting, but was not a focal element of their stories. However, what caught their narrative attention was when they felt a personal impact from an interpersonal interaction or implementation of a policy. Accordingly, their personal emotional experiences shaped their memories and subsequent analysis, more so than the many sights, sounds, and other sensory inputs competing for their attention.

Figure 5.1

Map of Checkpoints and Barriers in Occupied Palestinian Territory



Note. This image is a screen capture of an online map from B'Tselem. (n.d.) Interactive map. Retrieved August 13, 2020, from https://www.btselem.org/map

The checkpoints throughout the occupied West Bank and at international borders of Israel are sites where different forms of power converge in ways that can be witnessed, experienced, and felt with a clarity that may be more difficult to discern in other arenas. When these U.S.-American students were stopped at checkpoints, they found themselves in the nexus of three realms of power dynamics at play: geopolitical, systemic, and interpersonal. The interviewees recognized how specific aspects of their identities were particularly salient for each of these realms: their passports flexed the geopolitical power of the U.S. and its relationship with the state of Israel; their ethnicities shielded them from the systems of discriminatory power that restrict movement and access for Arabs and Muslims; and the degree to which they were perceived as White facilitated interpersonal interactions with soldiers or security guards who could exert interpersonal power over people on an individual basis as they crossed.

The interviewees were most attuned to dynamics of power that they witnessed or experienced through their interactions with individual soldiers or security guards. After all, these individuals were not only representatives of the state's institutional policies, but also exerted some discretion over whether and how to enact the policies through their choices on whom to scrutinize, interrogate, detain, and ultimately to allow or deny passage. The interactions with these security personnel individuals dominated much of the interviewees' attention in the stories they narrated to me. Moreover, these interactions seemed to the students to operate within a set of rules that they were deciphering as they moved through checkpoints, and continued to make sense of during their interviews with me.

In their retellings, the interviewees talked about crossing checkpoints as if they were learning how to play a sort of "How To Get Through A Checkpoint" Game with rules that they discerned as they played. At first blush, this notion struck me as a bit frivolous in the face of

substantial oppression imposed by checkpoints and the occupation more broadly. It initially seemed like the height of privilege for these students to talk about situations that present life-and-death consequences to others, as if they could learn some trick to get around the rules, or to "get away with something" by outsmarting the guards or soldiers. However, while writing this chapter, I conversed with a Palestinian friend from the West Bank about her approaching travels from the U.S. through Jordan to Palestine, and she happened to mention the her dread of playing the game of crossing checkpoints, albeit from a cynical perspective that highlighted its pervasiveness. I realized that this "game" characterization was apt: the interpersonal interactions at checkpoints operate within a set of rules that are informed by political and systemic policies, but that are enacted by individuals on a case-by-case basis according to other guidelines, logics, and assumptions. This game is played by anyone who crosses one of these checkpoints, and is dependent on each person's sociocultural identities. For these interviewees, their outsider identities determined how the rules were applied, as did their degree of informational and/or emotional Connectedness, which subsequently determined how much friction or delay each player had to negotiate. For those of us who are privileged to cross various types of checkpoints, we learn as we play because the rules are unwritten.

These students technically met the criteria that should have allowed them to cross checkpoints as easily as they expected to cross other international borders; in fact, they grappled with the realization that they were afforded privileges that their peers and Palestinian friends were not granted. Even so, they learned that they had to appease the guards and convince them that they were "safe" enough to be allowed to cross with minimal delay. Through the narratives that offered insights into this grappling, they revealed how they learned about the many ways that multiple facets of their identity were relevant to playing this game. Indeed, several of them

began to recognize the ways that identity can be performed so as to accentuate or attempt to hide various aspects for different audiences.

In their narrative retellings to me, they cast themselves as the stars of their own individual dramas, positioning themselves as having been simultaneously frightened yet indignant, scolded yet triumphant. They retroactively centered themselves in their checkpoint stories as if they had been unfairly profiled yet ultimately rewarded for playing their hand at the game well. In addition to considering the systemic rules in place that determined how difficult or possible it may be for various people to cross checkpoints, these interviewees often focused their stories on the ways they tried to outsmart the security guards — and the game itself — through various interpersonal tactics they employed when they found themselves in stressful situations.

The students' stories revealed some of the ways that they had made sense of and learned from these border encounters, especially with respect to the ways that they and their peers felt like they had to play to win the access and mobility they had previously taken for granted. In this section, I will present excerpts from the students' stories about their experiences crossing various checkpoints. I begin with the checkpoints they encountered when they crossed international boundaries to enter the country. I will then share some of their stories about the checkpoints they crossed while riding the tour bus with their group, and I will pay special attention to the different ways that three interviewees described the same incident at one of these checkpoints internal to the West Bank. In these examples, I will note the ways in which the interviewees saw the impact of checkpoint interrogations on their minoritized peers, but rarely provided evidence of noticing how their peers were impacted. Then I will share several excerpts from anecdotes some of the students shared about the times when they crossed checkpoints on their own, without the comfort

of being with their group, when they crossed international borders at the conclusion of their program.

Crossing Borders: Entering the Country

Setting the Stage: Pre-program Preparation Primed Them With Particular Preconceptions

Prior to traveling for this program, the participants had received their first indications that travel to Israel/Palestine involved a different set of "rules" than other travel destinations with which they may have been familiar. Occasionally in their narratives, an interviewee would offhandedly mention some of the guidelines they had been given by their program leaders before they left the U.S. These suggestions included not only a list of what to pack, but also what *not* to pack. For example, a couple of the interviewees shared that they had been warned about their program itineraries. One student told me that they were supposed to leave the printed version of their schedule at home in the U.S. so that it would not be seen if their bags were searched during their travel or upon entry into Israel. Similarly, in the excerpt below, Paige remembered this recommendation to hide her itinerary.

> Paige: Yeah, so, we got our schedule maybe in February or March before the trip, but [we] had to kind of hide them. Just for the sake of when they— if they checked our luggage, so like I had this tucked away in a folder at the bottom of my suitcase in a zip-up part. Just in case! Some people did get stopped.

During her third interview, Paige showed me the printed copy of her program itinerary that had a few of her brief handwritten notes that she had taken during her program. In the midst of talking me through a chronological overview of the first few days of her program, she interjected this small story, which was not directly related to anything she said immediately before or after. Nevertheless, she told me that she had hidden this document in the bottom of her

suitcase when she had traveled, “tucked away” and zipped up. Saying that she took this precautionary step “if they checked our luggage,” she did not name to whom she was referring with that “they.” Nevertheless, this was an apparent reference to the security checks inherent in flying to the Tel Aviv airport. She also did not indicate why this schedule was considered to be contraband worthy of hiding away, nor what the consequence would have been had “they” found it in her luggage. However, by adding, “Some people did get stopped,” she drew a connection between security guards finding something like that program schedule in a person’s luggage, and the consequence of being detained or interrogated or otherwise “stopped” upon entry into the country. Although she noted that some people in her group had been stopped at this border in the airport, she did not offer any speculation as to why they had been stopped, much less if these stops had anything to do with what had been found in their luggage, whether a printed program itinerary or anything else.

Sylvia also mentioned the packing guidelines that had been part of their program preparation when she noted, in response to my prompt about a meaningful object from her trip, that she had been cautioned against packing things in her luggage that indicated a sympathy with the Palestinian liberation cause.

> Sylvia: I packed really light on this trip. So I did not accumulate souvenirs. I was, uh, we were really heavily warned against anything that, like, said "Free Palestine" on it or anything, because of security going back home. [sigh]

While “packing really light” could apply to both entering and leaving the country, Sylvia’s mention of souvenirs indicated that she was primarily addressing her packing strategy for flying out of Israel. Saying that they had been “really heavily warned” emphasized her perception that the preparation her group had been given involved more than mere packing

guidelines, but more of a warning that had significant implications. Although she specified that this forewarning had been about items that were clearly related to Palestine, she nevertheless extrapolated this security-related rule to apply to souvenirs of any kind.

The incomplete nature of both of these excerpts indicated an assumption that I, as their audience, understood the context of security checks of luggage in the Tel Aviv airport. Still, their references were both brief and vague, and left me with an indication that they had been prepared with tips about travel without fully understanding the rationales behind these warnings. In fact, their lack of analysis during the interviews may have indicated that they still had not given much consideration to why they had received tips about how to proceed through Israeli security. Like so much within their narratives, and consistent with the effects of their outsider gaze, they positioned these militarized aspects of Palestine/Israel as simply being "how things are" over there, due to The Conflict.

Watching Peers Get Profiled: "The Conflict Kinda Just Hit Home When It Was People in Our Own Group Being Denied Access Into Places"

Whereas the interviewees did not often speak to direct connections between their experiences at checkpoints and those of local Palestinians and Israelis, witnessing the profiling of their "connected" peers at checkpoints made an impact on their understanding of the game. After all, the interviewees perceived less social distance between themselves and their Muslim and Arab peers, than they had between themselves and local Palestinians or Israelis. So when their peers were subjected to different, harsher rules at checkpoints, these interviewees took notice. Two types of checkpoints made this strong impression: the international border crossing between Jordan and Israel/Palestine, and the checkpoints within the West Bank that the group passed through in their tour bus.

Crossing the Border Into Israel: "We Were Kinda, Like, Hit with, Like, Reality"

Two programs required the students to enter Israel/Palestine by flying into the Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv; the other gave participants the option of alternatively flying into Amman, Jordan, and crossing into Palestine/Israel at the land border near Jericho in the West Bank as a group along with other student participants and a facilitator. Regardless of their mode of entry, almost all of the students mentioned something to me about their entry process. For example, as one of the interviewees who flew into the Israeli airport, Diana offhandedly mentioned that "I had a rough time going from [Western European country] to Tel Aviv, which is where I flew in. I don't even know if it was relatively tough or that's just, you know, the way it is, like, going to Israel." Without offering any details or any story about her experience, she dismissed her experience by suggesting that flying into Israel — and going through the security checks — is just difficult, in general. Like so many other observation by interviewees, there was an assumption that what they saw and experienced reflected "the way things are" without considering how and whether they might change, or be changeable.

Flying Into the Tel Aviv Airport

This difficulty with airport security was elaborated upon by Molly, who had traveled along with an Arab American student from her program. Molly described to me her first impression of Israel as a first-time international traveler:

Molly: So my first experience was the Israeli airport security. Being aggressive with us. And I had been — my friend who had gone on the program, she's half-[Arab]. We kinda, like, went together and planned to go together. And we walked up to the security together. And so, they took her to a room, but they just kept asking me about her for, like, a half hour. Like, "Did she give you

presents?" And stuff like that. I'm just like, "So this is how it's gonna be, this is the tone."

And they're like, "Do you know her?" And then, Lucy always told us not to lie to the airport security, but I didn't tell them — they were like, "How do you know— how did you meet her?" 'Cause I met her in my Arabic class, but I was like, "Just the class for the study abroad." And so I didn't talk about Arabic class, 'cause I didn't wanna be — I already figured that would not be a great talking point with the airport security. And yeah, other people had other issues. 'Cause there were other people of Arab descent on the trip. But we got there.

JM: Did you all fly together? Separately?

Molly: A lot of us flew on the Israeli airline. Um, El Al.

JM: Mhm, mhm

Molly: Yeah. Which was a mistake.

JM: Why?

Molly: They were — their security was just much more intense. Which, like, makes sense. But we didn't, like, really know that. We were just like, "Oh, cool. Straight there." Yeah. So yeah, that was — that's how that ha— it's like, more than half of us took that plane together. So it was nice that we all were waiting together to go. 'Cause we were like — everyone was a little shook up.

In this story, she described a few specific aspects of why she described the Israeli security as "being aggressive." First, she noted that her Arab American groupmate was questioned in a separate room for approximately half an hour. In the meantime, Molly was also being

questioned, primarily about her relationship and interactions with the Arab student. As one example she recalled being asked whether her Arab friend had given her presents. Although she did not make this connection explicitly in her story — she merely alluded to "the tone" of this line of questioning — sharing this kind of question with me implied that the security guard may have been framing the friend as being potentially dangerous or even potentially capable of planting something dangerous on Molly.

Recalling that her program leaders had previewed the rules of this game and cautioned the participants against lying to security guards, Molly told me that during her interrogation, she had recognized that it "would not be a great talking point" to divulge that she not only had taken an Arabic language class, but that she met this Arab American friend in that class. This retelling gave the impression that she had come to this realization on her own, without indicating why it would be a mistake in this game to share that she had studied Arabic. When she then noted that other groupmates of Arab descent had also "had other issues" with security, she further implied that Arabness was considered to be a red flag in the checkpoint game. Without yet explaining why this was an important rule of the game, she acknowledged the connection between Arabness and being detained for questioning by airport security personnel.

She went on to tell me that she had traveled with several of her groupmates on the Israeli airline, El Al. When I asked why she claimed that it had been "a mistake" to fly on this airline, she first noted that their security was "more intense," but then added her evaluation that it "made sense" that this was the case. Because she had not elaborated on why intense security was somehow sensible, I speculate that perhaps this made sense to her based on her subsequent experience with intense Israeli security checks throughout Israel/Palestine. At any rate, she next revealed that, had she and her peers been aware of this airline's "intense" security practices prior

to booking their travel, it could have changed the way they played the game. When making their travel arrangements, they had not realized that they already started "The Checkpoint Game." Rather, they had only assumed that they had been playing the more common, more benign "International Travel Game," so to speak, for which they took into consideration travel times and costs instead of the degree of intensity they may face in a security checkpoint. Notably, at the end of this story, she shared that, although she suggested that everyone in her travel group had been shaken up from the intensity of this experience, it had been a relief to experience this encounter with security checks as a collective group, rather than on her own.

Later in this same interview, when I asked Molly what her expectations had been prior to traveling, she briefly revisited her airport entry story, noting that the treatment of her Arab American peers had caught her attention and set a serious tone.

> Molly: I just went into it and was like, "Yep. This is probably gonna be difficult." Especially after the airport situation. When I was like, "Oh!" Like I knew it was serious, but I was like, "I'm just— I'm just trying to get on the plane." OK. So it's this— it's this serious where you're hounding, like, American citizens of Arab descent, like, if they're gonna, like, commit an act of terror. … But like, that — this really set the tone, I think, for a lot, in general.

Having known prior to traveling that her trip would be difficult in many ways, she pointed out that "the airport situation" in which she and her groupmates were questioned had signaled one way that her time in Palestine/Israel would be particularly challenging. In addition to how serious it had felt for her to experience interrogation prior to boarding her flight, she acknowledged that the "hounding" of her Arab American classmates increased her perception of severity. Moreover, here she explicitly noted that her classmates had been profiled as if they

were accused of being terrorists, thus making clear her connection between Arabness and the stereotypes that fueled this sort of interrogation.

Sylvia talked about the effects that flying into the Israeli airport had on one of her Arab American peers, who prior to the trip had already been concerned about mitigating the intensity of the interrogation he apparently had anticipated from the security check. According to Sylvia, this person had been "extremely paranoid about security," and thus cleared information off of his phone and brought along a borrowed computer from his university in order to avoid bringing his own. Sylvia continued, indicating that this paranoia was justified, although her friend's preventative actions had been in vain:

> Sylvia: [My friend] still got searched. They, like, took his phone behind closed doors. And like, he was really stressed about that. … [Another student] still was held up for a little bit. So I don't know — I really felt for them. And I can be grateful that I didn't have *that* stress on that trip.

Through this anecdote, Sylvia reveals that the identity-differentiated rules of the game prompted one of her groupmates to clear information from his electronics in an attempt to avoid certain kinds of suspicion at the border checkpoints. Moreover, it seemed as though her friend already knew these rules prior to traveling, which was one reason for his paranoia. Sylvia did not suggest that non-Arab students took any of these similar precautions, which would indicate that the rules were perceived to be different by Arabs and non-Arabs even before the trip. After this incident, Sylvia went on to explain that her friend had been consumed with anxiety during much of the trip, and had spent significant time, energy, and money trying to change airlines for the return flight. Therefore, when she told me that she was relieved that she did not endure that kind

of stress during her program, she was empathizing with the way that these stricter rules of the game had had detrimental effects on her peers who had been profiled.

Crossing the Border From Jordan

According to the participants who opted to fly into Jordan and cross the land border into Israel/Palestine, the profiling of a few group members impacted the experience of everyone in the group. To begin with, Linda mentioned that her decision to travel through Jordan had been partially informed by a desire to avoid some of the more intense questioning they had been warned about with respect to the Israeli airport:

> Linda: But so, a bunch of us bought our tickets together and decided to go to Jordan a few days before, 'cause we had been told that the airport in Israel was like very annoying to go through security-wise. So we went, like, "OK, we'll go through Jordan."

Her framing was notable for a few reasons. First, she and her groupmates spent "a few days" in Jordan as tourists, visiting popular destinations in Amman and in the south. Her choice to frame her story to me as if this decision was made to avoid Israeli airport security, may have been understated foreshadowing for the story she would soon tell me about the interrogation that her group nevertheless encountered from Israelis at the border from Jordan into Jericho. Second, it was an interesting choice for her to describe the Israeli airport security as "annoying." This is another instance of minimizing of the severity of what security interrogation can be for some people. Interestingly, it undermined her claim that it had been a factor in her decision. If airport security were merely annoying, it may not have been worthy of rerouting a travel plan. Regardless, this phrasing served to highlight the privilege that this choice represented in terms of the game: choosing to avoid an annoyance by flying into an alternate airport demonstrated a

privileged position of attempting to altogether sidestep an encounter with security. Moreover, because the rules of the game do not permit Palestinians from the West Bank to access the Israeli airport, they must always enter and exit their country using the route that Linda and her groupmates chose. Whether or not Linda and her peers recognized this, the ability to even consider this option was thereby implicitly related to the privilege according to the rules of this game.

The three interviewees who crossed from Jordan through this Israeli checkpoint had shared stories with me about their crossing. Each of their stories offered salient evidence about how the rules of the game had been elucidated for them through this experience.

As a White woman, Elizabeth made a point of how different her interactions with security guards had been in comparison with some of her Arab and Muslim peers.

Elizabeth: And then we had to cross the border — we met Rania at the border and she crossed with us. And it was the Muslim female who hijabed, and then the Palestinian boy. They all had American passports.

We all had American passports, and we had, like, some special kinda thing that we paid to go through as a group. I don't know. And the two — everyone else got through, like I remember walking up, showing my passport, and the Israeli guard was super nice, like "This is your first time?" And I was like, "Yeah, super excited!" And walked through, and the two of them were held up for five hours. So like we all stayed. And like everyone kept saying like, "Oh no, move through, you guys already passed," and some of the like activist-kinda people, like I was saying — or, I need a better name for them, 'cause that's just incorrect, but — so the very passionate people, like, started

screaming at them, I'm like, "Holy crap!"

JM: At who were they screaming at?

Elizabeth: The, the guards

JM: The border guards

Elizabeth: The border guards, like, kept telling us to come over. Like," No! We're not going anywhere." And like the two people were like filling out their forms, and they'd go back and get interviewed, and Rania was stressed out, and she's like, "Do we send everyone?" People were like, "No! We're all staying as a group!" I'm like, "OK, we're all staying as a group?" Yeah. And they eventually got through, but that like set off a real, like, nasty taste in everyone's mouth, just first getting in there.

JM: Your first experience

Elizabeth: Yeah. And for me, like, I didn't even understand, like, the severity of that situation at first, 'cause I was, like, so confused. But we made it through. It took like five hours. And like I said, it was 30 seconds for me.

Her narrative attention was focused on the students who were Muslim and/or Arab, since she mentioned them from the beginning, as part of setting the scene. She noted that these two students had U.S. passports before clarifying that everyone in their group had U.S. passports, and that they had all paid money to cross the border with other foreigners rather than with local Palestinians who often wait at the border much longer than international tourists. She almost returned her focus to the two Muslim peers, but instead mentioned that "everyone else" in her group "got through" security, without any apparent issue. Then she turned to her own experience with the guard, who had been "super nice" when they asked her one simple question, before

allowing her to enter easily. Since she had already been a seasoned traveler, this was the kind of border crossing with which she had been familiar. Then, she quickly pivoted to "the two of them" — her Muslim peers — and told me that they were held up for hours.

She described the waiting period as stressful because of the interpersonal conflict among some of the students in her group (to whom she referred as being "activists" or "very passionate" about Palestine) who had been screaming at the border guards, resisting their directions to leave their Muslim peers behind. Meanwhile, she said that Rania, her program leader, had been distressed about whether or not to send the non-Muslim students to their hotel in Tel Aviv while the two Muslim students were waiting to see if their passports would clear such that they would be allowed to enter the country. Elizabeth positioned herself in this story as an observer to the tension of her groupmates and program leader. She even revealed some of her uncertainty about the strong stance her "activist" peers had been taking against the boarder guards, in that her remembered response to their declaration that they were staying at the border in solidarity with their held-up groupmates, she repeated that assertion as a question: "OK, we're all staying as a group?"

In retelling this anecdote to me, she positioned herself as having been naïve and clueless about "the severity of the situation." Even though she said that this experience "set off a real nasty taste in everyone's mouth," just minutes later she told me that she had still been considering her first destination, Tel Aviv, as if it had been a beach vacation. Therefore, she made it clear that this experience had made more of an impact on her after the fact, once she had gained some perspective and understanding about how this encounter fit into the larger context of The Conflict.

Her final quotation in this excerpt reminded me that she recognized how quick and easy it had been for her to cross this checkpoint, but that it had taken the collective group several hours to cross as a whole. She did not attribute blame to any person or institution for this, although when she recalled reiterating that the group decided to wait together, she insinuated that the decision to wait together as a group was made by other people within the group, likely her Activist Peers who were reportedly yelling at the border guards. Indeed, her language in this excerpt vacillates between the use of "we" and "they" to referr to the group, indicating that she did not always align herself with her groupmates' behavior and decisions.

Bridget was another well-seasoned traveler who described her casually detached perception of this crossing as having been informed by her prior experiences of waiting while crossing international borders.

JM: And how did you get from Amman to Tel Aviv?

Bridget: We met Rania in Amman, and then taxied to the border, and then we crossed with her on a bus. And that was intense also, because we had two Muslim students with us. And, I, like, we'd talked about profiling before, but I just didn't realize how blatant it was going to be. And, they were immediately stopped, and they held their passports for four hours, and we all stayed with them as a group. But, it just, like, I wasn't expecting it to be so obvious. I guess. …

JM: I wonder about what it was like for you — you're naming, kind of, the unexpectedness of "this is actually blatant racial profiling." But, what it was like for you to come from Amman, to be at the border with people in your

group, including your facilitator, and wait. And just know that you were waiting for this permission to be — after this profile.

Bridget: Yeah, it was — I don't know, I mean, I've traveled a lot, so waiting at airports isn't, like, weird for me. I mean I haven't been, like, detained very mu— at all. I don't think. Not that I remember, at least. But waiting in a place of transit isn't unusual, and so I don't think I felt the same urgency that a lot of people felt. Even though I was really surprised. And I think it didn't quite regis— yeah, I just don't think it quite registered emotionally for me what was really going on. It just felt like more waiting. And I think later I understood a little more deeply, at least. 'Cause I understood conceptually what was going on. And, obviously, the other two students were pretty freaked out, and we're all, just trying to distract them by — with normal conversation and stuff.

Bridget began by describing this experience as "intense" because the two Muslim peers had been profiled. She said that she had been anticipating such profiling because she recalled her group had been prepared for these rules of this game prior to traveling. However, she had been surprised at how "blatant" and "obvious" this profiling was. Once again, when these students confronted discrimination for the first time from a firsthand perspective rather than merely a theoretical perspective, they were surprised by how much more severe these experiences were than they had imagined them. Although Bridget acknowledged the overall intensity of this incident, her groupmates' experience appeared to be subordinate to her personal experience of waiting, which was familiar to her.

Still, Bridget indicated that her comprehension of the scenario at the time of her interview had evolved from what she had been feeling and understanding when she had been at the border.

In response to my question about what this had been like for her, she shared that, at the time, she had not fully grasped the situation that her "freaked out" Muslim peers were enduring. Although she said that she and the rest of her group were trying to distract them, suggesting that she had understood that they were upset enough to benefit from diversions, she said that in the moment, she had framed this scenario in her familiar terms: international travel involves long waits. She claimed that this framing prevented her from recognizing that they were waiting because two her peers were being profiled. This was apparently in spite of the fact that other members of her group were well aware of this dynamic. Nevertheless, her experience of that moment had been informed by her previous experiences, which had superseded the information she had been receiving from her peers in that moment. Because she personally experienced this episode as "waiting while traveling," this travel game resembled other travel games she had played. Therefore, she was not aware of the differential and "blatantly" discriminatory rules of this game until later, when she had contextualized it with additional information that shed light on her understanding of her peers' experiences.

Elizabeth and Bridget had not registered "how bad" the situation was until later when they learned about why and how this incident related to the context. Even though they "had the experience" of waiting at an international border crossing with Muslim peers who were detained for hours, they didn't have the same experience, and they had not been gazing at the situation with a lens that afforded them understanding.

Being Interrogated: "But That Was, Like, When We Kind of Got, Like, Hit in the Face With Reality"

Linda's story included the most detail about this interrogation. This made sense, because her experience of being questioned had been very different than her White peers who were

hardly questioned at all. Her personal and emotional experience widened the framing of her gaze so that she took in more information about the interrogation process that her Muslim peers endured. She recalled details about the interrogation to which she had been subjected, and also recalled details about the interrogations that her other peers of color had faced. This was a stark contrast to the stories told by Elizabeth and Bridget, who had simply relayed that they had been present, waiting, while their peers were questioned. Linda's non-White racial identity shaped her perspective, in part because she suspected that she was questioned because she was not "White-passing" — that is, because the border guards suspected that she was not White.

In order to analyze how she talked about this incident and learned from it, I will split her long story into several consecutive excerpts.

Linda: And so, when we crossed the border, that was the first time we were kinda like hit with, like, reality. So we had two students that — there was like thirteen of us, in this group. So we had two students, um, yeah. One, um, Palestinian. Well he's Am— all of us had American passports. And one of the students, Raed, he's Palestinian. And then the other student, Fatima, she wore hijab, and she's, like, [South Asian]. And, so when we got to the border, that was like — we were all like still super happy and, like, excited from Jordan. But then when we got to the border, like the Israeli part of the border, we got separated. So Raed and Fatima were taken to, like, another room. We had a VIP service, but like — So we were sitting in, like, a closed-off room. And then, we got kicked out of that. And then, Raed and Fatima got, like, separated from the rest of us, and they're like, "Oh, we just have to do extra security

with them. They're doing the same thing as you, just, like, in a closed room." And we were like, "OK?"

She began by framing this story as the moment they were "hit with reality." In a sense, this border also served as a demarcation between the carefree vacation mindset they had had in Jordan, and the reality of what they were about to experience in Israel/Palestine. Then she continued to set the scene by offering some demographic information about her group, focusing her attention on the two Muslim students, and noting that all the students had U.S. passports. Again by pointing out that they had just been "super happy" from their time in Jordan, she was clear that the tone changed at this border: as soon as her group stepped into Israeli-controlled territory, the Muslim students were segregated from the rest of the group. In this case, she recalled that the separation was stark in that they were taken to a different room. She brought up their "VIP service," as if to underscore the fact that this, along with their U.S. passports, did not exempt her Muslim peers from the rules of this game. In a sense, her entire group was essentially demoted from their VIP status when they were removed from a VIP room while their peers were being interrogated in a different location. As a method to explain this separation, Linda spoke as if in the voice of one of the guards to focus on their claim that they "had to do extra security with them," referring to the Muslim students. Through this quotation in which she was speaking as a border guard, embellishing her narrative design as per positioning Level 1b (Depperman, 2013b), she previewed the next part of her story and said that her interrogation experience had been similar to that of the two Muslim students; the only difference, according to what she remembered this guard saying, was that they were being questioned in a different room. To demonstrate her memory of being skeptical of how the guards had been playing this game, she

expressed her group's collective response to their explanation with an uncertain yet submissive "OK?"

Linda: And then, so, they went off to a closed room, and then, the rest of us, like — we all turned in our passports — and the rest of us were called up one by one to talk to the — like, get interviewed, like, asked questions, about like, what's your name, where're you from. What were you doing, why are you— like. And they were all very, very different. So like, I'm, like, Latinx, like, and I'm, like, not White-passing. And so all the people who weren't White-passing on our trip, had like a different set of questions.

So we were asked, like, what we were studying, what we were doing, why we were coming to the country, like, all those type of things. It was kind of stressful. Like, I felt like — I don't know, I remember my interview specifically. I kept getting asked, like, what I was studying and I didn't know. And I was like, "I don't really know." And they were like, "What do you mean you don't know?" And I was like, "I haven't picked out a major, like, I'm just trying to explore." And they were like, "What kind of things are you exploring?" And I'm just like, [in a shaky voice] "I don't know." And it was really stressful.

She couched her memory of this experience in the context of how it had been differentially experienced by different members of her group, rather than solely from her own narrow point of view. She recalled details that the others had not, such as the memory that everyone's passports had been collected prior to determining who was questioned. A key point of her story was her awareness that the security guards asked very different questions of the

students who were White-passing and those who were not. Because she is not White-passing, she was asked a series of questions that she remembered from an emotional point of view as stressful. The specific questions she recalled being asked were about intent behind her visit. According to how she retold this story, she was flustered by these questions. Perhaps this was why she misinterpreted the question that became increasingly stressful as the security guard repeatedly asked it: what she was studying? From my interpretation of her story, the guards may have been asking what she would be studying on her educational program that brought her to Israel, and thus did not accept her repeated claim that she did not know. On the other hand, she had not yet declared her major at her university, and so her honest answer to "What are you studying in college?" was legitimately "I don't know."

When she relayed this dialogue to me, she emphasized her feelings of fear and stress that she had felt while being interrogated by voicing her "I don't know" in a shaky, high-pitched voice that conveyed meekness, fear, and submission. She then amended her description of her emotion in that moment: whereas minutes before she had initially said that "it was kind of stressful," at this point in her story, she remembered this questioning as being "really stressful." This stress of being interrogated may have played a role in the way that she had apparently forgotten the preparation from her program leaders regarding the rules of how to play this game. According to her story, she felt like she had been answering incorrectly, and thus like she had been losing the game.

Linda: And finally, I was like, "Oh I wanna be a teacher." I'm just like, "I wanna be a teacher!" And then she immediately was like, "Oh that's so great!" And I was like, "OK." [meekly]

Her story took a dramatic turn when she shared that she had ultimately found a satisfactory answer to her interrogator's questions about her studies. Claiming a desire to be a teacher was not only acceptable to the guard, but commendable, according to Linda's dialogic narrative performance. Linda had provided an acceptable answer, thus passing this round of the game. Nevertheless, she still positioned her past self as having been so shaken by the experience that her "OK" was still quiet, high-pitched, and uncertain.

Linda: So then after that, Raed and Fatima came back. And they, basically, had the same — not, I don't know if the questions were exactly the same, but it was the same type of process. But they were, like, put into separate rooms, and sat down. Like, kind of a conversation like this [interview]. Where they were, like, asked questions rather than in public. And then, they also had to fill out, like, paperwork. With the same questions. So then we were all sitting there and one by one we got our passports back, except Raed and Fatima. And we were there for maybe like, two or three hours, until they got their passports back. Even though they had finished, like, all the process. And like, those two or three hours really sucked, 'cause like, we had a big group, so we were all sitting, and then we got kicked out of the seating places, 'cause they were like, "We need to make room for other people." And then we were sitting somewhere else, like on the ground, and we got kicked out. And it was just like, we were all really confused. And everyone was speaking Hebrew and Arabic, and we just didn't know what was going on.

Next, Linda shared with me what her Muslim peers had presumably reported to her, after their interrogation. She noted the similarities in the process to which she had been subjected, but

noted that they had been separated into different, private interrogation rooms. Furthermore, they had to put their answers to the same questions in writing, which none of their peers had experienced. And finally, unlike their peers, they did not get their passports back immediately. She did not remark about how these two peers may have experienced their extra interrogation, but like the other interviewees had done, she noted that entire group waited for hours because these two students had to wait for their passports to be cleared and returned.

Linda recalled that the time spent waiting at the border had "really sucked" for the group as a whole. They all had been "kicked out of" their chairs as other people came through the waiting area. This was demanded, in the narrative, by an unidentified "they." Then her group was moved from the area where they had been sitting on the floor. Linda said that this was all very confusing for her and her groupmates, in part because of the Arabic and Hebrew languages that many people around them were speaking, that she did not understand. Although Linda did not directly identify this as such, this confusion apparently played an important role in the game in which power was exerted by the security personnel in many different ways, such as making them physically uncomfortable by restricting where they were allowed to sit, and making them uncomfortable by speaking to them in languages they did not understand.

> Linda: But that was, like, when we kind of got, like, hit in the face with reality. We were like, OK, this isn't fun. Like, it's fun, but like, this isn't — this trip isn't like the other [study abroad] trips, where like, I had friends that went on, like, to Vietnam, and like, they, like — we were, like, this is like, a lot different.

Again, Linda repeats her claim that this had been an experience of harsh "reality." Not only were they faced with reality, they were "hit in the face" with it. Constructing it in this way, she positioned "reality" against the frivolity of not only their happy and exciting days as tourists

in Jordan, but also against how she had understood the experiences of friends who participated in other study abroad programs in different locations. She also included the contradiction of remarking that this was a moment when she realized that this trip was not "fun," but immediately corrected herself, assuring me — and perhaps herself, related to Bamberg's (1997) positioning theory Level 3 self-identity claims for herself — that the overall trip had included fun aspects, but that it also included "real" aspects that were "not fun." In this sense, this checkpoint game was not one that was played for fun, but was grounded in a reality that was more consequential than carefree tourism.

Linda: And, yeah. So it was — and then, I remember, we were given the option for all of us to go. Like, 'cause we went to Tel Aviv that night. And we were all given the option to go to Tel Aviv while Raed and Fatima waited. And we were like, "No." Like, "we're not leaving them." So we just sat there. But I remember that was, like, our first, like, what-the-heck's-going-on thing. Especially, in my experience, I'm not like Arab or Muslim or Israeli or Jewish or anything, so like, for me, going on this trip was kinda like out of my comfort zone, in that, like, I knew nothing about the experience. Or experiences of these people, and like — like conflict in general. So like, what happened at the border, like, being separated and all that stuff, wasn't targeted towards me, but it was targeted towards my friends. So like, that was, like, my first time I was like, "OK, like, this is a lot."

After recalling her group's decision to show solidarity and "not leave" their peers behind while they waited to get permission to enter, Linda reiterated yet again that this experience caused her and her group to consider the context of Palestine/Israel, rather than just go through

the motions of traveling from Point A to Point B. Demarcating this particular experience as a "first" of a series of proverbial wake-up calls, she implicitly forecasted that there were other such "what-the-heck-is-going-on-here" experiences during the trip.

She then switched focus from speaking as a "we" to speaking for herself, positing that discrimination against certain sociocultural identity categories had been the source of her discomfort with regard to the trip in general. She noted that she had been out of her comfort zone because she was not "Arab or Muslim or Israeli or Jewish or anything," and seemed to imply that belonging to one of those identity categories would have prepared her, somehow, for being in this place in the midst of conflict. Or, perhaps, prior experience may have prepared them for the realities of being racially profiled. Ironically, she made this assertion while telling me about the extra difficulties that her Arab and Muslim peers had been subjected to; in this case, they may have presumably been even further out of their comfort zones than she had been because of those very identity categories. This is exactly what she told me next, as a conclusion: the discrimination during her border crossing experience had been targeted at her friends, but it also had a profound impact on her. Redirecting her attention back on herself, she once more repeated her refrain that this had been the first time that she had felt overwhelmed by the circumstances of the oppressive political context of this region.

She ended her border-crossing story with a refrain that many of the students said in their interviews when reminiscing about their time in Palestine/Israel: "It was a lot." Apparently a common phrase in these students' lexicon, it was invoked to express an emotional reaction to the input to which they had been exposed. When students said this, they often displayed an emotional response in the present tense during the interview while they were recalling a memory about having been emotional in the past. When Linda said this in this instance, it was a signal

that she was done talking about this episode while it also revived her emotions of having felt overwhelmed, confused, and "out of her comfort zone."

Like the other two interviewees, Linda's border-crossing story had described the lasting impression upon her of the first time she had witnessed her Muslim peers being profiled and given noticeably more scrutiny by security guards upon their entrance into the country. Unlike the others, Linda had also recalled that she, herself, had also been treated differently than her peers who were White-passing. This personal experience of discrimination had been disorienting enough for her to start to wonder, "What the heck is going on here?" That is, what are the rules of this game? And why do they discriminate based on religious identity and ethnicity?

It is worth noting that neither of the other interviewees had included any mention of how Linda and perhaps other non-Muslim students of color had undergone additional questioning. Elizabeth had explained that her confusion about this discrimination stemmed from the fact that she had neither expected nor had a contextual basis for understanding what had been happening. And Bridget had remembered assuming that the wait had been a mere consequence of traveling internationally, and had only later realized retrospectively that "blatant" profiling had occurred. However, Linda had positioned this episode as being the first of many wake-up calls in which she sensed a personal, experiential connection to otherwise impersonal theories about power, privilege, and oppression. Because of her racialized identity, her experience at this first checkpoint had been different than that her White-passing peers. Because of her (non)religious identity, her experience had been different than that of her Muslim peers. These distinctions had the effect of directing her attention to the checkpoint game that was being played, and some insight into how its rules operated, which otherwise may have been invisible to her.

Crossing Checkpoints From the Comfort of Their Tour Bus

While the students were transported to and from various sites throughout Israeli territory, in Jerusalem, and within the West Bank, their tour buses crossed several checkpoints along the way. On the occasions when their bus was stopped at these checkpoints, the interviewees sometimes noticed the ways that their Muslim and Arab peers were treated differently. In so doing, the interviewees continued to discern the rules of the checkpoint game. These instances shed additional light on how their experiences shaped their gaze to selectively perceive certain elements of their surroundings and circumstances.

From the comfort of being a passive passenger in a bus, the interviewees did not always necessarily realize when they crossed through checkpoints, because their bus was not always stopped; at times, they were waved through when the guide had simply claimed to a guard that the group was from the United States. This, in itself, was indicative of the first rule of the game: being tourists with U.S. passports facilitated passage through several checkpoints. As Sylvia said about what she had retrospectively learned from her program, "You don't realize how much that passport … can be a 'get out of jail free' card." By using a phrase from the Monopoly board game, she indirectly referred to her citizenship privilege in terms of being advantageous for a kind of game.

Using another metaphor for the bus itself, Bridget described her group's minibus as a "portal" in her creative response to my prompt to describe an object that reminded her of something meaningful from their program.

> Bridget: We had, like, this little bus that we took wherever we went. … We crossed the borders and checkpoints a lot, together, and, I think — I don't know, I'm struggling to define exactly what it represents. Or, meant. I guess, within the

> context of The Conflict and what we were learning about and limited mobility, it was kind of our portal into and out of, like, each of the different areas.

In spite of mentioning that The Conflict had taught her about limits to mobility, her symbolic object in fact represented her own ability to literally circumnavigate the structures that obstructed and prevented local Palestinians from moving freely within or outside of the West Bank. Describing it as a "kind of portal" further underscored the notion that this mobility privilege that she and her group were afforded seemed almost magical, in contrast with the obstacles that prevented local folks from crossing the borders and checkpoints that these students were able to bypass. Even by metaphorically attributing the "magic" to the vehicle instead of acknowledging the geopolitical power behind the passports and the citizenship of the passengers, Bridget depoliticized the mobility that she and her group had been afforded while traversing the region. Regardless to how the tour bus facilitated or outright bypassed how the students played the checkpoint game, Bridget's fond memory of it highlighted how foundational it had been for the group's experience to cross so many borders and checkpoints.

According to the interviewees, their collective experience at various checkpoints had been inconsistent, causing confusion and uncertain expectations with respect to how to play the game.

> Linda: Every time we went to a checkpoint it was different. So like, we had that [soldiers entering the bus to check passports], or we had people who didn't even, like, come on the bus. We had people, like, multiple people come on the bus. So like, our experience with checkpoints was, like, always very different and confusing. Especially because it was never in English.

This uncertainty about what to expect, along with a disorientation about where they were located most of the time they were in transit, and their lack of control over their itinerary altogether, combined to create a sense of confusion and sometimes stress with respect to checkpoints. Lacking the ability to understand the soldiers' Hebrew language used at checkpoints, the participants pieced together checkered observations in an attempt to make sense of not only the underlying logic, but also how to behave while crossing them.

Passports and Passing as White: "I Would Be Able to Get Away With It"

Three of the four students from that program recalled their memories of a particular incident when their bus was stopped at a checkpoint. Soldiers had entered the bus and asked to see the passports of only a select few students. Because each interviewee remembered different details based on whether she herself had been profiled, these three anecdotes about the same incident reveal how these students understood their experiences at checkpoints, and subsequently the extent to which they learned from them.

Bridget's Small Story

Bridget had included this small story just after telling me that she had been surprised at how blatantly the Muslim students on her program had been profiled.

Bridget: …when we were crossing between the West Bank and Israel, a couple times, they would ask for people's passports. And, it would seem random, but it was really quite targeted. But, once they chose the two Muslim students and, like, one of the Whitest people in our group, and they called up the other two, and they didn't even call up his name, but they looked at his passport. And Lucy was like, "They're trying to make it seem random." Awkward.

Bridget's anecdote about this incident was quite short, focusing on what she had considered blatant profiling of her Muslim peers, and also what she had learned and attributed to something her facilitator had pointed out as an informal lesson from this experience. Details were sparse: she did not specify who "they" were who had asked for people's passports. Although she likely assumed that I would understand that her reference indicated the Israeli soldiers, she did not directly name anyone in particular as the person or persons who had been doing the targeting. Rather than describe the more common scenario in which Muslims were checked, she had recalled this one, which had disrupted the norm of profiling Muslims and Arabs because the soldiers also took the passport of a White student. To emphasize the point that this person was unlikely to be mistaken for a person of color, she noted that he was not merely White, but "one of the Whitest people in our group."

Among the few details that she provided was that "they" had not seemed to scrutinize the White student as much, if at all. That is, the apparent purpose of this story was not to attend to the feelings of those who were profiled, but rather to offer an example of how soldiers attempted to conceal their profiling. She remembered this as if the soldiers had been playing a sort of game in which they were trying to obscure how blatantly they had been profiling the Muslim students — in this case, awkwardly, by Bridget's assessment. By quoting her facilitator, she both validated this conclusion and revealed how she had come to it. This focus on the interpersonal choices made by the individual soldiers underscored the game-like quality of it.

Linda's Small Story

Whereas Bridget had framed this incident from the positionality of an observer, Linda remembered it a bit differently, claiming that the soldiers also checked her passport during this

stop. Nevertheless, she recounted it as a funny story about a White person being included among those whom were profiled.

> Linda: We had been going through checkpoints this whole time. And like, each time was different. We'd get to a checkpoint and like, someone would come on the bus and ask us all for our passports. Or they'd only ask, like, certain people for their passports. Anyone who looked Arab, or anyone of color. And then they'd always— it was so funny, I remember they came on the bus once, and they asked us for our passports, and they asked, like, Raed, Fatima, me, another girl, and another boy, and we were all, like, people of color. And then, they — just to, like, throw one in there, they asked, like, a really, like, White boy on our trip, and we all thought it was so funny, 'cause we were just like, they obviously, like, didn't care about, like, his passport. It was so funny.

She said that the people who had been profiled had been "anyone who looks Arab, or anyone of color." As a Latinx woman, she herself had been profiled, so her experience offered her a distinct memory of whom had been profiled. In addition, she also expanded her recollection that the profiling in this instance had included "anyone of color," and not only Muslims and Arab students, as Bridget had remembered it. Like Bridget, Linda had not specified to whom she was referring when she said that "they" or "someone" would enter their bus at checkpoints and ask for their passports.

Linda also made a point of including the profiling of the "White boy" as a humorous element. Noting that this person's racial identity was unambiguous, she described him not just as being White, but "really, like, White." Although she did not attribute her insights to her facilitators' commentary, as Bridget had done, she indicated that her entire group — "we all" —

had considered that the profiling of a White student had been funny at the time. What had been particularly funny to Linda was that her group all somehow understood that the soldiers had not, in fact, intended to check this White student's passport, but rather, they had chosen to "throw another one in there" as if to obfuscate the profiling that was otherwise obvious to the students. Again, this account made it seem as though the soldiers had discretion over whose passport they chose to inspect, in an effort to distract from the rules of the game that had targeted Arab and Muslim people. But according to Linda's tone, this attempted deception did not work — it did not prompt her to modify her understanding that the checkpoint rules gave White people a pass in the game, in order to easily pass through the checkpoints.

Linda's emphasis on the humor of this incident offered a few insights as to how she positioned herself while telling this story. First, by repeating how funny she considered this incident to have been, she not only minimized how her Muslim peers may have felt during this and other security checks, but she also minimized the seriousness inherent in militarized checkpoints. For people whose identity positions them to experience Israeli checkpoints as being structurally and directly violent (Galtung, 1990), anecdotes about profiling may not be very funny. As such, that this story is humorous to her may indicate that she did not take the profiling very seriously nor very personally. After all, she did not mention having felt any trepidation from *her* experience of having her passport taken by Israeli soldiers, perhaps because she knew that there would be no material consequence for her in this scenario.

Also, the part of the story that Linda found funny was not directly related to Muslims being profiled, but instead focused on a "really White boy" being profiled. The punchline to her joke implied that this person, based on his Whiteness, could not have been actually targeted by the soldiers as a potential threat. As such, she implied that this particular instance had in fact not

been profiling per se, but rather had been a poorly executed ploy to conceal the profiling of the Muslim students. Considering this to be "funny" seemed to play with the power dynamics of the scenario. Even though these soldiers had the authoritative power of the state behind them, as well as the threat of violence because they were armed with weapons, Linda's laughter at their poor attempt to obfuscate their discriminatory profiling could be understood as reclaiming some power by seeing through this ruse.

Notably, framing the story as funny implied certain assumption about me as her audience. To the extent that she considered my positionality, consciously or subconsciously, she may have surmised that I would not be offended by this framing, and perhaps that I might also be in on the joke and find it funny.

Neither Linda nor Bridget offered any reflection about what it had been like to get stopped in the first place. Furthermore, their framing did not challenge the commonplace reality that their Muslim/Arab peers were routinely targeted at checkpoints. Apparently, this element may have been unfortunate, but it had been expected in the context of The Conflict. Because it had not disrupted their expectations, it evidently had not been worth their commentary or reflection. Furthermore, in Linda's story, she did not comment about what it had been like for her to have her passport taken to be checked along with her Muslim and Arab peers. She had noted that the soldiers had "always" taken passports of the people of color, which implied that this had been the norm, and had thus been incorporated into her expectations about traveling around Palestine/Israel. In contrast to her story about being interrogated upon entering the country, her nonchalance about this incident indicated a sense of acceptance or resignation to being profiled.

These two interviewees had positioned themselves as being wise to the checkpoint game, as well as to the tactics employed by the soldiers. In this way, they implied that they were smarter than the soldiers, who could not even obscure how blatantly they had been profiling the Muslims and/or students of color during a checkpoint stop.

Elizabeth's Small Story

As a contrast, Elizabeth shared greater detail about this incident, telling her story with additional flourishes, but also with additional context. Interestingly, she remembered that a different subset of students had been profiled in this instance: the two Muslim students, the White man, and herself. (She did not include Linda in this story, just as Linda had not included her.) She began by recalling how this incident was distinct from her other memories of crossing checkpoints, when soldiers had just waved them through, or had boarded the bus just to look around or check passports of the Muslim students. In this case, though, the soldiers took a few select people's passports.

Elizabeth: …first couple times [we went through a checkpoint], like sometimes they just sent us through, other times like a guard would walk onto the bus, kinda look around, um, yadda yadda. Other times, they would come on, check the two Arabic-looking people, check their passports, that was it. And there was one time that we were in a little bus, and a guard walks in, and he takes the two Arabic students' passports, my passport, and this White guy in the back. Patrick. Dear Patrick. And he [the guard] like sits there, looks through 'em, calls out Raed's name, calls out Fatima's name, calls out my name, didn't call out the White boy's name, and he gave us back our passports. And then we drive off through, and Lucy stands up, she's like, "Elizabeth, congratulations,

> you've just been profiled as an Arab!" I'm like, "Ohhhh. Cool." So that was interesting.

There were several notable differences between Elizabeth's account of this incident and the previous two. Elizabeth referred to "a guard" who had entered the bus, as opposed to the more faceless "they" who had appeared in the other two students' anecdotes. She also did not specify the degree of Whiteness that the boy represented, but she did pause her story after saying his name, and then repeating as "Dear Patrick" with a smirk and a bit of put-on nostalgia that gave me the impression that she believed that he had been naïve somehow. Because she also described him as White, it is possible that she associated naïveté with Whiteness. She remembered that the guard read the names on the passports he returned after checking them, presumably because she had remembered the experience of hearing him read her own name. She also recalled that the guard only read aloud the names on the passports without reading Patrick's, as if to make a point of targeting the students with non-White-passing names. Finally, Elizabeth acknowledged that the facilitator had articulated an observation about the guard's behavior with the group after they were released from this checkpoint. However, Elizabeth did not recall a general comment about the guard's deceptive rationale in taking a White person's passport, as Bridget had done. Rather, Elizabeth recalled Lucy's comment as having been directed at her, with a sardonic congratulations for having been profiled as an Arab. Elizabeth centered her own experience of having been profiled in this situation. She had been the White person in the center of the story, and Patrick was not part of her punchline. Indeed, she presented this story with a very different purpose than the other two interviewees. Whereas they had remembered a soldier's clumsy attempt to cover up his racial profiling, Elizabeth had framed this incident as a time when she had been profiled because she had been misidentified as an Arab.

Because her own experience of being profiled had been the point of her story, I asked a follow-up question, to which she responded with her common refrain of having felt guilty. Furthermore, because of this experience of feeling profiled, she was positioned to empathize with her peers who had consistently been profiled throughout their trip. Indeed, in her response, she shared her empathy for her Muslim peers.

JM: What was that like for you?

Elizabeth: I kinda felt guilty? 'Cause like, I mean when they checked my passport, I clearly didn't have an Arabic last name. My last name's [____]. It's Hispanic, I'm [nationality].[19] And so, I don't know, I kinda did feel guilty 'cause like, the two Arabic students, they went through that every single time. And then it happened to me, and I was like, "Oh, like, it's exciting."' Cause I knew it was fine. And it's not— exciting wasn't even the word. I don't know, it just didn't feel right that I was — like, they have to go through that, and they bear that. They, like, the whole trip, had to deal with all that shit, from the first crossing of the border, into us being in Hebron, the whole group was not allowed into a museum, the Tomb of the Patriarchs, 'cause the two Israeli guards said, "Oh, she's in a hijab, she can't come in." And they had to deal with— that trip was *haard* for those two. It was hard for everyone.

JM: The whole trip?

Elizabeth: Yeah. I would say it was hard for the two of them. 'Cause they were — I mean it was, you know, The Conflict kinda just hit home when it was people in our own group were being denied access into places.

[19] While she attributes her family name to "Hispanic" nationality, throughout her interviews she repeatedly self-identified as racially White, without mentioning any Hispanic or any other particular ethnicity.

In this response, Elizabeth revealed her understanding that, in the checkpoint game, the soldiers had been profiling Arabs and checking the passports for names that would indicate Arab ethnicity. Although she had not indicated why they may have done this, she did speak empathetically to the impact that it had on her Muslim and Arab peers who had been profiled so consistently throughout the trip. Recognizing that this experience of being discriminated against had been "*haard* for those two," she said that she had felt guilty because being profiled, for her, had been somewhat novel. Moreover, she had been assured with the knowledge that this had been a mistake, and therefore, that this profiling had no potentially serious consequence for her. In terms of the game, she knew she was not going to lose this round, and she felt guilty with the understanding that her peers and others did not play with that same sense of assurance.

When I met with her at the end of the summer, Elizabeth's complexion had been tan enough to be racially ambiguous. And even though her surname could be perceived as Hispanic (as she notes in the following excerpt), she was unambiguous throughout her interviews that she identified as White. Therefore, this checkpoint episode had been particularly memorable to her in that she had felt profiled because she had been misidentified as not-White, and possibly Arab. On the other hand, in all three of these stories, Patrick had been consistently positioned as so unambiguously White that it had seemed impossible to these interviewees that he could have been racially profiled. For this reason, Elizabeth's experience of being profiled had highlighted for her the rule of the checkpoint game that White people were not profiled in earnest, unless they had been mistaken as Arab.

Referring to another instance when the group had collectively opted to not visit a site in Hebron when their Muslim students had been denied entrance, Elizabeth made a strong statement about what she had learned about The Conflict on a macro level, from seeing the micro-level

impact of its discriminatory policies on her peers: “The Conflict kinda just hit home when it was people in our own group were being denied access into places.” Notably, she did not attribute this feeling of “hitting home” to having been a guest in the home of a Palestinian family, nor because she had volunteered on a besieged farm in the West Bank, but because she had personally experienced a taste of the impact that discriminatory profiling had on her friends.

To this point, it is worth mentioning that none of interviewees included any report of whether and how their Palestinian guide had been profiled at checkpoints. That is to say, Khalil’s experiences apparently fell out of the scope of their gaze. Nor did anyone mention the experiences of their Arab co-facilitator at any checkpoint. Instead, their anecdotes were focused on their own experiences, and their occasional observations of the experiences of their peers. Overall, though, they dedicated most of their attention to their affective memories of their own experiences.

Finally, in her narrative about this particular incident at the checkpoint, Elizabeth put into perspective her feelings associated with being profiled, with respect to the larger context of how relatively inconsequential it had been for her to be profiled. Indeed, in her interview she made it seem like she had known this in the moment at the checkpoint.

> Elizabeth: … like, it’s, it’s not fair to any person ever to be profiled, um, but I just kinda felt guilty that I was profiled. But I was able and willing and fine to get through, and how I flew through the border in the beginning, and it just kinda like reminded me that this is, like, I would be fine in this situation. The two of them, if the guard, like, they would be the ones who were [pause] I don’t know, have it worse. And I would be able to get away with it.

By the time she interviewed with me, Elizabeth knew that the checkpoint game had very real consequences for others, such as her Muslim peers in the program. Without articulating what those consequences might be, she had understood that they would "have it worse" than anything she would face. Meanwhile, her guilt was rooted in the knowledge that, because of her privileged White identity, this experience had been like a game for her; that is, it had no bearing on the rest of her trip, nor on the rest of her life: she "would be fine." Her final statement here was revealing: the notion of "getting away with something" carried extra weight. This phrase seemed to invoke a sense that she had evaded punishment for wrongdoing, even though she had not done anything differently than her Muslim peers. But because they faced "worse" consequences, she had been given a pass from the guards due to the rules of their game.

Finally, both Elizabeth and Bridget indicated that their facilitators shaped some of their learning from certain experiences during the program. In their stories, they each recalled that Lucy had offered a cue that directed their attention to certain aspects of the experience. Even if the interviewees rarely credited their program leaders as having provided information or insights, it is likely that students relied on the facilitators to offer guidance with respect to to how to make sense of what was happening, and why.

Disruption That Inspires Empathy: "And This Is the Reality of It, Is These Borders Are Here"

Of all the anecdotes about internal checkpoints that the interviewees shared with me, Paige offered one that was short yet powerful, about a time when she and her group on Program A had been stopped at a checkpoint and subjected to an extensive search of their property and luggage.

> Paige: There was another moment where we were crossing the Green Line [which ostensibly delineates between the West Bank and Israeli territory]. And our

whole bus got searched. Everybody had to come out, they took out all the luggage. They went through everything, we had to go through metal detectors, get patted down. And it was, like, a whole hour-and-a-half fiasco. And that—that was not planned, they had not intended for us to have to go through that. But it was also like, this is what most people have to go through when traveling in the region. And this is the reality of it, is these borders are here. They're very big, they're very scary, and they take up a lot of people's time and resources.

JM: What did you learn from that? You, personally.

Paige: I don't know, just how frustrating it is, I guess, to, to be in this situation and not be able to say anything, for fear of you or your loved ones getting hurt. To know that this shouldn't be happening to yourself and to your people, and to really just feel powerless. Because there— I mean, it's so overwhelming, and it's so overpowering.

This experience was disruptive not only because was unexpected, but also because it was personally consequential to the entire group. Without providing any details about whether people within her cohort were treated differentially, she framed this story as if the entire group faced the same "fiasco" of being searched and waiting for an hour and a half. Like other interviewees, she generically referred to the soldiers who searched the bus as "they." However, in a stark contrast to the others, she used this story as an opportunity to empathize with "most people" in the region when they travel. She positioned her group's collective experience to recognize that "these borders … take up a lot of people's time and resources." Even when I asked what she personally learned from this, she framed her response in terms of empathy with locals. She related her

remembered emotions of fear and frustration from feeling silenced and powerless in the face of overwhelming and overpowering systemic oppression, to what locals might feel on a regular basis.

The Feeling of Being Profiled: "They're Not Gonna Let Me Through"

Similar to their stories about entering the country, when students experienced personal profiling at international borders after their program concluded, they told their stories differently than when they merely witnessed others' racial profiling. Still focusing on themselves, they included more about dramatic details and associated emotions. Their stories were more about "concrete experiences" that involved interactions, decisions, and consequences for their actions and choices.

Three of the students shared stories about their personal experiences of being profiled for interrogation when they crossed checkpoints at international borders at the end of their programs. Because these students encountered these checkpoints essentially on their own, without the relative safety of their group, their program leaders, or their tour bus, they had to play the game on their own. In so doing, they learned experientially rather than observationally. Especially because these scenarios occurred at the end of their respective programs, these participants had been prepared to approach the game from a more critical standpoint since they had been primed to pay attention to elements that had been invisible to them weeks prior. Not only did these encounters provide them with an opportunity to play their hand according to the rules they had gleaned throughout their program, but they also were positioned to notice additional lessons as they continued to challenge their assumptions about the privileges that were — and were not — attached to their sociocultural identities. Furthermore, these experiences provided opportunities

for these women to deepen their empathy with Palestinians who experience much more profound and sustained indignities from these systems at which the interviewees had been gazing.

In these final border crossings, they learned that their sociocultural identities alone did not give them a pass them to coast through these borders as easily as they had previously assumed. In Paige's case, she learned that her U.S. passport had not been sufficient for easy crossing. After her program in Palestine/Israel concluded, she and a peer had traveled to Jordan. They took a day trip with a different tour provider and crossed from Israel into Jordan, and then back into Israel.

Paige: We went to Petra. Another very interesting trip, because when we were crossing through Jordan we had to go through Eilat,[20] and then come back in [to Israel through the border crossing at Eilat]. I was stopped at the border, coming back into Israel, and they held me for like thirty minutes. And kept asking me if I had alternative nationalities. And I was like, "No this is— this is it! This is all I've got!" You know. And they ended up letting me through, but I— it was just kind of ridiculous, 'cause the, the girl I was with, she's from [a Central American country], so her passport is [from there]. I have the U.S. passport. We were just like sitting there, and I'm like, "They're not gonna let me through, [friend's name]." They did. But it was just so weird.

JM: Was this after the program?

Paige: Yeah.

JM: So you weren't with the whole group anymore?

[20] An Israeli city in the southernmost point of the country, bordering Jordan and Egypt.

Paige: No, it was just the two of us, but we were with, um, we had paid for, like, a tour group. So we were with the tour guide and stuff. And they were all just like looking at me, and I was like, "You can't do anything [laugh]. Here I am."

JM: Was that the first time you were stopped? It sounds like the whole group was, or different people in your group were pulled up [during your study abroad program]

Paige: Yeah. This was my first— my first time alone, yeah.

JM: Wow. What was that like?

Paige: I don't know, by that point I was just kind of fed up. I was like, "K, you keep stopping us, you keep asking us these questions. Like, can you just, like, let me through. Like, I just went on a tour. And you have my tour guide receipt. Like, the tour is here. There were all these people from Birthright on the tour, too, and everybody was just, like, looking at me. And it was like, "I can't, [laugh], I can't help it!" So, I wasn't angry, but by that point, I was just tired and I was like, "OK, stop stopping us." Like, "Can we go through?" Which I'm sure is a lot of what other people feel. It's just, that exhaustion. So that was another moment of reflection for me.

She did not qualify for easy passage across the very border she had just traversed earlier that day in the opposite direction. As a biracial U.S.-American traveling with a Central American national, Paige had been profiled and subjected to additional questioning. In this case, as she told it, her U.S. passport had been challenged to be insufficient, as if she had tried to use it to hide additional nationalities. Perhaps she did not pass as White because she had been traveling with a

non-White-passing friend. Furthermore, perhaps traveling with someone who was not U.S.-American cast doubt on to her own citizenship status. At any rate, she had been unsettled by this, her first experience being scrutinized as suspicious. Indeed, this had been the part of her trip to Petra that she referred to as "interesting" — this incident eclipsed any stories about her visit to Petra itself.

According to her story, the guards held her for approximately thirty minutes and asked if she were a citizen of any nation-state besides the U.S. It was unclear if her Central American friend had also been questioned or detained in this instance, because Paige had only centered her own experience without including any observations about her friend. Moreover, she used her friend as a prop in the story to whom she could voice her concern that "they're not gonna let me through." Her narrative emphasized her fears about her own potential consequences. Initially she limited her analysis of this incident as being "ridiculous" (which was an adjective she had used frequently during her interviews to indicate situations she found unjust and/or absurd) and "just so weird."

In response to my clarifying questions about the scenario, she suggested that she had felt somewhat confrontational, not necessarily toward the guards or soldiers who had been questioning her — they had merely been "ridiculous" — but toward the other tourists from her day trip who had to wait for her to be cleared to cross the border checkpoint. Positioning herself as if she wanted to teach them a sort of lesson, she told me that she had imagined saying to them, with a laugh, "You can't do anything. Here I am." It was as if she was proud of having been responsible for revealing the existence of this game, of which they otherwise may not have been aware due to their positionalities that had allowed them to cross the border unscathed. That is,

Paige assumed that the checkpoint game had likely been invisible to them because it had not impacted their experience at this particular border crossing.

She then inserted another allusion to her awareness of the other people in her group who had to wait while she had been detained. The mention of "people from Birthright" signaled the positionality of some of the other tourists in this group; Birthright tours are fully-funded ten-day heritage tourism trips to Israel for Jewish young adults. People in these programs would presumably not be stopped at checkpoints during their tours, and may not be aware when or whether they crossed borders or checkpoints while in their tour buses. With these assumptions about her fellow tourists and their limited understanding of the game she had been forced to play at that moment, her story had positioned them as having been looking at her with a sense of confusion about why she had been detained, and possibly with suspicions about what she may have been guilty of, to have caused her to be detained at all. Again, through this retelling she positioned herself to teach a lesson to these people who were otherwise ignorant to the game. Although she gave no indication that she had actually dialogued about this with the other tourists, she implied through internal dialogue that she had wanted to convey to them that she was not to blame for this delay in their travels. As far as she was concerned, she had been just as innocent as the rest, in that she had been on the same tour to Petra. They were all being stopped, not because of her per se, but because of the checkpoint game.

Her laughter while recalling this internal dialogue seemed to reiterate her assessment that this game was ridiculous; equally as ridiculous to her was the notion of defending herself to a group of people who had not been subjected to similar treatment by Israeli security guards. Her genuine laughter while telling this story also conveyed the distance that she felt from the situation two years after it had taken place.

Paige suggested that she had been connected her experience with The Conflict writ large. When I asked her about what it had been like to be profiled, she said that she had felt "fed up" by that point in the trip, after having traveled through checkpoints for three weeks on her program and witnessing many things that she considered to be unjust. Linking this experience with these particular guards to her prior experiences with other guards, she spoke with exasperation in second-person, as if to a generalized representative of the checkpoint regime, to whom she could demand: "Enough with this game. You should know that I'm innocent, you should let me pass without wasting my time with these additional questions."

She concluded this part of the story by telling me about how she remembered feeling: this game had made her tired and exasperated. Furthermore, aided by the emotional and temporal distance, she was able to put into context for me why she had recalled feeling tired. By claiming that she had felt tired of the game at that point, she positioned herself as being empathetic toward Palestinians and the exhaustion she imagined that they felt from living under Israeli occupation. Although Palestinian residents are subjected to different rules to the checkpoint game than Paige and her peers, this personal experience of self-conscious helplessness lent her the opportunity to reflect upon the exhausting impact the occupation may have on others.

Elizabeth's Airport Story: "They're Gonna Think I'm a Terrorist!"

Of the interviewees who flew out of the Israeli airport near Tel Aviv, Elizabeth had been the most emphatic and dramatic about her experience of being profiled at the airport at the conclusion of her program. In contrast to her narrative about being profiled on the tour bus at a checkpoint in the West Bank, she framed this recollection with more gravity. In addition to the stress she felt from being treated as as a threat, this experience had the added stress of a potential consequence: she had feared that this additional questioning could have caused her to miss her

flight. Because she did not follow the rules of the game, she was confronted with the limitations of the privilege afforded by her sociocultural identity. Her emotional response to this small experience enabled her to better understand important elements of The Conflict on a larger scale.

The attention she gave to this lengthy anecdote made it evident that this border-crossing had left a very strong impression on her. She first described this scenario as if she had gone through security alone, without any support from her peers, much less without the familiar protection that their tour bus had provided. She began the story by sharing that her facilitators had coached her group about the security screening at the airport; from this, she had been aware of some of the rules of playing this game. But she quickly transitioned into expressing her distress over being questioned about spending time in the West Bank.

Elizabeth: It took me like an hour to get through ’cause Lucy and Rania said, like, when you’re going to check your bags, like you have to go through like the screening. And like someone will ask you questions, and in my passport I had my stamp from entering from the West Bank. When I came over from Jordan. And they were like, “Oh,” like — I had my letter from school, and they’re like, “Say the least thing you can, just get through.” And I had said that I was in the West Bank. And they’re like, that like, set off a ping. In the guard’s mind. Then she called over her supervisor, they’re like, “Who do you know in the West Bank?” And I’m like, “I told you! I’m here on a school trip, I know nobody! I’m just here to learn.” And of course I didn't tell them, “Oh yeah, I’m working on a farm of a Palestinian man who’s trying to fight the Israeli government to keep his land.”

And I was terrified that I was not gonna make it onto my flight. 'Cause I was going to visit family in [Europe] and I'm like, "Oh my god, I'm gonna get stuck in this country, I'm gonna get questioned, they're gonna think I'm a terrorist." Like, "I promise I'm not Arabic! Or a terrorist! And even if I was Arabic, I'm not necessarily a terrorist!"

[sigh] So it was like in that moment especially was just my final taste of Israel. And it left such a bad taste in my mouth.

JM: Yeah. It feels stressful to talk about it now

Elizabeth: It does feel stressful. Like, I'm a little wound up just talking about it. Not of Israel, my last taste with the Israeli military.

By recalling some of the precautions she been coached to take, she alluded to the rules of the checkpoint game. For example, she mentioned that she had brought with her a letter from her school that validated her participation on an educational program sanctioned by a U.S. university. She had understood that her entry visa stamp revealed that she had been in the West Bank, and she had been warned that she would be questioned as a result of having been in Palestinian territory. Still, after telling me that she had been told to "say the least thing you can," she had volunteered information anyway. Sure enough, confessing to spending time in the West Bank had "set off a ping in the guard's mind," so a supervisor had been called over for extra questioning.

That she contradicted herself indicated that she had been flustered. She had known the rules to the game, but nevertheless played her hand poorly, answering some questions in a way that she had been warned would raise concerns of the security personnel. In fact, her present-day retelling of this story demonstrated the limited scope with which she still understood the rules of

the game she played. While it had been established that her non-Arabness protected her to some degree, she did not seem to fully understand that proximity to Arabs was also incriminating in this game, which was the reason why her confession to having been in the Palestinian territory of the West Bank had "set off a ping." On the other hand, she was aware that she benefitted from obscuring the fact that she knew anyone in the West Bank. Furthermore, she believed that "being on a school trip" might give her a pass at this checkpoint. She told me that she knew to avoid mentioning her volunteer work during her program because she understood it to be partial to Palestinians and part of a "fight" against "the Israeli government." Moreover, by intentionally omitting or occluding certain information when questioned by airport security guards, she signaled that she had been playing the game.

Meanwhile, her emotions during her interview while retelling this story may have caused her to be flustered in that present moment, as well. She remembered having been concerned that the additional questioning from the security guards might have negative, tangible consequences for her: namely, that she would be detained so long that she would miss her flight. She underscored her fear by telling me, through an internal dialogue she had with herself in that moment, that she had been worried that "she might get stuck" in Israel, even, because they might have thought that she was a terrorist. This remark was interesting not only because it demonstrated how upset and irrational her thoughts had become when she had been stopped briefly by airport security, but also because of what it implied about her present-day understanding of the rules. She believed she had been stopped because she confessed to being in the West Bank, and she therefore feared they might think she were a terrorist. Implicitly, a connection in her mind (still) existed between the West Bank and terrorism.

This connection was further reiterated by her next statement, which she framed as if she had been thinking it during her interrogation. As her emotions elevated while telling me this story — she had confirmed that she was feeling "wound up just talking about it" — she had implied that "being Arabic" was associated with "being a terrorist." She quickly caught herself, adding the amendment, "And even if I was Arabic, I'm not necessarily a terrorist!" thereby reassuring me that she did not believe that "Arab" should be conflated with "terrorist." Regardless of whether or not she retained an implicit bias that connects Arabness and terrorism, including this bit in her story indicated that she believed the security guards did so. Indeed, these few sentences of internal dialogue that she included in her story pointed indirectly to her cognizance this element of the game.

Presumably she included her memory of wanting to cut to the chase and insist to the security guards that she was neither an Arab nor a terrorist because of how she interpreted the rationale behind their questions. But this slip during her storytelling indicated that she may have thought that "not being Arabic" would relieve her from being scrutinized. In other words, until then, she had understood the rules such that being a White, non-Muslim U.S.-American should have been enough to get her off the hook, consistent with her previous experience of having been mistakenly profiled when her tour bus was stopped at a checkpoint.

Simply by attempting to follow the rules that had been passed along by her group leaders, Elizabeth had felt guilty and nervous when she played the game. As a result of these emotions, she had not been able to keep up the façade of detached innocence, even though she made it clear that she had understood that this façade was also a part of the game as well. After all, one of the rules that she had been given was to say as little as possible when being questioned.

JM: What was it like to be told to say minimum information?

Elizabeth: [sigh] I just— I was — I love to talk. To people. And it was just like I went up, and like, I felt like I was guilty. When I was like first going up [to approach the security guard], so it's probably why, like, they probably saw it. And like I tried to act cool, like, I know like the things to look out for, like, if people are like, playing with their hands, or like, they blink a lot, or they touch their hair, like, that means they're nervous. And I'm like, "Try to not look nervous," but I mean they probably realized maybe I was nervous about something. But yeah, this felt like I had to, like, hide something, in that I was guilty. Even though I wouldn't, say, if I was talking to, like, anyone else, like, I wouldn't feel guilty.

She knew that she had done nothing to warrant feeling guilt. In fact, she repeated that she happily and frequently talked about her entire trip, including her time in the West Bank, with many friends and family in the year since it had concluded. However, she had to deny part of herself — her love to talk — in order to try to get through this checkpoint. Apparently, this was the first time she had experienced being profiled by an authority that might consider her actions or friendships as threatening. As such, she had become so legitimately nervous that she could not abide by the rules that she knew about "how not to look nervous or guilty." Her emotions had clearly been elevating during her interrogation, just as they had been reappearing during our interview as she remembered her experience.

Elizabeth: What was the question? [laugh]

JM: That was it [laugh] — that was it! Like, what was it like to not, to be told not to divulge extra

Elizabeth: Yeah. Yeahyeahyeahyeahyeah, to hide what I was saying. It made me feel like I was guilty. Even though I'm, like, proud of the work that I did, I was happy that I was there and learning from both sides, and trying to just get like a better taste of what's going— what the situation that's happening there. So to anyone else, I'd be like happy, and willing to speak. But it was, like, with the Israeli military and border patrol that I felt like I had to hide, I had to hush. And something would happen to me. Maybe. Like I wouldn't get on my plane. … And like, I just wanted to sit there and be pissed. Yeah. Left a bad taste.

When I asked her what it had been like to have been coached to disclose minimal information to the security guards, she told me she had felt guilty, once again. In this case, her guilt did not stem from her relative privilege, but rather from her distaste from feeling as though she had to hid something she had been otherwise proud of. She also felt fear that "something would happen to me." Although she had not fully explained why she had worried that a prolonged detention had been in the realm of possibility, the mere notion of such a consequence from this kind of profiling had her nervous and upset.

Even after having been present when her peers had been profiled throughout the program, and even after having been profiled mistakenly at one point, it was this affective and embodied experience that left not only a "bad taste," but also left a deeper comprehension of overarching injustice because she could connect her experience to the bigger picture.

Elizabeth: And like, it's stupid of me to sit there and— like I wasn't necessarily upset that it was happening to me. Like I was upset that the whole situation was happening. You know? 'Cause I don't wanna be selfish about it, and be like, "Oh I'm so pissed that it took me an extra hour to get through." No, it's not

> about me, it's about, like, the greater picture. And it's about that this kinda stuff happens to, like, I'm a girl with an American passport, who just said that she was *in* the West Bank.

When she expanded her gaze to consider the larger context, she changed the way she described the ultimate consequence she had faced from this experience. When she was being questioned, she had been scared about missing her flight. In retrospect, she recognized that, although it had taken her extra time to get through security, she still had plenty of time to catch her plane. There was no material consequence for her as a result of this questioning. However, she learned something from this experience when she considered it with a wider gaze: she claimed that she had not been upset because she had been profiled, but because the profiling she had experienced was commonplace and more detrimental for many others within the context of The Conflict. Although she did not specify to whom this happens in "the greater picture," she seemed to imply that it was especially telling that profiling like this even happened to a U.S.-American citizen, just for the non-offense of visiting the West Bank.

During a moment when we continued chatting after the second interview had officially concluded, Elizabeth shared additional details about her memories of being pulled aside for questioning while her bag was being checked. For the most part, her narrative remained consistent with what she had shared in her first interview, but she had elaborated in two ways that are worthy of mentioning. Her tone conveyed more defiance and anger than the previous time, when her stress and fear had been palpable. Also, she mentioned other people who played background roles in the scene.

Elizabeth: …like [Israeli security] wanted to check my bag, that was fine. And when I went to security, they pulled me aside. They made me open my bag of chips. I think I told you. Did I tell you that?

JM: No!

Elizabeth: Oh, I had a bag of chips. It was, uh

JM: [quietly] Oh my god

Elizabeth: They were really good, it was like za'atar chips that I had, like, ate with my host sisters a lot. I'm like, "Oh I want to take these back for my family to eat." Just 'cause we're big foodies, and I thought it was a fun little thing.

And [the security personnel] they're like, "We need to open this bag of chips, like, or you have to throw it away." I'm like, "Well I want my damn chips. So just open the bag, do your little whatever swab." But it was just ridiculous, they were taking everything out, they made me take my shoes off, and they wiped my shoes with the drug, or whatever thing — I don't even know what they were looking for. But like, it took a while! And I was going with a friend, we had similar flight times, and she was waiting for me on the other side.

I remember people, like, they walked by me in line for the passport control, and I tried not to look at them, 'cause I didn't want to make— like, if they came over, like, "What did you do?" And then I'd be like, "Rrra, you too?"

I was pissed! I was really pissed (through) that whole thing. Just pissed that — Not pissed 'cause it was taking more time out of my day, like, not like the selfish kinda pissed. But pissed that, like — of the situation.

In this case, she highlighted this small indignity of having a snack bag opened and swabbed as a symbol of how this process was simultaneously ridiculous and demeaning. When telling this version of the story, she narrated with a very different tone than she had portrayed in her first interview with me, when she had been reliving the stress that she was recounting. Elizabeth seemed emboldened in how she positioned herself as defiant when she had talked to the security guard. Instead of focusing on having been scared or nervous, in this second retelling, she had been pissed and irritated.

In this anecdote she also introduced new characters that embellished the scene. To demonstrate one of the consequences of spending time in this extended security game, she mentioned a friend who had been waiting for her to pass the checkpoint. Therefore, this interrogation had another indirect victim: it had not only taken up Elizabeth's time, but it also wasted the time of her friend. Also, she mentioned other people in the setting with whom she avoided making eye contact after this ordeal. Imagining herself as the center of others' attention while they were in line for passport control, she was conscious of being judged by strangers who had seen her waiting while her belongings were being searched and swabbed. Perhaps her guilty feeling extended to a feeling of shame, thinking that other people had seen her in this helpless position of being questioned as suspicious.

She concluded this anecdote by stating and restating that this treatment angered her. As opposed to the nervous stress she had conveyed while talking during her first interview about being profiled at the airport, in this instance she was righteously angered. Finally, she tacked on the clarification that her anger was simply out of selfish frustration because her own time had been wasted, but vaguely noted that the overall "situation" is worthy of anger.

Elizabeth may have told me this story primarily to mention this detail that she considered to be unbelievable: that the security guards at the airport opened a sealed bag of chips that she had intended to bring as a fun little souvenir through which she could share an experience she had enjoyed with her host family, with her family back at home. In addition to sharing additional descriptions about her memory of this experience, her focus had been on her personal feelings of anger, impatience, and shame. However, she did not include any thoughts about why she thought the guards singled out the snack, or what it had to do with the game. Without speculating about whether the bag of chips had Arabic text on it, thus connecting it to having spent time in the West Bank, she treated this as an interpersonal insult from the security guards that imposed additional inconveniences to her. This attention to the interpersonal game that had seemed so personally directed at her, had distracted her from further systemic analysis of the larger power dynamics. That said, she ended this anecdote by reminding me (and herself) once again that, while she had been "pissed" about her own personal inconvenience, this particular episode also angered her because, to her, it had represented "the situation" of security profiling more generally. Furthermore, her annoyance implied a heightened empathy to what the overall "situation" was, and what it might feel like to be subjected to this on a regular basis.

Playing Dumb: "They'll Leave Us Alone a Little More Than Last Time"

When faced with the experience of being questioned by security, these young women tried to play their own game in order to evade the rules of the checkpoint game. In accordance with what these students had been told in preparation for their encounters with Israeli security, two interviewees told me about a strategy they had deployed for the game in the airport on their way out of the country: "playing dumb." Pretending to be dumb had seemed to be consistent with their understanding of the rules, as one technique to say as little as possible, as per the

advice they had been given. These two women named this strategy using discourse they may have heard in other contexts, that is, being a "dumb White girl," or a "dumb American." Furthermore, by telling me about this strategy during the interview, they also positioned themselves as being "not dumb" enough about The Conflict and the checkpoint game in order to attempt this tactical maneuver. Indeed, they implicitly suggested that they thought they were "not dumb" enough that they could outsmart the guards. Having decided to play this card, as it were, revealed some of their assumptions about the interpersonal nature of these encounters. It was also an opportunity for them to strategically leverage their privilege as White U.S.-American young women that revealed a sophisticated attempt to leverage their sociocultural identities, especially their Whiteness.

Molly told her airport exit story as if she were amused that she had been identified as threatening. Contrary to Elizabeth above, she had not indicated any fear of consequence for being detained. Perhaps she had already overcome that fear from her prior experience having been questioned before her flight into the country. She also positioned herself as if she had been fortified by her three weeks in the program. After all, her story revealed much about her understanding of the game and its rules:

Molly: I was ranked the highest security threat. And I was like, "OK" [laugh] Which I just thought was kinda funny. Just 'cause like I had been to the West Bank and did stay with a Palestinian family, they were very concerned. And like, I remember the tone, [laugh]. 'Cause it was me and this other, [laugh], this other girl. We were like, "Let's do the security together." And then she's like, "We'll just act like we're dumb White girls, and like, we don't know what—

we're just here for, like, fun." Like, "They'll leave us alone a little more than last time." And like, that's kinda how the tone was.

And they were like, "So where did you stay?" We were like, "Well we were in hostels, and a hotel. And we stayed in, um, in a homestay." [laugh] They were like, "Where?" And we were like, "Mm. in, like, [Arab town]." They were like, "Oh." Or like, we said, "In the north." And they were like, "Where in the north?" [laugh] "[Arab town]." They were like, "That's a weird town name." We were like, "Wellll. [laugh] Ummm. I guess!" [laugh] And then they were like, "What was the name of the family you stayed with?" And I was like, [sigh], was like— or, like, "Who were you with?" And I was like, "Umm. [pause] But uh, [pause] um, Abu Samra."[21] And she was like, "That's a weird name." And I was like, "Is it?" [laugh] She's like, "I've never heard that name before." And I was like, [pause] "OK!" [laugh]

The tone changed after that, and we got asked a lot of questions [laugh]. 'Cause it was also just two young girls working security. Which was — it was weird.

But yeah. So. That was a much less intense airport experience, actually. From coming in.

By telling me that she had been "ranked the highest security threat," her story began soon after her arrival at the airport in the security pre-screening, where a guard placed a sticker on her passport to allegedly indicate her potential threat. When she said that her response had been a nonchalant "OK," she laughed, explaining that she had found it funny, and apparently still

[21] A pseudonym.

thought it was funny at the time of the interview. Then she explained the rules of the game as she had learned them: that, in spite of her White U.S. identity, she had earned this status because she had been to the West Bank, and because she had stayed in the home of a Palestinian family, albeit in Israeli territory. Rewinding back in time a bit, she revealed that she and another student had strategized to go together through the security process on the way out of the country, and the other student had suggested that they act as if they were "dumb White girls." As Molly said, that had set the "tone" of their final encounter with Israeli security. Then, after answering the first few questions in ways that made them appear suspicious as per the rules of the game, they were subsequently subjected to "a lot of questions." According to Molly, this is when the tone changed — in other words, the "dumb White girl" gig was up.

When she described this ploy to act dumb, she had not put on any affectation of a stereotypical "dumb-sounding girl," which is to say that she didn't alter her voice in a higher pitch or use upspeak. She had inserted a few more pauses in her remembered dialogue between herself and the security guards, but all of her interviews had been interspersed with similar pauses, so this did not especially add to any "dumb" effect. And although she had laughed quite a bit while telling me this story, it seemed as though she was laughing in the present-tense while reenacting this encounter for me. At the time of our interview, this memory was funny to her.

Had she not told me that "the tone" had been "playing dumb," I would not have guessed that this was the tactic she was describing. According to the dialogue she performed for me, she had not followed through with what she had just summarized as her "dumb White girl" plan. For example, she did not indicate that she had been in Israel "just for fun." Instead, in her reenactment, she immediately revealed that they had stayed in a homestay. According to the rules, this suggested to the guards that she may be a threat, and so she then had to answer

predictable follow-up questions about that. This confession was in violation of a key rule that had been shared with them, to reveal as little information as possible. Instead of pretending to be clueless tourists, her interpretation of “playing dumb” came across as simply being nonspecific and hesitant.

Interestingly, her reported dialogue gave the impression that the guards had been “playing dumb” as well, with regard to Arab names of towns and families. According to her story, when the guards had said that they had never heard of the Arab town where she had stayed in the north of Israel, they could have been implying something about their beliefs that Arabness was “weird” or, by extension, dangerous. Similarly, had they asserted that an Arab surname was also “weird” or unusual, this could have divulged their ideology about who should be classified as Israeli, who belonged in Israel, as opposed to who was suspicious. That Molly had positioned the guards and their responses in this way, reiterated her earlier statement about the rules: because she had stayed with a Palestinian family, the guards had been concerned about her.

It was also interesting that Molly positioned herself not so much as being dumb, but as being somewhat subversive. When she quoted the Israeli guards as playing dumb in return, by challenging the name of the Arab town, she said her response had been, "Wellll. [laugh] Ummm. I guess.” And then when the guards challenged the name of the Arab family, Molly said she replied with, “Is it?” Perhaps because she had recognized these statements as prejudiced or discriminatory, her ignorant response had been her attempt to position herself in this story as having been subtly resistant.

She noted that the security guards who had questioned her and her friend had also been “two young girls” themselves, which was an interesting detail to include regarding this rhetorical battle of feigned ignorance. By telling me that after she had admitted to having stayed in a

Palestinian family's home in an Arab town in the north of Israel, the tone of her encounter had changed such that neither the U.S. girls nor the Israeli girls pretended to act dumb anymore. She concluded this anecdote by comparing this experience with the questioning she had faced on her way to Israel, and suggested that this was less intense. Because she had not elaborated on this any further, it was unclear to what she had attributed this reduced intensity. Were the questions less rigorous or accusatory? Was she more familiar with the context of The Conflict? Were these "two girls" less intimidating than her first interrogator(s)? Perhaps traveling with another White woman on the way out had subjected her to less intense questioning than on the way in, when she had traveled with an Arab American woman? Or, perhaps her enhanced understanding of the checkpoint game had the mitigated intensity.

"If I Played, Like, Dumb American, Like, I'd Feel Safe"

Elizabeth was the other interviewee who used the phrase "playing dumb" to describe a strategy she had used when questioned by airport security. In fact, in her second interview, she used some variation of this a couple of times, which prompted me to ask a follow-up question about her use of this tactic. This response had been part of a long answer to my questions during her second interview about her mother being nervous for Elizabeth's safety when she traveled to the Middle East.

> Elizabeth: And so I felt very safe[22] when I was with my host family, and, like I said before, not so much crossing, like, checkpoints and stuff, just 'cause that's when, I don't know, the military just scared me. But overall, I felt pretty safe.

[22] Elizabeth had consistently (mis)used the word "safe" in a way that may have conflated feeling comfortable or unafraid with common discourse about safety in Palestine/Israel. She had not used this word to describe any situation in which she had felt that her physical safety had been threatened, but perhaps she used it to refer to her psychological or emotional safety.

And even with, like, the Israeli military, like, if I played, like, dumb American, like, I'd feel safe.

This was the first time that she had mentioned playing "dumb American," and she framed as a protective response to feeling "unsafe" in the presence of the Israeli military. As such, she was apparently telling me that she had employed this tactic to feel more comfortable in checkpoints, not solely just as a strategy to pass through them more easily. When she said this, I interjected:

JM: Oh really?

Elizabeth: Yeah. 'Cause like I said before, um, in the airport, like, I felt like I was guilty of something, even though I had nothing to be guilty of, but in their eyes, I was guilty, or I was doing something that they considered to be wrong. So, like, I tried to play, like, dumb American, like — not even dumb American, we'll say, but, I tried to play, like, the ignorant role, of like, "Oh, I came and went to the holy sites, Israel's great." Like I tried not to say West Bank, but I had that stamp on my passport, so they asked me.

Here she began to unpack her ever present feeling of guilt. In the case of the checkpoints, she recognized that she had nothing to feel guilty about, but that she understood that the security guards and soldiers considered her to be guilty. She was not merely nervous about their guns and their interrogations; her emotions also reflected her awareness that the guards considered her to have been in violation of their rules. So, in an attempt to affirm her innocence, she decided that she would pretend to be ignorant. If she acted as though she did not know about the occupation or the condition of Palestinians — in their words, had acted "dumb" — and instead had focused on visiting the holy sites as a tourist in Israel, then she had believed that she could convince them

that she was not "doing something that they considered to be wrong." However, when they asked her about the West Bank, rather than keep up the ruse by focusing on holy sites in Bethlehem, for example, her guilt prevailed and she abandoned her attempt to play "the dumb American card" in the checkpoint game.

Because Elizabeth had traveled internationally with her family extensively prior to her program in Palestine/Israel, I was curious about whether or not she had ever pretended to be dumb when she had traveled elsewhere.

JM: You've been to lots of other places, have you played "dumb American" in other places?

Elizabeth: Mmmm! [smiling] No! I have not. 'Cause I mean, I've never been somewhere before that I felt like I was doing something wrong. Or, like, have been somewhere that I felt like, "Oh I need to hide this, or cover this up, or play the American card." So no.

For Elizabeth, playing dumb was intended to distract the authorities so as to protect her from suspicion. When it was not enough to simply be U.S.-American and have a U.S. passport in the hand that she played at this checkpoint, she had surmised that it would be a winning strategy to play the "dumb American" card. In this excerpt she even omitted the "dumb" adjective, implying that "playing the American card" might be equivalent to "playing dumb." In Israel, she tried to rely on the stereotype that U.S.-Americans in general, and perhaps U.S. tourists more specifically, are ignorant about The Conflict and the condition of Palestinians due to occupation.

Interestingly, during her interviews, Elizabeth had repeatedly asserted that her biggest takeaway from this program had been that it had "shattered her ignorance" with respect to issues

of injustice and inequity. Within the first few minutes of her first interview with me, she had even described her pre-trip self as having been "dumb":

> Elizabeth: And I was accepted [to participate in this study abroad program], and I was *thrilled* to be accepted. And I knew absolutely nothing about Israel/Palestine. I thought like Palestine was its own place, and I remember like going to maps and like searching for it, I'm like, where is it? I was, like, *so* dumb! [laugh] I look back on that now, I'm like, "What?"

And again, less than ten minutes later in that same interview, she had positioned herself as having been "dumb" about the context and purpose of the program upon her arrival:

> Elizabeth: Yes! And that was about as — I was just, I don't even know how, like, how I was so dumb! It blows my mind. I thought it would be a vacation.

Ironically, Elizabeth had previously positioned herself as initially having been the "dumb tourist" who had been visiting Israel on vacation, having known so little about Palestine that she could not find it on a map. Had this same version of herself been questioned at a checkpoint, she would not have had to "act" nor "play dumb," nor would she have known about the checkpoint game or its rules. Indeed, when she had entered the country, she said that she was welcomed in after only one simple question. However, she had recognized how much she had changed during the course of this three-week program, such that she had become aware enough about The Conflict that, upon her departure from the country, she had to feign the same kind of ignorance with which she had arrived. During her three weeks in Palestine/Israel, she had gained enough knowledge to be considered dangerous, which is a unique but perhaps telling assessment of the efficacy of her program.

Performing Ignorance

Both Elizabeth and Molly had tried “playing dumb” when they had to play the checkpoint game on their own, without any protection or support from the rest of their group or their program leaders. It is likely that they determined that ignorance was a good hand to play, so to speak, from their interpretation of the coaching their facilitators had provided about the rules of the game. It was interesting to consider the reasons why these two women described their “ignorance" strategy in terms that drew upon identity-based discourses attached to certain assumptions about U.S.-Americanness, gender, and Whiteness.

Acting like a “dumb White girl” attempted to capitalize on the stereotype that young White women and girls may be assumed to be naïve, unintelligent, or unconcerned about the world around them. Moreover, it conveyed a helpless posture that solicits help and pity from others.

Acting like a “dumb American” relied on the stereotype of U.S.-Americans being seen as generally ignorant to realities face by people in the rest of the world (and perhaps within the U.S. as well). In using this phrase, Elizabeth had evoked the imagery of an airheaded tourist who is more concerned with her own recreational enjoyment over noticing the political conditions for people outside of the direct gaze of popular tourist sites of the “Holy Land” and Tel Aviv’s beach and nightclub scene. Considering the evident push from the Israeli tourism industry to highlight these destinations, it could seem rational to emphasize these components of a visit to Israel when questioned by airport security personnel. However, focusing on these touristy elements of a study abroad program would not necessarily require someone to also act like a “dumb American” while doing so. This terminology may have revealed some additional

understanding of performativity needed to play the checkpoint game. In order to cover up her knowledge of The Conflict, Elizabeth chose a role to play that invoked familiar stereotypes.

Although several of these interviewees had categorized themselves as having been ignorant prior to their trip, it is unlikely that any of them would self-identify as having been "dumb,"[23] per se. So the notion of behaving like a "dumb White girl" also implied some degree performativity from Molly, based on a trope that links young White women to being simpleminded, naïve, and easy to dupe, take advantage of, or manipulate. This also plays upon the trope that White women need protection and assistance in making their way through the world, and may be employed to trigger such a response from the other person.

On the other hand, this trope also implies that White women can use this "dumb" performance as their own tactic to manipulate others and evade anything from bureaucratic drudgery to more serious consequences for their transgressions. Performing dumbness is a widely recognized tactic to distract someone in an authoritative position — usually a man, simultaneously engaging the ploy of beguiling through heterosexual flirtation — and assuming a posture of helplessness or weakness in order to appeal to that authority figure's inclination to feel sympathy towards the White woman who is playing dumb. This is a tactic that is learned and reinforced throughout women's socialization over their lifetime.

Therefore, Molly ultimately positioned herself as participating in the trope she had referenced. As a White woman who pretended to be dumb as a manipulation tactic, she had

[23] As noted elsewhere in this chapter, Elizabeth had referred to herself as having been dumb with respect to her knowledge about Palestine/Israel prior to the program. However, this did not imply that she would have considered herself to have been dumb in a more generalized sense. Also, it is worth noting that Diana had told me about how much she resents being overlooked or undervalued in academic and social scenarios based on assumptions that she is less intelligent than her peers.

attempted to leverage her privilege in order to evade the detainment and distress that she had feared from Israeli airport security.

Both of these "dumb" tropes are closely intertwined with global Whiteness and its corresponding privileges. Although people of any race or ethnicity could be perceived as being "dumb Americans," the global association of Americanism with Whiteness only reinforces the potential utility of this trope. As the interviewees had gleaned in the case of the checkpoint game, U.S. citizenship and Whiteness often offered exemption from scrutiny by security personnel. In many ways, the instinct for Elizabeth and Molly to exacerbate those two identities by also relying on "dumb" tropes linked to them, was a logical strategy. Because ultimately, what these interviewees had been learning was that the rules of the game that they were playing were most favorable to those who could perform U.S.-Americanness, Whiteness, and ignorance to the sociopolitical situation of The Conflict.

These students' assumptions ultimately revealed one more rule of this game: Whiteness may have been privileged, in part, because of the reliance of the guards — and of the policies of the system as a whole — on the stereotyped assumption that White U.S.-Americans would not know much about the occupation, or associate with Arabs.

Checkpoint Souvenirs: "Ah, Yep! You Got Me!"

Perhaps because Elizabeth and Molly had such powerful learning from their firsthand experiences of having been profiled at the airport checkpoints, they both told me about artifacts from their encounter with Israeli security, almost as if they were souvenirs, or even battle scars from having played the game.

For their second interviews with me, I asked each of the interviewees to think of an object that had some meaning for them related to the trip. As Molly was introducing hers, which

was a piece of jewelry from a refugee camp, she mentioned that she had brought very few things back with her. One of the things she mentioned, almost as if it were a joke to classify it with other souvenirs, was the pamphlet that the Israeli airport security had put in her suitcase to notify her that it had been given their standard search.

Molly: I have like a book of, like, [laugh], "Israel checked your"— or like, "Our security checked your baggage." And I was like, "Mm. 'K. Thanks for the pamphlet on [laugh] how you checked my baggage!"

JM: And so, where did you get that?

Molly: They just put it in your suitcase. After they checked it. 'Cause I

JM: And you kept it?

Molly: Yeah! I don't know why, I was just like, this is funny. [laugh] It's just like, they— I was ranked the highest security threat.

Later, she also mentioned that she had purposefully not removed the sticker on her passport that had indicated her as a possible security threat.

Molly: I still have the stamp. Or like, the sticker on my passport, that says I'm like, I'm a six. Like, level six.[24] [laugh] Like, it's just so crazy to me, I'm just like

JM: Yeah. And you kept it on going to Jordan and back

Molly: Yeah. It was fine. Well, people were like, [laugh] [pause while gesturing] They're like, "You get a six." [laugh] You know, it's a big deal! [laugh] So, people I know, like, we kept 'em on.

Molly had positioned the pamphlet, the sticker, and her stories about acquiring both of these things, as funny souvenirs that she had collected on her way out of the country. These two

[24] She understood that on a scale of one to six, she had been prescreened by Israeli security in the Tel Aviv airport as a threatening level six.

excerpts had bookended her “dumb girl” anecdote, which itself had been an aside from telling me about her meaningful object. She had been laughing throughout this story, and when she told me about these security-related souvenirs, more than a year after her program, this incident had become an amusing memory. After having been through two instances of extended questioning, it was almost as if her luggage notice was a a feeble afterthought, informing her of something she had already known: she had been surveilled. Although this pamphlet is commonly left in luggage that travels out of Ben Gurion airport as a baggage search is part of their standard security protocol, this pamphlet had a special meaning to Molly because she had associated it with her airport checkpoint interrogations. In a sense, this slip of paper was evidence of the game that she had played.

Moreover, she also connected this pamphlet to her story about being given a sticker on her passport that had identified her as a potential threat. Because she considered it “crazy” that she had been deemed as a security threat, as symbolized by a coded sticker that is placed on travelers’ passports after a first round of triage questions, she left the sticker on her passport. In addition to serving as a personal reminder of playing the checkpoint game, she also positioned it as a badge of honor. The following summer, when she studied abroad in Jordan, it got the attention of other people who had recognized it and joked with Molly about what a “big deal” it was to have been designated as threatening to the state of Israel. She even positioned herself as being part of a group of people who had been labeled as Level Six by saying “we kept ‘em on.” This first-person pluralization indicated that she felt like she was part of an unofficial club, and also underscored the absurdity of being one of many people she knew who had been identified in this way as a high risk.

Elizabeth also kept the pamphlet that had been left in her luggage, and even brought it to her second interview to show it to me.[25] She associated it less with her own experience of being put through an extra degree of security scrutiny, and more with what she had learned from her program about the Israeli government's use of the term "security" as a justification for oppressing Palestinians.

Elizabeth: … my last taste with the Israeli military. And even when I got to [my destination], I like opened up my bag, and there was like a little pamphlet in there, it was like, "Oh your bag had been searched for security reasons," like security's like the key word, or the rationale behind — it's like what the, like the Israeli reasoning behind the oppression, or like, at checkpoints, or at the airport, like, security kinda stuff. "Security" was the big word that like we continuously noticed for, like, the rationale. So I saw that it literally said the word, like, "for security purposes, safety purposes," I'm like "Ah. [pause] Yep!" [laugh] You got me, with my dirty clothes, and my tea. [deep sigh]

JM: Your last little souvenir.

Elizabeth: My last little souvenir, yes. And I kept that little pamphlet, too,

JM: Oh yeah?

Elizabeth: 'Cause I'm like, [pause — shaking head, smiling] "Goddammit." [sigh]. So yeah.

From the way that Elizabeth narrated this story, finding this pamphlet had been the culmination of what she had learned during her program through the checkpoint game about

[25] This had not been intended as her meaningful object in response to my request; she had brought six photographs from her trip for that purpose. Rather, she brought this to share with me, unprompted, because it held a special meaning for her.

several aspects of the Israeli occupation. Here, she begins by sharing her recognition that the concept of "security" had been used as an excuse to justify systems of oppression. This insight had been shared with her by speakers, guides, and/or facilitators during her program — it was a word that her group "had constantly noticed for the rationale" for the implementation of systems of oppression. However, because of the experiences she had at checkpoints, she had taken this to heart. Because she knew that she had done nothing wrong but had still been identified as a security threat, she rolled her eyes at the entire concept of Israeli "security," dismissing it as a deception that served to cover for their oppression of Palestinians and other Arabs. Therefore, she told me that when she saw the word "security" written in the English-language text on the pamphlet left in her luggage, she thought she recognized what had been going on. Rather than feel guilty or stressed, as she had at the checkpoint, she felt as though she had seen through the ruse. "You got me," she said, sarcastically, pointing out a few innocuous things they may have found in her luggage during the check.

In response to why she had kept the pamphlet, she captured her feeling upon finding it with a sighing "goddammit." She said this with a sense of amused resignation, indicating that her heightened feelings of fear, discomfort, and intimidation at the checkpoint had been attenuated by the time she had first opened her luggage from that trip, and especially by the time she had interviewed with me. By then, she had clearly reflected upon her experiences with the checkpoint game enough to make sense of them within the larger context of what she had learned about the Israeli occupation.

Noticing Other People in the Background

Stories about their group's experiences at checkpoints revealed that the interviewees were aware of how different it was for other passengers in their bus to cross through checkpoints.

Through observing the impact of encountering security guards on others, these interviewees learned that their own experience crossing checkpoints was relatively easy. Moreover, they learned about the nature of the game: because some rules were applied in different ways for different people, there was room for people with privileged identities to subvert some of the rules.

When the Rules Weren't Rules: "We Were Kind of, Like, Following Things Literally, but Also, Like, Skirting Around Certain Things"

Because these programs were accompanied by two dual-narrative tour guides, the participants had the opportunity to witness how their Jewish Israeli and Muslim Palestinian guides played the checkpoint game. On the surface, they recognized that the presence of these two guides had an impact on the entire group's mobility, due to the fact that the rules permitted each guide differentially limited access to different places.

> Paige: I mean, just traveling throughout that region is so difficult. Especially given that our two [guides] held different identities, and different citizenship cards. So, it made it a little more challenging. But I think that was important. I think that that was necessary for us to see.

Here, Paige noted that the guides did not just have different ethnic identities, but different "citizenship cards," or ID cards that indicated where they were born, which grants them access to different places in accordance with Israeli law. Israeli citizens are allowed to be in Israeli territories, whereas Palestinian residents of the West Bank are not allowed to enter Israeli territory without permission. Notably, none of the interviewees ever mentioned anything about the permits for which Khalil, their Palestinian guide, had to apply from Israeli military authorities in order to be allowed access into Jerusalem and other Israeli territories for his work.

This permission is rarely granted, nor is it easy to acquire even after being granted permission, as there are many steps that one must take in order to get temporary and time-limited permits issued as attachments to their ID cards. On one occasion, one of the interviewees recalled a time when their tour bus drove through a checkpoint within the West Bank, and Khalil mentioned that he could be shot if he were to stand at a particular place designated for Israelis in that militarized intersection. Nevertheless, in spite of being told that checkpoints could invoke life-or-death consequences for Palestinians, these students' stories did not focus on the Palestinian experience. Rather, their own experiences and emotional reactions had taken precedence in their memories.

For example, in the excerpt above, Paige said that the presence of their guides "made it a little more challenging" for their group to move around the region. This statement not only downplayed the reality of the challenges for their guides, but it also centered attention on the group's challenges, rather than the challenges faced by the local guides. Regardless, as she said, this added challenge ultimately conferred important meaning for her. Because she understood this to be a reflection of life with The Conflict, she believed that it had been important to see this way that different IDs determined differential access for local residents. Perhaps without having the experience of riding a bus with these two guides, participants would not have understood these discriminatory policies in the same way, albeit superficially, as they would not have witnessed any effect of the policies firsthand.

Indeed, many of the interviewees noted that they had been especially aware of their tour guides' different identity-based access when they drove through checkpoints in the West Bank with their guides on their bus. In addition to raising awareness about their own relative privilege, the students became aware of how differently the checkpoint rules operated for people with

different identities and different mobility permissions. Moreover, the rules seemed to leave room for certain people with certain identities to find ways to evade them.

Bridget: The first time we crossed into the West Bank, we were going to eat lunch in Ramallah. So our tour guides were on the bus, and they told us — so we passed all these signs that, like, you're going into Zone A, or Area A, and they told us, like, our Israeli tour guide was going to sit with us in the back because he technically wasn't even supposed to be there. And that was, like — I mean up to that point, we'd talked about some things, like, Lucy had said, "Only answer the questions that they ask," like, don't necessarily give them more information than they're asking for. So we were aware of that kind of thing, but that was really, I think, the first time I realized that we were kind of, like, following things literally, but also, like, skirting around certain things. I don't know, that was interesting to realize, 'cause it was so easy for us, also, and there were many times we passed, like, we went through a different checkpoint, and Lucy and Rania pointed out where we were leaving, like, the normal — or, leaving the Palestinian checkpoint, and taking a different road, and it just, like, I mean we were stopped a few times. And at each checkpoint they just checked credentials or something. I don't know, it was — I guess just so easy for us, and it was difficult to visualize exactly how it is for other people. Or for Palestinians going between, um, or Israe— I think — yeah. Israelis, too.

Bridget began this story by pointing out that their Israeli guide — who was White-passing — came to the back of the bus to blend in with the students and evade scrutiny at the

checkpoint when he was entering territory in the West Bank called “Area A,” which is technically supposed to be off-limits to Jewish Israeli citizens without permission from the Israeli military. Recalling the advice given to them by their program leaders, Bridget noted that this experience of trying to bypass the rules of a checkpoint had brought that advice to life for her. Moreover, this prompted her to consider the nature of the rules, and what it meant to follow them. The authority figures on this trip — her facilitators and her tour guides — had been telling the students how to play the game, but here she recognized that inherent to playing the game was outsmarting the game, in this case by “skirting around” some of the rules.

From this episode, along with the other instances she mentioned next, she learned that she and her group were playing by a different, easier set of rules. As her evidence, she recalled that in the many times that they crossed checkpoints, they were often able to pass through easily after the guards “just checked credentials or something.” She did not even know or remember what they had done in order to cross checkpoints, this indicated that crossing had been easy enough to be relatively inconsequential to the passengers from the comfort of their tourist bus. She also remembered that her group’s bus had access to bypass roads and checkpoints that local Palestinians were not allowed to use. Importantly, she wrapped up this story by recognizing that her experience had been different enough from local people’s experiences that it was difficult for her to visualize or understand what the checkpoint regime imposed on both Palestinians and Israelis. So even though she had a taste of what her tour guides experienced when they were traveling with her, she knew that her experience was not representative of many other people’s realities. In spite of having been told about the restrictive policies, without experiencing them firsthand, it remained difficult for her to fully grasp how they operated.

In her second interview with me, Allison elaborated a bit on what it was like for her to cross borders. Like Bridget, she recognized that her experiences crossing checkpoints had been easier than typical experiences for local Palestinians or Israelis, in part because of what she had become aware of when she traveled with the two tour guides.

Allison: But yeah, I think we really, like, got it easy with checkpoints, because we're not Palestinian. But I also do remember, either [Israeli guide] having to get off, or sometimes like Khalil having to meet us places. Because they couldn't go the same way to a certain place. Which is really interesting. Because then, we'd be confused if like, only one was with us. And they'd say, like, "Oh, Khalil can't, like, travel with us," or something like that. And that was interesting because like, from an outsider point of view, we were not Israeli or Palestinian, you could basically go wherever you want. But like, if you're Israeli or Palestinian, it's like definitely much more controlled. And you realize you're not, like, receiving the brunt of it. … So I think it's not even, like, fair, my perspe— like, what I experienced of checkpoints? Because, like, I just got it so easy. I didn't have to do anything. And I never felt — like, I felt uncomfortable, but, I was always, like, I'm like, you know, this White girl who like, like, no soldiers are gonna be, like, picking on me at a checkpoint or anything like that.

Recalling her confusion when one or the other guide had to leave the group or change their route due to their restricted access to certain areas and certain roads, she put herself back in the emotional space of the program. This remembered confusion highlighted the gap that she had felt between knowing information about the restrictions, and experiencing an impact from those

restrictions. Positioning herself as having been "confused" at checkpoints also indicated her prior naïveté about the realities of the restrictions for her guides and other local Palestinians and Israelis.

In this excerpt, by comparing her access with that of her guides, Allison shed light on how she had learned that her positionality as an outsider — neither Palestinian nor Israeli — afforded her the privilege of mobility such that she had an "easy" time when crossing through checkpoints. In spite of having felt uncomfortable at the checkpoints, she recognized that being a "White girl" protected her from being "picked on" by soldiers. This minimization of soldiers' potential behavior at checkpoints further illustrated how her own experience had not exposed her to the potential indignities faced by Palestinians who are subjected to different rules and different consequences in this checkpoint game. That notwithstanding, she connected her easy experience at checkpoints to her Whiteness, which she suggested was the reason why she had been able to play the checkpoint game with different rules. Therefore, she identified another key condition of playing the checkpoint game: being an "outsider" was not sufficient: in addition to possessing U.S. citizenship, it was important to be perceived as White in order to have a so-called "winning hand."

Learning From Cumulative Experiences: "Those Little Things, Like, Kind of All Just Built Up to Make Me Kind of Pissed Off at How Unfair It Is"

While analyzing this data, I was struck by how few of the interviewees drew direct connections between their stories about borders and checkpoints, and any lasting impact or enduring learning. Elizabeth provided the sole example of an analysis that situated her cumulative experiences in the overarching context of The Conflict that she had learned about.

During her second interview, she revisited her airport checkpoint incident again, after she mentioned that seeing the Israeli flag made her "upset, kinda" once she had returned to her campus. I asked her what had informed that feeling.

Elizabeth: I don't know, like I said, the oppression, and like the persecution against the Palestinian people, I just think it's unfair. So I think that's maybe where I get that from, as well. Um, like, just from my trip there and the experience and like the emotions that I felt very strongly.

JM: Can you think about a time — like if you're thinking about, now, if you see something that's, like, the Israeli flag.[26] Can you think about a time that that relates to back on the trip?

Elizabeth: [heavy sigh]

JM: Are there any specific examples, or do you think it's more of a feeling you got over the course of being there?

Elizabeth: I mean definitely, like, my time in the airport. You know, like, that was— 'cause that was something that, like, really pissed me off, just leaving, the ending my trip, like I explained before, like that just left, like, a sour taste in my mouth, of Israel, of security, of the Israeli military. Of the profiling that happens. … So that was something that pisses me off. And then [pause] just, even when driving through checkpoints and the fact that, like, you know, the people were profiled on our trip, and the fact that, you know like the one day I came back from, um — where were we at, we were in Haifa, and my host sisters told me, like, "Oh, like, I've never been there before." I was just like,

[26] This question was a direct reference to something she had said about seeing the Israeli flag.

> "What?" Like, those little things, like, kind of all just built up to make me kind of pissed off at how unfair it is. And so, and then you go over into Israel — like, 'cause I spent my last day in, like, Tel Aviv and, it's just a completely different world, and people don't have those same struggles.

When she recalled her program as a whole, she mentioned that her personal experience of being questioned at the airport made a lasting impression about the "profiling that happens" in Israel/Palestine. Sighing heavily, she expressed a good deal of emotion as she contemplated her recollections about witnessing and experiencing "the oppression, and like the persecution against the Palestinian people." She also recalled other interpersonal and emotional incidents that she had previously told to me, such as the incident when a soldier held her passport when their bus was stopped at a checkpoint, and when her host sisters had told her that they could not travel to the sites of her day trip excursions. Altogether, she said that these personal experiences had accumulated such that she was "pissed off at how unfair it is." While this reflection about her overall insights from her program may have been prompted by the act of interviewing with me, nevertheless she demonstrated that her interactive and emotional experiences in Palestine/Israel and on the program were her clearest points of reference for understanding — and being angry about — the injustices in that region.

Discussion

The experience of playing the checkpoint game left lasting impressions on these students, beyond what they had previously understood from merely a theoretical level. Diana had suggested as much in response to a question about times during her program when she had encountered something she hadn't expected. "So I think it's one thing to look at the pictures of all of the checkpoints, things like that. Just be like, 'Wow, it's wild that's happening.' And then,

being there and doing it is so different." Whereas it had been hard to believe that checkpoints existed throughout the West Bank and elsewhere, it had been another thing entirely for these students to experience them firsthand. Their stories that described moments where they had deeply begun to understand not only how the checkpoint game operated, but also how the occupation had operated through discriminatory assumptions and profiling, had been those in which their peers or especially they themselves had been the target of discriminatory profiling by security guards. The lasting learning was evident from the ways they could relate to and personalize the injustices that had been surrounding them, but had previously been invisible.

This hearkens to what Linda had said when she had been recalling her introduction to the concept of the "invisible occupation":

> Linda: That was the thing for me, there was a lot of things I didn't think about. Until I was there seeing it. … if you aren't really analyzing what's going on, you're not gonna notice. That was something for me, like, I had never thought about or considered, until I saw it, and heard about it, and felt it. And that was a really important thing for me, coming from the trip.

In the case of these checkpoint stories, the interviewees had the uneasy benefit of being part of a group in which some of their peers were discriminated against, because these dynamics provided them with opportunities to witness racial profiling and discrimination when crossing certain checkpoints. Had all the students in their program been White U.S.-Americans, their homogeneously privileged identities may have protected them from even knowing that this game existed, as had been the presumed case for the tourists on Paige's post-program day trip to Petra who had previously been part of an exclusively privileged program. However, because of the unfortunate reality that their Muslim peers and other peers of color had been profiled, these

"outsider" interviewees had been granted access to witnessing and analyzing various aspects of the game as it unfolded before them.

Likewise, had they not visited or stayed in the West Bank and met with Palestinians there, they would not have had a personal vantage point from where they could analyze additional, conditional rules of the game. Through these interpersonal interactions, they had increased their awareness about material circumstances for Palestinians living throughout Israel/Palestine, and therefore, according to the terms of the game, had felt increasingly guiltier. Accordingly, they learned that, at checkpoints, they should avoid disclosing the very information, encounters, relationships, and increased awareness that they had been so proud of accruing and were otherwise eager to share. Ultimately, they interpreted their experiences as though they were playing a game that required them to use interpersonal tactics to try to outsmart the guards and soldiers by appearing to be dumb.

Innocence Abroad: Performing Whiteness

The checkpoint game was less about discrete wins and losses, and more about the degrees to which one could successfully cross an Israeli checkpoint without raising too much suspicion and ultimately without being detained for questioning or more intense security checks. In addition to learning about some specific aspects of the conditions of The Conflict in Palestine/Israel, the students also gained insights about the extent to which Whiteness is privileged in various spaces, globally. Through playing this game, an underlying lesson was about the benefit of passing as White, or performing elements of Whiteness, in the face of the Israeli authorities. Although few of the students indicated much analysis of this phenomenon, they indirectly described it throughout their stories about checkpoints.

On one hand, Whiteness signifies power. At the checkpoints, for example, in combination with declaring U.S. citizenship or presenting a U.S. passport, White U.S.-Americans were beneficiaries of the U.S. geopolitical alliance with Israel. While most U.S. citizens without Palestinian heritage or other Arab ethnicities are easily granted visitor visas upon their entrance to Israel, White U.S.-Americans especially are extended the benefit of the doubt as being natural allies. People who presented as White could often rely on that presentation to relieve them of skepticism and scrutiny. This was demonstrated to the interviewees when U.S. students of color had been questioned more frequently and more intensely than their White counterparts at various checkpoints and borders. Moreover, the presentation of Whiteness allowed for non-U.S.-Americans to cross without detection, as when the White Israeli tour guide sat in the back of the tour bus in order to blend in among the U.S. students without raising suspicion from security guards at a checkpoint into the West Bank.

On the other hand, due to the privilege of being protected from many forms of racialized discrimination, Whiteness also signifies innocence, or even ignorance, with respect to sociopolitical realities faced by non-White people globally. At checkpoints, White U.S.-Americans were often assumed by the Israeli authorities to be a benign, innocent, or even friendly presence who were presumed unlikely to be aware of the systems and structures of occupation and oppression in place for Palestinians. Along these lines, White people were also often presumed to be unaffiliated or unassociated with Arabs or Muslims, which granted them easy passage through checkpoints meant to deter or detain Palestinians.

In accordance with these two attributes of Whiteness, the interviewees' narratives collectively described the ways that, through playing the checkpoint game, they had come to understand that it was not enough to simply be a U.S. citizen, or to be perceived as appearing to

be White, but also to *perform* White innocence for the guards. That is, when the game dictated that they performed ignorance of The Conflict, and performed the impression of being distanced from Arabs, they were able to pass through the checkpoints with ease. However, when they had not performed Whiteness well enough — for example because they had a dark complexion, or they had been traveling with an Arab peer, or they had admitted to visiting Arab spaces within Israel/Palestine, or otherwise had confessed to being Arab-adjacent — they had been subjected to scrutiny and inspection. As such, they learned that the rules of the checkpoint game consisted primarily of performing Whiteness. Or, as Elizabeth and Molly had put it, performing like "dumb American White girls."

This recognition of the importance of the interpersonal power dynamic with the guards was expressed well by Molly when she suggested that she probably would not have a hard time returning to Israel: "I don't know if they would really, like, want me. I don't know if they would let me in. [laugh] They probably would. I'm not too menacing to them. Appearance-wise." Although her post-program politics and activism against the systems of occupation may concern to Israeli authorities, Molly realized that, as a White woman, her appearance was "not too menacing" to the guards at border checkpoints who would ultimately be the ones to decide to "let her in" to the country again.

Recognizing Their Privilege: "In Real Life, and Not Just Told to Me"

It was not lost on these interviewees that they were privileged with respect to how they played the checkpoint game. Indeed, a privileged positionality was required to interact with the checkpoint regime at all, much less in game-like terms. Many people who do not have the privilege of presenting or performing as ignorant White U.S.-Americans may often experience checkpoints as being inherently dehumanizing spaces, due to the attitudes and actions of the

people working there and the overall violence of the infrastructure, alike. Moreover, there are millions of people who do not even have permission to access the checkpoints at all, which is a painful reality of the Israeli occupation.

Of course, in all cases people with privilege play by different sets of rules in all sorts of sociopolitical games and transactions, especially when interacting with authority figures. During these programs in Palestine/Israel, the checkpoints and border crossings were the sites where this truism was brought into sharp relief for these interviewees who otherwise had not been attuned to seeing concrete ways that their various intersecting sociocultural identities had resulted in explicit benefits, especially in comparison with others who had different sociocultural identities. In this setting, they were also able to understand how the concept of "privilege" corresponded directly to facing fewer rules, restrictions, and limitations in their daily lives. In the following excerpt, Linda expressed how her experiences at the borders heightened her awareness and ultimately inspired a profound and lasting change in most aspects of her life back at her university.

Linda: But that trip … that was the first time I really had my privileges put in my face, and shown to me. Like, in real life, and not just told to me. And I was like, "Yeah, OK." Like, that was the first time I like — going to the border, and like, *not* getting separated from the group. Even our group, had issues crossing the border. But like, there are people who didn't have American passports that were treated a lot differently than us. And like, that was the first time I really noticed that kinda stuff. And that experience, for me, really changed a lot for me coming back to the U.S. And like, made me really

> interested in social justice, like, diversity, equity, inclusion. And like, has really inspired me in a lot of the stuff I do now.

Linda clearly described how significant it had been for her to see, feel, and experience how her privilege operated in a real-life setting, rather than just learning abstractly that she was somehow privileged, for example by having other people tell this or teach this to her. She claimed that she had felt her privilege when she had been at the border and had not been separated from the group like her Muslim peers were. She then noted that while she had been waiting to cross the border from Jordan into Israel/Palestine, she had been aware of people without U.S. citizenship who had been treated differently; presumably they had a more difficult time crossing than the Muslims and Arabs in her group. Again, she remarked about the implicit distinction between knowing about "that kinda stuff," and *noticing* it, in person. Finally, she claimed that the experience of not only being in Palestine/Israel, but of crossing borders and seeing her privileges in action, had changed her. Indeed, she attributed her post-program work as a diversity peer educator and global education peer mentor to this profound awareness that she had gained from learning the rules of the checkpoint game at Israeli border checkpoints.

"The Interviewees', Like, Discourse and, You Know, the Way They, Like, Talked"

The reader may have noticed certain patterns of speech and ways of talking across the many excerpts from the eight interviewees; I would like to discuss some key trends that I noticed across many of the interviews pertaining to linguistic tendencies which may have had some utility in the students' stories about what they had learned from borders and checkpoints.

First and foremost, these interviewees' manner of speaking offered constant reminders of the fact that they were all young women. At the time of the interviews, they were all 21 or 22 years old; when they had participated in these programs they were between 19-21 years old.

While their colloquial speech patterns are not exclusive to young women, many of them certainly sounded like stereotypical girls by their frequent use of the words “like” and “you know.”

In making choices about presenting excerpts from the interviewees, as I discussed in the Methodology chapter, I made many choices about whether and when to include common kinds of speech that most of them inserted frequently into their narratives, but did not necessarily carry any meaning that contributed to the narratives. Most of the women peppered their speech so heavily with the words “like” and “um,” and the phrase “you know,” that in print, these words sometimes distracted and detracted from the point they had been otherwise articulating. In some cases, the word “like” had been uttered between every other word in a sentence. Sometimes it would stand alone as if its own sentence, as if filling time while the person was thinking through what to say next. (I chose to edit these out, for the sake of clarity.)

Because of all the “likes” and “ums,” it could be easy to imagine that these young women spoke as if they were airheads, clueless, or possibly even dumb. Certainly, at times when I read the transcripts, I had a tendency to also imagine singsong voices with upspeak at the end of the sentences, which could imply belittlement of these women and the content of their stories. That said, this inclination contrasts sharply with my experience of sitting with them as they spoke. Their narratives had struck me as thoughtful and insightful, and I was consistently impressed by the degree to which these students had reflected upon many of the issues that they discussed in their interviews. These interviewees were far from the “dumb Americans” or “dumb White girls” that a couple of them had attempted to portray when they went through airport security.

During the second and third interviews with these women, I shared a few transcribed excerpts of their own words with them. Nearly every time, almost every woman remarked about how many times they had said “like” or “um,” even though I had usually already edited a few of

these extraneous words out prior to sharing them. One of the women even remarked that she needed to attend to this habit when she interviewed for jobs, implying that she recognized that this made her sound unprofessional, or perhaps unintelligent. Altogether, these students' self-conscious surprise upon reading their own speech indicated to me that they were largely unaware of these verbal tics, which were, indeed, habitual forms of discourse common to many of them in their everyday speech.

As such, the abundant use of all these small filler words may have been an indication that the interviewees both felt comfortable enough to use their familiar speech patterns with me, and also that they had been actively thinking while they were crafting their narratives. For both of these reasons, the prevalence of "like" almost bestowed an earnestness to what they said. While they were crafting their responses, they were often deep in thought about what they had remembered from their program and how they continue to make sense of it.

Dramatizing Emotions With Heavy Sighs

For a few of these young women, their stories about their experiences overseas would evoke strong emotional reactions during the interview. Among the more expressive ways that these emotions were evident were the sighs that several of the interviewees would vocalize while they were recalling certain events. Most of the time, these heavy exhalations seemed to express that they had been reliving the emotions they had experienced during their program, while they were remembering them. For example, the stress of being questioned at the airport provoked many sighs when those stories were retold. At other times, the sighing had been prompted by their in-the-moment reflections about their experiences. Both of these rationales were confirmed by Elizabeth when I told her that I noticed a lot of sighing as I transcribed her interview. She explained that her sighs had been rooted in how strong her emotions had persisted after the

program, such that they would arise when she talked about her time “on the ground” in Palestine/Israel:

> Elizabeth: I’m just — me, just personality-wise, I’m a person that, like, feels a lot of things. And I guess just, like, when I, whenever I talk about this kinda thing, and like, get kind of emotional or whether it’s, like, upset, or just stirred up, or overwhelmed and, I think maybe it’s ’cause I don't think about this that much. So when I do, when I get like overwhelmed by, like, how bad it is, what’s happening, um, it kinda reminds myself, like, what I was feeling on the ground there. ’Cause those, like, the emotions that, like, I guess come up when I talk about it, ’cause I, like, get upset. Sometimes I even, like, cry when I’m telling people about it. Like, those were all emotions that I felt, like, on the ground, during my time there, experiencing what life can be like there for the Palestinian people. So. Yeah. I think it’s just me empathizing with the cause and the people

In addition to sharing how emotional she becomes when talking about and remembering what her time had been like during the program, it is also worth noting that she positioned her emotions to be connected to her empathy for Palestinians, based on her experiences of what life could be like there.

During their interviews, these women had been striving to position themselves in certain ways, likely both consciously and subconsciously. For instance, they occasionally appeared to be carefully choosing words to express themselves that supported their implied claim that they were using politically correct terminology to convey issues related to race, ethnicity, religion, as well as elements of The Conflict writ large. In not wanting to say the wrong thing, or when they had

been unsure of certain naming practices and terminology, they would sometimes pause and insert "like" to buffer their statements, as if to reduce their certainty about using particular words. Additionally, they sometimes sighed in exasperation when they were searching for the right words to express ideas that were difficult to express:

> Diana: I definitely know that, like, my, like, sighs and pauses are, like, me trying to not say the wrong thing, or come off in a way that I don't mean to. Um. So I like to, like, choose my words. And kinda convey exactly what I mean, and not — you know, I don't wanna be misconstrued, ever, really. Especially with, like, you know, important conversations, I don't wanna come off in a way that I don't mean to. So I, like, definitely, you know, like "[sigh]." And so I sigh and then I think, like, what am I gonna say? How am I gonna phrase this?

In fact, this also seemed to be the case when they used "like" in order to blur around the exact details of a particular story. If the interviewees were offering a detail that they might have been misremembering, they would sometimes add "like" as a sort of prefix. Regardless, the focus of their stories were often less about the particulars of a scenario or of the context more generally, but rather about their memories of their own responses to what had been happening around them or to them. In many cases, as I discuss throughout this dissertation, they positioned themselves as the central characters and focal points of their stories.

Centering Themselves

Many of their stories privilege their own "a-ha moments" or emotional responses at the expense of what other characters in the narrative may have been experiencing or feeling. To some degree, then, the other elements of the story served as backdrops, props, and secondary characters, all whose presence in the narrative supported whatever insight the speaker had

claimed to achieve from a given experience. Although this self-centered gaze is understandable in light of the context of being interviewed about their experience, it was sometimes startling to read their narratives about the checkpoint regime, in which they — the privileged U.S.-American women — were the stars of their stories. As for their peers or their Palestinian tour guide, their experiences rarely, if ever, made it into their narratives. An illustrative example of this was the incident when a soldier came on the tour bus at a checkpoint stop and requested to check the passports of only a few students. In the three different stories in which this anecdote had been relayed, none of them included any description or speculation of what the Muslim students had experienced during or after being profiled. Similarly, in their stories about crossing into Israel/Palestine, they did not share insights or observations about what it had been like for their Arab and Muslim peers to be interrogated. The one exception to this had been Sylvia, who had briefly described some of the steps that her Arab friend had taken to clear his electronics in order to mitigate scrutiny, and the way that he had been consumed with trying to change his flight out of the country to avoid another upsetting interrogation. Still, she concluded that small story by redirecting back to herself when she expressed relief that she had not dealt with that particular stress during the trip.

This centering of self may have been an effect of learning experientially. Rather than simply taking in information passively through reading or listening, many of the experiences they shared with me had been intensely personal, and often rife with emotions. Sometimes the emotions were empathic about better understanding the challenges faced by the Palestinians they came to know and love who lived under occupation, but oftentimes the emotions stemmed from what they directly, personally experienced, rather than what they had observed or heard. Especially coming from backgrounds where they had rarely been exposed to outright

discrimination and oppression, these students had been shocked and at times overwhelmed by the stories they heard, and mostly by what they witnessed and encountered themselves. As such, when crossing a checkpoint had evoked feelings of stress and guilt, they told that story rather than a more impersonal lesson about the material impact of checkpoints in the daily lives of Palestinians. In the short span of three weeks, they did not have time to work through their own affective filters of their immediate and intense experiences in order to draw connections to larger issues related to The Conflict. Nevertheless, the trips made strong, lasting impressions. The lessons they drew from their own experiential and emotional episodes often resulted in sufficient unlearning, such that these students did not have the additional mental or emotional capability to process the experiences or circumstances of others around them.

Reenacting Conversations and Voicing Reported Dialogue With Others

The interviewees frequently included quotations in their narratives, either recalling the gist of conversations with others or internal dialogue they remembered having with themselves. Recalling dialogue like this gave the interviewees another reason to use the word "like" as a colloquial indicator of starting a quotation, often followed with the word "Oh" as if a verbal signal of an open quotation mark. Embedded in many of their stories — especially the ones about their encounters with soldiers and guards at checkpoints — these students incorporated memories of what others had said to them, or what they had thought to themselves in a particular moment, by play-acting their memories by quoting themselves or others. Of course, these quotations were always indirect, muddled by a combination of memory and positioning their stories and themselves for particular purposes.

The inclusion of dialogue in these narratives seemed to serve various purposes, all of which served to maintain the focus of the story on the narrator herself. For example, they would

sometimes quote something that had been said to them as a way to underscore how meaningful that comment or conversation had been to them. Through such quotations, the interviewees would implicitly credit other people for providing them access to certain perspectives or analyses that they otherwise may not have accessed. This technique was common when they talked about their host families. Of course, they could have simply stated that someone else had told them something they had understood to be profound or insightful. However, by instead framing these bits of received information as a quotation, these women placed themselves back in the moment in a more visceral way. They sometimes relived the emotional responses they had felt in the original moment. Also, in addition to inserting dialogue as a way to position themselves to me, their audience, through narrative performance (Depperman, 2013b), they offered these quotes as evidence that they had been in a particular situation, lending a sort of validity to their memories and/or the associated claims they made about them. To use this convention of quoting someone else, it was as if they were telling me, "Don't just take my word for what I'm telling you; this is what someone else had said to me when I was on the ground."

Several of the interviewees expressed their view that someone's personal experience must be inherently true, and cannot be challenged or denied. This was likely something they had discussed during the trip when they had been exposed to multiple, divergent, and often incongruous narratives from Palestinians and Israelis. Consistent with this reasoning, they all collectively placed a great deal of value on the information they had learned about The Conflict through their experiences, which they considered to be unassailable. Therefore, it made sense that they would include snippets of their experiences by way of quotations in an effort to further validate the things they shared with me.

Every time the interviewees told me a story about being questioned at a border checkpoint, they included a bit of dialogue with the guards or soldiers who had been questioning them. In addition to using this as a way to set the scene to more accurately depict their memory of this experience, they also usually dramatized their emotional reactions to being questioned. For example, in many cases, they would emphasize the feeling of fear or trepidation from that moment by making their voice quiet and higher pitched. Inherent in these performances was an efficiency: rather than using words to describe their emotional state at the time of being questioned, they could demonstrate it to me using their voice and body language. Furthermore, these performances expressed how deeply felt these experiences had been at the time, and continued to be when recalled. For the most part, I had the impression that these women performed these dialogues more out of instinctual emphasis or habitual flair, rather than from a conscious storytelling strategy.

Voicing Their "A-Ha Moments" With Internal Dialogue

In addition to sharing quotes as if in the voice of other people, these women also occasionally included quotations of their internal dialogue within their stories. Again, this technique often seemed to reflect the ways in which they were cinematically recalling the moments that had been the focus of their stories. However, these self-quotations also seemed more strategic, albeit subconsciously. It was almost as if these quotes would rewind us back in time to the moments when these interviewees had a notable realization that had stayed with them. Here are two examples from the excerpts in this chapter:

Linda: …that was, like, my first time [during the program that] I was like, "OK, like, this is a lot."

Molly: And I was like, "Mm. ’K. Thanks for the pamphlet on [laugh] how you checked my baggage!”

This self-quoting technique not only underscored what they had become aware of, but also pointed to the very moment during an experience to which they attributed their learning. In this way, these quotes brought to life the notion of an “a-ha moment,” which is a common saying among educators. These women were sharing with me those points in time when, in their head, they had told themselves something along the lines of “A-ha! Now I understand something new.”

“The Oppression Was Ridiculous!” Limited Analysis and Limited Discourse

Finally, these students had a tendency of concluding that things they had seen or experienced in Palestine/Israel were “crazy,” “weird,” or “ridiculous.” These seemed to be colloquially common words for these women, and so were consistent with the way they spoke in general. In many respects, these words represent decent assessments of situations in which conflict and oppression were integrated into structures and systems that impacted people’s daily life so profoundly, yet in ways that were so different from what the interviewees had considered normal or fair. However, these words also served the function of precluding any further analysis. For example, it seemed that one interviewee found it sufficient to exclaim repeatedly throughout her interview: “It was just ridiculous!” Even when I had pointed out to her how frequently she had said it, she had a difficult time elaborating further on the ways she reacted with exasperation to juxtapositions she witnessed that she found to be exasperating. Similarly, phrases like “It was just weird,” often referred to something that an interviewee had found to be unjust or unfair. However, these phrases were uttered to wrap up a thought, as if it were sufficient to remark about how strange or abnormal it felt to witness injustice, without delving any deeper into the injustice itself.

This tendency reflected a significant avoidance overall in their narratives with regard to analysis of oppression. much less mention of occupation per se. Rather than consider the factors that had created and maintained the inequity that had made such an impact on them, they spoke about The Conflict as if it were fixed and unchangeable. According to their narratives, The Conflict was unfortunate and sad and unfair, and also crazy and weird and ridiculous. But it was static, unchangeable. It just was. Its existence had been the backdrop to their trip about which they had raised awareness, and the scenery among where they picked up various insights.

Correspondingly, their discourse left little room for any action besides awareness-raising. Because the interviewees had interpreted the purpose of their trip to hear multiple perspectives and thus raise their own awareness about the realities of The Conflict, it was as if they understood this as an end in itself. Consequently, they all spoke about the importance of having post-trip conversations back at home with friends, family, and classmates about what they had learned. For a majority of the interviewees, "quiet activism," as Allison had phrased it, had seemed to be the extent of their actions related to their program. Collectively, they tended to focus on raising awareness about what is, rather than imagining possibilities of what could be.

CHAPTER VI

EXPANDING OUR GAZE: CONSIDERING THE COMPLEXITIES OF IDENTITY, EXPERIENCE, INTERACTIONS, AND INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

In this dissertation, I focused on themes across the narratives the eight participants shared with me about their memories and experiences on short-term study abroad programs in Palestine/Israel. From the ways that they talked to me about certain incidents and aspects during their program, I was struck by apparent contradictions in their stories and presentation. On the one hand, they all spoke of being deeply impacted by their program, and many of them offered evidence of this in their narratives. However, their stories did not indicate moments, incidents, or interactions that related directly to their learning, either about themselves or about issues pertaining to the central topic of The Conflict. Nor did they talk much about their impressions about the lives and experiences of the people and speakers they had met throughout their program, even though a large portion of their trip involved listening to narratives of local people. With a few exceptions, the interviewees also did not share many reflections about how the program may have impacted their peers, although their peers had played significant roles in their stories. Rather, their stories were about themselves, and how they remembered their own personal experiences of certain scenarios and incidents.

To some extent, their focus on themselves was understandable. When I interviewed these students, I asked them to share *their* stories. My first question was always, "What do you want to tell me about your experience with this program?" I asked them to talk about themselves, and specifically to talk about what they had remembered and how they thought about their trip and experiences more than a year later. This study was not intended to evaluate any component of these study abroad programs, so *what* was learned was of less interest than *how learning*

occurred. Still, I admit that I was surprised about what they collectively tended to exclude about the context, and include about their narrow experiences. Throughout their stories they consistently positioned themselves as outsiders who were not connected to the region.

This is not to say that their stories were consistent. Not only did they all talk differently — each with her own élan — but they each talked about different scenarios and takeaways. It was challenging to find themes that were comparable across all of the narratives. When I realized that most of them did not say much about stark visual symbols of The Conflict, such as the separation wall, or the refugee camp they visited, I had my own version of a disorienting dilemma, so to speak. When their stories did not align with my prior expectations, I needed to shift my analytic frame of reference.

All of the interviewees talked about some of their experiences crossing checkpoints. Their stories did not focus on the impact that checkpoints have on people living in the region, nor did they discuss the discrete effects that checkpoints had on their peers and tour guides from their program group. Rather, the interviewees focused on memories of their own personal interactions at checkpoints with individual guards and soldiers, even when those interactions were minimal and had no material consequences on their ability to cross the checkpoints. These stories brought into sharp relief some differences between learning from observation and learning through personalized, active experience. Even if these checkpoint experiences ultimately contributed to the storytellers' overall understanding of The Conflict, their gaze upon the checkpoints excluded substantial observations of other people's experiences with systems of discrimination or oppression. Rather, these things were subjugated to the background of the interviewees' narratives, while they instead centered their own privileges in these systems that did not impose many personal consequences beyond minor inconvenience.

Another common theme across the participants' narratives was their surprise at their ability to relate to Israeli people and places. Whether they had expected the region to be subsumed by "conflict," or had expected that people to whom they were politically opposed would resemble contemptible cartoonish villains, the interviewees' expectations were thwarted when they encountered cities like Tel Aviv, and when they met with a right-wing settler. Because these were the situations that disrupted their prior assumptions, they were among the stories they told me.

In this concluding chapter, I summarize my findings in accordance with the major themes of my research questions of identity, experience, and peer relationships. I review how the students positioned themselves according to a context-dependent identity of "outsiders," and how this subsequently framed their interactions with their peers and their learning overall. I also summarize my findings suggesting a differentiation of experiential learning in relation to experiences that rely on passive observations, as opposed to those that involve interactive engagements. In addition, I present supplemental findings that indicate that these students used multiple pathways to reach outcomes of transformative learning. Considered all together, I propose an expanded understanding of experiential learning pathways and cycles that incorporate inputs and outputs that are often overlooked in experiential education, such as considerations of identity-informed gazes, social interactions, and emotional responses. Then I suggest a consideration of expectations in framing one's gaze and what they subsequently take for granted in specific contexts, as this has implications for learning processes. I identify implications for intercultural and experiential educators, and note the need to consider the ethics of short-term educational tourism in a conflict zone. Finally, I conclude the dissertation with considerations for future research and scholarship in the fields of education abroad and experiential education.

In Chapter 1, I noted that a lot of literature about study abroad flattens the depth of learning that a program could potentially inspire. In the following discussion, I will contrast some of these general trends with the opportunities for more enriched, robust, and complex analysis that emerged in this study.

Summary of Findings

As I discussed in Chapter 1, much literature in the field of short-term study abroad (STSA) has a tendency to tout the benefits of a program abroad by asserting nonspecific generalities about its beneficial impacts to students. In spite of the vast complexity of an intercultural program, the countless interactions and experiences therein, and the differential learning outcomes for its various participants, the simplistic nature of these claims has the effect of flattening the rich vibrance of these programs into generic claims that seem two-dimensional. I present the summary of my findings as counterexamples to the superficial perspectives that I shared in Chapter 1, which aligned with my three research questions.

Context-Dependent Identity Categories: Positioning Oneself as an "Outsider"

Superficial Principle #1: *Students learn about themselves and their own identities while in a new cultural context.*

Opportunity for depth: *Students understand themselves in relation to the setting and purpose of a given study abroad program. While considering how they position themselves according to their sense of connection (or lack thereof) to a particular place and topic, we can further explore variations in how students learn and make meaning from a study abroad program with respect to how they position themselves according to their sense of connection to the featured place(s) and topic(s).*

Sociocultural identity was a central theme of these programs, yet these students spoke of a different kind of identity category that emerged in relationship to their sense of connection to the program. Their connection to Palestine/Israel increased because of their participation in the program, due to their presence in the country, their relationships and encounters with people who lived there, and the information they learned while there. As a result of this deepened sense of connection, they all continued engaging with something related to Palestine/Israel after their program concluded; some even claimed to be "passionate" about these issues. Still, they recognized a distinction between their own sense of increasing Connectedness, and the kind of connectedness tied to ethnic and religious sociocultural identities that are impacted and implicated by issues related to Palestine/Israel. Because they did not identify as Arabs, Israelis, Jews, Muslims, or Palestinians, they maintained an outsider identity, which had a number of implications on how they perceived various elements of the program, how they interacted with their peers, and ultimately how they learned from their experiences.

While it is not uncommon for people to feel like cultural outsiders when they visit communities that are new to them, all of these interviewees understood the "outsider" concept differently. Instead, they identified as outsiders not to any culture within Palestine/Israel, but as outsiders to The Conflict, the issue that had been central to their program, and thus considered themselves to be outsiders to the region of Palestine/Israel. This notion was reinforced by people they encountered while traveling, as well as people back on their campus, where issues surrounding Palestine/Israel were commonly discussed in classes they took, among their circle of friends, and generally across campus.

This identity was meaningful to these students because it shaped the way that they took in information during their program. Positioned as outsiders, the interviewees spoke about their

experiences as if they had framed them using an outsider gaze. It was as if these students had been spectators upon a static object of interest, or a documentary film that was interesting and affecting, but was not interactively engaging. This gaze determined what was in their frame of vision: what they noticed, as well as what remained invisible. Subsequently, it influenced which experiences they prioritized and processed, some of which was evident from what they had remembered when recounting their stories during their interviews. Based on many of their stories, their gaze focused upon themselves and their own reactions and sensemaking. Because their stories often did not include their perceptions about how certain experiences impacted their peers or interlocutors in conversations, it seemed as if their gaze upon themselves may have precluded them from gazing upon — or along with — these other people.

Without their own sense of connection to the material they were learning about, they framed their perspective in terms of "learning about The Conflict," and so they focused on learning new facts, confirming assumptions about conflict, and their perceived objective of forming a personal conclusion about the political situation — that is, "taking a side" as either pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian. "Like" utterances notwithstanding, Diana quite clearly expressed why she strove for objectivity due to her positionality as an outsider:

Diana: I think, for this issue, like, specifically, I wanna stay, like, really fair, and like observant, like, listen to people, just because, like, it's not my — not that it's not my place, but it's not, like, it's not tied to, like, me as a human being. Like, my identity, or my ethnicity or anything like that. So definitely I don't want to put myself in a position where I'm assuming things about people. Without giving them, like, the benefit of the doubt of, like, you know, hearing their opinion, or anything like that. So, and I feel like, I guess it's like kind of

> a lot of issues in the world, like, I'm not personally, like, you know, genetically tied to or anything like that, so I wanna, you know, hear everybody out before I just, you know, make assumptions and state opinions that I can't really — or state, like, I guess, facts that I can't back up.

For all the students who took such a stance of purported objectivity, this sense of detachment reflected their outsiderness while also reinscribing it, as they intellectualized their observations and thus remained emotionally distant from considering how The Conflict — and their experiences while in the country — impacted local people they met as well as the more "Connected" people within their group. As outsiders, the interviewees strived to maintain a sense of objectivity when they talked about considering multiple perspectives in order to dispassionately rationalize their stance.

Furthermore, this gaze may have played a role in their relative lack of impetus to take action towards changing any part of the situations they had learned about. That is, even when they discussed activism that took place on their campus after their program, their stories (with one exception) did not include much of an impulse toward activism beyond raising awareness about what they had learned through conversations. Indeed, some of them were more likely to talk about themselves in terms of their personal interest in The Conflict, more than they were likely to talk about solidarity with people impacted by it.

When describing their relationship to The Conflict, they often invoked a subset of peers from their program group, especially those who were connected as "activists," or as people who were staunchly supportive of a particular Palestinian narrative and, according to many of the interviewees, intolerant of perspectives that differed from theirs. The interviewees tended to

position these Activist Peers as though they were morally distinct from themselves, especially in terms of their outspoken partisanship.

In addition, their outsider gaze positioned them in further tension with this subset of peers, and it precluded the interviewees from empathizing with the experiences of the peers themselves, as well as with other Palestinians they met during their program. Even more, the frame of their outsider gaze allowed these young women the space to consider complexity and nuance through considering a breadth of perspectives, so they often appreciated and occasionally empathized with Israeli people and places, which further seemed to create tension within their peer group.

The notable social, political, and sociocultural tensions within their peer groups also impacted what and how learning transpired for all the participants. These intergroup dynamics are often overlooked in study abroad scholarship.

Peer Influence on Learning and Overall Experience of the Program

Superficial Principle #2: *Peer relationships within the cohort group provide a supportive community for individuals to process their experiences together, so facilitators should develop a sense of community prior to traveling or at the beginning of a program.*

Opportunity for depth: *Complexities exist within intercultural communities of practice, and may arise due to the exigencies of peers traveling together under stressful circumstances. Different levels of connectedness to the program's focal topic and/or place can result in tensions and conflict that can ultimately distract — or even detract — from the overall program. Peer interactions may evoke emotions that could overshadow*

the content-based purpose of a program. Learning that emerges from within the peer group may be more significant than interactions with people from the host community.

The dynamics within the peer groups were consequential as to how the interviewees talked about their experiences during their travel, as well as about their overall impressions about their programs. The two students who had participated on Program A had enjoyed the trip and felt strongly connected to all of their peers, even two years after the program. In their stories, their group had collectively valued differing opinions within the group, and mutual learning apparently took place during the group debriefs. As a very isolated "island"-type program, in which the group was together in hotels and tour buses for the entirety of the three weeks, it seemed that their intergroup dynamics were mutually challenging and supportive, according to these two participants. The degree to which many of them were still regularly in contact through an active texting group, more than two years after the program, was remarkable.

The Program C cohort had remained congenial throughout their trip, but according to three of these four interviewees, a divide within the group had impacted the debriefing sessions. These outsiders reported that they had not felt comfortable sharing their honest reflections and questions during the full group meetings. Indeed, they were under the impression that their opinions were not welcomed by their Activist Peers, who spoke a lot during the debriefs. Furthermore, Diana said that she and another friend had bonded during the program out of a shared sense of commiseration that their voices were not respected within the full group (although it was unclear if this was related to the Activist Peers). From the depictions, it seemed as though insider/outsider identities played a role in the degree to which collective critical reflection took place during the debriefing sessions. The outsiders recalled their feelings of not only discomfort in sharing their own perspectives, but also disinterest in what the more

connected students shared, in part because of how much more they had talked during these sessions. It is likely that the connected students may have felt tension from these dynamics, as well. At any rate, the full-group reflections were not a supportive space for empathic co-learning with one another.

The group from Program B was not only divided, but divisive. One of the interviewees shared that a contingent of the Activists even turned against the facilitator and the tour guides. Two of the interviewees dedicated most of their interview talk to their emotional reactions with respect to the conflict within their peer group, rather than issues with respect to The Conflict in Palestine/Israel. All three of the interviewees from this program noted that at one point in the program, when they had free time during lunch, the group divided along racial lines: the students of color went together to one restaurant, and the White students went together to another restaurant. All three of these women recalled feeling discouraged by or intimidated from speaking up in their group, and shared a few specific examples of language that their Activist Peers had reportedly used to this effect. The dynamics within the group seemed to add to the stress of the overall experience of the program, rather than mitigate it through peer support. Many of their personal experiences in reaction to this stress had overshadowed their stories about what they had observed. Sylvia was conscious of this during her first interview with me:

> Sylvia: I know I keep talking about them so much, but I wish I— I wish I remembered more about the trip, that wasn't just tons and tons of problems [unintelligible] within my group.

Even though this excerpt is specific to Sylvia's frustrations with a peer group that had caused her distracting levels of distress, it underscores the importance of group dynamics as a component of any cohort-based program.

All three of these programs were led by facilitators who were well-versed in principles and practice of intergroup dialogue. In addition to focusing on principles of intergroup relations among Israelis and Palestinians, the facilitators also put these principles into practice within the group during the pre-trip orientation courses and the daily debriefing sessions. For example, when the interviewees from Program B mentioned the racially-divided lunch incident, they noted that the facilitators had convened the group soon thereafter in order to call attention to the division and collectively address it. Moreover, much of the learning they attributed to their participation in the program was in relation to overcoming these interpersonal challenges with their peers. Therefore, the facilitators did things well, according to recommendations for leading a high-quality study abroad program. However, these techniques did not necessarily curb the challenges that arose within the peer groups. Moreover, it is possible that the attention that debriefs paid to identities and identity-based divisions may have exacerbated the attention that the participants directed toward these tensions.

The recognition of context-based identities could be crucial for cohort-group study abroad programs, particularly those that focus on sensitive issues related to a particular context, such as multiple narratives about a geopolitical conflict that are premised on issues of identity. Regardless of the context, there may be some students who have very different embodied and affective reactions to being in a place in which they may have a connection through their ethnic heritage. While heritage tourism has been studied (Naddaf et al., 2020), researchers have not given much attention to tourism programs that include some people who have a heritage-based connection to a place, alongside those who do not. This is even less of a consideration in literature about study abroad; I did not come across this in any scholarship concerning STSA programs.

For groups composed of participants with different degrees of connectedness to a place, one consideration may be that each student may begin the program at a different starting place with respect to information about the topical issue(s) at hand. In addition, they will all experience the program with different gazes; an outsider gaze will likely be quite different from an insider's, who may attend differently to sites and sensations that relate to symbols of oppression or stories of resilience, depending on how their identities shape their sympathies. If they identify with a collectivity that has a narrative of cultural trauma (Alexander, 2004), this may be triggered by visiting certain places or hearing certain stories. Importantly, cultural trauma could also be exacerbated by participation in a group with peers who have very different gazes, experiences, discourses, and levels of information and awareness towards a site. As such, it is understandable that intergroup interactions could be unsupportive and annoying at best, perhaps burdening insiders with an expectation to be teachers rather than learners. At worst, peers' ignorance and lack of ability to empathize may incite painful emotional responses for insiders. As such, this is an important dimension of identity to consider.

Regardless of the composition of a group, intergroup dynamics among the cohort will demand group members' attention during the program. Because a person has limited capacity with which to take in information and emotion, the intergroup dynamics will modulate the amount of information each person can take in and process. In order to understand the impact on learning, program leaders would benefit from an awareness of how both cognitive load and "affective load" impact learning. This connection between the neuroscience of learning and experiential education could help to understand the multiple kinds of learning that take place while studying abroad.

The Nature of the Experiences During This Experiential Education Program

Superficial Principle #3: *Concrete experience, together with reflection and thinking, generates learning.*

Opportunity for depth: *Different kinds of firsthand experiences prompt students to engage and learn differently, in part due to a person's gaze, which is informed by their identity and sense of emotional connection with an experience.*

Experiential learning takes place in a variety of ways according to a variety of factors; one of those factors is the type of experience that prompts learning. Like so many STSA programs, the programs at the center of this research included lots of passive observation through guided tours and meetings with speakers. During these meetings, the students were encouraged to listen respectfully rather than engage in debate. As such, learning was expected to happen through these passive modes of receiving and perceiving information. Nevertheless, because this perception happened *in situ*, this learning could be considered to be experiential.

In this research, the participants' stories about border crossings provided clear examples of how similar experiences were perceived and interpreted differently. On one hand, some experiences consisted of selective observations about a setting that had a consequential impact on other people. On the other hand, some experiences involved varying degrees of interpersonal interactions that required decision-making that impacted the storyteller herself. This disambiguation between different types of experience — in this case, observations versus consequential interaction — points to different kinds of learning outcomes, and perhaps also to different learning cycles beyond Kolb's foundational model.

Interestingly, stories of these experiences did not appear to generate stories of empathy for others who experience checkpoints differently. For example, the participants focused their

stories on how they themselves experienced the checkpoints and border-crossings. Even when they were not the center of the action, they were the center of their story. They were more likely to share their own emotional responses or reflective thoughts about an incident instead of focusing on the experiences of their peers who had very different personal experiences. This tendency corresponds to the neurobiological principle of core memories, which become meaningful and memorable relative to the strength of the emotions that a person attached to past events, experiences, or relationships (Desautels, 2016). Moreover, the interviewees did not often extrapolate in their stories to share reflections or insights about the experiences of local Palestinians or Israelis at checkpoints, except occasionally to note their own more privileged access in comparison to the locals' restrictions.

The interviewees' stories further revealed inconsistencies about the relationship between disruptive experiences and potentially transformative learning or sensemaking. Many of the stories about borders centered on an element of disruption to a preconceived notion or belief. For example, the students had not expected a White person to be inspected by soldiers at a checkpoint in the West Bank, so three of them told a story about "the time when a White person had their passport inspected." However, the stories about this incident did not offer any evidence that the storytellers had learned something new about checkpoints from this unexpected turn of events. Instead, with help from framing provided by their facilitator, it reconfirmed their prior suspicions about practices of discriminatory profiling at such checkpoints.

Stories about these incidents also revealed what the students had expected in their prior frames of reference, based on how they talked. That is, experiences that they had considered to be disruptive were *not* that their tour bus was stopped and searched by armed guards at checkpoints, nor that their Muslim and Arab peers were frequently targeted by discriminatory

practices of inspection and interrogation during their trip. Rather, it seemed as though these students had expected such practices to be present in the context of Palestine/Israel, such that seeing them from a firsthand perspective did not faze them enough to tell stories about them. Since these interrogations aligned with their expectations of The Conflict, they were not disruptions but rather confirmations of information they had already learned. Similarly, throughout all the interviews, there were very few mentions of the concrete wall that serves as a separation barrier through neighborhoods these programs visited in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, nor that refugee camps existed in the West Bank for families displaced decades ago from their land that may have been a few kilometers away. My overall impression was that the students had observed these elements of The Conflict as if they were a given: this is just how things are because of The Conflict. While students sometimes noted that these aspects were unfortunate, they rarely mentioned resulting emotional reactions associated with witnessing symbols and acts of injustice, such as sadness, disappointment, or outrage.

Besides learning how to play a sort of game, the interviewees' stories about checkpoints did not indicate whether or what they may have learned about Palestine/Israel from crossing checkpoints, either from the experience of watching their peers undergo inspection, or from their own experiences of being interrogated at borders. In my experience as a facilitator as well as an individual who has accessed many checkpoints, these kinds of moments offer incredibly rich possibilities for experiential learning. However, none of these interviewees' stories revealed evidence of the prized "a-ha" learning moments that we educators are often seeking for our students.

On the other hand, crossing checkpoints and borders taught these students lessons about themselves, especially with respect to how their own privileges operated. Whereas many of them

did not remark upon memories of others' experiences at checkpoints, they all noted that their U.S. passports granted them privileges of mobility and access, especially in comparison to Palestinians. Allison made this point directly:

> Allison: I think we really, like, got it easy with checkpoints, because we're not Palestinian … So I think it's not even, like, fair, my perspe— like, what I experienced of checkpoints? Because, like, I just got it so easy. I didn't have to do anything. And I never felt — like I felt uncomfortable, but, I was always, like, I'm like, you know, this White girl who like, like, no soldiers are gonna be, like, picking on me at a checkpoint or anything like that. So that was always, like, definitely a privilege on my part. To not have to worry about it.

She suggested that her groups' collective experiences at checkpoints had been "easy" because they were not Palestinians (from the West Bank, specifically). Then she dismissed her own personal experience of checkpoints because she "got it so easy" and she "didn't have to do anything," which she attributed to her identity, particularly as a White person. When she claimed that her racial identity protected her from getting picked on by soldiers, she implied that other people do get "picked on" at checkpoints. But like most of the other interviewees, rather than focus her awareness and stories on the people within her group who got picked on, instead she focused on her own experience of being privileged. Indeed, nearly all of the interviewees remarked upon their own personal privilege at checkpoints.

Based on stories of the students who had been questioned during their final border-crossing experiences, the participants apparently learned that they should try to deny what they had learned about Palestine. According to the way they described the guidelines they had been

given prior to traveling, they were all informed of tips and techniques to minimize questioning when entering and exiting the country, including revelations of only select and limited information. In other circumstances, this may seem ironic, to train students how to minimize the information they learned from their travels and experiences. However, in this setting, these practices seemed to reiterate to the students that this was yet another fixed element of The Conflict, and that they could rely on their privileges to avoid being "picked on" too severely so that they could cross borders relatively easily.

Nevertheless, these border-crossing stories were meaningful to these participants, as indicated by their choice to include them in their interviews. While none of them shared direct connections between their stories and their resultant learning beyond consideration of their own privileges, it is possible that these checkpoint stories contributed self-assessment about how they comport themselves in novel, confrontational situations. Perhaps their encounters with checkpoints contributed to their newfound awareness that legitimized their stance about the politics of The Conflict. Perhaps these incidents will be stored in their memories such that they will be used as points of reference at a later date in the future, where the meaning will be more clear as they formulate new insights about their values and beliefs. For example, perhaps elements of the coronavirus crisis have inspired them to think differently about borders, in light of their experiences in Palestine/Israel. This is all to say that narratives and small stories may not be the best way to assess learning outcomes from complex and multilayered experiences. Further, perhaps transformational learning does not always result from discrete events that can be pinpointed with precision. Instead, for these students, it seemed as though perspective-changing learning impacts were cumulative, through a composite of observations and experiences throughout their trip.

What They Learned from Their Experiences

The Paradox of Connection to Palestinians: Concealing New Learning

The checkpoints raised a conundrum for these students, because the systems in place disincentivized them from showcasing the content that they had learned during their program. Rather, their encounters with border security taught them a different lesson altogether, about how certain information can be considered to be threatening, as can connection to people who are stereotyped as threats. Especially for the White-passing women, authorities had not previously treated them with suspicion, as though an aspect of their identity posed a problem. So for the first time, the border crossing presented several of these students with an experience that prompted them to obscure something about themselves in order to avoid scrutiny and its potential consequences.

The border checkpoints also presented them with a consequence for having become more connected to Palestinians and their issues. Whereas their identity as Not-Connected outsiders benefited them when they entered the country, their increased sense of Connectedness to The Conflict ended up being a detriment in the case of border interrogation. While they recognized that their non-Arab ethnicities and U.S. citizenship protected them from more serious interrogation, several of them told stories about the small consequences they faced once they revealed a connection to Palestinians.

The students learned, implicitly, that there is a price to pay for connectedness with Palestinians and for "taking their side." In an attempt to conceal their incriminating associations with Palestinians, these students learned to perform so that certain aspects of their privileged identities were accentuated. After three weeks of checkpoint-crossing that underscored the privileges they were granted because of their citizenship and ethnicity, this final checkpoint-

crossing gave several of them the opportunity to choose how to enact and engage those privileges.

After returning home, many of the interviewees continued to recognize how their experience and knowledge from the program — specifically concerning Palestinian rights — had consequences with respect to their interactions with others. This seemed to be most consequential for Paige, who received death threats after having been quoted in the student newspaper in support of Palestinian rights. She also told me that her program group had faced significant obstacles from several university departments when they collectively coordinated a post-program event with their dual-narrative tour guides, such that many departments would not advertise such an event, and even that their individual financial aid packages were threatened due to questions about their fundraising efforts. But by and large, the other participants noted that they had learned about the sensitivity required when speaking about Palestine/Israel when they spoke about their trip to various people in the U.S. For example, Bridget was conscious of the language she used when she spoke about her trip to her family's Jewish neighbors, Elizabeth was conscious of how she framed her study abroad stories for her politically conservative family members, and Paige remained hypersensitive to people's reactions when she said the word "Palestine" on campus. Among their considerations was an evaluation of whether their interlocutors were insiders or outsiders to Palestine/Israel and The Conflict, as well as whether they might sympathize with Israelis or Palestinians. Several of the interviewees mentioned that they had learned important considerations with respect to tailoring a message or a simple conversation according to their audience.

A few of the students navigated these conversational tensions by relying on a human rights discourse, in which they focused on human rights abuses against Palestinian people, rather

than on identity-based narratives about Palestinians, Arabs, Jews, or Israelis. They believed that "human rights" are something that many people can agree upon, and that human rights are often understood as being inherently good, laudable, and noncontroversial. For example, Elizabeth frequently talked about her inclination to frame The Conflict in terms of human rights, and in her third interview with me she summarized her conversation strategy in this way:

> Elizabeth: And like, we even talked about this on the trip. Like, like it's not a dichotomy. It's a human rights issue. So usually when I'm talking to people, I say that. 'Cause I try not to provoke anyone.

Elizabeth referred to group conversations during the program, and suggested that the alternative to considering The Conflict to be a dichotomous issue between Israelis and Palestinians, was to frame it as "a human rights issue." Furthermore, she considered this approach to be non-provocative. In fact, she provided evidence of successful conversations with her conservative mother and other family members who had been willing to listen to her stories, and who reportedly agreed that the human rights violations she described to them were bad.

In the context of this study, it is likely that these students navigated their interviews with me in light of what they had learned about the precarity inherent in talking about Palestine/Israel. Although none of them asked me any direct questions about my positionality, background, or stance, their assumptions about my identity and politics certainly informed the way they positioned themselves while talking to me. This could account for their tendencies to avoid language about "the occupation" or injustice, and perhaps even their reticence to assign responsibility and agency for actions of aggression.

The Privilege and Responsibility of Awareness

These students' positioning as outsiders had an impact on their post-program engagement with the issues they had learned about. Because they had understood that they were not connected to The Conflict, a few of them had noted that they did not want to develop — or be seen as having — a "white savior complex," a phrase that is commonly used to describe the impulse of (usually White) outsiders who assume that they have resources to make significant changes to communities in short time frames. Allison acknowledged that her program had been designed to mitigate the savior complex that she nevertheless implicitly admitted to having: for example, she was resentful that she had been dissuaded from debating with local speakers because she had wanted to try to change their minds. On the other hand, Sylvia had been ambivalent about meddling in other people's business because she did not want to be criticized as a "white savior," and so she shied away from engaging in the issue at all upon her return to campus.

The trope of "white saviors" who swoop in to help victims who cannot help themselves is not new in activism or media representation, but since Teju Cole (2012) introduced his commentary about the language of the "white savior industrial complex," it has become prevalent in discourse around efforts to "help," especially internationally. It was apparently a topic of conversation during at least one of these study abroad programs. So it was not surprising that many of these students referred to the concept in their interviews.

Similarly, the discourse of privilege has been connected to notions of responsibility, such that people who hold power or privilege have a responsibility to help those who are underprivileged. Therefore, I had been expecting these students to make claims about their responsibility to help those "less fortunate" because of an increased awareness of their privileges

due to studying abroad. This attitude is, in fact, considered to be an indicator of increased "global competence" by some scholars (Dockrill et al., 2016). However, most of these interviewees did not share this sentiment with me. Only Sylvia suggested that her privilege made her feel a "deep feeling of obligation" to do something; in her case, she interpreted that her responsibility was to contribute to public policy and religious literacy education in the U.S. as a future career. As for the other students, when they acknowledged their new understandings about their privileges, they did not suggest that this instilled them with a sense of responsibility to be involved in The Conflict. In several cases, the participants noted that their responsibility was to continue raising their awareness about issues of conflict and inequality, in Palestine/Israel and globally. Diana grappled with this in terms her nascent recognition of of her privilege and power as a U.S. citizen, suggesting that it should be a responsibility of U.S. citizens to know "what's going on, the way that our government is intervening" in other parts of the world, and also to "be aware that we have privileges" that other people in the world do not have.

Surprisingly, some of them had a different analysis of privilege: rather than instigating them to take action, it instead offered an option to disengage and ignore issues of suffering and injustice. In this sense, privilege served as a buffer that granted a person the option to live comfortably without the responsibility of knowing about other people's suffering.

Elizabeth alluded to this in terms of ignorance, in that "ignorance is bliss" when it allows a person to ignore suffering and hardship. Nevertheless, even with this analysis, she discussed the way that her privilege gave her the option to eventually forget about what he had learned about the Israeli occupation.

Elizabeth: We had a fuuuull trip. Three weeks doesn't sound like a lot, but [pause] I like your analogy, drinking from a fire hose. 'Cause that's what it was! And, like, I

> remember, like, some nights, I just wanted to, like, go to bed and cry! Like, 'cause I was just overwhelmed, I'm like, this is god-awful! What can I do? And like, that's, you know, like I said before, that was something, like, we continually asked ourselves, like, what can I, as some White-ass American even do? And I think eventually I just, like, stopped thinking about it. And then I got less upset about it. Maybe that's *why* I get so emotional in these interviews, 'cause, like, I — that question comes up in my mind, and I ask myself again, like, what can you do? And I realize I've never actually found the answer to it yet. I don't think there is one succinct answer, but I think it's important for me to keep that question in the back of my mind, that that's how I'm gonna answer it, maybe.

When she felt overwhelmed by emotions related to her new awareness, she may have inadvertently exerted her privilege by *not* taking any action, and ultimately stopped thinking about the difficult issues altogether. She had been eager to interview with me and talk to me about the program, so she evidently did not actively choose to repress her memories. Also, she credited the interviews as an opportunity to revisit whether and how she might want to "do something" in response to what she had learned and witnessed. This excerpt reveals that upon this reconsideration, she continued to struggle with what that responsibility might entail.

Moreover, she indicated that her identity was relevant to her consideration of her responsibility. In the middle of this excerpt she referred to her outsider status as "some White-ass American," which seemed to complicate her ability to take action. While she claimed this identity for herself, she also indicated that issues had been a point of discussion among her groupmates during the program — they collectively considered outsider identities (such as being

White U.S.-Americans) to be complicating factors for involvement. This recognition of outsiderness seemed to confound any "white savior" impulse to help by making simplistic assessments or interventions.

Molly and Paige both discussed how their privileges afforded them a further privilege: the option to disengage from difficult issues. Molly contrasted herself with some of her peers from her program who had surprised her when they admitted to her that they did not really think about the program months later:

> Molly: It's just like, so strange. It's almost like I could probably have forgotten it if I, like, really wanted to. 'Cause it just doesn't — well I make it come up now, but [laugh], basically with what I do, and what I'm interested in, and care about. But like, if I was just doin' it [as], like, purely educational, and just wanted to do it for a one-time thing, then [pause] yeah, I probably could just go on with my life, and, [be] like, "Oh yeah, I did that!"

She contrasted her interest-driven, intentional efforts to stay engaged with The Conflict with the notion that she could just choose to forget about it. She suggested that some people participated in the program as a "purely educational" opportunity — implying dispassionate learning — and then opted to continue on with their lives as they had before, seemingly unaffected by what they had learned. She marveled at the fact that she had the privilege of forgetting about The Conflict.

Paige had been more direct when she deemed her ability to choose to remain comfortably uninformed and disengaged as a privilege.

> JM: So, can you explain how you see yourself privileged in — vis-à-vis this conflict?

Paige: Yeah, yeah. Well one: my American passport. Like, I can travel through Israel and the West Bank freely, pretty freely. I also can travel to basically anywhere else in the world. I'm free to do that. I'm free to go sit on the beach in Tel Aviv if I want. If I wanted to, I really didn't have to see any of the apartheid. I didn't have to see any Palestinians, any Druze, any refugees. If I wanted to, I didn't — I don't have to do that. I can be as ignorant and as removed as I want. And I can go my whole life without any of this touching me, or without any of this knowledge ever having any importance. And I can be happy. And I can be free. And I don't have to spend time thinking about it, talking about it, arguing about it. Because it doesn't affect me.

By repeating "if I wanted to," she underscored the power of choice in her actions, and made it clear that she chose to dismiss the temptation to comfortably enjoy a beach in Tel Aviv and ignore "the apartheid." She also made clear the relationship between her outsider status and this privilege of choice when she said that she could choose to be "happy and free" by ignoring the occupation "because it doesn't affect me." While this awareness had been informed by many aspects of her life until this point, it was clear that her experience during her program of being exposed to multiple perspectives had made an impact on how she understood the privilege of disengagement.

These two women further revealed their sophisticated consideration of these issues when they each described how they leveraged their privileges of their outsider status when talking about Palestine/Israel to other people. Molly said that she was positioned to raise issues of injustice in the U.S. and abroad as conversational points and counterpoints with "other privileged White people." She also acknowledged that she had the ability to choose when to step up or step

back, because of her outsider positionality. Paige understood her outsider positionality to be received as more persuasive to other outsiders to The Conflict. The following explanation demonstrated that she had cultivated a detailed analysis about her outsider voice.

> Paige: I may have mentioned this before, but I do my best to speak on it as much as I can, because I have no perceived personal ties. I'm not Arab, I'm not Muslim, I'm not Palestinian. So, for whatever reason, people think that because I have no immediate personal ties, that I am with less bias. And looking at it from the outside perspective, like, maybe I do have something more to offer to people — or they think I have something more to offer them, because I was able to go in with no knowledge, and come back with these ideas and these experiences. And I mean, just in activism in general, nobody wants to take the people who are directly affected seriously for whatever reason. But I understand how the dynamic works, where if you're more removed, or if you're part of the privileged group, for example, you do have a larger voice to people who are outside of that conflict.

When sharing these insights with me, Paige did not make claims about why outsiders may be perceived as having less bias, although she did suggest that her outsider story of ignorance-to-awareness was, indeed, compelling. Regardless, she revealed intentionality and thoughtfulness around "how the dynamic works" via her deployment of her outsider identity in her efforts to raise awareness through conversations.

Rewards of Whiteness

As several of the excerpts above demonstrate, the White interviewees were conscious about their racial identity and occasionally referred to themselves as White. While it was not a

topic they dwelled upon, they did not deny or ignore this aspect of their identity, nor that it gave them privileges in the U.S. and abroad. I have contemplated many aspects of how their White identity may have shaped their gaze during the trip, but this study did not offer data that enabled me to offer analysis beyond conjecture.

I have also considered whether all eight of the interviewees made comments that may have implied a relationship to White supremacy or Orientalism, but none of them made comments along these lines. To some extent, their analysis of the roots of The Conflict was so limited in their interviews that they did not give themselves an opportunity to discuss cultural supremacy as a sort of justification for imperial or colonial dominance. Similarly, most of their analysis of Palestine/Israel did not touch on the discourse of settler colonialism, much less how considerations of how White supremacy is manifested in Israeli society. While limited analysis about their own complicity and connectedness to power may be a function of Whiteness — both for the participants who were White, as well as for the multiracial participants — in this case it may also be related to other aspects of how they perceived their program. Again, I am not equipped to draw conclusions along these lines from the data I collected.

These interviewees did not speak about their program as if it were an opportunity for them to learn about or immerse themselves in another culture, as may be the case for other study abroad programs. Without this framing, they rarely mentioned "Palestinian culture" or "Israeli culture" at all, so they avoided this avenue of making essentializing generalizations. The primary exception to this was Linda's favorable comparison between her Central American cultural norms to features of the family-oriented, days-long wedding that she had attended with her Palestinian host family. To the extent that other interviewees remarked on cultural norms, their

commentary pertained to observations about gender dynamics in Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim cultures, as well as Orthodox Jewish practices.

Irrespective of the interviewees' lack of overt analysis, being perceived as White was rewarded throughout their trip, often in conjunction with their U.S. citizenship. This was most notable for them at checkpoints and border crossings, where it was clear that White people were afforded much easier passage without scrutiny. As Elizabeth noted in the following response, her White complexion gave her a sense of security.

JM: Were you worried [about your trip to Israel/Palestine]?

Elizabeth: Kind of? Like I said, I felt very protected by the school, very protected with my American passport. Which is just a golden ticket in that country, I believe. Um, and crossing checkpoints, and. And just my ... White complexion made me, like, not feel worried.

Students like Elizabeth recognized that their U.S. passports not only provided them access to many places, but also offered them a sense of protection. Furthermore, they learned that their citizenship was not sufficient to protect them from interrogation at checkpoints. Comparing their experiences to those of their U.S.-American peers who did not pass as White, they learned to appreciate the additional protection from discrimination that was afforded to them by their ability to pass as White.

In the instances when the White students were questioned at checkpoints, they may not have been aware that they were being scrutinized for their connectedness to Palestinians. Nevertheless, Molly and Elizabeth had been aware that acting dumb was a performance of Whiteness that they could employ in an attempt to appear innocent. This hearkens James Baldwin's (Baldwin & Peck, 2017; Jones, 1966; Mirin, 2006) criticism of White people's

purported innocence through willful ignorance about unjust situations that are not only in their proximity, but from which they benefit. At checkpoints in Palestine/Israel, White people — especially those with U.S. passports — are often given the privilege of the benefit of the doubt in terms of their presumed non-connectedness with Palestinians. This presumption then relieves them of suspicion as a security threat, and allows them to pass through checkpoints with relative ease.

Several of the interviewees also implicitly relied on their outsider identities to relinquish a sense of responsibility to stay engaged with the issues. In so doing, they denied a sense of meaningful connection to the people they met and issues they learned about. In addition, they denied their access to power due to their White identity and their U.S. citizenship. Rather than acknowledge the power that is associated with privilege, many of them simply marveled at the privilege itself.

Based solely on these interviewees' accounts, it is difficult to discern how the program's content or leaders may have shaped their gaze with respect to power and privilege. What is clear, however, is that these students encountered an enormous amount of information and sensory stimuli during their short three-week sojourns in Palestine/Israel. In this respect, considering all the ways that their cognitive and affective load may have been taxed during the program, these students contended with a lot of information to process, and so they may not have had the capacity to deeply consider their privileged relationships to power.

Indications of Program Impact on These Participants

In addition to asserting that the programs had changed them, the interviewees provided evidence in their narratives that they had altered their thinking and behaviors after returning back to their home campus and communities. Several of them shared stories about how their social

circles changed after the program, and how they sought out friends who were interested in thinking, talking, and learning about global issues. For instance, two women ended up breaking up with their boyfriends due to political differences about Israel/Palestine. Linda explicitly stated that her friends from her first year of college were more interested in partying and superficial reports about the touristic aspects of her study abroad program; but because she had become more interested in exploration of issues pertaining to multiculturalism, equity, and justice, she pursued related residential learning communities and job opportunities on campus.

The interviewees also offered evidence that their experiences with this program impacted their academic interests. Three of them committed to majors in international studies after the program. Diana began a minor in Latin American Studies, which extended her newfound critiques of U.S. policy interventions that she had first been introduced to in the context of Palestine/Israel. Four of them studied Arabic, and Molly and Linda participated in a subsequent Arabic-language immersion program in Jordan the summer after their trip to Palestine/Israel. Allison had studied Hebrew prior to her programs, and continued learning Hebrew and Arabic after her trips. When I talked to Bridget at the beginning of her senior year, she was planning to focus her Honor's thesis on the relationship between Palestinian resistance to oppression and environmental innovation. Sylvia was preparing to go to graduate school in theology with an eye on religious intercultural education.

A few of the interviewees noted that they had become more critical consumers of media, recognizing that every source had different bias and perspective. Elizabeth had been most vocal about her new consciousness that inspired her to seek multiple sources for any given story, whether both Fox News and CNN for U.S. news, or various international sources for stories with global relevance.

Several of them were active in groups, clubs, and classes related to The Conflict, although most of them shied away from labeling themselves as "activists." To varying degrees, they supported symbolic activism that took place on their campus; several of them mentioned ways that they deliberated about whether or to what extent they associated themselves with a protest against the Israeli occupation that was staged annually in the center of their campus. Molly became involved as an intern, and later a paid employee, with a research project that recorded data about ongoing acts of violence against Palestinians; she later accepted an internship with an international Palestinian advocacy organization. Paige had been very actively engaged in campus activism around Palestinian liberation, and had even been targeted with death threats for her public vocal support of pro-Palestinian activism. She had become sensitive to people's reactions to the word "Palestine" and had renegotiated the roles she wanted to take in activism and advocacy. By and large, almost all of the interviewees shared about their intent to converse with their friends, family, and classmates about what they had learned and witnessed about Palestine/Israel, with the understanding that this was an important action for them to take as outsiders.

Many of the students remarked on their progression in emotional maturity since having participated in the program. Whereas Paige and Molly had considered how to channel their anger about the injustices they had witnessed, Sylvia and Allison discussed newfound self-awareness and growth with respect to their emotional intelligence. These sentiments offered me important reminders of their developmental stage as young adults who were not only highly engaged undergraduates (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), but were also thoughtfully reflective about their personal growth subsequent to their involvement in curricular and extracurricular activities.

Finally, many of the interviewees spoke of a desire to "help" others in their lives, whether through their careers or through extracurricular involvement and support with nonprofit organizations. It was difficult for me to discern if they had this "helping" orientation prior to their program, but it was clear that their participation in the Palestine/Israel program had invoked their intention to contribute to social justice and social responsibility. Notably, most of them did not specify Palestine/Israel as being a target of their desire to help; indeed, many of them noted that they were averse to being "white saviors" with respect to that conflict and to other regions of the world. Several of them even maintained the implication that global issues did not personally impact them because they were not personally adversely impacted. Furthermore, none of them spoke of a responsibility to help others because of their own societal privileges. Because of this, their references to helping did not align with some of my assumptions about students' perspectives on global engagement and activism.

Discussion

This research calls attention to how students told stories about their experiences in a study abroad program to a person who was unrelated to their program and its evaluation. Most scholarship in this field includes analysis of written assignments, journals, and responses to qualitative questionnaires, in which respondents can take time to craft their writing for a particular audience, e.g., their instructors or administrators who may expect the students to discuss their transformational learning outcomes. In my research, the interviewees talked to me informally and without much preparation — many of them had confessed that they hadn't reviewed their notes, photos, or itinerary prior to their first interview with me. Although some of their stories seemed well-rehearsed, as they had previously shared them with friends and classmates, the nature of our in-person interviews required that they crafted their stories on the

spot, performing certain identities and positioning themselves "on the go," as Holliday (2016) suggests, through narrative interaction (Depperman, 2013b). This was revealed through pauses, sighs, false starts, and occasional retractions while they talked and pieced together their memories and the meaning they produced.

The topic of learning was not central to the interviews, and so their narratives may not always have captured the extent of their learning. Indeed, it is possible that some of their enduring learning and transformation were not directly related to their particular recollections that had been most memorable, or that may have been fun stories to share. Also, perhaps it is difficult for these students — or anyone — to pinpoint how and why they had changed as a result of a study abroad program. Transformative learning generally may be difficult to articulate, especially after some time has passed and specific memories may be increasingly hazy. Without prompts to craft or contrive specific instances when "learning happened," stories may focus on other incidents that were surprising, unexpected, or disruptive, but not necessarily the stories they related to learning, per se.

That said, it is reasonable to conclude that the students' overall experience of participating in this program in Palestine/Israel changed something about their perspective or worldview, or set into motion some changes that continued to create new possibilities. But after some time had passed, they did not couple their learning to specific moments when things changed for them. Moreover, many of them spoke as though much had transpired and changed in their lives in the year or more since participating in these programs; these young women filled their time as undergraduates with many activities and experiences that left impacts on their thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. This program was one among many programs that collectively challenged and changed them.

Abbreviated Analysis

Most of the students frequently limited their analysis about The Conflict in their interviews. The extent to which they understood the larger contextual systems at play in their stories was not clear when they concluded their small stories with pronouncements that "It was crazy" or "It was ridiculous!" Did they not remember the broader contextual connections, or were they reluctant to talk about them? Were they just being emphatic, and was this language reflective of their colloquial way of talking? Or did they assume that I already understood the context, and thus would empathize with their sighing exasperation about the realities on the ground? Was this an attempt to not take a side? At any rate, this tendency contributed to my impression that they may not have retained sufficient information about the larger geopolitical context that informed the narratives that they had encountered.

This impression was sustained by the ways that the students spoke about The Conflict, as if it were a fixed point of interest. Gaining awareness about specific conditions of The Conflict was positioned as though such awareness was an end in itself. Although many of the interviewees retained details about the occupation, they did not often explicitly refer to the historical or political context behind the situations they encountered. For example, the students did not discuss the purported rationale behind the presence of checkpoints throughout the West Bank. When they told stories about water shortages in the West Bank, many of them did not attribute these shortages to the military occupation. Many of the students who stayed in the West Bank did not identify reasons why their hosts were not able to travel as freely as they were to Jerusalem, Haifa, and the Dead Sea. Nevertheless, several of the interviewees talked to me about how much they cared about this region and the overarching issues, and some of them expressed

frustration with how little other U.S.-Americans cared about the human rights abuses that Palestinians endured.

Framing the context as static and unchangeable may have contributed to their limited analyses. It also may have precluded the notion that there is any cause for action besides "raising awareness." Indeed, for many of these women, upon returning home, they spoke of the importance of raising awareness through conversations about what they had seen, heard, and experienced "on the ground" in Palestine/Israel with friends, family, and classmates. This reflected their position as outsiders, as they believed that awareness-raising was an appropriate action for outsiders to take, in part because it was not an intervention that could be interpreted as unwanted "meddling" or as evidence of a white savior complex.

Many of these findings have prompted me to consider several of my own previously-taken-for-granted assumptions about experiential education, particularly in a multicultural context so rife with opportunities for a person to confront previous beliefs. Indeed, this study has provided me with a lens to expand my understanding of salient aspects of identity; the priming of pre-program preparation; the relational impacts of peers on intercultural and interpersonal learning; and the nature of what we consider to be a "learning experience." Moreover, in the back of my mind for much of this research, I have been considering the ethics and responsibilities of studying abroad in a conflict zone. I will now discuss several of these considerations.

Observation as a Form of Experience

As discussed above, this research brought to light some distinct differences between what some may refer to as "concrete experiences" which are interactive and actionable (Morris, 2019), and experiences that consist of firsthand observations of a setting or situation. Whereas long-

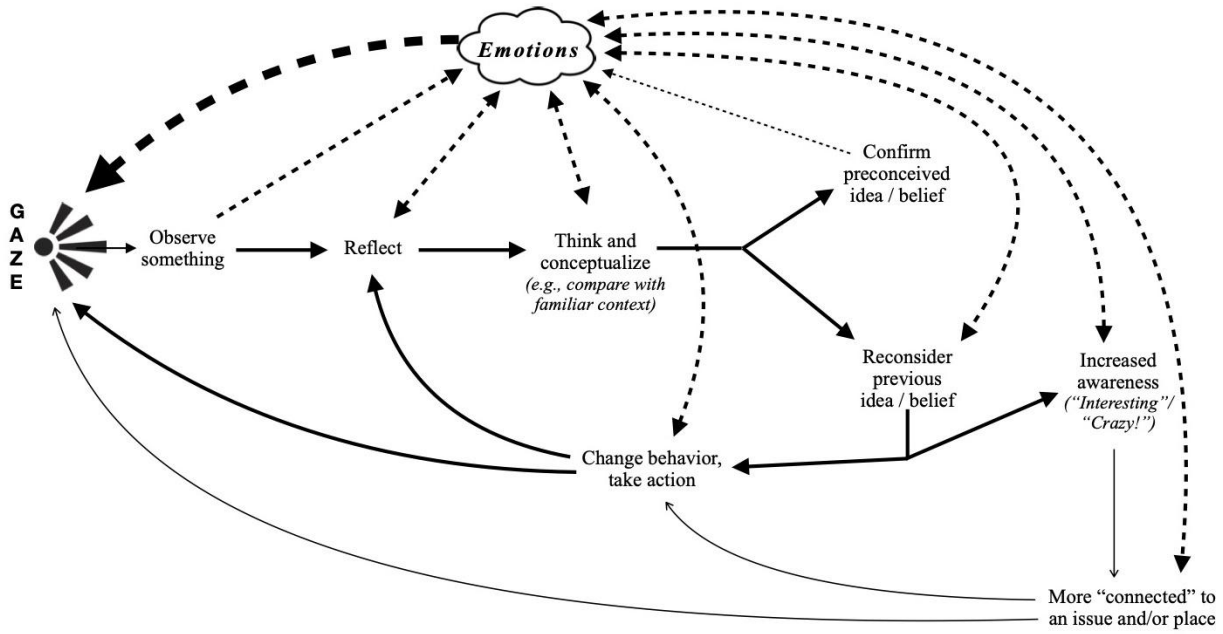
term study abroad programs inherently comprised a variety of concrete experiences through which students needed to face consequences of their own decisions, STSA programs generally present students with fewer opportunities for taking action and testing new behaviors. Rather, they involve many guided tours and local speakers, and thus present information passively.

The more closely connected a person is to a situation, an observation of that situation may be perceived as an experience that feels "concrete" and consequential. Bearing witness to sites or symbols of achievement, resilience, oppression, or injustice can feel personally resonant due to personal connection or deep empathy with people who are affected or implicated. As such, a person's gaze is shaped by their sense of connection to a place and its people, as well as their associated emotions. The gaze then informs the degree to which an observation may be experienced as a "concrete experience" that generates experiential learning, as opposed to a more simplistic and emotionally distanced way of taking in new information.

In the spirit of drafting alternative learning cycles, as Vince (1998) had done in his critique of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, Figure 6.1 depicts my draft of a theoretical model that may be more illustrative of the various routes that could lead to different kinds of learning outcomes based on an initial observation about something, along with potential impacts of emotions throughout the process. These routes are not necessarily cyclical, nor are they time-bound such that learning may inspire immediate changes in thinking and behavior, or perhaps these changes will become apparent at a much later time.

Figure 6.1

Potential Paths for Experiential Learning through Observation



Among other differences, the intent behind observation is often different than the intent behind personal actions or interactions. Interactive experience has a likelihood of generating decision-making and actions that can be reflected upon through a cycle like the one proposed by Kolb. On the other hand, the experience of witnessing may initiate progression through different learning pathways and generate a variety of results. For example, observation may be useful in terms of learning new information, or perhaps to support, deny, or refine claims that are made by people through texts and testimonies. Clearly, observation is informed by gaze, and what a person witnesses may be filtered by their own cultural lens, so to speak, as well as by the guidance and direction provided by program leaders, tour guides, and other trusted actors. Learning from observations could provoke further action immediately or at some time in the future, or it could simply be filed away as new or confirmed factual information.

Observations may stimulate intellectual learning, or they may evoke emotional responses. In any case, emotions could facilitate or impede an intended learning outcome (Houge Mackenzie et al., 2014; Larsen, 2017; Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015; Sewell, 2020), or an emotion could alternatively serve as another kind of "concrete experience" that prompts learning, especially intrapersonal learning about oneself. A feeling of anxiety, for example, could prompt a person to reflect, think, and invoke new behavior in a cycle like that proposed by Kolb. A person's affective response to an experience may correlate to the degree to which they feel connected to a topic, place, people-group, issue, or cause. Emotions not only impact a person's capacity to take in information, but also have effects on one's interpersonal interactions with others.

The Effect of Expectations on Gaze and Disruption

The interviewees' expectations about their program was another element that shaped their gaze. They had understood that they traveled to Palestine/Israel to learn multiple perspectives about The Conflict, and so directed their gaze accordingly, with an intellectual focus toward certain narratives, sites, and objects, perhaps at the expense of other elements. For example, their interest in hearing the settler's perspective may have precluded them from understanding how that experience may have felt for their Connected peers.

Their expectations about what The Conflict entailed had shaped several of their stories about their initial impressions of various cities in the region. For instance, they had been primed to understand that the defining feature of Palestine/Israel was The Conflict. Therefore, many of the students were surprised to observe behaviors and everyday activities that had nothing to do with conflict, and those that they often considered as familiar enough to classify as "normal." This was especially prevalent in stories about Tel Aviv. Furthermore, many were surprised that

local Palestinian hosts were not fully consumed with The Conflict in their quotidian activities and conversations, even as the restrictions of the occupation impacted many aspects of the daily lives of the families in the West Bank.

Interestingly, even though they had expected to see signs of The Conflict everywhere, they often neglected to include descriptions about the symbols and signs they did encounter. In this way, their preconceptions about The Conflict seemed to have an attenuating effect on their experiences with components of the military occupation. For instance, perhaps because they had been prepared to cross checkpoints, the act of crossing them seemed relatively unremarkable, and so this was why they did not tell stories about the many times that their tour bus had easily crossed them. Only one interviewee noted the presence of soldiers' guns in one of her comments about Israeli checkpoints, but the others did not mention the presence of weapons in these scenarios, perhaps because they had been prepared to see them at such close range in this context. Similarly, perhaps because they were expecting to see the Separation Wall, they may not have been shocked to see it, and so did not mention this in their stories. And perhaps because they had been primed to see effects of segregation at checkpoints as well as within cities like Hebron, Jerusalem, and Haifa, their stories about these places did not often include commentary about what it had been like to see segregation that ranged from subtle to stark. These notable signs and symbols are prevalent in so many descriptions about Palestine/Israel that their absence from these stories was remarkable.

When considering conditions for transformative learning or sensemaking, a person's expectations are commonly overlooked in terms of setting the stage for "dissonant" or "disruptive" experiences. After all, a person's frame of reference is relative to a particular context, and not simply reliant on that person's general beliefs and values. In the case of a study

abroad program, a student's frame of reference is also informed by her expectations and pre-program preparation. It is likely that students can be transformed by experiences on a program even when they do not disrupt their expectations; indeed, such a measurement of "transformation" is narrow if it favors the naïve and underprepared (Duerden et al., 2018), and it also oversells the effect of overcoming simplistic and essentialist ways of thinking, such as by comparing oneself to a novel cultural 'other' (Doerr, 2013, 2017).

The notion of what might be considered as a dissonant or disruptive experience is necessarily shaped by a student's expectations about a particular context. Whereas it would be unexpected and likely disruptive for a student to cross a checkpoint while driving out of their hometown in the United States, these students did not demonstrate a sense of disruption in their stories about crossing checkpoints in Palestine/Israel. In this case, the interviewees' observations of checkpoints confirmed what they had been prepared to expect in this context. Therefore, to the extent that students expected to see certain signs and symbols of The Conflict, these signs and symbols may not have been disruptive enough to spark stories about learning processes. Also, in positioning themselves as spectators, these signs and symbols may have been sources of information for the interviewees, confirming or reshaping their previous understanding. Such an act of observation may not have triggered strong emotional responses, and therefore it may not have been a meaningful or memorable experience for these outsiders. Had they felt more connected to the implications of these signs and symbols, perhaps they would have had a stronger emotional reaction to seeing them. With this gaze, the occupation was not invisible to them, but it was perhaps underconsidered.

On the other hand, the students may not have expected Tel Aviv to be a big cosmopolitan city that reminded them of California or London. So when they first visited, they had

experienced emotional reactions of surprise and comfort. These observations and feelings were dissonant from their expectations of being uncomfortable in a foreign-feeling, conflict-ridden Middle Eastern city. Then, the personal experience of confronting and resolving this dissonance generated a story, as well as an opportunity for learning. Similarly, several of them had expected to dismiss the settler because they disagreed so strongly with her views. But when they met a person with a narrative that explained why she had been raised to believe such things, these students were confronted with dissonance from their prior expectation. Their worldview and beliefs were not challenged by this, per se, and did not change as a result of meeting the settler. However, the experience of meeting her triggered an emotional response that defined their experience. Unlike their description of some of their connected peers, their own emotional responses had not been so strong that they were overwhelming, nor were the settler's invectives personally hurtful or threatening to them. But their emotions were enough to prompt reflection and contemplation, thus rendering a story that generated another personally-relevant learning opportunity.

Implications and Future Opportunities

Implications for Educators and Facilitators

There are three practically-oriented, interrelated implications from this study concerning learning opportunities on short-term study abroad programs: 1) the effect of participants' context-dependent and topical outsider/insider identities; 2) the importance of peer relationships and group dynamics on students' learning in cohort-based programs; and 3) new considerations about the different kinds of "experiences" involved in experiential learning, and the different ways that they engage a rich assortment of cognitive and affective processes. These insights

encourage educators to integrate lessons from neuroscience and related theories of learning. In addition, I will comment briefly about the ethics of study abroad in a conflict zone.

Outsider Identities and Outsider Gazes

The participants in this study made it clear that they felt as if they were outsiders during this program. In contrast with common assumptions about feeling like "cultural outsiders" when entering a culturally novel community, these students instead felt like outsiders to the central topic at hand. This "outsider" identity was informed by multiple sources within their program, as well as from multiple people external to their program who reiterated the notion that certain sociocultural groups were insiders, or had presumed connections to the central topic of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Being positioned as outsiders did not make these students feel excluded, per se, but rather they maintained an emotional distance from the information to which they were introduced during the program. This emotional distancing impacted the gaze with which they observed and experienced many components of the program, including meetings with local speakers.

The program cohorts were composed of both outsiders and insiders, and this dynamic caused tension among the group members. These two categories of participants had such different experiences during the program — the insiders found the experiences, observations, and encounters to be more emotionally resonant, whereas the outsiders tended to intellectualize their experiences in an attempt to learn new facts and information. Particularly because these programs' central theme related to social justice, these two factions within the cohorts were not prepared nor equipped to support each other during the program. In fact, the tension within one of the programs grew to animosity such that each group apparently provoked the other.

Ultimately, the conflict within the cohort in that program distracted from The Conflict they had traveled to study.

While this particular notion of outsiderness was specific to Palestine/Israel, this concept is certainly transferable to other contexts. As one example, if some students on a study abroad program are connected to a destination through their ethnicity, ancestry, or cultural heritage, they may experience different emotional resonance with the program than students who have no sense of connection to the place. When sociocultural identities like race and national citizenship are also bound up in the determination of one's "insiderness" or "outsiderness," this may be cause for further care by the educators designing and facilitating such programs.

Needless to say, these are not dynamics that could or should be avoided. Instead, they are dynamics that can be critical to the students' experience and so must be acknowledged and addressed by program leaders. It may be the case that reflective debriefs may be divided up, at times, such that insiders can process together in a supportive space, and outsiders can do the same. Similarly, small breakout groups can be partnered with intentional mixing of insiders and outsiders. Program leaders often already pay conscious attention to students' identity categories, especially concerning sociocultural identity groups, in which case these insider/outsider identities would simply add a further dimension to consider with intentionality and care.

Peer Relationships and Intergroup Dynamics

Relatedly, this study points to the importance of peer group interactions and their effects on learning. In the three programs represented by participants in this study, the cohort groups had very different dynamics. Nevertheless, the participants from each program discussed the impact their peers had on their learning. In the cohort that had the most cohesive bonds among the group, their relationships with each other may have distracted them from engaging more with the

setting around them; the interviewees spoke as if they had been rather insulated from the context they were in, which is reflective of the "island program" moniker that some people assign to cohort-based STSA programs. For the interviewees from the cohort with the most tension, they were not only unsupported in their ability to process their experiences, but two of them were so emotional about their interactions with their peers that they, too, were unable to recall many content-related components of their program. For them, the conflict outside their tour bus was secondary to the conflict within it, so to speak. Even for a couple of the students from the group that had remained copacetic, their memories a year afterwards were bound up in their memories of interactions with their peers.

Again, these observations are not intended to be critiques of the cohort model. Rather, they are intended to shed light on the significance that participants place on their peer interactions within cohort models. A good deal of interpersonal and intrapersonal learning takes place due to the influence of social interactions, regardless of whether a program leader attends to these social dynamics during reflections and group processing. The recognition that learning is taking place on this front — perhaps even in interculturally relevant ways — is important for facilitators and participants to keep in mind as one of many factors contributing to experiential learning.

Different Kinds of Learning From Different Kinds of Experiences

To say that students learn from "experience" conflates the different kinds of learning that can be prompted from different kinds of experiences. The distinction that was most clear from this study is that between learning from firsthand observation versus learning from active or interactive experiences that bear decision-making and personal consequence. While simply having an experience — whether an observation or a consequential action — does not guarantee

a particular learning outcome, these different experiences may prompt different learning pathways.

In addition, the same learning experience may have different implications for different individuals based on their identities, which inform how they gaze upon a situation. Whereas one student might position herself as a passive spectator, another student may be positioned to witness the same scene as a viscerally emotional, personally consequential act. Relatedly, a person's emotional response may shape the degree to which an experience is personalized. A strong emotional reaction may be sufficient to initiate its own experiential learning cycle, which could amplify or distract from other learning that is simultaneously taking place.

These sorts of multifaceted considerations are glossed over when Kolb's four-factor Experiential Learning Cycle is the sole model for all types of experiential education. Out of the complexity of how humans process their various experiences emerge rich opportunities for learning. As other scholars have noted in their reviews and critiques of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, social and emotional factors are instrumental to what and how learning takes place (Houge Mackenzie et al., 2014; Larsen, 2017; Morris, 2019; Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015; Seaman et al., 2017).

Learning About Learning From Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience

The insights that emerged from this study reflect familiar concepts from theories of learning that span broad, well-developed disciplines such as social psychology and neurobiology (Houge Mackenzie et al., 2014; Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015). For example, it is well known that learning depends upon attention, which further relates to concepts like priming, framing, cognitive load, salience, and motivation. Furthermore, all learning is intertwined with emotions and their affect regulation (Sewell, 2020), which impacts attention, focus, and retention. Perhaps

emotions are especially inextricable from experiential forms of education. As noncognitive processes that influence appraisal of a situation, a physiological response, and a labeling of that response (Larsen, 2017), emotions can appear at any point along a conceptual learning cycle and thereby alter what or how something is learned or remembered (Desautels, 2016). In the context of a cohort-based study abroad program, the interpersonal dynamics within the group will impact the social and emotional dimensions of learning, as well.

However, these processes rarely seem to be acknowledged by experiential educators (Houge Mackenzie et al., 2014; Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015; Seaman et al.; 2017). Instead, Kolb's ELT seems to be understood by many practitioners as a sufficient model, perhaps both because of, and in spite of, its nonspecific simplicity. Within the field of study abroad, theories of learning — besides Mezirow's (2000) Transformative Learning Theory — are invoked even less in the literature by scholars and practitioners. Considering how many kinds of intercultural, experiential, and intellectual learning processes are invoked during a study abroad program, it is important to design programs that support students while they contend with a barrage of stimuli, novelty, and discomfort. Relatedly, educators could attend to the influence of students' identities on their gaze, and subsequently on how that gaze tends to filter various stimuli into or out of one's frame of attention. More generally, as we continue to deepen our understanding and expectations about how students' identities inform their perceptions about different contexts, we can move toward more nuanced preparation and expectation-setting prior to programs.

Finally, we educators can be thoughtful about how we frame various approaches to critical reflection that correspond to the multiple kinds of learning that will unfold, in order to maximize how participants make sense of their experiences in the short-term and long-term. Along these lines, it would be beneficial to consider the capacity of participants' overall

bandwidth during study abroad programs, based on the amount of cognitive material they process, along with associated emotional states that are sparked by experiences related to the program itinerary, as well as interpersonal experiences with peers and other people. Programs are designed to strike a balance between maximizing time in-country and allowing space for processing, while perhaps also including tourist sites and experiences without losing the educational integrity of the program. However, as described by several of the interviewees in this study, exposure to too many novel stimuli can feel overwhelming such that a participant may not be able to sustain attention to successive learning components, like speakers or sightseeing tours. This may be especially overwhelming in programs like those featured in this study, which endeavors to introduce a great deal of novelty through the presentation of multiple cultural sites and emotionally weighty narratives in a short amount of time.

Ethical Questions About Educational Tourism in Conflict Zones

Throughout the course of my research, an underlying current of doubt about this kind of educational tourism has thrummed quietly in the background, shaping my inquiry as well my impulse to critique and evaluate these students' learning outcome. After having lived in a town in the West Bank where groups of students, pilgrims, activists, and other tourists cycle through day after day and week after week, I have increasingly questioned the value of short tours in occupied territory. These doubts of mine have been seeded through many talks with local hosts who are simultaneously dependent on a tourist economy and weary from repeating the same stories of pain and dispossession to new faces on a regular basis, while daily life just gets harder. One of my curmudgeonly neighbors once told me that he used to feel like he was stuck in an open-air prison, but because of all the tourists, he eventually came to feel like he was an exhibit in a zoo. To paraphrase what he said next: "They come, they cry, they leave. Nothing changes."

Although ethical considerations are outside the scope of this dissertation, I would be remiss if I did not mention the extent to which these questions weigh heavily on me as I cannot help but wonder about the costs of programs such as this. What are the unspoken assumptions of the host communities when they tell and retell their narratives over and over? What is the responsibility of those who bear witness to these stories? What is the responsibility of the facilitators and program leaders who organize these trips? What are we anticipating that students will learn? Are we hoping they will not only take away information and insights, but also inspiration to take action?

The stories the interviewees told about their "activist peers" — those who felt a sense of connection to Palestine — also prompted me to wonder about the impact on people who may experience cultural trauma upon bearing witness to oppression, perhaps while feeling the sting of oppression in the form of microaggressions and macroaggressions, from interpersonal insults to structural violence. Beyond recognizing that some students are "insiders" while others are "outsiders," what responsibility might facilitators have to mediate how outsiders' carefree desire to go to a beach or drink at a nightclub might exacerbate insiders' pain? More generally, facilitators may need to consider how to support students who feel a sense of connection to traumatic and oppression during visits to sensitive places, especially in heterogeneous groups in which other students may not be aware of the depth of their peers' pain.

Considerations for Future Research/Scholarship

Like many forms of experiential education, this exploratory study generates more questions than answers. Consequently, there are a number of avenues that would benefit from further research and investigation. In the midst of the coronavirus crisis, when international travel has been put on hold (and may be denied to U.S.-Americans for quite some time), it is not

easy to imagine when study abroad programming will begin again, and what kinds of changes will be necessary due to the pandemic. That being said, this research prompts questions related to other issues pertaining to experiential forms of education more broadly, that can be explored without international travel. To be sure, a great deal of intercultural learning can take place within one's national borders, without a need to travel very far.

Short-Term Study Abroad

Although the field of study abroad is fraught with neoliberal pressures to accommodate students as consumers, and thus favor prepackaged programs by outside providers that prioritize tourism over education (Barkin, 2018), there may always be pressure for educators to prove the worthiness of their programs. Of course, there will always be a legitimate need to assess learning outcomes from study abroad programs. However, at this point, prior research has provided sufficient evidence that STSA programs have the potential to provide meaningful learning experiences. Since this is well established, future scholarship can redirect away from *whether* learning takes place while studying overseas, and instead focus more on *how* and *why* learning unfolds in many different ways, in different contexts, and for students with different identities and backgrounds.

My research recognized the emergence of an "outsider" identity and several ways that this impacted the students who positioned themselves as outsiders, as well as the intergroup dynamics of the peer cohort. In addition to exploring this dynamic in study abroad contexts other than Palestine/Israel, more research is warranted to better understand how connectedness to topical issues could impact any sort of experiential education. Such exploration has begun in the realm of service-learning, where students of color and students from lower and working class socioeconomic status experience double consciousness due to their White and economically

privileged classmates' dysconsciousness about race and class (Mitchell & Donohue, 2009). Attention to these issues have prompted several service-learning educators to reconsider the assumptions behind this pedagogy that had originally been designed to target privileged students by introducing them to lived experiences of less privileged and underserved communities. Since study abroad programs have traditionally been designed for privileged students to be exposed to "the cultural other" (Doerr, 2013, 2017), continued exploration of implicit assumptions about how intercultural education positions different people as cultural 'others' could be done in conjunction with exploration of how students position themselves and others as insiders/outsiders vis-à-vis connectedness to a particular place or context. Moreover, it could be interesting to explore the implications of heterogenous cohort groups in which some but not all students identify with a certain location as "heritage seekers" (Naddaf et al., 2020).

As scholars continue to move away from defending their study abroad programs by offering examples of successful practices, there is much to be learned from examinations of the components of programs that did not work well for all participants. Consistent with the experiential learning precept which claims that mistakes are opportunities for learning, as scholars we can delve further into the nuances and complexities of intercultural education through honest critique of less successful aspects of our multifaceted programs.

In order to further investigate the complexities of students' experiences, narrative inquiry offers the opportunity for researchers to create a space for participants to speak about their memories and their sensemaking, without necessarily relying on prompts that lead them to confirm certain hypotheses, or feel as though they are asked to assess the effectiveness of their program. Although any interview is laden with performance that arises from interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, an open-ended narrative approach captured a kind of

performance that may have been directed by salient aspects of each student's memory and sensemaking, rather than by the interviewer's line of questioning that may predetermine certain contrived answers. Furthermore, additional studies conducted well after a program's conclusion may offer evidence as to whether and how that program inspired lasting learning or influence on a student's identity, behavior, or worldview.

Experiential Education

My study raised questions about the different kinds of experiential learning that result from different kinds of experiences. Further research could continue refining the notion of what kind of experience initiates experiential learning, much like Morris (2019) did when he suggested that the catalyst to Kolb's model should be "contextually rich concrete experience" in which learners were actively involved in a learning process (pp. 7-8). In addition to the further empirical studies that Morris called for to test his revision, I submit that it may also be generative to consider that "experience" is a broad term that captures many different kinds of firsthand exposure to topics, issues, people, and places that can prompt learning. Because one model may be insufficient to capture the different kinds of experiences and the different subsequent paths of learning, more research is necessary to explore alternate models that incorporate social and emotional elements that are important mediators of learning.

In this chapter, I proposed a conceptual model that could be considered as a first draft for empirical testing and theoretical revision. Regardless, it requires further research in order to offer something more robust that can help deepen understanding about how educators can design experiential learning while supporting students as they encounter various experiences differently based on their identities, and then learn from these experiences according to a variety of different factors. Furthermore, future models may account for learning outcomes that may be behavioral,

such as Kolb's model that includes "active experimentation," as well as those that may result in a cognitive, affective, or ethical imprint on a person.

Finally, there are exciting possibilities for adjoining experiential educational models with established and developing learning theories from the fields of cognitive, social, and neurobiological psychology. Following the lead of scholars including Schenck and Cruickshank (2015), Houge Mackenzie et al. (2014), and Seaman et al., (2017), continued attention to learning theories can strengthen the design and rigor of experiential education in all its forms.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

The first interview question for each first interview:

- "What do you want to tell me about your experience with this program?"

To prepare for the second interview, I asked each student to think of an object from their trip that was meaningful to them. I suggested that they could bring the object to the second interview, or just describe and explain it to me. The purpose of this was less to learn about the object itself, but more to open up an additional line of inquiry as to what each student had considered to be meaningful.

In the second and third interviews, I often brought transcribed excerpts from their previous interview to ask for clarification, elaboration, and to engage in selective member-checking.

The following are representative examples of questions that I asked throughout all three interviews:

- In what ways do you feel like the program made an impact on you?
- Tell me about the group you were with.
- What had been surprising to you, or different from what you had expected?
- Were there places that you felt particularly comfortable or uncomfortable?
- Were there particular places that stood out to you?
- Were there particular people that stand out in your memory?
- Did you experience any kind of "culture shock?"
- What was it like to experience different cultures in one place?
    - What was it like to cross cultural boundaries throughout the program?
- What do you think was the purpose of the program?
    - From the standpoint of the university and the program leaders
    - And also for you, personally?
- How would you describe your relationship to Israel/Palestine now?
- Would you like to go back?
    - If not, why not?
    - If so, under what circumstances? To which specific places?

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