



DONATE WITH [HTTPS://WWW.MASHALLAHNEWS.COM/DONATE-3/](https://www.mashallahnews.com/donate-3/)
([HTTPS://WWW.MASHALLAHNEWS.COM/](https://www.mashallahnews.com/))
[/MASHALLAHMIX/](https://www.mashallahnews.com/)

[\(HTTPS://WWW.MASHALLAHNEWS.COM/\)](https://www.mashallahnews.com/)
[/FBORASHMASHALLAHNEWS/](https://www.mashallahnews.com/)
[/TWITTER/MASHALLAHNEWS/](https://www.mashallahnews.com/)
[/INSTAGRAM/MASHALLAHNEWS/](https://www.mashallahnews.com/)

Search

Ani mi Levanon

Smiling through Hebrew class

10.02.12

Sophie Chamas (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/contributors/sophie-chamas>)



(<https://www.mashallahnews.com/themes/culture/>)

(<https://www.mashallahnews.com/themes/rights-and-dissent/>)

Beirut (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/category/beirut/>)





A chocolate bar is just a chocolate bar?

Like so many Lebanese of my generation, I am more comfortable in a foreign language. Arabic is, unfortunately, greatly undervalued in Lebanon. Most families of means send their children to Western educational institutions where they learn to speak, read, think and sing in a foreign tongue. Arabic gets relegated to the corners of curricula and heard only in its colloquial form in the home and on the street. As a result, these children emerge highly educated by Western standards but essentially illiterate in their mother tongue.

Disadvantaged by this linguistic handicap, I was faced with a dilemma when I learned that I was required, as a Master's candidate in Near Eastern Studies at New York University, to study a Middle Eastern language. I hadn't studied Modern Standard Arabic since the eighth grade, so I would have had to start from scratch at the elementary level, learning words like 'apple' and 'dog' and suffering through the awful sound of Americans trying to pronounce the guttural letters. I decided it would be more interesting and challenging to learn a foreign language. Urdu and Turkish didn't appeal to me, so that left Farsi and Hebrew. It was morbid curiosity more than anything else that drew me to Hebrew, a language which had only ever signalled violence and war, occupation and oppression, to my Lebanese ears.

The glass wall

There was, expectedly, an invisible divide in every Hebrew class I took, between the Jewish majority and the small handful of random non-Jews. There was nothing hostile about it. It was a natural result of experiences had and not had, a glass wall built of Jewish neighbourhoods and Hebrew Sunday School, latkas (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potato_pancake) and knish (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knish>), Seders (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passover_Seder) and Shabbat candle lightings. Those of us who had not grown up on the other side of the wall were invited, through our participation in such classes, to peer through its transparent torso at a new *lifeworld*.

My first semester I was joined by an Argentine learning Hebrew to please his Israeli girlfriend, and a Hispanic girl from Florida driven to embrace this difficult, guttural language because she found Israeli guys attractive. We shared raised eyebrows and awkward smiles when references to Yiddish culture, Jewish religious practices or the Torah were made, and together felt impotent when unable, like the other students, to participate in such discussions. But to their credit, most of my teachers made an effort to explain everything they referenced, and to include those of us that were relatively ignorant of Jewish history and practices in such conversations.

I knew when I signed up to take Hebrew that much like the history and culture of the Arab world is weaved into Arabic lessons, Judaism and the Jewish people would make a frequent appearance in Hebrew class. It wasn't this glass wall that phased me, but the barbed wire that sat on top of it, visible, it seemed, only to me, made up of birthright, Israel pride parades, students for AIPAC (<http://www.aipac.org/>) and the like. In these classes, for the first time in my life, I was facing in the flesh a voice, a perception and an ideology that up until then had been boxed within television sets and newspapers. It had been contained and kept at a distance. I had felt it momentarily of course, through cruel foreign policies and disastrous wars. There were plenty of suits I could identify with it, plenty of names to curse and pictures to spit at. But I had never seen it at the grassroots level before. I had never given much thought to how it had flowed through the interconnected streams of power networks into the minds and bodies of ordinary people, and I never would have imagined that this encounter would terrify me more than the sonic boom of a plane popping my country's sovereignty, or a gun pointed at my borders.

The Zionists and me

Personified in the form of seemingly harmless freshmen was an ideology that demonised me, my grandmother and my neighbour, that kept friends of mine from ever knowing their homeland, that imprisoned my mother's childhood within the tank-lined borders of an occupation, that bombed the apartment my aunt loved and the entire neighbourhood along

with it, that displaced and humiliated so many, and that transformed a nation into a wretch. Sitting before me with their notebooks and schoolbags were the products of meticulous, successful processes of Zionist subject formation, and I had no idea how to react to them.

The first three words I learned in Hebrew were *mi ayin at*, or, where are you from. The professor used this question as an icebreaker. It was her way of getting to know the class, and it was an opportunity for us students to dip our tongues into the intimidating pool of a new language. On the surface, it was a simple question. She gave us the first half of the answer: I am from/*ani mi*. *Ani*, just like they say in the south of Lebanon. It was easy enough to remember. We just had to fill in our respective blanks. But after about ten '*ani mi Long Islands*,' I got nervous. What was going to happen, I wondered anxiously, when I interrupted this clean braid of Long Islands, Brooklyns and Westchesters, with my random lock of Lebanon? Would they throw the proverbial tomato at me? Or worse, would I be left lingering, along with my unwelcome nationality, in the limbo of awkward silence? More importantly, was I going to take the timid route, afraid of being a lone soldier, and let the words fall limp out of my mouth, or was I, head held high and chest inflated, going to belt them out proudly?

The actual event was anti-climactic, given the marathon of nervous thoughts that preceded it. *Ani mi Lebanon*, I said, my eyes shooting back and forth across the room, trying to survey the reactions. *Levanon*, the professor replied, correcting me. I told her my name and, smiling, she excitedly asked if I was related to the Israeli author [Anton Chammas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_Shammas) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_Shammas). The Palestinian author, I thought. No relation. Chammas is Greek Orthodox, it later occurred to me. That, coupled with my deceptive first name, meant it was safe to assume the professor had taken me for a Christian. I always wondered if that assumption informed our relationship at all, if thinking I was Christian meant she found me less threatening or 'foreign' than she would have had she known I was technically Muslim. I never bothered to correct her, even though I pictured that conversation on numerous occasions.

An opportunity even presented itself in her office once, when she asked me how we distinguish between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon. I responded uncomfortably, explaining that one couldn't really tell the difference unless a Muslim woman was wearing a headscarf, amazed that the question didn't strike her as offensive. I left it at that. It was tempting, right then and there, to casually say, *you know, I'm Shi'a*. But then I imagined that conversation getting awkward: *yes, Shi'a like Hezbollah. I'm writing my thesis on them, actually. Also, Zionism is the worst.*

All imaginary roads led to disaster. A battle with a middle-aged Hebrew teacher from Long Island just never seemed worth picking. It is easy to imagine oneself the hero in daydream scenarios, waving around a sword of words, cutting down every branch of Zionism in sight. But face to face with my Hebrew teacher, the 'soft Zionist,' as someone once labeled her, that sword seemed rather blunt and useless.

She never brought politics to the classroom, at least not intentionally. She often came armed with a bag full of Israeli chocolate. This was, for all intents and purposes, a benevolent, motherly act. To my fellow students, excitedly peeling back the wrappers, a chocolate was just a chocolate. But to me, this was no ordinary chocolate bar. It was a minuscule, caramel filled nugget produced in and economically benefiting an apartheid state. All I could do was set mine at the edge of my desk, unwrapped. We came from different worlds. In mine, nothing was apolitical, not even chocolate.

The professor never asked me about my politics, but she (rightly) assumed that I probably wasn't going to be comfortable writing about how wonderful life was on an Israeli kibbutz in the 1960s. Whenever we came to an assignment of that sort in our propaganda-saturated textbook, she would suggest an alternative topic to me. *Write about what it would be like vacationing in Rio de Janeiro*, she would say, for example. I could never figure out what the appropriate reaction to such a situation was. Was I supposed to feel appreciative because she had spared me the pain and discomfort of writing about, what for me, was a politically charged topic? What if, under another professor (as I heard was the case for some students), I was required to complete this assignment, and I decided to lodge a formal complaint explaining that I wasn't comfortable writing uncritically about a phenomenon I considered a symbol of occupation and settler-colonialism? Would I have been taken seriously?

A peer of mine studying under a staunchly patriotic Israeli professor composed an essay in flawless Hebrew critiquing the institution of the Kibbutz, and she was reprimanded for doing so. She had presented a ‘false’ portrayal of the Kibbutz, the professor argued. In a language class, my peer responded, she was supposed to be judged on the quality of her writing not on how well she conformed to Zionist propaganda. How was I supposed to respond, knowing that an Arabic teacher who, for example, showed her students a map of pre-Israel Palestine, would face the wrath of a thousand op-eds, while I was studying a Hebrew textbook that was more or less a badly disguised Israel-for-dummies manual?

“It was morbid curiosity more than anything else that drew me to Hebrew, a language which had only ever signalled violence and war, occupation and oppression, to my Lebanese ears.”

In Hebrew classes all over America, students were being served up a PG-13 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motion_picture_rating_system) version of Israel free of checkpoints and apartheid walls, settlements and blockades, and of course, Palestinians. It was as if one couldn’t learn Hebrew without learning about Israel, as if the language hadn’t preceded this precocious, adolescent state. I wouldn’t have found this so problematic if the image of Israel being constructed in these classes was at the very least, a nuanced one. Students were reading and writing about the aliyahs to Palestine, the history behind the Israeli flag, and the nightlife in Tel Aviv as if this was all light, fluffy, coffee-table conversation, while *Al-Kitaab*, the standard Arabic textbook, was being dissected by the hawks at Campus Watch who were determined to prove it an anti-Semitic and anti-western jihadist mouthpiece.

The blue and white elephant in the room

But in these classes, I wasn’t face to face with Mark Regev (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Regev) (the media spokesman for the Prime Minister of Israel). Rather, I found myself seated next to the likes of a squeaky voiced girl who almost exclusively wore overall dresses and constantly talked about the joys of her [birthright](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birthright_Israel) trip. She turned to me once and asked if I had been to Israel. *I can’t go to Israel*, I responded, stating what I thought was the obvious. *Why not*, she asked. *Because I’m Lebanese*, I said to her blank expression. She didn’t understand. This wannabe national spokeswoman for birthright, who had been to Israel a thousand times and boasted a deep familiarity with the country, didn’t know that Lebanon and Israel were enemy states. A semester later I shared a classroom with a young Upper East Sider who had never heard the term ‘Occupied Territories’ before, and couldn’t wrap her head around the idea that Gaza and the West Bank didn’t belong to Israel.

In one of my smaller classes, set around a conference table, I sat across from two Syrian Jews, born and raised in Brooklyn. I was excited to finally meet Arab Jews, an ethnic group that had sadly been [reduced](https://mashallahnews.com/?p=2411) to myth in my native Lebanon, their memory dying with our passing elders and their oral narratives, their presence reduced to wilting branches on Lebanese family trees that most preferred not to mention. One measly letter separated my last name from one of theirs. It was a sign, to me, of our shared Arab heritage, a testament to a time not so long ago when our ancestors lived peacefully side by side, and a dismal reminder that once we could have been kin and that now, in the modern, progressive, liberal future, this idea would be too intolerable for many to even imagine.

More tragic than anything else though, was that these two kids didn’t want to relate to me, but to the other Jews in the class. I was part of a past they had long severed themselves from. They were about as Arab as Netanyahu. On one occasion, our Professor asked the class to name some Jewish foods. One of the Syrian Jews said, [lahm b ‘ajin](http://www.tasteofbeirut.com/2011/10/armenian-meat-pies-lahmajoon/). Ears perked and eyebrow kicked up to the crown of my head, I looked at him quizzically and said, that’s not a Jewish food, it’s a regional Arab dish. The name meant meat in dough, I pointed out. It was an Arabic, not a Hebrew term. *Maybe the Arabs have a variation of it*, he retorted, pointing out that it was a popular dish in the Syrian-Jewish neighbourhood he grew up in in Brooklyn. *Because it is a part of your Syrian heritage*, I wanted to explain. They were so insecure, it seemed, about not having a part

in the Yiddish past, so concerned about not being able to contribute to talk of latkas (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potato_pancake) and matzah balls (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matzah_ball). It was as if it made them somehow less Jewish to also be Arab, as if you couldn't be both of these things.

My feelings towards the state of Israel were defined by the Arab-Israeli conflict, by its ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people, by the constant threat it posed to the existence of my country whose landscape bears the scars of countless Israeli raids. But my professors and fellow students didn't seem to perceive themselves, despite being self-proclaimed Zionists, as standing on one side of a conflict. They had learned to practice a kind of selective blindness, perceiving Israel through a tight lens that blocked out anything 'uncomfortable,' anything that would taint this farcical, constructed image of fun in the sun, falafel, and attractively tanned men and women. To be a Zionist for these people, it seemed, was essentially to love a fabricated, Disney version of Israel unconditionally. It is to practice a dangerous and profound form of ignorance.

To say all this is not to apologise for them, but to point out that what we refer to as ideology is not just an idea that one can adopt or discard. It's not just something that sits casually on the surface of cognition and can easily be removed, shoved out of the way by convincing arguments and facts, video footage and statistics. What we often call ideology is actually an aggregate of sedimented habits, a cultivated way of being in the world that is the result of practices engaged with in the school, the home, the neighbourhood, of books read and television shows watched, stories told and heard, pilgrimages carried out, all of them performed repetitively over the years, all of them training the body to react to its environment in certain ways, to perceive violence in specific ways, to see this but not that, to hear this but not that.

Prodding the big white and blue elephant in the room I realised, wasn't going to change anything on the fiery ground thousands of miles away, and it certainly wasn't going to undo the ways of perceiving and reacting to the conflict that had sedimented in my peers and teachers' bones over the decades. Sitting with them, engaging in the most ordinary conversations, I felt that I stood more of a chance of killing, or at least bruising, that elephant with kindness, with an assertion of my humanity rather than my politics. As the face of the invisible 'other' in the thick of that class, it was difficult for them not to see me. It made sense, more than anything else at the time, that I smile.



Sophie Chamas (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/contributors/sophie-chamas>)

 (<http://jackthedadone.wordpress.com/>)

 (<https://twitter.com/SophsC87>)

Sophie Chamas joined the editorial team of Mashallah News in 2013. She is a Lebanese writer currently based in Beirut. Never quite capable of settling down, she continues to think of herself as 'in between' countries.

Next article

12.02.12 — Mashallah Team

Bye Bye Mubarak



Cairo

Previous article

08.02.12 — Babelmed

Dans la ville blanche



Casablanca

19 thoughts on “Ani mi Levanon”

Oren says:

13.02.12 at 11:39 am (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1323>)

Hey Sohpie, good article, it's interesting seeing it from your eyes. I find those people to be like you in some parts of the article, non violent and informed by only one side. In the end of the day, we are mostly good people of both sides with our shares of scares, being dominated by evilness of both sides – Hizbollah and our share of racists and violent people. May we live in peace, Oren, Israel.

Rola Jordan says:

14.02.12 at 9:09 am (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1324>)

Very perceptive article and cuts through such deep issues. Very logical and convincing conclusion. Thanks for sharing an experience every arab would find really interesting. Good job.

Muni says:

14.02.12 at 11:40 pm (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1325>)

Excellent, moving writing, as usual Sophie :) Thank you.

Nour says:

16.02.12 at 3:31 pm (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1326>)
This article is full of powerful imagery, beautiful writing, and honesty. Well done.

Pingback: Friday Links (<http://blog.vickiboykis.com/2012/02/17/friday-links-87/>)

Sahar says:

17.02.12 at 2:14 pm (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1328>)
Beautifully written article. You have a distinct voice that is so nice to read! And it taps into a lot of the internal conflicts that face most who live and study between the two regions.

Nika says:

17.02.12 at 4:29 pm (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1329>)
Very interesting to see it from your eyes. I feel there is a lot more to both your perception of the “politics”, as well as to that of your classmates, many of whom come from immigrant families with painful histories, and from whom anti-Semitism isn't a myth or a propaganda,

but simply part of their experience.

I think your definition of “ideology” is extremely accurate, but I wonder, do you see your own “aggregate of sedimented habits, etc” as such as well? We have oddly similar sentiments, you and I, just with the reverse signs towards the constituent parts... It was both disturbing and revealing for me to read your words, because I could relate so well – but from the reverse perspective.

I grew up in Israel, and I wonder sometimes now if all those names and places I always associated with pain, violence, hatred – if people there all feel this way about the names and places I associate with peace, friendship, and tolerance? As an Israeli, I too cannot go to the “territories”, or to Lebanon, or to Syria. History is complicated and obscured in our parts of the world, and to be honest, I have no reason to think that your version is more true than mine or vice versa; the truth is probably somewhere in between, buried in the sand, long gone. But as long as there are people willing to sit down to one table, share each other’s stories, and perhaps decide to move on past the 1960s, working with what we have now: maybe then there is hope.

May we all have peace and prosperity. Nika.

Reza says:

19.02.12 at 9:49 pm (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1330>)

Of course Israelis can go to the territories. On a weekly basis, Israeli protesters join their Palestinian sisters and brothers to protest against Israeli oppression. Additionally, Israel occupies the Golan Heights, so in fact Syria is within reach. You can travel to Egypt, you can visit Jordan, you can speak with the Palestinians in your midst....

It is one thing to discuss the subjectivity of experience, and Sophie does a great, interesting job of bringing out her experiences. I would hope, however, that her excellent piece would not be an occasion for wishy-washy Zionists to obscure Israel’s very real crimes with some postmodernist BS about the subjectivity of truth.

alina says:

29.06.12 at 8:24 am (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1331>)

Reading the passage about the Syrian Jews I can’t stop wondering whether you’ve thought about the reasons that might be behind them severing themselves from their Syrian roots; maybe something that happened to their families in the past? Something that was the reason for them being in the USA now? There is unfortunately a reason why there are so few Jews in Syria nowadays ...

Anas says:

01.10.12 at 12:56 pm (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1332>)

My feeling: That “smile” at the end is of one who knows more than those being smiled at. Your exploration into this little Israel, Sophie, no matter how superficial, gives you an edge over your classmates. Curiosity (and humanity), ultimately, doesn’t kill the cat. What’s funny is how Israelis like Nika and Oren saw this article as an opportunity to be “friendly” and “open” by “smiling back”. Great. How about you start by working towards ending Zionism as the predominant ideology in Israel? Or volunteering to help out the thousands of victims of Zionist apartheid and violence? Then, your smile is more authentic.

Nika says:

17.10.12 at 2:28 pm (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1333>)

Strange, how I check back a few months later, on a whim, to see my words have made no impact on those who have written afterwards. The realities of living in Israel do mean that to go to the territories one needs special permits; for most Israelis it is not an easily accessible place. Syria and Lebanon outright do not allow Israelis in; those who have travelled through Israel and have stamps in their passport may also be questioned. Going to Jordan? I actually used to be fairly easy, as with Egypt. My mom went on an organized tour to Jordan once, where the group was not allowed to stray or walk anywhere unaccompanied by their Jordanian guides... People throw about words like “zionism” and “apartheid” with very little understanding of what these terms mean, or the realities on the ground, just because it is trendy now. This is rather unfortunate, and, sadly, will not lead to much dialogue between the

two sides.

Recently there was a silent “coexistence march” scheduled to take place in Bethlehem, that both Israelis and Palestinians were going to take part in, walking side by side, in silence, as a show of solidarity with one another. It was cancelled, before it even began, due to overwhelming protests by other Palestinian activists; the reason given by them was that it would show “normalisation” with Israel, meaning, that Israel has a right to exist, as such. I have been hearing this term a lot lately, and to understand what it means, I think it is time to stop treating Israel exclusively as the “aggressor state” and Palestinians as “victim people” – this equation perpetually leaves Israel without a people, and Palestinians without a state. If you are ready to dismantle ideologies, why not begin with your own?

Daniel says:

19.10.12 at 12:14 am (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1334>)

I loved this article, although I do think the author is guilty of much of the same blindness she attributes to the Other.

Arabs are just as much the victims of propaganda and meticulous conditioning as Jews are, if not more. It is undeniable that Israel is practicing occupation and oppression against the Palestinians, and has committed innumerable evils in the Middle Eastern neighborhood, but it is also undeniable that the Land of Israel is the home of Jews – no less than the same land, Palestine, is the home of Arabs. That is essentially what Zionism means; it refers to my right as an Israeli Jew to live here in my birthplace, and to our right as a collective to self-determination in our only homeland. It does not necessarily negate the same respective rights of Palestine’s Arab natives, and in this sense there is nothing particularly “Zionist” about the West Bank’s occupation. Arabs are taught, maliciously, to detach Zionism from its actual meaning and equate it, instead, with all that they perceive to be evil about Israeli conduct toward them.

Maya says:

19.10.12 at 5:22 am (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1335>)
Anas- Do you know what Oren and Nika?

What’s funny is how you judge them without even knowing what and if they do to stop Israeli apartheid.... maybe you ought to find out first then your comment will be more authentic.

samma7 says:

19.10.12 at 9:52 am (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1336>)
Sophie,

I think that you just couldn’t handle the fact that the Zionist people that you got to know weren’t that terrible. So you tried so hard to demonize them.

Israelis in the end of the day do want to have fun in the sun... to sit in coffe houses, to promote gay marriage and to and equal rights for women.

being a zionist is not a ude word. It decribes the right of the Jews o have their peace of land in Israel.

You blame the Zionists for being ignorant. Very arrogant of you I must say. You ignore the fact that these Syrian Jews were very pour under their local regime and were persecuted. Their whole propery was exploited when they left.

Israel will continue to exist, despite your hatred, depite your will to acknowledge it.

Shai says:

19.10.12 at 11:05 pm (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1337>)

Hi Sophie,

I am from Israel, nice article, Interesting, but very one-sided.

To start with, the Syrian Jews.

The reason why they are not in Syria anymore is because they were driven out by force, their property was confiscated and their lives was in danger.

This is why they fled out of Syria.

The same story happened in Iraq, Egypt and other Arab countries.

In total, about 1 million Jews became refugees from Arab counties.

Most of these refugees came to Israel with nothing but the clothes they were wearing.

The newly born Israeli state accepted the Jewish refugees with open arms and they became normal citizens.

This is why there are no Jewish refugees today.

However, the Arab refugees who fled to the Arab countries were not treated as such, they were put in camps, denied human rights and till this day, more than 60 years after the war, are considered "Refugees".

Moreover, their sons and grandsons are considered "Refugees" do not have any citizenship.

Why? because if they were given citizenship, there wouldn't be the "Refugee problem".

These poor people, their sons and grandsons are being used by Arab states as political ammo, for more than 60 years.

This is just the tip of the iceberg in regards to your one-sided view of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

Hopefully my response would encourage you to dig deeper into the facts.

Peace,

Shai

Amirah says:

20.10.12 at 2:12 pm (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1338>)

Thank you for your honesty and beautiful writing and for sharing this experience.

I am a Hebrew teacher, though I teach Jewish youth at a synagogue, rather than in a university setting.

It has always, since I began this work, been my deepest intention to challenge these political and power structures that exist in Hebrew education, which helped to create your experience and which build a mythological Israel and a singular idea of Jewishness in the minds of Jewish young people in this country.

I work hard so that my classroom will be a space where my students are invited to look at Hebrew as a religious and political language (and not as the only Jewish language), to ask lots of questions, to speak their minds.

When they ask me about my experience of being Israeli, I do not speak in protest slogans, but I try to give them honest answers that do not whitewash the militaristic, colonial society that I was raised in and that encourage them to look at their own society with open eyes and hearts.

Very importantly, I want to create a space where all of my students who are not white, middle-class Ashkenazi Jews to love themselves and affirm their cultures, and not just as tokens or diversity assets.

I don't know why I'm writing this - I guess because I was very moved and I feel reminded of the importance of continuing this work, even when it is extremely discouraging and I feel like I'm walking on a tightrope that's about to break.

Again, thank you.

Adel Nehmeh says:

25.10.12 at 3:51 pm (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1339>)

Sophie,

I completely understand where you come from as I am Lebanese too, I am from the south originally but spent my life in Beirut. I lived all the recent Israeli wars and aggressions that my 26 years have allowed me to witness. BUT, I think your own upbringing and culture, have made this class so unbearable for you.

Instead of looking at the Jewish girl that did not know anything about war in an embracing mentality, you judged her for her ignorance. I think it would be great if we did not reside to the wars created by others.

I can refer to many other similar examples, that just like them, me and you will only perceive from a different angle and category because that is how we were programmed. It is hard to format our system and encode ourselves to embrace what we have been taught to be an enemy,

but I hope you are able to do that if you are still taking the classes.

These American Jews were taught since the day they were born to believe in Israel as the promise land, they grew up on the stories of the prosecution and exile of their ancestors. They too have a history full of horror and connect strongly to their only recognized homeland. They did not choose to kill Palestenians, attack Lebanese. They were simply born Jew, just like you were born Shia.

I salute your courage to take the Hebrew class as many Lebanese, especially Shia from the south, would be opposed the the idea from the beginning.

Such experiences and opportunities, should help us recognize that we can sit with, talk to and eat with Jews. We are humans in the end. We both want the best for our families and our countries. Recognize the human, the peer in your classmates and you would see hope in coexistence. Of course that does not mean give up the rights of the Palestenians, and accept the zionist school of thought, but I have met lots of Israelis and Jews who were not zionists and wanted to kill all Palestenians.

thank you for writing this piece and sharing personal information with the world.

Rotem says:

12.03.14 at 10:25 pm (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hebrew-ani-mi-levanon/#comment-1340>)

شالوم يا سوفي

انا اسرائيلي (صهيوني..) من قريب ان تل ابيب وقيل سنوات درست اللغة العربية في المدرسة

انا نصف يماني ونصف الماني كمان وبعد خدمتي في الجيش الاسرائيلي ساكنت سنتين في باريس ودرست مع رفاق عربي من لبنان (شيعي ومسيحيين... وخليجيون ومصريون... يعني مم كل الشرق الأوسط

دراسة اللغة هي اكثر من اللغة فقط. دراسة اللغة تعمل الثقافة والموسيقى وكل الأفراد في الحياة

يوم واحد... في المستقبل... يكون السلام بيننا. مياه بالمياه

. نحن نستقبلكم جيران وان شاء الله انتم تستقبلنا جيرانكم

. خلم حلو وان شاء الله في الايماننا - حقيقة

الله يسلمك وكل النجاح والايتمامات في الدراسات . مع السلامة

روتم

Pingback: Sprankelende verhalen uit het Midden-Oosten | Het Grote Midden Oosten Platform (<http://hetgrotemiddenoostenplatform.nl/2016/01/05/sprankelende-verhalen-uit-het-midden-oosten/>)

Leave a Reply

You must be logged in (https://www.mashallahnews.com/wp-login.php?redirect_to=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mashallahnews.com%2Fhebrew-ani-mi-levanon%2F) to post a comment.

Recent posts

25.02.20 — Sarah Khazem, Mashallah Team

The next-door neighbour



Beirut (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hamra/>)

12.12.19 — Micheline Tobia

Arabic unexpectedly brings people together



Beirut (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/arabic-unexpectedly-brings-people-together/>)

Related posts

15.12.10 — Jenny Gustafsson

A matter of speaking



Beirut (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/trilingualism-a-matter-of-speaking/>)

15.06.11 — Jenny Gustafsson

Linguistic links



Beirut (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/linguistic-links/>)

Popular posts

25.02.20 — Sarah Khazem, Mashallah Team

The next-door neighbour



Beirut (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/hamra/>)

12.12.19 — Micheline Tobia

Arabic unexpectedly brings people together



Beirut (<https://www.mashallahnews.com/arabic-unexpectedly-brings-people-together/>)

Mashallah News 2020 — Design by AMI (<http://www.amiamiami.ch/>) & codes by Wonderweb (<http://wonderweb.ch/>)

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>)

