

Policing the Intimate

Israel's Anti-Miscegenation Movement

Sarah Ihmoud

On the evening of 16 August 2012, Jamal Julani, a seventeen-year-old Palestinian boy from the Ras al-‘Amud neighborhood of occupied East Jerusalem, was beaten unconscious in Zion Square, a large public area just past the Green Line’s invisible borders marking East from West Jerusalem. A group of about fifty Jewish Israeli teenagers had marched through the streets chanting “Death to Arabs,” and seemed, one witness recalled, to be “hunting for Arab victims.”¹ When they came upon Julani and his three cousins, the boys tried to flee, but the attackers blocked them. Hundreds watched, but no one intervened, as the group of Jewish Israeli youth beat Jamal nearly to death. While it was initially treated as a “brawl,” Israeli police later referred to the attack as a “lynching.”

Days later, during a police investigation, one of the attackers’ brothers, who had also been present at the scene, told court reporters it was the four Arab youths who had provoked passersby by “making passes at Jewish girls.” He added: “Why should an Arab make passes at my sister? *They shouldn’t be here, it’s our area.* For what reason would they come here if not to make passes at Jewish girls?”² While Julani still lay in critical condition, wavering between life and death in a nearby hospital, a fifteen-year-old Jewish youth involved said outside the courthouse, “For all I care, let him die. He’s an Arab . . . If it was up to me, I’d have murdered him.”³

In the aftermath of the so-called Jerusalem lynching, a poster in Hebrew and Arabic was distributed in the streets of East and West Jerusalem and circulated on Facebook, gaining hundreds of “likes” and “shares.”⁴ It read:

Dear Arab guy: We don’t want you to get hurt! Our daughters are valuable to us, and just as you

would not want a Jew to date your sister, we are also unwilling for an Arab to date a girl from among our people. Just as you would do anything to stop a Jew from dating your sister – so do we! If you are thinking of visiting Jerusalem malls or the pedestrian street [*midrechov*] with the intention of dating Jewish girls – this isn't the place for you. You may walk around in your own village freely and find girlfriends there, not here! Last week an Arab who thought he might find Jewish girls got hurt. We don't wish for you to get hurt, So respect our daughters' honor, as we mind it dearly!⁵

The poster, distributed by Lehava (the Hebrew acronym for Preventing Assimilation in the Holy Land) mobilizes a discourse of protecting Jewish women from Palestinian men as part of a movement to prevent intermarriage or intimate relationships between Palestinians and Jews. Benzi Gopstein, director of Lehava and a follower of Meir Kahane,⁶ praised the “lynching” of Julani and his cousins in its immediate aftermath and condemned the police investigation:

It seems that here the youth raised Jewish pride off the floor and did what the police should have done. They did justice with the Arab criminals harassing Jewish girls . . . An Arab guy that wants to find a girl should look in his own village . . . he shouldn't come to us here in Jerusalem.⁷

Gopstein's words, along with those of Julani's attackers and the materials distributed by Lehava, evoke the production of a racialized boundary between Palestinian and Jewish subjects drawn not only on the space of the Israeli-Palestinian borderlands – in which the city of Jerusalem is imagined as a Jewish space, with Arab life relegated to “villages” – but also on the intimate geographies of the body. Here, the Arab body is a criminal body, a sexually lascivious predator on Jewish women; the Jewish female body, conversely, is an endangered body, one whose pride and honor demands protection.

In this article, I examine the discourses of what I term an anti-miscegenation movement that appeals to foundational Zionist logics about the gendered relationship between the individual and the nation. These logics are tied, as in other historical contexts, to a larger project that seeks to demarcate and police social and geographic boundaries and national belonging: in this context, the boundary between who belongs to the Jewish nation and who does not – a distinction whose significance is made all the clearer with the recent passage of the so-called nation-state law. I argue that the erection of racialized boundaries between Palestinian and Jewish subjects are energized by a gendered discourse that constructs Palestinian masculinity as a hypersexualized threat to Jewish women, and thus, the Jewish nation. I term this “policing the intimate.” Jewish women emerge, within this context, as symbolic “border guards” whose bodies and sexualities must be controlled and protected.⁸ I understand these logics as part of a gendered nationalism that not only works to justify violence against Palestinian masculinities, and Palestinian communities more generally, but also helps produce the Jewish self as dominant, enabling both Jewish

men and women to achieve a sense of gendered racial superiority. The practices of the anti-miscegenation movement are a form of “social policing” a concept that highlights the role of Israeli civil society in policing the boundaries of the nation, pointing to the viscerally embodied political imaginary and practices shared by the state and its settler subjects.

Policing the Intimate

State surveillance and control over geographies of the intimate have played central roles in consolidating gendered-racial colonial power in historical instances as varied as Nazi Germany, Apartheid South Africa, and the Jim Crow United States. Racial laws that politicized private life were passed in each of these instances both as a technology of governance and as a means to protect the material benefits of “whiteness as property.”⁹ The surveillance of black or racially “othered” bodies arose in response to anxieties over a feared loss of white bodily integrity, an endangerment of the material benefits of whiteness.¹⁰

Intensified surveillance of the private and intimate sites of everyday life has been recognized as a “trope of colonial rule,” as those invested in the maintenance of colonialism’s racial regimes concerned themselves with the governance of the most intimate details of everyday life, from management of the domestic sphere to sexual relationships to “sentiment” itself – what Ann Stoler has termed the “education of desire.”¹¹ Scholars who have probed the embodied and gendered aspects of colonialism share an attunement to the nontransparent, often elusive, sites of colonial power embedded in the social fabric of the everyday.¹² In the intimate management of race – the governance of the domestic, familial, and sexual lives of those living in the liminal spaces created by the colonial situation – power is both reproduced and contested.

As in other colonial contexts, Israeli policies have attempted to police the intimate spheres of both Palestinian and Jewish life in order to demarcate who belongs and who does not belong to the Jewish nation.¹³ The presence of Palestinian bodies inside the still-expanding boundaries of the Israeli polity propels state violence, securitization, and suspension of civil liberties, using a variety of juridical-spatial strategies of segregation (including discriminatory laws, dividing walls, and checkpoints). These surveillance strategies are complemented by informal mechanisms of civil society control of the most intimate relations – what I call social policing. Social policing describes the processes by which some groups of Israel’s citizenry engage in practices of surveillance and social control that extend the panoptic gaze of the state.¹⁴

In the following section, I highlight some of the discourses and practices of the emergent Israeli anti-miscegenation movement. I then analyze the anxiety around sexual relations between Jewish women and Arab men. This anxiety, I contend, is premised on foundational Zionist logics that seek to reform and purify the Jewish body and/as the Jewish nation, a force that animates a range of racial schema between colonizer and colonized.

Dangerous Arab Men and Endangered Jewish Women

On 20 July 2010, in a now infamous case, an Israeli court convicted Saber Kushour of “rape by deception” and sentenced him to eighteen months in prison. An Israeli woman with whom Kushour had engaged in consensual sex discovered that he was not Jewish, as she had thought, but Palestinian, and pressed charges. In the verdict, Jerusalem district court judge Tzvi Segal wrote that although this was not “a classical rape by force” and the sex was consensual, the consent itself was obtained through deception and under false pretenses. “The court is obliged to protect the public interest from sophisticated, smooth-tongued criminals who can deceive innocent victims at an unbearable price – the sanctity of their bodies and souls,” Segal added.¹⁵

The court’s ruling, which included a “new definition of rape” frames Palestinian Arabs as “criminal elements” who are a threat to the Jewish “public interest” in their ability to invade the “sanctity of [women’s] bodies and souls.”¹⁶ Although no explicit law preventing sexual relations between Palestinians and Jews currently exists, the sentiment of the judicial ruling is to be found not only in the public statements of some Israeli officials, but also among the practices of a complex array of state and civil society actors.¹⁷



Demonstrators in Zion Square, West Jerusalem, hold aloft the Israeli flag and an image of Meir Kahane. The demonstrators also wear and present for the camera stickers produced by Lehava, warning Arab men in Hebrew and Arabic: “Don’t even dare to think about Jewish women!” (14 July 2014. Photos courtesy of Sarah Ihmoud.)

In a video shown in the public school system of Kiryat Gat, a city thirty-five miles south of Tel Aviv in the Southern District of Israel, high school girls are warned about how to protect themselves from being lured into romantic relationships with local Bedouin Arabs. The video, *Sleeping with the Enemy*, is part of a program launched in 2008 to prevent Jewish girls from becoming sexually involved with the “Arab minority,” an initiative backed by the local government and police and led by Kiryat Gat’s welfare representative.¹⁸ *Sleeping with the Enemy* “features a local police officer and a woman from the Anti-Assimilation Department, a wing of the religious organization Yad L’Achim, which works to prevent Jewish girls from dating Muslim men.”¹⁹ The video quotes from the Qur’an in an attempt to demonstrate that Islam condones the mistreatment of women. (The conflation of Arabs and Muslims speaks not only to the Islamophobia of the anti-miscegenation movement, but to its broader religio-nationalist framing.) Further, a Yad L’Achim representative discusses the deceit with which Arabs begin their flirtations with Jewish women:

The affair begins as superficial love which appears to be authentic. Many times the girl doesn’t even know she’s going with someone who is a minority. He introduces himself with a Hebrew name and speaks Hebrew fluently.²⁰

In a lecture preceding the video, a representative of the town welfare services department states:

Like they warn you to be careful while driving or when they warn you to be careful when swimming in the sea and there’s a black flag and a red flag – when it’s allowed and when it’s forbidden – the same thing we’re doing to warn [Jewish] girls of this unnatural phenomenon . . . The girls, in their innocence, hook up with Bedouin Arabs who exploit them. She sleeps with the enemy without realizing it.²¹

The discourse of the video and the welfare representative echoes that of Judge Segal in the Jerusalem case, where Arab men are portrayed as hypersexualized, dangerous, and deceptive, and Jewish women are portrayed as needing protection.

The fact that the video is shown with the support of local government and administered by the welfare services department points to the perception of Arab-Jewish sexual relations as a social problem requiring state intervention. In another instance, local authorities in Petah Tikva, a city near Tel Aviv, established a team of youth counselors and psychologists whose duty it is to identify young Jewish women dating Palestinian men in order to “rescue” them. The municipality also sponsors a telephone hotline where friends and family members can call in to “inform” on Jewish girls who date Palestinian men.

Yad L’Achim, an orthodox Jewish nonprofit organization founded in Israel in 1950 with the expressed goal of helping immigrants adjust to the newly founded state and

adopt Judaism, has emerged as an active player on the frontlines of what it terms “non-conventional warfare” – “saving Jewish souls” through preventing “intermarriage” between Jewish women and Arab men. Its Anti-Assimilation Department engages solely in the prevention of interracial dating between Jewish women and Palestinian men, the “rescue” of Jewish women and their children from Arab villages (again, denying Palestinians’ presence in urban areas as anything other than interlopers), and treatment of “survivors” of Jewish-Arab marriages.²² As the organization describes it:

People must understand that Jewish-Arab marriages are part of the larger Israeli-Arab conflict. These girls are in distress, they are wandering the streets and the Arabs take advantage of them. They see it as their goal to marry them and ensure that their children aren’t raised as Jews. This is their revenge against the Jewish people. They feel that if they can’t defeat us in war, they can wipe us out this way. We must fight this threat as well; it’s a matter of national security.²³

In the discourse of this civil society organization, the Jewish female body emerges as symbolic of the nation state, the protection of which merits militarized intervention as a matter of national security. The organization claims to receive one thousand calls per year reporting cases of sexual relationships between Jewish women and Palestinian men. As the website states:

Our Anti-Assimilation department responds to all such calls. In some cases, this means launching military-like rescues from hostile Arab villages and setting the women up in “safe” houses around the country, where they can build new lives for themselves.²⁴

The discourse of “saving Jewish souls” displayed prominently as one of Yad L’Achim’s priorities is tied to preserving the sanctity of the Jewish woman’s body as symbol of the Jewish nation. Being romantically involved or married to a Palestinian man is pathologized and treated as a multifaceted danger to the Jewish nation – a security threat that merits intervention in the form of military rescue, and a disease whose victims require psychological rehabilitation. Moreover, the group draws on culturally essentialist portrayals of Islam and Muslim culture to stake its claims that Jewish women need saving. Muslim men are portrayed as inherently violent predators, and Jewish women are warned that “the Koran relates to a husband’s treatment of his wife very differently from Western norms. What a Western woman would regard as a breach of her rights, Muslim women find perfectly acceptable.”²⁵

Like Yad L’Achim, in recent years Lehava has launched multiple campaigns to prevent “assimilation” between Palestinians and Jews. Notably, the organization has targeted public spaces of potential Palestinian-Jewish sociability and corporeal proximity. In one campaign, the organization targeted workplaces, urging Jewish employers not to employ

Palestinians, and urging Jewish patrons, both religious and secular, to boycott those stores not hiring exclusively Jewish labor. As part of their campaign, the group began providing certificates to stores that were “clean of Arabs” and employed only “Jewish labor.” The primary justification throughout the campaign was that Palestinian laborers endangered Jewish women workers, who were apt to become ensnared in romantic relationships with Palestinian coworkers. In 2010, a Jewish supermarket chain was targeted with posters around Jerusalem’s ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods. The posters read: “Do you want your grandson to be named Ahmed ben Sarah?”²⁶ In another campaign, the organization created a “coast guard” aimed at “protecting” Jewish women from Palestinian men who supposedly pass as Jews and sexually harass them at public beaches. Discussing the campaign, Gopstein stated: “Last year we discovered that there are many gentiles [non-Jews] arriving at the beaches, but not in search of the sun or water.”²⁷

In December 2010, Lehava published a letter signed by dozens of rabbis’ wives calling on young Jewish women not to engage in personal relationships with Arab men. The letter stated:

There are more than a few Arab laborers who call themselves by Hebrew names. Yusuf becomes Itai, Samir becomes Sammy, and Abed becomes Ami. They try to get close to you. They try to make you like them and heap all the attention in the world on you. . . . But this behavior is only temporary. Once they’ve got you in their hands, in their village, under their control – everything changes. . . . Your life won’t be the same again, and the attention you craved will be replaced by curses, beatings, and humiliation. . . . Do not date gentiles, do not work in places where there are gentiles, and do not perform National Service together with gentiles.²⁸

What compels the anti-miscegenation movement to draw upon discourses of dangerous Arab masculinity in its array of discourses, programming, and practices? Why is it that Jewish women, rather than men, are the targets of such discourses and practices? Why is control over Jewish women’s sexual choices deserving of state and/or nonstate intervention? In the following section, I delve into the politics of reproduction as a way of opening up these questions and investigating the racialized body politics of the Jewish state.

Reproducing the Jewish Body

Understanding the gendered discourse of the anti-miscegenation movement requires understanding the relationship between the gendered body and the nation within Zionism and the Jewish national project. Women’s bodies have been constructed as a symbolic national periphery in a variety of contexts, as “biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities” and “reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national

groups.”²⁹ As “symbolic border guards,” women embody the nation’s boundaries; their bodies thus become contested geographies.³⁰ Establishing a settler colonial society has been intimately tied to the “political and ideological pressures to define and reproduce the national collectivity in Israel,” a form of biopolitical management that constitutes Jewish Israeli women as its “national reproducers.”³¹ Jewish Israeli women “have been ‘recruited’ in the ‘demographic war’ to bear more children as their national duty to the Jewish people in general and in the Israeli Jewish people in particular.”³² As Nira Yuval-Davis highlights, the issue of national reproduction, “both in terms of its ideological boundaries and in terms of the reproduction of its membership,” has been at the center of Zionist discourse. Israeli demographic policies have historically had two primary goals: to “maintain and . . . increase Jewish domination in Israel”; and to “reproduce and enlarge ‘the Jewish people’ all over the world” in response to the Nazi Holocaust and what Israel refers to as the “‘Demographic Holocaust’ and assimilation.”³³

The Zionist project conceptualized the survival of Israel as a “demographic race” early on, as its leadership believed that sovereignty could not be achieved without a Jewish demographic majority. While Jewish immigration (*aliya*) and settlement was considered the quickest and most efficient method of increasing the Jewish presence in Palestine, the Zionist leadership’s preoccupation with the “need” to establish a Jewish demographic advantage was not limited to such efforts to bring Jews to Palestine. Within Palestine itself, “Jewish family size became an issue of security and a sacred national mission. Natality (having large families) was tantamount to patriotism.”³⁴

Expanding the Jewish birth rate thus became a matter of national policy, and women were encouraged to have more children as part of their “national duty.” In the 1950s, Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion implemented a financial reward for “heroine mothers” who had ten children or more.³⁵ The prize was quietly discontinued some ten years later, when it was revealed the majority of recipients were Palestinian women.³⁶ Israel moved to adopt and implement a formal “demographic policy” designed “to create an atmosphere that allows for the encouragement of natality, considering its critical role in the future of the Jewish people.”³⁷ The government program called for “ongoing pro-natal promotional campaigns and the removal of economic and social barriers and to offer relief in areas of education, housing, insurance, etc., with the goal of encouraging families to increase the number of their children.”

The state’s attempts to encourage population growth was accompanied by tightened restrictions on birth control and abortion. The tightening of abortion regulations in the 1970s was accompanied by an

emotive call to the Jewish mothers to do their national duty and replace the Jewish children killed by the Nazis. An extreme example of this ideology was a suggestion, narrowly defeated, of the Advisor of the Minister of Health at the time, Haim Sdan, to force every woman considering an abortion to watch a slide show which would include, in addition to horrors

of dead fetuses in rubbish bins, the pictures of dead children in Nazi concentration camps.³⁸

Pro-natal policies were subsequently passed in the Israeli Knesset, including the 1983 “Law on Families Blessed with Children,” which provided a range of subsidies to Jewish families with more than three children.³⁹ Such demographic calculations remained a priority for subsequent Israeli administrations. Pro-natal policies continue today through a variety of reproductive technologies and practices that enable the production of the Jewish body and the disappearance of the Palestinian body. These practices go beyond pronatalism, bordering on a form of racial eugenics tied to the white nationalist character of the state.⁴⁰ Beyond encouraging birth and expanding Jewish families to fight in the “demographic war,” pronatalist policies worked to “purify” the Jewish race and maintain exclusivity of the “chosen people.” While Israel encouraged demographic growth among its Jewish population, it discouraged such growth among Palestinians with policies aimed at “containing Palestinians and their fertility.”⁴¹ Palestinian women’s bodies and sexualities have been constructed as the vessel of a “demographic threat” that should be controlled and eliminated, making them a site of continuous political violence.⁴² The anti-miscegenation movement’s focus on protection of Jewish women and their bodies, and attempts to exercise control over their sexual choices, thus stems from the Zionist construction of women as reproducers of the Jewish nation, and a discourse framing Palestinians as a demographic threat to the security of the nation.

A “Hierarchy of Bodies”: Race and Miscegenation

At the same time that women’s bodies became the vessel for national reproduction, an emphasis was placed on the importance of Jewish motherhood in producing the “New Jew,” a process of rehabilitating the denigrated Jewish body that lay at the heart of regenerating the Jewish nation. Indeed, as Meira Weiss highlights, Zionism has a “unique bodily aspect,” which, stemming from the denigration of the Jewish body throughout Europe for centuries, sought to rehabilitate the Jewish body and especially Jewish masculinity.⁴³

Rather than challenging the Orientalist images that excluded and subjugated Jews in Europe, Zionism “internalized and reproduced them.”

Zionism modeled the “new Jew” on white European values and culture in purposeful opposition to Eastern cultural markers carried by Middle Eastern Jews and certainly by Muslim and Christian Arabs. As a derivative of Enlightenment Europe, Zionism reproduced the polarized binaries of the superior, enlightened West and the inferior, primitive East. It claimed that Jews as a national entity belonged to the superior, enlightened West

despite their geographical origins in the East and sought to enlighten (read: colonize) its primitive peoples.⁴⁴

Thus, Israel's European founders reified European supremacy in ascribing new value onto Jewish subjectivity and nationality in relation to the racialized Arab Other.

The "rehabilitation" of the Oriental Jew by making him European was a decidedly gendered endeavor. As Weiss's work explains, the construction of this "new Jew" as a sacralized "chosen body" is the attempt of the diaspora Jew as Other to reinvent himself by embodying the hegemonic European body, resting on the collective construction of a healthy masculine body in service of the Jewish nation.⁴⁵ The Hebrew man, whose reconstructed body symbolizes this national recovery, thus energizes a racialized "hierarchy of bodies" in Israel.

While the rehabilitation of Jewish masculinity is largely absent in contemporary Zionist discourse, it is performed through the anti-miscegenation movement's discourses and practices of social policing, which construct Jewish men (and women) as heteropatriarchal and hypermasculine protectors of the Jewish body and, hence, the Jewish nation. The construction of Palestinian masculinity as violent and threatening, and the infliction of violence against Palestinian subjects perceived as dangerous and violating the sanctity of the Jewish body, is a continuation of this sexualized logic. Thus, I argue that by inflicting pain on the Palestinian body, the Jewish subject seeks to feminize Palestinian masculinity, and in doing so perform a gendered sense of racial superiority. The politics of the anti-miscegenation movement lie between a fear of Palestinian hypermasculinity and its power to "contaminate" and erase the "purity of the race" and feminizing Palestinian masculinity as a pathological deviation from proper manhood.

The mobilization of such Orientalist discourses can be understood as part of a broader trend in displacing racial discourse with that of culture. In this instance, the language of cultural difference stands in for race. As Kamala Visweswaran argues, while the culture concept "is characteristically meant to displace race . . . culture has turned out to be a way of continuing rather than repudiating racial thought."⁴⁶ Cultural discourse framing Palestinians as sexual predators of Jewish women reveals, as I have previously argued, the "extent to which a gendered and sexualized Orientalist ideology saturates the Israeli settler colonial imaginary."⁴⁷

The desire for racial and sexual "legibility," tied to the settler desire for land and predicated on a project of native erasure, propels the policing of intimacy and identity. At times, such policing is performed by the Israeli state. The Kushour case, for example, warns Palestinian men and Israeli publics in general against sexual relationships across racial lines. Such transgressions confound and destabilize the categories of difference that enable the functioning and maintenance of state power and Jewish hegemony as racial whiteness. In other moments, policing is taken on by Jewish Israeli publics themselves – the nonprofit organization and the vigilante mob infiltrate spaces that are generally beyond the reach of a state seeking to maintain the fantasy of multicultural democracy.

Conclusion

In this article, I have analyzed the anti-miscegenation movement's discourse of needing to protect Jewish women and their bodies from dangerous Arab men, by highlighting the historical roots of such discourse in the Zionist history of gendered nationalism. What has been elided in analyses of Israel's racial character has not been its Orientalist tropes,⁴⁸ but the extent to which such tropes are gendered and sexualized. Israel's pronatalist policy, which positions Jewish women and their sexuality as symbolic border guards for the boundaries of the national collective, coupled with its attempt to restrict and restrain Palestinian "demographic growth" as an element of forced removal, is a reflection of the settler colonial regime. From a feminist perspective, it is the reproductive role of women and their bodies that animate the Zionist regime and its racial schema, a form of intimate state violence. Zionist colonial techno-scientific interventions work to discipline women's bodies and sexualities of both colonizer and colonized.

Such policies go beyond Foucault's well-rehearsed analysis of biopolitics, as Israel aims not merely to manage various populations, but to "rehabilitate" the Jewish body in the image of European masculinity. Beyond such rehabilitation, it is using the Jewish body, its "sacredness" and "purity," to energize the settler colonial regime. This bio-engineering orchestrates an ontological choreography of the body, where settler heteropatriarchy stakes its claims to the feminized Oriental land and body as an inherent aspect of its civilizing mission. The geography of the New Jewish body invades, occupies, and replaces the body of the native Other at the same time that it racially demarcates and segregates. Violence committed against native masculinities instills a gendered sense of racial superiority in the settler.

Yet the sacralized need to protect Jewish women's bodies and sexualities stems not only from construction of women's bodies as symbolic peripheries of the Jewish nation, but also a profound anxiety over policing the social, geographical, and racial boundaries between the Jewish people and the Palestinian "Other." A focus on policing of the intimate sphere reveals the concerns, anxieties, and fears that undergird the Israeli state's aspirations to a pure national bloodline and brings into central focus the relationship between space, race, and the body.⁴⁹ These practices of social policing, which mobilize religious discourse of the sacred duty to protect Jewish women and their bodies from dangerous Arab men, are used to justify racial segregation between the Palestinian and Jewish populations throughout the still-expanding and contested boundaries of the settler state, limiting interaction in employment, housing, education, and other aspects of social and political life, and purifying the racial boundaries of the Jewish nation.

Sarah Ihmoud is a postdoctoral associate in anthropology and women's, gender, and sexuality studies at Boston University.

Endnotes

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