

The (Hopefully) New Normal  
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## Proud to Partner with About Face Theatre on Omer Abbas Salem's *Mosque4Mosque!*



Ibrahim is an average 30-something queer Arab-American Muslim who is constantly being reminded that he is unmarried. But on the precipice of finding what could be his first real relationship, his mother feels compelled to take Ibrahim's future into her own hands by attempting to find the perfect Muslim man for him to marry. *Mosque4Mosque* is a comedy about a normal Muslim American family that challenges us to redefine what is "normal."



(From left to right) playwright and actor Omer Abbas Salem with actors Rula Gardenier and Gloria Imseih Petrelli in *Mosque4Mosque*

Silk Road Rising is providing dramaturgical and community outreach support for this production. In our last newsletter, we shared our groundbreaking conversation titled, "Putting It Together: Muslimness, Queerness, and Joy," which explores themes central to the world of *Mosque4Mosque*.

## Purchase Tickets for Mosque4Mosque

Check out Silk Road Rising's panel discussion, "Putting It Together: Muslimness, Queerness, and Joy," on YouTube

**The Polyculturalist**

Journeys in Cultural Interchange



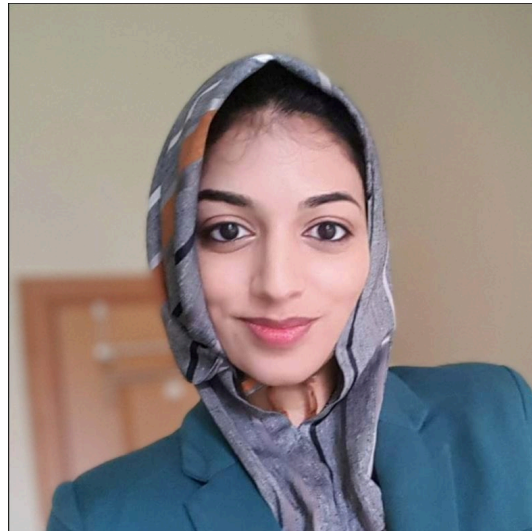
publication, *The Polyculturalist*, features actor, director, and educator, Daniel Cantor. We are thrilled to be sharing Daniel's wisdom with our Silk Road Rising community.

Stay tuned for expanded interview transcripts when *The Polyculturalist* officially debuts on Substack.

## Introducing Daniel Cantor

*This interview was conducted on July 25, 2022 by Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala, Polycultural Institute's Advisory Council Coordinator.*

**Tasneem:** As a professor of acting and an actor yourself, how do you think the embodied experience of communicating someone else's story transforms our understanding of ourselves and each other?



**Daniel Cantor:** Do we see the function of storytelling to be a mirror, an iteration of self, or do we see it to be a door to walk through to reach from self to other? We're always reaching from self to other, even if the other is in our exact demographic. If you only play what you know, you're only going to be doing your autobiography over and over again. There's something about polyculturalism that contains a paradox: it recognizes human variety, and through it, also recognizes a core common humanity. The act of portraying someone different from you assumes a core commonality. It starts with an act of empathy. I think it's very exciting for polyculturalism to inject itself into theatre to assert the complexity of human identity.



**Tasneem:** You have just embarked on your first acting role in a Broadway production, the world premiere of Tom Stoppard's *Leopoldstadt*. Aside from the obvious, what excites you most about this extraordinary opportunity?

**Daniel:** The play is exciting to me because it grapples with identity in currently relevant ways. It takes place in the first half of the twentieth century and is about a Jewish family in Vienna that is itself integrated - some are in "mixed" marriages and have roots in different parts of the empire. Two of the characters, Hermann and Ludwig, have particularly compelling roles. Hermann celebrates living in an integrated Vienna, and Ludwig pushes back against him by warning of the ubiquity of antisemitism, that ultimately a homeland - "a territory to have"- will be necessary. Stoppard gives a legitimate voice to both sides. The play explores the conundrums and paradoxes of human identity, looking at various sides without providing an authorial "answer"; This is what makes a great play. The play also manages to honor those who perished in the Holocaust in a way that is unsentimental, utterly earned, and deeply moving. I'm thrilled to be a part of it; honored

deep reverberation.



Daniel played the Apostle Paul in Silk Road Rising's 2013 production of Motti Lerner's *Paulus*.

***Antigone Project* and how it relates to polyculturalism?**

**[*The Antigone Project* invites actors from various cultural/ethnic backgrounds to rotate throughout the play so that every actor eventually performs all roles].**

That has become the *Medea Project*. I've been wanting to do a rock & roll adaptation of a Greek play for some time. We settled on *Medea* - now *Rock Medea* in our version - because it's about love, betrayal, heartbreak, about carnal passion turning into a passion grief—it's the blues! Doing a Greek play, there is some rightful questioning of a Eurocentric canon being at the core. Ancient Greece was mostly in economic and cultural exchange with people to their south and east, what we call North Africa and West Asia. That was the culture. In fact, the act of colonialization is the Western academy claiming the Greeks as their own. Rather than taking the Greeks out of the curriculum, I want to reassert that the Greeks are, in fact, polycultural in their sensibility, and so then can be claimed and performed by a diverse set of performers. I think it's exciting to be in a space that utilizes culturally conscious open casting. Without being general or eliminating difference, we're entering a space where we're asserting a shared humanity.



Daniel and David Darlow in Victory Gardens Theater's 2019 production of Steven Levenson's *If I Forget*.

**Tasneem: Please tell us a story of a time when someone surprised you because they supported you or demonstrated compassion towards you even though you expected otherwise.**

A couple of years ago, I gave students the assignment to interview somebody demographically different from themselves. The conversation began—it took the entire class—and I asked a lot of questions that were challenging. For example, the students felt very comfortable with someone playing a different gender. Yet, they didn't feel comfortable about someone playing a different race. And I said, "Okay—how come?" They said, "Well, gender is a construct." I said, "Okay, gender is a construct. What about race?" And there was a pause—well, race is a construct, too! And I saw them thinking, "Wait, do we have a consistent logic here about what we believe?"

We took a break, and I was nervous. This is a heightened time in history when young people don't want to be challenged on these issues. I felt I was going to get a lot of animosity. When we came back, one of the students said, "Hey, Dan, we were talking during the break."

are so grateful for the questions you're asking. You're really making us think about these things deeply." I thought the students were going to be mad at me for challenging some of their assertions, but, in fact, they were grateful.



As the founder of the UV Theatre Project, Daniel directed Anton Chekhov's famed classic, *Three Sisters*, in 2019. The UV Theatre Project is currently working on *Rock Medea*.



**Polycultural  
Institute**

**Connecting People, Cultures, and Communities**

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## **Congratulations Tasneem!**

Join us in celebrating Polycultural Institute's Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala on the publication of her new book, *South Asian American Stories of Self: The Dis/United States of Muslim Womanhood*.

Tasneem Mandviwala

# South Asian American Stories of Self

The Dis/United States of Muslim  
Womanhood

 Springer

[Click here for more information and  
to purchase her book](#)

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