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Beyond Collective Violence: Capturing Context and Complexity in Palestinian Diasporic Resistance

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Abstract

Approximately 50 percent of the world's Palestinians reside in the diaspora, territorially disconnected from occupied Palestine, but no less part of a population so often associated with political resistance. This article asks: how do Palestinians living in the UK express resistance to the military occupation of their homeland? In what ways are such expressions of resistance shaped by social processes specific to such a context? It makes the case for a more nuanced analysis of resistance amongst Palestinians living in the UK, framed by understandings of (post)colonialism. Through a qualitative analysis of ethnographic interviews with Palestinians residing in Manchester and Edinburgh in 2013, I begin by outlining a postcolonial context in the UK characterized by an Orientalism that Palestinians are forced to negotiate. I then spotlight 'storytelling' as an important instance of everyday resistance within (post)colonial settings, suggesting that storytelling might allow Palestinians to negotiate their resistance against the various constraints of life in the UK. The

findings challenge notions of 'violence' and collectivity traditionally associated with Palestinian resistance, pointing towards a need to reconceptualize everyday diasporic resistance in light of often complex, context-specific interactions.

Keywords

diaspora, everyday resistance, Orientalism, Palestinian resistance, postcolonialism, sociology, storytelling, violence

Introduction

> The idea of resistance gets content and muscle from Palestine; more usefully, resistance gets detail and a positively new approach to the microphysics of oppression from Palestine. (Said, 1992: 125)

Famous for their 'steadfastness', Palestinians have been the subject of swathes of sociological research, and their resistance to decades of military occupation has, unsurprisingly, captured the imagination of the Western academy. Unfortunately, the canonical literature continues to favour the extremities of resistance: cultures of violence, identities of armed struggle and the making of martyrs are just a few examples (Nakhleh, 1971; Peteet, 1994; Abufarha, 2009; Khalidi, 2010). Such grandiose concepts are without doubt alluring, but how much can they tell us about the nuances of resistance for Palestinians living in the UK today?

A number of scholars have attempted to make clear that unarmed Palestinian resistance has existed in times of armed conflict as well as during so-called 'peacetime' (Said, 1992; King, 2007; Hallward and Norma, 2012). Furthermore, Palestinian resistance has never been limited to the antagonist's territory and, if anything, the sort of Palestinian resistance that gained notoriety in the West was born in exile (see Khalidi, 2010). Despite this, everyday experiences of Palestinians in the diaspora have generally been neglected. This is especially true of those Palestinians living in the Western hemisphere whose stories, perhaps seeming less 'exotic' than those of their eastern counterparts, we rarely hear. Developing the idea of diasporic resistance, this paper asks the following: in what ways do Palestinians living in Britain today – distinct in both time and place from the Palestinian resistance movements that dominate the literature – resist the Zionist project facilitating the continued military occupation of their homeland? How do social processes specific to a contemporary British context – but intimately linked to Britain's historical relationship with Palestine – affect how this resistance is expressed? In exploring these questions, I hope that I might problematize the recurrent association of Palestinian resistance with violence and instead highlight a fundamental multiplicity of resistance as a socially and historically mediated phenomenon. Before attempting to explore the contemporary terrain of what Gilroy (2004: 125) describes as a 'postcolonial

melancholia', let us briefly outline the historical specificities of Britain's relationship with Palestine and the Palestinians.

Britain's involvement in Palestine began following the First World War and the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Under the rule of the British, a series of ambiguous promises by British officials gave credence and support to the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The 1917 Balfour Declaration was one such promise, '[taking] for granted the higher right of a colonial power to dispose of a territory as it saw fit' (Said, 1992: 16). Later ratified by the British Mandate for Palestine, it marked an 'alliance between British Imperialism and Zionism which both sides gained from' (Avnery quoted in Sabbagh, 2012: 45). The ambiguity of the terms of British support for Zionism meant Britain was absolved of much of its responsibility for a conflict that in 1948 culminated in the withdrawal of Britain from occupied Palestine, the declaration of the state of Israel and the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. For Palestinians, this was the year of the *Nakba*.[1]

In relation to Palestine, then, Sivanandan's (2008) statement that 'we are here because you were there' holds true: we can trace the UK's complicity in the settler-colonial project of Zionism to the continuing displacement of Palestinians from their homeland, many of whom arrive in the UK in search of a better life for themselves and their families. As Sivanandan (2008) re-iterates, 'colonialism and immigration are part of the same continuum'. I use the phrase

*post*colonialism loosely and with particular reference to Gilroy's conception of a 'postcolonial melancholia' (Gilroy, 2004: 125); a Britain that is struggling to reconcile the brutality of its colonial history with a very real multicultural reality in the wake of declining imperial power, the repercussions of which will be touched upon. Of course in relation to Palestine and elsewhere, the UK is still deeply implicated in projects of land and resource appropriation, occupation and displacement. The UK's continued arms deals with Israel (Smith, 2014) are just one reminder that when it comes to Palestine, whilst perhaps less physically present, we are still very much 'there'.

Based on a series of ethnographic interviews, I make the case for a reconsideration of how resistance operates for Palestinians living in the UK. I begin by attempting to outline some of the postcolonial parameters of life in the UK as talked about by those I met, before touching on 'storytelling' as a modality of resistance within this context, often obscured by a focus on 'violence' in the canonical literature. I explore the relationship between particular (post)colonial social processes and 'storytelling', asking whether, and how, such a context might circumscribe expressions of resistance for Palestinians living here.

My argument, then, is located at the nexus between the various sections: a necessary reconceptualization of Palestinian resistance in the UK. A more nuanced analysis based on context-specific understandings of the *interactions*

between social and historical processes at various levels opens up the space for this. Most importantly, it points towards practices of expressing resistance which challenge traditional notions of resistance as collective and inherently 'violent'.

Interviews were conducted with Palestinians residing in the two major UK cities of Manchester and Edinburgh in the summer of 2013. Whilst previous research with Palestinian diaspora communities has tended to focus on those in the North-West and South of England (see Long, 2006; Matar, 2006), my chosen locations allowed me to both contribute to, but also to extend, said research into Scotland, where Palestinian communities are smaller, receiving comparatively less attention. Further, although this study does not attempt to draw comparisons, differences in the demographics of the two cities lent themselves to a more varied sample. Participants were selected through theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 2004), with 10 ethnographic interviews conducted in total; seven participants were male, three were female. I unequivocally acknowledge here the limits of conducting a small-scale ethnographic study; I do not attempt to generalize the findings from this research, but I hope they might serve an indicative purpose and provide a point of departure from which traditional notions surrounding Palestinian resistance can begin to be problematized. Participants ranged from 20 to 50 years of age and came from a variety of occupational backgrounds, from taxi-drivers to students. I characterize the interviews as ethnographic due to their informal nature, as well as my established

and ongoing relationships with some participants through activist networks. The unbounded nature of interviews accommodated at least a degree of researcher 'reciprocity' (Oakley, 2004: 264) which played an important role in creating an environment appropriate to discussing what Swedenburg (1995: 27–8) rightly describes as 'a geographic/academic area … so emotionally and politically overcharged'. Similarly, interviews drew on notions of narrative sociology (Maines, 1993) in a broad sense, calling for an understanding of the sociological importance of narrative. Telling a story can be an 'invitation to bond' (Maines, 1993: 21) but stories can also be understood as 'social acts' which respond and speak to social conditions. Paying attention to narrative reminds us that sociologists, 'as social beings too' (Burawoy, 2013: 280), construct stories as interpreters of the social world, and indeed reflexivity remained a central tenet throughout the research process.

Toward a More Nuanced Understanding of Palestinian Diasporic Resistance

The Question of Palestine (Said, 1992) has been a focus of social and political enquiry for decades. At first glance, scholarly writing on Palestinian resistance seems to be in abundance, but it tends to focus on two major strands at the expense of a more holistic approach: first, the role of political organizations in shaping a Palestinian national identity centred around armed struggle (Sayigh, 1999; Khalidi, 2010), and second, the resistance of the intifada ('uprising') years

(Peretz, 1990; Peteet, 1994; Baroud, 2006; Abufarha, 2009). The title of
Nakhleh's 1971 article, 'The Anatomy of Violence: Theoretical Reflections on
Palestinian Resistance', neatly captures the central concern of earlier, pre-
intifada writings which often saw the Palestinian resistance movement of the
time as a 'textbook case for the study of violence as a phenomenon in the
political realm' (Nakhleh, 1971: 186). This focus on 'violence' continued with
the advent of both intifadas despite the centrality of unarmed civil disobedience
in both (King, 2007; Hallward and Norma, 2012), and the changing
contemporary character of the Palestinian political leadership (Rabbani, 1996;
Johnson and Kuttab, 2001; Khalidi, 2010). As a historically demonized
population, there remains a distinct lack of first-hand research with actual
Palestinians (Swedenburg, 1995: 26) which is surely only exacerbated –
particularly in relation to diaspora communities in the West – by such a fixation
on violence and the propensity for macro-political approaches. But even within
ethnographic research, Kelly (2008: 353) argues that there has been a tendency
towards 'over-determining violence' at the expense of the mundane which, in
reality, characterizes the vast majority of time and experience in contexts of
political conflict. Certainly, major ethnographic accounts from both intifadas
reinforce Kelly's concerns; Peteet's (1994) ethnography of Palestinian young
men during the first intifada draws together themes of bodily violence, ritual and
masculine identity, whilst Abufarha's research conducted after the second

intifada takes 'martyrdom operations' – in Western terms 'suicide bombings' (Abufarha, 2009: 2) – as its focal point. Meanwhile, Kelly goes on to suggest that 'an examination of the ordinary is just as important as the apparently extraordinary or exceptional' (Kelly, 2008: 353). I argue, then, that much of the canonical literature has tended to focus on violence at the expense of the 'everyday'. In doing so, expressions of resistance are decontextualized and dehistoricized. I suggest that an antidote to this might be found in applying a postcolonial analysis to everyday expressions of resistance.

A postcolonial perspective is uniquely situated in helping to make sense of the socio-historical context of the occupation of Palestine, but it also helps to reveal the complexities inherent in colonial relations, including the resistance of the colonized and its translation into a British context. Fanon (1986: 17) wrote of the Black man's sense of 'self-division' under colonial rule, while Said's (2003) theory of Orientalism exposed a long history of Western myth-making concerning the Arab 'other'. The colonizer constructs the colonized in ways that profoundly affect senses of self, but the 'story' of the colonial subject – who they fundamentally are, where they belong – is a highly contested terrain.

Whilst the image of kaffiyeh-clad *shabab*[2] dominates the popular imagination, there remains a significant body of research which highlights the diversity of modalities of everyday resistance both within and outwith Palestine. Music (McDonald, 2013), graffiti art (Parry, 2010), and naming traditions (Masalha,

2012) have all been explored, but it is the 'storytelling' elements of literature (Harlow, 1987; Said, 1993), oral histories (Masalha, 2012) and narratives (Khalili, 2007) that appear to speak most to those concerned with the legacy of colonialism and concurrent anti-colonial resistance.

Harlow (1987: xvii) contends that Palestinian literature can play a role 'alongside the gun, the pamphlet, and the diplomatic delegation'. Similarly, in *Culture and Imperialism,* Said (1993) explores the instrumentality of literary forms in both colonial enterprises and in concurrent resistance and *de*colonization. As part of 'national culture', storytelling 'organises and sustains collective memory' (Said, 1993: 260). Storytelling can thus re-assert indigenous national identities and culture as much as it can marginalize them. This cultural expression of resistance, Said (1993) argues, continues long after the establishment of newly independent, 'postcolonial' states.

As the work of Khalili (2007) and Masalha (2012) suggests, oral storytelling also constitutes a vital part of Palestinian claims-making. Khalili's (2007) writing on 'mnemonic narratives' in Palestinian refugee camps exemplifies storytelling as a social practice, its purpose and content slippery and shifting in light of wider social processes, reminding us that whilst 'where there is power, there is resistance' (Foucault, 1978: 95–6), resistance is always dynamic. Making an even more explicit link between anti-colonial resistance and oral traditions, Masalha (2012: 213) describes oral history as a 'decolonizing methodology' in

its ability to '[bring] to light hidden, suppressed or marginalised narratives' (Masalha, 2012: 211).

Addressing literature and oral histories together as forms of 'storytelling', I ask what their reproduction and retelling says about everyday life in the UK and its historical relationship with Palestine. In other words, what is it about the 'everyday' experiences of Palestinians living *here* that made engaging with literature and telling stories so ubiquitous amongst those I spoke to?

Johannson and Vinthagen (2014: 1) define everyday resistance as 'a specific kind of resistance that is done routinely yet is not publicly articulated with political claims or formally organized'. It is perhaps for these reasons that everyday resistance appears to be particularly complex. Here we might look also to the work of Lila Abu-Lughod, whose case for a shift in perspective regarding everyday resistance seems particularly pertinent. Not dissimilarly from Khalili, Abu-Lughod's (1990) discussion of the use of poetry amongst Bedouin women in Egypt emphasizes the importance of situating everyday forms of resistance within a wider social and political context; the use of poetry – who has access to it, its content and format – as an everyday form of resistance responds to wider changes and shifts in power. But further than this, Abu-Lughod (1990: 42) advocates using everyday resistance as a 'diagnostic of power', 'asking not about the status of resistance itself but about what the forms of resistance indicate about the forms of power that they are up against' (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 47). In

trying to develop an analytical framework for understanding everyday resistance, Johannson and Vinthagen (2014: 2) agree that it is fundamentally 'heterogenous and contingent' and 'historically entangled' with, rather than in opposition to, power. Further, everyday resistance possesses an 'inbuilt ambivalence' (Johannson and Vinthagen, 2014: 2). Perhaps Abu-Lughod's warning against automatically treating acts of resistance as 'signs of human freedom' (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 42) can be seen in light of such ambivalence.

It is against the background of these broader understandings of everyday and anti-colonial resistance that I have developed my own definition of what I simply term 'storytelling' as an expression of resistance, incorporating both literature and anecdotal storytelling. It is evident at this point that we should be mindful of reducing expressions of resistance to simple dichotomies. Instead, what needs to be asked is: how do modalities for expressing resistance *interact* with hegemonic power structures? And what implications does this have for understanding how Palestinians are able to, or choose to, express resistance to occupation? Aside from the tendency to reduce Palestinian resistance to its most violent expression, what receives comparatively less attention in the literature is an attempt to reconcile the constraining effects of postcolonial power structures in the UK with opportunities for everyday resistance.

As such, this article attempts to trace the relationship between storytelling as a seemingly ubiquitous 'everyday' practice amongst those I spoke to, and the

specific postcolonial moment that we are witnessing at present in the UK. In doing so, it aims to capture some of the social and historical nuance in expressions of resistance amongst Palestinians living here.

'Terrorism' vs. 'Falafel Identity': Western Constructions of the Palestinian

'Terrorism'

One thing that became strikingly evident throughout my discussions with Palestinians was their awareness of a widely acknowledged Western construction of them as generally threatening, and at times potential terrorists. This was a picture that remained jarringly at odds with their own sense of what it meant to be Palestinian in the UK today, but that was reinforced through concrete everyday experiences both here and in Palestine.

Restriction of movement was a theme that ran through many conversations. The personal and family biographies that participants briefly recounted were often inflected with issues surrounding identification documents, permits, visas, passports, border restrictions and airport interrogations, but what was most striking was the way that these seemed to form a backdrop to everyday life. Despite the routineness with which these occurrences were imbued, they often profoundly shaped the life trajectory of participants, as the following account by Salma demonstrates:

I came here [the UK] on the intention to go back, but then the Israeli army told

me that my permit was a one-way permit, so I couldn't go back through the

Erez border,[2] do you know the Erez border? So I stayed in the UK and did my

A Levels here.

Reflecting once again the routinization of restrictions on movement for those I

spoke to, Hassan told me that he had been held for interrogation at one UK

airport 'about seven or eight times'; 'every time they ask me the same question, I

give them the same answer'. A sense that Palestinians were seen as threatening

was undeniable amongst other participants. Sensationalist buzzwords poured out

of Sabeen in particular when asked about the Western perception of Palestinians:

'Crazy, eccentric, radical, angry, violent', she said. 'Scary, scary people … very

poor, scraggly and dark-haired', and most tellingly, 'Terrorist'.

The following account from Yousef of growing up as a Palestinian in Scotland

reminds us of the wider social context within which the Palestinians I spoke to

are forced to negotiate their association with 'terrorism' (Said, 1992: xxxvi) by

those in the West:

Nine-eleven really changed me. It made me really ashamed. I was very

ashamed of being who I was when I was in school, and I was really angry that

I was born to these backwards peasants that had just migrated here to take

advantage of the more advanced country that we have in Britain … with nine-

eleven everyone would always watch the whole thing again in class and discuss it. And then there would always be five people who would burst out crying, and you know then [that] no-one's gonna look at you the same way again.

Yousef's quote touches on a number of tropes that we currently see reproduced in popular discourse, immigration policy and so-called 'counter-terrorism' policy. One is, of course, the association of Arabs and Muslims with 'terrorism', often via the notion of 'radicalization'. The consequences for those young people identified as a 'radicalisation risk' (Kundnani, 2014: 155) are very real. The case of Jameel Scott is particularly salient, not least because the events that led to his surveillance and intervention by police took place in Manchester at a student-led pro-Palestinian demonstration (Kundnani, 2014: 153). For Palestinian students who are not UK nationals but here on a temporary student visa, the threat of police intervention is further compounded by that of deportation should they be linked to 'extreme' or 'radical' political activism.

Whilst much has been written about the relationship between nine-eleven and a proliferation of contemporary anti-Muslim racism, we must be careful not to exceptionalize the 'war on terror', for it forms part of a long colonial history of constructing racialized others as a threat to national security: just like other

forms of racism, contemporary Islamophobia has colonial precursors (see Kumar, 2012; Tyrer, 2013; Kundnani, 2014).

The other spectre currently haunting the popular imagination in the UK is that of the 'immigrant', both a cultural (note Yousef's talk of 'backwards peasants') and economic threat ('taking advantage of the more advanced country [here]'). I will address this construction further in the next section, but it is safe to say that as the son of Muslim Arab immigrants, Yousef is dealt a triple blow of sorts. It should come as no surprise, then, that he feels a deep shame relating to this part of his identity.

More implicit, but just as striking, was that a similar self-consciousness – an awareness of the perception of Westerners towards Palestinians – 'spilled over' from abstract conversation into concrete interaction between participants and myself. One participant, upon describing his inability to secure a student visa for the US and the suspicious 'delay' behind his application, felt compelled to assert his innocence: 'I was 17 back then, I didn't do anything back then' (Zak). My instinctive reaction was to assure Zak that I wasn't 'accusing' him of anything and to move swiftly on. I felt unsettled by the idea that Zak might think I harboured the same assumptions that may have prevented him getting a visa to the US, but it also forced me to consider the social processes underlying both these relationships. How might participants understand themselves in relation to me, a white Westerner? And in the same vein, in relation to those controlling the

borders of Western nation-states? Yousef's description of nine-eleven raises similar questions: 'nine-eleven was the biggest thing in my life anyway, and that was a big change in *how I saw others seeing me*, how I saw others seeing my family, how I saw my place in society' [emphasis added].

We might consider these relationships in light of Frantz Fanon's notion of 'self-division' (Fanon, 1986). Just as the black man 'experienc[es] his being' through his 'relation to the white man' (Fanon, 1986: 109–10), Zak and Yousef's awareness of how they might be perceived by a white Western population serves to shape local interactions and understandings. They are not simply Palestinian in their own right, they are also Palestinian in the eyes of the West. How might this consciousness shape the ways in which resistance to occupation is expressed? I first turn to another, quite different Western construction, before attempting to answer this question.

'Falafel Identity'

> It's an identity that doesn't mean anything. It's falafel identity … it's like Arab society here, what's it gonna have? Belly dancers. Shisha activities … it's an identity that doesn't move. (Zak)

A number of participants voiced their frustration at trivialized representations of Palestinian culture, succinctly put in what one participant called 'falafel identity'.

Others too suggested a less-articulable awareness of it: 'I have become more and more cosmopolitan … I don't go to Rusholme [an area of Manchester famous for its Middle Eastern and South Asian cafes and restaurants] and smoke shisha' (Mo).

The trivializing of Arab culture, the notion of an 'absence of great cultural achievement' worth the attention of the West, is a theme central to Orientalist thought (Said, 2003: 289). Indeed, the myth of Palestine as a 'land without people' which Zionists had a duty to restore relied on the notion of the West as the civilized 'other' to the East (Said, 1992: 9), a narrative propagated in the early 20th century which laid the foundation for the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and the consequent – let us not forget continuing – displacement of 800,000 Palestinians. Essentially, the doctrine of Orientalism, in its 'othering' discourse, reifies power relations in two very different but intimately linked contexts: the occupied Palestinian territories and the UK.

For those living in the UK, there is no shortage of reminders of the incompatibility of cultural 'others' with an apparently morally superior and more advanced 'British culture'. Perhaps one of the most pernicious examples of this is the obligatory 'Life in the UK test' (Booth, 2013) for those seeking British citizenship and permanent settlement here – a misnomer for a test others have described as 'a lampoon of Britishness' (Booth, 2013). For Muslims especially – and here we see an even clearer connection with

Orientalist thought – the claims surrounding cultural difference seem to be encroaching into new and often unforeseen territories. An appropriation of discourses surrounding gay rights (see Puar, 2006) and women's rights (see Farris, 2012) have only reinforced homogenizing and mythologized notions of a 'British culture' in opposition to a 'Muslim culture'. As Kundnani (2014: 80) highlights, non-compliance with supposed British 'liberal values' is again understood as a threat: 'Presumed lack of allegiance to these values became one of the ways in which liberals identified who was to be considered a Muslim extremist' (Kundnani, 2014: 80). Arguably, this continues to be the case.

Interestingly, interviews suggested that a one-dimensional version of Palestinian culture in the form of 'falafel identity' was not constructed solely by those in the West. Rather, some participants appeared to participate in its reproduction, in turn using it to their own political advantage. Referring to his experience of student activism in the US, Omar told me that the pro-Palestinian group he was involved in often provided free Arabic food, and sometimes hookah (shisha) in order to attract attendees to events. Furthermore, they were forced to frame their activities as humanitarian or cultural rather than political for fear of not being accredited by the university. He also conceded that a cultural focus for university groups here in the UK – 'smoking hookah or eating hummus or falafel' – whilst shallow, proved

'more attractive for non-Arabs'. This distinction between a de-politicized, cultural framing and a political one was further underscored by comments from Sabeen, who said she would happily attend a 'film-screening or food tasting' but that she finds 'political' events stressful and even guilt-inducing.

Thus we are presented with a complex picture: a distinction between the cultural and political framing of issues, and essentially of Palestinian identity, shaped by notions of threat and 'usefulness'. 'Falafel identity' is seen by some as a politically useless identity in itself, but also perhaps *indirectly useful* in its ability to circumvent the sense of 'threat' surrounding an explicitly political discourse in a UK context. The use of cultural tropes perhaps 'softens' the association of collective expressions of resistance with aggressive, excessive behaviour, and therefore 'terrorism' in the most obtuse sense of the word. Overall, it is clear that those I spoke to are forced to negotiate cultural difference and similarity very carefully in the ways that they express resistance.

Adherence as Resistance? Lifestyle, Age and Class Dimensions

If we accept that there exist two quite different Orientalist constructions of Palestinians in UK popular discourse and practice, of which those I spoke to are

very much aware of, we can begin to ask: how does the need to negotiate these understandings shape the ways in which resistance is expressed?

I have already touched upon an *adherence* to one of these constructions – 'falafel identity' – and the apparent enabling of opportunities for resistance through this: the 'attractiveness' of a cultural framing was used as a mobilization strategy, but the 'usefulness' of this was called into question by other participants. I turn first to the notion of 'cosmopolitanism' in an attempt to draw out this idea of 'adherence as resistance' within the context of UK culture more widely.

When Mo told me that he was 'becoming more and more cosmopolitan', what was he trying to communicate? He seemed to use the term, quite frequently, to distinguish between his 'new' life here and his life back in Gaza, where he spent much of his time 'sitting with coffee, smoking shisha'. If the term 'cosmopolitan' is understood in relation to what Bayat (2010: 186) describes as the 'normative' element of cosmopolitanism, the challenging of a language of 'separation and antagonism', we might start to think about lifestyle as a claim to similarity, or a challenge to difference.

All of those I spoke to opened up about the kind of lifestyle they led – or were seeking – in the UK. I turn first to what I am deeming the younger 'generation' of participants, who ranged from ages 20 to 26. This cohort consisted of five individuals who were university students at the time of interview, one who had

recently graduated with a master's degree, and one about to commence an undergraduate degree. Of these seven, five were first-generation immigrants who had settled in the UK for the purposes of university study. To be sure, the lifestyles of these young people seemed to reflect Bayat's notion of cosmopolitanism. Almost all participants had diverse social networks, with a significant number expressing a lack – accidental or otherwise – of social interaction with other Arabs. When I asked participants who they socialized with, responses ranged from: 'You're gonna find this strange but … I don't really interact much with Arabs. I don't know why' (Salma), to the more explicit: 'I try not to hang out with Arabs', the latter in connection with Yousef's quite vocal contempt of Islam.

Conversely, the older 'generation' of participants (34–50 years old) represented a different pattern of settlement in the UK. These three older men had arrived in the UK either seeking asylum or as economic migrants, and now worked long hours in low-paid jobs to support themselves and their families. As such, narratives of daily life revolved around long hours at work, lack of spare time, and general 'busyness'. Elias, a single father with two jobs, said the following: 'The day is only 24 hours … I've been asking if people could make it 36 hours, if someone could make me another two hands … so much to do'. Similarly, Hassan expressed concern that he was not involved in enough cultural or social organizations because of the time dedicated to taking care of his small

business. The fact that Reza works in a café during the same hours that his local pro-Palestinian group hold their weekly meeting there is another illustration of this. Some of the younger participants reported similar constraints for those in full-time jobs here; both Mo and Salma mentioned friends and relatives who were simply too busy to participate in collective action. Importantly, this was framed as a problem particular to living in the UK ('in this life, or in this part of the world' – Elias) in contrast to life before migrating.

How can this lifestyle be understood within a postcolonial context? Although the history of the British working class is often 'whitewashed' in the scholarship, it is important to remember that just as 'colonialism and immigration are part of the same continuum' (Sivanandan, 2008), the forces of imperialism have historically contributed to a multi-ethnic British working-class population (Virdee, 2014). In much the same way, the material realities of migrating to the UK today have a tangible impact on class affiliations and associated lifestyle, and consequently the ability or desire to engage in collective action.

Whilst claims to a 'cosmopolitan' lifestyle punctuated conversations with younger participants, a desire for normalcy characterized the 'everyday' landscape of those older men. The following quote from Elias poignantly captures this desire:

I think all these 15 years here, I've always been looking to settle down. It might be hard for me to settle, find the perfect job, the perfect house, the perfect family … but I've always wanted this peace of mind and being settled, but I can't really find it yet, I don't know why.

Arguably, then, while there appears to be significant class differences between the two generations of participants I spoke to, what ties all these accounts of everyday life together is some kind of adherence to hegemonic UK culture, whether that be through a rejection of monocultural social networks or in pursuit of 'settling down'.

As discussed previously, those I spoke to also pointed towards a strong desire to challenge Orientalist constructions of them, presenting us with a complex picture of both adherence and resistance to different kinds of hegemonic understandings. Scott (2008) suggests that deception plays a central role in maintaining the public and hidden transcripts of everyday resistance: 'one of the key survival skills of subordinate groups has been impression management in power-laden situations' (Scott, 2008: 3). I wonder, however, whether such an understanding of how everyday resistance operates for those I spoke to might be neglecting a genuine desire, and within that desire a resistant quality in itself, for the 'ordinary' (see Kelly, 2008). Furthermore, there is a danger of attributing a kind of cynicism to people's behaviour. I am in no way, for instance, suggesting

that Elias is *pretending* to want to 'settle down'. What I am in interested in is what this seemingly simultaneous process of adherence and resistance says about the specific social and political context that those I spoke to find themselves in. Perhaps 'mimicry' in Bhabha's (1984) sense of the word can better situate this adherence/resistance paradox. For Bhabha, the resistance of the colonized can be completely obscured by colonial dynamics. The 'almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha, 1984: 126) nature of mimicking the colonial culture suggests that acts which appear unrelated or even antithetical to resistance may in fact unsettle colonial discourse. In other words, could a 'mimicking' of certain elements of hegemonic UK culture allow Palestinians to problematize a different element of it, that of an Orientalist discourse of 'otherness'?

Returning now to resistance towards occupation, the above points towards two potential impacts of a hegemonic UK lifestyle on expressions of resistance. Both are suggestive of a move away from collective expressions of resistance. Particularly for the younger cohort, expressions of resistance towards occupation may be constrained within the realms of a hegemonic UK lifestyle and a related desire, or need, to resist Orientalist constructions of Palestinians. Taking part in collective forms of resistance has the potential to undermine this claim to similarity, and instead reinforce their identification as the Orientalized 'other': there was certainly a sense among some participants that activism in the UK was antagonistic in a way that left people feeling uncomfortable. Sabeen's claim that

'People tend to be quite combative during events that tend towards the political' was juxtaposed with a reflection on self-presentation: 'I make a point of being quite diplomatic when I speak to people'. Aisha also complained of people in a group she had been involved in being 'argumentative and critical about things that they shouldn't be critical about', and Hassan – referring to resistance more generally – made a distinction between 'shouting' about a cause and the virtues of trying to help someone understand 'quietly, peacefully'.

Yet for those older participants in full-time employment, their ability to express resistance in a collective capacity – and perhaps at all – may be more directly affected by their lifestyle in the UK, circumscribed in particular by social class affiliations. The spare time needed to participate in collective action is, in this way, not a luxury afforded to everyone.

The findings suggest, then, that it is not only Orientalist discourses within a UK context that shape the ways in which resistance to occupation is expressed, but also class structures which affect patterns of labour and leisure for those that arrive in the UK from elsewhere. Ultimately, resistance to occupation appears to be – at least in part – contingent upon context-specific hegemonic understandings and structures. This reinforces the call, made by the likes of Johannson and Vinthagen (2014: 8), for a thoroughly intersectional analysis of everyday resistance.

Storytelling: Remembering as Resistance

How does the Palestinian tell their own story? I hope this question might serve as a segue into an important instance of everyday resistance. I approach 'storytelling' here in an abstract sense, as in narrating what it means to be Palestinian, but also in a literal sense in that 'telling stories' emerged as one of the most significant themes in interviews. Reflecting on the work of Harlow (1987), Said (1993) as well as Khalili (2007) and the wider literature on oral history, this section begins to explore the role of both literary and anecdotal storytelling for Palestinians living in the UK today, against the social, historical and economic backdrop outlined so far.

Whilst Palestine's strong literary tradition has historically been neglected in Western scholarship (Said, 2003; Harlow, 1987), the enthusiasm with which almost all those I spoke to discussed Palestinian literature indicated the importance of this body of work for Palestinians themselves. At times participants reeled off names of Palestinian authors and poets at a rate I could barely keep up with, and aside from specifically Palestinian literature, participants referred to 'historical fiction', 'books with an aim', 'political novels' and 'books about conflict situations'. What sets these readers apart? It is surely the political spirit of the books and poems which they spoke about so fondly.

As one of the most cited Palestinian authors by participants, and as someone whose fiction critics consider deeply political (Harlow, 1987; Siddiq, 1984), I

use Ghassan Kanafani as a key reference point in Palestinian literature. Born in Palestine in the 1930s, Kanafani fled Palestine with his family in 1948, settling in Damascus and later Beirut. Kanafani believed that his own novels, steeped in realism and heavily influenced by political experience, could be an 'arena of struggle' (Harlow, 1987: 2). His writing certainly reflected the 'quintessentially Palestinian experience' (Siddiq, 1984) of the time and, most importantly, that of many Palestinian refugees. Whilst new 'sites' and 'spaces' for writing resistance have emerged since, that the resistance literature of an author assassinated in 1972 (Harlow, 1986) still resonates with young Palestinians today is surely an indication of the continuation of the conditions experienced by Kanafani.

Many participants discovered Palestinian literature later in life, but it was anecdotes that featured in the 'storytelling' experiences of participants as children: 'As a child I didn't actually read stories, because each day there's a story, people tell it' (Hassan). It would be impossible to translate here the enormity of experience bound up in the anecdotes recounted by participants, but I refer briefly to one Omar shared with me for illustrative purposes. During our discussion, Omar talked at length about his great grandmother's experience of returning to the village she was displaced from in 1948, only to find her house was now occupied by a Jewish woman who served her coffee in the very cups she'd left there 20 years earlier. This oral storytelling tradition, which Aisha described as 'the most fundamental way of remembering', appeared to be present

in the lives of almost all those I spoke to. Unsurprisingly, the anecdotes that participants reported hearing as children, much like Omar's, were characterized by extreme loss, violence and struggle; 'not bedtime stories', as Aisha incisively put it.

Oral history, as both practice and methodology, has been a widely used tool of resistance amongst marginalized and subaltern peoples. As a 'decolonising methodology' (Masalha, 2012: 213), it has been written about in relation to colonized populations the world over, from First Nation communities (Neufeld, 2008) to Aboriginal Australians (Nugent, 2008). Oral history is 'something more than an archival activity … [it] is at heart a deeply social practice' (Hamilton and Shopes, 2008: viii) and much has been written about its use in relation to Palestine and, in particular, the events of 1948. As Masalha (2012: 220) states: 'Oral history stands as the major means of reconstructing the history of the Palestinian refugees and internally displaced Palestinians as seen from the perspective of its primary subjects'. In the case of Palestine, oral history poses a challenge to the hegemony of both Zionism and the historical narratives of the Palestinian political leadership (Masalha, 2012: 218), both of which strive to centralize armed struggle as the major means of Palestinian resistance, albeit for different reasons. Consider too the cynicism amongst those I spoke to in relation to the contemporary Palestinian leadership; oral history in the form of anecdotal storytelling may provide a way for participants to distance themselves from

images of 'violent' struggle employed by two oppressive forces in Palestine, and as a classic trope in discourses surrounding 'terrorism' here in the UK.

How might we make a link between Palestinian literature and anecdotal storytelling? Ghassan Kanafani's novel *Return to Haifa* follows the return of the protagonist to the house he lived in pre-1948. Upon his return, he finds it occupied by a Jewish family, and notices remnants of his own belongings left there 20 years earlier (Kanafani, 2000: 162). The stirring similarity between Kanafani's fictional account and Omar's ancestral anecdote highlights the relationship of both forms of storytelling with the Palestinian political experience. In this sense, whilst Kanafani's account is fictional, it is also exemplary. Both 'stories' reassert the historical Palestinian experience: the existence of Palestine as a nation and a people before the establishment of the state of Israel, the experience of the 1948 *Nakba*, and the ongoing suffering of Palestinians who are denied the right to return. Aisha's comments on commemorating Palestinian martyrs reflect this idea of remembering as resistance: 'if Israel want to cleanse us completely – ethnically cleanse us – that means erasing our history, and if we carry on commemorating and remembering Palestinian figures then you can't deny there was ever a Palestinian nation, people, community'.

I find Khalili's (2007) work on mnemonic narratives perhaps most useful in bringing together the different strands talked about so far, as it encompasses

narrative practice in a number of different forms, much like the way I use the term 'storytelling'. More importantly, Khalili's work highlights the shifting uses of mnemonic narratives in relation to both transnational and local changes in the context of a Palestinian refugee camp. In this sense, the context of storytelling remains crucial. Indeed, whilst those Khalili spoke to used particular narratives for mobilization purposes, the sense amongst those I interviewed was that storytelling – reading, writing, telling or hearing anecdotes – was a particularly personal practice: 'I do want to keep my Palestinian feeling, and that's how I keep it, by reading about my country, by hearing stories about it' (Hassan). This sense of interiority, of 'feeling' Palestinian (Reza too spoke of feeling Palestinian 'just in [his] heart'), was also framed by Aisha in terms of 'never forgetting' her Palestinian heritage despite being born in the UK. Lambek's (1996: 248) discussion of memory as 'a form of internal resistance to the claims of others' rings true here. For some of those I spoke to, could storytelling be less about collective claims-making and more about a kind of internal resistance: sustaining a sense of self, an understanding of where one comes from and, ultimately, of belonging? Aisha spoke about the Palestinian community events that her parents took her to when she was younger in the following way: '[they] really opened my mind at a very young age as to who the hell I was and why I'm here'.

My argument, then, is that storytelling might perform a similar function whilst allowing participants to avoid the pitfalls of being associated with 'aggressive' or 'trivializing' collective action. What might this interior form of resistance say about the opportunities for exploring or expressing what it means to be Palestinian for those living in the UK's current climate? In light of the context of Orientalizing discourses and the very real threat of securitization and restriction on movement described earlier, the resort to storytelling – a relatively private, less obviously antagonizing practice – makes absolute sense. Storytelling may also provide an important sense of belonging in a diasporic context which, as demonstrated, seems to actively seek to alienate and exclude racialized 'others'.

Furthermore, storytelling may not demand the same time-based commitments that involvement in collective action does. For those struggling to support a family here or in the form of remittances, storytelling may also offer a more practical means of re-appropriating and sustaining a sense of self in the face of Zionist and Orientalist narratives, both of which perpetuate ideas of political threat and cultural lack. This being said, when it comes to reading literature, spare time still appears to be a privilege of the few: 'Ghassan Kanafani, have you read about him? And I have his books here … I love his books. Whenever I have the chance I could read these Arabic books but I don't have much time now' (Elias).

To be sure, a story can speak volumes about the political, social and even economic context within which it is told. In some cases, storytelling may well play a role 'alongside the gun, the pamphlet, and the diplomatic delegation' (Harlow, 1987: xvii), or form part of a collective process of decolonization (Said, 1993). Elsewhere, storytelling might form part of the 'often altogether inaccessible' hidden transcript circulated within subordinate groups (Scott, 2008: 19), but the easy exchange of stories I experienced in conversation was suggestive of something much more humble: an opening, an opportunity for negotiating and engaging with issues both deeply personal and political within the wider constraints of diasporic life.

Conclusion

Tracing resistance from one local, micro-level manifestation – what I have termed 'storytelling' as an everyday expression of resistance – to the wider processes which shape it, exposes not only the multifariousness of resistance as embedded in the social, but also the facile nature of focusing solely on collective, so-called 'violent' acts of resistance.

The findings I have outlined point towards a number of things. First, expressions of diasporic resistance respond to both the wider struggles which they are aimed at (in this case, the occupation of Palestine) but also – and perhaps even more so – to the hegemonic structures within that very particular

diasporic context. Thus, a nuanced analysis of resistance necessitates a movement between both the local and the global, taking into account both contemporary and historical power relations. In this way, 'storytelling' speaks initially to decades of Zionist propaganda. But it may also provide a mode through which some Palestinians can address a strong sense of obligation towards resistance whilst avoiding reifying Orientalist constructions associated with collective opportunities for resistance here. I tentatively suggest that the various constraints and openings of living in the UK today as a Palestinian interact in ways that push those living here away from collective expressions of resistance and towards more individual – and indeed less visible, more privatized – acts. What is also clear is that an association with collective resistance is not a simple issue of self-projection or perception, but carries with it very real consequences related to the increased demonization and securitization of Muslim and migrant populations in the UK (see Kundnani, 2014). Not only are the Palestinians I spoke to less engaged with or committed to collective forms of resistance than much of the literature would have us believe, but some actively labour to distance themselves from it. In the current UK climate of extreme 'othering', where fears of political 'radicalization' abound, those I spoke to present counter-claims which surely deserve our attention.

There remains too a strong sense of cynicism amongst those I spoke to relating to the outcomes of collective resistance in Palestine over the last few decades. A

number of participants spoke of the social and political costs of both intifadas, particularly in relation to the ongoing ramifications of the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, a sentiment reflected amongst many of those residing in Palestine (Kelly, 2008: 357). Importantly, such a sentiment may compound a tendency towards individual expressions of resistance here in the UK.

Whilst this article has focused on postcolonial social processes as the loci of power, intersectional understandings of everyday resistance remain crucial yet rare (Johannson and Vinthagen, 2014: 8). Research into the ways in which other types of hegemonic power interact with everyday forms of resistance within a postcolonial context is in this sense paramount; this might include further research into the class dimensions of Palestinian diasporic resistance.

Studies such as Aouragh's (2012) which explore the internet as a mediating space for pro-Palestinian activism point to how we might move beyond an outdated, territorially-bound narrative of 'violent' resistance to consider how particular globalized spaces can also reconfigure expressions of resistance. Such perspectives must not fall into a trap of 'techno-optimism' (Fuchs, 2012: 777) however, and should be tempered by an ongoing commitment to understanding everyday resistance and power as complex and interdependent.

I have focused on Palestinian diasporic resistance, but I want to emphasize, finally, its relation and relevance to other struggles. I hope that the findings in

this article provide an insight into the ways in which humans, displaced or otherwise absent from their homeland, find very meaningful expression in the 'everyday'. In the same way, the 'everyday' can be used as a mirror to the workings of wider postcolonial power relations. In our increasingly globalized world, new networks of communication make it even easier to sustain narratives, meaning and identities which transcend traditional boundaries, but a postcolonial analysis reminds us that the rippling effects of the past continue to circumscribe everyday resistance as much as new 'spaces' do. It has therefore never been more important to understand the ways in which diasporic resistance operates and contributes to struggles against oppression. Although those I spoke to constitute a minute example of such, I hope that their stories might act as a window into this world, for resistance not only takes place against the backdrop of tear gas and rubber bullets; it is happening right here in the UK, in subtle, and at times almost indecipherable ways.

Notes

1. *Nakba* is an Arabic phrase meaning 'catastrophe'. It is often used to refer to the events of 1948 which saw hundreds of thousands of Palestinians forcibly displaced to make way for the establishment of the state of Israel.

2. *Shabab* is an Arabic phrase which, in the context of popular resistance, typically refers to male Palestinian youth.

3. The Erez border, or the Erez crossing, is an entry point into Northern Gaza via Israel. Movement of both people and cargo through the crossing is tightly controlled by Israeli authorities.

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