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THE LIMINAL HERO

Student, Occupation and Resistance in Palestine

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Abstract

In this paper I argue for the need to re-evaluate the capacity of students to exercise productive political agency against the actual exclusion of students from the conventional political space. My case-study centres on the Second Intifada generation currently studying at Palestine's universities, a group of young people who are traditionally understood as carrying and exercising the violence that their given name suggests. However, I put forward the argument that this generation rethinks their resistance politics in inventive ways. Motivated by changes in the political and economic life-world in Palestine, they have shifted their political behaviour from a practice of violence and open defiance of the occupying force to what I call 'a politics of community building.' I read initiatives such as volunteer work or the choice to pursue an education as essentially political acts and describe how, in their indirectness, these manage to leave the Israeli state powerless. Opposing public opinion, I draw the portrait of a Palestinian generation of students whose political beliefs are not rooted in ideology or in violence, but in everyday reality, in the idea that building a strong local society forms the basis on which to establish a sovereign state.

I dedicate my work to the students in Palestine.

THE LIMINAL HERO: Student, Occupation and Resistance in Palestine

Wir brauchen einen Geist wie Schiller, der mit zwanzig seine Räuber machte ... Eine unromantische, wirklichkeitsnahe und handfeste Jugend, die den dunklen Seiten des Lebens gefaßt ins Auge sieht – unsentimental, objektiv, überlegen. Junge Menschen brauchen wir, eine Generation, die die Welt sieht und liebt, wie sie ist. Die die Wahrheit hochhält, Pläne hat, Ideen hat. Das brauchen keine tiefgründigen Weisheiten zu sein. Um Gottes Willen nichts Vollendetes, Reifes und Abgeklärtes. Das soll ein Schrei sein, ein Aufschrei ihrer Herzen. Frage, Hoffnung, Hunger!

Wolfgang Borchert, *Draußen vor der Tür*, 4. Szene

You are all a lost generation.

Gertrude Stein, *in conversation*

1.   <u>Introduction</u>

April, 2014 – ABU DIS, Palestine. It is one of the first days since I have arrived in the Levant and I am confused. I say Levant because I am not sure where I am in national terms. My map is vague on that. Jerusalem is the place where Israel and Palestine merge, but it remains disputed territory – which is which? For sixty-six years now, the Israelis and Palestinians have been at war trying to settle that exact question. This war – for that is what it is, a war – has a way of manifesting itself in the smallest details. Trying to find a bus, for instance, in the historic city centre is a Herculean task at best. I want to take the 36 from the Damascus Gate to Abu Dis, an Arab neighbourhood in East-Jerusalem, in an unreal world without borders and walls and green lines perhaps only fifteen minutes apart. I cannot just ask anyone for directions, especially here: what I am looking for is the Arab bus station, but most of the streets have Hebrew names. When after hours of walking aimlessly I reach the fifth bus terminal that day and I see students boarding the 36, I make to join them. 'Where are you going,' someone shouts. I cannot tell from his tone whether he is trying to help me or interrogate me, but I mention al-Quds University anyway. 'You will be safe there. You are Palestine's friend.' It is the first time that I will venture past the checkpoints, across the Green Line. I would be lying if I said that I was not the tiniest bit nervous. 'Shukran,' I reply.

My nervousness was unwarranted, I realise in retrospect, but my confusion telling. Even local students encounter difficulties navigating their way to school practically on a daily basis. When I talk to them, as I did on that first bus ride into Palestine, they tell me of an existence defined by segregation walls, checkpoints and Apartheid laws. I would always ask them how this affected their education and whether they believed that they could alter their predicament, even ever so slightly? Their responses form the foundation of this dissertation. In this study then I argue for the need to re-evaluate the capacity of students to exercise meaningful political agency against the all-too-real exclusion of students from the political space. By way of conclusion I will show how they manage to forge themselves a place within the political playing field. In the first chapter I bring some of the challenges that students under occupation face into sharper focus while maintaining that the image constructed of this Second Intifada generation (as violent radicals) fails to stand up to critical scrutiny. The second chapter will further address the question of student violence, underlining the rise in support for Islam fundamentalism at universities across the West Bank. However, I argue that nuance is crucial in any discussion of Palestinian violence, and I explore an implicative shift in the way students articulate their resistance to the occupier. That gradual shift – away from openly defiant and confrontational forms of resistance toward its more indirect and prosaic manifestations – can be attributed, I believe, to two recent

changes in the political and economic life-world of young Palestinians: the Palestinian Authority's implementation of neoliberal policies since 2007 and the student's alienation from party politics. The fourth chapter assesses this new indirect politics in more detail, attempting to identify what exactly falls under the category of student resistance (volunteer work, self-reform, grassroots initiative) and to determine what its qualities are. What all the forms of resistance that I touch upon have in common is a shared concern with the welfare of the local community – theirs is a politics rooted firmly in the realities of daily experience. To build and strengthen their community, so university students have come to believe, is to construct the basis from which a Palestinian sovereign state will emerge. Finally, in the last chapter of the corpus, I assess the generation struggle and the place of young people in conventional political paradigms. The conclusion to this project situates the significance of my case-study within the debate on student politics and articulates four questions that require further investigation.

My research, which offers an original inquiry into the political behaviour of students, is informed by a gap I noticed in the critical research on student activism. The theoretical foundation of the study of student activism dates back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the question of protest at university was acutely relevant in academia. Most critics still refer to this theoretical framework, and to the work of Philip G. Altbach, Jürgen Habermas (in *Toward a Rational Society*), Karl Deutsch and the Frankfurter School in particular. However, I have three main concerns. First, the critical theory discloses a strong western bias. In the Global South, students have toppled (often colonial) regimes and, as a vanguard movement, have paved ways toward decolonisation in much of sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. This project aims to correct that bias and in doing so contributes to the work of Fred Halliday and more recently Leo Zeilig, in his paradigm-shifting *Revolt and Protest: Student Politics and Activism in sub-Saharan Africa* (2007), which is the product of his doctoral dissertation at the University of London. My additional concern with the state of the art lies in the fact that is has become dated, thereby failing to take into account the full realities of modern-day globalisation. The Arab Spring serves as an indicative example here: students played, and still play, a major role in the political uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and they do so in profoundly different ways from their predecessors trying to achieve similar results in the 1960s. Thirdly, the concept of activism itself needs to be broadened and ultimately redefined. The work of the 1960s and 1970s too narrowly conceives of student activism in terms of formal protest, an emphasis that my study argues is misplaced. Addressing these three shortcomings – bias, topicality, scope – constituted the outset of my research proposal, and I will continuously return to tackle these limitations while discussing particular instances of student activism throughout the pages of this dissertation.

My methods to address both the questions that I raise and the weaknesses in the existing debates on student activism centres on extended fieldwork research conducted in Israel and the Occupied Territories in April and early May 2014. Through participatory observation I forced myself to challenge received notions of the political situation in order to try to see the local life-world from the perspective of the politically active student. When I returned to Belgium I contrasted observations collected from in-depth interviews in the field[1] (with students I had both carefully selected and randomly approached) to the claims made in the critical literature. My case-study has generated no academic reception so far; in fact, there is only limited secondary material on the political agency of Palestinian students at hand. Why then I chose to place the emphasis of my research on two universities in the West Bank, al-Quds University in the East-Jerusalem neighbourhood of Abu Dis and Birzeit University, remains a pivotal question. Substantial work on the case of Palestine was urgently needed. As to why Birzeit and al-Quds, I can only justify that choice up to a certain level, because at the start of this project I was little acquainted with the culture of education in Palestine: I chose the former quite simply because of its proximity to the segregation wall, a closeness I believed would trigger repeated protests. Birzeit, then, is known to be the most progressive of institutions of higher learning in the West Bank, and remains among the oldest, best-established and arguably most prestigious Palestinian universities. By attending strictly to two universities in the West Bank, I do not mean to suggest that I understand Gaza to be peripheral in a study of student activism in Palestine. Far form it. I will not discuss Gaza Islamic University for the simple reason that it falls beyond the scope of a project such as this one, with only limited time to spend on fieldwork and the obvious difficulties in conducting fieldwork in the Gaza Strip. Nor do I aim to imply that the political life of two small university communities could fully illuminate the seismic movements that are shaking the region of historic Palestine. But it is well to remember, as the critic Andrew Walker points out, that 'detailed ethnographic engagement has the advantage of providing insights that fall below the radar of more totalizing forms of analysis' (2012: 5). As I study everyday forms of resistance, I would benefit form an observation of local everyday life. James C. Scott suggests, 'the justification for such an enterprise must lie precisely in its banality – in the fact that these circumstances are the *normal* context in which … conflict has historically occurred' (1985: 27).

Nevertheless, in my concluding chapters I extrapolate my findings to alternative cases – different universities, different students, different backgrounds – and to Palestinian society at large, for I always aimed to say something about the universal through the particular, about *the* student in Palestine, our titular 'liminal' hero, through the life of *a* student enrolled at Birzeit or

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[1] To safe-guard the anonymity of my interviewees, I chose throughout this text only to refer to the place where the interviews were conducted and the month in which they took place.

al-Quds. Fieldwork proves indispensable in a close-to-the-ground approach: to study the universal through the local daily life, which has only rarely been the subject of extensive academic debate. One final point is that research in an occupied 'state' is inevitably never conducted under ideal circumstances. I met with restrictions on movement and access to people, with surveillance, with cross-examination at Tel Aviv airport, and self-censorship of interviewees. Leo Zeilig writes that, in a certain respect, '[to examine] the activism of students in the conditions that they have had to confront in the country's universities gave me a rare insight into the nature of their political action' (2007: 15). I agree wholeheartedly. I owe this work to the students who so selflessly chose to talk to me and help me with the many questions that I had, regardless of the difficulties that this could entail to them personally. This dissertation is therefore the product of my fieldwork research, but even more so, of their support. It ultimately aims to be both descriptive and analytic, reflecting how students *do* politics and explaining why they act politically they way they do.

2.   Education Under Occupation

2.1. Challenges

> So I would say it is challenging. Seeing one of the students being shot and then having to continue work and talk about philosophy – John Locke and political systems, for instance – it's really difficult. Because you're telling them about the ideal and the reality is different.
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> – Interview, Birzeit, April 2014

As I finally reached al-Quds for the first time, and I got off the 36 bus, I realised the gates of the university were closed. I started walking down the street, along the segregation wall, and decided to sit down, my back against the concrete barrier, and watch daily life pass by. When we speak of Palestine there is no shortage of imagery to shape how we conceive of the place and its people. However, it is when something appears to us to be obvious, or universal, or when an image springs to mind too quickly, that it is in need of exploration. Beforehand I had already understood that I could learn a lot from a study of arbitrary, everyday life as it unfolds itself. Yet sitting there it took me quite a long time to realise that the street, and the campus, were perhaps too quiet, eerily so. The silence felt unreal. Even now it is hard to say why the gates of the university were closed that Thursday afternoon, a regular school day, and whether it had anything to do with politics. What I do know is that over the past academic year – on September 8, October 22, November 11 and December 2 – this place had been the scene of repeated violent attacks by the Israeli Occupation Force. The facades of the buildings in front of me were ridden with bullet-holes.

Al-Quds[2] is the only Arab university in Jerusalem. From the top floors of its campus buildings, facing west, one can see the Mount of Olives, and behind it, barely escaping from view, Haram al-Sharif – الحرم القدسي الشريف – the myth-like mountain top where Mohammed descended to Heaven. Owing to the political conflict of 66 years a large majority of the Muslim students at al-Quds University cannot visit or pray at what is to them the third holiest site of their faith. They live in a divided world. To drive home precisely that point, Israel erected a concrete, 8-metre-tall Apartheid wall in 2003, a massive structure that threatened to slice the university in half. Protest ensued. The university should be a place of knowledge and learning, not a plaything of force, and the students felt it was important to protect that. During the week they organised sit-ins on the disputed land, played basketball and attended class lectures in the sunlit field. On

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[2] Derived from the verb 'qadusa' (to be holy, to be pure), Al-Quds is the Arabic name for the city of Jerusalem.

Fridays they held prayers.[3] Eventually the wall diverted slightly from its projected path. A modest victory in the larger narrative of the Palestinian emancipation struggle, but a significant one nonetheless. That this concrete barrier – the wall against which I lean my back as I wait for the closed gates to reopen – today encircles the university instead of cutting right through it, is the result of a grassroots attempt of students to protect their right to education.

Yet the wall is strangling al-Quds University as it is strangling the West Bank. The construction of the separation barrier, during the Second Intifada in the aftermath of the failing of Oslo, marks a reversal of Israeli political tactics: no longer forcing Palestinians into exile, the idea behind the wall is to make them stay precisely where they are, and to deprive that place of symbolic air to breathe in. In controlling the international borders of Gaza and the West Bank, Israel imposes a policy of economic and social isolation – of suffocation, as the metaphor suggests. It is largely in charge of what, and who, goes in and out. For a Palestinian university – any university – this is more than merely inconvenient, as institutions rely heavily on resources and exchanges of people and ideas.[4] The ramifications of Israel's policy of closure are therefore much more extensive than, say, the issue of access to university and the threat of arrest that students face on their way to school. The problem extends beyond these inconveniences to the more fundamental question of the endurance of the university itself. In an interview conducted at Birzeit a professor of language and philosophy explains how it can fundamentally affect the way students produce knowledge and learn to think critically and independently: 'some of the material that I teach,' she says, 'the books are not available. So I have to paraphrase what I've read. And it feels unfair. It feels like they have to trust my authority, and then I have to be neutral. And there is no such thing as neutral' (interview, Birzeit, April 2014). Implicit in the professor's comment is the notion that a student needs reference works as badly as a laboratory needs equipment, or a campus international voices, or a classroom from time to time a visiting academic. As is evident, the wall, and the movement restrictions which it symbolises, continues to impact the quality of education in very subtle but as readily very overt ways, with students appearing late in class because of checkpoints, or others not being able to pursue an academic degree at a university of their choice. Only recently, in September 2012, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected a petition challenging the Israeli authorities' decision to refuse civilian travel permits to five young women from the Gaza Strip who had all been accepted into highly selective graduate programmes at

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[3] Chu, H. (2003). 'Israeli fence threatens to slice through Palestinian university.' *Los Angeles Times* 15.09.2003: http://articles.latimes.com/2003/sep/15/world/fg-alquds15.

[4] Since the Oslo Agreements, Israel has been tasked with issues of access, mobility and security in the Area B of the West Bank. Of course, the institutions of higher education themselves fall under the authority of the Palestinian Ministries of Education and Higher Education, which came into existence in August 1994 as a direct outcome of the Oslo Agreements and the Early Transfer of Authority Agreement between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Israeli state.

Birzeit University in the West Bank (OCHA 2013: 44). It becomes clear that these barriers established for so-called 'security' reasons serve more than one function: to isolate the occupied territories from an ever more globally interconnected world, and, indirectly, to create a culture of internal division among the Palestinians. Where in 1991 around 60 % of the student population at Birzeit was foreign to the West Bank, now there are less than 33 students in total from both Gaza and the 48 Lands.[5] 'Again,' an Arab student from the lower Galilee living in the West Bank explains, 'it's not about the distance between Nazareth and Ramallah. [The Israeli] are trying to tell you: Don't go to the West Bank, you don't know them. You cannot understand their situation there. Like I'm not Palestinian, like I'm moving to another country' (interview, Birzeit, April 2014).

How students cope with these challenges is indeed central to the potential success or failure of their further education. And that is not even to speak of the weekly raids on the Abu-Dis campus of al-Quds, or the problems that haunt its students after graduation. As one of the younger among institutions of higher education in Palestine, al-Quds University was established in the early 1990s through a merger of four small Arab colleges in and around the old city of Jerusalem. To this day it is the sole place of higher learning for the Arab inhabitants of the capital city and remains one of the smaller colleges in the Occupied Territories as a whole, dividing its student body of 14,000 among two campuses in the old city and in Abu Dis (in Area B under joint Israeli-Palestinian control). Precisely this geographic division forms the basis of Israel's argument to discredit the academic and institutional legitimacy of al-Quds. With one foot in the West Bank and one in the old city, the Council of Higher Education in Israel cannot recognise the university as one of its own, nor as a fully foreign institution. It falls through the cracks; in the eyes of the Jewish state, the university does not exist. Consequently, degrees issued to graduating students are not accredited in Israel, home to more than one third of the student body, which is to say that graduates cannot be employed in Jerusalem, and if they are, cannot make minimum wage. As before, subtle bureaucratic measures – here, the accreditation of a university – reveal themselves to be Israel's forceful means to maintain the educated Palestinian youth within the quickly rising walls of the West Bank. This is an old trick: in its legal texts, Israel does not discriminate against Israeli Palestinians, making it all the more difficult for the

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[5] These statistics derive from an interview with the Vice-Chancellor of Birzeit University, conducted in April 2014. During the 1948 Nakba – *the catastrophe* – Israel forcefully and systematically displaced a large majority of the indigenous inhabitants of historic Palestine. Yet, the Zionists divided the land in two, not the people. Those that remained after the establishment of the state of Israel, a mere 15% of the original Arab population, are referred to as the people of the 48 Lands. Jonathan Cook calls them 'the quietest minority in the world,' and believes that their fate is key to any understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To this day, the legacy of the Nakba is tangible: 66% of the Palestinian population, roughly around 7.5 million people, are still refugees (interview BADIL resource centre, April 2014).

international community to find a basis within international law upon which it could intervene.[6] Israeli law continues to be, ironically, among the most progressive and democratic in the world. Yet the violence against the Arab inhabitants lies in the interpretation and the practical execution of the law, and the differentiation the Jewish state insists upon between national rights (granted to Jews) and citizen rights (granted to the population of the land). This has urged many critics of the Zionist project to claim, quite rightly, that Israel is a state for the Jews, not for its citizens. In partial response to this tangled bureaucratic web, al-Quds University commenced an academic partnership in February 2009 with Bard college, a private liberal arts college in upstate New York. Students are given the possibility to enrol at Bard on the Abu Dis campus – a university within a university – and, taught in English, are offered dual degrees at the end of their academic career. These diplomas (al-Quds-Bard) enable them to circumvent the accreditation issue. However, Bard has become something of an elitist place on campus, accepting students based on academic merit and proficiency in English (students, therefore, who are often private-school-educated) and charging almost twice the amount in tuition fees.[7]

2.2. The Second Intifada and the politics of identity

These are only few of the trials – checkpoints, arrest, violence, degree accreditation, employment constraints and limited resources – that students and academics at Palestinian universities meet head-on on a daily basis. The list is endless. Education, movement, and the production of knowledge: everything in occupied Palestine poses a challenge, and everything has become politicised. Now, for the first time in more than 200 years, after Ottoman, British (1917-1948), Jordan (1948-1967) and Israeli (1967-1994) rule, Palestinians in the West Bank find themselves, with the establishment of a Ministry of Higher Education in August 1994, once again in charge of their own education and curriculum.[8] With this comes the implicit ability to write their own national narrative and to put the Palestinians back into the history of the land. Universities and education practise a crucial role in the development of a country's self-identity, its national consciousness, and the actual creation of a forthcoming state in the region.[9] As the Israeli

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[6] As Illan Pappé points out in conversation (Haifa, 12 April 2014), there is something self-destructive to Israel's judeaisation policies. The international community will not support a full apartheid state, which is to say that once *Jewishness* becomes part of the Israeli law, the West will intervene.
[7] Tuition fees at al-Quds University amount to 35-40 Jordanian dollar per hour-credit. At Bard, fees rise to 85 Jordanian dollar per hour-credit, which is a price many students are not able to pay (interview, Abu Dis, April 2014).
[8] The ministry immediately created a commission of local intellectuals to compose a national curriculum. As a result, by 1996, the Center for Curriculum Development produced *The comprehensive plan for the development of the first Palestinian curriculum for general education*, a two-volume work of more than 600 pages (Kimmerling and Migdal 2003: 351).
[9] Even earlier in the 20th century, and in contexts different from the Middle East, students have played a major role in the decolonization processes in the developing world, establishing nationalist movements and toppling regimes in

historian Reuven Paz observes, the establishment of the first universities under Israeli occupation (Birzeit in 1972, An-Najah in 1977 and Gaza Islamic in 1978) transferred the core of the Palestinian nationalists inward, from the refugee camps in Lebanon or from universities in Cairo and Amman (2003: 26).[10] Before, spatial separation of students from the family home (the central locus of social life in the Middle East) and the local community divorced them from the nationalist struggle that attempted to defy the reality of living under occupation. Returned to their homeland, the student generation of the 1970s and 1980s started to play a leading role in politics and (civil) society, replacing, as Klein suggests (2001: 187), the veteran, pro-Jordanian *hamulas* (clans). To understand just how important a driving force students became in Palestinian society, it is instructive to return to Birzeit University in the period from its establishment in 1972 until the First Intifada (1988-1993). Birzeit quickly became the centre of leftist political activity encouraging discussions and daily acts of resistance of both the student body, in mass, and the administration (especially vice-president Gabi Baramki, who was later exiled to Lebanon).[11] As this culture of opposition accumulated towards the end of the 1980s, the Israeli military ordered the university to remain closed for the duration of the First Intifada. However, many professors continued to teach in their village homes, and radicalized student life moved underground. To this day, as something of a legacy to these thriving years, Birzeit remains the only village in the Occupied Territories to have a communist mayor.

It is hard to fail to draw the historic parallels: a vanguard of students in a small leftist university town, on the outskirts of an urban area, initiate social and political change in the second half of the 20th century. Birzeit is the Berkeley of Palestine. Only a few years before the foundation of the university in 1972, the world, both its capitalist and communist corners, had known a global escalation of social conflict triggered by student protests, strikes and occupations. In the popular imagination still referred to as the Year of the Student, 1968 saw 'the arrival of a new social force' (Zeilig 2007: 1). Refusing to acknowledge the stagnant inevitability of social reality, student movements succeeded in challenging established authority – they demonstrate what Altbach calls 'a propensity toward anti-regime' (1989: 104) – and aimed to renegotiate and restructure social relations that were rooted in dichotomies such as black and white, or rich and poor. The leader of the Free Speech Movement, Mario Savio (1942-1996), writes that he arrived

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South-East Asia and Africa. Students are often first in articulating the idea of a indigenous nation-state, as was the case in colonial Indonesia for instance. During the mandate period Palestinian students as well, educated at universities in Egypt and Jordan, vitally participated in the Arab uprising against British rule (1936-1939), but an Arab state was not created.

[10] In the early 1980s a Palestinian press was established in East-Jerusalem, which became a major tool in the creation of a national consciousness (Kimmerling and Migdal 2003: 287).

[11] His memoir, *Peaceful Resistance: Building a Palestinian University under Occupation*, published in 2010, accurately documents the thriving period of the 70s and 80s at Birzeit University.

at the University of California, Berkeley with *romantic* expectations of education and improbable notions of the way in which authority works in the wider world. However, he soon grew disillusioned as he realised that power, displaying an 'unsuspected nakedness,' is not conceded but must be demanded – and for many individuals impromptu student mobilization has been an immediate result of this realisation:

> This was the explosiveness of uncalculated indignation, not the slow boil of planned revolt. In many cases it was born of the first flash of discovery that the mantle of authority cloaked an unsuspected nakedness. The experienced radical on campus did not consider this to be news … there is first love; there is first baptism of fire; there is the first time you realize your father had lied; and there is the first discovery of the chasm between the rhetoric of Ideals and the cynicism of power among the pillars of society. (Hal Braker, quoted in Zeilig 2007: 45)

Acting within the new context of the sexual and cultural counter-revolution of the late 1960s, these students embody an attempt to bend a 'seemingly unbending social world' (Zeilig 2007: 12). For the course of the year 1968 they collectively managed to relocate the political centre of gravity from the capitals of the geopolitical world (Washington D.C., New York, Moscow, Berlin, London) to Berkeley, Mexico City and the Sorbonne, revolting against the establishment or the Vietnam War and in favour of causes as diverse as workers' parties, sexual freedom, social equality, Marxism or anarchism. Theirs, it becomes evident, is also a generational struggle of the radical child against the authoritative father.[12] For the first time in history, students fulfilled their revolutionary potential as a vanguard social group on a massive, global scale. In his groundbreaking study on the ideology of advanced capitalist society, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), the German-American sociologist and philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1898-1972) had already anticipated the events of May 1968 in asserting that students and intellectuals, the new proletariat, were to assume the task of an alienated and paralysed working class to challenge the prevailing hegemonic system (Zeilig 2007: 45). While Marcuse surely saw it coming, he could not have predicted it to occur on such an unprecedented scale.

What is it, then, that makes a generation stand out? What impels us to intuitively perceive one generation as vanguards and another as quintessentially lost? Why do we insist on making such distinctions? It is important to note that the current generation of politically active students in Palestine is informed by the history of the places where they are educated, and the students that have come before them. Yet, despite this, the generation of students presently at Palestinian universities, whose formative years roughly coincide with the period of the Second Intifada

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[12] The same can be said of the current student generation in Palestine, whose politics centres on an antagonistic opposition to the Palestinian Authority. I will return to this later.

(2000-2005), is indeed defined in terms that quite categorically oppose the characterization of those educated during the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. In his study on student activism, Herr theoretically substantiates the self-evident (yet reductionist) link between the formative years of youth and the personality of a student – which is to say that 'one behaves as one has been taught to perceive oneself and one's role in institutions' (1972: 225). Implicit in Herr's argument is the idea that the personality and political behaviour of Arab students currently at university reflect the socio-political context in which they came of age. The Second Intifada was an especially violent episode in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and, indeed, the students of today are still understood as carrying the legacy of that period. Self-determination becomes a political project. In an article in the *New York Times* of 12 March 2007, Steven Erlanger, then Jerusalem bureau chief, draws a portrait of a generation that resorts to violence as a means of self-expression:

> Their worried parents call them the lost generation of Palestine: its most radical, most accepting of violence, and most despairing. They are the children of the second intifada, which began in 2000, growing up in a territory riven by infighting, seared by violence, occupied by Israel, largely cut off from the world and segmented by barriers and checkpoints. (Erlanger 2007)

This characterisation is in no way an isolated occurrence. Throughout public opinion, the media and academia, multiple instances can be found of precisely this sort of image-construction, often juxtaposed with a photograph of a young person throwing stones at Israeli soldiers or settlers across the Apartheid wall. These are, more often than not, essentialist and reductionist views of youth identity – "violent resistor," "Arab terrorist," "student shaped by radical politics." That reality is more complex and identity a much more nuanced concept,[13] is convincingly argued by the Harvard economist and Noble Prize laureate Amartya Sen. In *Identity and Violence* (2006) Sen shows that the belief in the choiceless singularity of human identity – 'a miniaturization of people' (2006: xvi) – both produces, and is produced by, conflict. In no other case are dichotomized identities so clearly articulated as in Israel and Palestine. Sen maintains that an acceptance of the plurality of the Other's sense of self would ultimately lead to a more harmonious contemporary world. In that respect a student at al-Quds University can be as much of a radical political agent (if that is the case, of course) as he or she is a jazz music enthusiast, or tennis player, or a Christian.[14] In accordance with Sen I agree that there should be no hierarchy in

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[13] So ambiguous and complex a term, in fact, that some argue we should discard of identity altogether (Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

[14] Denis Constant Martin, too, suggests that the particular part of his or her identity an individual puts forward is based on a contextual reading of the situation (Martin 1995). Which to say that whether one chooses to be a pious

the way we order the plural aspects of our respective identities. From my fieldwork research I have learned that there is so much more to students' identities than mere politics, and that their political behaviour, too, is more diverse and innovative – in fact, less violent – than is often perceived. This statement seems almost too self-evident to make, yet it does disclose the paradox at the heart of the image constructed of the Second Intifada generation: there is indeed a widening gap between the way in which the students see themselves and the singular (highly politicised) identities that they are given by others. Who is this Second Intifada generation then really? Who are the students that, against all odds and despite the many hardships, travel to Palestine's universities every day?

> We know what happened during the Intifada. We grew up fast. We became men in an age where we should still be teenagers or children, you know. No one in the civilized world has to face war or death at any time, or arrest or being attacked. And when someone is faced with those, his perspective on life changes, where he should be a tougher guy, or a tougher person, in order to survive. And our generation has been through that, has that perspective in him and view on life. For me, for instance, I've been shot at 4 times. I almost got arrested. I have friends who were killed by the Israeli military. I have friends who are in the Israeli jails. When you have those things in your life, you become depressed automatically because you can't do a thing. And our generation is trying to free itself from this oppression that we face. Not just ours, us, everyone in the Palestinian land. (interview, Birzeit, April 2014)

Indeed it would be difficult to sustain the argument – and naturally there is little point in doing so – that the Intifada and the ongoing Israeli occupation do not shape the sense of self of the students that I met and have come to know. But they are also getting an education in large numbers: With more than 213,000 students currently enrolled in higher education – 25.8% of the age group of 18-24 year olds[15] – they constitute a more than representative section of the Second Intifada generation. These numbers are high by any international standards, especially in comparison to enrolment figures of neighbouring countries in the Mashrek and of the developing world in general. That so many young people enrol at universities is a personal choice that speaks highly of their commitment to self-reform and their aspiration to foster a better society for Palestinians. This chapter has outlined the challenges of higher education in Palestine, and has introduced the generation that is confronting these challenges today. Unlike previous active student movements, they are falsely portrayed as political radicals that too readily resort to violence. Their actual resistance politics – the multiple ways in which they manage 'to survive'

Muslim (when among family) or a jazz enthusiast who uses Facebook and Twitter (when among friends) depends highly on the situational context.

[15] These figures are derived from a study the European Commission carried out in July 2012.

and try to 'free [themselves] from this oppression,' as the interviewee above put it – forms the focal point of the next two chapters.

3.   Frontline Activism

3.1. The nuances of violence

> And now he's gone ... And at the same time they think about themselves: that could have been me, and how would my family react. In just like two seconds my whole life is gone. That's the thoughts of normal Palestinians. I hate to say normal. It became normal life here. And I hate the fact when people are like 'ah, it's normal.' But it's not normal. I don't know why we accept that. It just became our lives. Our lives became politics.
>
> - Interview, Birzeit, April 2014

Saji Darwish, an eighteen-year-old student in media and journalism studies from Birzeit University, was herding his family's goats on the evening of March 10 this year – 'and now he's gone' (interview, Birzeit, April 2014). He was shot in the head by an Israeli soldier and died of his injuries before he could make it to hospital. He had reportedly been throwing stones at a jeep of the Israeli Defence Forces, although there is no way of confirming or denying this. What can be verified, however, is his lifeless body being rushed back to the small Palestinian village of Baitin and an empty chair in the university classrooms, where his professors, completing the daily task of registering the attending students, still call out his name at the beginning of every lecture.[16] The day after the young man's death, the students of Birzeit gathered collectively as his body was carried through the streets on campus, and out of respect, allowing its students time to grieve, the university remained closed for the following days. Saji's death – which forms part of six unrelated Palestinian casualties by the Israeli army in less than 24 hours – came at a telling moment, only days after Amnesty International published *Trigger Happy*, a 70-page-long report on Israel's use of excessive force in the West Bank. Eleven days earlier as well, a 24-year-old from Birzeit, just released from Israeli prison, similarly succumbed to injuries inflicted by the Defence Force, as he watched his family home being raided and burned to the ground.[17] 'It became normal life here,' a student explains, 'It just became our lives. Our lives became politics' (interview, Birzeit, April 2014). Saji Darwish is Birzeit University's 26th martyr.

That excessive use of violence has become normalised in Palestinian university communities is shown once again at al-Quds University in East Jerusalem. On 22 January 2014 the Israeli Defence Forces stormed the campus, shooting rubber bullets and firing tear gas at crowded places. According to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society 430 students and members of

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[16] Ma'an News (2014). 'Thousands bury slain Beitin youth Saji Darwish.' *Ma'an News Agency Online* (12/03/2014): http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=680984 (last access: 12/08/2014).
[17] Reuters (2014). 'Israeli forces kill Palestinian in the West Bank.' *Reuters* (17/02/2014): http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/27/us-palestinians-israel-violence-idUSBREA1Q18220140227 (last access: 12/08/2014)

staff required medical care on site and in nearby clinics (Amnesty International 2014: 55). In interviews students describe how they have become essentially numb to such raids, though traumatic the first few times, and how evacuation is now something of a routine task to them (interview, Abu Dis, April 2014). In the first semester of the academic year alone, from September through December 2013, Israeli forces made more than twelve incursions into and around the campus adjacent to the Apartheid wall, leaving 420 students in need of treatment for asphyxiation from tear gas and wounds from rubber-coated metal bullets (Amnesty International 2014: 55).

Both of these scenarios bear witness to the extent to which extreme violence pervades Palestinian university life. They also illustrate that to persist that violence is essential to the identity construction of the Second Intifada generation is to be trapped in a one-sided narrative. Naturally, students do react – at times in violent ways – to the death of one among them, or to raids of their place of learning. Students in East Jerusalem do throw stones toward Israeli army jeeps passing on the other side of the segregation wall. Even as this violence remains marginal at best, it is important for the purpose of our present inquiry to consider two further nuances. First, how much of this violence is initiated and planned by students and how much is merely the ad hoc product of provocation and retaliation? It is nearly impossible to find statistics of, let alone to measure, how much of the student violence is reactionary, but I presume these figures would be revealing. Second, there often seems to be a disparity between the misdeed initiated by a Palestinian and the penalty. It seems reasonable to expect a punishment that fits the crime, but that is only rarely the case in the West Bank. Under Israeli military law, for instance, a person can be charged for the act of throwing a stone, regardless of the damage or injury caused or of the fact that damage or injury was caused at all. If a boy pleads guilty for throwing stones, he can expect up to four months in Israeli prison. If he were to plead not guilty (which he frequently is) then the trial would be postponed indefinitely so as to keep the young boy imprisoned in often agonizing circumstances.[18] Further questions are raised when one compares the outcome of violence on both sides of the conflict. While the number of reported injured in Israel consistently remains below a hundred per year, in the West Bank alone the figures are substantially higher and have tripled since 2009, and even doubled in the transition from 2011 to 2012: 937 West-Bank Palestinians were injured in 2009, 1261 in 2010, 1646 in 2011 and 3029 in 2012 (OCHA 2012: 12).

The point bears repeating: violence is prevalent at Palestinian universities, but that does not make its students a *violent* generation per se. Such an assumption fails to take into account that the Occupying Force initiates much of the violence, or that many of the formal protests held

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[18] 15 April 2014, data from a lecture at *Defend the Children International*, a Palestinian NGO that has been providing legal aid to children imprisoned in Israel since 1991.

in these places are non-violent. Students of Birzeit University, for instance, participate on a regular basis in the weekly anti-barrier demonstrations in the neighbouring village of Bil'in, which remain (if left unprovoked) peaceful. They also organise protests at Qalandia checkpoint on the main route that connects Jerusalem with Ramallah. Though non-violent from the start, these acts of confrontation are often repressed by the Israeli Defence Forces or met with provocative behaviour from soldiers in order to elicit a violent reaction. There are limits to anyone's endurance. When a student is killed, a campus raided or a peaceful protest countered with hostility and provocation, students can retaliate in violent ways – whether such violence is, in the end, appropriate or not presents a moral question to which I do not purport to know the answer. They emerge, as an interviewee at al-Quds put it citing Arafat's eloquent words to the UN General Assembly in 1974, 'bearing an olive branch in one hand, and a freedom fighter's gun in the other. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand' (interview, Abu Dis, April 2014). In asking me to consider Arafat's words, this student implicitly asserts that in any scenario there is always a choice, but the choice is not always left to the students to make. From interviews conducted over the course of April 2014 I gather that the law of the jungle mentality that had typified the First and Second Intifada seems today only to live with a small segment of the student population. These students remain often anonymous and elusive, but their anonymity should not be mistaken to imply that they are not present. To them, 'urban guerillas' as Zeilig labels them (2007: 38), violence constitutes a means to articulate an identity as Palestinian, and to fix meaning between Self and Other in an otherwise fractured world. Though an absolute minority, they do indeed carry within themselves the legacy of the period in which they came of age.

However, one significant development is especially marked in this respect, namely the rise of students' involvement in Islamic radical groups that make militant resistance against Israel often into the core principle of their respective agendas. Since the establishment of Palestinian universities in the early 1970s, and because of the university's role in shaping the ideologies of young people, Islamic factions have been decidedly present on campuses across Palestine. Especially Gaza's Islamic University continues to be the centrepiece of the orthodox Muslim Brotherhood's power (Paz 2003: 31).[19] The idea of Islam as a kind of radical politics has intensified since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and escalated briefly in the early 1980s on the campus of An-Najah University in Nablus with clashes that rose beyond the administration's control between nationalist-secularist students and Islamists (Paz 2003: 32). Roel Meijer extends this trend to the Arab world as a whole, interpreting the rise of the Islamist movement as 'almost

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[19] The rise of Islamic fundamentalism is most pronounced at Gaza Islamic, which for obvious reasons lies beyond the scope of my fieldwork research.

completely a youth phenomenon' and 'the most conspicuous sign of the decline of the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the nation's young' (Meijer 2000: 4). This is perhaps too comprehensive a claim to make,[20] but it is worth noting that among students in the West Bank Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) increasingly gain following while the political legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority is largely criticised. There are two explicit motivations that might explain why this is the case. Firstly, Palestine is a key example of a society that has turned onto itself. As Israel closed the international border in the aftermath of the Oslo Agreements and thus further isolated the Occupied Territories, Palestinians were forced into a more radical confrontation with their own Islamic identity. Secondly, as Zeilig proposes, Islamic fundamentalism principally appears to take root in 'societies traumatized by the impact of capitalism' (2007: 263).[21] Palestine still suffers a great deal from the introduction of neoliberal policies by the Palestinian Authority, a theme to which I will return later on. It suffices to point to the consequences of that economic change here. Graduate employment is at an unprecedented low. Simultaneously, higher education is becoming something of a commodity: in 2012 students shut down Birzeit University for multiple days in protest over rising tuition fees.[22] Whereas previously, as Mahmood Mamdani argues, students were guaranteed privileged jobs on account of their university diplomas, now higher education 'seemed to lead more and more students to the heart of the economic and social crisis' (quoted in Zeilig 2007: 266). They have become 'less marginal to the social world they sought to change in the 1960s and 1970s' (Zeilig 2007: 266), in their pauperized condition developing more affinity with the working class and urban poor. While western secular culture seems to seep through the closed borders of the West Bank into Ramallah and while at the same time jobs remain scarce, a large number of students turned inward to find refugee in their religious traditions.[23] On 5 November 2013 and again on 24 March 2014, radical students at al-

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[20] As I will illustrate later, students additionally turn to many subtler forms of politics in resisting the Palestinian Authority. A return to Islam is only of them.

[21] To substantiate his point, Zeilig refers to Mohammad Atta, one of the suicide bombers who carried out the 11 September attacks on New York and Washington D.C., as an illustrative product of the failing of the economy and the implicative rise of fundamentalism. Atta was born in Kafr el Sheikh in the Nile Delta in a family that had felt the disastrous ramifications of Anwar Sadat's opening up of the Egypt economy to the West in the late 1970s. He graduated from a university that had become the centre of fundamentalist activity and joined a Muslim-Brotherhood-controlled engineer association. A fellow student remembers him to have been appalled by the 'contrast between a few rich people and the mass of the population with barely enough to survive' and this critique of the massive disproportion in wealth in rural Egypt underlay Atta's radicalisation and his subsequent enlistment in al-Qaeda (Zeilig 2007: 264).

[22] Ma'an News (2012). 'Birzeit University students protest fees.' *Ma'an News Agency Online* (20/05/2012): http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=488822 (last access: 12/08/2014).

[23] This process – turning toward religious traditions to wade off secular modernist culture – is nothing new. Before, in the 60s and 70s, as Reuven Paz notes, the secular-religious conflict that lived among university students also had a cultural dimension: 'The universities and colleges in the Territories, especially those in the West Bank, accelerated the absorption of Western secular culture, particularly among the lower class, traditional folk who compromised the majority of the student population. Daily exposure to Israeli society also contributed a Western influence. Birzeit University and Bethlehem University became the centres of the cultural struggle, with a notable number of Christian

Quds University, affiliated with Hamas and the Islamic-Jihad Student Bloc of al-Quds, organised extremist – fascist – rallies on campus, celebrating martyrs and performing militant and Nazi-like salutes. This caused quite a stir in the international media. In the aftermath of the first rally, both Syracuse and Brandeis universities, two American Jewish-sponsored institutions, decided to suspend their academic partnership with al-Quds. Head of school Sari Nusseibeh issued a letter to the students explaining that public opinion can sustain the occupation and that respect is a core value of the *haram*, the university campus. But quite tellingly, Nusseibeh did not renounce the actions that occurred, instead calling upon his students to hold firmly the values of deference and non-violence, 'for a world with degraded principles is like a beast that may be skilful in its tasks but reaps nothing but havoc upon the earth.'[24] His statement has been the subject of an entire controversy in its own right.

3.2. Toward non-violence

It is imperative once more to emphasise that most demonstrations and protests are peaceful acts of defiance. Yet as proves to be the case, violence executed by students at al-Quds or Birzeit increases when they feel they have little to say: in a pronouncedly neoliberal world on which they have no grip or during raids and protests when instead of being heard, they are taunted by the Israeli forces. Israeli and American media are eager to portray that violence, yet fail to realise that the more compelling question in itself is not *that* students are violent, but *why* they are. In the above I have briefly tried to show that it is crucial to question student violence and to tease out the nuances, that is the imbalance in power, for one, and the politics of initiation and retaliation. Whether hostile or not, the kind of student activism assessed here – demonstration, protest and rally – entails a direct, literal confrontation with the occupying force, which is what differentiates it from the subtler forms of political resistance that I will turn to in the subsequent chapter. My fieldwork research suggests that a surprising shift is occurring from the former to the latter – a gradual move of the current generation away from formal protest and toward more indirect and anonymous means of resistance. Why this is the case, is an urgent question. To answer it fully would require a deeper investigation into the economic and political life-world of the Intifada generation. More specifically, it necessitates an examination of the PA's implementation of

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professors, local and foreign, and even Israeli Arab citizens. An-Najah University in Nablus, despite having a Muslim character and very few Christian students and professors, developed a relatively strong Marxist element side by side with labor and professional unions' (Paz 2003: 10).

[24] Letter from Sari Nusseibeh to the students of al-Quds University: http://www.brandeis.edu/now/2013/November/pdfs/al-quds-statement-11-18-13.pdf

neoliberal policies in the West Bank and the attitudes of university students towards the Palestinian Authority in general.

Let us turn to the systemic changes in the economy of modern Palestine first. Open acts of defiance imply bodily presence: students confront soldiers at Qalandia checkpoint (in a peaceful demonstration) or defy defence forces in Abu Dis (during a raid) *in person*. They cannot hide in anonymity, which partly explains why so few female students participate. But the most important feature of frontline activism lies in the potential threats it entails – the risk of arrest, the risk of injury, the risk of death. 'The students who are active will pay the price of speaking. Activism is not without sacrifice. You speak; you pay the price. Freedom of speech is not guaranteed' (interview, Birzeit, April 2014). To observe, then, that students protest formally in smaller numbers and less frequently is to suggest that they have increasingly more to loose and are less willing to confront the risks inherent to a confrontation with authority. This fundamental premise underlies the work of Raja Khalidi, a former doctoral student at the London School of Economics and now senior economist at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). He argues that the Palestinian Authority's implementation of (flawed) neoliberal policies, consistently since the premiership of Salam Fayyad in 2007, neutralises mobilisation and liberalisation, not only creating 'a people willing to resist encroachments upon their material gains and the liberal way of life'[25] but also implicitly perpetuating the occupation. In essence this amounts to saying that there exists a link between the materialist culture and lifestyle, and the public's inclination to maintain the political status-quo. Forsaking national emancipation, Palestinians turn to domestic concerns: paying off outstanding bank loans and securing pay checks in order to fund a neoliberal lifestyle, of smartphones, trips to Dubai or coffee breaks in Ramallah's overpriced but Americanized Starbucks offshoot. Especially in the tri-city area of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah, where both al-Quds and Birzeit are situated, this neoliberal lifestyle is most prominent.

> Ayman and Rahma abu Hussein can't help but feel they are moving up in the world. The database engineer and his wife just bought their first home, and it's large enough for both of their children to have their own rooms. There's a Hyundai parked outside and a flat-panel TV hangs in the living room, one of many new appliances decking out the place. But the Abu Husseins are up to their ears in debt. Their upward mobility, like that of thousands of other Palestinians, came tied to something that was once rare in the West Bank: mortgages and consumer credit. … 'Now that I have all this responsibility on me, my main

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[25]Khalidi, R. (2012). 'After the Arab Spring in Palestine: Neoliberalism and National Liberation.' *Global Research*: http://www.globalresearch.ca/after-the-arab-spring-in-palestine-neoliberalism-and-national-liberation/30127 (last access: 12/08/2014).

concern is stability,' Ayman said. 'I don't want to see anything happen that might stop my pay-checks.'[26]

Personal debt in the West Bank has more than doubled to about $750 million, from 2008 to 2011, and rose 40% over the last year alone.[27] It becomes evident in what ways the risks intrinsic to formal protest (arrest, injury, death) can at the same time pose a threat to the monthly pay-check. Politics becomes an exercise in balancing domestic and national priorities.

Living, to reiterate Mamdani's words, in the 'heart of the economic and social crisis' (quoted in Zeilig 2007: 266), students collide with these new economic realities in profound ways. Not only are they equally prone to materialist lifestyles, but neoliberal processes, as I described earlier, have also led to the privatisation and commodification of university education.[28] To put it crudely, neoliberalism has nullified students' political assertiveness; Khalidi's argument extends fittingly to students as a social group. Before, separated from the production process, most students enjoyed a privileged position in society – free to engage in political activism without having to worry excessively about income and family. To those less fortunate scholarships were allocated (after a home visit) by political parties such as Hamas or Fatah. Now, however, with rising tuition fees and the cost of a materialist lifestyle, ever larger numbers of students turn to banks for loans.[29] Younger generations typically prove themselves to be more interested in secular Western culture, and therefore more easily inclined to pay the financial cost that such a way of living entails. The lifestyle of Nadeem Suwara, the 17-year-old who was shot dead by Israeli forces in May 2014, is symptomatic of this new generation. Nadeem's death incited quite a stir in the international public opinion, as CCTV footage shows that he was shot unprovoked at a Nakba day demonstration outside Ofer prison, posing no apparent threat to Israeli soldiers.

> Nadeem was not a child of the camps or the poor neighbourhoods but came from a solid
> middle-class home (…) His family has enlarged the last selfie that Nadim took on his
> phone, wearing a kefiyeh and with his baseball cap on backwards. His parents show me his
> computer. There is Nadeem swimming and building a snowman, hanging out with friends,
> a teenager interested in American culture as Palestinian. There are no pictures to do with
> politics, of friends throwing stones, of demonstrations, or images saved from the news. In

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[26] Sanders, E. (2012). 'Palestinians are up to ears in debt.' *Los Angeles Times* (18/03/2012): http://articles.latimes. com/2012/mar/18/world/la-fg-palestinian-debt-20120318

[27] idem.

[28] 'These polarized higher education in Western societies, where a minority of privileged institutions – the Ivy League universities in America and Oxford and Cambridge in the United Kingdom – are able to remain faithful to an earlier, idealized world of intellectual endeavour and educational pursuit (greatly assisted by private endowments), while most institutions of higher education are caught in a web of marketization. They have become client-driven providing an increasingly self-funded service to larger bodies of students' (Zeilig 2007: 47).

[29] In conversation with Ghada Almadbouh of Birzeit University.

that sense Nadeem was the child of the new Ramallah that has prospered amid an economic boom.[30]

Wearing a kefiyeh and a baseball cap, backwards, captures that new lifestyle quite appropriately. And as a 17-year-old from a middle-class family in the 'new Ramallah,' Nadeem would most likely have attended Birzeit University in the following academic year.

Khalidi does indeed put forward a compelling argument: 'neoliberal ideology, through its economic policy content, created a Palestinian constituency for normalcy and risk aversion that could hold back progress in the struggle for national liberation.'[31] Yet, in a sense, his predicament is also too bleak, failing to see the emergence of subtler forms of political behaviour among the young that evade the risks so inherent in open confrontation with the occupying force. (I will turn to the inventive ways students manage to rethink political activism in the next chapter.) It does justify and explain the gradual shift I mentioned earlier – from a language of force to a language of politics. One additional remark, I believe, is imperative here: the middle class, though rising in numbers, constitutes only *one* part of the population currently living in the Occupied Territories. The lower working classes – the people of the refugee camps, for one – do also, in fewer numbers, send off their sons and daughters to university. Their decision not to engage in political activism has nothing to do with the kind of neoliberal resignation or self-interested complacency that I have described here. Rather, most of these students can be believed to lack the time or energy for politics (they often work after school hours to make the family's ends meet), and to that end – the fact that they are so vital to the subsistence of the family – are less willing to face the risk of arrest or death during an open confrontation with Israeli soldiers. Khalidi's argument therefore proves to be a bit one-sided in being biased toward a middle-class perspective. To this day, Palestine receives the highest percentage of non-military aid per capital in the world, and its economy remains to a large extent dependent on Israel. Palestine sends sixty to seventy thousand workers daily across its borders into the Jewish state.[32]

Let us, finally, consider a further motivation that might explain the shift in the political attitude of the Second Intifada Generation. A growing number of university students have become alienated from the political practices of the Palestinian Authority, and from the self-involved party politics of Fatah and Hamas. One significant consequence of the PA's

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[30] Beaumont, P. (2014). 'Rammallah father: I want to believe that the boy soldier who shot dead my son seeks forgiveness.' *The Guardian* (25/05/2014): http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/25/palestinian-territories-ramallah-nadeem-suwara (last access: 12/08/2014).

[31] Khalidi, R. (2012). 'After the Arab Spring in Palestine: Neoliberalism and National Liberation.' *Global Research*: http://www.globalresearch.ca/after-the-arab-spring-in-palestine-neoliberalism-and-national-liberation/30127 (last access: 12/08/2014).

[32] statistic from a presentation by a professor of economics at Birzeit's Center of Development Studies.

implementation of neoliberal policies systematically since 2007 is that it has, in Khalidi's words, 'broken the national-social contract.'[33] One interviewee felt the PA was stuck between Israel on the one side and the Palestinians on the other; another dismissed the PA and the two major political parties as outright corrupt; and a third student mentioned 'a gap between the PA and the people' (interviews, West Bank, April 2014). Their choice to turn to alternative ways of *doing politics* can be interpreted as an evasive manoeuvre from party affiliation. Students are non-political not in the way the young people of Tel Aviv are – they could never be that in an occupied territory. But, significantly, they do seem to turn away from the conventional established politics of the older generation. Party politics on Palestinian campuses is very much alive: towards the election period, the buildings would be covered in green (Hamas) or yellow (Fatah).[34] For years now student council elections at Birzeit University have represented the outcome of elections later held in parliament. Yet, ironically, in an interview a student at al-Quds University estimated that roughly one in three students did not vote in the last elections, largely owing to the self-involved behaviour of the student representatives of these political parties on campus, and of the Fatah and Hamas politicians on the national stage. A group of students at al-Quds University created an initiative to train other students to make it in the professional world without invoking or relying upon patronage networks. Students have become disillusioned with the actual realisations and the potential for change that the reigning parties offer. In this sense I disagree with Altbach's claim that student politics is a politics of idealism that expects complete, uncompromised solutions and 'often embrace[s] political (or religious) ideologies which offer a total program for society' (Altbach 1984: 648). From fieldwork observations I conclude that rather the opposite is true: students move away from this sense of totality, away from larger narratives and their political manifestations. Not untypically, Palestine bears witness to both trends: it sees a growing number of students joining Islamist factions (which I have clarified elsewhere), and, conversely, a group moving in the opposite direction – escaping from affiliation with political programmes into smaller, locally-centred initiatives.

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[33] Khalidi, R. (2012). 'After the Arab Spring in Palestine: Neoliberalism and National Liberation.' *Global Research*: http://www.globalresearch.ca/after-the-arab-spring-in-palestine-neoliberalism-and-national-liberation/30127 (last access: 12/08/2014).

[34] These political representatives have indeed learned to respond to the new materialist culture very much alive on campuses (to which I referred in the previous section). Reportedly, it is common practice for both Fatah and Hamas students to distribute phone credit (among others things) to voters in order to win their support.

4.   <u>The Politics of Community Building</u>

> If revolution were a rare event before the creation of such states, it now seems all but foreclosed. All the more reason, then, to respect, if not celebrate, the weapons of the weak. All the more reason to see in the tenacity of self-preservation – in ridicule, in irony, in petty acts of noncompliance, in foot dragging, in dissimulation, in resistance, in mutuality … in the steady, grinding efforts to hold one's own against overwhelming odds – a spirit and practice that prevents the worst and promises something better.
>
> - James C. Scott, *The Weapons of the Weak*

In the previous chapter I have illustrated that students are becoming less willing to engage in a formal confrontation with the occupying force. Their demobilisation, I argued, can be attributed to two distinct changes in their economic and political life-worlds: a materialist lifestyle and the alienation from the conventional political system – from politics with a capital P, if you will. However, I already suggested that it would be too bleak a predicament to speak of a resignation or of a full demobilisation, as Khalidi does, therefore failing to understand how students creatively rethink their political agency. In this chapter I want to substantiate the claim that students, in profoundly inventive ways, develop and practise a politics that avoids the risks of open confrontation, yet still allows them to *be* politically assertive. One of the principle aims of this dissertation is indeed to prove that students are not only political on the rare occasions when they actually formally protest. Resistance to the Israeli occupation consists of a form of everyday politics. In a world where according to the much-repeated Palestinian dictum, *everything is politicised*, the struggle to resist is inevitably prosaic but constant. This chapter on the politics of community building will bring into sharper focus some of the choices students make, and some of the initiatives that they organise, and will conceive of these initiatives and choices as fundamentally political acts. Such an all-inclusive approach begs the question: What is political? 'The easy answer,' Christian Lund writes, 'is of course that everything is political'

> However, this is not entirely satisfactory. If every name of a place, every administrative operation, any participation in public events and every cup of coffee drunk with a 'big man' is political, it effectively evacuates the analytical sense from the concept. On the other hand, such issues may easily be politically significant. People die in the name of places, administrative procedures are potent instruments of exclusion, public events are ideal for the manifestation of interest and allegiance, and many a sordid deal is made over a cup of coffee. Most elements of social life can be politicized, that is, become the objects of efforts to secure interests, and may thus be significant. However, this cannot always be read from the process itself. While questions of new distinctions, of institutionalization, and of power can be asked in very particular contexts, we are tasked to assess their significance in a slightly broader perspective — beyond the event itself, so to speak — namely in terms of

their institutional ramifications. This entails an 'epistemological change of gears', as it were, as we must see the political events and processes as 'diagnostic' for something broader. (Lund 2006: 697)

What Lund proposes is that if we want to critically examine the intentions behind small prosaic acts we need to look at how these acts secure interests. In doing so we are assessing the significance of these acts in broader terms: we move 'beyond the event itself' (Lund 2006: 697). The choice of a young girl from Ramallah to attend Birzeit University is not only a personal, but essentially a political choice. That is, it secures a way for the community to develop itself and it is made with that idea in mind. The political level would be more pronounced if the young girl does not originate from Ramallah, but, say, from a small Palestinian village in Israel's Upper Galilee. Her decision to defy concrete barriers, checkpoints and green lines in order to pursue an education in the Occupied Territories reflects a refusal to accept the political reality as inevitable and static, and contributes a consistent effort to the development of the Palestinian community. I will return to this example in due time, but for now it illustrates clearly, I believe, that politics manifests itself in multiple ways – that a choice of school (or the choice *to* go to school) can be as significant as protesting in front of Kalandia checkpoint, with signs and shouts de-legitimising the Israeli occupation. In the first section of this chapter I set myself to the task of assessing such forms of indirect politics; in the second section I will try to tease out its qualities and characteristics.

4.1. Building a Palestinian community

Volunteer work and self-reform

> Personally when I was a child, my father was a very active man in political parties and he was put in Israeli jail for 3 years. So I did not get to see my dad since the minute I was born till I was 3 years old. This will show you that it's not very productive to invest your time and effort in resistance, but rather self-reform. So you can be a good teacher, a good baker, a good farmer. This will benefit your country more. Because of the imbalanced power in the political … euh, well … the struggle itself is not fair, so how can the resistance be fair. (interview, Birzeit, April 2014)

Though these are the words of only one female student enrolled in the International Studies graduate programme at Birzeit University's Development Institute, they are in fact indicative of a larger trend among university students in Palestine. Within the Second Intifada generation a strong belief persists that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict perpetuates an imbalance in power – this realisation is an awakening that every generation in turn has had to go through. Like the student

cited above, they now understand that many of their actions, for which they face the risk of injury or arrest, are ultimately inconsequential precisely because of this disparity in power. An unfair struggle cannot elicit a fair resistance response. Reacting to the disproportion in power politics, this particular student turned inward to reform herself. She believed that in going to university and becoming very skilled at whatever she chose to do in life, her community would benefit more. If you see injustice and injury done to your people on a daily basis, she told me, it 'triggers the motivation from within to work harder,' and, she added, 'maybe we can have better political representation of our nation' (interview, Birzeit, April 2014). However, the interviewee failed to comprehend that resistance and self-reform are not mutually exclusive, and that the latter ultimately presents itself as a manifestation of the former.

A reform of the self is reflected in the community, and vice versa. Reform is a two-way process: if the individuals of a particular group better themselves, the community will benefit from this; and conversely, if the community improves, so will its people. Instructive here is the notion of volunteer work, which is rooted in the understanding that individuals hold a certain responsibility toward the local community to which they belong. Every Palestinian university student – at the two universities that form the lens of my research, or others in Nablus or Bethlehem – is obligated by the Palestinian Ministry of Education to complete 120 hours of community work before graduating. This has been a longstanding tradition in the Occupied Territories. Long before the ministry was established (that is, before Oslo), leftist political groups and student associations (especially the Palestine Communist Party) developed the volunteer and charity framework for university students in the second half of the 1970s. As Paz notes, it quickly turned into 'one of the main elements of the younger generation's organization in all aspects of political and social life in the Territories,' and was formally categorized under what was called 'the youth committees for social work (*lijan al-shabibah lil-'amal al-ijtima'i*)' (2003: 31). Indirectly, behind student participation in ploughing, harvesting, the mending of roads and the cleaning of villages, lay the cultural theme of *sumud*, perseverance and steadfastness (Kimmerling and Migdal 2004: 290). To make students work the land is to ensure that they do not lose affinity with the Palestinian soil, and symbolically, with their indigenous roots. Quite literally, it is a clever way of getting the dirt of the land under the students' fingernails until it grows to be part of who they are. And so will eventually the struggle for the land that they with so much effort ploughed and planted, and finally harvested. These ideas can be read quite explicitly in the credo of the Supreme Committee for Voluntary work, which was established in 1980:[35]

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[35] The Supreme Committee of Voluntary Work was established in 1980 when both the Jordanian authorities and Fatah opposed the idea of young men and women working the land together (Kimmerling and Migdal 2004: 290).

> We do not only build a wall or pave a road. We are building a new human being … Our purpose is to turn voluntary work into a workshop and a school, both able to provide our Palestinian people with pioneering individuals, bound by national ethics, firmly anchored into the land and highly dedicated to the national cause. (quoted in Kimmerling and Migdal 2004: 290)

Though noble, volunteer and charity work are also essentially political matters. The idea of manual labour and 'building a new human being' out of the Palestinian soil may owe much to the communist rhetoric of the 1980s. Today in Palestine, however, that rhetoric has been partially obliterated, although it has not vanished altogether: the yearly planting of olive trees in the hilly area around Birzeit, to name only one instance, affirms the student's sense of belonging, and it does so in a wonderfully symbolic way. Volunteering now is mainly seen in practical terms. Through obligating the entire student body to participate, the university aims to increase the awareness of its students for the societal issues that are facing the local community. This moves well beyond politics into areas that even first-world societies are familiar with: the assistance of the elderly and the disabled, the care and teaching of children and the overseeing of cultural activities – voluntary work is in that sense a way of getting things done in a society that still requires 'a lot of work' (interview, Birzeit, April 2014). One noteworthy initiative, which ties back to the previous subchapter on violence, is the fully student-run division of the Islamic Crescent of the Red Cross Society at al-Quds University, which students join on a voluntary basis, and which provides fellow students and members of staff with assistance and first aid when the campus is raided by the Israeli forces, at times more than once a week.

Education as a political choice

Education is crucial to the idea of self-reform, especially in a globalised world such as we live in today. In that global world, basic education is higher education. A lot of the development theory focuses too narrowly on primary and secondary education in the Global South. The university features rarely in structural adjustment programmes, and considering education is given priority in the UN's Millennium Development Goals, higher education is overlooked. A World Bank report published in 2000 notes that less than half of the world's 80 million students in higher education originate from so-called Third World countries (quoted in Zeilig 74). These statistics do not seem to reveal a huge discrepancy at first, until one considers the fact that more than 85% of the world's population (in 2000) lives in those countries in the Global South. If a developing society therefore wants to compete in the world economy and in international politics, it desperately needs a growing number of inhabitants educated at institutions of higher learning. In

Toward a Rational Society, the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas substantiates a correlation between the significance of a university in a particular society and the social development of that society and of its individuals:

> The university itself is an agent of social change. It generates both new, technically exploitable knowledge and the consciousness of modernity, with all of its practical consequences. Thus merely belonging to a university provides an impulse toward entering the struggle against the traditionalism of inherited social structures. (1980: 13-14)

Social and societal mobility are key here. The university is a meritocratic institution that promises advancement based on merit (and, too often, capital which determines access to university in the first place). As such, it challenges traditional practices and loci of authority in Third World societies, where family, ethnic group or tribe control and shape the social life of young people (Altbach 1984: 640). Especially in the context of Occupied Palestine with its history of displacement, higher education can be seen as something of an embodiment of what economists call *human capital*. Unlike material property or land, knowledge and competences can indeed be carried around. This concretely explains why Palestine as a state invests so heavily in education, and why comparably high numbers of students attend local universities. The impressive statistics bear repeating: in 2012 it was calculated that 25.8% of the age group of 18-24 year olds were enrolled in institutes of higher learning.

Choosing to attend university, it becomes apparent, is choosing to improve yourself (social mobility) and your community (societal mobility). Precisely for this reason, university attendance, too, can be understood as a manifestation of resistance politics. On departing I asked a student of al-Quds University whether he would return here, if, in an unreal, hypothetical world, he got to make his life choices all over again. We had spent the afternoon discussing the effect of politics on education and he had just shown me a bullet-ridden facade of a building near the entrance gate, where we were parting. Yet despite all the obvious difficulties that were making his engineering studies tougher, he replied in the affirmative: 'Coming to university here proves my quiet loyalty to Palestine.' He told me that as long as the university does not cease to exist, as long as students continue to come and study there, Israel cannot claim the land. His answer owes much to the notion of ideological perseverance (*sumud*) that pervades Palestinian discourse. Reacting to the attack on al-Quds University of 17 November 2013, Sundos Hammas similarly writes that 'education is our tool to resist occupation. It is important to keep our Palestinian heritage and to resist the narrative of the occupier.'[36] To do this successfully, a group of

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[36] Albawaba News (2013). 'Israeli forces attack al-Quds University, injuring 40.' *Albawaba News* (17/11/2013): http://www.albawaba.com/news/israel-raid-al-quds-university-534237 (last access: 12/08/2014).

professors at Birzeit University are designing a mandatory course for all first-year students on the political system of Palestine, and on the politics of the conflict. This course will include readings from and discussions on core Zionist texts. It aims to raise critical awareness, and to reconfigure the way in which the student sees him- or herself in the conflict. Professor Ghada Almadbouh explains that emotions and anger run high among students on the Birzeit campus, but that many of them remain ignorant of the particular ruling ideas behind the conflict. With this course she aspires to transform that emotive response into a rational one. At al-Quds and Bard, too, students are taught the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in two compulsory courses, respectively entitled *The Palestinian Cause* (at al-Quds) and *The Palestinian and Israeli Conflict* (at the Bard Honours College). The courses are constructed on the underlying idea that knowledge in itself will make a person act morally correct – in other words, educated people do not resort to violence. In how far this holds true remains to be seen.

Why do education and universities hold so prominent a place to the Palestinian cause? In the Arab world, universities, together with mosques, still play a crucial role in society: Al-Azhar's vast influence over Egypt's religious and political landscape is perhaps the most illustrative example. In Palestine that task is of particular importance, for education continues to be, in the words of Sundos Hammas quoted above, 'our tool to resist the narrative of the occupier.' Through the curriculum and the idea of the *haram* as a public forum, higher education puts Palestine back into the history of the place, producing and dispersing a common Palestinian narrative and a collective memory for the Palestinian people. It provides its students with a vocabulary for resistance. Crucially, Ilan Pappé argues that the discursive formation of a common narrative should transcend the green line. To him, a foundation for peace and for a common state can be found in one mutual history that explains the atrocities that led the Jewish to leave Europe, but that also contains the Zionist crimes in historic Palestine: 'You don't have a common state in the future if you don't have a common past.'[37] As so many before him, he alludes to the Apartheid history of South Africa, where all schoolbooks were rewritten after the decline of the Apartheid regime, now describing the white coloniser's misdeeds as well as his achievements. That falsified history is a crime that has far-reaching ramifications, in Palestine or in South Africa, is stressed by Nasser al-Shaer, a Hamas politician who was the PA's Minister of Education from 2006 until he was dismissed from his governmental duties when Hamas rose to power in Gaza in 2009. Al-Shaer has a running joke: in his office he would lay out all of the course books taught in Palestinian schools and universities on three tables, in a somewhat self-satisfied manner claiming that 'if you have any questions about it, let me know. Take your time'

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[37] meeting with Pappé in Haifa, Saturday 12/04/2014

(interview, Nablus, April 2014). There is a larger point to his anecdotal remark, which al-Shaer explicitly pronounces at the end: the Palestinian curriculum is transparent, unlike the Israeli syllabi packed with Jewish ideologies and falsified histories (on, for instance, the Nakba, or on how God gave the land without people to the people without the land). In short, 'We don't teach terrorism' (interview, Nablus, April 2014).

The university produces collective knowledge, but knowledge is at the same time a malleable thing, which is evident in both the accounts of the academic (Pappé) and the politician (Al-Shaer). To reiterate Habermas, higher education generates 'new, technically exploitable knowledge' (1980: 13). This leads us to one of the most crucial debates in post-modernism: the crisis in epistemology, that is, in the correlation between discourse and power, and the power relations of knowledge. The notion that the university is a vital instrument for the transmission and reproduction of dominant ideas, received its most sophisticated exploration in the theoretical work of Foucault (how is truth constructed?), Althusser, Bourdieu, Nietzsche (knowledge as struggle), and, perhaps most evocatively, the work of the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci, whose fundamental thesis proposes that the people in power produce a discourse that legitimates their power. Gramsci can easily be read in Palestine, or in Israel, or in Israel's relation to Palestine, and in fact many commentators have done precisely that (Bouillon 2004, Stein and Swedenburgh 2005). While it certainly holds true with regard to Palestine that universities produce a common narrative for the Palestinian people (and this is not a bad thing in itself), students never slavishly adapt these narratives. Some theorists tend to overlook the fact that the university fosters critical thinking. It urges students to engage in a critical examination of the society in which they partake on a daily basis. This makes it all the more evident why the absence of any Palestinian institutions of higher learning in the current state of Israel, the 48 Lands, is so problematic. Education is important, and political, for all of the reasons mentioned above: self-reform, social mobility, human capital, sumud, the production of knowledge and critical thinking. It provides young students with powerful ideas, and the skills to examine these ideas critically. As Marx once noted, 'The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon; material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses' (Marx and Engels 1975: 182). In other words, an idea grows to be a material force as soon as it has convinced a majority of its truth.

Resistance manifests itself in multiple ways. A third case that proves relevant to our present inquiry is the involvement of Palestinian students in grassroots initiatives. Founded toward the end of the Second Intifada, the *Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign* – in short, the BDS – is one such initiative, calling for three basic rights: ending the occupation, ending the racial discrimination in Israel, and the right to return. BDS comprises the sort of movement that Israel has not encountered before, and especially the boycott support of the international community manages to pose a strategic threat to the Israeli government. The campaign is founded on the idea of not targeting the crimes, but targeting the criminal, in a forceful yet non-violent way. It actively calls on students around the world for support. In Belgium, the Fédération des Etudiants Francophones (FEF) has pronounced a full economic boycott of Israel. Palestinian students, too, from all political affiliations, have expressed their commitment to the campaign: as of March 2014 students declared the Nablus campus of An-Najah, to name only instance, free of Israeli goods.

The list of grassroots initiatives in which students participate and often play a leading role, seems near-limitless. Others before me have assessed the workings of these ngos and their productive role in civil society (Muslih 1993, Norton 1993, Sullivan 1996, Challand 2009, Marteu 2009). More noteworthy, of course, are the grassroots initiatives created and run by students themselves. Though concealed in a cellar room in the administrative building of Birzeit University, the *Right to Education* Campaign manages to achieve impressive results in the Palestinian community. It was established by a group of teachers in 1988 as a way to defend the right to education when at the start of the First Intifada Birzeit was closed by military order. Now, however, the organisation is fully student-run. Their grassroots work includes raising awareness for the current 45 student prisoners, organising international campaigns and advocating on behalf of the students of Palestine; and, on the local level, helping small schools with their resource burden, collecting financial support for schools in problematic or far-off areas such as Hebron or the Jordan valley, and in many other ways, 'tackling the isolation of students imposed by the Israeli occupation.[38]' At the heart of the campaign lies the idea of advocacy and awareness. The students involved document violations against the right to education and create a body of information, which is eventually used for publishing, in order 'to make sure these violations are being recorded and being brought into the public sphere' (interview, Birzeit, April 2014). What makes the Right to Education Campaign so valuable, apart from the work that they

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[38] charter of the Right to Education Campaign.

are doing, is that the initiatives 'come from students,' as one professor put it. 'It's needed. And I like the fact that it comes from them, because they know their needs. Nobody is telling them what they want' (interview, Birzeit, April 2014). The students of the campaign understand perfectly that education is not only a human right in itself, but also – and they quote the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in their charter – 'an indispensable means of realizing other human rights.'[39]

4.2. Methods

These are only three of the many instances of the subtler, more indirect forms of political resistance of students, but I chose to elaborate upon them because they are internally so distinct and so diverse. In whatever shape or form, volunteer work, higher education and grassroots mobilisation contribute to what I would call a *politics of community building* (which, again, I distinguish, from formal acts of resistance such as violence or protest). The principle idea of this dissertation is to read initiatives in community building as an act of resistance, and I have illustrated how they can be understood in precisely that political sense in the previous subchapter. Many of the students I talked to believed that only a strong Palestinian society can create the condition for the establishment of a Palestinian state – that, in other words, they needed to change first, to build a society better-equipped to deal with the challenges that it is already facing today, before they could alter the fate of the ongoing political conflict, and end the occupation.

The recent literature on *social capital* supports such views. In his most controversial work to date, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community* (2000), Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam argues that social capital – the belief that there is a collective and individual worth to social interaction – is declining in the United States, while social isolation is exceedingly present. Yet central to our inquiry is that Putnam shows that this decline in social capital undermines the active civil engagement that is expected of the member-participants of a strong democracy. A sense of belonging to a community is thus understood as a resource – 'like capital' (Sen 2006: 2). It presents an essential requirement for the creation of a strong democratic state, which is what the Palestinians need, which is what they want. Beyond this, in its very core, a sense of communal belonging provides a means to reaffirm one's own identity, whether as American or as Palestinian. Putnam's colleague at Harvard, the political philosopher Michael Sandel, writes that 'community describes not just what they *have* as fellow citizens, but also what

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[39] Charter of the Right to Education Campaign.

they *are*, not a relationship they choose (as in a voluntary association), but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity' (Sandel 1997: 150-15).

Local action, global reach

I am not arguing that what I call the politics of community building is solely articulated and practised by students – far from it. However, this locally defined way of approaching politics seems to be a rather particular quality (but not exclusively so) of student politics, which largely differs in method from the conventional exercise of authority. In an interview on the momentum of the pro-Palestinian movement on American college campuses, Ahmad Hasan, a student activist at the University of Michigan, says of the non-violent protest he had organised in Ann Arbour:

> For the most part, there hasn't been any opposition … I think this is because there really wasn't a way to delegitimize our action; we did not disrupt the event or the speaker. This was important because many times, demonstrations for social justice are targeted by their methodology and not their message, which results in a delegitimized protest for an otherwise just cause.[40]

The notion that 'there really wasn't a way to delegitimize our action' is central to that methodology. In what follows I will try to tease out briefly some of the qualities – the participants (who), the methods (how) and the places (where) – that volunteerism, grassroots mobilisation and self-reform have in common so as to suggest ways in which student politics differs from conventional political behaviour.

      i. Who are the active students?

This question should first be answered in the negative: most students do not participate in student activism; only a small minority of students at any university engage in politics (Altbach 1984: 12). Because of the ongoing occupation that affects everyone's life, Palestine might be seen as an exception to this rule. Still, the majority of students are not engaged in formal activism. Resistance through community building is a different case altogether: because of its anonymous and indirect methods, I argue, student politics in Palestine is becoming all-inclusive. Especially in the Arab world, this means concretely that female students can and do participate, while they are

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[40] Quraishy, S. (2010). 'Student activism and the pro-Palestinian movement gains momentum.' *Memo: Middle East Monitor* (19/11/2010): https://www.middleeastmonistor.com/resources/ commentary-and-analysis/1760-student-activism-and-the-pro-palestinian-movement-gains-momentum (last access: 12/08/2014).

often absent in formal protest, owing to the risk of accountability. However, Israel is left powerless against initiatives such as volunteer work, so girls and young women are more eager to engage. In the case of grassroots participation, I observe that it is mainly young people studying the humanities who are politically active – students of history, of literature, of sociology, of philosophy or of law:

> Why is it that even when there is next to no other constituency for revolutionary politics in a capitalist society, the one group most likely to be sympathetic to its project consist of artists, musicians, writers, and others involved in some form of non-alienated production? Surely there must be a link between the actual experience of first imagining things and then bringing them into being, individually or collectively, and the ability to envision social alternatives – particularly the possibility of a society itself premised on less alienated forms of creativity? One might even suggest that revolutionary coalitions always tend to rely on a kind of alliance between a society's least alienated and its most oppressed; actual revolutions have tended to happen when these two categories most broadly overlap. (Graeber 2000: 73)

Although here we examine a politics that is revolutionising (it aims to build a new society) yet could not be further removed from actual revolution and systemic overthrow (it is too subtle for that), Graeber's always eloquent words do bring home some truth: that those involved in a 'form of non-alienated production' seem more easily to 'envision social alternatives,' which forms an incentive of political behaviour. Altbach (1984) and Habermas (1980), in fact most commentators on the theory of student activism, have made precisely this observation.[41]

It is difficult to speak of a unified Palestinian student movement, for although students act collectively, they act in different ways and are not organised under one ruling ideology or leader. In fact I argued earlier that students tend to move away from all-encompassing political narratives. In his groundbreaking study on the power-politics of social movements, Sidney Tarrow defines a 'movement' as 'collective action as a result of individual decisions made in an organizational framework' (Tarrow 1994: 26). Here, it is precisely that uniform 'organizational framework' that is lacking. The observations that form the basis of my argument are best described as 'trends' or 'tendencies,' as I have consistently tried to do. Why this is the case, I will address in the next section, although a potential answer can already be found in the simple fact that a materialist lifestyle and alienation from party politics led to student demobilisation. Rather than defining it as a movement, resistance through community building can be conceived of in

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[41] Altbach, for instance, writes that 'the content of the social sciences is focused on societal issues and on an understanding of the problems of modernizing societies. In the Third World particularly, the gulf between reality and a desired goal is often wide, leading students to question the efficacy of existing political arrangements' (1984: 646).

terms of what others have called *eine Politik in der ersten Person* (Reichardt),[42] a politics in the first person. Its approach is individualistic, but its visions and goals are communal: what can *I* do to build a stronger society? or, how can *I* shape social reality and affect change for my community? A growing number of students pose exactly these questions, yet they are (not yet at least) formally organised (which again explains why I hesitate to speak of a student movement). Tied to this is the fact that most political action is concerned with the immediate, circumstantial reality, as is clearly seen in volunteer work for example. This is certainly not a politics of postulation and theorisation. Unlike formal protest and violence, the actions remain within the contours of what is considered legal in both Palestinian and Israeli (military) law. They do not entail a literal confrontation with the occupying force. For these two reasons – the legality and the indirectness of the resistance behaviour – the question of accountability is mute. Whether in the case of volunteer work, self-reform, the choice to pursue an education or grassroots mobilisation, there are no realistic grounds, as the student representative from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbour pointed out, on which to 'delegitimize our actions.'[43]

ii. How do students articulate their resistance?

In the twenty-first century, technology forms a vital part of the life-worlds of most individuals in the globalized west, especially of its young people. This is perhaps too self-evident, too banal, a claim to make. It is worth underlining, however, that students seem to make better use of the opportunity that this prevalence entails. Their political method, especially in organising the kind of grassroots initiatives described above, is in no small part determined by their familiarity with Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Youtube, blogs, social media and the internet in general. Already in 1989 – that is, long before the popularisation of the internet – Altbach predicted that mass media were to become a key factor of student politics. In Palestine, these media are used to bring the violations of the Israeli Defence Forces into the global public sphere and thus to generate awareness and support for the Palestinian cause. Technological innovations allow for the 'multiplier effect of possibilities,' (2007: 236) that Ann Bartlett identifies in her work on politics in the global world. While her focus lies on expatriate politics of Darfur refugees in the City of London, her observation – that technology helps to create 'microspaces of representation in the

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[42] Sven Reichardt coins the term in his recently published *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin 2014); it is quoted in Jens Bisky's book review in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of 3-4 May 2014, on page 13.

[43] Quraishy, S. (2010). 'Student activism and the pro-Palestinian movement gains momentum.' *Memo: Middle East Monitor* (19/11/2010): https://www.middleeastmonistor.com/resources/ commentary-and-analysis/1760-student-activism-and-the-pro-palestinian-movement-gains-momentum (last access: 12/08/2014).

West' (2007: 227) – is equally true of the informal politics of Palestinian students treated here. Such microspaces, far removed from the actual place of conflict, she concludes, are established 'by actors who, for a variety of reasons, consider existing political forms to be inadequate and have stepped outside of the constraints of these structures to create new political projects' (2007: 227).

Palestinian students have achieved precisely this. If we reconsider the case of the Right To Education Campaign, it becomes apparent that the use of technology to raise awareness and ensure interconnectedness across the globe largely accounts for the successes of the campaign. The campaigners directed three short films on the educational difficulties in Gaza and the West Bank – *Lucky Ahmad*, *Permission to Narrate*, and *Cage Bird* – which they then went on to disperse globally. They also use cameras to record violations that occur in and around school campuses. As these films and photographs go online, they start to live a life of their own. The aim is very much to make the world see, in the understanding that he who knows cannot in full conscience remain silent. Such methods urged one student in an interview to appropriately refer to a Third Intifada:

> You mention the third intifada. Could you say a bit more about this?
>
> Do you remember Anonymous, those with the masks. In 2007 they hacked the security website of the Israeli Government. And it was really something so cool, and I think this was the beginning of the Third Intifada.
>
> Do you see this Third Intifada as a new episode of violence?
>
> No. I believe things have changed now. People are more educated. The youth is much different than before. And I believe things are different. Education can do a lot of things.
>
> (interview, Birzeit, April 2014)

Her remark is telling in that it relates the concept of *intifada* (literally from the Arabic 'shaking off' but used to indicate a violent uprising) to the technological changes and possibilities that I allude to. Substantiating my larger argument, the student suggests, indirectly, that a new kind of politics, based on technology and education, has replaced the violence that characterized the two previous intifadas (1988-1993 and 2000-2005). *The Electronic Intifada*, an online news website, similarly plays with that loaded term.

iii. Where does action take place?

Volunteer work, education and grassroots initiatives serve in the first place the *local* community. If students of Birzeit University plant olive trees, they do so in the immediate neighbourhood of the village of Birzeit. The students at Al-Quds, too, who volunteer in the Red Crescent, are first of all concerned with the well-being of their fellow students when the university is attacked by Israeli forces, or of citizens in need of assistance in Abu Dis. I have already argued that societal improvement – the forging of the Palestinian community – naturally follows from this. Student politics is, to sum up, a politics of local direct action. However, community building also aims to transcend the local village, to create what Ann Bartlett has called 'microspaces of representation in the West' to which I allude in the previous section. Raising awareness is key here. The Right to Education Campaign, for instance, brings violations of human rights into the public sphere, and organises a Right to Education Week once a year on more than 40 campuses across the U.S. and Western Europe. What is quite particular to their methodology is that Palestinian students rely so heavily on the solidarity of international university communities. This, I argue, makes their politics so productive, their successes so enormous. With blogs, Facebook, Youtube, Skype and other such things, they, 'the children of the new Ramallah,' have mastered the techniques to reach out and disperse their stories globally – to compress time and space, as the much-used dictum of globalisation goes. With that reality of globalisation in mind the university charters dictate that students are expected to take one mandatory English language course – an initiative that allows for the global communication that underlies their politics. Solidarity among students anywhere in the world seems indeed almost boundless. One Birzeit graduate student told me that she had met people on her travels across Europe who were 'pro-Palestinian more than me' (interview, Birzeit, April 2014). These stories then go on to inspire the formation of solidarity initiatives in far-away places. Established in 2001 by a group of enthusiastic students at the University of California, Berkeley, *Students for Justice in Palestine* is one such initiative that has grown to include more than 80 chapters across North America. They can be credited with the widespread support for the BDS campaign in the U.S. and Canada, and perhaps – although this is admittedly mere conjecture at this point – with the gradual shift in the public opinion in the U.S. from a pro-Israeli to a pro-Palestinian narrative.

In conclusion, what is most striking about the methodology of student resistance – who, how, and where – is that it leaves Israel powerless, for these initiatives remain well within the contours of international law. It is no exaggeration to claim that for the entire course of the conflict, ever

since 1948, Israel had been by far the stronger party; and knew very well how to deal with the violent resistance of the Palestinians. However, this is a different story – a movement they have not encountered before. The student politics of community building is self-effacing, Palestinian-led (not headed by NGOs), non-violent, legally within the boundaries of international law and rooted in international support. Not unlike the anti-(neoliberal-)globalisation movement,[44] it has developed a new language of resistance:[45]

> I would say what really disturbs the powers-that-be is not the violence of the movement but its relative lack of it; governments simply do not know how to deal with an overtly revolutionary movement that refuses to fall into familiar patterns of armed resistance (Graeber 2000: 66).

Rather ironically, the absence of the violence for which the Second Intifada generation has come to be known, proves to be one of its most crucial features in depowering Israel, allowing the Zionist state little to no legitimate grounds on which they can intervene. To students, in the tradition of *sumud*, resistance is less about seizing power than about exposing injustice and delegitimizing the authority of the PA and, foremost, of Israel. They do not aim to overthrow the occupying power – not yet, anyway. Developing the local community and, through this, revitalising the political life of Palestine is their principle aim, and the foundation, so they believe, on which to construct productive final-state solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Reading The Weapons of the Weak *in Ramallah*

In some crucial aspects, my argument on the Palestinian student's indirect way of being political reiterates a point made by Yale anthropologist James C. Scott in 1985. In his seminal study *The Weapons of the Weak*, Scott employs his examination of class struggle in a Malaysian farming village, Sedaka, to make larger claims about what constitutes a political event. Especially his broadening of that definition of the political makes his research relevant to our inquiry. Scott's context of study, however, and his focus differ in two fundamental aspects from my research: as is apparent by now, it does not address farmers in South-East-Asia (but students in the Middle East), nor does it treat of class struggle (but rather, resistance to a coloniser state). Despite these

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[44] It is only when we take the facts of globalisation into account (technology, solidarity), and we consider all of the preceding, that we first realise the familiarity of the story. The politics of Palestinian students does indeed seem to owe something to the methodology of the anti-globalisation movement as described by David Graeber (2000). The link between student activism and (anti-)globalisation is also substantiated by Zeilig (2007: 260, 270).

[45] Such renewal can even be read on the level of language itself: twenty years ago there was no rhetoric for a political movement that was distinctly non-violent. In 'The New Anarchists' David Graeber speaks of 'an army which aspires to be an army anymore' (2000: 68).

crucial differences, it remains productive to read *The Weapons of the Weak* alongside the resistance politics in Palestine, and to extrapolate the conclusions of the former to the case of the latter. For essentially, both farmers in Malaysia and students in Palestine seem to cope in a similar indirect way with the loss of autonomy.

Scott appropriately opens his study by pointing to the unbalance in the critical reception of political resistance. 'Much attention,' he writes, 'has been devoted to organized, large-scale, protest movements that appear, if only momentarily, to pose a threat to the state' (1985: xv). Such an emphasis is misplaced, simply because, in his words, 'we would miss much of what is happening' (1985: 298). *The Weapons of the Weak* is among the first texts to shift that focus of critical attention toward prosaic forms of political resistance used by the weak, history's misfits. Their political activity could not be further removed from the quixotic acts of open, collective defiance of figures of authority (in this case, the Malaysian landowners) that make up the subject of much of the literature on resistance. Theirs is a silent struggle, anonymous and indirect, but prosaic and therefore effective:

> The ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so on. (Scott 1985: xvi)

Covering most strategies in between the two polar extremes of flight and open confrontation, these weapons manage to renegotiate the balance of power in very subtle ways. They aim to do just that. Unlike the revolutions of the Arab Spring or the uprisings of the First or Second Intifada, the rice farmers in Sedaka are not concerned with overthrowing the system, nor with political ideologies and utopian vision. They live in a subsistence economy: an end to the system that sustains them would imply, to some of them at least, an end to their lives. This explains concretely why their political action remains indirect and anonymous and why they always conform – publicly, yet subversively – to the rules of the game, why they give 'the impression of compliance without its substance' (1985: 26). Scott quotes the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm in this respect: the Malaysian farmers '[work] the system … to their minimum disadvantage' (1985: xv). That idea of household survival also provides one explanation as to why the misfits in Scott's story do not organise themselves collectively; they hold on to their 'institutional invisibility' (1985: x), an obscurity that equally conceals them from the national and geopolitical histories of their time.

Scott's argument presents no flawless case, especially in its reading of Gramsci's notion of hegemony. In 'Everyday Metaphors of Power' (1990) Timothy Mitchell has shown that Scott's

work maintains the kind of dichotomous thinking that is pervasive in Western political discourse. This critique notwithstanding, the analogy with Palestinian resistance is clear, so clear in fact that it will require no spelling out. Palestinian students, too, exercise a politics 'close to the ground' (1985: 348), rooted not in ideas and theories, but in concrete reality – a set of practices, therefore, that largely falls behind the conventional political paradigm and perhaps because of this escapes from critical scrutiny. I agree with Scott that such 'weapons of the weak' have falsely been construed 'at best as prepolitical and at worst as apolitical' (Genovese 1976: 94). As these methods fall outside of the sphere and scope of formal politics, this chapter has tried to illustrate in what ways they could be thought of as political. It is instructive to reiterate the words here of the female student at Birzeit's Institute of Development, who believed that it was 'not very productive to invest your time and effort in resistance, but rather in self-reform' (interview, Birzeit, April 2014). She failed to comprehend, as did many theorists who came before James C. Scott, that politics can be an intention as much as an idea. We come full-circle here. The argument of Christian Lund, with which I opened this chapter, is constructed on the idea that the *trivial* turns into the *political* as soon as it becomes 'diagnostic for something broader' (2006: 679).

5.   <u>Generational Warfare and the Political Space</u>

I have argued that student activism has undergone a change in Palestine. Students try to avoid the risks and accountability of formal protest and violence and develop an indirect kind of politics that is firmly rooted in local daily reality. In doing so, they aspire to rebuild the Palestinian community. In what follows I aim to draw out some general ramifications of my conclusions on the politics of community building for the way in which we conceive of students and their political behaviour. Of course Palestine is only one place – and a compellingly complex one at that. Yet I do believe strongly that the resistance politics that I have described can be used to make universal claims about the political assertiveness of young people. This is actually a first crucial realisation to make in any study of the political life of communities in the Arab World. The Maghreb and Mashrek areas are, in the words of Steven Erlanger, 'overwhelmingly youthful' places (Erlanger 2007). Statistics diverge, but on average people under the age of 25 constitute up to 65% of the total population in Arab countries (Meijer 2000: 18). The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Jerusalem has calculated that over half of the population of Gaza is under-age, and 75.6% under 30 (Erlanger 2007). Youth is therefore 'a force to be reckoned with since its mass emergence in the 1960s and 1970s' (Meijer 2000: 7). Herein lies the paradox of the politics of much of the Arab world, and the contradiction is especially marked in the political world of Palestine in particular. As a country, Palestine invests heavily in education (for reasons relating to human capital), yet it leaves little political representation to its students and young people, who in some communities (such as Gaza) represent a majority of the population. Apart from patronage networks and party affiliation, students in Palestine are experiencing difficulties orienting themselves within the traditional political framework.

        That in conventional politics minimal political space is left to students also in one way or another determines their resilience. As such, the resistance politics of Palestine's students can be said to be reactionary in two ways: it antagonistically opposes not only Israel but also an older generation of Palestinian politicians with their own ideas of how politics should work. Especially this latter rejection is by now a familiar narrative in the history of the twentieth-century, and I have already alluded to the generational conflict that lies at the heart of the student protests of the 60s and 70s. In light of this, the American sociologist Lewis Samuel Feuer (1912-2002), who studied at Harvard under Alfred North Whitehead, argued that student protesters essentially act out 'the struggle of the children against the parents' (Altbach 1989: 104). Each generation in turn discovers the randomness of power, the 'unsuspected nakedness' that I quoted earlier. One reading of Isin's work even goes on to suggest that this realisation in an individual's education

coincides with his or her political awaking: 'Becoming political is that moment when the naturalness of the dominant virtues is called into questions and their arbitrariness revealed' (2002: 275). This moment of *becoming political* is perhaps more clearly pronounced in the Arab world, where the spatial separation from the family home that university often implies is key to the student's development of a sense of political and social identity. In the case of Palestine then in particular, from the moment they arrive at university, students often learn to criticise the politics of the PA, which many among them see as a mere plaything of Israel. Their resolution to *do politics* differently – to engage in alternative methods and to consider an alternative local focus – is in part read as an attempt to escape from an established political paradigm that is indirectly determined by the Israeli occupier. Only through the ability of marginal groups to position themselves vis-à-vis others, Isin further argues in *Becoming Political* (2002), can the conditions for a new kind of politics emerge. Their challenge of the legitimacy of the power of the elders, and of the state, forms therefore a crucial constituent in the forging of a new kind of politics. Such open questioning of the political status-quo has been articulated more clearly in the last few years, in the Arab world in particular since street demonstrations against the regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali commenced in late December 2010. At its very core, the Arab Spring has done just that: it saw a new generation of young people asking their leaders for transparency – to justify their practices, and even more fundamentally, their presence.

If one considers this generational approach, one comes to understand why I believe student resistance in Palestine – or student politics more broadly – makes for such a valuable object of study. Despite and precisely because of the fact that the older generation leaves little to no representation to the young in the conventional system, students forge their own political space. During the Arab Spring for instance, in Egypt, they formed a vanguard in over-toppling regimes that denied them basic political rights. In Palestine, too, students prove themselves to be, again and again, productive re-thinkers of political power. This leads us to a fundamental re-consideration of the place of students in the political stratification, and, arguing against Jones (1983) and Cockburn (1969), of the student itself as a politically significant social category. Much of traditional scholarship sees 'the student' as a transitory category, Habermas (1980: 48) and Bathily perhaps foremost among them. 'Students,' the latter writes, 'are only in a transition, over which they have no control because they have no impact on the socioeconomic stakes. So instead of being actors/initiators of this change, they have turned into mere artefacts of this evolution' (quoted in Zeilig 2007: 92). My aim in writing this dissertation has been to prove the opposite by maintaining that Palestinian university students at Birzeit and al-Quds rethink politics in inventive ways and thus partake in what can be considered acts of resistance. Leo Zeilig, too, in his

discussion of politics in Zimbabwe and Senegal, agrees that they become increasingly fixed in the social world: 'students are no longer the transitory social group waiting to be allotted government employment; on the contrary, they have become pauperized, converging more and more with the wider urban poor – the social groups they historically saw as their responsibility to liberate' (Zeilig 2007: 91-92). As such, they move towards 'the centre of the structural crisis' (Zeilig 2007: 266). My argument is rooted in the understanding that they should similarly be moved toward the centre of critical and academic reception.

6.   Conclusion: The Meaning of Student Politics

As I write this, Gaza is burning. On Saturday August 2, the Israeli army bombed the Islamic University of Gaza, which offers higher education to approximately 20,000 students, boasting it had destroyed this 'weapons development center.'[46] The current crisis in Gaza emerged in July after an alleged kidnapping of three young Israeli settlers in the West Bank. Earlier this summer, in the early morning hours of a June Thursday, the occupation force stormed Birzeit University, unprovoked. Before that I was in the Occupied Territories myself, three months ago now, on that very place, the campus of Birzeit. It is as hot a day as I can stand, but the students here do not seem to be all that bothered by the heat. I ask them what they hope the future might bring for them. 'I want to be a teacher,' my very first interviewee replies. 'I am going to Mannheim to study German literature,' one student adds. 'I just want to be able to walk into to Jerusalem,' the concierge of a hotel in Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem, tells me. Simple requests in themselves, yes, but not in Palestine, where education and movement pose inherently problematic challenges. 'My happiness bears no relation to happiness,' writes the poet laureate Taha Muhammad Ali (1931-2011). Palestine necessitates a reinvention of our working definitions that make up our understanding of the world. Happiness here is not quite like happiness elsewhere. Nor are safety, or walls or the projection of an ordinary day. The Palestinians are a resilient people, but the endless violence executed by the Israeli occupier – structural as well as literal – begs the question: how far can a country bend before it breaks and ceases to exist? Unlike many others I am not startled by why there is so much anger in the Arab World? I wonder instead why there is so little of it in the western world, and why we as a collective group seem to accept the injustice done to the Palestinians so easily.

        Part of the answer to that question lies in the problematic nature of discourse, upon which we depend to gain access to the physical world as it is, to the *Ding-an-Sich*. The Scottish poet Veronica Forrest-Thomson (1947-1975) writes that 'we are all trapped in our systems for measuring and understanding the world' (1973: 4). This is the post-modern predicament: language and text construct the reality they are only supposed to reflect. However, few people question the degree to which any experience of the outer-world, or the account of such an experience in journalism, is mediated. I find this lack of critical scrutiny troubling. It troubles me because these accounts of violence in media too readily shape and define our perception of

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[46] Sherwood, H. (2014). 'Israel is creating a new generation of enemies.' *The Guardian* (11/08/2014): http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/11/gaza-children-israel-new-gneeration-enemies-najia-warshagha (last access: 12/08/2014).

Palestine and the Palestinian people. Take Harriet Sherwood's recent portrayal of the children of Gaza in *The Guardian*, which she, not randomly, entitles 'Israel is creating a new generation of enemies.'[47] 'Enemy' is a loaded term, and its use here subtly contributes to the initiation of a young generation into politics, without allowing them the possibility of self-determination. This association of a generation of children with the word 'enemy' becomes part of what we accept as true. Similarly, my thesis project emerged out of – and offers a critique to – the realisation that the public image constructed of the generation of students currently enrolled at Palestine's universities equally distorts reality. It has tried to delineate some of the challenges of higher education in Palestine today, and has introduced the students that are facing these difficulties. They are known as the Second Intifada Generation. However, their actual political engagement is a long way removed from the intrinsic violence that their given name suggests, and with which they have come to be associated throughout much of public opinion. In fact, I argue that their resistance has undergone a shift from a language of force to one of politics, and I have tried, first, to suggest that neoliberal policies and political alienation offer an initial explanation as to why this might be the case, and, second, to tease out some of the qualities of their indirect, pre-figurative, risk-averting politics, that leaves Israel largely powerless. In doing so, I have extended a common understanding of what we see as *political* beyond existing concepts and into incipient forms of political behaviour, such as volunteer work, self reform and the choice to pursue an education. Such decisions and initiatives, I believe, disclose a concern of young people with the welfare of the local community – they reveal a generation that is shying away from ideologies and grand explanations of the order of things, and that is trying, in and through their small communities, simply to restore what has been broken. 'We need to build our society first as Palestinians,' they tell me time and time again (interview, Birzeit, April 2014).

Ultimately I have wanted to say something about *change* and *agency* and *politics* in its rawest sense. My conclusions are simple: Resistance may be more nuanced and prosaic than we often believe it to be, and politics, too, in many ways transcends the existing structures through which we approach it. Politicians and revolutionaries are not the only agents that effect social change; change in itself can be subtle, indirect, and informal. Most of these observations are commonplace enough, yet they underlie much of the confusion in the actual analysis of political conflict – in media, in academia, in conversation. I reach four specific conclusions that may encourage further research into the matter. First, I have addressed a need to construct a more complete picture of the Second Intifada Generation as a collective of political selves far more

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[47] Sherwood, H. (2014). 'Israel is creating a new generation of enemies.' *The Guardian* (11/08/2014): http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/11/gaza-children-israel-new-gneeration-enemies-najia-warshagha (last access: 12/08/2014).

resourceful in its articulation of resistance than it is given credit for. Second, I have disclosed a further need to re-evaluate the peripheral role of students in conventional politics. Palestine, in particular, is an 'overwhelmingly youthful' (Erlanger 2007), but also an overwhelmingly educated place, with a near one fourth of the age group 18-24 pursuing an academic degree. A history of displacement and the notion of human capital go a long way toward explaining this tendency, but students do also increasingly justify their education in political terms as attempts to build a stronger Palestinian society. The third conclusion already anticipates a motivation for the re-evaluation of the political role of students: they are, as Altbach affirms, 'something of a conscience for their societies' (1984: 637) and 'serve as a social and political barometer' (1989: 105). To identify, then, a shift in the political engagement of students is to bear witness to the larger changes now occurring in society. Although falling beyond the scope of this project, further research into the changes in the way Palestinian civil society as a whole articulates its resistance politics remains to be done. Fourth, I conclude that these shifts have occurred in waves throughout the past century. Certain generations seem more prominent in articulating a critique of conventional politics and in envisioning and enacting alternatives. Undoubtedly, different levels in engagement are linked to different contemporary historical realities. I have discussed Berkley and the counter-culture movement in the 60s above, and Kimmerling and Migdal, in their seminal *The Palestinian People: A History*, point to the achievements of the student generation of the late 1970s and 1980s, which, not incidentally, marks the period of the establishment of the first Palestinian universities and (the preamble to) the First Intifada.

The university is a dangerous place. Birzeit and al-Quds teach their students to be critical of what is accepted as normality, and in doing so produce the conditions for the emergence of alternative political realities and alternative political players. Ultimately I have argued throughout these pages that, contrary to the politically liminal space they are given in reality, Palestinian students are a force to be reckoned with. In my fieldwork I have only seen the resistance politics in the West Bank more clearly and described its scales and manifestations in different ways – ways that reveal university students to be, despite and perhaps because of the overwhelming odds of pursuing an education, the carriers of a productive political voice.

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