Kent Academic Repository

Ordinary Ethics and Democratic Life:

Palestine-Israel in British Universities

Ruth Sheldon

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy,
University of Kent, 2013

This thesis is 98,800 words

Abstract

This is an ethnographic study of student politics relating to Palestine-Israel within British universities. Palestine-Israel has been a focal issue within British campuses for over four decades, manifesting in intense, high profile conflicts, which have been subject to competing political and media framings. In this thesis, I identify this as a case of what Nancy Fraser (2008) describes as 'abnormal justice', a situation of incommensurable, spiralling conflicts over the 'what', 'how' and 'who' of political community. I show how students' engagement with Palestine-Israel raises spectres of entangled histories of the Holocaust and colonialism, and tensions over the national versus global boundaries of the polity. Moving beyond abstract portrayals of this as a conflict between discrete ethno-religious groups or autonomous moral actors, I attend to students' complex personal experiences of these political dynamics. My central argument is that Palestine-Israel exerts discomforting, at times irreconcilable, claims over participating students, arising out of violent histories, ongoing racisms, complex transnational attachments and the rationalism of post-imperial British universities. I trace how unsettling ambiguities and a desire for moral coherence are enacted within this campus politics, analysing how institutional practices of containment and shaming lead to 'tragic' moments of passionate aggression, which then circulate in the media.

Contributing to a cross-disciplinary turn towards affect, aesthetics and ethics in the study of public spheres, I stake a claim for responsive ethnography with ethical ambitions. I do so by drawing our attention beyond spectacular political conflicts, showing how students cultivate reflexive practices and express uncertainty, care and commitment within overlooked, 'ordinary' spaces of the campus. In these ways, I show how attending to intersubjective political experience provides vital insights into the motivations and desires at stake in justice conflicts, and opens up expansive possibilities for reflexivity and creativity within the public institutions of democratic societies.

Contents

Acknowledgements

I wish to begin by thanking each of the students who helped me with this research. This is a world in which trusting people can be difficult and I feel very grateful to students who risked sharing personal experiences with me, teaching me so much in the process.

I have been very lucky to work with a team of inspiring supervisors over the past four years who have shown me creative and ethical possibilities for academic life. Gordon Lynch has supported this project from the beginning, pushing me to think more clearly, guiding me with care through difficult times and tirelessly opening up opportunities. Anna Strhan has been a wonderful friend and teacher, providing unwavering support and unique philosophical insight. Monika Krause has shown me how to question what I 'already know', Jennifer Fleetwood advised on all those little details, which are not-so-little at all, and Dina Kiwan helped me to get started. Thanks also to my Kent cohort, Steph Berns and Sarah Harvey, for sharing the highs and lows of the PhD marathon.

I would like to thank NUS for all their practical support, particularly Alex Bols and Kat Luckock, for their interest, patience and bringing me back from the brink of academic abstraction more than a few times.

Participating in the NYLON network has been an education in new ways of researching, collaborating and learning. I am very grateful to the NYLON faculty and students for all our conversations, especially to Vic Seidler for opening me up and Katherine Robinson for collaboration and friendship.

My trip to the Center for Cultural Sociology at Yale was a transformative experience, made possible by a Christine and Ian Bolt Scholarship. I am grateful for the intellectual generosity of the CCS faculty and students, and for the hospitality of my old friend Dan, and new friend Marta, who helped make this trip so unique.

Closer to home, two very close friends have shared this journey with me - from dinner tables, to the campus, to the Middle East and back again. I would like to thank Liz for our travels which have stayed with me all these years later, and Anood for her passionate politics and for showing Oxford (literally) what's what.

My family have shaped and supported this work in very many ways. I dedicate this thesis to each of you; with love to my mum, Helen, for speaking and listening with honesty and care; Micky, my dad, for his inspiring, exilic spirit; my stand-up sister, Sarah, whose comic spins bring new perspectives; Oli, who has supported me to travel across the Atlantic, into my head and to come home to (extra) ordinary love. And last but never least, from my heart, to my (little bit mashugana) nana, Ilse Sheldon, a stubborn and most loving conversationalist.

Preface

Each time I visit my nana in her flat in North-West London, she points me towards a set of framed photographs that sit in a glass cabinet in her living room. In one of these pictures, she appears as a glamorous teenager linking arms with her suave fiancé. Smiling, this cosmopolitan couple stroll along a Prague street. In a second picture taken not long after, everything has changed. In the foreground, my nana is tanned in a short-sleeved blouse and pinafore, frizzy hair pragmatically pinned back as she industriously prepares crêpes on the street. Her now-husband has rolled up the sleeves of his sweat-soaked shirt. He looks down with concentration against a yellow-hued background which evokes the warm sensuality of this place, 1940s British Mandate Palestine.
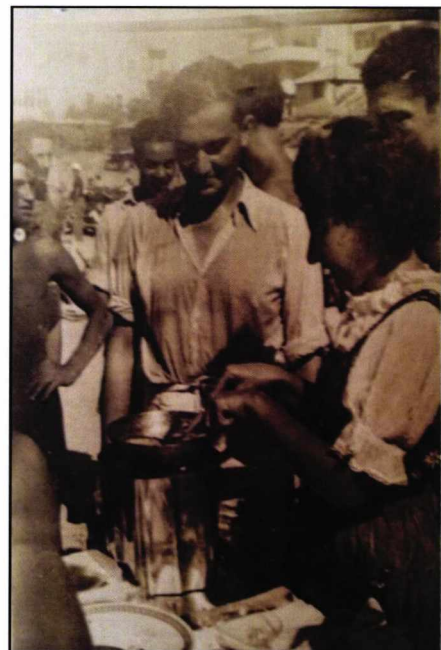
In Prague...   ... and in Palestine

In the time that passed between these two photographs, my nana's life had become inextricably enmeshed with the catastrophic events of early twentieth century Europe and the Middle East. In the space between these images is her singular experience of the interconnected violent ruptures of the Holocaust, events leading up to al-Nakba (the Catastrophe) and the foundation of the State of Israel in Palestine.

These entangled histories, which are both singular and collective, continue to be lived in the present. They are expressed in a very public politics of Palestine-Israel which cuts across established territorial and temporal boundaries emerging at a particular conjuncture within British university campuses. It is the questions raised by the complexity and intensity of this evolving politics which lie at the heart of my research presented in this thesis.

In 1939, as my family began to perceive the imminent threat posed by Hitler, my seventeen year old nana and her fiancé booked onto an illegal transport to take them from their home in Prague to Palestine. My great grandmother along with so many members of this close, extended family remained at home. My nana never saw them again; they were killed by the Nazis. After a six-week boat journey and internment in a British camp in Lebanon, my nana and her husband arrived in Palestine. Life was hard as this young couple, who had grown up in affluent homes, struggled to earn a living and then to support their young son, my uncle. My nana's husband could not cope. In 1947, now a single mother, my nana left Palestine and came to settle in London.

In June 2013 on a sunny, breezy day, my nana and I were sitting together in her living room, talking with and around these stories. Our conversation turned to the present and she looked at me directly repeating, in her thick Czech accent, her passionate commitment, 'I love Israel!' Setting her face stubbornly, anticipating confrontation, she told me that 'the Arabs' cannot be trusted because they want Israel for themselves. In the same breath, she angrily decried the religious Hassidim in Israel, who she said are damaging everything that Israel is and could be.

For years my nana did not know, or was not able to know, what had happened to her mother, Josephine Bart. Then, in 2010, we found a record for Josephine in the Yad Vashem database of Shoah victims. My nana asked us to create a memorial to her mother in Israel. When I asked her, 'why not in Prague?' she replied, 'no Prague *was* home but I can't plant a tree in Prague. Israel *is* our home.' My dad arranged for a ring of trees to be planted. Now on that June afternoon, my nana once again drew my attention towards the memorial certificate hanging on her wall, telling me, 'that's all I have for her'. She continued slowly and emphatically, 'one thing I must say, I can't believe in God. How could he let Hitler kill all these innocent people, my mother, my aunties, my family, *six million*?' I was quiet; this was not a question that I could answer. And in my silence, I was also reflecting on my experiences during my doctoral research. I had been learning about the violence experienced by Palestinians, not only of different narratives but how this violence, past and present, continued to be felt in the lives of people with whom I had

6

become friends. In these relationships, I had come to feel that my nana's question was inextricably tied to another; how could we inflict such violence on Palestinians?

A central claim of this thesis is that as political subjects, a key question of justice, 'how is justice possible in a violently unjust world?' arises *out of* our intimate, everyday experiences. This question is formed in our living relationships with family, friends and colleagues, the ghostly figures of our family photographs, our attachments to sacred places, narrated and embodied histories, as well as often ambivalent relationships to political and faith traditions. Yet in both theoretical discourse and institutional life, the setting for questions of justice is imagined and instituted as a public arena of rationality, autonomy and coherence, of procedural justification, recognition, resolution or resistance. My aim in what follows is to challenge these abstractions, to show ethnographically the importance of attending to complex ethical experiences intrinsic to democratic participation. In this way, I suggest that we can begin to understand why it is that democratic consensus reaches its limit. In the process I develop a practice of 'ordinary ethics' as I seek to show how, in cultivating responsiveness in our ongoing relationships, we can begin to imagine more radical political possibilities for democratic life.

Chapter One

Introduction: Unsettling Subjects and the Ethical Turn

In late December 2008, a year before I began this research, I was sitting at my parents' dinner table with their friends. Reports of violent events in Gaza, later named as 'The Gaza War/ Massacre' / 'Operation Cast Lead', were just emerging in the media. These events formed part of a longer political trajectory which had recently culminated in the expiration of the cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas. Yet news of the brutal form of this violence nonetheless felt shocking as early reports of Israeli missiles striking densely populated civilian areas circulated via the media. *The Guardian* reported that 'the timing and scale of the assaults came as a surprise' (Guardian 2008) as air strikes were later followed by a ground assault, in which it was shown the Israel Defence Force had used white phosphorus bombs (BBC News 2009). By 21st January, up to 1417 Palestinian people and 13 Israeli people had been killed. As our dinner conversation slowed, my dad suddenly, abruptly, switched our attention to these events. Conjuring an imaginary interlocutor and banging his hand on the table, he railed against the shame wrought by Israel, shouting 'not in my name'. The visceral quality of his apparently unprompted anger felt somehow bewildering; he was met with a disconcerting silence from our usually vociferous assembled party.

A few kilometres away, towards the centre of this English city, students at Universities B and C were also moved by these events. Along with students at over twenty five universities across Britain, they began to initiate energetic campus activism, the like of which, media commentators observed, had not been seen for many years (Rifkind 2009; Dugan 2009). Alice, an undergraduate at the time, described how an emergency students' union general meeting,

> "sparked off massive arguments and lots of conflict and led to an occupation... a month long occupation and their demands were... that the university should be helping these Palestinian people and Palestinian students that are suffering." [1]

---

[1] The quotations from students in this thesis are drawn from a combination of tape-recordings and reconstructions from my fieldnotes. I have indicated direct representations of speech with double quotation marks and reconstructed speech with single quotation marks.

On the other side of the country, students at University A also began an occupation. A students' union motion supporting Gazans and condemning Israel was debated at a full capacity meeting manned by university security staff. This culminated in vitriolic exchanges between a Palestine Society member and a Jewish student, both of whom were students' union representatives. At the end of the meeting, students occupied the stage of this lecture theatre, beginning a protest which lasted for days. Soon after, the student newspaper, which had initially supported the occupation, reported allegations of anti-Semitic assaults against students, 'including tripping, spitting and snatching of religious clothes' and published an editorial stating that, 'last week's events went too far in damaging the diversity of our university'.[2] A motion was passed mandating the Union to restore "harmony" on campus while a proposed 'Anti-Terrorism' policy seeking to condemn 'pro-Hamas' factions and monitor 'foreign students' was defeated. The following month, a university-authorized 'dialogue commission', set up in response to these tensions, fell apart over the disputed wording of a proposed anti-Semitism policy, which sought to proscribe the expression of analogies between the Holocaust and events in Palestine-Israel.

When, two years later, I began ethnographic fieldwork at these universities, the effects of these events were still being felt, sustained through renewals of students' union policies, in plaques marking buildings and in the repertoires of support for the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Students' memories of the Gaza War occupations seemed important in shaping their ongoing activities, including campaigns for Palestinian justice and dialogue initiatives aimed at harmonising campus relations. Their evocations suggested that the Gaza war period had intensified an ambiguous atmosphere on campus in ways that remained unresolved. In one sense the heightening of activism was exciting and energetic, drawing people together in feelings of solidarity. Nuha shared this feeling with me at a gig when we listened together to the hip-hop anthem *Long Live Palestine*,

> 'I remember we played this constantly for a month while we were doing the Gaza occupation. It was all we listened to. There was one time when it was the middle of the night and we were all falling asleep; Tariq just started singing it and we all woke up and joined in'.

---

[2] Throughout this thesis, I have anonymised the names of the three university field-sites and have altered quotations from online student media associated with these institutions while taking care to retain their meaning and tone. I have also adopted pseudonyms for research participants and changed the names of individual roles within student societies. My intention is to protect the identities of student research participants and I discuss these issues further in Chapter Three.

Jewish student groups were also brought together by this oppositional politics; Miriam, a Jewish Society Officer explained how anti-Israel politics generated a "better community...a good, solid JSoc". Yet, this intensity also carried a disturbing quality; it was shadowed with aggression circulating among the student body as David expressed, "it did have an impact on the whole of campus, it meant that there was a security guard on every door, it meant that the whole atmosphere on campus just kind of changed". And while students' accounts of these events perpetuated the polarisation of Palestine-Israel politics, somehow the Gaza war occupations brought into focus more indeterminate feelings. As Michael, a filmmaker who documented this period put it, "It was, I think, definitely a pretty watershed time for a lot of people who didn't know how to express their response". In the period leading up to my fieldwork, as public attention increasingly focused on university conflicts, what emerged were shifting dynamics of excitement, aggression and attempted reconciliation, in which seemingly distant violent events, of the past and the present, were being passionately felt in British campus life.

In this thesis, I explore student engagement with Palestine-Israel in British universities by cultivating sustained attention to the unsettling feel of this politics. I begin with the term 'unsettling' in a number of senses here, to evoke key qualities of Palestine-Israel campus politics *and* to highlight my approach to studying it. Palestine-Israel is an issue which is unsettling first of all in the sense of being institutionally disruptive. The campus events, described above, brought into public focus the destabilising potential of this politics for British university institutions. This was an intensification of an issue with a history; for over four decades, Palestine-Israel has been of pivotal concern within the British student movement generating high profile policy and media attention (Day unpublished). As such, it has continually posed challenges for students' union officers and university managers charged with maintaining institutional harmony. In this way, Palestine-Israel politics has emerged for key university stakeholders as a practical *problem*, which requires intervention.

This study explores how these historically evolving framings of Palestine-Israel significantly affect local campus dynamics. However, I also begin from the observation that politicised explanations for the recurrence of these conflicts have occluded attention to students' *experience* of this politics. In opening this thesis with students' evocations of the exciting, disturbing *atmosphere* during the Gaza War occupations, I also use the adjective 'unsettling' to foreground the affective experience of this politics as simultaneously exciting and aggressive. As such, this thesis begins from a concern with exploring Palestine-Israel politics as a destabilising *experience*. In this way, I wish to

align my project with cross-disciplinary aesthetic and ethical turns towards researching sensuality, materiality and desire in political life.

In this introductory chapter, I will expand on my claim that attending to 'unsettlement' is an important focus for the study of politics. I will begin by situating Palestine-Israel as a live case of what Nancy Fraser has described as 'abnormal justice' (Fraser 2008). This is a political situation of radical disagreement over the substance, form and bounds of justice conflicts. I will suggest that Fraser's challenge to established theories helps to illuminate the spatial and temporal complexities of Palestine-Israel campus politics, as shaped by attachments which cut across established territorial and temporal boundaries. I will then introduce my ethnographic approach to studying abnormal justice in this thesis which, in contrast to Fraser's critical theory of justice, is phenomenologically grounded in a particular institutional context. I will make a case for reflexive ethnographic attention to subjective *experiences* of justice conflicts, as vital aspects of political life excluded by abstract theories. Here, I will relate my study to a turn towards 'the ordinary' within political theory, and make connections with an emerging anthropological concern with ethical subjectivity. In this way, I will situate the central aims of this thesis, which seeks to contribute a richer sense of ethical experience to theories of justice and to develop a normative sociology, which opens our attention to creative democratic possibilities for responding to conflict.

Researching abnormal justice: unsettling territorial and temporal boundaries

In the opening of this thesis, I described scenes of engagement with Palestine-Israel which diverged from liberal theories of democratic public spheres as arenas of rational discourse. As students responded to events in Gaza, they did not only participate in reasoned argumentation or justificatory exchanges but rather expressed a passionate sense of irreconcilable difference over the stakes, form and scope of this politics. Students clashed over their incommensurable experiences of their campuses; some felt a swelling of humanitarian solidarity while others sensed an arousal of anti-Semitic sentiment. These events evolved through a profound lack of agreement over how to communicate, which manifested in the *unravelling* of dialogues, legislation and debates and in turns to embodied practices of singing, theatre, the occupation of spaces and physical confrontations. As calls were made to respond to Palestinian suffering, ensure campus safety or exclude 'foreign' students, what emerged in these disjunctions were tensions over *whose* claims for justice could and should be heard.

Insofar as the campus politics of Palestine-Israel can bring into play such profound contestations, I suggest that it can be helpfully situated as an empirical case of what Nancy Fraser describes as 'abnormal justice' (Fraser 2008). For Fraser, 'normal justice' is that form of 'justice conflict' grounded in shared underlying presuppositions about the criteria for claims-making. This includes tacit agreement about what counts as a substantial matter of justice, implicit consensus regarding the grammar through which those claims are made and agreement over the scope of the political community with the sovereignty to claim and decide. While this form of political engagement is organised around dissent, Fraser highlights that 'disobedience to its constitutive assumptions remains *contained*' (ibid: 49, my italics). Fraser develops the concept of 'abnormal justice' to connote situations in which the shared presuppositions that ground substantive questions of justice are themselves radically put into question:

> 'No sooner do first-order disputes arise than they become overlaid with meta-disputes over constitutive assumptions, concerning who counts and what is at stake. Not only substantive questions, but also the grammar of justice itself, are up for grabs' (ibid: 50).

At stake here is the 'what' of justice, the substance of its concern, the 'who' of justice in terms of the perceived boundaries of that political community, and the 'how' of justice, a lack of agreement over the criteria or decision procedure for claims-making. Abnormal justice, Fraser suggests, manifests in a 'destabilising' and 'freewheeling' form of politics in which established paradigms 'unsettle' and become 'unmoored' (ibid: 49-50). While acknowledging that no empirical justice discourse is ever fully 'normal', Fraser draws on this heuristic distinction in order to suggest that abnormal justice is a pivotal aspect of our contemporary political condition.[3]

Fraser's work on abnormal justice forms part of her broader project in *Scales of Justice* (2008) to rethink questions of justice for a globalising era. She uses the image of scales in two senses; first to invoke questions over the *weighing* of increasingly heterogeneous justice claims and, second, to raise questions relating to the spatiality of

---

[3] This recent development in Fraser's work arises out of ongoing debates amongst post-structuralist and critical theorists following Habermas' formative work on the public sphere. In her contribution to the edited collection (Calhoun 1992) that followed the initial 1989 translation of Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Fraser first introduced the political question of the 'how' of justice. Her essay argued that normative forms of communication, and particularly the demand for rational deliberation, are not neutral mediums but sources of power, domination and oppression (Fraser 1992).

justice. In situating Palestine-Israel campus politics in relation Fraser's work, my research develops her critique of the implicit methodological nationalism of dominant social theories.[4] Fraser highlights the salience of globalisation for abnormal justice and for its theorisation; she emphasises that, as processes of transnational migration and global media flows have undermined the assumed frame of the modern territorial state, 'the claims for recognition of once distant 'others' acquire a new proximity' (ibid: 51). In this context, struggles for justice include disagreement over the boundaries of the political collectivity itself, so that while some parties frame membership in terms of the domestic citizenry of a bounded territory, others posit regional, transnational or global 'who's'. While Fraser's critical intervention is focused on the spatial framing of justice, my approach in this thesis extends these questions to the temporal domain. I suggest that the contested boundaries of political community in relation to Palestine-Israel do not only engage with new proximities of geographically distant others but also invoke connections with the entangled pasts of the Holocaust, imperialism and colonialism, which exert powerful, unsettling claims over the present. In this way, my study also connects with burgeoning work on the ethics of public memory struggles in a post-colonial, post-Holocaust world (Rothberg 2011, 2009).

Reimagining scales: attending to 'ordinary' experience

In seeking to re-map the spatial bounds of justice, Fraser's work aims to transform social theory and political practice. She critiques hegemonic nation-state framings for excluding people from authorised contests over issues which affect their lives. Yet, in attempting to re-frame justice according to alternative principles, Fraser focuses exclusively on expanding our spatial conceptions of political community *beyond* the nation-state. Her theoretical imagination and political examples are focused on the movement between the national and transnational, which she identifies as the site of contestation regarding the 'who' of justice claims. This, Fraser contrasts with 'ordinary-political justice' as first-order conflicts rooted in shared ground-rules between agreed members of a bounded polity (ibid: 19). In this thesis, I wish to develop a more radical disruption of 'scales' of justice by exploring how this 'abnormal' destabilisation relates to seemingly bounded 'ordinary' politics within a British institutional setting. In this way, I consider how the dislocations of abnormal justice have not only transformed relations

---

[4] Fraser's critique of assumed nation-state framings is closely attuned to Ulrich Beck's diagnosis of 'methodological nationalism'. This forms part of a broader move within the social sciences to develop reflexive theories responsive to processes of globalisation (Fraser 2008; Nash and Bell 2007; see also Seidler 2007a).

between coherent publics, but must also be traced at the level of embodied inter- and intra- personal relations.[5]

By challenging Fraser's conflation of the 'ordinary' with the 'normal' and 'bounded', I seek to find one way beyond an opaque opposition between the 'macro' and 'micro' still dominant in social and political theory (Krause 2013). In the context of Fraser's work on abnormal justice, this emerges in her concept of the 'meta-political'. In her use of this term, Fraser identifies *epistemological* contestations over the criteria for justice claims, with a *geographical* notion of the meta-political as transnational, and a *theoretical* conflation of the political with 'discursive arenas'. My suggestion is that this focus on politics as *transnational discourse* creates significant blind spots, limiting our capacity to understand the *sources* of the intensity, passion and violence that imbue cases of abnormal justice. Furthermore, while a turn to performance theory in the study of large-scale political events, such as 9/11, has draw attention to the symbolic, aesthetic dimensions of abnormal justice (Alexander 2006), this structuralist approach has been limited by its inattention to embodied, psychic experience. Here, my claim is that these self-consciously 'macro-level' theories have excluded complex personal experiences and questions of *motivation* from the realm of sociological analysis. In this context, my attempt to disrupt the hierarchical scaling of the macro/micro or collective/individual is part of a broader attempt to re-imagine the political as *more* than dominant discourses, narratives and symbolic performances. As Jane Bennett has argued, it is only in attending to the formation and expression of sensibilities and interpersonal practices that we can understand how principles and policies become more than 'just a bunch of words' (Bennett 2010: xii, Bennett 2001). This point is elaborated by Michael Lambek as he explores the empirical limitations of Kantian and Durkheimian theories, which conflate morality with universal reason or with the social order. As Lambek puts it, 'simply asserting the rule or value is insufficient to explain what happens' (Lambek 2010: 17; see also Zigon 2007). Rather, in order to understand the *sources* of political action, we require approaches attentive to socially situated human motivations within particular empirical contexts.

In order to identify these situated cases of abnormal justice, I suggest *beginning* from unsettling experiences within contexts that might, in Fraser's terms, appear as bounded, 'ordinary' and 'normal'. As Avery Gordon has suggested, taking feelings of

---

[5] Fraser has been critical of experiential approaches to justice conflicts, which she has described as uncritically subjectivist and has opposed theoretical turns towards 'soft' psycho-cultural issues of identity for drawing attention away from 'hard' political issues (McNay 2008; Bennett 2010: xi). As, I discuss further below, my study seeks to challenge the dichotomies between 'soft / hard', 'subjective / objective' which underpin Fraser's critique.

14

unsettlement as a source of knowledge can help us to identify contexts in which seemingly distant forms of violence and suffering exert claims over the present (Gordon 2008). Then, in order to attend to the affective, visceral dynamics of concrete situations of abnormal justice, my study develops a notion of dramatic genre as an analytical mode for exploring particular kinds of interactions.[6] Dramatic genre, as I am imagining it here, is a sensual, material, technological medium and form of praxis which arises out of and in response to historical, existential conditions (Cavell 1982, 1996). As such, I conceive of dramatic genres as conventions, which reflect and mediate vital aspects of the existential situation of audiences (Williams 1996).[7] Attending to the sensual, relational and affective dimensions of dramatic praxis in these ways helps me to open up motivation, desire and vulnerability as key aspects of political life. This is to explore the movement between what is spoken and unspoken, to examine personal, embodied *investments in* and *responses to* public discourses, narratives and symbolic performances (Das 2007; Seidler 2013). However, while I develop notions of genre to explore particular kinds of patterned interactions, I also wish to expand our understanding of the dynamics of justice conflicts beyond these more spectacular encounters. My approach here is to re-imagine 'the ordinary', as a site not of convention or normality but of achievement and creativity. In these ways, by reconfiguring the scale and boundaries of how we imagine scenes of justice, I seek to open up a more expansive sense of political possibility.

Situating this study: contributing to a cross-disciplinary ethical turn

A central aim of this thesis is to cultivate attention to lived experiences and the complex forms of ethico-political subjectivity engaged in an era of abnormal justice. A key claim that I develop is that the incommensurabilities of contemporary injustices shape personal relations as we (who are implicated in these conflicts) experience demands arising out of these geographical and historical entanglements (Critchley 2007). I seek to show how people are moved by multiple attachments which disrupt established

---

[6] Here, I diverge from structuralist approaches which treat social performances as scripted symbolic communication (Alexander 2006b), so prioritising textuality over material, somatic and experiential dimensions of theatre. See Critchley and Kesselman (2012) for one critique of approaches which treat theatre as text and for discussion of how notions of theatrical praxis can illuminate political experience.

[7] With Raymond Williams, I suggest that our ordinary uses of aesthetic terms, such as 'tragic' are significant. We use the word 'tragic' to *both* describe aesthetic traditions *and* lived experiences and this is reflective of a symbiotic relationship between the aesthetic and experiential in social life (Williams 1996).

notions of proximity and distance and are caught between the claims of different grammars and scales, struggling with conflicting and perhaps awkward demands (Critchley 1999: 133). I also trace how incommensurable tensions over *how* to communicate do not merely challenge the coherence of public discourse but also produce fragmented self-relations, limiting the intelligibility of us to ourselves (Cavell 1990). In these ways, I explore how abnormal justice destabilises the 'what', 'who' and 'how' of the embodied self and draw attention to the connections between ambivalent ethical experiences, political commitments and collective actions.

In approaching abnormal justice by attending to subjectivity, ethical experience and relationality, this study draws on and contributes to an ethical turn emerging across the humanities and social sciences. As Dave Boothroyd (2013) observes, over the past twenty years 'the ethical' has received growing attention across disciplines concerned with the study of society, culture and politics. As theoretical universalism has been undermined in both its epistemological and political forms, philosophically abstract approaches to ethics have been undermined. Increasingly the ethical has been located as a central dimension of social life, so falling under the remit of the critical humanities and social sciences (Boothroyd 2013; Lambek 2010). As scholars reflecting on this shift have emphasised, normative codes and routines have long been an object of social scientific study, while ethical concerns have informed research practices (Boothroyd 2013; Robbins 2012; Lambek 2010). However, recent developments diverge by explicitly identifying ethics as a *central* concern for the social sciences. They are also distinctive in relating ethics to themes of freedom and creativity, and in developing original theoretical resources for approaching these questions (Robbins 2012; Zigon 2007).

Within the field of North American political theory particularly conversant with Nancy Fraser's work, this turn has evolved through an emphasis on the 'micropolitical'. Described by Jane Bennett as an ethical and aesthetic turn (Bennett 2010: xi), this approach has highlighted the everyday sensibilities, affective qualities and bodily practices of citizens, perceived to be ignored by too much theoretical focus on processes of justification and legitimation (Livingstone 2013: 274). While, as Alex Livingstone observes, there is a wider turn to ethics within post-structuralist political philosophy, the notion of the micropolitical draws particularly on the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, from whose work the term is derived (ibid). These resources are helpful in highlighting the material, sensual and visceral registers of the political, resonating with my own use of dramatic genres to explore affective dynamics. However in the context of my ambition to develop a responsive ethnography, discussed further in Chapter Three, I have found that this post-humanist language can be depersonalising

(Seidler 2013). An emphasis on affects circulating *between* bodies can limit our attention to the importance of personal histories and intra-subjective emotional life.[8] As such, by exploring ethics in ways that connect with personal experience, this study is particularly engaged with emerging anthropological work in this area.

In recent years, linguistic and cultural anthropologists have been making the case for an ethical turn in order to provoke a rethinking of established analyses of power and to open up issues of freedom (Lambek 2010; Robbins 2012). This reflects growing dissatisfaction with an over-emphasis on Foucauldian notions of power-knowledge and Durkheimian conflations of the social and moral order, which focus on codes and prescriptions, closing down attention to the indeterminacies and creative potential within lived experience.[9] However, in contrast to the micropolitical approaches discussed above, this work does not identify an ethical realm *distinct* from language and symbolism but rather 'locates ethics in the dialectical movement between the spoken and unspoken or, more generally, between objectification and embodiment' (Lambek 2010: 6). This has led to helpful synergies with philosophical traditions that share this focus on the immediacy of the ethical within speech, action and interpersonal relationships (ibid). Drawing on the ordinary language philosophies associated with Ludwig Wittgenstein and the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas and Michel Foucault, some anthropologists have put questions of conditioned freedom, creativity and responsibility at the centre of their work (see Lambek 2010; Faubion 2011; Zigon 2007).[10]

In this study, I share in these projects as they develop a sense of the ethical that diverges from the structuralist determinism *and* from the individualism of Kantian rationalism. My project connects with these approaches as I explore how normative genres, cultural scripts and rationalist norms are experienced, disrupted and transcended in practice. Here, my study is responsive to Joel Robbins' call for further ethnographic research to explore how ethics is lived in concrete social contexts *and* his appeal for greater attention to the relational quality of these processes (Robbins 2012). As Robbins and Michael Lambek have observed, there has been a tendency for Aristotelian and Foucauldian-inspired work to be 'almost solipsistic' in its excessive

---

[8] See Thrift (2004) for a helpful account of different traditions of theorising 'affect'. This need to explore different layers of emotions and feelings is developed by Vic Seidler in his study of the intimate politics, which followed the death of Princess Diana (Seidler 2013).

[9] In Chapter Three, I provide a reflexive account of how my own sense of dissatisfaction with Durkheimian-influenced theories of morality emerged in the course of my ethnographic fieldwork.

[10] As such, throughout this thesis, I follow Anna Strhan in broadly using 'morality' in the sense of symbolic rules and 'ethics' for situated practices and uncodified experiences, while recognising the overlapping, dialectical relations between these dimensions of social life (Strhan 2012a: 87).

emphasis on a self-fashioning, autopoietic self, at the expense of attending to relational virtues (Lambek 2010: 25). My study seeks to address these limitations as I draw on philosophical sources which posit ethical experience and practice as relationality constituted. In the chapters that follow, I turn to Simon Critchley's Levinasian conception of ethical experience as constituted through the demand of the Other, Stanley Cavell's writings on moral perfectionism and democracy, and Foucault's discussion of 'parrhesia', an ethical practice of truth-telling grounded in friendship and political community (Foucault 2001, 2010; Owen 2006). In these ways, I explore situated experiences of ethical ambivalence and the cultivation of a form of freedom, which is profoundly shaped by heteronomous responsibilities toward others.

In relation to this emergent field, my study also contributes to an important question regarding the relationship between fieldwork *in* ethics and the ethics *of* fieldwork (Robbins 2012). As Michael Lambek suggests, these tensions are reflected in the basic ambiguity of the word 'ethical', which both *describes* a field in which judgements are enacted and normatively *affirms* particular acts (Lambek 2010: 9). Anthropologists have diverged in their responses to these questions in ways that are influenced by the history of the discipline. For example, Jarrett Zigon (2007) situates his attempts to build a systematic foundation for this field as a response to the theoretical limitations of existing approaches. Zigon claims that previous anthropological studies of morality have often tended to unreflexively impose their assumed notions of morality onto the people they study, producing findings which are in effect projections. While Zigon depicts this as an epistemological limitation, his critique shows how the anthropology *of* ethics continues to struggle with the questions raised by the discipline's implication in Orientalist and colonial projects (Asad 1993; Clifford et al 1986).

In this study, one way in which I respond to this risk of objectifying and colonising 'others' is by turning our ethnographic attention away from the exotic and toward the familiar university institutions out of which we work. In this way, my hope is to translate these inspiring anthropological developments into a sociological register concerned with disrupting the boundaries of familiarity and strangeness. Here I also contribute new theoretical resources to recent sociological research into multiculturalism, also concerned with the ethics of complexity, ambivalence and creativity in democratic settings (Gilroy 2006; Seidler 2007a; Karner and Parker 2010). I also connect with an emerging 'cultural sociology of democracy', concerned with imaginations and experiences of democracy from the perspectives of everyday lives (Polletta 2012).

18

Of course, ethical questions of objectification, projection and domination also arise in ethnographic research conducted close to 'home' (Back 2007). My sense is that, to draw on the work of Stanley Cavell and Michel Foucault, is to commit to a world in which our ethical responsibilities, both to others and to ourselves, are *prior to* and so *ground* our epistemological practices of *understanding*. In addition, for both Cavell and Foucault, exemplarity and pedagogy are pivotal aspects of ethical relationships. As ethnographers seeking to direct attention toward, learn through, and represent, relationships with participants, we are necessarily implicated in the ethical processes that we study. As such, I aim to show how a processual ethics of care, reflexivity and responsibility must shape *how* we seek to understand others in our fieldwork, theorising and writing (Das 2007). One further aim of my study is therefore to show the possible form and value of an explicitly *normative* ethnography of ethics.

Normative ambitions: bringing ethical experience to political theory

In *Scales of Justice,* Fraser begins from the claim that existing political theories which *assume* the grammar and scope of 'normal justice' have become inadequate; 'these theories do not tell us how to proceed when we encounter conflicting assumptions concerning moral standing, social cleavage and agency of redress' (Fraser 2008: 51). Fraser asks what kind of theory could 'provide guidance' in responding to struggles in which the very intelligibility of claims-making is under dispute and 'we have no firm ground on which to stand. Abnormality confronts us at every turn' (ibid: 57). Her response is to develop *new principles* which she terms 'parity of participation' and 'the all subjected principle'. By instituting these principles, she claims, it can be possible to both respect the expanded field of contestation and provide a stable, institutional framework which can lead to the *resolution* of conflict. Guided by these principles, Fraser suggests, a process of confrontational argument, categorical judgement and collective decision-making can be revived (ibid: 72). According to this model, those who claim to suffer abnormal injustice *must make a discursive case* that demonstrates their exclusion from decision-making arenas by existing arrangements and justifies their entitlement to inclusion in that justice community.[11] However, here Fraser's abstracted account, which is inattentive to the *experiences* and *motivations* shaping situations of abnormal injustice, succumbs to an important limitation. For, as Stanley Cavell, observes, it may be part of

---

[11] Here Fraser claims that entitlement to be included in a justice constituency should not be determined by national citizenship but rather according to the principle of whether people are subjected to a broadly defined, shared governance structure.

the condition of injustice that people lack the capacity to *express* their claims and to be *heard* (Cavell 1990). It is this observation that leads me to claim that abstract interventions into situations of abnormal justice, which assume coherent, rule-governed subjects, are destined to miss the mark.

Fraser's response to the problem of abnormal justice converges with the work of other eminent political theorists, from Habermas to Honneth, by invoking models implicitly driven by the desire for moments of origination, sovereignty and authoritative decisions (Critchley 2007). In this study, I wish to question the empirical and political value of this insistent scholarly recourse to foundational principles. My suggestion is these abstract normative models for *remedying* injustices are themselves acts of framing. They invoke an idealised image of a political community, constituted by autonomous moral subjects governed by external rules, in which 'political action' is limited to the level of formal institutions rather than emerging in the context of indeterminate personal relationships.[12]

In response to these abstractions, this thesis considers what kinds of political possibilities emerge if we begin from lived experiences of abnormal justice within a particular social context. Rather than assuming a public sphere constituted by principles, discourses and conventions, I *start* from the concrete experiences and practices of political subjects as they *stake* claims for community with their relationships. In the chapters that follow, I show how, by exploring aspects of political life arising at the limits of coherent discourse, we can address questions of experience, motivation and desire, which are occluded by, yet of central significance for, normative political theory. In addition, focusing on embodied, interpersonal relationships also brings in to view non-rule governed forms of communication in public life, exposing creative openings for the expansion of political community. This opens our attention towards dependency and intimacy in public life, out of which emerges alternative possibilities for connecting ethical experience with political commitments. It is with these aims that I develop an ethnographic account which speaks from lived experiences of democratic community *to* political theories. As such, normative ambitions are threaded through this thesis as I consider how key questions of justice – relating to 'free speech', 'good relations' and 'political activism' – can be re-imagined if we begin by attending to campus life.

---

[12] In Chapter Three, I explore the sources of *our* desires, as theorists, for these foundations, which reveal our personal entanglement with the 'problems' that we study.

Chapter Outline

The overall narrative of subsequent chapters traces how dominant framings of Palestine-Israel on campus are enacted, transgressed and creatively transcended by students. This empirical work forms the basis of my explicitly ethical and political claims in the final chapters.

In **Chapter Two**, I relate the aims of this study to the particular context of Palestine-Israel politics in British universities, showing why this is an illuminating case for exploring the dynamics of 'abnormal justice'. Taking up Fraser's emphasis on the injustices produced by intellectual and political *framings* of conflicts, I explore dominant problematisations of Palestine-Israel campus politics within policy discourses, practical interventions and scholarly research. I show how these framings of the stakes, form and scope of this politics impose liberal democratic assumptions or assume coherent ontologies of identity, in ways that cannot account for the limits of consensus and which risk disavowing students' complex experiences. In the process, I situate the present 'abnormal' quality of Palestine-Israel campus politics in relation to evolving relations within the British civil sphere, the contemporary geo-politics of the 'War on Terror', and entangled histories and geographies of violence relating to the Holocaust and imperialism. Finally, I consider how these frames occlude attention to the significance of the institutional context within which these conflicts arise; the university itself. I discuss how in a post-imperial, globalising world, the 'public university' shapes situations of abnormal justice and how this differs across institutions operating in a increasingly fragmented higher education field. I conclude by explaining my multi-sited approach in this study, describing my selection of case study institutions and introducing these field-sites.

Chapter Three develops my approach to ethical ethnography, introduced in the preceding discussion, as I explore my own entanglement with this subject as a Jewish student personally invested in Palestine-Israel, researching out of and about universities. I begin with questions about the relationship between ethics, epistemology and theoretical language in approaching questions of justice, shaped by asymmetries of power, past and present suffering. Through a detailed empirical account of the development of my fieldwork within three university campuses, I explore the ethical limitations of existing languages for communicating about Palestine-Israel and begin to develop alternative vocabularies, which I learnt in my relationships with students. By attending to themes of proximity and distance in fieldwork, I explore how, as ethnographers, we are never fully intelligible to ourselves, and reflect on the ethical implications of my own ambivalences and exclusions. In this way, I introduce a

methodological ambition for responsive ethnography, seeking to show how this entails the cultivation of reflexive, relational practices of fieldwork, theorising and writing. This chapter narrates the theoretical and methodological journey in this project but it also attempts more than this. As I explore the ethics *of* fieldwork *in* ethics, I also seek to exemplify practices central to the normative concerns of this thesis.

Chapters Four and Five develop through detailed descriptions of two high profile public events which took place at University A. I describe these as melodramatic and tragic genres of action in order to illuminate the ways that they each instantiated different responses to questions of truth and justice within the university. In these chapters, I develop claims from my data by paying in-depth attention to unfolding interactions within one institution, an approach which reflects my emphasis on the significance of process, complexity and subjectivity in understanding situations of abnormal justice. My focus on material from University A in these chapters also reflects the particular visibility and intensity of Palestine-Israel politics at this institution. This raises issues of publicness, institutional status and mediatisation which I discuss here, and return to in the concluding chapter.

In Chapter Four I describe how a debate about the academic boycott of Israel sought to impose a liberal democratic model governed by communicative rationality and ironic detachment, so affirming a particular ideal of political discourse and of the university itself. Exploring the sources, dynamics and consequences of this event, I show how it repressed and shamed aspects of students' political attachments which could not be articulated within this frame. Chapter Five then turns to a student society meeting held one month earlier, in which events had turned violent. Drawing on Simon Critchley's work, I explore this as an alternative form of 'tragic' political action, in which claims of justice shaped by the felt demands of past and present sufferings came to be expressed as a passionate refusal of recognition. This chapter concludes by reflecting on the intersections of these liberal norms of autonomy and tragic heteronomous demands, as they shape the complex experiences of students over time. My suggestion is that while the liberal model of the university reflected the dominant institutional order, the moments of disruptive tragic excess described in Chapter Five come as a return of the repressed.[13] In highlighting the 'generic' qualities of these political events, my claim is that these were ossified forms of sociality that were highly visible within universities, and widely circulated by the media. Whilst I do not find that these were the only forms

---

[13] This is my rationale for describing the events in Chapters Four and Five in a non-chronological order as I first describe the dominant institutional order and then explore how it came to be transgressed.

that Palestine-Israel politics took, I do suggest that these genres were replicated across other contexts in my fieldwork and at National Union of Students (NUS) conferences. I conclude by exploring how these melodramatic and tragic events related to each other over time, highlighting the role of public media and the logics of spectatorship in this process.

In **Chapter Six**, I turn away from these most visible public events in order to attend to the *seemingly* ordinary activities of students involved in the 'Israel-Palestine Forum' at University B. The chapter focuses on a meeting, in which I actively participated, which sought to engage with the historical claims of Palestine-Israel, the same entangled pasts which provoked violent responses at University A. I describe how participants in this meeting cultivated alternative practices, which enabled us to engage with each other as ethical subjects who are uncertain, ambivalent and fragmented. Drawing on Michel Foucault's ethics of 'parrhesia' and Stanley Cavell's insights into the pedagogic dimensions of democratic relationships, I explore how risk-taking, trust and friendship enabled tragic dimensions of this politics to be spoken and reflected upon. Here, I emphasise the significance of the singular relationships involved while also considering how particular institutional conditions made possible and limited this seemingly unique form of politics.

Chapter Seven explicitly addresses the normative ambitions of this thesis; my attempt to invite responsiveness and attentiveness to forms of ethical relationality within overlooked, 'ordinary' spaces of the university. In exploring what I learnt from students in this research, I aim to speak to current political concerns with 'free speech', 'good relations' and political activism in universities *and* to enhance contemporary political theories. This chapter stakes a claim for possible connections of ethical practices with political action, exposing possibilities for *ethico-political* subjectivity in contexts of abnormal justice. In these ways my thesis seeks to respond to the complexity and intensity of our ethical experiences, which are intrinsic to questions of justice in democratic life.

Chapter Two

Contested Framings: Democratic Conflict and the Public University

---

In April 2012, after a confrontation between the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) and pro-Palestinian activists once again dominated the annual National Union of Students (NUS) conference, a student writing in the *Jewish Chronicle* asked,

> 'What I do not understand is this: why the problems in the Middle East, and in particular the Palestinian cause, continually gain so much attention within the arena of student politics?' (Carroll 2012)

This rhetorical question regarding the source of students' fascination with Palestine-Israel is an established response in this public arena; it is one manifestation of the process through which Palestine-Israel campus politics has become a 'well-defined problem' (Becker 1998: 23). Conflicting inflections of the problem 'why Israel-Palestine?' circulate widely in the media, expressing the predetermined commitments of key public actors. In one register, this question alludes to the underlying presence of a 'new anti-Semitism' as the Jewish State is subject to disproportionate hostility. Yet in alternative framings, this question invokes the injunction to challenge the perpetuation of Western imperialism, or to affirm the moral primacy of humanitarian values.

Competing claims over the stakes of this politics are also bound up with incommensurable spatial framings; for prominent government policy makers, 'counter-extremism' think tanks and inter faith dialogue organisations, this is a problem of 'good campus relations' *in Britain*; the challenge is to secure harmonious campuses while securing rights to freedom of expression within British law. Meanwhile pro-Palestinian and left wing campaigners radically oppose this national frame, insisting that Palestine-Israel is a question of transnational solidarity with legitimate claims for justice emanating from far beyond the British campus. As high profile conflicts over the stakes and bounds of Palestine-Israel evolve through national, international and student media, a broad array of public actors have become enmeshed in these struggles. This includes British politicians and civil servants, international government representatives,

Universities UK[14], national faith bodies, think tanks, campaigning groups, NUS and academic researchers, all of whom proactively intervene in the dynamics of university campuses.[15]

In this chapter, I will situate the aims of this thesis in relation to the particular case of Palestine-Israel politics on campus. Taking up Fraser's call for reflexive attention to the politics of framing (Nash and Bell 2008), I begin with an account of the dominant representations of this campus politics within media discourses, policy-oriented interventions and academic research. I will trace how these framings problematise campus conflicts in ways that import liberal notions of contractual politics, rationality and autonomy, assume the boundaries of the nation-state and a progressive temporal orientation. I will explore how these framings have emerged historically in the context of evolving relations within the British civil sphere, and how they are particularly shaped by contemporary geo-political pressures relating to the 'War on Terror'. In the process, I will situate this case of 'abnormal justice' in relation to deeper cultural entanglements, shaped by overlapping geographies and intertwined histories of the Holocaust, British imperialism, migrations and racisms (Critchley 1999; Hesse 2000). I will then turn to consider interventions which have sought to resist these dominant frames by supporting the alternative grammars of diasporic and left-wing counter-publics. I will highlight the importance of attending to these counter-framings while also questioning their tendency to reify and homogenise identity groups. Finally, I will turn my attention to an aspect of this politics which has become obscured within these dominant approaches; the university itself.

My analysis in this chapter makes the case for my ethnographic approach to studying abnormal justice in the rest of this thesis. I will show how dominant framings of Palestine-Israel campus politics, are unable to account for the limits of consensus or to explore the significance of lived contradictions, ambiguities and ambivalences for democratic life. This reveals the value of research that is responsive to complex experiences, attentive to the heterogeneity of political groups, and also to the

---

[14] Universities UK is the umbrella representative body for UK higher education institutions.
[15] See Appendix A for a list of the key stakeholders engaged with Palestine-Israel campus politics. Alongside analysis of policy, media and academic sources, this chapter draws on twenty-one stakeholder interviews that I conducted between November 2010 and June 2011 with civil servants, NUS politicians, an organisation representing universities, a campaigning organisation, national student faith organisations and inter faith / dialogue practitioners. Interviewees were provided with detailed project information and participated on the basis that their personal names would not be identified. In consideration of the political sensitivities in this field, I have decided to attribute quotations to types of stakeholders rather than naming the organisations who participated in these interviews.

heteronomous responsibilities of subjects shaped by multiple temporal and spatial attachments, belongings and relationships. In this way, I will introduce my approach in the subsequent chapters, as I develop reflexive, ethnographic insights into ethical experience, subjectivity and communication in a concrete site of abnormal justice.

The historical context of Palestine-Israel on campus: student activism and academic politics

Student activists' responses to the Gaza War reanimated an ongoing politics of Palestine-Israel which has been central to the British student movement for over four decades (Day unpublished). The history of this issue within British universities is very significant; contemporary tensions have evolved over time, shaped by processes of globalisation, democratisation and marketisation and by specific geo-political developments. In addition, British campuses have long been a site for struggles over this issue in ways that are suggestive of the academy's entanglement with twentieth century projects of imperialism, nationalism and international socialism. While a detailed historical analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will therefore begin here with a brief account of the evolution of this campus politics over recent decades.[16]

The politics of Palestine-Israel first began to garner momentum in Britain during the Cold War. Within international student arenas, the General Union of Palestinian Students, established in 1959, became aligned with the pro-Soviet International Union of Students, in opposition to the pro-Western International Students Conference (Burke 2012; Day unpublished). From the 1960s, moderate and more radical left-wing British student factions developed split allegiances toward Palestinians or Israelis. These differences deepened after the 1967 Six-Day-War, as socialist activists increasingly identified Zionism with American imperialism, reflecting a broader migration of left-wing sympathies from Israel to the Palestinians (Kahn-Harris and Gidley 2010). In 1973, UJS was established in response to a perceived rise in anti-Zionism and left-wing anti-Semitism in the student movement (ibid). Within NUS politics, UJS became closely aligned with the National Organisation of Labour Students, and this close association between UJS and Labour Students continues to shape contemporary NUS politics. During the 1980s, following UN resolution 3379 which declared Zionism to be a form of racism and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, high profile campaigns sought to exclude 'Zionist' groups from campuses, including attempts to ban Jewish Societies at London

---

[16] For a detailed historical narrative of the history of the British student movement, including discussion of Palestine-Israel activism, see Day (unpublished).

South Bank and Sunderland Polytechnic (Rich 2011). Students continued to campaign on the issue throughout the 1990s, developing campaigns against human rights abuses, imperialism and racism, while UJS raised ongoing concerns about 'the new anti-Semitism'. Over the past two decades, Palestine has become a key campaigning issue for the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), whose growing importance within student politics reflects rising numbers of Muslim students within UK Higher Education, as well as the embroilment of Palestine-Israel within a new global politics of the 'War on Terror' (Song 2011; Gilby et al 2011).

The evolving, high profile politics of Palestine-Israel in British universities has also been reflected in heated conflicts between academics. Kahn-Harris and Gidley (2010) describe 2000 /2001 as a turning point here, as the initiation of the Al-Aqsa intifada gradually gave rise to the international 'Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions' campaign against Israel. The most controversial dimension of this movement, which models itself on the South African anti-Apartheid campaign, is its call for an academic boycott of Israeli universities. From the outset, debates over the academic boycott have been fractious, provoking conflicts over definitions of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism and over the meaning of 'academic freedom'. In 2003, the Association of University Teachers first passed a motion in support of boycotting academics, which formally stated that 'anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism' and opposed witch-hunts of academics opposing Israeli government policy (Hirsh 2012). Within the newly formed Universities and College Union (UCU), policy debates over support for the boycott and the question of anti-Semitism have recurred on a frequent basis (ibid). Most recently, in 2011, the UCU rejected a working definition of anti-Semitism on the basis that it confused 'genuine anti-Semitism' with legitimate critique. In response, the President of the Jewish Board of Deputies publically accused the UCU of institutional racism (Morgan 2011). These conflicts have been perpetuated through the establishment of opposing organisations of academics; the British Committee for Universities in Palestine (BRICUP) has promoted the academic boycott while a counter-campaign called 'Engage' has been established to expose left-wing anti-Semitism in universities and oppose the boycott (Kahn-Harris and Gidley 2010). In addition, the boycott call has also been consistently rejected by the British government and by Universities UK on the basis that boycott infringes the principle of academic freedom.

As this historical overview highlights, Palestine-Israel has long been a concern for academics and students based in British universities. As I will explore in this thesis, this history is significant, reflecting the ways in which the imperial pasts, racisms and anti-Semitism at stake in Palestine-Israel have shaped British universities as public

institutions (Back 2004; Phillips 2012). Yet importantly, political struggles within academia are not only enacted within institutional arenas but also manifest in theoretical and empirical scholarship (Gilroy 1998). In the context of Palestine-Israel, this is reflected in studies which implicitly reproduce liberal Enlightenment paradigms and in research produced *out of* explicit solidarity with oppressed or maltreated groups. As such, this chapter analyses academic scholarship alongside more overtly political interventions, as part of my exploration of contemporary framings of this issue.

Assuming the frame of the liberal nation-state: contractual and 'good relations' models

Political struggles over the problematisation of Palestine-Israel politics accelerated after the Gaza occupations as prominent stakeholders rearticulated the stakes of this conflict within dominant paradigms. An example of this was the 'Campus Conflict' comment series published in *The Guardian*, which featured exchanges between UJS and FOSIS representatives along with well-known Jewish and Muslim academics, political activists and inter faith practitioners (Guardian 2010a). The newspaper introduced these contributions by framing the 'problem' within the classical terms of liberal democratic theory, as a conflict between principles of freedom from harm and freedom of speech in the civil space of the campus,

> 'Debate in universities has become increasingly fractious and polarised between supporters of Israel and pro-Palestinian campaigners, with accusations of anti-Semitism against Jewish students and cries of censorship from Islamic societies and leftwing activists. Is there still a space on campuses for civil debate? If not, what can be done to resolve the tensions threatening to divide a generation of students?' (Guardian 2010a)

In his contribution to this debate, the President of FOSIS made his appeal in juridical terms. Focusing on the legal right to freedom of expression 'except that which incites violence' and citing the liberal philosophy of J.S. Mill, he opposed the call for campus cohesion as an illicit form of censorship. Instead, he framed pro-Palestinian activism as grounded in rational principles of social justice, universal human rights and international law (Hanjra 2010a; 2010b). The university was invoked as an exemplary site for the expression of legitimate, critical debate, in which freedom of speech takes the form of the *right* to assert truth-claims and to *justify* moral and political opinions.

28

Conforming to the theoretical assumptions of classical liberalism, these claims for universal rights were grounded in the British juridical framework bounded by the terms of national citizenship. As Universities UK's report *Freedom of Speech on Campus: Rights and Responsibilities* stated,

> 'It is the law alone which can set restrictions on freedom of speech and expression and on academic freedom - it is for the law and not for institutions or individuals within institutions to set the boundaries on the legitimate exercise of those rights.' (Universities UK 2011)

Responding in the *Guardian*, the Campaigns Director of UJS criticised FOSIS for supporting 'hate speech' on campus, on the basis that incitements to violence infringed students' *rights* to 'freedom from harm' (McKenzie 2010). In this way, UJS mirrored this contractual language to emphasis the preventative *responsibilities* of universities with regard to student welfare.

As well as affirming a contractual model for negotiating conflict, UJS also drew on an established discourse emphasising the need to cultivate 'good campus relations'. While this differed from the purely juridical language of rights, it also appealed to a liberal imaginary. As Dinham and Jones (2012) describe, the emergence of this 'good campus relations' agenda in higher education has reflected the development of a broader policy emphasis on 'community cohesion'. Since 2005, a series of policy reports have focused attention on students' relations (ECU 2005, 2007; DIUS 2007) and this concern has also been reflected in empirical studies of religious diversity on campus (Weller et al 2011; Gilliat-Ray 2000). Dinham and Jones (2012) observe that this discourse has emerged out of a particular historical conjuncture. As with the broader emphasis on community cohesion, the increasingly prominent 'good campus relations' agenda has been shaped by the geo-politics of the 'War on Terror' and the dominant discourse of a civilizational clash between 'the West' and 'Islam'.

The British government's concern with enhancing integration and shared values reflects a broader retreat from political multiculturalism, which has been *constructed* as antithetical to liberalism.[17] As the cultivation of 'cultural diversity' has been blamed for social fragmentation and international terrorism, it has increasingly been supplanted by the political rediscovery of national identity, notions of civicness, social cohesion and 'a resurgent liberalism' presented as neutral (Meer and Modood 2012: 176). As Michel

---

[17] See for example, David Cameron's notorious Munich speech in which he set out the coalition government's opposition to political multiculturalism (BBC News 2011).

Wieviorka (2012) notes, these attacks on multiculturalism occur on two fronts; first that multiculturalism endorses relativism and refuses universal values of reason and law, and second that it undermines the traditional values of the nation-state. Recent British government discourses have *converged* these responses by identifying threatened 'British values' *with* liberal universalism. For example, the government's 2011 'counter-extremism' policy strategy, which included a focus on higher education institutions, defined 'extremism' as 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values' (Home Office 2012: 107). These 'British values' were named as, 'democracy, rule of law, equality of opportunity, freedom of speech and the rights of all men and women to live free from persecution of any kind... individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (ibid: 34). This was explicitly linked with a call for *loyalty* towards the British nation in relation to the legacy of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, 'we also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas' (ibid: 107).

This particular policy document exemplifies the increased stridency of a simultaneously universalistic and nationalist discourse. Yet, as I will discuss further in this thesis, the interplay between an exclusive construction of English identity and liberalism has a much longer political history. Critical studies of this assimilatory tendency within British political culture have emphasised that this was not confined to the post-war period. Rather, within evolving anti-racist and multicultural politics, vocabularies of 'tolerance' and 'integration' have focused on managing the threat posed by cultural 'difference' to a monolithic, dominant culture (Kushner 1998). As Paul Gilroy has emphasised this discourse is bound up with Britain's ambivalent relationship to its imperial past, with the 'internal colonialisms' of British racisms, and with the mythology of World War Two victory in the fashioning of national identity (Gilroy 2004). This has had different implications for 'minorities' who carry complex connections with these violent histories and whose diverse migratory trajectories have shaped different responses to assimilatory demands. In this sense, the current prominence of this liberal-nationalist discourse is the most recent expression of ongoing struggles within the British civil sphere. As my study explores, in its contractual and assimilationist forms, these models of liberalism do performative work within Palestine-Israel politics, disavowing the ways in which the British nation is *not* a neutral, ahistorical space and imposing powerful demands on student activists.

Political secularism and the problematisation of Islam

The campus occupations in response to the Gaza war were initiated under the auspices of student Palestine Societies, who organised as *political* coalitions of people from diverse backgrounds. Yet when this was represented in the national press, this 'campus conflict' became a 'Jewish / Muslim' issue framed through the elicitation of comment pieces from UJS and FOSIS representatives. This reflected a broader tendency within contemporary political culture; while, as described above, there is a long history of liberal antipathy towards 'difference' in Britain, the focus on 'faith', and specifically Islam, is a more recent development. Muslims' claim-making has been constructed as uniquely illiberal and in violation of Western communicative norms. This has been greatly accentuated following the violent events of 9/11 and 7/7 and the emergence of a 'War on Terror' driven by the image of a civilizational clash between the 'West' and Islam. As Pnina Werbner describes, from the Rushdie Affair to the 7/7 bombings, the recurrent 'failure-of-multiculturalism' discourse has underlined an 'unbridgeable chasm between European values of citizenship and the rule of law, and Muslims' vengeful transnational politics' (Werbner 2012: 201).

The politics of 'good campus relations' in higher education has mirrored this wider political shift from concern with divisions of 'race' and 'ethnicity' to an identification of 'faith', particularly Islam, as a key source of conflict in the public sphere (Dinham and Jones 2012). The 'War on Terror' has affected campuses, which have experienced heightened surveillance, regulation and allegations of the extremist and radicalising tendencies of student Islamic societies (ISocs) by centre-right think tanks (Song 2011). As the *Guardian* 'Campus Conflict' debates exemplified, this problematisation of ISocs has pivoted around questions of speech in public spaces, with speakers invited onto the campus accused of inciting hatred amongst the student body (Guardian 2010a). Within campuses and beyond, this identification of religion as a critical category of difference has been shaped by a conspicuous form of political secularism carrying Orientalist inflections (Asad 2003; Said 1978). The assertion that British citizens must conform to norms of rational universalism has simultaneously operated to differentiate 'good' and 'bad' Islamic traditions. This has delimited the legitimate expression of Islamic faith within political interactions in the public sphere and invoked a normative notion of citizenship, which insists on the separation and

exclusion of 'irrational', traditional beliefs, commitments and practices from the scene of political participation.[18]

One claim that I develop in this thesis is that this dominant public vernacular has powerfully shaped the problematisation of Palestine-Israel activism on campus, implicating policymakers, the media and academics in struggles to express or resist this discourse. As the FOSIS President's appeal to the tenets and prophets of liberalism suggested, these pressures are *experienced* as demands to participate as exemplary liberal citizens. This is a theme that I will pursue in the chapters that follow; here I will begin by considering the challenges that this raises for academic research into the political activities of students who identify as Muslim. I suggest that while research diverges in affirming or challenging the construction of 'Muslim students' as illiberal, there had been a common tendency to unwittingly reproduce the dividing practices of this dominant secularist discourse.[19] This is a challenge which has arisen for existing academic and policy-oriented research touching on pro-Palestinian student activism, which has often taken the politically defined category of 'Muslim students' as an unproblematic unit of analysis.

Following the bombings of the London Underground in July 2007 and the failed 2009 bomb attempt by a University College London graduate, there has been an exponential growth in academic and social research into the politics of 'young British Muslims', including an increasing focus on university students (see Edmunds 2009; Gilby et al 2011; Hopkins 2011; Quilliam Foundation 2010; Office of Public Management 2009; Song 2011; Thorne and Stuart 2008; Tyrer 2004). In the context of the resurgent liberalism described above, much of this research has been oriented towards exposing the legitimacy or illegitimacy of Muslim students' political activities. This is significant in the context of my own research, as it reveals the connections between dominant political imaginaries and the theoretical frameworks of social scientists working out of British institutions. An example is June Edmunds' (2010) qualitative research exploring the political activities of 'young British Muslim' university students, which framed Palestine as an 'Islamic' issue. Edmunds situated her research in opposition to an essentialising 'clash of civilization' discourse and emphasised the need for research that questions the

---

[18] As Talal Asad (2003) and Vic Seidler (2007b) have observed, this secularist, 'universalistic' discourse draws on categorical distinctions, such as between reason/emotion, public/private, which are inherited from particular Christian traditions.

[19] I adopt the Foucauldian notion of 'dividing practices' (Foucault 1979) here to suggest that these dominant discourses shape students' experiences as they internalise distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' Islam. However, in this thesis, I also draw on the shift toward ethical subjectivity in Foucault's later work as I question an emphasis on discourse as *constitutive* of subjectivity and attend to embodied, relational experience (Foucault 1986; Strhan 2012).

homogenising notion of 'the general Muslim' (ibid; 217). In interviews, Edmunds found that Muslim students expressed,

> 'a firm and secure sense of being British in terms of formal citizenship rights and obligations as well as values (e.g. multiculturalism / freedom of speech, considered as British)...with only two [respondents] expressing ambivalence or confusion [in relation to their British identity]' (ibid: 224-5).

In addition, respondents emphasised their commitment to speaking English, rejected accusations of 'dual loyalty', did not support the institutionalisation of Shari'a Law or separatist politics. As such Edmunds found that 'this new politics of dissent does not reflect disloyalty but is, rather, rooted in a firm sense of national citizenship' (ibid: 225). Edmunds also suggested that these students focused on global political causes relating to Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Chechnya, in contrast with the diasporic or transnational 'homeland' orientation of their parents' migrant generation. Furthermore, while other studies have highlighted the primacy of young Muslims' 'religious' identifications with the Ummah over transnational 'ethnic' loyalties,[20] these students justified their commitment to Palestine using universalistic vernaculars of human rights. Edmunds concluded, 'nationalism in Muslim societies is closely associated with movements against western colonialism and imperialism...that is, the very antithesis of the *universal values* of *western* Muslims' (ibid: 237, my italics).

In these way, Edmunds' research also worked as a political intervention, providing evidence that Muslim students share in values of modern liberal cosmopolitanism, are engaged with 'secular and global politics' and 'universal principles, especially human rights' (ibid: 228). Furthermore, this modern Islam entailed the forgetting of historical grievances against 'the West' and the detachment of this generation from identification with the oppressions of colonial history. This reveals one way in which a liberal frame assumed a progressive temporality which delegitimised and excluded claims for justice emanating from the past.

One challenge raised by Edmunds' research is that in focusing on key divisions between 'British' values and Islam, her approach unwittingly reproduced what Will Kymlicka terms a 'liberal-illiberal front' (Meer and Modood 2012: 191); it drew on distinctions between secular universalism versus ethno-religious primordialism and

---

[20] The claim that religious identity is superseding ethnic or family ties in shaping the political commitments of young Western Muslims is a prominent finding within recent research (Edmunds 2010; O'Toole and Gale 2010).

between a good 'Western' Islam versus a sectarian, violent Islamism. In seeking to challenge the stigmatisation of Muslim students, this research portrayed Muslim students as exemplary *liberal* students *within* the terms of their problematisation. As I will explore in this thesis, my own research suggests an alternative interpretation of Edmunds' findings, which is also supported by Peter Hopkins research into the 'contested experiences of Muslim students' (Hopkins 2011). My study highlights the pressures on 'young Muslim people', both as they participate in research and other political arenas, to *demonstrate* their Britishness through identification with universalistic values, unwavering loyalty and the performative rejection of 'partial' attachments. This pressure to affirm a palatable form of Islam perpetuates its essentialisation rather than allowing for diversity amongst people shaped by plural traditions (Seidler 2007a).

A key claim of this chapter is that, insofar as research reproduces these distinctions, it precludes attention to the *tensions* of political experiences. This includes an exploration of processes of shaming and anger, of subjective struggles as people experience themselves in relation to the demands of the dominant culture (Seidler 2000: 14). In other words, it is only by questioning these inherited, essentialising distinctions, such as between the 'religious' and 'secular', or 'universal' and 'particular', that we can attend to complex, perhaps ambivalent loyalties and commitments. Within an implicitly national frame, 'divided loyalties' are discursively prohibited and shamed. However, the question remains as to how people *experience* and express the heteronomous demands of the liberal, national order *and* diverse traditions, historical inheritances and connections across national borders.

Framing a model minority: Jewish insecurity and support for Israel

In the previous discussion, I have been developing the claim that a dominant liberal imaginary of a West / Islam clash has shaped campus politics according to universalistic norms that excluded partial claims grounded in inherited histories, 'illiberal' Islamic traditions or diasporic attachments. This political context also framed Jewish engagement with Palestine-Israel in particular ways that reflected the histories of Jewish minorities in the Britain. In her combative response to FOSIS in *The Guardian* series, the UJS Campaigns Officer authoritatively staked a claim to represent Jewish students and identified ISocs as key sources of anti-Semitic hatred within universities. She emphasised the continuity between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, alluding to the spectre of the Holocaust in warning of these dangers,

'For the Union of Jewish Students (UJS), the price tag we must never pay is incitement to antisemitism. Over the years campuses have been host to those who promote hateful ideology against Jews or, more routinely, Zionists (the two words have become interchangeable in such ideology).' (McKenzie 2010)

She also situated the Israel-Palestine politics within a Western / anti-Western matrix, as she depicted the 'adulation' of Hamas as just one more example of Islamic extremism. This particular response exemplifies a broader dynamic in the framing of campus Palestine-Israel politics; UJS were drawing on sources of legitimation developed among Anglo-Jewish community organisations such as the Community Security Trust, conservative think tanks such as 'Student Rights' and some inter faith / dialogue groups.

Relative to the intense scrutiny of Muslim students' activism, there has been little scholarly or policy research directly focused on the political activities of Jewish students in British universities. While research into diversity and equalities in higher education has included the views of Jewish students, these studies have tended to focus specifically on student welfare issues such as hate crime and discrimination (Weller et al 2011; NUS 2011a). In what follows, I wish to suggest that the relative lack of interrogation of Jewish students' political commitments reflects a dominant framing of Jewish identifications with Israel as distinctively authentic. Grounded in a complex history of civil sphere relations, mainstream political discourse has been careful to acknowledge the intrinsic importance of Israel within Jewish identity in contrast to the less legitimated pro-Palestinian commitments of Muslim and 'left-wing' student activists. For example, this perception was expressed to me by a prominent British-based dialogue practitioner, as she contrasted the closeness of Jewish students' attachments with students not perceived to have this 'personal' connection to the region,

'For members of the Jewish community, they may very well have grown up hearing about Israel on a regular basis. People may very well have friends, relatives they visit - it's very real and familiar. Also of course, there's also the element of the bolt-hole idea, um for a lot of members... of the Jewish community. Um with many Muslims again... it can be an issue of identity in that it's something that defines um, *sadly*, defines one's identity in some way; either because it really does, because people really feel some sort of sense of identification with Muslims in other parts of the world, or because it can be used as a sort of tribal badge.'

As the *Guardian* debates showed, this emphasis on the authentic connection of Zionist and Jewish identities was part of the ongoing narrative of UJS, who describe 'engagement with Israel' as one of their official core values (UJS 2013). Yet the relationship of Judaism and Zionism in Britain has not always been framed in this way (Seidler 2000; Kahn Harris and Gidley 2010). Rather, this discourse expresses a particular conjuncture within a trajectory of Anglo-Jewish civil sphere relations that have been profoundly shaped by exclusivist, assimilationist English traditions (Kushner 1998). As I will now discuss, these histories play a key role in shaping the contemporary emphasis on Jewish students' welfare, locating the politics of the Middle East within the Manichean matrix of Western / non-Western civilizational conflict, and embedding support for Israel within a growing culture of Holocaust sacralisation.

As described above, the contemporary backlash against multiculturalism has engaged in the stigmatisation of Muslim 'difference', producing pressures to assimilate and integrate among Muslim students. In contrast, recent research has highlighted a different dynamic shaping the experience of Anglo-Jewry, as Jewish communal leaders have turned toward explicitly emphasising Jewish particularity over the past two decades. Keith-Kahn Harris and Ben Gidley (2010) have traced how the Anglo-Jewish communal leadership have shifted from an assimilationist strategy focused on the security of Anglo-Jewry within a monocultural society towards a multicultural mode of incorporation in Britain in which difference is venerated.[21]

Kahn-Harris and Gidley highlight the historical significance of the dominant liberal assimilationist culture in Britain from the late nineteenth century through to the post-war period. During this time, the Anglo-Jewish communal leadership was careful to stress the loyalty, civility and 'sameness' of British Jewry as exemplary citizens, relegating expressions of Jewish tradition, faith and particularity 'indoors' (ibid: 16). Their account highlights the ways in which new waves of Jewish migrants were historically acculturated by the settled Anglo-Jewish community. The gradual shift towards a more assertive Jewish identity was, they suggest, shaped by a conjuncture of events. This included concern over a crisis of Jewish 'continuity' as a consequence of intermarriage and assimilation and by the emergence of more affirmative multicultural possibilities, led by post-war immigrant minorities arriving from the Commonwealth. The result was a new 'strategy of insecurity' among the Anglo-Jewish communal

---

[21] I draw this notion of a 'multicultural mode of incorporation' from Jeffrey Alexander's theorisation of the symbolic dimensions of majority-minority relations in *The Civil Sphere* (2006).

leadership, emphasising the need for proactive bolstering of Jewish traditions, culture and community.

British Jewry have for some time been represented within popular discourse as a success story, exemplifying minority integration within diverse, modern Britain (ibid). This has been reflected in the presence of Jews within senior positions in British public life, and by the relative material success of Anglo-Jewry who do not appear to fit the minority paradigm of racial and material disadvantage. As Kahn-Harris and Gidley observe, this 'success' has however been inflected with assimilatory tendencies in British culture; in contrast to the United States, it has been rare for Jewish intellectuals to explicitly thematise their Jewishness in their public activities (ibid; see also Seidler 2000). Rather, following the post-war period of immigration, as first 'colour' and then religion have become the crucial markers of difference, British Jewry have achieved the status of a white ethnic group, compatible with the secularised Christianity of British mainstream society.

Kahn-Harris and Gidley's analysis highlights the ongoing association between these processes and the historically shifting, contentious politics of the Jewish diasporic relationship with Israel. Historically, the assimilationist strategy of Anglo-Jewry coincided with the Zionist struggle against the British in Palestine during the Mandate periods of 1917-1948. This political conflict in Palestine had profound implications for Jews living in Britain, challenging the key tenet of exclusive loyalty to the country of settlement. Significantly, Axel Stähler (2009) notes that silences within contemporary Jewish historiography reveal the continuation of tensions provoked by Zionists' 'anti-colonial' struggle *against* the British.[22] As Stähler observes, this reflects a broader lack of attention towards the British involvement in Palestine from 1917-1948, which has not been a central focus of critical public discourses concerned with empire, colonialism and diaspora. Histories of *Jewish* anti-colonialism and resistance towards the British are troubling to dominant narratives of Jews as a model minority, aligned with the Western, liberal values of the contemporary British nation. These histories also raise a more liminal position for Israel, and for Judaism, as 'verging East and West' (Cavell 1994: x). These are ambiguities that have been repressed within the contemporary post-historical framing of the 'clash of civilizations'. In the contemporary context, the geo-political identification of Israel as a 'Western' outpost in the 'War on Terror' mirrors the alignment of Anglo-Jewry with British values of tolerance, facing down illiberal Islamic

---

[22] Stähler cites as an example Tony Kushner's account of the anti-Semitic riots which took place in Britain in 1947. He notes that Kushner situates these as comparable to racist attacks on post-war immigrants from the Commonwealth and does not connect these events with the struggles that were taking place in Palestine (Stähler 2009).

opponents together.[23] As the President of FOSIS implied in the *Guardian* series, the traditional liberal-nationalist accusation of 'dual loyalty' now directed at British Muslims, is no longer part of mainstream discourse in relation to Jewish support for Israel (Hanjra 2010c).

In this contemporary context, official representatives of the Anglo-Jewish community, including the Union of Jewish Students, are vocal in their public commitment towards the Israeli State. Yet the emergence of a more assertive defence of Israel by Anglo-Jewish national and student leadership has taken a *distinctive* form. The legitimacy and connection of diasporic Jews' connection with Israel has been framed increasingly in terms of what Kahn-Harris and Gidley describe as a 'strategy of insecurity'; the need for Israel is publically articulated in relation to experiences of Jewish persecution (Kahn-Harris and Gidley 2010). This has manifested in increasingly vocal claims that anti-Zionist left-wing politics in Britain is associated with a resurgent 'new anti-Semitism', along with the establishment of new institutions focused on defending Israel and protecting against anti-Semitism. With this emphasis on insecurity and persecution, Zionism is made compatible with a historical narrative shaping the British liberal imaginary. While the history of Jewish opposition to the British in Mandate Palestine continues to be silenced, attention is focused on the history of European anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. This was reflected in UJS' appeal to preventing anti-Semitism as a 'bottom-line' (McKenzie 2010) and the dialogue practitioner's allusion to the Jewish need for a 'bolt-hole' in Israel. In these ways, the legitimation of Jewish students' investments in Israel has become bound up with the sacralisation of the Holocaust as a 'pre-eminent symbol of suffering' in British culture (ibid: 150; see also Rose 1998; Macdonald 2005).[24]

Social research into British diasporic identifications with Israel has also participated in this multicultural politics of insecurity. Kahn-Harris and Gidley (2010) have highlighted the broader context for this politicisation of research into British Jewry; from the 1990s, concerns about Jewish insecurity and continuity were raised through an

---

[23] As Tony Kushner (1998) has argued, historically, the attribution of racisms to un-patriotic Fascist groups enabled a disavowal of racisms operating from *within* a politics of liberal tolerance. In the current context, it is the Muslim 'other' who is identified as the common enemy to liberal civility.

[24] As Kahn-Harris and Gidley (2010) have highlighted, the contemporary framing of the Holocaust in British society differs radically from the silences of the post-war period. Anglo-Jewish historiographies have described how the British mainstream, and some leaders of the established Jewish community, fostered a silencing and indifference in relation to the Holocaust until the 1970s. This has been attributed to a combination of liberal ideology, the affirmation of an exclusive national narrative of the 'war effort', and the assimilationist pressures produced by ongoing anti-Semitism (Kushner 1998).

embracing of demographic and statistical research by the Anglo-Jewish leadership, funded by Jewish organisations.[25] There has been a tendency to avoid qualitative research into Jewish experiences, reflecting a sense that exposing intra-communal plurality could further jeopardise Jewish continuity (ibid: 49). In these ways, research itself has been implicated in a project of securing the position of a Jewish community, whose boundaries and needs are delineated in terms of national citizenship in Britain. As Kahn-Harris and Gidley acknowledge, it can be difficult to attend to this diversity within a multicultural framework that posits a Jewish community as a unified whole operating 'within' the British nation-state. It is only by challenging this bounding of political experience within the national-state that we can attend to the intertwining of European histories with imperialism in the Middle East and challenge the amnesia embedded in these dominant framings. As such, in this thesis I question those framings of Jewish students' experiences which are most implicated with Anglo-Jewish communal politics. In this way, I move beyond dominant discourses and open up attention to the pluralism of students' complex relationships to Jewish histories and traditions.[26]

Importing models of mutual recognition: fixing the boundaries of campus politics

I have been situating the problematisation of campus conflicts within dominant political discourses, which have framed Palestine-Israel politics in accordance with a liberal, assimilationist British culture. However, interventions on campus are not limited to these media, research and policy discourses but also have also engaged various practical initiatives focused on conflict resolution and cultural dialogue. An example of this was the 'Dialogue Commission' established following the Gaza War occupations at University A in order to 'foster enhanced interaction, understanding and respect' among student societies who represent 'a diversity of viewpoints and opinions'.[27] This was repeated across campuses as nationally organised inter faith and dialogue projects, focusing directly or indirectly on the Palestine-Israel, proliferated in proportion to the ascendency of the 'good campus relations' agenda. This has included the development of a government-funded NUS inter faith project, the development of a charity called the

---

[25] See Kahn-Harris and Gidley (2010): 38-55 for a detailed discussion of the different research studies produced by Anglo-Jewish organisations during this period. For a recent survey of Jewish students, conducted by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, see Graham and Boyd (2011).
[26] As I will go on to explore in subsequent chapters, the Jewish students who participated in my study came from diverse national and cultural backgrounds and expressed very different relationships to these collective histories, shaped by different migratory experiences of dislocation and assimilation, and complex connections with Jewish and Zionist traditions.
[27] These quotations are taken from the student newspaper.

'Forum for the Discussion of Israel-Palestine (FODIP)' and campus tours by the Middle East conflict resolution organisation, 'One Voice'. These organisations have articulated the softer end of the 'good campus relations' agenda, focusing on Palestine-Israel as a limit issue between minority groups, 'the elephant in the room' which threatens the desired integration of the university imagined as a microcosm of British society. Initiatives have varied in their positions on this spectrum, with organisations such as 'The Coexistence Trust' seeking to 'resolve' tensions, while FODIP aims to provide a containing 'safe' space within which 'differences' can be discussed in a civil, 'positive' manner (FODIP 2013). What is common to these interventions is a sense that intractable *differences* over Palestine-Israel potentially threaten pluralistic democracy with cultural segregation or violence (Delanty 2011).

In contrast to calls for rational, agonistic debate on the Middle East, these interventions focus on the expression of narratives, the exploration of commonalities and differences, oriented towards a goal of mutual recognition. The guidelines produced by these organisations identify the stakes of these disagreements as conflicting values and identities. As the NUS inter faith tool-kit puts it, 'students... of different religions and beliefs are likely to... share many key values in common but also to have distinctive perspectives on a number of issues' (NUS 2011b: 6). Focusing specifically on Palestine-Israel, FODIP (undated) emphasise that people are involved because of 'a sense of identity, family ties or religious convictions'. Beginning from this conception of coherent identities, the NUS tool-kit explains: 'Dialogue can lead to people developing a better understanding of one another celebrating the values held in common whilst acknowledging distinctiveness' (NUS 2011b: 10-11).

These dialogue initiatives differ from liberal models that, as discussed above, delegitimise justice claims perceived to be grounded in partial, 'irrational', personal attachments. In contrast, dialogue approaches encourage students to explicitly thematise their particular differences in their claims-making about Palestine-Israel. However, while these initiatives expand the 'what' of justice-claims to include particular kinds of partial attachments, they continue to place emphasis on regulating the *form* (the 'how') of communicative interaction, through ground-rules and guidelines. For example FODIP have emphasised the importance of regulating emotions, 'the tone of someone's voice, if for example, contemptuous or angry, can cause resentment or hurt' (FODIP undated). The role of the facilitator has also been established as crucial to the process of providing a neutral or containing space, ensuring that difference does not 'spill over into conflict' (NUS 2011b). In this way, while substantive differences of opinion or belief can be

expressed, these interventions demand consensus and compliance over how claims can be made, oriented towards a higher goal of mutual understanding and recognition.

This practical emphasis on dialogue has been mirrored by a wider turn within policy and academic discourses towards an emphasis on 'interculturalism' or toward the open, dialogical possibilities proffered by political multiculturalism (Meer and Modood 2012).[28] Here too, dialogue is understood as a process in which differences and commonalities are shared so that each party comes to develop a greater understanding of the other and, in more dialectical framings, of themselves. These approaches to Palestine-Israel dialogue, and the more abstract politics of recognition which they articulate, differ from the liberal framings discussed previously in emphasising the need to attend to the cultural embeddedness of students from different backgrounds. Yet, the limitations of this framing are revealed by two challenges which have arisen in practice for these campus dialogue initiatives. First, there is the refusal of some pro-Palestinian activists to participate in these activities. Second, there is the question of why these initiatives, such as the University A 'Dialogue Commission', break down.

A prominent narrative among 'inter faith' organisations is that some activists' refusal to participate in dialogue reflects their 'instrumental' investment in this politics. The delegitimation of student activists not perceived to have an identity-based connection to the region is exemplified in the organisation of conflict resolution initiatives which are overwhelmingly oriented towards improving inter-communal relations between Jewish and Muslim students. In my interviews with practitioners, they also expressed a sense of frustration with 'left-wing' students who lacked a 'personal connection' to the region and were perceived to be using Palestine-Israel as 'a form of moral escapism'. Groups who connected to this as a 'humanitarian or moral issue' were described as having 'a political bandwagon to push and they'll push that whether or not it's going to drive a wedge between Muslim and Jewish students.'[29] In excluding these 'disconnected' activists from their analyses and interventions on campus, these practitioners implicitly framed Palestine-Israel campus politics through notions of 'cultural identity'. As such, these approaches risked mirroring problematic vernaculars of the 'clash of civilizations' in imagining cultures as wholes with fixed boundaries, hermetically sealed values or meanings, and fixed connections between identity groups and territories (Werbner 2012). In orienting their interventions towards the goal of improving mutual understanding between identity groups in *British*

---

[28] For example, see a special issue of the *Journal for Intercultural Studies*, edited by Neer and Modood (2012), featuring contributions from leading theorists of multiculturalism.
[29] These phrases are quoted from my stakeholder interviews with dialogue and inter faith practitioners.

campuses some of these initiatives also implicitly bounded their work within this national polity. As the demands for improved community relations were foregrounded, so obligations of justice which cut across territorial boundaries and disrupted these domestic relations were delegitimised. In this sense, some dialogue organisations insisted that students prioritise their obligations within the campus over claims for justice emanated from the Middle East. As one practitioner from a Jewish-Muslim inter faith organisation told me,

> 'When we refer to the Middle East we refer to a situation which is outside of our country but has an impact on relationships, and in so much as it has an impact, we are concerned with it, we are concerned with the space that it affects, rather than with the cause.'

One implication of this assumed nation-state frame was that the political inequalities, disadvantaging Palestinian claims from being heard in the *transnational* public sphere, were bracketed from the context of the British university campus. As a consequence students who identified with transnational claims for justice actively opposed campus events that were perceived to be tacitly reproducing these asymmetries. For example, alongside explicit 'inter faith' activities, organisations such as 'One Voice', who define themselves as a 'grassroots conflict resolution movement', have sought to engage a wider audience of student activists within British campuses (One Voice Movement undated). Between 2008 and 2010, One Voice organised a series of campus tours, in which they brought young Israelis and Palestinians to British universities in dialogue and discussion meetings. In 2010, the organisation ended these tours after student members of Palestine societies coordinated boycotts and disruptions of One Voice events. This opposition was focused on the issue of 'normalisation', as activists argued that the process of dialogue itself was founded on a disavowal of existing power inequalities, both for Palestinians and Israelis living in the Middle East and in relation to transnational activism. A key element of this critique has focused on claims that, as Palestinian narratives, histories and experiences are silenced in this transnational public sphere, initiating *reciprocal* dialogue perpetuates this inequality. At stake here are divergent assumptions regarding the spatiality of the relevant justice community, a tension felt but rarely recognised by dialogue organisation faced with rejection.

These dialogue organisations intervene on campus by importing a model of democratic justice organised according to ideals of recognition. They seek to achieve a

form of intersubjective autonomy in which the seemingly endless spiral of incommensurable disagreement is resolved through consensual relationships of mutual understanding. As Simon Critchley has highlighted, embedded in this politics of recognition is an imagined ontology of subjectivity. In place of the ahistorical Kantian individual, recognition theories posit a Hegelian progressive model of the public sphere as the site of *intersubjective* autonomy, of reason as the progressive unfolding of self-conscious understanding (Critchley 2007). The suggestion, which I will develop in this thesis, is that this desire for autonomy depends on a bounded framing. This excludes acknowledgment of 'excessive' asymmetrical claims arising out of entangled histories and geographies, and is unresponsive to the demands of others who cannot be fully 'understood' (Strhan 2012b).[30] These limitations have manifested in the repeated rejection of inter faith and dialogue organisations by some of the very students whom dialogue organisations claim to be targeting. Within their own frame they are unable to account for these absences, and this profoundly impedes this politics of recognition. These questions of the ethics and politics of dialogue are at the heart of my study. I will return to these questions in subsequent chapters as I show how alternative possibilities for dialogical relationship also exist within campuses.

Contesting frames: invoking counter-publics and diasporic grammars

In rejecting the neutral 'pretensions' of dialogue organisations, student activists have developed alternative practices which seek to challenge the dominant *form* of political communication. This struggle is instantiated in language as, rejecting the vocabulary of 'peace' associated with a focus on British campus relations, pro-Palestinian activists speak only of 'justice'. When, in January 2009, students at University A renamed the site of their occupation 'The Liberation Building', their grammar drew on a historical lineage connecting left-wing student activism with post-colonial, liberatory and radical social movements. Historically, the NUS' commitment to anti-racist and multicultural politics in Britain was linked to internationalist solidarity with anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements (Day unpublished). In this way, those on the left of the contemporary student movement including, for example, the NUS Black Students Campaign[31] also

---

[30] This connects with Anna Strhan's illuminating discussion of Levinas' critique of dialogue models that are oriented towards goals of mutual recognition and consensus (Strhan 2012b).
[31] The Black Students Campaign is one of four NUS 'liberation campaigns' formed out of the legacy of the radical social movements of the 1960s (Day unpublished). These campaigns operate with some autonomy and have frequently adopted pro-Palestinian policy positions, far-left and anti-racist positions which have conflicted with the predominantly Labour NUS leadership.

positioned pro-Palestinian politics as a mode of resistance to liberal, Western hegemony. The student activists who occupied their buildings at University B also imagined a very different university to the liberal-democratic space posited by policymakers and dialogue practitioners. Invoking the festival atmosphere highlighted by Nuha, their blog from this period expressed an alternative vision of democratic politics, 'Well well a great day! High spirits... We were busy getting things together: painting banners, organising a library and continuing the media struggle.' Politics was framed in terms of passion and desire as they decried the supporters of Israel for,

> 'their anti-democratic shameful efforts to silence our desire to express legitimate outrage at the ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people. Their answer came soon after when disgusted by this effort to sabotage democracy, more than a thousand people came out to reclaim our union and take power back!'

These activists expressed fierce resistance to liberal framings of Palestine-Israel focused on rational, universal discourse or as neutral spaces for consensual multicultural deliberation 'in the medium of talk' (Fraser 1992: 112). Instead, the British university was framed as deeply implicated in transnational injustices which must be addressed through alternative grammars. In this way, student activists invoked in practice the more abstract claims of political theorists concerned with counter-publics. Identifying the demand for rational dialogue as an operation of power, and taking up Nancy Fraser's claim that, 'deliberation can serve as a mask for domination' (ibid: 119), activist students sought to challenge liberal styles of behaviour and norms of speech.

This framing of Palestine-Israel activism as a form of resistance has also been supported by research focused on Palestinian diasporic politics. For example, Joanna Long's (2006) research with Palestinian students in Britain has helpfully explored how an 'embodied activism' can work to contest the erasure of the diasporic nation within dominant media representations.[32] Long's account of bodies as the site of political work develops notions of diasporic grammars as aesthetic, affective and material practices, able to articulate an excess of 'what can be understood discursively' (Werbner 2009: 21). Yet Long's study also points toward a more complex process than a simple binary conflict between dominant and resistant grammars. She observes how Palestinian

---

[32] Long emphasises the importance of attending to differences between British born or raised Palestinians and students who have lived in Palestine and the Arab world. However, her focus here on 'diasporic politics' (ibid: 189) utilises 'diaspora' as an analytic category and so does not seek to explore the significance of students singular histories and varied, multiple attachments for their campus activism.

activists experience 'de-subjectification' as they feel obligated to perform the role of the 'good Palestinian' in ways which prohibit them from expressing their individuality (ibid: 198). While Long does not focus on the particular normative space of the campus itself, her analysis reveals students to be struggling with rationalistic injunctions, against being 'silly, or loud, or rude', emanating from the campus (Long 2006: 197). In addition, Long also describes how one of her research participants complained of the way in which Holocaust education is institutionalised in the British educational system, in contrast to the amnesia regarding Britain's role in Palestine. This particular invocation of the Holocaust disrupts the notion of pro-Palestinian diasporic politics as oriented to a geographically distinct place. Rather, it is suggestive of a situation in which Palestinian students must engage with the conjuncture of transcultural, multidirectional memories within British universities (Rothberg 2011).

The notion of counter-publics also informs research into the emergence of alternative political grammars among young Muslims activists in Britain (O'Toole and Gale 2010; Gale and O'Toole 2009; McDonald 2006; Solomos et al 2003). O'Toole and Gale (2010) suggest that some young ethnic minority activists are not merely refashioning transnational and diasporic connections but rather engaging in a more profound spatial shift. They characterise this with the hybrid term 'glocal'; a concept used to express new ways in which global connections intersect with local contexts (McDonald 2006; Eade and Garbin 2002). Transnational mobilities, globalising flows of capital and forms of communication and networking have made geographically 'distant' spaces newly present as people feel new forms of connection and affiliation (O'Toole and Gale 2010). These alternative grammars of action are also shaped by 'local' processes, such as histories of discrimination and desires for belonging which connect to inter-generational migratory experiences.

My research adds to these literatures by focusing on some experiential tensions produced by these shifts in the spatialities and grammars of political action. O'Toole and Gale (ibid) retain a distinction between the 'global' and the 'local' in their categorisation of the issues concerning activists.[33] However, I take these disruptions a step further, considering how conceptions of the *scales* of justice, of what counts as 'global', 'local' and 'personal', come to be contested. In O'Toole and Gale's research, the distinction between 'publics' and 'counter-publics' is translated into a contrast between conventional (e.g. party political) and alternative (more 'fluid', 'reflexive' and 'interpersonal') grammars of

---

[33] For example "Palestine" is characterised as global in contrast to a conflict over the building of a casino in Birmingham (ibid: 139).

action (ibid: 141). Discrete forms of political subjectivity are perceived to be expressed through these practices. Yet, while these scholars observe that these new grammars may *coexist* with conventional patterns (see also Eade and Garbin 2002), the ways in which these might be mutually imbricated requires further exploration. As such, my study invites us to attend to *the connections between these different modes of political participation*. Rather than taking 'mainstream publics', 'counter-publics' or 'diasporas' to index discrete groups or political subjectivities, I begin from relational encounters. In these ways, I am able to trace students' simultaneous inhabitation and struggle to negotiate multiple attachments and spaces.

Situating the public university

In the preceding discussion, I have begun to show how attending to the lived experience of Palestine-Israel politics within British public life can enhance theories of justice. In approaching the concerns of normative political theories through an ethnographic study, my research begins from the particular institutional contexts of British universities. As discussed, dominant framings of this politics have assumed the university campus itself to be a neutral space. This reflects powerful myths of academic liberalism, amnesia over British institutions' historical role in the Middle East and a lack of acknowledgement of forms of institutional racism within higher education (Phillips 2012; Back 2004). In this section, I will turn to discuss the significance of the university setting as a democratic space engaged with Palestine-Israel politics. My claim is that both 'the academy' and particular university institutions are *implicated* in the Palestine-Israel politics in a number of different ways. In making this explicit, I will further clarify the potential for this study to contribute to contemporary debates about the public university.

As 'an open space in which power, culture and knowledge collide' and 'a paradigmatic institution of the public sphere' (Delanty 2001: 12), the university's engagement with democratic politics is multifaceted. Universities are institutions that connect socio-historical modes of knowledge production, articulate dominant epistemic models, engage with the political negotiation of cultural meanings and the (re) production of patterned sociabilities. They are embedded in complex, evolving relationships with nation-states and with globalised economic markets. They are also shaped by, and contributors to, contested social imaginaries, particularly in relation to the nature and function of knowledge for society. Universities are also locations in which theoretical knowledge and lived experience intersect as highlighted by Alfred Whitehead's emphasis on their cultivation of a 'zest for life' through to Habermas' claim

46

that the university links knowledge and the life world (ibid). As a consequence, in this thesis, I frame the university *both* as a historically situated microcosm for the working out of broader democratic tensions in British civil society *and* as an institution whose own identity is at stake in this politics.

In both these dimensions, as the bearer of cultural values and as a socially embedded public institution, the contemporary university has been profoundly shaped by, and implicated with, the transformations of modernity. As Gerard Delanty (ibid) has argued, the roots of the contemporary idea of the university, which crystallise in the ideal of 'academic freedom', can be traced to the post-enlightenment, liberal and humanist institutions that emerged in the nineteenth century. Universities have played a pivotal role in the development of enlightenment epistemologies and methods which, 'have settled, at least in the public imagination, around the assumption that society (and its universities) is post-religious' (Dinham and Jones 2012: 188).

Alongside the university's role in cultural and epistemic processes of rationalisation, secularisation, scientism and moral universalism, these are institutions profoundly shaped by wider geo-political and economic changes. This has included the implication of universities in nineteenth century projects of nation-building and empire, and the emergence of their economic function in the context of industrialisation.[34] With the expansion of universities in the second half of the twentieth century, Delanty describes how a role emerged explicitly implicating the university with processes of liberal democracy. As well as providing knowledge to inform public debate, the university was also to play a role in the education of democratic citizens. This role has been constantly evolving with the mass expansion of higher education alongside critical disciplinary developments which undermined traditional sources of epistemic authority and, from the 1980s, the embracing of the market within a globalising order (Delanty 2001).

The university is a public institution that reflects broader transformations shaping contemporary democratic life and, as such, is a highly relevant empirical setting for exploring the questions of democratic conflict at the centre of my thesis. One central aspect of this relates to the shaping of universities in relation to globalisation. As actors within a global market for knowledge and education, attracting growing numbers of international students, British universities are public spaces which disrupt the established nation-state framing of social theories. As institutions operating within an

---

[34] The formations of universities have varied *across* and *within* national contexts. See Delanty (2001) for discussion of the differences between the French, German and Anglo-American traditions, and for different traditions within England shaped by Anglicanism, utilitarianism and the vocational, regionalist emphasis of the civic universities.

international media environment, competing within a global marketplace shaped by flows of symbolic and economic capital, universities are communicative arenas profoundly shaped through transnational relationships. Furthermore, contemporary universities have been slowly transformed by the expansion of access to higher education to previously excluded 'minority' students, including second generation immigrants connected with post-colonial histories, diasporic cultures and Islamic traditions.[35] This had occurred at the same time as critical social and scholarly movements have sought to challenge institutional 'amnesia' and to highlight how universities have been historically shaped by projects of imperialism, racisms and the reproduction of socio-cultural hierarchies (Phillips 2012; Law, Phillips and Turney 2004; Back 2004). As such, these processes have opened up new challenges to the dominant liberal imaginary and practices of British universities (Phillips 2012).

As I highlighted at the beginning of this section, universities are not *only* microcosms reflecting social transformations. Rather, they are idealised as public institutions and seek to instantiate a particular place in the public sphere. This is connected to their still-unique, though evolving position as institutions charged with public missions relating to producing knowledge for the public sphere and educating its citizens. As Delanty (2001) and Craig Calhoun have observed, the period from the 1960s to the present day has seen radical transformations in the capacity of universities to fulfil their public missions, along with uncertainties and 'ambiguities about just what those public roles are' (Calhoun 2006: 8). In response to pessimistic diagnoses declaring the decline of the university under neo-liberal conditions, the fragmentation of knowledge and undermining of epistemic authority, alternative visions of the public university have focused on its critical communicative potential. Delanty (2001) has argued that the university must occupy the place of the public sphere by contributing to reflexive negotiations over questions of inclusion, identity and the cultivation of post-national forms of 'cultural citizenship'. Connecting with Habermasian notions of the university as a site for critical and communicative reason, Delanty suggests that the university is a uniquely *reflexive* institution able to contribute to forms of public

---

[35] For example, the Equality Challenge Unit reports that 'over the past eight years, the proportion of UK-domiciled Black and Minority Ethnic students increased from 14.9% in 2003/04 to 18.4% in 2010/111' (ECU 2012: 94; see also Pilkington (2013). Statistical evidence regarding the religion or belief of students in higher education is patchy (Weller et al 2011) but the expansion of ISocs in the past decade are indicative of rising numbers of Muslim students entering higher education. For recent estimates of the numbers of Muslim and Jewish students in British higher education see Gilby et al (2011); Graham and Boyd (2011).

.

communication 'in which inter-subjectively shared assumptions are problematised in open-ended discourses' (ibid: 154). Calhoun also takes up this emphasis on critical and reflexive communication; he argues that the success of the public university should be evaluated according to whether they are 'underwriting a critical public sphere' by, not only creating knowledge, but enabling knowledge to inform public life (McQuarrie 2006: 107).

This study seeks to contribute to these debates about the role of the public university by attending to the ways in which particular universities are *responding* to questions of their meaning, identity and purpose in their institutional practices. There is also a political dimension to my attempt to bring the experiences of students into these debates. Delanty has argued that too much of this debate over the state of the university has dominated by speculative ideals (Delanty 2005). As Calhoun has observed, one of the issues for those attempting to regenerate visions of the public university is that these claims tend to be articulated by elite actors. The people who are 'most empowered to speak' are those who, by virtue of their institutional position, intellectual, cultural and material resources, are 'predisposed not to see some of the problems' (McQuarrie 2006: 112). Calhoun refers here, not only to the availability of public platforms but of hierarchies in 'analytic opportunities' shaping the capacities of people to be heard. While Calhoun's emphasis is on the disempowerment of people working as academics within universities, his analysis exposes the need for us to include students' perspectives within these debates.

Exploring institutional contexts: multi-sited ethnography and my selection of field-sites

By focusing on Palestine-Israel politics on campus, this thesis explores how these broader patterns of social change shape experiences of democratic conflict. However, in attending to the conditions for lived democratic practices, my study is also attentive to the distinctive ways in which *particular* institutional contexts have been affected by these processes. The need to attend to salient differences between universities is heightened by the political structuring of higher education as an increasingly competitive field. The economic changes to the funding of universities and increasingly instrumentalist framing of higher education as a commodity have resulted in growing fragmentation and inequalities between different types of institutions within the sector (Calhoun 2006). In this sense, it is important to explore the different ways in which pressures facing higher education manifest in relation to the distinct material and

cultural conditions of particular institutional contexts. In addition, rather than reducing the local 'case' to an *exemplar* of wider types or processes, my aim is also to explore the complex intersections of different scales in the production of democratic practices. This means also attending ethnographically to the ways in which singular relationships between individual students can disrupt and transform established institutional dynamics (Das 2007).

In order to explore the particular institutional and relational settings of democratic conflict, I designed this study as a multi-sited ethnography.[36] I focused on politically active institutions by selecting field-sites from among those institutions which had been politically active during the 2008-9 student protests relating to Gaza, also drawing on stakeholder interviewees' knowledge of the political reputations of particular campuses. I found Nick Crossley's (2008) research on student political activism in England a helpful resource in reflecting on what other factors might be pertinent for exploring the institutional conditions shaping Palestine-Israel politics. Crossley highlights key institutional features of the university campus significant for understanding student mobilisation. These include (but are not limited to); the size of the student population on campuses; the density and availability of networks; mechanisms for mobilising resources; the history of political organisation on campus; lack of obstacles to involvement which relates to students' position as full-time or part-time and living away from / at home; and the relatively 'collective' nature of university life. These insights helped me to develop criteria for selecting my three institutional field-sites. I decided to include three different 'types' of university in order to attend to differences in institutional status. Because of the contemporary structuring of the higher education field, this also enabled me to explore salient differences with regard to the socio-economic, cultural and national backgrounds of the student bodies at these three institutions.

---

[36] While it is more common for multi-sited ethnography to focus on tracing movements between settings, my approach was oriented towards the comparative possibilities generated by studying multiple settings (Herzfeld 2001). One disadvantage of this approach is that it limits time spent in each field-site, potentially sacrificing 'depth' of relationships for 'breadth' of encounter (Summers Effler 2010).

Introducing my field-sites: Universities A, B and C

University A is a selective institution located in a large city. It has a relatively small student body, a relatively high proportion of international and postgraduate students and a relatively high proportion of privately educated students. Among the student societies engaged with Palestine-Israel on campus, there is an active Islamic Society, Israel Society, Jewish Society, Palestine Society and Socialist Workers Society.

University B is a redbrick university located in a large city. It has a very large student body including a relatively high proportion of international students and a mixture of privately and state educated students. There is an active Islamic Society, Jewish Society, Palestine Society and Socialist Workers Society as well as a student-led Israel-Palestine Forum on campus.

University C is a 'post-92' university, previously a polytechnic, also located in a large city. It has a very large student body, a high proportion of state-educated, part-time and home domiciled students. There is an active Islamic Society, Palestine Society and Socialist Workers Society on campus and a small, inactive Jewish Society.

My ethnographic fieldwork in these three institutions took place between January 2011 and January 2012. During this period, I participated in seventy-five events organised by a range of student societies engaged with this issue, conducted thirty interviews with students engaged with these activities and also observed student societies' public online forums. The breadth and depth of my participant observation varied considerably across these sites. I had much greater involvement with Universities A and B as compared with University C and I reflect on the causes and implications of this in subsequent chapters. As I will also discuss further, I sought informed consent from students' union officers and student leaders of these societies and took the ethical decision to anonymise the names of institutions in order to protect the identities of individual students. The experience of negotiating these methodological questions, of exclusions, naming and trust, helped to illuminate the politics and ethics stakes of Palestine-Israel on campus. As such, the brief overview provided in this section forms the basis for a detailed description of my ethnographic process in the next chapter.

Conclusion: beyond 'framings', towards political and ethical experience

This chapter has situated Palestine-Israel campus politics as a key case of 'abnormal justice', turning away from Fraser's more *abstract* conception towards an understanding of conflict 'in-history' (Werbner 2005). I began by describing how British universities have long been a site of struggle over Palestine-Israel, reflecting their implication with the entangled historical stakes of this politics. I then explored the historical conditions shaping contemporary framings of Palestine-Israel campus politics within policy and media discourses, practitioner interventions and politically engaged research. I claimed that seemingly neutral, contractual and cohesion-based ideals for campus relations in fact express nationalist and secularist political projects. I described how these have been shaped by inherited histories of anti-Semitism and imperialism, assimilatory British traditions and the revived Orientalist imaginary of the 'War on Terror'. I suggested that some research with Muslim students has unwittingly reproduced these framings while politicised research in the Anglo-Jewish community has occluded attention to the pluralism and complexity of Jewish students' experiences. I then turned to consider prominent dialogue interventions taking place on campus; I explored how these approaches have implicitly framed the 'who' and 'how' of justice claims in ways that have limited their capacity to understand why attempts at mutual, symmetrical recognition fail. These interventions have also been challenged by activists and politically committed researchers who have disrupted established spatial and discursive frames by positing counter-publics and diasporic grammars. However, I also claimed that, in framing justice conflicts according to an agonistic model of convention and resistance, these latter approaches can ignore how disrupted scales affect, and create tensions within, personal experience.

In attending to the complex experiences of Palestine-Israel activism, my approach also differs from existing studies by highlighting the significance of the institutional setting. I have discussed how universities as particular socio-historical spaces and idealised public institutions are implicated in democratic conflicts in general, and in the politics of Palestine-Israel in particular. This emphasis on the occluded significance of institutional contexts informed my design of this research as a multi-site ethnography and I concluded this discussion with my rationale for selecting Universities A, B and C as my field-sites.

A key claim of this chapter is that the intense politics of framing that I have described had unintended effects in the everyday lives of students. As I began my ethnographic research within campuses, the tensions raised for me in negotiating

consent and anonymity with student participants were illuminating. The difficulty of this process signified something important in the shift from a politics of representation to the politics of lived encounters. One consequence of the highly politicised media, policy and research framings of campus conflicts, discussed in this chapter, was that an *atmosphere* of mistrust and suspicion imbued campus relationships. As I shifted from discourse analysis to participant observation, I began to learn how these more abstract political conflicts translated into difficult ethical encounters within personal relationships. It is to these ethical questions that I turn in the next chapter, as I describe how I learned to look beyond these dominant framings in order to attend to the complexities of students' lived experiences.

Chapter Three

Finding the Words: Towards Ethical Ethnography

> 'To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.'
>
> (Wittgenstein 1967 [1953]: para.19)

How should I name the subject of this research – 'Palestine-Israel', 'Israel-Palestine', 'Palestine/Israel' or 'the Middle East'? The ethical and political dimensions of researching this issue arise at this very first juncture, in my responsibility for entitling this thesis. Which nation is inscribed first in 'Palestine-Israel' or 'Israel-Palestine'? How are the parts of this name to be sutured together; with a connecting hyphen or an exclusory dash? Might I resist commitment with the more generic name 'Middle East'? Or would that be to abstract from, and so disavow, the crucial particularities of *this* conflict? These questions accumulate as I write; for the word 'conflict' is also contested, as a potentially equalising description which blurs distinctions between perpetrators and victims. As I approach this subject, there is no neutral language, no clear gap between fact and value. In the moment of writing or speaking about 'Palestine-Israel', I must make a political commitment between polarised alternatives.[37] And yet, contained within the decision of my thesis title is my unresolved struggle; an ethical experience of conflicting demands encapsulated in this basic task of announcing my subject.

In this chapter I aim to develop a language for speaking about Palestine-Israel for a context in which politicised words seem frozen and my inherited vocabularies feel inadequate. I do so in order to open up key questions about the relationship between language, experience and ethical relationality which are at the heart of this study. I begin with my struggles over naming 'Palestine-Israel' which permeated my fieldwork, in order to explore the desire for neutrality which shaped the very way I imagined this project. Reflecting on this experience, I develop a language of researchers as 'imaginatively situated', by which I mean that the epistemic, embodied and emotional

---

[37] Here I am following Joanna Long (2011) who has also explored how the politics of naming arises within academic scholarship on Palestine-Israel.

dimensions of our research investments are fundamentally intertwined. My approach here connects to a broader ambition to both diagnose and put into question inherited dichotomies between thought and life, language and experience in this thesis. Learning this from Wittgenstein's writings leads me to challenge the legitimisation of theoretically abstract modes of knowing by developing a methodology of 'ethnography as responsiveness'. By this I mean a practice of reflexive knowledge production, in which the researcher learns about themselves and others, through exploring closeness and distance in their relationships within and beyond the field. As I trace this process, I identify a turning point in relation to the workings of my own personal name in the fieldwork; I show how this exposed my deep implication with my research subjects, enabling me to explore my responsibilities towards them.

This is not only a methodology chapter; as my research is centrally concerned with exploring the possibilities for ethico-political relationships within universities, this discussion of the ethics and politics of my research process also contributes to the substantive claims of this thesis. In the course of this chapter, I begin to develop an ethics *of* responsiveness towards the complexities, diversities, ambiguities and singularities of lived experience. Learning from Wittgenstein's confessional practices, I suggest that this ethics requires reflective work on the self which I seek to instantiate (Wittgenstein 1998; Seidler 2006). By attending to my own experience in this research, I claim that, in our political and research lives, we are not fully intelligible to ourselves, and that the mobilisation of authoritative abstract languages, both theoretical and moral, can work to secure us against aspects of the unknown that are intellectually, sensuously disturbing. Reflecting on my research process, I show my struggle to learn how I am embedded in opaque relationships of proximity and distance within the world I am studying. This includes my relationship to the epistemic and institutional cultures of universities out of which and about which I research. It also includes attending to the ways in which my experience in this research has been shaped by my particular connections with Palestine-Israel, carried in my embodied histories and ongoing relationships, and in the appeal of diasporic intellectual traditions, which challenge Eurocentric assumptions and attend to the strangeness of the self to itself (Cavell 1994; Critchley 1999).

In what follows, I also show how I engage with this responsibility, by cultivating particular forms of dialogical relationality in my embodied, imaginative practices of ethnography. In describing how the students who participated in this study taught me to speak, my suggestion is that I was not learning *about* them but *from* them. In writing out of these experiences, inscribing my embeddedness in this research and representing

others, I also hope to expose the 'we' in my 'I', to stake a claim to community, and to enable others to challenge and educate me. This is an ongoing ambition, in part contingent upon my relation to you, the reader of this thesis. It raises the question of authorial authority, which I begin to address (and return to in the Postscript) by showing my unresolved struggles in representing, sharing and questioning my findings. In this way, this chapter is shaped by a dialogical ambition. I expose the detail of what I did and how I struggled with my deep entanglements with this research in the spirit of an open-ended conversation. Wittgenstein (1967) famously begins the *Philosophical Investigations* by inviting us to attend to how we learn our language. For Stanley Cavell (1999) this process of learning new languages is always unfinished, providing the possibility for the expansion of democratic communities. So here in what follows, I will try to show you in the present tense; *this is how I am learning to say it.*

Approaching fieldwork: fascination, unsettlement and imagination

At the beginning of 2011, as I began my ethnographic fieldwork at three universities, I began to circulate my project information sheet to student 'gatekeepers', key student representatives whose support I needed in order to access student society activities. This sheet outlined the project aims, research design, funding, supervisory team and the approach to anonymity and confidentiality agreed in my departmental 'ethics review' procedure.[38] It described my intention to, 'Produce an independent, academic analysis of the nature and significance of student engagement with Israel-Palestine within the context of UK universities'. At this stage I intuitively wrote 'Israel' first, with a fleeting justificatory thought of naming nations in 'alphabetical order'. The emphasis of this information sheet on taken-for-granted values of 'independence' and academic rigour reflected my early attempts to adopt a distant and intellectualised perspective as I approached this fieldwork.

The initial framing of my project had been put in place prior to my involvement; it was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as a collaborative doctorate with NUS. The aim was to focus on a series of recent 'religious/secular' conflicts that had taken place between student societies on campus. As I began to conduct background research into the history of campus conflicts, I was struck by the prominence of Palestine-Israel within British student politics. I felt drawn towards focusing the project on this particular issue. Without consciously reflecting on this, my desire to explore

---

[38] See Appendix B for a copy of my 'Research Ethics Application Form', which was approved by my university department.

Palestine-Israel seemed somehow connected with my past experiences of ambivalent feelings and uncertain silences in discussions of Palestine-Israel with family and friends. In the background, there was also my experience as an undergraduate student, when I had found that this passionate politics was too personal and emotional to be addressed within the formal pedagogic spaces of my university. There was something fascinating, disturbing and perhaps dangerous about Palestine-Israel, which pulled me toward this subject. Yet, as I engaged with established sociological literatures on reflexivity in research, somehow I left this quality of my attachment unexplored.

My first step in beginning fieldwork at University A was to email Sadiq, a committee member of the student Palestine Society, to introduce myself and sound out participation in my study. As with my other fieldsites, I had first approached students' union officers to seek permission to conduct the fieldwork before contacting the various student societies. Sadiq replied to my project information sheet with guarded professionalism, asking, 'What are you hoping to achieve through it? What do you expect to find?' I later learned that he was also active in the student Islamic Society, who had officially responded to my introductory email first with silence, and then with a categorical refusal, 'We do not partake in research for PhD or similar projects as general principle'. A week later, Sadiq and I met in person on the steps of a historical academic building facing a central campus street. Sadiq nodded hello but did not shake hands. He wore a smart black coat, cropped hair, glasses; I noticed that he was not sporting the black and white keffiyeh, commonly worn by Palestinian activists. We headed to a university cafe where Sadiq greeted numerous acquaintances and turned down my offer to buy his coffee. He agreed to distribute information about my project at a Palestine Society committee meeting, warning me that some of their members would not want to be involved. Repeatedly emphasising the Society's financial independence and political transparency, he suggested I come along to their public events, which he stressed were 'open to all'.

The following week, on a dark February evening, I nervously exited the lift of an academic building to attend a Palestine Society meeting. The topic, 'The Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions and the Palestinian Question', had attracted an intimate audience of twenty-five students, who greeted each other as they arrived at the small seminar room. Nodding to Sadiq, I took a seat in one of the back rows of chairs facing the speaker, slumping inconspicuously in my chair. In front of me, a white woman, who I later came to know as Laura, struck up a conversation with an Asian man about the British government's counter-extremism policies. I listened silently as Laura angrily explained how the 'Con-Dem' government's crackdown on campus extremism was a thinly-veiled

strategy for censoring pro-Palestinian activists. As she continued with this impassioned critique of institutional monitoring of students, it felt imperative for me to out myself as a researcher. Self-consciously, I interrupted their conversation to introduce myself as 'a researcher doing a PhD study about student engagement with Israel-Palestine.' Laura responded to my disclosure assertively, 'Yeah but I really don't understand - what's the point of your project?' Her tone made me stumble. Anxiously sensing unspoken stakes, I emphasised my academic research aims and the practical involvement of NUS. Laura frowned and, as if repeating herself, continued, 'But what's your *interest* in this project?' Defensively, I framed my research as responding to an intellectual puzzle, 'My interest is based on my sense that this has been such a significant issue in student politics for a long time, and it's worth trying to understand why'. I paused and then, sensing a pragmatic need to demonstrate further transparency, I added, 'And I guess on a personal level I have an interest in the sense that I'm from a Jewish background – but I'm not a Zionist.' Without missing a beat, Laura retorted, 'Lots of Jewish people aren't' before turning away for the beginning of the talk. Laura's words and her tone somehow stuck to me, reverberating during subsequent months of fieldwork. It was not until the following year that I noticed her name listed as an online signatory for a public petition supporting Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions on the website of a Jewish Anti-Zionist Organisation. I had not recognised her name as Jewish and it was only after this long lapse in time that I was able to think about how much was left unspoken in our painfully abrupt exchange.

As the speaker was nearing his conclusion, Sadiq came over to me and quietly suggested that I say something about my project to the group. I immediately agreed, feeling the pressure to prove my transparency, yet also unprepared for making a public announcement. When the enthusiastic applause for the speaker had died down, Sadiq stood up and introduced me to the audience. Feeling exposed, I sought to demonstrate my academic credentials and research council funding. I was also beginning to subtly adapt my terminology for different students, a pragmatic practice that I justified to myself on the basis that I was *genuinely* attempting to build relationships with conflicting groups. Now, introducing my research in person, I adopted the politicised name that asserted 'Palestine' as a distinct entity,

> 'My PhD research is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and is trying to understand what the importance of *Palestine* is to students, and also how student activism varies across campuses. As part of the project, I'd really like to speak with people like yourselves in order to learn more about your perspectives on this.'

However, my 'neutral' information sheet about 'Israel-Palestine' had preceded this speech. There was silence before Atif, a Canadian graduate student, stood up,

> 'On the information that Sadiq sent round, it said something about this being an action research project with NUS. What's their interest in this? What do they want out of it?'

I felt mistrust in this question and in the audience's gaze as I sought to demonstrate my academic integrity and independence, resorting to a kind of plea, 'I'm not coming at this with a particular agenda'. As members of the society began to leave, I asked Laura if we might meet up at some point. Her firm, polite refusal, 'I'm just not sure how this would be used' left me feeling personally rejected.

I left the meeting tearful and shaken. Writing my fieldnotes on the bus and at home, I described feeling 'churned up', 'emotional', 'paranoid', 'overwhelmed by being the lone outsider in a group that didn't trust me'. This practice of writing down my observations, interactions and personal responses, was a process that I repeated after each event and interview during my fieldwork. My fieldnotes included different registers, as I tried to record the mundane materialities and affective dynamics of these meetings, including my felt responses, alongside the detail of speech and more interpretive reflections. As the ethnography developed, my notebooks, typed fieldnotes and research diary became scattered with references to my inchoate, unsettled feelings and bodily reactions; tears, feeling hot, overwhelmed and drained in ways that I couldn't clearly articulate.

At the time of writing my fieldnotes for this early meeting, I understood my own sense of paranoia to be a reflection of circulating feelings of suspicion and anger among this group. This, it seemed to me, was related to a broader surveillance culture at this university and was also a consequence of my association with NUS. As the ex-Black Students Officer of NUS had expressed to me, Palestinian activists were angry at the NUS leaderships' perceived long-term resistance to responding to this as a human rights issue, and at their related refusal to 'touch' this at a national policy level. As I found myself implicated in these established antagonisms, I began to imagine myself as a victim of a hostile political culture, writing in my fieldnotes, 'why do I want to do a project in which I will be the object of people's paranoia and mistrust?' In my tears, there was also a sense of my virtuosity; I felt myself to be absolved of any responsibility for the Palestine Society members' rejection of my claim to transparency. However, over time, I began to put this interpretation into question. Here, I found Vic Seidler's reflections on

the challenges of researching 'affect' helpful. He writes about the need for us to be careful in 'evaluating emotions and feelings within grammars of affect'. We must not 'assume that emotional responses are necessarily truthful. It takes time and effort for people to establish a genuine *feeling connection* with themselves' (Seidler 2013: 61, original italics). It was only one year later that I began to reconsider my initial response to this meeting. Had I just been the victim of other students' projections here? Or was it the case that my 'churned up' feelings in response to these Palestine Society members expressed something truthful in their suspicion of my lack of transparency? At the time of this meeting, I had not yet asked myself difficult questions about what had drawn me to this project; the very questions that I was asking of these students. As such, I had imagined myself to be a detached academic, sharing only my intellectual preoccupations and formal role with the NUS. In an institutional context of suspicion and surveillance, I was asking these students to trust me, yet I was highly opaque not only to them but also to myself.

My initial inattentiveness toward the feelings which had *drawn* me to this research revealed an important limit to my reflexive methodological intentions at the time when I began this fieldwork. In the preceding months, I had intellectually engaged with prominent disciplinary narratives in the social sciences, which have traced a shift towards increasingly reflexive, interpretivist epistemologies (Mason 2002; Coffey 1999). As Marcus Stoelzer and Nira Yuval-Davis (2002) have described, sociology has been transformed by the challenges posed to positivist models of objective, universal truth. Against the positivist insistence on neutral validity, scholars have argued for the need to attend to the social conditions of knowledge production. This shift has been led by post-colonial, feminist and cultural theorists who have challenged the assumption of a 'view from nowhere' for covering and legitimating a particular hegemonic position (ibid). Shaped by these critiques, reflexivity has been presented as a central epistemological device and as a moral virtue in ethnographic research (Strhan 2012a).

As the turn to reflexivity has become increasingly valorised within the social sciences, attempts have been made to disaggregate the various forms that this takes in contemporary scholarship (Webster 2008). It has been observed that the meanings of reflexivity range from awareness of the significance of the researcher's biography, unconscious assumptions and embodied presence in their empirical fieldwork (Lynch 2012a), to forms of epistemic and theoretical reflexivity as concern with, 'thinking about how we think' (Webster 2008: 65). As such, a distinction has emerged between the individualistic reflexivity of the biographically and socially positioned fieldworker and a 'more fundamental' concern with the historical, social and cultural conditions of our

categories and forms of knowledge (Lynch 2012a; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). As Amanda Coffey (1999) describes, even among scholars sympathetic to interpretivist sociology, ethnographies focused on biographical reflexivity have been subject to accusations of narcissism. As 'auto-ethnography' has emerged as a field, it has been claimed that excessive self-preoccupation risks obstructing attentiveness to others in our fieldwork (Coffey 1999; Back 2007). This is a charge that carries a particular potency within contemporary university cultures, insofar as they are shaped by norms of altruistic self-denial and a Kantian emphasis on epistemic and moral universalism (Seidler 2007b). This suspicion of excessive egoism is not limited to positivistic approaches. Rather, it also been sustained by the post-structuralist emphasis on language with the social sciences; here an emphasis on reflexive discourse analysis has displaced approaches attentive to lived experiences (Lynch 2012a; Back 2007). In this way, hierarchical distinctions between the collective and the individual, the theoretical and personal, and between thought and experience, have imbued epistemological debates in ways that frame fragmented notions of the reflexive researcher.

In the aphorism from the *Philosophical Investigations* with which I introduced this chapter, Wittgenstein (1967) makes a *connection* between imagination, language and life. In order to attend to the connections between the personal and theoretical dimensions of my research investments, I suggest that this vocabulary of 'imagination' can be very helpful. Here, I draw on the work of Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis (2002), who have introduced the notion of the 'situated imagination' as part of a dialogical epistemology. They describe how feminist standpoint theory has challenged positivism by highlighting the importance of accounting for the situatedness of the knowing subject. The form of 'situatedness' developed in this article differs from the reductive conceptions described above. Instead Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis propose that there is a need to explore the *processes* which shape the researcher's epistemic perspective, which connect their socio-historical location with their production of knowledge. They suggest that the terminology of the 'imaginary' often implicitly plays this role, articulating the link 'between experiences and thoughts, social practices and conceptual knowledge' in ways that tend to be left unexplained (ibid: 216).

Opening up philosophical traditions concerned with the imagination, this epistemology brings together the individual and collective, conceptual and corporeal aspects of knowledge production. The concept of the imagination, with its attention to the sensual aspects of thought departs from the mind / body dualism of post-Cartesian rationalism. A key source here is Spinoza who writes of the imagination as a corporeal aspect of the body's self-awareness (the mind), which emerges out of a bodily

61

experience of collectivity. Spinoza described how different patterns of embodied association feed into 'differing "temper(s) of imagination" that cause conflicts both between individuals and within the same person' (ibid: 323). These philosophical resources can help us to see how the emotional and embodied situatedness of the epistemic subject is social *and* individual; our imaginations are shaped by histories of embodied associations, *forms of life,* which cleave intra-personal and social imaginaries together.

Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis also develop a vocabulary for thinking about the relationship between imagination and reflexive understanding by drawing on Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia (*1978), a book whose title links thought with (damaged) life. They highlight Adorno's attention to embodied impulses of anticipatory desire and fear which shape the intellectual process itself, in relation to why, whether and what we are able to perceive and know. For Adorno, desires for, and aversions towards, understanding and thinking arise out of *histories,* expressing 'the 'traces' of recollection and memory' that connect thought to its situatedness in society (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002: 323).

These insights can help illuminate the processes that drew me to this research and my early neutralising approach. My imagination of the world I was researching, both my sense of fascination and use of categorical taxonomies of innocence and aggression, was situated within a broader social context. As I will go on to discuss, both my questions and silences were formed through my personal relationships and embodied histories. Drawing on Adorno's insights into the desires and fears that shape our conceptualisations and understandings opens up questions of how these inheritances affected what I could consciously think as I began this fieldwork. As Spinoza highlighted, while the imagination is crucial to communication, it can also be a source of *illusion* (ibid). Here, there is a connection with the opaqueness of my tears following the Palestine Society meeting. I imagined this world to be one of moral dualisms and so experienced myself as the innocent victim of unjust aggression. In this way, I stuck rigidly to what I already 'knew', averting my attention from the troubling undercurrents that had brought me here in the first place.

These sources of epistemic insight also suggest particular ways of approaching reflexive practice. These philosophies of the imagination open up new possibilities for attending to social agency, creativity and transformative potential in the research process. If the imagination can be subject to illusion than it must be educated as part of a collective, political process which can move us beyond reproducing only what we already know (ibid). As I will show in this chapter, I gradually learnt to reflect on my

inherited imaginaries through lived encounters in the field. As I participated in this political world, I began to learn how I was drawn to this project by the unknown in myself, which was difficult to *think*, formed through inherited memories, ideas and practices, transmitted in intimate and distant relationships.

The question remains here, as to what kinds of reflexive practice are necessary in order to uncover, question and transform our *imaginative* (as opposed to discursive) situatedness in research? Here, I turn to Wittgenstein's (1967) connection of language, imagination and life in order to suggest that processes of reflexive imagining are necessarily communicative. They are bound up with language *as* bodily, impassioned intersubjective experience. We learn from post-structuralism that, as scholars, we inherit theoretical languages which position us within social and political structures from the moment we frame a question. Yet in Wittgenstein's formulation, there is also an appeal to the creative yet precarious possibilities for expanding the limits of language in our relationships with others. I would also like to suggest that, exploring how our languages limit us, and seeking to expand these, is part of the imaginative process of social theorising (Seidler 2013). This opens up the possibility of a dialogical claim to truth, in which, through language, I can stake claim to speak with an open-ended community (Cavell 1999). It is in this spirit that I try out new vocabularies for speaking of Palestine-Israel politics in what follows.

Theoretical neutralisation and distancing

The following month I encountered Laura again when the Palestine Society organised a settlement on the main street of the campus to mark Israel Apartheid Week. Behind a mock wall, scrawled with graffitied slogans, 'illegal under international law' and 'humanitarian crisis', there was a 'Blue Territory' limited to Palestine Society members marked with blue ribbons. Over the next few hours, I loitered uncertainly on the periphery of this area by the information stall laid out with leaflets chronicling human rights abuses in the Occupied Territories. During a lull, Laura told me that she was studying part-time for a Masters in Human Rights, and described her distress at a lecture that she had attended that afternoon, which was about public indifference to media representations of suffering. Her words resonated with my recent fieldwork experiences. I had just attended a public lecture by Dr Ang Swee Chai, an orthopaedic surgeon and founder of 'Medical Aid for Palestinians'. Her talk evoked the heroism of medics, contrasting this with graphic description of the murderous violence of the Israeli military and the quiet dignity of Palestinian mothers. This was supplemented by images

of horrific injuries interspersed with the innocent gazes of orphaned Palestinian children. Breaking momentarily from her narrative flow, Dr Chai had reminded the enraptured audience of some Zionist Federation protestors who had threatened to disrupt the meeting. She stated bluntly, 'I'm disappointed our Zionist friend didn't come, I put this up to show him', as a close-up image of the desecrated bodies of dead children was projected onto the screen. When she concluded, the silence was broken by a lengthy, loud standing ovation. In the Q & A that followed, Dr Chai was hailed as 'an inspirational figure for us all' as, one after another, the audience members asked, 'what can we do to help?'

Standing awkwardly next to Laura as she sought to engage passersby in the mock settlement action, the powerful imperative that I had felt at the Dr Chai event was still with me. As Laura emphasised her frustration at students' apathy, I felt a strong desire to join the Palestine Society members, to claim an anti-Zionist position and put on a blue ribbon. My decision not to do so clearly positioned me, not as a neutral or in-between figure, but rather as someone unmoved by, and so complicit with, Palestinian suffering. In this sense, my inaction felt shameful. Yet I was also conscious that to participate as an activist would alienate me, emotionally and pragmatically, from members of the Israel Society. This was the first of many occasions in this fieldwork in which I felt as if I wanted to disappear; there was no 'right' response to my experience of being torn by different demands.

As I experienced the impossibility of the question, 'to act or not to act?', I began to sense the tragic resonance in this campus politics. Yet, as I struggled to navigate the intense vicissitudes of my early fieldwork encounters, I turned first to a theoretical framework known as the 'Strong Program' in cultural sociology in order to understand these experiences.[39] I had engaged with this theory prior to beginning my ethnography at the point when I was exploring representations of student Palestine-Israel politics in the media and in national NUS politics. This hermeneutic approach, which is strongly influenced by Emile Durkheim's (2001) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* and by linguistic structuralism, seemed to offer explanations for intensely felt political polarisation, which took seriously the subjective meanings of conflict for those involved. In contrast to Marxist and Weberian traditions in conflict sociology, focused on underlying material interests, Strong Program theories explore how social solidarity and conflict are shaped by the (re)production and contestation of affectively charged,

---

[39] For a detailed elucidation of the theoretical lineage of the Strong Program, see Cordero, Carballo and Ossandón (2008); Lynch and Sheldon (2013). For a programmatic statement of their social performance theory, see Alexander (2006b).

symbolic distinctions between the sacred / profane (Lynch 2012b). [40] As I reflected on my difficulty in sustaining an in between position in relation to conflicting student groups on campus, this framework offered an explanation; I understood Palestine-Israel politics as organised by symbolically constituted moral groups, reproducing affective boundaries in their social performances on campus. The Strong Program's attentiveness to symbolism and emotion seemed to illuminate the compellingness of foundational moral realities and of polluting threats, such as in relation to human rights or the Palestinian or Israeli nations. With this theory, Strong Program scholars have sought to extend the insights of linguistic structuralism sociologically, drawing on performance theory in order to theorise 'the manner in which such bifurcating classification is oriented not simply to mind but to affect and society' (Alexander 1988: 217). The process of incorporating concepts and methodologies from literary and aesthetic theories has formed part of a project to open up the felt, sentimental and sensual dimensions of culture to theoretical analysis.[41] Political performances are framed as aesthetic scripts, producing particular structures of feeling associated with solidarity and exclusion including love, pride and pity, indignation, offence or fear. By drawing on formalist and Aristotelian genre theories, which causally relate structures of meaning, such as agonistic plotting, with particular emotional responses, some Strong Program scholars claim to move beyond interpretivist description towards sociological *explanation* (Smith 2005).

I began to describe the reproduction and pollution of sacred forms circulating in this politics. I identified human rights, the Palestinian and Israeli nations, and the Holocaust as deeply felt moral realities, performed through aesthetic, activist repertoires, shaping affective processes of solidarity and differentiation. In this way, I began to produce an authoritative theoretical *explanation* of the very visible symbolic polarisation of Palestine-Israel politics on campus. Focusing on the symbolic dimensions of this politics offered a form of analysis in which generic structures of feeling could be read off from dramatic public actions. For example, by attending to the aesthetic

---

[40] Rather than operating as a signifier for god, religion, or an ontological experience of transcendence, this sociological conception of the sacred develops Durkheim's theory of morality as the intersection of symbolic classifications, ritual practices and collective sentiments (Lynch 2012b). The sacred and profane, Jeffrey Alexander argues, is a fundamental cultural structure, which binds and differentiates moral collectivities when it is produced and reproduced through ritual-like practices, which are re-conceptualised for modernity as 'social performances' (Alexander 2006b).

[41] As such, this approach forms part of an 'emotional turn' within the sociology of social movements, politics and protest (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001) towards growing interest in the compelling and passionate dimensions of political processes (Calhoun 2001).

representation of the violation of the Palestinian nation or of the Holocaust, I could explain how this provoked students into verbalising emotions of pity and disgust. This produced certain insights, as I began to explore high profile performances, including debates and inter-societal conflicts, which were often amplified by various public media. In Chapter Four, I begin from one student's observation that the university was deeply complicit in the production of these "Syrian dramas" to describe this 'melodramatic' form of politics.

However, when I 'operationalised' this theory to analyse my early ethnographic experiences, I seemed to come up against troubling limitations. As I developed closer relationships with students over time, I began to feel that this pre-formed framework precluded my attention to the heterogeneity of students' responses at campus events, or to the significance of singular histories and attachments within this. I also struggled to explore the sources of aggressive feelings that, despite being symbolically *coded* as irrational or racist, continued to be expressed on campus. But the starting point for my sense of dissatisfaction was the disjuncture between this theoretical framework and my own experience. This emphasis on moral dichotomies seemed inadequate to my sense that this politics was also shaped by radical, contradictory ambiguities. Crystallising in my question 'to act or not to act?' was a sense that truth and justice were somehow two things at once. In the presence of this question, I was somehow divided within myself even as I was forced to make a political decision. Was I alone in experiencing this murky sense of ambivalence in relation to this politics? Was I the only one who was struggling here?[42] Somehow my use of theory had worked to defend me against exploring these ambivalent meanings and *uncodified* feelings, which could not be framed within a framework of the sacred / profane. I began to sense how the Strong Program's semiotic approach offered a resource for me to repress this ambivalence, mirroring the institutional practices of universities themselves. In this way, my attempt to develop authoritative Durkheimian explanations was not an abstract theoretical issue. Rather it was a way of abstracting myself from the historical entanglements of Palestine-Israel in which I was deeply embedded.

Becoming an implicated ethnographer: Ruth Hannah Schwarcmann Katz

Early in my research, prior to beginning my ethnographic fieldwork, I spent some time familiarising myself with the political worlds of student activists, interviewing stakeholders and exploring the histories of particular campuses via their online policy

---

[42] I am grateful to participants in the NYLON seminar for helping me to confront these questions.

and student media archives. It was during this period that I first came across the name 'Dan Sheldon'. Dan had been actively involved in events on his campus during the period of the 2008-9 Gaza war, subsequently becoming involved in national student politics. In summer 2011, he took on a senior role with UJS and started to appear in person at the different universities where I was doing my fieldwork. Although I registered our shared surname, I didn't reflect on this until months later, when Leo, a student who was familiar with the UJS scene, asked if Dan and I were related. With Leo's question, I began to feel anxious, asking myself, what does my name, shared with a well-known UJS representative, signify to these students? I thought about a Palestine Society meeting where people had joked about the preponderance of the name 'Abu' among their invited speakers. I recalled Sara, a Palestine Society member from an Algerian family, telling me twice that her Hebrew first name had marked her as a potential Zionist infiltrator. I imagined that 'Sheldon' signified Englishness but did people identify me as Jewish from my name? In the process of reflecting on this, I became aware of how my name implicated me in this research in ways that preceded, undid and opened up my strained attempts, up until that point, to sustain a neutral position.

Leo's question marked a kind of turning point in my research, pushing me to attend to the sources of my attempted neutrality. As I will explore, this was revealing of the particular challenges of ethnographic research into political conflicts marked by histories of discrimination, assimilation and shame. Leo was the second student to raise a question about my name. Early in the fieldwork I had struck up a conversation with a female student activist in the students' union, who had told me that she was a 'Jewish convert' before explaining that, 'NUS is dominated by Jews, UJS basically just pick who they want for President.' A few minutes later, this student had asked if I was Jewish. Suddenly the students' union entrance in which we were standing felt too public; I froze. Then I mumbled that I was from a Jewish background. She said, 'I thought so, because of your name and because you're working for NUS'. I paused and by the time I responded with 'I'm not working for NUS', she had turned away.

When I described this encounter to my supervisor later, he characterised the claim that 'NUS is dominated by Jews' as 'anti-Semitic'. Hearing it named in this way was a momentary jolt. Claims, counter-claims and denials of anti-Semitism were prominent within campus conflicts, as with the politics of the Middle East more widely. To name this as 'anti-Semitism' was to be drawn into a politics and away from the experience. Yet my supervisor's verbalisation pushed me to look beyond these discursive struggles over what constitutes anti-Semitism and to attend to the felt experience of these kinds of speech-acts. My frozen response in this moment revealed something of my anxieties

around being identified as Jewish, which crystallised in the exposure of my shared surname.

In my invisible 'whiteness', with my English accent, I had assumed that I 'passed' in these institutional spaces (Ahmed 2012). Yet, the absent figure of Dan Sheldon had exposed me, shamed me, as I experienced myself through the distaining eyes of others, a moment of splitting evocatively captured by Anna Strhan's phrase, 'a fissure of subjectivity' (Strhan 2012: 31). Following Norbert Elias (2000) I found it helpful to consider how, within a modern culture that emphasises autonomy, shame can be repressed and unacknowledged by those subject to it (Ray, Smith and Wastell 2004). Perhaps it was this dynamic that made it difficult for me to learn from this encounter and to explore how experiences of shame marked Palestine-Israel campus politics more widely. Yet when, many months later, Leo raised the question of my Jewishness within our evolving friendship, this marked the beginnings of a shift, as I began to explore the complexities of the *embodied* histories carried in my name.[43]

Sometime in the 1950s, my paternal grandpa, Marek, and great uncle, Joska, anglicised our family name, changing it from 'Schwarcmann' to 'Sheldon'. My nana explained,

> 'That was our name; that was our name for quite a long time. That was Marek and Joska's name and then we changed it to Sheldon, to make it easier for our children in school. In business Sheldon was easier to cope with.'[44]

From past conversations, I had learned that this name-change was part of my grandparents' attempt to assimilate with the 'English Jews' when they settled as refugees in London after the Holocaust. When my parents got married, my mum had been relieved to take the anglicised name 'Sheldon', replacing her own familial name 'Katz', which her father had carried from his home town on the Austro-Hungarian border to London. As a young child, my mum was sent for elocution lessons before starting at her London primary school, to neutralise the Viennese accent that she had inherited from her mother, also an Austrian refugee. In this way, from the age of five, my mum had

---

[43] I use the term embodied histories to connote various ways in which the past can be felt in the present, without being consciously recognised or symbolically represented by the subject.
[44] I have drawn here from a conversation between my nana and my dad about her life history, which they recorded and transcribed in 2006.

experienced the pressures of assimilation, the shame of a different 'private' home-life, of concealment not only in relation to *what* to speak about but also *how* to speak.

Sharing their stories of growing up in the North-West London Jewish community during this period, my parents often referred to 'the English Jews'. It seemed that this was a weighted phrase, spoken with a hint of anger. Somehow, it communicated my parents' sense of rejection by this community, a rejection which they reciprocated, choosing to relocate our family to the geographically and culturally distant middle class suburb where I grew up. Here our family formed very different relationships; my school friends were not Jewish, I have rarely set foot in a synagogue in England or learnt more than a word of Hebrew. Yet, our hidden continental name was also a mark of distinction, imbued with a proud sense of difference, which I somehow associated with the Freud and Anne Frank posters and colourful Chagall prints framing our home. It was a nostalgic pride that I felt on family holidays when my sister and I would resignedly follow my parents as they sought out the old Jewish quarter of European cities. Or, again, only on holiday, when we would curl up while my dad read us Isaac Bashevis Singer's stories, lingering on the sounds of each Yiddish punch-line. As I remember, this only happened on holiday, and so, in confusing contrast to our distance from Jewish life in England.

Writing about his experiences growing up in a part of London close to my parents, Vic Seidler (2000) describes the ambivalence carried in public English and private Jewish names, the shame and anger of rejection, and the pride of Jewish difference. Although these inheritances evolve generationally and are shaped by different responses to assimilatory demands and Jewish traditions, this account resonated with me in ways that helped me to reflect on different dynamics in my fieldwork. As I began to approach students who *I* took to be the 'English Jews' that my parents had spoken of, this history shaped my research relationships in ways which complicated my abstract understandings of 'insider / outsider' dynamics, research distance / closeness and ethnographic selfhood.

Assimilated names: understanding and arrogation

My early contact with representatives of the Israel and Jewish societies at Universities A and B felt relatively easy, as compared with my tense exchanges with the Palestine and Islamic Societies. The organisation of these student groups differed across institutions; University A had for many years sustained a nominally separate Israel Society alongside a Jewish Society. The politics of Palestine-Israel was firmly within the remit of the Israel

Society while the Jewish Society focused on faith and cultural matters. There was, however, significant overlap between the societies' memberships. For example, at the beginning of the 2011 academic year, Justin, a Jewish Society committee member also worked alongside his friend Ella on the Israel Society committee.[45] Initially, the representatives of these societies responded positively to my project information sheet. My balanced approach seemed attuned to the 'good campus relations', 'conflict resolution' discourses promoted by UJS. Yet, while I was welcomed at the University A Israel Society events, it seemed difficult to deepen my relationships with Jewish and Israel Society members. Once again, I initially interpreted this in relation to broader institutional cultures, as a reflection of the strict separation of religion and politics at University A, and the tendency toward insularity among close-knit Jewish Societies. Then, in December 2011, when I finally 'got around' to interviewing Justin and Ella, I began to develop a sense of the ways in which I was participating in the production of this distance, through my own implication in collective histories, which were being felt in these present relationships.

A few days before I was due to interview Justin and Ella, I woke up in a panic in the night. What if they refused consent when I produced the printed interview consent form? What would this mean for all the data I had collected at meetings they had attended? When they had taken over their committee roles in October 2011, we had spoken about my continuing the research. Yet somehow, even now, in this last month of my fieldwork, these relationships felt so precarious, as if these students might still reject me at any time.

We had arranged to meet in the early evening, in the sterile cafe of an academic building. Justin arrived first, a little later than we had arranged, apologetically explaining that our interview was sandwiched between a meeting of the students' union anti-racism assembly and a talk by a senior Conservative politician. Justin's busy diary confirmed my existing impression that he was someone at the centre of campus politics. I had noticed Justin early in my fieldwork; spotting him in the front seats at Israel and Palestine Society events, where he would confidently ask questions with the self-assurance of an experienced public speaker.

Yet, while we were used to exchanging greetings, Justin and I had never had a conversation. Unlike at University B, members of the Jewish and Israel societies had not asked about my personal background and I had not volunteered any information.

---

[45] This contrasted with the societal structure at University B, where Israel-focused campaigns remained within the remit of the Jewish Society, with a designated officer, Miriam, coordinating these activities.

Instead I had unintentionally disclosed small ambiguous signals in uncomfortable moments at Israel Society events where, for example, I accepted but did not wear an 'I support the two-state solution' sticker and declined the free Israeli street food on offer at the society's 'Discover Israel Week' stall. And then of course there was my 'English' Jewish name, Sheldon. This lack of openness also worked in reverse; from my earliest encounters with Justin, I had taken him be an 'English Jew'. Yet, I did not ask him directly about his own family history until nearly two years later.

Justin talked quickly and confidently in a Northern-tinged English accent. Although an undergraduate student in his early twenties, he projected a worldly maturity, imparting his detailed knowledge of various Jewish organisations relevant to my project. In response, I found myself inarticulate, feeling like the junior party. Justin began by locating himself at the centre of the Jewish community, on whose behalf he spoke, "It's all *our community* talks about apart from like obviously communal issues but then in terms of anything bigger, it's always Israel-Palestine. So that's the nature of Jewish communities". As our conversation evolved, he continued to speak with the authority of the first person plural, as a representative of the Jewish and Israel Societies, the 'Jewish community', and the university student body. Something in the certainty of his 'we' here unsettled me; Justin seemed so clear in his arrogation of this collective voice and this felt so different from my own ambivalent position in the worlds he described. Meanwhile I concealed my unfamiliarity with a language that he assumed we shared, only afterwards rushing off to Google names such as "Hatikva", "Gush Etzion" and "Habonim Dror" as I wrote up my fieldnotes.

Justin proceeded to offer a conclusive analysis of the dynamics of Palestine-Israel at University A. Depicting this as a conflict between two sides, he explained,

"Jewish communities are very close knit, you've got to realise that. I'm sure it's the same for Muslim communities as well. So we're not exposed to the other side, won't share a platform with other people unless, it's like a football match, you're either pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian."

Speaking on behalf of the Israel and Jewish societies, he proceeded to outline the parameters of "civilized", campus politics, contrasting the "disgusting", "offensive" Palestine Society "stunts" with the Israel Society who "do all our events to the book". Something in Justin's appropriation of the authority to determine the *legitimate* response to Palestine-Israel politics felt difficult for me and I found myself biting my tongue. In drawing on a vocabulary of "playing by the rules", he adopted a stance that

71

echoed the assimilatory practices of Anglo-Jewry, careful to play the game of liberal English politics. But my uneasy response here also connected to my sense that he had appropriated the right to speak for *me.* Justin's account of the Jewish 'side' of this politics seemed to leave little room for the ambivalence and divergence among those that he confidently spoke for. As he claimed authority at the centre of the British Jewish community, I silently identified with a marginalised position. In this way, we reproduced a dynamic which has shaped relations between 'English' and 'Continental' Jews in Britain.

As our conversation developed, Justin angrily denounced members of the Palestine Society for refusing to recognise the pluralism within Judaism and Zionism, repeating his categorical judgement of Palestine Society members as offensive, immature and self-interested. Justin focused his anger on students who he perceived to lack any legitimate familial or religious connection to the region. Then he shifted from a discourse of liberal civility to stake a claim for Jewish authority rooted in ownership of historical suffering, 'Who are these white Europeans who get involved? What for? I mean, for us, we're part of the conflict, through our identities and our families, but for them, they just talk about 'imperialism' or whatever'. Justin took a well-known member of the Student Socialist Workers Party, Emily, as an example, 'She just says stuff about imperialism. It's like with the anti-racism meeting...she was trying to get involved with Holocaust Memorial day and it's just disgusting tokenism, you know...she just wants to use us to make a point'. As Justin spoke, a moment from my meeting with Emily six months previously echoed in my silence. Emily had told me how alongside her broader socialist politics, her concern for the Palestinian cause was shaped by her family history. Although she had not shared this publicly, Emily's grandfather was a German Jew who had escaped just before the Holocaust. When Emily had begun to learn about Palestine-Israel at school, she had spoken to him about this,

> "So I went to my granddad and he never talks about like what happened to him but he said to me, he was like 'if you do anything with your time, like with all your protesting and stuff... make sure you fight for Palestinians because... there's this view that all Jewish people are against Palestinians and the thing is we're not and the thing is they're going through sort of like a mini-version of what happened to me and our family."

Sat with Justin and Ella now, I dwelled on my knowledge of Emily's motivations, which also was about my own concealed connection to this politics. I began to swell with self-

righteous indignation against Justin's categorical judgement of other students. Yet, as I grounded my superior judgement in my *authentic* connection with Jewish suffering, I fixed Justin as an 'English Jew' without ever thinking to ask what had brought him to this position. As I distanced myself in my judgement of Justin, I reproduced a competitive politics of recognition which mirrored Justin's authoritative claim to knowledge of others.

In *Giving An Account of Oneself* (2005), Judith Butler writes of how the practice of moral judgement establishes a clear distance between judger and judged. It requires us to assume knowledge and understanding of the one we judge and enables us to forget our prior implication with their position. Writing about the ethics of understanding in ethnographic research, Les Back highlights the importance of the ethnographer's attentiveness to the difference and integrity of those whom we research. Back proposes a non-appropriative mode of ethical understanding, in which we withhold judgement by allowing any 'simple separation' between ethnographer and subject to be undercut (Back 2004: 251). Starting from this commitment to ethical relationality can enhance existing methodological debates regarding the desirability of the ethnographic closeness and distance from research participants.[46] This can move us beyond methodological framings, which assume what it *means* to be 'close' or 'distant', and take the researcher's location within this matrix to be accessible to them in advance.

One implication of the relationships I have been describing here is that my 'position' in relation to research participants was opaque to me at the beginning of this fieldwork, despite my seeming identification with 'Jewish students'. While the tensions of distance and closeness, understanding and judgement are an intrinsic part of the negotiation of authority within the ethnographic process, here they were inflected by embodied histories of social relations in ways that I had not anticipated. It was only by exploring how this inheritance shaped difficult feelings in my fieldwork relationships with those students whom I identified as 'English Jews', that I was able to put into question my judgemental stance. In this sense, questions of positionality were not about *controlling* for the ways in which my location in the field determined my perspective. Rather, my methodological work here was to attend to *how* closeness and distance came to be shaped within these fieldwork relationships, and what the implications were for my capacity to be *responsive* to students, rather than appropriating their experiences as my own (Das 2007). In this way, I learnt that reflecting on the sources of anger and detachment, as well feelings of warmth and affection, formed part of my ethnographic responsibility towards these students. It was only with this self-reflective work that I

---

[46] See Coffey (1999) for a critical account of these debates within ethnographic literatures.

could begin to attend to the nuance and complexity behind Justin's seemingly fixed political position.

The limits of secular naming: acknowledging closeness

Early in our conversation, I had asked Ella and Justin to tell me about how Israel had come to be important for them. The tone and content of their responses were very different. Justin described how his attachment to Israel had been central to the religious and cultural Judaism that he learnt at his Orthodox Jewish school,

> "we sang Hatikva, we were ultra, ultra Zionist, you know Likkud supporting...'cos you buy in to this, this messianic principle about Israel, and part of me still finds that very hard to let go of because I still conserve the sense of my religion, "conservative" in the Orthodox sense rather than in the illiberal sense."

Justin described how he had subsequently become involved with Habonim Dror, a "socialist, Zionist, culturally Jewish union", an experience that had left him very "screwed up" as "I jump from side to side" in relation to questions of "security" and "social justice". He also spoke of his frustration at the separation of Jewish and Israel Societies on campus; he had become involved with the Jewish Society in the hope of making a space for a "depoliticised" Judaism yet he felt Zionism was inseparable from the "yearning for Jerusalem" expressed in the Torah. In contrast, Ella framed her Zionism in a more personal register, less connected with educational or religious institutions growing up, she described how,

> "I'm quite, nearly, nearly verging on secular, but my way of identifying with Jewish culture – Justin's laughing at me – um my way of identifying with Jewish culture and Jewish people and Jewish life is through an affinity with Israel".

As Ella and Justin shared their different connections with Zionism, I responded by seeking to situate their accounts within a binary distinction between the 'religious' and the 'secular'. They had been speaking of their frustration at the lack of public awareness of a connection between Judaism and Zionism, which manifested in the splitting of the Jewish and Israel student societies within the university. My response felt clumsy and seemed to aggravate things further as I asked, "how does it work in terms of like, the role of religion or faith in this?" and then pushed the two of them to articulate the difference

74

between their 'religious' and 'secular' positions. Justin reacted angrily, insisting that Judaism and Zionism are both pluralist and that the religious and secular sides are not mutually exclusive. I asked them why this "religious" aspect of Palestine-Israel politics seemed so difficult to speak about. Ella's reply was striking, her words stayed with me long after this interview as she pushed me to reflect on the sources of my own terminology,

"I think it's just really complicated, it's issues that people are uncomfortable with dealing with and feel maybe not educated enough to deal with them and people are scared, people don't want to offend people... You know it's like 'the actions of a Zionist entity government' rather than like 'a connection of a people to a spiritual homeland for many, many years'. It's a different terminology, a different way of understanding it, which makes it easier to, to, I don't know, talk about it I suppose."

In the practical context of ethnographic interviews with students from Jewish and Muslim backgrounds, my repeated recourse to the question 'what is the role of faith or religion in this?' was out of tune with my *theoretical* framing. The terminology of 'the religious and the secular' had initially been central to my research questions. However, I had decided early on to drop this language as I learnt from post-structuralist scholarship, which has critiqued essentialist academic definitions of 'religion' for complicity with European projects of colonial domination and political secularism (Lynch 2012a). In particular I was struck by claims that research concerned with Muslim communities in Europe has contributed to Orientalist constructions and pathologisations of Islam (Asad 2003). As I discussed in Chapter Two, this was a dynamic that was reflected in dominant scholarly and policy framings of 'campus conflicts', which instituted a division between a rational, civil Islam compatible with liberalism and an excessively angry, primordial Islamic 'extremism'. My intention was to avoid reproducing these inherently normative judgements embedded in the dichotomous categories of the religious / secular. As a consequence, while I sought to explore how this discourse circulated within this politics, I also reached for alternative theoretical vocabularies in order to attend to the complexities and ambiguities of lived experiences of Palestine-Israel politics.[47]

---

[47] See Lynch 2012a for a discussion of the ways in which the contemporary study of religion has been shaped by two cultural turns; one associated with Foucauldian post-structuralism and a second focused on the materiality, embodiment and relationality of lived religious experience.

However, despite approaching my fieldwork with this ambition, I was somehow unable to resist invoking this categorical dichotomy *in practice*. Driven by a sense that political secularism on campus was prohibiting me from learning about distinctively 'religious' aspects of this conflict, I somehow retained a category of 'religion' as an 'other'; a distinct object to be located. In this sense it seemed that I was still deeply influenced by the secularity of the social scientific discipline and the university institutions out of which I was working. As Michael Lambek has argued,

> 'Universities are "secular" in their constitution, governance and in their disciplinary orientations, procedures and means of establishing truths... so that they are always already implicated in the question of the boundaries of religion and secularism' (Lambek 2012).

It seemed that this secular culture had shaped my assumed habits for thinking and feeling about the role of religion, providing me a sense of security and scholarly authority. For example, one of the most significant ways in which an opposition between the religious / secular shaped my research practice was in relation to University C. As I highlighted in Chapter Two, my involvement with students at this university was limited in comparison to my other fieldsites. Although I attended some public meetings and, towards the end of my fieldwork, was able to join two Palestine Society committee meetings, I did not develop ongoing personal relationships with students at this institution. While, there were a number of different factors which shaped my relative distance from this university,[48] a particularly significant issue was my sense of the apparent religiosity of this Palestine Society as compared with the groups at the other two universities. The first event that I attended at University C was co-hosted by the Islamic Society. Over the course of my fieldwork, this turned out to be the only campus at which an Islamic Society was *formally* involved with a public event relating to Palestine. The meeting drew wider audiences beyond the student body including, it seemed, members of local Muslim communities. The people here greeted each other with 'Salaam Alaikum' and finished sentences with 'Insha'Allah', in ways that were strange to me. How and why did my sense of unfamiliarity with this world shape my own

---

[48] In part, my lesser engagement with this campus reflected the lower profile and more sporadic nature of Palestinian activism here as compared with Universities A and B. In Chapter Six, I discuss how this was affected by the particular institutional conditions at this campus. In addition, the University C Palestine Society was influenced by a charismatic, slightly older man, a seasoned activist who was no longer a student at the university and seemed particularly suspicious of outsiders, such as myself.

caution in engaging with these students? How was I responsible for the distancing and exclusions that this produced in my fieldwork? It was not until the summer of 2013 that I began to develop more of a sense of the stakes here. Meeting up with Sadiq to discuss my emerging findings, he challenged my construction of rational political debate as an exclusively 'liberal' model of politics. Instead he insisted that these values are also internal to Islamic traditions. In the course of our lengthy and unsettling conversation, I sensed how engaging with these questions destabilised my theoretical moorings and academic authority in ways that are necessarily unfinished. This enabled me to reflect back on my production of distance from the University C Palestine Society and to ask whether, in the background to my fieldwork decisions, lurked a fear that I might lose my scholarly footing?

A desire for scholarly authority was an important aspect of my recourse to taxonomies of the religious / secular. However, I was not merely a detached researcher seeking to impose my understanding. Rather, as my exchange with Justin and Ella exemplified, I repeatedly invoked this distinction in a way that closed down, rather than opened up conversations that were *personally* troubling to me. In order to understand this, I needed to begin from the texture of exclusions and limits within my fieldwork relationships. Michael Lambek has argued that, within the discipline of anthropology, reified, theoretical problems regarding the religious / secular dichotomy find their practical expression in ethnographic research. Lambek locates the practical expression of the religious/secular tension in the methodological debate about 'experience near' versus 'experience distant' analysis, as a question of how far the ethnographer should share the religious sensibility, practices or beliefs of those they research (ibid). Yet as Robert Orsi has shown in researching his 'own' religious culture, our very distinctions between the inside and the outside are not fixed apriori. Rather, they emerge in the ethnographic process itself, as we can learn how we might be both inside and outside of a tradition at the same time (Orsi 2005: 149). Here the ethnographer's use of boundary forming distinctions such as 'the religious / secular' can be seen as a relational practice worthy of reflexive attention. Beginning from the ethnographer's experience within fieldwork relationships can allow us to explore the ways in which abstract languages arise out of and operate within *forms of life*. In this way, ethnography can subvert the hierarchy of theory and practice by inviting reflection on the work that abstract language might be doing within living relationships.

It took time for me to learn how my recourse to this abstract 'religious /secular' dichotomy expressed my personal entanglement with these subjects. I began with Ella's suggestion that framing Zionism through particular terminologies works to defend

against something discomforting. Reflecting afterwards on my use of language in this exchange, I was struck by my deafness to words such as "messianism", "spirituality" and "yearning" or even Ella's striking phrase *"nearly* secular"; I was unable to respond to Ella and Justin's ways of speaking about their attachments to Israel. What were my strained attempts to capture and codify the 'religious' aspects of this politics doing to these relationships? What were the sources of my reaching towards 'making sterile taxonomies, griddling what we study into safe and discrete categories' (Orsi 2005: 61) in ways that closed down my conversations with these students? As Justin had peppered his speech with Hebrew names and references to Jewish traditions, he had assumed a shared horizon of understanding between us. My discomforting alienation from this language was reflected in my failure to correct his assumption or to ask him to translate. My silence reflected my sense of shame about my lack of fluency in relation to this world, which recurred in conversations with students as well as with Jewish academics. It was a difficult feeling which carried the texture, not of an encounter with an unfamiliar other, but rather of a loss of the familiar, some kind of estrangement.

In writing about the importance of names within Jewish families living in Britain after the Holocaust, Vic Seidler describes how alongside his public 'Christian' name, he also carried an inner Jewish or Hebrew name, only spoken within the rituals of the synagogue (Seidler 2000). This is a theme that I also found in an autobiographical essay by Stanley Cavell, concerned with his relation to Jerusalem, which lingers on an epithet by Gershom Scholem about Walter Benjamin's use of his Hebrew and civil names (Cavell 1994:2). Somehow my own experience of carrying a 'hidden' continental name in this fieldwork mimicked this traditional Jewish practice. Yet when I scratched the surface of my assimilated public name, it seemed that there was nothing to connect me to Judaism there. This sense of absence, which seemed important to my 'secularity', was connected with my family history in ways that feel complicated and painful to disentangle. One dimension is my nana's claim, which I inscribed in the preface of this thesis, that God is absent to us after the Holocaust. This stakes secularity on a scale with which I can barely connect. Yet reflecting on my absent Hebrew name also opened up a different dimension of loss and desire; this was my yearning for a connection, not so much with God, but with traditions, practices and languages, with forms of life, from which I feel dislocated.

Many months after I had formally finished my ethnographic fieldwork, I returned home for a weekend to visit my parents. Talking with my mum, I found that I listened in a way that I had not done before, so that while some things were familiar, others seemed new. She talked about her father, my maternal grandpa, Gashi, who died before I knew him. He came to London after escaping from a concentration camp in 1939; he never

78

spoke about it. Quiet and passive, he was a person of few words. He was also the only one of my grandparents who was religiously observant, an inheritance expressed in jokey family references to my mum's status as 'a high priest' emanating from a family of Cohens. On Saturdays when my mum was little, she would go with him to synagogue and then to watch Arsenal play football. I had heard this story before, but this time she added 'the football was the only time that I experienced him expressing emotion; I loved it'. My tears welled up with the detail of these little rituals and all that had been lost for my grandpa and my mum. Afterwards, I began to reflect on how different kinds of losses in our family, of people, relationships, traditions, practices, of forms of life, were bound up together and had been transmitted to me, shaping my fieldwork relationships with students.

One insight that emerged from this personal reflection was that I could not separate these losses into religious or secular components. To do so felt inadequate to the complex ambiguities of these cultures. Learning from my grandparents' lives, I began to sense the inadequacies of concepts of the religious and secular derived from an implicitly Christian frame. This is an issue that is taken up in Gillian Rose's memoir *Love's Work* as she describes learning how, 'non-belief in God defines Judaism and how change in that compass registers the varieties of Jewish modernity' (Rose 1997: 19). Vic Seidler (2000: 97-99) makes the connection with social theory, as he describes how the distinction between the spiritual (sacred) and the material (profane) makes little sense within Jewish traditions. These complexities, also articulated by Justin, were forms of knowledge which I somehow carried yet had forgotten because of the painful dislocations in my family history. This made it difficult for me to hear Justin and Ella's expressions of attachments which transcended, and so could not be articulated within, this dichotomising language. While I learnt this late in my fieldwork, these insights shaped a focus of this thesis, as I explore what happens when the dominant political language tragically distorts and represses students' lived attachments to Palestine-Israel.

Diasporic names: beyond Zionism / anti-Zionism

The losses and longings that I have been describing relate not only to traditions but also to places. In this way, they connect in complex ways with the politics of Jewish diasporic relations to Israel. As Justin's invocation of the "yearning for Jerusalem" in the Torah expressed, these inscribed inheritances of exile and the search for belonging are bound up with theological and political traditions of Zionism (Rose 2005). In speaking as representatives of Jewish student organisations, Justin and Ella revealed how a

dominant form of diasporic politics, oriented exclusively towards Israel, affected the campus. As I discussed in Chapter Two, this Anglo-Jewish orientation to Israel has a history. Vic Seidler (2000) writes of how, after the Holocaust, Jews learned to centre their diasporic attachments towards Israel rather than being able to imagine Jewish diasporas oriented to Central and Eastern Europe. This was associated with a modernist progressive vision of Israel, which differentiated modern Jewry from a stereotype of the atavistic 'Eastern' Jew (Bowman 2002; Rose 2005). This is a history that was not consciously known to me in advance and yet started to emerge as I reflected on the blackness of my name 'Schwarcmann'.[49] I began to learn how the strength and power of Zionism, was also articulated in the shaming of these 'weak' Eastern cultures among Jews themselves (Seidler 2000: 139).

Ella arrived at our meeting fifteen minutes after Justin and her interventions into our conversation subtly altered the dynamic. I had noticed Ella's presence on campus early in my fieldwork, struck by her distinctive curly hair. Ella spoke in a less assertive and less possessive register than Justin, although she seemed just as committed to this political cause. She told me how she had spent part of her summer interning for B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organisation working in the Occupied Territories. As we talked about Ella's experiences on campus, she described a recent Palestine Society event that we had both attended with a left-wing Jewish journalist known for his opposition to the occupation. I had observed in my fieldnotes how this speaker had repeatedly directed his comments towards 'our pro-Israeli friends in the room', noting that his tone felt particularly aggressive. Now, Ella explained that his speech had been directed at her after she given advance notice to the Palestine Society President of her intention to attend,

> "He mentioned the phrase 'our pro-Israel friends in the room' a number of times, and he looked directly at me a number of times…and like I didn't then feel comfortable to ask a question, or to debate or engage with him, because I would have to immediately start justifying why I was even in the room, which I just thought was just ridiculous in my own university. Like in terms of the content of what he was saying, he was talking about B'TSelem loads which is where I worked over the summer, and it's just the whole thing is so odd to me that he's like praising this organisation, this is where I worked, like I agree with quite a lot

---

[49] Other family members had written our name 'Schwarzmann', meaning 'black man' in German.

of what he was saying really, but the way that like it's been pitched on campus is that I can't express that even."

As Ella recounted this story in a soft, yet assertive voice which momentarily cracked with frustration, I felt her hurt at this refusal among pro-Palestinian activists to acknowledge the complexity of her politics. Yet, while I empathised, I could not shake my unspoken judgement; what did she expect? Ella had *chosen* to publicly represent the student Israel Society, she had committed herself politically to advocate for Israel on campus, a decision that reflected her categorical commitment to Zionism,

> "I'm a Zionist, I'm a Zionist because it's part of my Jewish identity, my Jewish culture and what I think is important for the Jewish people. Um and so I connect and relate to Israel and the well-being of Israel".

I could intellectually understand Ella's need to assert her Zionism in the context of campus struggles to code the very word 'Zionist' as taboo[50]. Yet, throughout our conversation, I responded to Ella's articulation of her feelings for Zionism by changing the subject. I experienced something discomforting in Ella's claim that the intrinsic connection with Israel is 'for every Jewish, Zionist student... *obvious*, that is, that is part of our identity and our makeup and the way that we think and react and feel.' Silently, I judged these expressions of Zionist commitment as problematic, and this distancing limited my ability to *hear* how Justin and Ella articulated these attachments.

The circulation of this absolute distinction between Zionism and anti-Zionism had shaped my experience of campus politics from the beginning of my fieldwork. From Dr Ang Swee Chai's invocation of the Zionist opponent to the Palestine Society's demarcation of pro and anti-Zionist campus spaces, my fieldwork relationships were permeated by this dichotomising pressure. My involuntary judgement of Ella's Zionist commitment revealed how much I had internalised this categorical distinction. As Jacqueline Rose writes, '"Zionist or anti-Zionist" issues a taboo. It makes of Zionism an unthinkable object' (Rose 2005: 12). Yet, something in Ella's description of Zionism as "a connection of a people to a spiritual homeland" pulled me up short.

Back at my family home one Friday evening, I had been drawn to the bookcase where our family photos were kept. In one faded old photo album, I stopped at a double-

---

[50] As UJS has observed, the word 'Zionism' has become coloured with negative connotations, as support for the Palestinian cause has grown. This has resulted in a discursive politics, with UJS seeking to reclaim this name as a source of pride for Jewish students (see for example UJS 2011).

page spread with Polaroids; there was my mum in her early twenties, smiling, tanned, horse riding, on the beach, posing by monuments, laughing with friends. The deep blue of the sky contrasted beautifully with the soft yellow landscapes. The photos were labelled in my mum's handwriting, 'Israel 1973', 'Jerusalem'. One picture, which showed military aircraft visible in the distance, was labelled '25th Independence Day, 7th May 1973'. Later, I told my mum that, during this research, I had listened to Hatikva, the Israeli National Anthem, for the first time. She smiled. Despite growing up in the same part of North-West London, my parents first met while volunteering on a Kibbutz in Israel. My mum told me how, when she was younger, she had thought seriously about moving to Israel. When she went there, she felt, for the first time, like she belonged. There was a feeling of pride in this kind of Jewishness; you could be who you were. And this difference seemed somehow reflected in the upward trajectories of our Israeli relatives. My maternal nana's cousin had fought with the Haganah in 1948, later becoming a university professor, achieving the status that my nana, whose education was irreparably interrupted, seemed to yearn bitterly for. In 1998, my mum and I visited these relatives in Israel together; it was a difficult trip, of painful conversations about family history and struggles to respond politically to the younger generation of relatives. My memories of the trip are hazy; I remember barely speaking, as if I was in a cotton-wool bubble.

In 2001, during the summer of my first undergraduate year at university, I returned to Israel, also visiting the Sinai and Jordan, backpacking with my close school friend, Liz. Although I was well-travelled already, those two months were uniquely affecting and dream-like. I was taken in by the sensuality of the place, the bright light, the warmth, the smell of sesame bread, the full red watermelons. Never one for outdoor activities before, I climbed waterfalls in the Golan Heights and Ein Gedi, watched the sun rise atop Mount Sinai, camped in the desert, wandered aimlessly around winding streets of old towns and ruins, taken in by the history. I became physically strong, as if inhabiting a new body. There was something about this place. Yet somehow, despite being an undergraduate student of politics, the politics here passed me by. In stark contrast to the active efforts of undergraduate students like Ella, I somehow managed to coast through my own trip to Palestine-Israel blind to the traces of occupation and violence, which simply failed to dawn on me.[51]

---

[51] My understanding of this form of denial was helped by Veena Das' ethical reading of Wittgenstein's famous duck-rabbit picture. The duck-rabbit shows us how that which is present might still be invisible to us, as a way of conceptualising how we might be absent to our own experience, or 'what it might mean to be absent from life' (Das 2007: 104-5).

Talking eleven years later with my mum, she emphasised that she no longer considered herself a Zionist. Since she realised 'what was going on there', my mum told me, 'I can't go back'. Later, after this conversation, I began to think about the significance of my own experience in Israel for this research; my sense of a kind of spiritual connection and of becoming *physically strong,* as connected to a particular kind of Zionist imaginary. As my mum spoke about her own awakening in relation to the occupation, her shame at not seeing was also my shame, at the blindness of my previous self. Gradually, these ambivalent feelings of pride and shame, connecting the Holocaust and Zionism, imbuing Israeli-Diaspora relationships, became clearer to me. The sources of *our* pride, the vitality and strength of Israel, which offered an alternative to my mum's elocution lessons and our Anglicised name, were deeply imbricated with *our* history of violence against Palestinians. This was not an abstract historical observation; it was part of my life, carried in my body throughout this research, shaping my relationships with students.

As Justin and Ella were trying to tell me, to speak the dominant grammar of a Zionist / Anti-Zionist dichotomy was to participate in a politics which foreclosed attention to more complex experiences. This was something that, in a sense, I already knew. Yet it was difficult to recognise because it was connected to feelings of loss and shame which take time to emerge. In this sense, I learnt that what shaped my own impulse towards fixing experience within rigid typologies was not my *distance* from the spiritual dimensions of Zionism, but the *closeness* of my ambivalent connection. Yet in appreciating how difficult these ambiguous connections between Judaism and Zionism *felt*, I began to sense how other students might be struggling with the shadows of their politically committed performances. And it was also only as a consequence of undergoing this very personal, yet also theoretically, reflexive practice that I started to be able to *listen* to the experiences of students in their own words.

Naming responsibilities: acknowledging singularity and differences

This chapter shows how I developed practices of ethical relationality in this ethnography, by which I unsettled my desire for authoritative understanding and attended to ambivalent experiences. This, I have suggested, requires self-reflective work in order to open up as a *question*, the qualities of my closeness and distance from my research subjects. I have also been highlighting the centrality of language within this process, suggesting that my uses of theoretical, abstract dichotomies could work to distance, dominate and defend in these relationships, so that part of the process of

83

developing an ethical ethnography is to cultivate alternative languages responsive to plural, complex experiences. Yet, claiming a stance that withholds *judgement* in relation to very real injustices, of violence, suffering and oppression, raises important questions of responsibility. How, for what, and to whom am I responsible as an ethnographer as I research this politics of Palestine-Israel? How are my differential responsibilities shaped by the forms of power that contour Palestine-Israel politics within and beyond the campus?

In November 2011, the University A Israel Society, with the support of UJS, organised an event with an organisation of bereaved Israeli and Palestinian parents. Entitled 'Pro-Israeli? Pro-Palestinian? Just Peace', the event sought to neutralise campus tensions by appealing to the higher value of the shared humanity of suffering victims, on both sides of the conflict. Members of the Palestine Society boycotted the event, accusing the organisers of practicing 'normalisation' by framing dialogue between 'equals' as morally obligatory in a way that denied the realities of political inequality. For Justin, this incident epitomised all that was wrong with pro-Palestinian activists. Angrily, he condemned their claims regarding inequalities between Israelis and Palestinians as irrelevant to the context of *campus* politics,

> "We try to bring the human in to the conflict, not only to give fair representation of the conflict but also to bring it back down to a level where *we* understand, *we aren't the ones oppressing*... you know this is a *mutual* conflict, and they talk about symmetry - this is campus."

Justin's response invoked an important critique of forms of public rhetoric which ignore geographical and generational distinctions between political actors (Rothberg 2011). However he also conflated this with a claim for the symmetry of the campus. In this way, Justin invoked the values of humanism to insist on a *depoliticised* understanding of Palestine-Israel politics within this setting.[52] My approach in this thesis is different. I claim that it is important to explore how power relations shaping British campus politics *differ* from the complex dynamics in the Middle East, and this includes attending to *particular* asymmetries within local contexts. In my ethnography, this required attention to the asymmetries in my own relationships with students, who were carrying very different inheritances within this differentiated political field. With this approach, I also question Justin's categorical refusal of any implication with Israeli oppression. Implicit in

---

[52] Here I draw on Michael Rothberg's (2011) discussion of the ethics of public responses to Israel's offensive in Gaza in 2008-9, discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

this circumscription of a non-culpable 'we' is a sense that ethical responsibility is confined to the intention and effects of an *individual's* actions. This notion of the autonomous moral self was demonstrably contradicted by Justin's own expressions of attachment, care and commitment in relation to Palestine-Israel. As such, I approach questions of responsibility from an emphasis on relational subjects, shaped by particular, heteronomous demands of past and present others, including past, present and future incarnations of ourselves (Das 2010). Turning to my relationship with Saniyah, the Palestine Society President at University B, who was strongly opposed to 'dialogue activities', I will develop an ethics of ethnographic responsibility grounded in the singularity*s* of embedded relationships.

My early interactions with Palestine Society members at University B differed markedly from University A, reflecting a less intense politics of surveillance, and the recent exclusion of more 'hard-line' socialist activists from the society. When my fieldwork began, Nuha was helping to organise the Palestine Society at this university. She responded warmly to my introductory email with; "I'd love to help out with your project". Over coffee, she invited me to attend the Society's small, informal committee meetings without asking about my relations with NUS or probing my personal background. At the beginning of the new academic year, Saniyah took over from Nuha on the committee. She was an undergraduate student from a Palestinian family who lived locally. Unlike Nuha she wore a headscarf and carried a keffiyeh in her handbag, ready to wear. Saniyah also shifted the tone of committee meetings, rather than treating them as a collaborative enterprise, her style was energetic and assertive. This was also reflected in her more categorical political position; Saniyah opposed, in principle, the 'dialogue' activities being initiated on this campus. Although I had anticipated a re-negotiation of my position, Saniyah took my friendly relationships with Nuha as our starting point, inviting me to continue attending meetings and laughing when I asked permission one too many times. As such, I continued to be included in the Palestine Society's internal activities, which often involved strategising against the Jewish Society.

In December 2011, toward the end of my fieldwork Saniyah and I met in a quiet cafe close to the campus after a committee meeting. We sat facing each other at a small table, drinking tea, for over two hours. I was touched that Saniyah seemed happy to spend the afternoon with me. Early in our conversation, I asked Saniyah if she would tell me a little about her family background. She responded immediately in her Northern British accent, finishing my request, offering to tell me, "*the* history". The ease with which Saniyah began to share her family history and the certainty of her narrative voice, gave me the sense that this was a familiar process to her. Beginning from her

grandparent's expulsion from their village in 1948, Saniyah's story was articulated through particular tropes, metaphors and an established temporal order which, as I had learned from various Palestine Society events, contribute to an established script of Palestinian nationhood. Saniyah indexed her grandparents and parents lives to the key dates in the history of the nation, and drew on Palestinian exilic imagery of carefully preserved house keys and lost orange groves.[53] In these ways, as Saniyah recounted her family's history of dispossession, suffering and exile, I sensed that she was engaging in an intensely political performance.

Veena Das writes of crystallised narratives and public performances of historical suffering as contributions to projects of nationhood. As I listened to Saniyah's narrative, her *mode* of speaking family history felt familiar to me. At the point of my final meeting with Saniyah, in December 2011, I had not spoken with any research participants about my own familial connections with Palestine-Israel or the Holocaust. However, a few weeks previously, I had felt overwhelmed by this silence during a supervision meeting; I cried as I narrated my nana's story of suffering and exile, a narrative that I knew by heart. Somehow in repeating this story I had felt possessed by a voice that wasn't my own, my tears felt like a political performance of victimhood rather than an expression of grief. Drawing on the available moral language of righteous victims and evil perpetrators seemed to channel some kind of political authority, which afterwards left me feeling intensely uncomfortable with my own actions. As Saniyah continued with this established script, she made explicit her socialisation into a language which carried a political function, "*as a Palestinian* you're very much told from a very young age about everything that happened." In this way, she highlighted a pressure to take up this script and to fully embody this political cause (Long 2006).

Veena Das also directs our attention to the *register* of political language, suggesting that we should explore people's *relation* to fixed and frozen narratives, as well as the ways in which experiences excluded by narratives can be *shown* (Das 2007: 10). As I listened, Saniyah moved into a different register, expressing the transmission of traumatic aspects of her family's historical experiences, which were not assimilated by this political script. She situated her own commitment to political action as a response to *unspoken* aspects of violence, suffering and grief communicated by her mother. Describing her mother's "gruesome" and "horrendous" childhood experiences as "quite a repressed thing", she told me that,

---

[53] House keys, kept by many Palestinian families after they were dispossessed of their homes, have become a prominent symbol of the Palestinian right of return.

"My mum, we'll watch on the news or something happens, she always instantly starts crying because she knows what it was like. She knows a hundred percent having her brother killed - she knows what the pain was like."

In response, Saniyah distinguished her own activism from this traumatised 'stuck' relationship to past and ongoing violence,

"I think the difference from my mum's, my mum's thoughts on Palestine which are very like 'look at the horrendousness that's going on, how can they do that blah, blah, blah'. For me it was more university… when I realised, actually there's no point sitting around and dwelling on what happened and how awful the situation is, I already know it's awful, let's try and do something about it."

Saniyah had never been to Palestine herself and she described her sense of distance from life in Palestine, including the pleasure that she took in "sitting down with someone who's Palestinian and talking about it, even someone Palestinian now that lives there, or *seeing* it". She articulated this sense of distance, when I asked her about the prospect of her visiting Palestine,

"For me it's kind of almost the same as somebody else from the outside going in [to visit Palestine], my family don't live there any more, um there are some relatives but I don't know where they would be now, so I don't know how I would find them. I think it would probably be very much like going there with a very pro-Palestinian supporter, we'd probably have the same reaction in the human rights sense."

This sense of distance from a connection with Palestine as a homeland seemed to shape her performance of a categorical political position. Saniyah's appeal to "the human rights" sense of Palestinian politics was a continuous theme throughout our conversation. Growing up in Britain as a second generation Palestinian immigrant, Saniyah had inherited her parents' struggles with assimilatory, hostile British culture, including the surveillance of her father, an activist journalist. As a consequence, Saniyah explained, her mother disapproved of her activism, maintaining a resigned wariness with regard to "anything that branches out to British civilians". In response, Saniyah had committed to a rationalistic, universalising form of politics. She repeatedly explained

that she grounded Palestine Society politics, not in the particularities of faith or historical experience but rather in the incontrovertible facts of human rights principles as "no-one can argue with that". She described how she had learnt over time, not to get angry or over-emotional because "that's the reaction *they* want", instead she played the civil game, learning to discipline her emotions as a form of empowerment,

> "That's why I think dialogue is very negative in some senses because you're just gonna get angry and it's not gonna be productive and then when you get angry it becomes emotional and when it's emotional, it's *not logical,* so you, you need to try and maintain your thoughts and everything and not get very personal about it."

As Saniyah articulated these different dimensions of her experience, I felt connections between us. I felt this in her expression of a familial inheritance of suffering, which was somehow only *speakable* within distorting cultural scripts. I felt how our encounter was embedded in our relationships with absent figures; Saniyah's murdered uncle, her unknown relatives in Palestine, my nana and her first husband, so many ghosts that we brought to this politics.[54] I also felt connected in relation to her sense of distance and dislocation from her 'own' home, traditions and people. And I felt resonances with her response to her family's migrant experience in Britain, which had shaped her political embodiment of *depersonalised* rationality, mirroring my own striving for neutrality in approaching this ethnography. So when, shortly before we parted, Saniyah asked me for the first time about my interest in the project, I instinctively began to speak in a personal register. However, as soon as I told Saniyah that I was from a 'Jewish background', she fell silent. As she leaned back in her seat, I felt something shift between us. I had been participating in this Palestine Society for many months; they had invited me to attend their small group meetings, complained and strategised about the Jewish Society in front of me. In all this time, Saniyah had not *recognised* my name as Jewish. I began to elaborate, describing my family as 'left-wing, not Zionist'. Looking away, she spoke sharply, 'but how could you be left-wing *and* Zionist?' And though the sharpness of her words expressed Saniyah's rigid refusal to engage with the complexities of Zionism, this was not a question to which I felt entitled to respond. I could *not* ask Saniyah to attend to these ambiguities, to do so would

---

[54] Avery Gordon (2008) develops a sociology of ghosts and haunting in order to attend to the affective ways in which aspects of repressed or unresolved loss and violence become present to us. She describes herself as developing a language which transcends fixed distinctions between past and present, present and future, knowing and not knowing.

reproduce some kind of hierarchy. And so it turned out that this was our last meeting. When I subsequently emailed Saniyah, I received no reply.

My encounter with Saniyah that afternoon had prompted me to push for greater intimacy between us. Listening to her speak of loss and suffering, her mother's pain, the ghostly, demanding figures of absent relatives and traces of injustices, I wanted to connect our experiences. In particular, I wanted to tell her about my nana's story of fleeing the Nazis and travelling to Palestine in the 1940s.[55] Somehow, it felt possible to ignore Saniyah's commitment to a dichotomised moral reality, which she had articulated firmly in her rejection of dialogue,

> "you can't have two agendas, you have one and that's all it is...that's why I won't get involved because I think I wouldn't want to misrepresent myself, or saying that I'm all for fairness or let's dialogue when I don't believe it."

In beginning to speak, I closed my ears to these words. Yet I was quickly stopped in my dialogical ambitions by Saniyah's response to me. Her rigid denunciation of Zionism seemed to warn me that this was not the place to explore the knots of our shared territory of memory (Rothberg 2011). Within this ethnography, Saniyah's silence raised important ethical questions. How was I responsible as I participated in, and then began to interpret, this limit to discourse, dialogue and recognition in our relationship?

In addressing these difficult questions, I begin by observing various problems with my too-quick *identification* with Saniyah's experience. This limited my acknowledgement of our differential positions within the asymmetrical politics of Palestine-Israel, a disavowal which was problematic precisely because I was *responsible* for attending to these differences. There were parallels in our struggles to negotiate the politicisation of familial histories and in our sense of demands shaped through our relationships with suffering, spectral figures. Yet in the context of the cultural politics of Palestine-Israel, the ways in which we were situated, in relation to these past and present sufferings, were very different.

What was the *source* of my desire to connect with Saniyah by sharing my own familial narrative of suffering, dislocation and victimhood? In the moment of my disclosure to Saniyah, I described my family as 'Jewish, left-wing but not Zionist', adding that I had 'grown up outside the Jewish community', and had 'not been involved in

---

[55] My language here, which is drawn from my research diary, reflects the ways in which I was articulating my family history of trauma here within a politicised script. In Chapter Six, I describe participating in a student Israel-Palestine Forum meeting in which we explicitly discussed how the verb 'to flee' indexed a politicised position within historiographies of Palestine-Israel.

Palestine-Israel politics as an undergraduate student'. Yet my generic account left so much unsaid. It enabled me to disavow my complex connections with the violence of Zionism. In this encounter, I continued shameful silences rather than allowing myself to be haunted by the unsettling disturbances of my implication with these ongoing pasts (Gordon 1997; Hohenlohe 2011). In this sense my effort to connect my victimhood with Saniyah's was somehow an attempt at my own redemption. Rather than responding to our differentiated empirical history, my desire to share a vicarious identification with victimhood here worked as a kind of *superficial* working-through that kept my virtuous identity intact (Rothberg 2011; Hohenlohe 2011; Rose 1998).

In order to recognise why Saniyah could not and should not be responsible for alleviating my unacknowledged shame, it is necessary to re-politicise the context of our *asymmetrical* relationship. While Saniyah and I shared familial histories of exile and assimilation in Britain, we were shaped by our different generational situation within these migrant histories, and by racialised hierarchies of belonging within British civil life. This difference was expressed by Saniyah as she described how people would invoke the accusation of terrorism against her,

> "People shout at you... you know really hostile and people that aren't even Israeli being very hostile and saying that there's terrorists... [so that] you start to get a bit more of a hard shell and you start to be a bit more reserved and with people that you talk to and less open about the situation."

This was connected to a second asymmetry; the differential public recognition of our inherited cultural narratives of injustice and suffering. During the course of my fieldwork, I had come to an uneasy recognition of the ways in which the sacralisation of the Holocaust within British public memory was *mobilised* as a source of power within Palestine-Israel politics. As I discuss further in Chapter Five, within student politics, a moral representation of the Holocaust as ontologically unique was connected to a competitive politics of victimhood. This powerfully proscribed what could be spoken in relation to entangled empirical histories of Jewish and Palestinian suffering.[56] In this sense, I needed to question my desire to invoke my familial connection to the Holocaust as trauma within *this* political context of my relationship with Saniyah. I needed to consider the effects of invoking the Holocaust within an unequal politics of memory

---

[56] This dynamic is described by Michael Rothberg who writes, 'Working through the implications and particularities of genocides needs to be separated from a discursive sacralisation of the Holocaust that legitimates a politics of absolutism' (Rothberg 2011: 540).

shaping Palestine-Israel.[57] As Michael Rothberg and Judith Butler have highlighted, within Western post-imperial democracies, Palestinians are *beginning* from a subjugated position in the struggle to render their experiences of suffering visible and grievable (Rothberg 2011; Butler 2006). Joanna Long has explored this in relation to the lived experiences of Palestinian students in Britain, describing the pressures on students to *embody* a nation which has been subject to discursive and physical erasure (Long 2006).

As Saniyah expressed to me, she had *inherited* a responsibility to expose these injustices in a way that was incompatible with an insistence on *mutual recognition* of Jewish and Palestinian suffering. In this context, my desire to connect by sharing my own *narrative of victimhood* reproduced a dynamic of comparison *as* appropriation or competition (Rothberg 2011). If I was to speak ethically to Saniyah of our histories, it would need to be in way that was also true to *empirical* history. I would need to risk questions of my implication with physical and symbolic violence against Palestinians, in an indeterminate sense my own inherited responsibility, which also connected me with Saniyah in more troubling ways.

The political asymmetries shaping my relationship with Saniyah also put into question the ethics of my *identification* with Saniyah's experience of dislocation. Saniyah's sense of alienation from Palestine seemed to mirror my own feelings of marginality in relation to Judaism and Zionism. Yet, Saniyah's dislocation was caused by the continued violence of the Israeli State. When I asked Saniyah if she had thought about travelling to Palestine, she paused and sighed. Explaining that it was "a goal of mine to try and go there... but whether I'd be let in is another matter", Saniyah told me how her Palestinian "family name" was now known to the Israeli state, after her sister, a journalist, had visited. She continued,

> "So I don't know how that would affect my going in... so it's difficult, it's a lot harder than people make out whereas when you see someone who is, like, Israeli and they just get to go, walk straight through, it's a bit heart-breaking in that sense."

In this way, political realities far beyond the campus pulled us into conflict. As an exiled Palestinian, Saniyah's proudly retained familial name was also the object of ongoing

---

[57] As I discuss in Chapter Five, reflecting on my ambivalent experience of this script of Jewish victimhood helped illuminate the dynamics of aggression on campus. With Das (2007), I learned to reflect on our complex experiences of fixed cultural scripts of oppression and victimhood, as we *show* ambivalent feelings of shame and anger, which cannot be narrated.

political violence by the Israeli State. And these violent actions, as my dad had called out, were committed in my name.

It is only now as I write this, two years later, that I have started to reflect on my own implication in Saniyah's heart-break. Her words spoke to my own experiences of visiting Palestine-Israel, repressed in my account of 'not being involved' in this politics as an undergraduate. My silence reflected how my own trip to Palestine-Israel as an undergraduate had lingered as screen memories, protecting me from the political realities of the occupation. It is only now, after undergoing this fieldwork process that I can learn to remember my encounters with the realities of occupation as a back-packing student. Now I remember the visibility of the young, tanned IDF soldiers, in their Khaki uniforms, guns casually slung over their shoulders. And peering out of our hostel window from the Old City in Jerusalem one afternoon, a cordoned off area and influx of military officials interrogating civilians; a bomb scare. These moments passed me by and my blindness identified me with the very people Saniyah described who just "go, walk straight through".

In developing an ethics of responsibility in this encounter with Saniyah, I have begun to acknowledge how our relationship was embedded in singular, asymmetrical demands. This is necessary so that I can attend to the alterity and integrity of Saniyah's political stance and question the sources of my appropriative identification with her, my desire for restitution. In this sense, my responsibility to Saniyah was to cultivate a self-relation, in which I explored how the demands of my own ghostly figures shaped my engagement with her. Taking responsibility here is not about assuming *guilt* for the actions of past generations, or even my own younger self. Rather my responsibility is to reflect on how these unsettling relationships, with people, places and events, shaped my participation in this fieldwork. In this sense, I am following the advice of Avery Gordon, who writes,

> 'Making common cause means that our encounters must strive to go beyond the fundamental alienation of turning social relations into just things we know and toward our own reckoning with how we are in these stories, with how they change us, with our own ghosts.' (Gordon 2008: 21-22)

Here, I also wish to make the broader claim for the contribution of ethnography to these ethical questions. By beginning from the experiences of implicated, responsive researchers, ethnographic approaches can enhance inter-disciplinary work on the

politics of memory. For example, writing about the politics of multidirectional public memories in relation to Palestine-Israel, Michael Rothberg argues that,

> 'A radical democratic politics of memory needs to include a differentiated empirical history, moral solidarity with victims of diverse injustices, and an ethics of comparison that coordinates the asymmetrical claims of victims.' (Rothberg 2011: 526)

The central ethical question that Rothberg raises is how we can recognise the specificities of injustices and sufferings without *appropriating* those experiences.[58] Rothberg addresses this question theoretically by outlining a set of principles through which the ethics of public memory struggles can be judged. My claim is that ethnography can take us a step further in addressing his question, enabling us to attend to the situated contexts within we *struggle* to practice non-appropriative relationships. As an ethicist, Rothberg adopts an external position. In contrast, an implicated ethnographer can *show,* rather than merely describe, the ethical practices required for this 'radical' politics of memory.

Theoretical responsibilities: towards and beyond vocabularies of trauma

Throughout this chapter, I have been exploring ethical concerns in relation to practices of responsive fieldwork *and* theorising. My responsibilities in my relationship with Saniyah did not end with our encounter in that cafe; they also shaped questions about how I might *describe* that final rupture between us. This moment of turning away in silence carried wider significance for my research, pushing me to attend to the limits of dialogue and recognition in Palestine-Israel campus politics more widely. The silencing of my conversation with Saniyah seemed to express a limit to narrative and understanding, which was connected to our irreconcilable locations in this politics. We were both shaped by our connections with histories of suffering and violence. Yet in meeting at this juncture of Palestine-Israel campus politics, we could not *both* be victims.

Reflecting on my relationship with Saniyah took me into the terrain of trauma theory in two ways. First it affirmed my early intuition that contemporary Palestine-Israel politics was profoundly shaped by the historical traumas of the Holocaust and Al-

---

[58] In the context of Palestine-Israel, Rothberg highlights the risk of a transcultural appropriative act that only recognises the Palestinian plight within the iconography of the Holocaust, and a form of intergenerational appropriation, in which recognition of the past is distorted for the purposes of a present politics (ibid: 533).

Nakba. But reflecting on the silence that ended my relationship with Saniyah also connected with a psychoanalytic notion of trauma. Some kind of limiting, radically incommensurable experience (we could not *both* be victims) was instantiated in this moment of turning away. It seemed that this experience could not be reconciled within narrative speech. These two notions of trauma correlate to Dominic LaCapra's (2001) non-binary distinction between 'historical trauma' and 'structural trauma'.[59] While historical trauma connotes the realities of sufferings caused by violent events, structural trauma expresses the instability and fracturing of identity. This includes the fracturing of identity within language and is 'often figured as deeply ambivalent' (ibid: 80). In making this distinction, LaCapra commits to an ethics that carefully differentiates between 'victims', 'perpetrators' and 'bystanders' in representations of *historical* trauma (ibid: 79). Yet he also attends to trauma *as* ambivalence arising at the limit of discursive and ethical categorisation (ibid: 80). As I began to attend to the silences and violent ruptures on campus, it was this 'structural' notion of trauma that seemed illuminating. Attending to the dynamics of ambivalence could enable me to withhold judgement on the coding of innocence and guilt in Palestine-Israel politics, in order to explore how students *experience* symbolic distinctions and ambiguities. In particular, the dynamics of withdrawal or violence within campus politics seemed to be illuminated by the psychoanalytically-informed grammar of traumatic acting-out (ibid). This could be helpful as I explored passionate actions at the limit of recognition, rational understanding and symbolic representation.

Yet drawing on the vocabulary of trauma in this study raises a number of political and ethical concerns. The genealogy of trauma theory is bound up with the emergence of Holocaust studies. Here, the Nazi Holocaust has been represented as the limit case, *uniquely* problematic for representation and beyond the norms of critical interchange. As such, the centrality of the Holocaust within trauma theories implicates this scholarship with competitive memory struggles, which have significant consequences for the contemporary politics of Palestine-Israel (Hodgkin and Radstone 2003: 7). As Michael Rothberg writes, 'too much emphasis on the Holocaust is said to

---

[59] I was pointed towards this distinction by Alice Hohenlohe's study of third generation Germans' cultural memories of National Socialism. Hohenlohe helpfully develops Dominik LaCapra's traumatic realism as an alternative both to social constructionist theories of trauma and to the psychoanalytic approaches of literary scholars such as Cathy Caruth. While the former bracket ontological and ethical questions of truth and responsibility, the latter make the unbridgeable chasm between representation and traumatic experience into an ethical injunction against theorising (Hohenlohe 2011; LaCapra 2001; see also Das 2007: 102).

marginalise other traumas, or inversely, adoption of Holocaust rhetoric to speak of those other traumas is said to relativise or even deny the Holocaust's uniqueness' (Rothberg 2011: 523). In this way, applying the terminology of 'trauma' to new cases can be an appropriative act, reducing other contexts of violence to these dominant theoretical frames. Furthermore, as Veena Das has argued, 'the model of trauma and witnessing that has been bequeathed to us from Holocaust studies cannot be simply transported to other contexts in which violence is embedded into different patterns of sociality' (Das 2007: 33). Against theorists who claim that it is possible to 'bracket' ontological and ethical concerns (e.g. Alexander 2003: 92), this reveals the inherent normativity of acts of theoretical naming, which are not merely semantic but shape the world (Das 2007:206). In this sense, to draw on trauma theories in a study concerned with Palestine-Israel is to be implicated in the cultural politics that I am researching in this thesis. This requires care over my intuitive use of this terminology if I wish to resist unreflectively reproducing a competitive politics of victimhood.[60]

Veena Das (2007) also highlights another sense in which the psychoanalytically-inflected grammar of trauma, acting-out and working-through can be limiting. In applying this psychological language, developed in the context of psychoanalytic practice, to the collective institutional life of university campuses, I risk converging individual experience and collective processes in deterministic ways. This is a critique which Das levels at trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth, as she writes that,

> 'the idea that the re-enactment of the past at the collective level is a *compulsion to repeat* seems to short-circuit the complex ways in which we might understand how particular regions of the past are actualized' (Das 2007: 102).

Das claims that we need to attend to the ways in which experiences at the limit of representational language are expressed through different mediums in everyday life, including through collective practices and the ordinary work of singular relationships. This suggests an alternative to the sedimented, dichotomising tropes of unconscious 'repetition' versus 'working through', as we can attend to the plural ways in which violence is produced and lived *with* as part of the processes of ordinary life (Das 2007: 103).

---

[60] Here, I learnt from Marta Kolankiewicz's illuminating discussion of the ways in which scholarly notions of 'cultural trauma' risk converging sociological analysis with dominant nationalist narratives in the context of Polish public memory (Kolankiewicz's 2013).

These are the ethical concerns informing my search for theoretical vocabularies able to illuminate the work of past and present violence within the campus politics of Palestine-Israel. In particular, this leads me to develop a vocabulary that is attentive to the presence of that which hovers at the limits of speech and understanding yet without *assuming* repetition and or pejorative acting out. Rather than beginning with the language of trauma in my research, I attend to the ways in which the violence of Palestine-Israel is expressed, and lived with, in campus life. In Chapter Five, I explore the processes by which violence ignites within the university itself, by developing a notion of tragic praxis. Reflecting on the tragic aspects of these encounters opens up a conversation with helpful aspects of trauma theory. As a historically-evolving genre, tragic action *presents* us with the haunting presence of the past (Critchley and Kesselman 2012). This emphasis on the sensual unsettlement of linear temporality has been helpfully opened up by trauma theorists who challenged the emphasis within social memory studies on *constructions* of the past from the present (Hohenlohe 2011: 58). Yet notions of the tragic are not implicated in the same way with what Das describes as the 'dividing practices' between perpetrators and victims (Das 2007: 221). In developing a theory of ethical experience and subjectivity adequate to our violent world, Simon Critchley shows how tragic drama expresses a truth of traumatic ambiguity, resonating with our experience. Tragic subjects experience incommensurable ethical demands as grief, lamentation and rage, shaped by historical violence and a frame of war (Critchley and Kesselman 2012; Butler 2009).

By identifying tragic encounters as *one mode* for the expression of violent histories on campus, my approach here also attends to the alternative ways in which these pasts are lived within the pluralities of students' relationships. To return for a moment to the tragic ending of my relationship with Saniyah, this was not after all the end of the matter. For, while I could not demand dialogue of Saniyah, we were both embedded in other relationships, which exerted different kinds of claims over our participation in campus politics. In November 2011, I was introduced to Sahir, an international student from Palestine, studying for a Masters at University B. Soon after arriving at the university, Sahir had become involved with the student Israel-Palestine Forum, an organisation concerned with promoting discussion among the student body. Sahir was critical of Saniyah's refusal to participate in dialogue activities or to engage with the complexities of Israeli and Jewish positions. He claimed that this rigid political position was sustained *by the distance* of diasporic Palestinians who were not *living* the conflict in their everyday lives, explaining, "I *need* peace, I *need* to be able to move, it's my life." In this sense Sahir staked a claim for an alternative to Saniyah's categorical

position, which arose out of the ways in which violence was folded into his everyday life. In contrast to Saniyah, Sahir sought out conversation with me, providing the possibility for a different kind of relationship, which I explore in Chapters Six and Seven. While this did not alter my own responsibility for acknowledging Saniyah's commitments, it did reveal other demands on her political stance. In this sense our encounter revealed how this campus politics was formed through complex webs of relationships. It showed how the ethics and politics of these encounters could not be fixed in advance, but rather engaged students whose lives were shaped in singular ways by the injustices of Palestine-Israel.

Conclusion

Veena Das writes about the ethnographer's relationship to the field as 'the subject's relation to the world' and suggests, following Wittgenstein, that this is the experience of a limit (Das 2007: 4). Yet, Das insists, it is not that we are limited by our external perspective on that which we observe 'like the eye to the visual field' (ibid). Rather the reverse, we are limited by being *implicated* in experience, constituted by it. In this chapter, I have attended to the various ways in which I am *implicated* in Palestine-Israel campus politics by reflecting on the development of my imagination, language and relationships in this ethnography. Staking a position which insists on the intimate entanglements of thought and experience, language and life, I have traced how the aspects of my entanglements with this subject are theoretical, existential and embodied.

One key question that I have been struggling with here is how to find a theoretical language to speak of Palestine-Israel when social theory itself has been implicated with the colonial and racist violence shaping this politics. I have attended to the *appeal* of epistemic practices of abstraction, categorisation and objectification in the context of my fieldwork relationships. These liberal-enlightenment traditions, which legitimate forms of autonomous, universalistic and authoritative knowledge, reveal universities as culturally embroiled with the violent historical and epistemic projects at stake in Palestine-Israel (Gilroy 1998: 285; Rose 1998). As Gillian Rose writes, in order to question these sources of intellectual and political domination, we also need to question moralistic academic approaches which leave us sentimentally, emotionally and politically intact and to learn to cultivate ambivalence and vulnerability (Rose 1998; see also Back 2007). Yet, as Gillian Rose and Veena Das express in different ways, we must not relinquish the possibility for social theory but rather seek to develop critically reflexive languages, which strive to be responsive to unjust worlds.

A central claim in my writing here is that finding an adequate theoretical language requires personally reflective and responsive practices. Against those who *distinguish* between epistemic and confessional forms of reflexivity, I have sought to show theoretical imagining as an embodied, passionate and intersubjective process, of staking claims about and toward community. In describing the singularities of my evolving relationships with particular students, I have exposed what I learnt from them, how responding within these relationships helped me to question my inherited vocabularies and try out new theoretical languages. Here, I am also responding to calls for more democratic forms of public sociology, which seek to resist abstract, technical language in order to respond to the complexities of personal experience (Seidler 2007a). This, I suggest, is particularly important for my ethnography of *student life* in universities, which carries the potential to challenge these hierarchies at both an epistemic and institutional level. This also raises important issues in relation to the ethics of ethnographic *writing*, prompting unsettling questions of authority, vulnerability and desire within practices of authorship and reading. I will return to this key locus of ethical ethnography in the postscript, as I discuss the possibilities and limits for dialogical writing in this thesis.

An important commitment which runs through this chapter is that reaching for understanding of ourselves and others is an ethical process. At stake are questions of our responsibilities, of care and interdependency in our relationships. In this sense, as I emphasised in the introduction to this chapter, this is not *only* a methodology and theory chapter. Rather in tracing the struggles and possibilities for my ethical and political research, I have begun to develop the central concern of this thesis; to explore the possibilities for ethico-political subjectivity within democratic student life.

This prioritisation of ethical relationality within my research also brings me back full circle. It connects with Jewish philosophical traditions which prioritise deeds over belief, and which ground ethics in lived, concrete relations with others rather than abstract, Platonic or Kantian ideals. This is a Hebraic moment in Wittgenstein's efforts to return our ordinary language to us so as to enable responsiveness to experience (Seidler 2007b). It is also reflected in the history of tragedy as a form of poetry and praxis, which has been disruptive of the 'Western' philosophical tradition (Critchley and Kesselman 2012). These are resources to which I was intuitively drawn to as I struggled to find my voice as an undergraduate student, silenced by the depersonalised academic culture of Oxford philosophy. This also connects with recent work seeking to respond to Palestine-Israel by looking towards Jerusalem for ethical resources (Butler 2012). As Judith Butler carefully emphasises, the hope here is not to reproduce Jewish exclusivity, but rather, to

connect to the connections and conjunctures of East and West already within. But while these philosophical interventions are important, I will leave them here. These concerns shadow the ethnographic chapters which follow. Now I will turn my attention to the concrete relational stakes in Palestine-Israel campus politics, and attempt to reveal ethical possibilities within students' everyday lives.

Chapter Four

University Melodramas: The Claim of Reason

"The university loves to have guidelines and policies in place to back itself up... but it just becomes a bit of, as I would say in Arabic, a 'Syrian drama', which is very like [in a high pitched voice] aahhhhh! Lots of things going on but nothing much is happening."[61]

In April 2010, I began my initiation into the student politics of Palestine-Israel when I went to observe NUS National Conference. UJS and FOSIS had organised a fringe meeting entitled 'Hate Speech on Campus', which had generated intense advance publicity. I arrived early and found a seat, struck by the visual politics as audience members, marked by keffiyehs, kippahs, hijabs and clothes emblazoned with institutional affiliations and political slogans, took their places. They sat in raised chairs encircling the invited speakers, like spectators at a boxing match. There was a buzz of collective anticipation in the air as the NUS President introduced the meeting and the room fell silent. As the debate unfolded, the tone quickly became confrontational, the atmosphere tense. Audience contributions were forcefully spoken; people shouted and attempted to transgress their allotted time. Others clapped or jeered in response. In angry tones, with aggressive gestures, participants expressed a contradictory refrain; 'we must return to the facts of the Middle East and have a reasoned discussion'.

This is the first of three empirical chapters in which I explore the different modalities of Palestine-Israel politics within university campuses. In this chapter I focus on one very visible and ossified form of political engagement which, as Saniyah observed, took on the generic qualities of melodrama. As a newcomer to this student politics, I had been struck by the theatricality of the NUS fringe meeting described above, and this impression was reinforced as I began fieldwork in universities. Here, I found that the campus politics of Palestine-Israel appeared to take the form of recurrent, polarised, high profile conflicts circulating in the media, which seemed at once intensely dramatic and predictably formulaic. These were encounters which affirmed and reproduced exclusively polarised relations between student societies, flavoured by

---

[61] This comment was made by Saniyah in an interview with me in December 2011.

charged moral symbols and dichotomising language of justice and injustice, right and wrong.

In Chapter Two, I described how government, media and some elite civil society organisations framed Palestine-Israel campus politics through norms of civility and autonomy. This chapter examines the *enactment* of this liberal-democratic model within a particular campus, exploring how and why this form of politics recurred, and what the consequences were for students' ongoing relationships. I will approach this by focusing on one illustrative case; a public debate about the academic boycott of Israel, which took place at University A in January 2011. I begin by describing how this event unfolded by sacralising 'rational' discourse and demanding emotionally-constrained, reasoning publics.[62] I also show how it imposed an ahistorical temporal orientation and affirmed the authority of the British nation-state. From here, I claim that this process legitimated a specific frame for addressing questions of justice on campus, and worked to validate a potent imaginary of the exemplary Enlightenment university.

Describing my experience of this event, I will show a paradox at the heart of this sacralisation of rationality, revealing how this process counter-intuitively drew on the techniques of theatrical melodrama (Wagner-Pacifici 1986). As such, my analysis draws on literary and philosophical insights into melodrama as a modern cultural form, which thematises and responds to particular aspects of our socio-historical condition (Cavell 1996). I will suggest that, at stake in this drama, was a collective desire for moral coherence and secure boundaries, and a need to exclude excessive feelings connected with Palestine-Israel, which threatened this institutional autonomy.

I will then turn to consider the wider conditions shaping this melodrama of the Enlightenment university, showing this performance to be a response to anxieties and insecurities circulating within British higher education. Against a background of heightened uncertainty for universities threatened by post-modernism, a resurgent nationalist liberalism and marketisation, this melodrama prescribed boundaries, affirming a particular sense of the university's moral identity. I then open up questions about the unacknowledged discriminations and exclusions, produced by these seemingly neutral processes, showing how students struggled with this institution's normative demands. I will conclude by discussing how the apparent consensus produced by the

---

[62] As will become apparent, I use the term 'sacralise' here to connote the process by which a community recursively produces a foundational value, which is felt to present claims over their ongoing actions (Lynch 2012b). Drawing on Durkheim, I claim that the process of affirming the 'rational' purity of the academic community, also involves the exclusion of polluting, 'irrational' others (Durkheim 2001; Lynch 2012b). See Alexander (2006c) for a discussion of these processes in relation to the public institutions of the civil sphere.

debate unravelled over time, as the exclusions produced by this debate returned to haunt the institution. In the process, I will begin to develop some key empirical claims of this thesis; first, that this most legitimated form of liberal politics repressed troubling experiences of complexity and ambiguity, shaped by entangled histories of racism; and second, that this very act of repression revealed universities to be profoundly implicated in the politics of Palestine-Israel.

The enactment of melodrama: staging a debate on the academic boycott of Israel

In January 2011 I began my fieldwork at University A during a period of intense political activity relating to Palestine-Israel. At the end of the previous term, a Palestine Society event featuring a controversial Palestinian journalist, Abdul Almasi,[63] had received national and international media attention.[64] The speaker had been accused by members of the audience of contravening the Student Union's anti-Semitism policy. Verbal and physical aggression had ensued after one member of the audience called a Jewish student a "Nazi". The police were contacted following claims by Jewish students that they felt scared for their safety and the university authorities had investigated the conduct of the event, including its chair, with regard to these allegations. As a consequence the university had been the focus of heightened public criticism as Members of Parliament and Jewish community leaders accused the university authorities of allowing extremism and hatred into the campus.

One month later, I learnt that the Palestine and Israel Societies at University A were organising a public debate between two academics, entitled 'Academic Boycott: For or Against?' The advance publicity stated that non-members of the university must pre-register by email, a regulation prompted by the Abdul Almasi controversy, when the Palestine Society and university management had been accused of excluding Jewish journalists from the event. Paradoxically, these formalities, unusual in the context of student-organised meeting, heightened anticipation of further tensions. The stakes were also heightened by the attention of external 'counter-extremism' organisations and political bloggers, who promoted the event beyond the university.

---

[63] As discussed in Chapter One, I use pseudonyms throughout and have changed details of events and media reports in order to protect students' anonymity.

[64] The next chapter is focused on a detailed account of this event, which I identify as a 'tragic' mode of engagement with Palestine-Israel. See Chapter One for an explanation of the non-chronological ordering of these chapters.

On the evening of the debate, I arrived at the venue half an hour early, nervously expectant and keen to secure my place. The large theatre was nearly empty as I wandered freely in. The theatricality of the setting was striking; a semi-circular auditorium with upstairs balcony, raised stage fringed by blue velvet curtains and two wooden tables prominent against the blackness of the back-stage area. As I pondered the dilemma of where to sit, I began to sense the politicisation of space within this enclosed setting, an intuition later confirmed by a Palestine Society member, Yusra, 'At some events you'll have people from different sides sat on different sides of the room'. An elderly man wearing a kippah was seated near the front of the room, a group of Asian students in a far corner, and I recognised a UJS officer speaking animatedly to someone near the exit. Selecting what I hoped to be a neutral, inconspicuous seat towards the back of the middle section, I overheard others negotiate their positioning as they entered the room. Two young men decided to head upstairs to the balcony where I could glimpse arms resting on the overhanging ledge. One woman said to another, 'I'd like an escape route' as they moved towards the back wall.

The four hundred and fifty person capacity theatre started to fill-up, buzzing with the sounds of people talking, greeting each other with kisses on cheeks and exaggerated hugs. I noticed skin tones, curly hair, kippahs, black, white and patterned hijabs and many keffiyehs. Each small, more or less malleable bodily marker carried the heightened significance of a potential affiliation in this politicised setting. In a later conversation with me, Sadiq affirmed how these sartorial signs inscribed bodies with pre-determined political positions as he cautiously explained,

> 'It was interesting to see how many um like Jewish people, you could see the Jewish people, a lot of them were wearing the kippah and things... not that you can say all of them were Jewish but I'm not - there were clearly Jewish, wearing Jewish er clothes, who were there.'

National student politicians entered the room, including the NUS Vice President responsible for Student Welfare, who began joking with a small group of students. Behind me a middle aged security guard in a red uniform stood expressionless, hands folded, by the door. In the left hand aisle, a student was setting up a camera directed

toward the stage. The video was subsequently posted online, supplementing the university's official audio recording of the debate.[65]

The spectators hushed as three white men emerged onstage and took their seats in front of microphones. Stage right was Dr Pro, dressed in a black polo-shirt and a black jacket, complementing his black hair and stubble. To his immediate left sat Professor Anti, bald and bespectacled, in a light grey jacket and white shirt. These dark and light figures waited tensely for a few moments, appearing as spotlighted characters against the minimal black background. I sat silently in the audience, struck by this visual contrast, experiencing an aspect of melodrama described by Robin Wagner-Pacifici who notes 'the importance of such markers as clothing' (1986: 282) and by Peter Brooks who describes motifs of lightness and darkness in melodrama's sensual construction of moral connotation (Brooks 1995).

The adjudicator of the debate, Professor Chair,[66] was seated behind a separate table at the edge of the stage. Sadiq later explained to me that the university authorities had specifically requested this senior academic, a specialist in a seemingly unrelated aspect of European politics, to chair the debate. Like the umpire described by Clifford Geertz in his account of the melodrama of the Balinese cockfight, it seemed 'only exceptionally well-trusted, solid, and, given the complexity of the code, knowledgeable citizens perform this job' (Geertz 1993: 424). And, as Geertz described, the role of this apparently 'neutral' figure turned out to be pivotal to the enactment of this melodrama. In a plummy English accent, Professor Chair's opening remarks drew attention to the visual dynamics of performance and surveillance in this spectacle, "I'm delighted to see so many of you here. It is a deceptively large theatre and quite intimate so we can see you just as easily as you can see us".

Affirming the ground-rules

Sitting upright and looking directly at the audience, Professor Chair adopted a paternalistic tone as he opened the drama by instating tolerance, respect and listening as the procedural bedrock of academic debate,

---

[65] I have drawn on these multi-media resources in my account. The public availability of these recordings illustrates the self-conscious circulation and surveillance of students' Palestine-Israel activities beyond campuses.

[66] I have adopted 'Dr Pro', 'Professor Anti' and 'Professor Chair' as pseudonyms in order to highlight how these figures functioned as abstract, depersonalised signifiers of moral valences in this drama.

"A shared will to debate rests of course on a common commitment to mutual respect as we discuss and argue. And I'm sure in fact that we would all believe that mutual respect is what the region actually needs more of. So in our debate this evening, I would like to ask everyone here to show toleration, to show respect, and to listen to what is being said. As chair I will rule out of order heckling or shouting. We are here in an academic institution to engage in serious debate, we will want to listen to the views being put. Otherwise there's no point in having the debate. So mutual respect means toleration, listening and I repeat no heckling or shouting... So if we respect each other's opinions I look forward to a very worthwhile debate."

He continued by firmly outlining the rules of engagement; each speaker to be given an "assiduously" timed fifteen minutes to make their case followed by "a short five minute rebuttal of each other's position", at which point short audience questions and contributions would be solicited. Again, Clifford Geertz illuminates this process as he highlights the centrality of these *shared* conventions to the success of this genre, 'Surrounding all this melodrama...is a vast body of extraordinarily elaborate and precisely detailed rules' (Geertz 1993: 423). Like Geertz's cockfight umpire, Professor Chair carefully circumscribed the anticipated passion, laying down the civic certainty of academic law. As the drama developed, these civil rules were tacitly affirmed by the protagonists' sporting gestures, politely thanking the event organisers and prefixing their heated rhetoric with "learned friend" and "colleague".

Establishing the structure of heightened agonism and demanding communicative rationality from those present, Professor Chair introduced a central paradox of this *academic* melodrama; rationality itself was sacralised via a highly theatrical, aesthetic process. His opening comments concluded by skilfully negotiating this very tension, with a technique repeated through the debate. Explaining the practicalities of audience participation, Professor Chair dryly commented, "Surely I'm not expected to come round you like some kind of morning TV discussion programme inviting you to speak on Jeremy Kyle". The audience chuckled appreciatively as he ironised the dramatic format, prompting the first of many self-conscious moments within the ensuing drama.

Personalising moral dichotomies, elevating rational expertise

Restating the binary choice before us, "This house believes in an academic boycott of Israel", Professor Chair introduced the opposing protagonists. The sartorial contrast between these two academics was now supplemented by knowledge of their contrasting

105

disciplinary expertise; Dr Pro, a specialist in the history of empire and imperialism at University A versus Professor Anti, a consultant medic. Listing the multiple qualifications and elite institutional affiliations of each character, Professor Chair highlighted the evenness of the impending match between these two intellectual heavyweights. Introduced as basic symbols, constituted by their institutional, disciplinary affiliations and position on 'the motion', the protagonists sustained this one-dimensional role all evening. By withholding any expression of personal complexity, each embodied the archetypes necessary for the audience to commit to their oppositional coding of hero and villain. This reflects Peter Brooks' description of melodramatic characters as, 'persons who indeed have no psychological complexity but who are strongly characterized' (Brooks 1996: 16). With the depersonalised academic credentials of both parties established, these characters together embodied forms that enabled the sacralisation of rationality to proceed.

With the prologue complete, Professor Chair again inserted a brief ironic interlude. Describing Professor Anti's elite, rival institution as "some other nearby university", he welcomed him "nevertheless". The audience converged in loud ripples of laughter at this subtle deflation of identity politics, as sporadic clapping grew into extended applause. Seconds later, there was silence and the air turned serious as Professor Chair set his watch down before him, and gestured for Dr Pro to take command of the stage.

Commencing struggles for 'universal' values: scientific progress and academic freedom

Leaning forward, shoulders hunched, Dr Pro's gaze shifted from his notes to the audience as he read out the logical steps of his carefully crafted argument, "I'll say what the academic boycott is, why it addresses the right target, why it has a strong rationale, is efficient, high impact and potentially effective". The call for boycott, he explained, is an exemplary civil and democratic social movement, transparently organised and opposed to violence and racism. Initiating the agonistic *and* integrative structure of the unfolding plot, Dr Pro then pre-emptively rebutted his opponent's arguments and announced the debate as pivoting around "shared values" of universalism, scientific progress and academic freedom,

> "The first objection that often gets raised by the nay-saying anti-boycotters - they
> say you're guilty of double standards, you're guilty of singling out Israel and
> really what lurks behind what you do is anti-Semitism... [But] The standards of

judgement are not those of anti-Semites, the standards of judgement are those of the universal categories of international law and human rights that we can all understand...

... The second main objection is that you boycotters, you oppose academic freedom and the advancement of science. In fact boycotters are *more committed and more serious about academic freedom and the advancement of science* than this highly selective charge maintains. Far from being against academic freedom, we want and aim to achieve academic freedom."

Dr Pro continued by emphasising that the key concern of the academic boycott campaign was the moral integrity of academic institutions. Carefully, he explained that Israeli *institutions,* as opposed to individual academics, are the legitimate targets of the boycott movement, because they have failed to live up to the requirements of academic institutional *autonomy*, and are polluted by their "ideological and material *complicity*" with the Israeli colonial regime. This institutional corruption was, he continued, intrinsically connected to the distortion of universal knowledge; as institutional goals were bent to serve Zionism, so the production of knowledge was inflected by racism. Dr Pro raised his voice forcefully to identify himself as representing "a movement based on freedom and democracy, speaking in the name of law and right". Yet he also contained his anger within the civil formalities of the debate format, "So surely Mr Chairman, ladies and gentleman, this house should *indeed*, at least consider supporting a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. Thank you."

As he sat back, the silence was punctuated by appreciative applause, which gradually morphed into slower staccato clapping by the core supporters. These bursts of applause were repeated after each subsequent speech, their rhythm and length acquiring heightened meaning, signifying levels of pre-determined support for each side. As Sadiq later described to me,

"You can tell from the beginning of the event, the claps for the 'for' and the claps for the 'against', so it was quite clear that there were a lot more people that were already opposed to the motion in that room."

By emphatically validating universalism, scientific knowledge, academic freedom and institutional autonomy, Dr Pro had set the stage for the ensuing drama in which each party struggled to embody these values and to portray their opponent as polluting threats. Professor Anti had been silent during this speech, looking fixedly away from his

opponent, visibly containing his anger as his hand cupped his chin and covered his mouth. Now, he came to life, leaning forward, he opened by categorically asserting his moral antipathy to Dr Pro, "I regard the academic boycott as completely pernicious, immoral and destructive". Staking an immediate claim to the value of scientific rationality, Professor Anti began by invoking his professional medical status, fundamentally concerned with sustaining human life,

> "I personally know that a cessation of links and grants with Israel would first of all have an immediate and direct effect...we're talking about direct disadvantage in a whole range of, not only biomedical conditions, including cancer, but also cardiovascular, gastrointestinal but also prosthesis and computing..."

With this prelude, he staked his claim to the symbolic core of this debate. Connecting humanitarianism, universal knowledge and scientific advancement as intersecting constituents of academic freedom, he articulated the Enlightenment imaginary of the university, which came to dominate the drama. Like Dr Pro, he *also* affirmed academic institutional *autonomy* and decried the boycott movement for threatening its sanctity; the very demand that Israeli universities take a political position in relation to their national government was, he argued, a corruption of their neutrality. In categorical terms he rejected Dr Pro's equation of silence with collusion and appealed to a *logic of consistency* to advance his argument,

> "We're in University A today; what is the attitude of University A towards any political event that's going on in the world? During the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, what was University A's attitude? I have no idea; I don't want to know because it is not the job of institutions to have political views."

Continuing to appeal to a universalistic logic, Professor Anti then mobilised the notorious argument 'why is Israel singled out?' Appealing to an assumed 'anti-war' sentiment among this university audience, he claimed that a consistent pro-boycott position would need to support boycotts of the United States, France, and the United Kingdom itself, "Are we going to boycott... the United Kingdom for the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan? Maybe we should be boycotting ourselves? No." However, while Professor Anti briefly invoked the resonance with anti-Jewish boycotts in Nazi Germany, he explicitly desisted from charging his opponents with anti-Semitism. Rather than mobilising an argument grounded in 'partial' claims relating to Jewish historical

experience, he stuck rigidly to a universalistic, ahistorical logic. In singling out Israeli academic institutions as uniquely complicit with their government's actions, the boycotters, he argued, had transgressed the *logical* and *moral* "universality principle, which is crucial to academic freedom".[67] The pace of Professor Anti's phrasing accelerated and gained momentum as he brought his counter-offensive to its climax,

> "I believe that the boycott,.. is completely pernicious, completely immoral and completely destructive...the boycott demonises and ostracises, it antagonises, it polarises, it increases hatred and it reduces understanding...I call on everyone to reject the terrible idea of an academic boycott."

Enacting the prefigured plot

As the speakers' statements drew to a close, I was struck by how neatly their pre-prepared speeches had intersected as logical arguments, mirroring, rebutting and even pre-empting each other's rhetoric, as if crafted by the same pen. It seemed that Dr Pro and Professor Anti were fully prepared for the twists and turns of the script that followed. So too, it emerged, were the members of the audience.

Professor Chair introduced the next act of the drama, once again, with a humorous interlude, "I must say incidentally on behalf of University A, I'm reminded of the British TV comedy programme *Yes Minister*". Inviting the audience to identify with this classically British cultural institution and tacitly assuming a shared national sentiment, Professor Chair continued,

> "*You'll* remember in this *Yes Minister* programme, Sir Humphrey, the senior civil servant in the ministry, explained to the rather, er, inept politician that the reason why Britain has nuclear weapons is because of France."

The audience began to laugh as he added, "so the idea that we should er boycott France, I must say, let's leave that open to another debate." In this way, Professor Chair drew an audience of 'Brits' together in subtle identification with an acceptable nationalism. This moment of comic relief prompted ripples of laughter from the knowing audience, which gradually died down as attention turned from the stage to the stalls.

---

[67] As I go on to discuss, this exemplified the ways in which this melodramatic frame circumscribed claims of the past that were incompatible with 'neutral', 'rational' procedures.

Just like the onstage protagonists, individuals in the audience now took on depersonalised political positions. As Professor Chair called for audience contributions, I recognised prominent figures from the national activist scene, identifying their position on one side or the other as soon as they announced their names to the room. Microphones picked up the sound of pages rustling as contributors presented pre-prepared statements to the audience. Littered throughout these speeches were rhetorical tropes already familiar to me. As one dialogue practitioner had explained in an earlier interview with me,

> "The interesting thing about, about this conflict is...people don't in general terms talk about it, what they do is they have... a whole arsenal of weapons – words, phrases, so-called facts – some are facts, some really are facts, some are just selected in special ways, which they can use as weapons to destroy the argument of the other, and the, the aim is to win. And it's almost like playing some sort of moral ball game."

As Robin Wagner-Pacifici has suggested, this sense of inevitability is a key feature of melodrama,

> '(In) melodrama, the plot is determined. Nothing unexpected will be allowed to change the course, no character will be allowed to develop, no rapprochement, or even dialogue between the heroes and villains will be tolerated' (Wagner-Pacifici 1986: 281).

Writing in my fieldnotes after the debate, I noted how phrases such as; "Israel has the most moral army in the world", "Qassam rockets in Sderot" and "Israeli Apartheid" were mobilised as if people were reading off a pre-prepared script, generating automatic applause or booing from different sections of the audience.

Interjecting to curtail lengthy statements by two university alumni, Professor Chair balanced the 'two sides' of the debate, "We've had two contributions arguing against the motion, do we have someone arguing in favour of the motion?" Yet, while his intervention seemed 'neutral', by characterising contributions as *either* "for *or* against", this actually worked to *perpetuate* the polarised plot. As the pace of contributions picked up, the debate pivoted around the question of the alleged 'singling out' of Israel,

"What rationale can there be for singling out Israel?"

"Isn't there an issue of consistency here when the Israeli government is itself boycotting an entire peninsula?"

"Israel is being singled out because its crimes are being overlooked"

"I'd like to address the issue of singling out... boycott is a tactic."

And while these allusions to prejudicial treatment raised the historical spectre of anti-Semitism and racisms, these claims were carefully couched in terms of abstract principles of universality and consistency.

Attention then turned from the stalls to the stage, as Professor Chair invited the two leading characters to respond. Their rhetoric quickened and their pitch was raised as each sought maximum impact in their allocated minutes. Professor Anti was mid-flow when Dr Pro momentarily interjected, apparently unable to contain his passion. He was quickly and briskly reprimanded with "it's completely out of order for you to interrupt me", to the sound of audience cheering and clapping. For this one moment, the spectators were presented with the thrilling possibility that academic civility might be transgressed, the revelation of the protagonists' *real* anger and distain for each other heightening the audience's connection with the drama.[68]

Ambiguity, irony and the democratic decision

The rhetoric of Dr Pro and Professor Anti now converged around their polarised struggle to embody the moral virtues of universalism, autonomy and rationality. Yet, as the atmosphere intensified, a few audience interventions signified more complex positions amongst some of these people. A male student questioned Professor Anti about his position on the boycott movement against Apartheid South Africa. He self-consciously concluded with the words, "I'm Israeli", momentarily unsettling the splitting of the room into pro / anti Israel camps. A woman, active in national Jewish student politics, cited a UN official who had spoken against the "collective punishment" of Gazan civilians in front of a Jewish audience while *opposing* the boycott. Yet the underlying complexities expressed in these interventions seemed barely to register within the crude dichotomising structure of this debate.

Before the denouement of the melodrama, a lone female voice piped up with the last contribution from the audience, "academics shouldn't inflate their own importance,

---

[68] In Chapter Five, I explore the uncodified aggressive feelings, repressed by this melodramatic form of politics, and show how these passions re-emerged in other contexts on campus.

they shouldn't go in for gesture politics." Professor Chair jokingly responded, "Thank you for that, I must say at University A, I feel slightly uncomfortable with the denial of inflating academic egos" prompting loud laughter from the audience. In this way, in the very build up to the debate climax, the audience colluded with Professor Chair as he momentarily deflated the intensifying drama. Seconds later the atmosphere shifted again as Dr Pro and Dr Anti ratcheted up their moral rhetoric. Professor Anti was first,

> "I cannot understand how you can regard such a serious issue as a boycott which attacks the fundamentals of universal freedoms, I don't understand how that can just be called a tactic... academic freedom is paramount, dialogue is paramount."

To which Dr Pro replied,

> "You anti-boycotters, your argument is full of contradictions...we believe in freedom for everybody and science for everybody."

Having completed their parts, Dr Pro smiled while Professor Anti remained stony faced. Both leaned back in their seats, still tensely refusing to look at each other as the audience whooped, cheered and chattered to each other.

Now the apex of the democratic drama commenced as Professor Chair announced the final vote. Qualifying this process with "you are not a scientific sample", he asked the audience to raise their hands either in support or opposition to the motion. I sat, fixed in my seat, struck by the rigid binary choice this presented and the absence of any formal option to 'abstain'. The 'neutral' format of the debate had itself crystallised the polarisation of the audience, any public expression of a third position foreclosed by the fixed structure of the plot. The result was quickly announced as the room now divided between loud cheers and stony silence. It was a victory for opponents of boycott, an outcome which Sadiq later insisted had been apparent from the outset. As Professor Chair thanked the two speakers and commended the audience on their "good behaviour", Palestine Society supporters joined their opponents in polite, civil applause. Within seconds the stalls filled with noise as the audience sprung back into action, busily commencing the post-show diagnostics.

Affirming the liberal university: 'A story they tell themselves about themselves' (Geertz 1993: 448)

In the immediate aftermath of this debate, the student newspaper published an article proclaiming its success. Although the event had not resolved this conflict, the newspaper suggested that, at another level, it had brought the university community together,

> 'Following recent acrimony between the Palestine and Israel societies...
> Professor Chair began Wednesday with an appeal to reason from the two sides.
> He asked the audience to sustain a spirit of "mutual respect, tolerance and calm"..."This is an academic institution and we will conduct this as an academic debate", he said... Afterwards, the organisers of the event said they were pleased by the meeting's civil discourse.'

Emphasising the context of embittered inter-societal relations on campus, the article also juxtaposed the debate with the previous term's notoriously aggressive meeting with Abdul Almasi. In contrast to the earlier ignition of violence, the paper reported the boycott debate as a 'detente'. While the event had provided a forum for the expression of 'the diverse views provoked by this issue', overall it was proclaimed as a triumph for civility and reason.

A key claim that I make in this chapter is that this very visible mode of engagement with Palestine-Israel was fundamentally concerned with affirming the identity of the modern, liberal university. While, on the surface, the academic boycott constituted an agonistic, polarised conflict, in effect it produced an idealised imaginary of the university itself. As Dr Pro and Professor Anti each struggled to embody moral virtue and to demonstrate the immorality of the other, they did so according to *shared* values. What emerged in the process of the academic boycott melodrama were *shared* investments in the idealised university among actors and audience. As each party sought to represent themselves as the authentic embodiment of rationality, autonomy and civility, what was at stake was their membership of a university community identified with these values.[69]

---

[69] See Wagner-Pacifici and Hall (2012); Delanty (2011) and Reed (2006) for theoretical expositions of this ideal-type of conflict. There are strong resonances here with Simmel's (1955) account of integrative work of conflict between oppositional parties and, in Fraser's (2008) terms, we can interpret this as an attempt by the university to impose a process of 'normal justice'. In addition, Jeffrey Alexander has made the claim, which I question in this thesis, that this

In the drama of the debate, the participants' commitments to universal rationality were communicated in the propositional content, embodied practices and agreed conventions of actors and audience. From the moment that Professor Chair authoritatively expressed the contractual ground-rules for the meeting, this debate circumscribed the *form* and so the content of this political process. With gestures to 'learned friends' and 'the house', which indexed the practice of academic debate to parliamentary politics, Dr Pro and Professor Anti exemplified liberal democratic civility. The main actors and audience members carefully presented their 'public' selves by indicating their position on the motion, their professional credentials and academic affiliations. Only these markers of their public identities were considered relevant, all expressions of partial attachments and personal feelings were tacitly silenced.

The sacralisation of this *rational* community was also expressed in the legitimation of particular discursive practices for expressing justice claims. Arguments were presented within the logical bounds of consistency, universality and principled deductions, while the expression of visceral, intense affects were carefully regulated. As Charles Hirschkind (2011) has explored, these discursive practices, which discipline and reject the sensual, visceral and affective dimensions of claims-making, have roots in the Kantian enlightenment (see also Seidler 2007b). As the boycott debate revealed, these norms exert powerful claims over academic institutions, revealing how an Enlightenment inheritance is lived and practiced in the contemporary university.

Another key dynamic of this exemplary liberal debate was its imposition of an ahistorical temporal frame, and its spatialisation of the British campus as *disconnected* from the Middle East. In approaching a propositional question of justice, 'this house believes in an academic boycott of Israel', 'the house' became a transcendent site of neutral arbitration, passing judgement from an objective, ahistorical location. All claims were grounded in present principles of universal law and logic. In this way, questions of responsibility, relating to the historical entanglements of British universities with imperialism and anti-Semitism, were excluded from discussion. With his invisible whiteness and upper class English accent, Professor Chair embodied this British university's assumption of neutrality. This was exemplified in the moment that he jokingly invited the audience to identity with Britain in its rivalry with France. His joke powerfully revealed the melancholic liberalism at work here, expressed in the absolute silence regarding Britain's imperial connections with the Middle East (see Said 1993).

---

dyadic, integrative form of symbolic conflict is *the* culture structure of the democratic civil sphere (Alexander 2006c).

In these ways, while this debate was explicitly oriented towards the rights and wrongs of the academic boycott, it worked to valorise shared normative ideals of academic freedom, autonomy, universalism, scientific truth and autonomy and to denigrate complicity, partiality, tradition and dependency. Each side struggled to demonstrate that they were more committed to these shared, fundamental values than the other and to align their opponents with the opposing profanities. It was through this agonistic process that an imaginary of university institutions, and of the public belonging to them, was dramatically affirmed.

From the selection of the neutral chair to the official audio recording circulated via the university's public website, the university management legislated for and legitimated this political process. As the university debated and voted on this question of justice so the university management and student organisers sought to instantiate an ideal of the *liberal-democratic public sphere*. This was a model of moral truth as science, accessible through methods of propositional argumentation, of communicative rationality and of rule governed contractual democracy. It was, as Nancy Fraser has described, a vision of liberal democracy which regulated *how* and by *whom* claims of justice could be made (Fraser 1992). The valorisation of neutral, logical and dispassionate forms speech delineated the boundaries of the speakable, excluding claims that could not be articulated in this form. This process legitimated a depersonalised, universal subject and excluded personal claims grounded in particular cultures, traditions and historical inheritances. The participants in this process were recognised through their mutual conformity to the contract-like ground-rules, engaged in a project of mutual knowledge and understanding rooted in the shared language of rational argumentation. As such, we can see how the academic boycott debate was simultaneously a sacralisation of the modern enlightenment university and a concrete attempt to occupy the place of the liberal-democratic public sphere.

The paradox of academic melodrama: producing ironic subjects

I have been describing how the academic boycott debate at University A dramatically brought to life a vision of a liberal, Enlightenment university for a public audience. In attending to the aesthetic techniques and generic conventions at work in this process, I have begun to draw on resources developed within cultural sociology, aesthetics and theatre studies. While the participants in this event valorised practices of communicative rationality, explicitly highlighting the cool logic of their own arguments,

the debate itself was a profoundly theatrical, affective and sensual experience.[70] As theories of social performance have highlighted, the (re)production of normative cultural meanings rely on forms of aesthetic communication which do not only create cognitive understanding but also a sensation of being compelled and moved among an audience (Alexander 2006b). As such, the participants in the academic boycott debate staged a struggle over the threats to the sacred values of the university, which took the form of an 'intense emotional and ethical drama based on the manichaeistic struggle of good and evil' (Brooks 1995: 12). Yet, unlike a fictional melodrama of theatre or film, this social drama took place in the context of a normatively 'rational' institution. Here, as with other liberal-democratic institutions, such as parliamentary debates, the aesthetic techniques of the melodrama were adapted to this cultural context.

Small aesthetic details of this event made the plot visceral in ways that drew on the conventions of the melodramatic genre. For example, logical argument was expressed in a hyperbolic, heavily invested tone, which parodied more mundane pedagogic and dialogical practices of academic speech. Against the minimalist backdrop of the university theatre, clothing, facial expressions and linguistic signifiers, such as personal names, became part of what Brooks (1995: 9) describes as an 'immense construction of connotation', clarifying and crystallising the moral conflict for the audience (Wagner-Pacifici 1989: 281) The central characters of the drama and the audience members were presented as simplified archetypal figures, reduced to abstract moral positions, which left no room for evolving or complex argumentation. Most significantly, while Professor Chair explicitly presented the debate as an exercise in *learning*, appealing to the audience to "listen" to each other, the pre-prepared speeches of various protagonists enacted precisely the opposite form of engagement.

Through these dramatic techniques, and with bodily practices of cheering, clapping and jeering, the audience were encouraged to relate to characters as iconic representations of abstract moral valences. This identification with the drama was cultivated through the expression of contained moralistic emotions; participants demonstrated their pride in the righteousness of the position with which they identified and offence at the profanities of their opponents. There was, however, a complex tension

---

[70] In developing this analysis I began from Jeffrey Alexander's (2006c) insistence that, as a deeply felt moral value in democratic life, rationality is itself culturally mediated in the sense of being imbued with sentimental meanings. As discussed in Chapter One, I have brought Alexander's emphasis on 'meaning' together with aesthetic approaches, which enable me to explore how 'rational' discursive processes affect, and are affected by, sensual, material, visceral registers of intersubjective life (Bennett 2010; Hirshkind 2011).

within this process, as rationality was communicated through an aesthetic, sentimental and affective appeal.[71] It was this tension that produced the ironic twist to the debate, as actors and audience were reminded of the need to maintain a detached relationship to this political process. In this, Professor Chair's role as the neutral British arbitrator was pivotal. Throughout the performance he skilfully wove an ironic inflection into the proceedings. This began with his introductory comments when, comparing the debate to a pantomime 'TV chat show', he invited the audience to self-consciously reflect on the theatricality of debate itself. Then, with his light-hearted jokes about institutional and national rivalry, Professor Chair ironised those forms of particularist attachment intrinsic to Palestine-Israel. In response to these timely interventions, the divided audience joined together in laughter and appreciative applause, momentarily defused from the melodramatic dynamic of the plot.

In these ways, the interjection of humour and laughter secured the boundaries of this meeting against the dangers of passionate excess. In order to affirm their own rationality and autonomy, audience members were required to demonstrate that they cared enough to participate, while controlling excessive feelings through this ironic distance. This introduction of irony by a neutral 'British' chair aligned his practice with political cosmopolitanism. For proponents of a cosmopolitan response to questions of justice, irony has been seen as a virtue, contributing to the cultivation of distance from those primordial attachments perceived as problematic (Delanty 2006). Yet, while this ironic stance might be valued from the abstract perspective of normative theory, the concrete context of the academic boycott debate exposed its limits. Here, while Professor Chair's ironic demands for distant self-control were momentarily integrative, in the long-term people found other ways to articulate those deeply felt attachments, which had been repressed.

In this discussion, I have shown how various conventions and techniques contributed to a hyperbolic performance of rational deliberation. In these ways, students, academics and a wider public underwent the motions of debating the academic boycott of Israel. Yet, they did so under no illusions that the substance of their exchanges would influence the meeting outcome. As Robin Wagner-Pacifici describes in her account of the melodramatic plot,

---

[71] This contradiction between expressed values of dispassionate rationality and performative process is, I suggest, a broader tension within liberal democracies.

'Nothing unexpected will be allowed to change the course, no character will be allowed to develop, no rapprochement or even dialogue between the heroes and villains will be tolerated' (Wagner-Pacifici 1986: 281).

In this sense, it seemed that the work of this melodramatic performance was not to change anyone's opinion. Rather it worked to secure each side, and the collective as a whole, in a sacred idealisation of the university. What pressures gave rise to this desire to secure the identity and the boundaries of the academy? In order to address this question, we need to consider how a melodramatic performance might offer a particular response to the current historical predicament of an elite university.

Contextualising the debate: the intensification of counter-extremist and anti-racist politics

In the first part of this chapter, I described how University A staged a form of engagement with Palestine-Israel which dramatically identified the university with an Enlightenment ideal of the liberal academy. I will now turn to explore the pressures which gave rise to this melodramatic spectacle, in order to highlight how this seemingly 'neutral' university was profoundly enmeshed with the stakes of this debate. I will begin by exploring the unsettling presence of racisms *within* universities. This leads me to consider the boycott debate as a process of cultural containment, engaged with the policing of boundaries. I will then relate this to broader social transformations of post-modernism, globalisation and marketisation shaping higher education which, in different ways, produced a desire for a reaffirmation of the moral identity of the university.

As I described at the beginning of this chapter, the academic boycott debate had been preceded by the intense public attention surrounding a meeting with a Palestinian journalist, Abdul Almasi. While activism relating to Palestine-Israel was consistently lively at this university, accusations of anti-Semitism, censorship and aggression at this meeting had intensified and publicised hostilities. Speaking to me about this event, Jonathan, the students' union anti-racism officer and an active Israel Society member, described it as "the worst experience I've had by a mile". He explained that ambiguity over the entry rules for the Abdul Almasi event, selective admission to external media and politicised chairing by a biased academic had culminated in violent exchanges, which had attracted widespread public attention. According to Jonathan, "the ramifications" of this event were that the university "finally" brought in new guidelines

for controversial speakers, including ensuring an independent chair, extra security and official recordings of meetings. This, he emphasised, was a direct result of the previous, high profile breaches at the university,

> "There's a lack of real recognition of the problem. But it's changing - it's changing after the bad, they got a lot of bad publicity after that event, and a lot of sort of governors who were unhappy about it, and the Jewish press were unhappy about it, which actually made them sit up and take notice."

Jonathan's account mirrored efforts by counter-extremism advocates and some Jewish media to frame this meeting as a violation of the integrity of the liberal university. The success of these interventions, Jonathan claimed, were now being felt as the university management had taken action to secure future events against extremism.

When I discussed these events with Sadiq, he also situated the boycott debate in relation to this recent history. Sadiq explained that the boycott debate had become increasingly high profile, after the publicity surrounding the Abdul Almasi event,

> "It [the boycott debate] was initially just going to be an internal, just our event...we were going to do it as an internal thing because the academic boycott's something that's controversial within Palestinian activist circles anyway, so while people support the boycott generally of Israel, not everyone supports a full blanket academic boycott. So it was going to be a debate between basically Palestinian... a small thing, should we do an academic boycott? Is it the right thing to do? ... I told [The Israel Society President] about it I think and she wanted to get involved and so we decided to do it as a inter kind of society debate, which is great... And then basically because of the Abdul Almasi event, there was a lot of controversy, it kind of put University A back on the map from when there was the occupation, that got a lot of attention...of the Israeli or the Zionist community all over again, written in the Jewish Press and things – 'oh there's going to be this crazy guy coming in' - and so that event in turn raised the profile of the next event."

This context helps to explain why the university staged the academic boycott debate, in this way at this juncture. The authorised selection of the chair, entry requirements, official recording and monitoring of the meeting all reflected the management's responsiveness to previous high profile 'failings'. Yet, this was also shaped by a longer-

term institutional history; specifically University A had, for a number of years, been subject to accusations that it had been polluted by Islamic radicalisation and extremism.

In 2008, members of the Islamic and Palestine Societies had featured in a far-reaching conservative think tank report, which had argued that Islamic radicalisation was rife in British universities and had identified pro-Palestinian activities as potentially 'extremist'. University A was one of the institutions investigated and the student Islamic Society had registered formal complaints about the authors' unethical, distorting and duplicitous research practices. These concerns with extremism and freedom of speech, circulating around University A, reflected one way in which universities have been drawn into the national politics of secularism and counter-terrorism.

The emergence of the counter-extremism discourse in higher education can, according to David Tyrer, be traced back to at least 1995, when the issue of Islamic 'fundamentalism' was first raised at NUS Conference (Tyrer 2004). This became amplified after the London bombings in 2005 with the circulation of high profile policy reports highlighting the dangers of Muslim students' radicalisation (Song 2011; Quilliam Foundation 2010; Thorne and Stuart 2008; UUK 2011). The spotlight on campuses further intensified in 2010, just prior to the academic boycott debate, when a former UCL student and Islamic Society President was apprehended attempting to blow up a US-bound flight (NUS 2011a; Home Office 2011). The consequence was a revived government focus on the institutional responsibilities of universities and students' union to prevent radicalisation, with Universities UK (2011) and NUS (2011c) producing reports and guidance focusing on freedom of speech, the monitoring of religious societies and the introduction of checks on external speakers (Dinham and Jones 2012; Song 2011).

This renewed emphasis on extremism and cohesion in higher education has raised broader questions regarding the value of 'the university' in public life. While stakeholders have offered alternative positions on *how* to protect core values (NUS 2011c: 5), their discourses have converged in portraying universities as moral institutions, shaped by ideals of communicative rationality, whose boundaries must be protected. In 2011, the British government's renewed 'Preventing Violent Extremism' policy (*Prevent*) portrayed universities as a key locus of liberal freedom in the struggle against pathological irrational fundamentalisms (Home Office 2011). Universities were idealised as bastions of free liberal thought and communication, a site for 'the exchange of opinion and ideas... debate as well as learning', which must be protected from dangerous Islamic ideologies which 'sanction the use of violence' (ibid: 5). At the centre of this discourse was moral vision of universities as institutions charged with

transforming immature, potentially violent youth into rational, *autonomous* citizens. As *Prevent* stated,

> 'Radicalisation is about 'who you know'. Group bonding, pressure and indoctrination are necessary to encourage the view that violence is a legitimate response to perceived injustice' (Home Office 2011).

This pathologisation of irrational, child-like 'others' carries distinctly Orientalist inflections, as I discuss further below. It has informed a government emphasis on the responsibilities of universities to protect the boundaries of the nation, and to monitor and socialise liberal citizens,

> 'Although it is vital that universities and colleges must protect academic freedom, it is a long-established principle that universities also have a duty of care to their students. Universities and colleges – and, to some extent, university societies and student groups – have a clear and unambiguous role to play in helping to safeguard vulnerable young people from radicalisation and recruitment by terrorist organisations.' (Home Office 2011: 71-72)

The Prevent agenda sought to institutionalise these distinctions by directing universities to monitor the boundaries of legitimate discourse. The report outlined a series of measures designed to protect campuses against the threats posed by external speakers. This included funding the NUS to assist students' unions with protecting the discursive boundaries of the campus. The response to these policies has varied across the higher education sector, with the emergence of counter-discourses from different stakeholders. Yet these stakeholders have shared underlying agreement with these liberal ideals of universities as bastions of individual and intellectual freedom. Thus, Universities UK began its report into these issues with a clear affirmation of this liberal vision,

> 'Universities play an important role in society as places of debate and discussion where ideas can be tested without fear of control, where students learn to challenge ideas and think for themselves, and where rationality underpins the pursuit of knowledge.' (Universities UK 2011: 1)

Within the student movement, a more critical response has drawn on a tradition of anti-racist politics to oppose government policy for singling out Muslim students. Yet,

here too the underlying stakes have been expressed in terms of a commitment to rational universalism. For example, in 2010, concurrent with the development of a government-funded NUS inter faith project, NUS Conference passed policy to 'oppose PVE [Preventing Violent Extremism] and similar initiatives on our campuses' (NUS 2012a: 4). For those on the left of the student movement, the Prevent policy was a 'racist' attempt to 'clamp down on Muslim students' freedom of expression' (ibid). Yet, in its very opposition, this discourse *also* distinguished between legitimate, free academic discourse and irrational ideology, identifying the latter not with 'extremism' but with racism and Fascism;

> 'NUS has a proud tradition of giving "no platform to fascists". This policy is rooted in the fact that fascism stands for the annihilation of whole groups of people, the elimination of democracy and all freedoms. Given this, there is no *logical* debate to be had with fascists' (NUS 2012b, my italics).

Codifying racism as irrational hatred, left-wing students reversed the charge against Islam, so affirming a shared commitment to rational universalism, and also seeking to police the boundaries of the university according to these norms.

A month after the publication of *Prevent*, NUS published its guidance for students' unions, *Managing the Risks Associated with External Speakers* (2011c). While this government-funded publication acknowledged the context of the counter-extremism agenda, NUS carefully situated this work within its ongoing anti-Fascist, anti-racist campaigns. The guidance was described as a complement to the 'blunt tool' of the NUS' 'No Platform Policy', through which participating students' unions excluded Fascists and racists from their premises. In this way, the guidance claimed to contribute to NUS' vision of the students' union as a 'safe environment for students where they can go about their lives free from prejudice, discrimination, physical harm and verbal abuse' (ibid: 5). In order to achieve this, the guidance offered a sample union policy for dealing with potentially controversial speakers, including a list of boundary-setting practical measures corresponding to those instituted by University A at the academic boycott debate.[72]

As an issue which provoked entangled claims of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and extremism, the politics of Palestine-Israel was a unique pressure point for stoking these

---

[72] The suggested measures included ensuring an independent chair, requiring that the event be independently filmed, that it be independently observed, subject to 'security' on the door, that the structure should be balanced so that views can be debated or challenged (ibid).

concerns. This was acknowledged in the NUS hate speech guidance, which offered various case study scenarios related to Palestine-Israel politics (ibid). These connections had also been institutionalised over time in student politics at University A. Following the conflicts arising with the students' 2008-9 occupation over Gaza, the students' union adopted a specific anti-Semitism Policy, which was still active at the time of the boycott debate. Unlike Universities B and C, this students' union had also formalised this politics by creating an elected anti-Racism Officer position. Over the previous two years, the candidates for this position had switched between Palestine and Israel Society members. As the current officer and Israel Society member, Jonathan, explained, he had been elected on a platform focused on, "free speech not hate speech. So this is basically saying that we welcome free speech but when it goes beyond that like there's got to be a limit".

In these ways, national discourses concerned with campus extremism, and the Enlightenment visions that they upheld, directly impinged on campus life. As I have described, one mechanism for this were policy and media reports which named particular institutions and individual students. The circulation of guidance on hate speech was another channel through which constructions of the ideal university were translated into regulations, institutional practices and students' ongoing relationships.[73] As university managers and student activists instituted these regulations at the academic boycott debate, they revealed how preoccupations with the boundaries of British campus came to be actualised within the relational dynamics of campus life.

Excluding 'irrational others': spectres of institutional racism, Orientalism and post-modern anxieties

I have been situating the production of this melodrama in the context of circulating anxieties over the threats posed by dangerous ideologies to the academy. The pressures of these dominant political discourses help to explain the timing of the boycott debate. Yet this also raises a broader question about the sources of these anxieties; why has concern with extremism and anti-racism become so prominent in relation to contemporary universities? In responding to this question, it is important to first situate tensions over 'extremism' and 'Islamophobia' within the broader historical context of institutional racism in higher education. I will then turn to consider the *specific* potency

---

[73] Although the official publication of the hate speech guidance occurred in June 2011, six months after the academic boycott event, it collated advice which had been already been communicated to campuses via the ongoing communications by the NUS and Universities UK.

of the 'threat' of political Islam within universities by drawing on Pnina Werbner's (2013) psychoanalytically-informed discussion of Islamophobia.

The current targeting of Muslim students within universities can be understood as one manifestation of a deeper historical culture of institutional racism in higher education (Law, Phillips and Turney 2004). Despite the development of policy agendas concerned with 'equality' and 'diversity' within universities, there has been strong resistance towards acknowledging and challenging racism within the sector (Back 2004; Phillips 2012; Pilkington 2013; Ahmed 2012). Deborah Phillips (2012) has written about the institutional discomfort that accompanied the introduction of various equalities policies in the higher education sector. Phillips links institutional inertia over race equality with a collective amnesia regarding the racial formation of academic institutions, and their historical involvement with projects of empire. For Les Back (2004: 1), the 'sheer weight of whiteness' within elite academic institutions has largely gone unacknowledged. Back adds that stringent new anti-immigration regulations, limiting non-European student migration to Britain, have drawn universities further into implementing discriminatory government policies, which have a racist genealogy (Back 2012).

A repeated point made by these scholars is that neutral, liberal discourses of diversity and tolerance facilitate the denial of institutional racism. For example, Sara Ahmed (2012) has argued that the discourse of 'diversity' has turned the category of anti-racism into a source of institutional pride, in ways that have perpetuated the silencing of *experiences* of racism within the academy. Writing about the current situation with regard to racism in universities, Deborah Phillips suggests,

> 'the picture is one of unsettling rather than transformative spaces, where we are beginning to see contests over power, intellectual authority and ethnic and civic identity, but there is also cultural containment through hegemonic practices' (Phillips 2012: 422).

My claim is that the academic boycott debate constituted just such a practice of cultural containment, as it repressed troubling experiences of 'irrational' anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and Orientalism, *with which the university was implicated.*[74] Situated within this context, University A's careful regulation and repression of 'irrational hatred' can be seen in a new light. By affirming 'neutral' values of objectivity and fairness, and

---

[74] For example, this casts a shadow over Professor Chair's ironic, humorous appeal to shared *British* nationalism, expressing a trace of the post-imperial amnesia within his performance.

projecting irrationality and violence onto Islamic and Fascist others, the institution disavowed its own ongoing, unacknowledged discriminatory practices.

The wider spectre of institutional racism was, I have suggested, an important part of the context for the academic boycott debate. In addition, by attending to the *particular* preoccupation with 'extremism' circulating at University A, we can develop a deeper sense of particular anxieties shaping higher education at the current conjuncture. While the government framed the Prevent agenda as a pragmatic response to terrorist threats, Pnina Werbner has observed that the effects of these policies are to essentialise and pathologise an Islamic 'Other' (Werbner 2013: 455). Pnina Werbner and Talal Asad offer helpful insights, as they invite us to consider what is at stake in 'Western' projections of this figure of the Muslim fundamentalist (ibid; Asad 2007). Writing about the global mutations of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism post 9/ 11, Werbner (2013) considers these social imaginaries to be formed out of fears shaped, not by difference, but resemblance. Werbner has emphasised the need to attend to the particularities of different racisms, arguing that the atavistic 'folk devils' of different racialised groups are projections of different kinds of cultural anxieties, which vary and evolve (ibid: 452). In contrast to the criminalising constructions of the black and, more recently Asian, criminal insurrectionist, or the hidden, malevolent, Jewish stranger, Werbner writes;

> 'Islam seems also to be a threat to the intellectuals and elites in western society because it clashes with contemporary intellectual trends towards anti-essentialism and relativism' (ibid: 457).

Werbner highlights the Western preoccupation with a fundamentalist ideology, perceived to authorise absolute truths, committed political action and violence. Her claim is that this fascination with certainty and violence reflects Western modernity's melancholic relationship to its *own* fundamentalism.[75]

Werbner's approach is particularly helpful for considering how anxieties and projections relating to extremism circulate within contemporary universities. As Gerard Delanty (2001) has argued, universities have been pivotal sites of the transformations of modernity, deeply implicated with the undermining of established social and epistemic forms of authority. The mass expansion and democratisation of higher education, from the 1960s, has coincided with epistemic challenges to scientific authority from emerging

---

[75] Here Werbner's work connects with Paul Gilroy's (2004) discussion of Britain's melancholic relationship to its imperial past. Gilroy has argued the British culture has evaded confrontation with the loss of its colonial past, through denial, nostalgia and sanctification, in ways that have shaped contemporary multicultural politics and the 'War on Terror'.

disciplines, such as cultural studies, feminist and postcolonial theory. These processes have contributed to the eroding of the Enlightenment conception of the university and of its moral identity (ibid).[76] As Craig Calhoun (2006) has highlighted, this undermining of authority has contributed to a profound sense of ambiguity with regard to what the public university is for. My claim is that this destabilisation of the epistemic moorings, social function and public identity of the university are connected to the current preoccupation with 'extreme' political commitments with campuses. In the framing and conduct of the academic boycott debate, University A regulated and excluded fundamentalist ideologies. And by performing such muscular Enlightenment liberalism, this institution was able to *disavow* and *enact* its own desire for a 'fundamental' identity.

Responding to a context in which the spectres of extremism and racism had come to the fore, University A staged a drama which actualised an anachronistic vision of the university, as an exemplary institution of the modern public sphere. The instantiation of a contractual model of democratic decisionism, moral certainty and scientific truth offered a response to the institutional fragmentation of meanings and authority. These tensions crystallised in the issue of Palestine-Israel which, as I discuss further in Chapter Five, raised the spectres of violence emanating from *within* Western modernity. In this context, the specific topic of this debate was of central significance; focusing on the value of academic freedom, it pushed the participants to explicitly thematise their commitments to the university in terms of truth, knowledge and justice. It also produced members of the university who embodied moral and epistemic certainty, shaping the university itself as an autonomous, decisive public arena.

The value of the public university: pressures of marketisation, apathy and reputation

Having situated the academic boycott debate in relation to various socio-cultural pressures, I will now consider the significance of the profound economic transformations shaping higher education. In their discussions of the contemporary anxieties facing universities, Delanty (2001) and Calhoun (2006) highlight the profound changes in the political economy of higher education, including the emergence of a global higher education marketplace and a shift from state to private sector funding of academic knowledge production. These processes have raised complex practical and

---

[76] As I go on to discuss, this institutional destabilisation has also been profoundly shaped by the economic transformations of higher education in late capitalist societies (Delanty 2001).

political questions which, I claim, played an important role in the staging of the boycott debate.

In the aftermath of the Abdul Almasi event, the public criticisms of University A had circulated via the national and international press, attracting the attention of senior politicians. As Justin emphasised in an interview with me, students' at this university were confident that their political actions could reach a global audience. As such, the stakes were significant, for an institution whose exemplary academic reputation functioned as symbolic capital within a global higher education market. The tension facing the institution between being seen to secure student welfare and academic freedom was emphasised to me by a previous students' union officer. He described how the university management had responded to the notorious, high profile 2009 occupation of the university by students protesting about Gaza,

> "The university were very pissed off about it but ultimately they didn't want to go in gung-ho...because they think University A as a top institution prizes academic freedom as a, you know, a selling point, and it wouldn't want any suggestion that it was trying to impinge on academic freedom...and I don't think University A wanted to be seen to come down on either side, I think they really want to stay out of that completely."

From this perspective, the negotiation of Palestine-Israel politics had been an ongoing struggle for the university, now heightened by these public criticisms, as it sought to project its symbolic reputation within a competitive field.

Yet, institutional support for the boycott debate was not simply an instrumental decision undertaken to achieve economic ends. Rather, the focus of the debate on the morality of *Israeli* academic institutions carried important resonances for British institutions also struggling with these tensions. As Delanty (2001) has highlighted, the decline in state funding for higher education and growing dependency of universities on donations and profitable research contracts has raised significant questions over academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Not long after the academic boycott debate, these issues began to feature prominently in the national media, as British institutions were accused of accepting funding from corrupt Middle Eastern autocracies. As Richard Sennett (2011) has highlighted, this revealed the precarious ethical and political tensions facing British universities. Faced with dramatic cuts in state funding for education, British institutions have become increasingly entangled with corporate funders and non-democratic political regimes. In this sense, by affirming its moral

identification with values of freedom and autonomy, University A was engaged in a restitutive process. This *both* appealed to a global audience and to anxieties among its members.

This context can help to explain the university management's authorisation of the academic boycott debate.[77] In a different way, these neo-liberal transformations of higher education also influenced the participation of students' union activists in this performance. University A, like University B, was an identifiably 'political' campus whose students' union was publically known for its long history of radical activism.[78] However, as I began to speak to politically active students at the university, they expressed a shared sense that this political culture was under threat. Students' unions were increasingly shifting from playing a political role towards perceiving themselves as service providers. Speaking about the broader context of student politics at their universities, students at Universities A and B explained that, in Justin's words, "the majority of people just don't care".

This sense of increasing apathy towards student politics was also demonstrated in practice during the period of my research. At University B, a referendum was held to change the process for determining students' union policy to an online system, as a consequence of poor attendance at general meetings. A similar change subsequently took place at university A; following a polemical appeal in the student newspaper from the Union General Meeting chair which proclaimed the 'disenchantment', 'disregard' and 'apathy' that students felt towards it, the decision was taken to end regular meetings. As Deborah Le Play (2008) observes in her study of student cultures in higher education, this decline of collective political action reflects the increasingly individualised, consumer framing of higher education. For Justin, this dynamic was exemplified at University A, an institution whose radical political history contrasted with the predicament of the current student body, many of whom were paying substantial fees for their qualifications,

> "Everyone here is a socialist until they get their offer from Goldman Sachs, which affects the politics in terms of international affairs, which is why I say it, but it is a general point as well. [Our] students' union subscribes to every march, every

---

[77] The official support for this event was evident in the details of its production. For example, this was the only occasion during my fieldwork in which a formal podcast of a nominally student-organised event was circulated via the university's public events page.

[78] This contrasted with University C, a post-92 'new' university whose students' union was not student-led but rather run by the university.

march that's going on in Downing Street but has a Credit Suisse banner dropping

down from the building. There's the visual paradox I think."

In the context of these challenges, politically active students at universities A and B explained that the issue of Palestine-Israel was uniquely able to mobilise students. As a pivotal issue that organised political factions, Palestine-Israel politics could energise campuses faced with growing disenchantment and disengagement. As Daniel, a Jewish student at University B emphasised, this was an accepted part of students' union culture. Discussing possible strategies for passing an inter faith policy in his union, he explained,

"[One] way is to create lots of fake motions which are really controversial because the only reason the union have been having – the only time the union have had general meetings in the last few years have been when there's been an Israel-Palestine issue 'cos that's when people just mobilise and come... you've gotta play the game."

As well as mobilising students to achieve quorate students' union meetings, these polarised alignments were institutionalised in the formal and informal slates formed during students' union elections.

In these ways, student union officers and activists were mutually invested in the perpetuation of agonistic Palestine-Israel debates, which kept politics alive. As an NUS guide advising students to 'Smash Apathy' suggested, the affective rituals of melodramatic politics seemed to offer a response to political disenchantment,

'Decide what you are in opposition to this year- around the University and in society. Research suggests that young people are more likely to respond to a call to oppose something' (NUS 2010: 3).

And while students from Jewish and Palestinian backgrounds expressed anger at the political opportunism of both 'far-left' and mainstream aspiring career politicians, they also shared an investment in this political process. As Laura explained to me, student indifference was more troubling to her than angry opposition; "it's worse when they don't respond at all, because at least when they argue with you they're engaging with you". Her comment draws our attention to students' *desire* for melodrama, as the dramatic instantiation of agonistic moralised debate. But what is the relationship between desire and the performance of moral certainty? Here, I suggest that we can helpfully learn from literary and aesthetic insights into the melodramatic genre

129

The affordances of melodrama

In his famous essay about the Balinese Cockfight, Clifford Geertz (1993) interpreted this melodrama, not as a functional affirmation of social hierarchies in Balinese Society, but rather as a source of interpretive meta-commentary. For Robin Wagner-Pacifici (1986) and Peter Brooks (1995), melodrama as a social performance or cultural form does existential work for collectivities experiencing a threat of chaos or disintegration,

> 'For certain types of social drama, namely melodrama, such a bifurcation reveals the yearning back toward ritual of a genre that attempts to deny the heterogeneity and fragmentation of modern societies' (Wagner-Pacifici 1986: 278).

As Peter Brooks explains, the insistent power of the melodramatic genre in contemporary life resides in its evocation of moral meanings per se. Melodrama is the drama *of* morality, which seeks to reveal the force of the moral universe, in what Brooks describes as the rationalised, secularised modernist era. In response to Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism, the draw of melodrama is that, 'it tells us that in the right mirror with the right degree of convexity, our lives matter' (Brooks 1995: ix).

In his writing about this genre in relation to Hollywood films, Stanley Cavell links the work of melodrama with Descartes' cogito. Both are responses to radical scepticism in which 'the theatricalization of the self becomes the main proof of its freedom and existence' (Cavell 1996: 10). For Cavell, 'symbol crammed' melodrama, like philosophical logic, arises as a compulsion to respond to, and avoid, a condition of unknowness. He repeatedly insists on the connections between this epistemic condition and an ethical experience. The condition of 'not knowing' the truth, including the truth of justice, is fundamentally bound up with the experience of the unknowness of others and ourselves. Cavell highlights how the discomforting experience of scepticism can result in the *dramatisation* of a procedures to produce epistemic and moral certainty. This includes the dramatisation of processes of justification and counter-justification, which I have shown to be hyperbolically enacted in the academic boycott event. Yet Cavell's insight is that melodrama is always shaped by the *excess* of meaning and desire which it disavows; he writes, 'a certain theatricality is the sign of an inability to mean, to get our meaning across' (Cavell 1996: 40).

In the context of the melodrama of the academic boycott debate, the question of Palestine-Israel was dramatised in ways that authorised *particular* meanings and

'reasonable' emotional responses, which were in a sense empty or disconnected from the very stakes of this politics. My suggestion is that this hyperbolic production attempted to repress institutional entanglements and personal investments which, for reasons that I will discuss further in Chapter Five, were too troubling to be publically acknowledged. The key claim, which I will develop in this thesis, is that this imposition of a melodramatic frame did not succeed as a containing practice. In order to begin exploring these dynamics, I will turn our attention towards students' *experiences* these processes, as they *struggled* with the normative demands imposed by the academic boycott debate.

Tensions of melodramatic experience: embodying and unsettling the claim of reason

In the previous discussion, I have claimed that the intensification of circulating moral and epistemic anxieties was a significant factor in the endorsement of the academic boycott debate by the university authorities. However, it was also the case that this event was only possible as a consequence of the willing participation of students, and specifically the leaders of the Israel and Palestine societies. The academic boycott debate was the only occasion of formal collaboration between an Israel / Jewish Society and Palestine Society over the year of my fieldwork. As I discussed in previous chapters, this reflected a consistent dynamic of this campus politics; while Israeli and Jewish student societies repeatedly initiated 'dialogue' activities, student activists for Palestine rejected inter-societal collaboration as 'normalisation'. For pro-Palestinian activists on campus, boycott was not just an abstract principle but rather a repertoire of activism connecting their work to a transnational social movement. Yet in contrast to their more frequent refusal of collaboration, the Palestine Society agreed to co-host this particular debate. As the nominated proponents of the pro-boycott position, their participation in this event appeared to put them in the paradoxical position of dialogically arguing *against* academic dialogue. My suggestion is that the Palestine Society's decision to participate in this event revealed the potency of the liberal imaginary of the university for these students too.

Writing in the student newspaper, Sadiq justified the decision to participate in the academic boycott debate. Contrasting the event with a request by the Israel Society to collaborate in raising money for a humanitarian charity, he stated that, "we are willing to work with groups who we disagree with," adding that the purpose must be "...to expose these disagreements and discuss them in a constructive way. However, we won't

share a platform on any other basis with these groups." In an interview with me a few weeks later, Sadiq explained that the decision to collaborate was not without its internal critics from within the movement,

> "So you will get groups who are like, not more puritanical, but in their ideological beliefs they apply that very strictly in terms of practice, so like we can't debate Israelis because it legitimises them, so that's one like kind of exceptional idea which might be true but they may really apply it completely in practice, they will not debate with Israelis anyway. Then you get people like me who are more pragmatic and so whether or not you think that it legitimises them, *which I don't anyway,* we're we go for a lot more tactics."

Later, when I met with another Palestine Society member, Yusra, she expanded on the meaning of Sadiq's terminology of "tactics", explaining how the Palestine Society committee sought to reach out, not only to an activist audience affirming boycott, but to a broader student audience within the university,

> "I would say that the stereotype that Palestinian activists have is something that we're always trying to overcome. Erm so you know being leftist *fanatical or whatever, radicals, terrorists*, Hamas supporting, you know we've been called a lot of things. I would say that we're trying to always come across and present ourselves in a way that is acceptable to someone who, like I said, isn't invested at all in what is going on in Palestine and Israel."

Yusra here highlighted the strategic dimension of the Palestine Society's participation in the academic boycott event. She revealed how the Palestine Society, at times, worked *within* what they perceived to be the widely shared, civil discourse of the university, which differentiated between legitimate and extremist actors. The Palestine Society's legitimacy, their ability to "present ourselves as acceptable" to this audience, depended on conformity to the rationalist norms of the university. While at other times the Palestine Society sought to challenge this civil code, the academic boycott debate was the most conspicuous example of their strategic investment in this conception of the university. At the particular time of the debate the Palestine Society had been publicly blamed for bringing profane extremism and racism into the campus. As such, demonstrably engaging in exemplary academic practices was a means of enhancing their legitimacy and this took priority over the commitment to boycott, which more frequently motivated their actions.

132

However, the participation of Palestine Society members was not only a conscious, instrumental strategy. Rather, attending to students' experiences challenges an overly strategic view of political action. In Chapter Three, I described how Saniyah had internalised liberal universalistic values in relation to her own practices and motivations. For Sadiq, who like Saniyah, was from a Palestinian family and had grown up in Britain, negotiating these dominant norms seemed to be a complex personal process. His participation in these kinds of liberal-democratic processes was not simply an instrumental decision rather, when speaking to me about his political activities, Sadiq insistently affirmed his *commitment* to rational communication. Explaining his willingness to participate in the academic boycott debate to me, Sadiq distinguished himself from other pro-Palestinian activists, who take all communication to be a struggle for power,

> "You do get some who think debate legitimises and then get you get someone like me who thinks *the premise of a debate is that someone's wrong so - can you legitimise?"*

Sadiq was critical of activists' rhetorical actions, including the use of provocative, emotive language. The following year, he represented the student Islamic society, in a seminar about 'hate speech' organised by an external interfaith organisation. This meeting was framed as a discussion about the boundary between 'rational discussion' and 'irrational hatred'. Sadiq's speech highlighted the compatibility between Islamic and liberal principles, as he argued for a framework for regulating speech grounded in communicative rationality and equal rights.

In these ways, Sadiq responded to dominant norms by embodying a spirit of detached reason. His response revealed how this institutional culture profoundly affecting the student activists' sense of self, as people learned to distance themselves from their partial, personal experience, to speak the universal language of the liberal-democratic academy.[79] Significantly this blurs the theoretical distinction between instrumental and assumed forms of action, revealing how strategy and motivation can be intertwined in complex ways within lived political experience.

It was these *connections* between widespread civil discourse, institutional context and students' personal motivations that contributed to the staging of the

---

[79] Peter Hopkins (2011) also traces a similar dynamic in his research with Muslim students as he describes how Muslim students internalised dominant discourses of their university as tolerant and harmonious, while also describing personal experiences which contradicted this liberal vision of their campus.

academic boycott debate on that particular January evening. By organising the debate on this particular theme, members of the Israel and Palestine Societies demonstrated the power of these civil discourses of the university. Paradoxically, by dramatising antagonistic, oppositional relations, these two groups affirmed their membership as recognisably liberal subjects, and committed to a contractual politics of mutual recognition within this imaginary of the sacred university.

However, while the liberal university imposed powerful demands, students were not simply 'shaped' or 'subjectified' in accordance with them; rather personal responses to these dominant norms were complex and changeable. Discussing the debate with me shortly afterwards, Sadiq questioned his own prior view that shared commitments to reasoned discussion could ground this debate. This position, he explained, assumed that both parties were equally able to be heard. The event had showed him how "debates aren't really that useful" insofar as "the Palestinian narrative is always inherently *under-represented*". He then proceeded to explain how he had chosen not to "mud-sling" regarding the unchallenged Islamophobic comments of one audience member. He refused to participate in a discursive anti-racist politics, which he described as "just this... label we can apply that will have a negative effect on you and make you think twice before you do it again". Yet, in the very process of demonstrating his ironic detachment Sadiq explicitly raised my awareness of this incident, expressing the latent anger produced by this unacknowledged racism. Torn between dominant norms and resistant feelings, Sadiq revealed how students were personally subjected to, and struggling with, the claim of reason.

When justification comes to an end: exclusions, repression and the unravelling of consensus

I would like to return to that moment at the end of the boycott debate when Professor Chair invited us, the audience, to participate in the final vote. I sat still and tense in my chair as he invited those in favour of the motion to raise their hands and then those opposed. I had approached this meeting without a clear sense of my position on this motion; the issue of the academic boycott was one of many questions that I had avoided asking myself as I approached this research. Nothing in what I had experienced that evening had moved me to raise my hand either way. Rather, throughout the whole meeting I felt unaffected by this self-conscious performance, which seemed aptly suited to its visibly theatrical venue. As I wrote up my fieldnotes, watched and listened to the official recordings, this feeling of detachment stayed with me, also permeating my

writing in this chapter. I ended my fieldnotes with a question; was *anyone's* mind changed as a result of the debate?

Over two years later, in May 2013, the academic boycott of Israel hit the news again when Stephen Hawking expressed his support for the campaign. Over the period of my fieldwork, I had gradually learnt to connect to Palestine-Israel politics in a more personal way. Yet when the Stephen Hawking news story prompted my mum to ask me what I thought of the boycott, I felt lost for words. Then, after all this time had passed, I felt angry. The academic boycott debate epitomised the most visible, legitimated form of student engagement with Palestine-Israel, it had plied me with facts and arguments about this important question. And yet it had produced a picture of Palestine-Israel campus politics as a conflict between two absolute positions, an image that I need to *unlearn* in my fieldwork in order to relate to students. In appealing to and authorising a detached, ironic disposition among us, its audience, the drama had nullified and delegitimised my inchoate feelings for what mattered in this politics. Returning to the scene of the campus at University A, I will suggest that the feelings repressed by the academic boycott debate, also emerged over *time* within students relationships. My claim is that, as it took time for my anger to emerge, so time also did important work in the campus.

In the aftermath of the academic boycott debate, reports of the meeting were widely circulated through various public media. While the local student newspaper interpreted the debate as a success for reconciliation on campus, 'the organisers were pleased with the meeting's civil discourse', the national press focused their stories, not on the substance of the debate, but on a transgressive incident which had occurred after the curtain had officially fallen. One national newspaper reported, 'Jewish leader complains of 'violent threat' from University A academic' and referred readers to an online video of the incident. The 'encounter' had taken the form of a momentary confrontation between a well-known Jewish community leader and Professor Murphy, the chair at the Abdul Almasi event who, as I will discuss in the next chapter, struck an ambiguous position on campus. The tensions of that previous event had been reignited as a visceral exchange between these two figures appeared to risk descending into violence. The video of this encounter was itself shaky and indeterminate; the question of who was the protagonist and who the victim in this encounter very unclear. The heightened media attention given to this ambiguous interaction circulated these unauthorised feelings of aggression to public audiences beyond the campus. In addition, the presence of Professor Murphy across these contexts revived feelings of aggression

and shame, which had been inexpressible within the official frame of the boycott debate.[80]

In the weeks following the academic boycott debate, the apparent 'social contract' grounding this collaborative meeting of the Israel and Palestine Societies quickly unravelled. A student newspaper article hailing the beginnings of a new phase of 'constructive' campus relations itself became the source of a dispute over language use. Within days, Sadiq announced a forthcoming speaker event with a 'Jewish anti-Zionist Rabbi', who had previously been publicly accused of Holocaust Denial. This transgression of civil and anti-racist norms sparked outrage from the Israel Society, reigniting mutually impassioned expressions of conflict. In contrast to the liberal-democratic demand for ironic detachment, these students invoked experiences of racism and of the presence of past violence, which shaped their *closeness* to, their deep implication, in these questions of justice.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how and why one university responded to the campus politics of Palestine-Israel by staking a place within the liberal public sphere. My claim is that the debate on the academic boycott of Israel was an attempt by University A to publicly sacralise itself as an exemplary Enlightenment institution in British society. I have situated this performance within the context of circulating anxieties connected with the post-modern, post-imperial and late capitalist condition of contemporary higher education, suggesting that this has created particular tensions for institutions in relation to the epistemic and moral identity of the public university.

With this political theatre, the university circumscribed and defined its members according to a vision of universities as autonomous public institutions. The conditions for participation in this 'academic' debate required claims-making to be articulated in a hyperbolically rational language of principled justification, and with an ironic, emotionally detached stance, excluding partial or historical attachments, and excessive feelings from expression in this arena. This repression also worked through the insistently ahistorical and deterritorialised framing of the university 'hosting' this debate, which was shaped by its own imperial amnesia. Demanding that the university's members engage as ahistorical liberal subjects, the conventions of this genre shamed

---

[80] I have drawn on Marvin Carlson's work to understand how latent feelings might reside within the materialities of the campus (Carlson 2001). Carlson's develops the concept of theatrical ghosting in which he describes how the recycling of scripts, props, locations and actors invoke resonances, associations and memories for a particular interpretive community.

136

into silence personal connections with Palestine-Israel experiences, shaped by particular histories and transnational relationships.

The form of the academic boycott debate enacted a simultaneously epistemic, political and moral form of engagement with questions of justice. This was an epistemic model which assumed that the answer to a question of justice was to be reached through scientific, logical processes of justification and argumentation. It was a political model of what Fraser (2008) describes as 'normal justice', which insisted on a rule-governed, contractual process, agreement within a shared language and compliance with the deciding vote. It imposed a moral vision of coherent, autonomous subjects grounding their judgements in universal reason. As students engaged with this normative form of politics, some came to experience these moral demands as internal to their sense of self. Here, we might make a broader connection by reflecting on the ways in which the university context also crystallised broader dynamics of modern, rationalistic public spheres. Stanley Cavell has written about these connections in his book *The Claim of Reason*,[81] whose title I have borrowed for this chapter. If we reflected on this phrase, 'the claim *of* reason', the simultaneously inner and outer workings of reason pivot around the word 'of'. Reason is something that *we* claim as we speak and yet in the moral and political world I have been describing, we do not only claim reason but, also, reason claims us.

As a political model, the boycott debate instituted a democratic process grounded in mutual recognition. This appealed to the fantasy of the intersubjective autonomy of this Kantian community who would together freely decide on this question (Critchley 2007). Each subject constituted by their fixed position on this question of justice was understandable by the other and transparent to themselves. As Foucault has discussed, this is an Enlightenment model of epistemic and moral certainty in which the truth is externally accessible to each individual, without that person needing to change or alter anything in their own being (Foucault 1986). As I discovered at the moment of the final vote, this was a form of relationality which excluded any possibility of ambiguity or ambivalence. While this meeting had originally been planned in order to address the *uncertainties* and *heterogeneity* of Palestinian activists' response to the boycott, the imposition of the debate structure demanded coherent, unchangeable categorical positions. As David Owen observes, this notion of the predetermined subject is also at the heart of contractual notions of liberal democracy, in which as autonomous, rational citizens political identities are 'fixed in advance' (Owen 2006: 150)

---

[81] The full title is *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Cavell 1999)

In an essay about John Rawls' liberal contractual theory of democracy, Stanley Cavell asks what we find in a political community when, to use Wittgenstein's words 'justification comes to an end?' (Cavell 1988) His suggestion is that these moments when consensus unravels reveal the precarity of democratic relationships, which cannot be secured by abstract principles. The concluding vote at the academic boycott debate appeared to provide a ritual resolution to a period of conflict.[82] Yet the subsequent aggressive actions of participants quickly undermined any shared criteria for consensus, revealing how this contractual form of politics disavowed passions, desires and complex personal experiences. Invoking spectres of Islamophobia and Holocaust denial, Sadiq proceeded to raise aspects of this politics which had been excluded as shameful by this academic frame. Students found other ways to express commitments which could not be articulated or heard within the neutralised register of a moralistic debate. In these ways, this form of political engagement with Palestine-Israel disavowed and repressed the ethical experiences of the very students who participated in it. In the next chapter, I will explore how these tensions were expressed, as I describe what happened when agreement over *how* to speak, and over the very possibility for mutual recognition, broke down.

---

[82] In his discussion of the melodramatic dynamic of the 2008 United States presidential election, Jeffrey Alexander (2010) observes that a vote can play a ritual function in peacefully bringing to end a period of sustained conflict.

Chapter Five

Tragic Action: Ambiguous Passions and Misrecognition

Banner displayed at a student Palestine Society event
(Source: anonymous 2011)

In early 2012, a succession of incidents at University A featured in the national news. First, it was reported that a fight had broken out after a student sports society had held a Nazi-themed party. A few months later, I received a flurry of messages via the student society email lists about a violent exchange that had taken place on campus. The Palestine Society had erected a mock Israeli checkpoint in a central street and had conducted document checks at the threshold of an academic building. Some Palestine Society members were playing the role of Israeli Defence Force soldiers, represented by fluorescent security jackets, sunglasses and over-size guns. Other Society members, wearing keffiyehs, took on the role of Palestinians; as they attempted to enter the building, they were stopped, searched and forced to the ground with their arms behind their heads as the 'IDF Soldiers' jabbed guns in their faces.

While this form of activist theatre has featured regularly at other universities over recent years, this performance developed in a particularly hostile way. Photos and videos, posted online, showed a group of young men approaching and confronting the protest. This was followed by some students attempting to hit and kick each other in the street. The mock 'IDF soldiers' and university security staff intervened and a few seconds later, the counter-protesters ran off. Video footage showed a Palestine Society

member, screaming in anger at the Jewish Society President, Samuel, who was stood in the street, "Are you proud of yourselves? Are you actually proud of yourselves?" The new Students' Union Anti-Racism Officer, also a Palestine Society member, marched over, "Who the fuck was that?" Samuel held his palms up and spoke with exaggerated moderation, "I'm not excusing anything that's just happened but, at the end of the day, people have families on this campus....first of all I'm sorry..." He reached out a hand, which was shrugged away... "Second, though, people have family members who were blown up – right. That is a fact, ok." He began to explain why the wall in Israel was necessary to protect Israeli security. This aggravated the crowd who started swearing at him again. Within hours, this incident was reported and circulated by the national and international media. The student media led with this story, including a link to a students' union statement, supported by the university management, who were compelled to respond,

> 'The Students' Union is committed to the rights of students to peacefully protest but condemns violence. The welfare and safety of students is of primary importance and the university will be launching an investigation into this matter immediately.'

As Palestine Society members staged suffering, victimization, humiliation and violence in the centre of the university, the balance between theatre and reality tipped into a moment of visceral aggression. In their physical confrontation and vitriolic screaming, these students violated the norms of autonomy, rational containment and civility carefully inscribed as the dominant codes of the campus. These transgressive moments occurred just a few times over the period of my research. In contrast to more routine, melodramatic forms of Palestine-Israel campus politics, these moments felt like shocks which raised critical questions; why did students transgress the very demands which would enhance their legitimacy as members of the civil university? How, why and with what effects did passions ignite?

This chapter continues my project of exploring how democratic conflict is *lived* in the relationships of British university campuses in order to speak *from* this experience *to* the more abstract concerns of normative political theory. In Chapter Four, I described how actors at University A attempted to enact a model of liberal-contractual democracy and to realise an ideal of the Enlightenment university. I claimed that this mode of political engagement shaped students' own sense of self, according to communicative norms of rationality, autonomy and coherence, and fixed participants in Palestine-Israel

politics within categorical identity positions. I concluded by suggesting that this form of politics silenced significant aspects of some students' deeply felt investments in Palestine-Israel politics. In what follows, I begin from this insight, exploring how these repressed feelings were expressed in an alternative 'tragic' form of political engagement.

My approach focuses on a detailed description of a Palestine Society meeting with a Palestinian journalist, Abdul Almasi, which was held at University A in December 2010. As I trace how this controversial event culminated in a moment of intense, passionate aggression, I will show how aesthetic insights into tragedy as a cultural form *and* as lived experience can illuminate these dynamics. I will draw particularly on some key aspects of the tragic highlighted by Simon Critchley in his writing on political injustice and ethical experience (Critchley and Kesselman 2012; Critchley 2007). I begin here by briefly foregrounding three elements of the tragic, which contrast with melodrama, and which I will draw out in the ethnographic narrative that follows; truth as ambiguity and excess, the undoing of temporal and spatial distance and ambivalent, fragmented, subjectivity.

Critchley describes tragic theatre as an invention that happens when a society experiences a disjuncture at the heart of its political life (Critchley and Kesselman 2012). In contrast to the coherent moral truth of melodrama, tragedy expresses a sense of truth as the excess of that which can be rationally known and contained. As I will explore in relation to the Abdul Almasi meeting, the tragic is a form of political interaction able to affectively connect with experiences of suffering and violence, at the limit of symbolic representation. I will trace how, in contrast to the melodramatic enactment of truth as coherence, tragedy presents an encounter with the experience of ambiguity. This is a radically unsettling moment, in which it is disclosed that,

> 'Truth is not one thing, but at least two things – and those two things are in a
> conflict – and not just a conflict, a life-and-death struggle' (Critchley and
> Kesselman 2012: 151).

A second key feature of the tragic, important for my analysis, is that it is a form of action, in which time is *dis*ordered (ibid). In tragedy, past injustices are felt in the present, in ways that exceed the conceptual understanding of those moved to act. This contrasts with melodrama in which, as Stanley Cavell writes, 'the past is frozen, mysterious, with topics forbidden and isolating' (Cavell 1996: 6). Furthermore, tragic action also disrupts spatial orders by enacting a a somatic, sensual process that momentarily undermines the gap between symbolic representation and lived

141

experience. This can move the audience from a relation of spectatorship to (inter)action. In what follows, I trace *how* these temporal and spatial disruptions unfolded at the Abdul Almasi event. In the process, I will suggest that this tragic action undermined the historical containments of progressive liberalism and its detached disavowal of geographical entanglements and connections with 'distant' suffering.

Raymond Williams writes insistently that of the need to understand tragic theatre as responsive to, and grounded in, tragic experience (Williams 1979). This is the opening claim of his book on the subject, which begins,

> 'We come to tragedy by many roads. It is an immediate experience, a body of literature, a conflict of theory, an academic problem. This book is written from the point where the roads cross, in a particular life' (Williams: 14).

In this chapter, I follow Williams in showing how these tragic encounters engaged students, including myself, as tragic subjects. I will show how some students were *struggling* here with the norms of autonomy and rationality demanded by the liberal university and with demands emanating from beyond the (national) boundaries of the campus. In this sense, we were struggling with experiences of fragmentation, moved to act by demands that exceeded our self-knowledge. This, I will claim, led some students into actions, which expressed a *deep* refusal of recognition in relation to both self and other. This will bring me back to reflect on the limits of the liberal democratic framing of Palestine-Israel, which demanded that students act in accordance with universal practical reason, even as we are shaped by demands of history and culture which exceed our full comprehension. Having identified violence and withdrawal as one response to this tension, I will ask how we might begin to find alternatives to this seemingly intractable dynamic.

This chapter attends to aspects of experience that were not consciously symbolised or narrated by students, by drawing on a notion of tragic *drama* (as opposed to narrative), to trace these experiences in action. As such, the narrative that I develop here is very much shaped by my reflexive methodology, discussed in Chapter Three. My claims are shaped by what I learnt in my relationships with students about the limits of language and the workings of ambivalence, closeness and distance in the politics of Palestine-Israel. Again, this raises difficult questions about the balance between reflexive insight and attending to the singularities of others' experiences. As such, while I claim that particular patterns of interaction can helpfully be identified as tragic, I also explore how what is tragic from one perspective might, from a different vantage point,

be experienced as farcical. Exploring students' different responses to the events that I describe will also lead me again to consider the workings of time within the campus. In this way, I will attend to students' diverse engagements with Palestine-Israel as these encounters evolve within the ongoing life of the university.

The Abdul Almasi event at University A: staging controversies

At the end of the 2010 Michaelmas Term, the Palestine Society at University A publicised a Friday evening talk by Abdul Almasi, a London-based Palestinian journalist. A frequent commentator in the mainstream British media, Abdul Almasi had been accused of anti-Semitism following circulation of an online video in which he had allegedly stated (in Arabic) that he would be 'delighted' if Iranian missiles were to strike Israel. The student newspaper reported that the Israel Society's attempts to prevent the event going ahead had failed although they had succeeded in moving it to a Monday evening in order to make it possible for observant Jewish students to attend.[83]

Struggles over the staging of the proposed event focused on the 'controversial' status of Abdul Almasi and the borderline topic of his talk. Pro-Israeli media commentators positioned him as a profane figure, whose recorded speech evidenced his anti-Semitic, extremist beliefs. A notorious conservative blog listed his 'long record of extreme and disgusting comments', including examples of his 'anti-Western' support for Saddam Hussein, and his use of 'Israelis-are-Nazis insults'. In addition to highlighting his profane character, commentators also implied that the very title of Abdul Almasi's talk 'How far is British and American foreign policy influenced by the Zionist lobby?' carried dangerous anti-Semitic resonances. In a joint statement, the Israel Society and Union of Jewish Students issued a warning about the dangers of this speaker, claiming to have 'contacted the Students' Union...in an effort to mitigate against any potential intimidation or hate speech'. Abdul Almasi responded with a public statement. Taking up the mantle of oppressed Palestinians, he identified the Israel Society's actions as Zionist censorship, arguing that they were participating in a concerted smear campaign against him, 'It would be very regrettable if Israeli students are able to silence one of the very few voices representing Palestinians, rather than participating in a proper debate.'

These negotiations in the lead up to Abdul Almasi's appearance repeated a language game that is engrained within the wider cultural politics of Palestine-Israel.

---

[83] These kinds of allusions to the religious identifications of participating students were an implicit, yet recurrent feature of this campus politics. This reflected an atmosphere of discomfort with the religious commitments of students participating in Palestine-Israel, an issue that I will discuss further in this chapter.

While opponents of Almasi's presence on campus positioned the Palestine Society as extremist promulgators of the 'new anti-Semitism',[84] the Israel Society were identified with the censoring oppression of the Zionist lobby. These well-established struggles over the politics of hate speech and censorship worked to translate the Middle East conflict into the multicultural politics of the British civil sphere. By recursively enacting this language game in the build up to the Almasi event, the student audience were primed to engage not as passive, ironic, melodramatic spectators but rather as *active* participants in this conflict.

As well as *identifying* the Israel and Palestine Societies with actors in the Middle East, the discourses framing this meeting situated it in relation to previous controversial events at the university. This included high profile clashes when an Israeli minister had visited the previous year, the notorious Palestine Society campus occupation over Operation Cast Lead in early 2009 and subsequent fall-out which included the adoption of a students' union anti-Semitism policy. As I will go on to show, these inter-group histories of victory and defeat were recursively evoked in this drama, contributing to its transgressive denouement.

The build-up to this event situated it within inherited struggles over *how* to communicate about Palestine-Israel. In contrast to the university melodrama in which mutual investments in communicative rationality provided the consensual ground for the agonistic plot, the Abdul Almasi event was framed by a refusal of these shared ground-rules. Having failed to get the event cancelled, the Israel Society continued to put its legitimacy into question, by challenging the key aspects of the proposed format, arguing that the panel was 'unbalanced', critiquing the 'biased' chair and the opaque entry requirements. Organised from the outset as a liminal event which did not conform to norms of academic civility, this context provided the basis for a tragic praxis to unfold.

Circulating videos: mediating unstable knowledge

The meeting took place one month before I began my fieldwork, by which time two videos of the event were available online. The longer version, uploaded by the Palestine Society lasted ninety minutes. A counter-extremism think tank produced an edited five minute version of this, which featured captions highlighting key, 'scandalous' moments. My analysis in this chapter draws on various media, including these recordings, the

---

[84] See Chapter Two for more detail on the background to this discourse. For an example of a debate relating hate speech and censorship to academic contexts, see Judith Butler's essay 'The Charge of Anti-Semitism' (2006) and David Hirsh's response (2010).

many local, national and international newspaper articles and blogs, as well as my subsequent conversations about the event with student participants. As Gordon Lynch (2012: 87) explains, 'media' in the sense of the material expression of meaning, includes images, sounds, spaces, practices and bodies; one claim of this chapter is that the sensualities of bodily interactions at the Abdul Almasi event were pivotal to the direction of the unfolding action. Yet, as a member of the wider audience, who was not physically present at the meeting, I found that the quality of these videos drew me closer into these visceral dynamics. In contrast to the professional, official, recording of the academic boycott debate, the Abdul Almasi video was filmed by Yusra from a hand-held camera situated in the midst of the audience. The shaky camera work, which swung around during the question and answer session, shifting in and out of focus, created a sensation of liminal instability for the viewer. After sixty minutes, the video started to skip, disrupting the medium's authority as a source of transparent access to the truth. Questioning the video's reliability, the Jewish press reported that, 'The audio and visual and quality of this recording, taken by the Palestine Society, is limited and skips sections repeatedly. It was only made available to the public one week after the meeting'. While Yusra convincingly protested the transparency of the video (and of her own intentions) online, these exchanges only exacerbated the uncertainty of unaligned spectators. Hesitancy over the trustworthiness of the medium drew the viewer into the ambiguous struggles enacted in the drama. As such, this material, technological and political mediation of the *unstable, ambiguous* Abdul Almasi drama contributed to its tragic actualisation for a wider audience.

Announcing the ambiguous characters: embodying Palestinian identity

Yusra's video was shot from a few rows back in the crowded lecture room, the black hijab of a woman, seated directly in front, occasionally obscuring our view. The lens was focused towards the front of the room where, in contrast to the 'neutral' backdrop of the academic boycott event, a Palestinian flag was draped over a table. Abdul Almasi and Professor Murphy, the event chair, were seated in close proximity to, and level with, the audience, an arrangement which later facilitated the merging of actors and spectators as the action heated up.

Abdul Almasi, a man in his early sixties, was wearing a dark suit, white shirt, tie and had a striking bushy moustache. His appearance conformed to the Palestine Society's advance publicity, which had emphasised his Palestinian and Arab

background.[85] Warmly, Professor Murphy introduced him to the room, reading this bio out loud to the audience, punctuating the text with additional complements,

> "Born in Gaza, Palestine, now based in London where he has become established as an influential Arab voice... Journalists around the world frequently seek out his views and he is known for a passionate and lively style of debating - as we will, no doubt, hear today."

Looking towards him with her arms opened appreciatively, Professor Murphy smiled, "we hope there are more like you!" With this warm welcome, Professor Murphy pointedly performed a gesture of solidarity common within the pro-Palestinian movement. By inviting and welcoming Palestinian, and particularly Gazan, people to the campus, activists appealed to the immediacy of first-hand experience as an authoritative basis for claims-making.[86]

Abdul Almasi responded by heightening the politicisation of his Palestinian body, identifying his physical presence as a pre-verbal mode of resistance to censorship, "the people who are protesting against my speaking, who are trying to silence me, actually saved me half my lecture and confirmed my talk before I started." I was struck by the sound of his voice, his heavy accent and not-quite fluent English, which somehow made visceral his liminal position as a 'non-Westerner', claiming fluency in Western discourse. This equivocal position was re-affirmed as he introduced himself; Abdul Almasi repeatedly indexed his personal biography to the history of Palestinian oppression while presenting himself as a professional expert in the [pro-Western] fight against Al-Qaeda terrorism. While Professor Murphy depicted Abdul Almasi's 'passionate' presence as an authentic signifier of Palestinian resistance, opponents had already claimed his liminal Western-Arab position as a polluting threat. A British Zionist blogger portrayed Almasi's bilingualism as a technology of deceit, describing him as, 'yet another case of a leading Palestinian figure speaking one way, in English, to their liberal Western friends but saying something very different to their own people in Arabic.' In contrast to the unequivocal protagonists of the academic boycott debate, Abdul Almasi was, from the outset, a complex, uncertain figure. While the white, British backgrounds of the depersonalised speakers at the boycott debate were invisible within the British

---

[85] His appearance, however, later became embroiled in the politics of memory, as a conservative blogger described Almasi's moustache as 'Hitler-like'.

[86] In Chapter Two, I described how Joanna Long (2006) has explored this embodied activism. Long has suggested that, in the context of de-territorialised diasporic politics, in which Palestinian existence is itself at stake, Palestinian bodies themselves become a political space.

university space, Abdul Almasi's actions were framed through his complex cultural heritage, as his character embodied a historical stake in contemporary struggles over Palestine-Israel.

Seated next to Abdul Almasi, Professor Murphy, a white, middle-aged woman, spoke fluent English in a British accent, which perhaps carried other inflections.[87] She was wearing a black outfit subsequently interpreted by one critical blogger as signifying her 'biased' cultural allegiance; 'Swathed in a hideous dark velvet Bedouin gown (presumably as much a snub to Western fashion as to show solidarity with the Palestinians)'. A known member of BRICUP, Professor Murphy had been subject to scrutiny from outside the university when a counter-extremism organisation had critiqued her membership on the board of the university's Middle East Centre. Her political allegiances were well documented, captured, for example, in online video footage of protests against a visiting Israeli Minister to the university. As such she was a symbolically significant actor for this student audience, her liminal activist-academic activities at once interpreted as supportive by Palestine Society members, and as aggressive, by Israel Society representatives. She sat with a fixed expression, lips tightly pressed together, as Abdul Almasi began his impassioned denunciation of the Israeli State and its supporters. In response to his sarcastic castigation of the student Israel Society, she briefly broke into smiles and laughter, before withdrawing once more to a stern grimace. Then, as the scene shifted to the audience, she was drawn into more proactive action which, as I will go to describe, situated her as an increasingly ambiguous actor in the interpretive struggles that followed.

Under the conditions of modern, individualised societies, theorists of tragedy have argued that characters come to be increasingly important as the locus of tragic themes (Williams 1979). Rather than being externalised as conflicts between the gods and the polity, the central tensions of the tragic plot are embodied as internal to the subjectivities of the central character, a process that Simon Critchley describes as 'Hamletization' (Critchley and Kesselman 2012: 155). My claim in this chapter is that both Abdul Almasi and Professor Murphy became the locus of a particular kind of ambiguity, full with contradictions, carrying the potential to exceed, with monstrous affect, the stable categories of political identity. As such these key characters were

---

[87] My caution in placing her accent itself exemplifies the struggles that students, including myself, engaged in when negotiating the political complexities of exposure and concealment in relation to this issue, which I discussed in Chapter Three.

presented as ambivalent objects for audience members in ways that shaped the unsettling encounters that followed.

Invoking ambivalence: "the Jewish lobby"

Leaning slightly towards the microphone, his hands resting on the table next to a stack of his papers, Abdul Almasi began his speech with the equivocal gestures which pervaded his entire performance. Commending the *resistance* of the Palestine Society because, "they managed to keep fast, they did not actually submit to the intimidation and pressure", he then conflated Zionists and Jews at the university with a sarcastic aside, prompting aggressive laughter from a sub-section of the audience, "also I would like to thank our *Jewish* cousins because they publicised this event otherwise I wouldn't have such a lovely audience here". After addressing the controversial nature of his subject, he carefully moderated his denunciation of the Zionist lobby with the qualification, "But I have to admit that not every Jew is a member of the Israeli lobby...so we shouldn't generalise, I'm not going to generalise here". Twenty seconds later, in the midst of denouncing Zionist "control", Abdul Almasi made the first of four controversial slips between "Zionist" and "Jewish, "and you know, the, the, the Jewish lobby, the Israeli lobby, sorry the Zionist lobby in the United States is the second strongest lobby in the whole of the United States."

Members of the Israel and Jewish Societies seated in the audience were well-equipped to hear the anti-Semitic echoes in these words. In 2009, UJS and the Community Security Trust (CST)[88] circulated a booklet to student societies entitled, *A Student's Guide to anti-Semitism on Campus*. The booklet provided a definition of anti-Semitism which identified the phrase 'Jewish lobby' as anti-Semitic on the grounds that it generalised about Jews as a homogenous group. Linking this to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, the guide explained that, 'If a journalist refers to a "Jewish lobby" controlling events in Washington, this is an updated version of the Jewish conspiracy allegation' (CST and UJS 2009: 25). The *Jewish Chronicle's* prolific campus media coverage heightened student vigilance towards these transgressions. On campus, speakers hosted by the Israel Society also highlighted these threats, including by establishing tight security procedures when they visited the university. At University A, this discourse had also been institutionalised in the Students' Union Anti-Semitism Policy, ratified following the campus occupation over Gaza in 2009.

---

[88] The CST is an organisation concerned with safeguarding the security of the British Jewish community (see Appendix A).

The claim that traditional anti-Semitic tropes are congenitally connected to contemporary anti-Zionism was an established political script. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Keith Kahn-Harris and Ben Gidley (2010) have situated this discourse within an evolving multicultural politics in the UK. They argue that prior to the 1990s, Anglo-Jewish leaders had adopted a strategy of security, focusing on assimilation and minimising grievances. From the 1990s, however, figures such as the Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, publically embraced multiculturalism, difference and the public airing of grievances. This included the amplification of the 'new anti-Semitism' discourse, which claims that much contemporary anti-Zionism is contiguous with traditional anti-Semitism (ibid). This provided the cultural horizon against which Abdul Almasi's speech was interpreted, embedding students' interactions within a wider dynamic of civil sphere politics. Abdul Almasi's use of the term "Jewish lobby" became a pivotal source of evidence in subsequent debates about his anti-Semitic speech. For example, one Jewish website published a post attributed to a student entitled 'The anti-Jewish, whoops, I meant anti- Israel lobby' which stated,

> 'Where Almasi differed from the standard rants was his interchangeable use of the words, Israelis, Zionists and Jews. He proceeded to emphasise his absolute disgust at the fact that if anyone is critical of Israel they are automatically labelled as an anti-Semite (and he began with a disclaimer that not every Jew loves Israel), yet he himself fundamentally failed to distinguish Israel and the Jewish Nation.'

The new anti-Semitism discourse authorised this taboo on the blurring of the categories of 'Jew' and 'Zionist'. Yet claims that nominal attacks on 'Israelis' and 'Zionists' were *contiguous* with traditional anti-Semitism against Jews, simultaneously posited this connection. This tension was expressed in the *Students' Guide to anti-Semitism* as it claimed that the traditional anti-Semitic conspiracy trope has 'found its way into the mainstream of political debate by *substituting* the words 'Israeli' or 'Zionist' for the word 'Jew' (CST and UJS 2009: 13, my italics). In response, Abdul Almasi railed against this silencing of Palestinian voices, shouting,

> "If you criticise Israel, you are anti-Semite. If you say there's a Zionist lobby in the United States and in Britain, you are an anti-Semite. If you talk anything about Israeli crimes, you know, you are anti-Semite".

His rage increased as he went on to claim that Zionism in fact *demanded recognition* of the nexus of Judaism and Zionism, placing Palestinians like himself in an impossible double bind,

> "That's the racism, this is the real ugly side, you know when you say you have to - look - you have to give the oath of loyalty to a *Jewish* state, which doesn't belong to you. That's, that's, that's what they want to impose on the Palestinians..."

With visceral anger, Abdul Almasi expressed his entrapment in an impossible impasse, as one required both to recognise and deny the connection of Judaism and Zionism.

Later, when I interviewed Justin who had attended this meeting, he suggested that Abdul Almasi had articulated an ambiguity in the relationship of Judaism and Zionism, which was also experienced as troubling for Jewish students,

> "You know the Almasi event... the guy uses the word Zionism and Judaism interchangeably. But that, to me, when he's criticising Zionism, you know for me, whilst that is an issue that he's using them interchangeably and there is blatant anti-Semitism if he's saying, you know, 'Judaism's this, Judaism's that'. But equally I find a huge problem in it, in that it's a completely - again – delegitimisation; the idea is that Zionism *is* an essential tenet of Judaism."

In Chapter Three, I described how these questions arose in discomforting ways in my relationships with Jewish students. I showed how these were shaped by diverse histories of migration and diasporic attachments reflected, for example, in the silences between anti-Zionist Jewish students and Jewish / Israel Society activists. I also described how these tensions were shaped by the dominant secularist norms of the British university, which insisted on a rigid distinction between religion and politics, equating religious nationalism with anti-Western violence. This discourse was mobilised again in this context when, in the social media discussions which followed the Abdul Almasi event, a member of the Jewish Society criticised the Palestine Society for undermining inter faith relations at the university. Sadiq responded by attributing the categorical distinction between Judaism and Zionism to the Israel Society and then wielding this against them,

> 'This is a political and not a religious issue. Zionism is not Judaism, remember? ... Aren't you collating Zionism with Judaism when you claim that there is a need for interfaith dialogue around this issue? ... Please don't refer to the problems of

Zionists as being the same as the problems of Jews. I might have to report you to the JC [Jewish Chronicle].'

A second contributor, supporting Sadiq, amplified this critique of 'violent' politicised religion, adding,

'Do not associate the Jewish faith with militant Zionists as I consider these offensive anti-Semitic statements. Judaism is a religion of peace and should not be mercilessly associated with Israel's transgressions. As a Muslim, I am empathetic to victims of those who use religion to progress certain reprehensible social / economic / political agendas, which don't even reflect the faith, yet actually represent other interests.'

It was within this broader context that Abdul Almasi's words carried the potential to provoke discomforting feelings among Jewish students in the audience. As I learnt in my relations with Justin and Ella, the lack of an available language for speaking about these tensions publicly could lead us into rigid, categorical positions. This, I suggest, provides one insight into the explicit, categorical and very public condemnation of Almasi's words by high profile Jewish students.

As I watched Abdul Almasi speak of "the Jewish lobby", I was also struck by another difficult tension in responding to his words. The word 'lobby' echoed with my encounter at University B, when a student had suggested that NUS politics was run by Jews.[89] The visceral impact of this encounter had taught me how language could affect me in bodily ways, how *particular* words could hurt when they resonated with embodied histories of racism. While I could feel this again in relation to Abdul Almasi's repeated reference to "the Jewish lobby", I was also struck by the descriptive truth of his words; I agreed with his claim that there are influential Jewish organisations lobbying for Israel in the United States. Then, listening back to Abdul Almasi's speech, I began to sense how the texture of his anger, and his convergence of Jews with Israelis was connected to his own historical experience, as a Palestinian from Gaza. As Sahir, a student who had grown up in Palestine, later taught me, this experience of living with Israeli violence could shape a *particular* kind of anger towards Jewish people, which the generic accusation of 'anti-Semitism' refused to recognise.[90] And, more than this, I sensed that the sweeping

---

[89] I describe this incident in more detail in Chapter Three.
[90] In Chapter Seven, I provide a detailed account of the ways in which Sahir taught me to appreciate this.

accusation of 'anti-Semitism' could be *invested* with a disavowal of the historical experiences that Almasi embodied as a Gazan Palestinian. My suggestion here is that, some Jewish students were invested in denying the particular sources of Almasi's anger, so that the significance of his background was both *known* and *denied* at the same time. This was highlighted a few months later when an Israeli journalist visited the university. Describing himself as a critical friend of Israel, this Israeli man used the phrase "Jewish lobby" to refer to people who had censored him from publicly criticising the violence in Gaza. I had noticed Ella and Justin in the audience there, along with another prominent Jewish society member, who had criticised the Abdul Almasi event in the Jewish press. On this latter occasion, Ella wrote a positive report of the Israeli journalist's speech in the student newspaper. His use of the phrase "the Jewish lobby" disappeared without comment, in stark contrast to the furore provoked by Almasi's words.

By attending to this context, we can see how Almasi's passionate naming of "the Jewish lobby" and the categorical judgement that this provoked, constituted a moment of mutual *mis*recognition. In subsequently denying responsibility for his "slip", Abdul Almasi refused to recognise how his words could hurt Jewish students. In their absolute condemnation, Jewish students refused to recognise the particular *sources* of Almasi's anger, or the historical experiences of violence which shaped the texture of his words. In addition, I will here introduce a claim to be developed in this chapter; there was a more fundamental misrecognition enacted here. As both parties insistently adopted the position of the victim, this entailed a denial of their own aggressive desires. As such, this was misrecognition, not only of the other but of the self.[91] And somehow this was connected to the limits of a language inadequate to inchoate feelings, and unable to sustain the possibility of a *contradiction* grounded in unspoken historical entanglements; Could Abdul Almasi be *both* anti-Semitic and *justifiably* angry toward 'Jews'?

Paradoxes of victimhood: from passive innocence to active aggression

Abdul Almasi spoke without interruption for the next forty minutes, in a speech that followed the same Manichean script of villains and victims performed at the academic boycott debate. Like Dr Pro, Abdul Almasi emphatically denounced the occupying Israeli State and its supporters, including Zionist actors on campus, whose lobbying and censorship, he claimed, was contiguous with Israeli State oppression. Positioning himself

---

[91] This sense of the tragedy enacted through the misrecognition of one's own desire is an insight developed in Simon Critchley's recent discussion of Hamlet (Critchley 2012).

momentarily within the civil-rational codes of the liberal university, Abdul Almasi opened the meeting with an appeal to Enlightenment values,

> "So if I am sophisticated enough to talk to a Western audience in a way they understand the conflict, in a very neutral way, or scientific way, or professional way, what's wrong in that?"

Towards the end of the meeting, he returned to affirm these norms, "so, so please let us have a civilized dialogue, a sophisticated dialogue." Yet in contrast to the organised enactment of the predetermined plot at the academic boycott debate, Abdul Almasi's actions radically contradicted his words. Despite pronouncing the virtues of neutral speech, he continued with a personal, impassioned performance, which significantly contributed to the liminal instability of the ensuing drama.

After evidencing the power of the Israeli lobby in the US, Abdul Almasi increasingly departed from the depersonalised argumentation adopted by Dr Pro at the boycott debate. Identifying as an innocent victim, Abdul Almasi's speech and gestures came alive as he vividly described the suffering of "his people" at the hands of Israelis, "And Gaza. I am from Gaza, I was born in a refugee camp in Gaza. In 2008 when the Israelis bombed Gaza, you know, I couldn't believe my eyes. You know those people..." Abdul Almasi raised his hands in their air, gesturing towards this unspeakable violence. Next to him Professor Murphy shifted in her seat, frowning as she listened intently to his expression of Palestinian desperation and hope,

> "Gaza is a hundred fifty square miles, a hundred and fifty square miles. About two million people there, most of them extremely poor. There is nothing in Gaza but children. Nothing at all."

Professor Murphy looked towards him, with a slight, sad smile as he raised his palms towards the audience, in a gesture of helplessness, "They only produce, the only thing they produce there is children, nothing else." A wave of sympathetic laughter continued as Abdul Almasi spoke of his father with poignant humour, "My father actually, he got ten children and he died when he is forty, imagine if he is, you know, sixty or something like that, how many children he would have..." The smile on Professor Murphy's lips gradually faded into a grimace as he invoked the violent destruction of this innocence,

"So, so... when I saw the Israelis bombing Gaza, imagine bombing with F16, F15, I don't know how many F's there are... bombing, bombing Gaza, imagine that. And the people are hopeless, helpless, bombing Gaza from the sea, from the air, from the tanks, from everything. Bombing Gaza and using actually phosphoric bombs... and actually children were dismembered by this bombardment".

Repeating the phrase "we are victims", Abdul Almasi pleaded with the audience,

"Zionist lobby is supporting that. And the Western world are silent about this...What, what about humanity? What about war crimes? Where is the human rights? What about the Geneva treaties?"

By grounding his narrative in the moral authority of human rights, and presenting himself as the suffering victim, Abdul Almasi appealed to deep commitments within his audience. His invocation of the mutilation of Gazan children by Israeli phosphorus bombs carried potent symbolic resonances for these student spectators. As Lori Allen has argued, campaigners have increasingly mobilised aesthetic representations of Palestinians as a 'nation of sufferers', in order to advocate politically within a 'global meritocracy of suffering' (Allen 2009: 162, 165). These representations circulated on campus via the university speaker tours of campaigners, such as Dr Ang Swee Chai who, as I described in Chapter Three, presented graphic imagery and testimony to powerful effect.[92] In this way, Abdul Almasi's idiom of suffering recycled an image indexed to collective memories of activism, carrying particular resonance for this audience.

In presenting himself as a vulnerable, sympathy-deserving victim, Abdul Almasi claimed legitimacy in relation to widely *shared* values of this otherwise divided audience. Like the Palestine Society, the Israel Society at University A *also* sought to situate its politics within a humanitarian frame, organising dialogue and reconciliation meetings, which emphasised the shared humanity of victims on 'both sides' of the conflict. The trope of the victim was not only applied to representations of the Middle East but rather translated into the politics of anti-racism on campus. As described above, the discourse of the 'new anti-Semitism' shaped feelings of vulnerability, sensitising students to the racist threat concealed in campus anti-Zionism. In 2012, the parallel contested discourse of Islamophobia was institutionalised in a students' union policy.

---

[92] Dr Ang Swee Chai had visited University A during the period following the university occupations against the Israeli military action in Gaza.

This claimed to protect vulnerable Muslim students from hate speech, proscribing the 'stereotyping, harassment or demonisation of Muslims, including portrayals of Muslims as terrorists or barbarians'. In this way a competitive politics of victimhood linked the student politics of Palestine-Israel with the politics of anti-racism on campus. This played out in a dyadic struggle, as pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian student societies each sought to project the other as infringing the humanitarian and anti-racist values shared by the wider campus community. However, the moralistic exchanges in the Abdul Almasi event did not follow this dynamic of contained, complicit struggle. Rather, his performance became increasingly unstable, and the status of his 'victimhood' increasingly ambiguous, in ways that diverged from these more routine forms of symbolic to and fro.

A few minutes into his speech, Abdul Almasi unsettled his passive victim status. In the midst of a description of the Israeli State's military dominance of the Middle East region, he inserted an aggressive sarcastic joke about Israel's paranoia, "Who is threatening Israel - Hamas, with its Khartoum missiles? Unbelievable!" In striking contrast to Dr Pro's avoidance of this subject at the academic boycott debate, Abdul Almasi proceeded to argue for Western engagement with Hamas, who had been "elected by democratic means". After forty five minutes, Professor Murphy opened the question and answer session, sternly imploring the audience to "please ask questions, I will be ferocious if speeches start to develop." The controversial resonances in Abdul Almasi's rhetoric of Islamic resistance, were immediately stoked by Jewish and Israel Society members in the audience, who repeatedly raised the issue when invited to speak.

Gail, the Israel Society President was the third person called. She cleared her throat, slowly announcing her first name to the room. In the foreground of the shot, a student member of 'Stand With Us'[93] sombrely stroked his chin. Behind him a woman wearing a hijab smiled as a flutter of suppressed laughter was picked up by the microphones. Reading her intervention in a slow, even tone, Gail began,

> "You said on Arabic TV 'if Israel is struck by Iranian missiles, by Allah, you will go into the centre of London and dance with delight'. You claim that this is a smear campaign against you and deny having said this. Many around the world have seen this footage making this defence..."

Abruptly, Professor Murphy sharply interjected, cutting Gail off in mid-flow, "This is a bit of a speech". Murmurs of "yeah" and "she's reading" emanated from the audience. Gail

---

[93] 'Stand With Us' is an organisation that advocates for Israel (See Appendix A).

raised her hand insistently and continued, "Please can you explain why you deny having said this when there's clear evidence you have. Furthermore, can you now please denounce this view?"

There was a second of silence before audience muttering began to swell in anticipation of the escalation of conflict. Next to Gail, a student burst out laughing. Raising her voice, Professor Murphy staked her position, as she wryly addressed Abdul Almasi, "Let's take the questions in order ok – useful question first..." leaning back, she smiled, "and then we will move to your dancing". Abdul Almasi obliged, first addressing a question about the two state solution, then, leaning forward into the microphone with his hands on his hips, "About the dancing – and I'm a very bad dancer by the way!" Professor Murphy broke in to a broad grin as the sound of laughter pervaded the room. Abdul Almasi picked up speed and pitch as his rhetoric crescendoed,

"This is a smear campaign against me, saying you know – WHO IS BOMBING? WHO IS BOMBING? Am I bombing the Israelis?"

In response to loud clapping from the audience, he vigorously jabbed his index finger, pointing and gesticulating with anger. As the clapping continued and Professor Murphy selected the next questioner, Gail and Jonathan interjected in unison, "You didn't answer the question! Can you answer the question?" Without hesitating Abdul Almasi shouted back, summoning his oppressors *in the audience* with a directed gaze and the pronoun 'you';

"I ANSWERED THE QUESTION – YOU ARE BOMBING US EVERYDAY! I am a man of peace, that's the problem".

Professor Murphy raised her palm and her voice over the crescendoing sound of clapping. Ignoring her, Abdul Almasi erupted again, thrusting his finger in the air as he shouted,

"WE ARE NOT GOING TO BE INTIMIDATED OR TERRORISED!"

Directly in view of the camera, a girl turned to her friend grinning with exhilaration, as the audience whooped and cheered in support of his resistance.

In this way, Gail's attempts to fix the action in relation to established moral binaries were thwarted. She had attempted to bring the structure of melodrama into this

meeting, to draw on the authority of established moral codes. Professor Murphy's laughter at Gail, and Abdul Almasi's rejection of her question, expressed a visceral refusal to *recognise* Gail's moral position. With laughter and anger, they refused Gail's claim that speech supporting the destruction of Israeli constitutes an anti-Semitic attack. Instead, Abdul Almasi denied any shared moral grammar, by identifying Gail's speech as an act of oppression.

As Abdul Almasi's expression of victimhood transposed into passionate anger, he destabilised the innocent position that he had previously claimed for himself. Images of suffering victims, such as those projected by Dr Ang Swee Chai, worked effectively when they sustained a distance between the spectator and their object, which contained humanitarian feelings within the civil norms of the university. The trope of the suffering victim appealed to members of the university to empathise on the grounds of humanistic universalism, complementing their position as autonomous academic subjects. In this way humanitarianism provided an authoritative vernacular for Palestinian claims, in contrast to the particularism of religion, nationalism or ethnicity. As I discussed in Chapter Three, Saniyah highlighted this political reality very explicitly as she explained, "people can get very heated about faith issues whereas you can't really say 'no they shouldn't have human rights". However, Abdul Almasi was a physically present person rather than a distant image. As such he did not merely *symbolise* the position of innocent victim, but rather expressed a more complex psychic relation between suffering and anger. By *embodying* rather than abstractly signifying Palestinian trauma, Abdul Almasi destabilised the distancing relation of humanitarian empathy. In this way too, as I watched him, I felt torn by his ambiguous position. As he blurred fixed moral valuations of his character, I seemed to reach the limits of my understanding of the rights and wrongs of this situation, and came to feel deeply troubled by the ethical uncertainty that this provoked.[94]

The month after the Abdul Almasi meeting, Lars, a Danish student activist, complained to the newspaper about their coverage of the event. Lars argued that the image of an Arab demonstrator that accompanied the newspaper's article was,

> 'of the typically stereotyped victims of racism today: a bearded, young Arab man with sunglasses and a keffiyeh. In this context, the image provokes thoughts of 'the Muslim terrorist' in a similar way to the tabloid mass media.'

---

[94] The difficulties that we experience in relation to the ongoing inhabitation of this kind of ambiguity are also explored by Jarrett Zigon in his illuminating discussion of 'moral breakdown' (Jarrett 2007).

The implication was that Arab and Muslim students were being victimised by this picture and that the welfare of ethnic minorities on campus was threatened by the circulation of these stereotypes. Lars argued that sympathetic students should focus on the victimhood of Arab civilians, and he linked this to the vulnerability of minorities in Britain,

> 'In future, I hope that the editorial team will be more discerning in selecting its visual material to avoid perpetrating stereotypes of a minority, who are already discriminated against enough in the UK and beyond.'

The student newspaper responded by challenging Lars' interpretation of the image, revealing that they had replicated the front cover of a newspaper with whom Abdul Almasi was associated,

> 'There is an irony in your critique – the original editorial decision was therefore made by Mr. Almasi's colleagues, who we can fairly assume are sympathetic with events in Tunisia. Their decision to publish this picture, like ours, is defensible. The defining feature of Tunisia's Revolution has been the spontaneous, wide-spread involvement of everyday people. Thus, an image of an impassioned protester seems apt.'

This exchange made explicit the complex symbolic politics of victimhood in this context. While Lars appealed to the moral authority of the passive victim, the newspaper argued that the picture of the impassioned protestor was circulated by the pro-Palestinian movement itself. This image, it seemed, simultaneously signified dignified resistance *and* enacted racist stereotyping by invoking the trope of the 'Arab extremist'. Ambivalence towards this strategy was *internal* to the pro-Palestinian movement, as the dynamics of pride and shame associated with victimhood fragmented the positions of Palestine Society members. As Lars' intervention revealed, this was not only about representations of Arabs in the Middle East, rather it was also about responses to a politics of victimhood in Britain. As such, this was also one way in which Abdul Almasi's performance helped to collapse the geographical gap between Palestine-Israel and this British campus.

Abdul Almasi's embodiment of apparently incommensurable categories of victimhood and aggression, resistance and extremism, connected powerfully with some students' experience of engaging with this politics. In Chapter Three, I described how I

personally struggled with the powerful sacralisation of the Holocaust on campus, which insisted on an absolute distinction between (elevated) innocent victims versus evil perpetrators. One of the limits of this moral symbolism was that it prohibited any acknowledgement of how difficult it can *feel* to be identified with passive victimhood. I described how Saniyah also experienced this struggle, as she sought to distance herself from her mother's passive, traumatised relationship to Palestine. Drawing on these insights, I suggest that Adbul Almasi's paradoxical embodiment of innocence and anger did not only provoke divergent interpretations *between* students. Rather it mirrored experiences of ambivalence and fragmentation internal to some students' sense of self. This can help us to understand some students' expressed delight at Abdul Almasi's rage. This was a consequence of Abdul Almasi's ability to tap into students' unspoken ambivalence with the dominant moral codes of the campus.

Reflecting ambivalence: tensions of civility and resistance

As the question and answer phase of the meeting continued, Israel and Jewish Society members obstinately fixed on the question of Hamas. In response, Abdul Almasi's resistance hardened, as he angrily refused to condemn Hamas, Hezbollah or Iran as terrorists, rather expressing his pride in the "people who are actually resisting the occupation". Members of the audience supported his defiant stance; a Saudi Arabian student spoke on behalf of the "younger generation", asking, "how can we resist the Zionist lobby... if we're so touched by everything that's happening now?" Admonishing the enforced complicity of Mahmoud Abbas and Fatah with the Israeli occupation, Abdul Almasi shouted "it's humiliating". Banging the table as he appealed to those present as co-resistors, "this meeting is a great step in that direction! We have to speak out! We have to confront the lies and the deceptions of the Zionist lobby!" Standing alert by the door of the room, Sadiq, now intervened with an attempt at containment, asking Abdul Almasi to allay the fears of those who considered him a proponent of terrorism. Yet Sadiq's efforts had the opposite effect. Raising his hands, Abdul Almasi unleashed an expression of rage incommensurable with the archetype of the innocent victim, and profoundly transgressing the emotional conventions of the civil university,

"It is intimidation, you know, 'You are an anti-Semite; you are a racist'...YOU
KNOW WE ARE NOT ALLOWED TO SCREAM! You are flogging us! You are killing
us! You are taking our land! You are demolishing our houses! YOU ARE DOING
ALL THESE EVILS TO US AND WE ARE NOT ALLOWED TO SCREAM! WE ARE
NOT ALLOWED TO SPEAK!"

Abdul Almasi's impassioned refusal to condemn Islamist politics carried
dangerous resonances for Palestinian activists in this university setting. The dominant
discourse of the liberal university aligned Hamas with the profanity of 'Islamic
extremism', linking Middle Eastern politics with threats to British universities. This
boundary work located British universities within what Pnina Werbner describes as the
'global mythology' of the 'Clash of Civilisations' between the West and Islam (Werbner
2004: 463). The polluting threat of Hamas had circulated on campus via institutional
discourses. For example, when, in 2009, this Students' Union had voted to twin with the
Islamic University of Gaza, the Palestine Society member proposing the motion carefully
emphasised, 'this is absolutely not a sign that we condone Hamas but aims to support
the right to education for the people of Gaza'. As I described in Chapter Four, Palestine
Society members often conformed to this civil discourse in their strategic practices, at
times internalising it in their expressed motivations for action. As Yusra had emphasised
the society sought to overcome the labels of "fanaticism, radicalism, terrorism and
Hamas-supporting" while Sadiq affirmed his civil commitment to this process.

However, while Yusra and Sadiq carefully adhered to these symbolic and
emotional codes in our conversations, the Palestine Society also practiced resistance to
this demand for civility. Student occupations inverted conventional uses of pedagogic
spaces and, with activist theatre, portrayed scenes of violence in the main street of the
campus. Musicians and performance poets were invited to speak, adopting angry
vernaculars and aesthetics repertoires of resistance, which opposed the institutional
demand for calm, reasoned discourse. For example, the British-Iraqi hip-hop artist,
Lowkey, toured the three case study campuses, offering 'Rhythms of Resistance'. I
attended his gig at University B where, dressed in a Malcolm X t-shirt and swirling
keffiyeh, he initiated a collective rendition of his hit, *Terrorist*, the crowd shouting the
hook and verse in call and response,

'They're calling me a terrorist / Like they don't know who the terror is / When
they put it on me

I tell them this / I'm all about peace and love / They're calling me a terrorist / Like they don't know who the terror is / Insulting my intelligence / Oh how these people judge.'

Explaining to me that, 'It's angry music... we wouldn't get an audience this big at one of our speaker events', Nuha, a Palestine Society member, joined in with Lowkey's anthem *Long Live Palestine*, fists pumping in the air as the hyped crowd chanted 'Free Free Palestine' in unison.

Significantly, as well as evoking the sonic and visual aesthetics of Arabic anti-colonial resistance, these performances expressed resistance to the British government's counter-extremism policies, also moving fluidly into protests against university fees. As such, the angry vernaculars of these Palestinian activist events simultaneously dramatised transnational solidarity and opposed the perceived rejection of multiculturalism by the British government. As Abdul Almasi shifted into this resistant activist position, he also exposed its incommensurability with the norms of the liberal university. As Abdullah, a Palestinian postgraduate student from Ramallah put it to me,

> "You have this struggle and you have the tension between being a neutral academic, if there is something called like that, and being a normal human being who is Palestinian and who is coming from there. And here the clash comes and you cannot, you cannot hide your anger and your frustration behind your academic umbrella. Just like, you will be yourself and being yourself means that you go out of this dress that you are an academic and a researcher and just act as a Palestinian citizen - if not a Palestinian citizen as someone who care about Palestine and the Palestinian cause. So the link is quite challenging and, it's quite, the line is really very thin."

Rejecting the humiliating position of the violated victim, Abdul Almasi's resistant rage breached the emotional codes of the civil campus. The tension between the audiences' visible pleasure in Abdul Almasi's expressive anger and Sadiq's attempt to contain this breach was revealing of fragmenting positions among pro-Palestinian activist students. While the contained melodrama of the academic boycott debate repressed these tensions, Abdul Almasi embodied them. As he identified with members of the audience, he invited pro-Palestinian students to dramatically undergo the moral ambiguities intrinsic to their ambivalent belongings.

The somatic chorus

As the pace of the Q&A picked up, Yusra's camera shot panned back to reveal the long rectangular classroom overflowing with over a hundred people, crammed into seats and leaning against walls. Seated in the audience were committee members of the Israel and Palestine Societies, along with high profile student activists from the national scene. Sadiq had already breached the boundary between actors and audience, appearing on the periphery of the camera frame, at the front table. He whispered into Professor Murphy's ear to warn her of the fifty extra people waiting outside, information that she relayed to the crowd, so heightening the tension. Now, increasingly, the rest of the audience were drawn into the drama as active protagonists.

Unlike the detached spectatorial position imposed by the rigid ground rules of the academic boycott debate, the Abdul Almasi meeting had already *actively* engaged its audience via the intense conflict leading up to this event. Abdul Almasi's opening address had facilitated this fusion, as he thanked the Palestine Society for resisting intimidation and sarcastically referred to his "Jewish cousins" in the audience. This was the first of many instances in which ridicule worked to shame a sub-section of the audience; in contrast to the reflexive humour of the university melodrama, sarcastic laughter here *implicated* the audience in conflictual action. In response to critical questions from Israel and Jewish Society members, Abdul Almasi shifted his mode of address, repeatedly adopting the pronoun "you" as he decried the physical and symbolic violence of the Zionist lobby. This direct address was complemented by increasingly vociferous interjections from the audience as this discussion *about* the Middle East morphed into a live enactment of conflict.

In striking contrast to Professor Chair's authoritative guardianship of a predetermined script, Professor Murphy was increasingly embroiled in the dramatic action. During Abdul Almasi's opening speech, she sat with a fixed expression, her lips pressed together, breaking into a smile at his sarcastic humour, before withdrawing once more to a stern grimace. As the Q&A unfolded, however, she began to communicate her allegiance more viscerally, sharply interrupting Israel Society members to demand, "What is your question?" This was her response when one audience member sought to re-establish spectatorial distance and *deny* moral culpability,

> "when you [Abdul Almasi] addressed someone back there, you said 'you are bombing'... As a Jewish peace loving person *I'm* personally not bombing. I don't think *he's* personally bombing'.

162

Professor Murphy again interjected to demand a question and, this time, members of the audience retaliated, "You're supposed to be impartial". As Professor Murphy's actions became increasingly subject to incommensurable interpretations, the evolving plot span out of her control. Conventional patterns of academic discourse were increasingly disrupted, as students interrupted to challenge Professor Murphy's authority. Gradually conventional rules of turn-taking and attention were contested as the sounds of shouting, laughter and clapping focused the drama on the audience's interactions.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche described how the rhythmic entrainment of bodies and sounds creates an experience of fusion, a loss of self-consciousness, in which the individual membranes of the body are transgressed and the *principium individuationis* (principle of individuation) breaks down (Nietzsche 1993). Nietzsche claimed that the praxis of theatre could generate an alternative form of aesthetic truth which disrupted the contemplative, conceptual truth of philosophers. This is an aesthetic, sensual truth, which is not observed by a distinct subject, but rather is undergone by the participating chorus (ibid; Critchley and Kesselman 2012). The spectatorial distance that separated audiences and actors at campus events, was synonymous with the gap between the university and the Middle East. With the erasure of the membrane distinguishing audience and actors, these students were no longer engaged as contemplative spectators but were rather practically engaged in the unfolding drama. With these techniques of dramatic praxis, the existential insecurity, oppression and aggression of people in the Middle East became profoundly identified with the victimisation, persecution and culpability of students at University A. In this way, the liberal-democratic bounding of political space was undone as students did not only *represent* but rather *lived* demands of justice which crossed these borders.

The presence of the past: impossible claims

Towards the end of the meeting, a woman with dark hair, speaking in a British accent, quietly asked,

> "Why is it considered *completely* politically incorrect, in criticising Israel, to mention 'Jew' instead of 'Zionist' because some Jews don't consider themselves Zionists or support Israel - why is it *completely* politically incorrect, *completely* anti-Semitic, *completely* forbidden - and why is *not* politically incorrect to actually *massacre* Arabs - it's not politically incorrect?"

163

Shortly afterwards, Jonathan was called to speak. He stood up and announced himself as, "anti-racism officer at University A", adding with sarcastic civility, "thank you for finally allowing me to speak". This prompted Professor Murphy to shout back, "Excuse me, excuse me, there have been a lot of hands up...I am not prejudicing against people, it's impossible to have everybody speak". They continued to shout over each other, as Jonathan adopted an air of indignation, while Professor Murphy virulently objected to the underlying implication of his tone. The audience laughed, muttered and whistled as Jonathan looked down despairingly for a moment before continuing,

> "Our students' union here at University A has passed policy on what anti-Semitism is and it says...'Anti-Semitism includes; accusations that Jews control the world, the government or the media, as well as blaming Jews as a group for real or imagined atrocities'. This evening Mr Almasi you've pointed at Jewish students and said 'you bombed Gaza, you bombed Gaza' -"

The buzz in the room increased as Professor Murphy cut in shouting, "Question? Question?" Jonathan raised his voice to be heard over the shouting and shushing from opposing sections of the audience, "You've also used the terms Jewish and Zionist lobby interchangeably - that is also anti-Semitic." Raising an arm high, he displayed a piece of paper, featuring a visible Swastika, to the audience "and you've published pictures of the Star of David interspersed with Nazi propaganda". From the midst of the audience, the same dark-haired woman, speaking clearly, interjected,

> *"But you are Nazis"*

> *A second of silence. The room erupts in a collective 'oh!'- a high pitched intake of breath. Students' mouths drop open. Some, including Gail, rise to their feet as if wrenched from their seats. Shouting erupts, along with furious pointing. A few people are laughing. Members of the Palestine Society stand over the crowd shushing and shouting, palms outstretched, pleading for others to sit. The dark-haired woman has risen from her seat and is facing the audience, shouting and shouting.*

Professor Murphy was quickly on her feet, hands outstretched as she raised her voice over the noise, threatening to end the meeting, "you all behave or you're out". Jonathan continued in a loud voice "If you are not a racist -" The dark-haired woman yelled angrily at him furiously gesticulating as Sadiq begged her to "please sit down". Some students

started to leave the room as Jonathan delivered his punch-line to the sound of prolonged clapping, "If you are not racist, why have you done all these things that our students' union thinks are anti-Semitic?"

Two months later, I met up with Jonathan, who recounted these events to me in detail,

> "As I finished my question I said 'you've used Nazi propaganda', the girl in the front row turned round and goes 'you are a Nazi' to me at which point there was a to and fro with another Jewish student and her and, like, the Jewish student, like, basically walked out erm - and then it all sort of got a bit, *it all got a bit hazy* and then quickly closed down. And then sort of the event finished, and then the chair had a slanging match with security outside - this girl who had called me a Nazi started going, calling other people Nazis... It got very heated outside, there was a bit of argy-bargy..."

Jonathan's words, "It all got a bit hazy" expressed the liminal sensuality of the moments that followed the utterance, "But you are Nazis". This woman's intervention had crystallised an experience of unbearable conceptual ambiguity, a profound blurring and reversal of the categories of victims and perpetrators. Her exchange with Jonathan produced a moment haunted by the claims of painfully entangled pasts, which became present yet were unthinkable (Gordon 2008). Significantly it was *Jonathan,* a Jewish student, who introduced this unthinkable temporal and conceptual entanglement to the meeting, as he publicly displayed the Star of David / Swastika that visually conflated Nazis, Jews and the Israeli State.[95]

In presenting what *he* took to be a symbol of Jewish victimhood, Jonathan attempted to mobilise a powerful resource. His act of introducing the Holocaust into this drama appealed to the underlying moral culture of this campus, in which the Holocaust was embedded as a potent sacred symbol. These deep moral codes were sustained through various ritual-like practices. For example, in 2011 Jonathan had organised a talk by a survivor of Auschwitz. It was attended by an audience of over one hundred and fifty students, who sat still, silently listening to this testimony. Events such as this connected the university community with a state-supported national ritual, first initiated in 2001. As Sharon Macdonald has suggested, this emerging commemorative culture forms part

---

[95] This equation of the State of Israel with National Socialism is an established analogical device which has been utilised to express solidarity with Palestinians. The ethics of this have been explored by Michael Rothberg (Rothberg 2011) in an article that I discussed in Chapter Three.

of a liberal imaginary of the British nation which, I have argued, also shape universities as public institutions.[96] These links were explicitly articulated by the University A chaplain, commenting on Holocaust Memorial Day, a few weeks after the Almasi event,

> 'The historical undeniability of the Holocaust is borne out in how it has shaped our institutions in concrete ways that we may take for granted. This includes University A, which played an extraordinary role of hospitality to refugees from the Holocaust (at a time when antisemitism was common in England too) and benefited immensely from their expertise...This need not have been so.'

The chaplain concluded by articulating a vision of the university as a cosmopolitan, hospitable, learning community, arguing that remembrance of the Holocaust should temper hostile impulses 'particularly as we engage in the contentious and intractable issues of our day'.

Alongside this sense of the Holocaust as a symbol of universal racist-evil, it also circulated on campus as a symbol of the particular traumatic history of the *Jewish* community.[97] This manifested in the student politics of Holocaust memorialisation, which I discussed in Chapter Three, also linking the campus with memory struggles in the British civil sphere.[98] Students' articulation of the Holocaust as a *Jewish* trauma was bound up with the politics of Palestine-Israel on campus. At Israel Society events, invited speakers linked Israel's existential insecurity to contemporary anti-Semitism in the Diaspora, and grounded both in the foundational trauma of the Holocaust. The UJS guide to anti-Semitism on campus included a section on 'The Holocaust – Israel as a refuge' (CST and UJS 2009: 32), and this emphasis was repeated in my interviews with

---

[96] Sharon Macdonald (2005) has explored the cultural politics of the first British Holocaust Memorial Day, arguing that, while this ceremony proclaimed the universal-evil of the Holocaust, it enacted and affirmed *British* national identity. She describes how the ceremony represented Britain as a sacred stronghold contra Nazi Germany in ways that subtly produced a multicultural vision of Britishness, at a time when explicit articulations of nationalism were less legitimate.
[97] Here I have drawn on Alexander and Dromi's (2012) discussion of the symbolism of the Holocaust in relation to Israeli politics. They helpful highlight these two dimensions of moral representations of the Holocaust as both a universal and 'restricted' trauma.
[98] The politics of Holocaust memorialisation in Britain is enmeshed with political struggles between minority groups. In 2002, the Muslim Council of Britain decided not to take part in the main Holocaust commemoration event. Explicitly linking this decision to the politics of the Middle East, this public conflict situated cultural memories of European anti-Semitism in a competitive relationship with recognition of 'Western' violence and colonial histories (Macdonald 2005).

politically active Jewish students. For example, Adam a former leader of the Jewish Society at University B explained his commitment to Israel in these terms,

> "[It's] mixed in with, like, the Holocaust I guess as well where, where you feel, like, like Israel is like a safe haven for Jews and the narrative that Jews have been persecuted for a long time and that Israel's the one way to prevent, like, that from happening."

In mobilising the authority of Jewish trauma against Abdul Almasi, Jonathan iterated the dominant reactive approach of Zionist politics on campus. While the Palestine Society drew on scripts and images of the Palestinian nation within its campaigns, Zionist students were cautious about publicly articulating connections with Israel in explicitly nationalist grammars. In 2011, UJS organised an event at NUS National Conference entitled 'Meet the Zionists'. The advance publicity articulated this sense that the expression of Zionist *pride* was proscribed on campus, explaining that Zionism as an ideology had become a 'dirty word'. Proactive Israel and Jewish society events such as 'Israel Awareness Week' were vehemently opposed by Palestine Society members, who aligned Zionist culture with racist colonialism. In contrast, the symbolic grammar of the Holocaust carried much greater resonance with the wider campus community, and Palestine Society members were much more cautious in their responses to this.

Jewish students' own mobilisation of what Michael Rothberg describes as, 'Israel's most potent legitimating symbol: a narrative genealogy of ultimate victimization coupled with absolute innocence' (Rothberg 2011: 540), was, however, precarious. Precisely because the Holocaust also symbolised a universal trauma for all humanity, it was a potential resource for both pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian groups on campus. Attempts to proscribe the use of this symbol *against* Jewish students were inscribed in the Students' Union Anti-Semitism policy quoted by Jonathan, which also defined anti-Semitism as,

> 'Equating Jews or malevolently equating the Jewish foundations of the Israeli State with the Nazi regime. This also includes equating Zionism with Nazism and asserting that "History is repeating itself" with regards to the Holocaust and the

State of Israel. This includes using religious imagery and Jewish symbols alongside Nazi imagery.'[99]

In their routine interactions, Pro-Palestinian activists carefully complied with this taboo against historical analogy, revealing the power of this sacred symbol within British universities. In recent years, they had organised an annual mock 'settlement' on the main street of the University A campus. This consisted of a cordoned off area, emblazoned with a triangular symbol, only accessible to Palestine Society members wearing blue ribbons tied around their arms. Showing me her ribbon, Laura had explained that,

'Some people complained about this saying that it was too similar to the marking of Holocaust victims. But we deliberately chose the blue triangle because if we'd used the Star of David that would really have wound people up.'

Nonetheless, another activist reported that he had removed his ribbon after two Jewish students had said that it carried offensive associations with the marking of Jews in Nazi Germany.[100]

In producing this shocking image at the Almasi meeting, Jonathan strained to mobilise this powerful source of symbolic meaning. His actions appealed to the victimisation of Jewish students, subject to the anti-Semitism of Abdul Almasi and those Palestine Society members who cruelly laughed with him. Yet, *in this moment* when Jonathan's display of the Swastika / Star of David provoked the passionate response "But you are Nazis", these established moral codes were dramatically transgressed. Suddenly, participants' *very capacity to comprehend the action* was exceeded as their bodies responded; the intake of breath, the collective gasp, the laughter, hands concealing mouths and screaming. This was a moment in which coherent speech had itself been lost; as language reached its limit, the action tipped over into the physical confrontations outside the room when "it all got a bit hazy".

---

[99] This drew on the controversial working definition of anti-Semitism produced by the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). The outlawing of analogies was also emphasised by the UJS anti-Semitism guide, which explained that, 'The murder of six million Jews during the Holocaust was an evil on a horrific scale. There can be *no greater insult* to Jews than to be compared to those responsible for this evil' (CST and UJS 2009: 19, my italics).
[100] The Palestine Society's resistance to this symbolic code was restricted to the less contested space of their own online blog, where some contributors argued that Jewish students sometimes manipulated this symbol for political ends. One other way in which Palestine Societies sought to navigate this taboo was by inviting Norman Finkelstein, the Jewish anti-Zionist author of *The Holocaust Industry* (2000) onto the campus. Finkelstein publicly emphasised his familial connection with the Holocaust to authorise his critique.

As I have shown, various aspects of this unfolding meeting disrupted temporal and spatial boundaries to open up this liminal moment. This was crystallised in the woman's direct address *"you"* (are Nazis) to Jewish students in the room. Her utterance blurred the past and the present, invoking the Nazi past as alive and operative in the present. It also collapsed spatial distinctions, conflating Jewish students' actions with the violence of the Israeli State and fusing this meeting with the conflict in the Middle East. Most transgressively, in this *moment,* the distinction between pure victims and victimizers which structured the established political grammar was collapsed, reversed and made radically undecidable.

As this event tipped into violence, I suggest that it was shaped by misrecognition on a number of levels. In displaying the Star of David / Swastika, Jonathan consciously *identified* with absolute victimhood while in *effect* engaging in an unacknowledged aggressive act to silence Abdul Almasi. His gesture of mobilising the Holocaust-symbol repeated the very grammar which excluded Almasi, as an "anti-Semite", from expressing his claims to suffering. In this sense Jonathan repeated, and so refused to recognise, the symbolic violence which Almasi had articulated as he screamed, "We are not allowed to scream".[101] In response, the turning of the word "Nazis" against Jonathan expressed a reciprocal refusal of shared language; Jonathan's demand for recognition of Jewish suffering was refused by identifying Jews with their victimizers. Both claims to suffering excluded the other from being recognised as legitimate claims-makers; neither acknowledged the aggressive sources of their own actions.

Simon Critchley writes that, at the heart of tragic misrecognition, there is the misrecognition of the self by itself (Critchley 2012). It is this misrecognition that can lead to violence as,

> 'We act, and are acted upon, in a specific situation of rage...unknowingly... [in ways that are]... bound up with your ancestors, with your place, with your context.' (Critchley and Kesselman 2012: 153) [102]

While Jonathan appeared to be drawing on a source of symbolic power, by introducing the Swastika / Star of David into this encounter, the *effect* of his action was to invoke

---

[101] The significance of Almasi's silenced scream is illuminated by David Morris' claim that, 'a scream is not speech but the most intense possible negation of language' (Morris 1996: 27).
[102] Here, in making the connection between misrecognition and violence, I also draw on Ray, Smith and Wastell's discussion of how 'unacknowledged shame can transform into rage against those who are seen as the sources of shame' (2004: 350).

troubling aspects of the historical connections of Jewish and Palestinian suffering. In Chapter Three, I suggested that these entanglements are so difficult to think about because they raise questions about painful connections between genocidal and symbolic violence in Europe and the Middle East *and* about our responsibilities as we are embedded within these violent worlds. With his own aggressive insertion of the *corrupted* Star of David into this meeting, Jonathan seemed somehow compelled to raise this shameful question of Jewish *culpability*. In this way, registers of unacknowledged shame and aggressive desires shaped this encounter, feelings within the self, which could not be spoken or recognised.

Tragic spectatorship over time: splitting, fascination, shame and repetition

The liminal moment of the Abdul Amasi meeting quickly dissipated; Professor Murphy brought the event to a close and the planned follow-on meeting with the crowd waiting outside was cancelled. Members of the Jewish Society subsequently raised a criminal complaint against Abdul Almasi, which was later dropped by the police with no charges raised. Detailed reports of the altercations were soon picked up in the British, Israeli and US media. Soon after, the event was discussed in parliamentary debate, prompting responses from the Chief Rabbi and Israeli Ambassador. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the university authorities also became involved, initiating an investigation and review of future procedures for events, which influenced the organisation of the academic boycott debate.

Having left the scene of the immediate action, student society representatives turned to participate in these wider struggles over the interpretations of this meeting. The ambivalences that had shaped the moment of liminal violence were quickly resolved as each party attributed aggression to the other, and returned to the security of their fixed moral positions. The Israel Society issued a statement, which situated this within established framings of good campus relations,

> 'University A Palestine Society have demonstrated that they do not have any regard for good campus relations, student welfare, nor a peaceful resolution to the Middle East conflict. Our repeated efforts to work constructively with members of the Palestine Society have been rejected. Instead, they have chosen to pursue an alienating, aggressive and one-sided agenda.'

170

Responding online, Sadiq and Yusra drew on the discourse of censorship and distortion. Yusra described the event as subject to 'a vicious campaign of lies and misinformation', while Sadiq added, 'It's unfortunate that some people are content to distort the truth in order to serve their own ends.'

While these students and their supporters returned to these moral positions, they also perpetuated the liminal quality of this event for broader audiences, as they continued to disagree on the detail of what actually happened. This included a conflict over a claim, vehemently denied by Sadiq, that some students had shouted 'go get her' after Gail when she left the room. Tensions also revolved around claims and counter-claims that the Palestine Society video of the meeting had been edited. As with the aggressive exchange that featured in the media following the academic boycott debate, it was this quality of intense, ambiguous conflict that seemed to capture the attention of wider public audiences.[103]

Soon after Yusra posted the Palestine Society's video of the meeting, a counter-extremism organisation produced an edited five-minute version. Compressing this meeting, the video presented a focused sequence of breaches by Abdul Almasi, his supporters and Professor Murphy. These were interspersed with captions, which ended with the condemnatory statement,

> 'This is not what we expect from University A. This kind of behaviour must stop. [Our organisation] exists to expose this intimidation of students on campuses all over the country.'

In this way, this organisation, along with various other external stakeholders, pressed shame onto students, and their institution, for engaging in these 'excessive' actions.

This process of shaming recurred the following year, after the violent incident at the mock Israeli check point, which I described at the beginning of this chapter. In response to this explicit and very public violence, the students' union condemned the actions as 'ridiculous' and 'disgusting'. Soon after, a video was posted on YouTube which spliced clips of the violence with the captions,

---

[103] As Gordon Lynch has highlighted, this reflects the ways in which particular kinds of cultural forms carry distinctive affective power which, he suggests, intersect with socio-economic, political and technical affordances to shape the production, circulation and reception of public media (Lynch 2012b). I will return to consider the implications of these media logics for democratic politics in Chapter Seven.

'Reminder 1: Neither side eats pigs after all, why aren't Muslims & Israylees friends?

Reminder 2: Seriously now, both sides, grow up. There is no JewGod, there is no Allah, you gullible people'

The video linked to a clip of the comedian Tim Minchin performing his *Peace Anthem for Palestine*, a classical composition with a sing-a-long chorus; 'You don't eat pigs, we don't eat pigs, it seems it's been that way forever. So if you don't eat pigs, and we don't eat pigs, why not, not eat pigs together?' Like other satirical articles which had featured in the students' newspaper, this video framed these events as farcical, shaming the primitive minorities, with their irrational religious commitments in contrast to the mature, rational secularism of the assumed majority.

In addition to these highly moralised or detached responses, some students, including myself, responded in more ambivalent ways. Over the course of my research, the videos of these transgressive campus events caught my attention. I found myself watching them a number of times, drawn to these visceral yet, for me, deeply ambiguous scenes with what felt like a hint of voyeurism. I did not reflect on this further until I was nearing the end of my fieldwork, when I got talking with Emma, a Jewish Canadian student whom I met in the audience of an Israel Society event. She was describing her mixed feelings towards Israel, her sense of being drawn to study the region and her political frustrations. She explained that she had stopped attending so many events because "I get really mad and then I'm just like, ok, I need to calm down". Then, as Emma continued to describe the frustrations and fascinations of attending these events, she used an evocative phrase, which stayed with me, "I wanna, like, stab my eyes out." While, in one sense, this was just a causal remark, it seemed to me to articulate something true about the draw of these tragic encounters. Somehow, events such as the Abdul Almasi meeting, and the mock checkpoint violence, were both deeply gripping and yet shameful to *watch*.

Simon Critchley writes that, 'tragedy is about watching people move into a situation of shame' and he suggests that, rather than think of the experience of tragic spectatorship as an experience of the sublime, we might also consider how it relates to the experience of disgust (Critchley and Kesselman 2012). Here, I take him to be highlighting how, when we experience the breakdown of moral distinctions, this can prompt feelings of simultaneous fascination and repulsion, which profoundly undermine our sense of autonomy. As spectators of the Abdul Almasi event, we watched students failing to conform to the demands of the rationalist moral order, acting out of

172

heteronomous desires, which put the very sovereignty of their actions into question. Yet, as the subsequent processes of public shaming revealed, the claim of reason inscribed within the public university also imposed demands on *spectators.* As a member of university drawn to this violent encounter in ways that revealed my own lack of autonomy, I *too* felt ashamed.

I began this chapter by describing two violent incidents that occurred one year after the Abdul Almasi event. With the high profile, widely circulated infraction by the student sports society, the Nazi past had once again become present to the campus. Shortly after, at the Palestine Society's checkpoint drama, a physical altercation ignited in the centre of the campus. Once more, students were moved by the immediacy of connections with suffering and violence, as a scene of Palestinian humiliation was enacted live on the steps of an academic building. When Samuel, the Jewish Society president, described how 'people have family who were blown up', he mirrored the words of Sadiq. Together, they emphasised how students' sense of closeness to violence in the Middle East shaped a relationship to this conflict which was not about ideological belief but rather a more visceral rage.

A number of the same students who had participated in the academic boycott and Abdul Almasi debate were present at that checkpoint incident. The oversize guns, jackets, mock check-point wall and the very setting of this campus street were familiar, recycled from past activities which had resulted in victory for some, humiliation for others. These material resonances worked through what Marvin Carlson describes as a technique of 'ghosting', sustaining institutional memories of transgressions. These practices provided the material grounds through which campus relationships evolved over time. While the shaming, containing practices of the liberal university sought to exclude these transgressive connections with Palestine-Israel, these tragic affects remained latent in ongoing campus relationships. In these ways, these struggles were ingrained in the life of the university, producing what could feel like a circular dynamic of melodramatic and tragic encounters over time.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on forms of interaction which viscerally transgressed the dominant moral order of the campus. In the process, I have drawn attention to the complex lived experiences of democratic subjects, shaped by conflicting demands of inherited injustices, felt connections to seemingly distant people and places, which act on us as we act politically, in ways that are not transparent to us. Attending to this

texture of experience reveals *how* political subjects are shaped through multiple relationships and attachments, which cut across the national boundaries assumed by liberal democratic theories and practices. It also puts into question the tendency within critical theories of the public sphere to assume coherent, autonomous subjects.[104] The Abdul Almasi event made the past present and distant suffering close. In these ways it disrupted the liberal insistence on Palestine-Israel as a conflict 'imported' into the sovereign setting of the campus. As I discussed in Chapter Two, this imaginary rests on a clear distinction between the local and the global, which is, at the same time, a political distinction, disavowing the deep implication of individuals and institutions in these questions of justice. In these ways, my empirical analysis here disrupts established spatial and temporal framings of democratic public spheres. I have done so by developing a more complex notion of political experience, which attends to the tragic dimensions of our lives.

By evoking the aesthetic drama of the Abdul Almasi event, I have shown how the moral ambiguities of Palestine-Israel were staged in the centre of the campus. In these passionate moments, truth was presented as *two things at once*. This expressed the ambiguities of incommensurable moral, yet historically valid claims to suffering between conflicting groups. Yet it also evoked the ambivalence *within* individuals struggling with the blurring of distinctions between vulnerability, aggression, resistance and oppression. In this way, I have expanded Fraser's (2008) theory of 'abnormal justice' by highlighting the importance of attending to incommensurabilities, not only in relation to groups, but also within the self.

Drawing on insights into the praxis of tragic theatre, I explored how the participants at the Abdul Almasi meeting expressed claims to justice which could not be articulated within grammars of rational justification. I showed how the entangled pasts and present violence of Palestine-Israel manifested in unacknowledged shame and incommensurable language, so that neither party could *hear* the other's claim for recognition. Furthermore, I have claimed that this experience of misrecognition worked at a number of *levels;* it reflected our engagement as *tragic subjects*, embedded in histories and cultures which shape desires not fully intelligible to ourselves. It was this layering of misrecognition that ultimately gave rise to a visceral expression of aggression. In this way, a momentary exchange was produced which powerfully transgressed the dominant codes of the campus.

---

[104] See my discussion of Nancy Fraser's work in Chapter One.

The Abdul Almasi meeting was one of a number of occasions in which an exemplary Western democratic institution engaged political subjects who were fragmented, struggling with heteronomous demands. However, as an event embedded within the moral order of the campus, the expression of these transgressive experiences also became a source of shame. Simon Critchley has argued that Greek tragedy, from its earliest incarnation, emerged as a struggle between poetry and philosophical truth in the Greek polis. He suggests that tragedy as a form does not transcend reason but rather is engaged with reason's always failed attempt to give voice to something uncontainable (Critchley and Kesselman 2012). The leaders of the Palestine and Israel Societies responded to the fall-out of the Abdul Almasi event by affirming their commitment to the civil, dispassionate codes of the academic boycott debate that followed. This tension between speaking the language of reason *and* expressing the uncontainable was experienced, not only as a tension between individuals, but also as an ongoing struggle within the self.

As I will explore further in subsequent chapters, there are important ethical implications of my analysis here. In his own analysis of the knotted history of Palestine-Israel, Michael Rothberg (2011) argues that public memory struggles pivot around the epistemological grounds and emotional tonalities of recognition. By attending to the affective dynamics of one such memory struggle, we can see how entangled pasts of suffering and violence, *act* on people unknowingly, in ways that prohibit recognition of both the other and the self. This is suggestive of an experiential limit to the kind of empirical, historical awareness, which Rothberg identifies as necessary for a non-competitive ethics of memory (ibid). As such, it requires us to locate alternative ethical practices for responding to these situations, which must be able to engage with the self's opaqueness to itself.

Across the previous two chapters, I have focused my ethnographic attention on two dramatic modes of Palestine-Israel politics. I have shown how their qualities, to differing degrees, captured media attention and engaged a wider public, including myself, in spectatorial relationships. I have explored how the dynamics of Palestine-Israel politics appeared to take a cyclical shape over time, to shift between a recurrent pattern of order and disorder. Yet, as a responsive ethnographer, I now wish to highlight the ways in which this focus on the spectacular also emerges out of, and secures, my own more detached position. Attending to these institutional patterns can take action to be deterministic, obscuring the singularities of students' experiences which open up a different relationship between time, sociality and subjectivity (Das 2007: 98).

Veena Das writes of the need for reflection in relation to the *scale* of ethnography, inviting us to establish, 'the horizon within which we may place the constituent objects of a description in their relation to each other and in relation to the eye with which they are seen' (Das 2007: 4). As I suggested in Chapter Three, this process of establishing closeness and distance is not merely an intellectual exercise but rather reflects my ethical implication with this subject. As such, I will now challenge the sociological model of democratic politics as theatre, and the spectatorial scholarly position upon which it depends. This approach, I suggest, limits our conception of democratic life to forms of politics authorised by institutions and supported by public media logics. My response now is to turn away from these most visible modes of engagement with Palestine-Israel and to attend to political practices in a more 'ordinary' register. It is in these ways that I put assumptions of the 'intractable', 'repetitive' dynamics of Palestine-Israel campus politics into question, and begin to uncover alternative forms of relationality in campus life.

Chapter Six

Ordinary Ethics: Conversation, Friendship and Democratic Possibilities

In March 2011, the Israel Society at University A organised an 'Israel Awareness Week' in a central street of the campus. Alongside a memorial to Israeli citizens who had been killed the previous week, free hummus and a stall raising money for an Israeli humanitarian charity, there was an information table, draped in blue. Literature about Israel was carefully displayed on this table, including copies of a BICOM booklet entitled, *Israel: Frequently Asked Questions.*[105] In front of this, Israel Society members sought to engage passersby, passing round a sign saying 'WE SUPPORT A TWO STATE SOLUTION' and taking photos, later posted online.

Shortly after I arrived, I noticed that Sadik, the Palestine Society member who played a prominent role in the academic boycott debate and Abdul Almasi meeting, had approached the information table. Holding a BICOM booklet and protesting its narrative, he began an intense conversation with Daniel, an Israel Society member. They faced each other directly, staring intently, with only the width of the table between them, and began a lengthy, repetitive and intense debate which continued for over two hours. Around them, a group of us listened in as they debated the meanings of 'homeland', 'Zionism', 'security' and 'justice', shifting between registers of intellectual argumentation and personal narratives. As this encounter rolled on and on, audience members variously listened, interjected or withdrew. Noticing that Daniel had stepped back for a moment, I asked if he often had discussions like this. He nodded and explained,

> 'It's always better talking with Palestinians about this; they tend to be much more knowledgeable than your average person who's just got in to politics when they turned twenty... Sadik and I often have these arguments.'

Surprised, I asked how often they saw each other. Daniel turned to Sadik and interrupted his flow to put the question to him. Sadik responded 'all the time, but we don't always talk about politics,' then turned back to continue debating. The following day, the Israel

---

[105] BICOM is the British Israel Communications and Research Centre (see Appendix A).

Society posted pictures of the event on their Facebook page. Among them was a photo of Daniel, smiling, as he stretched out his arm far across the table in order to shake Sadik's hand. Sadik looked up towards the camera, half smiling, half grimacing, as if caught off-guard.

I wish to begin here by pausing at this scene in order to suggest that it is both puzzling and discomforting in its indeterminacy. Here is Sadiq, a pivotal figure within very public Palestine-Israel conflicts, ambivalently acknowledging a friendly relationship with an active member of the Israel Society. This exchange appears as a highly politicised, symbolic moment, frozen in an image and circulated to an audience, and as an amicable disagreement, shaped by a feeling of mutual care for this issue. As I have described in previous chapters, Palestine-Israel politics at University A was publicly enacted through opposition between antagonistic, polarised student societies. This encounter between Sadiq and Daniel provided a rare glimpse behind the scenes of these most visible political dramas, pointing towards the embeddedness of political activities in lived relationships between students, who knew each other. How did Sadiq and Daniel come to form and develop this relationship? How were personal experiences and political principles threaded through this alternative form of sociality? What were the conditions that made Sadiq and Daniel's public co-presence possible on that cold March afternoon? What pleasures and pressures shaped this encounter?

In the previous chapters, I described how the dynamics of Palestine-Israel politics were publically enacted through two dominant genres, of melodrama and tragedy. The academic boycott debate and Abdul Almasi talk exemplified key modes of engagement with Palestine-Israel, which recurred over time, institutional settings, and in national student politics. These 'spectacular' forms of campus politics generated high levels of public attention, circulating via the media in ways that sustained ongoing conflicts. Melodramatic performances paradoxically inscribed the clarity of moral universalism, truth as democratic decisionism by autonomous, depersonalised subjects engaged in rational debate. The experiences repressed by this framing were expressed in tragic moments of uncivil action which disrupted the spatial and temporal boundaries of the campus. The public enactment of these complex, partial claims of justice culminated in momentary breaches of relationships; violence, withdrawal, and then a return to the security of fixed moral positions.

Exploring how the claims of reason and tragic action intersect in the British university opens up our attention to the entanglements of 'Western' democracies with seemingly distant events, which shape the lived experiences of political subjects. In the last chapter I focused on how the inheritance of past and, seemingly distant, suffering

shapes tragic subjects, who act under conditions of misrecognition. In this chapter, I wish to unsettle notions of tragic repetition by exploring the alternatives ways in which students (myself included) engaged with these claims on us. My concern to avoid hyperbole and voyeurism is a part of my ambition to avoid uncritically reproducing dominant framings of political life. As Les Back (2007) has argued, in orienting ourselves towards what is most visible, sociologists may perpetuate the visual hegemony of our own cultures, and risk objectifying the people we study. Furthermore, by focusing our attention on mass mediated interactions, we can become blind to more marginal perspectives and less *authorised* experiences (Seidler 2013).

I also learnt about the importance of attending to these less visible aspects of political life from the students whom I met during the course of my fieldwork. While activists themselves mobilised tactics of hyperbole, some students also criticised media representations of local campus interactions for simplifying, and so disavowing, the complex realities of students' lived relationships. In 2010, Leo, the initiator of a new Israel Palestine Forum (IPF) at University B, publicly described the impulse behind its inception in these terms,

> 'In today's society, what has become important is not what really happened but how it gets depicted in the mass media...I suppose positive signs are not shown because the public is more interested in shocking news. But perhaps also it is because the [Jewish] media are focused on portraying pro-Palestine activists as violent, so emphasising that "the whole world is against us" rather than noticing the examples of good will and dialogue.'

Leo's words here highlight the limitations of focusing ethnographic attention on widely publicised, generic forms of politics, as well as opening a question about the diverse ways in which these dominant forms of politics are *experienced*.

In seeking to attend to other forms of sociality, I have learnt from Veena Das' approach as she engages with, 'the slippery relation between the collective and the individual, between genre and individual emplotment of stories' (Das 2007:2). Das has shown how attending to singularity in everyday life, 'pluralises the narrative task', bringing into view aspects of human agency even in settings shaped by powerful cultural scripts (ibid: 149). Underscoring the ways in which powerful discourses and traditions do shape subjectivities, Das draws on Wittgenstein and Cavell's insights into the creative openness of language. She pays close attention to the ways in which language exceeds its semantic meaning in particular relational contexts. This reveals how communication can expand and transform personal relationships. Like Leo, Das invites us to look beyond

public spatial and temporal framings of dramatic 'events' in order to attend to everyday sites where agency and creativity are possible. This notion of the ordinary as the site of the ethical does not take the ordinary as given in advance (Lambek 2010). Rather, as Das explores, in contexts of collective violence and sectarian division, the repair and maintenance of particular local relationships, can reveal 'ordinary' life to be an achievement (Das 2010). Part of the ethnographic task here is to attend to linguistic practices that resist inherited dichotomies and ossified narratives. In this way, encounters that transcend polarised cultural scripts of solidarity and exclusion come into view.[106] To focus on the ordinary is to examine a locus within which collectivities are created through the ongoing work of singular persons in fragile, open-ended relationships; as Das puts it, 'everyday life is the site in which the life of the other is engaged' (Das 2010: 376).

There is also another ambition in my turn to the ordinary in this chapter, which relates to the ethics of researching situations shaped by inherited, entangled histories of violence. Here, following Das, I wish to avoid imposing deterministic assumptions, implicit in vocabularies of 'repetition' and 'acting out', about *how* violence is inherited in social life. As I have discussed in previous chapters, Michael Rothberg (2011) has written of the need for an ethics of memory in relation to Palestine-Israel that *hears* the distinct claims of differentiated empirical history and is responsive to the asymmetric claims of victims subject to diverse injustices. Yet how might Rothberg's ethical ambitions relate, in practice, to the lives of students who have *inherited* these pasts in ways that are not fully known to us?

In what follows, I trace the ways in which one group of students sought to create an ethical practice, which responded to the claims of entangled, violent histories shaping Palestine-Israel politics. By describing the details of their interpersonal interactions, I explore their skilful crafting of a different kind of democratic politics. Through close attention to a meeting of the Israel Palestine Forum (IPF), I trace how this group of students developed ethical practices, with regard to the past, each other and in their self-relations. I draw out the significance of risk taking, acknowledgement of the unknown, cultivating trust and care, reflexivity, speaking from experience, dialogism and open-endedness. Here I draw particularly on Foucault's (2001) account of the ethics of 'parrhesiastic' speech and Stanley Cavell's (1990) insights into the intersubjective,

---

[106] I initially developed these insights out of my dissatisfaction with Jeffrey Alexander's identification of symbolic agonism as *the* relational structure of democratic societies. This assumption all relationships between social actors are mediated by binary codes seemed to preclude any attention to the ethical possibilities residing within complex interpersonal relationships (Alexander 2006a, 2006c).

pedagogic dimensions of democratic relationships. As the narrative develops, I also show how these students taught me ways of engaging with Palestine-Israel politics as an ethical subject. This connects to my discussion towards the end of the chapter of the intersubjective and institutional *limits* shaping the IPF's work. For, in exposing the partial, incomplete quality of our work here, I hope to show how limits can be open to future transformation. This will introduce the context for the ethical and political claims in my conclusion, as I stake a claim for democratic possibilities within university life.

Absent figures: marking the limits of the IPF's work

In November 2011, I received an email invitation to an IPF meeting entitled, 'Israel Palestine: Facts and Narratives of the Conflict'. Addressed 'Dear Friends', Leo's email explained that this event was part of an ongoing project, initiated by the IPF committee, to explore 'how different actors see the history as it shapes their view of the current reality.' The proposed format differed from the Israel and Palestine Society events that I had attended previously as there would be no external speakers. Rather, this would be a 'participative' opportunity for students to 'share their vision of the events and how they learnt about them'. Appealing to those with 'strong views or no prior knowledge', the invitation did not require advance registration. Instead it called out to an undetermined community, 'please invite your friends'.

Familiar faces greeted me as I arrived at the students' union meeting room. I noticed Rachel, an incoming officer of the Jewish Society, talking animatedly in the far corner. The previous week, we had sat opposite each other at an intimate Palestine Society workshop on media strategies, where I had been discomforted by her failure to disclose her role with the Jewish Society. Saniyah had subsequently cited this incident to illustrate why pro-Palestinian activists distrusted outsiders. Now, as I scanned the room, I was unsurprised to find that Saniyah and her friend Sara were both absent.

As I described in Chapter Three, Saniyah had categorically opposed dialogue events; her knowledge of the injustices perpetrated against Palestine precluded participation with activities that appeared to put this moral truth into question. Sara, who was from an Algerian family and had grown up in Britain, also described how a strong sense of certainty shaped her political practice, "if it's trying to see both sides, then I don't want to know basically - because I don't need to try to make a decision

because I've already made a decision."[107] For Saniyah and Sara, these strong identifications seemed to reduce their relationships with other students to *either* solidarity or opposition. This was a form of sociality in which activists related to themselves and each other as politicised, depersonalised symbols, so that membership of a Jewish, Israel or Palestine Society represented a fixed moral position. Situated in this broader context of political asymmetries and a moralistic culture, Saniyah and Sara's absence appeared to mark a problem for the IPF before it had begun.

Upon entering the scene of campus politics in 2010, the IPF had quickly become enmeshed in these existing polarised relations, unwittingly drawn into the powerful, melodramatic frame, which organised student union politics. Pressures to collude with this dynamic emanated from *both* the Palestine and Jewish Societies. For example, Leo told me how a Jewish Society Officer, Miriam, had encouraged him to stoke controversy, "She was like 'look you should organise an inflammatory event!' She was like 'I would demonstrate against it but at least if you organise it people would get engaged.'" Earlier in the year, Miriam had spoken favourably about the work of the IPF. By the conclusion of my fieldwork, after months of engaging with students' union politics, she had become much more critical. In my last meeting with her she described Leo as having "weak leadership...he's developed basically this society for a bunch of hippies who are happy clappy and wanna love everyone". Even when the IPF resisted this pressure to stake a clearer political position, their very existence implicated them in this Manichean frame, as members of the Palestine Society repeatedly criticised their overwhelmingly 'Jewish' committee as evidence of 'pro-Israel' bias. As Leo explained,

> "When I'm asked, 'Where are you from?' I'm like, 'Leo from Belgium' 'Oh Belgium yeah, yeah' 'Yeah, Belgium' I insist... and then if they insist, I'll say 'I'm Jewish'. But I feel, I feel I want to hide it and I want to" He paused for a moment before continuing, "like I assume that this Jewish identity could lead to them not wanting to be involved. So I'd like them to be involved and I don't know how to build this now, like because you need, we need people to join the committee and if at the first meeting, the committee is me and two other Jews and they'll see it,

---

[107] Sara's image of moral commitment as a 'decision already taken' helps to illuminate the form of subjectivity corresponding to the 'pre-determined' plot of the academic boycott debate. To participate in this democratic drama was to act on an absolute norm already *given* to the subject *by* their knowledge of the truth (Foucault 1986).

it's something people feel, then they'll be less interested in doing so, er so that's a big challenge for me now. Do you have any advice?"[108]

One way in which the Forum had sought to negotiate this dyadic politics was by alternating between symbolic activities which appealed to different 'sides'. The week before this 'historical narratives' meeting, they had organised a screening of the documentary film, *Budrus*, which told the story of a village who famously engaged in non-violent resistance against the Israeli State. Sara had responded enthusiastically to this "Palestinian" film, "Obviously I was gonna be there and I really wanted to watch that film anyway. So things like that, I'm all for". However, the choice of film had angered some Jewish IPF committee members. One student, Jason, had subsequently withdrawn his involvement, telling Leo 'it's not ok' and pointedly failing to attend subsequent events. Insofar as the IPF vacillated between opposing positions, the group only seemed to affirm the fixed commitments of both sides.

The absences of Saniyah, Sara, Miriam and Jason from this most recent IPF meeting reflected limits that arose out of complex (inter)personal and institutional contexts. I flag them here as I will return to the questions raised by these absences later in this chapter. Located within this political culture, the IPF struggled to organise events which transcended these institutionalised conventions and established forms of relationality. However, despite these pressures, my claim in this chapter is that the 'historical narratives' meeting successfully initiated alternative practices. Furthermore, the ripple effects of this apparently mundane student meeting resonated with these absent figures, carrying wider, transformative potential within and beyond the campus.

Organising the IPF: uncertain ambitions

I first learned about the IPF some months before beginning my fieldwork. In my initial conversations with national dialogue and inter faith professionals, Leo's name repeatedly came up as the IPF was praised for exemplifying good campus relations. In January 2011, I contacted Leo, conscious that 'dialogue' was a politicised and divisive label within Palestine-Israel politics and wary of aligning myself too closely with this

---

[108] Leo repeatedly addressed me dialogically, as someone also implicated in these difficult dynamics. Within our relationship, Leo helped me to learn how to reflect on and speak about my implication with Palestine-Israel, in ways that shaped the claims for ethical ethnography that I developed in Chapter There. Reflecting on the ways in which Leo initiated a dialogical relationship with me also contributed to my understanding of the IPF's ethical practices, which I elaborate in this chapter.

group.[109] As we started speaking, I was surprised to hear my own uncertainty echoed by Leo. Our first conversation was by phone, as he was preparing to study in France for six months as part of his undergraduate degree. Speaking slowly and thoughtfully in fluent English with a French-sounding accent, Leo initially framed IPF within a 'good campus relations' discourse, describing how he and some friends had started the IPF in response to an eruption of campus tensions the previous year. In its first year, the IPF had organised well-attended public debates on Gaza and the two-state solution, as well as a meeting with the Bereaved Families Forum.[110] Yet, unusually for a student activist, Leo promptly started describing the limitations of these events; the debate structure had polarised its audience while the Bereaved Families Forum meeting seemed to only appeal to Jewish students. As a consequence, Leo had decided not to adopt the model proposed by a more established Israel Palestine Forum based at another British university. That Forum had organised its meetings as debates in which each 'side' would present its topic from the opposite viewpoint. The problem with this approach, Leo suggested, was that it merely perpetuated the framing of this politics as an agonistic struggle between two opposing positions. Yet the restricted audience for the Bereaved Families Forum meeting had also demonstrated the limitations of emphasising peace, reconciliation and shared humanity. This latter approach was alienating insofar as it could fail to acknowledge moral and political distinctions, felt by many activists to be deeply important.

Leo told me that he had grown up in Brussels, and had been actively involved in a Zionist Socialist Youth movement. He explained that, although he had always been to the 'left' of Jewish politics, he had never really "heard the Palestinian narrative" until he came to University B and attended a Palestine Society event. Realising that "the ideas which seemed so obvious to me were really not obvious from a pro-Palestinian point of view", Leo had sought to establish a Forum with a "neutral" political stance. Unlike many other dialogue initiatives, he wanted to establish a group, which did not commit to a two-state solution but maintained an undecided position in relation to Middle Eastern politics. As he acknowledged however, he also faced a challenge in relation to UK campus politics. The very discourse of 'dialogue' was perceived by pro-Palestinian activists as part of an ideological move to delegitimise their activism; Leo was struggling with the politicisation of 'neutrality' and with the lack of any language in which to speak from an undetermined position.

---

[109] See Chapter Three for a reflexive discussion of my negotiation of norms of 'neutrality' during the fieldwork process.

[110] This was the same organisation whose visit to University A in 2011 was boycotted by the Palestine Society, an incident that I discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

It wasn't until September that I met Leo in person when I attended the students' union annual 'Freshers' Fair'.[111] With his mop of curly hair and wisps of a beard, Leo looked younger than his voice sounded. He greeted me with a broad smile and we arranged to catch up later over coffee. In the meantime, I hung around at the IPF stall watching Leo energetically approaching students, smiling, shaking hands, introducing himself, asking their names and skilfully engaging passersby in conversation. Alongside him, Jason, an active Jewish Society member, also promoted the IPF. Listening in, I was struck by their different approaches; Jason, a self-proclaimed British-American right-wing Zionist, described the IPF as a 'safe space'. In contrast, Leo seemed to have dropped this emphasis on defusing tension, focusing instead on the IPF's educative ambitions. When Jason left, Leo leaned towards me with a mischievous smile, 'You know he's a Republican'. Leo's comment was significant; his distance from Jason's political worldview was reflected in their different framings of the IPF itself. While Jason affirmed the need to mollify campus tensions, Leo sought to transcend a discourse which would be perceived by pro-Palestinian activists as yet more 'normalisation'.

The next day, Leo and I met up in a local cafe and he expressed a growing uncertainty with this politics of dialogue, "I have a lot of doubts now about the whole IPF idea". In contrast to other student society leaders, Leo had spoken to me from the outset in a very personal register. Now he situated his changing politics in the context of a romantic relationship,

> "The whole thing started through this IPF thing - I was last year invited to Leeds to a conference and there I met a group of people - and a Palestinian girl. And we became friends and this summer we met and we, we got together – great idea! Er but and so we started er, it was great, everything was good. At the beginning we didn't argue about relationship stuff only about Zionism. So now we also argue about relationship things because we are away. But we did argue a lot and like I think I discovered other things through her - er I learnt about Palestinian history, and life. And I put in question Zionism more, even though I still would say that I'm a Zionist, it is more difficult. And she had a lot of problems with the IPF idea."

> "Why?" I asked

"Because she thinks that it normalises the occupation - I think that's one of the main sentences you hear from Palestinian activists about initiatives like this, it normalises the occupation, it takes people away from activism to debate."

Invoking his girlfriend as a critical interlocutor, Leo expressed his personal struggles with the politics of the IPF. Having questioned an approach oriented towards *reconciliation,* Leo could not describe a clear purpose for the Forum. Yet, despite this, he still affirmed its value for campus life,

"Like what is this useful for at the end of the day? It's not a bad question. Er so I ask myself these questions, I think I want to continue it, I don't know by talking to people today and yesterday, I think it gave me the willingness to continue and to, like, try to get new ideas... Also I need to be conscious that, like, when people say 'is your thing for peace?' It's like, yeah, obviously I'm for peace but like this IPF will not bring peace. It's like, that's not what the aim is. I, I don't know what the aim is, maybe it's to bring peace on campus? No not really, I think it's to educate about the issues, to like get some mutual understanding in Britain."

In the previous two chapters, I argued that moral culture of the liberal university powerfully shaped forms of engagement with Palestine-Israel; the university instituted norms of civility which were affirmed and violated at different times. At the academic boycott event, the *agreed* organisation of the meeting, as a bounded, balanced, reasoned debate, arbitrated by an unaligned chairperson, enabled a predetermined plot to unfold. In a different way, the transgression of these mechanisms of democratic containment at the Abdul Almasi event also provided the conditions for the dynamics of excess and violence that unfolded. In contrast, the form and objectives of the IPF's events were much less determined. Leo expressed perpetual uncertainty with regard to the purpose of the IPF; in refusing the discourse of 'peace', he acknowledged the limitations of the desire for conflict *resolution*. Yet he also sustained a hope for some kind of reconciliation, resisting Palestinian activists' reductive identification of 'mutual understanding' to normalisation.

Caught between two positions, Leo refused to *decide* on the Forum's aims, instead presenting this as an open-ended question. As a consequence, the format of the IPF's events also continually evolved. Drawing on the practices of more established groups, including debates, speaker events, and activist films, the IPF questioned these repertoires, acknowledged their import *and* transformed them. As I will go on to describe, the 'historical narratives' meeting exemplified this creative, reflexive ethos.

Leo's account of the IPF's 'trial and error' approach revealed the society to be engaged in process of re-framing and reflection, which opened up existing conventions for questioning. Embedded in unknown aims, adopting malleable forms, this openness to creative uncertainty helped shape the IPF as a collectivity that could generate new political possibilities on campus.

Present friends: risk-taking and the cultivation of self-division

I was helping to set out chairs when Sahir walked over, greeting me with a broad smile and arm around my shoulder. We had been previously introduced when I had bumped into Leo a few weeks earlier and the three of us had taken the bus together to an off-campus lecture by Norman Finkelstein.[112] Despite the large size of this university, coincidental encounters like these were fairly common in my fieldwork as I ran into familiar faces at the library, students' union and local bus stops. This was a particularly common occurrence at University B where the students' union building was centred around a large entrance area, framed on one side by sofas, sometime hosting information stalls, with the bar, shop and meeting rooms, all leading off from what felt like a well-used sociable space. As I had sought to establish my neutrality, I found unplanned, high visibility encounters discomforting, tensing up when I entered the students' union. In contrast, I was struck by the way in which Leo seemed to relish these encounters as opportunities. One such occasion, I was stood with Sara in the students' union when Leo wandered up and introduced himself to her. I stood silent, momentarily frozen with anxiety. Meanwhile, upon discovering that Sara knew his housemate, Leo promptly invited her round for dinner that evening. In this way, Leo's willingness to risk rejection imbued apparently mundane encounters with the potential to disrupt established conventions. By improvising in these ways on campus, Leo created the conditions for new forms of dialogical interaction to evolve.

Taking my cue from Leo, I had asked if I could accompany him and Sahir on the bus to the Norman Finkelstein event. An international student from the West Bank, Sahir's openness quickly put me at ease. Waiting at the bus stop we exchanged names and, in an accent inflected with northern English and North American undertones, Sahir

---

[112] This Palestine Society lecture by Norman Finkelstein had unfolded as a high profile melodrama on campus. Media reports of this lecture focused on the polarised conflicts that it initiated between the Palestine and Jewish Societies. But chatting to Leo, Sahir and Miriam on the bus to and from the meeting, I developed a different perspective, learning how in conversations between *friends,* these fixed positions could be disrupted.

asked, 'Oh 'Ruth', that's a name that can come from lots of places like where I'm from. Where are you from?' Looking over his seat, he told me that he had recently arrived at University B from a Palestinian University to study for a Masters. When I responded to the underlying tenor of his question to me, explaining that I was 'from a Jewish background', Sahir seemed un-fazed, chatting about his participation in an Israeli-Palestinian scholarship programme in the United States. Later, Sahir told me more about his experiences both prior to and since arriving at University B, describing the singular path that had resulted in his presence at the IPF meeting.

Upon beginning his UK studies in the autumn of 2011, Sahir had got to know a core group of activists from across the two Palestine Societies at Universities B and C,[113] hanging out with them long enough that "some of them I even call definitely friends." Yet, in conversation with me, Sahir described how, participating in everyday activities with this group, he had started noticing that he was "different". Explaining to me that he was "not a religious person", Sahir confessed that, in a way, he felt more comfortable with those Jewish members of the IPF whom he found to be "not religious".[114] Sahir's growing willingness to engage with the IPF was also a source of implicit tension. Speaking hesitantly in a lowered voice, Sahir explained that Palestine Society members felt that the IPF was leaning too much in a pro-Israeli direction. Sahir had attempted to challenge them on this, suggesting that the IPF were "doing something interesting". Yet while his very participation undermined Saniyah's claim that the IPF did not represent Palestinians, he was unable to address the more fundamental accusation of normalisation. Implicit in the Palestine Society's rejection of IPF was a judgment of Sahir himself, an interpretation of his involvement as a form of 'complicity'. Sahir expressed anger to me about being judged in this way, particularly by students (including from Palestinian families) who had grown up in the UK and didn't have to 'live' the conflict. But he also revealed that his ongoing participation in the IPF came at the cost of ethical uncertainty, and divided feelings,

---

[113] Although the two student societies were distinct organisations, they often worked together and overlapped socially.

[114] As I described in previous chapters, the categories of the religious and secular were mobilised as part of the discursive politics of Palestine-Israel. Sahir's account revealed how these symbolic distinctions were translated into everyday practices, for example relating to alcohol consumption, shaping his relationships. Yet Sahir's invocation of these distinctions was also shaped by his complex negotiations of Islamic faith and politics growing up, an aspect of his narrative which I describe further in the Chapter Seven.

"You wouldn't imagine the amount of times I was thinking, is this bad? That time when I was thinking – is this too close to be with the enemy? And all the things I'd learnt about normalisation and the Israeli, how I'm sure there would be some people who would accuse me of being some sort of like a collaborator, for doing this..."

These were struggles that had evolved within the demands of his most intimate relationships. Talking affectionately about his father, he explained that this political question had become an increasingly significant issue in their relationship,

"He doesn't really agree much with the whole idea of Israel and Palestine – Israelis and Palestinians being too close, you know he doesn't, he doesn't think that's a good way of handling the conflict or contributing to the conflict... he has his views but he doesn't necessarily agree, which kind of affected it a little bit, affected my relationship with him."

Just as Sahir's difficult-to-place, hybrid accent expressed his own unique journey to this campus, so he developed a singular way of engaging with campus Palestine-Israel politics. His interactions with Palestine Society members revealed the heterogeneity within these seemingly coherent political groups as, for example, he grounded his alternative politics in his experience of living under occupation. Like Leo, Sahir situated his ethical uncertainty within intimate relationships, which were infused by broader cultural scripts but irreducible to them. Sahir's question "am I a collaborator?" revealed how Palestinian claims for justice exerted demands as an internally felt judgement, which he associated with his father. Yet, he also described how the singular qualities of this relationship had *enabled* him to sustain uncertainty,

"I always felt that *he [my father] gave me a lot of space to think* and he was a different parent than I noticed with my friends – um a lot more space, easier, just my own space."

Beneath the surface of Sahir's warm greeting to me on this November evening, he was carrying the demands of these absent activists and family members. Yet his personal account also revealed how he was able to sustain a practice of ethical uncertainty, which acknowledged doubt while remaining engaged.

Now, as the group of approximately thirty students gradually sat down on the haphazardly arranged semi-circles of chairs, Sahir and Leo introduced the meeting by

189

drawing attention to their *co*-presence. Standing up, Leo began, "It's very difficult to touch this issue in a way that respects the facts but in another way also allows people to understand how others learnt about that." He continued with a personal detail, a risky act of self-exposure given his privately acknowledged fear that this would alienate non-Jews,

> "As you may imagine, what you learn in a Jewish school in Tel Aviv and a Muslim school in Hebron is not the same about the history of what happened in the past 100 years. And this is the same for if you learn it in a Jewish school in Brussels, *like I did*, or in er a Muslim family in Europe."

Then, as IPF committee members fiddled with an unwieldy video projector, Sahir suddenly stood up and mirrored Leo's confessional gesture,

> "I have seen how, how having two separate stories have helped create this kind of war in that part of the world where people are, kind of like, alienated from each other because they don't see the other, they don't see the other kind of perspective or way of looking at it..."

The presence of both Leo and Sahir at the IPF meeting depended on their capacity to sustain an 'agonal', conflicted sense of self and to experience *not knowing* in relation to moral truth. In this way, they embodied a self-relation which contrasted with the self-evident certainty expressed by Saniyah or the tragic aggression of students at the Abdul Almasi event. In Chapter Five, I described how students' encounters with moral ambiguities arising out of their felt connections with Palestine-Israel could be experienced as radically *uncontainable*, prompting violent passion, withdrawal and repression. However, as Leo and Sahir grounded the work of the IPF in their uncertainty, they demonstrated the possibility of an alternative response. By expressing uncertainty, Leo and Sahir embodied positions in which acknowledging 'not knowing' could be appreciated and modelled. Drawing attention to their co-presence at the meeting with utterances that exposed their personal connections with Palestine-Israel, Leo and Sahir *exemplified* a particular democratic ethic. In contrast to the rigid conventions imposed at staged political meetings, these IPF organisers did not outline any 'ground-rules' for this meeting. Rather, they introduced a democratic process which differed radically from the model of civil debate, a form of mutual encounter, not as instruction, but provocation (Cavell 1990; Owen 2006). As I will go on to explore further, these were all processes

through which the rigid conventions of more spectacular politics were disrupted, as ordinary speech, personal experience, and the equivocal present were introduced into Palestine-Israel politics.[115]

Disrupting spectatorship: reframing, reflecting and active participation

Just before the meeting began, I cautiously mentioned to Leo that I would like to ask the group's permission to audio-record the meeting. In contrast to the public videos of the academic boycott debate and Abdul Almasi talk, this event was not recorded or reported in the media. This reflected the understated framing of the event in the IPF's advanced publicity, as an informal student-led meeting, which did not feature any external speakers. Leo's enthusiastic response to my request, 'It's a good idea', expressed his characteristically trusting way of relating, in contrast to other activists' suspicion of potential 'surveillance'. Following Leo's lead, others in the room also consented; as such my account of this meeting in this chapter draws on my own personal recording, from a device located by my own body in the room. This contrasts with my detached, spectatorial relation to the intensely visual, videoed events discussed in the previous chapters. In contrast to those encounters, the prioritisation of auditory senses at this IPF meeting shaped my different relationship to the action. Afterwards, as I reflected and wrote about this meeting, I listened back carefully to the sounds of my own embedded voice, in dialogical exchange with others. In these ways, my own location within the field shifted as the practices of speaking and listening within this IPF meeting implicated me sensuously and affectively in the action.[116]

My own experience of moving into more active engagement was also mirrored in the progression of the IPF meeting, which itself shifted from visual to auditory practices. To begin, Leo explained that we would watch two contrasting videos about the history of Palestine-Israel, an experience that 'can be revolting to some people'. The first video, portraying the 'Israeli narrative', featured the smartly dressed Israeli Minister, Danny Ayalon, who spoke direct to the camera, as colourful graphics illustrated his claims. Focusing on events from 1967 onwards, he smiled serenely as he stated,

---

[115] I draw the phrase the 'equivocal present' from Mikhail Bakhtin's Essay *The Epic* and the *Novel* (1981: 25). This essay helped me to draw out the distinctions between ossified 'genres' of political action and the open-ended dialogic qualities of this IPF meeting (Bahktin 1981: 25).
[116] In reflecting on the different forms of subjectivity and relationality associated with different sensual practices, I have learnt from Anna Strhan's study of the embodied practices of a church congregation. She writes that, while vision depends on a gap between the eye and the perceived object, listening bridges this gap between internal / external, self and other (Strhan 2012: 147).

'From whom did Israel capture the West Bank? From the Palestinians? No. In 1967 there was no Arab nation or state by the name of Palestine. Actually was there ever?'

There was a collective intake of sharply inhaled breath in the room, in response to Ayalon's violent denial of Palestinian existence. As the jazzy theme music of this video faded away, the sombre sound of string instruments heralded the start of the second clip. This was an extract from the documentary, *Occupation 101*, intended to portray 'the Palestinian perspective'. This technique of projecting the extremities of two opposing historical narratives, relating to the history of Palestine-Israel, iterated the agonistic, Manichean form of the academic boycott debate, discussed in Chapter Four. In addition, the projection of these film extracts carried tragic potential, as I had learned when watching *Occupation 101,* in a different context, just a few weeks previously.

Earlier that month, the Palestine Society at University C had screened Occupation 101, introduced by an activist just back from Gaza.[117] The extract selected by the IPF focused on, 'the causes of the conflict' and provided a historical narrative of events between 1917 and 1948. As the narrator turned to the decade of the 1930s, the screen was filled with a Swastika and the sound of beating drums, 'In just five years, 174,000 Jews flooded in to Palestine, doubling their population.' The face of one of the expert academic contributors filled the screen, 'The Palestinians – they were not the Nazis; they were not responsible for the Holocaust. But they were the ones who paid the price.' In my fieldnotes from the first screening of this film, I wrote that I felt 'stung' by the word 'flooded'; I had caught myself, momentarily, straining to see the face of my nana in the black and white footage of overflowing boats carrying Jewish refugees. The video cut to Jewish soldiers, marching with weapons and descending on Palestinian homes, as the narrator described the events of 1948. The voiceover continued, 'the most infamous campaign was the massacre at the village of Deir Yassin, where over one hundred men, women and children were systematically murdered.' Moving seamlessly to footage of corpses and desecrated buildings, an elderly woman's voice cracked as she testified to Jewish brutality. The film extract ended with her bowed head, subtitles listing her

---

[117] While I had found this film intensely disturbing, Society members had afterwards explained that they had seen it many times before, 'it's a staple for Palestinian activists, a good introductory film for people new to the movement.' This highlights the context-dependency of 'tragic' modes of engagement; a film that might be profoundly unsettling from one person's perspective may be experienced as routine politics by others.

murdered family members as the sound of a mournful horn crescendoed. Watching this in the context of the Palestine Society meeting, I had turned away, unable to look at this tragic conjuncture of Jewish Holocaust refugees and Zionist violence. This time, however, I sustained attention; by taking this activist resource and situating it in a new context, the IPF had shifted my experience of the film.

The group laughed nervously as technical difficulties abruptly ended the video and our attention turned back to Leo. Having introduced films which invoked the claim to reason and to tragic history, Leo had opened up the potential for the group to respond in these registers. Yet, he quickly undermined too hasty a response by inviting us to collectively reflect on our experience of watching these. One person commented, "They're both a little one-sided" and a woman interjected to ask who had made the Occupation 101 film. In response, Leo highlighted the politicised framing of both of the videos, "the fact that it says it's neutral – it's true but... what about the periods that were analysed in each?" Shifting to a more personal grammar, he prompted laughter from the audience as took responsibility for the selection of these clips, "I think that the reason that it (the video) was chosen – by me – but ok!" Justifying his choice to the group, he opened up this apparently neutral framing to questioning, allowing us to reflect on the implicit workings of power in the organisation of this meeting. Continuing in this reflexive register, Leo uncertainly confessed,

> "I'll give you my personal opinion, I'm not sure I should do that... the second [video] insists more on the events of 1947 /1948 whereas the first one will more insist on what's happening now. And that is often er a divergence in the debate, where a lot of the – I don't know if I'm saying the right things – where a lot of pro-Palestinian will want to discuss about the events until 1948 whereas a lot of pro-Israelis will want to discuss events, how they are now."

As discussed in the previous two chapters, melodramatic and tragic campus dramas differed in their temporal orientations. While melodramas dramatised a synchronic conflict between abstract moral valences, tragic dramas expressed the diachronic force of the past in the present. By introducing a question of how *temporality* can be politicised, Leo invited us to reflect on these unconscious elements of student activism. By cultivating practices of reframing and reflection, our group began to explore our relationships to these political processes and to initiate alternatives.

The unknowness of others: acknowledging singularities

Following this introduction, the meeting now shifted into a different non-spectatorial mode. Leo explained that, for the rest of the session, we would attempt to reconstruct our own history of the conflict as a participatory enterprise. Informing us that we needed to break up into small "mixed" discussion groups, Leo apologetically requested us to, "please make groups in a way that, by racially profiling, you will have a sense that maybe the people with your group have a different view as you". The sound of nervous laughter pervaded the room before Karen, a white British member of the IPF committee, interjected firmly to oppose this as "racist". Instead Karen assertively proposed a random numbering system, a 'veil of ignorance', which would treat everyone the same, as we organised our groups. Torn between these two equally inadequate systems, Leo deferred to Karen's decision.

People stood up and started to move around the room, creating five small circles of chairs; each of these groups was to focus on reconstructing a different period in the modern history of Palestine-Israel. Yet despite Karen's careful allocation of numbers, I noticed people moving around, exploring the different options and informally negotiating their way towards their group of choice. Following their lead, I wavered before joining the '1917-1948' group, allowing my choice to be shaped, not by the requirements of 'neutral' research, but rather by my intuitive personal investment in this period. As my own actions revealed, this process enabled the IPF to conform officially to liberal academic conventions, whilst informal improvisation enabled the expression of more personal attachments.

I drew up a chair to join this circle with four other students. Sahir joined us a few minutes later. I recognised Marie from a previous IPF meeting where, speaking nearly-fluent English with a strong French accent, she had introduced herself as recently arrived in the UK from Belgium. I noticed a small Star of David dangling from her bracelet. Next to Sahir, Gad leaned back nonchalantly in his seat and greeted me casually in his southern English accent. His sardonic manner was by now familiar to me; Gad had kept the IPF running while his housemate, Leo, was studying in France. He had previously said little to me about his motivation for involvement, leaving me curious. He had a southern English accent and while his name indicated a Jewish connection, his facial features suggested an East Asian background. To my left were two students I hadn't met before; Malik, an Asian student, said hello in an accent local to this city, later confirming that he had gone to school nearby. Next to him, a white woman shyly

introduced herself as Eleanor, her quiet manner sustained throughout the ensuing discussion.

Despite being surrounded by chattering voices, our circle of chairs felt intimate, an enclosed space of mutual attentiveness. As we took turns over introductions, I was struck by the limits of Leo's suggested method for organising "mixed" groups. Beyond the questions this raised about the cultural capital required to decode names, accents and visual clues of others' 'position', the intimacy of this space posed a more fundamental challenge. While crowds in a lecture theatre, often further objectified through a camera lens, could be reduced to the condensed meanings of their exaggerated sartorial signifiers, the people sat just a metre away were too close for such abstraction. Beyond the discrete details signalling partiality, such as Marie's tiny dangling Star of David, the richness and complexity of accents, dispositions and physiognomy felt irreducible, revealing what Mikhail Bakhtin has evocatively described as a, 'surplus of humanness' (Bakhtin 1981:37). Any attempt to categorise abstract positions was also complicated by the multifaceted personal connections between different members of the group and our varied, still evolving familiarity and strangeness with each other.

The dialogical small group: learning how we learnt it

Distributing some printed pages, Marie spoke authoritatively as group facilitator, reiterating the task before us; together we would read and discuss the pre-prepared texts about events in Palestine-Israel between 1917 and 1948. These extracts had been deliberately selected to include narratives from both 'sides' of the conflict. Explaining that some discussion questions had also been provided, Marie handed a slip of paper to Eleanor who read quietly in an English accent, "Do you have any personal accounts, of family or friends relating to that period of history or stories to share?" Passing the paper to Malik, he read, "How did you learn that history? How different from what you've learnt now?" While the provision of two opposing narratives appeared to replicate a Manichean structure, the practical framing of our task instituted a very different logic. Inviting us to collectively read, reflect and question histories, this practice seemed oriented towards self-conscious dialogism and personal expression.

In contrast to melodramatic performance, which was rooted in *present* rationality and tragic action, which unleashed unconscious and immutable pasts, now the past became open to language and thought, *connected* to ongoing conversations and an inconclusive future. This helped to create the possibility for a different kind of relationship between temporality, subjectivity and sociality. The suggestion that I will

develop in what follows is that, in speaking together out of our hybrid, partial knowledge, we began to initiate a 'democratic politics of memory' (Rothberg 2011: 526). We initiated a process of re-telling fixed cultural narratives in ways that both strove to hear the truth of *distinct* claims of suffering, while also disrupting narrative completeness by speculating in the unknown.

The practice of reading aloud, interspersed with reflexive questioning, was pivotal to the creation of this alternative temporal register. We began with a clear order of turn-taking, the singular sound of each individual voice clearly differentiated from the others. Yet, as the discussion evolved, this individualistic order was gradually transformed as we began to finish each other's sentences, speak in unison or interrupt each other in more challenging tones. These shifts in the pace of speaking and listening were intrinsic to the emergence of a collectivity, not grounded in agonistic or dialectical in-group / out-group relations, but rather in our open-ended negotiation of singularity and togetherness. This emergence of our collective heteroglossic voice, took place against a noisy background of other groups' overlapping conversations. In this way, the micro-practices of each group combined to sensually enact a democratic community perpetually in formation.

Discussing the differences between dialectical and dialogical encounters, Richard Sennett has explained that the former is rooted in a desire for synthesis and common understanding. In dialectical interaction, oppositions are not sustained but rather subsumed into a higher unity. In contrast, dialogic discussion is a process that does not engage in consensual resolution, instead sustaining a multiplicity of textured, interwoven differences. Yet, Sennett emphasises, dialogic cooperation also differs from the melodramatic 'joust', 'the dialogue of the deaf', in which the appearance of dialogue disguises a *lack* of heightened awareness of self and other (Sennett 2012: 14). While Sennett focuses on dialogism as encounters *between* people with different perspectives or worldviews, Bakhtin focuses on the dialogism internal to meanings; as such for Bakhtin dialogue may occur between people or between an earlier and later self (Bakhtin 1981: 426). In asking us to reflect together on "how we learnt that history", the IPF invited us to engage in a dialogic practice *simultaneously* within and between selves.

In his discussion of dialogism as a social practice, Richard Sennett also emphasises the complex historical and cultural roots, which underpin these contemporary initiatives. After the meeting, Leo explained to me that his approach was, "very much inspired by the [Zionist] Youth Movement - small group discussion, I think it's great, much more educational than anything else." As Eleanor and Malik read out our opening questions, I was also reminded of Leo, ad-libbing early in one of our

conversations, as he repeatedly inverted the conventions of our 'researcher-informant' relationship, to ask for my perspective, "I'm Jewish - I answer a question with a question". In these early stages of our small group discussion, questions seemed to play a pivotal role. As soon as Gad had finished reading aloud the first text, Sahir invited Eleanor to repeat "her" question, "Do you have any personal accounts, family or friends relating to that period of history, or stories?" The sound of Eleanor speaking a question that was both hers to ask, yet originated elsewhere, carried a slight ritual-like quality. Something of this practice resonated for me with memories of occasional childhood Seders, the only formal Jewish ritual that I remember my family ever attempting. These were curious evenings where, as the youngest, I would, like Eleanor, read out pre-formed questions in order to prompt a historical story to be told. As Sennett highlights, contemporary secular forms of cooperation have complex religious and political genealogies; it was the capacity of the IPF organisers to draw on these wider cultural resources which enabled this dialogical process to develop.

Cultivating mutual care and engaging 'the British'

Marie handed Gad a printed sheet of text as she invited him to read next. He responded with a caustic "great" and quickly began. The text collated extracts from Wikipedia, describing the 'two promises' made by the British during the First World War; the promise of an independent Arab State to Hussein bin Ali and the promise of a Jewish national home in Palestine in The Balfour Declaration. When Gad had finished, Eleanor and Marie repeated the questions, "Do you have any personal stories?" "How did you learn about it?" Sahir eagerly jumped in, drawing attention to the significance of Britain's role in the region and describing how he been taught about the unjust treatment of Palestinians at the hands of the British. As Sahir was speaking, Gad became more animated, interjecting, "the Israeli narrative is exactly the same". Both voices now overlapped in affirmation of the 'divide and rule' dominance of the British third element,

> Sahir, "It is interesting...to see that both people, at the beginning viewed the British as enemies -"
> Gad [finishing Sahir's sentence], "- but as long as they were in relation to each other -"
> Sahir, "exactly!"
> Gad, "- there's this higher British power who gets to decide."

197

In the previous two chapters, I described how dominant forms of campus politics converged in framing Palestine-Israel as a conflict between two opposing groups. I claimed that this was sustained through the enactment of a detached, paternalistic British position on campus. British characters figured as independent arbitrators, imposing 'neutral' norms of rationality and civility to contain the primordial desires of unruly 'minorities'. The forms of power enacted with this, seemingly neutral, frame were occluded by the institutional whiteness of the campus and the assumption of spatial boundaries which took Palestine-Israel to be an 'imported' conflict. Now, as Sahir and Gad argued for Britain's significance as a historical actor in the Middle East, Eleanor drew our attention to the institutionalisation of this silence within the British educational system,

> "We barely touched on it [Palestine-Israel], like I went to a British state school and it wasn't on the syllabus at all... and it's such a contentious issue... in secular state schools it's rarely kind of explored."

Animated by Eleanor's revelation, Gad added his voice to this intervention,

> "Yeah, never learnt about this *ever* - like we never learnt about Israel-Palestine in school ever, just not, I don't think anyone in my school *cared*."

Marie looked sideways towards Gad and, speaking softly asked, "A bit sad?" The group chuckled and Gad mumbled to indicate his indifference. Yet, while her tone was light, Marie's attunement to Gad's unspoken hurt was significant. Gad's reference to his school's indifference provided an insight into the disciplining of his own ironic disposition. His comments alluded to implicit prohibitions against the expression of excessive investments with this issue, which he embodied in his current detachment. By explicitly acknowledging this, the group began to undermine the norms of civil rationality which shaped this campus politics. Eleanor's subtle role was significant here; momentarily representing a 'British' position, she drew attention to unrecognised exclusions. Marie's attentiveness also expressed a practice of care, acknowledging the legitimacy of Gad's investments without seeking to mediate or resolve them.

As Sahir continued, describing Palestinian anger towards the British for their colonial role, Marie interjected again. Momentarily aligning herself with Sahir, as two 'international' students, she joked, "Why you come to study in Britain?" The opaqueness of Sahir's response, "I want to understand!" expressed a desire for insight *simultaneously* oriented in relation to himself and the British 'other'. In these subtle, multifaceted interactions, the group questioned the postcolonial narrative of Britain's benevolent

neutrality, enabling a mode of responsiveness in which *caring* about Palestine-Israel was acknowledged and given expression.

As our conversation evolved, Gad's initially detached, ironic posture gradually softened, as he began to risk exposing his commitment to our conversation. For example, despite repeatedly turning away to text his girlfriend with deliberate distractedness, Gad seemed touched when Marie asked him to play the role of group scribe, shrugging off my offer to take over this role.[118] In this way he adopted a simultaneously active yet non-confessional role, as this group enabled him to express *both* ambivalence and care. Sahir too expressed something of the paradox of his position as a Palestinian drawn to studying in Britain, carrying simultaneous anger and attraction towards the British nation. In this sense, our mutual acknowledgment that this history *matters* was not simply a postcolonial critique. Rather, it was embedded our critical care, for this British university community, which made our conversation possible.

In his writings about the ethics of democratic community, Stanley Cavell has drawn our attention to those elements of democratic life which are prior to formal rules, determinate frameworks and established procedures. Cavell turns to an *overlooked* sphere of modern culture, Hollywood romantic comedies, to develop insights into the micro-level interpersonal texture of democratic relationships[119]. For Cavell democratic relationships require the acknowledgement of mutual care, in which we become intelligible to ourselves as political subjects through conversations with others committed to us. Here, as in Foucault's use of this word, 'care' refers to both to attentiveness and commitment (Owen 2006). My claim is that Gad's use of the word "care" was not incidental; rather it evoked the *quality* of commitments required for our democratic conversation to develop.

Beyond tragic language: reflexive speech

The narrative voice now passed to Malik, who began reading the text from 1929, which described a period of "inter-communal violence" beginning with "The 1929 Palestine Riots also known as the Western Wall Uprising". This was the first of many passages in

---

[118] Stanley Cavell suggests that expressions of boredom are important moments for reflecting on relations of desire and acknowledgment within language. Drawing on these insights within an educational context, Ian Munday (2009) has observed how the expression 'I'm bored' in the classroom expresses a particular desire for responsiveness from the other.

[119] I draw here on David Owen's observation that, in Cavell's seemingly esoteric turn to popular Hollywood films as a philosophical resource, he is *exemplifying* democratic responsiveness in his encounters with the works of modern culture. (Owen 2006)

which our received text highlighted the tragic incommensurability of available languages for representing Palestine-Israel. Marie repeatedly drew our attention to this phenomenon, highlighting how opposing positions were expressed in even the simplest choices of words,

> "I just wanted to make a comment about that, how changing one word in a sentence changes all the sense of it"

In the previous chapters, I described how this linguistic politics imbued melodramas and tragic action. Particular words such as 'apartheid' functioned as semiotic weapons driving agonistic plots, while phrases such as 'Jewish lobby' carried visceral force.[120] Now, this hurdle in relation to the most basic conditions for speech posed challenges for the continuation of our current conversations. Sahir, for example, felt compelled to qualify a reference to "the land, Israel-Palestine" with the words "or call it what you will", as we each struggled to find ways of keeping language open. As I described in Chapter Five, this sense of the impossibility of speech could prompt some students to withdraw from this scene, unable to express ambiguous connections. However, by repeatedly and explicitly *highlighting* these linguistic tensions, our group offered a reflexive alternative. Beyond Marie's explicit pedagogic prompts, this was also achieved in our embodied practice of reading aloud. As each of us took turns to read aloud two incommensurable perspectives, we spoke the conflicting words, one after the other. In this way, we were able to bring together seemingly incommensurable semantic meanings in the auditory unity of each individual voice.

As Malik continued reading descriptions of violence, Sahir observed how the narrative here felt particularly cursory, as events were reduced to statistics of injured and killed "Arabs" and "Jews". The narrative voice had shifted to Eleanor, when Malik suddenly interjected with a criticism of the text. Highlighting how a binary matrix was embedded in the building blocks of this nominally neutral statistical language, he exclaimed,

> "You can be Arab *and* Jewish, it seems that they only think it's *either* Arab *or* Jewish, you can be Arab-Jewish, do you understand what I'm saying?"

---

[120] As I discussed in Chapter Three, these tensions had permeated my fieldwork from the very first act of naming my research. Learning how students negotiated these tensions was educative for me as I sought to develop new languages. In this sense, this experiences I describe here inform the claims that I developed for ethical ethnography in Chapter Three.

Marie responded quickly to support this undermining of the 'neutral' narrative provided by the IPF, "Actually you can! It's a wrong way to say it." Significantly it was Sahir, who authoritatively followed up to open up the notion of multiplicities of Jewishness, introducing and explaining the distinctiveness of "Ashkenazi, Mizrahi and Sephardi" as well as Palestinian Jews called "Samaritans, or something like this."

Sahir's eagerness to share his knowledge of Judaism exemplified another way in which our group disrupted assumed positions in practice. The location of authority in the group repeatedly shifted, as knowledge-claims were intertwined with *willing* admissions of ignorance and an expressed desire to learn from each other. When Eleanor stumbled over the Hebrew name of the Jewish forces in Mandate Palestine, Sahir and Marie stepped in to help her with the pronunciation "Ha-ga-nah". Marie now turned to me, laughing a little awkwardly "would you like to read? From 1918..." I paused before beginning; I was accustomed to remaining silent at public meetings in this fieldwork and my own voice sounded alien to me. When, in contrast to my exchange with Justin,[121] I confessed myself unable to pronounce Hebrew words, Sahir and Marie again responded in unison. In this way, their shared knowledge of this language undermined their ostensibly opposed positions.

Parrhesia: speaking frankly and truthfully

We moved rapidly through the 1930s, with Sahir and Marie sharing their inculcation (as younger selves) into particular 'Palestinian' and 'Jewish' scripts, while also carefully subverting these in the present by offering alternative narratives. This double move was also enacted in our ongoing shifting between expressive and confessional registers of speech. In expressive registers, inherited cultural narratives took on the force of propositional claims for the 'truth' of historical facts, a claim to represent a universal reality. In their confessional voices, we bracketed the 'facts' that we described with phrases such as 'we say that', or 'we / I learned'; in this register, we spoke *truthfully* about *our own experience* of learning about the conflict without staking a claim to absolute knowledge. The tensions raised by the dialogical negotiation of these subtle shifts revealed the fragility of our collaborative enterprise. For example, after confessing "well I've never learnt about it apart from today", Malik shifted to an expressive register, telling us a "little known" truth about Ayatollah Khamenei's protective treatment of

---

[121] I am referring here to my discussion in Chapter Three of my meeting with Justin at University A. In that context, I felt ashamed of my lack of fluency in these languages and sought to conceal this.

Iranian Jews. Marie's encouraging response, "interesting, I hadn't heard that before, have you?" was quickly shut down by Gad, who abruptly interjected "yes" before turning away, only returning to the discussion when Marie asked him to be scribe, in a gesture of repair.[122] For Gad, it seemed that Malik's claim to objective knowledge here was *too* familiar, reiterating well-worn rhetoric of the Israeli / Iranian propaganda wars, out of step with the reflexive ethos of this meeting.

Listening carefully, I noticed how our skilfulness in speaking these registers diverged, revealing this cooperative enterprise to be a learnt craft. Well-practiced in dialogue, Sahir sustained this confessional voice throughout. Identifying himself with the Palestinian people, as he represented 'our' narrative, he prefixed his contributions with "we say that", and explained that "this is what I was taught". By shifting pronouns, Sahir also expressed an internal dialogism of multiple selves, a 'middle voice' simultaneously active and passive in its reflexivity.[123] Moving between the collective "we" of the Palestinian people to a singular "I" who *was* taught, Sahir presented both past and present selves to the group. It was in his present voice that he made a claim to truthfulness, as speaking "fair and square" he related the Palestinian narratives regarding both the Israelis and British, "we have two sayings... those who don't own gave to those who do not deserve" and "people who are willing to cut the baby are not the real mothers."

In this mode of confessional speaking, Sahir engaged in a practice, described by Foucault as 'parrhesiastic speech'. Foucault explains that,

> 'In parrhesia, the speaker emphasises that he is both the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciandum – that he himself is the subject of the opinion to which he refers... the commitment involved in parrhesia is linked to a certain situation... the parrhesiastes says something which is dangerous to himself and thus involves a risk.' (Foucault 2001: 2-3)

---

[122] Both Richard Sennett (2012) and Veena Das (2007) have written of the importance of small gestures of repair within ordinary, cooperative relationships.

[123] Here there are connections with Roland Barthes' discussion of the middle voice as an alternative to active or passive voices, discussed by LaCapra in relation to the ethics of representing trauma. LaCapra highlights that, for Barthes, the middle voice is not homologous with 'self-reference' or relativism; it does not deny the possibility of truth claims. Rather it is a form of speech (or writing) in which the subject affects themselves in acting, 'place[ing] ourselves at the very centre of the problem of *inter*locution' (Barthes cited in LaCapra 2000: 20). In his critical discussion of the ethics of the middle voice, LaCapra claims that it is most justified in contexts of entanglement and ambiguities, when distinctions between victims and perpetrators are unclear, and in relational contexts of *generosity* (ibid: 29-32).

For Foucault, the practice of parrhesia depends on a model of truth that diverges from an Enlightenment emphasis on external validity. Whilst in the latter case, the distinction between subject and object is the condition for externally verifiable truth, truth in parrhesia is guaranteed by the ethical *character* of the speaker. The speaker's claim to a sincere character, in turn, resides in their actions; their speech must say something dangerous that puts them at risk.

The dangers immanent to Sahir's truthfulness as he confessed Palestinian narratives to the group were twofold. The intake of breath his revelations prompted showed how speaking utterances, profane to the ears of Zionist sympathisers, might provoke tragic violence or alienation. Yet, Sahir's truthfulness also entailed the risk of his internal ethical struggle, the unresolved question of his potential 'collaboration', the possibility that his words betrayed the Palestinian cause in this act of exposure. Yet, in spite of this risk, Sahir continued to use the first person pronoun, so taking responsibility for his utterances. In this sense his mode of speech contrasted with the speech acts of tragic drama. In those settings, language carried independent power, as characters such as Abdul Almasi denied responsibility for the effects of phrases such as 'the Jewish lobby'. By speaking in the voice of his own experience, Sahir showed how a person might simultaneously be constituted by trans-individual scripts yet express their own agency, in 'a free act of speaking freely', which acknowledges responsibility for the consequences of our words (Owen and Woodford 2012: 16).

We approached the critical date of 1948, which contained within it the most symbolically charged clash of names, 'The War of Independence' / 'Al-Nakba'. Now the tensions between confessional and expressive registers were heightened, as questions of objective truth loomed unavoidably in our conversation. Marie handed the paper to me, "your turn", and I read,

> "In May, Zionist leaders proclaimed the State of Israel. Fighting breaks out between the newly declared State of Israel and its Arab neighbours as British troops are leaving the country..."

In the descriptions that followed, I stumbled over the pronunciation of both Hebrew and Arabic names, "Jaffa, Haifa, the Haganah, Irgun and Lehi"... Marie prompted me to continue, "ok you want to read just maybe the two perspectives?" and I confessed,

> "Yeah, um I'm not going to be able to pronounce it – the war was known as –"

In unison Sahir and Marie stepped in to assist,

"Milhemet Ha'atzma'ut"

Explaining that we had been provided with testimony of a 1948 massacre of Palestinians by the "Israeli army" at Deir Yassin, Marie shifted out of a pedagogic role to urgently assume the authorial voice. She paused briefly as Sahir interjected to clarify that that the perpetrators were "The Haganah" before reading at a quick pace,

> "The Jews ordered all our family to line up against the wall and they started shooting us. I was hit in the side, but most of us children were saved because we hid behind our parents. The bullets hit my sister Kadri, four years old, in the head, my sister Sameh [Marie interrupted herself] - I'm sorry for the names – eight, in the cheek, my brother Mohammed, seven, in the chest. But all the others with us against the wall were killed: my father, my mother, my grandfather and grandmother, my uncles, my aunts and some of - and some of the children."

Momentarily scanning the page, Marie continued,

> "Another one for example, so - I screamed but around me other women were being raped too. Some of the men were so anxious to get our earrings they ripped our - sorry -"

As Marie stuttered, her English pronunciation failing her, Sahir joined in and they finished in unison,

> "they ripped our ears to pull them off faster."

Malik, Emily and I listened in silence as, barely missing a beat, Marie now continued,

> "So I wanted to tell you also a story of a, a more Jewish side, Israeli side, whatever you want to say"

Once again, Sahir interrupted her flow, "A personal story?"

> "Yeah it's a personal story"

The group laughed nervously at Sahir's opaque comment,

> "Yeah, not Jewish propaganda but rather personal, yeah".

In response to Marie's mock-scolding "Shhh", Sahir fell silent, attentively listening with the rest of us as Marie determinedly continued,

"Ok so er my grandfather was in Auschwitz and er he lost everyone - his two sisters, his parents, and um so after the war he came back to Belgium, he was just um alone. And he decided to leave to, for Israel. And he er got there before the Independence War and he enrolled in the army. And erm, he fought er for the Haganah and he fought er on the main road for Jerusalem and in the Negev. And I think that, after, um I've always been really proud of him because after everything he had been through and all like the horrible situation and, I mean, he had been in Auschwitz for three years, he still had the hope that, like, Israel would exist and, like, it was a good cause. And, I mean, in the following years, he never talked about Auschwitz, he never talked about it, it was really like, we never really know what like, knew, what happened. But [we knew] what happened during independence more, though he was so proud and he talked about it a lot and so um yeah so -"

Later, I discovered that the personal stories of Deir Yassin had been taken from a website called, 'Deir Yassin Remembered', a commemorative site politically engaged in the construction of Deir Yassin as an iconic symbol of unrecognised Palestinian trauma.[124] As we listened to the stilted sound of Marie reading this Palestinian testimony aloud, in a language foreign to her in various ways, it felt as if her voice had been borrowed by others. In contrast, after introducing her own contribution as a generic "Jewish" or Israeli" narrative, Marie's fluid speech claimed *authorship* of her grandfather's story, merging his biography with her own feelings of pride. Yet, paradoxically, *both* the stiltedness and fluidity of Marie's speech suggested a recitation of powerful cultural scripts. The difference was that, in speaking of her grandfather, this second cultural narrative was *also* her own. As Marie related her grandfather's story, she invoked the trope of the unrepresentatibility of the Holocaust, and of Auschwitz, as a condensed icon of this abject horror. She conjoined this with a Zionist discourse of pride in the foundation of the Israeli State.

In this way, Marie's means of expressing her own personal experience, to herself and to others, were mediated by powerful cultural narratives. For Judith Butler, this

---

[124] The Deir Yassin massacre has acquired increasing significance as Palestinian claims making has adapted to a humanitarian political culture focused on evidence of trauma and suffering (Allen 2009). Describing the commencement of a global Deir Yassin memorial day, Anne Karpf (2002) described these events as, 'so symbolic that they might almost serve as the DNA of the Arab-Israeli conflict'.

reveals the ways in which the conditions of language limit our freedom. She writes,

> 'The very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves
> intelligible *to ourselves and to other*s, are not of our making. They are social in
> character, and they establish social norms, a domain of unfreedom and
> substitutability within which our "singular" stories are told' (Butler 2005: 21).

For Veena Das, the ways in which voices are shaped by trans-individual forces is
reflected, not only in the terms that are used but in the quality of their sound, so that
words might have a 'frozen slide quality to them', which Das describes as revealing a
'numbed relation to life' (Das 2007: 11). In invoking for *us* the sacred reality of the
Holocaust in the transmission of her grandfather's silence, Marie expressed an
inseparable bond between her personal and political self. Her expression of a familial
transmission of silence, shame and pride was inseparable from political narratives about
Israeli-Palestinian history.[125] Marie ended her contribution with soft, uncertain
laughter,

> "That's it; someone else? Because that's like the more recent um, more recent
> event so maybe you have personal accounts too, I don't know?"

She paused for a few seconds, as our group sat still, not speaking... then she continued,

> "No? Fine."

Listening back to this recording, I hear the sound of my own nervous laughter,
awkwardly disrupting the tense silence. In my fieldnotes from this meeting written up
from memory later that evening, I had added a detail into Marie's testimony, which I
subsequently discovered was absent from the audio recording. In Marie's narrative of
her grandfather's journey to Israel, she had described him leaving from Belgium for
Israel after the war, giving no further details of this journey. In my fieldnotes, I recorded
Marie as saying, 'he escaped and got on an illegal boat to Israel'. This disjuncture in my
data reveals a moment at which my own tragic experience came to the fore, inhibiting

---

[125] Here, I have drawn on Marianne Hirsch's discussion of the mutual imbrications of familial and
public memories of collective trauma. Hirsch claims that 'even the most intimate familial
knowledge of the past is *mediated* by public images and narratives', while private familial images
and narratives, and the very language of the family, become politicised within the formation of
more public memories (Hirsch 2008: 112).

my capacity to *listen*. Marie's words summoned my own personal-political narratives of Palestine-Israel, my own family mythology, in a way that subsumed the distance between us, eclipsing my capacity to hear her words.

In this encounter with the painful ambiguity of the War of Independence / Al-Nakba, it seemed that tragic responses (including my own) would dominate. In the previous chapter, I suggested that the invocation of this ambiguous historical connection, the blurring of victims and perpetrators, and experience of truth as 'two things as once', resulted in violent excess or sceptical withdrawal. Yet, at this IPF meeting, our conversations continued. How then, did this moment come to differ from the tragic action which unfolded at the Abdul Almasi event? At that meeting, Palestinian or Zionist truth claims were embedded in a zero-sum relationship, the expression of one claim powerfully foreclosing the speech of the other, a dialectic encapsulated in Abdul Almasi's exhortation that "we are not allowed to scream".[126] In responding to the Deir Yassin testimony with a heroic Holocaust narrative, Marie appeared to enact this tragic cultural politics, crystallised in the iteration of "the Haganah" across the two testimonies. As Marie vocalised the testimony of suffering victims of Deir Yassin, Sahir pushed her to acknowledge the Haganah as the perpetrators of this violence. Countering this, Marie then expressed *pride* in her grandfather's role with the Haganah, framed within a Zionist discourse of Jewish survivors as heroic-victims.

For Michael Rothberg, memory politics which set victims against each other in antagonistic logics of competition, and which fail to attend to differentiated *empirical* historical injustices, are profoundly unethical, reproducing forms of domination through a refusal of recognition (Rothberg 2011). Here, it appeared that Marie, affected by the demands of her own familial history, was reproducing this problematic dynamic, Yet, I wish to claim that, within the ongoing dialogical practices of our small group, an alternative to this competitive memory politics emerged. As Marie spoke these two narratives of suffering aloud, it became possible, in contrast to the Abdul Almasi event, to *hear* the incommensurable claims of Israeli-Palestinian sufferings simultaneously. It also became possible to hear the double truth of Jews as both victims and as oppressors. Marie acknowledged both claims, the distinctive sound of her voice moving from one to the other, containing their incommensurable demands in this practice of auditory unification. In the context of our co-present, dialogical conversation, Marie's expression

---

[126] As I discussed in that chapter, David Morris (1996) suggests that screaming is the antithesis of having a voice. In this sense our group's continuing conversation showed us to be finding our voice.

of Holocaust symbology had a different effect to the 'Holocaust' utterances at the Abdul Almasi meeting. Here Marie's personal testimony was not experienced as a disavowal of other narratives but rather as open to the responsiveness of others.

Offering up her personal narrative alongside the Deir Yassin testimony, Marie embedded it in our ongoing dialogue. Yet, in sharing the revelation about her grandfather with our group, Marie's actions risked provoking a melodramatic or tragic *response*. The group's capacity to find an alternative way of proceeding depended, not only on her mode of speech but also on our listening practices. Here, the short silence that followed Marie's revelation was very important. In this shared silence, the members of our group, and particularly Sahir, found the space to resist the desire to respond to Marie with a counter-narrative, or to 'evaluate' her claims. Through quietly cultivating receptivity to her voice, we could reflect on our own aggressive desires and could respond without insisting on a reciprocal process of justification, balancing and neutrality. As we paused together, I found, that, rather than experiencing her invocation of the Holocaust as an exertion of power, I could be attentive to the singularity and complexity of Marie's multi-tonal speech.[127]

In this chapter, I have been developing the idea that to speak in a democratic voice is to speak in the name of one's own experience, and to make a claim to truthfulness on *behalf* of that experience. In speaking these two testimonies, Marie was also not retreating into relativistic subjectivism. Rather, she was seeking to remain 'true to the facts', in all their contradictoriness, while representing her personal stake in this reality. Yet the exchange between Marie and Sahir revealed how this process of developing democratic voices is necessarily inter-subjective, leaving open the very question of what it is speak in one's 'own' voice. Marie's claim to speak from her own experience as she told the story of her grandfather was unsettled by Sahir's raising the question, "propaganda?" The paradox of speaking in the name of our own experience is that, even in our most personal, truthful moments, we must, as Bakhtin (1981) observed, speak through the voices of others. Sahir's response suggested that inherited cultural scripts might appropriate personal voices in ways that require questioning. In this sense, this exchange took the form of a parrhesiastic encounter of *mutual* frankness. To speak in a democratic voice is to leave one's claims open to the responsiveness of others. And, insofar as the other is able to show us the occluded claims and desires carried in our

---

[127] Here, I have learnt from Anna Strhan's discussion of the norms of receptivity embedded within listening practices (Strhan 2012a). I am also grateful to her for pointing me towards Levinas' ethics of asymmetrical dialogue (Strhan 2012b).

voice, they can help us to become increasingly intelligible to ourselves (Cavell 1990; Owen 2006).

Bringing the subject into play: grammars of ambivalence

Marie now returned to her pedagogic role, adopting a mock-teacherly tone as she focused our attention on the task at hand. She explained that, together, we needed to create a timeline of the five key events of this historical period, "We need to try... to find an objective way to put it on the timeline." We huddled round a large A3 size sheet of paper across which Gad had drawn a horizontal line signifying the period of 1917-1948. Quickly the group reached consensus that our first 'event' to be inscribed on the timeline would be the 'two promises' (to Hussein bin Ali and the Balfour Declaration). Now, as we turned to discuss whether to include the Second World War and the Holocaust, a sense of tension pervaded the conversation. For the first time, Marie, Gad and Sahir took up explicitly divergent positions. The disagreement almost didn't happen. When Gad commented, "So the War is important but it's not clear how it's important", Sahir took this as a categorical decision to include this event on the timeline. He was ready to move on when Marie assertively interjected to question the inclusion of the Second World War / Holocaust on the timeline. Rebutting Sahir's insistence that the War *was* important with the words, "I don't think so", she passionately rejected the "pro-Palestinian" notion that Israeli Statehood occurred as *compensation* for Jewish suffering. The paradox of Marie's position struck me forcefully; having closely tied her grandfather's experience in Auschwitz with the War of Independence, now Marie's passionate denial of the significance of this connection expressed her ambivalence.

In Chapter Five, I claimed that the mobilisation of a politics of victimhood, exemplified in public representations of the Holocaust, was emotionally fraught, simultaneously begetting legitimacy and unacknowledged shame. In tragic dramas, the expression of this ambiguity had prompted violence or withdrawal from participating actors. In our IPF group, Marie and Sahir now acted to contain these tensions, by situating them within a clearly comprehensible binary matrix of pro-Palestinian versus Zionist arguments. Leaning back, Marie created some ironic distance, joking "listen to us!" and then more seriously, "that's the point of today, to show that there's two ways to see each event". Yet, seemingly against his will, Gad had also become animated, as he intervened to speak frankly, rejecting this too-easy solution,

"but the argument isn't just split across the line that way...Jews use that argument about the Holocaust...but a lot of Zionist historians say that because all the Zionists were killed in the Holocaust, that made it more difficult [to create the State of Israel]".

As the passionate register of the conversation escalated, Marie suggested the civil resolution of a majority decision; "well if the majority says yes I don't have a - whatever – democracy!" Yet, the others refused to adopt this mode of containment, insistently encouraging her to continue probing this theme. Despite these tensions, we carried on talking, expressing the ambiguities of these deeply significant histories. In contrast to the rationalistic containment of the melodramatic frame, and the excess of tragic actions turned violent, we stayed in our circle, acknowledging yet not resolving these internal tensions. In melodrama and tragedy, I suggested that feelings of ambivalence, for example in relation to the Holocaust or victimhood, were in a sense unthinkable by participating individuals. Now our conversations brought ambivalence to the surface as the free-speaking frankness of members of the group helped to create a reflexive space.

Creating a 'we': beyond abstraction

As we worked on this task, Marie reminded us that one of us would need to present our narrative to the whole group. Beyond nervous laughter and Gad's "wow", no-one responded. How would we nominate someone to articulate the complexities of our conversations, disagreements and shifting positions? What would it mean for one of us to represent this group in the form of a coherent narrative? What might be the difference between representing our particular experiences to each other and representing our group to outsiders? These unspoken questions jostled for attention, as we rushed to abstract and represent our story. Having made our decisions about the timeline, a quiet descended, as members of the group sat on the floor, colouring in, adding drawings, jokingly complimenting each other on their artistic skills. Then an external solution presented itself; Leo announced that, due to limited time, we would skip this presentation stage, which had initially been presented as the culmination of our meeting. Rather than nominating a member of each group to summarise their discussions, we would stick our timelines up on the wall.
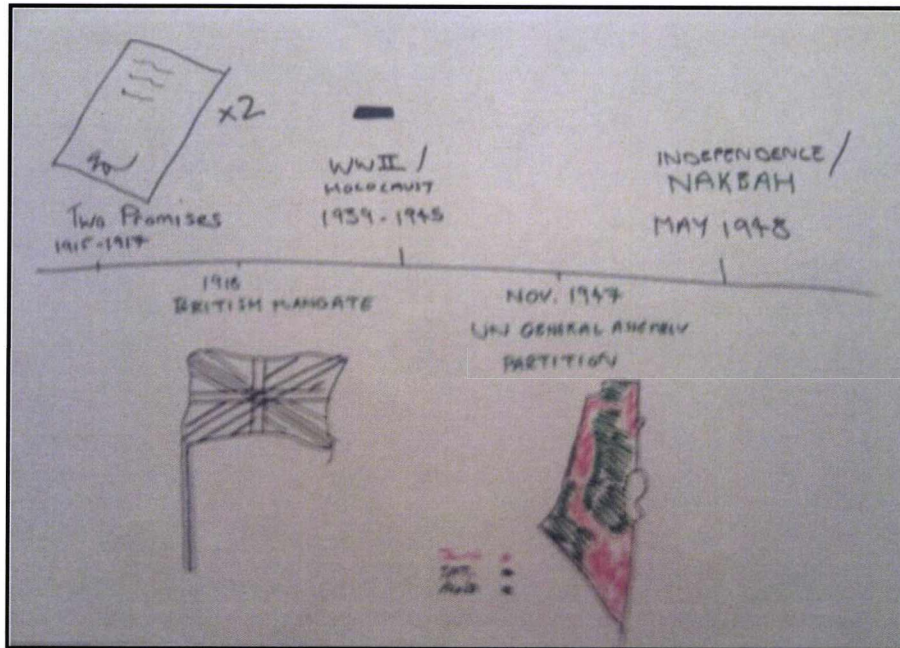
Our historical timeline of Palestine-Israel, 1917-1948
(Photograph taken by myself)

I stayed where I was, chatting to Malik as the small groups gradually disbanded and, one after another, the posters were pinned up. People milled around, to a buzz of overlapping conversations, which ranged from discussions of the Middle East to possible dinner plans. In stark contrast to the academic boycott debate and the Abdul Almasi event, this IPF meeting lacked a dramatic denouement. Shouting over the din, Leo explained that the timelines would be uploaded online. In fact, this never materialised. Rather than conclude by expressing a unified, 'shared understanding', the gestures of putting up posters and milling around enabled dialogism to continue into the future.

Saying my goodbyes, I headed off to a Palestine Society event, overhearing Leo invite everyone along to a local falafel restaurant to 'carry on talking'. The next day, Sahir recounted what I'd missed,

> "Last night when I was with Leo and his friends... I was comfortable with that kind of surrounding you know, just relaxing, you know, like, talking about so many things. One of the guys is Israeli by the way, he was sitting with us – Gad?... yeah he's half Israeli, his dad is Israeli, so to a degree he is Israeli, only to a degree - he speaks the language."

I asked Sahir if he had known this during the meeting and he explained how Gad had only revealed it to him afterwards, though the gesture of speaking Hebrew. When, I observed that Gad had 'not said much' at our meeting, Sahir responded by reflecting, "I don't know how much of his Israeli-ness that he feels, I wasn't sure." At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that the IPF sought to foster forms of relationality which both acknowledged commitment *and* singularity. While Gad and Sahir had exchanged few words at the more formal IPF meeting, their co-presence there, combined with attentiveness to each other's equivocal 'positions' had created conditions in which friendship could evolve. Continuing to tell me about their evening, Sahir explained, somewhat apologetically,

> "We did talk about some things relating to the conflict yesterday but our main discussions were about - like everything else. We talked about so many things, sometimes we mentioned the conflict but it wasn't like a central point of what we talked about, which is interesting, you know, to see that it's not always about that."

Suddenly regretful that my dutiful prioritisation of a high profile Palestine Society event had caused me to miss out on this mundane opportunity for a friendly dinner, I confessed to Sahir "Yeah well it would be exhausting if it was, wouldn't it?". Nodding his head, he replied "Yeah, yeah, yeah..."

Just as uncertainty was intrinsic to its ethos, so the meeting's formal outcomes were marginal to the IPF's political achievements. The pictorial representation of our discussion marked a collective decision, a symbolic condensation of our shared voice at a particular moment. Yet, in contrast to the concluding vote of the academic boycott debate, the continuing conversations of the IPF meeting revealed how this static representation was already redundant, as the 'we' that it represented continually evolved. In Chapter Four, I described how a melodramatic performance instituted a political process between the bearers of votes, in which responsibilities were fixed by predetermined conventions, analogous to a contractual form of liberal democracy. I then showed how tragic dramas reacted against this repression of personal commitments with passionate transgressions. With its lack of dramatic denouement, the IPF revealed how this meeting successfully initiated a different kind of democratic practice. This, we might imagine as a perpetual 'conversation', in linguistic and sensual registers, between mutually responsive citizens, whose democratic sensibilities evolved in the process.

Acknowledging limits

This chapter has traced how ethical practices, responsive to the questions of Palestinian-Israeli justice, were taking place within the 'ordinary' life of the campus. In the context of one meeting, I have shown how the IPF engaged in a process which exposed, explored and sought to overcome the limits to dialogue. But what were the limits contouring the meeting itself? Who was excluded and how? And how does my implication and investment in these processes shape my attentiveness to these exclusions?

The most visible exclusions at the IPF meeting related to the absence of those students, such as Saniyah, who had explicitly rejected 'dialogue' activities. As I have discussed, for Saniyah, these activities were incommensurable with her committed moral stance, shaped by inherited claims of past injustices. In Chapter Three, I suggested that Saniyah's implication in this politics was formed in complex ways through her relationships with present and absent familial figures, and with her feelings of connection to and distance from Palestine. I emphasised the ethical importance of acknowledging the singularity of Saniyah's experience. For Saniyah, dialogue and committed political action could not be made commensurable. Her perspective was bolstered by a sense, shared more widely among activists, that dialogue activities would defuse tensions that are *necessary* for pro-Palestinian advocacy. This intuition was supported by the media logics, which focused attention on agonistic and transgressive political encounters. As I have emphasised, given the asymmetrical ways in which Saniyah and I were implicated in this politics, my intention here is not to judge but rather to *acknowledge* and reflect on her response.

However, I also have an ethnographic responsibility here to attend to the diversity of students' responses to the IPF, including the ways that these can change over time, as relationships with self and other evolve. I learnt the importance of this in my relationship with Sara, another Palestine Society member who had expressed her categorical opposition to the IPF. Earlier in this chapter, I described how I had been present at Leo's chance encounter with Sara, struck by the boldness of his dinner invitation to her. In December as my fieldwork was drawing to a close, Sara and I met up one last time. Leo came up in conversation and Sara indicated that their relationship had evolved over recent weeks, "Like I speak to Leo quite a bit and I feel like he's, he's kind of, it's really hard to figure what the hell he is!" For Sara, Leo had become too complex and singular to fit an abstract characterisation. In contrast to distancing relations, which fixed individuals as depersonalised moral symbols, or as embodied representatives of minority histories, here Sara described the beginnings of friendship.

213

Yet, there were also other less visible exclusions operating at this meeting embedded in the IPF's framing of the question of justice. As I have described, the IPF were working here to initiate ways of responding to conflicting pasts. Yet the 'history' at stake, beginning in 1917, was resolutely 'modern' both in its circumscription of this historical period and in the attempt to develop a linear narrative of causally related political events. There was no space in this meeting for the expression of the kinds of historical claims raised by Justin's references to the Torah, or Ella's invocation of "a spiritual homeland for thousands of years".

In justifying his approach, Leo emphasised the necessity of making pragmatic decisions in a context of a particular meeting. The following year, I also received publicity about a planned IPF inter faith event seeking to discuss religious attachments to the region. Yet nonetheless, this assumed 'secular' framing appeared to be one limit to our reflexivity that evening. This also converged with the unease towards 'religion' expressed by Sahir, which had drawn him towards relationships with 'non religious' members of the IPF. As I discussed in Chapter Three, I was also at ease with the 'modern' temporal orientation of this meeting, sharing Sahir's sense of alienation from 'religious' students. This raises important questions about how 'religion' gets constructed in the process of being excluded. As I have discussed previously, cultural imaginaries embedded in the university have projected anxieties regarding 'fundamentalism' and the authorisation of absolute truths towards Islam. Yet, Saniyah, a Muslim student, did not bind herself to absolute truth in the name of Islam but rather *humanitarianism*. Furthermore, many months later, when I met up with Sadiq, he emphasised the rationalist and dialogical traditions within Islam. This radically puts into question the wider cultural conflation of religion with political conflict, rather pointing to these anxieties as *projections* of liberal universalism itself.

My preceding discussion of trusting friendships, pedagogic practices and democratic possibilities also raises further questions about the institutional conditions which make these forms of sociability possible. Leo and Sahir contrasted the student culture at University B with French and Palestinian campuses; they drew positive conclusions about British student unions' encouragement of sociable, as opposed to politically affiliated, student societies. Yet, as I compared across the three fieldsites in my study, I noticed that, within this British context, the political culture at University C differed substantially from the other two institutions. This raises important questions about the broader institutional conditions enabling or prohibiting campus democracy.

Attending the 'freshers' fairs' at the three universities, I was struck by the smaller scope and scale of student activities at University C, a campus with a very large

number of undergraduate students. This was confirmed by Saniyah who described how University C's student societies were mainly focused on sports activities. I had also experienced differences in the atmospheres of the two students' union buildings; the intense busyness of the union space at University B was in stark contrast to the muted emptiness of the union building at University C. Speaking to a union staff member at University C, I learnt how these contrasting political cultures were shaped in complex ways by institutions' differential positions within the higher education field, and by the social and economic backgrounds of distinct student bodies. As a 'new' (post-92) institution competing within the higher education field, University C's particular emphasis on vocational and economic value was reflected in the dominant framing of its students' union as a service provider. This was also influenced by the governance structure, as this students' union was run by the university, rather than being student-owned. As such, University C lacked the strong culture of political engagement in comparison with the other two universities, making it more difficult for students to initiate and participate in these kinds of activities.

In this chapter, I have also described how the cultivation and development of precarious democratic relationships depends on conditions of *time* and *space.* This included, for example, taking the time for all those moments of informal sociability which formed the basis for the IPF's work. Known as a 'widening participation' institution, University C included a large number of mature students, parents, students living with their families and students from low-income backgrounds, working to support themselves through university. In this sense, the economic and familial pressures shaping students' lives, which differentially affected students at University C, were of critical importance in limiting political participation. As such, while University C held many less events relating to Palestine-Israel, and has featured less in my preceding chapters, this absence is significant. These are issues to which I return in Chapter Seven, as I develop the political implications of my analysis for the 'public university'.

Conclusion: unfinished conversations as political action

My central claim in this chapter is that the students who participated in this IPF meeting were striving for a form of democratic politics, which differed from the dominant modes of engaging with Palestine-Israel on campus. By focusing this meeting towards the entangled pasts of Palestine-Israel, the IPF sought to find languages through which we could speak about violent histories, without ourselves turning violent. In this way, we opened up democratic spaces of the university to ethical subjects claimed by

heteronomous *partial* and *passionately* felt demands. Resisting the teleological goal of mutual recognition, this was an open-ended commitment to democracy which relinquished the desire for a sovereign decision.

I have traced how this group cultivated various skilled practices of speaking and listening, through which dialogical conversation emerged. This process, I have claimed, depended on students who were able to acknowledge and sustain an experience of ethical uncertainty, including in relation to their own motivations and desires. By inviting us to share our inherited narratives at this meeting, the IPF asked each of us to expose ourselves, and to stake a claim to represent something meaningful to each other. These were 'passionate acts' in Stanley Cavell's sense of this term; the felicity of each confession depended on the other's responsive acknowledgment, a possibility which resided in ongoing relationships of risk and trust (Cavell 2005).

A few months previously, the IPF had screened a documentary film, *Promises*, which told the story of an Israeli-American film-maker's attempt to cultivate friendships between Palestinian and Jewish Israeli children. The question of 'promises' recurred in the IPF small group, as together we identified two broken political promises as the *first* event in our historical narrative of Palestine-Israel. The recurrence of this theme within IPF was suggestive of the ethical process with which we were engaged. This required risk-taking on all sides; the risk of acknowledging the singularly of others, of allowing others to challenge us, and most significantly of attending to unknown desires in ourselves. As Leo intuited, the 'success' of these promises depended on the quality of our 'ordinary' relationships. In this sense, the apparently ad hoc encounters framing this meeting were of central significance; it mattered that we bumped into each other on campus, proffered dinner invitations and participated in conversations about, to use Sahir's words, "so many things".

At the beginning of this chapter, I showed how the IPF were enmeshed in the political culture of the university campus, struggling to negotiate a politics shaped by two powerful genres of action. The first, a contractual view of democratic community, was manifested in the predetermined rigidity of the university melodrama. Here, conflict over justice was framed as process in which pre-formed subjects evaluated and justified criteria regarding the objective truth of 'right' or 'wrong'. In the second genre, a refusal of the demand for mutual recognition was realised in the passionate excesses of tragic action. Here, a truth, that was also internal to the self, was experienced as unknowable and so acted out, resulting in violence. In this chapter, I have claimed that the IPF disrupted these ossified forms of political engagement, opening up a space in which we could reflect on, rather than merely contain or act out, our passions and desires. By

reframing, reflecting and transforming political conventions, this meeting cultivated a different relationship between subjectivity and truth, in which both could develop and transform. While university melodramas affirmed a sacred collective identity, and tragic actions transgressed this, the IPF's improvisations engaged a *reflexive* political community, at once dialogical *and* passionate, in expansive conversations of our own making.

Describing the skilled nature of dialogic cooperation, Richard Sennett raises the question of 'why skilled cooperation of these sorts appears to belong more to the ideal realm of what ought to happen rather than to the practical realm of everyday behaviour' (Sennett 2012: 6). However, in concluding this chapter, I suggest that we turn this question around. Attending to unspectacular, everyday encounters in the university, we can see how activist students were engaged in highly skilled, ethical practices of cooperation with others (who they might call friends). In this context, we might ask, what political and theoretical obstacles occlude us, those looking in from 'the outside', from *seeing* and attending to these ordinary achievements?

My claim in this chapter is that the IPF initiated spaces of friendship, in which we confessed and acknowledged committed positions, and engaged in risky practices of critical testing and truth-telling which sought to create a new kind of collectivity. If university melodramas foreclosed the expression of students' desires, and tragic dramas expressed them in moments of embodied excess, the IPF engaged students in dialogical collaboration specifically concerned with developing our intelligibility to ourselves. Outside of the formal pedagogic spaces of the lecture room, and behind the high profile spectacles of activist politics, we can, if we look, find political acts of ethical education in the interstitial spaces and everyday life of the campus.

In September 2011, I met up with Leo in a local cafe to conduct an interview. Before recording my conversation with Leo, I handed him an ethical consent form which included the carefully worded clause, 'I understand that neither my name nor the name of my institution will be connected to anything I say'. Conducting fieldwork in this politicised context of heightened student surveillance had led me to approach questions of recording with caution. I had learnt to take time in asking students' permission for this, carefully explaining the university ethics procedure and my decision to anonymise the three institutions. On some occasions students had preferred me not to record. Leo's response took me by surprise. Looking over the consent form with a bemused expression, he asked, 'But why wouldn't you use my name?' His question contrasted to my dad's exclamation in response to the Israeli State, 'not in my name' and my own struggles with concealment and naming discussed in Chapter Three.

As Simon Critchley writes, 'politics is always about nomination. It is about naming a political subjectivity and organizing politically around that name' (Critchley 2007:103). Critchley's claim is that we must somehow commit to the particularity of our own experience as the ground for staking a more general claim. The question that this raises is how we might engage as political subjects, shaped by ethical experiences of dispossession, interconnectedness and vulnerability, in which 'our' names are always also those of others. By questioning the conventions of anonymity in my research, Leo expressed an intuitive desire to speak in his own name, while participating in relationships that continually provoked him. In this way, his actions linked ethical uncertainty with commitment. How might we learn from this as we seek to respond ethically and politically to situations of abnormal justice? It is to these difficult questions that I now turn in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: On Free Speech, Good Relations and Political Activism

'What did she learn in order to do that? *What did she learn from having done it?*
If she had never made such leaps, she would never have walked into speech.
Having made it, meadows of communication can grow for us.'

(Stanley Cavell1979: 172, original italics)

To encounter Palestine-Israel in British universities is to be confronted with an unsettling experience of 'abnormal justice' (Fraser 2008). This is a site of contestation not only in relation to the substance of justice claims but also with regard to 'how' to communicate and 'who' is entitled to participate. At stake in this politics are struggles over how competing experiences of suffering can be spoken and heard. Conflicts over the very boundaries of the relevant political community are enmeshed with demands arising out of the entangled pasts of European anti-Semitism, colonial oppression, and ongoing violence, which cut across territorial borders. The questions raised by this case of abnormal justice speak to the contemporary condition of our democratic politics, which is shaped by processes of globalisation, the legacies of decolonisation and the Holocaust. As such, the empirical case study of Palestine-Israel campus politics offered in this thesis speaks to pressing concerns for our democratic theory and practice.

In Chapter One, I situated my project in relation to a turn towards 'ordinary' experience, affect and ethics in the study of politics. By attending to embodied communication in democratic life, this ethnography has explored classical problems of political theory – of intractable difference and violence – as they emerged in the ongoing life of situated campus communities. In this way I have developed a historically and institutionally contextualised approach to understanding abnormal justice, which attends to politics *as* lived experience. This, I claim, can enhance existing theories of justice by contributing nuanced insights into the workings of desire, interpersonal relationships and experiences of self-fragmentation within political life.

My study also contributes to recent anthropological work, which has explored the relationship between moral codes and ethical practices (Lambek 2010; Zigon 2007;

Robbins 2012; Das 2007). I have explored the power of moral symbolism in public communication, including the problems of the certainty that moral language evokes and the potentially distorting effects of simplifying moralistic representations (of ourselves and others) within interpersonal relationships (Lynch 2012b; Williams 2002). I have also related this to the ethics of academic practice by challenging an (often unspoken) scholarly quest for moral authority and developing a more personal, responsive relationship to the world that I am studying. In these ways, by attending to occluded experiences and my own implication with this subject, I have sought to democratise the study of the democratic university.

Focusing on the dynamics of moralistic performances, I have shown how Palestine-Israel campus politics evokes particular epistemological and ethical ambiguities for members of British universities. I have highlighted how the incommensurable stakes of abnormal justice do not only polarise groups but also fragment individuals. In this sense, I claim that the contestations over the 'who' of communities of justice, described by Nancy Fraser (2008), are both struggles between groups and *within* the self. I have traced how the different modes of engagement with Palestine-Israel within the university imposed competing demands over students. These included injunctions of rationality and autonomy, and the claims of haunting pasts and deeply felt cultural attachments. Students *struggled* with the rationalist norms embedded in the university and with commitments arising out of their felt connections with Palestine-Israel. While a dominant university culture silenced passionate expression, these transgressive feelings re-emerged over time, in other campus settings. These outbursts of aggression attracted high profile attention, contributing to processes of shaming and further repression. As such, my account of how personal experiences of ambivalence, aggression and shame *relate to* institutional cycles of containment and excess, can also illuminate dynamics of exclusion and violence in other democratic contexts.

However, my study has also looked beyond these widely publicised spectacles of contractual democracy and violent confrontation, which converge most closely with our inherited images of Palestine-Israel politics. Here, I follow Les Back (2007), who has argued that, in orienting ourselves towards what is most visible, sociologists perpetuate dominant framings of social life and risk objectifying the people we study. By focusing our attention away from mass mediated events, we can explore more marginal perspectives and less *authorised* experiences (Seidler 2013). As such, by learning about this world through relations in the field, my project has sought to 'enlarge the field of our vision' (Das 2007: 4) and to 'listen more carefully' (Back 2007: 7). This opens my work

towards scholars concerned with 'ordinary ethics', who wish to draw our attention to overlooked achievements, and who exemplify responsiveness in their academic practices (Das 2007; Owen 2006).

In the preceding chapter, I showed how students could develop alternatives to the exclusions and excesses of liberal and tragic forms of politics. I directed attention towards ethical practices, in which students expressed ambivalence and dependency, while also cultivating reflexivity. Yet this emphasis on an ethics of uncertainty raises a further question in relation to the possibilities for *achieving* justice. How is political action possible in the absence of foundational principles and moral (self) certainty? This is a question that preoccupies the political philosophers whose work informs this thesis (Fraser 2008; Critchley 2007). Yet it is also an immediate, practical tension confronting student activists, who are concerned that dialogue activities undercut the momentum for responding to transnational injustices. As such, in this conclusion, I will consider the political implications of my call for an ethics of care, responsibility and reflexivity in this campus context. I begin with a conversation between myself and Sahir, which took place months after I had left the University B campus. Focusing on the interpersonal and institution conditions that made this encounter possible, I will draw out implications for current debates around the 'public university'. From here, I will return to the dominant public discourses of 'free speech', 'good campus relations' and 'political activism', which frame Palestine-Israel campus politics. Drawing on my experience with Sahir, I will show how we might *re-imagine* each of these terms. In this way, I will stake a claim for a more expansive meaning of what it can be for us to act politically.

Towards political possibilities: a conversation

In May 2012, five months after I had finished my fieldwork at University B, I went back to this city for a weekend visit to see my parents and also arranged to meet up with Sahir and Leo, my friends from the Israel-Palestine Forum. That Friday evening, my mum and I started to talk about Israel and I found that I listened and learned in a new way. The next day, late in the afternoon, I took the bus down the road to meet up with Sahir and Leo. It was a Saturday and the public spaces of the campus felt quiet and unoccupied. After an hour, the cafe we were in closed so Leo guided us toward some corner sofas in the lobby of a deserted academic building. Not long after, Leo apologetically left in order to go and continue revision for his imminent exams, first inviting us both to his house for dinner later that evening.

221

Sahir and I settled in, legs crossed, our bodies at right angles to each other, hidden-away in the corner of this indeterminate public space, which had become intimate in this out-of-hours moment on a Saturday evening. Then cautiously, we began to speak in a register that felt new to me, with a kind of clarity and directness. Sometimes we looked at each other, sometimes we looked towards the space in between, leaning in to speak and listen carefully. The pace of our conversation was slow, at times stilted, both of us pausing to choose our words. Prompted by Sahir, I narrated parts of my own history and spoke directly, for the first time in my fieldwork, about my political feelings for Palestine-Israel, and how this felt connected with my family. Nervously, I expressed my fear of sharing too much because of my sense that speaking of 'the Holocaust' could exert a kind of power in conversations about Palestine, and that this dynamic could, itself, be difficult to talk about. Sahir nodded and leaning forward intently, he asked me if I thought Jewish students *really* feel unsafe when they stress their feelings of insecurity in their public reactions to Palestinian activism. I tried to articulate how the memory of the Holocaust might shape these feelings, even if they seem irrational. He asked me if *I* felt unsafe and if I really thought that 'it', the Holocaust, could happen again? I paused for what felt like a long time before responding, 'not really, not really that it could happen again, but I do understand the fear, when I am in particular situations, where I feel it too.'

Sahir told me that he had not known much about the Holocaust growing up in Palestine, 'you know we didn't have this thing "anti-Semitism"'. He stopped in his flow with the words, 'I don't know how to say it'. Then despite somehow lacking the language, he continued, describing his feelings of hatred towards Jews when he was young, how he had felt the truth of religious idioms which framed Israelis as infidels, and how anger at Israeli violence was expressed in common phrases like , 'Hitler should have finished the job'. As he looked at me nervously, I felt the frank honesty of his speech, the risk that he was taking in confessing a dimension of his experience which seemed to have been shamed into silence in other spaces of my fieldwork. I told him how my inheritance left me uncertain; that the violence of the Israeli State felt shameful to me but I was somehow unable to name myself as a committed 'anti-Zionist'.

Sahir told me how the Israelis controlled his life, even from a geographical distance. He had bought train tickets to visit his sister in France but was unable to get a visa to travel there. Speaking urgently, he said, 'it's my *life,* I need to be able to move'. The plea in his voice pulled at me, as I felt his helpless frustration in the face of this distant power. He looked at me,

'so then I was thinking with the Israelis, do they really not know what they are doing to us or do they know but they do it anyway? When I look at that Israeli soldier, does he know how he is hurting, squeezing us but he does it anyway?'

With trepidation, I responded to his question,

'I suppose there is something I think when you say that about the soldier – but I'm not sure that it is something that you need to listen to or understand – but when you ask that, it makes me think about how, in my family, there was perhaps this feeling of how so many of my relatives who died in the Holocaust didn't fight but my nana had courage, she went to Palestine to make a new life. And so with the Israelis – it's like that's where the Jews did fight – and so perhaps there is that aspect to aggression, like a sense of pride in that strength'.

Sahir replied, 'oh I've never thought about that before, never thought about it in that way.' I repeated my uncertainty about what I had said, unsure, as I am still, whether this is another 'narrative' I have learnt. I said to Sahir that somehow this was not something that he was obliged to hear. But he insisted, 'I need to try; otherwise things will stay the same.'

Somehow when Sahir said, 'I don't know how to say it', he articulated the key to the uncertain yet committed quality of our encounter that Saturday afternoon. This form of communication, in our stilted words and attentive bodies, opened up the possibility for a particular kind of conversation between us. Sahir's acknowledgement of the precarious, unknowness of this kind of conversation was the beginning *not* the limit of our exchange. It seemed to make possible a form of action which evolved in the *absence* of rules. It can be helpful here to imagine Sahir's expression of uncertainty as a moment of what Stanley Cavell (2005) describes as 'passionate speech'.[128] Cavell's work is illuminating here as it shows us how particular forms of bodily, linguistic communication can call us into relationships of vulnerability and desire, which are ethical precisely as they exceed social codes, conventions and rules. In order for this

---

[128] There is a connection between Cavell's notion of 'passionate speech' and Foucault's description of parrhesia as a 'speech activity'. Both Cavell and Foucault are drawing our attention to forms of communication which are not secured by conventional guarantees of truth and felicity (as compared with constative or illocutionary speech acts). Rather the commitment of parrhesiastic and passionate speech resides in the relationship between the speaker and the one they address (see Foucault 2001: 3; Cavell 2005).

conversation to develop, Sahir and I both needed to take risks. We needed courage to express shameful uncertainties and taboos because each of us had the capacity to *hurt* the other. All it would take would be for one of us to adopt the posture of moraliser or legislator, to impose a judgement. In this sense the reciprocal quality of our encounter depended on a kind of attentiveness which Cavell (1999) calls 'acknowledgement'; it required responsiveness to the vulnerability expressed in asking dangerous questions, such as 'do Jews really feel unsafe' in a non-rhetorical register. It required receptivity to the risks taken in confessing shamed feelings of aggression. My suggestion is that this kind of encounter depends on qualities of *courage* and *care*, which cannot be guaranteed in advance. It is in this sense, that Cavell emphasises the centrality of *friendship* to ethical and democratic life (Cavell 1990).

As Foucault (2001) discusses in his lectures on 'parrhesia', there was also another dimension to our risk-taking; not only the danger of judgement or rejection from the other, but also the spectre of self-judgement. Writing about my conversation with Sahir for the unknown readership of this thesis feels dangerous; in sharing my suggestions about the sources of Israeli aggression, I risk angering people, particularly Jews and Israelis, whose relationship with Israel differs from my own. But more than this, I feel uncertain about the ethics of my own motivation; perhaps my intervention expresses an element of anger towards a Jewish community, with whom I am implicated yet feel marginalised? Reflecting on this I can learn from the sense of ethical uncertainty that Sahir expressed to me, in his fear that he might be playing the role of 'collaborator' by participating in dialogue activities. He was struggling with the disapproval of Palestinian activists on campus and his own father when he said, 'you wouldn't imagine the amount of times I was thinking, is this bad?' I can also connect this moment with Jewish philosophical traditions, which show us how the process of engaging with the unknowness of others *and ourselves* is intrinsic to our ethical life (Seidler 2007b; Cavell 1994).

What were the conditions that made this conversation possible? It was late by the time Sahir and I hugged goodbye and parted ways; we had been talking together for two and a half hours. The peripheral, indeterminate space of the academic lobby allowed for an exchange with no determinate objectives, a conversation between friends. So too, it was speaking together for these uninterrupted hours on a Saturday early evening, outside of the official university 'timetable', that enabled the attentive, careful quality of our exchange.

Alongside these temporal and spatial affordances, our conversation was also embedded in and shaped by many other relationships. Foucault and Cavell, in different

ways, describe how in order to act as a friend or parrhesiastes, it is necessary for that person to have attended to, but not resolved, the agonistic, ambivalent aspects of their own self-relation (Foucault 2001, 2010; Cavell 1990; Owen 2006). Their suggestion, which is also a psychoanalytic insight, is that, in order to sustain non-judgemental responsiveness to another's uncertainty, a person must be attentive to discomforting truths in relation to their own desires and struggles. In this sense, I had to *learn* during my fieldwork how to be a participant in this kind of conversation; I had to learn how to open up to the difficult ambivalences in my own embodied relationship to Palestine-Israel. I learnt this in my relationships with others, including from the group of students with whom I conversed during the memorable IPF meeting, discussed in Chapter Six. This was also made possible by my parents' openness with me, by my conversation with my mum just the evening before, which had helped me to sense how our family carried connections to Palestine-Israel in our shared history. Here my own experience resonated with Sahir's description of his father, 'he always gave me a lot of space'. This illustrates the point made by Foucault that particular ethical practices are embedded in broader webs of relationships and connected to our participation in, and resistance toward shared practices, institutions and activities (Owen 2006:134). In my conversation with Sahir, the capacity of each of us to speak freely resided in the quality of our relationship at this moment. It developed through a sense of trust cultivated in a way of conversing and in a friendship, which took time to evolve. It also rested on our embeddedness within so many other evolving relationships, and on the ethical practices we had learnt through the IPF.

Foucault (2001, 2010) describes parrhesia as a practice of speaking truth to power, highlighting how this works within friendship and within a democratic polity. In the context of friendship, the power of the friend resides in their capacity to hurt; as I described above, the possibility that Sahir and I both had of refusing to acknowledge courage, and of closing down the other in judgement. But democratic parrhesia is also about challenging the power of the majority, by presenting a challenge to the dominant meanings, codes or practices of that political community. In his *confession* of a collective desire for 'Hitler to finish the job', Sahir spoke against the dominant civil norms of the British university, which prohibited direct expression of these dangerous sentiments. He also resisted activist responses which denied the *shame* associated with aggressive feelings. In this sense, our conversation opened up a form of democratic practice which was not mediated by dominant scripts and genres. As opposed to the 'heavy symbolic irony' of melodrama (Cavell 1991: 105) or aesthetic excess of tragic action, our ordinary

conversation worked to speak truth by resisting rhetorical ornamentation (Foucault 2001, 2010).

In presenting ordinary conversation as a potentially liberatory practice of resistance to dominant political conventions, my intervention here is inherently normative. Yet, it is important for me to emphasise that I am *not* passing a judgement on Palestinian activists, such as Saniyah, who refused to participate in these activities. Participating in dialogue was dangerous for student activists seeking to challenge unacknowledged asymmetries of power which prevent 'screams' from being heard. Dialogue activities organised with the aim of achieving *reconciliation* worked in a similar way to the university melodrama, presenting their frame as universal, while denying this as an operation of power. In order to illustrate this, we can consider the contrast between the uncertain framing of the IPF meeting and the attempted dialogue event with an organisation of bereaved parents, organised by the Israel Society at University A.[129] In the latter case, participation in dialogue was presented as a moral injunction; guided by the higher values of 'humanity', mutual understanding and civil peace. As such, this meeting reproduced a civil discourse, which disavowed its own power over pro-Palestinian and Muslim students. The organisers of this meeting did not take a risk, or expose their own vulnerability or openness to self-transformation, but rather affirmed their moral status in a way that reproduced existing hierarchies. A fundamental feature of Foucault's parrhesia and of the conversations of justice described by Cavell is that these cannot be *prescribed* by external authorities. The risk that Sahir took could not be *demanded* of him by me; it could only arise out of his own desire to respond in that way in the context of his ongoing relationships. As Sahir explained, his commitment to our conversations was a form of politics grounded in his life under occupation. It was from this personal experience that he had come to feel that he needed to challenge inherited scripts, to transform *his own* relationship to this conflict, or else 'everything will stay the same',

> 'So I was thinking exactly – like why – like these guys live in the comfort like here – it's so comfortable you know - you know like I just walked to university, just walked you know - listening to my MP3 and going through the parks, just walked to university, everything is so comfortable, the location is really nice, and at the same time there is all this fuss about like taking sides.... If we want to have

---

[129] See Chapter Three for a discussion of this event, which was boycotted by Palestine Society members at University A. As I discussed in Chapter Six, this was the same organisation hosted by the IPF at University B in a meeting which, Leo explained, only seemed to attract Jewish students.

support from the people here, if they really wanna find a solution for us back there, these guys are gonna graduate and go to places that maybe one day will have a connection to what we're doing and will have one day a say....and I want to think that maybe they'll be actually helpful rather than being positioned one way or another.'

To refuse to legislate for this form of politics is not to limit its possibility to contingent voluntarism. Rather, as Leo showed with his insatiable openness and unlimited dinner invitations, this form of communication can be cultivated through personal, everyday relationships. In other words, this is to locate political possibilities in the sphere of an intimate citizenship, as the location where friendship, trust and ethical forms of speaking and listening can evolve.

As I have described, the possibility for these relationships to develop partially resides in the temporal and spatial materialities of the environment, insofar as this can enable opportunities for informal sociability without determinate ends. In this way, the broader political and economic pressures shaping the contemporary campus have tangible effects. This is an important point of connection between policy agendas promoting 'good campus relations' and the economic changes to higher education. It reveals the unacknowledged consequences of the framing of the student experience in terms of instrumental values, which produces students' unions as service providers and shapes how time is 'spent' in the university. As such, it is important to emphasise that cultivating sociable, trusting relationships in universities is a political and economic, as well as a cultural issue.

The public university and democratic citizenship

The role of the university has long been framed in terms of its contribution to democratic life. Universities are imagined as loci for the cultivation of reflexive knowledge, communicative capabilities and, more broadly, as sites for the socialisation and education of future generations of democratic citizens. These hopes have been revived by eminent scholars in recent years, who seek to reaffirm a vision of 'the public university'. At the heart of these calls have been claims that universities have a particular mission to help cultivate democratic reflexivity (Calhoun 2006, Delanty 2001, Lynch 2012b). At the same time scholars working out of these institutions theorise democracy and offer proposals regarding how societies should respond to intractable questions of justice. As I have discussed in this thesis, these insights can be enhanced via methodologies attentive to the embodied, experiential qualities of knowledge

227

production and democratic communication. This enables us to consider how 'reflexivity' is always (even when technologically mediated) practiced within socially situated relationships.

My attention to the situatedness of reflexive practices adds a sense of necessity to this affirmation of the central role for the university. My suggestion is that, in order for universities to play this hoped-for role, scholars must first attend to the lived institutional ground of their own interventions, including the ways in which these are already shaped by historically evolving forms of epistemic and political power. We must explore how contemporary universities validate particular forms of knowledge, communication and relationality. These are reflected both in the epistemic hierarchies of theory and practice, in institutionalised assumptions regarding the direction of teaching and learning between academics and students, and in the prioritisation of formal pedagogic over 'extra-curricular' spaces within the university. In order to develop this reflexive university, I suggest that we might challenge each of these assumed hierarchies; scholars might develop theories of the political by paying attention to lived experiences in the institutions out of which they work. Rather than merely educating undergraduate students, the university might itself learn from them. And rather than imagining the university through its officially venerated spectacles of rationality, such as grand debates and public lectures, we can find the institution's democratic potentiality in ordinary peripheries of the campus. For, it is here that, despite the major transformations in higher education, students continue to live and learn together.

Over the course of this project, my campus-based 'fieldwork' (broadly understood) took me from the luxurious heights of theoretical discussions in an Ivy League seminar to meetings with students in the grungy hallways of students' unions. Repeatedly over the course of my research, students described how they did not speak about their personal attachments to Palestine-Israel in their own seminars and lectures. As Alice, the Campaigns Officer at one students' union told me,

> "[My degree] was mainly political philosophy so erm really abstract things about 'what does democracy mean?', 'is it a good thing?' and things like that, rather than actually looking at case studies, we didn't do that very often at all, no... I don't think we ever really touched on it."

Yet as I spent time in the cafes, entrance ways, streets and out-of-hours rooms of these campuses, my informal conversations with students became truly educational, teaching me how to speak democratically. These were ethical practices whose liberatory potential was not visible within the frame of my existing sociological theories. In this way, as I

communicate what I learnt *from* students *to* scholarly debates, this study challenges institutionalised hierarchies shaping who can articulate claims for the public university.

Expanding our language: 'free speech', 'good relations' and 'political activism'

When I began this collaborative studentship, I imagined that the 'practical outputs' of this project would take the form of policy recommendations for NUS. But now, I want to suggest that the political potential for this research resides, not in the production of generic guidelines, principles or toolkits but in the detail of ongoing conversations. In showing how forms of public communication relating to Palestine-Israel involve processes of exclusion, violence, disenchantment, commitment and creativity, this thesis speaks to policy and activist discourses contouring the campus.

In Chapter Two, I described how dominant policy discourses frame the requirement for universities to balance *opposing* responsibilities between 'freedom of speech' and 'good campus relations'. I also drew attention to activists' rejection of these framings as antithetical to transnational political action. By exploring how students are engaged as political subjects within the university, I wish to intervene in these debates in two ways. First, I claim that questions of what constitutes 'free' speech and 'good' relations are underexplored. As I discussed in Chapter Two, prominent liberal framings of campus politics define 'freedom' in relation to official, juridical regulation, and converge 'good relations' with harmonious consensus. This discourse is contiguous with a growing assumption, shared by policymakers and disheartened academics, that the current generation of undergraduate students are 'liberal' individualists, approaching their education from an instrumental, consumerist perspective. But attending more closely to the lived experiences of contemporary students challenges us to rethink this framing, to see how students themselves are developing alternatives. Importantly, this also connects to traditions of democratising higher education developed historically within NUS (Day unpublished).

In response to discourses which *oppose* free speech and good relations, I imagine an alternative, by considering how 'free' speech is configured *through* relationships, with oneself and others. Here I begin from the insight that words and statements can become frozen or empty, disconnected from what we are really communicating as in melodrama. Yet also, our language can be taken over by powerful desires that are somehow not our own, as in tragedy, where we need help in order to learn what it is we desire and in whose voice we speak (Cavell 1990). This opens up questions of how students might be prohibited from speaking in *their own voice*, as well as linking free speech to a condition

of being *heard* in particular ways. From this perspective free speech *depends* on particular kinds of relationships; it depends on relationships with critical yet caring interlocutors (individual or collective), who, by attentively listening to the tone as well as the substance of speech, enable a student to *reflect* on the sources of their commitments, to *develop,* and to take ownership of their words. This form of free speech depends on trust; the one who speaks needs the courage to speak out of their own experience, to take the risk of hurting oneself or another. The interlocutor needs to be able to respond, not as a dialectical, argumentative opponent but rather as one who carefully provokes the other into acknowledging discomforting, conflicted aspects of their experience. This is an insight developed by Stanley Cavell as he makes the connections between friendship, education and democratic life. Against the abstract idea of democracy as contractual, Cavell suggests that we live in world where theoretical justifications regarding questions of justice (the ground of any 'contract') always come to an end somewhere. And what do we find at the point where these justifications reach their limit? Either we trust each other or the relationships fall apart in our scepticism. Rather than assuming that formal moral arguments constitute the core of political life, Cavell suggests that it is everyday conversations, including the conversations of our most intimate domestic lives, which constitute the lived basis for democracy, as we teach each other to develop as citizens. In all these senses, we can find that 'freedom of speech' and 'good campus relations' are not policy agendas in tension with each other, but rather are internally connected. 'Good' relationships reside in openness and trust; and as members of democratic universities, academics and students, we can only learn to speak in the freedom of our own voices, within these evolving relationships.

Finally it is by refiguring what is at stake in speech and relationships that I wish to speak to the challenge of political action. Rather than assuming political activism to depend on identities and positions fixed in advance, we might instead consider how reflexivity, ethical uncertainty and practices of the self can *be* political processes. I have emphasised the importance of practices of speaking and listening, within personal encounters, for this intimate form of democratic politics. Does this mean that these possibilities are necessarily 'small-scale', and so *limited* by the mass-mediated structure of the public sphere? I claim not, but suggest that overcoming this limit depends on our capacity to imagine 'scales' in more creative ways.

In the context of campus politics, I have shown how the combination of institutional authority and public media logics has perpetuated dramatic, agonistic forms of engagement with Palestine-Israel. I have discussed how University A sought to circulate evidence of the institution's exemplary moral performance, and how the public

media repeatedly focused on violent transgressions of civility. As Gordon Lynch has highlighted, this reflects the ways in which moral symbolism carries distinctive affective power which, he suggests, intersect with socio-economic, political and technical affordances to shape the production, circulation and reception of public media (Lynch 2012b). This dynamic poses a challenge to the scaling-up of the ethical processes that I have been advocating, revealing the distorting effects of publically mediated forms of communication, which appear to be necessary for achieving social change.

In order to respond to this apparent limitation, I wish to return to the opening ambitions of this thesis and to call for a more radical re-imagining of the scales and possibilities for political life. Rather than assuming that political *impact* depends on mass mediated communication, we can consider how interpersonal encounters, and apparently ordinary situations, can have 'large-scale' effects (Krause 2013: 145). We can also challenge a dominant conception that *defines* political processes as 'performances' for passive spectators, considering the efficacy of overlapping interpersonal exchanges, and how public spaces can become sites for intimacy and responsiveness among large groups of people (Seidler 2013). This is also about cultivating attention to the *linkages* between situations, to the ways in which intimate conversations, and personal reflexivity can potentially impact on 'distant' political events (Krause 2013). This was a point highlighted to me by Leo, as he articulated a *hope* that cultivating more reflexive engagements among young diasporic people, could make a difference *both* in Palestine-Israel and on campus.

I began this thesis by highlighting how an emphasis on the 'large-scale', discursive and symbolic dimensions of the public sphere, has bracketed the question of what *motivates* us to engage with questions of justice. By re-imagining the scale of the political in the way I have suggested, we can appreciate how the hopes, desires, attachments and vulnerabilities, formed within our personal relationships, are central to political action in democratic life. In this way, we can imagine the potential of those 'ordinary' practices, which are all too easily overlooked. What might political activism become from this perspective? I will end with an appeal - for processes which engage us as in learning, expansion, revision and transformation - in those very moments in which we stake our claims.

Postscript: Unfinished Conversations

In the summer of 2013, after I had completed a first draft of this thesis, my supervisors began to ask me about the ethics of my writing process. How did my commitment to responsive ethnography relate to questions about the ethics of ethnographic representation? Was the process through which I produced these representations of students itself dialogical? How did the ways in which I imagined students' responses shape what I had written about them? Were the people I was writing about invited to reflect on and respond to my representations of them?

These frank questions challenged me to confront an aspect of the ethnographic process that I had previously struggled to reflect on. In the process of writing, I had developed some distance from my fieldwork relationships, feeling more secure and less overwhelmed by uncertainties and ambivalence. Now, as I anticipated reconnecting with particular students, I began first to attend to the anxieties which had held me back from this process, and then to challenge my own need for certitude. Over the next month, I was able to make contact with Sadiq, Leo and Justin, who each expressed an interest in learning about my findings. The risk with each person felt slightly different. I wondered how I might share my more personal approach in this thesis with Sadiq; would he find this narcissistic or feel that I had been duplicitous in my previous claim to a neutral status? With Leo, I had become attached in my writing to the hope that he seemed to embody, could anybody live up to this idealisation in practice? As soon as I emailed Justin, my fears of rejection returned. He had moved into a more senior position in student politics; would he insist that I change what I had written about his institution? How could I share with him what I had written about our difficult first encounter? Was sharing this part of my responsibility? In the process of this research I had learnt that, rather than seeking to imagine and control for others' responses, I need to allow them to unsettle and change me. I had also become aware of the importance of attending to the singularities of these personal and political relationships, each of which was shaped by different balance of authority, responsibility and vulnerability.

In the landmark edited collection *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), a group of anthropologists sought to foreground central tensions regarding the ethics and politics of ethnographic representations. Their primary concern was with challenging relations of objectification, instrumentalisation and domination between the author and those who they claim to represent. Within the discipline of anthropology, these questions were tied up with post-colonial critiques of the exoticisation and exploitation

232

of 'distant' others. However, these concerns have been shared in relation to research closer to home. As Les Back (2007: 154) observes, sociological writing has also been critiqued for contributing to pathologising representations of marginalised communities.

As I began to prepare summaries and extracts to share with research participants and my family, I became aware of a potentially more basic operation of authority within relationships of ethnographic representation. I found that that I needed to change my theoretical language, that to write about people in terms that they could not understand was problematic. I began the difficult and unfinished process of surrendering abstract and technical terms that can be exclusive and objectifying. For any kind of dialogical process to be possible, I needed to find an inclusive language capable of opening up conversations (Seidler 2007a; Sennett 2012). This is a process that I find to be in some tension with the genre of an academic thesis, as the demands of our initiation into the academy can encourage us toward adopting an authoritative, expert tone (Rabinow 1986; Marcus 1986). Yet there are also more personal obstacles as we seek to write democratically; in this process, I have begun to learn how utilising established theoretical languages might enable me to brush over *both* my own lack of clarity *and* my ethical ambivalence. This is an observation that Wittgenstein writes of, with regard to the limits of abstract philosophical discourse; it motivates his ambition to return us to our ordinary language or, as Cavell puts it, to lead words 'home, as from exile' (Cavell 1989: 82; see also Das 2007; Seidler 2007b).

In order to subvert the established hierarchies between ethnographers and those they represent, the *Writing Culture* scholars took a different path, calling for a reflexive turn towards polyphonic, collaborative and dialogical textual strategies (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Yet within these debates, the meaning of 'dialogic' representation itself became contested in ways that undermined the possibilities for 'truly' democratic texts. For example, Paul Rabinow argued that each attempt to displace ethnographic authority succumbs to the ultimate power of the author who orchestrates the text (Rabinow 1986). From this perspective, it seems that authorial authority can never truly be subverted. However, in my own work, I wish to challenge the assumption that this is necessary for ethical writing. I question the model of a unilateral power dynamic intrinsic to the representative relationship. With Les Back (2007), who draws on his experience of research with racist groups, I suggest that we learn how we are situated in multiple relations of authority and vulnerability within the research process; it is this specific context that then shapes the ethics of our writing process.

As Les Back (ibid) highlights, the identification of representation *as* an operation of power has had unanticipated effects within the social sciences. In taking truth claims

233

to be enactments of institutionalised patterns of domination, the epistemological moorings for empirical ethnography have been undermined. In addition, critical challenges to abuses of scholarly power have invited practices of self-censorship in which difficult, complex and contestable elements of our writing about others are edited out of our accounts (ibid). In response to these limits, recent calls for a public sociology have emphasised the need for an ethics of writing that is both committed to truth while reflexively engaged with the limited and precarious nature of writing (Seidler 2007a; Back 2007). In this spirit, Back advocates forms of writing, in which we commit to complex, ambiguous and perhaps difficult truths, both in relation to ourselves and others. He suggests, 'embracing the idea that our writing always falls short...[which] need not result in a turning away from a commitment to dialogue' (ibid: 155). It is in this context that I am beginning to develop a particular sense of what 'dialogical' practices of writing might be in my thesis. As an author, I take responsibility for my own voice and commitment to a reflexive truth, while working to enable others to challenge my partial, incomplete text.

As I have begun to share parts of my thesis with students and my family, I have found that the locus of authority and responsibility here lies, not only with authors, but also with readers. In other words, alongside an ethics of writing, I suggest we must also cultivate an ethics of reading. Chatting on Skype, Leo told me that it felt good to read about himself in such 'laudatory' terms. Yet, he also expressed a sense of being troubled by this personally and politically. As we spoke, he reflected on the risks for himself, of identifying with a 'heroic' position. And then questioning my decision to focus on a particularly successful event that he had organised, he pushed me to attend the limits of his work with the IPF. When I travelled to Sadiq's home town to meet him, I found that he had also read my extracts carefully, highlighting the places where he felt that I had articulated his experience, and challenging me in moments where his perspective differed. Somehow, in this conversation, it became possible to speak in a very personal register. He talked about the lack of trust on campus, and told me how, when I began this research, he had not known what I was up to. I emphasised that I would let him know if I was to publish or share this in any other ways. Shortly before we hugged goodbye, he replied 'you don't need to'.

The atmosphere and tone of my meeting with Justin was very different; we met in the centre of the university, in the heart of this same political world. Uncertain about how to share my findings with Justin, I had written an overview of my research emphasising my wish to attend to the tensions of students' lived experiences. I included an account of the issues raised for me by our first encounter, repeatedly offering to share

more in a way that, I hoped, might enable a more personal conversation. Pushed for time, Justin took our meeting as an opportunity to update me on campus events, reiterating his commitments and judgements, and reacting against my apparent criticism of 'good campus relations' agendas. As I tried to respond, I felt drawn into a 'debate' of fixed positions and so I fell silent. It felt to me that, from his current political position, Justin had been unable to read my writing in the reflective spirit it was intended. As such, rather than share extracts with him, I returned to edit my text. My aim was not to censor it, for I also have a responsibility to myself and a wider public to write this. Rather, my challenge has been to represent the complexities of Justin's position without using my authorial position to mirror his moralistic form of judgement. I have found this process to be an ongoing struggle, steeped in uncertainty, as I try to reflect on my motivations and responsibilities, within this continuing relationship.

In these ways, the pressures and possibilities for ethical relationality explored in this study continue to imbue my ongoing communications within and beyond this thesis. And so, I will stop writing here by pausing - in this moment of uncertainty - within a text which is necessarily incomplete - and to which I am committed.

Bibliography

Ahmed, S. (2012) *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Alexander, J.C. (1988) Culture and Political Crisis: "Watergate" and Durkheimian Sociology, in J.C. Alexander, ed., *Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 187-224.

    -- (2003) *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

    -- (2006a) From the Depths of Despair: Performance, Counter-performance, and "September 11", in J.C Alexander., B. Giesen and J. Mast, eds., *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 91-114.

    -- (2006b) Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy' in J.C Alexander., B. Giesen and J. Mast, eds., *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 29-90.

    -- (2006c) *The Civil Sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

    -- (2010) *The Performance of Politics: Obama's Victory and the Democratic Struggle for Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Alexander, J.C. and Dromi, S. (2012) Holocaust and Trauma: Moral Restriction in Israel, in J.C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Allen, L. (2009) Martyr Bodies in the Media: Human rights, Aesthetics, and the Politics of Immediation in the Palestinian Intifada, *American Ethnologist*, 36(1): 161-180.

Asad, T. (2003) *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

    -- (2007) *On Suicide Bombing.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Back, L. (2004) Ivory Towers? The Academy and Racism, in I. Law, D. Phillips and L. Turney, eds., *Institutional Racism in Higher Education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham, pp. 1-6.

    -- (2004) Politics, Research and Understanding, in C. Seale, ed., *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage, pp, 249-264.

    -- (2007) *The Art of Listening.* Oxford: Berg.

Back, L., Sinha, S. and Bryan, W.C. (2012) New Hierarchies of Belonging, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(2): 139-154.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays.* ed. M. Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M.Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

BBC News (2011) State multiculturalism has failed, says David Cameron, *BBC News,* 5 February 2011 [online], http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994 (Accessed 27 August 2013).

BBC News (2010) Israel to restrict white phosphorus use in future wars, *BBC News,* 21 July 2010 [online], http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-10711086 (Accessed 21 August 2013).

Becker, H. S. (1998) *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bennett, J. (2010) *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

    -- (2001) *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings and Ethics.* Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Boothroyd, D. (2013) *Ethical Subjects in Contemporary Culture.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bowman, G. (2002) Migrant Labour: Constructing Homeland in the Exilic Imagination, *Anthropological Theory*, 2(4): 447-468.

Brooks, P. (1995) *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Burke, F. (2012) *Students of Resistance: Palestinian Student Mobilization at Home and in Exile*. University of Oxford. PhD Thesis.

Butler, J. (2005) *Giving an Account of Oneself.* Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press.

    -- (2006) *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence.* London: Verso.

    -- (2009) *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.

    -- (2012) *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Calhoun, C. ed. (1992) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

-- (2001) Putting Emotions in Their Place, in J. Goodwin, J.M. Jasper and F. Polletta, eds., *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 45-57.

-- (2006) The University and the Public Good, *Thesis Eleven*, 84 (1): 7-43.

Carlson, M. (2001) *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Clifford, J. and Marcus, G.E. eds. (1986) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Coffey, A. (1999) *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity.* London: Sage.

Carroll, B. (2012) Tell me what do university fees have to do with Israel?, *Jewish Chronicle* 30 April 2012 [online], http://www.thejc.com/campus/campus-comment/67019/tell-me-what-do-university-fees-have-do-israel (Accessed 25 August 2013).

Cavell, S. (1982) The Fact of Television, *Daedalus*, 111 (4): 75-96.

-- (1989) *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures After Emerson After Wittgenstein*. Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch.

-- (1990) The Conversation of Justice: Rawls and the Drama of Consent, in S. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectonism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

-- (1994) *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

-- (1996) *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

-- (1999) *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

-- (2005) Passionate and Performative Utterance: Morals of Encounter, in R.B. Goodman, ed., *Contending with Stanley Cavell*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Community Security Trust and Union of Jewish Students (2009) *A Student's Guide to Antisemitism on Campus* [online]. Available from: http://www.thecst.org.uk/docs/Students%20Book%2001-for%20website.pdf (Accessed 27 August 2013).

Cordero, R., Carballo, F. and Ossandón, J. (2008) Performing Cultural Sociology: A Conversation with Jeffrey Alexander. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 11(4): 523-542.

Critchley, S. (1999) *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought*. London: Verso.

-- (2007) *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*. London: Verso.

-- (2012) *The Tragedy of Misrecognition: The Desire for a Catholic Shakespeare and Hegel's Hamlet*, unpublished paper.

Critchley, S. and Kesselman, T. (2012) Tragedy and Modernity: The Logic of Affect, in C. Cederström and T. Kesselman, eds., *Impossible Objects: Interviews / Simon Critchley*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 139-163.

Crossley, N. (2008) Social Networks and Student Activism: On the Politicising Effect of Campus Connections, *Sociological Review*, 56(1), 18-38.

Das, V. (2007) *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary; Foreword by Stanley Cavell*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

-- (2010) Engaging the Life of the Other: Love and Everyday Life, in M. Lambek, ed. *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*. Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press, pp. 376-399.

Day, M. (unpublished) *Respected not Respectable – A History of the National Union of Students 1922 – 1997*.

Delanty, G. (2001) *Challenging Knowledge: The University in the Knowledge Society*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

-- (2006) The Cosmopolitan Imagination: Critical Cosmopolitanism and Social Theory, *British Journal of Sociology*, 57(1): 25-47.

-- (2011) Cultural Diversity, Democracy and the Prospects of Cosmopolitanism: A Theory of Cultural Encounters, *British Journal of Sociology*, 62(4): 633-656.

Dinham, A. and Jones, S. H. (2012) Religion, Public Policy, and the Academy: Brokering Public Faith in a Context of Ambivalence?, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 27(2):185-201.

Dugan, E. (2009) Students are revolting; the spirit of '68 is reawakening, *Independent on Sunday*, February 8 2009, pp. 22.

Durkheim, E. (2001) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. trans. C. Cosman. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eade, J. and Garbin, D. (2002) Changing Narratives of Violence, Struggle and Resistance: Bangladeshis and the Competition for Resources in the Global City, *Oxford Development Studies*, 30(2): 137-150.

Edmunds, J. (2010) Elite Young Muslims in Britain: From Transnational to Global Politics, *Contemporary Islam*, 4 (2):215-238.

Effler, E. S. (2010) *Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes: Emotional Rhythms in Social Movement Groups*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Elias, N. (2000) *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations..* trans. E. Jepbcott. Oxford: Blackwell.

Equality Challenge Unit (2005) *Promoting Good Campus Relations: Dealing With Hate Crimes and Intolerance*. London: Universities UK.

- - (2007) *Update: Promoting Good Campus Relations: An Institutional Imperative.* London: Universities UK.

-- (2012) *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2012, Part 2: Students* [online]. Available from: http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-he-stats-2012 (Accessed 27 August 2013).

Faubion, J.D. (2011) *An Anthropology of Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Finkelstein, N. G. (2000) *The Holocaust Industry: Reflection on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering.* London: Verso.

Forum for the Discussion of Israel-Palestine (FODIP). (undated) *FODIP Website* [online], http://www.fodip.org/ten_principles.pdf (Accessed 28 August 2013).

-- (2013) *FODIP Website* [online], http://www.fodip.org/whatis.html (Accessed 28 August 2013)

Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. trans. A. Sheridan. London: Penguin.

-- (1986) On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress, in P. Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*. London: Penguin.

-- (2001) *Fearless Speech.* ed. J. Pearson. Los Angeles: Semiotexte.

-- (2010) *The Government of Self and Others.* trans. G. Burchell, ed. F. Gros Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fraser, N. (1992) Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, in C. Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 109-142.

-- (2008) *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World.* Cambridge: Polity.

Gale, R. and O'Toole, T. (2009) Young People and Faith Activism: British Muslim Youth, Glocalisation and the Umma, in A. Dinham, R. Furbey and V. Lowndes, eds., *Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, Policies and Practices*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Geertz, C. (1993) [1973] Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays.* London: Fontana, pp. 412-454.

Gilby, N., Ormston, R., Parfrement, J., Payne, C. (2011) Amplifying the Voice of Muslim Students: Findings from Literature Review, *BIS Research Paper Number 55*. London: The Stationary Office [online]. Available from: http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/a/11-1305-amplifying-voice-of-muslim-students-literature-review.pdf (accessed 27 August 2013).

Gilliat, S. (2000) *Religion in Higher Education: The Politics of the Multi-Faith Campus* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Gilroy, P. (1998) Afterword: Not Being Human, in B. Cheyette and L. Marcus, eds., *Modernity, Culture and the Jew.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

-- (2004) *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* London: Routledge.

Goodwin, J., Jasper, J.M., Polletta, F. eds. (2001) *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gordon, A. (2008) *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination / with a New Introduction; Foreword by Janice Radway*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Graham, D. and Boyd , J.(2011) *Home and Away: Jewish Journeys Towards Independence: Key findings from the 2011 National Jewish Student Survey.* Institute for Jewish Policy Research [online]. Available from: http://www.jpr.org.uk/downloads/NJSS_report%20 final.pdf (Accessed 27 August 2013).

Guardian (2010) Campus conflict series, *Guardian Comment is Free,* April to May 2010 [online], http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/series/campus-conflict (Accessed 27 August 2013).

Guardian (2008) Israel launches deadly Gaza attacks, *Guardian,* 27 December 2008 [online], http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/dec/27/israelandthepalestinians (Accessed 21 August 2013).

241

Hanjra, F. (2010a) Student Islamic societies are radical not extremist, *Guardian*, 22 April 2010 [online], http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/apr/22/student-islamic-societies-radical (Accessed 27 August 2013).

-- (2010b) The truth about campuses, *FOSIS website* [online], http://media.fosis.org.uk/fosis-media/articles/702-the-truth-about-campuses (Accessed 27 August 2013).

-- (2010c) Keeping universities free for fair criticism, *Guardian,* 21 May 2010 [online], http://www.theguardian.com/profile/faisal-hanjra (Accessed 27 August 2013).

Herzfeld, M. (2001) Performing Comparisons: Ethnography, Globetrotting, and the Spaces of Social Knowledge, *Journal of Anthropological Research,* 57(3):259-276.

Hesse, B. (2000) Introduction: Un/settled Multiculturalisms, in B. Hesse, ed., *Un/settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, "Transruptions".* London: Zed Books, pp. 1-30.

Hirsch, M. (2008) The Generation of Postmemory, *Poetics Today.* 29(1): 103-128.

Hirschkind, C. (2011) Is there a Secular Body?, *Cultural Anthropology: Journal of the Society for Cultural Anthropology,* 26(4): 633-647.

Hirsh, D. (2012) Defining Antisemitism Down, *Fathom Journal.* Available from: http://www.fathomjournal.org/policy-politics/defining-antisemitism-down/ (Accessed 31 August 2013).

-- (2010) Accusations of Malicious Intent in Debates about the Palestine-Israel Conflict and About Antisemitism, *Transversal* 1. Available from: http://engageonline.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/4958_transversal_2010_01_i nnenteil_beitrag_hirsch.pdf (Accessed 27 August 2013).

Hohenlohe, A. (2011) *In the Presence of the Past: Young Germans and the Cultural Memory of National Socialism and the Holocaust.* University of London. PhD Thesis.

Home Office (2011) *Prevent Strategy: Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty, June 2011.* Norwich: The Stationary Office.

Hopkins, P. (2011) Towards Critical Geographies of the University Campus: Understanding the Contested Experiences of Muslim Students, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36 (1): 157–169.

Kahn-Harris, K. and Gidley, B. (2010) *Turbulent Times: The British Jewish Community Today.* London: Continuum.

Karpf, A (2002) Remember the pain, heal the wounds, *The Guardian,* 26 March 2002 [online], http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/mar/26/israel1 (Accessed 27 August 2013).

Kushner, T. (1998) Remembering to Forget: Racism and Anti-racism in Post-war Britain, in B. Cheyette, L. Marcus, eds., *Modernity, Culture and the Jew.* Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 226-241.

Hodgkin, K. and Radstone, S. eds. (2003) *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory.* London: Routledge.

Kolankiewicz, M. (2013) Different Faces of Silence: Katyn and Jedwabne in Polish Collective Memory and the Politics of Cultural Trauma. (manuscript submitted for publication).

Krause, M. (2013) Recombining Micro/Macro: The Grammar of Theoretical Innovation, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 16(2): 139-152.

LaCapra, D. (2001) *Writing History, Writing Trauma.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lambek, M. (2010) Introduction, in M. Lambek, ed., *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action.* Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press, pp. 1-38.

-- (2012) Facing Religion, From Anthropology, *Anthropology Of This Century,* 4. Available from: http://aotcpress.com/articles/facing-religion-anthropology/ (Accessed 21 August 2013).

Law, I., Phillips, D. and Turney, L. eds. (2004) *Institutional Racism in Higher Education.* Stoke on Trent: Trentham.

Le Play, D. C. (2008) Making Sense of Student Cultures in Higher Education Today, in Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work, ed., *University Life Uncovered: Making Sense of the Student Experience.* Southampton: Higher Education Academy, pp. 6-14.

Long, J. (2006) Embodied Politics: Palestinian Students in the United Kingdom Tackle Media Misrepresentations, *Arab World Geographer,* 9 (3): 188-200.

-- (2011) Geographies of Palestine-Israel, *Geography Compass*, 5(5):262-274.

Livingston, A. (2013) Avoiding Deliberative Democracy?: Micropolitics, Manipulation, and the Public Sphere, *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* 45(3): 269-294.

Lynch, G. (2012a). Living with Two Cultural Turns: The Case of the Study of Religion in S. Frosh and S. Roseneil, eds., *Social Research After the Cultural Turn*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 73-92.

-- (2012b) *The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lynch, G. and Sheldon, R. (2013) The Sociology of the Sacred: A Conversation with Jeffrey Alexander, *Culture and Religion*, 14(3): 253-267.

Macdonald, S. (2005) Commemorating the Holocaust: the Ethics of National Identity in the Twenty-first Century, in J. Littler and R. Naidoo, eds., *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of Race.* London: Routledge, pp. 49–68.

Marcus, G.E. (1986) Afterword: Ethnographic Writing and Anthropological Careers, in J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 262-267.

Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative Researching.* London: Sage.

McKenzie, C. (2010) Student Islamic societies must tackle hate speech, *Guardian,* 26 April 2010 [online], http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2010/apr/26/student-islamic-societies-hate-speec (Accessed 27 August 2013).

McDonald, K. (2006) *Global Movements: Action and Culture.* Oxford: Blackwell.

McQuarrie, M. (2006) Knowledge Production, Publicness, and the Structural Transformation of the University: An Interview with Craig Calhoun, *Thesis Eleven,* 84 (1): 103-114.

Meer, N. and Modood, T. (2012) How Does Interculturalism Contrast With Multiculturalism? *Journal of Intercultural Studies: An International Journal*, 33(2): 175-196.

Morgan, J. (2011) Jewish group renews attack on 'racist' UCU, *Times Higher Education,* 8 June 2011 [online], http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/jewish-group-renews-attack-on-racist-ucu/416445.article (Accessed 27 August 2013).

Morris, D. B. (1996) About Suffering: Voice, Genre, and Moral Community, *Daedalus*, 125(1): 25-46.

Munday, I. (2009) Passionate Utterance and Moral Education, *Journal of Philosophy of Education.* 43(1): 57-74.

Nash, K. and Bell, V. (2007) The Politics of Framing: An Interview with Nancy Fraser, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24(4): 73-86.

Nietzsche, F. W. (1993) *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music.* transl. S.E. Whiteside, ed. M. Tanner. London: Penguin.

NUS (2010) *Smash Apathy Now.* Available from: http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/training/Smash-apathy-now/ (Accessed 27 August 2013).

-- (2011a) *Hate Crime: Interim Report.* London: NUS. Available from: www.nus.org.uk/hatecrime (Accessed 27 August 2013).

-- (2011b) *Good Inter Faith Relations on Campus: A Toolkit for Students' Unions.* London: NUS. Available from: http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/news/article/faith/1834/ (Accessed 27 August 2013).

-- (2011c) *Managing the Risks Associated with External Speakers: Guidance for Students' Unions in England and Wales.* London: NUS. Available from: http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/asset/News/6013/Hate-Speech-Guidance-Web.pdf (Accessed 27 August 2013).

-- (2012a) *Society and Citizenship Zone Policy 2010-2012* [online], www.nusconnect.org.uk/pageassets/about/.../Soc-Cit-Policy-2012.pdf (Accessed 27 August 2013).

-- (2012b) *NUS Connect Website* [online], http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/blogs/blog/aaronkiely/2012/09/19/Redefining-NUS-No-Platform-Policy-would-weaken-the-fight-against-fascism-amp-how-it-is-possible-to-/(Accessed 27 August 2013).

Office of Public Management and Hussein, S. (2009) *The Experiences of Muslim Students in Further and Higher Education in London. A Report for the Greater London Authority.* London: OPM.

One Voice Movement (undated) *OneVoice Movement Website* [online], http://www.onevoicemovement.org/ (accessed 27 August 2013).

Orsi, R. A. (2005) *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study them.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

O'Toole, T. and Gale, R. (2010) Contemporary Grammars of Political Action Among Ethnic Minority Young Activists, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33(1): 126-143.

Owen, D. (2006) Perfectionism, Parrhesia and the Care of the Self: Foucault and Cavell on Ethics and Politics, in A.J. Norris, ed., *The Claim to Community: Essays on Stanley Cavell and Political Philosophy.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 128-155.

Owen, D. and Woodford, C.M. (2012) Foucault, Cavell and the Government of self and others: on truth-telling, friendship and an ethics of democracy, *Iride*, 66 (In press). Available from: http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/338361/ (Accessed 29 August 2013).

Phillips, D. (2012) Unsettling Spaces: Higher Education Institutions in the UK, in W. Allen et al. eds., *As the World Turns: Diversity and Global Shifts in Higher Education Theory, Research and Practice.* Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.

Pilkington, A. (2013) The Interacting Dynamics of Institutional Racism in Higher Education, *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 16(2): 225-245.

Polletta, F. (2012) Letter from the Section Chair for Spring 2012, *Culture Newsletter*, *American Sociological Association Section Sociology of Culture*, 25, 2: 1 cont. 16-17, [online] http://www.ibiblio.org/culture/newsletter-archive/CultureNewsletter (Spring2012.2). pdf (Accessed 31 August 2013).

Quilliam Foundation (2010) *Quilliam Briefing Paper: Radicalisation on British University Campuses: A Case Study.* Available from: http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/index.php/ component/content/article/713 (Accessed 18 October 2010).

Rabinow, P. (1986) Representations are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-modernity in Anthropology, in J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.* Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 234-261.

Ray, L. (2011) *Violence & Society*. London: Sage.

Ray, L., Smith, D. and Wastell, L. (2004) Shame, Rage and Racist Violence, *The British Journal of Criminology: Delinquency and Deviant Social Behaviour,* 44(3): 350-368.

Reed, I. (2006) Social Dramas, Shipwrecks and Cockfights: Conflict and Complicity in Social Performance, in J.C Alexander., B. Giesen and J. Mast, eds., *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.146-168.

Rich, D. (2011) Campus War, 1977: The Year That Jewish Societies Were Banned, in E.G. Pollack, ed., *Anti-Semitism on the Campus: Past and Present.* Brighton MA: Academic Studies Press.

Rifkind, H. (2009) Angry young things, *Times,* 16 February 2009 (section T2), pp. 2-3.

Robbins, J. (2012) On Becoming Ethical Subjects: Freedom, Constraint and the Anthropology of Morality, *Anthropology of This Century,* 5. Available from: http://aotcpress.com/articles/ethical-subjects-freedom-constraint-anthropology-morality/ (Accessed 31 August 2013).

Rose, G. (1997) *Love's Work*. London: Vintage.

-- (1998) Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation, in B. Cheyette and L. Marcus, eds., *Modernity, Culture and the Jew.* Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 242-256.

Rose, J. (2005) *The Question of Zion*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Rothberg, M. (2009) *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

-- (2011) From Gaza to Warsaw: Mapping Multidirectional Memory, *Criticism*, 53(4): 523-548.

Said, E. W. (1978) *Orientalism.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

--(1993) *Culture and Imperialism.* New York: Knopf.

Seidler, V. J. (2000) *Shadows of the Shoah: Jewish Identity and Belonging* .Oxford: Berg.

-- (2007a) *Urban Fears and Global Terrors: Citizenship, Multicultures and Belongings After 7/7.* London: Routledge.

-- (2007b) *Jewish Philosophy and Western Culture: A Modern Introduction.* London: I.B. Tauris.

-- (2013) *Remembering Diana: Cultural Memory and the Reinvention of Authority.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sennett, R. (2011) Universities need your Titians. *Guardian,* March 6 2011 [online], http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/mar/06/universities-titian-lse-dodgy-donors (Accessed 27 August 2013).

-- (2012) *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Co-operation.* London: Allen Lane.

Simmel, G. (1955) *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations*. US: Free Press.

Smith, P. (2005) *Why War?: The Cultural Logic of Iraq, the Gulf War, and Suez*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Solomos, J., Keith, M. and Shukra, K. (2003) *Democratic Governance and Ethnic Minority Political Participation in Contemporary Britain*, ESRC Research report: (L215242046). Available from: http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk (Accessed: 27 August 2013).

Song, M. (2011) Part of the British Mainstream? British Muslim Students and Islamic Student Associations, *Journal of Youth Studies* 15 (2): 143-160.

Stähler, A. (2009) Metonymies of Jewish Postcoloniality: The British Mandate for Palestine and Israel in Contemporary British Jewish Fiction, *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 16 (1): 27–40.

Stoetzler, M. and Yuval-Davis, N. (2002) Standpoint Theory, Situated Knowledge and the Situated Imagination, *Feminist Theory*, 3(3): 315-334.

Strhan, A. (2012a) Discipleship and Desire: Conservative Evangelicals, Coherence and the Moral Lives of the Metropolis. University of Kent. PhD Thesis.

-- (2012b) *Levinas, Subjectivity, Education: Towards an Ethics of Radical Responsibility.* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Thorne, J. and Stuart, H. (2008) *Islam on Campus: A Survey of UK Student Opinions.* London: Centre for Social Cohesion.

Thrift, N. (2004) Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect, *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 86 (1): 57-78.

Tyrer, D. (2004) The Others: Extremism and Intolerance on Campus and the Spectre of Islamic Fundamentalism, in I. Law, D. Phillips and L. Turney, eds., *Institutional Racism in Higher Education.* Stoke on Trent: Trentham, pp. 35-48.

Union of Jewish Students (2013) *UJS Website* [online], http://www.ujs.org.uk/about-us/ (Accessed 28 August 2013).

-- (2011) Meet the Zionists and NUS Conference, *UJS Website* [online], http://www.ujs.org.uk/news/580/meet-the-zionists-at-nus-conference/ (Accessed 28 August 2013).

Universities UK (2011) *Freedom of Speech on Campus: Rights and Responsibilities in UK Universities.* London: Universities UK.

Wagner-Pacifici, R. (1986) *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wagner-Pacifici, R. and Hall, M. (2012) Resolution of Social Conflict, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38(1): 181-199.

Webster, J. (2008) Establishing the "Truth" of the Matter: Confessional Reflexivity as Introspection and Avowal, *Psychology and Society*, 1(1): 65-76.

Weller, P., Hooley, T. and Moore, N. (2011) *Religion and Belief in Higher Education: The Experiences of Staff and Students.* London: Equality Challenge Unit. Available from:

http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/religion-and-belief-staff-and-students-in-he-report.pdf/view (Accessed 28 August 2013).

Werbner, P. (2004) The Predicament of Diaspora and Millennial Islam: Reflections on September 11, 2001. *Ethnicities*, 4(4): 451-476.

-- (2005) The Translocation of Culture: `Community Cohesion' and the Force of Multiculturalism in History. *Sociological Review*, 53(4), 745-768.

-- (2009) Revisiting the UK Muslim Diasporic Public Sphere at a Time of Terror: From Local (Benign) Invisible Spaces to Seditious Conspiratorial Spaces and the 'Failure of Multiculturalism' Discourse, *South Asian Diaspora,* 1 (1): 19-45.

-- (2012) Multiculturalism From Above and Below: Analysing a Political Discourse, *Journal of Intercultural Studies: An International Journal*, 33(2): 197-209.

-- (2013) Folk Devils and Racist Imaginaries in a Global Prism: Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in the Twenty-First Century, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(3): 450-467.

Wieviorka, M. (2012) Multiculturalism: A Concept to be Redefined and Certainly Not Replaced by the Extremely Vague Term of Interculturalism, *Journal of Intercultural Studies: An International Journal*, 33(2): 225-231.

Williams, R. (1979) *Modern Tragedy*. London: Verso Editions.

Williams, R. (2002) *Writing in the Dust: Reflections on 11th September and its Aftermath*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Wittgenstein, L. (1967) [1953] *Philosophical Investigations.* trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, eds. G.E.M Anscombe, R. Rhees, G.H. Von Wright. 3rd edn. Oxford: Blackwell.

Wittgenstein, L. (1998) *Culture and Value*. trans. P. Winch, ed. G.H. Von Wright. Oxford: Blackwell.

Zigon, J. (2007) Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand: A Theoretical Framework for an Anthropology of Moralities, *Anthropological Theory*, 7(2): 131-150.

Appendix A

List of Stakeholder Organisations Recently Engaged with Palestine-Israel within British Universities.

British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP): an organisation of UK based academics campaigning in support of an academic boycott of Israeli universities. http://bricup.org.uk/what.html

British Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM): a 'British organisation dedicated to creating a more supportive environment for Israel in Britain.' http://www.bicom.org.uk/about/

Campusalam: a project established in 2008 by the Lokahi Foundation to 'support students of faith and belief and university staff with resources, skills and advice on building bridges and contributing to positive change on campus.' http://www.campusalam.org/campusalam/about-campusalam/

Coexistence Trust: an organisation that existed from 2005 to 2013, focused on 'improving relations and building networks of trust and understanding among British Muslim and Jewish students on university campuses in the UK'. http://www.coexistencetrust.org/what

Community Security Trust (CST): an organisation established in 1994 which 'provides physical security, training and advice for the protection of British Jews, assists victims of antisemitism and monitors antisemitic activities and incidents'. http://www.thecst.org.uk/

Department for Business, Education and Skills: British government department responsible for responding to anti-Semitism and hate speech in universities and to calls for an academic boycott of Israel.

ENGAGE: a 'left-wing' campaign which provides resources in order to counter calls for the academic boycott of Israel. http://engageonline.wordpress.com/about-engage/

Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS): an umbrella organisation for student Islamic Societies, 'that caters for the needs of Muslim students in further and higher education across the UK and Ireland'. http://www.fosis.org.uk/about

Forum for the Discussion of Israel and Palestine (FODIP): established in 2008, 'its remit is to host and facilitate sensitive inter faith dialogue on the Israeli Palestinian conflict, within and between Jews, Christians, Muslims and others in the UK, and to promote co-operation through dialogue.' http://www.fodip.org/whatis.html

National Union of Students (NUS): a membership organisation and confederation of students' unions representing the interests of more than seven million students in the UK. http://www.nus.org.uk/en/who-we-are/

One Voice Movement: an organisation with branches in the Middle East and Europe that supports a two-state solution and delivers conflict resolution training in communities, schools and universities in Britain.
http://www.onevoicemovement.org/programs/onevoice-europe.php

Palestine Solidarity Campaign: a UK based organisation campaigning for justice for Palestinians. http://www.palestinecampaign.org/

Quilliam Foundation: a 'counter-extremism think tank' which focuses on Islamic extremism and seeks to 'foster a shared sense of belonging and to advance liberal democratic values'. http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/

Stand with Us: an international organisation with headquarters in the United States that advocates for Israel and focuses on 'combating extremism and anti-Semitism.'
http://www.standwithus.com/aboutus/#.UjSE2MZrUa4

Stop The War: a campaigning coalition founded in 2001, which opposes British military intervention in the Middle East and supports Palestinian rights.
http://www.stopwar.org.uk/about

Student Rights: an organisation 'dedicated to supporting equality, democracy and freedom from extremism on university campuses'. Set up in 2009 'as a reaction to increasing political extremism and marginalisation of vulnerable students on campus.'
http://www.studentrights.org.uk/about_us

Three Faiths Forum: a UK based inter faith organisation dedicated to 'new models for intercultural cooperation' which runs programmes within UK campuses.
http://www.3ff.org.uk/about-us/

Universities and College Union (UCU): a trade union for academics working in further and higher education in the UK. http://www.ucu.org.uk/

Union of Jewish Students (UJS): a 'membership organisation which represents 8500 Jewish students studying in the UK and Ireland.' http://www.ujs.org.uk/about-us/

Universities UK: the umbrella representative body for higher education institutions in the UK. http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx

Windows for Peace UK: an organisation connected with an Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative, promoting dialogue between Jewish, Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities in the UK. http://www.windowsforpeaceuk.org/who-we-are/

Yachad: a Jewish UK based organisation supporting the two state solution and committed to 'broadening the current conversation about Israel in the Jewish diaspora.' http://yachad.org.uk/about-us/

Appendix B

Copy of Research Ethics Application for this Study

I completed the following form in May 2011 and it was approved by my departmental REC committee in June 2011[130].

SSPSSR RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (REC) APPLICATION FORM

Please complete this form, sign it, and return it either to your supervisor (where relevant) or direct to the REC administrator to forward to two REC members for approval. Many thanks.

Section 1
Title of Project
Exploring Student Engagement with Israel-Palestine within UK University Campuses.

Section 2
Name of Main Researcher
Ruth Sheldon

Name of Supervisor(s) and others(s) involved plus affiliation (e.g. SSPSSR)
Monika Krause, SSPSSR; Gordon Lynch, Department of Religious Studies; Alex Bols, NUS

Section 3
Brief jargon free, one or two paragraphs outline of the background of the project (its rationale/aims/hoped for outcomes)

This collaborative PhD study with the National Union of Students (NUS), which began in January 2010, aims to analyse the nature of student engagement with Israel-Palestine in the UK. The study asks; how are identifications with Israel-Palestine formed and performed by students in the UK? How does engagement with this issue play out in campus life? Drawing on concepts from Cultural Sociology including the sociology of 'the sacred' and 'social performance', the study seeks to explore the cultural, aesthetic and emotional dynamics of UK campus events relating to Israel-Palestine.

These research aims are being addressed through a two stage methodology; first, an investigation of national discourses and interventions using stakeholder interviews, policy and media analysis. Second, ethnographic research is being conducted within three university campuses which are sampled for diversity in type of institution and student demographics.

---

[130] This was mid-way through my fieldwork as I transferred universities at the start of my second year of this PhD and had previously completed an ethics review process at the University of London.

Section 4 – Research Method

a.) Selection and number of interviewees / participants

1.) Stakeholder interviews: qualitative interviews with approximately fifteen stakeholders, purposively sampled to include the range of organisations involved with the Israel-Palestine issue within HE. Initial scoping work (including analysis of national media and policy documents relating to the issue of Israel-Palestine within campuses, informal meetings with relevant stakeholders and input from NUS) generated a list of these key stakeholders, from which interviewees have been selected. This includes national student faith organisations, national political and campaigning organisations, inter-faith organisations with programmes oriented towards UK campuses, representatives from government departments and from HE stakeholder organisations.

2.) Campus ethnographies: participant observation at student events relating to Israel-Palestine during the fieldwork period. This includes conversations with students at campus events and meetings with individual students to discuss their perceptions of campus events. In addition analysis of relevant local media and policy documents will be conducted.

3.) Up to fifteen recorded interviews with students may be conducted on each campus, the sampling and recruitment of which will develop out of the ethnographic fieldwork. My provisional plan is that interviewees will be purposively selected in order to include the perspectives of:
- Students with different levels of political involvement with Israel-Palestine on campus, ranging from Society presidents to students critical of activism.
- Students involved with the full range of organisations engaged with the issue on campus.
- Students from different backgrounds (faith, ethnicity, gender, international or home students)
-Students' union officers and student journalists who are involved in responding to the issue on campus.

4.) In addition, the decision may be taken to seek interviews with relevant members of university staff, such as chaplains and academics (for example those who participate in, or are asked to adjudicate at, student events). The relevant interviewees will be selected through snowballing on the basis of ethnographic data collection described above.

b.) How will your project comply with the Data Protection Act?

All fieldnotes, transcripts and audio files will be kept in password protected files. The interview data will be coded and the key linking the code and the participants' identity as well as any other identifying information will be kept password protected.

Informed consent will be obtained from all interviewees who will be provided with verbal and written information about the project and asked to complete a consent form. Verbal consent will be sought during the participant observation in situations where students are not anonymous to the researcher (e.g. in small group meetings as opposed to large public events). For further information see section 6.

The stakeholder organisations will not be named unless the organisation formally agrees that their name may be used in the findings.

The university case studies will not be named in any publicly available findings in order to protect the identities of local stakeholders and students. The names of individual students will not be identified in the research findings. For further information about anonymity and confidentiality please see section 5b.

c.) Anticipated start date and duration of data collection

Fieldwork started in November 2010 and will last for approximately 14 months (I transferred after the fieldwork had begun. The project previously had ethics approval from Birkbeck College.)

d.) Details of payments, if any, to interviewees / participants

None

e.) Source of funding (if any)

The project has AHRC funding and NUS are contributing to some project expenses, such as travel costs.

f.) List questionnaire and other techniques to be used

A discussion guide for the stakeholder interviews, which are semi-structured qualitative interviews.

Section 5 – Ethical Considerations
a.) Indicate potential risks to participants (e.g. distress, embarrassment) and means adopted to safeguard against them

The topic of Israel-Palestine could potentially lead to participants becoming upset, either because of their feelings about the situation in the Middle East or because the interview causes them to reflect on difficult experiences on campus (such as of perceived racism, discrimination or aggression during conflict).

In response to this, I will ensure that interviewees are aware that consent is an ongoing process, that they can pause or stop an interview or meeting at any time and that they can withdraw from involvement in the study if they choose. Given that this potential distress also relates to the sensitivity of the subject matter and the lack of trust that often ensues between those involved in talking about this issue, interviewees will be given the opportunity to interrogate the aims and objectives of the project (and of myself as a researcher) in an ongoing way.

I will draw on the help of NUS and the local students' unions in order to collate information about relevant support services for students, which I will have available should this be needed.

It may be that some students feel distressed at my presence at small group activities, given the political context in which some students feel concerned about university

surveillance of their activities. When attending small group events, I will enlist the help of the students organising those activities to ensure that all members are aware of my project and consent to my presence. Should any students appear to be distressed by my presence, I will seek their consent to remain and leave if necessary.

If confidentiality is breached, there is also a risk to individuals' reputations. I will guard against this in various ways listed below in section 5b. Where data is particularly sensitive, I will take further steps to protect confidentiality such as using composite case studies to guard against speculative identification of institutions by research audiences. Finally, in my initial and ongoing discussions with students, I will be explicit about the ways in which I can ensure confidentiality and the possible limitations of this. For example, I will explain that I will not provide information to research audiences who speculate about which institutions have participated in the research.

b.) What confidentiality issues might arise during data collection, analysis, dissemination of results? How do you plan to protect participants' anonymity?

The most significant issue relating to confidentiality arises out of my intention to study conflicting groups within an institutional context. Student groups may have plans which they wish to keep confidential from other student societies, NUS, or other stakeholders within the university for a specific period of time. I may therefore need to keep details about planned activities confidential both from other students and from NUS for a particular length of time.

In the course of the ethnographic fieldwork, it may be that I learn personal information about participants that they do not wish me to share, or which are not relevant to the research findings. In both of these instances I will keep this information confidential.

Protecting student anonymity is particularly important in this study because of a political context in which some students feel that they are being penalised for their political views and activities. Student anonymity will be protected by a.) Not using names or descriptions that could reasonably be used to identify individual students in the research findings; b.) Keeping the names of case study institutions anonymous. This means that students playing formal roles within those institutions will not be identifiable; c.) Where necessary, creating composite case studies, particularly in relation to the practical resources generated for student use, in order to further protect the anonymity of institutions and students.

The need to maintain institutional anonymity will mean that care must be taken to anonymise any references to media articles or to publically available data derived from student media, for example by removing proper names and by paraphrasing quotations.

Stakeholder interviewees and organisations will not be named, unless explicit consent is provided by those individuals and organisations to do so.

c.) What difficulties might arise (e.g. regarding power and / or dependency imbalances between researcher and participants) and how do you plan to safeguard against them?

My association with NUS may raise issues in terms of my relations with local students'

unions and student societies. Students may feel a sense of obligation to participate in a project supported by NUS or they may feel hostile or suspicious towards the project given that NUS is itself politically engaged with the Israel-Palestine issue. In response to this, I will provide detailed information about the nature of NUS' involvement with this project, including the intellectual property agreement and funding arrangements. I will communicate the distinction between NUS' collaborative role in generating practical resources and the independence of the academic findings.

When I am conducting research within student societies, I will remain aware that the leaders of these societies are not entitled to give consent of behalf of individual members of the group and I will seek ongoing consent from individuals. I will attempt to ensure that individuals do not feel pressured either to participate or abstain from the project as a result of their position within the group by communicating directly with these group members.

In the stakeholder interviews, and if I choose to interview university staff or academics, the power dynamic is more ambiguous. The issue of Israel-Palestine is so politicised that stakeholders may be hostile to the project or may wish to influence the research findings. I will ensure that I defend the integrity of this research and do not accept any support that could compromise its independence.

d.) How will the project take into consideration cultural diversity (e.g. through the provision of interpreters where necessary?)

The research methods described above aim to access the broad range of cultural, religious and political groups that engage with this issue within campuses. As the research participants are students at UK universities, it is unlikely that anyone will be prohibited from participating in the research due to language barriers, although I may need to seek translations of events which, for example, use Hebrew or Arabic. In the course of the ethnographic fieldwork, I hope to participate in the activities of various student faith and cultural groups, such as student Islamic and Jewish societies. In doing so, I will seek advice from students participants to ensure that my behaviour is culturally sensitive.

e.) Why, if at all, are you paying participants? What is the potential impact on them of such financial inducement?

N/A

f.) What provision are you making for giving feedback to participants about your findings?

As part of the ethnographic fieldwork, I will be discussing emerging findings with research participants in an ongoing way. I will also seek to involve them in generating the practical resources through seeking their contributions and feedback as these are developed.

In addition, stakeholder interviewees and students who were formally interviewed will be offered a condensed version of the research findings, which I will produce alongside the academic thesis.

g.) What other ethics review procedures has this project already undergone (e.g. with funding bodies)?

I transferred to SSPSSR in January 2011. Prior to this, the project was approved by the ethics committee at the Department for Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck College.

Section 6 – Consent

a.) What procedures are you using to ensure participants' informed consent (please append any forms etc used for this?)

Stakeholder interviews: interviewees have been provided with an information sheet about the project, as well as verbal information about the project aims, objectives and organisation. All interviewees have signed consent forms and have retained a copy of this.

Campus ethnographies: various gatekeepers are being contacted in order to gain consent to attend to student-organised events and activities. This includes students' union officers, students' union staff and student society presidents and officers. At each event attended, verbal consent has been sought from the individual responsible for organising that event. An information sheet has been circulated to all of these gatekeepers, who have been asked to circulate this more widely to their members. In addition, verbal information has been provided to society members at events, either to the whole group or to individuals depending on the context. Students have been given the opportunity to ask further questions about the project verbally and via email.

All student participants in audio recorded interviews have been, and will be, asked to complete a consent form and will retain a copy of this.

b.) What procedures will you use with participants unable to give their own informed consent?
See below.

c.) Explain, where applicable, why the informed consent of participants is not being sought

Many of the events at which I am conducting participant observation are large public events. In these cases it is not possible or necessary to seek consent from all the people present. I will ensure in these instances that I do not describe members of audiences in ways that would put their anonymity at risk. Where individuals are giving speeches at events that are open to the public, I will take this to be publicly available data which does not require consent in order to be analysed as part of my project.

In addition I am also collecting data from publicly available websites, including blogs and open social media pages. Again as this data is publically available I am not seeking permission in order to access and analyse it. However, in order to protect the anonymity of institutions and individuals, I will ensure that proper names are not used and may paraphrase quotations within the research findings.

Form completed May 2011 and approved June 2011.