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Identity, cultural production and diaspora politics

An exploration of the work of second-generation Palestinian artists in the UK.

Agata Patyna



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An exploration of the work of second-generation
Palestinian artists in the UK

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Abstract

While diaspora politics is one of the most commonly discussed issues in migration studies, the existing literature is mostly limited to considerations of the role played by financial remittances, development work and lobbying activities in affecting migrants' places of origin. This project aims to add to current studies of diasporic political engagement by investigating another area of migrant activity – that of cultural production. It does so through an exploration of interrelated issues of identity and politics in the work of second-generation Palestinian artists in the UK. The paper investigates processes of identity formation among second-generation Palestinians and their effect on artistic expression, as well as the usefulness of cultural production as a political tool.

This project brings together three areas of theory: literature concerning the political participation of migrants, diasporic cultural production and second-generation identity. Using a methodology which combines performance studies and ethnography, this paper draws on three examples of Palestinian cultural production: Al Zaytouna, a dance group, Rafeef Ziadah, a spoken word artist and Selma Dabbagh, a writer. Rather than investigating cultural production through the lens of organised diasporic activity, this methodology makes it possible to take the perspective of the individual artists, which allows for an insight into the considerations and negotiations affecting their work.

This paper finds that cultural production serves a dual role for artists in the Palestinian diaspora, both as a tool of resistance and a form of expressing and defining their “Palestinianness” against the context of community and identity fragmentation. Furthermore, since cultural work takes place outside of formal political institutions, it serves as an effective and alternative form of politics, allowing artists to find their own way of relating to the Palestinian cause. Crucially, this form of expression provides space for criticism and commentary through which the artists negotiate their place both in the Palestinian community and Palestinian politics.

With regard to the wider literature, the paper offers commentary on conceptualising processes of identity formation and political engagement among the “second generation”. Cultural production serves as a counter-example to studies that see fragmented identities and distance from the homeland as reasons behind the formation of militant and fundamentalist ideologies. In contrast, cultural work allows for an emergence of alternative “Palestinianness”, political at its core, which accommodates both a strong sense of being Palestinian and a more “global” political outlook.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*Think, when we dance with the keffiyeh¹, that you see 2000 years of history
Identity rooted down like an olive grove*

Excerpt from *Unto the breach*, a show by Al Zaytouna Dance Theatre

In many ways, the Palestinian diaspora can be described as unique. The majority of the Palestinian population, amounting to at least 4.5 million people (Lubbad 2007) live outside of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which puts the diasporic experience at the heart of Palestinian identity (Bamyeh 2007; Nielsen 2011). Moreover, even those currently living in the West Bank and Gaza share this diasporic consciousness as most see themselves as refugees of the *Nakba* (“Catastrophe”) displacement which followed the establishment of Israel in 1948 (Lindholm Schulz 2003; Rempel 2006). As time passes, fewer and fewer people among the current diaspora belong to those who lived in the original Palestinian “homeland”. The majority of Palestinians were born and grew up abroad, and a significant number have never visited Palestine (Mavroudi 2007). However, despite the huge variations in the experiences of the different Palestinian communities after 1948 (Abufarha 2008; Chatty and Hundt 2005), the Palestinian identity persists “by choice” (Said 1999) among the dispersed Palestinian people around the world, with the second and third generations of refugees playing a major role in promoting the Palestinian cause (Matar 2011; Mavroudi 2007). In addition, cultural production, including, poetry, song and the traditional *dabke*² dance, has been central to both the continuation of Palestinian identity (Abufarha 2008; Hammer 2005; Lindholm Schulz 2003) and diaspora politics (Khalili 2004; Serhan 2008).

Despite its uniqueness, the experience of the Palestinian diaspora provides a useful framework for investigating questions of wider importance in migration studies. In the past decade, political engagement among diasporas has been one of the most frequently discussed issues in the discipline (see, for example, Anderson 2002; Collier and Hoeffler 2002; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Sheffer 2003; Sinatti *et al.* 2010), with the majority of

¹ The *Keffiyeh* is a traditional Arab headdress/scarf made out of cotton (usually black and white or red and white). Popularised by Yasser Arafat, it became a symbol of Palestinian resistance, and is now worn all around the world to signify solidarity with Palestinians.

² *Dabke* is a Levantine folk dance characterised by stomping of the feet, danced in a group formation, typically performed during weddings and other celebrations (Al Zaytouna 2011b). In Palestine, the 1960s nationalist movement led to a “politicization” (Rowe 2010a:117) of the dance which started to be performed on stage outside of the context of village rituals (Enderwitz 2003). Since then, *dabke* has been strongly linked to political identity and resistance of the Palestinians (Al Zaytouna 2011b; Rowe 2010).

studies emphasising the role of migrant remittances, development work and lobbying activities in influencing the migrants' countries of origin (Hansen 2008; Kleist 2008; Lampert 2009). By looking at the Palestinian diaspora, whose ability to use regular channels of political activity is constrained by the nature of the Israeli occupation, this project investigates another possible dimension of diasporic political activity, and one which is rarely explored in the literature – that of cultural production. Drawing on notions of “cultural activism” (Grassilli 2008:1237) this project explores how the cultural form of political engagement comes into being, and how it relates to processes of identity creation among second-generation Palestinian artists - those born outside the Occupied Palestinian Territories and whose parents or grandparents migrated out of Palestine - working in the UK³.

The UK provides a useful research site to investigate the Palestinian diaspora for a number of reasons. Firstly, although Palestinians are widely dispersed around the world (Sheffer 2003) there has been relatively little research on the Palestinian diaspora outside the Middle East (Mavroudi 2007; Shiblak 2005:7). Particularly in Britain, Palestinians are a reasonably large but rarely-studied migrant group (Long 2011; Mahmoud 2005). Secondly, scholars of the Palestinian diaspora argue that living in Europe makes the experience of being Palestinian very different from that in the West Bank or the Middle East, since it comes with a “diluted” sense of belonging (Mason 2008:2266; Mavroudi 2007:40) due to the numerous cultural influences, and the physical detachment from the occupation, experienced by diaspora members. This makes the European context interesting in terms of exploring issues around identity formation and sustained connections to the “homeland”.

Moreover, questions of politics, art and second-generation identity seem inseparable in the case of Palestinian artists working in the UK. Art and performance are central to Palestinian

³ I am aware that some of my respondents would be uncomfortable about using the term “second-generation” to refer only to those Palestinians who find themselves outside of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and many see it as one which is applicable to refugees living within Gaza and the West Bank as well. My use of “second-generation” here, however, is meant to reflect the additional physical detachment of the Palestinians born outside Palestine and currently living in the UK from the occupation on the ground, and is not intended to negate the fact that many Palestinians in the Occupied Territories currently live outside of their original homes. Where appropriate, this paper sometimes refers to the term “third-generation” which young Palestinians may use to describe themselves, indicating they are the third generation living after the 1948 *Nakba*.

diaspora politics in Britain, as demonstrated by the frequent cultural-political Palestinian events which take place around the country, in which second-generation artists often play a central role. In their work, the artists frequently combine “memories” of Palestine and a rejection of Israeli occupation with global political concerns about the impact of capitalism, poverty and marginalisation, making their work relevant to audiences outside of the diaspora.

This project explores the interrelated issues of identity, politics and culture by focussing primarily on three examples of Palestinian cultural production. These do not only represent the diversity of Palestinian “cultural work”⁴ in the UK, but they all combine elements of “traditional” Palestinian art with more “modern” approaches. The first one, Al Zaytouna (“The olive tree”) Dance Theatre, which brings together first- and second-generation Palestinians as well as other dancers sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, combines the traditional *dabke* dance with other forms of music, spoken word and digital image. The second, a spoken word poet-activist Rafeef Ziadah, represents the young generation of Palestinians who have been influenced by living in different countries. Born in the Middle East and educated in the US, Canada and the UK, Rafeef has never visited her original homeland. Her poetry is intensely political, critiquing not just Israel, but also some of the Western world’s approach to the Palestinian issue. Finally, Selma Dabbagh is a British-Palestinian writer of fiction, whose stories are located mostly within Palestine and the Palestinian diaspora. In her work, she touches upon “idealism (however futile), placelessness and political engagement (or lack thereof)”⁵. Although Selma’s work is primarily in written form, she often presents excerpts of her writing at Palestinian political events, something which resonates with the strong tradition of spoken word in Palestinian culture.

This paper begins with an exploration of three existing literary strands, all of which have relevance to the Palestinian case: literature on diasporic political participation, diasporic cultural production and second-generation identity. The literature review is followed by a

⁴ The term “cultural work” was used during the interviews by both artists and activists, in a way similar to “political work”, reflecting the contribution made by cultural production to the Palestinian cause.

⁵ Quote from writer’s website, ‘Home & Home?’, <http://www.selmadabbagh.com/index2.html> (30 April 2012).

discussion of the research methodology, which combined elements of performance studies and ethnography.

The research findings are presented in three chapters. The first explores how Palestinian identity is formed among second-generation refugees, and how it relates to their political awareness and their framing of the Palestinian cause. The second presents cultural production as an effective tool to provide multiple *connections*: a way for the artists to locate themselves in the Palestinian struggle and for members of the Palestinian community to assert themselves as the Palestinian “people”, as well as a mode of communication with non-Palestinian audiences. The final empirical chapter offers a closer look at the work of the three case studies in order to bring together issues of identity and politics, and explore how both are reflected in their representations of Palestine. The concluding section provides commentary on the role of diasporic cultural production and theorising the “second generation”.

This paper finds that cultural production serves a dual role for artists in the Palestinian diaspora, both as a tool of “resistance” (Delbono 2011; Hammer 2005) and a form of expressing and defining their Palestinian identity. The artists’ work cannot be seen in isolation from the complex processes of identity-making in which Palestine emerges as something simultaneously familiar and distant in the young people’s imagination. By engaging in cultural work second-generation Palestinians negotiate their position within the Palestinian community and Palestinian politics. Most crucially, cultural work allows Palestinians to express themselves outside the constraints of formal political institutions, which lets them set their own agenda and effectively communicate their messages to both their Palestinian and non-Palestinian audiences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This project draws on three areas of theory developed both within and outside migration studies: discussions about diasporic political participation, theoretical approaches to diasporic cultural production, and debates regarding identity formation among second-generation migrants. While existing literature largely treats these issues separately, this project hopes to demonstrate that they are in fact interrelated. Firstly, as diasporic political participation results from the attachments developed by migrants towards their countries of origin (Fouron and Glick Schiller 2002), it is important to consider how these attachments might be fostered through both cultural production as well as family and community ties. Secondly, cultural production itself is an increasingly important way in which migrants participate in politics (Durrant and Lord 2007). Given the importance of subsequent generations of migrants for the preservation of Palestinian politics (Chatty 2007; Chatty and Hundt 2005) and culture (Khalili 2004; Lindholm Schulz 2003; Serhan 2008), the Palestinian case provides a further link between issues of identity and both political and culture studies perspectives on diasporas. The sections below outline recent developments in all three theoretical areas, and relate them to the Palestinian diaspora.

Diaspora and political participation

In the last ten years or so, there has been a proliferation of literature on political participation of diasporas, and their relationship to home country politics. Many studies argue that diasporas have grown in confidence to act on behalf of their homelands, which has been made easier by developments in international communication and transport systems (Cuko and Traoré 2008; Sheffer 2003). Anderson (2002) refers to these different engagements of diasporas in affairs of their home countries as ‘long-distance nationalism’. Although Anderson’s concept largely covers the more radical and militant ideologies which might arise among diaspora members this project draws on a more positive definition of ‘long-distance nationalism’ by Fouron and Glick Schiller (2002:173) who see it as “ideas of belonging that link people living in various geographic locations and motivate their taking action in relation to an ancestral territory [...]”. According to this understanding, ‘long-distance nationalism’ is more than a feeling or sentiment: it leads to action. The focus here is on how the motivations to act are developed through the different connections between diaspora members.

Such a perspective on 'long-distance nationalism' resonates with the ways the Palestinian diaspora engages in politics. Numerous studies place strong emphasis on the political aspect of Palestinians' identity and organised activity. Hammer (2005:36) sees Palestinians around the world as linked by a "culture of resistance", with experiences of exile and occupation lying at the heart of Palestinian identity. Diasporic consciousness, a sense of injustice, the concept of *Haqq al-awda* ("right of return") are crucial elements of the social psychology of this diaspora (Bamyeh 2007; Said 1993). These, in turn, inform practices aimed primarily at producing and maintaining a memory oriented towards keeping alive an image of Palestine, also across national borders (Bamyeh 2007; Loddo 2006). Mavroudi (2007) argues that although many Palestinians do not see themselves as politically active, most are "politicized" and influenced by political narratives.

While looking at motivations behind diasporic political activity, recent studies also emphasise the need to understand the conditions that affect diasporas' capability to act (Brah 1996; Knott and McLoughlin 2010). In their edited volume, "Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-makers or Peace-wreckers?", Smith and Stares (2007) describe the varied forms in which migrants may engage in the politics of their homelands, depending on factors in their countries of origin and destination as well as wider international developments. Likewise, Cuko and Traoré (2008) argue that the nature of the home state is a major determinant of diaspora action.

Similarly, studies of the Palestinian diaspora emphasise the importance of global events on one hand, and politics within the Occupied Territories on the other, in determining the forms of diasporic political engagement. Describing the recent emergence of grassroots initiatives which place the Palestinian issue in the context of wider international social movements, including alter-globalism, grassroots politics, human rights and anti-war campaigns, Loddo (2005) argues that Palestinian political movements are strongly influenced by outside actors. Lindholm Schulz (2003) also recognises the role that recent global events have played in the mobilisation of Palestinian organisations abroad to put political focus on the Palestine question and create counter-images to negative media representations. In addition, the politics of the Palestinian diaspora is determined by the diaspora's "stateless" character (Sheffer 2003), and ways in which the Israeli occupation constrains the "normal" forms of engagement with the Palestinian homeland (Nagel and

Staehele 2004). In this context, this project argues that cultural production offers a form of political activity outside the “formal” channels of interaction between migrants and their home government.

Diaspora and cultural production

The literature identifies two main ways in which cultural production relates to diasporic political activity. Firstly, due to its public nature, cultural production itself can become a form of politics. Secondly, cultural production is considered central to the development and negotiation of migrants’ identity, which might produce the attachments necessary for ‘long-distance nationalism’ to take place.

Theories surrounding art activism firmly locate cultural production within the sphere of politics. Cohen-Cruz (2002) and Shank (2005) see activist art as a space for critical thinking and self-expression, and a way to relate to community concerns. Others have conceptualised artistic space as “a battleground” (Mouffe 2008:10) and a space of struggle (Conquerood 2002) where different discourses arise (Möntman 2008). Seen this way, artistic space becomes one of social change and political intervention (Mouffe 2008; Gielen 2011; Young 2002), making cultural production “a public issue” (Sejdel 2008:4).

Recently, a number of studies have addressed this relationship between cultural production and politics in the migration context, following a trend which focuses on the art of minorities and marginalised groups. Their art has been characterised as “critical” (Mouffe 2008), as “resistance” (Delbono 2011; Grassilli 2008) and “subversion” (Gielen 2011). McFarlane (2004:175) sees diaspora aesthetics as part of the “global visual politics” - a way to contest colonial and nationalist cultural production. Art is seen as a way to express the migrant’s “dislocation”, “dispossession” and “uprooting” (Mufti 2011; Said 2011) as well as a statement of “a minoritarian and exilic relation to the society and the world” (Mufti 2011:193). This shows the blurring of the personal and the political in migrant art: it is both a vehicle of self-expression and a political tool. Moreover, by changing the conditions of art creation and using less formalised settings for their art, migrants demand political visibility (Davis *et al.* 2011) and gain a platform for expressing a voice which they might not possess in mainstream politics (Akcan 2011; Grassilli 2008; Lee 2011). As art can lead to different types of engagements than “traditional” politics, and affect new audiences, migrant

aesthetic practices can escape cultural, political and economic constraints faced by particular diasporas (Durrant and Lord 2007). This is especially important in the Palestinian case, given the challenges faced by this diaspora in the context of the Israeli occupation and the absence of a Palestinian state.

Many studies address the relationship between cultural production, politics and identity among Palestinians, and directly relate these to theories of art activism. Most are based in the Occupied Palestinian Territories rather than the wider Palestinian diaspora and analyse art not just as a way to maintain Palestinian identity, but also as a tool of political resistance (McDonald 2006, 2010; Tawil-Souri 2011, 2012). De Cesari (2010) explores the strong relationship between heritage, the arts and liberation politics in Palestine. Rowe (2008, 2009, 2010b) focuses on this interrelationship in the case of dance. He conceptualises dance as “counter-hegemony” (2008) and describes the process of “public dance criticism” (2010b) in which dance acts as a “cultural barometer”, articulating issues important for the community in political conflict. Similarly, Massad (2003:37) sees songs as a way of expressing the current dynamics of the Palestinian community, their feelings and aspirations. Mitchell (2011) describes the role of films, which often focus on the everydayness of Palestinian life, in the portrayal of the Palestinian struggle.

Returning to the second area of overlap between migrant culture and politics, there now exists a wealth of writing about the relationship between cultural production and diasporic identity. Gilroy (1993), Hall (2003), Mercer (2003), McFarlane (2004) and Lowe (2003) all argue that diasporic cultural expressions need to be seen in the context of multiple identities, “hybridity”, “adaptation”, “translation”, and interaction of different heritages. In particular, Hall (2003) sees identity as unstable, metamorphic and even contradictory. Lowe (2003) adds another level of complexity to this “unstable” view of identity by arguing that diaspora culture cannot be seen as something simply passed on from older to younger generations, but is also constantly negotiated “horizontally” within the community across gender, class and other lines. As such, diasporic culture is analysed as a vehicle through which a collective diasporic identity can produce and reproduce itself (Davis *et al.* 2011; Hall 2003; Young 2002), but also as a space in which identity is individually explored, especially by young people (Forman 2002).

In the context of the Palestinian diaspora outside the Occupied Territories, art has been similarly analysed in terms of identity making and preservation. Hammer (2005) emphasises the importance of the arts in producing images of the homeland which are central to Palestinian identity. Lindholm Schulz (2003) sees the role of art as both an expression of longing and a way of connecting people to place. Through repeated symbolism of orange groves and olive trees, symbols of rootedness, she argues, poetry provides a way for Palestinians to keep alive their memories of home and pass them down to subsequent generations. Both scholars characterise Palestinian literature, poetry and visual arts as providing a glorified version of the homeland and often expressing longing for the villages and cities in Palestine. Similarly, Massad (2003) and Saloul (2007) see longing and displacement as central to Palestinian culture, including poetry, novels and theatre. Khalili (2004) goes beyond exploring the theme of loss of land, and points out the strong connection art has with Palestinian fears about loss of *memory* of their homeland as the generation that still remembers life in Palestine passes away.

Khalili's (2004) study is one of the few which address the relationship between art, ritual and politics among the wider Palestinian diaspora, going beyond the discourse of loss and longing. He sees commemorative practices among Palestinians in Lebanese refugee camps as "not merely a narrative or practice of remembering and reconstructing, but the basis of their political identity and the motivation for [...] political mobilization" (Khalili 2004:19) of subsequent generations. He argues that the localised, "grass-roots" commemorations, which differ from the abstract, nationalist discourses previously sponsored by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) are a way for refugees to reassert themselves and demand recognition as member of the Palestinian community. Serhan (2008) adopts a similar perspective to a community outside the Middle East in her description of "politicization" of weddings among Palestinian-Americans in New Jersey. Weddings, with their songs, dances and other forms of cultural expression, have recently become occasions for Palestinians to present a "selective past" of their homeland. Resistance songs are frequently performed and some of the dances become overtly political, incorporating symbols like the Palestinian flag. In these expressions, "mythical tranquil past is bluntly juxtaposed with songs about violence, the fragmentation of a people, and resistance" (Serhan 2008:24). In this way, the celebrations are not just about maintaining tradition, but also about doing politics. Both

studies show how Palestinian culture is intertwined with different forms of community politics, and becomes a form of 'long-distance nationalism'.

Diaspora and the second generation

Both Khalili's (2004) and Serhan's (2008) studies demonstrate that cultural production, which is linked to politics, develops in the context of intergenerational knowledge transfer and the passing down of Palestinian traditions in the diaspora. To explore these issues, this project relates to theories regarding the development and maintenance of identity among second-generation migrants. Two questions are especially significant here. Firstly, what processes lead to the creation of second-generation migrant identity? Secondly, what is particular about this identity in comparison to that of older generations?

In relation to the first question, the issue of second-generation identity gained significance in academia during the 1990s when numerous studies (Portes 1995; Portes and Zhou 1993; Waters 1996) focussed on host-country assimilation of migrants. Studies from the 2000s, in contrast, stressed that the question of second-generation identity is much more complex. Levitt and Waters' (2002) edited volume, "The Changing Face of Home", for example, is an attempt to move beyond the host-country perspective and explore the kinds of attachments that contemporary migrants maintain to their homelands. The volume argues that transnational ties are not the same for all groups, and are affected by life-course factors, hierarchies experienced in host countries (Smith 2002) and social networks (Levitt 2002). Olwig (2007) and Fortier (2000) see the family as a particularly important network within the migration context, where it occupies the space of memory and identity formation normally utilised by the state.

Among the Palestinian diaspora, the role of family and intergenerational knowledge transfer is especially important (Hammer 2005; Lindholm Schulz 2003; Long 2011; Serhan 2008). The emphasis on exile and the right to return makes collective memory, political life and national identity inseparable among the diaspora and is central to young people's upbringing (Chatty 2007). Many see this as a reason behind the continuation of strong identity among subsequent generations of Palestinians (Bamyeh 2007; Hammer 2005; Lindholm Schulz 2003; Said 1990). Younger generations become part of the narrative produced by their parents, which includes not just a reproduction of family history, but also

political education. In this discourse, future generations are made responsible for the continuation and survival of Palestinian identity (Chatty 2007; Serhan 2008) and “keeping the Palestinian cause alive” (Mavroudi 2007:402). The passing down of Palestinian culture (and politics) is also a way in which diasporic Palestinians reaffirm their connection to their homeland. Khalili (2004:7) argues that “to insist on the trope of intergenerational transmission of memory (...) is another way in which the refugees insist that memory legitimates their belonging to the nation”. Once again, the familial and the political are intertwined.

Outside of the immediate family context, scholars in the wider literature, including Fournon and Glick Schiller (2002) focus on the role played by sending-country individuals, resources and ideas which are a constant presence in the lives of the second generation. This process is apparent in numerous studies of the Palestinian diaspora. Aoudé (2001), Khalili (2004), Loddo (2006) and Hammer (2005) argue that not only the connections young people have with their local diaspora group and family in Palestine, but also links between diaspora members in different locations contribute to identity formation. Family connections are still really important as relationships are often maintained over vast distances (Aoudé 2001; Lindholm Schulz 2003), especially when young people visit their relatives all over the world. However, what is new for the current generation of young Palestinians is the additional role of communication, especially the Internet (Chatty 2007; Nagel and Staeheli 2004). Khalili (2004:11) argues that “the proliferation of cyber-connections between Palestinian youth across national boundaries [has] strengthened a national identity that is *politically (rather than geographically) defined* [my emphasis], emphasising the transnational character of this identity.” Developments like these contribute to the complexities surrounding the development of the Palestinian identity, taking it beyond the purely familial interactions.

This issue relates to the other question regarding the identity of second-generation migrants: what makes them different from the first generation? The studies outlined above open the way for looking at the issue from a more nuanced, individual-focussed perspective, and considering multiple identities and crosscutting allegiances among second-generation migrants (Alba 2005; Chatty 2007; Nagel 2002; Wolf 2002). Wessendorf (2007:1099) argues that the second generation “develop(s) different notions of longing and aspirations of belonging” from their parents and can adopt different strategies towards their home and

host countries. Likewise, Mavroudi (2007:407) sees constructions of identity within the diaspora as “active strategies to deal with exile, insecurity and displacement”.

In a similar fashion, the idea of a strong Palestinian identity has been much problematised lately (AbulGhani 2005; Aoudé 2001; Chatty 2007; Mavroudi 2006; Mason 2008). Aoudé (2001) argues that many of the studies glorifying the maintenance of Palestinian culture fail to address how Palestinian identity is complicated by multiple other identities, including Arab and Muslim connections on one hand, and host country identity on the other, all mediated by class, gender, age and other factors. Similarly, Bowman (1994:2003) argues that there exist competing versions of what it means to be Palestinian, and it is differently imagined by different people within various diaspora groups. Mavroudi (2006) analyses Palestinian identity as “strategically constructed”, and something that cannot be taken as given. She (2007:396) argues that for Palestinian parents, bringing up children to be Palestinian is part of a process of “imagining and creating a Palestinian nation”, in which they position themselves in relation to more abstract concepts of Palestinian identity. A similar perspective is present in Long’s (2011) study of second-generation British Palestinians in which she presents “home” as a place in which “hegemonic constructions of Palestinianness are imagined, challenged and (re)produced” (Long 2011:193) through everyday practices of relationships, domestic space and material objects.

Aoudé (2001) argues that because of the multiple forms of belonging, diasporic Palestinians in Australia often struggle with their ethnic and national identity. While several studies (AbuGhani 2005; Lindholm Schulz 2005) argue that exclusion in the West and distance from Palestine might lead to “essentialisations” (Lindholm Schulz 2005:27) of Palestinian identity and its reduction to religious fundamentalism, others take a more nuanced perspective. For young Palestinians in Athens, Mavroudi (2007) argues, issues of identity are full of ambiguity and tension, combining both belonging to and detachment from home. Mason (2008:273) uses the term “strategic hybridity” to describe how young Palestinians in Europe move fluidly between the various elements of their identity and negotiate ties to Palestine and their country of residence. She argues that although Palestine is still central to young people’s identity and concept of “home”, the subsequent generations’ engagement with the homeland differs from the previous ones, influenced by the conditions in the host country and the culture of acceptance there. Mavroudi (2007) and Chatty (2007) add that with a lack

of state-sponsored Palestinian education and because of the strong political opinions host-country residents have about the Israel-Palestine issue, young Palestinians often feel they have to “choose” to be Palestinian (Chatty and Hundt 2005), a decision which has important consequences for their relationship to the “outside” world.

Conclusion

The theoretical issues summarised here illustrate the interrelatedness of politics, identity and cultural production among second-generation migrants. The literature presents both identity negotiation and diaspora politics as active processes resulting from interactions between members of families and diasporic communities, and with the “outside” world. Cultural production can be a way to mediate between all these different interactions. Based on this literature, this project explored the role of cultural production in shaping identity and political engagement through the following research questions:

- 1) How is the artists’ identity developed through their interactions with their families and the wider Palestinian community, and how can cultural production become a response to these interactions?
- 2) How can cultural production be used as both as both a form of “long-distance nationalism” as well as a vehicle for expressing and maintaining Palestinian identity?
- 3) What images of “home” arise out of these artistic productions? How might these differ from the “traditional” nostalgic representations described by Lindholm Schulz (2003) and Hammer (2003)?

By asking these questions, the project sees both Palestinian identity and politics as dynamic and evolving as a result of the changing circumstances of subsequent generations of Palestinians.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Analysing cultural production provides researchers with opportunities as well as challenges. On one hand, cultural productions constitute tangible examples of how individuals or communities present themselves to the outside world and can generate information unavailable to the researcher through “traditional” research methods such as interviews. On the other, it can be challenging to relate artistic expression to specific theoretical concerns and to link this form of data to the “real world”. With the understanding that cultural production cannot be analysed in isolation, this project aimed to overcome these challenges by triangulating a variety of methods, including performance analysis, (participant) observation and semi-structured interviews.

This project was guided by the theory and methodology developed in performance studies, whose methods have recently become popular in geography and other social sciences (Atkinson 2004; Doel and Clarke 2007). While the performative approach sees all cultural forms (including rituals, political gatherings and everyday life) as performances and seeks to understand the ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives (Denzin 2001), it is nonetheless equally useful for the analysis of “performance” and “art” in the original sense of the words. Davis *et al.* (2011), Schechner (2006) and Striff (2003) understand and analyse performance as a process of remaking and representing the self. In this way, the performative approach provides a methodological link to the theoretical concerns about cultural production described in the literature review.

Moreover, the performance studies perspective is also relevant here as it advocates for an analysis of multiple medias (Jackson 2005) and invites hybridity, “[embracing] *both* written scholarship *and* creative work, papers and performances” (Conquerood 2002:151). Consequently, this approach provides a framework for working with such diverse cultural forms as literature, spoken word and dance – each with their specific routines and conventions – as is the case in this project. Roach (2003) argues that poems, plays and essays are not just texts but they interact with other cultural practices, and should be similarly analysed. Consequently, an ethnographer of the performing arts does not have to be an “expert” critic of a particular art form (Atkinson 2005). Using this principle, this project applied similar methods of analysis to the literary work of Selma Dabbagh, the spoken word performances of Rafeef Ziadah and the dance-theatre fusion of Al Zaytouna, all

of which were approached as ways in which artists negotiate their identity and their relationship to the Palestinian community.

In its methodology, this project followed a holistic approach to cultural production present in both performance studies and ethnography. Broadly, it drew on Valentine and Matsumoto's (2001) Cultural Performance Analysis Spheres (CPAS) method which includes an investigation into the cultural context of a performance, the immediate performance and the ethnographer's own positionality. This way, it allows the researcher to play a dual role as a researcher-spectator, which I took on during this project.

Firstly, I aimed to contextualise the "performances" (the work of my selected artists) within the wider "culture" in which they took place (Striff 2003). To do so, I followed the ethnographic principle of recording all possible data (Delamont 2004; Okely 1994) and used observation in addition to the more "formal" research methods (Denscombe 2007). To get a better sense of the Palestinian community in the UK, I attended political and cultural events, talked to as many Palestinians as possible and followed the news about the different actions and campaigns. I had an opportunity to visit the Palestinian School in London, which provides an example of formal passing down of culture from older to younger generations. My conversations with the school's founder, teachers, parents and the *dabke* trainer provided information about the Palestinian community and the importance of *dabke* and other cultural forms for the diaspora.

To familiarise myself with the Palestinian cultural scene, I attended a number of events, some of which did not feature any of the artists chosen as my case studies. I soon realised that this was a useful research tool which allowed me to record a lot of "informal data" (Crang and Cook 2007), especially about how the different artists were "related" to each other, as artists, friends and members of the Palestinian community. Moreover, the artists I was interested in also attended the events which allowed me to talk to them outside the interview context and observe their interactions with one another.

Secondly, I looked at a number of "performances" in more detail. Schechner (2006:224) emphasises the need to analyse cultural productions as "dynamic ways of generating, playing, evaluating, repeating and remembering", composed of different stages: from training, through rehearsals and performances, to critical responses and memories. Young (2002) and Rose (2007) similarly advocate for an analysis of cultural forms at all stages of

their production, display and consumption. Atkinson (2004) adds that a full understanding of performance requires careful recording of as many details as possible throughout the process of its creation. Although the limited timeframe here did not allow for a full analysis of the artists' work at all stages, I tried to recreate this methodology to the extent it was feasible within the confines of this project. Whenever possible, I observed the artistic production "in practice" by attending rehearsals and performances. I was particularly fortunate that my research period coincided with the rehearsals and preview of Al Zaytouna's new show, *Unto the Breach*, and I could observe their dance practices, conversations and feedback sessions, which allowed me to gain a particular insight into their group dynamics. Box 1 below provides a summary of all the events attended during the research period.

Box 1: Cultural events attended during the research period

Date	Event
9 January 2012	"Gaza Letters - Commemorating Israel's Cast Lead Massacre in Gaza Three Years On", event organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, London (with a reading by Selma Dabbagh)
27 April – 3 May 2012	Palestine Film Festival (selected films), London
3 May 2012	Rehearsal of <i>Unto the Breach</i> by Al Zaytouna Dance Theatre, London
15 May 2012	"Commemorating <i>Al Nakba</i> – Celebrate Palestine", cultural event, London (with a performance by Rafeef Ziadah)
19 May 2012	"Festival of Ideas: Bidisha and Selma Dabbagh – Palestine Now", literary event, Bristol
20 May – 6 June 2012	"Chronicles of a Refugee", film screenings, London
27 May 2012	Rehearsal of <i>Unto the Breach</i> by Al Zaytouna Dance Theatre, London
June 2012	Palestine Place, "a space for workshops, discussion and action in support of Palestine" (http://palestineplace.wordpress.com/about/), various events, London
9 June 2012	Preview show of <i>Unto the Breach</i> by Al Zaytouna Dance Theatre, London
24 June 2012	"Free the word! Zones of conflict: Poets Caught in Global Crisis", part of the Poetry Parnassus, Southbank Centre, London (with Rafeef Ziadah)
10 July 2012	"Introducing Palestinian literature", a talk by Selma Dabbagh at the Frome Festival, Frome

In addition, I conducted research into the artists' portfolios using material available online and in print. In this process, I found online videos especially useful as they provided the closest possible experience to watching the "real" performance. Finally, to get an idea of the "critical responses" and "memories" (Schechner 2006) produced by the artists' work, I

analysed reviews, online forums and recorded the audiences’ reactions after performances, including the audience feedback session after Al Zaytouna’s preview performance of *Unto the Breach*.

Alongside performance analysis and informal conversations, I conducted interviews with 21 individuals, including artists, organisers of Palestinian events and representatives of institutions. The interviews were semi-structured (Walliman 2001:239) in order to generate an “open response” (Longhurst 2003:119) from the participants. In addition to finding my contacts through Internet research, representatives from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and Al Zaytouna acted as my “gatekeepers” (Valentine 2010), connecting me to other artists and activists. While this might have resulted in linking me to only a certain section of the community, I did not find this problematic as I wanted to explore the particular environment the artists worked in and discovering the relationships between different people added to this analysis. In addition, although my position as someone previously connected to the Palestinian cause through stage-managing cultural events run by the PSC might have somehow compromised my neutrality as a researcher, I also felt it allowed me to generate more interest and trust from the artists.

A summary of all the interviews with artists is provided in Box 2 below.

Box 2 – Summary of interviews with Palestinian artists

Name	Role	Generation
Rafeef Ziadah	Performer/poet	Second-generation
Selma Dabbagh	Writer/performer	Second-generation
Ahmed Masoud	Director and dancer of Al Zaytouna, writer	First-generation
Leila Sukkar	Dancer (Al Zaytouna)	Second-generation
Nabil Melhem	Dancer (Al Zaytouna)	Second-generation
Sali Kharobi	Dancer (Al Zaytouna)	Second-generation
Shadan Nassar	Dancer (Al Zaytouna)	First-generation
Ahmed Najjar	Dancer (Al Zaytouna)	First-generation
Kareem Samara	Musician	Second-generation
Basel Zaraa	Musician	Second-generation
Nizar Al Issa	Musician	Second-generation
Saeed Taji Farouky	Filmmaker	Second-generation
Omar Al-Qattan	Filmmaker	Second-generation

The interviews were intended to gather data on issues which did not come to light during the analysis of the artistic production, especially those surrounding identity formation and the artists' interactions with their families and the Palestinian community. They also provided the artists with an opportunity to comment on their own work, and how they saw its relationship to the Palestinian cause and "traditional" politics (a sample interview schedule is available in Appendix 1). In my participant selection, I primarily focussed on the second-generation artists selected as my case studies, but I also conducted several interviews with other artists who worked in a similar context. This allowed for a better understanding of the dynamics of the artistic-political world the artists were involved in as well as the development of Palestinian identity among second-generation refugees. While the scope of this project did not allow for a detailed analysis of all the artists' work, they nonetheless strongly influenced the first empirical chapter concerning Palestinian identity. To highlight the negotiations taking place within Al Zaytouna and understand the dynamics in the group I found it important to also interview the first-generation dancers who play a central role in the dance theatre.

As the connection between the "private" issues of the artists' identity and their "public" artistic engagements was a central theme of this project I was unable to anonymise the artists' quotes, something which required a degree of flexibility and collaboration on my part. Although my respondents were happy for their names to feature in the research, they were provided with an opportunity to specify which parts of the recorded interviews they did not want to be quoted. Several respondents were also given a chance to read and comment on earlier drafts of this paper.

I also conducted interviews with Palestinian event organisers, a summary of which is provided in Box 3.

Box 3 – Summary of interviews with event organisers

Name	Role/Organisation	Generation/Nationality
Omar Al-Qattan	Filmmaker, event organiser, curator of the Mosaic Rooms	Second-generation Palestinian
Khalid Al-Tamimi	Committee Member, General Union of Palestinian Students	Second-generation Palestinian
Hazem Muheisen	Committee Member, General Union of Palestinian Students	Second-generation Palestinian
Aser El-Aqqa	Curator of Arts Canteen	First-generation Palestinian
Mohammed Masharqa	Cultural Attaché at the Palestinian Mission in the UK	First-generation Palestinian
Georgina Reeves	Organiser of “Chronicles of a Refugee” film screenings, activist	Non-Palestinian
Noreen Abu Oun	Director of the British-Arab Centre	Non-Palestinian
Martial Kurtz	Palestine Solidarity Campaign	Non-Palestinian
Jenny Daly	Haringey Justice Centre for Palestinians	Non-Palestinian

These interviews provided a useful background to the Palestinian art scene and raised important questions about “ownership” of the campaigns and decision-making. I also wanted to get a better picture of the different players influencing the Palestinian cultural world: from “official” institutions (the Palestinian Mission), to private initiatives run by Palestinians (the Mosaic Rooms and Arts Canteen), to mostly British-led local and national activist groups (the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Haringey Justice Centre for Palestinians). All of these helped me understand the environment in which the artists work and in which Palestinian activism takes place.

Chapter 4: “A dispossessed nation⁶”: being and becoming Palestinian

*Every rock in Jerusalem knows my last name
Every wave hitting the Haifa shore is ready for me to return
And I will always be on your mind...
Always there to haunt you
From Savage by Rafeef Ziadah*

Issues surrounding identity and emotional attachment are central to the maintenance of “long-distance nationalism” (Fouon and Glick Schiller 2002). Consequently, this project began by exploring processes of identity creation and maintenance among second-generation Palestinians, assuming these play a crucial role in determining their political and artistic engagements. In this chapter, I take a person-centred view of identity, looking at the different interactions which might have influenced how the artists see themselves. Following Mavroudi (2006) and Mason (2008) I present Palestinian identity as complex and fragmented. This chapter begins by arguing that growing up Palestinian comes with conflicting feelings of estrangement from Palestine on one hand, and strong attachment to the Palestinian “refugee nation” (Siddiq 1995), on the other. Secondly, it shows that while second-generation Palestinians might not embrace all “cultural” elements of “Palestinianness⁷”, including language and gender roles, a “sense of injustice” (Bamyeh 2007) is present throughout their lives and becomes central to their understanding of the Palestinian cause. This is followed by an illustration of how the “politicised” core of Palestinian identity gets even stronger as many Palestinians reconnect to their Palestinianness as young adults, prompted by interactions with the “outside” world.

“Palestinianness” in the family: the complexities of dealing with distance and trauma

Like Hammer (2005) and Long (2011), I was interested in every-day discourses surrounding Palestinian identity in the artists’ households and the Palestinian community. During my research, it became apparent that my respondents attached different weight to the role that language, customs, food and the “tiny things like nursery rhymes”⁸ played in their Palestinian upbringing while at the same time expressing a broadly similar political

⁶ Phrase from the draft script of *Unto the Breach* by Al Zaytouna Dance Theatre (accessed during rehearsals, May 2012).

⁷ “Palestinianness” was a term used by many of my respondents to refer to their Palestinian identity.

⁸ Leila, interview (26 May 2012).

attachment to Palestinianness. This research aimed to discover how these similarities arise despite different every-day experiences of growing up Palestinian.

As for other diasporas, family is a central site of diasporic identity formation (Fortier 2000) among Palestinians. On the family level, maintenance of identity is complicated by the long-lasting estrangement of Palestinian families from their homeland. The current generations of Palestinians are the third and fourth outside Palestine since the 1948 *Nakba* (Shiblak 2006). This means that many of my respondents' parents either left Palestine as children or grew up outside of it, mostly in refugee camps and towns around the Middle East. Many parents experienced dispossession, poverty and violence, something which can lead to contradictory pressures on their children. On one hand, the past is seen as a "burden"⁹, as something to move away from; on the other, the sense of injustice and dispossession ground people firmly in their Palestinianness (Lindholm Schulz 2005, Mavroudi 2007).

Painful experiences of the parents and grandparents meant that details of the family history were rarely spoken about in some households, and became a "taboo subject"¹⁰. Rafeef describes the pressures faced by her mother, a first-generation refugee:

She wanted us to know our history, but it was traumatic and difficult to speak about. So for a very long time it was unspoken of, we talked about Palestine but not about our own personal family history.¹¹

Having grown up in difficult conditions themselves, with experiences which for many included death and discrimination of their family members, most parents focus their attention on helping the children establish successful lives and a degree of stability abroad (Lindholm Schulz 2005:27). The artists I spoke to were aware of this. Rafeef grew up with a sense that her parents wanted to spare her the difficult experiences of their past, and to "have some kind of normality" in her life¹². Saeed Taji Farouky, a half-Palestinian British filmmaker, similarly sees the aim of his father's life as "trying to figure out a way to get out" of the Middle East, and avoid the difficulties he faced as a young person for his children¹³.

⁹ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

¹⁰ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

¹¹ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

¹² Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

¹³ Saeed, interview (7 July 2012).

Saeed's perspective was shared by several of my respondents who grew up with a complicated view of what being Palestinian was. Many either didn't consider themselves Palestinian until they were older or "didn't really know what it meant"¹⁴. Some remember their first "real" discovery of, and identification with their Palestinian identity as a sudden, quite shocking experience, usually prompted by something they saw on the news or heard from other people. Kareem, a second-generation British-Palestinian musician shared his memory of that moment:

I didn't know I was Palestinian until I saw my mum cry once about something on the television during the Intifada. And I said: "what on earth are you crying about?". She answered: "this is our country. This is where we're from". And I obviously asked: "why don't you go back there?"¹⁵

As a result of such experiences, and the emotional connection to their parents, the essence of the young people's Palestinian identity is closely connected to a sense of injustice and trauma. As Selma puts it, her Palestinianness arose out of the "personal connection with [her] father and the sense of injustice which was ongoing"¹⁶. Most of my respondents began their definition as Palestinians with the "trauma of dispossession" (Costandi 2009:41), describing the places their families came from and how they got "kicked out" of their homes¹⁷.

Young Palestinians' interactions with their extended families often add to this emphasis on injustice and dispossession (Lindholm Schulz 2003; Mason 2008). For third-generation refugees, grandparents provide the most tangible connection to Palestine and stories of life there before 1948. They are often the ones who feel strongly about the young people's Palestinian identity and their role in the Palestinian cause. Leila and Nabil, both second-generation dancers from Al Zaytouna describe the special role of their grandparents:

They lived through 1948, the *Nakba*, all the problems, so they found it really important to instil in us the pride and an identity with Palestine. They tell us all about their olive groves

¹⁴ Saeed, interview (7 July 2012).

¹⁵ Kareem, interview (6 June 2012).

¹⁶ Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

¹⁷ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

and also about their fields, the land my grandfather used to work and the way grew up and how important it was to them.¹⁸

The idea of a “homeland lost” (Lindholm Schulz 2003) plays a part in countering the sense of fragmentation among Palestinian families spread all over the world. During family gatherings, young people are “saturated with Palestine”¹⁹ through shared stories and images. The sense of common history and injustice are again central to expressing the connections families share with each other. Nabil explains:

I still have a very strong identity with [my home village in Palestine]. It’s because of the way my grandparents talk to me about it, the rest of my family talk to me about it, my auntie, about how close they feel to it.²⁰

At the same time, for many Palestinians these extended family connections are quite sporadic and come with a corresponding sense of detachment from the Palestinian community as the young people realise not only the similarities but also the differences between them and their families. The encounters raise new questions about the essence of being Palestinian and can exacerbate the confusion among second-generation refugees. Leila, for example, talked about “the frustration of not being able to speak the language [to your family members] which makes you question who you are”²¹. My respondents were aware of the differences between them and their Palestinians peers who grew up in other places, as well as the added difficulty of maintaining Palestinian identity among the current generation of refugees. Rafeef described this problem: “We were the first generation out of Lebanon and we weren’t rooted in a refugee camp so holding on to our culture was much harder for our generation.”²²

What does it mean to be Palestinian? Exclusion, belonging, positioning

As Rafeef’s words above demonstrate, Palestinian identity is complicated due to the geographical distance from Palestine, and the social and cultural distance between different Palestinian communities (Aoudé 2001). While my respondents’ experiences varied in this respect, a significant proportion, especially those who primarily grew up in the UK, did not

¹⁸ Leila and Nabil, interview (26 May 2012).

¹⁹ Nabil, interview (26 May 2012).

²⁰ Nabil, interview (26 May 2012).

²¹ Leila, interview (26 May 2012).

²² Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

speak perfect Arabic and found it difficult to relate to some of the “cultural” aspects of being Palestinian. This was especially evident for those who came into contact with Palestinians who grew up in the Middle East or might have come from more religious families. Selma describes her experience of going to school in Kuwait, attended by “70% Palestinians”, as feeling “very English”, “not particularly Palestinian” and “excluded” by language and the “liberal” culture of her home compared to other Palestinian girls²³.

Like Selma, Leila compared her own childhood experiences to the more “traditional” upbringing of other Palestinians in the UK and around the world whom she saw as “more likely to speak Arabic at home, more likely to wear a *hijab* and not be allowed to go on dates”. Leila expressed her frustration trying to occasionally deal with these “traditional” aspects in her own home:

My dad could play the Arab dad card whenever he felt like it. But for us it could be quite confusing, when you’re being told most of the time: “yes, you can have boyfriends, you can go out”, but every so often something I would want to do would make my dad feel uncomfortable and he would say: “You can’t do this. Not under my roof”. It could feel frustrating.²⁴

The differences within their generation of refugees force young Palestinians to engage in “horizontal” negotiation of their identity (Lowe 2003), and relate those differences to what is important for Palestinian identity. Often, my respondents labelled aspects of custom and social convention they found hard to understand as “traditional” or “Arab”, therefore dismissing them as not central to Palestinianness. In fact, almost all of the interviewees differentiated Palestinians from other Arabs, identifying loss and dispossession as the “core” of Palestinian identity. Basel, a third-generation musician told me: “We have a special experience different from other people. And I don’t think any other people can understand it.”²⁵ According to Nabil, “other Arabs take for granted that they have their villages and homes elsewhere whereas we can’t.”²⁶ By identifying the refugee experience and their own *ghurba* (“exile/diaspora”) (Petee 2007) as central to being Palestinian, second-generation

²³ Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

²⁴ Leila, interview (26 May 2012).

²⁵ Basel, interview (29 June 2012).

²⁶ Nabil, interview (26 May 2012).

refugees position themselves as members of the Palestinian community, something which was expressed by Saeed:

People sometimes want to make a distinction between a real Palestinian and a “not-real” Palestinian: if you have a British passport and you weren’t born there you’re not a real Palestinian. But the majority of Palestinians don’t live there, weren’t born there and don’t have a Palestinian passport. So that’s not unusual, it is a population of refugees now and the refugee experience is now mainstream.²⁷

Defining themselves as “a refugee nation” (Siddiq 1995) and a “victim diaspora” (Cohen 1997), Palestinian refugees legitimise their belonging to the Palestinian community (Khalili 2004). They do not only “choose” to be Palestinian (Chatty and Hundt 2005) but also make decisions about what Palestinianness means, and create a frame of reference which allows them to belong to the community without necessarily embracing all elements of language and custom.

“Re-becoming” Palestinian: growing up and a new search for identity

By emphasising exile and injustice over “cultural” elements of Palestinian identity, second-generation Palestinians develop “ideas of belonging” (Wessendorf 2007:1099) different from their parents. Their negotiations follow Nagel’s (2002) conception of identity which she sees as resulting from “assertions of *sameness*” (Nagel 2002:259) as well as “constructions of difference” (Nagel 2002:280). The latter were expressed by my respondents when defining themselves in relation to people in their host countries. An awareness of difference becomes central to the young people’s experience growing up as they go through what Leila described as an “identity crisis”²⁸ in their early teens. Another Al Zaytouna dancer, Sali, a third-generation Palestinian whose parents came to the UK from Syria saw this process as realising that “people don’t get you”²⁹. Teenage years are the time when a lot of young people rediscover their desire to “connect to [their] own people”³⁰, to “make connections”³¹ and “ask real questions”³² about their family’s past and Palestinian politics.

²⁷ Saeed, interview (7 July 2012).

²⁸ Leila, interview (26 May 2012).

²⁹ Sali, interview (4 June 2012).

³⁰ Sali, interview (4 June 2012).

³¹ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

³² Saeed, interview (7 July 2012).

This more “mature” awareness of Palestine goes beyond childhood images and family stories. To counter some of the sense of detachment experienced in earlier childhood young people search for information from other sources. As Kareem described it:

You only know certain stories, certain things, certain tales. So you have to find out the rest yourself. And you do. You read books, you watch films, you watch documentaries. And now you obviously have the Internet.³³

As they get more interested in Palestine as young adults, Palestinians are confronted with a new sense of injustice coming from the outside world, resulting from how Palestine is described and seen by outsiders. Their “defence”³⁴ of their Palestinianness is prompted by “unfair”³⁵ news reporting, which leads them to identify international perceptions as one of the central issues in the Palestinian struggle. Selma describes the resurgence of her Palestinian identity during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the early 1990s:

I was at university when the first Gulf War happened and my father was trapped in Kuwait for three weeks during the invasion. And I think it was seeing how biased the news reporting was, and the lack of understanding... that was quite traumatic for all of us³⁶.

In Selma’s experience, her personal family history and the wider external perceptions were part of the same issue affecting the Palestinian community.

For Nabil, watching the news also provided a way to feel connected to people in Palestine. He expressed how he personally perceived the unfairness of the situation:

You watch the news every day and you see that these are your people and your family there living in these situations and you feel, in rainy Britain without any problems, you need to feel connected to these people because they are your people and it’s only fate that brings us to live in this country and not a camp in Beirut or Gaza.³⁷

Often, this new sense of connection with Palestine, and a desire to address the injustices there, developed during the artists’ university years and was accompanied by their general politicisation. Their exploration of Palestinian identity usually went hand-in-hand with wider political activism which allowed the artists to link the Palestinian cause to other injustices around the world. Many of my respondents emphasised that their “Palestinianness”

³³ Kareem, interview (5 June 2012).

³⁴ Leila, interview (26 May 2012).

³⁵ Leila, interview (26 May 2012) and Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

³⁶ Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

³⁷ Nabil, interview (26 May 2012).

affected their political engagement, and the other way round, and the two become inextricably linked. Saeed explains:

My understanding of injustice was fuelled by my own past. But the more I saw injustice in the world the more I wanted to understand where my family came from. But you know the Palestinianness was also a reason to be interested in the idea of social justice and human rights.³⁸

Rafeef describes her “politicisation” at university in America:

This was when the anti-corporate globalisation and the anti-war movements were going on because it was soon after 9/11 and Iraq. So my own politicisation which was about Palestine became about corporate globalisation and anti-war organising and it all came together.³⁹

Selma similarly sees her Palestinianness as something which “informed” her career choice to train as a lawyer: “I was interested in discrimination issues at work, and I worked with civil action against the police, it was a sort of broader mindset than just the one cause.”⁴⁰

This overall politicisation affects how the artists frame the Palestinian issue, and their understanding of how they can effectively contribute to the cause. Rather than following a particular political party or faction they see it within a larger context of human rights and equality. Rafeef described this paradigm:

The Palestinian cause is part of justice struggles around the world, not an isolated thing. And if we isolate Palestine then we’re really doing it a disservice and we’re not true to what Palestine is about. Palestine is not just the geographical location, it’s much more of a metaphor for justice everywhere. I say when you’re on a picket line you’re fighting for Palestine, when you’re a domestic worker fighting for your rights you’re fighting for Palestine.⁴¹

Conceptualising Palestine as a justice and human rights struggle, artists not only create their own way to define Palestinianness but also add their own perspective on Palestinian politics which is far removed from any domestic political divisions.

³⁸ Saeed, interview (7 July 2012).

³⁹ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

⁴⁰ Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

⁴¹ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

Conclusion

Although Palestinian identity is still strongly present among the current generation of Palestinian refugees, its passing down is far from straightforward. The Palestinian experience is a constant tension between belonging and not belonging to Palestine as a location and a community, and the identity of second-generation refugees is complicated by their parents' migration histories, their desire for their children to be successful in their host countries and (in some cases) issues of gender, language and social conventions. Nonetheless, as this chapter demonstrated, the political "core" of Palestinian identity and a sense of injustice are present throughout the refugees' childhoods and lead to a re-connection to Palestinian identity later in life. This "rediscovery" of identity can be closely related to overall politicisation, and influenced by outside actors and other political agendas, altering and shaping young people's definition of Palestinianness. Reframing the Palestinian cause as one of justice and human rights makes Palestine into a "moral and political imperative"⁴², and not just an identity issue. Conceptualising the political as central to Palestinianness is an act of "strategic hybridity" (Mason 2008) through which second-generation Palestinians create a space in which they feel included in the community despite not sharing some of the religion, customs and personal experiences of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Through a redefinition of the essence of Palestinianness and the Palestinian struggle, "(b)eing Palestinian is negotiated and reconciled with being a citizen of the world" (Hammer 2003:195).

⁴² Omar, interview (14 June 2012).

Chapter 5: “We teach life, Sir”⁴³: Cultural production, identity and politics

Protest, speak, dance

Write, say, stay

We live.

Excerpt from Al Zaytouna’s *Unto the Breach*

“The world needs to see that we don’t just chant in the streets, but that we survive through our poetry, our *dabke*, our music” - Rafeef Ziadah makes this statement to an audience of Palestinians and non-Palestinians at an event commemorating the 60th anniversary of the *Nakba*⁴⁴. As is the case for many Palestine-related events in London, this one is attended by a diverse group of people: there are Palestinian families with young children, Palestinian students and young professionals, international activists from the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement⁴⁵ and a variety of other spectators of all ages⁴⁶. In that sentence, Rafeef not only talks to the Palestinian community about the strength of their continuing tradition, but she also makes a statement to outsiders about who the “Palestinian people” are, emphasising the importance of culture in their community. In this chapter, I investigate why second-generation artists engage in cultural production and how they see its role in furthering the Palestinian cause. Following on from Chapter 4, I argue that cultural production results from the artists’ identity and their framing of the Palestinian issue. It provides a means to make multiple connections in this fragmented world of politics and identity – firstly, a way for the artists to redefine their Palestinianness, secondly, a uniting factor for the Palestinian community, and thirdly, a tool to “spread the message”⁴⁷ to non-Palestinian audiences.

Cultural production as a personal connection to Palestine

The previous chapter described second-generation Palestinian identity as something which comes with both a sense of distance from the homeland, and a desire to maintain a connection with it. When asked why they do cultural work, many artists began with

⁴³ Title of one of Rafeef’s poems, recorded on *Hadeel*, CD, released 24 Oct 2009.

⁴⁴ Research diary note, *Commemorating Al Nakba – Celebrate Palestine* event (15 May 2012).

⁴⁵ Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) is an international civil society movement against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Its techniques are reminiscent of those used in South Africa during the anti-apartheid campaigns (Jasiewicz 2011; <http://www.bdsmovement.net/bdsintro>).

⁴⁶ Research diary note, “Commemorating *Al Nakba – Celebrate Palestine*” event (15 May 2012); Martial, interview (13 May 2012); Noreen, interview (14 June 2012).

⁴⁷ Khaled, interview (21 June 2012).

personal stories which reflected on these aspects of their identity. For some, engaging in cultural work became an “active [strategy] to deal with exile, insecurity and displacement” (Mavroudi 2007:407) as they saw it as a way of connecting to their Palestinianness. This was most evident in the case of the dancers from Al Zaytouna and their reasons for picking this particular art form. Sali, who joined the group through Palestinian family friends and “hadn’t danced before”, treated the theatre as a space where she could learn not just about the dance, but also Palestinian history and politics⁴⁸. For Leila, getting involved in Al Zaytouna was a way to reconnect to some of the aspects of her identity she lost growing up:

We used to go to Jordan when I was a child. My auntie Nassi from Ramallah is an amazing dancer and when we went to weddings she used to teach us *dabke*. So I knew the basic moves when I was little, completely forgot them and when I went to university I was told to come along to this *dabke* group. And then all the memories came back. I thought: “Oh my god, I remember this!”⁴⁹

Other forms of cultural production might not carry as much symbolic weight as *dabke* but they nonetheless provide a way to for the artists to “connect” to the Palestinian community. While Selma and Rafeef might not see their work as part of their exploration of Palestinian “heritage”, they certainly relate cultural production to finding their own role in the Palestinian cause. Selma describes how she began writing when living in Bahrain, this time as an adult, where she felt she “didn’t know what [she] could do that would include [her]”⁵⁰. Writing became a way to counter the lack of political engagement she perceived among the Palestinian and Arab community there. Her personal experiences and her own sense of a contrast between actual detachment from the Palestinian cause and her emotional attachment to it is something she reflected upon in her writing:

I started writing stories about people who felt that the revolution had failed them, or they felt that the revolution had defeated the people who were on the outskirts. And I guess that’s how I felt at the time. I felt that I wasn’t doing anything and I could be doing a lot more. So that was my way of recreating the world that I had perhaps lost.⁵¹

For Selma, writing became a new framework within which she could relate to, and reflect upon, the Palestinian cause, and offered her a certain degree of independence in terms of

⁴⁸ Sali, interview (4 June 2012)

⁴⁹ Leila, interview (26 May 2012).

⁵⁰ Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

⁵¹ Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

how she wanted to address the issue. Crucially for her, as for the other artists I spoke to, cultural work offered advantages over “regular” political work as it allowed her to distance herself from political institutions. Selma emphasised the “freedom” of not being connected to a political party, of “not having that world around me.”⁵² Similarly, most of the artists repeatedly stressed that they worked outside any party-political or religious alliances. Although many perform at events organised by campaigning and activist groups, they saw these engagements as additional to their main artistic practice and did not perceive them as a major driver behind their work. In addition, both artists and activists emphasised that the performers usually had the freedom to showcase whichever part of their work they wanted to during cultural-political events⁵³. This relationship makes cultural work a suitable avenue for those second-generation Palestinians whose “politicised” (Mavroudi 2007) identity does not revolve along party-political lines⁵⁴. Many of my respondents, like Sali from Al Zaytouna, saw politics as “divisive”.⁵⁵ Rafeef stated emphatically: “the world does not revolve around this stupid Hamas-Fatah split”.⁵⁶

My respondents related this rejection of institutions and political parties to wider developments of the last two decades which have had a profound effect on the Palestinian diaspora. They referred to the ongoing disenchantment of the diaspora with the Oslo Peace Process of the 1990s (Abu-Iyun and Lester Murad 2006; Hammer 2003; Pappé 2004) which created the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza. As the issue of the refugees’ “Right of Return” was not central to the agreements made, the process left many diaspora Palestinians feeling sidelined (Farah 2006; Karmi 1996). According to Hammer (2003:190), after this process “Palestinians realized ever more clearly that their definition of Palestinian identity would have to rely on more than this promise of a state to be”. While it is beyond the scope of this project to examine the complex effects the Peace Process had on Palestinians abroad, it certainly resonates in the work of the artists in the UK, and was a subject frequently brought up in conversations. According to the artists, the “anti-Oslo

⁵² Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

⁵³ Selma, interview (13 June 2012); Ahmed Najjar, interview (23 May 2012); Martial, interview (31 May 2012), Jenny, interview (26 June 2012).

⁵⁴ Research diary note, reflecting on Al Zaytouna’s rehearsal and other interviews (27 May 2012).

⁵⁵ Sali, interview (4 June 2012).

⁵⁶ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

feeling”⁵⁷ and the need “to get the Palestinian struggle back on track”⁵⁸ led to a resurgence of activity and resulted in “many new voices, much more disparate and much more fragmented”⁵⁹ on the diasporic cultural scene. As described by Rafeef:

When the Oslo peace process happened a lot of the political structures collapsed and it was up to the individuals to assert our identity. And that’s where I think the real culture comes in. When we lost all structures this is the way to sustain ourselves.⁶⁰

Rafeef’s words, and my respondents’ rejection of institutions, place the work of Palestinian artists in the UK within a very specific moment in Palestinian politics, in which individuals have to find their own way to contribute to the cause, influenced by both the politics of the home “state” and the artists’ identity. They illustrate the intersection between the personal and the political, and the responsibility the artists feel towards the Palestinian community, an issue I shall address in the following section.

Cultural production as a connector for the Palestinian community

My respondents did not just stress the role cultural production played for them on a personal level but also emphasised its function as a “public issue” (Seijdel 2008:4) for Palestinians: a way of reaffirming the existence, and the concerns of, their community to both itself and the outside world.

For the Palestinian community, cultural work is a means of connecting to its own past and identity, a response to a sense of loss and fragmentation (Tawil-Souri 2011, 2012). Of the three examined art forms, *dabke* serves this purpose in the most obvious way as it carries a lot of weight as a symbol of identity, tradition and resistance (Rowe 2009). My respondents saw it both as something which “brings the nostalgia” and is a “trip down memory lane for older people”⁶¹ and as “a way of announcing our ID and showing our resistance, our grief, our anger”⁶². Through dancing *dabke*, however, Al Zaytouna dancers do more than just present a romanticised version of their community. They see the dance as having a deeper purpose and being able to address community fragmentation which exists in the diaspora,

⁵⁷ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

⁵⁸ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

⁵⁹ Omar, interview (14 June 2012).

⁶⁰ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

⁶¹ Leila, interview (26 May 2012).

⁶² Shadan, interview (4 June 2012).

and which they might have personally experienced. Ahmed Masoud, director of the dance theatre, described London as a meeting place for Palestinians who could not normally interact with each other because of the “huge divisions” created by the occupation and saw *dabke* as a way to “bring everyone together”. For Nabil, the dance has the potential to create a sense of pride in a community affected by traumatic experiences by showing that:

We have a heritage worth protecting as well. When people ask why we’re fighting, it’s not just that we lost the land, it’s the impact on our families, on our heritage, on our song, our music and culture which has all become so fragmented around the world. It is something we should try to hold on to and we try to keep alive as a diaspora.⁶³

While *dabke* might be the most obvious connecting mechanism for the Palestinian community, Rafeef and Selma see a similar purpose for their spoken work and writing, and consider Palestinians, also those in the diaspora, to be their target audiences. Unlike *dabke*, which is more traditional, these other two forms of cultural production offer different opportunities to tap into the Palestinian community in ways which younger generations might find more relatable. Commenting on the role her spoken word might play for the community, Rafeef again raised difficult issues of language and identity:

I know a lot of Palestinians don’t like to admit this but there are a lot of Palestinians who don’t speak Arabic, especially the younger generation raised in Canada. It’s a shame but it’s our reality. So while a lot of my work [in English] is for non-Arabs, a lot of it is also for Palestinian youth who feel empowered when they hear someone speak about Palestine in the form of culture which you rarely get.⁶⁴

While serving the “connecting” purpose for the community, artistic production fulfils a wider political objective – it is a way to reaffirm the existence of the Palestinian people to the outside world (Serhan 2008). Holding on to the cultural heritage becomes a weapon, “counter-hegemony” (Rowe 2008) and a way of “resisting annihilation” (Tawil-Souri 2012). Mohammed Masharqa, the cultural attaché at the Palestinian Mission described this in a way typical of my other respondents: “Israelis want to say that there is no Palestinian people so we have to take care of our culture as part of the argument in Europe”⁶⁵. Putting culture on the map changes the dynamic in which the occupation is perceived, providing a

⁶³ Nabil, interview (23 May 2012).

⁶⁴ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

⁶⁵ Mr Masharqa, interview (21 June 2012).

way for people to realise, as Kareem put it, that “they’re oppressing the whole culture”.⁶⁶ This way, a connecting mechanism for the Palestinian community also becomes a way to communicate the Palestinian struggle to outsiders.

Cultural production as an effective connection to the “outside world”

The previous section showed that by asserting themselves as the Palestinian people, Palestinians use cultural production to demand “political visibility” (Davis *et al.* 2011:9-10). This brings me to the question of general effectiveness of cultural production as a medium of communication to outsiders, something that Selma referred to as “cultural diplomacy”⁶⁷.

According to my respondents, cultural work, both inside Palestine and in the diaspora, is influenced by the disenchantment of many Palestinians with military resistance which they think “has lost its legitimacy”⁶⁸. Reflecting their characterisation of cultural work as a “revolution” and a “weapon”, Nizar-al-Issa, a second-generation oud⁶⁹ player said: “The time of [an armed] revolution is finished. We have a different revolution now, which is culture, it gives you weapons as a writer, as a painter, as a musician.”

Almost all of my respondents, both artists and activists, expressed a sense of change in attitudes towards the Palestinian cause over the last decade or so, arguing that “people know more about Palestine now”⁷⁰. They saw cultural work, including that of diaspora, as an important factor in this process. Omar Al-Qattan, a second-generation Palestinian filmmaker and curator of Mosaic Rooms, an art venue in London, summarises this development:

It’s very clear to me that the fact that in the last 10 years the public opinion in the UK has shifted so much to pro-Palestinian has mainly been because of the many cultural efforts and networks that were created, partly because of the diaspora and especially younger generations.⁷¹

What makes this cultural “weapon” so effective? Durrant and Lord (2007) argue that cultural production is able to provide diasporas with new frameworks of public engagement and new audiences. Palestinian artists likewise see cultural production as a way to make

⁶⁶ Kareem, interview (5 June 2012).

⁶⁷ Selma, speaking at *Palestine Now* event in Bristol, research diary note (20 May 2012).

⁶⁸ Saeed, interview (7 July 2012).

⁶⁹ Oud (or ūd) is a form of lute played in Arab countries.

⁷⁰ Hazem, interview (21 June 2012).

⁷¹ Omar, interview (14 June 2012).

new linkages to the outside world. The artists I spoke to thought that cultural work had advantages over more “traditional” political work such as protesting and lobbying as it could attract people who might not be interested in politics or “not so curious”⁷² about the Palestinian issue. Al Zaytouna’s aim “to promote Palestinian culture in the West”⁷³ is reflected in their inclusion of different target audiences, as they perform in churches, at minority festivals and a host of other events. Sali saw *dabke* as a particularly effective way of presenting the Palestinian story to these diverse audiences:

We show our culture through the dance but we’re also telling stories about the history and politics of the conflict. So I think in that sense people will want to find out more about it rather than going and sticking leaflets in their face.⁷⁴

Like Sali, Rafeef perceives cultural work as something that “touches people in a different way” than political activism, and sees the aim of her poetry to be to “find new ways to relate”⁷⁵. Selma similarly classifies the novel as a “form of communication, of making Palestine alive to a British audience”.⁷⁶

The potential of cultural work to create a connection between people serves another important purpose. The artists’ consider it part of their role “to combat negative stereotypes and bias”⁷⁷ towards Palestinians. They see cultural production as a way to directly challenge Western audiences. According to Nabil, cultural work can be particularly effective in this regard as “you present yourself to the people in a way they don’t expect from Palestinians”⁷⁸. The artists see culture as a means to “humanize the Palestinian story” (Matar 2011:12) and demonstrate that Palestinians are “not just a war zone”⁷⁹, not “just terrorists and the political stuff”⁸⁰, not “all about occupation and resistance”⁸¹. According to Leila, culture is a way of reacting to popular representations which “you see on TV”, but also to ones the artists might have personally experienced growing up:

⁷² Selma at *Palestine Now* event in Bristol, research diary note (20 May 2012).

⁷³ Quote featured on Al Zaytouna’s website: ‘About Al Zaytouna’, (<http://www.alzaytouna.org/about-us/about-al-zaytouna>; 1 June 2012).

⁷⁴ Sali, interview (4 June 2012).

⁷⁵ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

⁷⁶ Selma, *Palestinian Literature* talk at Frome Festival, research diary note (10 July 2012).

⁷⁷ Rafeef, *Free the Word!* event during the Poetry Parnassus, research diary note (26 June 2012).

⁷⁸ Nabil, interview (26 May 2012).

⁷⁹ Sali, interview (4 June 2012).

⁸⁰ Kareem, interview (5 June 2012).

⁸¹ Khaled, interview (21 June 2012).

I had experience growing up of people saying: “You’re nothing but a bunch of terrorists. You’re screaming, bearded, raging, toothless, *Allahu Akbar* Arabs.” When you dehumanise a Palestinian to that point, then it makes what the Israelis do almost justified. But when you humanise them you make them realise that they have fantastic culture, they’re kind, warm, generous people.⁸²

Through cultural work, artists find a way to provide a new representation of Palestinians, by emphasising those aspects of the Palestinian identity which might not come to fore in popular representations. They position themselves between the Palestinian community and the outside world in a way which allows them to relate to both of these audiences, while also furthering the Palestinian cause. This particular positioning is further analysed in Chapter 6.

Conclusion

This chapter identified cultural production as a connecting mechanism for diaspora artists. By making connections on numerous levels, from the personal to the public, Palestinian artists use cultural work as a “weapon”⁸³ and a mode of “resistance”⁸⁴. Within the framework of cultural production, the artists negotiate a “safe space”⁸⁵ to engage in politics, independent of institutional and party-political divisions. The choice of “weapon” is dictated not just by its perceived efficacy, but also by the identity issues faced by second-generation Palestinians which were described in the previous chapter. While negotiating their own role in the Palestinian cause and community, the artists also take into account multiple audiences and manage numerous responsibilities. They benefit from their position in and awareness of Western society which lets them find effective ways to challenge existing stereotypes of the Palestinian people.

⁸² Leila, interview (26 May 2012).

⁸³ Nizar, interview (21 June 2012).

⁸⁴ Ahmed Masoud, interview (20 June 2012).

⁸⁵ Georgina, interview (13 June 2012).

Chapter 6: “The Palestine I know doesn’t have a VIP pass⁸⁶” – presenting the homeland

*I did not know what to make of this. What nationality
did we want to be? Who was whose enemy? What
were we?
From Me (The Bitch) and Bustanji by Selma Dabbagh*

In the previous chapter, I argued that cultural production serves as a way for the artists to position themselves vis-à-vis the Palestinian cause as well as a political weapon. This chapter explores how the artists’ positioning as Palestinians and as activists takes place in practice by examining the work of Al Zaytouna, Selma Dabbagh and Rafeef Ziadah in more detail. Looking at the representations of Palestine featured in the artists’ work, I present cultural production as firstly, a site of negotiation and secondly, a site of critique. In negotiating between “traditional” and new ways of presenting Palestinianness, and considering their responsibilities towards their Palestinian and non-Palestinian audiences the artists produce their own complex image of the homeland. Rejecting the role of a spokesperson for “romanticised”⁸⁷ Palestine, they include messages which are critical of internal politics and society while at the same time promoting the Palestinian cause.

Being a Palestinian, being an artist – cultural production as site of negotiation

Numerous pressures influence the creation of Palestinian cultural production and decision-making by the artists. When selecting what to present and how to present it, Palestinian artists keep in mind the different connections their work is meant to create, both with Palestinians and outside audiences, taking into account not only their responsibilities towards their community, but also the importance of artistic quality *per se* in their work. Members of Al Zaytouna specifically discussed this in relation to the difficulty of attracting and “meeting the expectations”⁸⁸ of “demanding”⁸⁹ audiences in the UK. Their desire to stand out in a “very competitive market”⁹⁰ is a major factor behind Al Zaytouna’s own version of “strategic hybridity” (Mason 2008:273): their fusion approach which aims to produce something original, while at the same time making the work relatable for different

⁸⁶ Line from “the Palestine I know” by Rafeef Ziadah, as presented during the “Commemorating Al Nakba – Celebrate Palestine” event, London (15 May 2012).

⁸⁷ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

⁸⁸ Ahmed Najjar, interview (23 May 2012).

⁸⁹ Ahmed Najjar, interview (23 May 2012).

⁹⁰ Shadan, interview (1 June 2012).

groups of people. The members understood that their audiences increased with the quality of their work as “it attracted people who were mostly interested in the arts” and “the vision to combine *dabke* plus contemporary dance”⁹¹. *Unto the Breach*⁹², Al Zaytouna’s current production adapts the storyline from Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, and includes rewritten lines from the original play, video, contemporary dance, club music and other modern elements alongside traditional *dabke* steps and powerful Palestinian symbols like the *keffiyeh* and olive groves. Ahmed Masoud describes Al Zaytouna’s approach: “We have our own style as Palestinians abroad, we merge two cultures. And this makes it easier for us to reach out to our audiences in Europe and in the UK.”

The need to relate to audiences in an innovative way and the desire to produce work of high artistic quality leads to the rejection of some of the “traditional” Palestinian symbols which the artists see as old and overused. The new symbolism, which includes “your copters, your F-16 in our skies”⁹³ and Palestinian political prisoners on hunger strikes⁹⁴, among other recent emblems of the occupation, is strongly influenced by the justice and human rights paradigm through which the artists perceive the Palestinian issue. Rafeef comments on how the work of her generation of poets differs from the more “traditional” strand of Palestinian poetry:

Our situation is so different, we’re not in this ’68 revolution phase around the world anymore, people are not wearing the Che Guevara hats and wanting to go to the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organisation] camps so our writing is also different, it’s about the confusion of our moment. Within that context we’re talking about the injustice of Palestine.⁹⁵

Understood through this paradigm, the picture of Palestine which emerges from the work of all three case studies is one “stuck between curfews and checkpoints”⁹⁶, one of ever-present control, humiliation, and oppression. Presenting and documenting the

⁹¹ Ahmed Najjar, interview (23 May 2012).

⁹² During the research process *Unto the Breach* was still a work in progress. The final production and script might differ slightly from what is presented in this paper.

⁹³ Line from *Shades of Anger*, poem by Rafeef Ziadah, recorded on *Hadeel*, CD, released 24 Oct 2009.

⁹⁴ The issue of political prisoners on hunger strike, which was very prominent in the news this year, was raised in one of the scenes during Al Zaytouna’s preview production of *Unto the Breach*; research diary note (9 June 2012). See also: Appendix 4, Image 2.

⁹⁵ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

⁹⁶ Line from the draft script of *Unto the Breach* by Al Zaytouna Dance Theatre (accessed during rehearsals, May 2012). See also: Appendix 4, Image 4 and 5.

discrimination of the Palestinian people is a more dominant theme than longing for a land lost or stories of the past before 1948 with descriptions of “their homeland as they knew it” (Hammer 2003:182), which frequently feature in the work of previous generations of Palestinian writers in exile.

In order to connect to their audiences, the artists believe that presenting a nuanced, “human” version of the Palestinian story is more effective than a “romanticised”⁹⁷ picture of it. Selma is critical of Palestinian writing which overuses certain symbols and idealises the Palestinian people:

There is really a lot of bad Palestinian writing which always has very noble heroes, the *kaffieh* and the Kalashnikov, there is no possible weakness that can be shown by those people, they’re invincible. I can see where it’s coming from but I think you should be able to show these people in a way that is negative as well. They’re not always going to be heroes given the state of repression. In fact most of them will probably not be and will end up doing bad things because the stakes are so high in terms of moral decisions that are being made all the time.⁹⁸

Selma’s writing is her response to this criticism. Her most recent novel, *Out of It*, includes a variety of “different” Palestinian characters who offer a “nuanced vision of what it is to be Palestinian”⁹⁹. As Selma puts it, “It follows the lives of Rashid and Iman as they try to forge paths for themselves in the midst of occupation, religious fundamentalism and the divisions between Palestinian factions”¹⁰⁰. In the novel, Selma makes a statement that there is more than one version of being Palestinian and of being political, and that engagement in the Palestinian cause is not always easy, partly due to the dynamics of the Palestinian community. In the book, she explores Palestinianness in a way which also reflects her experience growing up. As she describes: “I wanted to write something not just about divisions but about what holds us together - the political consciousness, feelings of guilt, different experiences of engagement.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Ahmed Masoud, interview (20 June 2012); Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

⁹⁸ Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

⁹⁹ Omar, interview (14 June 2012).

¹⁰⁰ Quote from writer’s website, ‘Out of it’, http://www.selmadabbagh.com/out_of_it_novel.html (2 June 2012).

¹⁰¹ Selma, *Palestinian Literature* talk at Frome Festival, research diary note (10 July 2012).

Like Selma, Al Zaytouna's dancers see adding the human element as an important part of changing perceptions about Palestine, a "translation" (Hall 2003) of the occupation to outside audiences. The Palestinians in their shows are not just noble heroes, but ordinary people who have strengths and weaknesses, and are deeply affected by the occupation. In *Unto the Breach*, for example, the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is presented as a man facing a lot of personal dilemmas and doubts about his leadership and the right way to conduct the Palestinian revolution. One of the scenes which the preview audience found most effective featured the character in a dance solo on an empty stage questioning the decisions he was about to make¹⁰².

Rafeef's work also departs from straightforward depictions of Palestinian revolutionary heroism and adds a new, human understanding of "resistance". Her poems frequently include ordinary people whose experience is central to demonstrating the suffering and injustice in Palestine and who are presented as the new Palestinian heroes. *Breathe* is written from the perspective of a young girl who saw her family killed on a beach in Gaza. Similarly, *Hadeel* is a moving poem about the death of a little girl and the grief of her mother (Box 4):

Box 4 – excerpt from *Hadeel* by Rafeef Ziadah (1)

*And who, who will tell Hadeel's mother
Busy baking bread and zaattar
That doves will not fly over Gaza again
Doves will not fly over Gaza again
Hadeel is gone and her brother Ahmed lost his sight
Hadeel...
Every prayer I remember and half-remember won't bring you back
Every prayer I remember and half-remember won't bring you back
As you wrap yourself in stories in Palestine
Gather the other children to cry a while
Waiting restless for the next soldier to knock down your door*

By including these stories, the artists not only manage to find new ways to connect to outside audiences, but they also reinforce the justice and human rights paradigm through which the Palestinian issue is conceptualised.

¹⁰² Research diary note, Al Zaytouna preview show of *Unto the Breach*, audience feedback session (9 June 2012).

As I discovered, however, the artists' negotiations do not always result in presenting a "new" version of Palestine. The issue of conflicting loyalties and responsibilities towards different audiences came up most strongly during my interactions with Al Zaytouna. As alluded to previously, the dance theatre is a meeting place for different "kinds" of Palestinians - those from Gaza, the West Bank, and second- and third- generation Palestinians living in the UK. They are all aware of each other's differences, both in terms of their experiences and political opinions, and the dance group is a forum where all of these come together.

One of the most prominent issues raised in the making of Al Zaytouna's *Unto the Breach* was the need to strike a balance between the "traditional" and the "new". For the second-generation dancers, for whom *dabke* is "the way of connecting to back home"¹⁰³, and who were described by the first-generation dancers as "more attached to the traditional Palestine"¹⁰⁴, it was very important to present the traditional *dabke* and not depart from it too much in the current show. They really cared about the opinions of their "cultural audience" (Toelken 1979, in Valentine and Matsumoto 2011:75) - the "implied audience" of Palestinians present in the minds of the participants - and their role in preserving their Palestinian heritage, worrying about their parents' and other diaspora members' responses to the new show¹⁰⁵. As the second-generation dancers argued, because they are more aware of the fragmentation and sense of loss in their community, they were the ones who defended the traditional *dabke* and did not want to "dilute" it¹⁰⁶. Leila related this concern to her identity as a second-generation Palestinian:

If somebody was born a Christian and their family went to church every Sunday, they're Christian but they don't overtly shout it out to the world, they get on with their daily lives. But somebody who is a converted Christian and discovers Christ when they are 18 can be much more evangelical in nature. And being a British Palestinian you are more conscious or aware of just how fragile it is, of protecting this heritage and making sure that people see it.¹⁰⁷

Of course, *dabke's* special status in the Palestinian community makes this medium especially likely to generate this sort of response. However, just like Selma and Rafeef, second-

¹⁰³ Ahmed Masoud, interview (20 June 2012).

¹⁰⁴ Shadan, interview (1 June 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Research diary note from Al Zaytouna's rehearsal (26 May 2012); Leila and Nabil, interview (26 May 2012); Shadan, interview (1 June 2012); Ahmed Masoud, interview (20 June 2012).

¹⁰⁶ Leila, interview (26 May 2012).

¹⁰⁷ Leila, interview (26 May 2012).

generation Al Zaytouna dancers show that creative decisions are related to the artists' identity, their experience growing up, as well as their conceptualisation of what is important in the Palestinian struggle and their personal role in it. By offering artists a degree of creativity, cultural work provides a space for such negotiations to take place.

What (not) to show – cultural production as a site of critique

Another issue raised by the artists when talking about the flexibility offered by cultural production was the degree to which it could cover difficult or contentious issues. While “Israel is consistently and indubitably painted as the enemy”¹⁰⁸ in all the artists' work, as demonstrated in the examples provided in the previous section, another wave of criticism is addressed at the West, its apathy in the face of the Palestinian oppression, and its discrimination of Palestinians. As described in Chapters 3 and 4, the artists see this criticism as central to addressing the Palestinian issue. Referring to this issue, Rafeef said: “I can't not write about what happens to Arab people who are racialised on a daily basis”¹⁰⁹. Her poem *Shades of Anger*, which reflects her personal experience, is written from the perspective of an Arab woman towards a Western man and is aimed at someone who was racist and violent towards her on a university campus in Canada, and other people “like him” who identify Palestinians with terrorists and extremists¹¹⁰. In “Hadeel” she juxtaposes the indifference of the West with the brutality of a little girl's death (Box 5):

Box 5: Excerpt from *Hadeel* by Rafeef Ziadah (2)

*Who will tell Hadeel that we went out for coffee
And carried on the day she died.
Nothing stopped, not a pause, not a tear.
Next meeting, next cigarette, next train,
Check email and sigh over another Palestinian gone.
Is this worth a press release?
Maybe not.
Solidarity from afar like a sick joke,
A bad story to tell a child.
But the doves, the doves will not fly over Gaza again.
The doves will not fly over Gaza again.
Hadeel is gone, forever gone.*

¹⁰⁸ ‘Exactly whose conflict is it anyway?’, a review of Selma Dabbagh's novel *Out of it* by Niamh Fleming-Farrell, *The Daily Star (Lebanon)*, 5 January 2012: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Books/2012/Jan-05/158855-exactly-whose-conflict-is-it-anyway.ashx> (16 May 2012).

¹⁰⁹ Rafeef, *Free the Word!* event during the Poetry Parnassus, research diary note (26 June 2012).

¹¹⁰ Rafeef, introducing her poem at *Commemorating Al Nakba – Celebrate Palestine* event (15 May 2012).

Another dimension of criticism in the work of the artists has to do with Palestine itself. Within the justice paradigm, the artists allow themselves to be critical of certain internal developments in Palestine, especially the political divisions which they perceive as “intrinsic problems within which are so effectively uses by the Israelis”¹¹¹ and which they distance themselves from. Al Zaytouna’s current production addresses the issue of factionalism in Palestinian politics. The performance opens and closes with scenes of quarrelling between the wannabe leaders from the different political factions (see Appendix 4: Image 1). The message is clear: divisions create another enemy to the Palestinian cause, and ultimately contribute to its plight.

Selma’s *Out of It* also “does not shy away from criticizing the activities of and infighting between various, loosely fictionalized, Palestinian factions”¹¹². Selma comments: “I wanted to add my personal critiques about where we [Palestinians] were going wrong.”¹¹³ Her critique extends outside the sphere of politics. Using a multiplicity of female voices and characters, her novel *Out of It*, as well her short stories *Beirut-Paris-Beirut* and *Me (the Bitch) and Bustanji*, address issues of religion and gender which she found difficult to deal with as a child. One of her characters, a young girl called Iman, who returns to Gaza after living abroad, is desperately trying to find her role in the Palestinian cause but meets resistance from her community. The passage below describes her struggle (Box 6):

Box 6: Excerpt from *Out of It* by Selma Dabbagh (page 18, Bloomsbury first edition)

This was her lot. This was her life, the life of her father, her mother, her brothers. This was their lot, their country, their place in the world. This was what she had come back for and it was for her to find a meaningful role within it. At the time she had decided to join her family in Gaza there had been change, hope, peace agreements, agreements that, however faulty, had enabled what before had always seemed impossible. And she had returned valiantly, triumphantly to find that there was no role offered for her at all, except for that of wife and mother, both of which were pushed at her constantly.

¹¹¹ Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

¹¹² ‘Exactly whose conflict is it anyway?’, a review of Selma Dabbagh’s novel *Out of it* by Niamh Fleming-Farrell, *The Daily Star (Lebanon)*, 5 January 2012: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Books/2012/Jan-05/158855-exactly-whose-conflict-is-it-anyway.ashx> (16 May 2012).

¹¹³ Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

Commenting on her inclusion of criticism of gender and religious attitudes of some Palestinians, Selma sees it part of her role to make people inside and outside Palestine question the Palestinian society:

I'm actually quite happy when people say: "what is she saying about Palestinian society?". I really want them to question what was going on and do more of it, maybe even to make them uncomfortable.¹¹⁴

Like Selma, Rafeef believes that Palestinians need to be critical of some aspects of their society in order to bring justice to Palestine. One of her poems, *Supposed To* raises "the issue of treatment of domestic workers in Arab countries, and criticizes the class structures which give rise to it"¹¹⁵. She recalls people's reactions to the poem:

A lot of Palestinians who have domestic workers were quite upset. But the way I see it is I want to write about the issues of justice, whether it's Palestine or not Palestine. I want to be true to ideas of social justice and human rights, environmental justice, economic justice. I don't want to step outside of that framework to make people happy. I have had complaints saying: "Don't write about Iraq, don't write about Afghanistan, just focus on Palestine and the Palestinian suffering". And it's just not me, I'm not going to try to fit into someone's idea¹¹⁶.

Rafeef's words show that although the criticism might create tensions with the Palestinian community, it is the only way artists can be "true" to themselves. They do not see themselves as "spokespersons" for Palestine in the strict sense of the word, something which is influenced by their awareness of community fragmentation and divisions between different Palestinians. In Selma's opinion:

You can't say to a writer of fiction, even a Palestinian writer of fiction: "You shouldn't be covering X and Y because that's not something we want to expose to the West or the outside world" in a same way that you would do a PR agent who is covering a cause or place. It's not the expectation of fiction writers.¹¹⁷

Selma's words demonstrate another aspect in which cultural production might be more effective than 'traditional' political activity for diaspora artists – it can serve as a *site of criticism* as it allows the artists to address the issues they find important to the Palestinian situation, within the framework influenced by their identity and personal experience.

¹¹⁴ Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

¹¹⁵ 'Soundtrack to the struggle: Rafeef Ziadah's "Hadeel" reviewed', by Ahmed Habib, *The Electronic Intifada* 23 March 2010, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/soundtrack-struggle-rafeef-ziadahs-hadeel-reviewed/3577> (30 May 2012).

¹¹⁶ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

¹¹⁷ Selma, interview (13 June 2012).

Conclusion

The work of the three case studies demonstrates a specific moment in Palestinian cultural production, while at the same time providing various examples of personal engagement and individual negotiation. Through their work, the artists participate in a “continuous renegotiation of images of the past and the homeland” (Davis *et al.* 2011:10). They try to effectively use tradition and modernity, as well as inside and outside influences to deliver a message to both the Palestinian community and the wider world. This process is not always straightforward: for the *dabke* dancers, maintaining tradition is might be the dominant desire given the importance of the dance for the community, whereas other means of expression, especially writing, might offer artists a greater degree of flexibility. Nonetheless, all the artists need to negotiate their responsibilities towards the different audiences.

As this chapter showed, cultural production’s dual role “as connection and as criticism”¹¹⁸ leads to nuanced and complex representations of Palestine, which result from how the artists position themselves as Palestinians. It is a way for “placeless” (Jayyusi 1992:48) Palestinians to create their own version of Palestine as a place and an idea. Their depiction of Palestine presents it not just as an object of longing and nostalgia, but allows space for criticism and critical thinking, and invites both Palestinians and Westerners to question their attitudes. To adapt McFarlane’s (2004) term “global visual politics”, Palestinian artists engage in “global cultural politics”, which they see central to their relocation of the Palestinian struggle in the minds of the world.

¹¹⁸ Omar, interview (14 June 2012).

Chapter 7: Conclusion

*You have always recorded, you have always taken pictures
But we are more than statistics
From Breathe by Rafeef Ziadah*

As my respondents repeatedly emphasised, “it’s hard to be Palestinian and not be political”¹¹⁹. This paper explored the interrelationship between identity, politics and cultural production among second-generation Palestinian artists working in the UK. Cultural production was approached from the perspective of the artists who engage in it, in an attempt to reveal the influences and decisions which shape their work. The paper presented cultural production as an intersection between the personal and the public, and a way of dealing with distance and fragmentation experienced by second-generations Palestinians who, through their work, “are compelled to revise their memories and narratives of the past” (Davis *et al.* 2011:10). Using cultural production, Palestinians position themselves towards the Palestinian community in a way which allows them to find their own role in the Palestinian cause.

In Chapter 4, which begins the empirical part of this paper, I presented Palestinian identity as complex and fragmented, and as resulting from conflicting pressures of belonging and not belonging. Physical, as well as ‘social’ distance from Palestine, force second-generation Palestinians to redefine Palestinianness. Bridging different influences and political agendas, young Palestinians put injustice and dispossession at the heart of the Palestinian struggle. Their Palestinian identity emerges as, “at its heart, political” (Matar 2011:10).

Chapter 5 looked at how cultural production can work as an effective political tool in the context of community fragmentation and complex identities. It conceptualised cultural production as a connecting mechanism which allows the artists to find their own way of relating to the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian community, while also maintaining a degree of independence in terms of setting their own agendas. Cultural production also offers a way to effectively connect to non-Palestinian audiences, which allows the artists to

¹¹⁹ Rafeef, interview (28 June 2012).

challenge international perceptions they identify as part of the problem in the Palestinian struggle.

Finally, Chapter 6 analysed the work of the three case studies to present how identity, politics and the multiple expectations and connections are negotiated in practice. It conceptualised cultural production as a site of *negotiation* and *critique* which produces new and nuanced representations of Palestine. Themes of loss and injustice are manipulated and adapted by the artists to reframe the Palestinian issue in the way they see effective. Unlike in the work of older generations of Palestinians abroad examined by Enderwitz (2003) and Lindholm Schulz (2003), the artistic expression of the current generation of artists is not dominated by nostalgic representations of home, but by multiple layers of criticism directed towards Israel, the West and the Palestinian community itself.

By exploring cultural production, this paper offers a contribution to studies of 'long-distance nationalism' (Anderson 2002; Furon and Glick Schiller 2002) and diaspora politics, especially those which see it diaspora action as an effect of specific political and cultural arrangements (Smith and Stares 2007). My analysis agrees with Cuko and Traoré (2008) that the nature of the home state is an important determinant of the form of diaspora action. However, when looking at diaspora politics one should also take full account of the small-scale, individual decision-making processes which take place among diaspora members. While the nature of the Palestinian "state" and domestic Palestinian politics, especially in the post-Oslo environment, certainly influence the artists' decisions, their cultural production also results from every-day negotiations of identity and their position within the community, which are especially significant among the second generation.

Furthermore, the Palestinian case demonstrates that cultural production can be an effective alternative form of politics as it offers a certain degree of independence from the institutional and social structures migrants might find constraining. In this particular case, it becomes a valuable weapon for second-generation Palestinians, who might not relate to political factions in their homeland or specific aspects of Palestinian society. The "hybridity" in diasporic production, emphasized by scholars like Gilroy (1993) and Hall (2003), results as much from a search for identity as it does from political and artistic calculations of individuals, providing an example of "strategic hybridity" (Mason 2008) which bridges the

individual and the public. Most importantly, cultural production allows second-generation artists to take ownership of their representations of the Palestinian issue. This way, the work of the artists is not just an expression of “uprooting” and “dispossession” (Mufti 2011; Said 2011) but also offers opportunities for “re-rooting” and redefining oneself as a Palestinian.

The paper also provides some commentary on conceptualising the “second-generation” of migrants and their relationship to home. While it recognises that distance from Palestine and lack of personal experience of flight among the current diaspora generation make the passing-down of identity complicated, it shows that distance does not have to lead to eradication of Palestinianness. On the contrary, conflicting pressures of Palestinian identity motivate the artists to establish their own connections to Palestine. In their journey of self-discovery their homeland emerges as a “moral destination” (Malkki 1992:36). Although families play an important role in this process, the “ideas of belonging that [...] motivate [people] taking action in relation to an ancestral territory” (Fouron and Glick Schiller (2002:173) are also influenced by “outside” treatment, stereotypes and influences. The sense of duty towards Palestine which young people originally develop through the older generations is later reinforced by other political influences. Incorporating the global justice agenda while not necessarily maintaining all aspects of Palestinian culture does not reflect a “diluted” (Mason 2008:2266) sense of identity. Rather, it provides a way of redefining Palestinianness and the Palestinian cause in a way which includes second-generation Palestinians while also relating to Western sensitivities. Consequently, this paper provides an alternative example to studies focussing on essentialisation (Lindholm Schulz 2005:27) of identity resulting from conflicting pressures and distance from the homeland. It argues that “multiple or broken identity” (Enderwitz 203:226) does not have to lead to limiting “being Palestinian” to religious fundamentalism (AbulGhani 2005:55), but can offer avenues for creativity and negotiation which result in an emergence of “new” Palestiniannes.

Bridging together issues of identity and politics, this paper presents cultural production as a specific response to challenges faced by second-generation migrants, especially those coming from regions affected by conflict. Both in terms of political activity and identity, those difficulties do not have to lead to militant and extremist approaches typical of Anderson’s (2002) account of political engagement or the fundamentalist ideologies

described in some studies of the second generation. Migrant responses to their position can take multiple paths which incorporate different values, loyalties and agendas, leading to new ways of defining oneself and alternative forms of political activity.

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Original dissertation proposal

Dissertation research proposal:

Home, collective memory and political protest – an exploration of the work of young Palestinian artists-activists in the UK

By Agata Patyna, MSc in Global Migration

Project background, aims and objectives

This project will hope to explore the “culture of resistance” (Hammer 2005: 35) in the work of young British Palestinian artists-activists against the background of existing debates about diaspora politics and cultural production. Particular focus will be placed on the processes of identity creation and cultural hybridity among second-generation artists.

The idea for this project arose during my involvement in events organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in London which regularly feature various Palestinian artists. Many of the contributions come from young, often second-generation, Palestinians who use artistic mediums which merge traditional Arab culture and Western influences. Their art spans a wide variety of forms, including dance, song, drama, rap and slam poetry. Watching these performances, I am always struck by how the artists combine “memories” of Palestine and a rejection of Israeli occupation with global political concerns about the impact of capitalism, poverty and marginalisation.

Through this project I aim to explore how this artistic expression comes into being, and how the artists-activists negotiate the different strands of their identity, both as artists and as members of the Palestinian diaspora. Moreover, this project aims to investigate the role played by family and other diaspora members in processes of identity creation, and the relationship between these processes and artistic practice.

Initial research questions

This research will hope to explore the following questions:

- 1) How do young Palestinians use art as a vehicle for political protest?
 - What key messages arise from their artistic expressions?
 - How do these relate to the wider concerns of the Palestinian diaspora in the UK?
- 2) What images and memories of “home” are presented by young artists-activists?
 - How are these different from representations of Palestine by older generations?
- 3) In what ways do family and the diasporic community affect the identity and artistic expression of young Palestinians?
 - How do artists-activists use the images, memories and ideas passed down to them by the older generations?
 - How do interactions with other diasporic Palestinians (both UK- and Palestine-born) affect the artists’ work?
- 4) What sort of “Palestinian” (or other) identity arises out of these artistic productions?
 - What aspects of identity are emphasised, and how do they coexist/contradict each other?
 - How does living in the UK affect the artists’ identity and artistic practice?

Discussion of the relevant literature

This research relates to three existing theoretical streams in the studies of migration and diaspora.

Firstly, it will draw on the recent proliferation of literature on the political participation of diaspora (see, for example, Anderson 2002; Ostergaard Nielsen 2003; Sheffer 2003). Sheffer (2003) describes the recent growth of confidence and openness of many diasporas in the West who increasingly act on behalf of their homelands. An important contribution to the discussion about diaspora participation is *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-makers or Peace-wreckers?*, the edited volume by Smith and Stares (2007) which focuses specifically on the role played by conflict diaspora and describes the varied forms in which migrants engage in conflict at home.

Secondly, the project will make use of theories relating to diasporic cultural production, especially the relationship between culture and diasporic identity. Scholars like Hall (2003,) Mercer (2003) and McFarlane (2004) argue that diasporic cultural expressions need to be seen in the context of multiple identities, hybridity and interaction of multiple heritages. As such, diasporic culture is analysed as a vehicle through which diaspora identity can produce and reproduce itself (Hall 2003).

There is now a significant body of literature specifically addressing the relationship between cultural production, memory and identity among Palestinians. Hammer (2005) emphasizes the importance of different types of memory, including historiography, oral memory and the arts, in producing images of the homeland central to Palestinian identity. Other studies, mostly based in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, analyse art not just as a way to create Palestinian identity, but also as a political weapon. De Cesari (2010), for example, explores the strong relationship between heritage, the arts and liberation politics in Palestine. Similarly, Rowe (2010) focuses on Palestinian dance as a form of 'criticism' and a 'cultural barometer', articulating issues important for the community in political conflict.

Thirdly, the project will relate to the existing literature on diaspora identity among second generation migrants. The edited volume by Levitt and Waters (2002) addresses the complex issues around the production of identity and ideas of home and belonging. In the volume, numerous authors focus on the role played by sending-country individuals, resources and ideas which are a constant presence in the lives of the second generation.

In the Palestinian diaspora context, the role of family and intergenerational knowledge transfer is especially important (Hammer 2005; Lindholm Schulz 2003; Long 2011). Historiography and political discourse are central to the upbringing of young Palestinians. The emphasis on exile and the right to return makes collective memory, political life and national identity inseparable among the diaspora and contributes to a continuation of strong identity among subsequent generations of Palestinians (Bamyeh 2007; Hammer 2005; Lindholm Schulz 2003). Mason (2008), however, problematizes this unified view of Palestinian identity, arguing that for the second generation issues of identity are more complex. She uses the term 'strategic hybridity' (Mason 2008: 273): to describe how young people move fluidly between the various elements of their identity, and negotiate ties to Palestine and their country of residence. This is particularly important in the context of syncretism in artistic practice described above.

Proposed methods of data collection and methods of analysis

This study will combine numerous data collection methods including interviews, observation as well as literary and performance analysis.

The main source of the data will be in-depth qualitative interviews with the artists-activists as well as organisers of Palestinian cultural events. If possible, household interviews will be conducted with the families of the artists to investigate their role in the artists' identity and work. The already established contacts with a number of Palestinian artists will be used to find additional interview participants. Further contacts will also be generated through Palestinian organisations such as Al Awda and Palestinian Return Centre and during cultural events. This will hopefully result in about 20-25 interviews.

Additionally, the artistic productions themselves, including slang, song, literature, dance and film, will provide data for this research. Data will be collected during a number of Palestinian cultural events including the upcoming Palestine Film Festival and the rehearsals and performance of the new production by the Al Zaytouna dance group. These will be combined with an exploration of material available online and in print. In analysing this material, methods from performance studies and literary analysis will be employed, with a focus on the connections between the different art forms (Roberts 2008), and the metaphors, subtexts and structures they use (Aitken 2005).

Rationale and value of the research

Despite its relatively large size the Palestinian minority in the UK is poorly understood and infrequently researched (Long 2011). This project hopes act as a step towards closing this research gap through providing a nuanced understanding of Palestinians as political actors. This is especially important in the context popular representations of Palestinians which often focus on the more militant and violent aspects of their activism.

Moreover, by looking at culture among this highly politicised group the study hopes to bridge political and material culture perspectives on diaspora which are often considered in separation. Although the link between art and politics has been well demonstrated inside Palestine the importance of artistic practice for the diaspora is largely unexplored which makes this group a suitable case study.

Finally, by looking at the second generation artists in particular this research hopes to add to the existing understanding of diaspora and cultural production, especially in terms of how art can reflect and negotiate the different identities of diaspora members.

Proposed research timetable

Timeframe	Research Activity
Before May 2012	<input type="checkbox"/> Setting-up initial contacts with Palestinian artists <input type="checkbox"/> Participation in events in London, including the Palestine Film Festival <input type="checkbox"/> Literature research
2 May 2012	<input type="checkbox"/> Presentation and project summary

May 2012	<input type="checkbox"/> Completion of literature review section <input type="checkbox"/> Final interview arrangements <input type="checkbox"/> Participation in the preview production of <i>Henry V</i> by Al Zaytouna dance theatre
June - mid-July 2012 (6 weeks)	<input type="checkbox"/> Data collection: interviews and text/performance analysis
Mid-July to August 2012 (2-3 weeks)	<input type="checkbox"/> Additional interview transcription and data analysis
August 2012	<input type="checkbox"/> Write up
10 September 2012	<input type="checkbox"/> Final submission

Preferred supervisor

My preferred supervisor is Dr Claire Dwyer.

Proposal bibliography

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Auto-Critique

While this paper broadly followed the methodology, aims and objectives outlined in the original proposal, its focus and emphasis changed slightly due to considerations made during the planning phase and the early stages of data collection.

The research methodology changed in two ways. Firstly, I adopted a case-study approach, mostly concentrating on three examples of Palestinian cultural production. This approach strengthened the paper methodologically, as it allowed for a more focused analysis of the chosen artists' work. Including the three case studies, however, also presented additional challenges as each came with its own set of problems and questions. This was particularly relevant to my research with Al Zaytouna. Since the theatre is a group venture, issues around negotiation are more prominent in its case than when it comes to the work of individual artists. In addition, *dabke's* symbolic value for Palestinians produces additional considerations regarding the importance of heritage preservation for the diaspora. I would have liked to analyse these issues in more detail, but was unable to do so within the scope of this project.

The other decision made during data collection was to reduce the emphasis on interviews compared to the more "ethnographic" methods such as observation and performance analysis. I initially intended to conduct household interviews with the artists' families but I abandoned the idea when it became clear that for most respondents the family was not at the forefront of their artistic considerations. Overall, the final number of interviews was on the lower end of what was originally intended. Given the case-study approach and the amount of data gathered during events and rehearsals, however, I did not find a greater number of interviews necessary.

With regard to the issues covered in this research, they broadly followed those in the initial proposal, with perhaps a slightly different focus. The original project aimed to investigate the role played by family and diaspora members in affecting artistic practice. During the research, I discovered that while family was obviously important in the process of identity-making, cultural production resulted largely from influences beyond purely familial ties. Consequently, the final paper has less emphasis on the role of family and community, and brings to the fore the decisions and negotiations of the artists.

Another area of research which produced unanticipated results was the role of campaigning organisations and event organisers, and their influence on Palestinian cultural production. The artists saw themselves as independent from the campaigns, and their work was never “commissioned” by a particular organisation. This meant a weaker emphasis on event organisers in the paper than perhaps originally intended. However, the interviews with organisers were still a useful method of data collection as they revealed a degree of self-sufficiency among the artists I did not appreciate to begin with, and allowed me to really focus on issues of decision-making and negotiation, thus linking themes of politics and identity.

Finally, the project title also changed from the original proposal. While the artists saw their work as political, some wanted to differentiate it from “traditional” politics. As a result of the interviews, I removed the words “protest” and “artist-activist” from the title as I found some of my respondents might have been uncomfortable with them. I hope this reflects the participant-driven and individual-focused nature of this project.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview schedules

Interview schedule A: Palestinian artists

1. Personal and family history

- First/second generation; half-Palestinian, UK-born?
- Where were you born/brought up?
- Family's migration history – who moved, how, when?
- Do you maintain Arabic/Palestinian traditions at home? What are they?
- Identity: how do you see yourself? Palestinian/British? Other? Where is “home”?

2. Relationship to Palestine and Palestinian diaspora

- Thoughts about Palestine/associations. What images/memories of Palestine do you have from your parents/family/other Palestinians?
- What does it mean for you to be Palestinian? It is it about: culture/language/relationships/politics?
- Have you ever visited Palestine? Are you in contact with family in Palestine?
- (How) do you engage with the Palestinian diaspora in the UK? Do you have Palestinian friends? Do you attend Palestinian events?
- Do you have a relationship to Palestinian politics? Are you part of any organisations/campaigns/institutions/parties?
- Do you speak Arabic? At home/to other people? Do you read Arab/Palestinian literature, listen to Palestinian music/watch Arab/Palestinian performances?

3. Art/Performance

- Why do you do what you do? What do you see as the main point of your art? Are you a full-time artist or is it a hobby/interest?
- Why this form of art, what medium used, why, how does it change effects?
- What are your most important messages?

- Is it important to you that your art is political? What does this mean to you? Do you think it matters to your audiences that you are Palestinian? How different is your engagement from non-Palestinian artists?
- How does being of Palestinian descent influence your work?
- What are your most important artistic influences? Are you affected by any Palestinian artists? Does your family affect your art/performance? How does living in the UK affect your work?
- Do you engage with other (Palestinian) artists? What sort of events do you participate in? How much choice do you have about what to perform? Are you always happy to participate in certain campaigns/events?
- Language in cultural production – is it important to use Arabic? Why do you use Arabic/English? What do you think using Arabic/English adds?
- Which “traditional” Palestinian symbols do you use? What do they represent?

Interview Schedule B: Event organisers

These conversations will be more unstructured and will depend on the particular organisation and organiser interviewed. Specific questions about particular artists the organisers worked with might be added, if relevant.

- What sort of Palestinian events do you organise? What do you want to achieve?
- How do you relate your campaign to Palestinian politics?
- What sort of artists do you engage? Do you consciously choose Palestinian artists? Any young people? Second-generation?
- What is the relationship between the campaign and the Palestinian artists: who sets the theme? Who is invited? How much freedom do artists have?
- How do Palestinian artists work with non-Palestinian artists? Does it make a difference to have Palestinian artists involved?
- What are your audiences? What reactions do you look for?

Appendix 2: Interview excerpt (Selma Dabbagh)

(Introduction not recorded – we speak of her recent appearances, I summarise my project and talk about the different people I've spoken to. We start covering identity issues and we realise it's probably a good time to start recording not to miss anything important)

- From what I understand it's your father who is Palestinian and he came over here...
- Yes, my father is Palestinian and he was born in Yaffa. And we left in 1948 when he was 10 because he was hit by a grenade thrown by some Jewish groups who were active in the area. He was nearly killed and he left with his family on a stretcher in 1948. And that was something which was very powerful as a sort of story that he told us from as early as I can remember. And I think the issue with him sort of being forced into exile and made a refugee and his... the trauma of that, I don't think that ever left him. It's a big thing in our household. It's something that often came up, particularly in times of stress for him. Us not knowing what is what like for him to have gone through this. My mother, in contrast, comes from a very, I would say, middle class English background. Her father was in the services, he was in the marines and she had a lot of privileges in terms of education... My dad went from Yaffa to Nablus for a couple of days with his extended family and then they all went to Syria, and the thought that they'd just wait there until the fighting died down and then return to Yaffa, which of course they couldn't. So they ended up staying in Syria until the early 60s and then some of the family moved to Jordan, some to Kuwait and my dad went to Kuwait for a while where his older brother (my dad is the youngest of 7). His older brother was the one who ended up supporting them and taking on the fatherly role. Because from what I understand my Palestinian grandfather was quite... he was imprisoned 3 or 4 times by the British Mandate Authorities for his political activity. And I think he came out of prison not the same man and I think the exile really shocked him. So it was really important for the brother to take over. He managed to get Kuwaiti nationality and he supported my dad in going to England. My dad came to England in 19... I think 1956, he met my mum in '61, they got married in '65, I think. In terms of my Palestinian identity I would say it was strong in terms of the personal connection with my father and the sense of injustice which was ongoing. And I think I became more and more aware of it from what he told us. My parents would sometimes find books which they thought were not too biased the other way to show us. But I don't know that I particularly felt... because I went to school in Kuwait when I was 8...
- And was this through the family connection or separate?
- Completely separately. It was my dad who was a civil engineer here and then he got a job with the Kuwait Firm for Arabic Development, it's a World Bank type organisation. And we moved there with my sisters, my older sister is two years older than me and my younger sister is 4.5 years older than me, and we went to school there. Actually looking at it now, in the classes me and my sister were in it was probably 70% Palestinian, a very high percentage of Palestinians and I would say there I didn't feel particularly Palestinian.

I felt quite English in a way. There were also quite a lot of kids who were half-half so they were mostly my friends (*laughs*), the half-half crew.

- Was it also because of the language or personal experience?
- I think experience but also culture at home. I was allowed to do things which other girls were not allowed to do. My dad was fairly liberal, relatively liberal with us. I could go out, although I had to be home by 10, I could go to parties and we were allowed to dance... And I think also language excluded us, perhaps we didn't feel excluded, we were just in a different group. So I think at the time the Palestinian side of me was not dominant in my life. I think I felt it much more when I came to England and I went to university. I was at Durham University when the first Gulf War happened and my father was trapped in Kuwait for three weeks during the invasion. And I think it was seeing how biased the news reporting was, and the lack of, I'm not explaining it very well, I mean that was quite traumatic for all of us. Him being trapped there and us being not able to do anything and the realisation that anything possible could happen to him. And then he left on his British passport after 3 weeks, he managed to sort of sneak out through Iraq into Jordan. And that's something I wrote about in a short story.
- Yes, that was actually one of the questions I was hoping to ask you. Was that the inspiration...?
- Well, yes. It's not my story, it was actually connected to my story. My dad actually went with a friend of mine who was in the car, Sonja, so it was a bit from her perspective.
- So the girl is not you?
- It's not me, no. None of my girls are me. And yes, I felt that was a turning point. And I felt very angry about it and I felt there was so much news coverage around the people I was talking to about it. And that made me more curious. And the second Intifada was going on at the time and I became much more interested in these events. I was also studying international law and human rights and something just made me think (because I wanted to go to the West Bank) that I should look at human rights organisations, which I did.
- And before that you hadn't been to Palestine?
- Now, I hadn't been. Nobody in my family had, actually. It was just, you know, at school in Kuwait we had to cross it out of the map and write "Occupied Palestine" on the first day of our geography lessons, that's what we did. And cross out "Persian Gulf" and write "Arabian Gulf" (*laughs*). Because it really made a difference (*laughs*). So nobody had gone back but I really wanted to go, and it was... also I didn't have any contacts, I didn't have any family there, I went to work with this human rights group. And they interviewed me for about a week and it got to the point when I didn't have any money so had they not offered me a job I wouldn't have been able to go to Cairo anyway (*laughs*). And I did this job, and I spent 3 months there working on a tourist visa, and that, if anything, changed me. It was that experience, it was probably the best experience I've ever had. Because it was a really well-run organisation and they were really amazing and inspiring people, the people I worked with. Many of them had been to prison or had family in prison... and they were just so dedicated. And I think we really felt we were part of something

together, the organisation, that we were really struggling towards a cause. And I felt that the skills I had to bring it were something I could contribute and it was really appreciated. But after 3 months I left on this tourist visa and then the Israelis wouldn't let me back. I did keep trying but I just didn't have the permission. So I stayed in Cairo and I worked for the human rights organisation there. But it was not the same, I felt that... and then all my work after that was somehow related to Palestine: in terms of my Masters study, and I got married to a Palestinian. And... our life was very much more demonstrations, talks and a lot of voluntary work. I started a legal career and I qualified as a lawyer but the Palestinianness informed it, and I was interested in discrimination issues at work, and I worked with civil action against the police, it was a sort of broader mindset than just the one cause. And then I went to Bahrain which was really kind of arbitrary (*laughs*), it was a very quick decision because my ex-husband and I had been talking about going to Gaza as the peace process was going on to live there. Because with all the organisations being set up after the Oslo accords they needed a lawyer. So he was going to get that great legal job and I was going to find something there. But that job never came about. But by then we sort of got this idea in our heads about moving abroad, and his sister was in Dubai enjoying it. And we thought we would just go to Dubai and pay off our debts. And then a couple of years went back, and we went there. It's this typical thing with the Gulf, you go there and you get stuck. And from being in this very politicised idealist environment I had in London I was suddenly in this very corporate, basically dead... there was very little I could do there.

- There was no active Palestinian community there?
- There is but what you do is you have fundraising events, you'd have dinners... with 2009 and the assault on Gaza people were making cakes and sending aid parcels, that kind of thing. And that's fine, and you do that but in terms of your agitation and various things going on I don't know what I could do there that would include me. So I started writing shortly after that, I'd always wanted to write. And I decided to start with short stories. And then with short stories what started coming out was stories about people who felt that the revolution had failed them, or they felt that the revolution had defeated the people who were on the outskirts. And I guess that's how I felt at the time. I felt that I wasn't doing anything and I could be doing a lot more. So in a way that was my way of recreating the world that I had perhaps lost, that I had been engaged with and lost.
- So would you say that for you the sense of Palestinian identity was more related to this sense of injustice than your upbringing?
- Yes, I would say it was more of a political thing. Because I wouldn't say we had a particularly Palestinian household in terms of, you know, entertaining or what we, how we do things at home... or language, my Arabic is still not very good. In many ways I'm very English. My English grandparents would take us for walks in the New Forest and we grew up on marmite and toast so there is a strong element of that as well...
- So not hummus?
- Well, we had that as well.

- Because a lot of the people I talk to tend to say: Oh, my food was Arabic...
- Well, we did had Arab food, my mum cooked both. And we had more of that in our houses in Kuwait but I can't say that I felt very connected. A lot of it was because of the language, of course, but a lot of it was because (*thinks for a while*)... in some ways I felt a little bit excluded because we weren't religious at all. Religion wasn't even mentioned, I didn't even know what religion I was (*laughs*). I think I must come from one of the most irreligious households I've ever come across. I actually thought I was Christian until I was 8 (*laughs*) and I then I found out that I wasn't. I guess if you come from a household which is mixed and you grow up to think that these things aren't important, when went to Palestine we saw how bitterly people thought that they were important to bring about the state of injustice and dispossession, I think it kind of, probably affected me more.
- When you travel there or even here you're surrounded by a lot of Palestinians, but do you feel part of it?
- It's half and half. I think it depends on... There was this series about Palestinians, *Chronicles of a Refugee*, when you see that, I definitely felt very part of it. And I think it's a hard question... I think maybe with Westernised Palestinians you feel immediately like you can connect. But I think it's a bit artificial sometimes because there could be differences in education and class which always separate people. There are certain Palestinians in Kensington that I don't really relate to at all. But I think probably most of my friends now, probably half of them are originally Palestinian and the other half, everyone is sort two backgrounds or of multiple backgrounds. I think it's still a medium I'm most happy with, being a bit challenged by where they're from.
- So you said your writing started around the time you became politically active. But at the Bristol event I went to you said you didn't think a writer should be a spokesperson for a people. And yet you appear at a lot of the different political events. I was wondering how you feel the two work together.
- It's a really difficult one. I think you can be a spokesperson for a people in certain environments. But I think to say to a writer of fiction, even for Palestinians to say to a writer of fiction: "Well, you shouldn't be covering X and Y because that's not something we want to expose to the West or the outside world" in a same way that you would do a PR agent who is covering a government or a cause or place, it's not the expectation of fiction writers. Because I think you should be able to explore the actual... try to get into the state of being and the way that people are emotionally challenged by the people around them. Because it's really the emotion which communicates about the situation. And I do think we should be responsible about what we present if it might lead to stereotypes and misrepresentations, but as long as you're being reasonable and responsible then you should have a bit more freedom not to be just simply uplifting. There is really a lot of bad Palestinian writing which always has very noble heroes, the *kaffieh* and the Kalashnikov, there is no possible weakness that can be shown by those people, they're invincible. I can see where it's coming from but I'm not sure it's

particularly the most interesting character. And I think you should be able to show these people in a way that is negative as well as positive. They're not always going to be heroes given the state of repression. In fact most of them will probably not be and will end up doing bad things because the stakes are so high in terms of moral decisions that are being made all the time. I think that's one of the reasons why Palestine is an interesting place to write about because a lot of fiction writers are often looking for conflict and tension. And a lot of that is based around moral choices, and a lot of what people have to constantly decide about, for example having a family compared to doing great political things, but it's also small things on the day to day level. And I think sometimes you are going to show people being weaker than the ideal. And I think you shouldn't be afraid of doing that. At the same time I don't think there's a contradiction... There is a role for literature to present the situation and to challenge stereotypes and to make people interested in the cause. I think in Bristol I gave this example of a novel about Guatemala which got me fascinated about Guatemala with no prior interest. So I think you can lead the way in for people in a way which makes them curious. It's not going to give them all the answers but they can take it from there, they can read newspapers in a more critical way and go to non-fiction books.

(Interview continued after this excerpt)

Appendix 3: Sample research diary entry

“Commemorating Al Nakba – Celebrate Palestine” event, London, 15 May 2012

The foyer is buzzing with people, it seems the event will be pretty packed. There are a lot of young people around, as usual, many different accents can be heard. I can also recognise some familiar faces from the Palestine Society Campaign events. In front of the door, there are a few leaflets about different campaigns. Zaytoun, the organic olive oil company also have a stall.

I spot Ahmed and Leila from Al Zaytouna. They’re very friendly as always and invite me to sit with them. We take our seats towards the front of the room, just behind a group of mothers with Palestinian children in traditional outfits. Many of the mothers are wearing headscarves and traditional long outfits. They adjust the children’s sashes and laugh – the kids are from Zajel, a *dabke* group run by the Palestinian school. They will start the show. Looking around, a lot of people seem to be Palestinian (perhaps more than at other events?) – some are wearing the *keffiyeh*, some the traditional Palestinian robe. Behind them there is a group of young people speaking English and Arabic. On the other side, representatives from Zaytoun. At the back there are the representatives from Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. They are the loud ones in the room. In general, lots of other people of different ages.

Leila is disappointed with the Al Zaytouna turn-out: “I’m surprised more people didn’t show up. This is the sort of event they should turn up to.” We get to talk a bit – Leila is second generation, half-Palestinian (her mother is English), she grew up in Cirencester where “no-one was like her”. She only became aware of “people like her” at university and that was “very nice”. They had the same situations at home. She remembers videos of her dancing *dabke* at weddings when she was a little girl.

Zajel start. A lot of them are quite young kids, and they dance to traditional *dabke* music. They get a huge applause, there is clapping and shouting throughout the performance. Leila gets excited (“I always love them”) and so does Ahmed (“We do the same dance!”).

A representative from Zaytoun comes on stage and talks about his doubts about organising this event. He thinks the *Nakba* should be something which is contemplated in silence and not “celebrated” with an event, but he decided to come and speak in the end because he thinks it’s important for the Palestinian community to come together and show their strength.

He is followed by an Australian-Arab performer Phil Mansour whose album is devoted to Palestine. He has video in the background during his songs. In one of them, refugees in a camp in the Middle East have written on their hands the names of cities and villages they came from in Palestine. A mother in front of me, excited, grabs her daughter and points at one of the names. Another young boy points at footage of places he knows during another

clip, and shows them to the boy next to him. People are visibly moved during some of the songs, especially those about the right to return.

Rafeef Ziadah closes this half of the event. She is introduced as a Palestinian refugee/poet, organiser of the event. At the start of her performance she asks everyone: “Just shout out the name of the village or city you are from in Palestine”. The room fills with different voices trying to shout louder than the others. Leila shouts hers out as well. Rafeef introduces herself (“I always say this: I’m a refugee from Occupied Palestine, soon to be free Palestine”) and the event: (“We organised this event because we thought Nakba couldn’t pass without something cultural.”, “The world needs to see that we don’t just sing chants in the streets, but that we survive through our poetry, our *dabke*, our music.”; “After every social movement it is the culture that remains”). Visibly moved, she performs her poem about a little girl dying during the Gaza Siege (*Hadeel*). The atmosphere during her performance is incredible – there is clapping, shouting, laughs, silences and tears (hers and the audiences).

Appendix 4: Photos from Al Zaytouna’s preview show of Unto the Breach

Courtesy of Al Zaytouna Dance Theatre

Image 1: Quarrelling between political factions



Image 2: Presenting hunger strikes of political prisoners

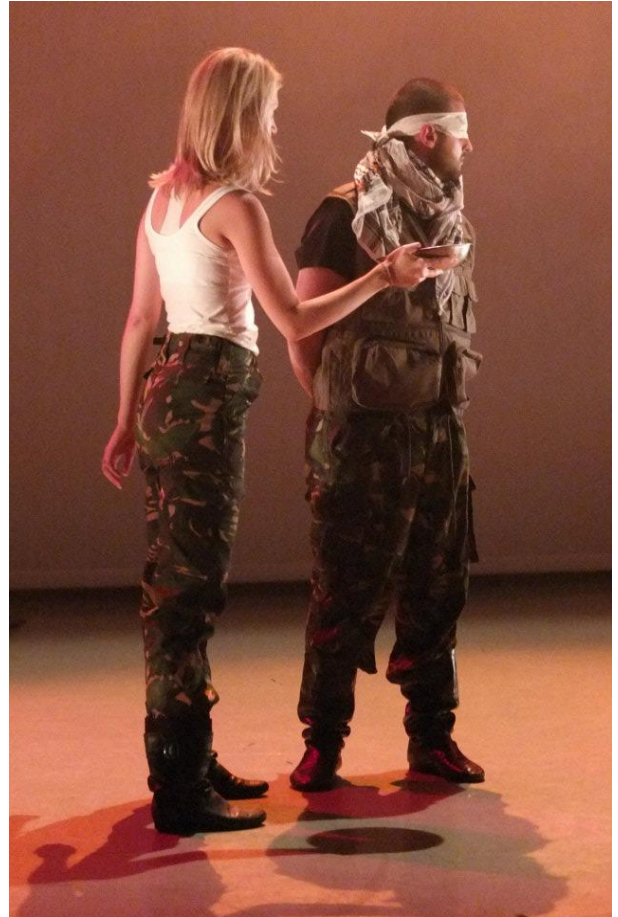


Image 3: The Intifada (“uprising) – stone-throwing



Image 4: Checkpoint scene (1)



Image 5: Checkpoint scene (2)



Image 6: Some traditional dabke to close the show

