

# Something's wrong here: transnational dissent and the unimagined community

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Based on ethnographic research in 2011–2012 this paper explores the production of a transnational community through various dissenting practices in Israel–Palestine. In a critique of instrumental and structural approaches to transnational dissent, from micro-level framing processes to the macro-level concepts like Global Civil Society (GCS) and networks, it builds understandings of the affective dimensions of protest and proposes that a transnational community is being produced through a shared feeling of wrongness. Drawing upon recent reassessments of community conceptualisations [Amit, V., & Rapport, N. (2002). *The trouble with community: Anthropological reflections on movement, identity and collectivity*. London: Pluto; Djelic, M.-L., & Quack, S. (Eds.). (2010a). *Transnational communities: Shaping global governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Rapport, N., & Amit, V. (2012a). *Community, cosmopolitanism and the problem of human commonality (anthropology, culture and society)* (Kindle.). London: Pluto Press], this paper asks why the moral actors from GCS limit their imagined community in spatial terms. In a world of movement, where the everyday practice of community is as likely to be defined through shared worldviews as it is through shared place, the challenge is to ask how we may engage in recognising and re-imagining transnational activism as not merely an episodic and instrumental *gesellschaft* but as a praxis of fluid, interconnected and self-reproducing *gemeinschaften*.

**Keywords:** transnationalism; activism; community; affect; Israel–Palestine

## Introduction: imagining the community

*Positive change does not come quickly and demands ongoing effort. If we become discouraged we may not attain even the simplest goals. With constant, determined application, we can accomplish even the most difficult objectives.* (Dalai Lama, n.d.)

For millennia Jerusalem has been a crossroads and a destination, a site of transnational social emplacement where armies triumphed and retreated, merchants paid their toll and kept their piece and migrants and pilgrims came and went and stayed. The city is a repository of the unending cultural accretion of thoughts, tongues, texts, deaths and lives that touch upon its hills. Today 'pro-Palestinian' activism is a significant contributor to these ongoing processes and the practices of Palestinians, Israelis and Internationals coming together are clearly producing a community of sorts. In addition to the instrumental practices like demonstrations, documentation and dissemination, there are also avenues for occupational specialisation, economic channels and spaces and occasions for casual socialisation.

The notion of community is used by this highly heterogeneous collective of dissenters. However, it is often imagined to be small weak and fractured. Its boundaries are thought to terminate at municipal or state borders and it is fractured along ideological spectra, prognoses and tactics. The categories used by members to describe the community reflect traditional and idealised understandings of community, as a geographically bounded population which possesses a relatively harmonised outlook on the world.

Contemporary research of transnational social processes in fields such as economics, international relations, migration studies, knowledge production and global elites are

decoupling the notion of community from 'place' and finding communities of 'purpose', 'practice', 'episteme' or 'interest'. Building on this body of work, this paper asks why the field of transnational activism studies has 'on the whole not used or appropriated the term "community", preferring terms such as "networks" or "social movements"' (Djelic & Quack, 2010b, p. 40). This absence also highlights certain problematics that the practice of transnational activism poses for established paradigms and concepts in social movement theory, at both the micro-level specificities of framing process theory and the macro-level abstraction of Global Civil Society, and the metrics used to describe and analyse the concept.

In the first instance, framing process theory or collective action frames are found to be more divisive than cohesive and often unsuitable for addressing the elusive and fluid nature of contemporary transnational power and resistance. Emphasising both social and psychological dimensions, framing process theory has developed richly since Goffman's early work, providing in-depth analyses of a crucial component of social movement practice. Originally conceived as schemata of interpretation 'rendering meaning, organizing experiences, and guiding actions' (Goffman, 1974, p. 21), frames are now understood as complex, contested and cascading processes which must resonate on both cognitive and affective dimensions (Borah, 2011; Gould, 2004; Schrock, Holden, & Reid, 2004). Yet, between the local and the global, the transnational dimension of contemporary dissent challenges the effective development of collective action frames which can resonate across cultures and social-groups (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Olausson, 2009).

Moreover, terms such as Global Civil Society (GCS) and Transnational Networks are structural abstractions which though descriptively and analytically powerful can obscure the affective and potentially productive dimension of 'belonging' that community affords. By the turn of the millennium, GCS was an idea of 'unusual promiscuousness' (Keane, 2003, p. xi) employed both by academics as a major sociological potential (Beck, 2005) and by proponents as 'an expression of the love of life, freedom, community and democracy that resides deep in the soul of every human being' (Korten, Perlas, & Shiva, 2002). Like grand ideas such as nation or society, GCS has always been a fuzzy concept, at once manifest yet difficult to empirically define.

Network analysis proved a sophisticated and empirically grounded methodology from which to approach the various emergent instances of GCS. Its tool kit allows us to compare how signature characteristics facilitate goal achievement, communication flows and mobilisation processes, the extensity, intensity and velocity of its macro-structure and the constitution of global public spheres through hyper-network structures of inclusion and exclusion (Anheier & Katz, 2004).

Though well suited to describing and analysing transactional exchanges, many affective dimensions of dissent have also been addressed through network concepts. Juris (2008) in particular highlights how the shared experiences of intense emotions at mass events like Seattle, Prague or Athens generate affective solidarity, which is 'particularly important with fluid, network based movements that rely on non-traditional modes of identification' (p. 63). Nonetheless, in the tension between descriptive and normative capacities of social sciences there is always the problem of reifying our object of analysis through our methodology and our abstractions can become essences in the minds of academics and its practitioners alike. Pro-Palestinian<sup>1</sup> dissenters are keenly aware that they are part of a transnational network and they do imagine themselves as belonging to such a structure.

However, in this paper I wish to suggest that another significant affective process is occurring but is overlooked both by academics and practitioners, the practice of community. I believe that this affective consequence of dissent may be significant for just as the sense of community belonging is leveraged by major polities to promote cohesion and durability (Anderson, 1991; Berezin, 1999, 2001; Billig, 1995), it is possible that by imagining themselves as part of a wider transnational community dissenters may also overcome fragmentation and fatigue.

Community is also a fuzzy subject having both concrete and constructed connotations (Olwig, 2002). Certainly there are concrete relationships involved and as with any community these may come to be defined through both friendship and enmity, but I suggest that the practice of dissent by a diverse and distributed population is also akin to what is normally seen as an imagined community. This is partially a consequence of the ongoing nature of the conflict for, in contrast to the intense affect of mass mobilisation described by Juris, dissent sociality in Israeli and Palestine is shaped by long duration, scheduled protest and the interim and uneventful daily routine of being a dissenter. Though there are often intense confrontations, these happen mostly on Fridays and Saturdays in locations far removed from each other. Many members of the professionalised dissenters, those in local or international NGOs may not even attend or are contractually prohibited from participation in such events. In the weekly interval between protests there may be special actions organisations or the ongoing efforts of NGOs. But there are also the unspectacular and banal everyday practices of daily life such as the meeting of friends, family and colleagues, going shopping, writing emails, dropping the kids off to school or going or taking the bus. However, over time it is precisely through such familiar and concrete routines and faces that we come to feel we belong (Rapport & Amit, 2012a).

The established choreography of weekly protest in Israel and Palestine, the specific places in time where protests are organised, lead to 'emplaced sociality' (Pink, 2008) in which diverse backgrounds converge and share experiences and feelings which in turn enable the future sharing of those stories with others and the recognition of those experiences amongst peoples whom have never actually met. This is as much an imagined community as Anderson (1991) could have conceived of, though not one controlled by a constructed collective memory but by a shared sense that something is wrong. This feeling of wrong need not amount to or be sustained at the level of 'moral outrage' (Nepstad, 2004; Nepstad & Smith, 2001; Risley, 2012; Warren, 2010) but it has been felt wrong enough for long enough to bring people to particular places in Israel and Palestine. The emplaced sociality continues in the days between demos where quiet streets, shops, schools and offices are also shared sites of dissent sociality and in which participants become as loosely, intimately or indirectly familiar as the people meet each Friday. Though the concrete community is certainly experienced, there is a wider and fluid population of unmet dissenters whose emplacement happened at different times and places but whom nonetheless share the sense of wrongness. It is the imaginable yet unimagined community which this paper addresses.

The present paper is based on 12 months ethnographic research which began in October 2011. The field was approached through the Israeli contingency by regularly attending two weekly protests in Jerusalem. Methodologically I did not join any particular movement or place of protest and was not closely involved with the strategic workings of an organisation or ideological goals of a protest. Following Jean-Klein's (2003) lateral ethnography, I limited my own inclinations and followed the movements and suggestions of participants. This approach

resulted in an emphasis on the social aspects of dissent over the strategic or instrumental. I begin by describing a typical weekend protest routine which brings together a highly heterogeneous group of activists on a regular basis.

Even within this small gathering, which constitutes only a fraction of the concurrent protests in the region, there is an impressive diversity of critiques and imagined solutions. Examining this diversity highlights the utilitarian limits of framing processes when transnational activism opposes diffuse power systems. Nonetheless, a high degree of unity is achieved by the consensus that something is wrong. Following on from Prinz' (2007) equation of morality with non-cognitive affective appraisal, the elusiveness of transnational framing is overcome and the uncodified moral impetus of GCS is found to function well enough (Beck, 2005; Keane, 2003). Taking this embodied judgement to be the shared motivator, I suggest that despite the 'moral multiverse' by which the diversity of actors come to practice dissent the shared feeling of wrongness in turn produces a sociality that is equivalent to what we can call 'community-like' practice. In focusing on the strategic outcomes and reifying network abstractions, academics may be overlooking the sense of community which may be crucial in dissent's ability to reproduce and endure over time (Jasper, 2011). In doing so, we also fail to legitimise such practices as being community in the imagination of dissenters. With this paper, I hope to contribute to the large body of work on emotion, morality and social movements and to be 'movement relevant' by arguing that dissenters may access the positive potential and greater extent of community, if they can legitimately imagine it so (Berezin, 2001; Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Goodwin & Jasper, 2004; Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001; Gould, 2004).

### **Who are we? Protest demographics and discourses in Jerusalem**

There are places across Israeli and Palestine where the sociality of dissent occurs. Some, like the regular weekend protests, are scheduled in time and space. Others, like the cafes, bars, infocentres and offices, are available during trading times and yet more like the city streets, the private homes and the social media sites afford random access. Below I provide a description of a one Friday's fieldwork in which out of the dozen or more weekly protests occurring across the region I visited two in Jerusalem. Fridays and Saturdays are routine for these are the days on which protest is regularly scheduled. Perhaps routine is the key notion in the case of Israel and Palestine. Of the two events, Sheikh Jarrah has been held every week since 2009 and the Women in Black have been holding their vigil for over 25 years. The main tactical consideration is to persist and so the same Palestinians and Israelis come to practice dissent together week after week and year after year. Additionally, these protest performances are, like tourist honey-pots and Broadway musicals, well known and accessible to International dissenters throughout the year. Though they may come and go, Internationals from all over the world also have the ability to exchange common experiences of place, protest, emotions and critique even though the sharing occurred at different moments in time. I consider the diversity of critique found at these protests and the use of complexity as a barrier to social change, before considering the potential of community as an unintended and unimagined product of taking action when something feels wrong.

I leave the kids off to nursery on Friday morning before getting a message that the protest at Walaja is called off so I go to West Jerusalem to join the weekly silent vigil held by Women in Black. Dina who keeps the black hand-shaped placards usually arrives first with Tanya. They are joined by half a dozen, other Israeli women dressed in black. About three to five

Internationals with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)<sup>2</sup> also arrive. They are volunteers on three-month rotations in the region and their movement between protest sites or security checkpoints is dictated by their coordinator. I met Mia and Marco here on my first day in the field, she from Finland and he from Switzerland had also just begun their three-month placements with the Jerusalem team.

The vigil is laid out along three sides of Kikar Paris, a small square that sits between four of the Western city's major thoroughfares. Given the small size of the group, which is usually no more than 20 people, the protest body is dispersed in clusters rather than grouped together. I usually chat with a few different people catching up on the weekly news both personal and political and keeping an eye on fellow protesters being angrily berated or insulted by passers-by. The silent vigil has gathered here in West Jerusalem every Friday for the last 26 years calling Di LaKibush.<sup>3</sup> Having abjectly failed to achieve this end I asked Tanya why they continue? 'We keep this space open, so that people know they can come here on any Friday'. At the stroke of two the women greet the end of the vigil with smiles and light-hearted relief. There is small bustle of chit-chat as everyone comes back together to return the placards to Dina's bag and with a criss-cross of Shabbat Shaloms everybody heads on their way.

This leaves me an hour or so to cross the city centre to the weekly protest in Sheikh Jarrah. The distance is walk-able and takes you from predominantly Jewish West Jerusalem, up to the Old City walls and down past the commercial heart of predominantly Palestinian East Jerusalem at Bab al-Amud.<sup>4</sup> On the way, there is enough time to drop into the Educational Bookstore on Salah Ad-Din Street. Mia and Marco had told me about this place, full of books in English relating to the conflict and cappuccino and cakes. The EAPPI teams are brought here as part of their induction training. This is also where I met Avner properly for the first time, a young Israeli man whom I would have seen several times before at Sheikh Jarrah chanting out slogans in Arabic over the mega phone. In the quiet proximity of the bookshops, our glances of recognition turned to handshakes and first names exchanged and we walked on down the road together to join the Sheikh Jarrah protest at four.

Dina and Tanya are usually parking by the time I get there. I see Mia and Marco with some others from the EAPPI and am drawn by their smiles. A handful of local men who have been evicted or face eviction from their homes constitute the core of the group. One brings a fine frilled Palestinian flag on a long pole. Occasionally other locals join, children play with crayons and Palestinian activists from the Hebrew University turn up. A regular group of Israelis bring a mega phone and a bag of placards. Sometimes the Yasamba drummers add volume to the protest. There are activists with Ta'ayush, B'Tselem, Breaking the Silence and any number of Israeli left-wing organisations, visitors from the International Solidarity Movement and factfinding Christian missions. Some people take signs from the bag and stand by the road side or around the samba band and join in the chants, but the majority hang back in small intimate groups, surprised and smiling when they meet someone they have not seen for a while. Its normally quiet, there are no police here now and only occasionally tensions rise with some of the Jewish settlers who now live in the evictees' homes. At the end of the protest the activists disperse, heading home perhaps or to meet friends or prepare for Friday dinner. I head to Uganda, one of a few places in West Jerusalem that stays open on Shabbat.<sup>5</sup> It is usually quiet at this time and I write up my field notes, but often others I know drop-in at this time. Like Nur who I recognised from a march in Tel Aviv. She is here to meet Rachel, a Jewish activist arriving from England and we talk over beer and humus. Rachel kindly offers me a place to stay in London for my upcoming conference.

Though initiated and led by local Palestinians, the Sheikh Jarrah protest is not particularly constituted either by the local community or a particular movement. This is generally true of most of the weekend protests which are impressively transnational in their make-up but number less than 100 people at best. Not present at the protest are teams of lawyers engaged in the ongoing court cases deliberating the evictions. The Norwegian Refugee Council, which along with several other local and major international NGOs are based in the area, also coordinate some of the legal assistance. Journalists, researchers and various other agencies monitor, assist, publicise and interject in Sheikh Jarrah in various ways. This is a snapshot of a moment in the dissenting community in Israel and Palestine. The protest is temporal social 'performance' in Turner's (1988) terms which for an hour or two brings together people from various neighbourhoods, cities, countries and predilections. Aside from a few organisers and shapers of the protest practice, the majority are not fully engaged with a given script for this performance. It is not a Durkheimian cohesion ritual focused on a collective totem (Durkheim, 1912) nor a carnival affair or intensely affective direct action event (Juris, 2008). Some chant, some do not, some do not like certain slogans, the volume of the drums annoys one while others do a little shimmy. Mostly people are sitting or standing in small groups chatting casually and on the whole participation is fluid, informal and elective. I began to explore the various understandings of the situation by appropriating the classic protest chant and asking participants 'What are we fighting for?'

### **The moral multiverse**

Nilli: 'What are we fighting for – oh that's a hard one – we're fighting for different things you see – I don't know, can I get back to you on that'

Vered: 'I'm fighting so I can go camping, hiking at the weekend. I want a normal life'

Moshe: 'I could give you the political answer, justice, equality, bla-bla-bla, but I just want to live in a normal city. Like Montreal'

Khalid: 'This is not political this is social'

Kate: 'I'm here in solidarity with the Palestinians'

As the above responses demonstrate, ideological discourse is also fluid and relatively unascribed. While Palestinian national flags are present and the chants call out 'Free Free Palestine', such overtly nationalist symbols and notions are often rhetorical devices. This is true even for the Palestinian organisers, as Khalid's statement shows. Though in many imaginations the Two State Solution is the obvious answer, Farouk from Al-Tariz tells me he does not care what flag flies 'so long as I'm left alone to build a house and raise my family, find work – that's what peace is'. Amongst Internationals, Palestinian national liberation and justice are strong tropes, as is anti-Semitism according to one Israeli activist. Others talk of respect for Human Rights or liberal democratic values, while some defer judgement saying they are on 'fact-finding' tours. Israeli critiques and visions of the future are also fragmented. While the Women in Black call for an end to occupation, Yigal from B'Tselem thinks this 'a rather outdated notion'. The One State Solution is openly posited while another sees hope in the future primacy of urban polities and focuses his efforts on Jerusalem. Subjective critiques are unfolding and coming to Sheikh Jarrah has also changed peoples' perceptions. Moshe, an Israeli citizen raised in the USA 'came to Sheikh Jarrah a classic left-Zionist Two State

activist ... after that year I was an anti-Occupation activist'. Tomer, who had never protested, came here because he 'did not think it was right that the police were arresting people' and is now with Anarchists Against the Wall.

Sheikh Jarrah is fairly typical of much of the 'Popular Committee' form of protest activity which has been prevalent for the past decade or more. Its focus is a particular localised instance of dispossession, it insists on being peaceful and avoids overt alliance to the major Palestinian political parties. It invites Israelis and Internationals to join and persists in the face of physical coercion and incarceration by state and private security agencies. These protests are all monitored by numerous Palestinian, Israeli and international NGOs, journalists, filmmakers and researchers. Reportage is published in local and international media outlets and is also included in publications by and for major global governance organisations such as UNICEF, UNDP, The European Union and the Quartet. Efforts at direct contact and coordination between the various protests are now being attempted through personal networks, conferences and strategy meetings. However, with the exception of one or two isolated cases there have been few instrumental gains. In the absence of any political opportunity structure over the last number of years, these protests are critiqued by some as symbolic acts (Al Saa'fin, 2012). Debates on indices of success or failure and the importance of symbolic acts aside, we can concretely say that these protests have managed to persist for years and have played a significant role in the growth of international dissent to Israeli policies (Landy, 2011). Though instrumentally we can rightly call this diverse set of peoples and practices a network, what sustains these protests week after withering week is the affective component of the sociality of prolonged dissent, which is producing what maybe properly understood as a transnational community.

### **Division through complexity**

There are though significant obstacles to a sense of unity amongst such a collection of peoples, both real and imagined. This is an impressively heterogeneous group containing a liberal mix of cultures, experiences, genders and generations. It holds a multitude of different understandings of the problem and its resolution and such diversity of opinions is inevitable for three main reasons. First, there is the obvious relativity of acculturated understandings, experiences and expectations of Palestinians, Israelis and Internationals. This is further compounded by the historical depth and unfolding nature of the situation and its complexity of narratives and counter-narratives. These narratives have been central characters in a major geo-political performance for over a century now with each character vying for the attention, sympathies and assistance of audiences and powers near and far. Third, in this period of 'relative quite' expropriation of Palestinian land and property is not simply a state-controlled exercise. It is a transnational project where private capital, diaspora resources, urban planning, archaeological preservation, environmental quality, messianic beliefs and other stakeholders devolve the state from culpability.

Much of the differentiation between dissenters' understandings is to be found in the modes of dispossession employed by 'pro-Israeli' agencies. In East Jerusalem alone a property developer and a religious tomb are driving evictions in Sheikh Jarrah; in Silwan, illegal homes are demolished and a bronze-age archaeological dig undermines foundations; a national park is established on the land of Issawiya and a by-pass road is set to cut Beit Safafa in two. In Area C of the West Bank, where the Israeli military has jurisdiction over the Palestinian civilian population,<sup>6</sup> dispossession occurs by various means. The construction of the West Bank

'barrier' around Walaja, the settlement security fences near Beit Ummar and the military Firing Zone 918 all confiscate land on the grounds of security needs. Construction companies expanding settlements and their road systems are all part of infrastructure development and 'natural growth'. Absence of infrastructure is also effective, as when raw sewage from the Betar Lilit settlement pollutes Palestinian agricultural land below. Bureaucracy and the rule of law are also significant. Palestinian villages like Susiya remain 'unrecognised' and so they are not connected to transport, water and power infrastructures and have their homes, schools, sheep pens and porta-loos demolished on the grounds that they are illegal constructions.

Attributing blame and proposing a resolution on which there can be consensus is difficult. For collective action framing there is simply no unifying diagnostic to describe the problem, no definitive protagonist to highlight and no certain prognosis for resolution. Framing process theory sees movement actors as 'signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, bystanders or observers' (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 613). Collective action frames function to organise experience and guide action 'by simplifying or condensing aspects of "the world out there" but in ways that are intended to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilise opponents' (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). While I do not dismiss the descriptive and analytic utility of framing theory, the diffuse powers that transnational collectives of dissenters face increasingly problematise this process (Olausson, 2009; Schrock et al., 2004). Such diffusion of power is now common across the liberalised globe. While the dictator's delight in pasting his bust on every street corner ultimately portrays him as the head that must roll, the evicted Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah are locked in an Israeli court fight over private property rights and Ottoman era documentation. That their opponents in court are Nahalat Shimon International, one of a number of US funded organisations that have explicit Zionist motivations to settle Jews in East Jerusalem, has no bearing on the proper proceedings of civil cases (Fendel, 2010; Ir Amim, 2009; OCHA, 2010; Reiter & Lehrs, 2010). Apportioning blame in Sheikh Jarrah is highly problematic and is just one particular instance of how dispossession has been advanced during this period of quiet.

However, the lack of unified diagnostic or prognostic does not preclude participation in protest, nor does it inhibit non-instrumental socialisation by the dissenters. Given that most protests are routine events, there is a limited need for tactical meetings and those that occur are not open to the dissenting masses. Being 'normal' people, dissenters spend much of their week tending to the ordinary needs of living, the quotidian affairs. In doing so, a complex of intersecting personal networks and structural momenta produce a high degree of non-instrumental exchange as a matter of routine, hospitality, friendship and chance. A Rabbi, an Anarchist and an Arab walk into a bar is not a joke, the bar just happens to be Uganda. This is what Stewart (2007) calls the 'ordinary affects' of life, the unceasing and unremarkable encounters which make up most of our days. The residents of Sheikh Jarrah invite activists to join them in breaking the Ramadan fast for Eid al-Fitr. Vered visits a hospital in West Jerusalem to be with the family she knows from Bel'in. She has not seen them in almost a year and their young son is seriously ill. A Jewish-American activist falls in love and marries a Palestinian in the West Bank. Mia returns from Finland for two weeks and we go for coffee where an (other) anthropologist friend of hers joins us. I am asked if I can collect someone's cat from the vet in West Jerusalem and bring it to Bethlehem. Introductions are made at dinner parties and particular 'bi-lingual' schools become places for dissenters to send their children. If all this direct and indirect sociality, structure, specialisation, leisure activity exchange and

contestation existed within a village or neighbourhood there would not be much compunction about using the term community.

Is the colloquial use of 'community' just shorthand for dissent's capacity to produce social capital – 'ties that are based on mutual trust and mutual recognition [that] do not necessarily imply the presence of collective identity' (Diani, 1997, p. 129). To what extent is collective identity essential to the notion of community? Indeed, how and why should we be talking about community at all? In the last section, I discuss the historical understanding of this concept in social science and its contemporary reformulations. I suggest that what links the various interpretations, practices, purposes and interests is the shared feeling that something is wrong. To use Nate Silver's term *Wrong* is the affective signal which cuts through the discursive noise and is what motivates the disparate individuals to come together (Silver, 2012). The consequent enmeshed sociality of this political tourism, structured by the famous protest performances and the intervals of ordinary living, follow and create pathways of dissent sociality that are often devoid of strategic content. In the small and severely constrained landscape of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the daily reality of military occupation creates inescapable avenues along which dissenters are compelled to travel. When one chooses to attend the performances of dissent and follow the pathways that lead from one to another the faces and places encountered become familiar, shared and sometimes intimate. Is this what we might call community?

### **What is community?**

'There's a left-wing community in Tel Aviv, but not here in Jerusalem'

Vered Amit points out that the historical practice of ethnography has reinforced a correlation between place and community, in effect employing location as the unit of analysis rather than the object of research (Amit & Rapport, 2002). Anthropology took its time in coming to understand that their cultural isolates were not timeless units of utopian sociality. In the 1950s, Max Gluckman and the Manchester School confirmed that 'tribal' life was neither harmonious nor isolated. Gender, generation, blood lines and indeed any facet of a social structure as much shaped dissent as it did order (Epstein, 1969; Gluckman 1955, 1958; Mitchell, 1969; Turner, 1957, 1967). Some time passed before this observation was applied to that great community of modernity, the Nation. Gellner and Anderson were amongst the first to unpick the historical contingency and the mechanisms through which national communities had come to be imagined in the minds of their members (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983, 1994). The later turn to transnational studies has further problematised traditional concepts of belonging and also questioned the role that academia has played in reproducing the notion of nation as the natural representation of modernity (Appadurai, 2008; Beck, 2005; Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002).

If communities need not be constructed from harmonious outgrowths of concrete social bonds and face-to-face relationships, then what are they? There is insufficient space to fully address this debate here, but the transnational turn has led to a reformulation of the concept in various ways. Studies on migration, business and finance, trade agreements, tourism, scientists, elites and more now talk of transnational communities in which 'place' is of secondary importance or less. Instead we have communities of practice, episteme, purpose or interest which are based on shared convictions, values, expertise, goals or socio-political visions. What

most authors agree on is a sense of belonging emerging from mutual interaction, a common project and/or imagined identity and the active involvement of some of its members (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Blanc, 1994; Djelic & Quack, 2010a; Hannerz, 1992; Levitt, 2001; Mayntz, 2010; Metiu, 2010; Morgan, 2001; Morgan & Kubo, 2010). Despite the perceived explosion in transnationalism ‘approaches that dominate the study of globalization direct attention selectively to markets, organizations, and networks, neglecting other kinds of social collectives extending beyond national boundaries, such as communities’ (Mayntz, 2010, p. 64). Though some authors are now beginning to critically apply the term to transnational socialites (Dobusch & Quack, 2010; Mariussen, 2010; Metiu, 2010), its general absence limits our understanding of the both role and impact of novel community formations in the studies of social protest and the wider discussion of how and when community is produced.

### How is community?

Amit uses the term community to distinguish a collective connection that is not merely or even primarily instrumental. This excludes for example members of a workforce if they engage only through formal roles. However, when co-workers begin to meet for coffee, lunch conversations or go bowling together some of them may come to feel part of a community.

*Most of our experiences of communality arise similarly out of more or less limited interactions afforded by a variety of circumstantial associations, with our neighbours, the parents of children at our children’s school, or team-mates, fellow students, club members, conference-goers and more.*  
(Amit & Rapport, 2002, pp. 58–59)

This sense of belonging, through quotidian and banal interaction which Amit calls consociation, emerges first through eye-contact, recognition, then being able to put names to faces, telling stories about mutually shared experiences, and in some cases leading to friendship, intimacy, love or lasting animosity. An example is Dyck’s observation of the construction of community sentiment in suburban Canada through the consociation practices of parents supporting their children at track and field days. At these weekly events parents shared the purposes and practices of positive child rearing, leading to formal identification as a ‘track parent with reference to a person’s history of co-participation with others in happenings’ (Dyck, 2002, p. 116). Repeated presence at and participation in track days, entailing casual social interactions and a growing intimacy with both people and behavioural norms, can lead to one being identified with – and feeling as part of – a community. Even more limited, less formal and indirect familiarities are produced through the proclivities of our daily routines. Over time we begin to recognise others, at shops, bus stops or our favourite bars. By regular movement through spaces we learn the rhythms of the lives of people whom we do not know. For Wallman (1998) recognising and occasionally being recognised by others in these ‘traffic relations’ also fosters a sense of belonging, without the need for direct interpersonal relationships or substantial exchange. Implicit in Wallman’s analysis is the awareness that community imagination comfortably accommodates an affinity to others whom we shall never meet. This understanding is of course in line with Anderson’s (1991) formulation of national belonging and also evokes ‘a wider set of social potentials that exist for a specified population’ (Pink, 2008, p. 171). However, the community of dissent, which passes through Israel and Palestine, is a rather ambiguous population to specify. Due to its diffuse and dispersed constituency, in which ‘belonging may or may not be recognized, interpreted, responded to and

felt' (Amit in Rapport & Amit 2012b), and because of its non-traditional modes this population is not well imagined as a community along its transnational dimension, either by observers or practitioners.

### **Communities of practice, purpose, interest and affect**

All the community processes outlined above are apparent if one spends a few months at sites of dissent such as Sheikh Jarrah, Beit Ummar or Kikar Paris. Authors have been re-imagining the concept of community in the face of such novel socialities and perhaps we could call the transnational populace that pass through these performances a community of practice, purpose, interest or episteme. While the popular committee protests do share a mode of practice in non-violent or more properly 'unarmed' resistance, practice alone would exclude the professional contingency of journalists, legal experts, fund raisers and NGO assistance that have such crucial and engaged roles. The purposes of protest performances are well stated in the local dimension; resisting evictions, dispossession, restriction, ending the occupation, etc. However, there is no consensus on the greater purpose of the network of protests, as Nilli admitted 'we are fighting for different things'. Perhaps, we can better imagine this transnational dissent as producing a community of interest or episteme. However, interest too 'must be understood in a very general sense to avoid misinterpretation' (Mayntz, 2010, p. 66), whereas episteme has more generally been applied to communities of 'professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain' (Haas, 1992, p. 3). We can say though, that even while practices, purposes interests and episteme are differentially constructed and constrained, everyone from the Palestinian waiting at the checkpoint, to a Rabbi for Human Rights, the Anarchist blocking a bulldozer, the UN report compiler, the fact finding Christian or Fasel who wants his house back, all share the feeling that something is wrong there.

This feeling is not of secondary importance, nor is it a mindless reaction. It is a sophisticated, pervasive and often astute process by which we perceive, understand and judge our world. This model of affect follows from the work of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio who sees emotions as describing the relationship between the organism and the environment. Emotion is not the result of higher cognitive process, it is not the by-product of a rational actor designed to prepare them for fight or flight. It is a 'wordless knowledge' which informs our understanding of the world and the actions of others independent of conscience discursive critique (Damasio, 1997, 2000). Jesse Prinz expands on this to propose that emotion is a form of perception and that feelings of Right or Wrong are an embodied judgement on an act or a behaviour subjectively apprehended which constitutes the essence of morality. Feeling that something is wrong is what tells us that a moral precept has been transgressed (Prinz, 1997, 2004, 2007).

There is of course no universal Right or Wrong which we all access. Wrong is a cultural construct and we cannot doubt that those advocating a 'Greater Israel' through the expansion of settlements feel this to be the Right thing, but all transnational dissenters be they foreign or local come to the scheduled sites of protest because they feel something is wrong. They may arrive there by different paths but they have all become moral actors. Palestinians who have lived for generations under both banal and violent expressions of military occupation have little reason to judge their lot as somehow legitimate. Many Israeli dissenters have had to overcome nationally promoted sentiments of Right and Wrong and both they and the Internationals are no doubt also being acculturated in some way by the emergent 'moral entrepreneurs' of GCS (Beck, 2005).

Given that the feeling that something is wrong is the basis of any moral judgement and precedes cognitive formulation, the need for a unifying framing is not proven for collective mobilisation. Regardless of its origin or object of attribution, what resonates with all is the sense of wrong and this is enough to sustain dissent and overcome discursive complexity, ideological tension and post-modern obfuscation of oppression. Driven by the ambiguous certainty of wrongness, these people move through and come to share the established and emergent physical spaces in which first faces and places become familiar and then possibly loved or loathed in concrete relationships. Yet, others in the dispersed population equally engaged by this sense of wrongness pass by unmet in the bustling commerce of dissent. It not only apposite and analytically useful to conceive of dissent in Israeli and Palestine as producing community on the basis of a sheared sense of wrong, it is in many ways a more concrete and inclusive unit of analysis than the practices, purposes and interests.

### **Conclusion: imagining the unimagined**

It would be wrong to ignore the impediments that this community faces. It is certainly not a peaceful 'place' to be and is the object of systematic derision, oppression, incarceration and occasionally violent death. Its national fragmentation is highly problematic. Despite being ideal candidates for cosmopolitan identity, the mobile, affluent and urbane Israelis find it particularly hard to subordinate nationalist identity and their role as the oppressor. Palestinians in the occupied territories have an impeded capacity for movement and which restricts their opportunity for non-instrumental activities; you cannot simply go for coffee in Jerusalem. The Israeli and Palestinian constituents are not only a minority in the surrounding populations, they are dispersed across a dozen or more performances which mostly happen at the same time on Friday or Saturday, thus diminishing their visible extent. Though the Internationals bring much needed vigour to activities, their framings and actions sometimes unintentionally offend both Palestinians and Israelis. For this they are mostly forgiven but their high turnover diminishes the sense of permanence of the community. The professionalisation of dissent and service provision by NGOs is also open to accusations of profiteering or 'normalisation' (Allen, 2013; Nakhleh, 2012). Finally, it cannot be said that there has been much material success in terms of ending the occupation, and few Palestinians or Israelis speak of hope.

Communal divisions, costly misunderstandings, a fast and fluid turnover of people and institutional dysfunction are perhaps inevitable in transnational communities, indeed we have come to expect as much from their traditional counterparts. However, such issues will inevitably play out through framing processes and novel negotiations in the unfolding global civil structures. A lack of instrumental progress or hope and subsequent burnout and despair are perhaps the most difficult and most important issues to address, and not just for pro-Palestinian activism. Many other contemporary social issues requiring major structural realignment, such as the global capital system, military-industrialism, patriarchal power and so on, will not be overcome quickly and will be opposed by resource rich embedded interests within those structures. If as academics we recognise that community is 'good to think with' we can still critically approach the ambiguities of its instances in terms of scale, duration, mediation, formalisation and so forth (Rapport & Amit, 2012b). Perhaps more relevant to the performance of dissent, given that community is traditionally evoked to express and harness social capacity and a sense of permanence, its appropriation by academia may also assist its practitioners in re-imagining the extent and potential of their own novel social formations. The knowledge that from within GCS distributed communities emerge, interact and provide a legitimate sense of

belonging may assist dissenters in imaging their capacity to endure what may be many years of striving to put the obvious wrongs of the world to right.

### Notes

1. The term pro-Palestinian is technically problematic in that it may not be a central rationale for some dissenters and because it falsely connotes 'anti-Israeli' stances in other quarters. However, its colloquial power is sufficient to describe many of the undefined sentiments discussed in this piece.
2. Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. A programme of international observers developed by the World Council of Churches in 2001.
3. Di LaKibush (Hebrew) meaning End the Occupation. This is written on each black-hand placard in one of three languages, Hebrew, Arabic or English.
4. An Arabic name for a major gateway on the Old City walls. Also known as Sar Schem (Schem Gate) in Hebrew or Damascus Gate in English.
5. Shabbat (Hebrew) runs from sundown on Friday evening till sundown on Saturday evening. Most commercial venues in the Jewish west of the city and all public transport stops. Private cars become a premium at this high point of the weekly protest cycle.
6. In the West Bank since the Oslo accords, the Palestinian Authority nominally administers civil and security matters in Area A and civil matters in Area B. Israel administers security in Area B and both civil and security matters in Area C.

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