Beyond Expectations of Resilience: Towards a Language of Care

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This article draws from hundreds of interviews and conversations with survivors of wars and violence in different contexts to show the limits of resilience. I bring together stories from my experiences talking with survivors across many countries—including Palestine, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Qatar, Jordan, and the United Kingdom. Through employing ethnographic and autoethnographic methods, I argue that resilience expectations may impose supernatural coping mechanisms on communities struggling with adversities, romanticize them as exemplary in enduring injustices, obscure their humanity, and normalize (structural) violence they continue to experience or reduce its severity. I question who benefits from an overemphasis on and financing of resilience, especially within (international) development organizations. The communities I spoke with all contend that resilience is not just a useless word but also a discourse, a way of thinking, and a policy implemented during difficulties. They emphasize that the cheap (re)production of them as extraordinary people, who are expected to endure suffering, is violent because it places the onus on them to be resilient on issues beyond their control while, often, ignoring layers of (structural) violence and subsequent traumas they face. As an alternative discourse to resilience, I propose a collective and caring approach that deals with root causes of violence instead of ignoring them.

Cet article se fonde sur des centaines d'entretiens et de conversations avec des survivants de guerres et de violences dans différents contextes pour montrer les limites de la résilience. Je rassemble les histoires de mes discussions avec des survivants de nombreux pays, notamment la Palestine, l'Afrique du Sud, l'Irlande du Nord, le Qatar, la Jordanie et le Royaume-Uni. À l'aide de méthodes ethnographiques et autoethnographiques, j'affirme que les attentes de résilience sont susceptibles d'imposer des mécanismes de défense surnaturels à des communautés confrontées à des difficultés, de les romancer comme exemplaires par la façon dont elles endurent l'injustice, de masquer leur humanité, et de normaliser la violence (structurelle) qu'elles continuent de subir ou de réduire sa gravité. Je m'interroge sur les personnes qui tirent parti de l'importance excessive accordée à la résilience et de son financement, notamment au sein des organisations de développement (internationales). Les communautés auxquelles j'ai parlé affirment toutes que la résilience n'est pas qu'un mot inutile, mais aussi un discours, une façon de penser et une politique mise en œuvre lors de ces difficultés. Elles insistent sur le fait que leur (re)production facile en tant que personnes extraordinaires, qui doivent endurer la souffrance, est violente, car elle leur attribue la responsabilité de se montrer résilientes par rapport à des problématiques qui échappent à leur contrôle, tout en omettant souvent les couches de violence (structurelle) et les traumatismes qu'elles subissent par conséquent. À la place de la résilience, je propose une approche collective et soucieuse des autres, qui s'intéresse aux causes profondes de la violence au lieu de les ignorer.

Este artículo recoge los testimonios de cientos de entrevistas y conversaciones con supervivientes de guerras y de violencia en diferentes contextos con el fin de mostrar los límites de la resiliencia. Reunimos historias de experiencias relativas a mis conversaciones con supervivientes en muchos países, incluyendo: Palestina, Sudáfrica, Irlanda del Norte, Catar, Jordania y el Reino Unido. Sostenemos, a través del uso de métodos etnográficos y autoetnográficos, que las expectativas en materia de resiliencia pueden imponer estrategias de afrontamiento sobrenaturales a las comunidades que padecen las adversidades, tales como: idealizar estas adversidades como ejemplares cuando existen injusticias duraderas, oscurecer su humanidad y normalizar la violencia (estructural) que continúan experimentando o reducir su gravedad. Nos preguntamos quién sale beneficiado de un énfasis excesivo en la resiliencia y de la financiación de esta, especialmente dentro de las organizaciones de desarrollo (internacionales). Todas las comunidades con las que hablamos sostienen que la resiliencia no es solo una palabra inútil, sino también un discurso, una forma de pensar y una política que se pone en marcha durante las dificultades. Enfatizan que la (re)producción barata de ellos como personas extraordinarias, de quienes se espera que soporten el sufrimiento, les resulta violenta porque les impone la obligación de ser resilientes en cuestiones que escapan a su control y que, a menudo, ignoran las capas de violencia (estructural) y los traumas posteriores a los que se enfrentan. Proponemos, como discurso alternativo a la resiliencia, un enfoque colectivo y solidario que aborde las causas profundas de la violencia en lugar de ignorarlas.

I dream of never being called resilient again in my life. I am exhausted by strength. I want support. I want softness. I want ease. I want to be among kin. Not patted on the back for how well I take a hit. Or for how many. Instead of hearing "You are one of the most resilient people I know," I want to hear "You are so loved." "You are so cared for." "You are genuinely covered."
—Zandashé l'orelia brown (2022) - @Zandashe

I have been frequently called resilient ever since I made my way out of the Gaza Strip in 2013 to study a master's degree in "Global Politics and Law" in the United Kingdom. I was able to leave Gaza through the Rafah Border with Egypt and then to Cairo Airport where I flew to the United Kingdom. The journey would take a few hours but in an uncertain political situation back then, it took much longer. It was dangerous too, to say the least. Less than a year after I arrived in the United Kingdom, an Israeli aggression on Gaza began (2014). My family who lives in the eastern part of Gaza were forced to evacuate their homes as the bullets and artillery shelling got closer. As the Israeli attacks intensified, I was continuously asked in emails, lectures, and activist spaces about how I "remain strong" and "what I do to cope with the situation back home." I was hardly able to get in touch with family. Deep inside, I was not sure whether I was coping or I was strong. All that I wanted back then was the safety of my family. I cared less about languages or metaphors.

In 2021, my home experienced another Israeli aggression. This time, it was worse in its intensity. The videos I saw on Twitter of airstrikes were terrifying, not like anything I have seen before. The new Israeli F35 jets launched loud and constant airstrikes. I would hear them live as I spoke with my parents via WhatsApp. It was difficult to observe those from afar, let alone live through them. Once again, I was constantly asked how I was "handling it all," living away from family while they faced endless violence. I was also asked in emails about mechanisms I used "to cope with such violence." It was not long before I came to realize that coping with difficulties and rising or bouncing back from adversities is the ultimate definition of resilience. I started to realize the limits of resilience narratives through teaching, especially while conversing with students and colleagues at the University of St Andrews, and through research, especially on Northern Ireland, a region that has experienced much pain and suffering throughout the twentieth century and beyond. My research got me to see and read about several murals in and around Belfast, one of which was particularly relevant to resilience:

> Stop calling me resilient because every time you say,
> "Oh, they are resilient,"
> That means you can do something else to me.
> I am not resilient.

I saw the same lines repeated on posters throughout New Orleans in 2015 by grassroots organizations and activists who opposed the resilience discourse imposed by the city of New Orleans' strategy (; Woods 2017). The significance of these lines lies not only in their expression of a politically resistant community, but also in their rejection of expectations of strength through significant adversities. The words belong to Tracie Washington, President of the Louisiana Justice Institute, who requested that policymakers and media stop calling Hurricane Katrina and BP oil spill victims resilient. Rejecting the resilience framework, she added, "we were not born to be resilient; we are *conditioned* to be resilient. I do not want to be resilient . . .. [I want to] fix the things that [create the need for us to] be resilient [in the first place]" (emphasis added) (Feldman 2015). Taking Tracie Washington's words into consideration does not only mean refraining from the terminology but also focusing on identifying then challenging/changing methods and actors that produce the need to be resilient in the first place. Building on this, I argue that instead of expecting any community to cope with adversities, international development organizations (which are popular in their usage of resilience discourse) should define experiences using the population's own terms and hold oppressors accountable while digging deeper to tackle the root causes of violence.

Questions about "coping mechanisms" continue to come my way, and I have started to realize that there is often an expectation that I am coping unless I show otherwise, that my vulnerable moments in silence in diaspora are not recognized or seen. They are not valid. I have also started to realize that the main problem in resilience questions is a problem of expectations. In other words, individuals and communities have a right to not be resilient. They also have a right to be resilient. No one should expect someone to be the latter. Such expectations add further burden on already suffering communities when part of the human experience entails moments of fragility. Expecting people going through difficulties to deny themselves or murder their subjectivity can be dehumanizing in how it deals with them as if they have supernatural coping mechanisms that can endure anything, imposing mythical terms. It reduces them to rigidly emotionless bodies, detached from feelings of vulnerability. It also romanticizes them as exemplary in coping with adversities, obscuring their humanity and even diminishing the depravity of oppressive projects that work to maintain control over their suffering (Shwaikh 2021).

The discourse of resilience continues to be prevalent in society. There is still a positive value attached when someone is deemed resilient. We may have listened to motivational talks about how resilience is a cherished attribute to overcome difficulties. We may have come across international groups aiming to enhance our understanding of the term. Some educational institutions may invite motivational speakers to teach us the importance of resilience to our lives. And increasingly in academic spaces, resilience is used to encourage students and staff to be "productive" during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. If they are not productive enough, then it is assumed something is wrong with them, as individuals. This puts the burden on them even when it is the structures that should support their labor. At the heart of expecting their "normal" productivity during or shortly after a crisis is an ignorance of layers of structural letdowns they continue to face and their subsequent impacts on their productivity.

In the classroom, we may have studied literature with the underlying message of the significance of resilience. An American student in my MLitt module at the University of St Andrews shared one example in early 2022 for Tupac Shakur's poem "The Rose That Grew from Concrete," which was a required reading for her American literature class. It reads:

> Did you hear about the rose that *grew*
> *from a crack in the concrete*?
> Proving nature's law is wrong
> It learned to *walk without having feet.*
> Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams,
> it learned to breathe fresh air.
> *Long live the rose that grew from concrete*
> When no one else ever cared (emphasis added)

Through a resilience lens, this poem glorifies the beauty of a rose while ignoring that roses are not planted in concrete cracks, similar to multiple stories of humans who are glorified for rising from significant adversities.

I understand resilience as the physical and mental capacity of individuals and communities to not only cope with pain and stress arising from oppressive political and socioeconomic systems and situations, but also bounce back and be stronger, especially within violent (colonial) contexts. I

argue that resilience is a political tool used by global development organizations to pass the burden of coping with violence to individuals instead of tackling the root causes of (structural) violence. These organizations hardly hold aggressors accountable, and they may contribute to perpetuating violence. Often comprised of individuals from privileged positions in the "Global North," these organizations have a responsibility to be mindful of the impacts of their imposed languages on the "Global South" as potential tools to rob local people of their choices, which may include opting to not be resilient.

This article draws from hundreds of interviews and conversations with survivors of wars and violence in different contexts to show the limits of resilience. Through employing ethnographic and autoethnographic methods, I bring together stories from my experiences talking with survivors of violence across many countries—including Palestine, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Qatar, Jordan, and the United Kingdom. I discuss how resilience discourse has emerged, followed by an elaboration on the difference between *sumud* (steadfastness) and resilience, and an extensive analysis on the dangers of resilience expectations against vulnerable communities, starting with its heavy reliance on quantifications. Thereafter, I describe its detachment from local realities, and how it deals with locals passively and neoliberally. The final section explores alternatives to resilience, arguing for an approach that centers collective care and addressing root causes of (structural) violence.

The Birth of Resilience Discourse

Resilience is derived from the Latin word, "resilio" or "resilire." It means "to jump back" or "bounce" (Klein, Nicholls, and Thomalla 2003). The origin of the word has not yet been determined. This paper traces its source to the early nineteenth century in material science. It may have stemmed from Tredgold's work (1818) on the "transverse strength of timber" where he explained why some wood accommodated serve and sudden loads without breaking (McAslan 2010, 2). Since then, physical scientists have used it to refer to "the characteristics of a spring" and the "stability of materials and their resistance to external shocks" (Davoudi et al. 2012). Other scholarly literature argue that resilience began with the study of maltreated children, and the responsibility of everyone (frontline clinicians included) to prevent abuse in all its forms, from physical to emotional, and to support those affected (Wald et al 2006). Here, resilience is a process of "effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma" (Windle 2010, 1). Its subjectivity is particularly encouraged by "highly circumscribed imaginary," which is mostly defined by "survivability" (Reid 2018, 1). Three positive traits are central here: adaptivity, flexibility, and the fostering of "enduring relationships" (Holling 1973; Chandler 2012; Brassett, Croft and Vaughan-Williams 2013).

The language of resilience entered the field of ecology in the 1960s, and it has also been highly influential in a range of social science fields, including psychology and disaster studies. In ecology literature, there is almost an agreement that resilience is a system's capacity "to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks" (Walker et al. 2004, 2). In other words, and evoked by the etymology of the word, resilience not only is about one's ability to withstand or absorb oppression and accommodate (Evans and Reid 2013, 85) or suc-cessfully and positively adapt to external threats (Chandler 2012, 217), but it is also grounded in one's ability to return "to shape" and restart "the original position" (Lax 2021, 155). But how can subjects who experience constant violence retain the capacity to regenerate without breaking down? Why is it expected that they should constantly re-emerge from ongoing emergencies and multiple layers of traumas? And why are those who cause their suffering not held accountable by those same institutions that push the suffering subjects to stay resilient? The answers lie in the neutralizing and undermining of the impacts of resilience, reducing the severity of violence, and freeing organizations (with resilience agendas) from their duty to do enough. In this process, the most disadvantaged (including but not limited to the poor, oppressed, colonized, occupied, "underdeveloped," and post conflict) communities are pushed toward an "aura of positivity" (Keelan and Browne 2020, 459) while encouraged to develop "buffering capacities" (Timmerman 1981, 163). In other words, communities on the verge are pushed to "buffer the blows" (Lax 20212021, 163) and react as if nothing happens through maintaining endurance and normalcy. When injustice is hardly protested, those who commit it will continue with their violations, expecting no outcry or calls for accountability.

The study of resilience has rapidly expanded in its multidisciplinary forms. Psychological resilience, for example, focuses on good mental health and general personal growth while people are exposed to major adversities (Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker 2000; Rutter 2006). In other fields, it is a valued trait that evokes a positive image of strength and the ability to cope with, bounce back from, overcome, and defeat the obstacles thrown at us. It means either "returning to the state or conditions that existed before the disturbance occurred" or "returning to an improved state or condition" (McAslan 2010, 10). In both cases, resilience refers to grit, toughness, and the capacity of a human to recover rapidly from difficulties. At the term's heart, feelings, and issues such as vulnerability, (structural) violence, and trauma are often masked as acts of heroism, which may then be applauded by international development organizations and other external bodies.

Success in the face of hardships may deserve praise, but we should question whether lauding resilience, as the solution to hardships, is the way forward. There are many who may survive hardships, whether in conflict zones or beyond, but what often remains unchallenged by those expecting resilient populations are the traumas they live through and the root causes of their struggles. The conversations I had with my interlocutors show how resilience narratives, at times, may silence the suffering of those who need compassion and care the most. It may push for binary understandings and classifications of people; when some are able (or choose) to be resilient and others unable (or choose not) to be so, the former are seen positively in society and the latter are not only disapproved or criticized but also blamed for not *managing* to cope with difficulties, as if it was their individual fault. When individualizing this process, societal structures, whether it is governments, nongovernmental groups, or international (development) organizations, may not be held accountable for failing these individuals. In the words of Marie Berry (2022, 946), "thinking of resilience as an individualised outcome belies the embodied and relational experiences at the core of the concept: that to become resilient is to continue standing in the face of violent, unjust systems."

Sumud versus Resilience

In the literature, there are two contradictory arguments about resilience. One contends that resilience is a positive trait in that it offers transformability, elasticity, and being "in mutual assistance" to resistance (Borbeau and Ryan 2018, p. 231). In the same team, some scholars use resilience and *sumud* (Arabic for steadfastness) interchangeably (Ryan 2015; Borbeau and Ryan 2018). Caitlin Ryan (2015) even argues that *sumud* is a "resilient resistance." She writes that *sumud* as resilience "comes from a grassroots level and is a means of empowering Palestinians," asserting that resilience "can be a form" of resistance (p. 310) and represents "living despite the occupation, or even living to spite the occupation, rather than living with occupation" (p. 313). Ryan's work with Borbeau (2018) pushes against reducing resilience to "a neoliberal product" because this "provides an incomplete and biased understanding of resilience in the context of world politics" (p. 222). In agreement, Hammad and Tribe (2020) also use resilience and *sumud* interchangeably to refer to resistance methods. They contend that *sumud* is a "central component of resilience and provides a meta-cognitive framework which Palestinians use to interpret, cope and respond to ongoing injustice and traumatic experiences" (p. 1). While both Hammad and Tribe (2020) made it clear that relying on westernized measures (of resilience) in their research may be problematic, Ryan (2015) rejects the claim that resilience is a primary tool of Western interveners because to do so is to avoid the obvious, which is that "adaptation to shock and finding ways to cope with adversity are not the intellectual property of the West" (p. 300). Based on the data presented in this article, I agree with Ryan in that resilience is not an intellectual property of anyone, the West included, but expecting it in Palestine does relieve external forces, especially international development organizations, from societal responsibilities (including tackling root causes of violence instead of constantly expecting a resilient population). Ryan does not address the dangers of resilience expectations and its reproduction of Palestinians as extraordinary people who are expected to endure all suffering imposed on them.

Unlike (Ryan 2015, 300) who translates *sumud* as resilience, other scholars distinguish between both terms of resilience and *sumud* (Evan and Reid 2013; Keelan and Browne 2020; Lax 2021). More scholarly work addresses the question of *sumud* widely, especially within the framework of resistance in Palestine (Peteet 1991; Hallward and Norman 2011; Pearlman 2014). In this article, I see *sumud* as an act of resistance initiated by Palestinians to resist the Israeli colonial project, while resilience is an outside expectation to adapt and rise from adversities. I see *sumud* as a politics of refusal in which one refuses to let a strong political party decide their fate.

Sumud (Arabic for "steadfastness") is an active, agentic, endogenous/indigenous grassroots act/lens that emerged after the 1967 Israeli–Arab War, amplified and institutionalized in the late 1970s in rejection of the Israeli occupation. It became particularly popular during the first Palestinian intifada (an uprising between 1987 and 1993) and as Palestinians were sharing their discontent with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and "the stalled peace process" (Pearlman 2014, 96). It also may have started as the mere refusal to leave the land (Palestine), but is now widely seen as a more proactive means of resistance that is about, alongside other examples, resisting immobility (Hammami 2004, 18, 27). *Sumud* is also choosing to exist in and commit to the land, on one hand, and actively resisting occupation,

on the other. It is about cultural resistance, maintenance of traditions, and heritage from food to clothing. Everyday resistance (Norman 2011, 8) or infrapolitics (Richter-Devroe 2011) is central to *sumud*. It is where the oppressed challenge the power held by the oppressors, through choosing to exist in the land when one may be able to leave. James Scott writes extensively about infrapolitics being a "discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by power holders" (Scott 1990, 2–4). Annecy Lax (2021) builds on Scott's work and argues that *sumud* is the infrapolitics that builds the conditions and structures for visible political actions.

Unlike the imposed nature of resilience, *sumud* is a choice. It is about knowingly and willingly choosing to resist. It is fostered from within the community and often stirs practical and political solidarity. Rather than bending in an attempt to accommodate in a situation framed by a resilience discourse (Lax 2021, 162), *sumud* is more of an "irreverent disregard" (Rowe 2016, 39). Resilience expectation, on the other hand, is "an imposed substitute for resistance," often used by exogenous actors to shape progress in Palestine. The tragic irony of resilience is that "it renders problematic precisely those populations which are at-risk" to allow "their veritable containment and keep separated from those for whom resilience is seldom entertained" (Evans and Reid 2013, 97). In this process, resilience is not seen as a choice but an expectation. It is an imposter without a root in Palestinian history, encouraged in external intervening strategies. One Palestinian woman summarizes this well when she relays to me, "The discourse of resilience expects us to be strong. This expectation is at the heart of why it is wrong. It is an imposter. Foreign. Has nothing to do with our Palestinian identity that liberally and generously embraces moments of vulnerability" (2017). A second woman notes (2020), "Like all human beings, we have moments of weakness. And we do not shame those who cry amongst us. We surrender to our emotions. We do not expect resilience."

Sumud, on the other hand, as an indigenous term to Palestine, is widely used by Palestinian refugees, who are dispersed around the world. They use it to refer to forms of resistance they employ in their exile, including but not limited to their connection and longing to Palestine. Academics, however, exclude experiences of Palestinian refugees from *sumud* studies—the focus remains on Palestinians within Palestine. Instead of *sumud*, academics center resilience expectations, which, I argue, are both di-historicized and de-politicized of refugees and their experiences. *Sumud* should be inclusive to all Palestinians, and we cannot conceptualize it to one understanding, temporality, or space. Studying the refugee experiences would enhance our understanding of *sumud*.

Sumud can also be used as a tool of oppression when *expected*. In my conversations with a Palestinian ex-prisoner residing in Jenin (the West Bank) in 2020, she shared her disturbance at the misuse of *sumud* as an expectation. In her words, "The world gets used to us sticking to sumud. They expect us all to stick to *sumud*, all the times." Once *sumud* is used as an expectation, it may turn into resilience and become a means to oppress communities. The other worry here is the rise in popularity of *sumud* in scholarly work that it has turned into a fashion rather than resistance strategy at times. Palestinian author Susan Abulhawa criticizes this trend, and how *sumud* portrays "unfathomable Palestinian heroism, courage" and "in mythical terms." Abulhawa is frustrated at how the term has been "romanticized" to convey epic steadfastness, as if Palestinians "can endure anything." Therefore, *sumud*, as a term with cultural and historical her-

itage in Palestine, should maintain its deep-rooted meanings, and any fetishization of the term or the thought of it as an expectation should be resisted.

In the Fieldwork

> I am tired of being called resilient. I am not resilient. I do not cope with adversities. I want to be treated like a human being. I want to be allowed to cry. I want to embrace moments of vulnerability without any judgment or repercussion.
> - Interview with a refugee woman in the United Kingdom (2020)

The empirical evidence used in this paper draws from field research conducted with communities across Palestine, Jordan, Qatar, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and the United Kingdom between 2015 and 2018 and again in 2020 and 2022. The interlocutors insist that their choice matters, whether they decide to adapt to adversities or not. If there is one conclusion of my fieldwork, then it is that resilience expectations reflect a disconnect between how the most disadvantaged communities on the ground engage with the concept and how it is executed.

Palestine is a prime example and a popular field to experiment with resilience for international development groups, often based in the West and aiming to "teach" and "train" communities how to cope with Israeli (structural) violence. My fieldwork is limited in that it does not have the space to examine the impacts of resilience expectations on Palestinians living in Israel, but it recognizes the precarious conditions they face. It does not have scope to examine internal Palestinian politics either and how the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and that of Hamas in Gaza control the populations in both locations. There has been an internal conflict between Hamas and Fatah since 2006, the impacts of which not only split Palestinians at home but also in diaspora. The Israeli occupation force, on the other hand, has been involved in what Sara Roy (1987) termed "de-development" of the Palestinian society. It restricts access to basic facilities, including adequate clean water, provision of electricity, petrol, and construction materials. Inputs and resources needed for Palestinian's internal growth and sustainable economy are also banned by Israel. This includes, for example, building autonomous airports and borders. In the Gaza Strip, there are extra Israeli restrictions. Although Israel withdrew from the Strip in 2005, it maintains a close grip over its residents by imposing air, sea, and land blockades (Ariely 2021, 63). Peace efforts in Palestine, done in a context of an imbalance of power, have been a failure for the Palestinians. The Oslo Accords, for example, relieved Israel, as the occupying power, from its international legal responsibility for the well-being of its occupied population. The responsibility has been administratively delegated to the PA and financially outsourced to the international donor community, which continues to expect resilient subjects.

This takes place within a context of asymmetric Israeli violence caused by continuous illegal settlement building in the West Bank, occupation, confiscation of resources, and arbitrary arrests in other parts of Palestine. There is also violence in the form of curfews, denial of freedom of movement, statelessness of refugees in Jordan, gates in Jerusalem, and surveillance of Palestinians (see Smith 2011). The occupation, a process rather than a one-off event (Smith 2011, 318), is invasively pervasive, and it impacts the everyday life of Palestinians at home and in diaspora. It pushes Palestinians to live in a constant state of uncertainty. Amid this violence, it is important to stress that resilience cannot be fully realized in the present patterning of scattered streets and alleyways infused with a violent (colonial) reality in Palestine and in diaspora.

I interviewed a diverse array of society members between 15 and 75 years of age, with different jobs, education levels, religious orientations, and from multiple regions, including refugee camps in Jordan, townships/cities in South Africa, and rural villages/cities in Northern Ireland. My sample represents an intentional aim of representing a diverse set of views. In 4 years, I spoke with hundreds of people in person and virtually. It is vital to note here that I hold a Palestinian green identity card (from the Gaza Strip) and a PA passport, which means it is unsafe and nearly impossible for me to travel to Palestinian cities, aside from Gaza. Traveling to the Gaza Strip was not possible either, with the politically unstable situation in Egypt following the Arab Spring, which is the route I took to leave the Strip in 2013. A large number of the Palestinians I interviewed are ex-prisoners, with imprisonment and detention being a daily reality for Palestinians (Shwaikh 2020). I did not speak with Palestinians currently in Israeli prisons because speaking through smuggled phones is punishable if noticed by Israeli authorities.

This work benefits from an ethnographic research approach in which I observe, participate, and write about experiences of diaspora and home. I rely heavily on autoethnographic methods too. In the latter, I enter *the field*, take notes, and engage with participants about their daily experiences (Adams, Ellis, and Jones 2017, 3). I reflect on and connect personal experiences to socio-political meanings. I specifically opt for this approach because my personal experience as a Palestinian refugee in the United Kingdom, who is constantly called resilient, is infused with socio-political expectations. In other words, I am expected to be part of socio-political life regardless of how I may feel. I engage in rigorous self-reflection to identify the intersections between my personal story and the stories of Palestinians I met during my fieldwork. I adopt ethics of care and share stories from my life (in Palestine and in diaspora) with Palestinians I met. In our conversations, we engage in a language that supports and cares rather than judges and hurts, showing the commonality of our collective experiences and struggles. We both recognize the difficulties of living as Palestinians, at home or in diaspora, and avoid speaking about our struggle in a hierarchical structure in which it is assumed that some of us may struggle more or less than others. We share stories in which we are celebrated for either "managing to stay in refugee camps" or "choosing to stay in diaspora" and agree that such assumptions do not take into account the contexts of (forced) exile or the difficulty of returning home. Our shared struggles move our conversations into a space of care and center solutions that deal with root causes of violence. We agree that expecting resilience amidst difficulties is not one of these solutions. Of the terms used to describe resilience expectations in my interactions with interlocutors are "dehumanizing," "ageless," "violent," "exhausting," "annoying," and "frustrating."

Merging both my fieldwork data and personal experience, as a Palestinian refugee who has been unable to reach Gaza since leaving in 2013 due to political instability, shows readers "the meaning of [our] struggles" (Bochner and Ellis 2000, 111). This meaning became clear to me in my most recent fieldwork in Jordan, which turned out to be complicated. I arrived in late July 2022 to attend a conference in Amman and then started my fieldwork. A few days later, a major Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip began, lasting from

August 5 to 7, 2022 (Alsaafin and Hatuqa 2022; Tanis 2022). Gaza experienced another major attack a year earlier from May 6 until 21, 2021, and Palestinians have not yet recovered (Ahmed 2022). I have already organized much of my fieldwork and decided to carry on with it. This decision does not define my ability to work in difficult situations or bounce back from adversities. It was rather the only decision I could take then.

On the second day of the Israeli attack, my fieldwork was based in the Gaza refugee camp, an emergency camp for Palestinian refugees displaced from Gaza following the 1967 Arab–Israeli War. In the car, I was joined by my research assistant, a Palestinian refugee himself, and three women from different Arab countries. One woman asked how my family is doing. She then said, "the Palestinians of Gaza are very strong. They will come out [from the Israeli attacks] stronger." By assuming the entirety of Palestinians in Gaza to be strong, she was pushing for resilience expectations. She seemed to imply that all Palestinians are expected to cope with hardships thrown on them, removing the humans of their individualities. I did not have the energy to push back or challenge those views. It is, however, a reminder that even we, Palestinians and Arabs in diaspora, may internalize resilience expectations without realizing their dangers.

In addition to the Gaza refugee camp (or Jarash camp), I also conducted part of my fieldwork in Jabal el-Hussein camp in central Amman. The latter is one of the ten officially recognized UNRWA's Palestinian refugee camps and one of the first four camps founded in Jordan to accommodate refugees from 1948 (Palestinians termed it "Nakba" or ethnic cleansing from their homes) (; Khalidi 2020). For 2 weeks, I lived 1 mile from Jabal el-Hussein camp, which has allowed me to easily access it and have several conversations with its residents. Unlike Jabal el-Hussein camp, with its central location, Gaza camp is about 22 miles from Amman. In the Gaza refugee camp, I visited Sama Gaza, a local charity designed to supporting camp residents. Instead of expecting them to cope with economic hardships (a resilience expectation), the charity is an example of working with refugees as humans, understanding (and responding to) their needs, and training them with skills necessary to be independent business owners. UNRWA's presence was also clear in the services provided, especially in health services and education facilities. In both camps, I was welcomed generously when shop owners and locals learnt that I am a Palestinian from Gaza. This always led to interesting conversations. We spoke about food, cultures, geography, and dreams—in their words, "we have shared struggles." This commonality with interlocutors eliminated the tension that often occurs when researching such sensitive topics and helped in making interviews run more smoothly.

The common theme that stands out for me in conversations with refugees is their constant struggle to survive and cope. One relays to me (2022), "Sometimes, I just want to be weak. Resilience is hard." They are aware of the expectations placed on them to cope with difficult living conditions, but their everyday struggles are not necessarily seen by many, especially those who expect their resilience. "I am exhausted. We are not seen by those outside the camps. Our struggles are not theirs," one Palestinian woman tells me. A second woman reiterates the feelings of exhaustion, "I feel annoyed and exhausted because I do not think those who expect my resilience understand what I have been through." A third woman agrees, "nobody who has called me resilient seems to know as to what cost to myself this resilience has come." In another conversation, an old man shares a story about his ear infection, and the struggle to get medication in Gaza

refugee camp where he resides, with very little help from institutions (local and international) to ensure his recovery:

> I went to the UNRWA clinic in the camp. They do not provide specialised medical treatment there. It is only a general practice. But I had no other choice. The doctor prescribed me a medicine which proved to be wrong later. I struggled with the side effects and did not understand them until I managed to see another doctor in a private clinic where I had to ask several times to be seen for the little money I could afford. I tried really hard. Subsequently, they agreed, and [I paid what I could]. I was not able to leave the camp either because it is far from central hospitals, and everything costs money beyond our ability.

The old man, a refugee whose family is originally from the Gaza Strip, relays to me (2022) that refugees struggle in silence in camps. Just like Palestinians at home, their struggle for a decent life continues. International development organizations lie at the heart of this issue, expecting refugees to stay quiet and deal with their struggles individually instead of tackling structural institutions that harm refugees by preventing them from meeting basic needs. The result of not meeting such needs is multiple generations struggling to survive in camps. The insistence on expecting resilience from already suffering communities pushes us to minimize and, at times, even normalize (systematic) violence. It "reduces its severity" and frees us from our "responsibility and the feeling of guilt for not doing enough because of an expectation that the oppressed are resilient enough and will come out stronger." It lifts responsibility off our "shoulder and that of the international community who may consider the oppressed communities resilient enough and undeserving of support, inflicting even further harm upon [them]" (Shwaikh 2021). If we do not center the oppressed voices and needs and take away their fear and exhaustion instantly, the oppressors may pursue their violence. Against Palestinians, violence continues to be multiplied and multifaceted, starting from Israeli violence that forces Palestinians out of their homes and renders them refugees to (host) countries that engage in practices of institutional exclusion (including local and international organizations) and limit access to basic services from education to health.

Dangers of Resilience Expectations

> They want to tell us how to be "resilient," Can you believe it? They do not understand the meaning of the word.
> - Iman Aoun, artistic director of ASHTAR Theatre, Palestine (2017)

Around the world, international development organizations use the language of resilience liberally. It has become more of a buzzword in these spaces. They organize courses, workshops, training, school curriculum, policies, and other such resources to teach the most oppressed communities how to be resilient in the face of injustice. Data collected for this research contend that resilience is not merely a useless word but also a discourse, a way of thinking, and a policy implemented in conflict zones and during adversities to push them to cope with violence without tackling root causes of such violence.

In these contexts, language becomes vital as it may embody ideological significance, where power is upheld or contested depending on the words chosen (Peteet 2005, 153). Once in use, naming gains a currency that becomes hard to extract (Peteet 2005, 158). More specifically, when ap-

plied by international development organizations, resilience veils deep-rooted traumas, and it becomes harder to extract those veils. Resilience may help in alleviating negative consequences for such traumas, but it does not advocate for structurally political, economic, and social changes. When traumas are largely disregarded, the result is a reproduction of a status quo that ensures the continuation of violence.

International resilience programs may perpetuate the status quo by creating dependency on foreign money. Palestine (and Palestinians) offers a prime example of such dependency, where the overemphasis on foreign-funded resilience programs relieves Israel (from occupation costs) and host countries (from structural changes that ensure that refugees receive citizenship rights). In this context, the PA has become fully dependent on international aid and is forced to be increasingly dependent on the Israeli economy (Tartir 2015, 469). Western governments and donors, on the other hand, remain keen to "blindly subsidise a vulnerable Palestinian economy rather than provide any real attempt to redress the occupation for fear of the political repercussions" (Keelan and Browne 2020, 6). In pouring aid toward Palestine, those donors maintain and sustain asymmetrical colonial relations and relieve Israel from occupation costs. The result is a continuation of occupation policies, without fears of accountability, and an expectation of constant coping. One Palestinian woman, working in an international development organization, sums up the second result well, "I am called resilient a lot by international co-workers who push me and my Palestinian colleagues to work all the time. We are feeling drained."

But how has this dependency (between the PA and Western donors, on one hand, and the PA and the Israeli economy, on the other hand) started? How is it linked to the emergence of resilience expectations? The answer lies in understanding the Oslo Accord, signed in 1993 between the Israeli government and the PLO. Since Oslo, development money has flooded into Palestine (More 2008) and later into Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Resilience programs receive a good share of this support. In her book (2008), Anne Le More talks about how international assistance came into vertiginous sums of money after Oslo. Since then, international aid has become such an important element of the economy that the Palestinians have developed a "novel type of dependency on international aid" (Association of International Development Agencies 2017, 4). This dependency, in the existence of the Israeli occupation, has made it hard for Palestinians to create their own economic sustainability (Keelan and Browne 2020). The aid itself substitutes for the international community's lack of real diplomatic engagement (More 2008) to ensure justice in Palestine and for the Palestinians.

Then, there was another shift as international funding for Palestinians has become more limited. Funding from UN organizations such as UNRWA (which declined in resources since former American President Donald Trump decided to halt its funding in 2018) can be long term but are never sustainable because they increase dependency of local actors on external funds. The shift thus emerged: with less international funding available for Palestinians, the language of resilience has become more popular among international development organizations. Its positive connotations make it attractive to development organizations that are struggling to locate funds to support regions facing adversities. It is often advertised as a way to promote "a sense of 'coping'" and to encourage "Palestinians to better adapt to the negative effects of Israeli colonial policies rather than actively seek ways of overcoming them" (Keelan and Browne 2020, 9).

The international development sector, which has since promoted (and misappropriated) resilience work, often does so uncritically while ignoring individual subjectivity and human agency (Barber 1999; Loughry et al. 2006) and reflecting "unenlightened judgement by the West" (Keelan and Browne 2020, p. 464).

The resilience agenda has even been encoded and enshrined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emerged in 2015. It has framed the requisite action needed for a country to get development aid. The Palestinian National SDGs (2018) are full of resilience vocabularies for educational, health, and other usages. In one instance, a report stipulates, "poverty reduction relies on rebuilding the resilience of the poor and vulnerable households" (State of Palestine 2018, 72). Of course, development aid is vital for the running of PA institutions, but how can one be resilient to poverty? It is exactly what Annecy Lax (2021) unpacks in her work on Gaza's ASHTAR Theatre, destroyed by Israeli forces on August 9, 2018. Lax (2021) talks with ImanAoun of ASHTAR's Theatre who contends that internationally funded programs have been important to financing and preserving on-ground programs in Palestine (Al-Saber and Taylor 2014, 96) but to ask ASHTAR's workers to do more with less resources (and applaud them when doing so) while expecting them to cope with and endure violence to stay open has negatively impacted on their products (Lax 2021, 156–157). It makes for a fragile future, not a sustainable one.

Iman's account is similar to that of ex-prisoners I spoke with between 2015 and 2018, mostly expressing their hopes to "be treated like human beings, vulnerable at times." (Lax 2021, 153–154) problematizes this narrative and the power dynamics behind "laudatory narratives of overcoming adversity in a contested political sphere" and "often-pernicious practice of transferring social responsibility by categorising embattled others as 'resilient' and 'resourceful,' as perpetual survivors." What resilience expectations do here is push the resilient subjects to struggle to adapt themselves. In the words of Evans and Reid (2013, 83), "the resilient subject is a subject which must permanently struggle to accommodate itself to the world, and not a subject which can conceive of changing the world, its structure and conditions of possibility." In other words, the subjects are expected to adapt to the dangerousness of the world for them to partake of that world. The result of such an imposed elasticity is pushing the most disadvantaged toward inexecutable elasticity while maintaining structural inequality and leaving hegemonic power structures intact.

What follows is an unpacking of the three key dangers of resilience narratives about and against vulnerable communities, starting with its heavy reliance on quantifications. Thereafter, I describe its detachment from local realities, and how it deals with locals passively and neoliberally.

Quantifications of Resilience

International development organizations examine resilience in quantitative ways. This quantification is clear in both scholarly and nonscholarly reviews on the prevalence of resilience in specific communities (Kandel et al. 1988; White, Moffitt, and Silva 1989; Radke-Yarrow and Brown 1993; Tiet et al. 1998; Masten et al. 1999; Lin et al. 2004; Collishaw et al. 2007; Jaffee et al. 2007; Vanderbilt-Adriance and Shaw 2008). Likewise, the UN uses measurable and quantifiable resilience approaches in its reports and policies. The 2020s "UN Common Guidance on Helping Build Resilient Societies," a ninety-three-page UN document, stip-

ulates two steps to ensure "a strong focus on resilience-building" (p. 52). One step is largely quantitative, through identifying a shared problem and collective outcomes that are, among many, "quantifiable and measurable." The UN document not only pushes vulnerable communities to identify quantifiable outcomes but also specifies the number of years that resilience-building should take as more than 4 years (UNOCHA 2018; UN 2020, 52). The UN document does not address the rationale behind measuring resilience through quantifying the ability of someone/community to cope with adversities. This approach is unreliable because it does not take into account that communities are diverse, and what works in one community may not work in another. Also, what an individual/community shows (or chooses to show) us in public may be different than times they choose to keep for themselves, including moments of fragility. Understanding resilience may involve not only international development organizations but also an extensive interaction of families, groups, environments, and individuals. Even with all these actors included, resilience remains a complex process that cannot be narrowed down to the number of years, outcomes, or actors involved. Most importantly, it is hard for policymakers to monitor resilience projects so there is no way to measure its impacts.

Sally Engle Merry (2016) speaks about how seductive quantifications of social phenomena can be. Quantifying resilience may simplify knowledge and encourage decisions through numerical data only. The latter allows for hierarchical rankings and comparisons without detailed information or social context, history, or meaning (Merry 2016). Emma Patricia Keelan and Brendan Ciarán Browne (2020) rightly quote Nguyen-Gillham et al.'s (2008, 292) argument against such quantification, which depicts suffering communities as "objects of testable theories." The uncritical application of resilience may entail taking findings of limited studies as if they were undisputed facts. It is an orientalist view to the Palestinian society, assuming that all Palestinians are identical, not realizing or acknowledging unique challenges of different Palestinians at home and in diaspora and their individual subjectivity, in different contexts and temporalities, as well as their political and socio-economic status. Adding or imposing such a universal lens to a specific community overlooks or ignores their diverse and intersectional realities on the ground.

Detachment from Local Realities

> Aid agencies always talk about making people more resilient – but what does that really mean… in a situation such as Gaza, the reality is that regardless of our efforts, we cannot remove the ultimate risk.
> - Claire Grant, worker of the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), an international development organization (2014)

Internationally led resilience efforts, often top-down in deliverance, tend to be divorced from local reality, which within the context of Palestine is a settler–colonial project forming the root cause of violence. They may attempt to discount and distance the local populations and their knowledge from any discussion on justice or peace, dealing with them in a one-size-fits-all approach. This uncritical application of resilience is problematic in that it pushes for a project where the everyday (and intricate) struggles of already suffering communities may be ignored. It has been particularly interesting to observe how this is done in practice by the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP) that pushes for resilient strategies and training in Palestine. In October 2012, the UNDP created a program on resilience, named UNDP's Community Resilience and Development Programme (CRDP). According to the UNDP website, the CRDP program targets Palestinians living in Area C and East Jerusalem to "address the development needs of communities living" there and "utilising financial support from Swedish, Austrian and Norwegian governments," to contribute to "preventing the erosion of living conditions," "protecting Palestinian land and property," and "enhancing human security and livelihood."

The results announced on the CRDP website are enhancing the resilience of over 112,000 Palestinians in areas targeted, without noting what "enhancing resilience" means (or how it is measured) or what really enhances resilience in conflict zones. The results also include 110 grants of 24 million dollars, the renovation of 169 education units, and other training, workshops, and direct reclamation of "2,270 dunums of land," again without explaining how these contribute to the ability of Palestinians to be resilient. The CRDP also fails to focus on the root causes of violence in the areas targeted, namely illegal Israeli settler practices and policies that confiscate lands and demolish educational institutions. This also aligns with James Ferguson's (1994) work on how aid programs are anti-political. In the words of (Keelan and Browne 2020, 467), "the promotion of Palestinian rights is considered last on the list of activities that these resilience programmes seek to develop, while the Israeli occupation of Palestine is referred to as a 'constraint'." In other words, resilience policies do not challenge Israeli settler practices or advocate for political changes but only provide support to deal with some consequences of such practices. They do not dig deep to halt root causes of violence but only deal with some of its symptoms. Resilience here may become a tool of further oppression and a way to maintain a violent status quo, at times in forms of further structural and psychological violence that remain untouched. It also depoliticizes the Palestinian struggle for justice by expecting the already suffering populations to cope with colonial violence (Shwaikh 2020, 19).

CRDP is not the only resilience program implemented by a UN agency on suffering communities. There are also the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Pacific Risk Resilience Programme, and the Fiji Business Disaster Resilience Council. The former aims to "engage all actors key to building systems more resilient to disasters" (UNRWA 2021), and the latter two aim to strengthen resilience to climate change and disaster-related risk in the respective communities. There is also more of a trend in UN agency reports of overusing the term resilience without clearly defining what it actually means for the local communities. The UNDP's (2017) 107-page report on resilience mentions no clear definitions of resilience. In other documents published by other development organizations, the definition of resilience remains vague. At times, it is used as to what appears to be peacebuilding, disaster risk reduction and recovery, and conflict prevention tools. In 2017, for example, the European Commission published a report to construct resilience in conflict-torn societies by "increasing humanitarian efforts with political and diplomatic engagement" and enhancing "conflict prevention tools" (European Commission 2017). It is not clear what resilience here refers to other than equating it with efforts to prevent conflict and engage in political and diplomatic efforts. In another example, a "project support specialist" job opened in the UN website (2021) highlights the importance of resilience twenty-eight times in a role description, once again while remain-

ing vague and generic. This overemphasis on the role of resilience while providing no clear definitions of how it may help locals is a shortcoming in the work of international development organizations. Any work on developing resilience should have clear questions of resilience for "whom" and against "what" (Cote and Nightingale 2012, 479), all while centering the diverse voices of local communities. Defining resilience in such work is important, but understanding and challenging power dynamics and the constant roles of Western narratives that enable specific (political) actions are more important.

Dealing with Local Realities Passively and Neoliberally

This [Ukraine] is not a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan. This is a relatively civilised, relatively European — I have to choose those words carefully — city. You would not expect that or hope that it is going to happen. So, it's partly human nature…
- Senior foreign correspondent at CBS News, Charlie D'Agata (2022)

Effectively, D'Agata expects the people of Iraq and Afghanistan to be resilient to violence they continue to experience, unlike Ukraine that he depicts as "relatively civilised" despite it being no stranger to conflict. He pushes for a narrative of deserving civilized victims and uncivilized ones. The latter are undeserving of sympathy and are expected to remain resilient regardless of how much violence the West inflicts on them. A similar (and more indirect) example can be seen in how the UNDP expects Palestinian resilience when it co-organized the first Palestine resilience conference "from *Sumud* (Arabic for steadfastness) to transformative resilience" in 2016. According to organizers, the conference provides the space where donors and practitioners (and other stakeholders) meet to "think-plan-deliver on how to influence resilience-based programming across the occupied Palestinian territory." It aims to "deliver humanitarian and development interventions that result in real on the ground change and empower individuals, communities, and institutions to become *less vulnerable to shocks*?" (emphasis added). In pushing for resilience narratives, the UNDP deals with Palestinians as if they were passive or rigid materials or bodies, less vulnerable to adversities. It trains workers to teach the local community to be resilient while "expecting both to stick to resilience all the time," as one Palestinian worker in an international development organization office in Gaza relays to me (2022). Their top-down deliverance of resilience training expects Palestinians to discount and distance themselves from their own fragility. This approach ignores the fact that humans have feelings and cannot be expected to be less vulnerable when what causes their vulnerability continues to exist. It also ignores the multiplicity and diversity of human experiences, imposing a universal or versatile approach.

In holding "from *sumud* to transformative resilience" conference, the UNDP also expects Palestinian resilience as a choice rather than a last resort, while the Palestinian reality says something different. The suffering bodies are not given a choice. They have no choice but to live through and resist constant, repetitive, and structural violence. Here, the promotion of the resilience agenda frees the international community from their responsibilities of addressing root causes of injustice, presenting a continuation of "a colonial mindset that has been so destructive in that it encourages Palestinian acquiescence rather than agitation for change" (Bahdi and Kassis 2016 in Keelan and Browne 2020, 460). In

holding the conference in Jordan, most probably because not all speakers and attendees are able to enter occupied Palestine freely, the conference organizers avoid challenging Israeli colonial policies and instead cope with them. It is time that international development organizations stop calling on Palestinians to "acquiesce and adapt to their lived realities, rather than seek ways of shaking them off" (Keelan and Browne 2018).

By imposing the label of resilience, international development organizations continue to put the burden on struggling communities while ignoring grief and layers of (structural) violence that they continue to face and the subsequent traumas. They may also deem those who experience such violence (while pushed to always maintain their resilience) as less worthy or undeserving of aid and support. In the meantime, they may provide relief for a section of society, significantly halting the extent of support provided to the rest. These organizations can do better. Working in an international organization allows one to access resources that locals may never be able to get. International workers may not live anywhere near local living standards. They may stay in hotels, in safer areas, and with security protection. They may not experience what it is like to make a living (and a life) in an occupied city (or in a besieged area or a refugee camp), where resources to live a decent life are nearly nonexistent. The workers can become detached from this local reality. Thus, it is unfair for those external to the local context to expect local communities to be less vulnerable to shocks that the former does not fully know (or experience) how it feels or how it impacts them. Instead of promoting resilience agendas, it is time that international development organizations define the local experience on the locals' own terms and use their ample resources and networks to hold oppressors accountable while tackling root causes of violence.

Relevant to the above notes, there are also concerns about resilience links with neoliberal peace, and how its design and execution are often in the hands of external actors, leaving it to criticisms and rejections from the targeted local subjects (see Chandler 2012, 2013; Richmond 2012; Berry 2022). This neoliberal nature of programs that "build resilience" is clearly stated in the work of international development groups (see DFID 2012; USAID 2013). The neoliberal dimension relates to a problem with resilience as a way of shifting responsibility to individual and community actors to cope and adapt versus placing the onus on broader, collective, and relational (international) systems to change (Berry 2022, 950). In the same vein, the neoliberal nature of resilience decreases reliance on the state and increases self-reliance of the individuals/communities similar to neoliberal agendas. It pushes the latter away from the state/structure and forces them to be responsible for their *own fate* and develop coping strategies and survival mechanisms to deal with crises. Once they do, they may be cherished.

An example of this is what one refugee relays to me, "People told me that we would hire you for your resilience" (2022). In international development and peacebuilding initiatives, this may also be referred to as "systematic self-help"—noted openly by Milliken (Milliken 2003, 1) in a working paper for the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform. In this process, the role of the state and nonstate actors (including the international community and external actors) remains unclear, potentially leaving those who are not able to (or choose to not) be resilient on the margin. The individualized assumption of individuals as "autonomous and responsible" (Joseph 2013, 40) encourages the demoniza-

tion of those who do not align with the idealized neoliberal subject. The result is a neoliberal resilience discourse, which pushes for an individualistic language that obscures structural injustice. In its active de-politicization of the process that puts individuals at risk, not only does resilience dehumanize but it also de-historizes the power dynamics between individuals and institutions that govern them.

Beyond Resilience and toward Collective Care

Despite constant local critiques of its dehumanizing nature, and while the international community continues to struggle with budget allocations, the resilience agendas roll onward. By this, international development organizations continue in their attempts to make crises appear individual when individuals facing oppression have no control over their hardships. At the heart of resilience expectations is an ignorance of layers of (structural) violence and subsequent pains. These expectations may minimize (and even normalize) violence and reduce its severity. Both violence and resistance (in which individuals may *choose* to remain steadfast or to cope) are deeply structural and collective. Any individualization of either lets states and humanitarian groups off the hook for more structural issues instead of dealing with existing ones. In Palestinian refugee camps, more particularly, the individualistic approach to resilience shows an ignorance of the communal and relational nature of Palestinian society that centers collective approaches in dealing with hardships (Marie, Hannigan, and Jones 2017). Palestinian families tend to offer the most support to individuals struggling. They provide communal spaces for members facing wars and conflicts, which in themselves are collective experiences and where suffering is reproduced in collective social contexts (Summerfield 2000).

In Jordan's refugee camps, I visited Sama Gaza community center and attended a summer camp briefly with children and their teachers. The children, often unable to leave the camp and struggling with intergenerational traumas, find joy in the activities provided in the community center and the opportunities to meet and talk with their friends. None of the activities done in the community center are about teaching kids how to cope with structural and systemic injustices but are ways to support the kids, collectively and psychologically, through community help. After all, "rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion" (hooks 2000, 215).Desmond Tutu (1948) agrees, "my humanity is bound up in yours for we can only be human together."

In Palestine, I have seen the positive impacts of collective solidarity work during adversities. In May 2021, when Israel intensified restrictions on movements to al-Aqsa Mosque and increased eviction orders against Palestinian families in Jerusalem, Palestinians responded collectively. In one night of such violence in al-Aqsa Mosque, more than 205 Palestinians were wounded (Holmes 2021). The number of Palestinian residents of Israel detained was surprisingly large. Israeli authorities detained 3,100 Palestinians, 2,000 of whom were Israeli citizens, 677 from Jerusalem, and 1,100 from the West Bank (Addameer Report for May 2021). Compared with previous years, Jerusalemites have been arrested almost regularly and in more numbers. Palestinian writer Vera Sajrawi (2022) explains,

> You will never see a Jerusalem mother in front of the detention centre [where her child is being held] not knowing what to do, because the repeated arrests have created a social mechanism [for handling the fallout].

Although it is always scary, mothers will need psychological support.

The result of this first-time experience for many Palestinians was anxiety and fear of the unknown. Palestinian mothers of those detained from Israel would wait outside Israeli detention centers in distress. At times, Israeli soldiers beat young people badly and in public. In an interview with Asrar Kayyal, who has been part of psychologists' network to support Palestinian victims of Israeli violence and their families, she recalls,

> In Nazareth, the detainees kept shaking after their release because of the violence inflicted on them. In Haifa, minors started vomiting outside the detention center because of severe panic attacks, due to the beating they experienced which caused their heart rate and their breathing to spike (in Sajrawi 2022).

In response, Palestinians put out a call for lawyers, psychologists, and social workers to volunteer in supporting families who need psychological help. This Palestinian collective response is not to teach Palestinian victims of Israeli violence and their families how to cope with Israeli violence. Rather, they use joint mechanisms of support to share legal advice, support families, and simply offer to talk. In one example, Kayyal narrates,

> The volunteer psychologists started giving out our phone numbers to families for support if needed. Families called when they had questions regarding behaviors they found difficult to understand or deal with. We also provided psychological first aid for dozens of mothers who were not allowed to speak to their sons, as the Israeli court kept extending their detention week after week (Sajrawi 2022).

The language used in this collective approach is one that centers care and avoids expectations of bouncing back from adversities. It gives oppressed communities space and a time to heal. It embraces vulnerability without undermining one's values or (political) identities. It acknowledges that anyone may go through difficulties even if we do not see signs of vulnerability. More of these collective approaches are needed. There is also a need for an alternative language that is more caring, a language that is not about expecting but respecting the ways we all feel at times of difficulties. It is also about embracing differences in the ways we respond to such adversities, taking people as they come and accepting our human experience in its totality. This article is also a reminder that the less fortunate and privileged communities, those who are in constant fear and traumas, and the ones who regularly experience war and grief, are humans. They do not choose resilience. Palestinians I met, during and outside my fieldwork, are tired of being objects of work that expect their constant strength. They do not want to remain stories of documentaries or TV series but want collective justice and dignity.

Conclusion

In this article, I discuss the ways resilience is employed by various international actors to, effectively, responsibilize oppressed communities, and how, consequently, resilience helps to maintain oppressors' (structural) violence. I talk about the expected duty to constantly be strong, and the disregard this duty generates toward suffering communities. I argue that acknowledging and displaying suffering and vulnerability, and exposure of/to violence, are needed if any change is really sought after.

I make it clear that to expect someone struggling with difficulties to stay resilient is not only wrong but also dehumanizing because it is a denial of one's own subjectivity. This cheap (re)production of struggling communities as extraordinary people who will endure all suffering imposed on them strips them of the cores of their human values that liberally entail moments of fragility, at times in the corner of one's bedroom away from public eyes. It places the burden on them for issues beyond their control. It lifts responsibility off of our shoulders (and that of the international community) who may consider a specific community resilient enough and undeserving of support, inflicting further harm and violence upon them. In the context of Palestine, the palpable grief and exhaustion often show the impossibility of resilience. Our bodies absorb shocks and traumas. They replay and flashback; we are triggered. Our psychological well-being is never the same even when we make a move away from home. We leave home but home, with its multiple and constant distresses, never leaves us. In my interviews across different contexts, it becomes clear that there is a fragile side to our expected resilience, which is hardly seen or validated by those who expect us to cope with adversities. This may entail staying up until the early hours of the morning to check social media for updates on our loved ones when phoning them is not possible.

Resilience alternatives involve cutting ties with liberal discourse that either dehumanizes the oppressed or romanticizes them in mythical terms. A more critical alternative language acknowledges the reality of asymmetrical power relations and structural injustices while centering the language that the oppressed communities deem right. This language will move us towards tackling root causes of injustice and resisting all forms of oppression instead of expecting already struggling populations to cope with them. It will *allow* us to be tired, to relax, to cry, to be the way we willingly choose to be, and to embrace it. It will allow us to surrender to our emotions in their totality. As Palestinian social and cultural psychologist Rami Rmeileh relays to me (2022) puts it,

> […] Instead of trying to dull our feelings, we should surrender to them. Today, we must embody the emotions that are fundamental to social change, revolutions, and justice - may they guide us on our path to liberation.

Acknowledgments

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