Survival & the Predicament of Hope:
Rethinking Resistance through the Everyday

Expanding a view of resistance beyond revolutionary protest or transformative agency has helped to identify everyday struggles as political acts. As Scott observed:

So long as we confine our conception of the political to activity that is openly declared we are driven to conclude that subordinate groups essentially lack a political life, or that what political life they do have is restricted to those exceptional moments of popular explosion. To do so is to miss the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt, and that, for better or worse, is the political environment of subject classes [1997:323].

Indeed, the focus on resistance through the everyday, particularly by anthropologists, has illuminated the ways in which the status quo, comprising of various layers of oppression (such as patriarchy), is negotiated, contested, and subverted (c.f. Richter-Devroe 2011; Abu Lughod 1986). Some seek to reconstitute resistance in the mundane practices of everyday life, whereby the actions that men and women take to make the best of their circumstances are characterised as forms of ‘everyday resistance’ to structures of control and repression (c.f. Taraki 2004; Jean-Klein 2001; Scott 1985). This representation also allows everyday coping practices to be seen as conscious choices that people make in order to survive (perhaps as basic as the will to stay alive), which are visible in both ‘mundane’ actions as well as a national ethos of resistance.

Sivaramakrishnan (2005) notes that ‘everyday resistance emphasizes a constant strategic alertness on the part of those involved that places a lot of weight on agency and calculation’ (350-1). While the framework has proved a valuable ‘diagnostic of power’ (Abu Lughod 1990:42), there remains a tendency in writings on political violence and oppression to frame themes of resistance and collective agency in a tone of optimism. The tendency towards romanticism is arguably still rooted in the well-worn analytical dualism of domination and resistance. As Lila Abu Lughod remarks, resistance is often cast as the ‘hopeful confirmation of the failure—or partial failure—of systems of oppression’ (1990:53). In most sociological accounts of resistance, of which Palestinian society assumes a fair share of the focus, hope is implicitly ascribed to people’s actions and motivations and is often taken for granted by the author altogether. This hopeful gaze has implications for emancipatory struggles; in the case of Palestine, it has generated an analytical ‘blind spot’ that averts a reading of warnings signs to worsening human conditions.

There are several reasons why analytical reflection about Palestinian resistance and collective agency is necessary. First, while these ideals remain at the centre of the ongoing struggle against Israeli control in various forms of Palestinian society, options for livelihood have progressively worsened. Second, Palestinian resistance continues to be a
popular subject of research, reflected in over 100,000 entries on Google scholar alone. The enormous appeal is itself compelling, and as my research illustrates, may reflect our own preconceptions about human survival that are imprinted with a hopeful belief in the capacity of the fighting human spirit to prevail over immense adversity. This optimistic and powerful ideology—often subtle and unconscious, yet embedded in our analysis nevertheless—has diverted attention away from structural limitations that curb individual choices and social activity in concrete ways. The emphasis on optimism also obscures fluctuations of morale evident in day-to-day life, those that inform individual and collective senses of hope and despair, the future, and what survival actually entails under Israeli colonial authority. These dynamics render a shared ethos of national resistance very difficult.

This latter point runs contrary to a recurring strand in the literature on Palestinian society focused on illustrating how a nationalist ethos of resistance is both constructed in a cohesive and coherent manner, and how it is reproduced. By contrast, this article argues that resistance is more patchy, disintegrated, and contested than has been previously acknowledged. In doing so, and perhaps more importantly, it elucidates that the idealisation of Palestinian resistance has implications for understanding the dire state of the Palestinian family, which ‘has long been hailed for its ability to absorb shocks and to provide sustenance to its members’ (Taraki 2006:xvii). Influential policy makers have adopted this discourse, with The World Bank, for example, characterising Palestinian households as resilient ‘shock absorbers’ of economic crisis through their informal systems of social support. In a similar vein, academics speak of ‘the Palestinian people’s remarkable ability to not just survive, but to do so with tenacity and creativity’ (Peteet 2005:xii). This characterisation of Palestinian ‘resilience’ echoes widely in academia as well as within political resistance campaigns. While the sentiment behind such a statement may be laudable, the recurrent treatment of Palestinians as resilient has not helped us to understand or address the ‘messy’—in fact troubling—components of individual survival or the possible limitations of ‘social elasticity’.

The analytical ‘ethos’ of Palestinian resilience has in effect produced a kind of analytical ‘callous’, which treats human adaptation and resistance as self-evident conditions without demonstrating the detailed social processes involved. What does it mean for individuals and communities to be resilient? What are the social costs of employing such tropes in a context of acute political oppression, in which the dire terms of life result from relentless structural constraints on social reproduction?

These analytical tropes, therefore, too often conceal more than they reveal. In the face of economic enclosure, water and land confiscation, the ubiquity of imprisonment, severe mobility control and restrictions, and loss of income, the Palestinian household is in an ‘extreme state of emergency’ (Taraki 2004:14). For farming communities in particular, bleak circumstances have been further intensified by the Israeli Wall.

With a view of one such farming community, Jayyus, in the shadow of the Israeli Wall, this paper aims to reinscribe emancipatory politics with the often contradictory and chaotic contours of ‘the everyday’, contours which are paradoxically absent in studies of ‘everyday resistance’. The ethnography presented here is based on over 22 months of research conducted between January 2005 and September 2007. It is part of a wider ongoing anthropological study of colonial occupation among farming communities in what
had been the breadbasket of the West Bank. The findings emerged in the course of my daily work and involvement in farming, household tasks, and ongoing interactions with families and farmers. Sharing the minutiae of everyday life through an anthropological study of this nature aims to document social life in process, in the intimate daily context through which social conditions are negotiated. This vantage point offers a space to interrogate where political practice and social experience converge, which is crucial if we are to understand the political structures that enable systems of oppression as well as the social conditions and subjectivities of those living under these regimes. Here, reimagining resistance politics is especially imperative, as we are forced to attend to that which is dangerously silenced in a romanticised treatment of domination and resistance: the prospect of what happens when there are no more options for survival.

### A Different View from the ‘Breadbasket’ of Palestine

Under the tightening security architecture of a settler colonial state, Palestinian families and communities have been stretched beyond the scope of any cohesive resistance framework. Yet, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the theme of everyday resistance and collective political agency still assumes a strong analytic current in research on Palestinian society. In her often-cited study on Palestinian mobility and IDF military checkpoints, Rema Hammami (2004) emphasizes the role of everyday survival strategies in the reproduction of an ethos of national resistance, in which the concept of sumud (steadfastness) is central. Sumud was a key nationalist theme used by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation in the 1970s and 80’s, which referred to the refusal to ‘leave the land’ despite tremendous hardship of Israeli military control. However, the term has more recently been used in political campaigns and resistance studies to characterise the perseverance of Palestinian families and their ability to ‘keep going’ more generally as Israel’s use of collective punishment intensified and became more violent during the second intifada. Here, the fact that Palestinians continue to ‘exist’ at all is itself taken as evidence of resistance. Hammami argues that sumud now connotes ‘something more proactive’ (27). In examining the ways through which Palestinian taxi drivers have created informal transit systems to bypass Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) checkpoints, she correlates sumud with strategies used to resist immobility, in ‘refusing to let the army’s lockdown of one’s community preclude one from reaching to school or work’ (27). Sumud in this regard ‘is daily resistance of simply getting there’ (ibid). Hammami sees this as collectively understood, but achieved individually (see also Hammami 2003).

Taraki argues that this ethos of sumud and resistance ‘is elaborated through many other everyday practices that are conventionally subsumed under ‘survival’ or ‘coping’ strategies’ (Taraki 2004:17). In such a view, ‘everyday resistance’ would be seen in the practical measures taken, for example, to negotiate limited access to water—water that comes from West Bank aquifers but is syphoned and controlled by Israel. Practical kinds of coping mechanisms as such become ‘adi, part of the mundane, the usual. In a framework of everyday resistance, these would also be viewed as evidence of sumud (steadfastness) and affirmation of continued (and determined) Palestinian presence despite elaborate Israeli intervention. Resistance strategies are not, in Taraki’s view, (2004) limited to organised political movements and parties. Identifying the strategies households draw on to negotiate survival casts the household beyond just a passive
‘shock absorber’. Instead, it is a critical component in the production and reproduction of an ethos of national resistance (Taraki 2004).

Examining the circumstances of rural communities—and over an extended period of time rather than through ‘snapshots’ such as interviews and surveys—complicates a model of survival as ‘passive’ and resistance as ‘proactive’, however. Jayyus’s location in the northwestern agricultural plains of the West bank, beyond the main urban areas like Ramallah and Jerusalem, offers an important perspective for two reasons relevant to the discussion here (Figure 1). First, the farming communities of the region, historically the economic backbone of the West Bank, experience IDF-imposed restrictions in especially acute ways. On a macro level, the consequences of the Israeli Wall and evolving security architecture have transformed this northern region from a main center of food production and distribution to a periodic recipient of food aid within the span of just a few years. At the micro level, individual farmers and households throughout the area face military oppression that contributes to a sense of extreme insecurity. This goes hand in hand with the diminishing ability to generate income and be self-sufficient, even as the agricultural artery of the West Bank, and interconnected systems of food production, are being destroyed.

Second, this northwest region was the first to be subjected to the devastating consequences of the Wall since the first phase of its construction began there in 2002. Processes witnessed first in Jayyus and the north—land confiscation and isolation of resources, enclosures, income loss, unemployment, and restricted mobility—were soon mirrored along the path of the Wall as construction proceeded.

Figure 1 Jayyus’ location in the Qalqilya district of the West Bank
Jayyus is one of 32 villages in the Qalqilya district. A mainly farming community of around 3,500, as one farmer pointed out, “You cannot say that anyone [here] is not a farmer.” Teachers and policemen working their jobs part-time or on shift rotation, for example, worked in their fields when their schedules permitted. The village sits on a ridge 420 meters above sea level in an undulating landscape of olive groves and densely cultivated fields abutting the “Green Line”, about twenty kilometers from the Mediterranean Sea. Aside from the large landowners, most farms in Jayyus are small family plots of under thirty dunums (4 dunums ¼ approximately 1 acre). The best arable soils are located within the expansive plain that extends westward from the slopes of the village toward the coast. Dense cultivation in the plain is made possible by a continuous water supply from the village’s agricultural wells, which draw on the underlying Western Aquifer Basin.

Jayyus is part of the rich agricultural heritage of Palestine. For centuries, the region’s land resources and farming communities supported a dense and productive merchant-peasant society. The Qalqilya-Tulkarm-Jenin triangle continues to have the highest percentage of cultivated land of all districts in the West Bank. Like other villages in the area, Jayyus today has been shaped by significant interventions by the Israeli state. This “rural village,” integrated into the political economy of the Palestinian territories on terms not of its choosing, thus reflects decades of interference, regulation, and dispossession. Under Israeli military authority, Jayyusis have been subject to an evolving state security apparatus, with constant changes to the military rules that must be followed. Military interventions have also impacted the village’s access to and control over their land, including the construction of the Israeli settlement Zufin on lands confiscated from Jayyus in 1989.

The most recent dramatic changes in the village relate to the building of the Wall, with the segment affecting Jayyus completed in August 2003. Initially, Jayyusis had been led to believe, both by hearsay and press reports, that the Wall would be built on the Green Line (the [internationally unrecognized] ‘boundary’ dividing the West Bank from ‘Israel’). Contrary to these claims, however, the Wall intruded six kilometers beyond the Green Line to encompass three quarters of Jayyus’s agricultural and grazing lands. The isolated lands now behind the Wall contain 15,000 olive trees, 120 greenhouses, and 50,000 citrus trees of sixteen different varieties, as well as other fruit trees. Situated on the Western Drainage Basin, the agricultural area behind the Wall also contains the village’s water resources—six out of seven of its artesian water wells.

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1 This type of flexibility is no longer possible with the rigid hours of operation at the gate of the Israel Wall, discussed more below. Earnings diversification was an important livelihoods strategy of household economies.

2 Following the 1948 war and United Nations Security Council Resolution 181, the 1949 Armistice Agreement between the newly established state of Israel and Arab countries drew the line between Israeli or Jordanian administration, known today as the Green Line. This is not an internationally recognized legal border.
The Wall near the village is flanked on each side by electrified fences, deep trenches and razor wire, a patrol road for army jeeps, and a sand trace path to show footprints. This enclosed zone is 100 meters wide. A gate and permit system was soon implemented, requiring Jayyus residents to obtain Israeli-issued permits in order to access their lands behind the Wall. Initially, the two gates were open for fifteen-minute slots, three times a day. This shifted to forty-five-minute slots after daily demonstrations were waged in the village, especially in the first nine months after the Wall was completed, and which received international media attention. By the beginning of 2006, however, the duration of the slots had reverted to fifteen minutes and since then has fluctuated.

Construction of the Wall devastated livelihoods as land was expropriated for its passage and free movement between the village and its fields and orchards became strictly regulated by the IDF. By May 2007, after almost four years of living with the Wall, World Food Programme provisions, such as sacks of flour, were visible throughout the village. The presence of food rations reflected the collective degradation in livelihoods as communities in the “breadbasket of Palestine” had to rely on food aid to feed their families. This extraordinary reversal resulted from several factors, the most important of which is lack of access to village lands behind the Wall: some 80 percent of Jayyus residents today are without the necessary permits, which have been incrementally decreased since 2003 for “security reasons.” At the same time, part-time farmers (like olive growers) who used to supplement their income with wage labor are denied permits to work inside pre-1967 Israel, or ‘inside’ the Green Line. This situation was exacerbated by the 2006 international boycott of Hamas, when PA employees in the village (e.g., policemen and municipal workers) did not receive salaries for many months. As farmers increasingly were unable to work their fields, maximize harvests, and access markets (due to a reduction of agricultural input and output, as well as increased mobility...
restrictions), they became subsumed within the growing statistics of the “unemployed” households designated for food aid assistance.

The Wall is only one recent component of a wider system of extreme marginalisation and dispossession. Israel’s colonial occupation of the West Bank is both an administrative practice and a processual social condition. Drawing this analytic distinction is important because daily life for Palestinians is a negotiation of both. Israeli authority involves not only the administration of people; it is equally—and significantly—an administration of the wider space and time in which people live. Israeli intervention in these critical domains disrupts the rhythms of life tied to an agricultural calendar. It has also given rise to an acute, pressurised form of social confinement and malaise. Confinement is a defining component of Israeli control, administered through different military restrictions imposed on time and mobility, and is socially registered in both material and non-material ways. Confinement is both a physical and deeply psychological component of daily life.

In highlighting the various ways people talk about and perceive their existence, the following discussion brings to the forefront of analysis the emotional and psychological implications of an administrative system of social confinement, which have thus far been absent in theoretical discussions on resistance. Understanding how people cope and try to survive under conditions of systemic enclosure and displacement goes beyond meeting the needs of basic livelihood. Survival involves a daily existential struggle, relating to fundamental attitudes towards life as well as social roles as an individual, a family member, and part of the wider national community. Thus what it means to survive under Israeli authority is inevitably a source of tension and strife within families and in society at large. Divergent experiences make a collective resistance campaign very difficult. The paper illustrates how struggles with hope and the future, as well as frustrations and fluctuations in personal morale, are central to these wider debates about survival and the coping strategies people draw on.³

³ In using the term ‘coping’, I am not assuming a delineated set of strategies or a homogenous idea. Rather, I draw on this term to explore the succession of micro-level negotiations involved in daily life.

‘Tomorrow Will be Worse Than Today’

When talking about their lives, Jayyusis make clear that life under Israeli colonial authority not only limits the possibilities of today, it seriously restricts a sense of the future. How people relate to their present situation is intimately tied to their outlook on tomorrow.

‘Since 1986, my son has never seen a good day in his life of twenty years,’ a middle-aged farmer remarked while discussing current events with Umm and Abu Mahena’s family one evening. Across the generations there is a sense that conditions will not change. The expectation is that life will get worse, as people say ‘tomorrow will be worse than today.’ This expression is often uttered in a matter-of-fact tone when specific household pressures are exacerbated and livelihoods come under greater pressure. More than
merely a way of venting frustrations, the expression illustrates how Jayyusis across the
generations relate to their future. ‘We don’t talk about the future because our future is
gone,’ Kamal, a 26 year old, explained one evening while talking with a group of friends.
In 2002, Kamal was taken from his home by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and was
moved between several different Israeli interrogation facilities for three years while his
whereabouts was unknown to his family. In recounting his experience, he speaks of a
situation faced by many young men in his village.

Each of my friends have been imprisoned, and if not imprisoned, became a martyr
[i.e. someone killed by the IDF, martyred via the Occupying colonial state], and if
not a martyr, he is a wanted man [by the IDF]. And even if someone is released
from prison, your file is in the computer and because of this we are harassed even
more at every checkpoint. We are also not allowed to leave the country for five
years after getting out of prison. I cannot get permits to work, they took my
family’s land behind the Wall. I sit in my house because there is nothing I can
do...How can I think about having a family, from where will I feed them? I will
never accept that my family live the same life that I have lived.

On another occasion, one of Umm and Abu Mahena’s sons and I were talking while
herding his sheep in the mountains and picking green almonds for dinner that night. Qais,
28 at the time and a friend of Kamal remarked.

I live in a ghost village. I mean last night, the [IDF] army took seven shabab [young
men] from the village, my friend, Akram’s friend, Musa’s friend. This is life here. The
friends that are left, I don’t want to hang out with them anymore. The talk
between us just upsets me more about our situation. I come home left with my
thoughts. Life is shit, all the talk is about the army, there is no simple/easy talk,
not just in our house, in all of the village. One can carry a lot inside, but what can
we do? How tired I am, there is nothing left, no sleep, no rest, no work, only
problems, soldiers.

Young men have a common experience of conflict with soldiers, violent interrogations
and imprisonment, and unemployment. ‘The soldiers harass the shabab to make them
feel even more frustrated and suffocated by life,’ Qais’ mother Umm Mahena
commented. In one family alone, four of the sons living in the house were without
regular employment, and two had been imprisoned. In almost every family with sons of
comparable age from adolescence to their late twenties the experience is similar.
When taken by the IDF, individuals virtually disappear: with ‘a classified file’, their condition and
whereabouts remain unknown to families, as well as information on their charges and
whether or when they will be released.

Making Sense of Life: A Teenager’s Perspective

‘Musa has no friends left at all,’ Qais remarked about his youngest brother who was 17 at
the time. In a span of one month, between January and February 2007, 23 shabab were
taken by IDF soldiers during military raids in the night, including sixteen of Musa’s friends
and classmates in their final year of high school. Drinking tea one early morning before
school, Musa went through a list of all his friends who had been taken by IDF soldiers
from their homes. ‘Is this a life, is it?’ he asked. ‘You go into the street and there is no
one for you to talk to.’ He put his head down on his crouched legs and wept in frustration. During this period, Musa’s family became terribly afraid for him, sensing his increasing despair and desire to be taken by the IDF, to join his friends in prison. He was spending more and more time throwing rocks at the Wall in the evenings, wanting to get into conflict with the soldiers. ‘To the day they take me!’ Musa exclaimed, on more than one occasion. ‘Why not? It is better than this life.’

Students like Musa are required to sit for comprehensive exams in their final year of high school called the Tawjihi, organised by the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Education. While a vast majority of students cannot afford to continue on to college, the marks a student receives, in addition to family finances, determine to which university in the West Bank a student can apply. The names and marks of each student are announced publically on the radio, district by district, and families congregate together for the results with anticipation and anxiety. Regardless of whether or not a student progresses to higher education, the exam is an important status marker and the outcome perceived as a success or failure for the whole family.

Education is an important value in Palestinian society—in spite of and because of the political framework governing their lives. Gabi Baramki, one of the founding members of Birzeit, the first Palestinian university, explains why education has become significant for Palestinians:

> Education was not universally valued among Palestinians when I was young. Only the rich and members of the professional classes expected their children to study. Becoming a nation of refugees, of people living under a destructive, impoverishing military rule, has profoundly changed attitudes. Education is seen as one of very few escape routes. Families scrimp and save, forgoing even the small treats they allow for themselves on feast days, to pay for school books and uniforms. Mothers in villages or refugee camps may sell off the few precious pieces of jewellery received as wedding presents so a child can continue into higher education. For the poor, of course, getting an education has never been easy [Baramki 2010:3].

Despite the immense obstacles, families in Jayyus continued to place a high value on their children going to school. As Baramki describes, education is often seen ‘as the ticket out of the [Israeli-imposed] ghetto’.

As the youngest child in his household, Musa was the last to take the Tawjihi exams. His siblings and parents were constantly nagging him to study, and it seemed that not a day would pass without an argument concerning whether Musa had qara (‘read’) or not. Many hopes were riding on Musa, who was believed to be more suited for ta’lim (education) than zira’a (agriculture). His family often emphasised that he would have greater potential to secure reliable employment after college and ‘do something with his life,’ as his brother Qais would say. Qais would contrast his own life, which he said was wasted, with Musa’s: ‘I won’t let you end up like me’. Though Qais was an older brother to whom Musa looked up, Musa remained unpersuaded by his advice to study and stay out of trouble.

Musa shared his feelings of hopelessness about the future in our conversations. Although his family insisted he do well, he had yet to find an example to demonstrate
that such efforts could pay off. He watched his older sister try to finish college without enough money to pay for the transportation to get to class. He saw his unemployed older brothers unable to find regular paid work, whether as agricultural labourers or in any of the West Bank towns like Ramallah. They were also unable to help their father farm their land because the IDF refused them permit renewals to cross through the Wall to get to their land. Musa also thought about all of his friends and many of his cousins from the village who were in prison. Finally, he saw that those who did manage to complete college were still struggling to find a job.

Musa’s reflections were reiterated by older men and women speaking of Musa’s generation as we tended their fields. Abu Ghazāli, the manager of one of the village’s water wells, employs young men as agricultural labourers in his greenhouses. Thinking about the future of his own three young children, he commented.

University needs its time. Students here from the village, when they are not in school, parents expect them to do this and that, to take care of the sheep, to work in the orchards. Or if they are in class, they are thinking about money problems. They don’t have money for the transportation to school, seven shekels one-way [approx. £1.10]. This also means they usually cannot eat or drink the entire day there, even one shekel for a cup of coffee with their friends [approx 15 pence]. They have to take exams, but the very morning of the exam, they are still trying to pass the chaos of the checkpoint, facing problems with the soldiers. And sometimes, the checkpoint is even closed. Afterward, what kind of mind will they have to take their exams?

For Musa, the immediate stresses in the house have impacted on his ability to focus on and invest in his studies. The same is true for his older sister and brother studying for a degree in education at a local university, whose attendance fluctuated greatly due to lack of funds to pay for fees and transportation. On numerous occasions when Musa and his two siblings were studying at night, there were imposed power cuts which made it impossible for them to continue. The family could not always afford to buy candles to cope with the blackouts. At other times, studying was interrupted during military raids in the village, and also with the news of various individuals who were taken by the IDF. Family crises unfolded around Musa, which exacerbated his inability to follow the dictates of his family and their wish to encourage him in his studies. ‘All of this is for nothing,’ he would say. He longed to go to jail to be with his friends.

As the pressures around him intensified and as the prospect of having to face his life after high school became more imminent, Musa became increasingly introverted, sullen, short-tempered and angry. He would now sit by himself for hours without talking. Sometimes his frustration expressed itself overtly when watching television programs the content of which was in complete contrast with life around him. On one night, for example, while flipping through the channels on T.V., he came across the Dubai version of Deal or no Deal, a popular game show where contestants wager money in hopes of making up to one million dollars. ‘They play with money while we here search in circles for one shekel,’ he said angrily while lying on the floor with a pillow propping up his head. Another time, he was watching an American action movie, which he usually enjoyed, and a scene came on in which a man was smashing a room full of computers. ‘They destroy
computers for fun while we search for one to learn with,’ Musa remarked to his sister despondently while pointing at the television.

Musa’s inability to study was only partly a result of the periodic interruptions occurring around him. On another level, he struggled to find the incentive to do so, feeling, for example, that he would not be rewarded in life for passing his exams nor will doing so change his life circumstances. ‘What for?’ he said time and again. Musa and his siblings routinely bump up against global depictions of what constitutes a ‘normal life’ for a young person elsewhere, which come through on television shows and movies, for example. These depictions of a ‘model’ middle-class lifestyle further exacerbate the feeling that such aspirations are unobtainable. While such frustrations mimic those of marginalised groups within the global economic system more generally, in Jayyus, limitations are ‘artificially’ imposed and choices structurally curbed and eliminated through the military policies of a colonial settler state.

Implicit in one’s aspirations for life is the belief in possibilities to come. But for those like Musa and his siblings who see their future as being without options, they struggle constantly to have a sense of hope. ‘Everything about our lives is ‘abath (futile, useless),’ Faisal, a 28 year old, unemployed graduate with a degree in communications, told me. Final year high school students needed to focus on preparation for the 2007 Tawjihi exams, but they struggled to find value in such an endeavour at all as the situation around them worsened. In the weeks leading up to the exams in June, the IDF had taken over the regional administrative centre of Qalqilya and placed the entire town under curfew. When it came time to sit for the exams, high school students from surrounding villages were transported and occasionally smuggled to their schools in ambulances. In this context, the seeming paradox of the Tawjihi was not lost on Musa or his family, although they never wavered in pushing him to do well. 4

Musa’s family’s economic situation was representative of other households in Jayyus, with at least 100 worse off, and fewer than 50 in a higher economic bracket. In 2007, the family’s resources were exhausted because they were increasingly barred from accessing their lands. Umm Mahena was forced to sell some of her gold dowry, which is customarily given to each new bride by the groom’s family, to buy Musa new clothes and shoes to wear for the exams, as well essential items he needed for study, such as notebooks and pencils. She sold her gold because she wanted better possibilities for her son. Her action was taken in the interests of instilling hope within him. But for Musa, such dreams were starkly juxtaposed with the obstacles preventing their realisation.

The very act of her having to sell her gold—the marker of a financial ‘last resort’ for Palestinian families—expressed, for this family, their state of crisis and despair. 5 Although Umm Mahena had sold her gold precipitously and without consulting the family, Musa and his siblings quickly linked the fact of being able to buy these items to the fact that their mother was no longer wearing her gold earrings. Where else would the money come from, in a household with no means of livelihood? The family then

4 *Tawjihi* comes from the Arabic word *tawājaha*, meaning to direct oneself.

5 As I discuss elsewhere, this family, like many others in a similar situation, are not historically poor (see Calis 2011).
became sombre and Musa, in particular, felt quite demoralised, even guilty, since it was for him that she had sold her dowry. But Umm Mahena was adamant about the choice she made. ‘What, he will go and sit for his exams wearing those shoes?’ she asked, pointing to his frayed, worn out boots bound together with duct tape. For Umm Mahena, the emphasis on Musa looking murattab (presentable) was less about having new clothes than about lifting his self-esteem while taking the exams Umm Mahena felt to be critical for his future.  

‘I want to plant in them hope, but I have found no one to plant hope in me.’

Mureed, a youth outreach coordinator from Jayyus

The struggle between resignation that conditions will worsen and hope that lives may improve is a fundamental aspect of how people work to make sense of their lives living under Israeli authority. Hope—at the basic level believing (or not) that life can get ‘better’—figured prominently in how people engaged in their daily lives, and in their outlooks toward death and the future. At one end of the spectrum, hope provides a tremendous source of strength to get through hardship, and on the other end, it is absent altogether. But for the majority, there is a persistent tension between the two. At times they vacillate between one extreme and the other, at other times they maintain both ‘extremes’ simultaneously. The conflict between resignation and hope may be explicit and recognisable, as with Musa for example, or more guarded and strategically ‘controlled’, as with Umm Mahena. She maintained a conscious effort to foster optimism in her children and wider circles of family and friends, while also feeling a broader sense of resignation to progressively worsening conditions of a life without a foreseeable change in the political structure.

Umm Mahena’s conflictual relationship with hope as an ‘empty’ pretence is well illustrated in the following instance. On the 25th birthday of her daughter Joumana, another sibling decided to prepare a cake and sing ‘happy birthday’ with the family. Generally, birthdays otherwise passed without mention. In fact, it was not uncommon for individuals to forget when their birthday was, checking on their military ID cards when asked. After we sang to Joumana, who was then prompted to ‘make a wish’ and blow out the candles, Umm Mahena said to me quietly, ‘Not one dream that someone wishes for comes true.’ This comment was made by the same woman who had sold pieces from her gold dowry on several different occasions as a means of investing in such dreams for her children.

It may seem contradictory to be an arbiter of hope and a disbeliever in it at the same time. However, dealing with the intense interplay of both resignation and optimism in daily life is a very real facet of what it means to ‘cope’, particularly as the nature of one’s existence is continuously called into question. Some may have ‘lost hope’ for themselves or their own lives, but nevertheless project a sense of possibility for others. Umm Mahena has hope for her children, and Qais wants more for his younger brother Musa. In

6 After Umm Mahena decided to sell her gold, the reason she did so was rendered meaningless: all the public schools in the West Bank were shut down. Students like Musa preparing for the Tawjihi were uncertain what this would mean and were forced to remain home with their unemployed siblings.
these cases, hope ‘comes out in spite of what went before’, as Alphonso Lingis describes (in Zournazi 2002:24), working against one’s expectations—expectations forged through patterns of past experience. But to take this further, maintaining ‘hope against the evidence’ (ibid) becomes a means of survival.

The opposite is also evident, however. In an effort to carry on, many individuals reject hope and relinquish expectation. It reflects the sense of helplessness felt in not being able to chart one’s day or plan ahead. Here, the relationship with hope is not simply future oriented; it is a way of managing the present. The inability to direct one’s own life and to plan in the context of ever-changing military interventions leads people to address the present on a moment-to-moment basis. In the absence of what Vincent Crapanzano calls ‘the petty hopes that characterise daily life’ (2003:8), taking each moment as it comes draws emphasis away from the future. It is a manner of coping that sobers one’s expectations and lessens the feeling of overwhelming odds mounting against a person. Perhaps, it is easier to digest small pieces of life at a time. I too found myself using this coping mechanism after months of witnessing hopes being dashed. Under these conditions, hope for the future would be a corrosive illusion.⁷

Believing that ‘tomorrow will be worse than today,’ as the saying goes, thus also fuels feelings that life today is not worth living. Despair is widespread among Musa’s generation. They speak of wanting out of ‘this life,’ even feeling, in his case, that prison is a remedy. For others, the often stated alternative is a desire for death, as an ultimate escape. Death, and the threat of death, is so present in daily life that it structures language, expression and outlook. This is particularly the case with those between the ages of twenty and thirty, perhaps because these are typically critical years for thinking about and planning one’s future. This is also the age group typically targeted for harassment by the IDF.

In the last year of high school facing the question of ‘what next’, Musa and others of his age became especially dejected and resigned. But also, as the youngest in his family, Musa looked at the experiences of his siblings, parents, and grandparents. His reading of the future draws on their multi-generational experiences living under a colonial military regime.⁸ He observes that life has indeed worsened rather than improved over the generations. Confronted with his own future as bleak and without opportunity heightens Musa’s feelings of suffocation and frustration in dealing with his family’s daily life. When he sees a tomorrow without possibility, being able to commit to daily life today seems impossible.

While intihār (suicide) is considered forbidden by Allah in Islam, individuals often pleaded for God to take them. These ‘appeals’ to Allah appear to emphasise less death itself than a sense of reprieve from the tightening pressures of Israeli military control. Individuals often asked me, ‘Do you think we are living like this?’ or ‘Is this a life?’ Their daily life was

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⁷ Victor Frankl (1963) likewise made apparent the danger of misplaced hope while recounting his experiences as a concentration camp inmate, and the fatal repercussions for camp inmates when these hopes were not fulfilled.

⁸ Peter Loizos (2008) likewise underscores the generational responses to Cypriot displacement after the Turkish occupation of 1974. He argues, as this paper also does, that life course factors, such as age and gender, decisively influence “impressions, experiences, and structural constraints” (2008:3).
juxtaposed with a state of non-existence, somewhat like death. Death, rhetorically at least, was a far more favourable option, when one could finally ‘yirtaḥ min hal hiyat’ (‘rest from this life’). For Musa, his siblings, cousins, and the wider circle of friends, al mawt (death) seems to occupy an almost romantic space of the imagination in a life that otherwise feels uninspiring and meaningless (see also Dabaggh 2005). As young people feel suffocated and trapped—unable to find work, to move about freely, to make plans or find incentive to look ahead—a dream of death serves as a release for pressurised emotions and immense frustrations.

For younger siblings like Musa entering a critical age, the likelihood of imprisonment or being killed by the IDF (becoming a shahid, martyr) feels more tangible, perhaps less abstract than thinking about the future as open-ended. In addition to being seen as a favourable release from life, death—to be killed by the IDF—was often regarded as a likely fate for this younger generation. When a 16 year-old boy in the village opened up an email account for the first time, the immediate name that came to mind for his personal address was shahid, or martyr. The photos of villagers killed by the IDF, usually young men the age of Musa and his older brothers, are reproduced on large posters and hung all over the hallways in local universities. These images surround university students as they walk to class or talk with their friends, faces much like their own, or their friends and brothers, who have been killed. In Jayyus, the faces of the village’s own ‘martyrs’ are spray-painted onto the outer walls of homes and schools. Young individuals are confronted with their own mortality so often in daily life that their expectation of death seems clearer and more meaningful than their expectation of life.

**Negotiating Collective Survival**

As the previous section underscores, managing day-to-day life under Israeli military control is as much about confronting the nature of one’s existence as it is about trying to stay afloat. This effort is filtered through the various roles in which people engage their world—as individuals such as Musa and Qais, family members such as that of Umm and Abu Mahena, and as part of a larger ‘imagined’ national community. In doing so, Musa and his family must also negotiate wider debates (and expectations) as to the best path forward for ‘the Palestinian community’ at large.

Ideas about staying in or leaving Palestine exemplify this challenge. One evening, Umm Mahena’s younger brother, a father of three, came over to the house with his wife. While they were sitting on the floor mattresses drinking coffee, a heated debate erupted between them on the topic of Palestine. Umm Mahena often told stories about the days when she was a young girl. She gave lyrical and vivid descriptions about particular incidents that evoked her ideas of a better, earlier time, when access to land was less restricted and there were more moments to enjoy the beauty of encounters with people and the environment, as she would say. However, when Umm Mahena’s brother began to talk about their children, the storytelling stopped. Looking at his nieces and nephews listening to the conversation, Umm Mahena’s brother commented, ‘Look at Qais, look at his life, you should let him go barra (outside)’.

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9 People in the village often spoke about the world beyond Palestine abstractly, as ‘outside’, something inaccessible and unfamiliar.
place more beautiful than here,’ she said with a firm but raised voice, lifting her eyebrows. ‘What, you want them to stay here so you can tell them ‘Go feed the sheep and the donkey’? Is this a life? Is this living? It is not the same as when we were young,’ he continued. ‘The situation for them is fighting, death. They have no choices.’

One way of dealing with their lives under Israeli authority is to withdraw emotionally from Palestine—to emigrate, or to imagine the possibility of doing so. Umm Mahena’s brother would not rule out the possibility of his children leaving Palestine if necessary, having no hope that the situation at home would get better. And indeed, he later arranged for his eldest son to go to college elsewhere on a scholarship. 10 His son left quietly early one morning without anyone in the village knowing until he was safely across the Jordanian border and on his way to the airport.11

Others follow the same line, believing that hope—or the means to achieving a better life—lies outside of Palestine. Leaving is, however, a practical impossibility for most people, for a variety of reasons. Mohammad worked in the Palestinian Authority Security Forces for nine years in Ramallah, spending four days there and returning home to Jayyus for three days. He was 26, had been married for 18 months and had a baby girl. At that time, Mohammad—like other employees under the PNA—had not received his salary, worth about £300, for seven months. Since the 2005 PNA elections, the subsequent international boycott of the Hamas administration, and Israel’s withholding of millions of dollars of taxes owed to the PNA, the security forces, teachers and health care workers were not being paid. This resulted in the shutting down of schools and hospitals throughout the West Bank. In the span of seven months, Mohammad had received £350. ‘From where...how can I pay the bills—the electricity, food, water—for my family?’ Mohammad told me despondently. ‘It costs 30 shekels each way to get to Ramallah [£4.50], and then 10 shekels a day for food...if I didn’t have a wife and baby, I would have left Palestine.’

But for others, like Kamal, the 26-year-old discussed at the beginning of the paper, leaving Palestine is not an option. ‘I would never leave Palestine’, Kamal told me, despite feeling hopeless about his life. ‘But anyway, I can’t even live here in the village, so how can I leave?’ Umm Mahena was adamantly against any of her children leaving Palestine, feeling that the family ought to stay close together at all costs. This outlook also informed the scope of her visions about future marriage partners for her sons and daughters. For example, Umm Mahena had refused suitors who came to ask for her eldest daughter’s hand in marriage because they intended to live ‘outside’. Parents, and mothers in particular, live with a constant fear of losing their children, not only as prisoners or martyrs but also as exiles. Umm Mahena believed that the family needed to deal with their life together, rather than splinter apart.12

10 This correlates to Nikos Papastergiadis’ discussion of hope and exile as ‘inextricably linked’. He writes ‘sometimes they are connected in the sense that you leave a country with the hope for something better, and sometimes they are opposite—you leave because you’ve lost hope at home’ (in Zournazi 2002:79).
11 When travelling abroad, West Bank Palestinians must fly out of the Jordanian airport in Amman, as they do not have permits to access Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. The crossing point into Jordan is regulated by the overarching security apparatus of Israel, which ultimately arbitrates who can pass the ‘border’.
12 Because gaining access to the ‘outside world’ is so difficult for Jayyusis, individuals who do leave seem to disappear into an unknown space, to be cut off and largely unreachable.
This outlook caused a lot of ambivalence in her unmarried children like Qais, who wanted to support the family but also wanted to ‘shimm al-hawa’ (‘breathe air’) somewhere else, having been so unsuccessful at finding or creating a livelihood in Palestine. With resources becoming scarcer, pooling individual efforts within a single structure—the household—increases the capacity of all members to survive. Children help farm, tend to the livestock, or contribute when they find paid work. At the same time, however, individuals like Qais and his siblings feel hopeless about their own future; day-to-day life feels meaningless and ‘dead’ as they have nothing to strive for. Personal frustrations are exacerbated when people confront their lack of capacity to pursue individual paths, whether in creating an independent household or experiencing a different kind of life elsewhere. Unemployed men and women, unable to gain their own independence, are tied to the household with its pooled resources. Individual pursuits often become secondary. In the absence of a state and of structural safety nets or subsidy schemes, the family is in most cases the most viable insurance policy. Security, if indeed it can be obtained at all, is implicitly bound up with the family unit. For this reason, household solidarity can also be the only source of hope for individuals, who may otherwise be overwhelmed with despair.

In Musa’s family and others, there is a commitment to one another, to keeping the household afloat. Musa’s success in his education expanded the potential of resources of livelihood of the entire family. Accordingly, when Musa did go to college for a brief period, his older siblings were expected to give whatever money they had to help pay for his fees and daily costs, even though they often did not have the money to buy a pack of cigarettes for themselves. Musa’s siblings were constantly balancing their wish to invest in Musa’s future (and so that of the family) against the need to put their own future to the side, as Akram had done when he had been forced to delay the building of his own house. Qais, who had the highest marks of all the siblings on his Tawjihi exams years earlier, helped pay for his sister to go to college instead of himself. Although individuals were committed to the family, they were also often resentful of this same commitment. It is these frustrations that drive people like Qais and Mohammad to want to leave, although leaving may be a practical impossibility. They want hope for themselves, not only in terms of the family.

But the subject of leaving is a contentious issue within the village as well as beyond. Because the sheer weight of Palestinian numbers forms the basis of an ethos of national resistance, anything that lessens this is damaging. The debate is heated because it concerns the future of al ša’b al falaṣṭīnī (the Palestinian people). At the heart of this debate is a conflict about the best strategy of survival under Israeli occupation, centred on two main points of view. Those against the idea of Palestinians leaving to ‘find’ a better life tend to support the idea that a better life at home can only be actualised when there is no longer occupation. Therefore, Palestinians must stay put and actively contest ‘tattbī’ (normalisation) of Israeli control in their everyday lives. According to this reasoning, the presence of Palestinians is essential, from which the frequently used political slogan ‘To Resist is to Exist’ partly derives (‘al muqawama, hiya a-wujūd’). The more Palestinians who leave, it is argued, the greater potential there is for Israel to realise its political plan of forcing Palestinian migration via economic strangulation. Israeli officials reinforced such sentiments regarding Israeli policy. Exactly one year after the Israeli boycotting of the Hamas administration elected to the Palestinian National
Authority, Dov Weissglass, advisor to former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, issued a statement about the economic crisis in the West Bank resulting from the Israeli and international boycott of the Hamas government: ‘It is like an appointment with a dietician. The Palestinians will get a lot thinner, but won’t die.’ 13 The phrase ‘To Resist is to Exist’ responds by emphasising that ‘life’ for Palestinians can only continue through a concerted effort of challenging and ‘breaking’ Israeli occupation.

Another element of survival and a source of people’s conflictual and ambivalent relationship with resistance is that people are tired and ultimately just want to be left to get on with daily life, unencumbered by additional problems. Their day-to-day focus is on how to survive, how to cope with the obstacles that each ‘tomorrow’ brings. In such cases, families focus on managing life on a moment-to-moment basis, not necessarily on forging a different vision for the future. Bleak outlooks and fatigue are also informed by a cumulative experience of worsening conditions of life, particularly for those of Umm and Abu Mahena’s generation and older. While such individuals may not necessarily be resigned to the terms of their existence, they may not feel a sense of hope either. In some ways, a better life can be actualised through small victories, or just making it through the day. But equally, as the realities of life become more difficult, the ‘costs’ of resistance are felt to be greater. If, for example, answering back to the authorities means that a farmer cannot make it to his land, he loses his only source of livelihood.

In Jayyus, the repeated experience of IDF punishment as a result of any direct challenge to the colonial military structure had left fewer individuals inclined to participate in organised events, particularly as their conditions of life have deteriorated. This was so, despite the village’s earlier reputation for spearheading mass protests against the construction of the Wall: a reputation on which other villages throughout the West Bank still model their own efforts of resistance today.

Amina, a 25-year-old woman actively involved in a resistance campaign, discussed with me the personal conflict that she faced while organising such political protests, a conflict which also arose when thinking about strategies of resistance more broadly.

We [those who campaign] sit and talk together and come up with ideas, and then leave feeling good about the possibilities ahead. But what can we really ask of people, people who have had everything taken away from them? We even take their problems. Well, no, they are left with their problems...but we use them. It’s easy to see why people just want to focus on their own survival. I mean, someone tells us that their house is going to be demolished, and we, meaning all the popular committees, can’t find them a lawyer. Each person speaks from their position, and can they do more than this?

Mureed, in his thirties from Jayyus who works with an outreach organisation, expressed another view.

The cost is higher to do nothing. We want to live and so we don’t resist, but what life do we accept without resistance? Is this not worse than death?

13 Quoted in Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz, Feb. 19th 2006, “As Hamas Team Laughs” by Gideon Levy
Here, Mureed conveys the opinion that survival for Palestinians requires a constant eye on a different vision of the future. Acquiring such a vision necessitates consciously rejecting the imposed terms of their present lives. But even though Mureed had devoted his life to campaigning, he, like Amina, also struggled to keep a sense of hope and stay active in what often felt futile. Born and raised in the village, he could also relate to people’s sense of fatigue and desire for the least possible disruption as they carry out daily tasks. Military interventions and control points take away time in the day, felt not only in the hours waiting in line, but also physically and psychologically.

These debates around paths of survival and the nature of one’s existence are ever-present within families. When children blatantly challenge and ‘disobey’ soldiers while trying to cross the Wall gate to the agricultural fields, heated arguments within the family invariably follow, with flaring tempers. ‘Don’t make problems!’ parents shouted angrily. ‘To hell with them!’ children responded in frustration. ‘What, are we just supposed to put our head down and say thank you [for letting us pass to our own land]?’ Parents often reprimand children for such actions, both out of fear for their children and in frustration when they experience yet further delays. But in the view of some people in the Palestinian community, this same fear that parents have for their children’s safety forces a kind of compliance with colonial military administration controlling their lives.

The Limits of ‘Coping & Resistance’
If involvement in political resistance implies a vision of one’s place in the future, such a vision does not necessarily resolve the conflicts of life in the present. It is possible to be both resigned, and to resist. The effort to hold onto and maintain a sense of hope is an on-going one, even for those who are part of organised resistance campaigns. Individuals may actively resist, while also feeling resigned. Jamal once told me poignantly, ‘Hope is not something I believe in. Hope is destructive because it kills the spirit each time the hope is not realised.’ ‘If it is not for the hope of Palestine, then why are you involved in the PFLP (The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine)?’ I asked him. ‘Because as long as there is occupation, we have to fight it. But it doesn’t mean I have hope for the outcome,’ he replied.

Jamal’s comment merits further consideration. The lives of ordinary Palestinians are often cast in terms like ‘resistance’: both by outside observers (academic and otherwise) and within the political movement itself. Here, such terms as sumud and muqawama are commonly used, albeit with different emphases. Sumud (steadfastness) may require no everyday manifestations of hope (save the wider hope of the cause), whereas the activist muqawama (resistance) does require planning and action whether or not there is the slightest sense that it will effect an improvement (‘hope’) in the actor’s life.

Within these tropes, hope is taken for granted and is implicitly inscribed in people’s actions and motivations. This may speak more to the observer’s own sensibilities than to social encounters of everyday life. In my research, if hope was not in evidence in this implicit sense, it was even less evident in people’s overt statements. Very few speak about or relate to their lives with gusto and self-affirmation; still fewer explicitly affirm the possibility that their actions will make a difference. Sentiments of hopelessness are much more pervasive, with individuals struggling persistently not to become altogether
resigned but often succumbing to resignation. As a researcher, coming to terms with this sense of collective despair is undeniably difficult. Like others, I wanted to believe that there is a ‘silver lining’ to the fighting human spirit.

Yet I could not deny the fact that feelings of hopelessness and despair are prominent across generations, gender, and class. Parents constantly fear the loss of their children and worry about how they will be able to provide for them. Children often curse the day they were born, blaming their parents for bringing them into the world. Survival in Jayyus involves juggling life roles as an individual, a family member, and as part of a larger ‘national community’. More often than not, this includes having to cope with all three intertwining and conflicting responsibilities, desires, emotions, and attitudes about life, which also makes a shared ethos of national resistance very difficult. The use of sumud to characterise Palestinian resistance can also be misleading, therefore, because it casts collective ‘non-action’ (i.e. just ‘getting by’) as if this were a cohesive national movement. Yet, resistance is much more fragmented and contested in the messy business of everyday survival.

At a basic level, resistance can be a practical coping strategy to deal with day-to-day circumstances, as the political slogan of sumud perhaps implies. For Amina, Mureed and others like them, it is both a source of and means through which to generate ‘hope in the present’ (Massumi in Zournazi 2002) while mediating the pressures of everyday life. More specifically, hope provides a means to escape the present. Hope, as Vincent Crapanzano (2003) suggests, has a transcendent quality. It can offer a means of dealing with the now by turning to another time that simulates peoples’ senses of ‘a better life’. For some, particularly older generations, a better life is embodied in an imaginary past (see Calis 2011). Others derive hope from the thought of leaving Palestine, or in an imaginary future of Palestine without ‘al ihtilāl’ (‘the occupation’), believing in the capacity of human agency to force structural change. Here, the very notion of change is the basis of hope, which can give meaning and purpose to the present. This vision of a different future, akin to what Mary Zournazi characterises as a type of ‘future nostalgia’ (2002:15), also provides an impetus to engage in wider, more organised forms of political activity. In his three-volume exposition, Principle of Hope, philosopher Ernst Bloch (1985) articulated that hope is, in fact, a pivotal motivating factor for any political movement. He argued that a movement’s on-going relevance depends upon the alternative vision that it offers (see also Dauenhauer 1986).

Yet, as everyday life becomes ever more dire, people’s ability to focus on the future dissipates in the face of pressing issues of the day, such as how to evade a particular checkpoint or manage a specific military-related household problem. The wider national ‘liberation’ struggle may in this context seem abstract and far removed. In Jayyus, these somewhat divergent imperatives produce a tension between ‘coping’ and ‘resistance’.

However, even if individuals are not actively contesting Israeli military control, this does not mean that they accept the terms of their existence. When people ask questions like ‘is this a life?’ they are implicitly drawing on their own awareness of something ‘better’. A ‘good life’ may mean being able to live up to family and social expectations: in pursuing education, for example, or having the means to build a home with the furnishings of a sort of lifestyle portrayed as ‘normal’ elsewhere in TV and film; or having the ability to dream with hopeful prospects.
Crucially, therefore, hope is also linked with desire. Individuals in Jayyus often feel despair precisely because there is no belief that what is desired can be actualised. This underscores a significant point: to hope also depends on some other agency, and belief in the efficacy of its intervention. What is not in your power to do as an individual is left in the hands of external agents—whether a divine power, or the international community in the form of political intervention, or a higher morality embodied in an idea of universal human rights. This aspect of hope is essential in understanding the overwhelming sense of collective despair in Jayyus and beyond. Individuals feel helpless because, time and again, such outside intervention has failed to materialise. On the contrary, what has been reinforced over several generations is that no outside agency can be relied upon to change the political situation. Therefore, the critical dimension of hope that underlies a belief in the future is neutralised. It has been compromised over a prolonged period of time spent feeling helpless in the face of a colonial military authority.

Here, the transcendent quality of hope that Crapanzano emphasises is equally important in understanding Jayyus’s collective struggle with resignation. Bloch, on whom Crapanzano draws, remarked that ‘Hope makes people broad instead of confining them’ (1985:3). When individuals in Jayyus lack hope—and, in turn, lack any capacity to broaden horizons or transcend the present—the psychological effects of an administrative systems of social confinement are further heightened. The sense of feeling trapped in the present becomes more suffocating and oppressive. The extent to which conditions of life can deteriorate appears open-ended, endless. So, a wish for death is prevalent and almost romanticised among youth facing their futures; death seems to offer the only means of transcending military conditions otherwise inescapable and relentless.

Maintaining a sense of hope, therefore, is significantly undermined in part because two key dimensions necessary for its regeneration are either significantly undermined or absent altogether—its transcendent quality and belief in the efficacy of external agents to change life for the better. The result of this, as philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1951) claimed, is that life without hope feels worthless: ‘Hope is for the soul what breathing is for the living organism. Where hope is missing, the soul dries up and withers’ (ibid:10-11).

As Sherry Ortner comments, ‘it is the absence of these forms of internal conflict in many resistance studies that gives them an air of romanticism, of which they are often accused’ (Ortner 1995:177). Such romanticism in research on Palestine can divert analytical attention from the degree of structural interference that curbs people’s choices, actions, and aspirations in concrete ways. But what the above ethnographic material also illuminates is that while political oppression is enacted systemically through administrative practices, it implicates the most personal—people’s ability and instinct to survive. As Jayyus attempt to find inventive ways to continue to exist, options and resources are likewise structurally reduced and eliminated. This incessant cycle cripples the will to keep going and is at the heart of the tension between maintaining hope and feeling despair about life for the present and future. Romanticising resistance, therefore, also leaves little space for understanding the complexities of human emotion, unduly or inaccurately emphasising ‘hope’, when what we may need to be confronting is the real prospect of hope’s absence—or, at least, the possible social consequences of collective despair.
Bibliography


