

The Mass Media and the Determination of Palestinians

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This paper seeks to present a study of local structures through which global circumstances are negotiated. In particular I look at role of the mass media in the transformation of political significances in a Palestinian village on the West Bank from the local to the global, and the relation of those media to the articulation and negotiation of the relation between these different levels. I have argued elsewhere (Kaim 1997, 1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2005) **that if we are to understand the social and cultural implications of the integration of the whole planet into a single global system we must study the local level and the relations between it and the others.** The local level is particularly important as it is the level at which action takes place, and it is through action that (social and cultural) **structure is connected to (physical, geographical, technological, or other) circumstance.** Without understanding this relation at the local level between structure and circumstance we cannot understand social and cultural change or continuity, diversity, or convergence at that level or the others. This study takes as its ethnographic focus concerns the village of Tustas (not the village's real name), which is a Palestinian village on the West Bank, nestled in the Judean hills overlooking the Palestinian plain. It is a mixed Christian and Muslim village with a total resident population of approximately 1,000, about two thirds of which is Christian and one third Muslim.

Palestinians have been involved in a variety of transformative actions over a long period. Among those, the first Palestinian uprising (*intifada*) was not only a pivotal practical moment in the transformation of the territories as a whole and of Tustas but was also a critical theoretical one. The

mass media were central to this. In reporting on and representing the uprising and the actions of Palestinians in it, the mass media had a far-reaching impact in changing what is taken as authoritative knowledge and 'facts', **in Tustas, Palestine, and more widely. They gave Tustasis, and Palestinians more generally, a sense of Palestinian actions and the power of their actions.** They were thus importantly involved in the construction, *by Palestinians*, of Palestinian action in the world and, through this, of Palestinian identity.

This is sharply at odds with the approach and conclusions of Edward Said (1979, 1980, 1981, 1985, 1988, 1993, 1994, 1995). However, my approach, which brings together circumstances, structures, dispositions, and subjective actions, has greater explanatory force than that of Said when confronted, for example, with general phenomena such as Palestinians' 'use' of the mass media in their struggle. It also allows better understanding of local phenomena and details such as the changes in notions of authoritative knowledge which are occurring in Tustas, or the relation between the various structures, circumstances, and actions, such as symbolic geography, logics of relatedness, religious, political, and other affiliations, changed economic, communications, and educational circumstances, and changed notions of authority and knowledge.

The intifada both was and still is understood by many of those who participated in it as a construction of Palestinian identity through action in the world. However, an individual's field of direct experience in relation to a movement that was as large and widespread as the intifada must be limited. Therefore, given Tustasis' exposure to the mass media, their awareness of Palestinian action (in the intifada or elsewhere), **and thus their sense of that action, must be critically influenced by reportage and presentation of it in the media.**

In conjunction with mass education the mass media have produced a situation in which the authority-value of knowledge among older and uneducated inhabitants of Tustas differs from that among the youth. The former take their own experiences and those of their relatives and friends as the main referents for their views of everything from how to protect crops from the depredations of pests to the meaning of the unrest or the current peace process. Younger inhabitants are more inclined to accept the overriding of conclusions based on their own experience by declarations or disquisitions from authoritative sources. Those of natural scientists, intellectuals, and educated people generally, 'experts', and reports in the written or electronic media are particularly accepted and valued. For many people the primacy of personal experience in creating one's own view of the world is being compromised, and perhaps ultimately will be supplanted, to a greater or lesser extent, by the personal experience of exposure to 'pictures of the world' presented by

the media. The intellectually inclined (subjected to the same revolution in thought that the West has undergone since the time of Bacon) learn to accept the pronouncements of 'scientists' and 'experts' even when these may contradict their own experience.

Local Structures of Communication

Despite integration into the world economy, and the associated development of modern communications and education infrastructures some important communal and local networks and structures of communication have been retained. This supports, in part, the findings of Shinar (1987) that such networks are as viable as the mass media in performing communicative functions. He argues that they constitute "communications systems analogous to the mass media" and are "easily available, highly credible, reasonably flexible, pervasive, and organically integrated into society" (Shinar 1987 : 153) . However, although such apparently 'local' structures remain in place in Tustas they are not localised in the same way as when the village and its environs were the socially and politically significant world of the inhabitants. The movement of political and economic significance from the 'locality' to the 'region' or 'nation' of Palestine has led to formerly localised structures exerting influence *through connection to* wider organisations and structures of authority and knowledge. 'Local' structures are no longer 'localised.' Though still used for local purposes, they have also been caught in the movement to wider authority and knowledge structures and have been harnessed to those wider structures' purposes.

The mosque provides a particularly clear example of this. Announcements of local and communal interest continue to be made through local and communal channels. For example, Muslims announce forthcoming weddings in their mosque and Christians in their churches. Announcements are also made at the village's various guesthouses, which then take it on themselves to inform their members. When a Muslim dies, the loudspeakers of the mosque, which can be heard across the village, are used to broadcast the news of the death and details of when the funeral and burial will take place. When a Christian dies church bells are rung so that all know that a death has occurred. The time of burial may then be ascertained by hearsay. In addition to this the bells are rung again shortly before the funeral service is to take place.

The loudspeakers of the mosque and the bells of the churches are also used to rally the villagers, as was done, for example, when Israeli settlers attacked the village during one of my visits.

The loudspeakers of the mosque are also used to broadcast announcements of general interest to the village. For example, when health workers came to the village to open a clinic for the day, an

announcement to that effect was made over the loudspeakers. Such use of the loudspeakers to broadcast messages of cross-confessional interest to the whole village is accepted by both confessions, so much so that the Christians have not felt any need to establish an alternative method of cross-confessional news dissemination. Indeed, apart from setting up their own loudspeakers, nothing else would be as effective. Of course, the Muslims also use the loudspeakers for their own communal announcements. These are all clearly local uses and purposes.

However, all the key personnel controlling the mosque belong to the Muslim Brothers (MB). Finally, they control use of the mosque as an instrument of communication. They control access to the loudspeakers. They also determine who is invited to lead prayers or address the congregation. These last two are both very important *political* functions as they allow the imam, or speaker, largely to set the agenda for the gathering. The social importance of the mosque and its preachers is due, in large part, to the activities of the MB, an organisation having its base of authority and knowledge outside the village. The integration of the mosque and its communicative activities into wider structures is well developed and strong: guest speakers are brought in by the MB as frequently as once a month to address the congregation on topical issues, and video tapes from MB organisations in other countries are regularly brought in and screened in the mosque itself.

The importance of wider non-local knowledge-authority was succinctly expressed in one of the videos that I watched in company with the usual congregation. The subject of the video was a debate between a famous American television evangelist and a similarly well-known MB sheikh from Egypt. The video was made in Saudi Arabia. In it the alleged power of Islamic rationality to overcome its perceived greatest challenge (Western Christianity) was 'demonstrated' for the audience by the sheikh's manoeuvring of the evangelist to agree that certain parts of the Bible might not be appropriate reading for the latter's wife or daughter because of their references to sex. This was contrasted with the Qur'an, all of which the sheikh declared fit for his wife and daughters to read. The absence of 'impure' passages was taken as affirming the unquestionable truth of the Qur'an as God's unaltered Word (in contrast to their presence in the Bible, which was taken thereby as adulterated and therefore untrue), and by implication to confirm the MB as a group committed to the expression of that Word in the re-organisation of society. Authority for the MB was thus derived from the cosmic level. This relied on the logic in Islam that defines the Qur'an as the only *unaltered* expression of God's Word revealed to humanity and, thus, the only *true* revelation. Practically, too, the nature of the debate as between an *American* Christian and an *Egyptian* Muslim Brother, with the video itself made by the MB in *Saudi Arabia*, indicates the encompassment of 'local' structures by wider ones from which connection authority is drawn.

Within the specific area of the village, the influence of communal leaders through the mosque, preachers, and religious bodies (such as the MB) is demonstrated most dramatically by two of the villagers' responses to the attack by Israeli settlers. Firstly, at the time of the attack the calls to assemble females and children in the mosque (made by a known Muslim Brother), and the wide Muslim compliance with these calls, in contrast to the Christians' individualistic and critical reactions, illustrate this point. Secondly, the influence of MB-Hamas operatives in controlling the Muslim youth after the incident and the absence of subsequent actions to provoke the Israelis also indicate the influence of those operatives and their religiously-oriented modes of communication.

Regardless of the viability of religious and communal networks as modes of communication and their integration into wider knowledge-authority structures, mobilisation of the populace would be very difficult if not impossible, without system. Shinar noted that among Muslims, the Supreme Muslim Council was one of the few country-wide organisations operating legally on the West Bank under occupation. This allowed it to maintain communication with a wide audience at all times : leaflets and declarations were distributed during and after prayers ; texts were read in mosques, printed in the Palestinian press, and relayed on Jordanian television ; and the Council sponsored classes on religious matters (Shinar 1987 : 83). **Institutionally, three main features enhance the effectiveness, persuasiveness, and relevance of such religious networks.** These are their possession of centralised organisation with clear lines of control and channels accessible to wide audiences ; authoritative, well-defined, and uncomplicated messages relevant to the cognitive, emotional, and integrative needs of the populace ; and strong institutional links throughout society (Shinar 1987 : 83). **These qualities maintain the predisposition of audiences to use religious networks.** This happens in Tustas, at least among Muslims. The politically and religiously dominant MB-Hamas exhibits these features, which help shape a disposition of Tustasi Muslims to accept social and political integration, given a religious gloss and expressed through the religious network (Kaim 2004). **Local Christians, however, are characterised by denominational division, exacerbated by the influence of other forces.** This lessens the very possibility of a central and integrating religious network such as the Muslims enjoy.

The Electronic Mass Media

Externally generated electricity did not come to Tustas until 1982. There had been some electricity before that, from the beginning of the 1970s, as a Christian community project. An international Christian group provided eight generators which supplied power to the Christian community. However, since 1982 electricity has been available throughout the village. Wired electricity

was, of course, necessary for the spread of television to each house, though battery operated radios predated it.

The British administration gave the first radio to the Muslim mukhtar of the village in about 1940, to assist in the spread of propaganda for the war effort. The radio was well received by the villagers and large groups used to congregate to listen to it. More radios entered the village in the Jordanian period. During the Israeli period they became truly ubiquitous. The first television did not arrive until 1973 when a Christian family bought one privately. More were bought after this, and once electricity was laid onto the village in 1982 the television became one of the most common appliances to be found in village homes. The only houses which do not have sets are those of two refugees struggling to make ends meet and who, incidentally, live in the only houses which do not have electricity connected.

Relation to the Mass Media

This saturation of the village with both radios and televisions, together with a dearth of newspapers (which only come to the village if bought elsewhere and brought back), ensures that it is the first two that exercise greater influence on the people and their pictures of the world. Radio is the most convenient medium by which the populace gets most of its news. Television is important for a different reason, namely, for the narrative images that it provides. Narrative images from television, by their combination of visual dynamism and auditory input have a greater and more immediate impact on viewers than those of other media¹. This plays a part in, but is also accentuated by, the relatively greater penetration of the village by television than by radio and the printed media. The majority of villagers give the narrative images provided by television or video a credence second to none, while reports from other media are subject to confirmation or refutation by filmed reports².

Television provides powerful pictures of Palestinian unrest and circumstances, and of disasters and unrest elsewhere in the world. Through these pictures villagers in Tustas compare, however superficially, their situation with that in other countries. They generally return to the view that Palestinians suffer more than anyone else. During the uprising, electronic images had a role in the self-identification of Palestinian viewers as suffering. They also provided a vision of what it was that they were suffering. They thus formed narrative images. They 'showed' the necessity of vi-

1 The Internet and social media mobilization remain relatively limited due to unreliable electricity supply and reception difficulties in this rugged area.

2 This preference for filmed reporting is not confined to Palestinians by any means.

olence and demonstrations and reinforced the idea of Palestinians being a powerless and oppressed people, which in turn was used to justify their struggle. In a very general sense the pictures of struggles elsewhere provided a base for a superficial idea of the universality of their own struggle as one of oppressed people everywhere.

However, the mass of the villagers³ thought the Palestinian struggle to be especially severe : more so than struggles anywhere else are on the people involved. Comparisons made between demonstrations in South Korea and the Palestinian uprising are an example of this. In the early months of the intifada a series of demonstrations by South Korean students occurred and were reported in the television news on the West Bank. Sometimes these reports were broadcast immediately before or after reports of that day's intifada-related activities. The ferocity of the actions of both the Korean students and police was acknowledged by villagers of both confessions and all age and educational groups. However, this was done only to the end that it could be argued that the Israeli state was even more repressive than its South Korean counterpart⁴. Similarly, the current uprising in Syria and the previous uprisings in Tunisia and Libya as opposed to the 'failure' of civil unrest against Israel are also interpreted in a similar way. Indeed, the success of the uprising in Libya is perversely seen as confirming the allegedly more repressive nature of the Israeli state.

Such reports were used to emphasise the posited greater repression endured by the Palestinians and hence their particular right to physical protest. The notion that repression by the State justified such protest was also used to deny that the intifada was an act of violence (*'unf'*). The Israeli State was defined as particularly repressive and so unjust. Thus, its actions were characterised by the villagers as violent and terroristic (*irhābi*). The perceived justice of the Palestinians' protest in the face of an unjust and repressive regime was used to legitimate the use of physical force against that regime and its sympathisers. The particular use of force that developed was thus rendered as 'uprising' and not 'violence'.

Whatever else the villagers tune to on the radio or television all attend to the news programmes each day. This creates a high level of exposure to foreign news reports, so that it is not surprising that the villagers are very conscious of the news media as such. That is to say, they are conscious of the media transmitting images and information which people use as a basis on which to form views of the Palestinian problem. More than this, through foreign news reports they have

3 Apart from the Communists, who argued that the Palestinian struggle was one of a third world people against capitalist imperialism.

4 See also Hunter (1993)

become very aware of the images of Palestinians and Palestine that are presented and through which they perceive foreigners formulate many of their views of them and their struggle. The images of Palestinians that foreigners receive were of especial importance to Tustasis. Among people of all confessions, educational levels and age groups there was a widespread concern that Palestinians were often seen as practitioners of politically-motivated violence and that this might lessen the willingness of outsiders to understand their situation or to press for its resolution. On numerous occasions a wide range of people, from, for example, an old woman lacking the most rudimentary schooling to adolescents of both confessions, charged me with the responsibility that, having seen that the Palestinians “are not all terrorists” (as outsiders may have come to see them to be) **but are rather “normal people trying to live their lives in peace,”** I should communicate this to people in the West. Connected to this was another concern, again expressed across the whole spectrum of people in Tustas, that I should record detailed information about the demonstrations, demands, and activities of the Palestinians making up the intifada as well as the actions, both official and unofficial, of the Israelis in trying to put it down. I should then tell people in the outside world about it. These two related concerns and investments in my research indicate a wide spread belief in the power of reportage to influence international opinion, and faith in the ability of such opinion to assist in improving the situation in the occupied territories and, ultimately, in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself. In short, these villagers feel a need to get international support and see both media coverage and private reportage as effective in forming public opinion overseas, and so gaining that support.

From this consciousness of the media it is but a short step to another view, commonly expressed both inside and outside the village at the time, that the importance of the uprising itself lay in the effect it had in focussing international attention on the Israeli-Palestinian problem. The uprising was seen as important in allowing Palestinians to gain international support by showing their common humanity and by appealing to international ideologies such as liberty and national self-determination. The audience being targeted was international. Coverage of the uprising “gives the world a view of Palestinians and shows that we are people whose humanity is not less than that of other people and that all we want is to claim our freedom.” Just as the rolling strikes of the intifada were intended to disrupt the Israeli economy, demonstrations and civil unrest were intended to remind both the Israeli and international publics that the problem remained acute. To quote Isma’il,

the demonstrations are to show the outside world that the Palestinians can act with one mind, and to remind the world, which had begun to concentrate on other issues, such as the

war between Iran and Iraq, that we are still here and that the problem remains unsolved.

The primary importance of the uprising for these people was not as an attempt directly to topple Israeli structures of control in the territories but to put the plight of the Palestinians in the territories before the people of the world and to ensure that the world's attention did not stray onto 'other issues'. It was widely thought that demonstrations and throwing stones in and of themselves could neither threaten the Israeli state nor force it to make concessions. Of course, they were intended to increase the economic cost to Israel of continuing the occupation, but their greater value was measured by the extent to which they mobilised international pressure which could force Israel to negotiate. In order to achieve its goals the uprising needed, and was seen to need, an international audience and 'witness'. This could only be achieved through the reportage of the mass media. Because of this strikes of Arab shops which prevented Palestinians from buying even their necessities were deemed useful because, "by keeping the shops shut a signal is sent to the Israelis and especially to the outside world that the problem has not been solved and we are still here. This will, in turn, keep the pressure on Israel from the outside."⁵ Or, as a middle-aged teacher, who described himself as an educator non-partisan and apolitical, argued, "though the strikes may appear to hurt the Arabs [sic] more than the Jews [sic] because the Jewish [sic] shops and factories remain open, the reason for them is to cause the international and world community to study the problem and to try to do something."

The taken for granted nature of belief in the value and utility of using the mass media to communicate with the wider world as well as belief in the power of international pressure to achieve progress and a solution to the problem indicate a transformation of the villagers' systems of political significance occurring *through* the Palestinians' relation to the media and not in spite of it⁶. This is further brought out in the most common charge made against the Israelis: that they are or act like the Nazis, or even worse.

The villagers were well aware that when 'the world' was confronted with the inhumanity of the Nazis' treatment of the Jews this was of instrumental benefit to the case for the establishment of Israel. Villagers' sources of this information are varied. Several times when visiting friends (both Muslim and Christian) I found them attentively watching programmes on Israeli television dealing with the Nazis' persecution of the Jews. Even illiterate villagers have become familiar with

5 Abū Badr, of the Ghazal, in conversation, noted later.

6 This is connected to the transformation occurring through the changed nature of communications, the altered nature of the economy (discussed in Kaim 2005), and developments in education.

narrative images of both the Nazis and their treatment of the Jews through such programmes and could 'explain' to me what was happening in case I should not understand. High school pupils were well-informed about this subject through their classes in history. Articles on this and related subjects appear in the Arabic print media. Finally, each of the political groups in the village (the MB-Hamas, Fatah, the Communists, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)) take it on themselves to equip their members with the ability to argue their respective cases. This requires that members be able to address the question of whether the Nazi persecution justifies the establishment of the State of Israel in *Palestine*. A further issue is whether there are parallels between the position of the Jews under the Nazis and the Palestinians under the Israelis. These are important questions in political discussions among the villagers. By using an historical example so important in the campaign to establish Israel in order to characterise *the Palestinians'* position under Israel, the villagers are able to claim a moral equivalence between the two. This moral equivalence is expressed in terms of global discourses of human rights ; discourses which themselves rose to such prominence in the wake of the events of the Second World War⁷.

It was common, then, for villagers to say to each other, and for me to be told by them, that "the Jews are worse than the Nazis and kill young women and children ; " Israel "is worse than a Fascist state ; " "they are the new Nazis ; " or, as one informant interestingly queried, "have you heard about Hitler? They are worse than Hitler." Both education and the mass media provide such categories for the people to use in their perception of events and their use indicates that a 'global' vocabulary, common around the world, is used in this role. It should be stressed, however, that not all the informants who use such a vocabulary are necessarily conscious of the discourse from which it comes or knowledgeable of the events to which it refers. Many, particularly among the middle aged, have no developed idea of *how* the Israelis are like the Nazis but merely know that the Nazis and Fascists are associated with repression and the denial of human rights, and do not develop their ideas or understanding beyond that. Thus one young male Muslim informant could say that the Israelis are worse than the Nazis because women and children had been

7 The invocation of the Nazis to describe and condemn the treatment of Palestinians by Israelis is one of a number of interesting 'reflections' of Jewish and Israeli discourses of self-understanding. Other parallels are the notion of being a dispersed people and the desire to 'return.' Such apparent 'mirroring' deserves detailed study. However, to include such a study here would not be practicable. I therefore limit myself to mentioning it and suggesting it as deserving attention in the future. What is important for the current discussion is what it indicates about the transformation of the political significances with which the villagers work, from the local (during the Ottoman period) to the global (as is currently the case).

killed during the intifada, though of course the Nazis systematically killed large numbers of women and children. Similarly, while watching an Israeli television news report in which Palestinian youths sat blindfolded with their hands bound in front of their bodies, my co-viewers could ejaculate, "Look! Look at what they do! They are worse than the Nazis. The Nazis never did such things!"

The younger generations, who have had a more comprehensive education than their elders (who actually lived through the Second World War), **display a greater knowledge of the Nazis. So familiar** are they with this aspect of history that several of this literate generation, having been taught history in school, were able to present me with the revisionist arguments that the death camps did not exist and that stories of Nazi persecution of the Jews were part of a Zionist conspiracy, or that "only" 6 000 Jews were killed, not six million, and did so as competently as any such revisionists living in the West. Also of interest in regard to the influence of global discourses, the media, and the internalisation of this aspect of world and Jewish history was a graffito appearing in the village: "✱new✱". **Significantly, this graffito was written in the 'global' and 'media' language, namely English, together with symbols apprehensible around the world.** This contrasts with the mass of graffiti which came to cover walls in the village as the uprising continued, which were in Arabic.

This transformation of significances from the local to the global is, in this case, primarily political. At no time did members of the USA-based evangelical Protestant Church of God, established in the village by expatriate missionaries after the 1967 war, use the rhetoric of the equivalence of Nazism and the practices of the State of Israel in discussion among themselves, with other villagers, or with me. The significance of the actions of the Israeli state for this congregation was predominantly religious and chiliastic, and their significances and idiom quite different.

The other Christians' and the Muslims' logics of collectivity and engagement in action in the world predispose them to draw relevances with *politically* mobilising force. The evangelical Protestants have a particular logic of individualism which predisposed them to a quietistic millenarianism (Kaim 2003: 138-142). **The oppression of the Jews by the Nazis followed by the establishment of the State of Israel is, for them, a 'sign' of (literally) eschatological importance:** it is a sign of God's covenant with the Jews and the imminence of the Apocalypse. It was in these terms that it excited them and in which they referred to it. It was not used to mobilise members of that Church to political activism, but to reinforcement of their faith, and anticipation of Judgement and *personal* salvation. Not surprisingly, then, the evangelical Protestants did not make the same con-

nections as their Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox co-villagers. Indeed the logic of their particular individualism positively militates against the drawing of such significances. They draw religious parallels : the rest of the village draws political ones. From this difference antagonism grows : this is the logical basis of the regular denouncements of the Church of God as Zionist by politically active Muslims and Christians, and provides a further example of the influence of cultural logics on the constitution of significance.

Through the evangelical Protestants' *religious* predisposition, local and global (indeed, universal) foci both are obliterated because the universal is immediately significant on the personal level. God is everywhere and immanent in us all. For the Muslims and the majority of Christians the distinction between local and global is acute (though phrased in terms of a literate/non-literate distinction) and forms an important part of the *political* supersession of the traditional elders and the rise of the youth. The distinction is important because it allows the shift of political dominance from one generation to another, and from one type of knowledge to another, to be understood and to be made meaningful. It makes youth leadership in the intifada *appropriate*, even to those elders who lament their generation's loss of dominance. New circumstances are recognised to require new methods. The notion of change itself is basic. The Protestants' *apolitical* religiosity (in contrast to the Muslims' engagement of politics with religion and the Christian majority's a-religious politicality) does not require such a notion of change.

The media, (particularly television and the narrative images taken from it) were thus important not simply for conveying messages to an international audience and eliciting support from it. They also provided tools by which Palestinians themselves fashioned their own understanding of the uprising. They did so on the basic level of what was reported as having happened, and when, where, and how it happened. They also provided material through which the actors invested their understanding and knowledge of the uprising and the uprising itself with meaning. More fundamentally, they have been instrumental in shifting political significances from the local knowledge of previous centuries to the wider knowledge on which the youth currently rely. In this way they play a part in the further reduction of the elders (and their knowledge) to irrelevance, and in the increasing (political) relevance of the youth. They thus play a part in making *Palestinian* history. This is achieved through Palestinians being able to deal *appropriatively* with the media and their products. It is basic to my theoretical position and analytical approach that this should be so. However, this brings us into direct disagreement with the position and interpretation of perhaps the most influential commentator on the Palestinian problem, Edward Said. The reasons for this disagreement are both basic and important.

The Media : appropriating, appropriated, or both?

The uprising and its relation to the media are of import if we are to understand both the uprising and reportage of it. It draws into question the relation between events and the representation of events. More specific to this study, the uprising also draws into question the relation of the mass media to political actions and structures, and thus to notions of domination and coercion.

I have argued that the Palestinians actively involved media reportage of their action in their own political project. This I demonstrated to be done in two ways. Firstly, the media were 'used' to transmit the uprising to the world in order to influence international public opinion to demand action on the Palestinians' behalf. Secondly, the media, together with other aspects of modern communications, form sources of knowledge and information from the wider world. Palestinians may use this knowledge for their own purposes.

Within Tustas knowledge and information gained from such 'wider' sources are used to further weaken the political role of 'local' knowledge. This entails a movement of political power among Palestinians themselves, to assist *national* mobilisation and struggle. I have suggested that the mass media have a role in the transformation of Palestinian political relevances and authoritative knowledge, and that the *Palestinians'* active relation to the media is integral to this. I have therefore argued that *the Palestinians have dealt appropriatively* with the media and their representations of events. Edward Said argues that the media and their representations in fact drastically restrict the ability of Palestinians (and other non-Westerners) to so deal with 'reality.'⁸

When the uprising began one idea that united Palestinians (regardless of social class, educational level, or political persuasion) was that the intifada had brought the Palestinian question back to the attention of the world. Previously, the Arabs had down-graded its consideration at the Amman summit of 1987 and the world at large had concentrated on the Iran-Iraq war, among other issues. Indeed, writers such as Siniora (1988) see the relegation of the Palestinian problem as a trigger for the uprising itself. This is not surprising in view of the connection of the media to changes in the villagers' modes of interpretation, discussed above. Among Palestinians, in the territories especially, the intifada increased their national pride. This was partly because they saw

⁸ Though this issue also relates to questions of power and knowledge raised by 'post-modernists' the way in which I have phrased it here more critically affects my general argument. Here, therefore, I shall concentrate on Said's critique of 'Orientalism'. That critique informs his writing on the Palestinians, the Israeli-Palestinian problem more generally, and his criticism of the media and its coverage of the Middle East and Palestinians in particular.

themselves as unarmed Palestinians who “transformed the image of the Palestinians in the international community, and placed Israel in the most difficult dilemma of its forty-year existence” (Kuttab 1988 : 42). Not for these participants the idea that they had been rendered silent. Rather the global media were crucial to their vocality as it is through them that narrative images of both Palestinian struggle and Israeli brutality were transmitted to the international community⁹.

Reports of the intifada by the same media companies and networks that service the bulk of the Western world, helped create a new self-confidence among the populace. This is the second moment of the Palestinians’ relation to the media, in which the latter are used for *Palestinian* mobilisation. This new self-confidence is part of what I have referred to as Palestinians gaining a sense of their actions and of the power of those actions, through the media and *not* in spite of them, as Said would have it. Palestinians and their sympathisers elsewhere (for example, see Seddon 1989) have said very clearly that through this act of ‘making history’ a return to the pre-existing situation is not possible. Arguably, without the intifada the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories and moves towards Palestinian self-rule would not have occurred. Nor, it is true, is a return to the previous situation possible. History has truly been made by Palestinians for themselves and for the wider region, and so for the wider world.

What is important is that this new self-confidence is related to the reporting of aspects of the uprising by the media and the interpretation of such reported aspects by Palestinians themselves. Furthermore, a number of developments have shown that Palestinians can influence opinion and political agendas around the world through the media, and that the villagers’ faith is not misguided. These are :

- (a) the United Nations’ Security Council resolution of early 1988 on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict ;
- (b) Jordan’s renunciation of claims to the West Bank ;
- (c) the United States’ commencement of talks with the PLO ;
- (d) the peace negotiations sponsored by the United States ;
- (e) a movement of opinion in the West to favour settlement and realisation of Palestinian rights (cf. Nassar and Heacock 1990 : 310) ; and,
- (f) **the achievement of limited self rule by the Palestinians and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories.**

9 The media are also integral to Palestinians’ vocality through the narrative images transmitted to Palestinians themselves and which the latter appropriate to develop their own understandings and significances, and, indeed, their own mobilisation, as discussed earlier.

Of course, the final results of such attention and awareness depend on the further practice of actors (both in the territories and outside them), influenced by the structures in which they are situated and the circumstances that they face at that time. They do not depend on media reportage alone, or even mainly (as is also the case in the West) ¹⁰. Palestinians, constructed by Said in particular, as a non-western (and so mute) 'object' of the media, in fact *can, and do, use those same media to deal with reality appropriately*. In this sense the Palestinians are 'making history.' However, it is not only 'their' history that they are making. It is 'ours' also.

This is the significance of the historicity of local structures, dispositions and actions, even in confrontation with world-encircling structures (which, of course, have their own dispositions). This is why the crisis involving Tustas is *conjunctive* and not simply penetrative. It is the wider conjunction of changing circumstances and the penetration of wider structures such as the media, *with and into* local structures and dispositions that is the seat of this historical transformation. Although Said claims to oppose "universalising" 'world history' his analyses actually neglect the historicity of local structures and dispositions and their own potential for historical re-definition *in conjunction with* wider, more powerful structures. In arguing this I do not take up "Orientalism's political origin and its continuing political actuality" (Said 1985 : 2). For Said, it is because of this actuality that "we are obliged on intellectual as well as political grounds to investigate the resistance to the politics of Orientalism" (Said 1985 : 2). Equally, however, we should investigate the *political grounds of Said's resistance to criticism of his critique of Orientalism*. In that resistance it is his oversight (or is it denial?) of the ideological, methodological, and political similarities between his construction of Orientalism and the Orientalists' constructions of the Orient that is the foundation of the 'inconsistency' with which he views himself as superficially accused. The accusation of inconsistency is not, however, superficial.

Said's intellectual confusion over the relation between ideas and material reality has rightly been criticised elsewhere¹¹. This is apparent when we consider, in the light of his overall criticism of Western discursive coercion, his championing of Palestinian resistance. He says that Palestinian resistance to domination by the Zionist viewpoint in the West has caused that viewpoint to be diminishes and restrained (Said and Hitchens 1988 : 1-9). He also argues that Zionism has come under increasing attack due to Palestinians contesting it (Said and Hitchens 1988 : 13) and that the intifada was "one of the great anti-colonial uprisings of our times" (Said 1993 : 311). I have

10 This international attention itself is based on heteroglossia, multivocality, or dialogue (to use the jargon of 'post-modernists').

11 See, for example, Graham-Brown (1982), Turner (1994)

already mentioned these things as happening. They do not challenge my view of power and knowledge ; rather, they support it. Their implications for Said's view of 'Orientals' and especially Palestinians as the dominated victims of oppressive discourses are not so benign, however. Said does further damage to his own case when asserting that he follows C. Wright Mills' insight that "No man stands alone directly confronting a world of solid fact. No such world is available..." (quoted in Said 1981 : 42). This, in spite of earlier asserting that "an extremely important distinction to be made between American and European awareness of Islam" (Said 1981 : 11) is that "the absence in America either of a colonial past or of a long-standing cultural attention to Islam makes the current obsession all the more peculiar, more abstract, more secondhand" (Said 1981 : 12). It is curious that the lack of a colonial past makes American attention more abstract and second hand (and so more distant from some reality) than the European. Said is here arguing that it is the reality (he uses the term "concreteness" ; Said 1981 : 13) of colonialism that ensures a first-hand, non-abstract knowledge. This is a perverse and grotesque argument for one proclaiming himself as resisting American domination, and following Mills.

Beyond this, Said's assertion that the concentration of the mass media can be said to constitute "a communal core of interpretation providing *a certain picture of Islam* and of course, *reflecting powerful interests in the society served by the media*" (emphasis added) (Said 1981 : 43) neglects the indirect nature of the individual's relation to the world. The individual's picture of Islam (or of anything else) is not merely 'provided' by the media. The consumers of the media's products also interpret what they receive. For example, the interpretation given to the same filmed reports of violence in the intifada by a political youth in Tustas is likely to be rather different from that of a conservative Zionist in New York because of their different circumstantial, structural, and dispositional conditions. Such interpretation depends on the context, culture, circumstances, and structures in which the individual is located. This radically undercuts the power that Said would ascribe to the providing media. Though they have types of power we have seen that power is not undifferentiated or unchallenged in time, context, or in relation to the media's audience.

Said's confusion threatens to degenerate into disingenuous, however, when he later denies that he asserts that one general view is expressed by the media (Said 1981 : 45). We have already seen him argue that the media provide "a certain picture of Islam". Similarly, he denies that he implies a "conspiracy" or "dictatorship" (Said 1981 : 48-49) while we saw him assert that news and its presentation reflect "powerful interests", such as those of big business, or government policy (Said 1981 : 47).

I understand and accept that the “fact basic to any theory of interpretation or hermeneutics” which continues “in the political or ethical or even epistemological contexts proper to it” is the politics of any subject of interpretation and the act of interpretation itself (Said 1985 : 2). **It is because of this that I cannot accept that the existence and power of Orientalism might be postulated in such terms and then have the subsequent formulation presented as self-evident or manifestly true :** “patently impossible to dismiss the truth” thereof (Said 1985 : 2). In dismissing such criticism and not paying enough attention to the “political or ethical or even epistemological contexts” of his own project, Said fundamentally weakens the power of his own analysis.

One consequence of this (**which relates to our discussion of Palestinians, the intifada, and the media**) is that Said’s search for ‘knowledge that is non-dominative and non-coercive [and] can be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with politics... and the strategies of power’ (Said 1985 : 2) leads him to the utopian ‘discovery’ of a “wider and libertarian optic.”

In my framework (cf. Kaim 1997) **modes of domination persist through the three modes of knowledge** that are doxa, orthodoxy, and heterodoxy, and notions of non-dominative and non-coercive knowledge are, at least, nonsensical. This too, is the lesson of Foucault, from whom Said claims inspiration (Said 1979) and to whom he admits indebtedness (Said 1993). Said’s use of ideas of power and knowledge is odd and at odds with Foucault’s. He proposes using Islam as a concept without “offensively political” accretions (Said 1981 : 53). His methodology (see, for example, Said 1981 : 53–55) represents a dangerous slanting of enquiry to reproduce Muslims’ own ideologies about their faith and history rather than questioning them. As such it would be no more than an institutionalised mechanism for ensuring the reproduction of the established (Islamic) order and so obscure relations of domination therein from the grasp of individual consciousness and power (further related criticism has been made by Warraq 2007).

Importantly, Said’s postulation ignores his own determination in networks of power and knowledge. This leads him to present as liberating and non-dominative the actually oppressive and enslaving proposition that women’s studies by women, black studies by blacks, and anti-imperialist studies by the victims of imperialism are relatively free of the distortions and denials of coercion and domination. He has, grudgingly, conceded that it is “inadmissible... that only women can understand feminine experiences, only Jews can understand Jewish suffering, only former colonial subjects can understand colonial experience” (Said 1993 : 35). **However, in his concern to discredit** “essentialism and exclusiveness” he continues to overlook the common reality that the experiences of all these groups and *representations* of those experiences *by* all these groups are, together

with those of 'the West', *equally* determined by relations of power and knowledge and therefore are equally subject to the distortions and denials of coercion and domination *from within* those groups, experiences, and representations as to any from 'the West', 'the mainstream', or 'metropolitan culture'. Rather than discovering a "wider and libertarian optic" Said is proposing a new oppression, suitably denied and obscured.

The struggle of the Palestinians in the territories challenges fundamentally Said's notions. His critique of Orientalism amounts to a critique of a refusal by the West of the privilege of historical re-invention to the Orient, the Arabs, and Islam (see Said 1979 ; 1980 ; 1981 ; 1985 ; 1993 and 1995)¹². His own approach, however, entails a similar denial of that privilege. This is because he neglects the historicity and power of local structures and dispositions in circumstances of conjunction. As I have demonstrated, the Palestinian struggle and reportage of it in the 'international' mass media are integral to the historical re-invention of Palestinians both for Palestinians themselves and the rest of the world. Important in this is the conjunctive relation between the two. If, as Said asserts, the refusal of the Orientalists to extend this privilege is so powerful as to harness the relations of power between the 'West' and the 'Orient' to their own perpetuation important questions are raised. We should ask how it is that precisely when discourses and relations of power-knowledge have become truly global (and, one might be excused for thinking, better able to resist challenge because of this) groups such as the Palestinians, blacks, women, and anti-imperialists (to name only those mentioned by Said (1985 ; 1993)) could issue such challenges and do so with apparent success. Of course, it is not because the nature of power and knowledge has undergone radical change creating non-coercive or non-dominative forms. The space for challenge was always there. It is the interpretation given, in this case by Said, that is limiting. Fortunately for the Palestinians and other struggling groups Feyerabend is closer than Said to the reality of their action and experience : what matters is the subjectivity of actors, not what a few intellectuals declare to be real (cf. Feyerabend 1987 : 280-319).

This analysis of Tustas is based on the idea that the inhabitants (and inhabitants in all 'localities') are 'free' (given their structures and the dispositions of those structures) to react to the advance of the world system in locally specific ways. They are not mute objects whose silence

12 Said's later understanding and characterisation of power, its exercise, and influence remain, in the main, unchanged from those contained in *Orientalism*. Despite tentative formulations that metropolitan culture was important to the anti-imperialist mobilisation of both the colonised and the colonising, he still falls back on the idea that Western cultural forms are repressive and effectively silence the Other (see Said 1993 : 201).

has been imposed by the West. I thus criticise Said's picture of Western knowledge as determinant of relations between Western societies and those of the rest of the world. At the same time, by focussing on 'the local' my approach answers Said's criticisms of 'world history' as "universalising," "homogenising and incorporating" (Said 1985 : 11).

This is the nub of my criticism of Said. The nature of the crisis confronting Tustasis (**and the situation confronting Palestinians in the territories generally**) is conjunctive. It is *inter*-active. To see it purely as a case of 'the West' (or Israel) refusing the privilege of historical reinvention to Palestinians undervalues the importance of the historicity of local developments, structures, and dispositions. To understand such realities requires a depth of content and ethnographic detail which allow the relation of local factors to larger forces to be taken into adequate account. Said does not do this.

As might be expected from his position and training as a literary critic, Said's contribution is not so much in understanding the generality of power-knowledge but rather in analysis of the content of media reports as texts. From this as we read or view them we may be more aware that they are not simply 'information' but represent ways of viewing events and issues to which there are always alternatives.

I do not argue that there is no such thing as an international media culture. Neither do I argue against the idea that such a culture emphasises particular aspects of reality over others. In this it is the same as other cultures, for example that of literary critics who believe that they can meaningfully study imperialism through narrative fictional literature. I have, however, already challenged the idea that the mass media present a dominating representation which silences the non-West. Israel may equally be a 'victim' of the culture of the media and its language, though Said may consider it to be a part of Western 'imperialism' and its structures, which supposedly control the media in some systematic way. Indeed the reportage of the intifada by the mass media led to a loss of credibility and support for Israel abroad, even from "some of Israel's most loyal backers" (Marshall 1989 : 23-24) ¹³.

13 The media's cultural emphasis on the description of events rather than the analysis of processes, coupled with an exaggerated emphasis on conflict and drama means that even without 'taking sides' the descriptions and representations of reality that they give are neither full nor accurate. My experience of the media following the settlers' attack on the village follows this outline of these two main cultural biases closely. One team of reporters recorded a description of what happened, how many villagers were killed and how. They then 'wasted' no time in leaving when assured that no further violence or dramatic event was planned, but sped off to Nablus seeking 'stories'.

The mass media have been essential in promoting Palestinians' national consciousness and enhancing their political mobilisation. This critically illustrates, on the national level, Palestinians' active engagement with the media in the former's own terms. It is not surprising, given my view of power and knowledge, that while dependent on foreign news sources the Palestinians are able to use the products of those sources for their own mobilisation, reflecting views ranging from accommodation with Israel to outright rejection, or from secular nationalism to Islamic activism. Palestinians are actively engaging with the mass media (and education) to provide categories of understanding and 'global' vocabulary for the expression of their desires and demands. It is because of this that the media can be used both to further the Palestinians' international campaign (as the intifada undeniably did) as well as to build a nation within Palestinian society.

The nature of the crisis confronting this community and all others in the territories as inter-active, or conjunctive, and not purely penetrative, is clear.

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