A community-based qualitative study of intergenerational resilience with Palestinian refugee families facing structural violence and historical trauma

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore resilience processes in Palestinian refugee families living under Israeli occupation for multiple generations. Qualitative methods, critical postcolonial theories, and community-based research approaches were used to examine intergenerational protective practices and to contribute to reconceptualizations of resilience from indigenous perspectives. First, the researcher developed a collaborative partnership with a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in a UN refugee camp in the occupied West Bank. Then, with the support of this NGO, semistructured group and individual interviews were completed with a total of 30 participants ($N = 30$) ranging in age from 18 to 90 years old coming from 5 distinct extended family networks. Using grounded theory situational analysis, the findings were organized in a representation entitled *Palestinian Refugee Family Trees of Resilience* (PRFTR). These findings explain resilience in terms of three interrelated themes: (a) *Muqawama*/resistance to military siege and occupation; (b) *Awda*/return to cultural roots despite historical and ongoing settler colonialism; and (c) *Sumoud*/perseverance through daily adversities and accumulation of trauma. The study findings shed light on how Palestinian families cultivate positive adaptation across generations and highlight how incorporating community-based perspectives on the historical trauma and violent social conditions of everyday life under occupation may be critical for promoting resilience. Results may be relevant to understanding the transgenerational transmission of trauma and resilience within other displaced communities internationally.

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Introduction

Currently, there are approximately 12 million Palestinians worldwide, including five million refugees (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics [PCBS], 2016; United Nations Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA], 2015). The displacement experiences of this large refugee population are heterogeneous (Palestinian Centre for Human Rights [PCHR], 2005). Many Palestinian refugees trace their families' experiences of exile back to a war in 1948 in what Palestinians call *Nakba*, which means "Disaster" in Arabic (Pappe, 2006). *Nakba* refers to events where approximately 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced from their lands, villages, and homes (Pappe, 2006). The government of Israel refers to this conflict as the War of Independence (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007). Since 1948, subsequent generational experiences for Palestinian refugees have continued to be profoundly marked by political violence (PCHR, 2005). For example, the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza began in 1967, and was followed by settlement expansion with recurrent Israeli military responses to mass Palestinian resistance from 1987 up to the current day (United Nations [UN], 2008). The refugee camp where the current study was conducted is located in the central western region of the West Bank near the border with Israel. The camp was established in the early 1950s by the UN, and houses approximately 6,000 refugees (United Nations Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA], 2014).

Eco-systemic perspectives on family risk and resilience in war and postconflict settings

The past several decades have seen a growing interest in the study of trauma and protective factors in war and high-conflict areas worldwide (e.g., Goldman & Galea, 2014; Jong et al., 2001; Masten, 2015). In occupied Palestine, psychological research on the impact of war on mental health constitutes a substantial emerging body of knowledge. In a systemic review of 203 articles from peer-reviewed journals on youth and family health in the Middle East, Nelson et al. (2015) found that the majority of studies (72.9%) referred to Palestine and Palestinian refugees. The authors underscored how the majority of articles focused on mental health (58%) and have been conducted from a trauma perspective examining posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, aggression, and protective factors associated with exposure to high levels of violence (Nelson et al., 2015). These studies suggest that Palestinian populations have elevated rates of PTSD and other trauma-related disorders (e.g., Afana, Dalgard, Bjertness, Grunfeld, & Hauff, 2002; Thabet, Abu Tawahina, El Sarraj, & Vostanis, 2008).

Results on Palestinian vulnerability to PTSD suggest that there are specific experiences that are particularly detrimental, including: losing a child to military violence (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003); surviving bombardment (Punamäki, Qouta, & El-Sarraj, 2001; Thabet et al., 2008); experiencing home demolitions (Qouta, Punamäki, & El-Sarraj, 1998); being detained and tortured in Israeli prisons (El-Sarraj, Punamäki, Salmi, & Summerfield, 1996; Punamäki et al., 2008); or being humiliated during engagements with Israeli occupation forces (Giacaman, Abu-Rmeileh, Husseini, Saab, & Boyce, 2007). In addition to the type of trauma exposure, for many Palestinians living under political violence and chronic human rights violations, such as refugee communities in the West Bank (e.g., BADIL, 2013; International Court of Justice, 2004; Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions, 2015), repeated exposure to both war and non-war-related stressors and the accumulation of trauma may increase vulnerability (e.g., Dubow et al., 2012; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996).

Internationally, results from research in diverse high-conflict settings demonstrate interesting parallels to research in occupied Palestine. For example, in a meta-analysis of psychological consequences of forced displacement in the former Yugoslavia, Porter and Haslam (2001) concluded that adjustment significantly varied depending on age, degree of war exposure, and quality of postconflict resources. In Sierra Leone, Betancourt, Borisova, de la Soudiere, and Williamson (2011) found that children's adjustment to war varied based on factors such as gender, specific war experiences, and availability of postconflict resources. In fact, family resilience theorists have long argued that the availability of resources and the broader eco-systemic conditions shape developmental pathways (e.g., Ungar, 2010; Werner & Smith, 2001). When defining resilience, Ungar (2010) highlights two key collective family processes: (a) navigating to resources that are available and accessible and (b) negotiating for culturally and contextually relevant resources.

Furthermore, an emphasis on community resources and collective processes when investigating responses to traumatic stress may be a culturally meaningful approach to psychological research in occupied Palestine. Rather than adopting Eurocentric cultural constructs highlighting a person's individual resilience and independence from extended family and community, Arab social networks are often characterized by daily interdependence with kinship relations and the nearby community (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). In a report based on data collected from Palestinian ex-political prisoners and their families, including both qualitative and quantitative analyses, Punamäki (2010) explored the construct of posttraumatic growth (PTG) and identified various familial and cultural elements that assisted the ex-detainees in coping with torture including: shared emotional expression, a sense of belonging, religion, and cultural beliefs.

Moreover, when engaging in research on family resilience in occupied Palestine, it is also important to consider the fact that refugees have been living under Israeli occupation for many decades resulting in complex histories of trauma and intergenerational effects. Studies on intergenerational responses to traumatic stress are

relatively common, like those on families who have survived the Jewish Holocaust (e.g., Yehuda, Schmeidler, Wainberg, Binder-Byrnes, & Duvdevani, 1998) and the Armenian Genocide (e.g., Kupelian, Kalayjian, & Kassabian, 1998), which are consistent with family life-span perspectives that emphasize the role of family stories and rituals in shaping identity and transmitting resilience across generations (e.g., Fiese & Pratt, 2004).

In a study with Cambodian refugee households in California, Marshall, Schell, Elliott, Berthold, & Chun (2005) found that the challenges families faced were not only associated with past war trauma, but also ongoing violence in their communities postconflict. Marshall et al. (2005) demonstrated how new stressors after the genocide may interact with trauma of previous generations in complex ways impacting on both family risk and resilience. This research points towards the importance of considering whether traumatized families resettle in stable conditions or must continue to endure threatening environments. A study with families enduring long-lasting conflict in Afghanistan pointed to the importance of cross-generational associations in promoting family unity when coping with chronic war and insecurity (Panter-Brick, Grimon, & Eggerman, 2014).

In summary, the literature suggests that potential factors that impact family trajectories of trauma and resilience include: (a) type and accumulation of war- and non-war-related trauma exposure; (b) age; (c) gender; (d) accessibility of culturally relevant resources; (e) postcrisis conditions; (f) quality of family and community relations; and (g) cross-generational processes, family stories, and rituals.

Engaging critical and postcolonial perspectives on family resilience

When violence is structurally embedded and where millions of people experience essentially the same problem, a focus on investigating individual-level predicaments and processes can raise serious dilemmas (Lykes & Coquillon, 2009). Referring to the ways in which humanitarian psychiatrists and psychologists often fail to engage social justice analyses when framing human suffering in complex political geographies of Israel/Palestine, Fassin (2012) argues that "we risk a lot when we reduce violence to trauma" (p. 220). In an attempt to avoid reducing complex Palestinian refugee family experiences with political violence to "trauma," the current study took an alternative approach, drawing on antiracist social justice frameworks that highlight the role of power and colonialism in influencing many aspects of intergenerational family resilience.

An example of antiracist critical scholarship on intergenerational protective processes in families can be found in racial socialization; a unique construct that traverses critical race theory, cultural/Africana studies, and psychology (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Hordge Freeman, 2010). Peters (1985) defined racial socialization as the transgenerational process involving overt and covert behaviors that parents of color use to protect their children from damages associated with living within racist contexts over multiple generations. Racial socialization literature examines transgenerational protective processes in marginalized

families facing long-term racialized violence. Indigenous psychology is another critical area of study that engages social justice frameworks when exploring the coping responses of diverse groups facing historical and ongoing structural violence (e.g., Kirmayer, Gone, & Moses, 2014). In an attempt to approach increased clarity in the concept of indigenous historical trauma (HT), Hartmann and Gone (2014) emphasized four core components of HT: (a) colonial injury; (b) collective experience; (c) cumulative effects; and (d) cross-generational impacts.

Research questions

This study engaged global mental health research and eco-systemic theories on family resilience understood through critical postcolonial indigenous perspectives, based on research completed as part of the present author's doctoral dissertation (Atallah, 2015). Qualitative methods were utilized blending aspects of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), situational analysis (Clarke, 2005), and community-based methods (Hacker, 2013; Leavy, 2011). Qualitative methods are useful to explore new constructs (Charmaz, 2006) and well-suited to the study of complex decolonial processes in indigenous communities (Wendt & Gone, 2012). Guided by these approaches, this study built a research partnership with a Palestinian NGO in the West Bank to investigate the following two research questions: RQ1: What is the resilience process of Palestinian refugee families exposed to historical trauma and continuous structural violence associated with the Israeli occupation?; RQ2: How do Palestinian refugee families transmit resilience across generations?

Method

Setting

Data were collected in one United Nations (UN) refugee camp in the West Bank, home to approximately 6,000 refugees. This community was chosen for two reasons: (a) the camp context and adversities to which residents are exposed are similar to conditions in refugee camps across occupied Palestine, especially the West Bank (UNRWA, 2014); and (b) a well-established nongovernmental organization (NGO) located within this camp responded with enthusiasm to the investigator's outreach to develop a research partnership. Some activities of this NGO included: offering youth counseling; connecting families to social workers and legal representation; holding international and local summer camps; and teaching youth media production, gardening, and ethnic dance. Further details on the refugee camp context where this study took place and the community-based research (CBR) methods used can be found online in supplementary materials for this article (http://journals.sagepub.com/home/tps).

   In addition to collaborating with this NGO, the researcher built a partnership with an independent translator and cultural advisor unaffiliated with the NGO. In her description of CBR, Leavy (2011) highlights the importance of linguistic and

cultural advisors. The interpreter/translator for this study was a native Arabic speaker with knowledge of the local dialect and certification in Arabic–English medical interpreting from a U.S.-based health insurance corporation. In addition to translation, he provided cultural advice throughout the research process to enhance cultural sensitivity of the study and during the interviews with families, all of which were conducted in Arabic.

Participants

Thirty individuals from the refugee camp ranging in age from 18 to 90 years old participated in this research project ($N = 30$). These participants were members of five extended family networks. In this study, the term "family" is used consistent with the Arabic word for extended family, or *el-hamula*, conceptualized as a relational collective made up of members of a social system of kinship bonds that may include nuclear family members and both extended and fictive kin (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). Therefore, the concept of family was self-defined: the participants themselves determined the parameters of who made up their family and who would participate in the family group interviews.[1] Members from at least three generations in the families were included in this study. Specifically, first-generation participants, or Hajj/Hajja (male/female seniors), were elders born in the 1930s who had directly survived the *Nakba* of 1948 and were displaced from their native village located in an area where is now Israel. The elder participants originated from indigenous villages, including: Al-Qabu, Ajjur, Allar, and Ras Abu Ammar. These villages of the families were only a few kilometers away, just across the Israeli border from the location of the UN refugee camp. Next, a subsequent generation was identified as children of the *Nakba* survivors in the family, born in the 1960s and raised in the camp. A third generation interviewed identified as grandchildren of the *Nakba* survivors, born during the 1990s and raised in the camp.

Procedures

Interview protocols. The principal investigator (PI) developed semistructured interview protocols emphasizing "areas of inquiry" consistent with the research questions (Charmaz, 2006). One protocol was developed for the family interviews and a separate one for individual generation-specific interviews. There is no translation for "resilience" in Arabic and inquiries were focused on learning how families responded to structural violence and historical trauma. The four areas of inquiry developed for the family group interview protocol included: (a) meaningful family stories and refugee journeys; (b) the camp context and family life under Israeli occupation; (c) specific examples of how the family as a unit had survived, developed, and contested oppression over generations; and (d) closing questions (e.g., "Is there something that we did not speak about that anyone would like to raise, or is there something you would have asked based on your understanding of the focus

of this study?''). The four areas of inquiry developed for the individual interview included: (a) follow-up from the family interview with a focus on experiences specific to the participant's generation; (b) the types of helpful information shared across generations; (c) the ways in which the information was communicated across generations; and (d) closing questions.

Participant recruitment. Participants were recruited with the help of the partnering NGO. Consistent with community-based approaches (Leavy, 2011), staff from this organization engaged in planning meetings where issues pertaining to the selection of participants were discussed. During these recruitment meetings, all discussions were confidential and information about families in the camp was de-identified and privacy-protected. First, an initial list of potential families to participate was created by identifying all families in the camp where there was an elder who had survived the *Nakba* of 1948 and who was still residing in the camp. Then, discussions with the NGO staff focused on the main exclusion criterion, which called for omitting families where the living elders, or *Nakba* survivors, were too physically or mentally unstable to participate. Based on these discussions, nine families were identified as having family members who were *Nakba* survivors that still lived in the camp and were healthy. Subsequently, because of time constraints, six families were selected by prioritizing families with diversity in terms of gender, class, education level, occupation, and types of exposure to trauma (Charmaz, 2006). Identified families were approached first by the NGO staff, then by the PI with the help of the interpreter. An initial interview with the family was scheduled over the phone, requesting at least three family members representing three different generations to be present due to the project's focus on having discussions about intergenerational shared family processes and collective experiences. Five families were contacted and agreed to participate, for a total of 30 participants. Many expressed that they felt that it was important to speak about their histories and current circumstances, and requested that the researcher share their stories with wider audiences in the hope that his would effect broader social change.

Interview procedures. Semistructured group interviews were completed with each of the five participating families at the family's home within the refugee camp. Each group interview lasted between 1.5 and 3 hours. At the end of a family interview, individuals representing at least three different generations within the family were asked to schedule follow-up individual interviews with the PI. The purpose of these individual interviews was to enrich the data by asking follow-up questions about topics that emerged in the family group interviews while also facilitating discussions that were more generation-specific in a setting that could better protect confidentiality. Depending on participants' preference, these interviews were conducted either in their home or at the NGO office in the camp. A total of 21 individual interviews were conducted: eight with *Nakba* survivors born in the 1930s; seven with children of these elders, born in the 1960s; and six with grandchildren of these elders, born in the 1990s. These interviews ranged from 45 to 150

minutes duration. A total of 26 interviews were completed in this study with 30 participants.

The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Massachusetts, Boston. All participants provided informed consent. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in English. Because of funding constraints, not all the transcriptions were checked for translation accuracy on site, however, a bilingual Arabic–English consultant randomly selected four of the 26 audio-recordings (15%) and reviewed transcriptions confirming linguistic accuracy.

Data analysis

Data analysis began with data collection during debriefing discussions with the translator and cultural advisors after each of the 26 interviews. Next, the researcher engaged in reflexive memoing (Saldaña, 2009) regarding possible themes noting new insights and questions, which were integrated into future interviews (Morrow, 2005). Once the researcher left the field, *open coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) began, using computer software NVivo 10. Multiple cycles of coding, including *pattern coding* (Saldaña, 2009), were completed toward the generation of initial categories. When developing these categories, two family-level systemic elements were extensively considered based on narrative research approaches and analysis: coherence and thematic content emerging from a particular family's stories (Fiese & Spagnola, 2005). Throughout cycles of coding, emphasis was placed on exploring themes that spoke to patterns within family systems related to the transmission of values and coping strategies.

Simultaneously, information gathered from interviews and ethnographic observations was visually synthesized using Clarke's (2005) situational map-making exercises. Maps, poster boards, diagrams, tables, and figures were all crowded with ideas from interview data, memos, and field notes laying out major human, nonhuman, discursive, and other contextual elements. These visual representations enabled analysis of relations among key elements to situate families' statements and various emergent themes. Incorporation of decolonial analysis (e.g., Fanon, 1963; Hussein, 2004; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Said, 1993; Wendt & Gone, 2012) was utilized to help interpret the range of situational elements related to participants' reported experiences with colonialism in relation to three categories: (a) military siege and occupation; (b) displacement and settler colonialism; and (c) the siege's shadow. The lyrical expression of ''the siege's shadow'' refers to the temporal dimensions associated with the long-lasting nature of adversities, which have cumulative effects over time. Overall, Clarke's situational map-making exercises and the decolonial analysis helped unwrap complex macrolevel patterns of power impacting the lived experiences of participants.

These analytic exercises overlapped with *axial coding* (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2009), by identifying broader categories and relational analysis across the themes. A health promotion research team at the University of Massachusetts, Boston,

with 10 university students, faculty advisors, and stakeholders helped at this stage of the study with cross-verification of codes to enhance validity. This included the perspectives of women researchers and social scientists from diverse religious, racial, immigration, refugee, and cultural backgrounds. Research team members were invited to provide feedback on emergent themes, generate new viewpoints on the data, and offer diverse perspectives on the consolidation of the categories. Consistent with transdisciplinary community-based research (CBR), these data analysis discussions also involved ongoing collaboration with the partnering NGO and with the translator/interpreter of the project, who both participated in several of these meetings. Enhanced by situational mapping and community-based approaches, the final stage of *theoretical coding* (Saldaña, 2009) was completed generating a model of Palestinian positive family adjustment.

Results

Thematic analysis emerged from the researcher's deep immersion into the narratives of the participants and the anguish and strength of family life in the shadow of a military presence and its daily reminders of violence past and violence to come. This lived experience was ultimately represented by the researcher (with the data analysis team's support) as a family tree. The metaphor of the tree was inspired by cultural emphases on agriculture and interconnectedness between family life cycles, land, and dignity expressed by participants. More specifically, data were organized in the representation called *Palestinian Refugee Family Trees of Resilience* (PRFTR), which emerged form participating families' narratives. Table 1 describes the three constructs of resilience theorized in this study as *tree branches*: (a) resistance, (b) return, and (c) perseverance. Various *subbranches* articulate the coconstructed meanings of each of the three main themes.

Tree Branch 1: Resistance/muqawama

The Arabic word *muqawama*, or "resistance" in English, was frequently used by participants to describe the protective strategies families practiced when responding to the situational elements characterized in these results as "military siege and occupation." In brief, these contextual factors include diverse forms of Israeli army violence and the complex matrices of control that are part of the military occupation system. Several subbranches emerged representing the multifaceted resistance processes which families engaged in when protecting their physical survival, dignity, psychological wholeness, and community integrity through family-centered individual and collective action.

Protecting family survival: Seeking safety and vital resources. This first subbranch of *muqawama*/resistance reflects how participants evaluated risks and made difficult choices and sacrifices when protecting access to basic needs, including safety, water, food, mobility, shelter, health care, sites of religious worship, education, employment,

Table 1. Overview of the results: Introduction of Palestinian refugee family trees of resilience (PRFTR)

Core *situational elements* of the Israeli occupation:

Situational elements	Military siege and occupation: Diverse forms of military and structural violence and authoritative controls threatening the right to life and obstructing access to vital resources.	Displacement and settler colonialism: Historical and ongoing loss of land, property, and cultural dispossession and settler expansion.	The siege's shadow: Temporal dimensions related to long-lasting features of the adversities and how the trauma from political violence accumulates over time.

Family responses to the core situational elements (in terms of tree metaphor)

Tree branches and multiple sub-branches (emergent themes of family resilience)	Resistance/*muqawama*: 1. Protecting family survival. 2. Defending dignity. 3. Intifada families. 4. Gender in resistance.	Return/*awda* 1. Rejecting borders and states of exile. 2. Preparing meals of resilience. 3. Remembering beauty and belonging.	Perseverance/*sumoud* 1. Creating cultures of care within the family/*hamula*. 2. Creating cultures of care within the community. 3. Embroidering emotions. 4. Practicing patience and persistence.
Fruit seeds (contents of the inter-generational cultivation of resilience):	Skills and knowledge for resistance/*muqawama* Families cultivated direct skills and critical knowledge across generations to support resistance against military occupation, siege, and dehumanization.	Roots for return/*awda* Families cultivated connections to family history, lands, and culture across generations facing forced displacement, settler advancement, and land dispossession.	Morals, beliefs, and values for perseverance/*sumoud* Families cultivated morals, beliefs, and values of collectivism, compassion, strength, patience, and determination when facing accumulating hardships and residual effects of trauma.

Table 1. Continued

| ***Planting methods*** (ways of cultivating resilience across generations) | A. Verbal-based planting methods (multigenerational discussions and storytelling) ▪ Family storytelling, elders narrating the past. ▪ Youth sharing and asking questions, voicing unique generational concerns. ▪ Community members, intellectuals, and professionals storytelling, communal teaching. | B. Experiential-based planting methods (multigenerational witnessing and responding): ▪ Observing others facing challenges. ▪ Facing challenges oneself alongside others. ▪ Being exposed to the land and culture, participating in cultural celebrations, and/or family events, rituals, and routines. |

political representation, family togetherness, and tolerable living spaces. Dating back to the *Nakba* (Disaster) of 1948, when families were forced off their indigenous lands, participants shared how struggling for safety involved complex quests for food and shelter. One of the key strategies that families utilized involved using spatial and social landscapes as protection during periods of uncertainty and scarcity. For example, elders from the Zeitoon family shared:

> Our family lived in the village for thousands of years, even the trees of our grandfathers' grandfathers are planted there! During *Nakba*, Jewish soldiers invaded our village. Everyone fled in different directions. (Hajj Basil, 76 years old)

> A man got up the minaret of the mosque and started shooting randomly down below at our village. I still remember my mother carrying one of my sisters, who was only 2 months old, as we ran to the mountains ... We panicked when they started shooting at us. We lived for years in caves waiting to return to our village, surviving by eating raw wheat, finding help from other villages, or building shelters under trees. Four years later, the UN opened camps and we moved in. (Hajj Najwa, 70 years old)

Decades later, after moving into the UN refugee camps that were built in the 1950s, families continued to rely on combined protective skills such as resourcefulness, knowledge of the land, and social relationships. However, protecting family survival does not necessary mean survival of every member. Under constant siege involving tanks, warplanes, and snipers, families often prioritized protection of children. Generations after *Nakba*, youth describe seeking safety during curfew as parallel to their grandparents' strategies of surviving in caves. For example, Germana, a third-generation participant of the Zeitoon family explained:

> It was breakfast time, and the 14-year-old son of the family walked out of the house impulsively. He was so tired of the Israeli curfew, which had lasted for weeks already, and everyone was in need of food, clean water, and people were desperate to get out of small living quarters. When the 14-year-old son walked out, the father became nervous and urged him to come inside, but snipers saw the father peering outside the window and shot him in the head and he fell onto the kitchen table. The whole family saw him die. The 14-year-old rushed back inside and survived. (Germana, 24 years old)

Defending dignity: Nonviolent noncompliance. This subbranch addresses how families rejected inferiority and reaffirmed their humanity. Families talked about how hanging laundry in the color of the Palestinian flag (when waving the flag was illegal), or reading books that occupation authorities banned, were clandestine actions that provided participants with a sense of dignity. For example, Fawaz from the

Askedenia family shared strategies that protected his psychological wholeness when he was a political prisoner at the young age of 14:

> The Israeli prison administration took our books, but we would bring long writing materials folded in a plastic capsule and swallowed. Once we'd arrive in prison, we'd go to the bathroom and wash it and bring it to our cells to read. These readings saved us from isolation and feeling treated as an animal, or something inhuman. (Fawaz, 43 years old)

Intifada families: "Outing" the occupation. Intifada in Arabic means a reaction of shaking off something that has stuck, and is used by Palestinians to describe collective resistance against occupation. As reported by many of the families, the cultural meanings of the intifada help to provide a platform for resisting the internalization of oppression. Participants described the action of throwing stones as "outing" the occupation. For example, Mohammad, a second-generation participant from the Rumman family shared:

> When my brother was killed by the occupation, an energy exploded out of me. I began organizing strikes and throwing stones. Every stone I threw was like a building stone for freedom. I felt my brother was with me. Not left behind. (Mohammad, 35 years old)

Gender in resistance: Confronting intersections of patriarchy and militarism. This subbranch denotes the ways in which women uniquely contested intersecting hierarchical power structures resisting Israeli military and sexist violence overlapping amid sexism within their own families and communities. Women participants shared how they organized strikes, listened in on male conversations in their own homes, and other found other forms of subversion to bring their creative agency into family, political, and even prison life. For example, Fatima, a college student and third-generation participant from the Loz family, shared how she coped with coercion as Israeli soldiers used threats of sexual abuse to make her comply with demands during her arrest. She spent 2 years on administrative detention (i.e., imprisonment without trial). During this time, Fatima reported witnessing a fellow female detainee giving birth behind bars obligating the prisoners to collectively respond by raising children within captive exile, reconstructing "home" in the mist of lockdown:

> A woman gave birth while I was in prison. When she was in labor, her feet and hands were chained to the bed. In the night, the mother was taken to a hospital setting to deliver the baby. I remember watching her walk out of the cell, she could hardly walk, her feet and hands chained together. Once the baby was delivered, the same day she

was back in the cell with us. The place was no conditions for a baby. A 2-year-old little girl was also with us. We tried our best to keep it clean and make it a family environment for the children who knew nothing except for life behind bars. (Fatima, 23 years old)

Tree Branch 2: Return/awda

The second major theme or overarching *tree branch* that emerged in this study was called return, or *awda* in Arabic. This tree branch describes the resilience of families facing displacement and settler colonialism, characterized by experiences of land dispossession and replacement of cultural and structural geographies that shaped families' colonial injuries. *Awda*/return is a multilayered construct deeply rooted in Palestinian cultural consciousness (Richter-Devroe, 2013) emphasizing interconnectedness with *el ard*, Arabic for "the land." Moreover, as participants in this study described, *el ard* was not valued as something materially owned, but rather *el ard* inspired *el aard* (Arabic for honor or nobility). For example, in an interview with the 76-year-old *Nakba* survivor, Hajj El-Khader from the Loz family, he ended our conversation stating, "The most important thing is the land, and then your honor, which is tied to land." The Hajj concluded by repeating: "*El ardi-el aardi.* . .", ("My land is my honor"). The words *ard* and *aard* are similar phonetically and semantically. In this study, *awda* is conceptualized as mapping onto resilience not necessarily describing actions of families returning to land or territory, but rather, returning to dignity and honor.

Rejecting borders and a state of exile: Holding onto hope and house keys. This subbranch of *awda* emerged from the data related to the ways in which families refused resettlement by holding onto hope for the promise of self-determination focusing on returning to a "state of dignity" instead of accepting a "state of exile." Many Palestinian refugees still hold the keys to their relinquished homes in what is now the state of Israel. These keys are powerful symbols of *awda* and are frequently passed down from generation to generation as reminders of their right to have a history and to maintain a remembered presence as indigenous peoples. In fact, one of the striking features of the scenery of the camp is a giant statue of a key referred to by the blacksmiths who created it as the "Key of Return." The key serves as an inspirational document that rebuffs the imposed borders and facilitates collective coping with colonial injury.

Preparing meals of resilience: Smuggling flavors of freedom. This subbranch represents how families coped with vulnerability resulting from being uprooted off native lands and stripped of age-old indigenous ways of life. Practices within this subbranch included families returning to harvest their fruit trees, smuggling home indigenous plants and foods to prepare *meals of resilience* as sources of empowerment in coping with both hunger and historical trauma. For example, Jihad,

a second-generation participant from the Safarjal family described how returning to his family's original village (in what is now Israel), and harvesting crops that his family sustained for over a millennium, promoted coping:

> I was born and raised here in the camp. We lived with hunger and like a box of matches with my 11 siblings together in this small UN housing unit. We used to smuggle food from my family's village. We used to call it "*Steal our own land*"! I'd sneak into Israel and travel to the village and collect thyme, wild sage, and fresh fruits from our old trees, and I used to bring these things to my mom, and we'd make traditional pastries and we'd eat happily! (Jihad, 33 years old)

In this light, the trauma of displacement, deprivation, and dislocation proved to be transmittable across generations, and required intergenerational resilience where the rituals of partaking in collective harvesting and preparing of meals offered opportunities for family resilience.

Remembering beauty and belonging: Fighting forgetfulness. This subbranch represents the ways families promoted resilience through accessing culturally relevant sources of belonging by (re)turning to their memories of stable human ecosystems in their original villages. When forced to live in squalor in refugee camps while flourishing Israeli settlements arise around them, many participants spoke about the protective power of remembering their life of dignity back in the village. Planting trees and gardens while dislocated in exile within the camp and relocating their farming habits were explained as reminders of their expertise in regrowth.

Tree Branch 3: Perseverance/sumoud

Sumoud is the Arabic word for perseverance or steadfastness and has become a popular discourse and cultural value within Palestinian society. In these results, *sumoud*/perseverance is conceptualized as the third and final tree branch or overarching theme, mapping onto resilience when families face the cumulative challenges that persist and cast an unavoidable shadow into lives that remain under occupation. An important element of this theme is that families lacked opportunities to process trauma in postconflict conditions because of continual violence. Therefore, families were obliged to live with open wounds, face persistent challenges, and residual effects of trauma that evolve with time.

*Creating cultures of care within the family/*el-hamula. *El-hamula*, Arabic for "extended family," emerged as a primary platform of perseverance where interpersonal bonds become essential for resilience. Family members mitigated the effects of violence drawing on creative rituals and harnessing strengths of extended family networks. In particular, the violence of incarceration shed painful shadows across family life in the camp. Families showed perseverance when coping with separation, continuing to reapply for permits despite being denied access to family members by prison

authorities. For example, Jihad and his mother Hajja Rinad spoke about visiting Younis, Jihad's older brother, who was still detained after more than 20 years:

> The Israelis refused to give father a permit to visit Younis in prison. The reason why was that there was, "no kin relationship." They told him, "You're not the father of Younis." My father told the officer, "I've been visiting my son in prison for 20 years. Suddenly now I'm *not* his father?" (Jihad, 33 years old)

> But we never give up, we still try to be together. See these hot pepper plants here, I planted them for my son Younis. The first time, I did it with him before he went to jail. We raised seedlings each spring. It became a ritual. He asked me not to stop so I have done it every year since. Younis said, "Keep the ritual, please mama, don't stop." So I take pictures and send them so he can watch our peppers grow. (Hajja Rinad, 72 years old)

Creating cultures of care within the community. This subbranch represents the protective power of collective community bonds when facing "heavy" collective punishment. As Ata, a 27-year-old participant shared, "If you distribute the heavy load, it will be easier to carry" (Arab proverb). Families reported remaining steadfast by building community capacity for crisis responding and the sharing of resources. For example, neighbors organizing to rebuild after a home demolition can be a powerful practice of perseverance and a metaphor for defying the weight of collective punishment. Thus, apparently localized, spontaneous processes of neighbors helping each other emerged as an important resilience strategy in response to collective trauma.

Embroidering emotions: Processing accumulating traumas within tapestries of lived experience. This subbranch represents the ways families persevered through continual hardships by processing multiple feelings simultaneously. Practices within this subbranch highlight how families were obligated to live with their open wounds, yet found ways to process layers of emotions; weaving together traumas as part of the *tapestry* of their lives but not the final thread. For example, a third-generation participant from the Zeitoon family shared:

> My aunt was killed by soldiers while inside the house. Soldiers bombed the wall and shrapnel entered all over her body. When ambulances came, the soldiers blocked it and she bled to death. I felt strong rage and grief. Another time, when soldiers invaded our house, neighbors took photos and showed me afterwards. I saw myself smiling. I was amazed I could hold such sadness and strength at the same time. (Sultan, 19 years old)

Practicing patience and persistence: Harnessing faith, legends, and beliefs. This subbranch represents the processes that families engaged in during times of intense powerlessness (such as when tortured in prison). Participants underscored how they harnessed determination and patience grounded in national beliefs, legends, and/or

religious faith. For example, Mazen, a second-generation participant, also from the Zeitoon family explained:

> My brother and I were beaten hard with bats on our shoulders, necks, hands, and heads. My strength to overcome this came from God. Only from God. There is nowhere else to turn. When I pray, even while tortured in prison, I feel comforted. Praise be to God! Patience is the key for progress [Arabic proverb]. (Mazen, 42 years old)

The intergenerational cultivation process: Fruit seeds and planting methods

An important dimension of resilience emerged in this study as participants identified the specific processes of transmitting resilience across generations. Consistent with the metaphor of a fruit tree with rich cultural significance in Palestinian village family values, families referred to a cultivation process involving the *planting* of various *seeds*. From an agricultural perspective, *cultivation*, or the encouragement of growth from seed to plant through deliberate practices, was chosen to describe this intergenerational resilience process. In a variety of ways, for the families in this study, the connection between seeds, land, dignity, and self-determination took on unique meanings. Inspired by these metaphors, the contents of messages that families reported passing across generations are labeled as *fruit seeds* and include: (a) skills and knowledge for *muqawama*/resistance, (b) roots for *awda*/return, and (c) morals, beliefs, and values for *sumoud*/perseverance. Table 2 summarizes the ways resilience is passed across generations through two linked processes, or *planting methods*, verbal, and experiential.

Storytelling emerged as an important verbal-based intergenerational strategy. In fact, oral communication is deeply valued within Palestinian village culture where family stories can be packed with significance. Experiential-based methods, such as role-playing, often complement these stories. Though, separation of verbal and experiential methods emerged in results as participants highlighted differences between direct didactic learning compared to indirect activity-based learning. For example, Naila, a second-generation participant from the Safarjal family, shared how sneaking across the border with her father to their original village was itself a powerful intergenerational experience, breaking silence and sharing what was present but unspoken:

> Learning can be an indirect thing. I remember my father took us to the village and he was pointing and stopping, obviously looking for things that don't exist anymore, without even saying anything, but you could feel he remembered the details of the details ... Although things are not there anymore, the expression on his face, the sadness he showed in his face, the way he was pointing at things, told us children of deep things, even though they might not exist anymore, they are still there. (Naila, 48 years old)

Table 2. Methods for intergenerational cultivation of resilience

Ways of cultivating intergenerational resilience (planting methods)	Contents of intergenerational resilience		
	Skills and knowledge for resistance/muqawama	Roots for return/awda	Morals, beliefs, and values for perseverance/sumoud
Verbal	• Developing skills to keep body safe during military siege by listening to verbal instructions (e.g., staying away from windows). • Learning skills for confronting soldiers and maintaining dignity by hearing family stories and listening to elders. • Answering children's questions, helping to develop critical knowledge of the occupation and arrangements of local and global power structures.	• Passing down cultural roots through narratives, bed-time stories, and other oral-based communications packed with meaning instilling connection to lands and culture dating back a millennium. • Answering children's questions about their family and village history; instilling a sense of belonging.	• Elders giving verbal lectures and didactics (e.g., sharing stories about the importance of focusing on education). • Sharing cultural proverbs. • Hearing legends, stories of national heroes, faith-based lessons, and other value-rich narratives inspiring strength.
Experiential	• Learning skills to tolerate uncertainty, physical pain, and dehumanizing prison interrogations by practicing with older generations during role plays and acting out of plausible scenarios. • Developing skills to manage with few resources and restricted mobility during curfews by observing others in the family adjust and get by with little. • Participating in commemoration days (e.g., Land Day, Prisoner Day, etc.).	• Travelling back to native villages with elders. • Elders passing down keys and other symbols of remembrance and hope. • Teaching about roots through routines and rituals (e.g., daily food preparations, seasonal harvests, weddings, etc.).	• Witnessing nurturance first-hand by watching people help rebuild houses, practice compassionate actions for the more vulnerable. • Children supporting parents to be strong by providing unconditional attachment capable of implanting patience, determination, and hope.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to contribute to understandings of intergenerational resilience processes of Palestinian refugee families. To accomplish this goal, the researcher built collaborative partnerships with a grassroots NGO in a UN refugee camp in the West Bank, and interviewed five extended families from the camp including three generations within each family. Results articulate the culturally meaningful metaphor of the *Palestinian Refugee Family Trees of Resilience* (PRFTR), which describes three linked indigenous cultural constructs of family resilience: *muqawama*/resistance, *awda*/return, and *sumoud*/perseverance.

Resilience as resistance

Consistent with previous research on Palestinian family survival under Israeli occupation (e.g., Abu Nahleh, 2006; Kuttab, 2006; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009), the present study demonstrates how long-lasting siege-and-closure policies constrain safety and mobility, thereby transforming coping strategies into resistance strategies. From fleeing their villages to the caves after *Nakba* in 1948, to hunkering down during long curfews in refugee camps decades later, powerful strategies emerged from this "cave-to-curfew" intergenerational pathway. Many families in the current study spoke about finding themselves locked in a struggle that Qouta, Punamäki, and El-Sarraj (2008) called "horror and heroism," in which families' vulnerabilities were pushed to the extremes. The forms of resistance described show how families defended their dignity while protecting family survival. Participants spoke of the trauma of humiliation and complex processes of defending dignity to challenge "invisible" dehumanization. These findings are consistent with the work of Giacaman et al. (2007) on the unique impact or "invisible trauma" of deliberate humiliation as an instrument of subordination used by the Israeli military occupation.

   The present study also suggested the protective potential of direct collective political activism. These findings relate to research by Barber (2008) that demonstrates how early involvement of Palestinian youth in resistance can sometimes moderate the effects of political violence. Although increasing their risk for exposure to Israeli military aggression, engagement in intifada activism may actually provide protection against the internalization of oppression. These results complicate binaries of vulnerability and protection. Participants candidly articulated experiencing throwing stones as both burden and privilege: as a site of treacherous violence and yet also an opportunity to launch dreams for freedom uplifting hope and history together. Consistent with embodiment theory (Grosz, 1995; Krieger, 2005), this study shows how history is housed within the human body.

Resilience as return

Families in this study emphasized returning to dignity and belonging by way of rejecting, contesting, and negotiating the limits and inhuman terms imposed by

colonial violence. These results describe resilience processes of families returning to honorable psychosocial landscapes, though not through a return to spatial territories or to their actual houses. Participants spoke about the strange experience of being displaced at home as internally displaced persons (IDPs) within colonial borderlands that constantly remind them of their cultural loss, yet also inspire hope for self-determination and reviving honor. In the current study, remembering itself emerged as a powerful resilience strategy as participating families gathered recollections of their cherished villages and values, returning to the unmapped and unadministered psychological territory of memory. These findings are consistent with previous work within Palestine studies, such as that by Ghanim (2010), who theorized intersections between suffering and empowerment as coexisting, and that of Abu Lughod and Sa'di (2009) and Rochelle Davis (2010) on the role of memory and village narratives in coping with loss.

Resilience as perseverance

The conceptualization of perseverance as resilience suggests the protective power of creating cultures of care in family and community networks while processing cumulative trauma by harnessing cultural legends, beliefs, and spirituality. The centrality of access to sociocultural resources when families are forced to cope with accumulated traumas corroborates previous research in occupied Palestine on culturally meaningful adaptive processes (e.g., Afana, Pedersen, Rønsbo, & Kirmayer, 2010; Punamäki, 2010), in addition to theories of family resilience (e.g., Ungar, 2010), and eco-systemic developmental studies from other war-affected settings (e.g., Betancourt et al., 2011; Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Porter & Haslam, 2001). Moreover, a meaningful contribution of this study to the resilience literature is the way participants explained the process of weaving traumatic experiences into a larger story of strength, processing a range of feelings grounded within collective legacies and greater goals. These findings intersect with work by Rynearson on "restorying violent death" (Rynearson, 2006), and literature on "centrality of event" (Boals & Schuettler, 2011; Groleau, Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2013), suggesting that individuals who see traumatic events as the central aspect of their life are more likely to have clinical symptoms, while those who view the event as transformative but not defining, show greater resilience.

The intergenerational cultivation of resilience

Lastly, intergenerational cultivation processes emerged from the results highlighting both verbal and experiential cross-generational communication. These findings are consistent with Johnson's (2007) qualitative study on what she calls "the tactics of every day life," which focused on exploring Palestinian women's strengths and risks while living in refugee camps. In her study, Johnson underlined the importance of multigenerational daily discourses in the camp context, such as "checkpoint tales," as people process the paradoxical and inhumane challenges of navigating

occupied public and private spaces. In addition to the vital role of storytelling and sharing daily tales in promoting resilience, the study findings underline the importance of cross-generational experiences as family members witness others face challenges and are exposed to commemoration days, cultural rituals, and family routines. These results map onto findings from racial socialization research, such as the qualitative study by Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, and Brotman (2004), which highlighted the support African American parents give to their children when engaging in racism preparation training through modeling, role-playing, and exposure to cultural activities such as Black History Month or other events. When exploring resilience processes in Palestinian families it could be instructive to systematically engage comparative analysis linking constructs to contribute to understandings of indigenous responses to historical trauma (e.g., Brave Heart, 2000; Evans-Campbell & Walters, 2006; Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011).

Critical psychologists argue that researchers should recognize when trauma and resilience research primarily leads to individual-level interventions (e.g., Shapiro & Atallah-Gutiérrez, 2012). It is not enough to simply document harm and produce interventions to heal from damages of unending oppression (Lykes & Coquillon, 2009). More research is needed that builds community capacity with critical praxis to reveal detrimental public policies based on perspectives of oppressed groups themselves, especially in conditions marked by settler colonialism (Atallah, 2016). Future inquiry should afford local residents and NGOs opportunities to coauthor reports and share ownership of research.

Limitations

A common challenge of qualitative research is validity (Leavy, 2011; Ponterotto, 2005). To address this, the study employed a variety of methods aimed at improving trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005) when coding, memoing, and cross-verifying interpretations to enhance validity. The small number of participants limits the representativeness of the findings. Moreover, because this study did not systemically explore differences in rural, urban, and camp settings in the West Bank, or across vectors of power (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, religion, sexuality, etc.), generalizing findings to other communities is limited. However, this study focused on identifying culturally and contextually specific experiences allowing for nuanced constructions of resilience with respect for indigenous knowledge. Ecologically informed frameworks and qualitative community-based methodologies can allow helpful comparisons across settings (Clarke, 2005) in the spirit of translocation (Alvarez et al., 2014).

A significant challenge of this research included the researcher's limited Arabic language capacity. Relying on a translator did have benefits, such as creating a team environment when collecting data. Another challenge of the research was related to the Israeli occupation policies limiting mobility of Palestinian communities, especially in refugee camps. As a Palestinian American researcher, when

gathering data in the field, the investigator himself was profiled and his mobility restricted by Israeli occupation authorities which complicated data collection.

Conclusion

The representation of family resilience introduced in this study was developed through a community partnership with a Palestinian NGO and 30 participants in a UN refugee camp in the West Bank. The resultant *Palestinian Refugee Family Trees of Resilience* (PRFTR) metaphor describes the tragedies and strengths of refugee families as they resist military siege and occupation, return to dignity and belonging in the face of settler colonialism, and persevere through the siege's shadow—that is, the continuing adversities and accumulative effects of trauma. The framework takes into account complex structural dynamics and underscores culturally meaningful pathways that families travel when disrupting transgenerational transmissions of trauma. In this light, the landscape of resilience is reflected in the experience of indigenous families who have become exiled in their own territories, requiring a unique decolonizing "*refugeography*" to remap health and home, consistent with the Palestinian proverb: "Most people live in their country, but our country lives in us."

Mental health practitioners working with Palestinian refugee families residing under the Israeli occupation may find it helpful to build on the strengths of families identified in this framework. Each *tree branch* and the various subbranches have potential for enhancing clinical interventions. Work by others has begun to document the unique challenges of promoting resilience under occupation (e.g., Qouta et al., 2008; Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture [TRC] & Dulwich Centre, 2014). These findings suggest that clinicians should work alongside refugees to prioritize indigenous values and resources in making policy recommendations. Policy changes that can transform conditions of inequity and colonialism are imperative to promote family wellness.

The present study showed how for some Palestinian families exiled only a few kilometers away from their native villages, their family experiences of discrimination and dislocation share important similarities with African Americans and other racialized groups internationally. Further research exploring the various themes identified in this study is needed. Increased attention to the *intergenerational cultivation process* may be especially important to explore nuances related to how families disrupt the transgenerational transmission of trauma.

Note

1. Each participating family was assigned the Arabic name of a fruit tree to protect privacy and pseudonyms were given for each of the 30 participants' first names that surface in transcripts and quotes. Hajj and Hajja are honorific terms placed at the front of each of the elder's names.

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