Decolonising *in, by* and *through* participatory design with political activists in Palestine

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ABSTRACT

We contribute a conceptual framework for decolonising PD praxis with the aim of surfacing unsettling agendas. Our framework was developed in response to collaborating with young Bedouin activists in Palestine, where there is a need not only to delink approaches from potential damaging epistemological and ontological ways of knowing and being, but to recognise differently constituted positionalities, the geopolitical specificities of place and the role of INGOs alongside the cultural contexts of ongoing violence. We define our orientations as decolonising *in*, *by* and *through* PD praxis when working on issues of land-based conflict. We argue these multiplicitous orientations allow for negotiations between political struggle and indigenous connection to the land, how INGOs embody conflicting justice agendas and how equity enriches yet complicates community sustainment. In contexts of ongoing indigenous land-based conflict, we detail the framework as an approach for unsettling PD praxis.

CCS CONCEPTS

• Social and professional topics ~User characteristics ~Geographic characteristics

KEYWORDS

Decolonising, activism, development, indigeneity

1 Introduction

PD, alongside other cognate disciplines, is increasingly engaging with issues of decoloniality as praxis, where critical thinking and doing are conjoined in political forms of community action and inquiry [12,26,31,74]. This growing body of work has predominantly focused on key contributions across methodological and theoretical inquiry [1,47,63,65,72,79]; designing equitably with under-served and marginalised communities [6,17,18,19,36,83,84], invigorating debates in the design curriculum influenced by perspectives from authors and practitioners from the global South [9,11,50], while highlighting the necessity of citational justice in design reporting [48]. While the specificities of geography, intersectionality and working within borders is fundamental to these debates [6,28,57,86], few studies within PD have explicitly discussed a geopolitically informed approach to design exploring decolonising praxis with indigenous activists in the context of ongoing conflict and land-based dispossession.

In this paper we contribute a conceptual framework responding to PD's ongoing concern with decolonising praxis through a case study with young Bedouin activists in Palestine. We explore the geopolitical landscape by discussing how, as designers and researchers, we attempt to mobilise decolonial praxis alongside community action while responding to ongoing colonial violence toward indigenous communities who regularly interface with development and humanitarian agencies. Using the framework helps surface unsettling agendas while sensitising us to entrenched geopolitical issues that underpins such work. We do this by unpacking our situated practices, drawing on interdisciplinary participatory design work with young

activists in Area C of the West Bank, Palestine. The young activists seek to challenge the oppression of the Israeli state in response to the practice of house demolitions, which has seen (at the time of writing) over 10,000 West Bank and East Jerusalem Palestinians displaced in the last decade.[1]

Our framework includes different orientations within PD praxis as decolonising *in, by* and *through* design. These prepositional differences prove valuable for articulating how designers might distinguish between agendas associated with the ongoing work of decolonising and respond to complexities of geopolitical land-based conflicts. In designing with young activists this has meant distinguishing between i) decolonising *in* design by recognising the Eurocentric frames of reference that can remain prevalent in our work; ii) decolonising *by* design via creative collaboration as a catalyst for challenging institutional (INGO) perspectives by bringing to the fore alternative epistemologies and ontologies; and iii) decolonising *through* design by mobilising cracks that aim to effect change beyond research that speak to autonomous and communal forms of action and sociability. Paying attention to these distinctions demonstrates the necessity of unsettling work in decolonising [6,72,77,87] highlighting that contrasting political and institutional agendas - humanitarian aid, development, research and justice - are not always reconcilable or recognisable in the same way by all involved. We argue these multiplicitous orientations allow for geopolitical tensions to surface to create space for ongoing meaningful dialogue between overtly political articulations of struggle and indigenous connection to the land, awareness of how INGOs work is influenced by conflicting justice agendas and how working towards equity enriches yet complicates community sustainment [36].

2 Foundations

2.1 Decolonising PD Praxis and International Development

Recent PD research has articulated both the empowering potential and challenges of alternative praxis that makes explicit political orientations that seek to decolonise design. The familiar form of PD workshops and associated material interactions have been critiqued for not supporting social responsiveness [51] particularly in relation to situated intersectionalities associated with marginalised experiences of oppression and distrust which calls for decolonisation [36,78,88]. Designers have reinvigorated Freire's emancipatory pedagogy to re-politicise design action to research, code and transform awareness of the realities of oppression [74] that align with fluid experimental processes such as the creation of publics for articulating issues of concern. Furthermore, building on Freire, long-term approaches such as assets-based community design (ABCD) has been reported to support communities and designers to collectively appreciate expertise as assets to be mobilised while supporting lasting change [95].

Decolonising efforts in PD have also highlighted the importance of questioning assumptions on familiar design concepts and time-frames. Familiar concepts for design, such as creativity, that often highlight novelty in a Western paradigm, should be interrogated in relation to local knowledge and understood as re-creation, building on what is already there and not just focusing on creativity as something that takes place in design through well-defined time bound projects [79]. The challenges of time are also presented by early stages of project definition that can further impact on the ability of designers and collaborators being unable to adequately respond to the urgency of fast changing socio-political circumstances. More relatedly in the context of activist collectives and coalitions working to counter oppression designers report the necessity of care and a diversity of actors coming together to address issues of survival that many communities face [26]. This requires designers to work with communities to find productive ways to support each other with vulnerabilities associated with violence and everyday harm. Arruda et al. argues that decolonising efforts are necessarily full of friction due to affective and embodied ecologies that persist through territorial inequality and contrasting im/mobilities [6]. Smith et al. [77] describe a transcultural approach to support safe spaces for dialogue that gives time and space for participants to take over content through the different knowledges produced. Simultaneously they acknowledge the impossibility of delinking entangled colonial histories and neocolonial discourse from existing institutional agendas.

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[1] https://www.ochaopt.org/data/demolition

Much of this research has taken place within the context of international development efforts, where local governments and INGOs receive financial aid from higher income countries [58]. PD has long engaged in international development and humanitarian aid demonstrating ongoing tensions that speak to the challenges associated with histories of coloniality [24,44,48,54,56]. While projects reporting findings from collaborative and more equitable design research however are rarely sustainably integrated into INGO policy or practice [24,48] due to the challenges of operating at different geographical and temporal scales. The short time frames of development project activity, shaped by particular demands for results linked to 'value for money' and accountability to donors, do not lend themselves to a focus on equitable processes nor sustained in-depth engagement with historical contexts. Indeed, the positioning of participatory approaches to research within this context risks their attenuation. Relatedly, design for development can too often focus on insights from expert leaders not always motivated by grassroots community interests and concerns [25,48,78,88]. Expectations on what participatory methods and practices can achieve can be fraught with assumptions concerning what constitutes appropriate levels of 'participation' from different cultures and different actors [20,44,91] potentially perpetuating or even exacerbating social inequalities [17,18,19,20]. Tensions stem from how participation in these schemes still functions within a colonising politics of development knowledge [73]. While development provides a domain for PD work that resonates with commitments to social justice, empowerment and voice, designers can sidestep confronting the ongoing power inequalities, colonial histories and imaginaries of development and humanitarian intervention that underpins such work.

Critical development scholars have long argued that such histories are bound up with concerns for improving the social conditions of those who are considered to be the most worthy and fit particular geopolitical interests [21,28,60,73]. The entanglement of international development in colonial histories, technocratic assessments of worthiness and visions of social and economic change that privilege Western experiences underpin efforts at improving the social through design. This has been as much about designing out social inequalities, while retaining unreflexive traces of harmful ideologies and the belief there are simple solutions to fixing social problems [28].

Design, as a heterogeneous set of interconnected practices therefore, needs to be 'remade' to allow for alternative ways of responding to issues of sustainment and long-term care [32]. Schultz et al. [72] argue argue that decolonisation informs the politics of design as action not with the paternal intention of improving social life, but through facilitating "a process of delinking and redirection into other ways of being and becoming" [72: 82]. This shift from ways of knowing to ways of being and becoming helps contribute to a decolonial pluriversality and the recognition of the coexistence of multiple experiential realities also "grounded in the geopolitics and corpopolitics of knowledge, being and perception" [86: 54].

While these are valuable orientations within existing discussions of decolonising PD, reporting on the necessary geopolitical and unsettling nature of praxis has so far been limited. In an attempt to conceptualise orientations for decolonising PD, we invoke the necessity of unsettling praxis [72,87] as productive. We argue this is an essential aspect of decolonising efforts, recognising the limits of aiming for closely aligned agendas that don't pay attention to relevant differences within and between communities, INGOs and design researchers. In the context of PD in Palestine, it is important to acknowledge the significance of intersectional identities and privileges as differently attuned. Unsettling practice in this context is not only significant in highlighting ontological negotiations necessary while responding to differing agendas, but also in response to specific issues of indigenous land rights. In our design work with political Bedouin activists in Palestine confronting demolition orders on their homes and community built infrastructures, decolonising must be considered as inseparable from the land, "Land is what is most valuable, contested, required.[…T]he disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence."[87:5]. Sensitivities are required that work to counter ongoing material and cultural dispossession [15] towards "the repatriation of Indigenous land and life" [87: 21].

2.2 A patchwork of positionalities

We situate our work in the context of our collective identities and the particular context of house demolitions in Palestine. The authors of this paper are committed to raising awareness of the injustices of house demolitions, and to understanding how awareness raising and shared knowledge can subsequently lead to more equitable conditions for Palestinians via self-actualisation and self-determination and the right to a fulfilling and peaceful life. It is also important to acknowledge how we are all differently constituted as a team of interdisciplinary Palestinian, Lebanese and British researchers with varying privileges that might affect how to speak ethically *with*, *to* and *about* Palestinians vulnerable to the threat of house demolition. This is particularly important in paying attention to issues of pluriversality and recognising our unique herstories and histories that we bring to the site of inquiry that frame our collective critical engagements and experiences. Author (a) is a British design researcher and lecturer at a UK University with a background in HCI and community-arts practice with refugee and immigrant women. Author (b) is a Lebanese design and HCI researcher at a UK University that has worked with refugees (Syrian and Palestinian) in the Middle East. Author (c) is a Palestinian legal researcher and lecturer at a Palestinian University with a background in legal implications of demolitions on water structures and the built environment in Palestine. Author (d) is a Palestinian language education researcher and lecturer with a background in ESOL, citizenship and educational practice in Palestine in the context of international development. Author (e) is a UK legal researcher focusing on law and corporate responsibility. Author (f) is a human geographer working for a UK university with scholarly interests in research ethics and the political geographies of Palestine-Israel. Author (g) is a Professor of International Development and works closely with INGOs and humanitarian organisations researching youth volunteering and livelihoods. The two political activists we worked alongside are Bedouin Palestinians living in a southern part of the West Bank in an area close to an illegal Israeli settlement where the demolition of Palestinian homes and communal buildings is common. Both remain anonymous in this paper to prevent unwanted attention leading to retaliation impacting their communities and families, and their ongoing work. They have however, become prominent as they write and speak publicly about their village and life under military occupation. Their involvement in the research was as co-designers and community researchers.

We explicate these details to acknowledge the power dynamics that underpin research processes, rooted in feminist perspectives on ethics and the recognition that all knowledge production is situated [35,81]. We want to highlight the co-constitutive relationship between researchers and activists as worked through in praxis [27,55,67] and the mutable power dynamics during research with groups experiencing marginalisation [3,5,7,33,93]. While much of this writing has drawn on postcolonial perspectives – i.e., the ways that colonial-era power relations bear on mobilities, access and epistemologies – current considerations have moved towards a more decolonial approach, addressing not only questions of representation but also material change to real world circumstances. If *post*colonialism addresses seeing the world differently; a *de*colonial approach emphasises making the world different, in a material – not merely metaphorical – sense [87]. Others have further highlighted how postcoloniality can be valuable for unpacking cultural hybridity but not for responding to the economic and lived realities of communities in the global South [68]. The imperative prompted by this vibrant debate is to feel, think and action how the doing of our research relates to a decolonised vision of "the repatriation of Indigenous land and life" [87:21].

A discussion such as this cannot pass without an acknowledgement of the colonial histories written into both the specific context of Palestine-Israel and the skewed distribution of mobilities and resources that enable much academic work in the 'global South'. We recognise the privilege of white British lived experiences implicated in colonial powers enabling access to spaces with the ability to move between check-points and borders without questioning or fear. This differs from the lived experiences of Palestinians, who become accustomed to suspicion, delays and additional checks by the military when moving between borders and plan their routes carefully to avoid the risk of threatening encounters. Palestinian Bedouin communities are targets of further suspicion not only by the Israeli military but also by the Palestinian Authorities who often

fail to support them through recognition of indigenous rights to the land and are thereby further marginalised in their social status. Acknowledging this patchwork is not just one of stating these differences, but highlighting how moving between different places creates unsettling experiences of privilege and uncertainty pulled in and out of focus in embodied and visceral ways and speaks to issues of inequitable "corpopolitics" [86] underpinning our work.

2.3 Political Context and Project Overview

2.3.1 House Demolition in Palestine

We start this section by foregrounding the situated geopolitical context of activist struggles in Palestine for rights to land and home with an entangled political international history that has shaped ongoing struggles for Palestinian people seeking justice and equality. Palestine presents a complex geopolitics summarised here through the wider context of house demolitions in the West Bank. Palestine (or the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) as it is defined in development terms) is an ODA (Office of Development Aid) recipient state [22,23,29,30] divided between two governments; the Palestinian National Authority (PA) in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza. Since the Oslo Accords (1993, 1995), the West Bank has been split into three administrative zones Areas A,B,C. Our work is in Area C (~60% of the West Bank) controlled and managed by the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA). Planning and building restrictions for Palestinians are severe, even though Israeli settlements are expanding around those restricted zones. This brief survey conveys the complex geographical setting for design where political entanglements of sovereignty, land ownership and planning permission are spatially and temporally contested [9,62].

Housing demolitions began after the first world war under a British mandate to quash Arab anti-colonial resistance after the fall of the Ottoman empire and to open space for construction for the early Zionist settlers in areas such as Tel Aviv [64]. Today house demolition has become a strategy [16,40,41,89] to dispossess Palestinians of their land in areas of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. House demolition is geographically differentiated owing to overlapping legal delineations from imperial/colonial regimes (Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Israeli), a peace process that resulted in the Oslo Accords (1993 and 1995) and the formal division of the West Bank.

Control over Area C has led to demolition orders placed on buildings that are erected or expanded without planning permission. ICA, the arm of the military responsible for governing the West Bank, rarely grants planning permits to Palestinians for building new housing structures – despite significant (and illegal under the 4th Geneva Convention) Israeli settlements that are under construction at many sites throughout the West Bank. Between 1988 and 2016, Israel issued 16,085 demolition orders for Palestinian buildings in Area C. A significant proportion remain either 'in process' (57%) or 'on hold due to legal proceedings' (18%)[16,59]. Less than a quarter of orders have been executed. Demolition orders thereby form a particular kind of protracted anticipatory violence where many Palestinians live under constant threat of demolition [43,70,71].

2.3.2 Bedouin Activist Responses

For many people living in Area C in the West Bank, the experience of house demolitions and the anticipatory violence and loss of home, are closely connected to mass displacement experienced during the *Nakba* (نكبة catastrophe) of 1948 when the establishing of the Israeli state saw ~650,000 Palestinians forcibly displaced from their homes as refugees [58]. The Bedouin community, with whom we have worked with describe how they are already refugees, since their ancestors were displaced from land and moved during this time. Now they are under threat of losing their right to access the land and homes again with all but two houses in the area served with demolition orders.

The community is surrounded by an expanding Israeli settlement which has permission to more than double in size. Settlers control and restrict access to water, electricity, telecoms and herding pastures, amid ongoing violence and hostilities. Their struggle is not just one of decolonisation of indigenous rights to the land but a fight to avoid ongoing illegal land sequestration of Palestinian territory. Many of the village's existing

structures; buildings, homes, tents, communal ovens; have already been demolished and rebuilt again, only to be demolished and rebuilt as a form of ongoing resistance.

3 Project Overview, Timeline and Approach

Young members of the community who identify as activists have been working with INGOs and local organisations to create a significant online social media presence, inviting international volunteers to rebuild new infrastructures such as greenhouses, while documenting demolitions to cultivate acts of non-violent resistance against the ongoing violence of occupation from both Israeli military forces and settlers [43,62]. After visiting the community several times since 2017, the research team developed a funded proposal[2] to pay for activists' time and travel costs and began conversations over email, WhatsApp and FaceTime in October 2018.

Our interests formed around three broad aims
1) document and raise the profile of how young people informally respond to demolitions in their day to day lives and how it impacts on their future aspirations.
2) share this understanding with INGOS so as to change interactions within development organisations operating within Palestine who often position young people as passive victims and recipients of aid.
3) use the process to build solidarity and capacities for future resistance with neighbouring villages.

Palestinian youth (aged 16-25) are often considered a trapped majority, excluded from engaging in public political discourse due to perceptions of lack of maturity or violent behaviours, by elders, the Palestinian Authority and Israeli government unless they hold a particular social status [42,43,66,70]. Across the research team and with the activists, we sought to challenge such perspectives. At the same time, we wanted to respond to the concerns expressed by the activists that they themselves were not always representative of other views within their own and neighbouring communities experiencing similar struggles. Activists discussed wanting to be inclusive and ensure young women in particular would feel comfortable sharing their perspectives in respectful ways. We worked with three young men who were already accomplished film-makers and confident with broadcast media, but were also mindful how this approach did not always include wider perspectives from within their community.

Year	Month	Activity, Duration & Location	Description
2018	Dec	Visit *1 day* **South Hebron**	Researchers reconnect with Bedouin activists and help build steps down to new greenhouse in the village and share a meal.
2019	Jan-Feb	Online comms **Palestine-UK**	WhatsApp, email and FaceTime discussions between research team and activists to outline possible ways of working together.
	Mar	Visit *1 day* **South Hebron**	Researchers return to Bedouin village and explore potential questions and ideas with activists for engaging young people in the village about experiences and responses to demolitions.
		Design making 2 *days* **Bethlehem**	Activists visit Bethlehem and co-design with researchers to develop ideas, topics and questions they are interested to ask young people in their community. Questions are co-designed into paper shapes and packaged into kits. 4 pilot kits are created.
		Using kits *7 days* **South Hebron**	Activists use pilot kits with 4 young people in their village.
		Workshop *1 day* **Nablus**	Researchers present project at X University in Palestine as part of workshop with 20+ I/NGOs, local civil society organisations and 30+ law students to discuss the challenges of understanding and supporting young people experiencing demolitions in Palestine.
		Meetings *5 days*	Researchers meet with INGOs working with young people on house demolition in Palestine.

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[2] The project was funded through the British government's Foreign Aid budget part of a scheme to 'export' British research expertise to development practitioners, local government and INGOs in response to intractable global challenges https://www.ukri.org/our-work/collaborating-internationally/global-challenges-research-fund/ Initial funding was for two years 2018-2020, but with restrictions prompted by Covid-19, this was extended to December 2021.

		Ramallah, Jerusalem, Nablus, Jordan Valley, Hebron	
		Reflection *1/2 day* **Bethlehem**	Researchers reflect with and interview activists on their experiences of using the kits and discuss any potential changes needed to questions and design.
		Design making *1 day* **Bethlehem**	Based on reflections activists and researchers make suggested changes to kits to collectively make 8 more. A process for documenting responses to the kits and sharing is collectively developed.
	April	Use of kits *1 month* **South Hebron**	Activists use kits with each other and 6 young people in their village.
		Online comms **Palestine-UK**	Activists share insights and documentation of kits via mobile phone and shared drives. WhatsApp, email and Skype calls continue.
	May	Design making 2 *days* **Bethlehem**	Activists work with young community researcher in Bethlehem to create 10 kits.
		Use of kits *1 month* **Bethlehem**	Bethlehem community researcher uses kits with two villages facing demolitions in the district.
	June	Online comms **Palestine-UK**	House demolitions begin in activist village. Researchers keep in daily contact and promote on social media.
	July	Visit *2 days* **South Hebron**	Researchers visit village to spend time with activists and community elders. Activists discuss plans for using the kits to connect with three more villages.
		Interviews *1 month* **Across Palestine**	Researchers conduct interviews with I/NGOs.
	Sept-Dec	Design making / Use of kits *3 months* **South Hebron**	Activists adapt, make and use kits with 28 young people across three villages in the district.
		Online comms **Palestine-UK**	Activists share insights and documentation of kits via mobile phone and shared drives. WhatsApp, email and Skype calls continue and discussions begin on how best to use material and insights gathered.
2020	Jan	Online comms **Palestine-UK**	Early signs of coronavirus and lockdown in Palestine and Israel means project halted.

Table 1: Project timeline for first 14 months of the project. We focus on co-design activity taking place between January-March 2019 (marked in green).

The first year of the project focused on periods of intensively and iteratively co-designing a set of approaches to support activists reaching out to young people in their own village and neighbouring villages. This culminated in the design of a series of questions that developed into a kit, which responded to the mobility and preparedness of the bags they each had in their homes for when a demolition was due to take place. Each kit contained six themes and associated questions co-designed, developed and used by the activists. The themes and questions included questions about a) Future dreams for you? Future dreams for your community? b) How do you prepare for demolitions? c) Right to a home = right to freedom? d) Ancestral words of wisdom e) Scales of effective resistance f) Mapping hope, sacred, threatening, safe, spaces in your village. A total of 40 kits were designed, made and used by activists within their own village and three additional villages in the local area. Each time a set of kits were made for a different community, they inevitably changed in form and often included a change in language and approach as activists responded to the different relationships with a variety of young people in the wider area. Our approach described here is not intended as the contribution, rather to provide a brief overview of the collaborative design work that underpins the framework.

Figure 2. The first pilot kits were made using a combination of materials sourced within the community, from resources brought from the UK and materials purchased in Bethlehem.

The activists were central in developing a process that worked for them for inviting and documenting young people's responses to the questions. The process was collectively devised and each of the activists' engagements with young people would start with an informal invitation, usually through a social event. If a young person was interested in using a kit, this was given to them and a further explanation was shared on how to fill it in; there was no expectation to answer every question and they could respond in any order they wanted. An agreed time for when the activists would meet the young person again was set and kits were left for one to seven days to give the young person space and time to respond. Activists would then invite the young person to discuss their thoughts. Consent was given verbally, and written or drawn responses were photographed and the discussion was audio recorded on one of the activists' phones if permission was granted. Photographic and audio data was transferred via encrypted files from the activists' phones to password protected drives which were later transcribed in Arabic and then translated into English by the Palestinian research team. This made the process of engagement with young people protracted over time and it presented further challenges in how the activists were later able to make sense of and use these conversations as a catalyst for further action.

Our findings are reported more fully elsewhere and are not our intended contribution for this paper. Rather the brief overview below provides a contextual layer to our work. Findings from the overall project included highlighting the impacts of demolitions on young people's health and well-being, exacerbated by the challenges of anticipation and deferred futures. Further insights indicated how young people struggled to access information on legal geographies and education, and differing responses to humanitarian communications in their use of online media alongside intimately maintaining dignity in their everyday lives. Findings were shared via a youth conference, an exhibition of young people's artwork in response to demolitions, a booklet to accompany the exhibition, youth engagement resources, insights briefings summarising the findings and a UN report that described specific challenges experienced by indigenous communities in the West Bank at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

What follows are a series of vignettes focusing on intense activity that took place in March 2019 (see table 1 marked in green), that characterise unsettling moments of uncertainty we argue are necessary but require different orientations for decolonising efforts. The vignettes have not derived from collective analysis of all the data. Rather, what is presented is a conceptual orientation in reflecting on differently constituted positions, and how this has raised issues in our collective discussions on differing agendas present in negotiating decolonising as praxis. We discuss each of our orientations as decolonising *in, by* and *through* participatory design where we co-designed resources activists could use to connect with young people, while raising awareness of their work with INGOs.

4 Decolonising *in*; unsettling and delinking design scholarship

We frame our orientation to decolonising *in* as an approach to recognising, challenging and responding to our own Eurocentric frames of reference. In the following section we discuss how we oriented towards decolonising *in* incrementally to interrogate our assumptions and design approaches as an ongoing concern.

4.1.1 Questioning the value of decolonising

In our online meetings in early 2019, as researchers we discussed with the activists that we were keen to engage in the design process as an exploratory pilot, to debate and feedback how they felt things did or didn't work for them. One member of the collective, who also works for a non-profit, made clear some concerns about collaborating on participatory and decolonising approaches based on what that they had engaged with in the past. These projects he suggested tended towards producing *"art objects and exhibitions"*, becoming unclear, misleading and meaningless with little political sway in the context of Palestine. *"How does decolonising help the man over there?"*, he explained in frustration, highlighting a disconnect between what many people he had worked with claiming a decolonising agenda means and how little this reflects the everyday realities of people in Palestine in more practical ways. While we agreed that this could be problematic, we focused our attention on practical ways forward, while taking care not to over-promise or prescribe next steps beyond the exploratory pilot and what we as researchers thought the process could or could not achieve.

4.1.2 Interrogating design approaches

In March 2019 we returned to the village to discuss the specifics of a potential collective timeline and work through the practical logistics of payment details and schedules. We were first invited for a walk around the village to ground further discussion in the embodied realities of the land. This was shortened due to heavy wind and rain and was to inform the next part of the collective design process. Instead we drew the village from inside the community centre using a large blank piece of brown paper, pens and words we hoped might resonate taken from our prior experiences of the village. Activists pointed in the directions of each place they discussed including places that gave them hope, sacred places, or places they felt threatened or safe.

On the same day over lunch, we presented slides on a laptop from our own previous design work working with refugee and marginalised groups and work from Palestinian designers using traditional methods and symbolism associated with the land and occupation[3]. We described how we usually worked on design resources ourselves in studios and explained how we did not usually share this side of our practice which made us feel nervous but also excited about what to expect. Our intention here was to try and self-disclose how we worked in different ways with materials, provide a jumping off point for ideas and also to share something of ourselves as part of the conversation. One activist, after several examples, started laughing:

> *"Ah I get it. It's a trick! You are tricking people into making them talk, in a nice way."*

While we all nervously laughed at this observation it reactivated our concerns that some of our methods could also be perceived and potentially experienced as manipulative. A series of artefacts are made, which can be received as a set of gifts [20] with propositional questions that might also have the potential to create an unequal expectation of reciprocity [75]. Recent interpretations of Maus's theories of the gift have been further explored in the context of solidarity building for inter-societal relations in response to colonisation highlighting their contextual specificity in long-term exchange [52,53]. Simultaneously, the activist's laughter and response also alluded to the more playful possibilities of these material forms and the potential for different kinds of solidarity. After looking at the different examples the activists expressed excitement to make something themselves to help them engage other young people, but nervousness was expressed as to how they would be able to do this.

4.1.3 Sharing fragments of the land

To bring this back to ways of engaging the activists in being in the land and draw attention to their expertise we asked they show us examples of the most precious things in their village that we would not necessarily

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[3] Disarming Design in Palestine

know about. As the weather outside was still bad we asked if they could do this before we met each other again providing small jars and containers to collect these examples.

After two days the research team and activists came together again in one of the activist's collectives house in Bethlehem. We were unsure whether they would bring back anything and were pleased and excited when they brought a bag full of jars and energetically unpacked them. Over coffee, dates and cigarettes, small jars of poetic worlds of playful co-existence opened up as rocks, dust and plants were shared with affection and eloquence to detail intimate compassionate relationships with the geographies of home (Figure 2.).

Activists described plants that showed the colour and vibrancy of life in their community (poppy) despite many people only seeing the area as a desert. Also, plants that were used for medicinal purposes (camomile, alchemilla) herbs for cooking (mint and oregano used in sumac and za'atar), but also evidence of sustenance (ash from the bread oven), broken pots (to keep flour), and reminders of childhood play, including small stones used for practicing sheep herding.

Figure 2. Containers showing precious things from the land.

4.1.4 Co-creating themes and questions

Following our discussion on the jars we suggested we discuss ideas that activists felt would be interesting to talk about with other young people in their community. This was more of an open discussion than a formal exercise and as topics came up, the research team took notes on cards and laid them out on a coffee table as reminders. Despite the delight and excitement in sharing the precious fragments from the land earlier in our conversations, this wasn't considered a relevant way of asking young people to engage as some of the more political questions raised about demolitions and rights. Yet these important ways of being with and appreciating the land were considered by one of the activists as an important aspect of indigenous resistance and relevant to raise their international profile and a route to further international support.

> "Sheep herding is a holy practice for Bedouin. [...] People nowadays care about special groups and Bedouin is a special group that they should keep. [...] It is really important for the people to care because everyday we see on the TV those special groups like the Eskimo, people who live in the snow, people want to help them survive. I think people will be interested in that, because the occupation is not only harassing the Palestinian people, it is changing everything, our history, life, everything."

After two hours of open discussion we suggested we limit the ideas to a maximum of ten topics and we read out the fragments of what had been discussed, these were further debated on by the activists and then decided on. These began to focus down on issues of place and the poetics and emotions associated with the land, ancestral knowledge, futures, responses to demolitions, rights and the significance of different forms of resistance. As we explored how to turn these topics into questions or reflections, further issues were raised on how the questions needed to move beyond just documentation of demolitions and their wider impacts as this wasn't seen as valuable.

> "There is already so much documentation on demolitions and what difference has it made?".

Debates – occasionally heated – were also had over the phrasing of questions between formal Arabic language and Bedouin dialect, how to ask questions about rights associated with land and home, and the

tensions between asking closed and open questions that would resonate and make sense within the community. For example, we proposed asking a question about what dreams for the future young people have, the response was *"Our dreams are part of the community, not just our own."* highlighting the importance of underlining communal values. This is how the kits described earlier came to be.

4.2 Reflection on decolonising *in*

In reflecting on a decolonising orientation *in* PD, we have clarified where a more reflexive interrogation and ways of being is valuable for highlighting assumptions in our praxis. This not only includes what we do in design, but how concepts such as decolonising are perceived by others experiencing oppression for its perceived lack of practical applicability in their lives. Prior work on decolonising highlights the political pedagogical work of transforming awareness of oppression into design action aligning with a more fluid experimental process [74]. But it is also important to highlight a commitment to such practices can also be experienced as too open and unclear and irrelevant while at the same time needing to be responsive to the day to day realities and constraints on communities. A commitment to decolonising should be recognised as necessarily unstable, intense, messy, responsive, blemished and often inconsistent in how designers in western academic traditions have been trained to conceive or report on these processes through descriptions and abstract representations, therefore still requires ongoing negotiation and questioning throughout [1, 69, 72, 87].

For instance, in reflecting on decolonising *in*, we recognise how alternative points of inspiration other than sharing our own approaches could've further embedded ideas and conversations *within* rather than *separate to* the land. Yet these also enabled valuable opportunities to interrogate assumptions through *slippages*, moments where we unintentionally risked replicating familiar ways of thinking and being in design. hooks argues that slippages are important to call out because they offer moments of challenge by those experiencing oppression to foreground tacit knowledge and experience, drawing attention to what further work needs to be done [38]. Yet it is also important to recognise how such articulation work can be experienced as burdensome and relies on further attentiveness of those already involved in political struggle. Similar to the work of asset-based community design approaches [95], bringing to the fore expertise within the community requires careful negotiation work and trusting relationships. We argue that rather than seeing negotiations of trust as a prelude to design these are an integral aspect of decolonising and the ongoing unsettling work of PD praxis.

Ways of being and knowing for the activists and their wider community networks, also embodied a negotiation between the necessity and immediacy of defensive political action to upholding rights and resisting on and in the land, while simultaneously maintaining slower communal appreciation of indigenous day-to-day practice. We saw this in the distinct choice of questions that the activists decided to use with young people in their communities. Many were about encouraging reflections on political struggle and speaking to international and state-based decision-making injustices, others were more focused on reflecting on community dynamics and wisdom. This negotiation is important for activist aligned PD in particular in foregrounding struggle and ongoing action. An orientation towards decolonising *in* PD respects and responds to these negotiations, and tensions and does not position activists as inhabiting one way of being in responding either to explicit state-based politics, or slower communal ways of being with.

While Smith et al. [77] describe the importance of debate and diversity of responses in creating 'noise', in extending this acoustic metaphor, we'd like to propose, in line with [63] that decolonising *in* be considered a dance; relational embodied movement and listening across time – rather than as singular moment of 'noise'. Here we invoke the dabke (دبك), a Palestinian dance performed as an act of solidarity and struggle. In large circles men and women dance together at weddings and harvest to celebrate fertility and life. Pairs take it in turns to move into the circle and personalise the dance in dialogue with a partner. With regards to our case study, who takes a turn in responding to topics and materials, and how these are personalised and unsettle assumptions on what is considered stable is important. Acts of decolonising might bring about other forms

of localised cultural practices to consider how debate is supported through these enriching acoustic metaphors while attuning to these values [2,4,5]. PD research has brought valuable insights for designing with local knowledge and wisdom [44,94], but in designing with activists, it is important to recognise how local knowledge can also be fragile when political violence on land and life is so ever-present [15,28,34,71].

5 Decolonising *by*; Challenging organisational perspectives

Decolonising *by* design addresses creative collaboration as a catalyst for challenging institutional perspectives by bringing to the fore alternative epistemologies and ontologies. In early meetings with INGOs and local organisations working to support young people in Palestine, there was much to say in response to the project as organisations underlined the different perspectives we, as a research team, needed to consider and what each organisation was interested in ranging from issues of gender-based violence, legal support and psychosocial therapies. We presented the work of the Bedouin activists to foreground their fight and struggle as a human scale example of how young people were galvanising to prevent demolitions. One representative from an INGO working specifically on demolitions described the following:

> "We have a lot of data and documentation on demolitions. We document each demolition within 24 hours of it taking place and collect data and make this accessible to other NGOs who respond by providing shelter and international support. Many organisations work secretly in Palestine [because] Israel can take equipment. We have a lot of detailed data as we have worked for many years to organise responses with NGOs as it was chaos. It would be useful [for you] to go through our database first so you can look at the geographic scope, but we don't have anything specific on youth, we have data on specifics of gender, children under 18 and adults over 18, but not youth."

These early meetings were not necessarily an appropriate forum to challenge what organisations felt was important to say about demolitions and what data should be collected. However, this highlighted how differently organisations presented their expertise in demolitions. Their responses were something already known and understood through data and that any research should start from this existing knowledge. It is important to recognise however that representatives were several steps removed from the experiences of demolitions unlike the activists. Despite this, the conversations were valuable. We took from these discussions the lack of recognition of the creative agency of young people with hopes, fears, desires and valuable knowledge in the context of demolitions. Even more present was a lack of understanding of Bedouin activist knowledge and ways of being and their successful responses to preventing demolitions in galvanising international support [13] despite ongoing oppression due to their precarious borderland existence living between different state protections [15,34,71].

In relating INGOs perspectives to responses from young people, activists described how in the exercise for scaling effective resistance that many young people had put INGO support at the bottom of the scale.

> "They are, at the bottom, that's where he put the (INGO) projects. He said "I don't need a blanket I need someone to change the law", that's what he explained. You know [..] when they demolish your house, the (INGO), they bring you refugee tent, they bring you blankets, they bring you pillows [...]. He said "we have enough blankets and stuff.""

When a demolition took place, young people described how the wider community had their own localised preparation plans for what they would do when and how they would move useful resources. Communities had their own mutable tactics, evolving over time, to manage potential threat as forms of resistance. Responses from INGOs were considered too focused on material support and out of step with their own anticipatory efforts. Where young people felt INGOs could be effective was in response to changing the laws as this was often considered a significant aspect of justice that remained difficult to change.

5.1 Reflection on decolonising *by*

PD has long discussed designers as intermediaries, working between institutions and sensitively negotiating the struggles of marginalised groups with powerful organisational actors [85,92]. While it is important to highlight the different forms of communications required for intermediary work and the problems and tensions of speaking for instead of with others [80], in the context of our case study, our embodied positionalities are significant. How we are un/able to travel through and with sites of conflict and contestation is a noticeably unsettling aspect of working collaboratively as this movement between borders and in spaces further underlines the visceral and embodied ways that injustice and inequality is entrenched through particular bodies given or denied access to certain ways of being together [6,86].

For example it was not possible to bring the activists to these more formal organisational discussions due to extensive travelling distance and fear of checkpoint searches. It was also difficult to challenge perceptions and discussions from INGOs as we were positioned as guests to these discussions. We noticed a flattening of the geopolitical struggles of Bedouin activists, who also expressed distrust in how they were perceived by these organisations as recipients of particular kinds of material aid. [87] highlight how Indigenous struggles can be packaged with wider social justice struggles that gloss over the specific geographies of injustices, violence and communal ways of anticipation and response. In this sense many of the development INGOs did not want to differentiate between the particularities of communities as their focus was on how their data could be further used to make a difference at scale. They did not want to explore alternative ways of being in the specifics of Bedouin activist struggles. This is not to undermine the importance of the INGO work that was taking place acknowledging the care needed to avoid ICA removing resources, but to highlight how these agendas of INGOs and activists overlapped but did not productively align.

This is not to say that they are wrong and damaging for doing so. There is some alignment between activist struggles and INGO agendas ensuring communities have resources, but *how* this can be achieved is where these unsettling agendas palpably surface. For INGOs justice is about evidencing to prevent in the future. For communities it is about prevention now at an intimate scale. Recognising these challenges in the way that communities perceive *how*, *what* and for *whom* justice can be achieved, is fundamental for a decolonising *by* PD praxis orientation in the context of land-based conflicts.

6 Decolonising *through*: Towards community sustainment

Our final orientation is decolonising *through* design, a mode of praxis that aims to surface decolonial cracks [57] to effect change beyond research and most pertinent for the everyday realities of young people experiencing demolition orders. In our collective design of the kits two questions were included to help support reflection on community sustainment, one focused on dreams for the future and another about the significance of particular acts of resistance. Sharing answers to these questions, one activist in particular was amazed at the diversity of responses from his friends and family and an opportunity to learn what young people felt and thought. His sister for instance highlighted her desires to become a lawyer since she felt this was the best way to respond to their circumstances. Her choices for significant acts of resistance also surprised him as she clearly expressed distinct political views about the lack of impact documentation of demolitions have, that differed from his own. He later commented that this previous lack of recognition of her political interests in comparison to how he now understood her hopes and concerns, meant he had greater respect for her as he stated

> *"I thought I was the smartest person [here] but I am not anymore."*

Aside the humour, there was a serious point to activists' experiences. One articulated this well when he spoke – for the first time – to young women on the topic of politics, resistance and emancipation, gaining a greater appreciation of broader concerns within the community.

It is not our intention to romanticise these effects, nor to make exaggerated claims on their significance, but that this way of doing PD fomented – whether in strong or faint terms – a deepened sense of political awareness among young people is important. As one activist stated, his political alliances and collective resources were expanded:

"I was really surprised, I thought [he] and I are the ones who deal with laws and activism with internationals but we are not the best."

Towards a vision of repatriated land, these are small steps but they are steps nonetheless – ones headed in the direction of greater mobilisation and appreciation. Overall the kits that the activists created and used engaged in-depth with over 40 young people on activism and resistance in practicable terms, considering tactics such as olive tree planting, protest and boycott. They further trained up another young activist to work in Bethlehem to engage urban youth with similar questions. The fact that the activists repeatedly described how much they learnt in this process – especially with regard to speaking to younger women in the community, often on the margins of public and political life there – demonstrates how (gendered) politics was also brought to the fore where otherwise it may have been absent.

Many young people in response to the questions further highlighted how they struggled to have these debates ordinarily because their energies were so focused on prevention tactics rather than wider community conversations about these issues. It also demonstrates the potential for political activation that envisions a decolonial future, where young people can find ways to debate without judgement to move toward repatriated land and collective Palestinian self-determination. At the same time, we also acknowledge the disconnect between these *community conversations* engendered through the kits and the *documentation* of these conversations as not something integrated directly in future action by the activists. Despite this disconnect these conversations do suggest a form of decolonial insurgence that constructs moments of otherwise [57] moments that were not previously possible.

6.1 Reflection on decolonising *through*

For decolonising through PD, we argue that working towards change, how this might be enacted and by whom is important. Also that such change may not be the kinds of transformative justice we or activists imagine to be important in the long-term as significant change is slow. This is not to refer to the impossibility of decolonising in our lifetime [57,72,76,77], but point to how we should consider this work as necessarily protracted and precarious. In this sense decolonising *through* PD might instead be focused on creating openings, cracks [57], opportunities for other possible ways of being that have been quashed or were never considered. hooks [38] highlights the necessities of activating pleasures that open up critical reflection on issues of oppression as key to decolonising minds. Women activists in Palestine have long become disillusioned by geopolitics, fragmented state and international politics, instead seeking everyday pleasures as acts of gendered solidarity and communal defiance [66]. Bedouin women are regularly stereotyped as activists through representations of quiet stoic figures practicing *sumud* (صمود steadfastness), and traditional values associated with being on the land [42]. In the community conversations created however, young women asserted alternative ways of being in relation to land and politics that had previously not been considered by those who identified as activists, and this created a pleasurable exchange and learning. Change, therefore isn't necessarily the radical politics of land redistribution as we would hope or imagine in the long-term, but something more intimate and communal that suggests more of a restorative connection.

Simultaneously it is important to recognise how these potential cracks were also made tractable through paying for activists' time to do the work themselves in a way that made sense for them, which we argue should not be taken lightly. Prior research has highlighted the economic inequities of PD seeking to address issues of injustice [36], and how researchers can respond through payment of collaborators' time. This is valuable for committing to equitable project development, it also creates a critical surfacing of further issues of inequity. In our project this not only became significant in areas of ethics procedures, travel risk assessments, and disparities within the research team across UK and Palestinian policies, but also in the distribution of funds with specific criteria and limited flexibility in being able to respond to ongoing changes associated with protracted violence and marginalisation. This was significantly felt in the payment of activists where setting up, payment methods and the labour required to ensure payment highlighted huge disparities and assumptions on how this could be achieved. Most design research, PD included, does not discuss these issues, but most importantly when issues of decolonising are being addressed. We argue that not only do we have to consider the unsettling realities of not always achieving and sustaining transformational justice within

communities, and in the disparate agendas of international development but designers need to reflect on economic exchange and the realities between funders, institutions and organisations that can further enable and restrict what is considered possible to achieve [49].

7 Conclusion

We have contributed a conceptual framework for decolonising *in, by* and *through* PD to pull focus on unsettling geopolitical agendas as they surface in praxis in the context of activist agendas working toward Indigenous rights to the land and ways of life in Palestine. At the same time we also need to be prepared to question what we perceive as the very fundamental principles of decolonising and what it means for the day-to-day realities of experiences of injustice [1,69]. We propose decolonising *in* design is *one of many* ways in which praxis can be conceptualised but have offered further instantiations of decolonising *by* and *through* to reflect on how designers move across space and time sensitising to different agendas that are challenging to align. We have done this to extend the decolonising debate to highlight how designers negotiate between activist articulations of political struggle and the immediacy of threat and surveillance, alongside slower and more intimate appreciation of the land, how international development operates in relation to state and international geopolitical interests and concerns that differ from activist agendas for justice and how community sustainment might be re-envisioned through political forms of participation in more intimate pleasurable and conversational spaces, yet can be challenged through inequitable socio-economics.

Through co-designing with young Bedouin activists, a process for engaging a wider community of young people, PD can move beyond singular notions of activism and indigeneity and whether our approaches are unwittingly supporting colonial agendas or not [49,77]. We argue different orientations can support designers to reflect on and negotiate the unsettling colonial histories and violence that can underscore praxis in the context of Indigenous sovereignty [2,5,77,87]. From travelling between borders and gaining entry to particular sites, to broader international development agendas operating at the macro geopolitical and corpopolitical scale, how PD might operate more intimately with communities, and the backstage infrastructures we bring with our institutional frameworks and expectations for ways of doing design is an important challenge for decolonising debates. While these present challenges for PD, unsettling through paying attention to the slippages and cracks suggests potential for further questioning of ongoing colonial and neocolonial endeavours and ways of doing and being with design, while further extending political alliances within communities. It is important to foreground decolonising as a verb, and not be deterred by the impossibilities of delinking that can undermine the galvanising potential and necessity of hope underpinning much activist work [28,29,43]. Rather we argue it is important to see decolonising as a necessarily long-term unfinished messy collective *work in progress* with an ongoing imperfect patchwork of actors.

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