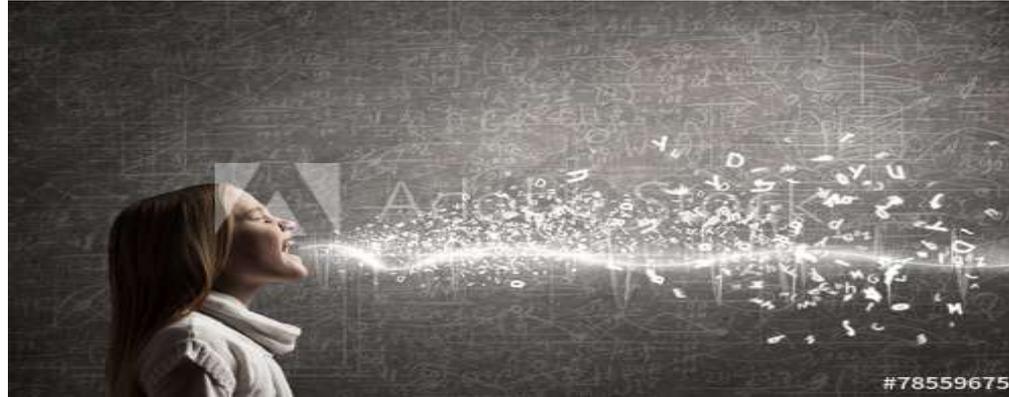# Identity and politics in diaspora: the voices of young Jews, Greeks and Palestinians in UK

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Outline

1. Introduction
2. Literature
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1. Introduction

- Background to research (Mavroudi 2007a; 2008; 2010; 2017; 2019; Christou and Mavroudi 2015)

1. The need to recognise those in diaspora as politicised and positioned

2. The need to listen to young people's voices and politics

3. The need for to explore young people's lives, identities and politics in diaspora

2. Literature

1. <u>Research on diaspora</u>
- Defining diasporas? (Brubaker 2004; Jöns et al 2016): diaspora as process? (Mavroudi 2007b; 2019)
- Diasporic identity as in-between, ambivalent, situated, emotional, in-the-making (Blunt 2007, Dwyer 2000, Christou 2006; 2011; Hall 1999; Clifford 1994)
- Diasporas as political, with tensions, in/exclusions (Werbner 2000; Sheffer 2003; Carter 2003; Yeh 2007; McConnell 2015; Baser 2015; Gabiam and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2017)

- 2. <u>Research on young people's politics</u>
- Children's voices, experiences, actions: informal learning; learning in a broad sense
- Children as 'active beings' and 'becomings'? (Kallio and Häkli 2013)
- Bridging 'micro-politics' and 'macro-politics' (Philo and Smith 2003; Ansell 2009)
- Children as political actors (Skelton 2010; Bosco 2010; Elwood and Mitchell 2012; Silva Dias and Menezes 2014)
- The potential for children's agency, participation and empowerment? (Wyness et al 2004; Skelton 2013)
- How do we decide what is political and what is empowering in such research?

3. <u>Research young people's lives, identities and politics in diaspora</u>

- Transnational migrant children (e.g. Tyrell et al 2013; Zeitlyn and Mand 2012; Wessendorf 2010); Haikkola 2011; Gardner 2012)

- Young people's identity in diaspora (Dwyer 2000; Sigad and Eisikovits 2010; Graf 2017)

- Young people's transnational and diasporic politics (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013)

- Gardner 2012, 891: "Within discussions of diasporic communities…children are generally either overlooked, or lumped into wider questions concerning family or intergenerational relationships, with scant consideration given to how the children themselves may have specific roles and perspectives"

3. Methods

- Greek, Jewish and Palestinian diasporas in the UK: all potential for politicisation to extent?

- Viewing groups side by side; exploratory research

- Builds on research with young people in these diasporas (e.g. Greek: Tsolidas and Pollard 2010; Jewish: Sigad and Eisikovits 2010; Abramson 2017; Palestinian: Blachnicka-Ciacek 2017)

- 42 young people (11-25); 26 gatekeepers, 28 parents interviewed; scrapbooks; drawing and sorting exercises during interviews

4. Some initial findings

On identities

- Complexities of identity negotiation. Nearly all had strong connections to homeland and strong diasporic identity; international outlook also common

- Nearly all were British citizens; nearly all were second generation born in the UK; many were religious to an extent

- The ability to negotiate belonging to multiple nations (and between religious and national identity) but also experiences of prejudice, Othering, insider/outsider: aware of their 'difference': impacts of this on politics?

- Their identities and politics are intertwined: their background is part of their identity and politics

On politics/being political

- They had political opinions, were political (overtly and implicitly) through actions (e.g. attending demonstrations), thoughts (e.g. on political leadership) and more informally (e.g. how they decorate their rooms, how they feel about where they live and what they would like to change)

- The security of British citizenship and living in the UK – as enabling political opinions and activism

- However, not always easy to have voice heard or effect political change

- Young people, on the whole, do not trust politicians or the political system and they feel they are not taught how to be create change (e.g. at school) in effective ways.

On generational differences, identity and politics

- Tensions evident between younger and older generation: different identities and ways to be political

- Role of family in politicisation and identity negotiations

- Role of family in 'setting the scene' for finding out about homeland

Negotiating complex, multiple identities

We personally are, I consider myself a proud Palestinian, first of all I'm a proud Muslim, proud Palestinian, a proud Jordanian and a proud British citizen, so …

OK, those are altogether?

All of them … all of them are together to me. Those are all part of my life, they're part of me.

(Hamsa, 17 year old male, Midlands, Palestinian diaspora)

Performing identities in particular spaces

I go a football match, like I support [local football team] and go to all their matches, and [neighbourhood] is a very kind of deprived majority Muslim area, and my parents always tell me to make sure I'm not wearing anything with Hebrew on it before I go there, just because they don't know what might happen. It is quite kind of similar to that, making sure that I'm not that obviously Jewish.

I get challenged about it so much in different ways that I have to talk about it with people at the school because they'll either just come up to me and ask random questions about Israel because I'm the person to ask that question to and … or they'll just come up to me and make an anti-Semitic joke, stuff like that, and I just kind of … I have to kind of talk to people about it and challenge people about it quite a lot, so … it's spread across the school.

(Alex, 17 year old Jewish male, Midlands)

The role of domestic space in identity negotiations

OK. So the British and English as well comes below the Greek…

Yeah, because like I feel like I'm Greek because most … most of my family is Greek, except from like people that have joined … like married somebody that's in my family and like they might be from a different country for instance.

Do you feel that you're growing up in a Greek home?

Yeah.

And what makes it Greek would you say?

Well we've got many like icons of … of like … God, Jesus and different … like saints that we believe in, like Greek Orthodox believe in. And I think like we've got many Greek things that make it a Greek home, including like many … souvenirs from Greece, but also … I think … also the thing that makes it a Greek home is actually that there is many things that speak out Greece to me, personally. (Aris, 11 year old male, Midlands)

The role of particular spaces for identity and community; role of parents

Yeah, yeah, so obviously I feel like I'm a citizen of the world. I think that can be applied to a lot of … most … well everyone in a way. Then I feel like Jewish and … because I sort of, I've been raised in the community pretty much because it was just my mum, me and my mum here, so she was working here a lot, she's very busy, so I sort of …

At the synagogue?

Yeah, and so through that, I sort of know a lot of people here and they've become like close friends and family and stuff, and it's a nice little community.

……

I've had a lot of experience with different sort of people, especially through my mum because she does so much sort of ethnic different … mixing with different ethnicities and religions, and with her, because I go to like meetings with her and stuff, well I did when I was … in the past.

(Max, 18 year old Jewish male, Midlands)

Differing attitudes between generations

I think if you look at any society, there's always a divide between the younger generation and the older generation, and that is also true within the Palestinian generations, in that … the way that the environment and the kind of … if you look at context and the way that … their background, my background is different from my parents' background in that I grew up here, my parents grew up in … well my father grew up in Palestine, and of course there's going to be a divide culturally first of all, and there's also going to be a divide in what we might believe is the correct way forward. (Adil, 17 year old male, Midlands, Palestinian diaspora)

Negotiating and creating new spaces of politics

So what we end up with is something that is called strategic hybridity, which is basically when you move strategically between both parts of your identity, and you can form the strong ties to the UK, because at the end of the day you live here, like you speak English but then we speak Arabic, a lot of us, and you can't run away from that part of you. But at the same time, you can forge new and dynamic links to the homeland, whether that's through technology, whether that's through regular visits if you're able to, or it's through even activism, that is something, well like keeping traditions alive, that's something that I think a lot of young people would, are able to relate to more, rather than referring to things that have happened to them, because it didn't happen to us specifically. And this is a concept known as the third space. So if there's hybrid space where you can take what it means to be Palestine and then forge it with what it means to be British and Muslim and Arab and all the rest of it…. I think we can be both without having to choose (youth session at Palestinian conference Dec 2018)

Being second generation and the need to have a voice and forge new inclusive spaces of community and connection

- talking about the older generation in the Palestinian community and the younger community, sometimes, and I've mentioned this quite a lot, I feel like the younger generation is kind of pushed aside and marginalised and not really listened to and not really given a voice, even though we have a lot to say, like we are a generation that haven't been to Palestine, are restricted from going back home, the older generation, you've lived it, you've seen it, you've spent time with family. And then there's us that have lived here and been raised here and can't go back home or can't see family or have missed spending time with our grandparents, haven't even seen our grandparents. So there's this built up anger that we have, that we kind of want to you know someone to hear us as well. And again, maybe we would probably do things differently, have like a more inclusive Palestinian community, really involve younger children from a smaller age, rather than just focusing on talks and conferences (Leela, 24 year old female, Palestinian diaspora, London)

5. Some ending thoughts

- Young people have myriad cross-border connections – impacts on identity (and politics?)
- Role that parents, peers, education, citizenship status, perceptions of community and inclusion play?
- Young people are political and have political opinions – empowerment?
- Young people are trying to use/reclaim space to capitalise on their age, generation, groundedness in Britain and British identity in order to try and make a difference in broad terms (ie not just to 'their' diaspora): creating inclusive nationalisms?
- Expansive notions of diasporic home, homeland and identity needed which encapsulates belonging to multiple nations: nation still important but needs to be conceptualised in more inclusive, less bounded ways?