

In and Out of Place: Resistance in the Musealisation of Palestinian Exile

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ABSTRACT

At the end of a long alley within the overcrowded Shatila refugee camp for Palestinians in Beirut stands The Museum of Memories. A small museum space which houses objects that Shatila residents brought with them from Palestine in the aftermath of *al-Nakba*. This museum is no nostalgic archive of Palestine – it is an important space of resistance. This paper makes use of Edward Said's (2000) conceptualisation of exile as being '*out of place*' to demonstrate how the objects adorning the walls of the Museum of Memories from ceiling to floor, are as this paper will propose paradoxically both *in and out of place*. Drawing upon theory surrounding museum practice and material culture, the paper draws readers' attention to the uncomfortable practicalities, ethics, and politics of researching the Museum of Memories. The paper, whilst focusing on the specific case of Palestinian exile, draws out a discussion about the wider way in which we tell stories of exile and how we think about the objects which should find themselves within museum spaces. Where we understand these everyday ephemeras of exile as contributing to a rich and nuanced understanding of exile stories with powerful resistance roles.

Keywords: Palestine, Exile, Museums, Material culture, Resistance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sat around a small table drinking tea with a heap of sugar spooned in, watching a game of chess, was not the usual way in which I encounter a museum space and meet its curator. Though, there was a lot about the encounter with the Museum of Memories in Shatila Refugee Camp in Beirut that does not fit the usual museum encounter. Whilst museum spaces are changing, the dominant mode of objects behind glass can often leave the visitor wondering whether the objects are out of place, and if the fullness of their story and their semiotic value has been diminished by being placed in a new space. In this case, the objects adorning the walls of the Museum of Memories from ceiling to floor, are, as this paper will propose, paradoxically both *in and out of place*.

In the opening lines of his memoir Edward Said, describes an interaction with an Israeli border official about when he left Israel:

"I left Palestine in December 1947, accentuating the word "Palestine", "Do you have any relatives here?" was the next question, to which I answered, "No one," and this triggered a sensation of such sadness and loss I had not expected. For by the early

spring of 1948 my entire extended family had been swept out of place¹ and has remained in exile ever since” (Said 2000, 11).

For Said, ‘out of place’ embodied feelings aroused by exile, how place and place of mind continuously unsettled him (Brennan 2021, XVIII). This paper makes use of Said’s ‘out of place’ to both ground and shape this paper. As such, I use the notion of the museum objects being *in place* within this space in Shatila to explore how the museum practice of curating becomes a form of resistance. Then, I use the notion of *out of place* to understand the continual effort by the Lebanese authorities to make Palestinians feel temporary, and not ‘in place’. The paper follows such a pattern by starting *in* the museum, focusing on the practice of curating and the stories the objects tell, followed by a brief discussion that looks outwards at the wider effects of two specific objects within the museum. Before concluding, I also use this notion of *out of place* to draw readers attention to the uncomfortable ethics, politics, and practicalities of researching the Museum of Memories. However, such entanglements and complexities do reveal themselves throughout.

I demonstrate that the story the Museum of Memories tells is more important than the objects contained and displayed, because whilst they ground the narrative with authenticity, its semiotic effect is wider. The museum showcases the everyday and contemporary restrictions and borders placed upon Palestinian cultural heritage in Lebanon, and the way in which a museum is itself a form of resistance in the face of such restrictions. It is a case which prompts a critical need to re-examine the assumptions regarding museums and the associated museum-practices.

2. THE MUSEUM OF MEMORIES

What is a museum? If we agree in functional terms that it is a space for the “collection, preservation, study, interpretation and exhibition of material evidence” (Harrison 1994, 160), it begs the question: why and for whom do we need this material evidence? Drawing upon museum studies and material cultural analysis this article posits that the Museum of Memories in the Shatila Refugee camp provides a way in which to reveal resistance in a museum space by the Palestinian diaspora in Lebanon.

Shatila was built on a one square-kilometre patch of land in the southern part of Beirut in 1949 by the International Committee of the Red Cross as one of the temporary camps to accommodate Palestinians after *al-Nakba* and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Originally built for 3,000 Palestinian refugees, Shatila today is a densely populated neighbourhood of multi-story concrete buildings packed tightly together, which houses over 22,000 Palestinian refugees (Middle East Eye 2021). The camp has been no sanctuary and since its establishment has been subject to repeated attacks and wars that led to its destruction and subsequent reconstruction two times over. In 1976, after Jordan forced the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) out of Amman, Shatila became the new headquarters for the leadership (Khalidi 2001). Shatila’s housing of the PLO led to the Israeli siege, the destruction of Shatila and the committing of one of the late 20th century’s most infamous war crimes, ‘the Sabra and Shatila massacre’. Shatila was destroyed for a second time during Lebanon’s War of the Camps from 1986 to 1990, and subsequently rebuilt (Khalidi 2001).

The Museum of Memories was established in 2004, as the curator felt that as those in Shatila who remembered fleeing Palestine during *al-Nakba* aged, it was vital to save the objects they had brought with them into exile. By saving the objects, they could emerge as a permanent collection on Palestine (CFC 2018). The museum itself can be found at the end of an overpopulated alley in Shatila. It is a place of small narrow alleys between leaning high-storey buildings as the Lebanese continue to restrict Palestinians forcing them to build upwards. Such compactness within Shatila means that there is no sunlight to lighten the Museum and so viewing of the objects mostly takes place under the small lamps. This physical infrastructure, building restrictions and increasing strains means that the Museum suffers from major damp problems. This damp is exposing the objects to great risk and the curator noted how there are now many objects in his home because they are too valuable to be put in such an

¹ Said’s own emphasis on Palestine, author’s emphasis on out of place.

environment. Adding that the museum has already lost many objects to water damage, including a great volume of pictures and documents which are unsalvageable. The lack of electricity, damp, being stuck and at risk of damage, are a scathing reminder that restrictions on Palestinians' access to the economy and wider protections in Lebanon could be the very reason Palestinian cultural heritage is destroyed.

It is necessary here to draw in the work surrounding The Palestinian Museum (see Toukan 2018; Burke 2020). The Palestinian Museum continues to face serious "problems of acquisition and the loss and ongoing vulnerability of artefacts" (Burke 2020, 12). Burke writes in relation to the problems the Palestinian Museum faced in getting objects to the Museum through Israel Occupying Forces borders as well as the permanent risk of potential damage to the museum by the Occupying Forces. Such vulnerability and threat, on the basis of Shatila's history and the Lebanese treatment of Palestinians, should not be overlooked in this case either.

The Museum's establishment in the camp, according to Rosemary Sayigh "impl[ies] a certain critique of the national leadership, especially its neglect of Palestinian history and culture, and its divorce from the refugees" (2013). Such a statement draws to the surface just one of the various complexities in which the Museum provokes as a case-study. As a museum space itself, it problematizes the 'national' or common 'state-sponsored' backing that has long been the long-held understanding of a museum (Anderson 1991; Bennett 1995). It is a ground-up effort which although widely supported by residents in Shatila, due to the curator's lack of allegiance with a political faction² is blocked in support for moving to a larger, damp free space in which the objects will be projected (CFC 2018). Even in 'new museology' which moves beyond the traditional European conception of the museum (see Harrison 1994; Sze 2010), and we look to scholarship surrounding the recent proliferation of 'memorial museums' specifically (see Violi 2017; Sodaro 2018), the Museum of Memories remains as a *lacuna*. It is a museum that is still embedded within an actively violent context of exile and displacement. It is a case which prompts a critical need to re-examine the assumptions regarding museums and the associated museum-practices.

Such a backdrop has contributed to Shatila becoming one of the most well-known Palestinian and over-researched camps (Sukarieh and Tannock 2012). Residents note feelings of being treated as though they live in "a lab for experiments" (Sukarieh and Tannock 2012, 502) Such a description evokes Smith's assertion that 'research' is one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary, inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism (1991, 1). Hence, it is no surprise that their paper describes how there is an increased suspicion surrounding political agendas of researchers coming from the US and UK. Of which I am one. These ethics, politics, and problems of 'researching' Shatila, made me deliberate for a lengthy period of time as to whether to write this paper using the Museum of Memories as a case study. However, it is my belief that reflexivity went into this entire process. Drawing upon Al-Hardan's powerful paper *Decolonising Research on Palestinians* (2014) and Abdunour and Moghli's *Researching Violent Contexts: A Call for Political Reflexivity* (2021), this is a paper which takes seriously the necessity to avoid producing reductionist knowledge which objectifies, normalises violence, and silences voices.

Before continuing, I would like to add a small note on how I found myself in the museum. On a field visit to Lebanon in January 2023, I met with a researcher based at the Institute of Palestinian Studies in Beirut. When discussing my focus on the materiality of Palestinian exile in Tripoli (Lebanon) and Amman (Jordan), the researcher suggested I meet the curator of the Museum of Memories. Although outside of my geographic scope, I felt it would be illuminating to see the objects and the museum. After calling the curator, he told me to meet him at the museum at 4pm on what was a very gloomy January day. Putting the phone down, I realised I had stupidly not asked him where the museum was and

² The factions have powerful roles in the functioning of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. They are involved in the 'policing' of the space due to Lebanese authorities being banned from entering, as well as creation of jobs for those within the camp. There are clear identification markers to distinguish which faction has control of certain areas within the camps.

searching google maps for the 'Museum of Memories' came to no avail. So, at 3.45pm, I found myself in an uber on the outskirts of Shatila, with the driver informing me he was not comfortable in taking me any further³. Jumping out, I headed to the first dukan in sight and asked whether one of the men inside knew the museum. Looking perplexed at the idea of a museum in Shatila, and slightly suspicious of me, one of the men called the curator to confirm. Post call, I followed the man as we walked through Shatila with him every few minutes or so, asking those we passed which way to the museum. After several minutes of weaving through the camp, we found ourselves at the end of an alleyway. A door was open, with a small light flickering inside, and three gentlemen sat at a table playing chess. On the right of the door, was a sign (see Figure 1) announcing our arrival to the Museum of Memories.



Figure 1. The sign which welcomes visitors to the Museum.⁴

The context to the Museum of Memories contributes to a case study which not only allows for theoretical contributions on resistance within museums and material culture of exile, but an opportunity to unpack some of the enduring tensions that emerge when researching in an ongoing space of violence and exile.

3. CONCEPTUALISING RESISTANCE IN THE MUSEUM

Understanding the way in which I posit resistance to occur within the Museum of Memories relies upon firstly clarifying *how* I conceptualise resistance. Such clarification not only brings about a focus to the concept, but more importantly signifies that it is a term that is not just a “symbol of the writer’s political stance” (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, 547). Hollander and Einwohner, following the review of several hundred scholars’ use of the term ‘resistance’, deciphered two analytically important core elements of resistance: action and opposition (2004). Firstly, where *action* is understood “not as a quality of an actor or state of being, but involves some active behaviour whether verbal, cognitive or physical” (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, 538). Secondly, where all uses of resistance included an element of *opposition*, which “also appeared in the use of words such as counter, contradict, social

³ I detail the uber driver’s discomfort and the man who lives in Shatila’s hesitation because I believe these are important moments to keep in mind for the paper’s later discussion of how one encounters with the Museum of Memories.

⁴ All photos taken by the author in January 2023.

change, reject, challenge, opposition, subversive, damage or disrupt” (ibid). Revealing the action and opposition within the museum practice of curating and in the objects themselves requires drawing upon museum theory and material culture scholarship. I will take these in turn.

Objects, despite their power, do not just appear *in* a museum. There is an important aspect of museum practice which must take place: the curating, which encapsulates “collecting, archiving, organising and displaying” of the objects. It is practice which has huge influence on the overall narrative a museum hopes to tell, as “collecting material culture of contemporary displacements is in itself a form of activism in the museum” (Hicks and Mallet 2019 as quoted in Sergi 2021, 144). Where *museum activism* is defined as “museum practice shaped out of ethically informed values, that is intended to bring about political, social and environmental change” (Janes and Sandell 2019, 1). It is one of the unique aspects of the Palestinian case, that Palestinians are in a permanent state of having to convince outsiders of their very existence. As such “memory is one of the few weapons available to those against whom the tide of history has turned” (Abu-Loghod and Sa’di 2007, 7). As such, the name ‘The Museum of Memories’ provides an opening to see what socio-political change the museum is attempting to bring about: the Palestinian counter-memory.

The focus on the counter-memorial practice forms a key role in Cole’s conception of the ‘activist curatorship’, which she sees as a discursive practice which “disrupts and reframes official memory narratives often involving the memorialization of forgotten, suppressed and excluded histories” (Cole 2022, 7). Importantly, Cole draws out that the practice is “not a stable or fixed ground of resistance, activist curating is open-ended” (16). As such, the practice does not end when the objects are placed within the museum but continues through practices of maintaining and caring for the objects and wider memory site (Cole 2022). This open-endedness to which Cole writes of, becomes particularly poignant in thinking about the Palestinian case, as it seems to reflect aspects of *sumud*⁵. The word which means ‘steadfastness’ or ‘perseverance’ in Arabic has become a way to reflect the enduring and varying ways Palestinians resist dispossession and domination. It is a term in which focuses on the enduring, the continual, and as Khalili describes “does not aspire to super-human audacity [but] consciously values daily survival” (2006, 101). This daily survival of the objects within the Museum of Memories through activist curating cannot be overlooked in this much contested present where the on-going erasure of Palestinians has taken up a powerful international stage. Recent examples of this are the ‘birthday’ message by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, on the occasion of Israel’s Independence Day on April 25, 2023 which describe how “You [Israel] have literally made the desert bloom” (EU in Israel 2023), or the blunter assertion by Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich in March 2023 who stated, “there are no Palestinians, because there isn’t a Palestinian people” on a visit to Paris (Al Jazeera 2023).

This ongoing erasure, and the wider precarious socio-political context in with Palestinians in Shatila are confronted with, means it is helpful here to draw upon Ho and Ting’s (2019) discussion on how civil society aimed to preserve, document, and research the ‘disobedient objects’ of the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement in 2014. Exploring the practices of self-archiving, Ho and Ting describes two social functions of the archiving of objects in a precarious political context. Firstly, collecting can be understood as an ethnographic approach to understanding the objects and their social relations (2019, 204). Secondly, collecting becomes a means of social intervention, a deliberate act that transforms an ephemeral object into a timeless representation (2019, 203). The desire to collect was based upon a fear of being forgotten because they felt the movement was at risk of being wiped out by collective amnesia (Ho and Ting 2019, 205). The social aspect of the collecting practice, and group decisions on how to make their voices heard in the local history, thus became as important as the final collection. I take Ho and Ting’s assertion of *deliberate act* to be highly relevant within this specific case study because it provokes a sense of agency and permanency: two things which Lebanese authorities have continually attempted to make difficult (even impossible) for Palestinians in exile in Lebanon.

صمود 5

The second form of resistance of the Museum of Memories is revealed through the stories generated from the objects on display. Theory surrounding material culture elucidates how I take these objects to showcase both action and opposition. In their introduction to *The Surviving Thing: Personal Objects in the Aftermath of Violence*, Dzuiban and Staniczuk (2020) describe how:

“Similar to people, things also fall victim to displacement... possessions swap hands, get voluntarily or forcefully relinquished, exchanged for food and shelter, hidden away, entrusted to friends and neighbours for safekeeping or brought along into exile” (381).

The objects adorning the walls of the Museum of Memories, therefore, become influential cultural objects with their own narratives of displacement and exile, with powerful biographies of catastrophe that not only play a crucial role in contributing to a *remembered presence*. For Said, the Palestinian household is transformed into a space of archival memory which can be used to assert the existence of Palestine (Butler 2009, 63).⁶ These objects are both survivors of *al-Nakba* and a witness of the 75 years of Palestinian exile that has ensued. Many scholars have written on the power of material objects (see Tolia-Kelly 2004; Miller and Parrott 2009) as well as the case of the materialisation of Palestinian memory (see Butler 2009; Saad 2019) and materiality of exile (see Dzuiban and Staniczuk 2020; Sergi 2021).

Such scholarship offers two important contributions. Firstly, these objects have a diachronic nature. Prior to exile these seemingly banal objects such as a mahmoul cutter (see Figure 2) or wooden dolls (see Figure 3) were just ordinary objects within a Palestinian home. Their value and transformation during displacement means that they now become objects which contribute to the oral history of Palestinian exile and an important contemporary archive of Palestine. They are themselves markers of a ‘before’. In a twofold effect, they assert a before which challenges those who continue to declare Palestine a nation which never existed (Butler 2009, 58). Secondly, when these objects are brought together, as a collective they commemorate, mourn, and recognise Palestinian’s enduring exile in a way in which relinquishes grand narratives but showcases the multi-faceted and heterogenous nature of Palestinian experience (Butler 2007; Davis 2017). The generation of a heterogeneity of stories cannot be overlooked because whilst Palestinian identification is tied to the seminal event of *al-Nakba* in 1948, nevertheless Palestinian communities have different and unique experiences in exile (see Al-Hardan 2016; Davis 2017).

Both the practice of curating and the generation of stories evoked from the objects within the museum showcase the core elements of resistance: action and opposition.

4. IN PLACE

When I first walked into the Museum, I was taken aback by how many objects lined the walls, and two glass cabinets filled with smaller objects: keys, jewellery and pictures. The museum which is itself only around twenty square metres was filled. My eyes could not stop scanning the walls, knowing that these objects are no mere nostalgic shrines to Palestine but powerful generators of both stories and questions. What did this object see in Palestine, what was its journey of displacement and how has it now ended up in the museum? The journey to the museum will be the focal point of this section, and used to highlight how these objects are *in place*. As outlined earlier, the process of collecting is integral to any museum curation, but in a context of displacement it takes on a wider role. It is resistance.

⁶ For Said, the *remembered presence* also plays a role in bringing comfort, cure and healing to situations of exile (see Butler 2009).



Figure 2. A mahmoul cutter. Mahmoul is a traditional Palestinian dish made for both the end of Lent [Christian holiday] and during Eid al Fitr [end of the Muslim Ramadan holiday].



Figure 3. Wooden dolls in dresses which showcase the traditional Palestinian embroidery, *tatreez*.

A 2018 feature film by the Copenhagen Film Company (CFC) followed the curator on his search for objects to add to the exhibition. In one scene, we watch the curator meet a 92-year-old Shatila resident, who presents a set of keys to the museum curator and lays out documents from Palestine on the coffee table. The man asserts, that despite his admiration for the museum, what little he has of Palestine, will be for his sons and his sons' sons. Keys, within Palestinian cultural heritage, have become more than just objects. They have come to symbolise the right of return; the enduring belief that one day, they will return. Knowing how precious keys are for many Palestinians, I found myself surprised that there were indeed keys within a large glass display unit in the centre of the museum. When asked, the curator described how many elders within the camp have asked that the keys be kept in the museum so that

even after death, when Palestine is returned to the people, there will be someone who can unlock the doors to their former homes.

I asked the curator about the collecting practice, and he revealed that at the start, he had indeed been worried that people may not wish to give the objects. However, he now describes the collecting practice as simple. He recalled an interaction with a woman he had gone to meet who had many objects from Palestine. When he asked whether she wanted anything in return, for donating the objects she replied “الشوم عيب يا” [“shame on you”, Arabic], before going on to say how “Palestine is not yours, it belongs to us all”. As the curator went on to explain, this need to showcase and protect Palestinian cultural heritage was not the duty for him alone, but one to be shared. As such, it is no surprise that as word spread of the museum, residents in Shatila began to donate objects. The act of collecting became a social activity, with residents looking in their own houses, as to what can become part of this Palestinian archive. As one donator of two plaques says, “it is important for the next generation to remember these things” (CFC 2018). This echoes what Ho and Ting (2019) highlight as a social function of the collecting of objects, that it becomes a *deliberate* act that transforms an ephemeral object into a timeless representation (2019, 203), which is not only at risk of amnesia in this case by the work of Israeli occupying forces, but also by the very collective they belong to. This resistance to Zionist and colonial narratives was paramount to the curator who pointed to the wall in which many agricultural tools hung and described frustration in how topography of Palestine is being decimated and changed by occupying Israeli forces. He went on to describe the wider effects this has, that places [and objects] become unrecognisable from the stories of Palestine that have been passed through generations of Palestinians in Shatila. As such, the safekeeping of these objects in the museum is vital. They become a powerful counter narrative even when the surrounding scenes and materials of these objects are erased.

This section has made two key assertions regarding resistance in the Museum of Memories. Firstly, these objects become a way of contesting erasure of Palestinian heritage and asserting Palestine’s very own existence in the face of colonial violence. Secondly, the objects become timeless and permanent, even within a space that was intended to be temporary. They serve to remind of the country that once was, so that even with the passing of time, the threat of forgetting by the younger generations of the Shatila community is lessened. The collection of these objects is more than the simple creation of a Palestinian archive. Collection is cultural, political, and social as understood through this paper’s account of the practice of collecting as a form of resistance within museum space.

5. AN AXE AND A RADIO

In this section, I focus on two objects within the museum which contribute to showcasing the unique overarching historical experience for Palestinians in Lebanon, as well as the connection to a transnational Palestinian community. The survival of these two objects have become traces of events, and important counter-narratives, in a Lebanese context where the state would prefer them forgotten. These two objects which themselves have powerful biographies, placed together in the Museum of Memories, come together to showcase the everyday and contemporary restrictions and borders placed upon Palestinian cultural heritage in Lebanon, and the way in which The Museum of Memories is a diasporic space of resistance.

During my visit, my eyes kept wandering to an axe (see Figure 4), the only object sat alone in a glass cabinet. Such a curation technique mimics the most prominent contemporary exhibiting strategy that many museumgoers recognise, where the object is displayed as art, set apart in glass (Pieterse 1997). Noticing my glances, the curator went on to explain that it was an axe used during the Shatila massacre of 1982. An axe which should have been used to cut wood, was instead used to “cut heads, cut arms, open stomachs” (CFC 2018). It was only after my visit to the Museum that I watched the CFC film, where the filmmaker also asks about the axe. It was the history of this massacre, and the knowledge that such a traumatic event has played into the over-research of Shatila, that made me question whether to even write about the Museum of Memories. However, its placing within the Museum is a poignant reminder that this is a museum space where the violence of Palestinian occupation is not abstract or described second hand by these objects or this space.



Figure 4. An axe used during the Shatila massacre.

Figure 5. The radio saved from Nahr al-Bared Camp for Palestinian Refugees in Tripoli.

The second object was a small radio (see Figure 5) placed on a cabinet, which found itself in the Museum of Memories due to the need for safekeeping. The radio had belonged to a family living in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian Refugee Camp in Tripoli, the North of Lebanon. In 2007, Nahr al-Bared found itself subjected to intensive fighting, which ultimately saw the camp destroyed and over 27,000 Palestinians displaced once again. The radio was one of the objects entrusted to the Museum for safekeeping. It is a poignant reminder of a life prior to 2007 in Nahr al-Bared, a camp which although partially rebuilt remains ‘materially absent’ of objects.

These objects and their survival within the Museum of Memories serve to highlight and make visible the pace of violence but come together as acts of permanency, in a context where the Lebanese authorities continue to create a setting which it hopes to make Palestinians an impermanent feature of its society. They serve to highlight that although placed within a ‘space’, the stories evoked from this museum are not easy to contain.

They paradoxically evoke a feeling of being ‘*out of place*’, where out of place can be understood as a continual effort by the Lebanese authorities for Palestinians to feel temporary, and not ‘in place’, and both ‘*in place*’ in a glaring reminder that Palestinians will steadfastly work against erasure.

6. OUT OF PLACE

In this penultimate section, I draw out another prominent aspect of ‘out of place’, which I strongly believe deserves further discussion. In understanding that “a space talks about other things than itself” (Violi 2017, 17), the museum offers a way in which to expose the stark reality of Palestinian exile in Lebanon. By naming the space ‘The Museum of Memories’, rather than say an ‘archival space’, it automatically invokes a relationship with the visitor. A museum becomes a space of encounter, and for the ‘public’. Whilst the museum does receive young school children who come on trips, the curator told me that most visitors are foreigners. If residents from Shatila do engage with the space, it is mostly to play chess.⁷

Whilst I understand that the visitor becomes part of the attempt to resist the ongoing erasure of Palestinian history and reality by attending the museum, I am drawn to Sodaro’s (2018) scepticism

⁷ Prior to its inception as the Museum of Memories, it was used as a space for a chess club.

about whether memorial museums can truly burden visitors with a responsibility for the future. As she describes there are “limits to memory’s ability to aid in the prevention of violence, promotion of democracy, and promise of peace” (2018, 29). Drawing upon the earlier mentioned work by Sukarieh and Tannock (2012) I wonder about the ethics surrounding an encounter with the Museum of Memories. Visiting the museum requires entering the Shatila camp which as noted earlier remains one of the most overcrowded camps in Lebanon. The overcrowding becomes visually present through the narrow lanes which separate one row of buildings from another. As such, the boundary between public and private space is minimal. There is a sense that one is trespassing into homes when walking to the museum.

If we are to use the museum studies vocabulary, the performative experience, is one in which I felt myself to be *out of place*. It was the awkwardness in going into a space in which residents have openly aired that they are frustrated with the number of researchers who consistently focus on the ‘trauma’ of the camp and secondly, thinking about how it would be if the museum suddenly become a top visit site in Beirut with busloads of visitors entering the camp. It is this entering (and subsequent leaving) of the museum which I pause for reflection on. For residents within Shatila, permanently leaving the camp is near impossible, because of the restrictions placed upon Palestinians by the Lebanese government. What are the implications of the space becoming so porous for museum attendees but so constricting for those living there. However, to relocate the museum outside of Shatila to increase visitor numbers would then be to take these objects into an *out of place* setting. Further research would do well to draw upon the work of Gotham (2005) conception of *tourism gentrification* and the increasing literature surrounding *in situ* memory sites and museums (see Violi 2017; Sodaro 2018).

7. CONCLUSION

Taking the Museum of Memories as this paper’s case study opened a dialogue surrounding museums, material culture namely objects of exile and resistance. I described how resistance, which can be understood as action and opposite, can be seen through the museum practice of curating as well as in the stories that are generated from the objects. As this paper has shown, the collection of these objects is more than the simple creation of a nostalgic Palestinian archive. The objects and the museum itself become an important way in which to contest the erasure of Palestinian heritage and assert Palestine’s existence in the face of ongoing colonial violence. Furthermore, whilst taking a clear form of transnational Palestinian resistance, I have also showcased how the museum reflects the wider reality of Palestinian exile in Lebanon. The axe and the radio are powerful reminders of the violence faced by Palestinians in Lebanon, and their permanent placement in the exhibition strongly resist the continual effort by the Lebanese authorities for Palestinians to feel temporary.

In exploring how the museum and its object become important parts of the tapestry of understanding Palestinian resistance in exile, I made use of Said’s notion of ‘out of place’, to guide the paper and to ultimately showcase how the objects seem to be both paradoxically in place, in the reality of an enduring exile, as well as startlingly out of place, in exile. However, I have also showcased the museum itself as a *lacuna* and therefore, ‘out of place’ in theory surrounding museums. The museum serves to subvert many assumptions regarding museums most poignantly in being a museum which is still embedded within an actively violent context of exile and displacement. It is a case, which I believe, prompts a critical need to re-examine the assumptions regarding museums and the associated museum-practices. From looking at how visitors [and researchers] engage with the museum to the ongoing risk to the objects from damage. Just a few of the ways in which the museum lies in contrast to many other museums.

Whilst this is a paper which focuses on the specific case of Palestinian exile, I strongly believe it serves a purpose in thinking about the wider way in which we tell stories of exile and how we think about the objects which should find themselves within museum spaces. These everyday ephemeras of exile contribute to a rich and nuanced understanding of exilic stories and their placing within a museum space will always serve a powerful resistance role.

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