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DOI:

[10.1080/17449855.2017.1337690](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2017.1337690)

Document Version

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Citation for published version (APA):

Bernard, A. (2017). Cultural Activism as resource: Pedagogies of resistance and solidarity. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 53(3), 367-379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2017.1337690>

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Cultural Activism as resource: Pedagogies of resistance and solidarity

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This essay engages with the notion that literature and other forms of cultural production are themselves resources. This idea becomes especially suggestive in relation to the cultural activism of international solidarity movements, which deploy artistic works as sources of information and inspiration for “distant issue” activism. Focusing on documentary films and novels circulated among anti-apartheid and Palestine solidarity activists in the long 1970s, this article explores the ways in which such works provide theorizations of the resource-value of cultural activism, particularly in its aesthetics of resistance and emphasis on the documentary real. These works advocate a comprehensive understanding of the political calculations and commitments of domestic activists, and seek to preserve and sustain their ideas for transnational resistance movements to mobilize in response to intensifying resource-based crisis, including the struggles over distribution, access and control that are yet to come.

Keywords: Palestine; South Africa; resistance; solidarity; cultural activism; documentary realism

In early 2012, three years after the first major Israeli aerial and ground assault on Gaza had provoked mass protests worldwide, the documentary film *5 Broken Cameras* (Burnat and Davidi 2011) entered the international film festival circuit. Co-directed by Emad Burnat (a Palestinian) and Guy Davidi (an Israeli), the film chronicled the weekly demonstrations against Israel’s “separation” wall in the West Bank village of Bil’in as well as the Israeli military’s violent reprisals against the unarmed Palestinian activists. Members of the international Palestine solidarity movement responded enthusiastically: Philip Weiss (2012), founder of the influential US-based blog, *Mondoweiss*, went so far as to declare that *5 Broken Cameras* was “the vehicle to bring wide attention to the horrors of the occupation” (n.p.). The film went on to win or be nominated for more than 20 awards, including the International Emmy and an Oscar nomination for best documentary, making it the first production by a West Bank Palestinian filmmaker to gain such widespread acclaim. At public screenings, meanwhile, the film was often explicitly framed as a spur to present and future activism. A number of US and UK screenings were followed by Q&As in which panellists and audience

members advocated the boycott of Israeli goods and institutions as a way for viewers to act upon what they had seen (see Weiss 2012; “*5 Broken Cameras* to Go on Q&A Tour” 2013). The UK Picturehouse cinema chain displayed a photography exhibition in its Hackney branch (December 2012 to January 2013) that emphasized a more basic aspect of the film’s organizational potential by documenting its capacity to reach a wide audience (see Mendez 2012). The exhibition consisted of portraits of a diverse group of audience members, each captioned with his or her brief response to the film. Most viewers praised it for either confirming or deepening their understanding of Palestinian life in the West Bank; a woman from the Liverpool screening said that it left her feeling “both helpless and inspired to try to make a difference in any way I could” (quoted in Mendez 2012).

I begin with this account of the reception of *5 Broken Cameras* because it points to some key features of the relationship between cultural production and international solidarity movements. Each response to the film invokes the notion of cultural activism as a critical resource. This idea is already implied in much of the metaphorical language scholars use to describe the interpretation, circulation and reception of literary and cultural texts: we say that texts can be mined, mapped, explored, pirated, recycled, extracted and consumed, for example. These verbs connote exhaustibility when referring to environmental resources, but plenitude and expansion, if not always in an idealistic or benign sense, when referring to art. The idea of culture as an abundant and mobile resource becomes especially suggestive in relation to the cultural activism of international solidarity movements, whose members typically seek as wide a distribution of activist art as possible – not for reasons of profit, but to fortify existing participants and galvanize new ones. Documentary films in particular, but also other forms like visual art, poetry, fiction and memoir, have a specific use-value for “distant issue” activism (see Rucht 2000). These works serve as pedagogical and imaginative resources, with the ability to promote what David Featherstone (2012) has called the

“embodied passionate character of connections” between actors who are distanced by geography (36), and often also by race, class or wealth. This is particularly true of texts that seek to cross the experiential divides that separate elite activists, whose circumstances may not be affected by the cause they are asked to support, from activists who are fighting for their own political and physical survival.

This is not to say that all forms of cultural solidarity activism are politically identical. *5 Broken Cameras* came to prominence at a time when, as has often been observed, the internet had already made it much easier to build transnational networks of like-minded actors (see Castells 2013; Aouragh 2011). Yet it also emerged in an era of left disappointment and disempowerment, in the wake of the ongoing defeat of anti-imperial nationalisms across the globe since the 1970s, of which the Palestinian national movement has become the most enduring example (see Jameson 1984; Ahmad 1993; Anderson 2002; Brennan 2006). The film’s searing critique of the occupation and its foregrounding of the agency and collective struggle of local activists mark it as an oppositional text in the current Euro-North American political landscape, in which criticism of Israeli state policy is regularly denounced as anti-Semitic and advocacy productions generally privilege victim testimonies over movement politics. In other ways, however, the film is less radical. *5 Broken Cameras* begins and ends by eliciting empathy for the suffering Bil’inis, particularly Burnat’s young son Gibreel. The film thus puts a “human stamp” on the occupation, as two of the Picturehouse viewers observed (see Mendez 2012), but it stops short of presenting the activism of the Bil’inis as part of the wider anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggles that implicate both viewers and protagonists, and so masks the systemic violence of the Israeli state’s extraction and monopolization of regional resources. In this regard, *5 Broken Cameras* coincides not only with other contemporary representations of political struggle that have achieved commercial or critical success, but with the turn from liberationist to humanitarian

notions of solidarity that took place in metropolitan left activism from the late 1970s onward. At this juncture, as Samuel Moyn (2010) has argued, the dominant notion of rights shifted from state-based politics to “the morality of the globe” (43), and from the idea of collective liberation and self-determination to “individual protection against the state” (4). An idea of solidarity based on shared ideological commitments likewise gave way to a defence of human rights, regardless of the victim’s politics (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 15), an approach that prevails in left-wing distant issue activism to this day.

This essay returns to an earlier and more adversarial moment in the history of international solidarity activism by looking at various cultural resources associated with the Palestine and anti-apartheid solidarity movements in Britain and North America in the long 1970s, up to and including the humanitarian turn. During this period, Palestine and South Africa represented “belated” national liberation struggles insofar as they continued to invoke ideas of armed resistance, anti-colonial nationalism and revolutionary socialism after the great mid 20th-century wave of Asian and African decolonizations. While metropolitan representations and self-depictions of these movements show evidence of the turn to human rights, especially after the civilian massacres at Soweto in 1976 and Sabra and Shatila in 1982, the films and texts I consider here either predate or resist this shift. They foreground the work of local activists, and they ask for solidarity not on the basis of charity or empathy for suffering individuals, but as support for the goals of an organized national liberation movement, including a more equitable distribution of material resources. Their address to viewers and readers presupposes common ideological commitments that offer particular ways of thinking about the resource-value of cultural activism, among them an aesthetics of resistance and an emphasis on the documentary real in both non-fictional and fictional forms.

The documentary impulse is not, of course, reserved for liberationist appeals for solidarity. Humanitarian appeals also invoke the real as a basis for their political claims, since

they too seek to make dispossessed sectors of national or global society more visible, and to inspire in their viewers and readers a “will to change” what they see (Bowlby 2007, para. 4).

As Fredric Jameson (2012) puts it:

The possibilities of a literature which is at one and the same time a political intervention have traditionally been premised on an epistemological dimension: such literature shows us things we have never seen before, whose existence we have never suspected. [... This supposition] is always also accompanied by a rhetorical assumption: that to know these alien conditions will be to experience indignation and pity, and to be stirred thereby to political action. (477)

This broad understanding of the utility of the real is common to theorists of literary realism and documentary film (see Beaumont 2007; Nicholls 2010; Cowie 2011). It was also shared by many of the Picturehouse viewers, a number of whom attributed their responses to *5 Broken Cameras* to its “vivid” and “authentic” portrayal of the “reality” of life under Israeli occupation (Mendez 2012). Yet Jameson’s description of realism’s aims does not specify the ideological character of the “political action” that the realist text solicits. “Political intervention” and “indignation” might seem to be associated with revolutionary sentiment, but they can just as easily apply to human rights advocacy. Equally, “pity” might seem to belong to a humanitarian imaginary, but as Lillie Chouliaraki (2013) has argued, following Luc Boltanski and Hannah Arendt, revolutionary anger on the part of the intelligentsia also has its source in pity: the pity that radical elites feel for the victims of imperial capital (33). The indeterminacy of Jameson’s account is in keeping with Joe Cleary’s (2012) reminder that realism is associated with both the 19th-century bourgeois novel and 20th-century socialist aesthetics: in itself, it carries no particular politics (262). Yet realism arguably finds its fullest

expression in the cultural production of revolutionary and liberation movements, which hold that reality must be known in order to be transformed. These “fighting realisms”, to use the language of the Warwick Research Collective (WReC 2015), are invested “not merely in mapping present realities but in the revelation of possible futures and emergent social orders” (77).

In assessing the resource value of cultural production for liberationist expressions of international solidarity, we might therefore consider a text’s ability to convey the political positions and tactics of its protagonists, as well as their specific visions of a more just future. This emphasis can generate alternative criteria for aesthetic judgement, including, as Tim Brennan (2014) has written, the privileging of “directness, sincerity, understatement, the longings of memory, compassion [and] emotional nakedness” (389), in contrast to the novelty, complexity and indirection that is typically associated with literary modernism (381) or the filmic avant-garde. While similar qualities might also be ascribed to humanitarian-oriented texts as well as those with multiple modes of address like *5 Broken Cameras*, the “directness” and “sincerity” of the works I am interested in takes the form of an explicitly resistant and often combative rhetoric and analysis. In both their content and aesthetics, these cultural resources offer a pedagogy of strategies and motivations for resistance, sometimes including a defence of the take-up of arms, and they ask the viewer or reader to support these actions on ideological grounds. This body of work might thus be said to constitute a subset of Barbara Harlow’s (1987) “resistance literature”, which she famously defined – with reference to Ghassan Kanafani, whose work I discuss at the end of this essay – as the literature of national liberation movements (xvi-xvii, 10-11, 28-30). The texts and films I consider similarly participate in an international cultural arena of struggle, but with the specific function of generating non-national support for a national movement on the basis of political belief.

Documenting and disseminating movement politics

The documentary films *You Have Struck a Rock!* (May 1981), by the South African filmmaker Deborah May, and *Occupied Palestine* (Koff 1981), by the American filmmaker David Koff, both targeted non-national audiences and circulated primarily in anglophone activist settings, with screenings at university campuses and movement chapter meetings in the US and UK (Moyer-Duncan 2012, 106; El Alaoui 2013; *Anti-Apartheid News* Jan/Feb 1982, 12; Jan/Feb 1983, 12; July/Aug 1988, 16). Produced with United Nations funding, *You Have Struck a Rock!* chronicles the organized opposition to the pass laws by the Federation of South African Women and other women's groups in the 1950s. It ends with a series of defeats – the Sharpeville massacre, the subsequent banning of anti-apartheid organizations and the imposition of passes for women in 1963 – yet the film is far from despondent. Through the use of protest footage and interviews with activists including Dora Tamana, Helen Joseph and Frances Baard, *You Have Struck a Rock!* celebrates the conviction and persistence of its protagonists, offering viewers a sense of the struggle's longevity at a time when international opposition to apartheid was gaining new momentum after Soweto and the 1977 murder of Steve Biko. The film's title comes from a chant used at the women's anti-pass march in Pretoria on August 9, 1956 – in translation from the Zulu, “you have touched the women, you have struck a rock, you will be crushed” – which would become one of the most iconic slogans of South African women's resistance (Hassim 2006, 26). *Occupied Palestine*, by contrast, had no major institutional backing. The film offers a broad overview of the history of Zionist settlement in Palestine, paying particular attention to the religious and ethnonational basis of Zionism; the expulsions of 1948 and 1967; the appropriation of Palestinian land; the drastic restrictions on Palestinian wage labour; and the mass incarceration of Palestinian political prisoners. While Koff also relies on interviews and

demonstration footage, he includes a wider range of mostly unnamed speakers, juxtaposing the provocations of Zionist activists, who unwittingly substantiate Koff's case that Zionism is a settler-colonial ideology, with counter-arguments and analysis from Palestinian and anti-Zionist Israeli activists.

The two films are linked by their eschewal of victim testimony in favour of the documentation and dramatization of movement politics. The activists in *You Have Struck a Rock!* confirm their own experiences of restricted movement, imprisonment and house arrest, but they spend more time explaining and reviewing campaign tactics. Women are identified not only by their names, but also their organizational affiliations, and there is almost no discussion of their lives beyond their political activity and its repercussions. Deborah May noted in an interview at the time that the activists risked their safety by speaking on camera about their work: "every woman agreed to be filmed at the risk of more harassment, bannings and jail sentences – they are the real heroines in the making of this film" (quoted in Crawford 1982, 51). While this assessment already suggests a refusal to see the protagonists as victims, the film does not simply praise or glorify their resistance. Instead, it allows them to narrate the campaign as informed and reflective participants, and presents their commentary as its primary source of historical and political authority.

You Have Struck a Rock! opens with a voiceover from an activist, Florence Mikze, who provides a structural analysis of the pass laws as a part of the system of enforced white privilege:

The pass or reference book is the means by which the white minority government controls our labour and our lives [...]. In order to protect white status and wealth, control regulations have been designed to restrict the number of blacks allowed to enter and work in the so-called white cities. (May 1981, 1:30)

The film also offers a structural evaluation of the situation of black women under apartheid, which employs a recognizably Marxian vocabulary. The narrator, exiled South African singer Letta Mbulu, reminds us that, “black women suffer a double oppression. Men are seen as sources of labour, appendages of the white economy; women are seen as appendages of men” (4:00). This “homiletic” introduction (Brennan, forthcoming) establishes some of the political principles that underpin the activists’ opposition to apartheid by describing the state’s coercive practices as part of the operation of imperial capital. This approach might not persuade an audience that is unfamiliar with these ideas, but it urges more conversant viewers to understand the struggle against apartheid in relation to their own presumed opposition to imperialism.

This ideological framing then gives way to a more pragmatic, if generally laudatory, assessment of tactics. For instance, Helen Joseph, a white English-South African who was one of the organizers of the women’s march on Pretoria, reports that the march circumvented the law against mass demonstrations by presenting itself as the simultaneous protest of many different individuals. She makes it clear, however, that this was a strategic decision rather than the position of the organizers. When she saw a group of protestors on their way to the march, she saw them as a collective: “I knew then that nothing could stop them. They were on that train and it was going to Pretoria” (May 1981, 12:00). Notably, Joseph articulates the wider goals of the anti-pass movement in terms of international solidarity. The activists sought, she says, “to focus the eyes of the world on what was happening in South Africa” and “to make the world aware that women were opposed to apartheid” (9:00). The film thus participates in the activity that it documents: it resurrects the oral and visual history of a campaign meant to draw global attention to the struggle against apartheid, in order to do so once again.

You Have Struck a Rock! shares with *5 Broken Cameras* an effort to document the real conditions and ideas of an ongoing protest movement. As in the later film, both the plot and its narrative momentum come from the activity of the movement itself. May depicts the protagonists' repeated swings between euphoria, in the build-up to a particular protest, and monotony, in the endless repetition of demonstrations that do not achieve political change. The film documents rounds of arrests and the activists' return to the struggle as soon as they are released; it revels in the development of new tactics and the formation of new lines of collective action, as nurses and domestic workers join the anti-pass movement. It thus produces what Terri Ginsberg (2013), in an analysis of Koff's film, calls a "contemporaneity effect" (n.p.): it depicts events that are ontologically prior to the shooting of the film, but do not come to resolution within the film itself. This lack of resolution reminds the 1981 viewer that the fight against apartheid persists and thus functions as a call for her support.

Occupied Palestine similarly emphasizes the contemporaneity of the Palestinian struggle, but the distinct structure of this film produces a different kind of appeal for solidarity. Rather than relying on the movement's organizational rhythms or the viewer's admiration for the protagonists, for the first 60 minutes of its 90-minute run, Koff's film includes only brief and scattered examples of Palestinian testimony and no evidence of Palestinian resistance. Instead, the film spends this time building its case against Zionism, which it portrays as a highly militarized colonial enterprise. In one key scene an unnamed Palestinian student activist, speaking with his face in darkness, makes the point as follows:

Zionism appeared at the end of the 19th century as a political movement representing Jewish capital, allied with international capital. It was, of course, in the interests of British imperialism to create a political movement in the Middle East to represent its

interests, to maintain it as a base for imperialism, and to secure the continuity of the economic exploitation of our country. (Koff 1981, 32:00)

While Koff insisted at the time of the film's re-release in 2013 that "[w]e weren't endorsing what anyone said, but that line was used as a stick to beat the film" (quoted in Campbell 2013, n.p.), the sequencing of scenes not only endorses the Palestinian activist's argument, but develops it further. The activist's voice continues over footage of Jewish settlers stockpiling automatic weapons in a concrete bunker, as a group of small boys are trained in their use. The subsequent subtitles, which are unvoiced, read: "Private donations from the US = almost \$600 million a year (1980)" and "Official US aid since 1973 = more than \$2 billion a year". Koff thus extends the student's assertion of Zionism's past alliance with the British Empire to its present alliance with American neo-imperialism, and underlines the link between American funding and the contemporary proliferation of both official and unofficial arms.

Much of the film's argument is presented in this indirect yet lucid way, in what might be called a didacticism of inference. As the film accumulates its charges against the Israeli state, Koff gradually dismantles Zionism's claim to be a national liberation movement, which, as Edward Said (1992) observed at the time, was then the anglophone left's default position (24-37, 58). Yet this argument is often not made explicit: to get its full impact, the viewer has to attend to particular juxtapositions of words, images and sound. In the early part of the film, for instance, Koff (1981) cites Zionism's own archive, including Jabotinsky's declaration in 1931 that "Zionism is a colonizing adventure" (11:16), and Joseph Weitz's 1967 statement that "[t]here is no other way but to transfer the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries. To transfer them all" (15:43). While the text itself already indicates Zionism's colonial character, the cinematography emphasizes its consequences for

Palestinians. During the reading of Jabotinsky's words, the camera rests on the windows, doors and walls of abandoned Palestinian stone houses to signal the expulsions of 1948; during the reading of Weitz, it pans across the empty concrete shacks of a West Bank refugee camp, which attest, as a Palestinian interviewee points out, to the second round of expulsions in 1967. These images are followed by several minutes of footage of the brutalist architecture of the Israeli settlements, which spread across the hillsides, surrounded by barbed wire, tanks and miles of empty roads (17:15). In the background, the Israeli Philharmonic plays the Czech composer Bedřich Smetana's symphony "Má Vlast" – a classic work of 19th-century European cultural nationalism – reminding the viewer who can identify the piece that Zionism's self-definition as a national liberation movement originates in Herderian nationalism rather than left anti-imperialism.

When a scene of Palestinian resistance is finally introduced (Koff 1981, 56:45), the viewer is not prompted merely to feel pleasure at the sight of people coming together in protest, as in the opening scenes of *5 Broken Cameras*. By now, she has been given sufficient imaginative resources to understand the motivations of the protagonists rationally, while also sharing their anger. The scene, which shows Palestinian protestors throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers at a Land Day demonstration, follows a discussion of the Israeli state's financial, legal and military means of appropriating Palestinian land, providing a still more specific context for this particular protest. The audio track features a musical arrangement of the exiled Palestinian poet Rashid Hussein's (1975) poem, "Opposition" ("Ḍid", in Boullata and Ghossein 1979, 158-159). For the viewer who recognizes the poem (though this would be unlikely for non-Arabic speakers), this pairing locates the demonstration as part of the broader political and cultural Palestinian resistance movement, to which the film's final half hour is dedicated.

The viewer is now shown several different sites of protest, including funerals of martyrs (*shuhadā'*), protests outside prisons and prisoner hunger strikes. More Palestinian interviewees then appear and make reference to Arafat, the PLO and the *fidā'īyīn*: in other words, to the armed resistance movement. The film ends with a Palestinian speaker's insistence that liberation for the Palestinians means liberation for everyone in the region, both Arabs and Jews: "This is the future toward which we strive, and for which we struggle" (Koff 1981, 1:25:09). The final shot features aerial footage of a Palestinian crowd, chanting "we will fight, together!" (*sanuqātil ājma'īn*), a slogan that was repeated across the Arab countries on the day of Gamal Abd al-Nasser's funeral in 1970.¹ In this way, the film's conclusion makes both formal and contextual links to wider struggles: it recalls the great films of the mid-century decolonizations, particularly the end of Gillo Pontecorvo's (1966) *The Battle of Algiers*, as well as the anti-colonial pan-Arabism that died with Nasser. The viewer is discouraged, however, from simply applauding the distant spectacle of Palestinian resistance. At the start of the film, the student activist makes a direct appeal for international solidarity: "What's most important is to get these things abroad" (Koff 1981, 2:38). The anglophone metropolitan viewer is asked to apprehend the full extent of Palestinian dispossession, and to recognize the Palestinian struggle as part of a shared fight against continuing forms of colonial rule, which Koff, like May, assumes the viewer already opposes.

Literary realism as a resource for belief

Literature, especially prose fiction, plays a less obvious role than documentary film in international solidarity organizing, and the role it does play is harder to verify archivally. Non-fiction is generally better represented than novels in movement publication reviews and recommended reading lists, but neither form lends itself to the film screening's performative affirmation of an informed and united community of activists. Still, both the anti-apartheid

and Palestinian movements have produced novelists whose work has circulated among non-national readers precisely because it has been seen as a document of the national struggle. Within this group, the South African novelist Alex La Guma and the Palestinian novelist Ghassan Kanafani are the most celebrated proponents of a liberationist aesthetics that foregrounds the political motives of the protagonists. Both writers had Marxist and national liberationist party affiliations. La Guma was a member of the South African Communist Party until its banning in 1950, and later the African National Congress (ANC)'s representative in Cuba; his penultimate publication was the travel narrative *A Soviet Journey* (La Guma 1978), published in English in Moscow. Kanafani joined the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a self-described Marxist-Leninist national liberation movement, in 1967, and in 1969 became the general editor of its journal *al-Hadaf* (The Target); in 1972, he was assassinated by the Israeli state as part of a crackdown on the PFLP (Ensalaco 2012, 37). La Guma and Kanafani focus more than May, and certainly more than Koff, on named protagonists and the suffering of individuals. However, rather than treating this suffering as an end in itself, La Guma uses the misery of his characters to reconstruct a whole system of control, in parallel with their escalating modes of refusal of that system. Kanafani goes further still: he turns the experiences of the protagonists into a site of political enquiry, focusing on the construction of new and more resourceful forms of subjectivity under conditions of oppression that leave Palestinians no choice but to resist (Caygill 2013, 97).

Unlike the films discussed above, La Guma's work was not expressly produced for a non-national audience. However, because his books were banned in South Africa, for a long time the bulk of his readership was not South African. As J.M. Coetzee (1992) notes in *Doubling the Point*, he was "the most substantial writer the Western Cape had produced, yet [in the 1960s] hardly anyone in Cape Town had read him" (302). La Guma's first short story

collection was published in Nigeria; his next two novels in East Germany; and his last two in London, in the Heinemann African Writers Series. Nevertheless, by the 1970s his work was “widely accepted, at least in South Africa, as paradigmatic of a literature oriented toward the world” (Zimbler 2014, 36). La Guma was also a central figure for the British anti-apartheid movement, in part because he lived in exile in Britain from 1966 to 1979 and participated in movement activity there. In *Anti-Apartheid News*, published by the Labour-affiliated Anti-Apartheid Movement, he is by far the most cited writer of fiction in the 1960s and 1970s (La Guma is cited in *Anti-Apartheid News* on: Oct 1966, 4; Mar 1967, 7; May 1967, 4; Dec 1967/Jan 1968, 2; Feb 1968, 7; Dec 1968/Jan 1969, 7; Feb 1971, 11; Mar 1973, 11; Jun 1973, 2; Jan/Feb 1979, 11).

La Guma’s novel *In the Fog of the Season’s End* (La Guma 1972) explicitly offers itself as a resource for activism – or, as a contemporary reviewer puts it, “propaganda for the truth” (Calder 1972, 646). The novel is a thriller structured around the distribution of political leaflets; as Stephen Morton (2013) has observed, it dramatizes Govan Mbeki’s detailed instructional essay on leafletting from the same period (105). There is some evidence for seeing *In the Fog* as an account of the regime’s human rights violations (Morton 2013, 107); indeed, the “Prologue” reads something like an Amnesty International report in its account of the arrest and torture of an unidentified political prisoner, who later turns out to be one of the secondary characters. But these scenes of torture must be understood within and in relation to the wider plot. The novel ends with the departure of several recruits who will be trained as guerrilla fighters in one of the camps outside of South Africa; the leafletting plot and representation of torture are therefore part of a narrative and historical trajectory that leads directly to the take-up of arms. La Guma emphasizes this point at the outset: the novel begins with a dedication to Basil February – an Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) member killed by the Rhodesian security forces in 1967 – and its epigraph, from which the novel’s title is taken, is

a stanza from the Guinean poet Conte Saidon Tidiany's poem "Martyrs", which describes the destruction of resistant black bodies. The "fog of the season's end" marks the end of one kind of struggle and the passage into another, whose scope and outcome are not yet known. Four years after the novel was published, the mass uprisings that followed the massacre at Soweto would begin.

La Guma is, like Koff, a didactic artist. Even his protagonist's memory of meeting his wife provides an opportunity to comment on the labour conditions of female factory workers: "[Beukes] drank some more of the pineapple drink and remembered the hum and crash of the factory, the ranks of girls [...] moving like mechanical dolls" (La Guma 1972, 42). Unlike Koff, however, he occasionally resorts to melodramatic language. In his description of the aftermath of a Sharpeville-like massacre, for instance, an anthropomorphized sky "mutter[s] darkly", rain falling "steadily to mingle with the blood" (105). But a different kind of sentiment appears in the novel's final lines, when the protagonist's interior monologue takes on a more invocational tone:

Beukes stood by the side of the street in the early morning and thought, they have gone to war in the name of a suffering people. What the enemy himself has created, these will become battle-grounds, and what we see now is only the tip of an iceberg of resentment against an ignoble regime, the tortured victims of hatred and humiliation. And those who persist in hatred and humiliation must prepare. Let them prepare hard and fast – they do not have long to wait.

He stood there until the van was out of sight and then turned back to where the children had gathered in the sunlit yard. (180-181)

The passage offers a recognizably Fanonian account of the *ressentiment* of the oppressed. However, Beukes does not present the turn to armed resistance as an unthinking or purely negative response to colonial violence. Instead, he describes it as the start of a war that will decisively challenge the regime and bring about the possibility of a different order. In this way, *La Guma* echoes both Fanon and Marx: in addition to vengeance and “suicidal sacrifice”, the resistance to apartheid “takes on a noble and affirmative character, creating a new democratic world beyond resisting the old” (Caygill 2013, 37-38). The admittedly sentimental closing image of children in the sun offers the generative and open-ended capacity of the novel form as a resource for imagining that potential emancipatory future.

La Guma thus draws on the language of the humanitarian turn to make a different point: rather than asking the reader to affiliate with the oppressed on the basis of their suffering, he asks her to comprehend the movement’s decision that armed struggle is the only route to a more just society. Kanafani also explores the take-up of arms, but, as Bashir Abu-Manneh (2016) has argued, his work engages more fully with the political principles that motivate this decision in the Palestinian context (71-89). During his lifetime, Kanafani’s writing was published in Arabic in Beirut, addressing a national as well as non-national Arabophone audience. His most celebrated publications – *Rijāl fi al-shams* (1963; *Men in the Sun*) and *‘Ā'id ila Haifā* (1970; *Returning to Haifa*) – were translated into English within a decade of his death, in 1978 and 1984 respectively, making them available to more distant readers. *Returning to Haifa*, his last major work, evinces what Abu-Manneh calls Kanafani’s “revolutionary realism”: his insistence that the Palestinian national movement must have an ideology and a strategy, and that Palestinian and Arab liberation must be understood as “a whole project of social and political transformation” (2016, 85).

Returning to Haifa tells the story of a middle-aged Palestinian couple, Said and Safiya, who travel to Haifa in search of the son they left behind in their frantic departure in

1948, after the Israeli conquest of the West Bank in 1967 has made this journey possible. The child has been adopted by a Jewish couple and is now an Israeli soldier; his adoptive mother is a survivor of Auschwitz. After a tense and emotional meeting with the Israeli family, the novella ends, like La Guma's novel, with Said's decision to support his next eldest son's choice to become a fighter (*fidā'ī*), which he had previously opposed. He says to Safiya:

We were mistaken when we thought the homeland was only the past. For Khalid, the homeland is the future. That's how we differed and that's why Khalid wants to carry arms. Men like Khalid are looking toward the future, so they can put right our mistakes and the mistakes of the whole world. (Kanafani 2000, 187)

While Kamal Abdel-Malek (2005) dismisses this closing call to arms on aesthetic grounds, calling it "rather didactic" and "thin" (67), Abu-Manneh argues that these lines should be read not as a "standard advocacy of armed struggle" (2016, 86), but in the context of the "moral rather than military confrontation" that takes place between the two families, which prompts Said to understand the Palestinian predicament in universal terms (88). When Said describes "the homeland" as a future society that will correct "the mistakes of the whole world", he refuses a notion of Palestine that seeks only compensation or vengeance for the 1948 refugees. He sees it instead as a site where all of imperialism's crimes, including the persecution of European Jews, might be redressed through the commitment to creating a more equal dispensation. *Returning to Haifa* thus becomes a resource not only for understanding the Palestinian national movement and its decision to take up arms, but for the idea of a future that could serve as a model for internationalist left activism everywhere.

The works I have discussed in this essay might be said to draw on two notions of the real: the real conditions of life in a regime that systematically privileges one group of people

and dispossesses another; and the realistic analyses, narratives and strategies – specific, pragmatic and informed – that are needed to effectively oppose that regime. Each sees the current order as transformable, as Abu-Manneh (2016, 77) argues of Kanafani, and each ends with a rallying cry that asks the reader or viewer to participate in that transformation. But each work also insists that the “rhetoric of solidarity and militancy” is not, to use Benita Parry’s (1994) phrase, “a sufficient condition for constituting a revolutionary literature” (12). Instead, they advocate a comprehensive understanding of the political calculations and commitments of domestic activists as a necessary condition of any international solidarity effort. Moreover, they seek to preserve and sustain these activist resources for resistant movements in future, to be redeployed in the struggles over the distribution and control of land, labour, housing and other material and environmental resources that are yet to come. Since 2011, the revival of the notion of revolution in metropolitan popular culture has recuperated some of the romance of national liberation movements, but perhaps not the detailed account of political ideology that we see in these works. In returning to them, we are reminded that an important part of the resource value of cultural production is its ability to explore not just how people feel, but how they think, act and (re)imagine.

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Note

¹ My thanks to Faten Hussein for this observation and for identifying the poem by Rashid Hussein.