Introduction: unsettling subjects of justice and ethics

In late December 2008, a year before I began this research, I was sitting at my parents' dinner table with their friends. Reports of violent events in Gaza, later named 'Operation Cast Lead' or the 'Gaza War/Massacre', were just emerging in the media. These events formed part of a longer political trajectory which had recently culminated in the expiration of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas. Yet news of the brutality of this violence nonetheless felt shocking as early reports of Israeli missiles striking densely populated civilian areas circulated via the media. The *Guardian* reported that 'the timing and scale of the assaults came as a surprise' (*Guardian* 2008) as air strikes were later followed by a ground assault in which it was shown that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had used white phosphorus bombs (BBC News 2010). By 21 January 2009, up to 1,444 Palestinian people and thirteen Israeli people would be killed.[1] As our dinner conversation slowed, my father suddenly, abruptly, switched our attention to these events. Conjuring an imaginary interlocutor and banging his hand on the table, he railed against the shame wrought by Israel, shouting 'Not in my name!' The visceral quality of his apparently unprompted anger felt somehow bewildering; he was met with a disconcerting silence from our usually vociferous assembled party.

Some kilometres away, towards the centre of an English city, students at Redbrick University and New University were also moved by these events.[2] Along with students at over twenty-five universities across Britain, they began to initiate energetic campus activism, the likes of which had not been seen for many years (Dugan 2009; Rifkind 2009). Alice, who was an undergraduate at Redbrick University during this period, described how an emergency students' union general meeting 'sparked off massive arguments and lots of conflict and led to an occupation … a month-long occupation and their demands were … that the university should be helping these Palestinian people and Palestinian students that are suffering'.[3] On the other side of the country at Old University, a students' union motion supporting Gazans and condemning Israel was debated at a full-capacity meeting staffed by university security personnel. This culminated in vitriolic exchanges between a Palestine Society member and a Jewish student, both of whom were students' union representatives. At the end of the meeting, students

occupied the stage of this lecture theatre, beginning a protest which lasted for days. Soon after, the student newspaper, which had initially supported the occupation, reported allegations of antisemitic assaults against students, 'including tripping, spitting and snatching of religious clothes', and published an editorial stating that 'last week's events went too far in damaging the diversity of our university'. A motion was passed mandating the students' union to restore 'harmony' on campus while a proposed 'anti-terrorism' policy seeking to condemn 'pro-Hamas' factions and monitor 'foreign students' was defeated. The following month, a university-authorised dialogue commission, set up in response to these tensions, fell apart over the disputed wording of a proposed antisemitism policy, which sought to proscribe the expression of analogies between the Holocaust and events in Palestine–Israel.

When two years later in January 2011 I began ethnographic fieldwork at these universities, the effects of these events were still being felt, sustained through renewals of students' union policies, in plaques marking buildings and in the repertoires of support for the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Students' memories of the occupations over 'Operation Cast Lead' seemed important in shaping their ongoing activities, including campaigns for Palestinian justice and dialogue initiatives aimed at harmonising campus relations. Their repeated references to the occupations suggested that these events had intensified an ambiguous atmosphere on campus in ways that remained unresolved. In one sense, this activism was exciting and energetic, drawing people together in feelings of solidarity. Nuha shared this feeling with me at a gig as we listened to the hip-hop anthem 'Long Live Palestine': 'I remember we played this constantly for a month while we were doing the Gaza occupation. It was all we listened to. There was one time when it was the middle of the night and we were all falling asleep; Tariq just started singing it and we all woke up and joined in.' Jewish student groups were also brought together by this oppositional politics: Miriam, a Jewish Society officer explained how anti-Israel politics generated a 'better community … a good, solid JSoc'. Yet, this intensity was also experienced as disturbing; it was shadowed with aggression circulating among the student body. As David expressed, 'It did have an impact on the whole of campus, it meant that there was a security guard on every door, it meant that the whole atmosphere on campus just kind of changed.' And, while students' conflicting accounts of these events reproduced the polarisation of that period, somehow the activism over 'Operation Cast Lead' also opened up more ambivalent feelings. As Michael, a filmmaker who documented these campus occupations, put it, 'It was, I think, definitely a pretty watershed time for a lot of people who didn't know how to express their response.' In the period leading up to my fieldwork, as public attention increasingly focused on university conflicts, what emerged were shifting, ambiguous dynamics of excitement, aggression and attempted reconciliation, in which seemingly distant violent events of the past and the present were being passionately felt in British campus life.

In this book, I begin my exploration of student engagement with Palestine–Israel in British universities by attending closely to the unsettling feel of these

political encounters.[4] This conflict is a transnational issue which is unsettling first of all in the sense of being institutionally disruptive. The campus events described above generated widespread concern about the potential for this activism to destabilise British university institutions. These concerns are not new; for over four decades, the Palestine–Israel conflict has divided students in Britain who have identified with left-wing internationalist campaigns and anti-racist politics, drawing external organisations into campus life and generating attention from policymakers as well as high-profile media coverage (Day unpublished). However, in the context of developing agendas around the threat of 'extremism' in Britain, these tensions have emerged as a particular kind of problem for students' union officers and university managers who are charged with maintaining institutional harmony on campus.

This study explores the various ways in which the highly charged, oppositional student activism associated with Palestine–Israel is currently problematised by stakeholders, who draw on the political discourses of 'Islamic extremism', 'cohesion' and 'freedom of speech' associated with the 'War on Terror'. However, I also begin from the observation that politicised explanations for the recurrence of these campus conflicts have occluded attention to students' lived experience of this politics. In opening this chapter with students' evocations of the exciting, disturbing atmosphere during the 2008/9 campus protests, I also use the adjective 'unsettling' to highlight how the activism associated with Palestine–Israel is simultaneously arousing and aggressive, and how it provokes tensions between and within individuals. As such, this book begins by exploring how political conflicts are not only constituted through competing discourses in the abstract, but are also the locus of intense feelings, contradictory desires and visceral interpersonal encounters.

In this introductory chapter, I expand on my claim that attending to unsettlement is an important focus for the study of political conflict within democratic contexts. I begin by drawing on Nancy Fraser's (2009) theorisation of 'abnormal justice' to highlight how this ignition of a seemingly 'foreign' conflict within 'Western' universities exemplifies key aspects of justice conflicts under conditions of globalisation. Following Fraser, I explore how the transnational politics of Palestine–Israel takes the form of radical disagreement over the established spatial frames through which this conflict has been conceived and practised. Then, by drawing attention to the contested histories, complex truths and violent experiences that people carry in relation to Palestine–Israel, I extend and deepen Fraser's notion of 'abnormal justice'. This helps to situate my ethnographic approach to studying politics and ethics as one that reimagines prominent theoretical distinctions between the discursive/embodied and public/personal dimensions of democratic life.

Unsettling spaces: the abnormal justice of Palestine–Israel

At the start of this chapter, we saw scenes of political activism which diverged from the liberal vision of democratic public spheres as arenas of rational communication

between objective actors. Students not only responded to events in Gaza with rational arguments, but also expressed passionate irreconcilable personal commitments over the stakes, form and scope of this politics. Students clashed over their dissonant experiences of their campuses during the occupations over 'Operation Cast Lead'; some felt a swelling of humanitarian or anti-establishment solidarity while others sensed an arousal of antisemitic sentiment. These events evolved through a profound lack of agreement over how to communicate, which manifested in perpetually disputed words, the unravelling of dialogues, legislation and debates, and in turns to embodied practices of singing, theatre, the occupation of spaces and physical confrontations. Furthermore, calls to express transnational solidarity with suffering Palestinians conflicted with demands to prioritise the security and sovereignty of the British campus in the face of 'foreign' and 'extremist' threats. As such, these fraught exchanges expressed tensions over the boundaries of the relevant justice community with regard to *whose* claims for justice could legitimately be heard.

Insofar as the campus politics of Palestine–Israel can bring into play such profound and multifaceted contestations, I suggest that it can be helpfully situated as an empirical case of what Nancy Fraser (2009) describes as 'abnormal justice'. For Fraser, 'normal justice' is that form of justice conflict grounded in shared underlying presuppositions about the criteria for claims-making. This includes tacit agreement about what counts as a substantive matter of justice, implicit consensus regarding the grammar through which claims are made and agreement over the scope of the political community with the sovereignty to participate and decide. While this form of political engagement is organised around dissent, Fraser highlights that 'disobedience to its constitutive assumptions remains *contained*' (ibid.: 49, my italics). In contrast, 'abnormal justice' connotes situations in which the shared presuppositions that ground substantive questions of justice are themselves radically put into question: 'No sooner do first-order disputes arise than they become overlaid with meta-disputes over constitutive assumptions, concerning who counts and what is at stake. Not only substantive questions, but also the grammar of justice itself, are up for grabs' (ibid.: 50). In other words, these conflicts are concerned with the 'what' of justice, the substance of the concern, the 'who' of justice, in terms of the perceived boundaries of that political community, and the 'how' of justice, the lack of agreement over the criteria or decision procedure for claims-making. Abnormal justice, Fraser suggests, manifests in a 'destabilising' and 'freewheeling' form of politics in which established paradigms 'unsettle' and become 'unmoored' (ibid.: 49–50). While acknowledging that no empirical justice conflict is ever fully 'normal', Fraser draws on this heuristic distinction in order to suggest that abnormal justice is a pivotal aspect of our contemporary political condition.[5] This forms part of her broader project in her book *Scales of Justice* to develop a critical social theory that is able to conceptualise justice claims under conditions of accelerating globalisation.[6] She emphasises that processes of transnational migration and global media flows have undermined the dominant theoretical assumption that the modern territorial state is the appropriate frame for conceptualising and acting on questions of justice so that 'the claims for recognition of once distant "others" acquire a

new proximity' (ibid.: 51). In this context, struggles for justice include disagreement over the boundaries of the political collectivity itself, so that while some parties frame membership in terms of the domestic citizenry of a nation-state, others posit regional, transnational or global 'whos'.

Fraser's theorisation of 'abnormal justice' helps us to attend to the complex formations of the Palestine–Israel conflict under conditions of globalisation rather than assuming its scale or topography in advance. When, in the opening scenes of this chapter, actors clashed over whether the security of the student body in Britain or the claims of suffering Palestinians should be prioritised, they were contesting this very question of how to circumscribe the legitimate community of concern. Those arguing that campus conflicts must not be 'imported' *to* Europe *from* the Middle East were similarly engaging in the political act of delineating the constituents of this conflict. As I discuss further in Chapter 1, when stakeholders situated campus conflicts as arising because of the increasingly multicultural make-up of the British student body, or as the expression of global humanitarian values, they reproduced hegemonic divisions of political space. This illustrates how the very use of prepositions fixing the location and boundaries of these conflicts can disavow the very contestations of the local and global, and of proximity and distance that are at stake in these exchanges. In this context, Fraser's critical approach invites us to attend to the ways in which campus conflicts around Palestine–Israel are shaped through the destabilising conditions of globalisation by asking: how do activists, policymakers and scholars contest the spatial framings of this issue?[7]

Unsettling histories of victimhood: uncovering the tragic politics of Palestine–Israel

The concept of 'abnormal justice' helps us to explore how the national boundaries of the British campus were destabilised in the period of activism following 'Operation Cast Lead'. Yet, in those intense exchanges, it was not only spatial boundaries but also competing historical claims that were disputed. In the scenes described above, the drawing of analogies between the ongoing history of Palestinian suffering and the Nazi Holocaust provoked passionate responses and, as I will go on to explore, the invocation of these traumatic and somehow incommensurable histories was a recurrent fuse for the ignition of conflict within campus settings.[8] The story that emerges through my ethnography is one in which the legacies of the Holocaust and colonialism shaped a deeply ambiguous politics of victimhood on campus, which gave rise to, at times, visceral exchanges between student groups. As such, this study does not only attend to the contestation of political space, but also asks how the presence of conflicting historical narratives and embodied memories come to exert powerful, unsettling claims within contemporary encounters.[9] This reveals a need to deepen Fraser's theoretical notion of abnormal justice by attending to the temporal as well as the spatial relationships that she imagines.

In what follows, I explore how the foundational historical traumas of the Holocaust and the Nakba shape present-day interactions in British campuses by learning from aesthetic insights into tragic theatre (Critchley and Kesselman 2012;

Williams 1979). Framing the campus politics of Palestine–Israel as tragic enables us to explore *how* time is disordered in this conflict so that past traumas that are somehow unthinkable come to be felt and acted out within students' present relationships. As such, this dramaturgical approach also opens up key questions around the movement between truth, thought and action in relation to this conflict: what are the interrelations between traumatic events, embodied memories, moral narratives and passionate actions in the contemporary transnational politics of Palestine–Israel? More specifically, *how* do conflicting traumatic histories and morally ambiguous meanings emerge within campus conflicts in the present?

Unsettling theoretical frameworks: language, embodied experience and truth

I have introduced this book by highlighting how the Palestine–Israel conflict unsettles British campus life at multiple levels. Alongside the institutional disruption provoked by the conflicts between activist groups, this is also an issue that provokes tensions between and within individuals. When the filmmaker Michael observed how some students did not know *how* to express a response to the 2008–9 Gaza war, he highlighted how people can lack an adequate language and voice for communicating their sense of the ambiguous moral and historical truths of this conflict. In the chapters that follow, I dwell on this complex relationship between language and self-knowledge, exploring how and why people feel unable to articulate what Palestine–Israel means to them, and how this is related to students' multiple connections with those violent histories, marginal traditions and shamed identities that are somehow at stake in encounters around Palestine–Israel.

As various commentators have observed, the high-profile debates around Palestine–Israel that feature in the British media are fiercely partisan as they depict the morality of this conflict in mutually exclusive black-and-white terms (Kaposi 2014; Lynch 2012b). A key concern of this study is to explore how these broadly mediated, reductionist, symbolic communications around Palestine–Israel relate to the complex personal experiences of ordinary people engaged within localised contexts. In order to open up our understanding of the relationship between high-profile public grammars of justice/injustice and more complex interpersonal responses within specific settings, I find that there is a need to challenge some of the key distinctions assumed within contemporary social theories. Within a theoretical context shaped by the dualistic traditions of Enlightenment modernity, it is common for sociologists to situate their empirical work within theoretical frameworks that are focused either on the discursive construction and representation of reality or on material and embodied phenomena and experiences that are not conceptualised or represented by research subjects (Seidler 2013). Underlying these different frameworks are distinct assumptions regarding the relationship between language and truth; while, broadly speaking, representational frameworks treat truths as constructed through discourse and so as endlessly fluid, materialist approaches speak of 'ontological' realities that are prior to language (Bennett 2001, 2010; Coole and Frost 2010; Seidler 2013; Stewart 2011). The former approach has

informed important analyses of Palestine–Israel within the transnational public sphere, as scholars have critically deconstructed opposing transnational narratives and symbolic performances relating to Palestine–Israel (for example, Alexander and Dromi 2012; Butler 2006, 2012; Hirsh 2010; Kaposi 2014; Lynch 2012b). Yet their focus on what Fraser (2009: 76) describes as macro-level 'discursive arenas' has obscured those more complex feelings, emotions and experiences of ordinary people participating in these processes.[10] This has resulted in a limited ability to understand the depth of feeling that, as Dávid Kaposi (2014) observes, pushes disagreements over this conflict to such an extreme. In contrast, while 'non-representational' and 'new materialist' frameworks can open our attention towards motivations, sensibilities and investments that may not be coherently articulated, these frameworks do not help us to explore key tensions between the public representation and repression of the difficult truths that people carry when engaging with Palestine–Israel.[11] In what follows, I develop an ethnographic approach that refuses the reductive opposition between representational/non-representational theoretical frameworks in order to ask empirical questions about the relationship between language, embodied experience and truth in specific contexts: how do students experience the rationalist norms and dominant public grammars that govern communications about Palestine–Israel within universities? How do more complex personal truths at stake in this violent conflict find expression within students' relationships? And how do these different modes for communicating about Palestine–Israel shape students' sense of themselves and their relationships with each other?

In order to explore these questions, I learn from the work of two philosophers who can open up alternative ways of imagining these relationships between language, experience and truth. First, I turn to the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who helps us to explore why we are tempted to make abstract, decontextualised theoretical and political claims, such as about the relationship of language to truth, and how these processes of abstraction affect our relationships. His writing challenges assumed epistemic hierarchies between 'theory' and 'fieldwork' from an ethical perspective, and helps me to develop an ethnographic method for exploring our uses of sociological and political languages for communicating about Palestine–Israel within specific contexts (Lambek 2010; Wittgenstein 1967). Then, by engaging with philosopher Stanley Cavell's reflections on democratic life, I consider how these issues around the languages and truths of Palestine–Israel crystallise on campus in relation to the question of 'free speech'. Cavell's work, I suggest, opens up the question of voice in relation to these campus conflicts: what does it mean for students engaged with this conflict to have a voice? And how can democratic relationships enable us to find our voices and to hear each other?

Violent conflict and ordinary ethics

In her inspiring ethnography, *Life and Words* (2007), Veena Das explores how the violent and traumatic events of the Partition of India have been inherited within contemporary life and enfolded into forms of communication within everyday relationships. She traces how people can carry experiences of violence that are

silenced and how this can put our 'ordinary' relationships and forms of communication under threat (Das 1998, 2007, 2010). Das's approach takes up Wittgenstein and Cavell's concern with ordinary language in an ethnographic register so that she helps us to respond to silences and abstractions in the work of these two philosophers. Learning from Das, I situate these questions of how we communicate around Palestine–Israel as acutely bound up with the inheritance and perpetuation of collective and interpersonal violence. In the chapters that follow, I explore how students carry a sense of the traumatic histories and violent realities of the Palestine–Israel conflict into their interpersonal encounters. Following Das, I trace how ordinary language and relationships can be distorted as students who express political solidarity find themselves reproducing the violent relations to the 'other' that haunt this conflict. However, I also learn from the affirmative register of Das's work; I take up her vision of the domain of ordinary language and interpersonal relationships as, also, the locus of ethical possibilities.[12] This opens up interpersonal relationships and ordinary language as thresholds in which it becomes possible to transform relationships with ourselves and others (Lambek 2010; Singh 2014). In these ways, the relationship between violence and ethics will emerge as central to my study.[13] In the course of my ethnographic journey and in conversation with these thinkers, I then come to ask a key question posed by activists and philosophers alike: how is political action and solidarity possible that is also ethical?

Ethnographic imaginaries

In this book, I develop a claim for ethnography as a practice which can open up creative possibilities for responding to these questions of politics and ethics. As such, I intervene in debates regarding the relationship between fieldwork *in* ethics and the ethics *of* fieldwork (Robbins 2012). As Michael Lambek (2010) suggests, these tensions are reflected in the basic ambiguity of the word 'ethical', which both *describes* a field in which judgements are enacted and *affirms* particular acts. Conscious of the colonial and Orientalist history of his discipline, anthropologist Jarrett Zigon (2007) insists that to collapse this distinction is to risk projecting moral values onto those we study. However, others have sought to refigure the relationship of ethnography to moral and political theory, exploring how our abstract imaginaries can be transformed through the conceptual fecundity of the ethico-political practices, concepts and relationships activated in the field (Biehl 2014). This connects with neighbouring moves to radicalise sociology as a discipline which offers live and provocative methods that enable us to not only critique but also act on futures (Back and Puwar 2012; Latimer and Skeggs 2011). My own response to these debates is to direct our attention away from the exotic anthropological 'other' and towards the university institutions within which we, as academics, work (Sangren 2007). I also share in that more radical vision for ethnography that begins by acknowledging how researchers are *necessarily* implicated in and can *learn* from the ethical relationships that we study in the field. This is an insight developed by Wittgenstein, who teaches us how ethical responsibilities are prior to

epistemological relations of knowing and judging, and by Cavell, who situates ethics as a process of learning about ourselves and others within democratic life.[14] At the heart of this book, then, there is also a claim for the ethnographic endeavour itself as a process that can help us to bring new languages, imaginaries and political formations into being.

Chapter outline

The ethnographic narrative of subsequent chapters explores how dominant framings of Palestine–Israel on campus are enacted, transgressed and creatively transformed by students. In Chapter 1, I provide a genealogical and historical account of why the campus politics of Palestine–Israel is an illuminating case for exploring the dynamics of abnormal and tragic justice conflicts. Taking up Fraser's emphasis on the injustices produced by intellectual and political *framings* of conflicts, I explore how prominent policy and academic discourses have problematised student engagement with Palestine–Israel in Britain. I show how these public representations have imposed liberal-democratic assumptions or assumed coherent identities in ways that cannot allow for the limits of consensus and which risk occluding students' complex experiences of this issue. In the process, I situate the contemporary campus politics of Palestine–Israel in relation to historically evolving relations within the British civil sphere, the emergent geopolitics of the 'War on Terror' and the historic legacies of the Holocaust and British imperialism. Finally, I consider how public constructions of this as an 'imported', 'ethno-religious' conflict have failed to address the role played by British university institutions in shaping these dynamics. I discuss how in a postimperial globalising world the 'public university' has become a site of tragic conflict and how this produces different challenges for institutions operating in an increasingly fragmented, market-oriented higher education field. I conclude by explaining my multisited approach in this study, describing my selection of case study institutions and introducing these field sites.

Chapter 2 foregrounds my notion of ethnography as an ethical process by exploring my own embeddedness as a Jewish ethnographer personally invested in Palestine–Israel, researching out of and about universities. I begin with questions about the relationship between ethics, epistemology and the languages of social theory in approaching tragic situations of injustice and violence. Through a detailed account of the development of my fieldwork, I explore the ethical limitations of existing theoretical languages for communicating about Palestine–Israel and begin to develop alternative vocabularies, which I learnt in my relationships with students. Attending to themes of proximity and distance in fieldwork, I explore how we, as ethnographers, never fully know ourselves but rather are engaged in a process of learning. This becomes part of a questioning of the dominant rationalist moral culture embedded in the university itself, as I draw on diasporic ethical traditions to make a pitch for responsive ethnographic fieldwork, theorising and writing. This chapter offers a theoretical and methodological narrative, but it also does more by exemplifying the central ethical processes uncovered in this project.

Chapters 3 and 4 develop an analysis of the institutional and interpersonal dynamics of this campus politics through thick descriptions of two high-profile public events which took place at Old University. I show how these unfolded as melodramatic and tragic encounters in order to illuminate the distinct institutional responses of universities to conflicts relating to Palestine–Israel and more broadly to questions of truth and justice. Chapter 3 explores the moral traditions that have shaped the idealisation of the rational, secular, modern university by offering a detailed account of the sources, dynamics and consequences of a public debate about the academic boycott of Israel. Showing how this university sought to contain conflict by imposing a liberal model of partisan politics, I highlight the paradox inherent in the performance of communicative rationality at this event. After situating this attempt to affirm the moral identity of the university within the wider context of neo-liberalism and securitisation, I argue that this involved a disavowal of relations of power that shamed, repressed and silenced vital aspects of students' investments in Palestine–Israel.

Chapter 4 then focuses on a campus meeting with a controversial Palestinian journalist at which escalating accusations of antisemitism and fascism culminated in physical violence. I draw on Simon Critchley's work (2007, 2013; Critchley and Kesselman 2012) to explore this as a 'tragic' event, in which the claims of past and present sufferings came to be expressed as a passionate mutual refusal of recognition. Attending closely to the linguistic, somatic and passionate dynamics of this meeting, I show how it culminated in the destabilisation of moral distinctions and the collapsing of spatial and temporal boundaries, including a blurring of distinctions between victims and perpetrators, a making-present of past traumas and of 'apartheid' and 'terrorism' in Palestine–Israel. Drawing together the empirical analysis across these two chapters, I develop the theoretical argument that, while the melodramatic assertion of the liberal university affirmed the dominant institutional order, the disruptive excess re-emerged as a return of the repressed. Learning from aesthetic theories of melodrama and tragedy, I offer an explanation for the repetitive, circular and high-profile quality of these campus conflicts over time, including the role of public media and the logics of spectatorship in this process. Finally, after focusing on the seemingly interminable quality of this repetitive politics, I conclude with a question that frames Chapter 5: how might ethnographers look beyond these spectacles to attend to relational possibilities inhering in the everyday life of the campus?

Chapter 5 foregrounds my approach to ordinary ethics. I show how an attentive ethnographic sensibility can uncover alternative, overlooked forms of interpersonal relationality beyond those more visible, purely political, spectacles of interminable opposition. The chapter describes my active engagement with a small-scale gathering of students involved in the 'Israel–Palestine Forum' at Redbrick University. Here students sought to engage with the same entangled histories of Palestine–Israel which, as explored in Chapter 4, had provoked violent outbursts at Old University. Tracing the interpersonal and institutional conditions of this meeting, I show how its participants cultivated practices of speaking and

listening which enabled us to engage with each other as uncertain, ambivalent and fragmented subjects. Drawing on Michel Foucault's ethics of 'parrhesia' and Stanley Cavell's insights into voice and pedagogy within democratic relationships, I explore how risk-taking, trust and singular friendships enabled tragic dimensions of this politics to be spoken and reflected upon. This chapter concludes with some comparative insights in relation to my three field sites, highlighting how the differential impacts of socio-economic changes to higher education can limit these democratic possibilities within campuses.

The Conclusion draws together the philosophical, methodological and empirical contributions of this book. I address the question posed in this introduction: how can an ethical form of political action be possible in response to Palestine–Israel? This gives rise to a second question: how can ethical sensibilities be scaled up to the level of political representation? Carrying my notion of ethical ethnography through to the book's conclusion, I frame a response to these questions through an account of an interpersonal encounter which taught me an alternative way of engaging the tensions between 'free speech', 'good relations' and 'political activism' within universities. This discussion offers a contribution to current debates around the public university by developing a more nuanced, expansive conception of what we might mean when we appeal to these key values. In these ways, in the process of curating a sociological response to the Palestine–Israel conflict in British universities, this book seeks to expand our sense of the ethico-political possibilities inhering within democratic life.

Notes

1 See Kaposi (2014) for an in-depth narrative of this 2008–9 conflict, as well as a helpful analysis of its representation by the British media. Kaposi observes that any description of these facts is contested, including the number and category of fatalities. This includes the very naming of these events in terms that connote human rights violations or reciprocal military conflict. I discuss these issues in depth in subsequent chapters, but for now I do refer to 'Operation Cast Lead' to specify the historical period that is the focus of this study.

2 Throughout this book, I have anonymised the names of my university field sites (and of the student media outlets associated with them), altered quotations from online student media while retaining their meaning and tone, and adopted pseudonyms for research participants. My intention is to protect the identities of the students, and I discuss these issues of naming and anonymity further in Chapter 2. See also Box 1 in Chapter 1 for an introduction to the university field sites.

3 Quotations from research participants are drawn from a combination of tape recordings and reconstructions from my field notes.

4 The main phase of my fieldwork within universities took place from 2011 to 2012, so the ethnographic material presented here reflects a particular moment in the development of British student activism that followed 'Operation Cast Lead'. However, while it is important to note the temporal framing of this study, my discussion remains relevant in understanding the dynamics of continuing student campaigns in response to ongoing violence in the region.

5 Fraser's recent work is part of her ongoing response to Habermas's seminal theorisation of the public sphere and develops her previous argument that the rationalist norms governing communication in the public sphere are not 'neutral' but rather express relations of power, domination and oppression (Fraser 1992).
6 Fraser's approach develops Ulrich Beck's critique of the assumed 'methodological nationalism' of much contemporary social theory and forms part of a broader move to develop theoretical responses to processes of globalisation (Collier and Ong 2005; Nash and Bell 2007; Seidler 2007a).
7 The ways in which spatial contestations should be taken as internal to such political situations has also been helpfully elaborated by Andrew Barry (2011).
8 As Michael Rothberg helpfully explores, this reflects a wider dynamic whereby the invocation of the 'interlocked archives' of Nazi genocide and colonialism occur with 'striking regularity' in representations of the Middle East conflict (Rothberg 2009: 311).
9 This connects with work by Michael Rothberg (2011) and Bashir and Goldberg (2014) on the ethics of public memory struggles in the Middle East under conditions of globalisation. My ethnographic approach supplements their analysis of literary representations of traumatic histories by exploring how the material invocation and memorialisation of these histories is experienced within public institutions.
10 Fraser's theory of 'abnormal justice' is a self-consciously macro-level theory, suspicious of the 'psychologising' potential of subject-oriented experiential traditions of political thought, which she claims draw attention away from 'hard' political issues (Bennett 2010: xi; McNay 2008).
11 While new materialist theories claim to dissipate ontological binaries, their emphasis on the need to prioritise 'non-human' actors and on the movement of 'affects' between bodies can oppose 'subject-oriented' or 'humanist' traditions of social theory in ways that can too easily dismiss the cares and attachments that people carry in relation to this conflict (Seidler 2013; see also Hirshkind 2006).
12 As I discuss further in the concluding chapter, in contrast with the burgeoning studies within the anthropology of ethics which focus on processes of moral discipline and self-formation, I share in Das's concern with ethics as an approach to the other at the level of interpersonal relationships. Like Das, I take up Wittgenstein's concern with the immanent ethical entailments of everyday speech and action, and learn from Stanley Cavell's emphasis on voicing and listening to experiences of uncertainty. My claim that Das frames 'ordinary ethics' as deeply bound up with relations of alterity and violence challenges Jarrett Zigon's (2014) reductive depiction of this approach as oriented around the 'truism' that ethics is located in the everyday.
13 As will emerge over the ensuing chapters, this ethnography is concerned with multiple forms of violence so that, for example, I trace the interrelations of historical and structural traumas, physical aggression and ethical violence within campus encounters.
14 This point is eloquently made by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992: 22–3), who writes that, while anthropologists have tended to understand morality as culturally contingent, there is an existential philosophical position that posits the inverse, that the ethical relation to the other makes all sense and meaning possible. Throughout this book, I follow Anna Strhan (2015) in broadly using the term 'morality' in the sense of symbolic rules or norms and 'ethics' for situated relational practices and uncodified experiences, while recognising the overlapping, dialectical relations between these dimensions of social life.