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**At the Borders of Friendship:
Work, Morality and Survival in a colonial
Israeli-Palestinian space**

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Notes on transliteration

For general rules of transcription I have followed the system outlined in the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES). The Arabic words and sentences that I have quoted in this text come from colloquial Palestinian Arabic, and they have been generally transcribed according to their pronunciation in the Bethlehem accent. For example, the definitive article *al-* appears as *il-* according to the Palestinians' pronunciation.

Names of people and places generally follow their common transcription in English.

INTRODUCTION

The threshold

It was a summer Saturday morning in the *ḥāra*, my host family's neighborhood, where I had just moved to live. The *ḥāra* was clung to the top of a hill in the middle of al-Bab, a Palestinian village in the Bethlehem area. Thanks to its high location, from my host family's house we could have a beautiful aerial view of the surroundings. Southwestern Jerusalem neighborhoods spread in front of us: they were so near that they seemed almost touchable.

That morning in summer 2011 I was going out of the house after waking up, while the other women were carrying out their morning chores and preparing coffee. I had to stop under the entry porch: men were sitting under the fig tree, a place in the *ḥāra* equipped with benches and the tree shadow where people used to gather. When male guests were there, like any other woman, I was not expected to approach. Yet, that morning something unusual attracted my attention: three people with a *kippah* on their heads were sitting among Palestinian men. The group was drinking coffee, chatting and laughing: it looked like a convivial gathering. I became curious and remained under the porch, looking at the scene from a distance. I asked who those guests were to my "brother" Nadir, who was busy in his intermediate role of connection between the feminine "inside" and the masculine "outside" to take coffee and sweets. He quickly answered: "They are my uncle Rida's friends (*aṣḥāb*)", and disappeared inside the house once again, carrying an empty tray in his hands.

This scene helps me to describe my research through the image of a "threshold". The scene represents a Palestinian village, that I named al-Bab ("the door"), which was situated at the border of an Israeli inhabited space: the Jerusalem neighborhoods expanding from the opposite hills. Furthermore, the porch of my host family's house became a liminal zone between feminine and masculine spaces, in which I, as a woman, could act as an observer, while the sixteen year-old Nadir kept crossing it. My attention focused on something that appeared strange to me: I voluntary positioned myself in the threshold between my cognitive categories and given assumptions, and people's social practices in their everyday life. As a matter of fact, the masculine gathering constituted an unexpected mixed situation: Israeli men were sitting and drinking coffee with Palestinian

men in a large family neighborhood of a Palestinian village. More surprisingly, these Israelis were apparently defined as “friends” of Rida, one of the family’s men who worked in Israel, and were welcomed like any other visitors in the *ḥāra*. I was later told that they had come to buy rabbits from Rida’s brother, who used to work in Israel, too. The image of the threshold is then constituted by multiple dimensions: space, moral, and political borders are actually superposed in this scene. Rather than clear delimitations and closure, the threshold suggests the idea of a breach. However, the threshold also contains an ambiguous character because we do not know if we are inside or outside, if we are entering or going out, and also if we are right or wrong to be suspended like that. The threshold is thus a space of opening, contamination, and constitutive uncertainty. At the same time it distinguishes, separates, divides. Like a door, it can be kicked down or shut.

This work aims to explore the moral and political limits which define personal relationships in the Palestinians’ everyday life. The main focus is on the link between the personal and the political in conditions of structural uncertainty and political violence. More specifically, my research attempts to question the “place” of the political in the context of the Israeli occupation and settler colonization of the West Bank and Gaza. Such a “place”, however, has not been searched through a study of the “structure” of the Israeli power, such as its spatial deployment, law, institutions, and public actors. My simple aim was to concentrate on the ways people define and redefine their social relationships in their everyday life. In so doing, I questioned “intimacy” and violence as two mutually constituting dimensions of the Palestinians’ social life. By considering people’s ordinary experience and personal ties I was more interested in the productive capacity of power, which affected the construction of moral and political subjectivities.

The context of research

The village that I have called “al-Bab” is a Palestinian village, which belongs to the Bethlehem governorate, and is actually situated only six kilometers far from the Bethlehem town. I chose to conduct ethnographical research in this village because of its specificity, although such a specificity was not unique in the West Bank. From the administrative and political point of view its inhabitants actually defined it as a “Jewish zone” (*manṭiqa yahūdiyya*), since the village was under complete Israeli control. Furthermore, the village already constituted a border zone because it had been cut by the Green Line, the 1949 Armistice line which became the first Israeli border: 70 % of al-Bab

land had been seized by the newborn Israeli state through the 1948 war, while the actual village had been reconstructed in the remaining lands at the beginning of the 50s. Because of their displacement al-Bab villagers enjoyed the refugee status granted by the UNRWA, the UN agency established for aid and relief for the Palestinian people after the 1948 war.

After the Israeli government announced the construction of a “security barrier” separating Israelis from Palestinians in 2002, during the second Intifada, al-Bab villagers discovered that the plan of the separation wall provided for completely surrounding their houses, closing the village and leaving only one militarily guarded entry/exit. Most of the Palestinians’ agricultural lands became thus unreachable outside the wall. In 2011 I moved to live in the village with the aim of focusing on the process of change that would have affected people’s life while the wall kept being constructed. When I arrived the barrier had been erected only in the eastern part of the village, where it was bordered by a growing Israeli settlement built in a part of al-Bab lands. Ultimately, al-Bab resulted to be a big open-air construction site.

However, when I started to live in the village I realized that the enormous and very expensive monument of the Israeli separation policies, justified by the need for the Israelis’ “security” during the second Palestinian Intifada, did not really separate Israeli citizens from the Palestinian population. At the entrance of the village the bypass road connecting the Israeli settlement to Jerusalem crossed the road which went from al-Bab to Bethlehem: Palestinian and Israeli cars normally circulated through this mixed crossing point. Furthermore, Israeli settlers and Palestinians could look at each other from the windows of their houses, although they were supposed to be separated by the eight meter-high cement blocks that materialized the “security barrier”. Finally, living in the village I found a striking social evidence, that was later confirmed to me by data: in the context of the growing rate of unemployment in the whole West Bank and Gaza, while 40% of al-Bab population was considered unemployed, 47% worked in Israel (Arij 2010). My fieldwork was thus confronted to a social reality in which spatial imbrications and political separation were constitutively intermingled with Palestinian-Israeli everyday encounters. This was why, despite my initial intentions, I chose to concentrate on “openings” rather than closure, and to question how social proximity and intimacy could be connected to the Israeli system of domination.

The Palestinian resistance and the Israeli spatial control

My research interest was born from two different forms of dissatisfaction concerning the literature on Israel/Palestine. Firstly, a sense of discomfort was generated by the widespread dichotomic opposition between “oppression” and “resistance”, where this latter is supposed to encompass the Palestinians’ social and political agency. Other authors have already underlined how Palestinians are often treated as “one-dimensional political subjects” (Taraki 2006: xi) and put into question what Diana Allan has defined as the “nationalist *doxa* of ‘perseverance and resistance’” (Allan 2014: 1). However, if these approaches tend to focus on people’s everyday life in order to take a distance from the nationalist paradigm of “resistance”, the risk is to displace the same paradigm looking at anything Palestinians do as a form of struggle engendered by the Israeli occupation. On the contrary, like Diana Allan proposed in her research on Palestinians refugees in Shatila (Lebanon), I explicitly focused on the interrogation of Palestinian nationalism in the context of my fieldwork. Further, I treated “resistance” as a normative frame produced by the national discourse, which intersected other discourses (the “peace” discourse, Islam, the honor code, “humanity”, modernity and tradition...) in the subjects formation. Conversely, I wanted to explore those dimensions of social life, which remained apparently untouched by the “resistance” frame, such as work and personal relationships like “friendship”. My interest was not merely recording how the Palestinians’ everyday life was under the Israeli military occupation – the difficulty to move, to have water, and even to marry sometimes – but to question the political dimension of what seemed to be not political at all. This approach has obviously engaged a reflection about what the political is, and I initially needed to take a distance from its definition by – and consequently, from its coincidence with – the public discourse. Yet, this approach opened a set of troubling questions: does “not political” mean “unpolitical”, recalling a sort of indifference and apathy? If the Palestinians’ political agency is eminently represented by their “resistance”, should we consider anything exceeding such a frame as its contrary? If Palestinians do not always resist, are they “normalized” so? Instead of snubbing “resistance” as a legitimate political project for a population living under a military colonial occupation, I think these questions can contribute in taking into account “resistance” and the “normalization” of the Israeli occupation more seriously. Inversely, focusing on “intimacy” and the “personal” did not mean to take them for granted as self-evident assumptions. It was their formation and formulation, which constituted the

specific object of my inquiry, focusing on the ways people defined and simultaneously produced such categories through language and social practice in their ordinary life.

The second form of dissatisfaction which led my research derived from the analysis that focused on space as the privileged matter on which Israel deployed its power and control. Much of this interest stemmed from the separation policies that Israel inaugurated at the beginning of the 90s, when the Palestinians' mobility was subject to increasing restrictions and the Israeli occupation took an "architectural" form (Hammami 2004, Perugini & Harb 2010, Rabinowitz 2003, Weizman 2007). While authors have observed the combination of physical proximity and separation between Israelis and Palestinians, much of their interest remained focused on the model of the "border", taking into account people's mobility and the illegal/informal crossing of the frontiers (Bornstein 2002, Latte Abdallah & Parizot 2011, Latte Abdallah & Parizot 2014). In the Israeli-Palestinian context some authors have recently proposed to focus on the "interfaces" of the two sides in order to "decompartmentalize" research on Israel and Palestine (Latte Abdallah & Parizot 2014: 17). Simultaneously, the strategic indefiniteness of the Israeli border has been widely acknowledged (Kelly 2006, Latte Abdallah & Parizot 2014). My research followed the interest for the interconnectedness that contributed in constituting the Israeli-Palestinian colonial situation: like Tobias Kelly (2006) has underlined in his research on Palestinian laborers, the distinction between the two populations is rather defined by their everyday encounters. However, I have privileged a perspective which highlights the "inclusive exclusion" of the Palestinians by the Israeli state (Ophir *et al.* 2009). Researching the life of Palestinians who live under complete Israeli control, in what they define as a "Jewish zone" in the West Bank, I have rather focused on the progressive expansion of the Israeli sovereignty into the West Bank, where the categorization of different populations is produced on the basis of distinct jurisdictional regimes. It is because these different regimes are deployed in the same space that the relationship between space and power has attracted so much attention. That is also why Eyal Weizman (2004) has talked about "politics of verticality", highlighting the tridimensional character of the space on which Israel exerts its control, and Cédric Parizot (2009) has proposed to consider the "Israeli-Palestinian ensemble" as the hierarchical superposition of different anthropological spaces in the same geographical space. However, it seems to me that the concept of "inclusive exclusion", that stems from Giorgio Agamben's reflections on sovereignty (Agamben 1995, 2003), further shows how the difference between Israelis and Palestinians is mainly deployed as a distinction

between a citizen population and a stateless one, where this latter is excluded from citizenship rights and confined into a state of permanent exception. For this reason I kept together military occupation and settler colonization as two interlinked processes and analytical tools for apprehending how Israeli-Palestinian relationships can develop, and what they mean for the subjects that are so constituted.

Colonial governmentality and the moral economy of friendship

Since I lived with and among the West Bank Palestinians who went to work in Israel, the Foucauldian concepts of “biopolitics” and “biopower” helped me to consider how the Palestinian people started to be treated as a population, whose conduct had to be regulated, in order to be included into the Israeli labor market. Not surprisingly, this new form of government was put in place after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, which established the end of the border policies implemented by the Israeli state in the first decades of its existence. Furthermore, the 1967 Israeli occupation inaugurated the Israeli project of settler colonization in those Palestinian territories, which had been under Jordanian (the West Bank) and Egyptian (Gaza) rule from 1948 to 1967. I use the concept of “colonial governmentality”, which the anthropologist David Scott (1999) introduced, to point out this historical rupture in the political rationality of the Israeli power.

The colonial nature of the Israeli state precedes the Israeli occupation, and it is linked to its Zionist formation. Zionism is here considered as the historical output of specific trajectories of the European modern history: growing anti-Semitism, colonial expansion, and the nation state as the model for statecraft. The Zionist claim of a state for a Jewish “nation” – legitimated by the European colonial powers that controlled the Middle East – founded the historical dispossession of Palestinians as the native people of Palestine. The appropriation of the Palestinians’ land and water resources, and the transformation of mainly European settlers into the indigenous people, while the Palestinians were treated as an alien presence, are some of the main features of the Israeli settler colonialism (Veracini 2006, 2010). However, what the concept of “colonial governmentality” aims to highlight is the appearance of a specific form of modern power in colonialism’s history. The apparent paradox I encountered in the fieldwork, when Palestinian workers talked about the “freedom” they could enjoy just after the Israeli military occupation of their living space, can only be explained through an analysis of

such a modern power in the Israeli colonial context. I would also add that, if the colonial nature of the Israeli state has opened up a large comparativist tendency among scholars with respect to other historical formations of colonial rule, my interest in this work has implicitly seen the affinity – and also the complicity – Israel has with European policies concerning labor, people’s movement, and citizenship. In this sense Israel can be considered as a “laboratory” for modern power, including its warfare apparatuses.

In this research my attention focused on people’s effort of constructing themselves as moral and political subjects. My interest was thus to grasp the points of contact and connection between differentiated populations focusing on the ways they were regulated and on their productive effect in the construction of subjectivities. Through the concept of the “moral economy”, my hypotheses of departure questioned the articulation between moral and political subjectivation in a colonial space, characterized by interconnectedness rather than separation, where the Palestinian workers’ experience was fundamentally defined by their everyday encounters with Israelis. In this sense I had supposed that a “moral economy of friendship”, regulating personal relationships between Israelis and Palestinians, had emerged as a specific historical formation inaugurated by the 1967 Israeli occupation. Under this perspective “friendship” was thus analyzed as a personal relation, produced by a moral economy which combined “freedom” with domination, closeness with suspicion, intimacy with violence, and peace with war. My use of the concept of the “moral economy” is thought to avoid an economical reductionism that would describe social actors as essentially moved by interest and necessity. At the same time, differently from its founding fathers Edward P. Thompson (1971) and James Scott (1976), the idea of “moral economy” is not mainly evoked to explain popular revolts, but rather their absence. As a matter of fact, my fieldwork developed in what Palestinian people defined as a time of “calmness” (*hudū*), at least until June 2014, when such “calmness” suddenly disappeared after the alleged kidnapping of three young Israeli settlers in the West Bank. If we consider the growing tensions that followed, however, my use of the “moral economy” does not seem to me to be in contradiction with the current deployment of military and popular violence in Israel/Palestine. Moreover, I have not limited the application of this concept to the side of the “dominated”, but I have rather tried to show how a moral economy of friendship precisely stemmed from a “peace” regime in which official and supposedly symmetrical relationships between the Palestinian National Authority and the Israeli state were established by the Oslo Agreements (1993-1995). Proposing to define the moral economy as “the production,

distribution, circulation, and use of moral sentiments, emotions and values, and norms and obligations in social space” (Fassin *in* Fassin & Eideliman 2012: 37), Didier Fassin has rather suggested to enhance the heuristic capacity of the concept in order to highlight the historical, social and political conditions which make specific moral economies emerge. In this sense a “moral economy of friendship” questions the relationship between the moral, affective and political dimensions of social life, highlighting how the subjects formation is linked to specific power arrangements.

Moral and political subjectivation

Focusing on Palestinian workers’ experience through the lens of a “moral economy of friendship” I was interested in considering how moral and political subjectivation could combine or be distinguished in people’s ordinary experience. In so doing I aimed to inquiry the ways people themselves produced or shadowed the distinction between the “personal” and the “political”, the “private” and the “public”, without conceiving these dichotomic couples as coincident. I traced the link between morality and politics through what is known as the “ethical” turn of Michel Foucault’s thinking. After studying political technologies, the philosopher introduced the concept of “technologies of the Self” to refer to techniques “which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault 1988: 18). In Foucault’s view, which became explicit in his study of sexuality, the Self was a product of power in the way it was objectified and became the target of a special scrutiny, with the aim of revealing the subject’s truth.

Following this path, throughout her research on the women’s piety movement in Egypt, Saba Mahmood has criticized the “compartmentalization of the ethical and the political”, which pertains to liberal political theory: in such a classical view, morality and ethics were relegated to the private sphere, while politics was conceived as necessarily public. On the contrary, the anthropologist has proposed to consider the cultivation of the Self through an analysis of “the historically contingent arrangements of power through which the normative subject is produced” (Mahmood 2005: 33). Under this perspective the separation between the personal and the political appears to be artificial, and is rather functional to power in producing specific power arrangements.

Retrospectively, I acknowledge that I have traced an implicit difference between “ethical” and “moral subjectivation”. I will try to clarify here what I have meant. “Moral subjectivation” has been conceived as a mode of subjectivation which refers to specific norms and particular social practices: for example, I have talked about “moral subjectivation” in relation to the Palestinian men’s construction of the self based on the social institution of hospitality, which is grounded on the display of masculine values such as personal autonomy and generosity. Through the performative acts of visiting, offering, welcoming, sitting together, I have considered how Palestinian men construct themselves as moral subjects through the exchange of respect between hosts and guests, which simultaneously founds their “respectability”. On the contrary, “ethical subjectivation” has rather referred to the individual experience of “adjusting” socially shared moral codes to situations and practices which are not so clearly standardized: this consists in a very personal “adjustment”, because the individual can find herself/himself confronted to unexpected situations and uncertain conditions for action. I have especially used the concept of “ethical subjectivation” with regard to Palestinian men’s experience in Israel, where they often need to “invent” and “create” their attitude vis-à-vis unexpected situations, while simultaneously complying with their embodied normative references. For example, a Palestinian worker can be ethically compelled when he must manage a sexually mixed situation at his workplace in Israel. In my sense “ethical subjectivation” necessarily questions the individualization produced by the Israeli government of the Palestinian population. Furthermore, it is especially in “ethical subjectivation” that the disciplinary, normalizing effect of the Israeli power is liable to intervene. As a consequence, the Palestinian workers’ “ethical subjectivation” is fundamentally linked to doubt and uncertainty.

My distinction of a “moral” and an “ethical subjectivation” may retrace Foucault’s differentiation between “code-oriented” and “ethics-oriented” moralities (Foucault 1990 [1984]: 25-32), although the author pointed out that these two “models” of moralities can superpose and melt into each other. However, I think my work introduces in this distinction a fundamental element: uncertainty. Uncertainty does not derive from the “rudimentariness” of moral codes, but it appears as an effect of forcible and ongoing change in which those moral codes are compelled to find their place: what is true, just and good must be constantly redefined. Of course, this kind of ordinary uncertainty is one of the forms that violence takes in the Palestinians’ lives in the context of the Israeli occupation and settler colonization. Uncertainty precisely constitutes the way through

which violence can affect ethical subjectivation. Therefore, I propose to consider the Palestinian workers' ethical subjectivation as always precarious and incomplete: this is why I define it through the idea of contingency. Furthermore, the uncertainty that produces such a "moral" contingency includes *non-action*, in the forms of refusal, unavailability and silence, as a fundamental ethical question in the subjects formation. Under this perspective ethical subjectivation rather highlights the evaluative character of moral work or, inversely, norms are embodied in the subjects' lived experience especially as values¹.

Friendship as a form of life

Like the initial scene of the "threshold" showed, "friendship" was not only a mode of political relation between Israelis and Palestinians in the "peace" regime, but appeared to be a social language through which Palestinian people described some of their interactions with Israelis. Such a question obviously created a political controversy, and appeared as the radical break of the "resistance" norm in the Palestinian national discourse. What was "resistance" then? And what did such a friendship mean?

"Friendship" with Israelis is a controversial issue because it seems to deny the opposition between two different populations, who are supposed to be enemies: how can the dominated deal with his/her oppressors? Carl Schmitt precisely defined the "political" as the contraposition between "friend" and "enemy", which is created by the virtual horizon of war. In Schmitt's sense – which had a great influence in the Western political thought – the political is expressed by an opposition: "The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or a separation, of an association or dissociation" (Schmitt 2007: 26). This perspective is interesting because it does not correspond, for example, to the idea of the political which would emerge from the citizens' shared life of the *polis* (Arendt 1958) – although even this idea was based on the exclusion of specific categories of "spectral humans" (Butler & Spivak 2007: 15), like women, slaves and foreigners, who were relegated to the apolitical social reproduction of

¹ I refer to the distinction between a "moral" and an "ethical" evaluation in the government of lives in Fassin 2010. The difference between norms and values was also discussed by Lila Abu-Lughod, referring to an article by Ralph Turner, who maintained that different conceptions of the self corresponded to different experiences of the same phenomenon. Criticizing Goffman's dramaturgical model to interpret the relationship between "private" and "public" discourse in the honor code, Abu-Lughod pointed out: "Individuals in Awlad 'Ali society perceive moral standards less than norms than as values; therefore, it is a matter of self-respect and pride that the individual achieve the standard, not an obligation" (Abu-Lughod 1986: 237).

material life. Both conceptions of the political rely on the same assumption: the political is grounded on the separation between a private and a public sphere (the opposition of *oikos* and *polis* in Arendt's work). According to Carl Schmitt, this also founds the autonomy of the political from morality, so that "the enemy in the political sense need not be hated personally, and in the private sphere only does it make sense to love one's enemy" (Schmitt 2007: 29). The problem here is not so much the definition of a friend or an enemy, however, but the definition of their opposition. Even if the political enemy may be morally good, it is the absolute "other": "He is, nevertheless, the enemy, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible" (Schmitt 2007: 27). In this way Schmitt defined the political opposition on the basis of the other's condition of strangeness, which would threaten a group's way of life. It is curious that Schmitt often underlined the "concrete, existential" character of the categories of "enemy" and "friend" to highlight the dimension of a struggle for survival which is liable to end up in war. Of course, Schmitt was talking about the political as a mode of relation between nation states. This may be coherent with his reading of the "stranger" as the ultimate nature of the enemy, rather than considering it as a precise condition produced by the very opposition, which founds "enemy" and "friend" as the categories of the political. At the same time it is the humanity of the stranger which keeps the political alive, and the dishumanization of the enemy precisely defines the overcoming of the political in a specific kind of war: "[This kind of war] simultaneously degrades the enemy into moral and other categories and is forced to make him a monster that must not only be defeated but also utterly destroyed. In other words, he is an enemy who no longer must be compelled to retreat into his borders only" (Schmitt 2007: 36). Conversely, it is from this "most extreme possibility" that "human life derives its specifically political tension" (Schmitt 2007: 35).

In my ethnographical work I have studied "friendship" as the interstitial space between the "private" and the "public" spheres which define the political in its classical conception. In this sense I did not study friendship as a separate domain of social life, but I connected it to more general ideas of "closeness" and "intimacy" that constituted Palestinians' ordinary experience. The concept of the moral economy helped me to take into account the relationship between social norms, moral obligations and affects as a matter which counts for defining the possibility of political division or alliance.

Furthermore, friendship has been analyzed by focusing on people's everyday life. I considered friendship as a social language that people used to name specific social contacts and personal relationships. I chose to study "friendship" through the concept of "form of life" in order to grasp the relationship between people's language and experience. Taking this concept from Stanley Cavell work on Wittgenstein's thinking, Veena Das has proposed to move its use from a phenomenological study of cultural variability (the *forms* of life) to an inquiry into the limits of the human in what is considered as "life" (the forms of *life*) (Das 2007). Apprehended as a "form of life" friendship is thought to redefine the terms of recognition about what human life is, and which values are attached to it. Following this perspective the political opposition of "friends" and "enemies" has kept suspended, in order to inquiry into the norms and values that social actors produce in their effort to give their life a meaning, and to establish what the sense of life should be. In this sense my work follows the direction of a political anthropology of life (Fassin 2014) which tries to conjugate – rather than separate – the material conditions for existence and the social fabric of life, the "private" and the "public", the "personal" and the "political".

Personal trajectories, methodological choices and ethical concerns

This work was born from my attendance in the West Bank in 2009, when I first went to study colloquial Palestinian Arabic at Birzeit University, living for three months in Ramallah. My first visit in the West Bank was motivated by an invitation from a Palestinian acquaintance, and by my longing for going out of Europe. At that time Palestine was a central locus of the political imagery of which I had grown up in the 90s, and represented the struggle of a people to exist despite a state power, like it was – according to the same imagery – for the Zapatistas in Chiapas or the Kurds in Turkey. However, my first visit to Palestine let me acknowledge simple evidence: Palestinians were first of all a society, and this considerably complicated the “flat” coincidence between their life and their resistance against the occupying Israeli state. This simple observation produced a sense of discomfort towards my own political representations. Such a discomfort became the main reason that drove me to embrace a critical approach, able to take into account of the ways the Israeli power affected personal lives, and give such personal lives to their complexity and their depth. I hope to have shown throughout this writing that such a discomfort has never ended: on the contrary, it was a constitutive condition – and it became even a tool – of my ethnography, together with the affective richness and the unquiet thinking that I could share with my Palestinian friends.

After receiving a Ph.D. scholarship in Anthropology, in 2011 I could go back to Palestine and start my fieldwork. I would like to add a further note to the feeling that accompanied my fieldwork. My discomfort contained an ethical tension concerning the people I was encountering: firstly, while highlighting their political condition of oppression and subordination in the context of the Israeli occupation, the frame of “resistance” obfuscated and made almost incomprehensible an important part of their lives; secondly, if not resisting, Palestinians remained with their “culture”, which risked to be essentialized through the lens of “Arabness” and Islam. These two epistemological and ethical risks were actually evoked by some of my Palestinian interlocutors while I was in the field. A man sarcastically pointed out to me: “In fact, we [the Palestinians] are a good material for research”. Moreover, a guy of my age refused to talk to me stating that he did not want to collaborate with “post-Orientalists”. Their remarks recalled the potential violence contained in the process of knowledge, and questioned the power asymmetries, which constituted such a process through our ethnographical relation. Actually, Palestinians have become the eminent object of an incredible amount of

political, “scientific” and public discourses, while they have been progressively disqualified as legitimate “authors” of their own history. These considerations went implicitly with my writing, and only retrospectively I can grasp why a certain insistence on the relationship between “secrecy” and “truth”, affecting the construction of the public discourse on Palestinians, appears in this text, both as an anthropological questioning and a methodological concern. In the field I have constantly perceived – and later assumed – the participation of my work, whose final output are these pages, in the problematic production of a discourse on Palestinians, which by definition slips away from its subjects. At the same time I perfectly know that this kind of consciousness would never be able to mitigate the Palestinians’ very justified worries about the violence of representation.

This work is grounded on an extensive fieldwork that I conducted from 2011 to 2014. I had lived in the West Bank, mainly in the Bethlehem area where my research was based, for long periods (July-September 2011, April-September 2012, July-August 2013, October 2013-July 2014, October 2014). I spent a total of almost two years in the field. Since my research focus was on personal relationships and intimacy, I decided to conduct an ethnography of everyday life in a Palestinian village: this was my methodological preference for several reasons. First, I needed to learn Palestinian Arabic. I did not want to work with an interpreter, nor to deal with English speakers only and grasp their concepts through a foreign – and colonial – language. I wanted to be able to have an unmediated contact with my interlocutors. When I moved to live with my host family in al-Bab I did not have many words to share linguistic interactions. For this reason playing with children and helping women in their domestic and care work were the main tools I used to find my place among people at the beginning. At the same time play and work were important vectors of socialization, which situated me at the threshold between children’s and women’s worlds. My personal identity – my being a young unmarried woman – legitimated this kind of socialization with refer to the Palestinians’ social hierarchy in the domestic milieu. Actually, Abu Yusef had welcomed me in his house as one of his “daughters”: this form of social inclusion implied both masculine protection and authority on me, as it mainly happened through the initial limitation of my movements in the village. This kind of control was not only exerted by men: women scrutinized me and children constantly followed me wherever I went in order to finally take me home. Yet, since I simultaneously remained a “guest”, men’s attention on me

was not only devoted to control, as their masculine duty especially provided for welcoming me in their homes. Furthermore, I arrived in the family's neighborhood at the first day of Ramadan in August 2011. Although Abu Yusef, the head of the house where I lived, underlined I was not obliged to fast like them, I chose to do it in order to bodily experience that special period of the year. Therefore, I also shared people's hunger, thirst, weakness and boredom, which characterize Ramadan time. This let me be included in the important exchange of invitations that intensified the sense of closeness among relatives and friends during fasting, since the break of the fast at sunset was an essential moment of gathering and sharing. Slowly, thanks to my immersion in the social life and the private lessons of Arabic I took from a friend in Bethlehem, I also became able to speak.

The second reason for the choice to conduct an ethnography of everyday life was that I needed to be socially included in order to study personal life and intimacy, and I knew that living together was a good way to achieve it. Those dimensions of social life were not delimited spheres that I could investigate as an external observer. Moreover, living with Palestinians constituted both a desire and a personal challenge, although it sometimes appeared to be a reckless choice. I soon became conscious that this achievement was not guaranteed at all by "sharing" and "empathy" as self-evident methodological tools. Yet, I needed to get out of my first research steps in Ramallah, where a huge international presence made me one of the many Western people who went around without most of the Palestinian people actually realizing what we were doing, hanging as we are in the mythical worlds of "development aid", "human rights", "solidarity activism", "political tourism", "journalism", and "research". In Ramallah I experienced the difficulty of getting in touch with Palestinians, who were not part of the internationals' circuits. Furthermore, it was there that I first perceived the social and economical inequality that crossed the Palestinian society, and I did not want to be swallowed by the middleclass social life I was expected – and subtly obliged – to conduct as a foreigner. I probably naively thought that a Palestinian village situated in a different area could be less exposed to the Western presence, but in al-Bab I actually found a *place* from where to start, a little, tragically circumscribed but unexpectedly open location where people welcomed me in their houses and in their lives. I remained a Westerner (*ajnabīa*) there, too, of course, but I benefited from the chance to mix with people and share their daily life.

This chance was a gift: it involved the reorganization of the house spaces to leave a room for me, in a family with six children where the oldest of them already slept on thin

mattresses arranged on the ground in the living room at night. My presence also required a fundamental sharing of the family resources: above all, food and water, in a context where income can be as intermittent as the water supply. Ultimately, this was given to me for free, like Palestinian hospitality provides for. This was – I think, retrospectively – the most important condition, which let me experience an effective reciprocity based on moral obligations and counter-gifts. Without monetary links I was suddenly introduced into the domestic community and its social hierarchy: throughout my ongoing mistakes and repeated frustrations, and after people’s careful evaluation of my moral qualities, I was finally accepted and included as a “respectable girl” (*muḥtarama*). Cohabitation was not a value in itself, it had to be gained.

For more than seven months I lived in the *ḥāra*, an extended family’s neighborhood hosting more than one hundred people, who belonged to four patrilineal groups referring to a common ancestor. The *ḥāra*, a word which often appears in this text, constituted not only my Palestinian hosts’ domestic space, but it also became my home for a long time. Like Lila Abu-Lughod pointed out, observation and socialization are coincident processes in the production of anthropological knowledge (Abu-Lughod 1986). In this sense building intimacy with the people whose lives I was studying was both a methodological tool and an inevitable output of my ethnographical work. This is not to say that this kind of ethnographical relationship necessarily implies empathy: on the contrary, my experience in the field was constitutively crossed by opposition and conflict, and further, conflict could especially emerge when intimacy had been achieved. The *ḥāra* condensed – and let me experience – at least three dimensions of “intimacy” in the Palestinian lives: the intimacy connected to the sense of a place, where “locality” is lived as a “structure of feeling” (Appadurai 1996); the intimacy depicted by the idea of “closeness”, which is especially represented by the kinship ideology; finally, the intimacy expressed in people’s affective life, in which I inevitably took an active part. I hope to have succeeded in giving depth to all these three dimensions throughout my text. At the same time it was not only living in the *ḥāra*, but also going out of it, which helped me to grasp what “intimacy” meant in people’s life: a second phase of my fieldwork was thus devoted to building relationships with other people and families in the village, and more generally in the Bethlehem area, while I moved to live by myself in a nearby town. My conscious production of a “distance” from my Palestinian family, who proved to be quite benevolent in negotiating it, further informed the idea of “intimacy” that I was studying: feeling of missing and nostalgia thus emerged. Furthermore, from this “distance” my

visits, the exchange of gifts, and my participation in the main events of people's life (weddings, deaths, accidents, sicknesses) kept my personal relationships alive and responded to the affective ties and moral obligations I had with people in the field. Living in the *ḥāra* and later taking a distance from it was also useful to apprehend the often subtle distinctions between “public” and “private” spaces and social situations in everyday life.

Such an immersion, however, did not let me collect my fieldwork materials in a very “canonical” way: one of the justifications I gave to my Palestinian family in order to move and live by myself was also my need to be alone, think, write my diary, and read. This justification was mainly welcomed by derision: “She needs to have calmness!”, Abu Yusef's wife explained to other people while laughing. The need to be alone was comprehensibly a strange need for a family made of more than one hundred people. Furthermore, it could look like a sort of refusal and disloyalty, so it had to be derided. At the beginning, while living in the *ḥāra*, I consecrated time for writing and reading at night, when I was alone in my room.

The first phase of my fieldwork, that lasted quite a long time, was dedicated to building a mutual trust between me and the people whom I was meeting in the field. I did not mean to act like a “spy”, nor as a policewoman, in a context where such figures are not only abstract ideas, but very concrete realities. I did not want people to feel “observed” or “studied” by me: for most of my fieldwork I almost never wrote down notes in front of them, I did not ask for interviews, I did not listen only to what interested me, I did not try to determine their time on the basis of my time (the time of questioning, writing, recording...).

Furthermore, in the context of my research making interviews was not so evident. The issue of the memory on the Nakba did not cause me so many problems, because most of people were enthusiastic to speak about that and did not mind to be recorded – the only difficulty was to find people still alive, and I could find only a few. On the contrary, work and friendship, both concerning Palestinian men's experience in Israel, constituted more sensitive issues and I finally got used to the refusals and the suspicion that my recorder – more than me – engendered. I was overtly explained that people feared to talk because they could not know where their voice would end up. Technology obviously reminded them of the widespread Israeli system of surveillance, and my continuous crossings of the Israeli borders, where I was actually inspected by the Israeli authorities – especially at

Ben Gurion airport – could not calm people’s worries. For these reasons I conducted recorded interviews mainly with the representatives of the Palestinian institutions I visited: the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, the Water Authority, the Labor Office, the village association – while the director of the Civil Liaisons Office refused to be recorded. In my informal interactions with people, before asking to have an interview, I tried to establish a personal connection that would mitigate their possible diffidence. I also learnt to detect when the right moment could be. Palestinian people who were already publicly exposed as activists – a minority of the people that I encountered – usually did not have problems being interviewed: the problem with them was to distinguish my ethnographical work from the journalistic questioning they had got used to. Moreover, if trust and a long-lasting knowledge actually made some recorded conversations possible, on the other hand they could also become the cause of refusing an interview, as if the interview would have “betrayed” our personal relationship: “What you have already taken is enough”, a friend peremptorily answered me when I proposed him to discuss about his personal connections with Israelis. People both refused to feel “objectified” by knowledge and to become identifiable “subjects” of speech: the interview engendered both of these fears. Like I will explain in this writing, I sometimes chose to risk exposing my demands in order to see what happened, as a way to apprehend the limits of the public discourse. In fact, I soon realized that in people’s perception the interview-form clearly contributed – or at least it was considered liable to contribute – in delineating the publicness of their speech. This is why the borders of the “public” and the “private” became part of my ethnographical knowledge thanks to my repeated failures in the field, which were accompanied by the anxiety to “produce” documentation.

Because of this general attitude of diffidence I rarely wrote in my notebook while speaking with people or spending time with them, except for the last months of my fieldwork, when relationships had become solid and I felt more at ease to address specific issues. The recorded material is thus a little amount if compared to my written diaries and all the experiences that remained impressed in my memory. A deep attention to people’s life and words, together with my prolonged and affectively intense participation in their life, was certainly my main ethnographical tool, which may give my knowledge an artisanal character, but hopefully a quite precise one.

In my work the Palestinian men’s point of view prevails. This is also why I explicitly focused on masculinity as an object of investigation while writing this

dissertation. However, women's social life – of which I was also part while living in the *ḥāra* – was central to understand the organization of social reproduction in the domestic economy, the values attached to work, and the politics of personal relationships and selective ties in which women played an essential role. My work may run the risk of reproducing binary opposition between the feminine and the masculine as coincident with inside/outside spaces, or the “private” and the “public”, so that women could appear only as silent agents relegated to the “private” sphere of children's care and domestic affairs. At the same time the focus on the Palestinian masculine labor in Israel and on personal connections with Israelis inevitably let my fieldwork overcome the limits of most of the Palestinian women's mobility and experience – at least for what concerned the women whom I daily dealt with. However, I focused on the distinctions between personal and political, private and public, just starting from an analysis of the domestic milieu and its internal dynamics. If Palestinian men's voice and experience is highlighted in this writing, I hope to have shown that it is only through their relational character that they took form, as much as women's and children's worlds are complex and internally heterogeneous social fields, where social norms are not merely reproduced, but also contested and possibly modified.

Contrarily to many women anthropologists who conducted their ethnographies in Arab and/or Muslim societies, I could greatly benefit from contacts with men during my fieldwork. Although I was obviously subjected to general norms of sexual morality and sex separation in most occasions, such norms could also be arbitrarily suspended on me as a foreigner. If I was prevented to attend exclusively masculine forms of gatherings, like the sheep market in Bethlehem or the ritual of conflicts resolution in the *ḥāra*, I also had access to feminine spaces and information from which men were excluded. In this sense my position was nearer to the children's one, for their possibility of moving between masculine and feminine spaces thanks to their role of connection between the two. Generally, however, in the Palestinian houses I used to attend during the fieldwork sex separation was not normatively enforced among the family members. The enactment of sex separation was another aspect that helped me to distinguish “private” and “public” situations, even when both occurred in the domestic spaces of the house or the family neighborhood. For example, sex separation was displayed during visits from people – even relatives – who came from outside the same domestic space, or during weddings and funerals, which are public events by definition: being included as a member of the family, or representing a single, foreign guest in most of the houses, my presence did not

necessarily produce the same kind of sexual separation, so that I could always deal with men as well as with women in most cases. While living in al-Bab, I could also meet unemployed men who remained in the “women’s realm” – the domestic space – for most of the time. When I started to follow peasants and shepherds in their work, in order to study their mobility in a militarily controlled area, the presence of children, who were expected to help adults in their work, let any possible ambiguity generated by a sexually mixed situation disappear. Furthermore, especially when I started to live by myself, my life resembled a “masculine” life because I could move alone almost everywhere. Although this constituted also a vulnerability and a potential threat to my reputation, on which I had to pay attention if I wanted to have good relationships with people, my male friends could come and visit me, thanks to their freedom to move, while my young female friends could not. Generally, as a foreign girl I was subject to social control, but not in the same ways that Palestinian girls and women usually experienced. For most of women this different treatment did not produce any scandal, since it also contributed in highlighting their moral difference as Muslim women. At the same time my morality could be linked to Palestinian Christians in the Bethlehem area, and in a few occasions women made clear that I would be better not to marry a Muslim man, implicitly stating that our moral difference had to be kept along the boundaries of different religious groups. However, in general my conduct was firstly judged by my everyday interactions with people rather than my abstract belonging to a certain religious or national group.

The possibility to deal with Palestinian men gave me the chance to join some friends who used to cross the Green Line through the hills in order to reach Jerusalem. Palestinian women never did, at least the women who lived in al-Bab. For some of my male friends this was also a way to take me on a trip in the nature. Initially, the risk of being caught by the Israeli patrol guards let me wonder about my own possible responsibility in exposing people to such a risk. If that would have happened – and fortunately it never really happened – the consequences for me and for them would have been very different, or at least I supposed so. However, they regularly moved in an ambiguous space where borders were often superposed and confused, so that the power of borders became arbitrary. Further, most Palestinians in al-Bab had got used to dealing with Israeli soldiers and border police, so they had developed good skills in communicating with them, and especially in telling the right lies to them. They had a precise knowledge of the space in which they moved, so they also had an ability to detect danger and strategies to limit the risk of being arrested – although this was not enough to

avoid it in some cases. Most of them moved by donkey and maintained the Israeli authorities had got used to seeing Palestinians from the village walking around with their animals. It actually worked so, and when some of my family's men happened to be stopped by the border police while going to work in Israel, they said they were looking for their donkey that had run away, and were left free. After my initial care I decided to join this kind of masculine mobility. In any case, people continued to cross the border despite my personal fears, and my perception of risk did not correspond to theirs. This was what convinced me to move with them at the edge of the Israeli law.

Some clarifications need to be made for what concerns personal relationships between Palestinians and Israelis, which constituted one of the main objects of my research. Like I have introduced through the image of the threshold, firstly I verified the existence of such social contacts while living with Palestinians. I followed my Palestinian interlocutors in the way they managed these relationships. My interest did not derive from a necessity to produce an "impartial" knowledge through an equal access to the two sides, nor a problem of assuring a supposed "completeness" to the research. My research focus remained on the Palestinians' perspective. I started to study their relationships with Israelis because they were part of their everyday experience. My research remained a study of the Palestinians' ordinary life in a social, economical and political context marked by the Israeli occupation and settler colonization of the West Bank.

When I began meeting Israelis autonomously for the purpose of my inquiry, I tried to avoid being introduced to their Palestinian acquaintances by them. I was perfectly conscious that hanging around with Israelis could radically undermine the Palestinians' trust towards me. Further, the research motivations that defined my strategic moves were determined by my personal political and ethical positioning, which recognized a fundamental power asymmetry between the two sides, and considered the Palestinians' life as terribly affected by the Israeli domination system based on military occupation and settler colonial expansion. It would be naïve to say that the process of knowing was separated from my personal evaluation of the situations I encountered. Suspicion, discomfort, rage and even repulsion were part of my personal experience in the field. My personal positioning constructed also the moral and political limits of my research: when I was pushed to join a Palestinian who used to meet and organize activities with settlers from the Gush Etzion area, I could not go forward. He and other young Palestinians asked me to go with them and a settler girl to a place around Jericho where there were music

and art expositions, but I refused. The focus on the everyday helped me to keep the direction I was following: those were extraordinary realities that the Palestinians I used to meet in the field had never experienced, and overtly contested.

I met Israelis through my Palestinian connections and I saw them both with Palestinians and alone. Palestinian men could speak Hebrew, given their long-lasting attendance of Israel because of work, but Palestinian women did not, so when Israelis visited Palestinians in their homes women were inevitably excluded because of the language and sex separation. This latter, however, was deployed only when Israeli men were there, while Israeli women were welcomed by anyone. Since I could not speak Hebrew, either, my conversations with Israelis were in English, and I could not focus on verbal interactions between them and the Palestinians.

With most of Israelis I had long recorded conversations. They were curious about me and considered me as an “insider” in the Palestinian society. Most of them were part of the Israeli leftist white middleclass; some of them were also scholars. My discomfort in meeting them did not mainly stem from personal considerations about how a single person was, but from my general disorientation, which inevitably produced my detached attitude. However, with almost all of them I had quite frank discussions about our personal positioning with regard to the political situation, and I have tried to show in my text how the Israeli side revealed to be full of doubts, contradictions and unease.

Some of the Israeli people I met also helped me to go back to Israel because of my research, and consciously offered me the privilege of their citizenship as a guarantee vis-à-vis the Israeli authorities. All of them knew that I was living in the West Bank and I was doing my Ph.D. research there. At Ben Gurion airport I used to say I was visiting them, and they allowed me to provide Israeli officials their names and telephone numbers. When I had to apply for the extension of the visa at the Israeli Ministry of the Interior, I could give a fake residence address inside Israel thanks to the availability that some Israeli acquaintances offered me. In this way I also became part of an ambiguous but real system of exchanges and solidarity, which crossed the Israeli-Palestinian borders, and that the Palestinians with whom I lived had already experienced for a long time.

Thesis plan

“At the borders of friendship” alludes to the moral and political limits which define the Palestinian people’s experience in the context of spatial imbrication and political separation created by the Israeli occupation and settler colonization of the West Bank. My writing has been organized into four main chapters, which analyze the Palestinians’ moral and political subjectivities from different perspectives. Each chapter tries to answer a specific question: how do Palestinians living under complete Israeli control represent themselves with respect to the rest of the Palestinian population? Which are the “inclusive” mechanisms that the Israeli power displays towards these Palestinians in order to legitimize and reproduce itself? What kind of social relationships do these mechanisms engender in the Palestinians’ daily life, and how are national belongings so redefined? What does the “place” of the political become, when the very nature of the Israeli state cannot encompass an exclusively Jewish population and the Palestinian National Authority is disconnected by a part of the population which it is supposed to represent?

In the first chapter I introduce the context of my fieldwork focusing on the social identification as *fellāḥīn* (peasants), through which Palestinians in my fieldwork represented themselves. Peasants’ narratives and memories are linked to their violent dispossession due to the creation of the Israeli State, but also reveal present fractures in the Palestinian society. Under this perspective I try to analyze how “peasantry” replaces the political substance of the refugee condition through an analysis of the Palestinians’ social fragmentation. At the same time “peasantry” as a specific way of inhabiting space highlighted the “public secrecy”, which overwhelms the historical dispossession of the Palestinians as a whole. In the context of the progressive expansion of the Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank, agriculture has become a political practice claiming the Palestinian ownership over the land. I analyze such a politization through the different ways Palestinian agriculture has been appropriated by both Palestinian and Israeli activists in the public arena, showing the conjuncture and disjuncture of emerging political subjectivities in a colonial Israeli-Palestinian space. The question of spatial borders and territoriality is rather examined through the conception of Israeli-Palestinian “neighborhoods”, which defies the sense of a nationalized locality, but simultaneously bears contradictory political implications.

After examining the tension between the social identification with peasantry and the structural dismantlement of Palestinian peasants' life, the second chapter focuses on Palestinian labor in Israel as an apparatus of the Israeli colonial governmentality. In the context of the Palestinians' growing economical dependence on Israel since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, a special attention is dedicated to Palestinian laborers' experience. I examine labor through three dimensions. The first dimension takes into account the values that work has in the Palestinian domestic economy: I especially explore the norms regulating masculinity in the context of the Palestinian social hierarchy, where the tension between personal dependence and the ideals of freedom and autonomy played a fundamental role in defining the individuals' social "respectability". The second dimension concerns labor as an apparatus through which Israel controls the Palestinian population, disarticulating while simultaneously reproducing relations of personal dependence among Palestinian men, and between Palestinian workers and Israeli employers. An analysis of the institutional context inaugurated by the Oslo Agreements aims to describe how the increasing personalization of work relations between Palestinians and Israelis is linked to the "civil liaisons" and "security coordination" between Palestinian and Israeli institutions. Further, I try to show how, in such a context, relations of personal dependence are rather transformed into power relations. The third dimension considers labor in Israel as a site of the Palestinians' moral subjectivation: work becomes an "ethical substance" that also defied Palestinian laborers' construction as political subjects. Through the ethical effort engaged by the experience of labor in Israel, the issue of "friendship" emerges from work relations conceived as "human relationships".

In the third chapter I go deeper into questioning personal relationships and their relation to the political. The category of "friendship", which is used to define some of the Palestinian workers' relationships with certain Israelis, is firstly examined through the articulation of language with social practices in everyday life. An analysis of the practical and discursive dimensions of "friendship" in the Palestinian society reveals the mutual interdependence of the ideas of "closeness" and "intimacy" in defining people's moral and affective life. I later present three ethnographical cases concerning personal ties between Palestinians and Israelis, showing how "friendship" can be differently thought and mobilized in relation to moral and political values. Ultimately, such personal bonds are framed by the perceived fragility of social relationships among Palestinians themselves. On the basis of the Palestinians' moral and political distinctions, in the fourth

chapter I question “life” as the core of the political. If “human morals” contribute in defining the legitimacy of a job and the possibility of a friendship, according to Palestinians what fundamentally separates them from Israelis is a different attitude towards “life”. While exploring the Palestinians’ conceptions of life, I refer to an ethnolinguistic analysis of the three words to say “life” in Arabic. Furthermore, I examine the tension between the normalization of Palestinian deaths under the Israeli security regime and their social death in the contemporary social and economical context. Focusing on the social and cultural treatments of death, I question how the Israeli necropolitics transforms mourning in a public expression of the Palestinians’ collective suffering, and enforces a “politics of life” which redefines life beyond physical survival. Hanging between life and death like “living dead”, the Palestinians’ quest for a “respectable life” questions the ethical dimension that survival can acquire under political and structural violence.

FROM REFUGEES TO FELLAḤÎN

1.1. Which border?

1.1.1. Domesticity and conflict: positioning al-Bab

When I visited al-Bab for the first time with a Palestinian friend, I was astonished by the beauty of the place. I did not know where I was exactly on the map, but there was a breathtaking, airy view on the surrounding hills: we oversaw a valley which opened up to green forests (I did not know yet those forests were one of the Jewish National Fund endeavors), while the village, on the opposite side, consisted of little cement houses which spread from terraced slopes cultivated with olive trees, assembled on the tops of the hills and then climbed down in internal slopes, where fruit trees mixed with almond trees, prickly pears and wild sage, and where fields were separated by dry stone walls. There was an “inside” and an “outside” of the village, this I knew: my Palestinian friend, an architect, was researching there to consider the impact of the separation wall on the village, which was supposed to be completely surrounded by the Israeli barrier (photo 7, figure 12). The construction of the wall had started some years before, in 2009, and works seemed to proceed slowly: the village actually was a huge, open-air construction site. We had lined the wall entering the village by car: new houses were expanding in the Israeli settlement on the other side of the barrier, which had already been erected in this area of the village. Palestinians and Israelis could look at each other through their windows, I thought: the height difference of the ground did not let the eight-meter cement blocks hide people from each other. Contrarily to the settlement expansion, the construction of some Palestinian houses had been stopped by the Israeli authorities, like a multi-storey but unfinished house in front of the wall demonstrated: it kept standing unchanged, big and empty like a house of phantoms, and even until the end of my fieldwork four years later. I was told that Israeli settlers had complained because Palestinian houses prevented them enjoying the view of that wonderful hilly horizon, probably one of the reasons which justified their residence there (photo 8).

The need of construction permits and house demolitions enacted by Israel were both peculiar – even if not unique – features of this village, which after the Oslo Agreements (1993-1995) had found itself under complete Israeli control. My friend took me to the area where most of demolitions had occurred: she indicated a little house below us, which

had been demolished and reconstructed three times. The head of the family and his boys had slept in tents in their garden to rebuild the house each time, and I was later told that every family of the village had sent men to help in the reconstruction. My friend took me to visit Ghassan, who later became one of my dearest friends in the village: contrary to his neighbors, his house had not been demolished, it had simply been left outside the separation wall surrounding the village, so that his family remained isolated from the populated area. My architect friend wanted to verify how the tunnel construction was progressing: Israeli authorities had spent one million dollars to build an underground way which ran under the separation wall and its related patrol road, in order to reconnect Ghassan's family to the village. Ghassan could benefit from a privileged communication with Israeli soldiers, who had to be informed every time someone wanted to visit him. Furthermore, he was the only one provided with the key to open the gate inside the tunnel and people who did not belong to his family were prevented to sleep at his place at night. Palestinian houses were not only repeatedly destroyed, they were structurally integrated in the architecture of the Israeli occupation: Palestinians were left living and slowly suffocating in their own lands. Until today I sometimes hear people asking: does al-Bab still exist?

I will call this village "al-Bab" ("the door" in Arabic) for several reasons. First, it really lies at the door of Jerusalem, whose majestic urban expansion can be admired on the other side of the valley where the Green Line runs. JNF forests of conifers – a weird green stain in dry, rocky mountains – expand at the outskirts of southwestern Jerusalem residential neighborhoods, which mirror al-Bab neighborhoods on the other side of the valley. Sitting in al-Bab at night one can enjoy the disquieting but wonderful sight of the Jerusalem lights spreading from the opposite hills, almost reaching the Palestinian village but never really touching it. Among infinite lights a huge shopping mall dominates the scene. Forests and urban planning, nature and modernity are perfectly combined here: a little picture of the Israeli splendor. With the city sparkling in front of you, the night in the village seems to be even darker, and silence more silent: however, even if Al-Bab stays in the shadow, upon its sky the stars shine more brightly and silence is dotted with the barks of stray dogs which wander among human dwellings while people are sleeping, like Israeli soldiers sometimes do, too.

Al-Bab looks at Jerusalem as a threshold in its paradoxical impossibility to define where one begins and the other ends: they are two unattainable points of the same line. Bethlehem, the nearest Palestinian urban center, lies hidden a few kilometers away, but it

is expanding Jerusalem which al-Bab faces. The village actually constitutes an opening into “the holy one” (“*al-Quds*”, like Jerusalem is called in Arabic): according to some villagers the etymology of its real name stems from the verb “to open”, since the village is told to have served ‘Omar Ibn al-Khattab as an entrance to take Jerusalem. This is a special glory for a Muslim village, which can so inscribe itself in Islamic history and claim a stronger tie to a Muslim Jerusalem. If for Muslims going and praying in al-Aqsa mosque, the third most important Islamic place in the world after Mecca and Medina², should be a normal practice, some Palestinians actually walk through al-Bab hills in order to reach the holy city because they are forbidden to enter Israel legally. From the time of the Islamic conquest, and despite less glorious outputs, al-Bab remains an opening for Palestinians who want to cross the Israeli border covertly, like it happens in some other Palestinian villages on the border of the Green Line, where the wall has not been completed, yet. Furthermore, despite its current administrative affiliation with Bethlehem Governorate, the social and economical life of al-Bab has been historically linked to Jerusalem, since the city was the main commercial center of the area and the place of the “market”, where Palestinian peasant women went to sell their vegetables walking from their village in the paths through the hills.

Today al-Bab itself consists of many gates (*abwāb*). Israeli authorities put yellow gates in border areas to ban Palestinians from having access to them. This is an ordinary practice to take more Palestinian land, suddenly declared under Israeli control. One day I went to visit ‘Ala, a man who had settled in his father’s land in a piece of the village which was outside the wall path and the Israelis considered it as a part of Jerusalem Municipality. This man lived *outside* a yellow gate situated in a dirt road, which led to his little stone house and went ahead until a checkpoint. My friend and I had to open the gate to be able to pass by car. Fortunately, it was unlocked. We sat with ‘Ala and started to chat: the checkpoint was about one hundred meters below us, in the valley. A military

² The mosque receives millions of devotees from all over the world, especially during the month of Ramadan. While I am writing confrontations occur between Israeli soldiers and Muslim worshippers in *al-Haram ash-Sharīf*, “the Noble Sanctuary”, which Jews consider the Temple Mount. Al-Aqsa mosque, situated in the Muslim neighborhood of Jerusalem old city and situated in the esplanade of the mosques under the administration of the Jordanian *waqf*, concentrates religious devotion and political tensions. After Sharon’s walk in the esplanade and the outbreak of the second Intifada (the Intifada “al-Aqsa”) in 2000, it kept being the setting of violent clashes between Muslim prayers and the Israeli army, which increased in 2014, when Jewish settlers started to enter the esplanade protected by Israeli soldiers. The so called “temple movement”, an amalgam of Jewish organizations which aims at the reconstruction of the second temple (destroyed by Romans in 70 AD) in its original place, has radicalized in last years and received funds and support by the Israeli government and Jerusalem municipality (Ir Amim-Keshev 2013). Al-Aqsa is a typical example of the conflicts over the political control of the space for which the Israeli army is one of the main actors, deployed to defend the so claimed Jewishness of the Israeli State.

jeep left the checkpoint, it remounted the dirt road and stopped at the gate: soldiers got out from the car and started to yell into a megaphone: “Come and close the gate!”. They screamed nervously addressing to ‘Ala because my friend and I had left the gate open. The soldiers kept screaming, standing next to the gate. ‘Ala stood up and started to walk towards the soldiers in a tired way. My friend and I remained at ‘Ala’s place and looked at what happened from a distance. The soldiers made ‘Ala close the gate by his own hands and then let him go. They did not bother us even though they could see we were there, they just wanted the gate closed and a Palestinian who voluntarily accepts to shut himself in their *ad hoc* prison. On the other hand ‘Ala had no intention to abandon his father’s land: “I am strong” (*anā qawī*), he used to say while crying.

The yellow gate that relegated ‘Ala to the outskirts of the village, in a sort of “no man’s land” where Israeli sovereignty was claimed over lands owned by Palestinians, contributed to engender a zone of moral ambiguity. Al-Bab inhabitants knew ‘Ala: he was a refugee’s son who had always been living in a camp before deciding to settle in his father’s land in the village. Like in Ghassan’s case, Israeli authorities had proposed ‘Ala to sell his land and to share the profits coming from the construction of a hotel which was supposed to be built there. Similarly to Ghassan, ‘Ala had refused all Israeli proposals. However, ‘Ala lived in his father’s little stone house by himself and his place was often visited by international activists, Palestinian guys coming from the Bethlehem area and Israelis belonging to what Palestinians generally define as “the peace movement” (*harakat is-salām*). Furthermore, his proximity to the checkpoint produced strange and recurring contacts with Israeli soldiers. Since in the village everybody knew that ‘Ala was an alcohol drinker and boys and girls gathered together at his place, this area started to be considered as a “zone of illegitimacy” (*manṭiqa ḥarām*) by other villagers. Due to the moral ambiguity of ‘Ala’s place and to his habitual contact with the Israeli army, people began to suspect him of being an Israeli spy (*jasūs*). Ultimately, ‘Ala was not only settled in a politically contested and highly militarized area, but he was also excluded by the village social life. In this sense al-Bab constituted a Palestinian-Israeli space where moral borders intersected administrative divisions and political cleavages in a constantly provisional and uncertain way, giving birth to a widespread feeling of suspicion.

Of course, I started to perceive how suspicion constructed people’s life some time later. When I arrived in al-Bab I just saw the wall – an enormous, grey and horrible presence – like most of the foreigners who disembark in Palestine do. Surprisingly, when I started to live with people in the village the wall disappeared: it was not their main

interest, nor the main cause of their rage or fear. The wall was for them an inert matter which still could be bypassed and overcome, children simply walked in its shadow to go to school. When I arrived in 2011 the barrier had been erected only at the entrance of the village, next to the Israeli settlement. Large parts of al-Bab on the Jerusalem side were still open, although dynamite and excavations to establish the wall path, a very long dirt road that completely surrounded Palestinian houses and separate them from agricultural lands, had upset these areas. Differently from the inert cement blocks, this road swarmed with life: workers, bulldozers, border patrols, jeeps, planners and Israeli registered cars, this was what Palestinians actually feared. “Here are soldiers!” (*fī jaysh!*), “soldiers are up!”, “soldiers are over there!”: children and young people usually gave the alert and that strange movement was supervised from the highest points of the village or from the top of the roofs, especially when it scattered from the wall path towards the inner populated area.

The issue of the Israeli military presence in the village was discussed during my first visit at Abu Jamil family, who had accepted to welcome me in their house. One of my friends’ father, who came from a refugee camp, contacted the head of the family asking for his availability in hosting an Italian Ph.D. student who wanted to conduct research in his village. When I went to visit the family, my friends from the camp accompanied me and introduced the issue. The problem was how to justify my presence at the family’s place in the case that the Israeli army found me there: my researcher identity had to be withheld in order to let my work be possible in the future – as I depended on an Israeli tourist visa – but I also wanted to avoid any possible problems for the family vis-à-vis the Israeli authorities. In fact, the Israeli suspicion is not only deployed towards “Arabs” as such, but any person who gets in touch with Palestinians can be unwanted in Israel: while entering Israel through its different borders, including Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, before being granted with a tourist visa a visitor can normally be questioned about her personal connections in the country and also about her possible intention to go to the Palestinian territories. Furthermore, we know that researchers who engage in critical thinking about the Israeli government of the Palestinian population, as well as activists, can be blacklisted and denied entrance into Israel³. Critical thinking aside, the simple choice to live among Palestinians seemed to me a

³ There is a large debate about the limits imposed on the criticism of Israel (see, among others, “The charge of Anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel and the Risks of Public Critique”, in Butler 2004: 101-127). For the purpose of my discussion I just want to underline that, in a zone under complete Israeli control, I perceived my positioning among Palestinians as a critical issue in itself.

critical point in itself, and this mostly depended on my own sense of vulnerability in a Palestinian village under complete Israeli control. My sense of vulnerability obviously reflected Palestinians' structural vulnerability in a context of power relations, which were chiefly established by making a civil unarmed population daily confronted with occupying armed forces. I also questioned if my foreign presence could endanger my host family in some ways. My friends from the camp found these worries pertinent: or better, they rose from our mutual debate. They, as people from a refugee camp, used to experience the entry of the Israeli army, which often raids camps in the night, but they did not really know how it was in that village. I later understood that these worries were *my* problem more than the family's one, since people in the village were well-accustomed to the army's presence, they knew how to deal with soldiers and, above all, they were perfectly conscious of what constituted the real dangers for them. Apparently, research was not such a big issue and I could simply be their guest (*dīfa*). Just in case we agreed to an official version: I was paying a quick visit to their daughter whom I had met at the Bethlehem university. On the other hand, at the very beginning of my stay at the family's the threat of meeting soldiers became a good justification to control my movements in the village. Furthermore, as my friends from the refugee camp had linguistically mediated my worries, my vulnerability in the village – implicitly constituted also by my status as a young unmarried woman – was overtly put under the family's protection. Finally, the head of the family welcomed me like one of his daughters. However, the mutual complicity deriving from a shared perception of threat caused by the Israeli army and its surveillance – although the reality of this threat had incomparable implications on my life and on my Palestinian friends' life respectively – increased over time, since my coming and going from Europe to the West Bank during my three-years fieldwork, passing through Tel Aviv airport or the Jordanian border, was stressed by growing expressions of nostalgia and worry.

I turned up to live in the Abu Jamil neighborhood (*ḥāra*), a domestic space which consisted of fourteen multi-storey houses and more than one hundred people. I lived in the *ḥāra* for more than seven months in August and September 2011 and between April and September 2012. In this period I also extended my social network in the village beyond the family's ties and its domestic space, profiting from a privileged position as a collectively acknowledged "guest" at a Palestinian family, which resulted in being a visiting card for getting to know other people in al-Bab. Despite my family's initial surprise and incomprehension, when I started to live by myself in a rented flat in a nearby

little town during my stay from October 2013 to July 2014 – a need which I justified by the necessity of a quieter environment to study and write – our relationship kept being strong thanks to my habitual visits, my support in specific circumstances and my loyal participation at the family's important events (weddings, funerals, sudden diseases or accidents, births...). The mutual offering of gifts remained a shared practice. At the same time my departure from the family let me enjoy a more autonomous mobility and I could build independent relationships with other people in the village. Those who had become closest to me also came to visit me in my place.

The *ḥāra* represented the residential space of a lineage: in my family's neighborhood four patrilineal groups, consisting of three generations, referred to a common male ancestor. All the people living in the *ḥāra* were linked by consanguinity ties and endogamous marriages were preferred at least until the 80s, so that the family kept being united and even women – who married their cousins – stayed in their family's environment, where they had grown up. Matrilineality remained thus effective in selective networks of feminine solidarity and as a latent counter-power to agnatic descent. Some men justified the preference for endogamy as a need to maintain the land ownership united: until today the inherited property has not been divided and individual property exists only for land purchased by one person. In fact, the *ḥāra* was founded by the “Nakba” generations: after being expelled from their original village and after wandering in different refugee camps, four brothers decided to settle in their lands left outside the Green Line (the 1949 Armistice line, that was the first Israeli border). In extremely precarious time and due to a disastrous loss of lands following the establishment of the Israeli State, it was not surprising that the family's marriage strategies aimed to limit fragmentation and dispersion. Since in peasant societies land and kinship groups are mutually constitutive, land unity had to be saved in order to preserve the unity of the agnatic group⁴. More recently, because of Palestinian land contraction due to ongoing Israeli confiscations and the construction of the separation wall, endogamy did not appear to be necessary anymore and marriage choices rather turned to create strategic alliances with well-to-do families from other villages in the Bethlehem area. Since land lost his previous economical and social prestige, Palestinian peasant families actually combined

⁴ According to Islamic right daughters are expected to inherit half of the land property due to their brothers. However, women in the *ḥāra* did not inherit: becoming part of their husband's agnatic group after marriage, endogamy let though conceive land ownership as one property of the larger patrilineal group. Today different plots of land, which are also contiguous, are merely identified with the four second-level patrilineal groups.

land property and social mobility. When endogamy was still enacted, I guess it was rather linked to the sense of moral unity which kinship ties are supposed to guarantee, in a context where social relationships are generally perceived as precarious and fragile.

Although Abu Jamil neighborhood reproduced the characteristic spatial model for a lineage, this model was not so widespread in the actual village. Only the Abu Mishmish neighborhood had similar characteristics of consanguinity and co-residence, which engendered a highly populated area made of a hundred people, sometimes still engaging in endogamous marriages. Abu Jamil and Abu Mishmish neighborhoods were situated one next to the other and occupied the upper part of a hill, looking at opposite sides. It was not accidental that the relationships between the two families had been tense for a long time and open confrontation had often occurred: even I, as Abu Jamil family's guest, was prevented to accept invitations from the opposing family. It was also not fortuitous that both families settled in an upper zone of the village as a self-defensive strategy. I was confidentially told about the strife that was given rise between the two families, who were competing for local power, by one of Abu Jamil members. This narrative mixed land control, kinship alliances, the Palestinian national discourse and the manipulative effects of the Israeli occupation. It must be situated in a particular historical background created by the 1976 municipal elections, which Israel had authorized in the West Bank, and the following establishment of the Villages Leagues. If the elections had confirmed the unequivocal consensus the Palestine Liberation Organization had gained among the Palestinian population, in 1981 Israel tried to undermine this consensus founding the Villages Leagues, "an armed, pro-Israeli militia with wide-ranging prerogatives to contain and combat the nationalist movement" (Tamari 1990: 39, see also Tamari 1983). The conflict between Abu Jamil and Abu Mishmish families began with 1976 elections: according to Abu Jamil's version, one of Abu Mishmish men was appointed as the *mukhtār* (the head) of the village despite the popular support expressed through a collection of signatures to one of Abu Jamil men. The Abu Jamil family thought that the new *mukhtār* had been imposed by the Israeli authorities thanks to a secret collaboration that led to disclosing and sabotaging the plans some *fidā'yīn* (combatants) were carrying out in the village, whom the Abu Jamil family was supporting instead. This mix of nationalistic stances and power ambitions which nurtured the conflict between two different groups, defined on the base of their internal loyalty to kinship alliance, led to target the enemies as "collaborators" of the Israeli occupying government. This strife kept alive from one generation to the other and attacks still occurred between the two

neighboring families through stones throwing and youth's clashes. Even if friendship ties linked some boys of the youngest generation, these personal relationships concerning specific individuals did not substantially affect the official standing of the two families.

The model of the *ḥāra* thus condensed “closeness” (*qarāba*) as both a physical and social proximity defining moral and political unity based on a strong solidarity and strategic alliances. However, in the same village this idea of closeness coexisted and contrasted with more “modern” views. Except for Abu Jamil and Abu Mishmish families, houses and land properties in the new village, rebuilt at the beginning of the 50s in the Palestinian lands remained outside the Green Line, were generally scattered in different areas. Because of its position Abu Jamil *ḥāra* was called “the mountain” (*al-jabal*) by the villagers living in the lower neighborhood, which had developed around a water spring. If the denomination of “*al-jabal*” primarily referred to a geographical opposition between higher and lower areas of the village, people living in the lower neighborhood distanced themselves from the idea of “closeness” based on expanded cohabitation and endogamy, which “the mountain” represented. This kind of “closeness” was in fact represented in disparaging terms, linked to chaos, noise, disorder and lack of privacy. The large number of people and the presence of a multitude of children were emphasized. On the contrary, life near the spring was considered quiet and respectful thanks to the distance between houses and families, even though the spatial organization of residence was almost informed by the same logic of patrilocality. The main aspect that seemed to differentiate the two areas was the supposed social homogeneity and closure of *al-jabal*, opposed to the presence of various patrilineal descent groups (*dūr*, pl. of *dār*, literally “house”) from different *ḥamā'yl* (pl. di *ḥamūla*)⁵ in the lower neighborhood. This distinction was also expressed by the ideal preference for exogamous marriage (“*nijawwez barra*”, “we marry outside”), although it was easily contradicted by practice. The supposed closure of “the mountain” was also linked to a strong Islamic devotion and to Abu Jamil girls' treatment, so that Abu Jamil people were sometimes defined as “fanatics” (*muta'aṣṣibīn*) and my foreign presence among them was considered odd and surprising. These comments were expressed to me with a sort of complicity, probably presuming that my ascribed belonging to a Western secular society implied an immediate appreciation of “open-mindedness” as opposed to religious devotion. However, I later understood that these comments did not really talk about the Abu Jamil family itself, but alluded to recent

⁵ Every patrilineal group (*dār*) belongs to one of the four different *ḥamā'yl*.

political struggles in the village. After the Hamas victory at the parliamentary elections of 2006 and its international boycott, followed by the Fatah-led Palestinian National Authority intensive repression of Islamist activists in the West Bank (while the same repression was conducted by Hamas against Fatah members in Gaza), political divisions also crossed the village. Some of Abu Jamil men had been expelled from the village council, where they had been legitimately elected, and had spent some time in PNA jails. Those who worked as public officials had been suspended from their jobs. Political tensions had also divided people from the same family. The modernist discourse presupposing Islamists' backwardness rather expressed conflicting political interests despite a largely shared and crosscut fulfillment of Islamic practices. Furthermore, if the modernity discourse provided an easy and comfortable resource to describe the social world through dichotomic oppositions where good and evil seemed to be self-evident, deeper conflicts existed among villagers as a direct effect of the Israeli appropriation of Palestinian resources. The appropriation of the modernity discourse thus showed how al-Bab was also open to international forces and Western hegemony on power/knowledge. Despite that, it was in peasant memory that al-Bab people found their shared social identity inscribed in Palestinian national history.

1.1.2. The past in front of us: talking lands and peasants' memory

One evening in April 2012 fireworks started to explode in the sky above Jerusalem, in the hills in front of Abu Jamil neighborhood. No fireworks were exploding above the village, where people kept sitting silently and seriously inside their houses, just watching TV: "*Il-yawm yawm in-Nakba*" ("Today is the day of the Catastrophe"), Abu Yusef, the head of my family, sadly said. Fireworks in Jerusalem were celebrating the Israeli Independence Day, no party for Palestinians.

Despite this one-day per year effort to avoid looking at the other side of the valley, the hills in front of us attracted most of people's attention when I arrived in the *ḥāra*. Particularly, it was my attention which people tried to draw towards the area where JNF forests spread at the outskirts of Jerusalem southwestern neighborhoods. An unaware observer could see only woods and a high tower on the top of the opposite hill where a red light was left on the whole night. As a new guest at the family's, all the people – men and children especially – took me to the point of the *ḥāra* which faced out to Jerusalem

and enthusiastically indicated to me those hills in front of us. That was, for them, “*al-Bab al-qadīm*”, “the old al-Bab”, their ancient village. After the Israeli militia had expelled or killed all its inhabitants during the war in 1948, the village had been blown up a couple of years later to make people forget to go back, since they had finally settled on the opposite hills and could look at their homes from the other side of the valley. JNF forests tried to unsuccessfully cover a painful emptiness filled by surviving memories and rage. The red light on the top of the high tower reminded Palestinians that they were any time watched by Israeli cameras if they tried to pass on the other side.

From the *ḥāra* people kept indicating to me the same direction, but this time they pointed out a little flat area inside “*al-Bab al-jdīd*” (“the new al-Bab”), some hundreds meters far from us, where four little stone houses overlooked fields cultivated with olive and fruit trees. These houses were four like the four patrilineal groups, which constituted the *ḥāra* today. They had been built by four brothers who had come back at the beginning of the 50s and settled in their family’s lands left outside the armistice line, after having fled and moved from a refugee camp to the other. That was the window where the Abu Jamil family could look out onto Jerusalem: their whole story – together with Palestinian people’s history – was inscribed in the hills in front of us. That was also why all Palestinians from al-Bab had been registered as refugees at UNRWA, the UN agency founded in 1949 to assist more than 750.000 Palestinians escaping from their lands following the establishment of the Israeli State and the 1948 war⁶.

The Palestinian “catastrophe” (*an-Nakba*) which occurred in 1948 has been conceived as “the key site of Palestinian collective memory and national identity”, “the focal point of what might be called Palestinian time”, “a key event in the Palestinian calendar” and “the creator of an unsettled inner time” (Sa’di & Abu-Lughod 2007: 4-5). Despite this centrality in the construction of contemporary Palestinian history and

⁶ According to UNRWA five million Palestinians are today assisted by the UN agency. The refugee status is reproduced following a patrilineal logic, from father to children. UNRWA is a humanitarian agency, which combined the bureaucratic recognition of the refugee status with aid and development missions. The protection of refugees’ rights intermingled with their primary assistance (camps establishment and management, rations, health assistance...), and projects devoted to promote work and resettlement based on the ideas of “progress” and modernization. Like many authors have shown, this multiple nature has shaped the Palestinians’ life and its social, economical and political dimensions in changing ways throughout time and in different contexts (Allan 2014, Feldman 2015, Latte Abdallah 2006, Van Aken 2003). UNRWA humanitarian policies inevitably affected the political question of refugees, hanging between temporariness and permanence in the absence of any solution concerning the refugees’ return. It is not my aim in this work to focus on the relationship between the refugee status and the special humanitarian aid dedicated to Palestinians. In the following pages I rather try to show the different political implications that the refugee condition bears in the West Bank society today.

experience, many authors have underlined the absence of studies and scholars' interest on the Nakba, denouncing an "abyssal emptiness" (Tamari 2011: 105) especially related to the experience of those who are defined as "ordinary people" ("farmers, workers and artisans" in Tamari's words). Other social categories, like "women", are said to have been neglected by the reconstruction of Palestinian memory (Sa'adi & Abu-Lughod 2007: 8). Particularly, a critique of the romantic and bucolic depiction of Palestine was moved by the generation who was born after 1948 and considered the literal and historical production on the Nakba as dominated by a bourgeois nostalgia (Mazzawi cit. in Tamari 2011: 99-105)⁷. If many researchers have recently engaged in collecting the Palestinians' narratives on the Nakba and studying their different articulations (Kassem 2011, Picadou 2006, Piniroli 2009), the denounced "emptiness" mainly questions the modes of history production. In their collection of researches on Palestinians' memories, Sa'adi and Abu-Lughod (2007) have questioned the *publicness* of memory in the production of discourses which are not necessarily part of history writing, but are "recognizable cultural forms [...] within particular social milieus": "Where are the traitor's memories, or the memories of those landowners who earlier sold their land to the Jewish colonizing agencies?", the authors have also asked, conscious of the nationalist frame which simultaneously reveals the political claims Palestinian memory essentially bears.

Starting from the parallel "emptiness" which seemed to characterize both research on the Nakba and the hills in front of me as a researcher in a Palestinian village in the West Bank, I would like to question, like Michael Taussig has suggested, "the characterization of negation as sacred surplus whose force lies entirely in the mode of revelation we seek and seek to make" (Taussig 1999: 3). Taussig referred to Walter Benjamin's comment (inspired by Plato's *Symposium*) on the difference between exposure and revelation of truth: while exposure risks to destroy the secret, revelation – in the form of the secret's self-destruction – is supposed to do justice to it. At this subtle edge the anthropologist situated the task of the "public secret", conceived as the most important form of social knowledge, that is knowing what not to know. My intention here is to focus on the modes of revelation, including my own writing in rendering Palestinians' ways of disclosing their silenced memories. We know the problem in this intermingled making of publicness and silencing is not "to give voice" to those who are

⁷ See Mazzawi, André (1997), "Memories and Counter-Memories: Production, Reproduction and Decostruction of Some Palestinian Memory Accounts about Jaffa", article presented at the Middle East Institute Studies Association annual conference, San Francisco, December 1997.

supposed to have not – risking to reaffirm hegemonic forms of authority disguised as charity – but to become able to listen: that is, in the forms of receptivity and recognizability (Butler 2009). When I saw fireworks exploding in the sky that day in April 2012, I went out to watch them – I did not know what they meant – and I found myself alone. The “public secret” is the truth people know they should not know. Like the ancient village of al-Bab had been defaced by Israeli detonators, Jerusalem fireworks celebrating the Israeli independence were one more time defacing Palestinian memory, making the violence which brought to the birth of the Israeli State a “public secret” in itself. Furthermore, a shared secret: that was Israelis’ celebrations and Palestinians’ silence – so much more than an opposition of enemies on the battleground – silence becoming a disabled way of truth telling created by joyful explosions in a dark sky. Like the Australian anthropologist has pointed out, the “clumsy hybrid” of power/knowledge that is at stake does not really imply that knowledge is power “but rather that active not-knowing makes it so” (Taussig 1999: 7).

I did not mean to focus on Palestinian memory when I began my fieldwork, but it became a condition for research. I was asked to do so by people who insisted in indicating a couple of meaningful points in the landscape, objectified through the window of their neighborhood because of their unattainability. This was the only field of recognizability in which my research was compelled to be realized. Judith Butler has defined recognizability as the historical conditions for the appearance of subjects in a common scene⁸. Looking out that window with my Palestinian family was the normative premise for our encounter: look far away in order to look at us! Children could not explain what the Nakba had been for their grandparents, but they could perfectly read the inscription of their family’s story in the land and they showed it to me. After the 1967 occupation, when fathers took their children to visit their destroyed village, children saw their fathers silently crying: this is what they, as adults, remember today. For this reason the question of memory was my point of departure, but more than reconstruction I was interested in what that memory was telling in the contemporary situation. I searched for old people

⁸ Butler has explained the relationship between recognizability and recognition through a theory of subjectivation: “If recognition characterizes an act or a practice or even a scene between subjects, then ‘recognizability’ characterizes the more general conditions that prepare or shape a subject for recognition – the general terms, conventions, and norms ‘act’ in their own way, crafting a living being into a recognizable subject, though not without errancy or, indeed, unanticipated results. These categories, conventions, and norms that prepare or establish a subject for recognition, that induce a subject of this kind, precede and make possible the act of recognition itself. In this sense, recognizability precedes recognition” (Butler 2009: 5).

who were born before 1948, I found a few of them and I conducted recorded interviews with some who agreed to do so. The most rich narrative was given to me by an old woman who was 16 years old when the Israelis attacked al-Bab: she refused to be recorded, although she spoke with me passionately. She was an unconventional woman because she preferred to live in Bethlehem alone, far from her family's land, next to the Christian family for whom she had worked her whole life. She had got married, her only child had died four days after his birth, and she had got divorced then. When her family escaped from al-Bab, they wandered and finally settled in Dheisha refugee camp in Bethlehem. Since she was the first born, her parents were old and her brothers were still young, she had started to work and provide for her parental family. Before 1948 she used to walk daily from the village through the hills in order to reach Jerusalem market and sell the vegetables her father grew in his land. When she told me about the first time she went back to the ancient village after 1948, she described her bewilderment in an unknown environment: she got lost because she could not recognize her father's land, since a fig tree – the main landmark – was not there anymore, the Israelis had cut it down.

Women's strength is central in Palestinian peasants' memory of the Nakba. Their strength is fully acknowledged by men who were born after 1948 when talking about their mothers' efforts to grow them up in very hard conditions. Strength (*quwwa*) is generally a controversial attribute of Palestinian femininity since it is mostly referred to the transgression of gender norms and often depicted as reproachable (Sa'ar 2006). However, in my fieldwork masculine narratives on the Nakba fully legitimized women's strength as both an embodied set of practices and a moral quality: women's bodies proved to be as strong as men's because they could bear unutterable physical and psychological strains, because women worked more than men, and because they were able to sustain their families alone, since in many cases their husbands had died. Feminine strength was thus legitimated by women's role in social reproduction: they were the mothers of a dispersed nation who were able to give it social continuity despite the total destruction of the Palestinian life conditions before 1948. In women's voice, however, the memory of their mothers' strength could also include a subtle criticism of gender asymmetries. Here is a piece of conversation between Imm Salama, who was 70 years old, and her grown up daughter Fatima. This conversation spontaneously arose between them during one of my interviews on the Nakba, while the old woman was describing women's life in the ancient village before 1948:

I. S.: “Once they weren’t afraid. And women were sent (*ywadda’ū il-niswān*) from al-Bab to Jerusalem to sell [vegetables] while they, the men, were sleeping in the houses. My mother told me ‘I used to come to Frikeh [an area of the village land], I picked up plumes twice in order to sell them’. You see, she went to Jerusalem to sell, she came back, she picked up fruits and she went to sell them once again, then she came back to us, by foot! And she raised us (*tarabbatnā*). We were children, and my father was still alive. She could bear (*tihmil*) to walk that way four times carrying everything on her head”.

F.: “What if she didn’t listen to him, *he* could go and sell [at her place]! And she would have stayed with her children.

I. S.: “How could he bear it (*huwa biqdar yhmil*)?!”

F.: “And wasn’t she a human being (*banī adma*)?” (she laughed)

I. S.: “But she was bearing it (*hiyya tihmil*)! Once she had to take a basket down from a high shelf in the house. My father stood up and lifted the basket to put it on her head, and said ‘I made your family bigger (*ya kabbart ‘ā’ltek*) and you broke my back!’. ‘What about me, when I go to Jerusalem don’t I break my back?’ [she thought]. He was mocking her” (Imm Salama, al-Bab 27/05/2012).

The Arabic verb *hamala* is noteworthy because it means both “to carry something” and “to bear”: women’s exertion was physical, since they walked barefoot in the paths through the hills, carried heavy baskets of vegetables on their head (old women say they could carry up to 60 kg) and raised their children, but it was also psychological, since they could endure in it while their husbands were “sleeping in the house”. Palestinian peasant women’s intense activity in bringing and selling the produces of their land to the Jerusalem market was confirmed by all the people I talked to, and testified to the organic historical link which connected al-Bab to the holy city as a commercial and religious center (the actual village is only eight km far from Jerusalem old city and about six km far from Bethlehem). To talk about the act of going to the city by walking old peasant women use the verb *ymadden*, a specific word in old Palestinian peasants’ Arabic coming from the word *madīna* (city), inexistent in classical Arabic and no more used today, since this social practice also extinguished. Imm Salama described what was a journey in the night illuminated by homemade torches, which she probably observed from her village

when she was a child: “Before ’48 women were going to Jerusalem in the night to sell in the market, they were making torches, putted gas and lighted them, and they walked with these torches: that light, another light, how many women! (*hadika id-ḍaw’, hadika id-ḍaw’, qaddīsh fī niswān!*)”.

In Palestinian peasants’ memory the Israeli seize of al-Bab in 1948 is inserted in the wider history of loss concerning Palestinian villages in western Jerusalem after the defeat of the Palestinian resistance movement, represented by the killing of its leader ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusaynī in the village of al-Qastal on 8th April 1948. The symbolic force of this killing is expressed by fear, disillusion and grief and described as a break in Palestinian national struggle and in people’s hopes. Peasants from the villages were also engaged in the resistance fight. In her memories Karima pointed out that her father was fighting beside the leader in the battle of al-Qastal and got blessed. She also remembered his sadness for the loss of al-Bab, his own village. This sadness was expressed by the refusal to eat the fruits cultivated in his land, of which the majority had been lost:

“People were selling the land in order to buy a rifle! It was expensive, a rifle! In the village there were twenty or thirty rifles, maybe fifty... At midnight men went out to keep awake and guard, to stand up. But when ‘Abd al-Qādir was killed... All Jerusalem villages were lost in the battle of al-Qastal. The day ‘Abd al-Qādir was killed, my father was in the battle: he was shot, the bullet remained in his body until his death in 1967. [...] My father knew, he kept telling, he kept crying. After we fled he has not tasted dates for three years, he could eat nothing, neither apples nor peaches” (Karima, al-Bab 18/07/2012).

‘Abd al-Qādir’s death also marked the beginning of Palestinians’ displacement, together with the terror caused by the massacre of Deir Yassin, another Palestinian village situated on the west of Jerusalem, where more than 250 civilians were killed on 9th April 1948 by the Israeli militia. The concatenation of these events and the common fate which hit western Jerusalem villages were sung like it follows:

“Oh ‘Abd al-Qādir, your mother had warned you! For al-Qastal you lost your blood! Oh ‘Abd al-Qādir, your sister had warned you! Al-Qastal made you lose your fortune! Don’t wear silky clothes because of what happened to you, oh Deir Yassin! Don’t wear your hat because of what happened to you, oh al-Bab!” (*Yā ‘Abd al-Qādir waṣṣatak immak ‘ashān*

il-Qastal ḍayya 'et dammak! Yā 'Abd al-Qādir wassatak ukhtak 'ashān il-Qastal ḍayya 'et bakhtak! Walla la ḥarrim labis il-hariri 'alli jaralik yā Deir Yassini! Walla la ḥarrim labis iṭ-ṭāqiyya 'alli jaralik yā bābiyya!)"
(Imm Salama, al-Bab 27/05/2012).

In this popular song, which an old woman recited to me, Palestinians' grief for their leader's death is also the grief for the loss of Palestinian villages on the south-west of Jerusalem, seized by the Jewish military forces to regain control over Tel Aviv-Jerusalem way. Grief expressed thus a collective mourning, represented by the prohibition to wear precious clothes usually used for celebrations (silky dress for women and hats for men). Furthermore, grief gathered all Palestinian villages under the same material and emotional conditions, and expressed the sense of belonging to one national group in displacement and despair. "All the other villages escaped to our village in 1948", explained to me Karima. Al-Bab inhabitants attended their fellows' defeat before their own. When it happened, they became refugees, too.

"We were in the village, the Jews attacked al-Qaṣṭal, they killed 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusaynī, he was the chief of the revolution, they killed him in al-Qaṣṭal. We escaped and went to Kharbat ish-Sharqī in the west of Ras Abu 'Ammar. We stayed there from June, there were summer apples, my father had a lot of trees, it was full of apples. We stayed there from June to September or August maybe, in Kharbat ish-Sharqī. All the village had run away. That night we stopped at Battir station. My father and my uncle carried our clothes, but they started to bomb the station. We got up and went to al-Baṣṭ Salīm – these were places in the old al-Bab – then we went to Beit Jala. The following day my father came by truck, he took us, we had barley, wheat and straw for animals, and we went to a village called Wadi Fukkin. We stayed in Wadi Fukkin in rainy days, we stayed in my aunt's house. We stayed there three or four months, then we went to Beit Sahour and we encamped under the olive trees, then my father found a truck and took us to Ta'āmra, we stayed six months in Ta'āmra. From Ta'āmra we came to Beit Jala, we rented a house there. Then we came back here and we dug caves. We have lived in caves for about five or seven years. They are still there in al-Khalla [an area of the new al-Bab]"
(Karima, al-Bab 18/07/2012).

Each family from al-Bab had its own story of dispersion, people did not know where to go but had continued to scatter for months, sometimes for years. Together with fear, a feeling of betrayal grew, mostly directed to the Arab armies which were supposed to defend Palestinians and were posted on the surrounding hills, and to the UN agency which was expected to assure them decent life conditions as refugees. In her very calm tone Imm Nabil told me about the rage Palestinian people felt after being forced out from their homes:

“I was eight years old when we left our village, my father lost all his land, Jews took all his land. The day Jews entered our village the Egyptian army was on the opposite hills. People cried to the Egyptian commander ‘Fight Zaghlool!’ – his name was Zaghlool – but he did not do anything. So Jews arrived and expelled us. They started to shoot at us so we ran away, they were shooting from a high ground near my father’s house. Some old people could not escape, they remained, Jews killed them in their houses, three men and a woman. [...] In al-Bab there were water sources, there were trees, there was everything! The day we left we went to al-Nafra source, then we went to al-Khalla, then near the big olive tree, then we moved to Beit Jala, then to al-‘Oja near Jericho. After seven months in al-‘Oja we went to al-Arrub refugee camp, we spent seven months there and then we moved to Dheisha camp. [...] We kept escaping because everywhere we stopped, Jews attacked us. We were running away from them because if we were caught they killed us, they shot at us so we ran away because we feared to be killed. In the camps at the beginning we slept in tents, people started to build houses later. It was the agency [UNRWA] which decided to move us from a place to another one. When we were in Jericho they transferred us because of scorpions, they came out from the ground, so the children took the scorpions, put them in cans and started to throw them against the director of the camp [to protest against the new transfer]. When I got married I was 16 years old and I came back to the village with my husband by a donkey, while my family stayed in Dheisha camp. We lived all together in a cave, I and my three sisters-in-law. I gave birth to my first child in the cave, my mother-in-law helped me. Later each one built his own house” (Imm Nabil, al-Bab, May 2012).

Imm Nabil underlined that she went back to the village by donkey because no roads existed at that time in the lands of al-Bab left outside the Green Line, where people started to return following the 1949 armistice agreement between Israel and the Arab countries involved in 1948 war (Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria). 70% of al-Bab land became part of the newborn State of Israel, while in the remaining 30% the new al-Bab was built little by little, digging caves first, then building little stone houses (*sakāyf*), until the actual cement multi-storey buildings (Figure 9). If today al-Bab inhabitants are about 2,200, they themselves consider that people from the village are actually more than 16,000, including people who continued to live in the refugee camps (with whom marriages still occur) or left for Jordan: in fact, after settling in Jericho area most of the refugees fled to Jordan during the Six Day War in 1967, which is commonly known as *an-Naksa* (the setback).

The inauguration of the first Israeli border, the Green Line, is linked to a time of particularly harsh violence in peasants' memories, since people who went back to collect fruits from their land or to graze sheep inside the new Israeli State were considered as "infiltrators", got imprisoned and could be released by paying a ransom. Many of them were killed by the border police. Violence and state repression were functional to the disruption of Palestinians' life conditions and targeted the base of their everyday subsistence: while the Israeli appropriation of most of Palestinian land and water was initially legitimized by its territorial sovereignty as an independent State, the expulsion of Palestinian people implied an eviction from their main sources of livelihood. Death is thus central to this kind of memories since it concerned the most basic and ordinary acts for living. Old peasants remember all the people who were killed in the border zone by their names and by the actions they were carrying out when they were shot: collecting water at the source or picking up fruits in their land were the most common scenes of murder. Imm Nabil remembered the following episode, which gives us an idea of how news about deaths circulated among Palestinians, probably profiting from social practices like rumors:

"When we fled from al-Bab some people used to go back and pick up fruits from their lands. Jews shot and sometimes arrested them, those who were not caught were killed, a lot of people died like that, maybe thirty. Once a woman went to pick up some figs. Jews found her there and told her 'Go home! Go to Arabs!'. She wanted to run away but they caught her,

they told her ‘Come with us!’. She refused and answered ‘May my son kill me instead!’. There was also an official of the Israeli army and his wife, the woman grabbed her by the hair to avoid being caught, so the official ordered the soldiers to shoot. They killed her. This woman lived in ‘Aida camp and was going to pick up figs for her children’ (Imm Nabil, al-Bab, May 2012).

Since these deaths were linked to some specific places, like the water source next to the Green Line – which remained the only source rich of water and available in the new al-Bab – death and violence constitute until today a living memory incorporated in the land. Like Imm Salama and her husband told me, “even trees and stones know [what the Israelis did]”. In old people’s narratives supernatural beings appear in the unpopulated valley which separates the new village from Jerusalem, where the Green Line runs. *Jinna*⁹ are told to appear where people suffered a violent death: “When someone is killed, he is possessed and his possessor (*il-mālik*) appears in his semblance”, Imm Salama explained to me. Abu Baraka, an old man whose house is today stuck between the Green Line and the separation wall, liked narrating his encounters with *jinna* who always found him unprepared: his *ability to see* them corresponded to his *inability to talk* to them. Death in the valley can still be seen but cannot be always articulated through words: that is why in Palestinian peasants’ memories the land keeps talking, while people sometimes seem to have become aphasic.

The most important form of knowledge for Palestinian peasants is thus the embodied knowledge of their land which contains their memory. For this reason displacement and social fragmentation following the Nakba are often conceived as the cause of the loss of memory affecting the generations who were born after 1948. Here is another piece of conversation, spontaneously sprung during one of my recorded interviews, between Karima and her daughter Nabila, a woman in her forties who had got married with a Palestinian living in Jordan and was back to the village for her summer holidays:

⁹ In the Koran *jinna* (sing. *jinn*) are conceived as spirits created by God from fire and their creation parallels the creation of man from clay (Koran LV 15, XV 26). Their presence in the human world is ambiguous and can be both benefic and malefic. In some Islamic contexts *jinna* can possess human bodies. From a historicist perspective, thinking about syncretism as a structural feature of every coherently organized religion, Vittorio Lanternari considered *jinna* as pre-Islamic figures which were later incorporated by Islamic monotheism (Lanternari 1997: 15, 199).

I: “They [the youngest generation] only know the name ‘al-Bab’, they don’t know the land. They don’t know whose this land, whose this house...”

N: “We don’t know the borders of the villages, ‘Ein Karem, il-Malha, Beit Jala, we don’t know their borders, we only know this is al-Bab. We don’t know. They planted trees to make forests, like you can see inside (*juwwa*) [inside Israel]”.

I: “All the mountains, aren’t they full of forests now? Vines and land remained, but they planted pine trees so people can’t recognize the land. Now do they know about the land? They don’t know. You don’t know where your land is. [...] My oldest brother knows the whole al-Bab. He knows where our land is. But they muddled it together, they took off the borders, the dry stone walls... they muddled the land all together (*khalatu il-ard fi ba‘d*), now there are no borders, how can you know? Why did they blow up the village? So that it does not appear (‘*ashān mā ybaynish*). If you go there now you can’t know there were houses”.

[...]

N: “We should write down all these facts. For example we, the generation who is in Jordan, don’t know anything. If you ask people they will say ‘I am from Jerusalem’”.

I: “But they know they are from the village!”

N: “People who are from the villages around Jerusalem say ‘We are from Jerusalem’”.

I: “Like a taxi driver I met once. I asked him ‘From where are you?’ and he said ‘We are from Dheisha camp’. I told him ‘Damned Dheisha!’, I asked him from which village, what does it mean ‘Dheisha’?! Which is your original village? He said ‘Ah, we are from Beit ‘Aṭāb’. They said they are from Dheisha, they don’t say they are from Beit ‘Aṭāb!’”

N: “You see? This is the problem!”

[...]

I: “But the families know”.

N: “They don’t know!”.

I: “They know... Every generation gives to the next one (*kul jīl y‘ṭī la-jīl*).

N: “It doesn’t give... Now you are talking about details I have never heard in my life!”

I: “You don’t know the details, but you know there was al-Bab!” (Karima, al-Bab 18/07/2012).

Nabila was not the first person I met in my fieldwork who declared not to know the “details”. My interviews often became a public occasion for young people to gather around their grandparents and listen to stories they had never heard before: the interview-form transformed old people’s knowledge into a discourse, legitimized by ethnography perceived as a form of history writing (provided by specific tools: recorder, notebooks, camera...) and rehabilitating elders’ authority as both storytellers and survivors. Children sometimes asked questions at my place. A young boy thanked me because he got to know things he had never known about his family’s story. I was surprised by this enthusiasm, but I was simultaneously disappointed about what I considered as a lack in the memory transmission throughout different generations: why did not people talk about that in their everyday life? Why did children not know what had happened to their grandparents? However, retrospectively I think the sacredness of the object we were discussing – sacredness expressed through the collective gathering, the excited curiosity, and the gratitude addressed to me – was not given by the special scene the ethnographer constructed through her interviewing, but by that silence which had accompanied the memory of the personal events which singular Palestinians experienced in their “catastrophe”. You don’t need to know the details, Karima concluded, but you must know that your village existed! And both mother and daughter knew that their village had been defaced through JNF forests: pine trees revealed concealment.

Furthermore, sacredness was also expressed by Palestinians’ fear of oblivion. This fear was represented by the refugee condition: displacement upset social borders, just like Palestinian land divisions – each plot corresponding to a patrilineal group – were cancelled by the Israeli State: “They muddled the land all together (*khalatu il-arḍ fi ba‘ḍ*), now there are no borders, how can you know?”. Land knowledge corresponds to social knowledge historically inscribed in the territory. This is why Karima also cursed the refugee camp described by a taxi driver as his homeland: “Damned Dheisha! What does it mean ‘Dheisha’?!”. What does it mean to come from a refugee camp? The contemporary Palestinian society is thought to consist of three main social groups, identified by their place of residence: peasants (*fellāhīn*, Palestinians living in villages),

city dwellers (*madanīyn*) and “people from the camp” (*mīn il-mukhayyam*). In my fieldwork experience I often perceived a latent conflict among these groups, which sometimes emerged as a social stigmatization of refugees from the camps as poor and morally ambiguous because of the social change, which they forcibly embodied. Furthermore, camps inhabitants were also blamed for being “privileged” by UNRWA humanitarian policies, since they were exempted from paying water and electricity. On the other hand city dwellers considered villagers as “those who smell like sheep”, like my Palestinian friends from Ramallah used to say to mock me when I decided to move to al-Bab, referring to villagers’ supposed distance from what is considered to be a modern way of life.

Karima pointed out that Palestinians from the camps do not know where they come from anymore: as a consequence, they lost their memory. However, like the stories of al-Bab inhabitants – who represent themselves as *fellāḥīn* despite their refugee status – show, most of the Palestinians experienced escape and displacement from their original homes: the refugee condition (*lāj’ī*) is a political status which characterizes Palestinians as one people. For this reason people from the camp are generally thought to be the main driving force for Palestinian uprisings: if the Intifada comes – and the Intifada is always liable to come – peasants say, it will start from the camps. However, in underling the coincidence between land and memory Palestinian peasants claim their cultural authenticity, expressed from specific everyday practices (eating without cutlery from one big dish, sleeping outdoors in summer...) and from agricultural expertise. The fact that I myself come from a peasant family who still owns my grandfather’s land facilitated my inclusion in the family as a peasant (*fellāḥa*) together with my love for walking in the hills and my preference for outdoor activities.

At the same time the stress on the relationship between land and memory revealed an opposition between those who are still land owners and those who lost everything in the Nakba, subtly recalling a socio-economical division which situates peasants as a rural middle-class despite their internally differentiated economical conditions. Moreover, I often heard people from al-Bab blaming their fellow villagers who remained in the camps for abandoning their land and leaving it uncultivated, ready for Israeli confiscation. Simultaneously, peasant social identification contains an inherent criticism to the political project instituted by the Oslo Agreements through the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority, as it will become clearer in the following paragraphs. The urbanized middle and upper class which was created by the concentration of power and financial

resources in Palestinian official representatives' hands is blamed for focusing on State building while the claim over Palestinian lands and refugees' return results to be neglected. "We want the land" (*bidnā il-arḍ*), like peasants in al-Bab often claimed, alludes only implicitly to the question of "return", since today the most important urgency is not to go back to their original village, but to be able to remain where they still are. Displacement and social fragmentation are current fears in Palestinian peasants' experience: claims on Palestinian memory also speak about contemporary conflicts which cross the Palestinian society today, involving different forms of political subjectivation and varying conceptions of national treason.

1.1.3. The prison-present: *fellāhīn* without land

The first time I went to take the sheep to graze with one of my family's men I realized how peasant life had become more than sixty years after the Nakba. Yazan had about twenty sheep and in summer he went daily to herd them in some uncultivated lands remained outside the separation wall, in the border zone between his village and Jerusalem, next to the Green Line. Since the construction of the wall went slowly, we could still pass through it by walking. The patrol road surrounding the wall path was one of the new military technologies introduced by the separation policy of the Israeli State to reinforce the border control from outside the barrier through a mobile police unit. If the combined wall and patrol road apparatus constituted an effective material block that separated "Israel" from Palestinians, it separated above all Palestinians from their agricultural lands, promptly confiscated by Israel for "military purposes".

At that time the patrol road was a dirt road where trucks and bulldozers went and came to uproot, dig, flatten, load up, carry earth, stones and corpses of trees: the time of concrete, iron, rubber and plastic had not come, yet. This did not exactly correspond to the pleasant bucolic landscape that characterized the Palestinian rural imagery described in literature, since we, suddenly become smaller human beings with our even smaller animals, had to breathe the dust trying to avoid giant machines (Photo 6). I was not so conscious that we were walking in a sensitive zone: if the wall and the patrol road were not completed yet, the Israeli border police was already there. While walking in a foggy atmosphere, something suddenly started to honk at us from behind: that was how patrol guards, invisible in their big and armored jeep, ordered us to stop. Instinctively, I did not stop and

continued to walk: I got afraid and I did not know what to say. On the contrary, Yazan stopped and started to calmly answer the policemen's questions, speaking with them through the window of their jeep. Their first problem was who I was, not really the fact that we were crossing a border. In his fluent Hebrew Yazan explained that, as his brother was a professor at Birzeit University and I was one of his foreign students, I simply wanted to enjoy a walk in the hills in that springtime day. One of the policemen made a sign by hand to invite me to get closer. I did not need to add anything to Yazan's story, but I was asked to show my passport. I bashfully answered that I had left it at home. Actually, I did not know that my passport was necessary for grazing sheep. My naivety maybe convinced the policemen, who turned to Yazan. One of them had got nervous and specified it was forbidden for his sheep to go beyond the wall. Enduring in his relaxed attitude Yazan replied that he could not see any signpost that would indicate the ban for sheep. Left without words, the border guards finally left and continued their way in the dirt patrol road, while we were able to get out of the dust and walk towards grass and still-living trees.

This visual nebula where blurry human beings moved in an uncertain and upset landscape, made of a dusty foginess where only mechanical actions appear to be clear – although their specific purposes are not always so – well describes my personal effort in trying to distinguish things and people in a paradoxically mixed and overlapped Palestinian-Israeli social space. This mixture evidently derived from the expansion of Israeli sovereignty into Palestinians' lands and the colonial relationship, which was developed through this kind of intense though asymmetric encounters. After resettling in the lands remained outside the borders of the Israeli State at the beginning of the 50s, villagers had to face continuous changes in the administrative and political status of their land. Following 1967 Israeli occupation half of the new al-Bab was unilaterally declared by Israel as part of Jerusalem Municipality, including half of the Palestinian populated area¹⁰. At the beginning of 70s some of the village land was confiscated to built two

¹⁰ After the Six-Days war Israel occupied East Jerusalem, under Jordanian rule until 1967, the Syrian Golan Heights and the Egyptian Sinai peninsula (Fig. 5). Sinai was given back to Egypt in 1982, while East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights were unilaterally annexed by the Israel State. For the purpose of my discussion it is important to note that after 1967 war Israel annexed also part of the West Bank to the municipal boundaries of West Jerusalem, and imposed Israeli law there: "These annexed territories included not only the part of Jerusalem that had been under Jordanian rule, but also an additional 64 square kilometers, most of which had belonged to 28 villages in the West Bank, and part of which belonged to the municipalities of Bethlehem and Beit Jala. Following their annexation, the area of West Jerusalem tripled, and Jerusalem became the largest city in Israel" (See B'Tselem, "The Legal Status of East Jerusalem and its Residents", in http://www.btselem.org/jerusalem/legal_status, accessed on 24/07/2015).

Israeli settlements, initially founded as military outposts and progressively recognized as Israeli residential neighborhoods (Figure 10). One of these settlements was inside the Jerusalem borders and looked like any other residential neighborhood, since it was completely absorbed by Jerusalem urban development, which expanded beyond the Green Line in the occupied East Jerusalem (illegally according to international law). In 2012 this settlement had 29,564 inhabitants¹¹. The other settlement, which I will call “Babylon” and grew just next to al-Bab, was the northern edge of Gush Etzion colonial bloc, which developed from southwestern Jerusalem to northern Hebron. In 2013 Babylon had 1,260 inhabitants, while the whole Gush Etzion consisted of more than 66,340 Israeli citizens. Gush Etzion is one of the largest agglomeration of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, mainly built in privately owned Palestinian land declared as “state land” by Israel. This colonial bloc is organized through a Regional Council gathering fifteen Jewish communities, scattered among Palestinian villages¹². Rooted in Biblical mythology – like any other Zionist endeavor is supposed to be – Gush Etzion is central to the political project of settler colonization which the Israeli State promotes in the West Bank: its location results to be strategic for connecting Jerusalem to Hebron, the only one highly colonized Palestinian town, with the aim of realizing the “Greater Jerusalem”, expanding the city municipality through a large scale development plan concerning 40% of the West Bank¹³ (de Jong 2000). The project implies the Judaization of the holy city, like the current Israeli eviction of Palestinians from East Jerusalem neighborhoods demonstrate. The link between Gush Etzion colonial bloc and the Judaization of Jerusalem was promptly stated by the Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion in

¹¹ The data about the Israeli settler population are taken from “Statistics on Settlements and Settler Population”, elaborated by the Israeli NGO B’Tselem from two sources (the Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics and the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies) and updated in May 2015. See <http://www.btselem.org/settlements/statistics>, accessed on 4/10/2015.

¹² The colonial bloc of Gush Etzion played a meaningful role in Jewish history. Ultra-orthodox Jewish settlements were firstly established in the area in 1927, and attempts to settle followed in the 30s and 40s, but they had been broken by Arab riots and 1948 war. After 1948 until 1967 the area, like the whole West Bank, passed under Jordanian rule. The actual settlements were founded immediately after the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and constitute an example of the widespread and successful settlers’ practice of establishing facts on the ground and then demand approval to the Israeli government. Gush Etzion settlements were approved with the justification that Jews had been violently expelled from the area 19 years before: Gush Etzion represents thus the enactment of the Jewish “right of return”. The first settlers are remembered as “pioneers” and heroes in defending Jerusalem from Arab attack during 1948 war. Gush Etzion Foundation is located in the U.S. and organizes fundraising campaigns. Actually, many Jews living in this colonial bloc come from U.S.A.

¹³ It is not a secret that right-wing Israeli parties promote the Israeli annexation of the West Bank, named as Judea and Samaria.

1948: “If there is a Jewish Jerusalem today, the Jewish people owe their gratitude first and foremost to the defenders of Gush Etzion”¹⁴.

In 1995 the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Oslo II) divided the West Bank in three zones with different status: Area A is under supposedly full civil and military control of the Palestinian National Authority and consists of the major Palestinian urban areas (about 18% of the West Bank); Area B is under Israeli security control, but PNA is entitled to manage civil matters (about 22% of the West Bank); Area C is under full Israeli control and includes rural areas and Palestinian villages (more than 60% of the West Bank)¹⁵ (Figure 6). It is in Area C that Israeli settler colonization spreads: in 2013 Israeli settlers were about 350,000 (547,000 including the population of the Israeli neighborhoods in unilaterally annexed East Jerusalem), while Palestinians were about 300,000. Following Oslo Interim Agreement, al-Bab population found that even the half of the village, which had been excluded by Israeli unilateral annexation to Jerusalem Municipality, had been submitted to complete Israeli control (this part of al-Bab is precisely divided in 2,6% of land defined as Area B and 97,4% as Area C) (Figure 11). For this reason, from a political and administrative point of view, Palestinians from al-Bab considered their village as a “Jewish zone” (*manṭiqa yahūdiyya*): the Palestinian police was forbidden to have access to this area and construction permits had to be demanded to the Israeli Civil Administration in order to build a house or a water reservoir. Moreover, following the Oslo Agreements in the mid-90s further Palestinian land was confiscated in the village to build a bypass road connecting Israeli settlers to Jerusalem. The first checkpoint in the village, situated at the entrance of Babylon settlement, was later moved down into the valley where the Green Line runs, controlling the circulation from and towards the holy city. Actually, only Israeli citizens can drive in the bypass road and Palestinians provided with Israeli entry permits are nevertheless forbidden to pass through this checkpoint.

In the political frame inaugurated by the Israeli separation policies at the beginning of the 90s, the so called “security barrier”, thought to separate Israelis from

¹⁴ Quoted in Gush Etzion Foundation website <http://www.gush-etzion.org.il>, accessed on 4/10/2015.

¹⁵ The political division of the West Bank provided by the Oslo Agreements – although supposed to be transitory – legitimized de facto the Israeli direct appropriation of more than a half of the West Bank. PNA power is also limited in Area A, where the Israeli army can enter whenever it wants – as it ordinarily happens during arrests of Palestinian activists. We assisted the evidence of PNA subordination to Israeli forces in April 2002 during the siege of Arafat’s compound in Ramallah that, despite its destruction, has constituted the headquarters of the PNA until today. All Palestinian cities, which are supposed to be controlled by the PNA, were under the Israeli siege during the same period of the second Intifada.

Palestinians after the second Intifada, heavily affected al-Bab: the wall has been planned to surround the whole Palestinian populated area¹⁶, leaving only one militarily controlled entry which is supposed to link the village with Bethlehem and the rest of the West Bank: inversely, it is also liable to be closed by the Israeli army anytime if so called “security concerns” rise, locking al-Bab villagers in one “open air prison”, like they themselves define their village today (Figure 12). My first steps in shepherding with my friend Yazan also demonstrated most of Palestinian-owned agricultural lands have been confiscated for security purposes and were left outside the barrier, so that Palestinian peasants lost most of their properties. For this reason agricultural work, especially animals farming, became a risking endeavor, since most of water sources and grazing lands became unreachable outside the wall: one year after the beginning of my fieldwork Yazan himself sold all his sheep because of the high costs deriving from buying food and water and the actual difficulty of having cash always available. Furthermore, in 2012 most of al-Bab agricultural lands which remained between the wall and the Green Line, in what is considered by Israel as Jerusalem area, were declared part of an Israeli natural park, with the official aim of preserving the agricultural landscape and the ancient terraces cultivated with olive trees, excluding Palestinian peasants who owned and still farmed them (see 1.3.3.) (Figure 13).

In peasants’ experience the loss of further land undermined their social identity as custodians of Palestinian memory: paradoxically, the refugee condition reemerged as a condition of immobility, opposed to the displacement which had defined Palestinian dispossession in 1948 and 1967. Karima pointed out this relationship between the village closure and the loss of memory: “[After the wall will be completed] it will be forbidden to enter inside (*juwwa*), it’s finished (*khalas*)! It will happen they [the new generations] won’t know our land. We know Ahmad valley, we know Babylon area, but they don’t know. They only know the house where they have grown up. We will become like a camp. We can’t go out”. Palestinians’ conception of the inside/outside opposition is meaningful: like Karima situated her and her fellow villagers in a condition of outsiders (“it will be forbidden to enter inside (*juwwa*)”) following the construction of the wall, in colloquial Palestinian Arabic *juwwa* usually identifies the Israeli State defined by the Green Line as its first border. The Palestinian territory lost during 1948 war is generally

¹⁶ The initial plan was to let the wall path coincide with Jerusalem borders: in this way the barrier would have cut the built-up populated area in two, leaving half of the villagers on the Jerusalem side. Coherently, the Israeli government opted for leaving all the inhabitants inside the wall and taking all their agricultural lands (in some areas the barrier was erected only 3-5 meters from Palestinian houses).

called “the ‘48”, a historical reference which represents also a spatial detraction, and is distinguished from “the ‘67”, that is the occupied West Bank. However, Palestinians’ feeling of being always outside, which reveals their experience of exclusion as a constitutive part of the colonial expansion of the Israeli sovereignty, was somehow upset by the separation wall as a new Israeli border which arbitrarily penetrates the West Bank and let the Israeli State gain much more Palestinian land¹⁷. Contrarily to the Nakba experience, dispossession is now linked to immobility: Palestinians are kept outside, but are also locked inside. Expulsion is converted into confinement: this is why people think about their condition as a “camp”. In Karima’s words, “inside” meant houses: new generations will know only the houses where they have grown up, she said, like Palestinians living in the camps have experienced for more than 60 years. Men in my family often complained the lack of land to build their children’s houses: “Do you see? We live like in the refugee camps! We have no space to build and every house must be erected next to the other one”. For al-Bab inhabitants the construction of the wall was one of the most radical transformations since the Nakba and it involved a growing sense of powerlessness: “They took this piece of land last year, since ’48 it was ours” – Imm Salama told me sitting in her house roof and indicating a plot of land below us – “They came and said ‘this is mine!’, and they put the wall and they took the land down. No one can oppose Israelis except God, only God can (*il-yahūd mā biqdar ‘alayhum ila Allah, rabnā illi biqdar*). Now they put the wall, they close us (*bisakkrū ‘alaynā*) so that we quit moving” (Imm Salama, al-Bab 27/05/2012).

This sense of powerlessness is also given by the relationship Palestinians must entertain with an impersonal military, judicial and bureaucratic apparatus, with a technical power which does not appear in human semblances, but acts through papers, bulldozers and courts. While the evidence of the “security barrier” is now incontrovertible, people were informed about its plan through notices hung on the trees, and I myself could collect confiscation orders left on the ground in the lands concerned. The Israeli power had no face and at the most you could appeal to an Israeli court. The political control of the space is thus combined with the enactment of Israeli law on Palestinian lives in a variety of forms. Even if it is not my aim to deal with this variety here, grounding on my fieldwork in al-Bab I just want to underline how Israeli

¹⁷ Some Palestinians ironically welcomed the separation wall as a definitive border: “At least we have a border now!”. This statement alludes to the ongoing appropriation of Palestinians’ land and water which characterized the historical development of the Israeli State: from this perspective the wall looked like a possible limit to the Israeli encroachment.

sovereignty is actually displayed through the imposition of the Israeli law on the Palestinian population rather than through borders control, like it prevailed between 1948 and 1967.

Ahmad was a Palestinian farmer and (illegal) laborer in Israel who lived with his family in the Jerusalem part of al-Bab. Three simple houses had been built by Ahmad and his two brothers in their mother's land. Since their mother died very young and their father had grown up in a refugee camp in Jericho, where he later worked for the "government" (*hukūma*, the Israeli Civil Administration established after the 1967 occupation of the Palestinian territories), Ahmad and his brothers were raised by their maternal grandmother in al-Bab. For this reason all the village knew Ahmad as "Ahmad Kawthar", Kawthar being his grandmother's name. Unusually, the three brothers had settled in the land which belonged to their mother's father, who had had no boys, because most of their father's lands had become part of the Israeli State in 1948. A little part of them, still cultivated with olive trees, had been cut out by the wall. To provide for his eight children Ahmad worked in Israel (although without a work permit), but he also continued to farm his mother's land using greenhouses to grow vegetables in order to sell them.

In 1998 the Israeli authorities started to issue demolition orders concerning Palestinian houses in the Jerusalem part of al-Bab: "I swallowed the rule" (*akalt il-hukum*), Ahmad told me, referring to the demolition order his house also received. In fact, after the 1967 annexation of about 48% of the new al-Bab, the Israeli jurisdiction had been extended into the annexed territories: Palestinian houses inside Jerusalem borders were thus considered illegal because they had been built without an Israeli permit¹⁸: out of 92 residential units, only 22 had been built before 1967 and so excluded from eventual demolition. Palestinians started to look for land property certificates in order to prove their legitimacy: some of these certificates dated back to Ottoman times and were found in Istanbul archives. Paper became a sacred object which had to be protected from Israelis' incursions: when Israeli soldiers went to take demolition orders and asked Palestinians for their property documents, people denied to have them at home because they feared they could be taken away or destroyed.

After his appeal to the Israeli court, judges established that Ahmad had to pay a fine. In 2002 he was arrested because he had not paid it. In 2004 Ahmad and other eighty

¹⁸ No zoning plan existed for the area. Recent efforts to elaborate one – realized by the village popular committee with the support of some NGOs – failed because the village plan was finally not approved by the Israeli authorities.

Palestinian men living in the Jerusalem part of al-Bab were taken from their homes in the night and imprisoned because they were considered illegal residents in Jerusalem. In 2005 the Israeli court forbid imprisonment and suggested Palestinians to ask for Jerusalem IDs. However, some years later the Israeli Ministry of the Interior refused to provide al-Bab inhabitants living inside Jerusalem Municipality with Israeli IDs. The possibility to demand Jerusalem IDs divided al-Bab community: some totally refused to get Israeli papers on the base of their political stance, doubting about further expropriations of their lands, but also on the base of practical reasoning, since they did not want to pay taxes to the occupying State. Nevertheless, other Palestinians living in the Jerusalem area were seduced by the chance to have a legal recognition: Ahmad himself would have favorably accepted a Jerusalem ID which would have accorded him the chance to freely move and work inside Israel instead of risking to be imprisoned every time he went to earn a living.

Ahmad's experience shows how the production of Palestinians' illegality is a central feature of the Israeli sovereignty based on the expansion of the Israeli law in the West Bank. The centrality conferred by recent studies on Israel/Palestine to the political production of space (Weizman 2007) must be connected, like others have already underlined (Hanafi 2009, Kelly 2006, Perugini and Harb 2010), to people's legal status as both a spatial practice and an autonomous domain of political production. Tobias Kelly, for example, has pointed out the constitutive indeterminacy of the Israeli/Palestinian "border", which is rather produced through the everyday encounters between Israelis as citizens and West Bank Palestinians as non-citizens (Kelly 2006). In this sense scholars who criticize the national state imagery of the border – materialized by the wall – used by Israeli separation policies to inscribe the military occupation in time, and describe Israel/Palestine as a "superposition of anthropological spaces" hierarchically organized on the basis of different regimes of mobility, turn back to physical borders to ethnographically describe the points of social contact and economical exchange between supposedly separated populations (Latte Abdallah & Parizot 2011, 2015). Moreover, the idea of "superposition", that is useful to stress the power relations which constitute the organization of the Israeli/Palestinian space as a space of inequality, is simultaneously expected to explain the different perceptions Israelis and Palestinians have of the separation itself (Parizot 2009). I would rather inverse the terms of the problem and I maintain that it is not the organization of space, but the production of knowledge and interlinked active non-knowledge, both involved in two distinct and confronting ways of telling history and embodying it, which is at the base of the separation as a legitimate

political program for both parts. In his comparative effort concerning settler societies in different colonial contexts, Lorenzo Veracini pointed out that, differently from the African National Congress which rejected separatist policies in South Africa, “paradoxically, the two-state solution envisaged by the Oslo process was accepted by the Palestinian leadership in the context of a framework that postponed partition indefinitely while allowing for the conditions of any such division to be gradually and irreversibly removed” (Veracini 2006: 23).

The model of the “border” was used by Abner Cohen (1965) in his famous monograph on continuity and social change in so called “Arab border villages in Israel”, based on his fieldwork conducted in 1959 in the newborn Israeli State. His effort to describe the changes in the political organization of the Palestinian villages, wrapped inside the recently established borders of the Jews’ national State, totally neglected the historicity of the border, which appeared to be a self-evident reality and seemed to be justified by an undefined and taken-for-granted hostility between Israel and the neighboring Arab countries: “The Triangle villagers are caught between two opposing fronts, because they happened to be near the border” (Cohen 1965: 16). Although their specific character of border villages was also defined by their being “in intense interaction with the Jews in Israel with whom they have great economic interests” (Cohen 1965: 18), it was just this border identity, conceived as a separation line between two hostile fronts, which was supposed to prevent an effective Arab-Jewish cooperation:

“The more these villages are economically absorbed within the Israeli society and the more material benefits they gain from it, the more they feel the impact of the hostility between the two fronts, and the more drawn they become, at least *emotionally* and *culturally*, to the surging Arab nationalist movement. Both fronts demand their loyalty, but because in their precarious position they cannot actively identify themselves with either, they are suspected by both. Israeli Jews suspect them of being a potential fifth column and the Arabs across the border often regard them as renegades” (Cohen 1965: 17, *italics mine*).

Cohen concluded his ethnographical exposition stating that *ḥamūla* (the patrilineal clan) as an Arabs’ political organization was *revived* in the mutated context of Israeli “democratic” life (elections are one of the ethnographical cases that Cohen examined), despite its decline in the English-Mandatory Palestine, when “a powerful, and completely

autonomous, national class structure” (Asad 1975: 255) represented Arabs’ political order. In his sharp critique of Cohen’s monograph, Talal Asad showed how the British anthropologist’s conclusions reposed on an “ideological time” (Asad 1975: 258). It was not surprising then that Cohen himself underlined anthropologists’ obligation to use history: “By comparing the present with some stages from the past, more factors can be isolated, and the ‘cause’ of the phenomenon he [the anthropologist] is analyzing will become progressively more elaborate and more precise” (Cohen 1965: 175). On the contrary, Talal Asad proposed to carefully examine the “modes in which the history offered is constituted” (Asad 1975: 258) considering its inherent “unconscious levels”:

“There is no mention of the political implications of setting up the British Mandate Government in Palestine upon the destruction of the Ottoman empire, nothing on the massive flow of European Jews into the country, or the purchase of land by Zionist colonists from Arab landlords and subsequent expropriation of Arab cultivators, or the pressure by Zionist organizations on Jewish labor at a time of acute unemployment. There is silence on the paramilitary and economic support given by the Jewish settlers to the British Mandate Government in its suppression of the Arab peasant rebellion; and silence, too, on the role of the Arab peasant cultivators in providing the Jewish settler community with most of its food” (Asad 1975: 257).

Talal Asad showed how the main problem for Cohen was to identify and categorize Arabs in Israel through an implicit idea of “ethnicity” which distinguished them from the Jewish population of the Israeli State. Cohen’s problematic was then revealed by its formulation through inversed premises: firstly, ethnicity was given priority over political economy and thus resulted to be an ideological category based on the idea of a reconstituted “tradition” (the *ḥamūla* as Arabs’ *revived* form of political organization); secondly, Cohen’s concept of politics proceeded from a “universal idea of order based on some formal notion of balanced exchanges”, rather than from “the specific historical movement of production, accumulation and control of surplus” (Asad 1975: 259-260). Ultimately, Asad proposed to use a class analysis to enlighten how the introduction of the capitalistic system during the English Mandate favored a Jewish economical sector, almost destroying the Palestinian non-capitalistic mode of production. Consistent with Meillassoux’s reflections on the constitutive interdependence between different modes of

productions in colonial states (Meillassoux 1975), the American anthropologist considered that Palestinians' subsistence agricultural sector served "to subsidize the low wage-rates of Arab labor, so it cannot be allowed to disappear totally". Furthermore, Palestinians' exploitation was combined with political repression: the Arab *ḥamūla* did not remerge spontaneously, but it was manipulated by the Israeli Military Administration (to which Palestinians in Israel were subjected until 1966) to control so called "Arabs in Israel" by impeding autonomous political formations and simultaneously separating them from the Jewish population on the basis of their cultural difference.

On the basis of these reflections, and contrarily to my initial interpretations, I refuse to consider al-Bab as a "border zone" from a spatial perspective, although its physical proximity to Jerusalem city and the Green Line and its ultimate closure by the separation wall would tempt us to do so. Rather, given its political and administrative status of "Jewish zone", that is how villagers themselves define it, the al-Bab case shows two different political processes which develop in parallel: on one hand, in this area we attend the progressive expansion of the Israeli sovereignty through the urban development of Jerusalem as a part of Israeli settler colonization, together with the establishment of an Israeli civil population in the West Bank; on the other hand, we find an ongoing military control targeting the Palestinian population and maintaining the Israeli occupation regime inaugurated in 1967. These two processes, far from being coherent in time and space (Veracini 2013), give birth to a specific formulation of what has been called the Palestinians' "inclusive exclusion" by the Israeli State (Ophir, Givoni & Hanafi 2009), where their state of exception appears to be the rule (Agamben 1995). If al-Bab offers us an insight into the simultaneous processes of settler colonization and military occupation which constitute the contemporary Israeli State, my interest here is to explore how Palestinians and Israelis are produced as two differentiated populations linked by a colonial relationship: their everyday contacts and connections are thus conceived as part of "a settler colonial system of institutional and personal relationships" (Veracini 2006: 1).

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Where is the border in al-Bab? This question needs to be reformulated: which is the border in al-Bab? In the previous pages I have tried to describe the context of my

fieldwork by answering this kind of questions. Although the village had initially attracted my interest because of the harsh impact of the separation wall on it, I soon had to depart from the notion of a physical border, which was supposed to separate Palestinians from Israelis. First, I became conscious that the idea of domesticity itself had been heavily affected by the Israeli power: demolition orders, the need of the Israeli authorization for construction, and enforced isolation influenced the very materiality of the Palestinians' dwelling. At the same time the borders had been multiplied throughout time: if al-Bab could be considered as a border village because of its proximity to Jerusalem and the Green Line, its actual territory was constituted by closed Israeli military areas, identified by the yellow gates, which had further fragmented the village space. Such a fragmentation had also produced the moral ambiguity of certain areas caught between al-Bab social life and the Israeli army's presence, like 'Ala's case demonstrated. Furthermore, the Israeli soldiers who normally circulated at the outskirts of the al-Bab populated area in order to guard the nearby Israeli settlement and the works for the wall, constituted an extraneous and threatening presence, whose movements Palestinians needed to constantly supervise.

From the Palestinians' point of view domesticity coincided with an idea of "closeness", which was mainly represented by a precise residential organization. Agnatic groups were identified with their land property, and agnatic solidarity also defined a moral space and a form of political unity. However, such a model for "closeness" had to be reorganized after 1948 and the villagers' displacement: most of al-Bab land had been seized inside the Israeli state, so that not all families were lucky to find it again – and in equal amounts – when they went back to their lands, which had remained outside the Green Line. The *ḥāra* where I lived was one of the two largest family neighborhoods in the village, and still reproduced the traditional residential organization on a large scale. Not surprisingly, a family's spatial control was linked to conflicts over local political control, so that the largest agnatic groups in al-Bab were both neighbors and historical rivals. Accusations of collaborationism with the Israeli authorities dated back to the 70s and nurtured their conflict. At the same time the rhetoric of a "modern" way of life, which was represented by little family units in other parts of the village, was opposed to the ideas of "chaos" and "religious fanaticism" that the *ḥāra* was supposed to embody. This opposition rather revealed the recent political strife between the Fatah-led Palestinian National Authority and Hamas government in Gaza, which had affected also al-Bab social life. Social divisions also followed the Israeli unilateral annexation of half of al-

Bab into the Jerusalem Municipality, so that some of the villagers wished to obtain the Jerusalem ID, while others refused it on the basis of their nationalist stances. More than an effect of “borders”, the transformation of the villagers living in the Jerusalem part of al-Bab into “illegal residents” demonstrated how the progressive expansion of the Israeli sovereignty into the West Bank was produced by the ongoing change in the administrative and political status of al-Bab land, and the consequent application of the Israeli law on the Palestinians’ life. Under this perspective al-Bab represented a clear example of two simultaneous processes that define the actual Israeli policies: the Israeli settler colonization – produced by unilateral annexations and the transfer of an Israeli civil population in the West Bank – goes with the enduring military regime targeting the Palestinian population since the 1967 occupation.

In this context I have considered the imposition of borders through a historical perspective highlighted by the Palestinians’ experience and memories. The revelation of the Palestinian “catastrophe” was inscribed in the pre-1948 al-Bab territory as a living memory, which was deployed by the capacity to see and to move rather than being stated by words. The “public secret” of the Palestinian dispossession was represented by the “old” al-Bab concealed by the JNF forests in what are today the Jerusalem forests on the opposite hills. People’s silence also reflected the current humiliation provoked by the ongoing Israeli confiscations of their lands. My interviews on the Nakba created a “public” setting where words could be more easily articulated and narratives could emerge. From old people’s memories of the Nakba we can grasp the social fragmentation produced by forced displacement, the violence of the border policies in the first decades of the newly established Israeli state, and the current conflicts that cross the Palestinian society today. Through these narratives we also find why, despite actual divisions and conflicts in the village, all al-Bab inhabitants identified themselves as “peasants”. What does it mean being a peasant when your land property has gradually disappeared? In the peasants’ view the loss of land corresponded to the loss of memory. The fear of this loss was represented by the refugee condition, embodied by Palestinians living in the refugee camps. Although even al-Bab villagers enjoyed the refugee status, their peasantry stressed the fact that they still were landowners and, as a consequence, custodians of a cultural authenticity, which safeguarded Palestinian memory. On the other hand, the social identification with peasantry expressed a subtle criticism of the PNA policies, which had marginalized the land issue in the political debate, and had rather focused on state building sponsored by international funds. Palestinian peasants differentiated themselves

from the middle and upper urban class created by the establishment of the PNA. In their words “we want the land” did not refer to a generic right of return to the lands lost in 1948, but consisted in a very actual claim which expressed the will to stay in their village despite its conversion into a “Jewish zone” following the “peace” negotiations.

1.2. Re-signifying Palestinian peasants

1.2.1. Agriculture and *ṣumūd*: the politics of staying

The shared social identification with peasantry which gathered al-Bab villagers together, despite their different occupational and economical situations, and also their actual political conflicts in the village, revealed its different political implications both related to Palestinian national history and to Palestinian peasants' contemporary experience. Firstly, Palestinian peasantry has represented the historical link between the Palestinian people and the Palestinian land, a link which was denied by Zionist ideology engaged in claiming Palestine as "a land without a people for a people without a land". Ted Swedenburg (1990) has shown how Palestinian peasantry was converted into a national signifier in the construction of Palestinian national discourse in the 70s and 80s: if the focus on the Palestinian *fellāḥīn* intended to counter the Zionist rhetoric, it was also a way to politically legitimize the PLO, mainly consisting of a middle class leadership in exile, as the official representative of the Palestinian people. At the same time the conversion of Palestinian peasants into the privileged signifiers of Palestinian nationalism shadowed their role as historical agents, especially in the first Arab revolts against the Zionist advance, and even Palestinian historiography which reported peasants' activism referred to their supposed lack of political consciousness (Saygh 1979, Swedenburg 1995).

In the previous paragraphs I have tried to analyze the historical and political conditions which still let al-Bab inhabitants represent themselves as *fellāḥīn*, despite the inevitable marginalization of Palestinian agriculture in the context of the Israeli settler colonization of the West Bank, and thanks to the modernization policies promoted by the economy of aid and development. I have shown how al-Bab peasants' relationship with their land is perceived as the base of their social memory: if their forced dispossession implied the fear of oblivion, their return to their lands, which remained outside the newborn Israeli State after 1948, was a way to re-root in the territory and preserve social continuity despite displacement and social fragmentation. Furthermore, the actual claim over a peasant identity must be referred to class and social distinctions in the contemporary Palestinian society: villagers' self-representation as a rural middle class who is still landowner, is thus opposed both to landless refugees in the camps, who are contradictorily depicted as those who lost their memory but also as driving forces of

Palestinian uprisings, and to the urban upper middle class, which is blamed for having arisen thanks to foreign money after the Oslo Agreements. Ultimately, I maintain that nowadays the peasant identity radically contests the centrality achieved by the establishment of PNA proto-governmental structures in an ever-imagined process of State building as a priority in the national project, and reasserts the question of the land as the most fundamental political issue. However, the contemporary claim over the land does not necessarily refer to the Palestinian refugees' right of return, one of the main pillar of the national agenda since 1948: the villagers' stress on their *fellāḥīn* belonging, rather than on their refugee status, reminds us that Palestinians' dispossession has not finished with the Nakba, and unveils peasants' current efforts and everyday struggles in order to be able to remain in their place, constantly threatened by ongoing Israeli confiscations and the expansion of the Israeli law in the West Bank.

“*Iḥnā ṣāmidīn*” (“We are steadfast”), Imm Yunis told me the first time she welcomed me in her home, referring to herself and her fellow villagers in al-Bab. During my fieldwork the word *ṣumūd* did not appear so often in everyday speech, and it was rather a concept which I apprehended through reading and the militant discourse of the Palestinian resistance. Actually, while I was moving my first steps in learning Arabic and I asked my friends how they would say “resistance”, their answers drove me to two different concepts: *al-muqāwama* (from the root *qām*, to stand up) indicated for them a collective mobilization, a set of actions aimed to contest and reverse the enemy's power; *aṣ-ṣumūd* (from the verb *ṣamada*, to withstand) was linked to resist the same power by simply being there and enduring despite violence and oppression. We could be tempted to think about these two distinct concepts through the active/passive opposition, since *al-muqāwama* engages public action, while *aṣ-ṣumūd*, more often translated as “steadfastness”, is rather linked to the subject's ability to bear something terrible by which he/she is affected. While underling the changing meanings of *ṣumūd* throughout time, Rema Hammami has stated “the emergent ideology of civic resistance is a variation on the old nationalist theme of *sumud* or steadfastness. In the 1970s, *sumud* meant refusing to leave the land despite the hardships of occupation; now, it connotes something more proactive. Its new meaning, found in the common refrain, “*al-hayat lazim tistamirr*” (“life must go on”) is about resisting immobility, refusing to let the army's lockdown of one's community preclude one from reaching school or work” (Hammami 2004: 27, *italics mine*).

If *al-muqāwama* implies a collective movement, *aṣ-ṣumūd* has often represented a specific kind of immobility, like the Palestinian anthropologist has underlined referring to the 70s: not only a physical immobility contesting forced displacement, but also a moral anchorage related to certain principles. For this reason the noun *ṣāmid* (steadfast), often used with an adjectival value, can indicate an individual quality or – in its plural form – a collective status, like Imm Yunis stated while talking about the whole community of al-Bab. In my fieldwork experience *ṣumūd* often got an ambiguous connotation, as it was defined as a “national” idea (*waṭanī*), but was also related to Islamic religion (*dīnī*). In fact, *aṣ-ṣamad* (the Eternal, the Everlasting) is an epithet of God as “the one who does not change”, like one of my pious friends pointed out. In my view it is just the moral connotation of *ṣumūd* which helps us to apprehend why the active/passive opposition has little sense in the conception of Palestinian resistance. If *ṣumūd* has condensed different and changing practices related to Palestinian national struggle, like resistance to physical pain (for example during interrogation and torture in the Israeli jails), the practice of rooting in the land as opposed to expulsion, or the determination to move despite Israeli closures (Hammami 2004), I maintain that the common ground of these different practices consists of emotional control and a strong attachment to specific moral values. In this sense it is not surprising that, together with national loyalty, patience (*ṣabr*) – which is also an important Islamic virtue – plays a consistent role here, sometimes replacing the word *ṣumūd* itself. The multiple but coherent references which characterize the concept of *ṣumūd* rather question the relationship between social and political practices, and moral and national values: more specifically, I propose to consider *ṣumūd* as a form of political resistance which implies a specific technology of the self (Foucault), encompassing both public actions and individual stances, and bringing political and ethical subjectivation together. In this perspective the concept of *ṣumūd* has an obviously flexible character and it is not strange that its “old” nationalistic meanings coexist with (rather than being replaced by) new ones: for al-Bab villagers “we are *ṣāmidīn*” still means their ability and political will to stay in their lands, which are today inside a “Jewish zone” under full Israeli control.

Palestinian peasantry thus expresses an attachment to the land, which is itself conceived as a form of national resistance and politically declined in terms of *ṣumūd*. Nowadays this political and affective attachment goes beyond economical interests concerning agriculture, and is rather linked to the importance of lignatic ties and the sense of social proximity so inscribed in the inhabited place, to the memory of past loss and

dispossession and to current fears of the Israeli confiscations. Despite its decline, agricultural practices still play an important role in keeping this relationship between the land and the people alive. Beyond the evidence that Palestinian society has historically been a peasant society dependent on agriculture¹⁹, many authors have shown how, after the 1967 Israeli occupation, subsistence agriculture has continued being an important base of livelihood (mainly based on children and women's work) complementary to Palestinian male labor in Israel (Farsakh 2005, Tamari 1981). However, while most of the scholars' interest has focused, on one hand, on the discursive function Palestinian peasants took on in the national struggle and, on the other hand, on their historical role as "revolutionaries", there has not been much interest in taking their work seriously and conceiving agriculture as a set of specific knowledge, social practices and work relations²⁰, which can conversely lead us to better grasp its political capacity²¹. I will show how this gap between peasantry as a discursive formation functional to national unity and peasantry as a social reality determined by specific material conditions, competences and social relationships, inserted in an overwhelming capitalistic mode of production, is not only a distinction denounced – and maybe simultaneously reproduced – by anthropological literature in search of Palestinian peasants as "historical agents" and "revolutionaries": it is also a prejudice which informs conflicts over political practices today.

In this juxtaposition of conflicting representations Palestinian peasants' economical, social and even political marginalization was caused by the decline of Palestinian agropastoral mode of subsistence in its progressive confrontation with the emergence of intensive agriculture directed to the global food market²², a confrontation which

¹⁹ "The first British census of 1921 found that 80 per cent of the indigenous population depended on agriculture, while for the Muslim majority the figure was even higher, 90 per cent (Christians, Jews and other minorities being mainly urban)" (Saygh 1979: xxiv). Saygh adds that "there is thus good reason to regard Palestinian society as a peasant society, and its struggle for liberation a peasant-based struggle".

²⁰ Land ownership and the practice of farming have never been necessarily combined. Peasantry cannot be considered as a social class, since different figures have historically represented it: in the case of historical Palestine, beyond absentee landowners living in towns, small peasant-owners went with tenants, sharecroppers and hired workers. Like I showed in the previous paragraphs, when I talk about Palestinian peasants in my research I deal with small landowners who could save a part of their lands despite the creation of the Israeli State on Palestinian lands.

²¹ An exception is Julie Trottier's work on the water issue in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict (Trottier 2000, 2013). The French researcher has pointed out the visibility given to the international dimension of the competition for water to the detriment of "local hydrogeopolitics". The originality of Trottier's work is to question water conflicts using a multiscale approach which takes into account the interrelationships among international, national, and local actors, dedicating an intensive fieldwork to study Palestinian peasants' water management and property rights systems and their interactions with PNA and Israeli institutions.

²² At the end of the 19th century, however, Palestinian agriculture was already integrated in the international food market and was, for example, the first producer of citrus in the world.

particularly occurred in Palestine/Israel due to the Israeli endeavor of “modernizing” farming through the elaboration of specific agronomic technologies (like drip irrigation) ideologically sustained by the colonial effort of “making the desert bloom”. “Modernization” as a global discourse, which furthermore informed all colonial and neocolonial projects in their economical and cultural dimensions, has become hegemonic in every process of State building in the so-called “Third World” countries. During my own visits to the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture to inquiry about the PNA policies in rural areas under Israeli control, I was often introduced as the one who does research on “poor peasants” (*il-fellāhīn il-fuqarā*), a representation which revealed peasants’ depreciation in the modern categories of politics and development, replaced by the “farmer” (*muzāri*) as a rational economical actor open to the market (see also Van Aken 2003)²³. At the same time, in more recent years and at an international level, the image of the peasant has been revitalized in contrast with industrial food production, thanks to a chiefly middle-class environmental sensibility which looks for healthy, organic, and preferably local food. In his analyses of the meanings of the “local” (*baladī*) in the Palestinian territories, Mauro Van Aken has pointed out “the *fellāh* swings today between a mythical and nostalgic idealization, to which we turn in search for ‘local’, ‘Palestinian’ food, and the devaluation and stigmatization of real everyday agricultural work, accompanied by the progressive colonial expropriation of rural resources. Between these two predominant narratives there are small farmers who persist in cultivating food for their ‘home’ and their families” (Van Aken 2015: 42).

In al-Bab agriculture is still practiced in little plots of land, usually inherited by sons. This kind of agriculture, which is the only one possible in the dry rocky mountains and highlands of the Bethlehem/Jerusalem area, is mainly directed to the family’s consumption and work is organized among the family’s members. A little amount of the produce can be marketed among fellow villagers or in the Bethlehem streets but, given the number of people to feed and the limited land available, marketed vegetables or fruits are never a significant source of *fellāhīn*’s income. Beyond fruit, almond and olive trees, the agricultural production is mainly concentrated on vegetables used in Palestinian cooking, like tomatoes, eggplants, zucchini and peppers, together with herbs for culinary or therapeutic use, like mint and parsley, while other wild herbs, like sage or thyme, are

²³ At the same time the Ministry executives complained about the marginalization of agriculture in the PNA agenda: according to the people I interviewed only 4% of the Palestinian Gross Domestic Product was invested in the agricultural sector in 2013.

regularly collected in the mountains. Due to the scarcity of water in al-Bab some vegetables cannot be cultivated, like *al-mulukhiyya*, the main ingredient of one of the typical Palestinian dishes, which abundantly grows in the wet and hot weather of Jericho basin. In fact, in al-Bab the contraction of Palestinian land due to the establishment of the Israeli State has been accompanied by the loss of water resources: out of more than twenty water springs which were collectively managed through irrigation turns in the ancient village²⁴, only three remain today in the new al-Bab²⁵. Of these latter, the only one rich of water is now outside the wall path, and during the time of my fieldwork could still be reached by shepherds who grazed their sheep crossing the new, uncompleted border.

While some Palestinians continue to farm their lands outside the wall in construction, mostly cultivated with olive trees (for which agricultural work mainly consists in ploughing, fertilizing, pruning and collecting olives), some others started to leave their lands uncultivated because it became difficult to reach them (today they are joinable only on foot or by donkey, since the existing roads were closed or destroyed, and Palestinian cars are forbidden to circulate outside the wall path) or because they consider those lands already lost. Furthermore, farming outside the wall, in what the Israeli authorities consider as the Jerusalem Municipality, can imply unpleasant encounters with the Israeli border police. Even inside the wall path, however, we can find uncultivated lands belonging to al-Bab refugees living in Jordan or in the West Bank camps. These lands are what even Palestinians call “the absentees’ property” (*mulkiyya al-ghā’bīn*), a legal category introduced by Israel in 1950 to seize Palestinian refugees’ property²⁶ and

²⁴ The water of the source was traditionally channeled into a pool, from which it was then distributed to different families’ plots through rotation. See photo...

²⁵ After the 1967 occupation Israel took full control of Palestinian water resources (the three West Bank aquifers). According to the 1995 Oslo Interim Agreement 82% of the West bank aquifers’ water is reserved to Israel. In the ancient al-Bab territory Israel drilled three water wells, today managed by the Israeli Water Company Mekorot, while Palestinians are forbidden to drill their own wells and to build private water reservoirs without Israeli permission. We must consider that Israel also controls fortytwo water wells inside the West Bank. Two of the water wells in the old al-Bab are on the Israeli side of the Green Line, while one on the Palestinian side: “We were living over a sea and we did not know!”, an old woman whom I interviewed underlined. Al-Bab inhabitants buy water from Mekorot: the water system firstly drives the water from one of these well to the Israeli settlement next to the new al-Bab, and then takes a share to the village: “If the Israelis decide to lock the provision, we will be completely cut off”, one of al-Bab inhabitants pointed out. The Palestinian Water Authority, which I consulted because of water problems in al-Bab, does not know the amount of water which is daily directed to the Israeli settlement. Officially, lack of water in al-Bab is justified by Palestinian institutions appealing to infrastructural deficiencies, which are at the core of international intervention and aid.

²⁶ Absentees’ Property Law 5710-1950, passed by the Knesset on 14 March 1950 and published in the official gazette, n. 37, 20 March 1950. Article 1(b) defines “absentees” as the people who, between 29th November 1947 and 19th May 1948, were citizens of Arab countries considered as enemies of the Israeli

until today used to confiscate Palestinian lands. In a few cases the Jordan refugees sold their land to some peasants living in al-Bab, or let them farm on it instead of keeping it fallow. During my fieldwork, however, some of al-Bab peasants used to reproach their fellow villagers who remained in the West Bank refugee camps: peasants blamed them for not returning to work in their properties in the village and feared that Israeli confiscations could be more easily enforced in those lands. It is evident thus that for Palestinian peasants farming is itself a political practice of resistance against the Israeli appropriation of their resources, and that the Palestinian presence in the land is a way to counter the fear of being considered as “absentees”, or worse, for the minority who rebuilt the village and resettled in it, of being expelled once again. In this sense *ṣumūd* does not express only the refusal to leave the land despite the hardships of the Israeli occupation, but it is a way to actively engage against the Israeli occupation and settler colonization, being those hardships an everyday reality which Palestinian peasants normally face while trying to prevent renewed catastrophes. At the same time some of al-Bab peasants individually and spontaneously act some forms of sabotage of the wall construction: pipes are stolen to be used for irrigation, pieces of the patrol road guardrail are dismantled to be able to cross the border by mule, parts of the barbed fence are moved away to let the flocks pass through it in order to reach the water source outside the wall path, and a part of the water driven to the Israeli settlement is taken from Mekorot network and diverted into Palestinian fields. Furthermore, peasants’ attachment to their land – in most cases their grandfathers’ land – is a very concrete physical and emotional attachment to its earth and trees: I often met landowners attending the destruction of their land while Israeli works were upsetting their property, and during demonstrations against the Israeli bulldozers people literally grab on to the logs of their olive trees (see the ethnographical case I describe in 2.3.2.).

The act of planting trees and farming has always had deep political implications in Israel/Palestine as a way to claim rights over the land, and Zionism’s endeavor of transforming the Palestinian landscape and modernizing it has been historically concerned with planting trees (Braverman 2009). The arborescent metaphors, which Liisa Malkki connected to the “sedentarist metaphysics” of nation and culture (Malkki 1997), are not only figures of speech here. Like Karima and her daughter Nabila pointed out

State, or simply were in one of these countries, or were Palestinian citizens who had left their place of residence for a place outside Palestine, or inside Palestine but held by “by forces which sought to prevent the establishment of the State of Israel or which fought against it after its establishment”.

with respect to their ancient village (1.1.2.), Israeli pine trees has been used to conceal the Palestinian presence in the land. I myself visited the various natural parks, made of extended forests of pine trees, which the Jewish National Fund created in the old al-Bab and in other Palestinian villages. Among these parks, one is dedicated to the American President John Kennedy: special plaques have been placed in front of some trees at the entrance, indicating that those trees were planted by the President's family members themselves. Even a cemetery for Jews who live abroad and want to be buried in Israel has been established in the old al-Bab, while Palestinians' tombs have been destroyed. Life and death are not only romantically concerned here: while walking in al-Bab lands between the wall and the Green Line, where pine trees spread from the upper Israeli settlement to the lower valley where Palestinians still have their olive trees, my friend Yazan meticulously explained to me the difference between the life cycle of a small olive tree compared with the life cycle of a soaring pine tree, which stood next to it and had already exceeded it in height: "Do you see? This olive tree is three years old, while the pine tree is maybe one year old. This is why the Israelis plant pine trees: they grow faster and reproduce and spread by themselves". When life develops more difficultly and more slowly, it can be also more easily erased. Conversely, Palestinian peasants' own existence depends on taking care of it and on knowing how to do it: olive trees cannot grow without human work sustaining their growth. For this reason Palestinian peasants have an intimate relationship with the land they inhabit: if the shepherd knows his sheep one by one, the peasant equally knows each one of his trees. This is not to attribute a trailblazing "environmental sensibility" to Palestinian peasants who, on the contrary, cannot conceive "nature" or "the environment" as something objectified and separated from their own everyday life and work.

In the context of clearly asymmetric power relations between Palestinians and Israel, Mauro Van Aken has pointed out the interconnections and the mutual mimetic effects which have characterized farming and agricultural policies both in early Zionism and in more recent Israeli and Palestinian institutions. Referring to a book published in 1930 by the founder of modern Israeli agronomy, Vulcani's *The fellah farm*, based on a study conducted in the 20s among Palestinian peasants, Van Aken has shown how Zionists' early acknowledgment of – and even admiration for – Palestinian peasants' local knowledge and agricultural techniques, was paradoxically accompanied by the suppression of the Other, targeted as "primitive" and culturally and materially "poor" (Van Aken 2015: 50-53). A comparable relationship based on this kind of interconnection

and mimesis can be attributed to planting trees as a political practice. As a response to the Zionist advance through the expansion of pine trees (“Every tree is like a soldier”, a man from a unrecognized Bedouin village in the Negev explained to a group of Italian tourists), planting became a counter-practice from the Palestinian side. More precisely, planting is conceived as an explicitly political practice in what is generally known as “popular resistance”, a set of public actions and demonstrations organized by Palestinian popular committees recovering the model of the popular mobilization of the first Intifada, which are inspired by the principles of non-violence and civil disobedience, and whose main reference is Gandhi’s struggle against the British colonial rule in India. Despite their “non-violent” character, the popular committees’ demonstrations generally become the setting of harsh confrontations between Palestinian activists and the Israeli army or border police, who react to Palestinian actions of disobedience (trying to overcome border fences or planting trees in confiscated lands, for example) with tear gas, rubber-coated bullets, sound bombs, sometimes even live ammunition, and beatings: prominent activists are arrested, many get injured, and casualties are not excluded²⁷. In al-Bab, too, the village council organized a series of demonstrations to plant trees in the lands outside the wall path in January 2014. The village council contacted the landowners and they agreed upon the lands in which the mobilization could occur, and a few peasants were also mobilized to plough and sow barley during the demonstration. Most of the participants were villagers already engaged in the village popular committee, which had been particularly active in the demonstrations against the wall some years before, and many young people, rallied by some Palestinian NGOs, came from Jerusalem. Their activity mainly consisted in cleaning the uncultivated lands from shrubs and weeds, and hoeing the ground in order to plant the new trees. While in some areas of the village the Israeli border police, who regularly circulate in the patrol road around the wall path, observed the demonstration from a distance and did not intervene, in other areas it pushed the activists back and prevented the demonstration. These kinds of mobilizations are usually captured by photographs and journalists and sponsored through websites and social networks, where photos and commentaries circulate after the event. In this case Palestinian agriculture becomes a demonstration (*muzāhara*), a public event not only exposed to mass media and public opinion, but also to the Israeli army’s repression.

²⁷ In December 2014 the death of Ziad Abu Ein, a PNA minister, got an international echo because of his prominent role in the Palestinian government: Abu Ein died as a consequence of violent clashes with the Israeli soldiers in the village of Turmusiya near Ramallah, where he was taking part in a demonstration to plant olive trees.

Many Palestinian peasants I met during my fieldwork were skeptical about this form of collective action: once the small trees are planted, who will water them in the days following the demonstration? Why should ploughing become a public event and attract the Israeli army, if one can plough alone and undisturbed in those lands outside the wall? And why does the army come, enter the village and block the roads before every demonstration? Do activists and Israeli soldiers agree upon it? We should consider that these questions arise in a context crossed by political conflicts: firstly, popular committees have a specifically local, village base, so the overwhelming discourse on non-violent resistance must be situated in various contexts where different partisan orientations and local struggles for power do exist. For example, as far as I know Hamas activists do not take part in this form of political organization, supposedly as a consequence of the political repression they suffered in the West Bank and of a resulting mutual boycott, but maybe also because of different ideological premises on the violent/non-violent divide. At the local level these forms of disaffection can be simultaneously mobilized through kinship alliances and families' cleavages, although political conflicts can also divide the same kinship group. However, popular committees publicly present themselves as non-partisan and do not spare the PNA from criticism, although in some cases PNA members are also part of popular committees and, inversely, the PNA can sponsor some of their actions: in al-Bab members of the village council were also members of the popular committee, and the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture was involved in buying the trees to be planted together with some Palestinian NGOs. More importantly, if we consider the violent/non-violent dichotomy as an hegemonic discourse through which institutional powers aim to regulate political practices in the time of global war against "terrorism", the PNA has always officially promoted its pacific stance and support for popular non-violent actions, while simultaneously collaborating with the Israeli intelligence in "security coordination" and repressing a large part of Palestinians' mobilizations, especially in times of increased unrest, when spontaneous demonstrations and intensified confrontations with the Israeli forces did occur²⁸.

²⁸ During my fieldwork experience in the West Bank I have identified three main circumstances in which the Palestinian security forces and police repressed Palestinian demonstrators: in July 2012, when Palestinian police violently reacted against demonstrators in Ramallah during a rally criticizing the Oslo Agreements and the Israeli-Palestinian official collaboration; in June-July 2014 after the killing of Muhammad Abu Khdeir in Jerusalem and the widespread spontaneous mobilizations in the West Bank with masses of people marching and throwing stones to Israeli checkpoints, while clashes occurred in many villages between Palestinians and the Israeli army; in the current so-called "Third Intifada", following the burning of a Palestinian family in their house by Israeli settlers in Nablus area, when the few cases of Palestinians' stabbing attacks to Israeli settlers are accompanied by general mobilizations in all Palestinian

However, in most of the Palestinian people's perception peaceful "peace negotiations" have led to discredit and contain the Palestinian resistance (*al-muqāwama*) as a manifold but unitary political objective, while the same "peace process" (notably the Oslo Agreements) has produced further land confiscations, the increase of Israeli settlements and a general deterioration of Palestinians' life conditions. Like one of al-Bab villagers used to tell me with anger: "Peace has taken my land, peace has ruined my house!" (*is-salām akhad arḍī, is-salām kharrab baytī*). The politicians' discourses are often defined as "empty words" (*hakī fāḍī*): people's disillusion and distrust towards institutional politics are thus produced by the separation between the political speech and its real references, reflecting a perceived separation between the people and their representatives. The conflict between Fatah and Hamas must be read in this perspective: in the polarization between Fatah's "leftwing" and Hamas' "rightwing", even "peace", that is diplomacy conceived as a leftist strategy, has split from a rightist "resistance" (*muqāwama*), which remains at the core of the Islamist party's rhetoric and military operations. In this current configuration of the Palestinian political imagery, where conflicting positioning are embedded in people's everyday experience of the Israeli military occupation and settler colonization, we can better apprehend why even a leftist villager, who had been engaged in the PFLP for his whole life, confided to me he had voted Hamas at the 2006 parliamentary elections because it was the only Palestinian party which put "resistance" (*al-muqāwama*) at the core of its political program.

I maintain that peasants' skepticism does not merely express resignation due to people's feeling of being betrayed and abandoned by those who are supposed to represent their interests, but also defies the liberal dichotomy between the "public" and the "private" on which the politicization of Palestinian agriculture is grounded, when peasants' work is given the public scenery of a "demonstration". In other words, peasants' skepticism defies the exercise of politics as a set of actions produced in the public sphere: for peasants farming itself becomes a form of reappropriation of their lands confiscated by the occupation forces, and thus already forcibly taken away from the "private" domain. In this sense *ṣumūd* as a multiplicity of individual stances and everyday actions equally claiming the right to stay in the land is a constitutive part of *al-muqāwama* as an

towns, contained by Palestinian security forces and producing mortal confrontations with the Israeli army. The "Third intifada" is, in my view, just the continuation of June-July 2014 increasing violence produced by Israeli settlers and right-wingers against Palestinian civilians. In Palestinians' perception the absence of established powers which act in their name, support their cause and protect their interests let people perform their own forms of self-defense.

incontestably shared political objective of refusing to accept Israel's full control over Palestinian lives.

1.2.2. Israeli mobilizations around Palestinian agriculture: politicizing 'nature'

The politicization of Palestinian agriculture as a way to claim the Palestinian ownership of the land does not concern only agriculture as an everyday work practice to which peasants are devoted, nor merely its transformation into a public event in the form of collective demonstrations which involve Palestinian and Western activists. In al-Bab Palestinian agriculture attracted the attention of some Israelis, most of them residing in Jerusalem, who engaged themselves in personal relationships with some of al-Bab peasants. These personal relationships were conceived as the base for Israelis' support and solidarity to Palestinians living under the Israeli occupation. As a matter of fact, I was introduced to these Israelis by Palestinians in the village and I started to meet them independently when I decided to draw my attention into such a form of Israeli-Palestinian social contacts (4.2.). Since these Israeli people were connected to each other by an informal network, I could get to know many of them through a spontaneous snowball sampling. This informal network had been labeled "Friends of al-Bab" (*yadid al-Bab* in Hebrew) and was animated by a few people who had bumped into each other because of their engagement in the village²⁹. Dina, whom I had met at my Palestinian family's home, introduced me to Yael, who managed an Israeli group whose members weekly purchased vegetables from Ahmad, one of al-Bab peasants. This is how Dina and Yael explained to me how they got to know each other, during an interview³⁰ I conducted at Dina's place in Jerusalem:

Y: "Yes, we are, all of us, long-standing friends of al-Bab.

D: This is also how we met.

Y: Yes, actually that's how I got to know her. She has been my neighbor for so many years...

D: Can you imagine? We met in al-Bab! Metaphorically, we talked about this [the vegetables group] and we became friends.

²⁹ In Hebrew the term *yadid* expresses friendship ties in terms of support, solidarity and engagement, and must be distinguished from *khaver*' which mainly refers to friendship based on intimacy and emotional sharing in personal relationships. In fact, in the relationships between men and women *khaver*' is used to indicate one's lover.

³⁰ All the interviews and interactions I had with Israeli people were carried out in English.

Y: It really binds people...

D: Because it puts you in some place in the world, I think, especially in Israel. Ok, you know where you are, you know what you are doing.

Y: Yes, and we won't let the border disrupt the relationships. Wow, this is fascinating, really beautiful! (Dina and Yael, Jerusalem 2/7/2013).

In these Israeli women's words al-Bab, a Palestinian village, became the metaphorical place of their friendship, after they had been neighbors in Jerusalem for a long time without knowing each other. While Dina underlined how a Palestinian village offered her the sense of place, a concrete space where human connections could be constructed around a common objective despite the general disorientation she perceived "especially in Israel", Yael pointed out how "the border" could threaten this "friendship" network, simultaneously including Palestinians into it. It is noteworthy that both these Israelis from southwestern Jerusalem and even some Palestinians in al-Bab commonly refer to each other as "neighbors" (*jirān* in Arabic) because of the physical proximity of their residences, which are only a few kilometers away and mirror each other through the valley where the Green Line runs. However, in the Israeli women's words the conception of an Israeli-Palestinian "neighborhood" was clearly linked to the social relationships they were interweaving through the border virtually distinguishing them from Palestinians. In fact, in Yael's view the border itself did not represent any specific reality (the Green Line, the fence...), like she herself admitted saying she had never understood the complexity of the frontier and had never felt so interested to do so: "For me vegetables and people are what keeps me into that".

In his analyses on the production of locality in a globalized world, Arjun Appadurai has conceived locality as a property of social life constituting a "structure of feeling" which is relational and contextual rather than being scalar or spatial: "[locality is] a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects" (Appadurai 1996: 182). In contrast, his idea of "neighborhood" refers to existing social formations in which locality "as a dimension or value" is differently realized. In the anthropologist's view the neighborhood is always both context-driven and context-generative: as such, a particular theory of context is required to explore "what a neighborhood is produced from, against, in spite of, and in relation to" (Appadurai 1996: 184). Furthermore, Appadurai has shown how "power is always a key feature of the

contextual relations of neighborhoods” (Appadurai 1996: 187), especially when locality is both appropriated and contested by nation states to produce “national subjects”, simultaneously revealing its historical fragility.

In the previous pages I have shown how the materiality of agricultural work constructs locality as a structure of feeling through which Palestinians peasants reproduce themselves as “local subjects” opposing the colonizing production of exclusively Israeli neighborhoods³¹. At the same time I have also shown how the split between the materiality of peasants’ everyday work and Palestinians’ counter-claim over a “nationalized” locality, expressed through a mimetic rooting by planting trees in the form of a public event, engenders conflicts and misunderstandings among Palestinians over agriculture as a political practice, fragmenting the sense of Palestinian locality itself. Al-Bab peasants’ skepticism contests agriculture as a showcase of the national cause in the context of its simultaneous marginalization in the PNA policies and its progressive dismantlement following “peace” agreements. It is in this context that we should analyze how Ahmad, a Palestinian peasant, started to sell his vegetables to Yael and her purchasing group of Israelis from Jerusalem.

Ahmad was a forty years old man with eight children. He worked in Israel illegally since he was prevented to get a work permit by the Israeli secret services for alleged security reasons, which he could not know and did not understand. To supplement his income as a laborer in Israel he also farmed on his lands. Due to water scarcity supposedly given by infrastructural problems, Ahmad and his family did not get water from the village water system because their house was one of the last ones in the lowest part of al-Bab. Fortunately, Ahmad had a quite big well where he collected rain water for domestic and agricultural use, and shared a part of it with his neighbors who suffered from the same lack of water but did not have their own reservoir. Ahmad had also built two greenhouses and had tried to sell his vegetables in Bethlehem, at the markets, some years before I met him, but he had stopped because it was not sustainable. In fact, selling to the market was not worthwhile for a little peasant because market prices were so cheap that one had to have a quite big production to really gain from it. Ultimately, Ahmad met

³¹ “All locality building has a moment of colonization, a moment both historical and chronotypic, when there is a formal recognition that the production of a neighborhood requires deliberate, risky, even violent action in respect to the soil, forests, animals, and other human beings. [...] The production of a neighborhood is inherently colonizing, in the sense that it involves the assertion of socially (often ritually) organized power over places and settings that are viewed as potentially chaotic or rebellious. [...] In this sense, the production of a neighborhood is inherently an exercise of power over some sort of hostile or recalcitrant environment, which may take the form of another neighborhood” (Appadurai 1996: 183-184).

Yael and her husband who had come to the village in order to look for a Palestinian “neighbor” from whom to buy “organic” vegetables.

These Israeli citizens were living on the other side of the Green Line, in residential neighborhoods built in southwestern Jerusalem in the 50s. They were all professionals who discovered the possibility to buy organic vegetables through cooperatives while living in the USA for work. Ben, a biologist living in Tzur Hadassah, who used to buy vegetables from a Palestinian farmer in the neighboring Palestinian village, explained to me: “We thought that maybe we could do the same here, and we started to organize it, so Yael got a group from Jerusalem and we had a group here. At the beginning we had 15-20 families, every week two or three families with kids went down into the valley where there is a big tree, a mulberry tree, and we met [with Palestinian peasants] like that, we drank tea, coffee, it was social”. After two years Yael had decided to split from Ben’s group because it took her too much time to go there: “People in Tzur Hadassah were really enthusiastic about this project because those were their neighbors, and it’s five minutes away. So I said: ‘Just a minute, if these are *their* neighbors, who are *my* neighbors? Who’s around here?’”. Yael found that Ahmad was one of her Palestinian neighbors: he actually lived ten minutes away from her place by car. However, while she could drive from Jerusalem in the bypass road for Israeli settlers and enter the village through al-Bab checkpoint, Ahmad could not. Like Ahmad, even his vegetables could not enter Israel, as a road sign at the checkpoint reminded the Israeli drivers (photo).

Israelis knew their practice was illegal: some years before one of them had to pay a heavy fine after he was stopped at a checkpoint, where the army found his van full of vegetables bought from Palestinians in the West Bank. However, these people were mainly part of an Israeli left wing, white and urban middle-class who looked for healthy food: “clean and nice vegetables”, like they said. Their definition of “organic” was not chiefly derived from an expert knowledge, but on a relationship with their Palestinian “neighbors” based on trust and friendship. Yael, who had previously met an “agricultural expert” to get basic information on organic farming, explained to me: “I asked Ahmad how he waters, if he uses any chemicals, if he can let us go and see around [...]. I totally trust Ahmad, I know he is telling me the truth. But I always tell every new member who would like to join the group that I cannot guarantee that it’s organic. There’s no label”. While having the opportunity to visit the peasant and see his way of farming, an explicit superposition was made between these Israelis’ idea of “natural” and their image of Palestinian agriculture as a “traditional” one: in their words the particular value of Palestinian vegetables was

represented by their being grown in “a very old way of growing”. In this sense Palestinian peasants’ knowledge was fully recognized and given authority: a young activist from Jerusalem, who was able to involve 70 families from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in purchasing vegetables from another Palestinian village, maintained that “[compared with Palestinians] *I am inferior, because they have the secrets of the earth*”.

A comparable idea of “nature”, fundamentally linked to a positive image of cultural authenticity, also constituted the ideological surface for the creation of an Israeli national park, which was approved in 2012 in al-Bab lands left outside the wall. The official aim of the park is to preserve the agricultural landscape and the ancient terraces cultivated with olive trees, simultaneously excluding al-Bab peasants who own and still cultivate them. The park is ruled by the Nature and Parks Authority (NPA) – an Israeli governmental agency – and is part of the Jerusalem metropolitan park, a green ring surrounding the city promoted by the actual mayor Nir Barkat to stop the building development project known as Safdie Plan³². The park will include the Jerusalem zoo and the Ottoman railway line Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, by which Israelis coming from the coastal town will be able to have a trip into the holy city moving through green areas only. The park infrastructures will offer many services like bicycle hiring and cycle paths, parking, a coffee shop and a restaurant (which will be probably created in deserted Palestinian stone houses) and visits to archeological sites. Beyond the appropriation of three water springs and pools that were used by al-Bab peasants before 1948 – one of which is still used by al-Bab shepherds to water their animals – the natural reserve includes the ruins of the old al-Bab, which the brochure of the park describes as an “abandoned” village. It is important to note that there is a shift in the Israeli narratives here: defacement as a form of concealment of the Palestinian history, which simultaneously hid the foundational violence of the Israeli State (1.1.2.), produces today a kind of revelation which unmask the Palestinian presence to project it onto a distant past totally disconnected from the Israeli history, objectified like the park nature and exposed to its visitors: a past of “abandonment” providing the taste of time, simultaneously becoming a past so far that Israelis could not know why they should have to deal with it. Concealment and exposition are here interlinked to produce oblivion.

³² At the same time Nir Barkat defended the E1 construction plan to “strengthen” Jerusalem and connect Ma’ale Adumim settlement to the city (“Barkat: E1 building will strengthen Jerusalem”, *Jerusalem Post*, 12/13/2012). In the same area where Refaim park will be established, the huge project of Givat Yael settlement was discussed a few years ago, but finally not approved.

The case of the national park in al-Bab lands must be situated in a broader discussion over “nature” which was produced by different forms of Israeli mobilization against the construction of the wall in this area. It is interesting to consider the different ways Israelis’ environmental commitment can both converge with and diverge from their political solidarity with Palestinians, and I suppose that these forms of convergences and divergences can proceed from the conjunctures and disjunctures between locality as a property of social life and neighborhoods as specific social formations (Appadurai 1996: 199). More precisely, I question how different Israeli actors could simultaneously claim the unacceptability of the separation wall in al-Bab and the acceptability of the national park in the village agricultural lands on the basis of a shared environmental sensibility.

It was the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), an environmental organization founded in 1953, that informally supported al-Bab attorney in the court appeal of the village council against the wall. However, while the village attorney was asking the court to move the route of the barrier down into the valley, the SPNI was opposing its construction itself. In June 2014 I met one of its members³³, who worked as the regional coordinator for environmental matters in Jerusalem and took part in public discussions about the wall and the park in al-Bab. He explained to me that the organization was “trying to be very professional and not political”: even if he defined himself a “secular left-wing anti-Zionist conservationist” and openly criticized Israeli occupation and settlements in the West Bank, he said that in the SPNI “there are people like me and there are settlers, quite a few. What combines us together is environment” (David, Jerusalem 20/06/2014). Gush Etzion settlers seemed to be very sensitive to environmental matters and a field school in Kfar Etzion used to organize trips on the Jerusalem hills. Actually, in al-Bab altercations occurred a few times between Palestinian youth and Israeli settlers who were hiking and wanted to enter the village in order to visit alleged Jewish ruins contained in the internal cavity of a water spring³⁴.

³³ Interview with A. S., Jerusalem, 20/06/2014.

³⁴ Under settlers’ pressure the Israel Antiquities Authority provided for archeological excavations inside the spring. Apparently, the Israeli government previously knew about the site but kept it secret since it was in a very sensitive location. We must consider that, as far as I know, archeologists who make excavations in the West Bank necessarily work for the Israeli army and are accompanied by soldiers on the concerned sites. Among al-Bab people suspicion started to circulate as the Israeli settlers did succeed in entering the spring maybe once, thanks to a villager who supposedly let them penetrate the area, which is only a few meters far from the wall construction. At the same time rumors reported that Israelis had put Jewish remains on purpose in order to claim some rights on that place. Since the water spring had progressively dried – providing a little water only in winter – the villagers also blamed the Israeli settlers to have entered the spring and blocked the water source. Clashes occurred between Palestinian *shebāb* and the Israeli settlers who were thus prevented to have access into the area. Until the end of my fieldwork in July 2014 Israeli

It is well known that Israeli settlers strongly opposed the separation wall construction in the West Bank. The SPNI representative told me that “many settlers oppose the wall because they think it will be the final border of Israel, so they don’t want to be separated from the rest of Israel. That’s a political and ideological attitude. People in Gush Etzion are acting on another basis, on an ecological [basis] and in great respect for the landscape and the people who work these landscapes”. In 2012 the mayor of Gush Etzion Regional Council, Shaul Goldstein, was appointed to head the Nature and Parks Authority, significantly changing the policies of this State agency – previously governed by ex-armies – with respect to the wall issue. This change was crucial in Battir, a Palestinian village near al-Bab, where the NPA stood – together with Friends of the Earth – in strong opposition to the construction of the fence³⁵.

What does this “respect” towards Palestinian “neighbors” and the landscape – that SPNI and settlers seem to share – consist of? Which practical forms does it take? The objection to the wall in al-Bab – and later in Battir by NPA – was claimed on the basis of an “expert knowledge”, grounded on academic disciplines like geography, geology, hydrology, which provide a “professional evaluation of landscapes”. I will focus here on three concepts that these environmentalist groups and their “expert knowledge” promote. The first is the idea of “protecting nature by educating people”, which is the objective of SPNI and Kfar Etzion field schools. As Joel Bauman pointed out, this was a common practice in early Zionism (in the Yishuv period) and consisted of “a highly mobilized and institutionalized academic discipline of *yediot ha’aretz*’ – literally ‘knowledge of the land’ – which employed hiking trips (*tiyulim* in Braverman 2009: 337) and other outdoor activities to ingrain a sense of attachment to the land” (Bauman 1995: 21). In this sense nature is objectified and the landscape becomes something to be surveyed and shown, even today, through organized tours for Israeli citizens and settlers in Palestinian lands. Israeli environmental sensibility also appropriates the concept of “cultural heritage”, taken from international organizations like UNESCO³⁶, which in most of these Israelis’

excavations in the spring were not started yet. In October 2014 it was revealed to me that some villagers had entered the spring cave and had destroyed anything inside: at the same time they irreparably damaged what in the past had represented one of their main water sources, around which a whole neighborhood had been built in the new al-Bab.

³⁵ Battir is another Palestinian village in the South-West of Jerusalem that was cut by the Green Line in 1949. In June 2014, upon a request led by the Palestinian National Authority, it was recognized as a world heritage by UNESCO. In September 2014 the Israeli government decided to withdraw the project of the wall in this village, letting the Palestinian-Israeli environmental organizations win their legal battle.

³⁶ “Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as [...] knowledge

view refers to the historical reproduction of the Biblical landscape and Jewish forefathers' culture. In the words of the SPNI representative an essential distinction is made between "living" and "dead" heritage and landscapes: al-Bab terraces are *surviving* because they are still cultivated, and this is a major reason to protect them. Ultimately, Palestinian agriculture is thus conceived as a form of "traditional agriculture", simultaneously representing Palestinian peasants as the successors of Jewish ancient farmers in the Biblical land and confining them to a pre-modern world, while objectifying them together with the landscape they inhabit. Indeed, what is surprising for my SPNI interlocutor is that "[Palestinian peasants] are working in the *same* terraces, with the *same* techniques, they still build the [dry stone] walls by hand and repair them by hand". What is not surprising, then, is that one of al-Bab peasants was repeatedly asked to show his way of plowing in front of a class of Israeli children accompanied by their teachers.

It is easy to understand how, on the basis of these ideas and forms of evaluation, the Israeli national park in al-Bab lands resulted to be acceptable in most of the Israelis' view (no protest was directed against its establishment), while the wall was considered unacceptable³⁷. On the other hand, the support to Palestinian "traditional agriculture" constituted the base to legitimize Palestinians' access to their lands inside the Israeli national park, while Israeli visitors were expected to enjoy natural tourism in their spare time. Eyal, Yael's husband, was a biologist like his wife. He always specified to me he did not want to be identified with any particular group, but he was actively engaged in the vegetables project and often visited Ahmad's family with Yael and their three children. Eyal and Yael also took their son, who studied Arabic language at school, to Ahmad's place in order to let him speak Arabic with Ahmad's daughters. When the park plan was going to be endorsed Eyal, as a member of "Friends of al-Bab", had a speech in front of the Jerusalem committee which was approving the park in order to claim al-Bab peasants' right to work in their lands. However, even in his words Palestinian peasants eventually became the performers of a "traditional agriculture" to be shown as a part of the park entertainment: "If [the park authority] want them to collect the olives or to water the

and practices concerning nature. [...] Cultural heritage is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization" (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002>, accessed on 26/11/2015).

³⁷ Above all, what resulted unacceptable was the proposal of al-Bab attorney to move the barrier down into the valley in order to keep the built up area and agricultural lands together. The SPNI representative said: "when [al-Bab attorney] suggested to take the barrier to the northern side of the valley, it was not acceptable because it would cut, block, the valley itself, and stop the flow of wildlife and the exchange of genes. Once again, professionally it's not acceptable".

sheep, it has to be very easy for them, otherwise they will stop doing it and then you'll have to look for people who demonstrate to children how traditional agricultural is done" (Eyal, al-Bab/Jerusalem 28/6/2014). In the summer 2014 he took me to have a walk in the future park area, around the water springs I had often visited with my Palestinian friends in what was for them "the old al-Bab". Eyal also showed an affective attachment to that place since in his teenage years (in the 80s), when he was devoted to hiking and bird watching in the valley, playing truant in order to have a walk in those hills. Even if he did not like going to the demonstrations against the wall in al-Bab like Israeli activists did, he felt involved in the struggle against the barrier for different reasons: "I knew people from al-Bab because of the vegetables and I knew the valley because I live on the other side of it. I wanted to stop the fence not only for Palestinians, but also for myself because I like the area" (Eyal, al-Bab/Jerusalem 28/6/2014).

Beyond Israelis' different reasons to oppose the construction of the separation wall, "Friends of al-Bab"'s support to Palestinian "traditional" agriculture aimed to claim Palestinians' right of access to their lands inside the park: if the park could be legitimate in order to preserve a wonderful environment, Palestinian peasants' exclusion was not. Explicit political solidarity was expressed by the group through their sharing of Palestinians' agricultural work. While the yearly olives harvest at Ahmad's and at other villagers' was a way to share a whole day with Palestinians and help them in a very hard work, Israelis' more political support rather deployed in accompanying Palestinian peasants to farm on their lands outside the wall route, where they would be forbidden to have access. It is important to consider here the different "souls" which animated "Friends of al-Bab" as a group of different Israeli people who could conceive their activities in al-Bab variably and could also embrace divergent political perspectives. Unlike Yael and Eyal, who did not represent themselves as activists, Amos and his girlfriend Sarah were engaged in al-Bab since 2009, when they started to take part in the demonstrations against the wall. They later created the informal network named "Friends of al-Bab" when they found other Israeli people who kept visiting al-Bab like them, although the collective mobilizations against the barrier had stopped and the village Popular Committee had started to refuse any other contacts with Israelis in the fear of "normalization" (see 3.2.3.). Amos and Sarah, however, did not conceive political solidarity with Palestinians as the main goal of their activism, but were more interested in mobilizing people inside their own society on the issue of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. As meditation practitioners, Amos and Sarah appropriated the

Buddhist philosophical concepts of suffering, compassion and awareness to propose their “community” – as they defined their wide social network based on the meditation practice – what they thought in terms of “engaged dharma”, an approach combining spiritual, introspective research with social engagement and political activism. Amos made this explicit: “As an activist of course I’m concerned with what gives activism more power, more force, more influence, and I see there is a community, and community is a very big resource for social change, and the values of the community is very much in line with the values of the activism that I do, but this community has no political awareness. So I see it as a resource that I can mobilize” (Amos, al-Bab 11/10/2014). For this reason Amos and Sarah organized “practice days in the field” in which people were not expected to sit in meditation, but to practice dharma values in action: “We do olives picking, we do it in a group, we practice our awareness, but there is also a political issue, because as an Israeli I come to a Palestinian village, maybe it’s my first time in a Palestinian village, I don’t feel so comfortable, maybe I’m afraid, maybe I’m ashamed, I hear Palestinians saying their perspectives, their narratives, it’s not easy for me to hear. I have many reactions inside. So there are a lot of things to be aware of, and to work with”. The olive harvest at Ahmad’s, in which I took part with Ahmad and his brothers’ families together with Israelis, involved tens of people coming from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, some even from England, linked by the meditation network or by the vegetables project. Since the olive harvest is a very hard work which takes many days to be accomplished, it involves the participation of all Palestinian family members, even women and children: the working day usually becomes a joyful occasion to gather together in the open air, have lunch and let children run in the fields. Communication between Palestinians and Israelis is not always easy because of the language barrier: most of Palestinian men can speak Hebrew because of their labor experience in Israel, while Israelis rarely can speak Arabic, so Palestinian women who are not English-speakers are often excluded by verbal exchanges. Like Amos admitted, sometimes these encounters were successful and people did exchange with each other, and sometimes it was only work to collect olives. However, these Israelis’ visits to the village were clearly framed as trips “in the occupied territories” and the issue of the Israeli occupation and settler colonization of the West Bank was openly stated, with the aim of contesting Israeli people’s mainstream views and let questions – more than answers – arise.

Beyond the olive harvest, Amos and Sarah also took people to farm on Palestinians’ lands cut out by the wall with some of al-Bab peasants who endured in cultivating there. In this

case the mobilization was Israeli, since landowners were there as singular Palestinians, in some cases opposing their fathers' resignation for lands considered already lost. Shadi, one of these peasants, went and farmed on his land also by himself – when his Israeli supporters were not there – and created a colorful piece of land thanks to the variety of his vegetables growing in a slope between the separation wall and the Israeli bypass road. The Israeli-Palestinian shared work generally occurred on Saturday, a day off both for Palestinian laborers in Israel and for Israeli people: this tells about who these Israelis are, since Jews are not supposed to carry out any activity during Shabbat³⁸. Israelis' tasks and work to do in the land was established by the landowner and could vary according to his need. Amos commented the Israeli people's support to Shadi's work as follows: "About the work days with Shadi you can say it's completely normalization, you come, you work on the land together, he's a man, we are people, we have a good time together, we eat together and we laugh together... This is maybe 99% of the day, but 1% we tell people that this land is threatened, there is the wall, there is the national park, and many people of the village have stopped coming to this area, and Shadi is one of the people who keeps on coming and we are doing this to support him. This 1% is really important, it's just 1%, but it allows maybe people to take later one more step and to do one more thing slowly slowly" (Amos, al-Bab 11/10/2014). Shadi was also asked to give lessons to Israelis about his "traditional" agriculture: in this case, however, Palestinian peasants' knowledge has not been confined to an open-air museum where the Israeli public attended its representation, but rather constituted a shared practice in the wish to let it be possible even in the future. At the same time, contrarily to Ahmad, Shadi had refused to sell his vegetables to the Israelis who helped him farming, stating he preferred to sell his produces to his fellow villagers.

The politicization of Palestinian agriculture in Israelis' discourses shows how the constitutive disjuncture between a nationalized sense of locality and multiple and differentiated Israeli neighborhoods produced by the settler colonizing nature of the Israeli State has simultaneously shaped different subjectivities in the contemporary Israeli society. Gush Etzion settlers' environmental concern produced an idea of "neighborhood" which included Palestinians in order to legitimize settlers' presence in the West Bank while promoting a Judaized hegemonic interpretation of locality to be expanded among Palestinians: in this sense settlers' penetration into Israeli governmental institutions

³⁸ Among 39 forbidden activities in Shabbat there is also plowing, sowing, harvesting and threshing (Mishna Shabbat 7: 2).

paradoxically questioned the Israeli separation policy enforced by the army and represented by the wall, generating apparently favorable effects for Palestinians, too. Conversely, Palestinians found themselves in the compromising position of addressing settlers' increasing hegemony in the Nature and Parks Authority in search of support for obtaining permission from the Israeli army to farm on their lands³⁹. This shows the constitutive tension in the Israeli State between a colonial system of domination, which keeps colonizer and colonized separated, from a settler colonial system, where settlers wish to be indigenized in the occupied West Bank and not to be seen as settlers anymore (Veracini 2013). More precisely, the mutually contradicting Israeli policies of military occupation and settler colonization, which both contribute to control and oppress the Palestinian population, let the settlers and the army emerge as two allied and simultaneously rival actors in the contemporary Israeli State.

Differently from settlers, the Israeli group "Friends of al-Bab" contested an exclusively Israeli definition of locality and concretely engaged in creating an Israeli-Palestinian neighborhood built on the development of personal relationships between Israeli people coming from Jerusalem and Palestinians living in villages next to the Green Line. In this sense the neighborhood was not created *despite* the border, but rather *thanks to* it. Yet, while contesting the state border as a national frontier, the materiality of the power it represents risked to be both trivialized and reaffirmed: although Yael and Eyal ordinarily went to visit Ahmad to buy his vegetables, most people of their purchasing group preferred not to enter the village. On the contrary, they asked Ahmad to deliver his produces at the village entrance, which coincided with the entrance of the nearby Israeli settlement, where Palestinian and Israeli mobility was mixed. In this way the Israeli purchasers could avoid entering the Palestinian village and simply drove in through the Israeli bypass road connecting the settlement to Jerusalem. Although Yael justified this preference saying some people were afraid to get lost in an unknown environment, Dina admitted that people were afraid that Palestinians could throw stones at their cars. From his point of view Ahmad just complained about the money he had to pay for a taxi when he had to take his vegetables up to that hybrid meeting point – whose hybrid character was precisely given by the Israeli settler colonization of the West Bank.

Furthermore, while the purchase of vegetables from Palestinians was conceived as a form of political solidarity among others, the Israeli desire for organic food seemed to express

³⁹ Thanks to settlers' environmental concern, this was what the al-Bab village council was suggested to do by some members of "Friends of al-Bab". Palestinians totally refused to undertake this way.

the modern sensibility of a globalized and urbanized middle-class, who is not really separated from Palestinians as such, but rather from agricultural work and food production. In the context of such an “environmental consumption”, the aesthetisation of “traditional agriculture” contributed to naturalize and objectify Palestinians within the landscape they inhabit, providing the open-air museum of a natural park where peasants' work could be shown as another form of public entertainment. Ultimately, the Israeli middle-class longing for organic vegetables and natural parks contributed to separate Palestinians' food production from their memory and social life, connected to agricultural practices and thus inscribed in the landscape: if only Israeli children will be allowed to enter the park thanks to their citizenship, Palestinian children will not be able to swim in the water pools their grandfathers built for irrigation anymore (Photo 5). At the same time the label of “traditional” attributed to Palestinian farming, sometimes explicitly referred to an ancient and possibly Jewish past, did not take into account the dramatic historical changes Palestinian peasants had to face since the Nakba, nor their necessary attempts to adapt their ways of farming to actual hard conditions, created by their ongoing dispossession. While in the ancient village a collective system of rotation was in force for irrigating, thanks to more than twenty different water springs, today a peasant can be considered as such only if he has a private well for collecting rain, or if he can afford to buy water from Mekorot, the Israeli national company which chiefly provides water to the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Finally, the constitutive ambivalent character of Israelis' solidarity towards West Bank Palestinians can nevertheless contribute to rethink Israeli activism against the Israeli occupation: shared agricultural work in confiscated lands can become a way to claim equal rights for Palestinians while contesting the Israeli society's oblivion of the exclusionary violence on which the Israeli state had been historically grounded.

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In the previous paragraphs I have questioned the political dimension that Palestinian peasantry bears today. In a famous article Ted Swedenburg defined Palestinian peasants as “national signifiers” in the construction of the Palestinian national discourse in the 70s and 80s. At the same time authors have shown how a supposed lack of political consciousness had hidden the historical role that peasants had played in the first Arab revolts against Zionism. If al-Bab inhabitants still represented themselves as

peasants, despite the structural dismantlement of Palestinian agriculture following the Nakba and its further decline after the Oslo Agreements, I have shown how agriculture is central to their resistance in the form of *ṣumūd*. Beyond the different interpretations of this concept, in my research I have considered the *ṣumūd* as an ethical practice based on staying in the land. In this sense *ṣumūd* overcomes the dichotomic opposition between immobility and forced displacement, or passive and active forms of resistance, and it is rather considered as a combined form of ethical and political subjectivation. Under this perspective the materiality of agricultural work, rather than the Palestinian peasants' role in discursive formations, has been taken into account: peasants in al-Bab criticize refugees who did not go back to cultivate their lands, leaving them ready for Israeli confiscations thanks to the label of "the absentees' property". Furthermore, al-Bab peasants operated some forms of sabotage of the wall construction in order to be able to continue farming their lands and grazing their animals. While the act of planting trees constituted a mirroring endeavor on both the Israeli and the Palestinian side with the aim of claiming rights over the land, peasants showed skepticism towards these forms of collective mobilizations and public events, which were organized by Palestinian popular committees with the occasional support of the PNA. Their lands had already been taken from the private domain through forcible expropriation, so that they preferred to carry on agricultural work alone and far from the control that the Israeli army exerted during such demonstrations. In this sense peasants contested the exercise of politics as a necessarily public action, and agricultural work was rather linked to their *ṣumūd* as an individual act to construct themselves as ethical and political subjects.

Palestinian agriculture simultaneously attracted the attention of some Israeli citizens. In these Israelis' view it represented a form of "traditional agriculture" recalling the Biblical landscape made by their Jewish ancestors, or representing the production of organic and healthy food. In both cases the pre-modern world to which Palestinian peasants were confined paralleled an uncontaminated idea of "nature" and produced the need for preservation of a reality that was considered as still "surviving". This ideological frame justified the approval of an Israeli national park in a large part of al-Bab lands, which remained outside the wall, simultaneously excluding Palestinian peasants who still cultivated them. In this context environmental sensibility drew different form of Israeli solidarity towards Palestinians. The collective purchase of "organic" vegetables accompanied the opposition to the peasants' exclusion from the natural park. At the same time the contestation of the wall construction united settlers and environmentalists on the

basis of conservationist claims. Despite the differences that crossed these Israeli subjectivities, a nationalized sense of locality was questioned through the conception of Israeli-Palestinian “neighborhoods” created by the Israeli settler colonization of the Palestinian land, and promoted both by Israelis living next to the Green Line and by settlers residing in the West Bank. Although the idea of “neighborhood” aimed to contest the “borders” implemented by the Israeli separation policies, the practices of purchasing vegetables from al-Bab peasants or hiking in the Palestinian lands to have trips in the nature contributed in reaffirming the borders between Palestinians and an exclusively Jewish space, where only Israeli citizens would gain access. Furthermore, the notion of the Palestinians’ “traditional agriculture” hid the radical changes peasants had to face because of the Israeli appropriation of their resources. Only the Israelis’ support to single farmers, who kept on farming on their lands outside the wall path, targeted the Israeli occupation as an explicit political issue which affected the Palestinians’ life, and tried to question the Israeli public opinion rather than focusing on a general solidarity towards Palestinian “neighbors”.

2. WORK AND DEPENDENCE

2.1. Work and social reproduction

2.1.1. Work and personal dependence

During spring 2014 I often visited my friend Yazan in his plot of land in al-Bab. In May, every year, he started to farm on his father's land to grow vegetables. Even if these vegetables were mainly grown for his family's consumption, the family members bought them at a certain price, which was established comparing market prices. In this way Yazan could get some money from his work, although the prices of his vegetables were not calculated in relation to the cost of water, irrigation materials, seeds and little plants, nor did they take into account his own work time.

Yazan always worked in the land with one of his brothers' son, Hasan. Hasan was 13 years old and followed his uncle's orders without complaining: he was sent to open and close the water pipes for irrigation, collect vegetables, carried heavy buckets full of produces to the mule and rode it home. Yazan himself carried out some specific jobs, like ploughing, but most of the ordinary tasks were done with his nephew's help. He considered it a part of his education: "In this way they learn" (*hīk bit 'allamu*), he used to tell me about youth in general, after I expressed my disagreement saying that this work was too heavy for Hasan, who would be better staying at home and studying, given his bad results at school. However, Hasan loved working in the land. He especially loved riding the mule and carrying out the tasks that gave him some responsibility, like riding down to the valley every day before the sunset, in order to pick up his father who came back from his work in Jerusalem following the paths through the hills.

When I went to visit Yazan and Hasan in the land I wanted to help them collecting vegetables, but Yazan preferred me to sit in the shadow because of the very hot weather. At sunset, when work was almost finished, we sat together near his parents' old stone house, that was set up as an open-air living room with comfortable sofas, and Yazan lit the fire and prepared tea, while giving Hasan the last orders: close the water pipes, bring some mint for the tea, take this and that, bring the mule... At the end of the day Hasan had worked as much as his uncle, but he had worked under his authority and direction. In the evening, when they took vegetables home, Hasan's mother (Yazan's brother's wife) weighed and divided vegetables in different packs, and put them in a corner of her house,

ready to be delivered. Yazan sold his vegetables not only to his brothers' families, but also to other people in the village. In summer 2014 he had earned about 2000 shekel (about 400 euro) from this business. Since Hasan worked so hard in the land and his mother took part in packaging, I asked Yazan why they couldn't have some vegetables for free. He welcomed my suggestion with an uncomfortable smile and did not answer. Yazan's own economical situation was not so good, since he earned his living by his agricultural work – especially in winter, when he was employed for ploughing other people's lands in the Bethlehem area – and by sporadic illegal labor in Israel.

The joint efforts of Yazan, Hasan and Hasan's mother to manage agricultural work for a modest sale of vegetables show how work in the domestic sector is differently organized and evaluated along the social hierarchy. The conceptualization of “personal dependence” to describe a specific organization of work relations in the domestic group has been introduced since the 70s by some French anthropologists. Criticizing the structural and functionalist reading of kinship from a Marxian perspective, Claude Meillassoux (1975) considered that kinship has to be conceived as an ideological display that serves the reproduction of the work force. In this way Meillassoux did not relegate his concept of the “domestic group” to pre-capitalist societies, but he proposed to contextualize its role on the basis of its insertion into a wider range of different historical modes of production, like he did by highlighting the constitutive link between domestic and capitalist economy in colonial contexts. According to the French anthropologist, if personal dependence and social hierarchies are justified by kinship, the control of means of production (land and work tools) in the domestic group is exerted through the control of men and women conceived both as producers and reproducers. Following the same Marxian critique, feminist anthropologists underlined how sexual difference constitutes the biological fundament for the naturalization of power relations between “men” and “women”, two social categories rather defined by the sexual division of labor based on men's appropriation of women's reproductive, domestic and care work (Guillaumin 1992, Mathieu 1991). Together with sex, other studies have focused on age as a social construct that defines power asymmetries and produces (being simultaneously produced by) a specific organization of work relations (see the study of apprenticeship in West Africa in Viti 2007a, 2013).

Following this French anthropological heritage, some Italian anthropologists have inquired personal dependence as a “practice of inequality” (Solinas 2005: 7) that can be identified and compared in different societies (Solinas 2005, 2007; Viti 2006, 2007b,

2008). Personal dependence has been defined as a social relationship which ties a person to another one through a *direct but non exclusive* link. Personal dependence, while remaining a wide category involving different forms of social ties, is thus distinguished from slavery, based on the appropriation of a person (the slave) by another one (the master) and his/her alienation from his/her social world (direct and exclusive relationship). Personal dependence is also differentiated from wage relationships in the capitalistic system, where work is formally “free” and becomes a commodity whose value is measurable (indirect and non exclusive relationship).

Fabio Viti has proposed to analyze the link between work and personal dependence through the concepts of “hierarchical solidarity” and “asymmetrical reciprocity” (Viti 2006). Borrowing and partly disarticulating Sahlins’ concept of “hierarchical solidarity”, drawn against Durkheim’s “mechanical” and “organic” solidarity, work appears to be a set of services which women and youth should offer to men and older people as a form of moral duty due to their position of subordination, dependence and debt. The sense of “debt” is produced by this organization of the “reproduction of life”, in which everyone’s position is contextual (it depends on whom the subject refers to) and transitory (it changes throughout time): such as children who are fed by their parents, once they are grown up they shall provide for older people who finally become unproductive in the domestic economy (Solinas 2007). Crossed by these naturalized differences on which power asymmetries are based, reciprocity still exists and contributes to reassert inequality: the dependents are supposed to receive protection and security in exchange of their services. Anthropological studies, mostly developed on Africanist ethnographies, have enlightened the ambiguous character of this kind of reciprocity, which appears to be as a structure of mutual – even if diversified – dependence. Referring to the Gramscian notion of “consensus” (Viti 2006: 16), it was shown how a sense of mutual attachment and a precise set of expectations usually emerge between the social actors involved in this kind of social relationships. These subjects are not simply obliged to do what they do, but they are actively engaged in the production of affects and moral values that goes beyond material necessities and the political arrangement of life conditions. The *normality* of the social relationships based on personal dependence, deriving from their organic link with different forms of belonging, has been questioned from the perspective of “obedience” conceived as the subject’s valued quality of conforming to social norms and respond to different forms of social authority (Cutolo 2012). At the same time the need to think of personal dependence in

contemporary broader configurations of work and dependence, where wage labor and “flexibility” play an important role in the post-fordist era, has brought to reconceptualize the relationship between the individual and his/her social world through the Foucauldian notion of “subjectivation” (Cutolo 2012: 25, Vignato 2010). Foucault departed from a normative idea of power as a force which represses the subjects’ supposedly constitutive freedom. On the contrary, power is rather conceived as a relationship characterized by instability and fluidity, and can be better grasped through the link between subjection (*assujettissement*) and subjectivation. If subjection refers to discursive formation, disciplines and apparatuses which have an effect of domination on subjects, subjectivation implies the productive capacity of power which let subjectivities emerge. The construction of the self constitutes subjectivation as the modes and techniques through which the subjects work upon themselves in order to accomplish certain norms and values. In this sense what links subjection and subjectivation is a process of objectivation through which subjects are constituted as objects of knowledge and specific practices. Foucault’s concept of subjectivation questions the classical view of “freedom” as ontologically opposed to power. Under this perspective the question of “obedience” does not appear to be pertinent in reading the link between work and personal dependence, even in the context of my research, if we consider work not only as a material deployment of living forces according to the social hierarchy, but also a set of knowledge and practices through which people are subjected, while playing a fundamental role in the ethical construction of the self.

While the anthropological interest on personal dependence had the merit of underlying the possible interpenetration of the affective and material dimensions which constitute social hierarchies, it is precisely the moral and affective dimension of personal dependence which will be at the core of my interest in the following chapters. The description of Yazan’s management of his farming, supported by his nephew Hasan and his sister-in-law’s unpaid services, shows how different values are attached to youth and women’s work in Palestinian domestic economy, originally based on agriculture. Even if Palestinian rural societies have been affected by radical changes, mostly produced by the appropriation of Palestinians’ resources (land and water) by the Israeli State, I will focus here on the present configuration of Palestinian domestic life, in which I took part during my fieldwork.

Trying to live in a very large Palestinian family’s as one of its members, I could also experience the internal hierarchies and potential conflicts that characterize what are

supposed to be homogeneous social categories in Marxian critique, like “men” and “women”, “elders” and “youth”. Significantly, an important part of my first socialization at the family’s consisted of work. My hybrid status of “guest” (*dīf*) and “daughter” (*bint*)⁴⁰ immediately situated me at the edges of women and children’s world. Unable to join and enjoy verbal exchanges with people due to my initial linguistic handicap, I started to take part in the *hāra*’s life through two main activities: playing with children – as playing consists of a bodily language that doesn’t require particular linguistic skills – and helping women in their domestic work, as a strategy to avoid the boring destiny of sitting, drinking and eating, like a guest should keep doing. However, my participation in everyday feminine work was never required and often raised people’s surprise: being a guest was a special status that spared me both from normal feminine duties and from an explicit exercise of men and women’s authority on me, contrary to what used to happen to my younger playmates, who often had to give up their games in order to go along with adults’ demands.

For children play and work are often blurred: their fundamental role of connection among different domestic units grants them a great freedom of movement in the larger domestic space of the *hāra* (the family’s neighborhood). Their involvement in domestic work mainly consists of carrying goods, exchanging food and water, sending messages from a house to another one and linking men’s and women’s space when sex separation is displayed. Little girls and boys – who are usually siblings and cousins in a wider domestic arena – share these activities, simultaneously enjoying the chance to meet each other and have fun together, and they often take advantage of their mobility to spend some extra time out of the house for playing. When they grow up and enter their teenage years, their activities progressively differentiate: girls start to take part in the everyday cleaning of the house, washing the dishes and helping cooking, or taking care of the newborns, while boys are rather expected to help men outside the house, in agricultural work and in breeding animals. Some activities remain shared, like serving coffee or tea or collecting fruits from the trees, going to buy from the nearby shops, keeping an eye on their youngest brothers and sisters when they start to walk around in the *hāra*.

⁴⁰ In Arabic language *bint* refers to two social identities: that of an unmarried woman, independently from her real age, and that of a daughter under her father’s social and legal protection. In the case of unmarried women the two statuses keep being coincident. In every Palestinian family with whom I experienced quite intense relations I was finally welcomed as a “daughter” by the head of the family: as a second step resulted from the process of getting to know each other, this was also a way to underline my asymmetrical inclusion while offering affection and support.

Young people's services are not only limited to their own domestic unit, nor to the larger domestic space of the *ḥāra*: a youth's general disposition to offer their help as a voluntary attitude towards adults is a way to actively engage as subordinates in the social hierarchy and show respect (*iḥtirām*) to those who enjoy authority (*ṣulṭa*) thanks to their age and sex⁴¹. In this sense work operates as an important vector of hierarchical socialization. Respect is thus central to work as a set of practices that contributes to situate each social actor to her/his proper position related to the others.

However, work must be analyzed in connection with a wider set of social practices that contribute to performing the value of respect. The different expressions of respect legitimize power asymmetries, showing conformity to social norms and obligations while recognizing others' position in the social hierarchy. It is the "obedience" that is socially appreciated and promoted, like other authors have pointed out (Cutolo 2012). In fact, if social legitimacy is based on granting respect in particular situations, in doing so a person will be considered respectable (*muḥtaram*, respectable/respected) by others. Respectability is thus a person's highest moral quality and the first criterion for social judgment, as it constitutes the condition to be respected, to get respect from the others, in order to be socially included. If an individual's relative position in the social group determines what kind of obligations and performances he/she is expected to achieve, respect is, however, a circular value based on, and distributed through, asymmetrical reciprocity, which guarantees the individual's entrance into a system of solidarity and protection. While respect is practiced contextually, depending on people's respective positions related to each other, it is ideally due to everyone: there are no human beings to whom respect should be denied, just like respectability is everyone's potential moral quality. As such, respectability regulates the individual moral conduct and must be cultivated ceaselessly in order to allow one's social inclusion. If we consider respect as a moral value and respectability as a set of social norms that must be fulfilled in order to attain it, the respect/respectability complex consists of two interlinked levels: a social hierarchy naturalized in sexed and aged bodies, in which specific forms of social authority emerge, and a set of social practices and single performances that aim to cultivate a legitimate behavior towards others and are liable to be flexibly adapted to different contexts. In this perspective we can understand why the idea of respect is also at

⁴¹ At the same time the playful aspect of children's work involves some forms of resistance to adults' demands, like hiding, pretending not to hear the voice which is calling them, or even simulating an autonomous management of the over mentioned activities when they are not requested nor expected.

the core of expressing a *normal* affection: “I respect you” (*baḥtaramak* (m.)/*baḥtaramek* (f.)) is equivalent to liking, appreciating and loving someone in a legitimate way, without destabilizing social norms, especially those regulating gender relations. At the same time the linguistic structure captures two specific individuals in one particular affective movement: the assertion goes beyond social practices generated by incorporated ideas of authority and produces an exclusive turn, which gives the precisely affective tone to the expression of respect itself.

In Palestinian society age appears to be more determinant than sex in defining social authority. In fact even adult men, who are supposed to represent an accomplished authority in their domestic unit, are expected to show respect toward elders, men and women indifferently. However, gender relations more explicitly show how work plays in defining the social hierarchy. Men often speak about “women’s work” (*shughl il-niswān*) to refer to feminized activities like cooking, cleaning the house, taking care of children and old people. Women’s work actually stands in an oppositional but complementary relation with men’s work (*shughl il-izlām*). The sexual division of labor reflects a naturalized complementarity, which is often supported by dichotomous features, like the bodily association of men with rationality (*‘aql*, mind) and women with emotions (*qalb*, heart). The “natural” incapacity to carry out some specific tasks characterizes both men and women: if women are excluded from public discussion and decision-making processes because of their lack of reasoning, men are not considered to be patient enough to be able to take care of children. At the same time, “it’s men who want children”, like many Palestinian women say, referring to men’s appropriation of their reproductive capacities based on masculine authority⁴². If women must respect their husbands’ authority, also men must comply particular duties to treat their women respectfully⁴³.

⁴² Men’s authority especially unfolds through their control on women’s reproductive work, generally determining how many children to have. However, women actively manage their reproductive capacity: different forms of negotiation and feminine pressure on men’s decisions exist to interfere and manipulate masculine authority, and I attested a widespread use of various contraceptive methods among married women. The dichotomist pattern of modernist/antimodernist discourses that Rhoda A. Kanaaneh (2002) found in his study on Palestinian women’s reproductive strategies in the Galilee seem to be much more blurred here: contraception is not conceived as a technique to limit children’s number in a logic of economic rationality, although it reveals a simultaneous process of family planning.

⁴³ Even if the relationship between men and women is characterized by an explicit asymmetry, men’s expressions of respect towards women are an important part of their moral conduct. For example, a good man, especially a good Muslim, should never look at a non-kin woman’s eyes while talking to her: this is a widespread practice that women themselves perceive as a form of masculine respect. As such, the question of respect puts also men in a situation of latent vulnerability with regard not only to other men – since the relationships among men are constituted by a basic competitiveness in the constant effort to affirm their equality in holding honor (Bourdieu 1972) – but with regard to social control more generally. Moreover, in Palestinian society women have a legitimate role in maintaining social networks and exchanging

What interests me here, beyond gender constructions, is that work is thus conceived as a set of different competencies naturalized in aged and sexed bodies and regulated by a moral conduct, more than an activity providing a wage. This latter is rather ascribed to men's work in their role of breadwinners⁴⁴.

The role of the male breadwinner is linked to the idea of responsibility (*masū'uliya*): each man is said to be "responsible" (*masū'ul*) for his house. The "house" (*dār*) thus constitutes a metonymic representation of a domestic unit intended as an adult man's property. By building his own house, marrying and having children, a man creates his own independence according to the segmentary logic based on the equality of all men from the same agnatic group. This important step to accomplish manhood is illustrated by his ability to maintain his house and provide for his wife and children. In this sense the family, conceived as the smallest unit of a patrilineal group, is usually identified with a man's house (for ex. *dār Abu Yusef*, Abu Yusef's house/family), although the "house" is a flexible concept that changes contextually, depending on the male descent the speaker is referring to. The *ḥāra* (neighborhood) where I was living was formed by four patrilineal groups deriving from a common male descent and including three generations. The whole *ḥāra*, made of more than 100 people, was called *dār Abu Jamīl* (Abu Jamīl house/family), and constituted one domestic space made of single houses/family units (*dūr*, pl. of *dār*).

The fragmentation of the patrilineal unit according to the segmentary logic establishes men's supposed equality and independence. Unmarried men remain dependents and are socially stigmatized: people wonder how they will get old without someone who takes care of them, especially without children who will provide for them when they will not be able to work anymore. However, Yazan was an unmarried man who benefited from his brother's wife and son's services thanks to his masculine status, which still granted him some rights on them. Women and children are linked to adult men by personal dependence. This dependence is articulated through the masculine ambivalent role of authority (*ṣulṭa*) and protection (*ḥimāya*). Masculine authority mainly consists of men's decisional power. As I was told proudly, every man in the *ḥāra* expelled his wife from the

information in relatively independent ways, thanks to contextually legitimated forms of sex separation and intense feminine sociality. Men often express their worries about "women's secrets" (*asrār il-niswān*) and their destabilizing potential.

⁴⁴ From the peasants' memories we can suppose that in the Palestinian peasant economy before 1948 women were probably more connected to the broader monetary economy than men, thanks to their direct sale of agricultural products at Jerusalem market.

house at least once, after arguments between the spouses had exacerbated⁴⁵. However, more eloquent than putting someone out of the house (that is probably easier to tell than to do), it is the inclusive capacity of the house that reveals the ambivalence of masculine authority. The visit is the social and political institution that regulates the outsiders' entrance into a domestic space (Van Aken 2003). Respect must be granted to a man's "house" by those who come for visit. This form of respect implicitly allude to the women of the house: in fact, it is when outsiders enter the domestic realm that sex separation is displayed. The house represents a moral unit whose inviolability a man must preserve. The materiality upon which masculine authority is constructed is not separate from its social and moral recognition.

Like for men, even for women marriage and reproduction are social obligations, so women accomplish their femininity when they start to have children. Women's social age determine women's internal hierarchy, upon which domestic work is organized and distributed. Old women enjoy a strong social and moral authority and are exonerated from ordinary feminine duties, while little girls work under adult women's authority. Married women progressively improve their position when they have children and they finally get much more authority when their sons marry: their younger wives, who leave their father's house and join their husbands' kinship group, are usually subjected to their mother-in-law's (*hamā*) control and can be burdened with most of her domestic work.

Women run the use of food and water, distribute these resources among the family's members and activate strong but selective solidarity ties that can influence and sometimes question men's control of social relationships inside the domestic group. Adult women manage their domestic affairs with great autonomy, especially when their husbands work in Israel and are absent for most of the daytime. Obviously, this autonomy depends on the financial resources their husbands are able to provide, so that the ideal husband is specifically represented by "a man who works" (*wahad ishtghil*): in a context of widespread masculine unemployment this can't be taken for granted.

In the village where I conducted my fieldwork only a minority of women was employed in wage labors outside the house, some even in Israel, as cleaners, cooks, secretaries, nurses, textile workers or teachers. While an educated woman (*muta'allima*) is more desirable for marriage and education has become an essential part of a modern conception of femininity, especially among younger generations, the high rate of feminine education

⁴⁵ Virilocality establishes that women pass from their father's house to their husband's house. Divorced women are expected to go back to their father's house.

among Palestinians does not correspond to women's access to the labor market. Many of the women involved in paid labor that I met in my fieldwork were unmarried, a condition that reinforces women's economical dependence from their brothers (after their father grew old and stopped working, or died). Brothers, of course, must also provide for their wife, children and elders, so they have limited resources. We can suppose that women's paid labor is especially linked to situations of particular vulnerability – at least in those social contexts where women are not expected to work outside the house⁴⁶.

At the same time, women's work can exceed the domestic realm in order to support men's job. This is Basma and Sharaf's story. Basma and Sharaf have been married for a longtime but did not have children. After working in the building sector in Israel for many years, Sharaf had to stop this activity during the second Intifada, when Israeli policies started to be more restrictive with regard to Palestinians' mobility and work permits were enforced to enter Israel. Since he did not have children, it was impossible for him to get a permit. As an alternative to unemployment he decided to open a grocery and arranged it in an unfinished room next to his house: now the shop supplies the whole family's neighborhood and some of its neighbors. Sharaf and Basma both sell in the grocery, which finally became an offshoot of their house and a guestroom where people like gathering. A TV, some sofas and a wood stove were put in it. Some evenings Sharaf's friends come to watch wrestling matches on TV and Basma delivers coffee and tea. The shop is open the whole day. If it's closed, one can always knock at the house door and Basma will be quickly available, even late in the night. Beyond selling, she is the one who keeps in touch with suppliers and manages orders. While working for the grocery, Basma simultaneously takes care of her sisters' children, cleans the house and cooks for her husband. When she must leave for some time, her female nephews replace her. I never asked Basma how the grocery worked, it certainly did not lack clients. However, she and her husband used to give credit to their clients, who were also their family's members. The copybook where they wrote down people's unpaid purchases had a page for each family's debts, a long and growing list without a deadline. I never heard

⁴⁶ I suppose their work also originated from their agnates' precarious conditions, caused by masculine economic instability in today's West Bank. The presence of unmarried women, that defies gender norms focused on feminine reproductive role, is justified by men through the necessity of their care work, which is emphasized despite these women's reproductive functions. As Amalia Sa'ar (2004) has shown, in this normative frame what seems to be an exception is rather structural. From my experience unmarried men are much more stigmatized than unmarried women because they never attain independence (building their own house and family) and contribute to expand their agnatic group, like normative masculinity provides. The absence of children who will sustain them in their older age is at the core of this stigma, relegating them to a permanent status of dependence.

Sharaf and Basma complaining: support must not be denied to the family members if they are in need.

Sharaf and Basma's story shows a more complex and multilayered concatenation of personal dependence, which expands from a married couple's relationship to the whole kinship group. The organization of work still mobilizes the moral values of respect and solidarity, although in this case it is clearer how an individual's effort reinforces his/her belonging to the group. Sharaf and Basma's grocery represents a hybrid system of exchange that paradoxically aims at profit, in order to maintain Sharaf's role of breadwinner despite unemployment, even if it is not grounded in a monetary offset, as its clients are family members who must be sustained when in need. This system rests on personal relationships based on trust and solidarity in which women's unpaid work plays an essential role. If the grocery became an extension of Basma's domestic duties, Sharaf depended on his wife's work to start up his new business and be able to make a living from it. Like for Hasan's mother, even Basma's extra-domestic work supports a masculine profitable activity, despite its earnings being miserable for anyone. As I will show in the following pages, personal dependence in the domestic sector tends to reorganize and is often reinforced in harsh economical conditions, questioning the traditional basis of social authority. Asymmetrical reciprocity keeps offering a wide system of solidarity and exchange that helps managing risks and controlling social reproduction, while transforming the internal hierarchy. In this context work appears as both a material effort that guarantees people's subsistence and the reproduction of the social group, and a moral act towards others.

2.1.2. Unemployment and social reproduction

If the present situation in al-Bab consists in managing to live in a "Jewish zone", the present may carry much more silence than the memory of past violence and loss. In the time I spent in the village this silence was rather a widespread buzz that invited me to focus my attention on this medley of voices. This constant buzz jumped from men to women without difference, it was full of worries, fear, rage, and humiliation, and sometimes I could feel the escalating tensions as if they were material, palpable. It was all about work: lack of work, search for work, voices saying maybe there will be work

tomorrow, and days spent sitting in silence and waiting. In everyday language the action of “sitting” identifies unemployed people just as “those who keep sitting” (*il-qā‘edīn*).

I remember Abu Yusef, the head of my host family, when he was making a very poor business in brokerage (*samsara*) for selling others’ lands⁴⁷. I remember his cheerful phone calls trying to be persuasive with his possible clients, and his simultaneous bad mood that loomed upon his wife, his children and I, while we had dinner together. Above all, I remember he used to sit for hours in the porch at his house entrance before the sunset, letting time pass until dinner, all alone, looking at nothing, sometimes pretending to pay attention to children playing in front of him in the courtyard. His brothers and sisters considered him a poor one because he did not have a job.

Al-Bab, 1st June 2012

Today Basma told me Abu Yusef [her brother] is unemployed. That’s why he is always in a bad mood, he must be very troubled and he has never asked me a cent. I think his children almost detest him because he’s always nervous and never stops getting angry with them. Some days ago there was a sort of men’s gathering in the house with one of his nephews, who later called his uncle Rami [one of Abu Yusef’s brothers]. I didn’t understand their conversation, but it was something about buying and selling lands. When Rami arrived, Abu Yusef didn’t look away from the TV, he never looked at his brother’s face and kept silent. While speaking with him, Rami suddenly took a pack of bills out of his pocket – I think those were Jordanian dinars – and after a while put them in his pocket again. The asymmetry of their economic status is clear, Abu Yusef’s attitude was a mix of deference and mock indifference. [...] The question of unemployment is always stated through his children’s unemployment, nobody alludes to Abu Yusef himself. I hadn’t understood the situation clearly until this morning, when Basma told me.

In these fieldwork notes I wrote about discovering my host’s real situation. Before that time I used to see Abu Yusef going to Bethlehem in the morning and coming home for dinner. When he did not go to Bethlehem and I asked him if he did not have to work that day, he usually answered that he was tired and needed some rest. On the contrary, his

⁴⁷ The broker’s gain is 3% of the land price. This man’s brokerage was an informal activity, while there are also formalized agencies that work in this sector.

brother Rami was a building contractor in Israel. He could show his economic power in front of his oldest brother and gain authority despite his younger age. Abu Yusef's effort to avoid Rami's gaze was a way to honorably acknowledge his subaltern condition, although he was not able to hide his stress. A part of the same honorable performance was to give me hospitality in his house without asking me anything in exchange: something that improved his moral status more than his economic position.

The family's and his own silence on his difficult situation spoke about the social discredit of not being able to accomplish the male role of breadwinner. As I showed above, a man's capacity to sustain his own house, wife and children constitutes a fundamental step towards adult masculinity. It is this responsibility that establishes his authority. For this reason it was not shameful to explicitly refer to Abu Yusef's children's unemployment: Zayd, 18 years old, and Nadir, 16 years old, who both had dropped out of school and occasionally found short-term jobs. Due to their young age, their position of dependence in the social hierarchy included an incomplete, uncertain status by definition. At the same time their duty was to gradually take their father's place in providing for the family, in order to be able to support their parents in their older age⁴⁸.

Besides sustaining their parental family, young men must simultaneously prepare to become adults, build their own house, get married and have children. These often contradictory tensions in the progressive construction of masculinity were well expressed by Sami, Abu Yusef's oldest son, who was 20 years old and worked eight-ten hours per day in a tiling factory in Bethlehem, earning 1600 shekel (about 320 Euro) per month. While all the money he gained served to support his parental family, a latent conflict existed between him and Abu Yusef, as Sami often expressed his desire to get married. Since this desire undermined the only secure income in Abu Yusef's house, Abu Yusef usually ignored his oldest son's request ("*jawazni!*", "let me marry!") or reacted to it with anger. Moreover, a boy's marriage is a quite expensive enterprise for his family because of the bride's dower (*maher*) to be paid⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ The "life debt" children must repay to their parents according to norms regulating social reproduction in the domestic economy is intensified by the lack of an institutional system of social welfare. The Palestinian National Authority grants retirement funds only to public officials working for it. Contrary to their married daughters, who become parts of their husband's kinship group, old people rely on their boys for material assistance. Boys are also supposed to provide for their unmarried sisters, who are expected to support their parents through their care and domestic work.

⁴⁹ An unmarried middle-aged man used to justify his status saying he did not have enough money to be able to marry. If this statement was true due to his uncertain incomes from seasonal agricultural work, sporadic illegal labor in Israel and long periods of unemployment, it is interesting how he played with his economical weakness to avoid social pressure on his stigmatized condition of single man. As I tried to

Abu Yusef's situation also had something to do with Israel. Some people in the village revealed to me he was politically active during the first Intifada and he was imprisoned for several months, so he was blacklisted by the Israeli authorities. In 2000 he was arrested while going to Jerusalem illegally to work in construction. Until 2000, he told me, he had work in sheep breeding, but he stopped because it became too expensive due to the lack of grazing lands and the necessity to buy food and water for animals, that implied having cash available. One of his brothers confided in me that Abu Yusef was involved in a sort of society with one of his relatives, who bought some sheep, while Abu Yusef had to take care of them⁵⁰. After some time all the sheep died and he was obliged to repay his relative. Abu Yusef's brothers helped him in solving this debt, but they blamed him for not being able to manage his business properly. Even his associate got angry with him and they drifted apart, although kinship ties linked them.

Abu Yusef could not tell me all these stories that were part of his social and economical failure. At the same time I got to know them confidentially from people who did not mean to blame him. On the contrary, they were sympathetic toward Abu Yusef, who was described as "poor" both materially (*faqīr*) and socially (*meskīn*). Showing pity was legitimate, simultaneously expressing Abu Yusef's lack of an appropriate social status related to his individual profile (an adult married man with children, who is supposed to be "responsible" for his family). The oldest of fifteen siblings, he was also economically dependent from some of his richest brothers, who paid electricity for his house and sent his daughters to study at the university. Silence was also a way to mask this situation under the normative performance of men's equality in front of me as an outsider – an equality mostly referred to equally possessing honor – so that an individual quality simultaneously affects the family's honor as a whole. At the same time individual generosity (*karam*), one of the most appreciated masculine virtues and rich people's moral duty⁵¹, dispensed a sense of family unity and produced a well organized system of

show, marriage and reproduction are also masculine obligations: the agnatic group offers economic support to those men who can't marry by their own means. In recent times masculine marriages are said to be one of the main causes of families' debts. In the past *badal* marriage (women's exchange between men from two different families) was a way to avoid *maher* payment (see also Moors 1995).

⁵⁰ This form of society is called *sharika muḍāraba* (speculative company) and seems to be quite diffused in the rural area where I conducted my fieldwork. Pre-existing personal relationships between the participants are the base to organize the activity with a clear division of labor: one invests his capital and the other provides his work force. Gains are supposed to be equally shared.

⁵¹ This is well expressed by the Islamic institution of *zaqāt* (charity) and particularly by the distribution of the lamb meat during the Feast of Sacrifice (*'īd al-aḍḥā*): one third is consumed by the family who makes the sacrifice, one third is given as a gift to other members of the family, one third is offered to the poor. Not anyone can afford a sacrifice: in the West Bank sheep prices are very high, an animal usually costs about

solidarity and wealth redistribution among the family members. If solidarity is not equally shared and depends on different levels of genealogical proximity (*qaraba*), material support is especially provided among siblings⁵². As we shall see, this network of solidarity also contributes to the redistribution of jobs opportunities and the organization of labor in Israel.

Abu Yusef's condition is not rare in today's West Bank. As recent data show, one in six in the West Bank is unemployed⁵³. Bethlehem governorate has the highest unemployment rate in the West Bank: at the end of 2014 it reached 23,2% against 19,2% in the whole West Bank⁵⁴. In 2010 40% of al-Bab population was considered unemployed, while 47% worked in Israel⁵⁵. Like the variations of statistic data also show, male unemployment should not be regarded as a monolithic phenomenon in individual trajectories inasmuch as different strategies are constantly mobilized to create income, alternating inactivity, odd or seasonal jobs and illegal labor in Israel. Many middle aged men of Abu Yusef's generation attributed the deterioration of their economic situation to the Second Intifada, when they lost their jobs in Israel due to Israeli restrictions on Palestinians' entry permits and increased military control⁵⁶. Some of them invented a new activity, like we saw in Sharaf's case, some others went back to agriculture as a reservoir of low-productivity labor (Farsakh 2005)⁵⁷, and many finally stopped working.

500 JOD (about 650 Euro). Inversely, the number of sheep that a man can sacrifice is a sign of his economic and social status. Boys are usually in charge of taking the meat share to the poor who are usually people living in the surroundings with whom the family is acquainted.

⁵² In feminine solidarity this is particularly evident among sisters, who are more helpful with each other than with female cousins in taking care of children, cooking, and sharing water when some houses have not. Feminine solidarity is also a way to keep matrilineal ties active despite patrilineal norms.

⁵³ See *West Bank and Gaza: Economic Monitoring Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee* by the World Bank (22nd September 2014). The WB registers that Palestinian growth started decelerating in 2012 as a result of a steep drop in foreign aid and it entered into recession in 2014.

⁵⁴ See Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2015), *Labour Force Survey (July-September, 2014) Round, (Q3/2014), Press Report on the Labour Force Survey Results*, Ramallah-Palestine. Considering the West Bank and Gaza together, the unemployment rate was 29% in this period: in Gaza it got almost 50% during the Israeli bombardment in July and August 2014. In general, the highest unemployment rate was 47.8% among youth aged 20-24 years.

⁵⁵ These data are taken from the *Village Profile* prepared by the Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (2010). From these statistics we can't understand how many people of those considered "unemployed" work in agriculture – even if not permanently – as well as how many of them work in Israel illegally.

⁵⁶ Men's unemployment rate increased from 14,6% to 27,1% in 2001, and reached 33,5% in 2002 (data refer to both Gaza and the West Bank, see PCBS, *Unemployment Rate Among Labour Force Participants in Palestine by Governorate and Sex, 2000-2012*). In the West Bank the annual unemployment rate permanently remained over 15% for both men and women until 2014. In Gaza it surpassed 40% in 2014. We shall consider that male and female participation in the labor force is consistently different in the Palestinian territories: at the end of 2014 the participation rate reached 71.6% for men, compared with 19.4% for women (PCBS, *Press Release on the Results of the Labour Force Survey (October - December, 2014) Round, Main Results*).

⁵⁷ Different authors have shown how a strategy of income diversification proliferated in Palestinian society since Palestinian men started to work in Israel after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip

Some socio-anthropological studies focused on the growing phenomenon of male unemployment during the second Intifada and highlighted the resulting “crisis of the male breadwinner” in Palestinian families (Abu Nahleh in Taraki 2006, Muhanna 2013). These studies have attested the decline of men’s independent status and their growing dependence on their wives’ and children’s paid labor. Conversely, they have showed how gender norms are far from being reversed by these social changes, rather accentuating women’s feminized selves in order to preserve their husband’s social role and authority. In her research on gender and moral agency in Gaza, Muhanna contested an essentialist (liberal) feminist view and illustrated how women’s entrance into the labor market has not necessarily “emancipating” characters, but can engender new forms of social vulnerability, especially when girls are called to provide for their family in their younger age. Moreover, the author showed how “poor women in Gaza have purposively drawn on the historical image of their gendered selves as subordinated and inferior, to facilitate their access to humanitarian aid on the one hand, and to psychologically support the masculinity of their jobless and helpless husbands on the other hand” (Muhanna 2013: 171). While stressing the class factor in the ways Palestinian people face this “crisis of representation” of masculinity and femininity provoked by the Israeli government of Palestinian lives, the author shows how humanitarian programs reinforce poor women’s feminized performance and contribute to reassert uncontested gender norms. Moreover, she discloses the “moral aspect of power” in gender relations, which consists of women’s demand for men’s provision of love and respect as a sign of real manliness despite their new role of family providers. Criticizing the liberal notion of “women’s obedience”, implying a sense of exploitation and oppression, Muhanna underlines that “this practice of willing subordination on the part of women in Gaza is based on relations of dependence according to gender. [...] If a husband respects and loves his wife, she will reciprocally respect and obey him and relish his authority” (Muhanna 2013: 172). This analysis confirms the asymmetrical reciprocity characterizing the respect/respectability system of values in social relationships defined by personal dependence, but it also shows its practical flexibility in a context of important social changes in the Palestinian family structure.

in 1967. Women, the elderly and children increased their participation in agricultural production, but Palestinian agriculture has remained a sector of absorption of Palestinian workforce during Israeli closures or entry restrictions (Farsakh 2005, Tamari 1981). Farsakh underlines that most of Palestinian workers in Israel come from rural areas or refugee camps.

Unlike Muhanna's focus on moral agency, Abu Nahleh implicitly leans towards a more psychological depiction of the masculine crises, limiting her conclusion to the acknowledgement of multiple "reactions" ("the male breadwinner's response varies with his particular circumstances"; "women's reactions to the male breadwinner crises vary by circumstances", Abu Nahleh 2006: 181). The author reports men's confessions about their deteriorated status of dependents, as the following quotation:

"It is known that the head of the household provides for his family, and when one is used to being the provider and then his wife and sister provide for him, he becomes dependent. I am considered a dependent. [...] For a whole year I have contributed very little to the household income. I felt belittled. You know, we have experienced a great deal of humiliation from the occupation and from people, but there is nothing worse than being humiliated with debt" (Abu Nahleh 2005: 144).

This piece of interview invites me to engage in a few short reflections. The first is that Palestinians' silence, that I found both revealing and censoring men's shame in my fieldwork, is totally absent here: this man openly acknowledges his condition of dependence. As far as I could grasp from my experience, shame and humiliation are very difficultly stated in everyday discourses, especially in masculine performativity. It could be that a Palestinian researcher is supposedly trusted more than an Italian one by her Palestinian interlocutors. Yet, it can work contrarily, and people can feel safer to talk about their frustrations to those who are not so implicated in their social milieu. We can better suppose that the specific conditions of intensified conflict during the Intifada more easily framed personal failures within collective suffering, in so far as the first may be pushed into the background of the more eminently political issue: the Israeli siege and the Palestinian uprising. More interestingly, the man's quoted self-disclosure lays a distinction between two different kinds of humiliation: in his words personal debt seems to be much more humiliating than the occupation itself. Why? I maintain that silence could be an answer.

The gender perspective used to analyze the masculine crises caused by men's increased vulnerability during the second Intifada has focused on the social impacts of the conflict on the Palestinian family structure. It has the merit to treat social normativity through the lens of masculinity and femininity as relational categories, which were heavily affected by social and economical upheavals in Palestinians' life conditions,

especially caused by male unemployment as a consequence of Israeli power. At the same time growing dependence from women's paid work has been conceived as the main factor of men's "new" vulnerability.

Through Abu Yusef's story I rather tried to underline how vulnerability is a constitutive feature of Palestinian masculinity and can be better grasped through an analysis of men's sociality. While personal dependence in the domestic economy was highlighted to describe work relations between different social categories, like "men" and "women", personal dependence can also characterize some of the relationships among those who are supposed to be equal, without being necessarily determined by the gender and generation divide. Balandier had already underlined how social relationships of personal dependence don't arise only from hierarchized structures, since inequality can be produced even between people who are supposed to belong to the same status according to the social hierarchy. For this reason, according to the French anthropologist, these relationships are intransitive and constitute a *network* rather than a hierarchy (Balandier 1969: 348).

Palestinian men have a double responsibility, which is not limited to providing for their family as a capacity in itself, but whose main aim is to enlarge one's patrilineal group while creating and sustaining autonomous units. The achievement of this goal gives men social value and strength. At the same time adult men's ideal equality in accomplishing this effort clashes with social and economical differences. Personal dependence can also shape social relationships between men, already characterized by rivalry, challenges and latent conflicts based on the honor code (Bourdieu 1972). Silence paradoxically hides and reveals masculine vulnerability and the shame deriving from power asymmetries in the relationships between supposed peers: men's humiliation is mainly provoked by other men's gaze, and not exclusively by women replacing their role of breadwinners.

Because of the moral commitment it engenders, personal dependence involves moral agency, based on the values that are supposed to sustain the continuity of the social group. In this sense women don't feel valued by their labor more than by their husbands' love and respect, since mutual respect is the base of a moral Self that cannot be separated from social belonging and constraints. The respect code associates self-fulfillment with social inclusion as two uncontradictory sides of moral subjectivation. The question remains: how is social normativity interlinked with Israeli power in the Palestinian society?

In many ways the Israeli power acts on Palestinian masculinity trying to undermine gender norms: the massive imprisonment of Palestinian men (40% of the

Palestinian male population) and the feminization of the Israeli army are only some aspects that increase the sense of powerlessness Palestinians live under occupation. If the intensification of violence in some specific moments certainly leads to further social pressures, like the phenomenon of increased male unemployment during the second Intifada has shown, I propose to analyze social change in light of the continuity of the Israeli elaboration of its power rationale. In other words, Israeli power is not more graspable in Palestinians' suffering under "war conditions" than in the ordinary construction of Palestinians' personal fulfillment and satisfaction. If we consider how the "crises of the male breadwinner" has been affecting Palestinian society some years after the second Intifada, when my fieldwork began, Palestinian labor in Israel must be regarded as a key element of renewed forms of personal dependence among Palestinian men. Palestinian labor in Israel does not seem to disarticulate gender norms as much as it alters masculine internal hierarchies: Abu Yusef did not find himself dependent on his wife, but on his son's paid work and his younger brother's economical success in Israel. His dependent status limited his family's growth and prevented his son's marriage. Although the gender perspective keeps its fundamental heuristic value in illuminating power relations, I suggest that Israeli power does not act on Palestinian masculinity as such, but it rather undermines Palestinians' domestic forms of social reproduction and, consequently, the Palestinian society as a whole. It is maybe for this reason that social norms and what is usually defined as "conservatism" often appear to be reinforced when social continuity is threatened. Personal dependence and competition on social authority are not new phenomenon in men's sociability, but they must be reorganized in a context of mutated work relations inside and outside the domestic domain.

2.1.3. Masculinities and futures

Masculine unemployment reflects upon the house as a material output of social reproduction and patrilineal expansion. The modern Palestinian house is often planned as a building that is supposed to develop in height, adding as many floors as the family's male members are. In fact, the parental family usually lives at the ground level and literally lays the foundations. Palestinian architectural landscape both in refugee camps and in the villages, but even in some urban areas, can be an expanse of roofs that have been left unfinished, with steel bars coming out from the main pillars made of reinforced

concrete. This usual incompleteness of Palestinian houses represents a wish for the future and for the family's growth, and it displays a potentiality that implies strength: material and social strength, as a big dwelling constituted by many masculine houses also means authority and protection.

However, in recent times Palestinian houses reveal an incompleteness of a different kind. Being a wage worker in Israeli pipe-fitting industry, Abu Mustafa, today a 67 years-old man, started to build a four-floor house in a piece of his land in al-Bab at the end of the 90s. His house dominates the beautiful valley between the village and Jerusalem, although the Israeli "security barrier", made of barbed wire in this part of the village, separates the house from the Israeli patrol road and from most of Abu Mustafa's lands. Abu Mustafa lives with his wife and his already grown-up but unmarried children, two boys and a girl, while his married firstborn lives with his family in an independent apartment in the same house. The whole family is settled indeed on the ground floor of the building, since the other three floors, although already erected, have never been finished. After Abu Mustafa lost his job during the second Intifada, he has never had enough money to go on with building. The three floors were supposed to be taken up by the remaining unmarried boys and their future families. Today none of the family's male members have a stable job⁵⁸, except for the only boy who left his father's home and went to Sweden. Three years ago he was granted with asylum status and built his life there: he found an employment, married and finally had a child. He sends some money to his parents monthly, raising his friends' esteem. However, like Abu Mustafa's house, most of his children's manhood remained unaccomplished.

In both the West Bank and Gaza the highest unemployment rate affects the youngest generations. Unlike Abu Yusef (2.1.2.), Abu Nadir would have liked his firstborn to get married. However, Nadir was not in the economic conditions to arrange a wedding and build his own independent life. He was 25 years old and was studying Arabic language and literature at Jerusalem Open University in Bethlehem in order to become a teacher. He was the oldest of four children and lived with his parents in a little house in the village. His father, Abu Nadir, had been working for many years in an Israeli hydraulic company, while Nadir did not have a stable job and sometimes went to sell agricultural products in Bethlehem streets, like many *fellaḥīn* do. Abu Nadir was very

⁵⁸ During the first Intifada Abu Mustafa and his firstborn were arrested and tortured in Israeli jails. When he was released, his son had serious health problems and could not work anymore. Today he helps farming his father's land, but it's his youngest brother who manages agricultural work.

worried about his children's future and compared his own youth with his son's present situation: at his age he was already married and had two children. The first time we met in August 2011 he was complaining about that and told me he really appreciated Hamas' initiative of sponsoring marriage, letting hundreds of people celebrate their wedding in Gaza some weeks before, as he had probably watched in TV⁵⁹. Like Abu Nadir, many Palestinian parents in the village expressed their worries for their children's future in terms of boys' financial inability to get married.

I usually found Nadir hanging around in summer nights with his cousin Zayd (18 years old), who could secretly smoke cigarettes far away from his father's gaze. The two cousins, who were also good friends, used to walk around the village or pass from one of their uncles' house to another, spending some time sitting with adults or joking with women. In fact, thanks to the social proximity (*qaraba*) that characterizes the domestic environment, sex separation is never strictly enforced and unmarried male youth often share women's social space. Affective ties are usually woven when boys are little and women take care of them, so boys' access to women's world usually start from their mothers' selective social networks. Later, boys' support to women's domestic work let them keep crossing female sociality. Married women and boys can share a great complicity, while women's relationships with girls can be tenser because of girls' greater and direct subjection to feminine authority. For Zayd and Nadir it was normal to spend their evenings at their aunts', where they could still enjoy a fun and more relaxed ambience without worrying to perform their (still subaltern) manhood among adult men.

Unlike his cousin Nadir, who was still studying, after having worked for some months in renewing a mosque in the Bethlehem area with one of his maternal uncles, in 2012 Zayd started to work in Israel like almost all his father's brothers. At the beginning he joined a group of construction workers who went every day to an Israeli town which was two hours far away from Bethlehem. Most of the workers did not have a work permit to enter Israel. One day the group was stopped by the Israeli border patrols, who arrested one of the workers but let Zayd go, as it was the first time they found him in Israel illegally. However, they warned him the second time would be different for him, too. In 2014 Zayd started to regularly go to work to Jerusalem with his paternal uncles and was finally integrated in his family's male division of labor in Israel. First, he worked as a

⁵⁹ Financially supporting marriage is one of Hamas' endeavors in the social field, publicized through media showing mass weddings involving hundreds of new couples (see for ex. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4727291.stm). In the last years even the ANP started to sponsor mass weddings in the West Bank (see <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25938549>).

house painter in West Jerusalem with one of his father's brothers, who could procure work in private houses thanks to his long-lasting Israeli acquaintances. At that period even Zayd's uncle worked without a permit. This kind of employment being unstable, one of his father's oldest brothers started to take him, together with his own son (Zayd's cousin), to Jerusalem. This uncle had his own construction company and usually employed Palestinians from Jerusalem. When they started to work with him, Zayd and his cousin initially entered Jerusalem thanks to a visit permit issued for visiting their uncle's wife, who was hospitalized in East Jerusalem for cancer treatments. After some months the Israeli authorities found them working, so their visit permits were revoked. Zayd started to enter Jerusalem without any permit.

In his usual half funny half serious way, Zayd often told me he would gladly marry an Israeli woman so he could get an Israeli identity card. His mother used to meet his comments with an immediate look of disapproval. He also joked telling me to marry him because he wanted to go to Europe. Zayd was a simple, bulky boy who suffered from being under his father's authority, from which he tried to run away through his overnight peregrinations with his cousin Nadir. However, his candid overstatements revealed a growing reality in the West Bank. Like Abu Mustafa's son, who fled to Sweden and finally got asylum status, from 2011 to 2014 (the time of my fieldwork) many boys I knew – all of them were in their thirties – made the same choice: after getting a tourist visa for a European country, they moved to northern Europe and applied for asylum. They usually left without warning their parents they would not come back. The youngest of Abu Mustafa's children (32 years old) had also worked abroad. He had spent two years in Russia, but he had had to leave when his visa expired. After he went back home he started to work in Israel illegally, but he was arrested and spent a month in an Israeli jail. He really wished to go back to Russia again: "There's no life here!" (*fīsh ḥayā hūn!*), he used to say. Unlike Zayd's naivety, Abu Mustafa's youngest son was well known for his black humor and he never spared me his sharp comments: "You, the Westerners (*ajāneb*) who come here, you say you like Palestine, but it's only because you have a European passport! Even Maryam [a Christian Palestinian friend] says she loves Palestine, but she has an American passport, she can leave whenever she wants!". In any case, he concluded, he would not like to come to my country, Italy, because you cannot find work there.

Youth's desire to leave Palestine appeared to be stronger and stronger in the years I spent on my fieldwork. "I want a future" (*biddi mustaqbal*), Jibril told me once we were

sitting in his house in one of Bethlehem refugee camps. He was 17 years-old. His two older brothers had been politically active in the second Intifada, when they were in their twenties: one had spent more than six years hiding because he was wanted by Israel, while the other had been four years in Israeli jails. Even many years after his release, his parents' house was still full of the photo portraits he had sent from prison. For Jibril, the youngest of five boys, his father had quite different plans. When the Israeli army entered their camp in the night, he prevented Jibril from going out in the streets to throw stones with the other *shebāb*. If he succeeded in finishing high school with good results – Jibril used to tell me enthusiastically – his father had promised to let him continue his studies in Germany. In the end he went to Eastern Europe: Jibril, the third of five brothers who had finally left home for abroad.

My definition of youth's "desire" to leave their country has a much more complicated background than simple individual motivations. Appadurai better talked about "aspirations", that he has proposed to conceive as a cultural capacity, "a navigational capacity that is nurtured by the possibility of real-world conjectures and refutations" (Appadurai 2013: 189). Focusing his reflections on the question of poverty linked to his research in Mumbai slums, the anthropologist has underlined how the capacity to aspire is not only unevenly distributed around the world, but it is also a differently developed meta-capacity: poverty appears "where the opportunities for such conjecture and refutation in regard to the future are limited" (Appadurai 2013: 189). The ambivalence that characterizes the poor's compliance with social norms and values that confirms and reproduces their marginality is analyzed in terms of "recognition": "In speaking about the terms of recognition [...] I mean to highlight the conditions and constraints under which the poor negotiate with the very norms that frame their social lives. I propose that poverty is partly a matter of operating with extremely weak resources where the terms of recognition are concerned" (Appadurai 2013: 187). If, on an analytical level, the concept of "recognition" (that the author borrows from Charles Taylor's work on multiculturalism) complicates the usually taken-for-granted coincidence between social conformity, subalternity and oppression, on a programmatic level Appadurai affirms the necessity of strengthening the poor's capacity to aspire in order to increase their capacity to protest, with the aim of altering the terms of recognition. In this sense protest is also defined as a cultural capacity and "not just as a generalized and universal democratic virtue" (Appadurai 2013: 186), since aspirations are based on "general norms, presumptions and axioms about the good life, and life more generally" (Appadurai 2013:

188) and “aspirations about the good life, health and happiness, exist in all societies” (Appadurai 2013: 187).

Focusing on boys and fathers-sons relationships in the contemporary Palestinian society⁶⁰, the above-mentioned stories show how the desire for elsewhere coincides with the desire for future: it involves a movement both in space and in time. This configuration of young Palestinians’ desire has a unitary force despite different biographical trajectories, and can be considered as a common set of aspirations for a large part of Palestinian youth today. These aspirations converge with their fathers’ worries about future: lack of work and the risk of imprisonment in Israel undermines Palestinian men’s ability for social reproduction. If thinking about social reproduction implies a temporal perspective by definition, it is not only conceivable as a social process that connects past with present throughout different generations, but also as a set of ideas and practices concerning the sustainability of the social group, which must be rearranged throughout economical and political changes and recurring ruptures in Palestinians’ life conditions, putting future at the center of people’s worries. As migration studies have more recently shown, the social investment on an individual’s departure inscribes the migrant’s experience in a transnational project of improving life conditions for his/her wider social group: migration is not necessarily an individualized process which favors people’s “empowerment” in contrast with social constraints, it rather reorganizes social hierarchies in a transnational space and often contributes to reinforce the material and moral debt a person holds over the family and the social network (smugglers, fellow citizens in the society of arrival...) which let migration be possible (Pilotto 2010, Viti 2006). In fact, mobility as a search for future, that is a means to increase the capacity to aspire, is not only made of hopes, dreams and imagination, but also of practical competences and social resources to manage one’s real departure. If we compare Zayd’s experience and his fancies about marriage, the complex organization that some guys mobilized in order to get a European visa and then apply for asylum, and fathers’ financial and moral support to their children who are sent to study abroad, we see how the capacity to aspire is unevenly

⁶⁰ Girls are absent in my text, but not in boys’ and their family’s life stories. Their more confined mobility, their fathers and brothers’ legitimated control on them and their normative future as wives and mothers should be considered, but not essentialized: many Palestinian unmarried girls study and work abroad. For a better understanding we should consider how class interlinks with gender norms and how girls’ families differently appropriate the idea of modernity. As I maintained in 3.1.1., girls’ education is today a fundamental part of Palestinian modern femininity and implies a greater feminine physical and social mobility inside the Palestinian society itself. What I want to question here, however, is the ways masculinity is at stake in Palestinian social reproduction throughout different generations and how men embody future as both a burden and a set of aspirations in uncertain times.

distributed even in Palestinian society and desire can take several forms with different political implications.

When Appadurai talks about aspirations in his proposal of deeming future as cultural fact, he refers mostly to social movements and collective actions in Mumbai slums, while for Palestinian youth future aspirations seem to imply moving away from the political struggle. This is a rather problematic point for Palestinian national discourse. In October 2013, while making a tour in the West Bank with a group of Italian tourists, I visited Youth Against Settlement⁶¹ in the southern Palestinian city of Hebron. When we arrived in their seat in the midtown, in the middle of an Israeli settlement protected by the Israeli army, after passing through two checkpoints and being held because of passport control, the group's leader welcomed us and started to present their political vision and action. With a militant style he explained the normative frame of the group's activism: in their non-violent struggle against settler colonialism, he said for example, the group members don't entertain personal relationships with singular Israeli citizens, but only with Israeli activists who oppose the Israeli occupation. What struck me more was when he addressed his speech directly to his European audience and admonished us: the worst we could do is thinking to help a Palestinian by providing him a visa for Europe. In this formulation of the national discourse Palestinians are expected to stay in Palestine: it is a moral duty and a pragmatic necessity for political struggle. As I have showed in the first chapter, *ṣumūd* as the capacity to endure and to stay in the land is a fundamental political practice among Palestinian peasants; more generally, *ṣumūd* is a key concept of the Palestinian resistance movement. What struck me in the activist's words, however, was how much his militant standing clashed with young Palestinians' desire to leave Palestine. At the same time its nationalist premise can be easily reversed: even leaving Palestine can become a national duty, like a 33 years-old unmarried and unemployed guy from al-Bab explained me, saying he wanted to go and work in one of the Gulf countries

⁶¹ Youth Against Settlement presents itself as “a national Palestinian non-partisan activist group which seeks to end Israeli colonization activities in Palestine (building and expanding settlements) through non-violent popular struggle and civil disobedience” (<http://www.youthagainstssettlements.org>, accessed 20/07/2015). The activist group found its seat in the heart of the Israeli settlement in Hebron city center, separated from the old city and the *sūq* by a checkpoint, where the Israeli army ensures settlers' tranquility through its massive presence and imposes severe limitations to Palestinian inhabitants' mobility and activities. One of the most popular events promoted by the activist group is Open Shuhada Street, a weekly demonstration (and an international annual event) to protest against the closure of Shuhada street by the Israeli army. Shuhada street was a lively Palestinian commercial center in Hebron midtown. The Israeli army has been keeping all Palestinian shops shut and preventing Palestinians' entrance and residence in this area for the past 20 years. As a matter of fact, almost no Palestinians live in this area today. As a result of 1995 Oslo Interim Agreement (Oslo II), in 1997 the Hebron Protocol divided the city in two areas: H1 under ANP control and H2, covering most of the old city, under Israeli control.

in order to support his family's *ṣumūd* at home. It is interesting to note that while the militant discourse promotes a “pure” political agency that can be expressed through field-based activism (demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience, reports, international lobbying...) against Israeli settler colonialism, Palestinian migrations and labor abroad can also be conceived as part of a political practice whose aim is Palestinian social reproduction as a whole. I suppose that this conflict, engendered by the normative frame that characterizes Palestinian national discourse, doesn't stem from irreconcilable ideological positions, but on a differently developed capacity to aspire among Palestinians themselves. This inequality, based on a varied set of social and economical differences, implies that neither collective imagination constitutes a uniformly shared ground nor people are equally exposed to the same global forces (some being more engaged in the international public opinion, others being more affected by worldwide labor flows). In this sense concrete life conditions affect the ways one thinks about future. More precisely, I maintain that the conflict among different ways of appropriating the national discourse and, consequently, of distinguishing which forms of life are political and which are not, has its point of convergence on the conception of life and on the sense of what a better life means. Exploring “national” conjunctures and disjunctures is important because it allows us to underline the historical conditions in which desires emerge and take form. It also gives us the opportunity to study how political subjectivation can exceed its normative frame and reformulate it contingently.

Both Zayd and Abu Mustafa's son saw documents as the condition to enjoy a good life: one dreamt about a marriage with a European or even with an Israeli girl in order to get the same rights; the other saw Westerners' visit to Palestine as a privilege given by their passports and their freedom of movement, which on the other hand demystified their alleged love for the country. The two guys' positions are quite different in substance: Zayd – who daily experiences the comparison between his and Israeli middle-class life through his work in Israel, strongly hierarchized under his uncles' authority – imagined a “privatized” obliteration of inequality through marriage with an Israeli citizen (which can be called a “normalized” imagery according to national standards) or with a European girl indifferently. On the other hand, however, Zayd revealed the political dimension of marriage as a strategic alliance that intersects state

laws and citizenship policies⁶². Abu Mustafa's son, who already experimented work migration and imprisonment in Israel, showed his cynical criticism to Western visitors' support for Palestine as a question of privilege, being conscious of a more complicated and multi-stratified landscape of global inequality that also determines different chances in acting politically. Despite their substantial differences, both positions seem to be consistent with many young Palestinians' choices to go to northern Europe, where asylum seems to be more easily granted. It is not strange that for stateless people living under a military occupation imagination is so tied to a bureaucratic imagery: a better life presumes the right papers in order to obtain citizenship rights and state protection.

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Focusing on the Palestinian domestic sector I have shown how work contributes to the construction of the individuals as moral subjects in a social context defined by inequality. The moral quality of work is thus linked to social reproduction – “the reproduction of life”, like Meillassoux stated it – rather than being considered as a mere cultural signification, which would justify subalternity. Based on relationships of personal dependence, work in the Palestinian peasants' domestic economy is mainly organized through a social hierarchy, which stems from the naturalization of social authority according to sex and age. Work is a free service due to those on whom one depends, while being included in a system of asymmetrical reciprocity and hierarchical solidarity. If the Marxian critique stressed the constitution of power relations among different social groups – rather conceived as “social classes” – in the division of labor, I have rather tried to show how power and authority are nurtured by a moral ground based on the circular value of respect. Respect is what unites people in different social positions: if the dependents offer their services to those who embody social authority, the superiors must provide for them and treat them in the appropriate ways. Under this perspective, for example, the distinction between “men” and “women” is not just

⁶² Palestinian men with Israeli or Jerusalem ID cards (Palestinians living in Jerusalem have a special residency status but they don't benefit from Israeli citizenship) prefer to marry Palestinian women with the same documents in order to benefit from the same regime of mobility (Israeli or Jerusalem ID holders are allowed to move inside Israel). On the contrary, I know some cases of Palestinian men, holders of Palestinian ID cards and living in the West Bank, who married Palestinian women from Jerusalem, holders of Israeli-issued ID cards. In this case it is not their wives' documents that limit men's mobility, but men's juridical status under the PNA (Palestinian ID holders are not allowed to enter Israel; in principle they can move all around the West Bank, but special restrictions are applied by Israel to ex prisoners. Palestinians can't move from Gaza to the West Bank, and vice versa, without an Israeli permit).

produced by their supposed natural complementarity and different competencies, which organize the sexual division of labor, but is rather defined by their distinct moral conducts, of which work is a fundamental part. In this sense domestic, reproductive and care work pertain to women, while men are expected to devote to wage labor in order to accomplish their role as breadwinners. However, these social obligations do not correspond to mere acts of “obedience” to social norms, but take part in the cultivation of the moral self as a “respectable” one. In fact, it is the individual’s respectability which allows a person to be part of a broader system of solidarity and protection.

In this context I have analyzed Palestinian masculinity in the tension between the normative construction of a man’s responsibility, represented by the “house” as an independent unit, and the access to labor. For men access to labor is strongly conditioned by the Palestinian economical dependence from Israel since the 1967 Israeli occupation, and from the wider economical crisis that increased the unemployment rate in the Palestinian territories. Palestinian men attribute their social and economical failure to the restriction of Palestinian labor and movement inside Israel since the second Intifada. In this context I have analyzed the production of inequality among Palestinian men. I have maintained that vulnerability is a constitutive feature of Palestinian masculinity produced by men’s sociality, based on rivalry and competition according to the supposedly equal possess of honor. At the same time the Israeli restrictions and the state of permanent uncertainty which characterize the Palestinians’ life under the Israeli occupation, have contribute in reorganizing men’s hierarchies and in creating new forms of personal dependence. While men working in Israel can benefit from a good economical and social status, unemployment is simultaneously produced by the exclusion of certain categories of Palestinian men from the access to labor in Israel (men under 25 years old, unmarried, and having “security problems” – having being engaged in the Palestinian resistance movement – cannot be granted with a work permit). Silence covers the unemployed men’s failure and humiliation, while the traditional forms of social authority can be put into question by some laborers’ economical success in Israel. Masculine dependence is thus analyzed through social relationships among men beyond the domestic realm, and does not only stem from a study of the family structure.

Following this perspective I have also questioned the relationship between different generations. The fragility of Palestinian social reproduction puts the question of future at the center of people’s worries, and youth’s desire for future appears to be a desire for leaving their country. Emigration is actually a growing phenomenon among

Palestinian boys especially, and it is often supported by parents. The Palestinian youth's desire for future is articulated around a bureaucratic imagery linked to papers, visas and passports, which testifies of a worldwide inequality. At the same time the desire for elsewhere questions the national duty of staying in their country to struggle against the Israeli occupation. If this is actually the official national standard, some young people explained their desire to leave in terms of resistance, as a way to support their family's *ṣumūd* from abroad. Using Appadurai's definition of future as cultural fact based on the capacity to aspire, I have considered the different articulations of the discourse about future as a sign of inequality in the Palestinian society itself: in this sense protest comparably appears as a social capacity, which is not equally distributed. This inevitably fragments the supposedly homogeneity that would gather Palestinians together according to the nationalist discourse.

2.2. Work as an apparatus

2.2.1. From “freedom” to institutionalized dependence

After having attested how work was a central issue in Palestinian daily life and to what extent men’s unemployment affected the social relationships in the domestic domain, I decided to delve deeper into the Palestinian workers’ experience. At the end of my fieldwork in 2012, after having lived for six months with a family from al-Bab, I thought it could be the right time to ask questions more directly. My ties with the family had become stronger, based on a prolonged cohabitation and an intense sharing of daily life, and mutual trust had progressively increased (as a matter of fact, I had started to enjoy a free mobility, while during the first phase of my fieldwork in 2011 my movements were limited and controlled). However, the first time I tried to ask some men for an interview on their work experience, I was quickly answered to go and ask the jobless (*il-qā‘edīn*, “those who are sitting”) instead. One told me to forget about using my recorder. Before doing an interview I used to ask permission to record the conversation because of my imperfect understanding of Arabic language. Peremptorily, the man told me that it was out of discussion; then, more sweetly, he explained to me that it was not because of me, but they would not know where the recordings would end up. I was not amazed because for Palestinians the use of technology was directly linked to the surveillance of their lives: people in the village were perfectly conscious that the tops of the hills around them were full of cameras controlling their movements. They also knew my computer and all my personal objects could be inspected at Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv. Trust was not a personal matter at all. One of the men, who maybe felt sorry to refuse, finally accepted to sit with me and talk about his job in Israel, and I preferred to write only a few lines in my notebook.

Since that experience I did not do many more interviews that had Palestinian labor as their main topic, the first attempt discomforted me and I kept feeling awkward. I was also annoyed that my research work could seem like a police investigation, after I had put so much attention into engaging with people’s lives, building closeness and simultaneously trying not to be so intrusive. Although my 10 year-old “brother” Sami had started to argue with me like with any of his brothers or sisters, my recorder was enough to push me back to my actual position, that of a Western white middle-class woman who

travels around the world with limited risks. While moving, my ethnographic material circulated with me and the people with whom I was living did not have the power to control it. The nice tale of the Italian girl living as a welcomed guest in a Palestinian family in a village situated among breathtaking hills had finished. I was a researcher and it was in my interest to be there. My interest concerned the production of knowledge on people's lives, but people must set their limits. Ours was a relation of force and this became clear. What were people's limits? At the beginning I did not know, but I gradually learnt about them.

At the very beginning of my fieldwork I started to inquiry about Palestinian peasants' memory: it was not a mere collection of information in order to write the "subalterns" history, nor an effort consecrated to prepare one of my thesis chapters about memory and identity, but it was a practical need and an attempt to orientate myself in a new social world that explicitly urged me to turn toward its past, that past which was in front of us, over there, on the hills where the ancient village was. People *wanted to talk* about the memory of their historical catastrophe (*nakba*), they could not do otherwise, they felt to be a result of it. On the other hand, the issue of masculine work was a daily obsession, people *talked* about that, but they didn't want to say more than what they used to do in their very pragmatic conversations about job chances, work division, salaries and work permits. In the process of my knowledge construction, work was not a legitimate topic to choose: once again, there was a silence that wrapped up people's lives beyond the immediacy of their everyday experience, a silence that also clouded a part of that everyday life and its precarious, and often dangerous, nature: what do you do? Where do you work? How do you go to work? These were simple, though uncomfortable, questions for the Palestinian men I met. Notwithstanding, I entered the relation of force consciously, although a persistent embarrassment and a sense of violation accompanied me all along my fieldwork: I continued to ask uncomfortable questions, sometimes playing the role of the naïve, sometimes benefiting from my friendships and a more confidential ambience, sometimes getting nothing at all. My aim was then to see what would happen. In my experience power relationships in the field were never unilateral: if I, the ethnographer, controlled the elaboration and circulation of ethnographical knowledge, people controlled my access to the field and delimited my position among them. I knew that people told me what they wanted and how they wanted, and I was not looking for the "truth". That was maybe the different ambition between my work and police work. My research interest focused on how Palestinian labor emerged as a

discourse, that is, as a set of enunciations and enunciative conditions produced by specific apparatuses of power and knowledge (Foucault 1969, 1971; Said 1978).

In the first chapter I showed how Palestinian peasant economy was progressively dismantled since the war in 1948 and the Israeli occupation, mainly through the confiscation of land and water resources. Until 1947 Palestinian peasants were not allowed to reach their lands inside their Green Line and many of them, trying to do it, were killed by the Israeli army as “infiltrators”. Violence and death characterized the initial Israeli border policies to enforce the borders of the new Israeli State: a violence that separated Palestinians from their main sources of livelihood. Palestinian labor in Israel came into being after this radical dispossession, which set the historical conditions for a break in Palestinians’ life conditions.

In many Palestinian workers’ words the period following the 1967 Israeli occupation opened up to “freedom”, as opposed to the over mentioned border policies that forcibly limited Palestinians’ movements and excluded them from the places they previously inhabited. How did this paradoxical juxtaposition of military occupation and “freedom” take form? What political rationale did it come with?

“I have lived in Israel since my childhood. I started to work when I was 12 years old and I was still going to school. After school we went to graze sheep up to Malha et Jora [Palestinian villages, today part of Jerusalem Municipality], we played with Israeli children, we went to buy from their shops and they gave us fresh water to drink. When I was 12 years old I started to work in a chicken farm, then in an orchard”⁶³.

This is how Abu Nadir explained to me his initiation to labor in Israel during one of my visits at his house. Abu Nadir was about 55 years old and had been working in an Israeli hydraulic company for a longtime. I usually met him under a fig tree in his orchard on Saturday, his non-working day in Jewish timetable. He spent the whole day sitting and keeping smoking his *argīle*, which was one of his great passions. Even in Jerusalem, at the end of his working day, he used to go and smoke in a coffee shop in Jaffa road, in West Jerusalem. He said it was nicer and cheaper than in Bethlehem, and he could meet some friends there. Abu Nadir was granted with a “00” permit, a work permit valid for 24 hours. This permit let Palestinians be allowed to stay in Israel even at night, as it actually happened to Abu Nadir when he had a night shift. While talking about his childhood, he

⁶³ Informal conversation with Abu Nadir (refusal of recorded interview), al-Bab, 26/04/2014.

told me his father “never had a job” (*mā shtaghal shughl*): he was a peasant, had fifty sheep and made his living by selling cheese and lambs. He died of a heart attack when he was 54 years old, so he had been able to benefit from his grown-up boys’ economical support only for a few years.

Unlike Abu Nadir’s father, many of Abu Nadir’s parents’ generation had worked in Israel and took their children to work with them. After the 1967 Israeli occupation Palestinians were allowed to move freely inside Israel, even by car. People from al-Bab, however, experimented the end of the border regime as a renewed possibility to walk in their hills and visit their lands. Men of Abu Nadir’s generation learnt to move in a wider space – made of Palestinian destroyed villages – from their fathers, who were born in those places and could see them again. The male division of labor based on social age was reorganized at that time: while fathers worked in Israel during the day, children herded sheep on Jerusalem hills waiting for them to come back in the late afternoon. When they arrived, they sent children to study and led the herd home before the sunset. Like Abu Nadir, some men started to work in Israel in the agricultural sector when they were in their younger age. They were often employed as orchard keepers and had to sleep in the land at night in order to ward off thieves. However, most of Palestinian men finally became construction workers.

After 1967 Palestinian peasants benefited from a larger grazing space and from water sources of ancient Palestinian villages. We can suppose this “opening” helped to relaunch Palestinian breeding and farming, together with the cash available from the new source of income constituted by labor in Israel⁶⁴. Salim Tamari showed how Palestinian agriculture and labor in Israel were constitutively interlinked since the first decade of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank (Tamari 1981). This is not in contradiction with Meillassoux’s analysis of capitalism as an economical system based on the exploitation of unpaid reproductive work in the domestic sector, so that capitalism appears to be characterized by the paradox of sustaining agriculture while destroying it, especially in colonial states (Meillassoux 1975). In fact, while being initiated to agricultural work in their childhood and to Israeli labor in their adulthood, in al-Bab the Palestinian men, who are now middle-aged, witnessed the Israeli transformation of their agricultural landscape.

⁶⁴ In the 70s Israel actively favored Palestinian agriculture by promoting drip irrigation and the use of fertilizers, providing credit to farmers and allowing exports to Jordan, as a way to “pacify the Palestinian population economically” (Farsakh 2005: 106). At the same time, after 1967 Israel seized large amounts of Palestinian land and took full control of water resources. Israeli policies inversed their trend in the 80s, when Israel started to limit Palestinian agriculture in order to protect its own agricultural sector.

Indicating the southern Jerusalem neighborhoods spreading on the hills in front of his actual village, Rida, now a 45 years-old worker in Israel, told me:

“After 1967 my father went to work over there, but at that time it was empty, there was nothing, there were no houses like there are today. The zoo was built in 1991, they took some big trees, olive and carob trees, and they planted them by an excavator. They wanted people to believe these were ancient trees. Who discovered it? Who knows it today? Even a Palestinian coming from elsewhere can think these trees are very old ones. Only us, we know it, because we used to graze sheep over there and we used to go even farther, up to Malha and Kiryat HaYovel” (Rida, al-Bab 27/04/2014)⁶⁵.

The shift between an “empty” space and a built-up area that Rida described corresponded to his father’s work in the construction sector in Israel, building Israelis’ homes and letting Jerusalem neighborhoods replace a large part of agricultural lands that belonged to ancient Palestinian villages, after Israel had expanded the boundaries of the Jerusalem Municipality and had unilaterally annexed East Jerusalem. However, Rida’s words do not reveal only Israeli urban development in the former Palestinians’ lands, but they also highlight the artificial character of Israeli nature: the image of big ancient trees planted by excavators in the area of Jerusalem “Biblical Zoo” represents the act of forcibly and mechanically inscribing Jewish presence in the land and transforming nature into a symbol of its ancestral history. “Who knows it today?”, Rida asked. Being free to move and graze their sheep in the Jerusalem area meant that Palestinians from al-Bab were also exposed to the active obliteration of their history and became lonely witnesses: so lonely that even other Palestinians could be misled by the silent and enormous presence of purported “Biblical” trees.

From Palestinian workers’ narratives we can understand that “freedom” after 1967 alludes to the freedom of movement inside British-mandatory Palestine, which Palestinians could finally enjoy at the end of the violent border policies that had characterized the Israeli State since its foundation in 1948. This freedom of movement was linked to Palestinians’ inclusion into the Israeli labor market, while the simultaneous

⁶⁵ Malha was a Palestinian village that became part of the Israeli State in 1948. While its original inhabitants fled away during 1948 war, being just a few kilometers away from the old city of Jerusalem the territory of the village was progressively transformed in one of West Jerusalem commercial neighborhoods. Kiryat HaYovel is a nearby Jewish residential neighborhood that was built between the 50s and 60s in Palestinians’ agricultural lands inside the Green Line.

expansion of Israeli sovereignty through the enforcement of Israeli law in the annexed territories and of military law in the occupied territories, excluded Palestinians from Israeli citizenship. In this context the “freedom” of the labor market, where “free” wage labor was offered and exchanged, let Palestinians become an essential labor force in the Israeli capitalist economy. At the same time “freedom” was not a civic and political right. Palestinians represented cheap labor due to their lower salaries and the compartmentation of their work, which was concentrated in the agricultural and building sector, and further because the costs of their reproduction fell back to their domestic society, while they were excluded from the social benefits the Israeli State granted to its citizens. Moreover, after 1967 Palestinians became also “free” consumers of Israeli goods, since Israel became the main trading partner of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, covering 70% of their imports (Farsakh 2005: 105).

On the other hand, this “freedom” contributed to a relevant economic growth in Palestinian society and further legitimized the Palestinian male role of breadwinner. Palestinian social hierarchies were reproduced and affected work division, while labor in Israel became a fundamental step toward adult masculinity: boys took their fathers’ place in agricultural work waiting to be integrated into the Israeli labor market. As Salim Tamari (1981) also showed, preexistent social relationships among Palestinians, mostly developed around kinship ties, became the main base for work organization and recruitment, so that labor in Israel became a “normal” experience in Palestinian masculinity. Talking about his father’s generation Qays, a 40 year-old man, explained to me “at the beginning two or three began to go, they found work and then took other people with them. It became normal, everyone started to go (*ṣār ishī ‘ādī, ṣār kul in-nās iṭl’a*). They [the Israelis] wanted people to work”. It is clear how the Israeli demand for Palestinian labor mobilized a job redistribution among Palestinians based on their complex social networks. This is another important point concerning perceived “freedom”: Palestinians felt they had control over their own internal work organization, they could maintain social hierarchies and mobilize personal dependence (like fathers-children relationships) to take advantage of the new economical perspectives, share new resources and redistribute them within their own social group.

If the concept of “freedom” emerges in Palestinian workers’ discourses in relation to the past (1967-1990), this “freedom” didn’t last so long and was substituted by the lack of freedom that characterizes the contemporary situation, after the system of permits was introduced at the beginning of the 90s. Rami, a 50 year-old man working as a building

subcontractor in Israel, maintains that “today work is harder because there are checkpoints, you need time, you are not free to move”. Rami was a very respected man in his family because of his economical power and his esteemed “generosity” (*karam*), since he financially supported some of his brothers when they were in need. His brothers told me he never liked working in the land – that meant he never liked manual labor – even when he was a young boy. However, I suppose he had been a construction worker in Israel like his father and brothers, at least for a while, before becoming an entrepreneur. Rami had his own building company and used to employ Palestinian workers from East Jerusalem. Once he had undertaken a contract to build a hotel in Tel Aviv, he was boasting in front of some of his brothers about the very expensive fish dinner he had had by the seaside. Despite what I considered an arrogant behavior, Rami’s family really loved him, and he benefited from a special social authority thanks to his elderly age.

Despite his success and his chance to move inside Israel, Rami complained about the lack of freedom caused by the Israeli restrictions implemented during the last two decades. However, his situation was quite good compared to the risks that other workers ran daily, because he had a work permit valid from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. Yet, in order to get his permit he had to pay 2000 NIS every month to his fake employer, an Israeli entrepreneur who falsely registered him as one of his employees. In fact, the Israeli permits system provides Palestinians from the West Bank the possibility to obtain a permit only under an Israeli employer’s request. Like in Rami’s case, Israeli businessmen could take advantage of the system by making Palestinians pay their service, which consisted of providing them with the right to enter Israel. Thanks to his permit Rami was making his own business and working as a freelance professional instead of being a waged worker like many others. At the same time, while performing his honorable position of rich entrepreneur in his own society, he was dependent on his fake Israeli employer in order to be who he was.

Rami’s case, one of the luckiest ones, shows how “freedom” declined after Palestinians stopped to be self-made men who could go and organize their work in Israel independently, and underwent the permits regime to be allowed to enter Israel. Moreover, since the second Intifada their movements to go in and out of the Jewish State had to occur, and were filtered and controlled, through the checkpoints, one of the best-known symbol of the occupation architecture. When Qays explained to me the progressive constitution of the “normality” of Palestinian labor in Israel after 1967, he clarified that “at that time the Israelis didn’t require a permit, people were going illegally (*bakū ytahrabu tahrīb*), like today”. It is meaningful how Qays compared the first “free”

commuting to Israel with Palestinian workers' mobility today, targeting both of them as "illegal"⁶⁶. First of all, Qays referred to the way of moving: today, entering Israel with a permit implies passing through a checkpoint, which must be crossed on foot so that Israeli soldiers can check Palestinians' documents. In Bethlehem area there is only one checkpoint, near the old city, where people with work permits can walk through⁶⁷. This checkpoint is far from most of Palestinian villages from which workers come, so they have to reach it by car or by bus. On the Israeli side, after being allowed to proceed, Palestinian workers get in a bus that take them into Jerusalem⁶⁸. On the contrary, when he spoke about illegal workers in the current time Qays referred to his village, where the wall had not been totally built yet and the border was still open. Being just a few kilometers far from Jerusalem, workers without a permit walk the same hill paths their fathers walked after 1967.

Qays was an unmarried man. After having worked for several years in the construction sector in Jerusalem, when we met he was working in the Israeli settlement built in a part of his village lands, since only work permits for settlements are delivered to unmarried men. In fact, Israeli authorities define a "socio-biological profile" (Parizot 2009) for possible male candidates to work inside the 1967 Israeli borders: they must be at least 25 years old, married and with children, and they are subject to a security check to establish their "dangerousness", that is their legitimacy to enter Israel. However, to obtain a work permit for settlements the only limit was to be at least 20 years old. Qays explained me how he passed from working in Jerusalem to working in the settlement:

"They [the Israeli authorities] started to request a permit since the Gulf War, but it was easier [than today] in 1991-1992, it was not limited to married

⁶⁶ The word *tahrīb* refers to Palestinians' illegal entrance into Israel and comes from the verb *harraba*, that literally means "smuggling". Contrary to the English transitive verb, indicating the act of taking people or things to another place secretly or illegally, in everyday Palestinian Arabic this word is mostly used with a reflexive connotation and refers to the subjective act of entering Israel without a permit, even when it happens without the intervention of smugglers or traffickers.

⁶⁷ There are different kinds of Israeli checkpoints and Palestinians are not allowed to walk through all of them. In al-Bab, for example, a little checkpoint was situated in the valley between Jerusalem and the village to connect Israeli settlers with the holy city. Only Israeli or Jerusalem ID holders and diplomatic cards holders could pass through it by car. At the beginning of my fieldwork even I, a tourist visa holder, wasn't allowed to go through it. It is important to note that checkpoints are not only architectural structures that limit Palestinians' mobility, but they are also thought to facilitate a "safe" Israeli settlers' circulation in and out of the 1967 Israeli borders. Even the functioning of the various checkpoints can differ with regard to control practices on Palestinians. We must also consider that since 2006 private security firms have been appointed to manage checkpoints (see Havkin 2015).

⁶⁸ The bus that takes Palestinians from the checkpoint to Jerusalem belongs to a bus company owned by a Palestinian family from East Jerusalem. The end of the line is Damascus Gate, just next to the old city. If Palestinian workers need to move inside Jerusalem they catch Israeli bus lines.

men. At that time I had a permit and I worked in a hotel in Jerusalem. [...] I have been working there for four years. Then the operations (*'amalīyāt*) began in 1996, when Hamas started to blow up Israeli buses. So they started to give permits only to married ones who were more than 30 years old. When the Palestinian Authority entered Bethlehem in 1998⁶⁹, it was better, we passed through the checkpoint normally, they [Israeli soldiers] didn't ask anything, until 2000. Then they started to build the wall and everything became more difficult. [...] At the beginning, although we needed a permit, we went [to Jerusalem] from here by walking. Today it's not possible because there are cameras, we are afraid, it's dangerous. If they catch you they put you in prison. I have been working in the settlement for four years, for four years I have been working with an entrepreneur (*muta'ahed*). Before there was freedom, you could go and look for a job by yourself, you didn't need to be tied to a boss (*turtibī bi-mu'allim*) that employs you. In the past I worked by myself, I took workers with me, I went everywhere I wanted" (Qays, al-Bab 15/09/2012).

Qays' story represents a case of particular vulnerability caused by his unmarried status and the consequent limitations he has to face for obtaining a work permit. His story shows how Israeli restrictions on Palestinian workers' movement reinforced Palestinians' dependence on their Israeli employers, but it also highlights how the Palestinian male population was progressively distinguished through an individualized scrutiny based on a person's "bio-social profile" depending on Israeli security concerns. Qays passed from subordinate employment in Jerusalem, where he felt independent in finding his job, recruiting coworkers and moving, to subordinate employment in a settlement, where he believed to be compelled: "There's no alternative, we must like it, we are forced to" (*mā fī ghīrū, bidnā nhibbū, ghaṣbn 'annā*). Moreover, he knew his work conditions in the settlement were not like those enjoyed by Palestinian workers inside 1967 borders: "There are no rights (*ḥuqūq*) here like in Jerusalem. If something happens to me it's at my expense, if I get injured I have to go to the hospital at my expense, not at my employer's expense. In Jerusalem the employer registers you at the Tax Authority⁷⁰, he pays taxes for

⁶⁹ Following Oslo Agreements the Palestinian National Authority took control of different areas of the West Bank gradually. It was firstly settled in Jericho and Gaza in 1994.

⁷⁰ The Israel Tax Authority is part of the Israeli Ministry of Finance and is responsible for both direct and indirect tax systems.

employing you and he also pays for insurance. If you get injured at work this permit covers you, you go to the hospital at his expense”. Moreover, after the wall construction in his village will be completed, Qays isn’t sure to be allowed to continue working in the settlement: “They say this settlement will be part of Jerusalem. In this way I won’t be able to enter with this permit, I would need a permit for Jerusalem”. If the settlement will be included in the Jerusalem Municipality, the kind of work permit necessary to do the same job in the same place will be different: because of his unmarried status Qays risks losing his job. This uncertainty did not let him imagine a happy future: “Insha’llah it will be better, but everyday it seems to go worse!”.

If we consider that 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip created a structural economic dependence on Israel, simultaneously producing “freedom” and autonomous forms of work organization for Palestinians, the introduction of the permits system links Palestinian workers to their Israeli employers by personal dependence. In its turn this personal dependence does not simply establish a hierarchical organization of labor, but gives birth to real power relations between a citizen population and a non-citizen one. In fact, the permits system made the Israeli classification of Palestinians as a foreign population explicit, thus distinguished from the Israeli citizens⁷¹, but also from other foreign workers who constituted an alternative and docile labor force during the second Intifada⁷². The Israeli legal frame concerning the permits system was produced by the progressive criminalization of Palestinians’ mobility and work in Israel: both the act of entering Israel and the act of working there were submitted to Israeli control and integrated not only into the security apparatus, but also into the bureaucratic and financial system of the Israeli State. Qays’ eloquent comparison between illegal work after 1967 and illegal work after the permits system was enforced, speaks about a common experience that Palestinians live: the experience of being *outside* Israeli law. Although the first labor offices were established by the Israeli Civil Administration in the

⁷¹ This change of perspective was reflected by the transfer of the Payment Department (the governmental agency in charge of collecting a part of workers’ salary to finance their social benefits) from the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor to the Ministry of the Interior (Zohar and Hever 2010 : 17).

⁷² Foreign workers’ entry in Israel was promoted during the two Intifada: if during the 80s 8% of the work force was Palestinian, after the first Intifada it decreased to 1%, while foreign work force grew from 1 to 12% (Drori 2009: 8, data was taken from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics). However, Farsakh notes that in 1992 and 2005 (during the first and the second Intifada) Palestinians working in Israel represented respectively 25% and 12% of the West Bank work force. Farsakh underlines that “these different labor-movement dynamics were only partly explained by the effect of closures and restrictions on people’s movement. They are also tied to the military’s intention to keep hold of the West Bank by building settlements. [...] Still, in 2006, and despite al-Aqsa intifada, 55.500 Palestinians from the West Bank, or 13 percent of its employed force, worked in the Israeli economy, reflecting continuous integration of the West Bank into Israel” (Farsakh 2009: 395; data comes from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics).

occupied territories to regulate the initial flows of Palestinian workforce, most of flows developed out of official labor exchanges thanks to Palestinians' free mobility. As Salim Tamari pointed out at the beginning of the 80s, "hardly any attempts are made by the government to control 'illegal' work, either through employers or by curtailing the flow of workers" (Tamari 1981: 49). At the beginning of the 90s Israel started to promote "separation" as a new political discourse that implied the elaboration of a specific set of rules, architectural structures and repressive measures. The separation policies were not only legitimized by the security question (and a supposed indiscriminate dangerousness of Palestinian population following Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation during the first and the second Intifada), but were enforced thanks to the appearance of a new political actor, the Palestinian National Authority, that was supposed to hold political responsibility for the Palestinian population. The permits system was institutionalized by the Oslo Agreements and the Paris Protocol, which fixed Palestinian workers' quota. "Peace" agreements also established a relationship of "coordination and liaisons" between the Israeli State and the PNA in the domains of security and civil affairs. Since work is the field where these two domains intersect and show their mutual interlink, it is interesting to examine how Palestinian institutions put this collaboration into practice.

2.2.2. Palestinian institutions after Oslo

"There's no other solution but to lift the siege that Israel has laid on Gaza Strip and the West Bank and allow workers to go back to their jobs in Israel. This is the short-term problem because these people were working there, the Israeli economy was benefiting from their labor, and I think this is the most important and urgent plan. On a longer term we have to create our own economy that absorbs the major part of our workers"⁷³.

With these words Nabil Sha'ath, a Fatah member and chief negotiator in Oslo peace talks, explained the "urgent plan" the still-imagined Palestinian National Authority had to face in its very beginning, while Yasser Arafat was entering Gaza and Jericho for the first time after 27 years of exile. It was 1994. At that time, after the first Intifada and Israeli closures, the necessary return of Palestinian laborers to their jobs in Israel seemed to

⁷³ RR9428/A - *Gaza/Jericho: Arafat Returns*, Associated Press Archive, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3zkSzYJ7Rc> (accessed on 21/07/2015).

constitute a transitory phase, before a prosperous national economy could be finally established in the Palestinian territories. It is strange, but meaningful, that while the first upcoming Palestinian President was allowed to go back to his homeland after a long exile, welcomed by exultant crowds in the streets – and after years of popular struggles strongly based on the boycott of Israeli products as a way to question economic dependence on Israel – the PLO representative referred to the Palestinian workers’ return to their jobs in Israel as one of the first and major political goals. A mutual interest seemed to be at the base of this goal, since also “the Israeli economy was benefiting from their labor”.

In the context of newly conceived relationships between Israel and the PNA after the Oslo Agreements, providing for a joint collaboration in security and civil matters, the case of Palestinian laborers needing a work permit to enter Israel is officially managed as a part of “civil liaisons”. In 1995 Oslo Interim Agreement set up a Joint Civil Affairs Coordination and Cooperation Committee, Regional Committees (West Bank and Gaza), and District Committees in the West Bank. Until 2002 the Israeli and Palestinian District Civil Liaison Offices (DCLOs) in Bethlehem shared the same seat in a big building that is now an Israeli military base. During the second Intifada official “liaisons” were interrupted. The Israeli and Palestinian offices were separated according to the new political organization of space inaugurated by Oslo Agreements, letting the Israeli DCLOs find their seat in Israeli settlements in Area C (under full Israeli control), while the Palestinian DCLOs were moved to Area A (under supposedly full Palestinian control). Each office is related to a particular district of the West Bank⁷⁴ and Israeli-Palestinian coordinated activities are organized in different administrative zones, and bilateral communication occurs between Palestinian and Israeli offices belonging to the same district.

Before exploring the everyday functioning of the Palestinian institutions created through this government structure, it is interesting to see how Israel conceives this “civil” coordination with the Palestinian counterpart. My aim is also to question the supposed separation between a “civil” and a “security” domain and to apprehend how this separation is practically (un)defined. Israeli DCLOs are managed by the Civil Administration, a structure of the Israeli government created in the occupied territories in

⁷⁴ The administrative category of “district” was determined by the Oslo Interim Agreement and corresponds to major Palestinian cities in the West Bank: Jenin, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho. In practice the Israeli DCLO in the large settlement bloc of Gush Etzion, south-west of Bethlehem and north of Hebron, covers Bethlehem, Hebron and Abu Dis areas.

1981⁷⁵. The institution of the Civil Administration created two distinct bureaucratic spheres of Israeli control, one related to the management of Palestinians' everyday life and one concerning military action (Shenhav and Berda in Ophir *et al.* 2009: 337). Before the institution of the PNA the Israeli Civil Administration provided Palestinians with orange Israeli ID cards, set up labor offices and managed Palestinian public officials' work (like teachers' work in public schools). Notwithstanding, the Palestinian population was simultaneously subject to military orders and not to the civil law applied to Israeli citizens. Today the Civil Administration is part of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), a unit of the Israeli Ministry of Defense, and has its headquarters in Beit El, an Israeli settlement in the West Bank, near the Palestinian city of Ramallah. In the COGAT website we can find the following presentation of the Civil Administration:

“The Civil Administration constitutes the body responsible for implementation of government policy in Judea and Samaria and bettering these areas in civil matters in accordance with the guidelines set by the government and in coordination with ministries, the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] and the security forces. As such, the Civil Administration is an integral part of IDF and Central Command operations on a routine and emergency basis. The main task of the Civil Administration is the civil and security coordination and liaison vis-à-vis the Palestinian entities. Within this framework the Civil Administration has regional representatives in various districts (regional coordination and liaison administrations). The Civil Administration also has authority over the population in Area C in matters relating to zoning, construction and infrastructure. In addition, the Civil Administration is responsible for

⁷⁵ *Order regarding the establishment of a Civilian Administration (Judea and Samaria)*, Order n. 947, 5742-1981. Article 2 provides for the establishment of a Civil Administration: “A Civilian Administration is hereby established in the region. The Civilian Administration will administer the civilian affairs in the region, in accordance with the directives of this order, for the well-being and good of the population and in order to supply and implement the public services, and taking into consideration the need to maintain an orderly administration and public order in the region”. The administration of local residents' civilian affairs goes with the maintenance of public order. Moreover, the Head of the Civil Administration is appointed by the IDF Commander. While the Head is provided with legislative powers (Article 4), it is the IDF Area Commander who signs the orders and the chief legislation in both military and civilian subjects.

liaison with the international community on issues relating to humanitarian aid and the promotion of various initiatives in Judea and Samaria”⁷⁶.

COGAT is said to be also responsible for “addressing the need of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank” and its Coordination and Liaison School “provide the unit's officers and soldiers a wide-ranging view of the Palestinian culture so that they can obtain a more profound understanding and better familiarity with the Palestinian population in order to create improved and more efficient coordination and liaison with the Palestinian population”⁷⁷. For better accomplishing its task, the School publicizes its spoken Arabic language course addressed to officers, policemen, IDF soldiers and prison guards.

From COGAT self-presentation, publicly accessible in its website, the nature of “civil” cooperation with “Palestinian entities” is quite clear. “Civil” cooperation is part of Israeli supposedly “defensive” strategies, implying the extension of the Israeli government in the West Bank, which is targeted by the Biblical toponyms of “Judea and Samaria” and so inscribed in an exclusive Jewish history. Moreover, the relationship between COGAT and the Israeli settler colonization in the occupied West Bank (illegal according to 1949 Geneva Convention)⁷⁸ is not hidden, since COGAT is also busy in “addressing the need of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank”: the “West Bank” rises again and replaces the more pacified image of the Jewish land of “Judea and Samaria”, insinuating something extraneous. We can imagine that in the alien environment of the “West Bank” Israeli settlers’ needs concern “security”, differently from an unequivocally Jewish “Judea and Samaria” where the Israeli government assures the implementation of its policy. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Israeli Civil Administration is defined as “an integral part of IDF and General Command operations”, revealing its military premise. Palestinian presence is left undefined or muffled: the security and civil coordination is developed with Palestinian “entities” (although other texts of the website explicitly refer to the Palestinian Authority) and Israeli authority is exerted on an indeterminate population in Area C. At the same time the “Palestinian population” is directly identified with “Palestinian culture” and the Arabic language – that is, with its otherness – so that a school is needed to let the Civil Administration military staff

⁷⁶ <http://www.cogat.idf.il/1279-en/Cogat.aspx>.

⁷⁷ <http://www.cogat.idf.il/1356-en/Cogat.aspx>.

⁷⁸ Article 49, sixth paragraph, of the 1949 Geneva Convention IV provides: “The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.” This principle is also contained in the International Criminal Court Statute: under Article 8(2)(b)(viii) of the 1998 ICC Statute, “the transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies” constitutes a war crime.

“familiarize” itself with it in order to act more efficiently. We do not need to dwell here on the colonial nature of the “cultural knowledge of the enemy”, in which even anthropologists have been enlisted, and that is perfectly integrated to contemporary global wars (Perugini 2009). In the context established by the Israeli Civil Administration the international community can intervene through its “humanitarian aid”, welcomed and facilitated by the Israeli liaison services.

After Oslo Agreements the Palestinian population passed from Israeli administration to the responsibility of the Palestinian National Authority, but the structure and the policies of the Israeli occupation remained, like the separation between “civil” and “security” domains demonstrates. What changed was the label under which they were represented in a renewed regime where the “peace” discourse became hegemonic and gained international consensus through the ideas of “cooperation”, “coordination” and “liaisons”, that is through Israeli-Palestinian officially legitimized relationships. But how do Palestinian institutions established after Oslo work in this context? How do they legitimize their existence? How is a “civil liaison” with the Israeli part put into practice? Being interested in Palestinian workers’ experience, at the end of my fieldwork in 2014 I decided to visit the institutions to which they turned to in order to get their work permits for Israel. Firstly, I went to one of the Labor Office in the West Bank, where Palestinians go to pick up their permits. While I had been told that I had better provide an official letter from my university in order to be accepted as a researcher at the institution, the first time I entered the office smiling employers welcomed me informally and offered me a seat and a cup of coffee as customary hospitality norms provide for. They were both happy and surprised to have me as an unusual client, a foreign girl who addressed them in Arabic and was interested in the slow and monotonous life of their office and in their clerical tasks. Several hanging boards publicized the multi-functionality of the office as a “One-Stop-Shop”, made by Palestinian-German cooperation⁷⁹. The office consisted of three rooms: at the entrance a plaque was hanging above one of the employees’ table with

⁷⁹ GIZ (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) is the German organization that implemented the project. In the program description, concerning “Local Governance and Civil Society Development” in the Palestinian territories, the organization’s approach includes that “in accordance with the principles of good governance, the partner authorities are being empowered to modernize their administrations, introduce transparent financial management and improve the quality of their service provision. [...] In this way the program supports local reform processes, strengthens the participation of the people in the political process and promotes the development of democratic structures. The priority at national level is to establish an enabling environment for the local authorities. Above all, this involves regulating and supervising the local administrations, shaping the relationships between national, regional and local levels, allocating responsibilities, and establishing a funding basis for the cities, towns and municipalities”. (<https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/18104.html>, last access on 30/07/2015).

the sign “External employment” written both in English and in Arabic, like any other writing in the room. “Receptionist” and “Job Placement” were hanging above the other table in the same hall. An open door took to another large room with glass walls, where two women employees sat at their computers. Next to their room, another door was closed and a sign on it indicated the entrance to the “Employment Officer”, that was the director of the Labor Office. Mousa, the employee assigned to “Job Placement”, let me sit near him behind his desk, answering my first questions and simultaneously welcoming people who addressed to him. At the beginning I was not at ease in occupying his own position in the room, attending people’s requests while papers and documents full of personal data were passing in front of me. In fact, as I later understood, the office clients went to pick up their permits from the women employees first, and then Mousa inserted their personal data (names, addresses, permit number...) in his computer database. As the office director later explained me, that was the “labor market system”, where personal files were created for each worker or jobseeker in order to “know all the information about him”.

I decided to start asking questions related to this “objective” and quantitative effort to produce data and I asked Mousa to know how many permits had been requested and issued in the last months, and from which areas people demanding a permit came. Mousa quietly told me that he only had access to the *approximate* number of permits issued in the whole Bethlehem area (994 from 1st to 28th April 2015) and that it was impossible for him to apprehend how these permits were distributed among different villages. In fact, the Palestinian Labor Office cannot know how many permits have been requested because its only task is to deliver them to the holders. Work permits are requested by Israeli employers at the Israeli Labor Office in Jerusalem: as a consequence, the Palestinian Labor Office is not informed about how many permits are finally refused and it is responsible only for workers who are *already* permits holders. Apart from the task of delivering permits, it is the District Civil Liaisons Offices that are directly concerned with the issue of permits. Every day an officer (always the same person) from the Palestinian DCLO goes to the Israeli DCLO and picks up the permits issued that day. Then he goes back to the Palestinian DCLO, where people can go and pick up their permits at the office counters. It is the Labor Office director, however, who collect the work permits at the Palestinian DCLO. The director takes them to the Labor Office, where they are finally delivered to Palestinian workers. The Labor Office employees, who later give the permits to their holders, are prevented to have any direct

communication with the Israeli DCLO issuing the permits: they say it is forbidden (*mamnū*). Only “the Liaisons” (*il-irtibāt*) can do it. Notwithstanding, like Mousa’s colleague explained to me, Labor Offices had been inaugurated by the Israeli Civil Administration after 1967 occupation and were transferred to Palestinian Authority’s responsibility after the Oslo Agreements. The system which organizes Israeli-Palestinian relationships, supposedly developed between symmetric structures with a “cooperative” aim, reveals not only the clerical hierarchies inside the national institution, but also shows how these hierarchies are produced by power relations that the Israeli counterpart actualizes in keeping the monopoly of information and the final decision. The role of the Labor Office director is to link the base-level (the Labor Office) with the upper grade (the Palestinian “Liaisons”), being granted by the exclusive capacity to have access to the “sacred” space of the Palestinian DCLO, while chosen officers of this latter have unique access to the “sacred” space of the Israeli DCLO.

Throughout my ethnography of Palestinian institutions at their different levels – the Labor Office and the Palestinian DCLO – I was interested in a very basic question: how can a Palestinian get a work permit? What does he have to do in order to get it? I consulted with the Labor Office employees, their director and the director of the Palestinian DCLO on this issue. Their official discourse firstly described the different steps a Palestinian has to undertake: first, he has to be requested from an Israeli employer. Apparently, job seekers can register at the Palestinian Labor Office and Israeli employers register their demand at the Israeli Labor Office. Israeli employers’ demand can refer to a particular individual or to the number of generic workers their company needs. The permit request is sent to the Israeli DCLO, that examines the individual profiles of the possible candidates. Three conditions must be satisfied: the Palestinian candidate must be at least 25 years old, married and with children. First of all, though, he is submitted to a “security control” (*faḥaṣ il-amn*) and he must not have “security problems” (*mashākel amniyya*). Eventually, he can be subject to interrogation by the Israeli intelligence (*mukhabbarāt*), the Shin Bet. The motivations of an eventual refusal remain a secret. On the contrary, if he does not have “security problems” he can apply for a magnetic card, provided by the Israeli DCO, where the worker must go and leave his fingerprint. The magnetic card is obligatory for entry into Israel. When a work permit is issued, the worker goes and picks it up at the Palestinian Labor Office, while for other kinds of

permit people can go directly to the counters of the Palestinian DCLO⁸⁰. When the DCLO director explained to me the job his office carries out, he distinguished between “coordination” (*tansīq*) and “authorization” (*tarkhīṣ*) as two different activities of the “liaisons” service. While “authorization” concerns the issue of permits, “coordination” implies a joint action in order to achieve a goal, for example, letting Palestinian farmers have access to their land when an Israeli barrier prevents them to farm on it. In this case, the Palestinian DCLO asks the Israeli authorities to let (*yasmaḥu*) them enter at an agreed time and Israeli soldiers should go and open the doors, but no written permits are issued. What remains implicit is that “authorization”, whether through papers or a specific action (like “opening”), is subordinate to coordination, but it is also unilateral: only Israel “authorizes”, while Palestinians must be “authorized”. Despite apparently symmetric structures, permits are given in one direction only (see Table 1). Moreover, the number of work permits is limited according to the Paris Protocol, which provided for Palestinian workers’ quotas. The DCLO director estimates that, out of 35.000-45.000 permits to be issued in the whole West Bank, Israeli gives about 25.000 permits: “They speak but they don’t give” (*biḥku bas mā b’aṭu*), he told me.

If a Palestinian is tied to an Israeli employer to obtain a work permit, how does it happen? How can he get in touch with an employer if he is not allowed to enter Israel? This was the second basic question I was really interested in, and I was even more interested in knowing how public officers of Palestinian institutions could answer. In fact, even if labor exchanges were theoretically developed through Labor Offices (the Israeli one registering the employers’ demand of workforce, the Palestinian one enrolling jobseekers), from my fieldwork experience I knew things were much more complicated in practice: people did not address to the Palestinian Labor Office to seek a job in Israel, they just went there to get their permit. The DCLO director made this explicit: the second option, in his words, was to go through people who already work with an Israeli (*bishtghilu ma’a istrā’yli*) and look for further Palestinian workers among the people they know. The Labor Office director confirmed this setting:

“[Palestinians seek a job] through other Palestinians (*min khilāl il-falastiniyya*). I work with someone, my employer (*ṣāhib il-‘amal*) comes

⁸⁰ There are three main kinds of permits: work permit (pink), entry permit for visits or trade (brown), and permit for medical treatment. In August 2007 B’Tselem reported nine types of permits, including movement permits for vehicles and special permits for the Seam Zone or the Jordan Valley (Ophir *et al.* 2009: 323).

and says ‘I want a tiler’. I know a tiler, I take his ID number and his bank account number, and the employer provides him with a permit. It works through people (*‘alā tarīq in-nās*), how did you meet us? From people, through relationships (*tarīq il-‘alāqāt*). There are also Palestinian contractors (*muqāwilīn*), they employ workers. A contractor can come to our office and says he needs 10 tilers, for example. I hang a notice at our office where workers can see it. I have a friend who is a Palestinian contractor and has 100 Palestinian workers” (Labor Office Director, Bethlehem 29/06/2014).

Palestinian contractors usually work as Israeli companies’ subcontractors. Like in Rami’s case, however, it is not so simple for a Palestinian entrepreneur to get an Israeli work permit and manage his own society autonomously. Discussing with the Labor Office director I alluded to Palestinian contractors who are obliged to pay their permit to an Israeli employer. At the beginning he was not surprised by my observation and just replied that this was mediation (*samsara*) and it was *harām*. “This doesn’t concern us” (*hadā mish mīn ‘indnā*), he said, referring to the Labor Office activities. Since I was insisting on this point he got defensive and started to ask me nervously: “Do you know why? One has a house, he has children! [He turned to English] Do you know the background of one who has to pay 2000 NIS every month to buy the permit to enter Israel in order to have a job?!”. I said *samsara* works also with buying and selling lands, it can be a normal job. “Land is different, it is not like workers!”, he answered: “This is his [the land mediator’s] job and everyone respects him (*kullu biḥtaramu ‘aleyh*). He can open his own office if he wants. But that one is different because he exploits workers (*bistaghil il-‘ummāl*). It’s like a slave trade (*tijarat il-‘abūd*), it’s not legal (*mish mashrū‘*), it’s against the law!”. While the Labor Office director, like his superior the DCLO director, acknowledged that a Palestinian would better find a job in Israel through personal relationships, he set some limits to it: paid mediation is both *harām* and illegal, involving a judgment that refers to a legal frame, but also to a moral code.

Coming down the clerical hierarchy, the conceptualization of personal relationships, which both make possible and legitimize Palestinian workers in Israel, became more explicit. From his position Mousa, the Labor Office employee who welcomed me every time I visited the office and let me sit at his desk, described the situation in a more detailed way. He, too, presented me the official version: Israeli

employers register their demand of workforce at the Israeli Labor Office. When I asked him how workers could get in touch with them, he answered that if one of his friends (*ṣadīq*) came to the office, he gave him some of these Israelis' numbers. He indicated some notes hung on the panel behind his computer, invisible to public because his counter hid them, where names and numbers were written by hand, and told me he got them from workers. Generally, he said, people can find a job through friends (*aṣḥāb*) who already work with a contractor in Israel and can propose him other workers to employ. In his view it is those who can't benefit from friends that come to the office. It was clear that Mousa answered my questions thanks to the information he got from the workers he daily met at his workplace: his main task was actually dealing with them and managing their ordinary and very concrete problems. He also knew that every morning at the checkpoint, when Palestinians enter Israel to go to work, some Israelis sitting in their pick-ups propose work permits in exchange for a payment. Workers entering Israel can eventually give their numbers to friends. Some workers had also gave Mousa the contact of a Palestinian who worked with an Israeli official of the Israeli DCLO in delivering permits, asking 2000 NIS for each one. As our conversation switched to selling and buying permits, I asked him what his opinion was. He said this was not good (*hada mish mnīḥ*) because help does not imply asking money. On the contrary, if he saw someone sad (*ḥazīn*), that is one who does not have a job and money, he tried to help him putting him into contact with some contractors, although he knew this was forbidden (*mamnū'*). "I deal with them sympathetically" (*anā a'amal ta'āṭufan ma'hum*), he told me. After I asked him to better define his feelings in meeting people at the office, he got annoyed and said: "Here it's not like in your country! You deal only with your father and your mother, when you walk in the street you walk straight on (*timshī doghri*). We are all brothers here (*iḥnā kulnā ikhua*)!". His form of help was distinct from the individualism that characterized the Western world in his view: it was not really help in itself, it was the attitude towards people that was at stake. Mousa was a young man and a practicing Muslim, and usually spoke with me handling his *masbaḥa*, the Muslim rosary that adult men usually keep moving in their hands as a pastime, simultaneously giving them a respectable and authoritative tone. Mousa's "sympathy" towards his clients had a clear moral base, involving comprehension and compassion. He dealt with his clients informally, although his work inevitably put him in a position of superiority, being the officially recognized position of one who provides services and partially controls the access to possible resources. This influenced also the way his clients addressed him. One

day, while I was sitting at his desk, two women came to his counter with a little girl. The girl's mother was very troubled and spoke restlessly. She lifted her daughter's t-shirt and showed Mousa her skin: the girl had had a bad burn and her breast was completely injured. She needed regular treatments at the hospital. The woman wanted to take her to a private hospital, since public ones are well known to be inefficient, and she needed health insurance. Since her husband was unemployed and they could not afford the necessary treatments, the woman wanted the Labor Office to deliver an unemployment certificate in order to have a free insurance. She got even more upset when Mousa explained to her that the certificate could let her obtain free insurance, but it was valid only for public hospitals.

If Mousa perceived his help to people as a moral duty based on solidarity and mutual understanding among supposed equals, like "brothers", these values were intermingled with his clerical position that accorded him some power over people's lives. In this sense his "sympathy" also meant compassion, implying an ethical standing in managing an asymmetric relationship created by the institutionalization of service provision and his role of mediation between the Palestinian institution and its public. The same ethics expanded the limits of his help beyond the official service provision itself, since Mousa also managed his own "liaisons" between workers and employers through informal but selective networks, especially based on "friendship" ties. Apparently, his help was part of a broader trend in which personal relationships are fundamental for seeking a job in Israel, but they remain masked by the official and efficient administrative work of Palestinian institutions. However, sympathy and compassion played a controversial role even in Mousa's superiors' job. Here is how the Labor Office director represented the office clients and explained me how his team was expected to deal with them:

"Palestinians are under stress because of many things, but most importantly because of poverty and unemployment. According to Palestinian statistics more than 26% is unemployed, unemployment especially affects graduated people. Most of them have psychological problems, because everyone who wants to improve his life needs a job, needs something to change his life, needs a dream. But, you know, we are under siege, we have the wall [...]. In our country we have a weak economy and life becomes more and more difficult, so most of them come

to our office to have a good service. As a team we have to deal with these people in a simple way (*bi-tarīqa basīṭa*), in a good way (*bi-tarīqa mniḥa*), we have to listen to them. Our simplest way consists of smiling and with this smiling we try to enter their world” (Labor Office Director, Bethlehem 29/06/2014).

The director underlined that the main mission of the Labor Office was to face poverty and unemployment in order to help people to match the labor market demands. Their work thus implied “changing the mentality”, since most people wanted their children to study at the university and kept choosing “traditional education” (*ta’līm taqalīdī*), like Arabic studies, English literature, engineering and medicine, while the labor market needs “professional training” (*it-tadrīb il-mihani*) to make carpenters, mechanics, hairdressers. When I asked him where this abstract “labor market” was, and what about all the workers that came to the office to pick up their work permits for Israel, he answered me delivering permits was not their main job: “We work with them to raise their awareness (*wā’ī*). Every laborer who works inside Israel must take his rights (*ḥuqūq*). We give them the permits and we follow the human, the social [question] inside Israel”. The Workers Union is actually one of the Labor Office stakeholders, together with the Trade Chamber, and has lawyers who follow the cases of Palestinian workers even when they work in Israel illegally or they work in Israeli settlements. On the contrary, the Labor Office is not involved in these cases: “We are not responsible for them. They are illegal. It is forbidden (*mamnū’*) [for us to work with them]”. In the director’s words illegality had a double meaning: on one side, workers without permits are illegal according to the Israeli rule, on the other side, workers in Israeli settlements are illegal from the Palestinian Authority’s point of view, since Palestinian policies rest on the illegality of Israeli settlements according to international law in order to pursue its national fight against the Israeli occupation. The legal frame, more than ordinary interactions with workers, prevailed in the Labor Office director’s discourse: a “good service” that provides for “smiling” is offered only to “legal” workers. However, this legal frame had multiple points of references. Workers’ rights discourse refers to labor law in Israel, since according to the director “the labor law in Israel is better (*afḍal*) than in the areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority (*manāṭiq iṣ-ṣulṭa*)” and “the Israeli labor law applies (*yuṭabbaq*) also to Palestinian workers”.

The question of Palestinian laborers in Israel involves the institutionalized procedures that produce a structural relationship between the Palestinian institutions and the Israeli authorities. During my meetings with the Labor Office and the Palestinian DCLO directors this relationship was conceptualized in different ways. The Labor Office director maintained that Israel prefers Palestinian workers than foreign ones. The valorization of Palestinians' labor in Israel was not strange to me, as I often grasped it by Palestinian workers themselves. Some of them praised their specific competences in the building and tiling sector, and their disposition to hard work. They were also conscious of being a convenient workforce in Israel, since "the Israeli employer cannot say anything to Israeli employees", because they are protected by Israeli law, while Palestinians "have no rights". Moreover, they were part of a convenient workforce because their money remained inside Israel. The Labor Office director added further explanations to these general views:

"The relationship between Israelis and Palestinians – forget the occupation – is characterized by a mix (*saffat fiha il-ikhtilāṭ*): the language, [Palestinian] people speak Hebrew, and then the Israeli companies have money to employ Palestinians. Some time ago Israel tried to take workers from Thailand, from Turkey, but it didn't work. This is because workers that come from abroad send money to their countries, but Palestinians work by shekel, buy by shekel, we take from Israel and go back to Israel. We, in the Palestinian society, depend (*n'atamed*) a lot on Israel for clothes, food, industrial products. In everything there's exchange (*tabādil*), so we started to understand each other (*sarna nifaham ma'a ba'ad*). The Palestinian worker, if he has to build a building, finishes his work in one year, while the Thai maybe after three years. Secondly, the Palestinian worker finishes his work and goes back home, he doesn't make problems (*bi'amilish mashākel*), but other ones [workers coming from abroad] drink, go to bars, look at women, it is a problem. The Palestinian worker is married, has children, he doesn't make problems. Palestinian workers are Muslim, and Islam interdicts (*biḥarrim*) those things" (Labor Office Director, Bethlehem 29/06/2014).

Palestinians' relationship of dependence on Israel is described in terms of mixture, exchange, and mutual understanding. The valorization of Palestinian workers in Israel

concerns also their moral standing. The Labor Office director represents them as respectable men who take care of their families, although being married and having children are also some of the main conditions Israel imposes to get a work permit. Moreover, Palestinian workers are good Muslims, so they do not “make problems”: the docility of Palestinian labor force is described as a moral virtue related both to men’s respectability in their role of breadwinners, and to their conformity to Islamic orthopraxis.

How is this valorized docility linked to laborers’ rights in which the Labor Office should be engaged? I asked the director what happens if a Palestinian laborer has an accident at work. I knew workers with regular permits who had been pushed back to the West Bank for treatments, instead of being taken to an Israeli hospital, and their permits had been suspended while they were on sick-leave⁸¹. However, in the Labor Office director’s words “exchange” and “mutual understanding” turn into an efficient collaboration where conflict seems to be completely absent:

“He [the worker] comes to our office and we prepare a medical report. We decide what is the kind of accident and how much time he must ask for vacation. Then we send it to the Israelis. And the Israelis collaborate (*bit‘āwanu*) with us. There’s a collaboration (*ta‘āwan*) about all workers’ rights, we sit together, we have meetings from time to time to follow the different cases. We go to the Israeli DCLO. The Liaisons office is the official part (*il-jiha ir-rasmiyya*) that has the right to sit and talk to Israelis. If I sit with Israelis is through the Civil Liaisons (*irtibāt il-madani*). But generally we have a coordinator (*munassiq*), I call him and I tell him ‘There’s a guy who has problems’. I send his name and his report, and he follows his case. The Israelis follow all these medical reports at their Labor Office in Jerusalem” (Labor Office Director, Bethlehem 29/06/2014).

Since the Labor Office work was so linked to the DCLO, I asked the Labor Office director to be put in touch with the liaisons service. We agreed to meet at the Labor Office one morning, where a car from the DCLO was sent to pick us up. For the Labor Office director it was just like any other day, when he left his office to go to the DCLO and collect work permits. In the car he introduced me to the driver and we started to

⁸¹ Palestinians with a work permit monthly pay a share, automatically deducted from their salaries, for social benefits, including health care in case of accidents.

discuss about my research interests in the West Bank and about politics. The driver turned to the Labor Office director and wondered for a while if I was working with Israelis, I could also be a Jew. We arrived at the DCLO, a multi-floors building at the outskirts of the city center. At the entrance the DCLO was provided with a waiting room where people went to request permits and pick them up at counters. There were not so many people waiting that day. The Labor Office director took me to the DCLO director's office straight away. The office was very large and modernly furnished. He introduced me as a Ph.D. student in Anthropology who was making research on Palestinian workers, and left us alone. The DCLO director started to tell me about his final dissertation on the Oslo Agreements. He seemed to me a very cynical person – I thought it was understandable given his job – and dotted our conversation with many rhetorical, sharp questions: “Where do you think Lieberman lives? Don't you know he is one of your neighbors?”. It was evident that his tartness was not directed to me, but to the subjects of our discussion. While discussing with me, he got annoyed when one of his assistants knocked on the door and introduced an old man who barely walked with a stick and seemed to be very sick. The old man had urged to talk to the director personally because his son wanted a permit for seeking a job in Israel, although he was unmarried. With a standoffish tone the director said it was his son who should have come and quickly got rid of him: his son was certainly not a good guy if he sent his sick father to move him to pity, he commented later. As I described above, he explained to me how the activities of coordination and liaisons were managed, and what specific procedures concerned Palestinian workers and work permits. He did not want me to record our conversation. Referring to my Anthropology specialization he explained to me that “the human issue” (*mīn in-nahia il-insānīyya*) consisted in the way Palestinian workers could reach their workplaces in Israel: the main problem was the checkpoints and the infinite time workers spent in waiting. After about an hour of discussion I felt the ambience had become more familiar and I openly asked him how his professional contacts with Israelis were. He described the way work mixed with intimacy because of everyday encounters:

“Soldiers are young. You know how they are grown: they always have been hearing that Arabs are dangerous, that Arabs are criminals and killers. But day by day a soldier gets close to us (*bisīr yqarrib 'aleynā*), he works with us every day: after a month an Israeli soldier can become my friend (*ṣāhbī*) because he sees that I have a brain and I have humanity (*'indī*

mūkhkh w 'indī insanīyya), and I know what I want. We are here because there's something called "peace". Our relationships become personal (*bisīru il-'alaqāt khuṣīyyat*), Israeli officials are now my friends (*aṣḥābī*). We are not at the same level of force, we don't need force, we don't want force. We have the force of our faith and of our beliefs, we are the owners of the land, the owners of the nation, our love is for our people"⁸².

A nationalist rhetoric mixes with the institutional establishment of Palestinian-Israeli relationships in the context of "peace" inaugurated by the Oslo Agreements. While the asymmetry of this relationship is represented by Palestinian civil officers, like the DCLO director, meeting with Israeli officials and IDF members – based on a racist representation of Palestinians as "dangerous" and "killers" – close and personal acquaintances develop from everyday encounters. In his view these personal relationships consist of "something shared" (*fī ishī mushtarak*), that is "work" (*'amal*) and humanity (*insānīyya*). "I want to live, he [the Israeli] must live" (*anā biddī 'aīsh, huwe lāzim y'īsh*), the director said, revealing also a differentiated relationship with the simple fact of living: Palestinians *desire* to live (although they could not be living) and Israelis *must* live (their life must be preserved).

Referring to the political economy of the Israeli occupation, Leila Farsakh has maintained that "the failure of the Palestinian economy is a result of a *sui generis* colonial structure of domination that was set up by al-Naksa ("the setback" in Arabic), or Israeli occupation in 1967. This colonial structure was transformed, rather than abolished with the Oslo peace process" (Farsakh in Ophir *et al.* 2009: 379-380). The institutionalized contacts between Israel and the Palestinian Authority have reproduced the power asymmetry between Israel and the Palestinian representatives, while legitimizing Israeli policies of land appropriation and settler expansion through the discourse over "peace" and its pragmatic forms of "coordination" and "liaisons". At the same time Israeli-Palestinian security coordination supports the Israeli repression of Palestinians' political opposition to the occupation: it is Palestinian police and security forces, rather than the Israeli Administration, that ensure public order in the West Bank, stifling some demonstrations and providing information to Israeli security forces. On the other hand, coordination with Israel paradoxically legitimates the existence of Palestinian Authority

⁸² Liaisons Office Director, Bethlehem 2/7/2014 (refusal of recorded interview).

itself⁸³. If Palestinian-Israeli relationship is represented by Palestinian public officers in terms of dependence and disproportion of force, everyday contacts and shared practices build a sense of closeness and familiarity, which becomes a mode of political relation based on “mixture” (*ikhṭilāt*), “exchange” (*tabādil*) and “mutual understanding”. While personal relationships are at the base of Palestinians’ labor in Israel, linking Palestinian workers to Israeli employers, personal relationships are also part of Palestinian officers’ connection with Israeli officials in their “civil liaisons”. As I will show in the fourth chapter, there is an important difference between the two: Palestinian laborers conceive their personal ties with Israelis as opposed to the political, grounding on the distinction between “people” (*sha‘b*) and “government” (*ḥukūma*). More precisely, a distinction is produced between personal ties among civilians, which are considered to be legitimate under certain conditions, and personal links with government representatives. The definition of the personal relationships Palestinian workers maintain with some Israeli citizens categorically exclude any tie with members of the Israeli government and army, and express a radical criticism to collaboration as a legitimate relationship between political institutions in the context of the Israeli occupation. These distinctions contribute to produce the sense of betrayal Palestinian people generally experience towards the PNA and its institutions, which under the current conditions are hardly acknowledged as their legitimate representatives.

2.2.3. The legal-illegal continuum: models and experiences

As we saw in the previous paragraph, Palestinian institutions were produced by the new juridical frame created by the Oslo Agreements and based on new distinctions between legal and illegal practices mainly referred to by Israeli law. With the introduction

⁸³ In July 2012 the Palestinian police violently repressed youth’s demonstrations in Ramallah, where some activists publicly criticized official Palestinian relations with Israeli authorities and government representatives, asking for an end to the Oslo Accords (“Palestinian stage protests in the West Bank”, *al-Jazeera*, 3 July 2012). From the Palestinian authorities’ side, security coordination with Israel is presented as a condition for the existence of the PNA itself: “People look at this, as if the Palestinian Authority, through its security forces, is an executive arm of Israeli security forces, but they need to remember that every step that relates to day-to-day life contains an element of security cooperation. [...] Ultimately, the entire PA is based on security coordination. Scrapping or halting it would mean that the PA as a government arm had ceased to act and would be turning in the keys to the Israeli government. Therefore a decision like this is not just a matter of stopping the meetings between intelligence chiefs or with the [Israeli] Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories” (Member of Fatah central committee, see Jack Khoury, “Analyses: Palestinians in No Hurry to End Security Coordination with Israel”, *Haaretz*, 13 November 2014).

of the permits system and the separation policy, Israeli rule started to precisely define whom can have access to the Israeli “legality”, thus being legitimate to get a permit and enter Israel, and whom cannot. Palestinian institutions reproduce and reinforce this duplicity, situating their job on the “legal” side. The definition of legality that PNA institutions produce does not appear to contradict Israeli rule, it is rather intermingled with it in the shared field of “civil affairs”, especially for what concerns Palestinian laborers in Israel. Ultimately, Palestinian institutions appear to be legitimated by Israeli rule itself. If one of the few points of open conflict between Israel and the PNA is the illegality of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian laborers working in Israeli colonies are granted with a limited access to Palestinian institutions, since the “legal” field that the PNA defines exclude them from certain services (such as the services provided by the Palestinian Labor Office).

The Israeli system of permits involves two dimensions that are called to define Palestinians’ “legality” in Israel. On one side, it is primarily concerned with Palestinians’ mobility: restrictions are based on the individual profile of the candidate to enter Israel, identified by sex, age, marital status, and supposed dangerousness related to the Israeli security regime. If we consider the different apparatus Israeli occupation has developed since 1967 until now, we see how the Israeli State progressively changed its forms of government of the Palestinian population: from a military regime, which distinguished citizens (protected by Israeli law) from non-citizens (excluded by Israeli law and subject to military rule) and contributed to the categorization of different populations, to a “civil administration” whose aim was to treat Palestinian civilians separately, simultaneously essentializing their otherness. While during this period (1967-1990) Palestinians started to be an important workforce in Israel, Israeli control did not imply an effect of individualization. As a consequence, Palestinian laborers’ experience illustrate that the legality/illegality dichotomy was not so clearly defined: Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip were all out of the Israeli law (being non-citizens) but included in the Israeli economical system, that was left “free”. When the system of permits started to be enforced in 1991, following Arafat’s support to Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War, it was generally focused on restricting Palestinians’ entry into Israel, that until that time was left free like the labor market demanded (the first restrictions were enforced during the first Intifada in the form of curfews and general closures). The individualization of Israeli control started to operate when Palestinian bodies began to be used as weapons inside Israel, threatening Israeli people in their ordinary life. The definition of the bio-social

status of the Palestinian candidate to enter Israel, grounded on the biological determinants of sex, age and reproductive life, both discriminates Palestinians on the base of their individual profiles and is supposed to produce their docility as hard workers and harmless breadwinners. Therefore, the individualization of Israeli control contributed to produce legality as a system of discrimination among singularized lived experiences. Notwithstanding, Palestinians can not merely be considered as atomized individuals and the Israeli system holds its own contradictory tensions: if a Palestinian belongs to a family where activists were killed or imprisoned by Israel, his/her movement can be limited even if he/she has not been personally implicated in political activities. Israel's "security concerns" are not reducible to governing Palestinian lives with respect to their biological existence, but must target their social and political quality, or rather their social and political potentiality. On the other hand I maintain that so called "suicide attacks" mainly express the inseparability and irreducibility of these two dimensions.

If most of the analyses on Israel/Palestine have been focusing on the Israeli control of the space and on different regimes of mobility, we should take into account that the permits system targets not only people's movement, but also Palestinian work. In fact, Palestinians may enter Israel legally but be considered illegally working there (see Zayd's case in 2.1.3.). If the chance to work in Israel is necessarily combined with an authorization to enter Israel, this permission is simultaneously disconnected from earning a living. The multiplicity of Israeli permits (for visit, medical treatment, trade, etc...) reflects this disconnection: it is not only the practice of moving and "entering" that is at stake, but also what kind of activity Palestinians are legitimized to carry on inside the Israeli State. More specifically, labor becomes the base for limited rights (the right of movement – limited both in time and space – for example), but these rights are granted through a process of authorization rather than constituting a permanent status, and they are liable to be revoked. These dynamics are not an exclusive feature of Israeli modern rationale, but they have become a common policy regulating (and contrasting) "immigration" in most of Western democracies. The obligatory link between the work contract and the residency permit, for example, was introduced by the Italian right-wing government in 2002, disabling work as the base for citizenship rights⁸⁴. Fabio Viti has

⁸⁴ "Modifica alla normativa in materia di immigrazione e di asilo", law n. 189, 30 July 2002. The first article of the Italian Constitution establishes that "Italy is a democratic Republic founded on labor". It was modern thought that ennobled labor to be at the base of freedom and citizenship rights, contrary to ancient times when freedom meant to be free from labor and labor was linked to the slave's condition (cfr. the

underlined how this new juridical configuration “personalizes both the work relation and the (limited) rights eventually connected to it, making both of them extremely uncertain, precarious and subject to be revoked” (Viti 2006: 29). This personalization of work relations undermines one of the basic principles of the capitalistic system, that is the “free” negotiation of the wage labor relation between those who offer and those who buy the workforce. In this sense post-fordist work relations and “migrant labor”⁸⁵ resemble pre-capitalistic relations based on personal dependence and acquire features of servile work. I would add that, if personal dependence may characterize contemporary labor, it should also be connected with the individualization process that modern power produces⁸⁶.

Without aiming to trace risked comparisons – that would merit further studies and reflections – I would like to underline how Palestinians’ integration into the Israeli labor market repose on their progressive categorization as a foreign population and, consequently, how this process has contributed to the definition and the expansion of Israeli sovereignty. If Palestinians’ specific historical conditions consist of being a population living under occupation in their own land – a situation that is fundamentally distinct from migrants’ condition – it is interesting to note how their legally constructed “foreignness” is constitutively linked to contemporary anti-immigration policies in Israel. In January 2014 large mobilizations were organized by migrants and asylum seekers, most of them coming from Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, who had been held in administrative detention in Israel for 18 months. Their mobilization spread after the approval of some modifications to Israeli law, providing for their detention to be in the “open” facility of Holot, next to Saharonim prison in the Negev desert⁸⁷. The basic law on which amendments have been applied is the Prevention of Infiltration Law, approved by the Knesset in 1954. At that time “infiltrators” were identified with Arab citizens and

distinction between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* in Arendt 1958). In the modern ethics of work the citizen’s condition stems from the laborer’s condition (Viti 2006: 37-38).

⁸⁵ The political category of “migrant labor” was elaborated by some Italian thinkers to think about the transformations in contemporary labor, characterized by flexibility, mobility, full and constant availability, precariousness and absence of rights (Raimondi and Ricciardi 2004).

⁸⁶ Critica al concetto di biopolitica di Paolo Virno

⁸⁷ According to the first modifications of the law asylum seekers had the possibility to go out from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., although they were forbidden to work and were required to sign in three times per day. The time of their permanence was undefined. In December 2014 a new amendment was approved, providing for migrants’ administrative detention in Sharonim prison for 3 months instead of one year as expected by the previous version. Their following transfer to Holot facility had to last 20 months maximum, but migrants could be imprisoned in Sharonim jail again up to four months, if they don’t respect the facility rules. According to this version, they are still forbidden to work and obliged to report once per day. The Israeli High Court of Justice had previously ordered to close the facility.

Palestinians who had “left their ordinary place of residence in an area which had become a part of Israel for a place outside Israel”⁸⁸. This juridical apparatus transformed the refugees question into a security concern, based on the existence of “infiltrators” entering the border of the newborn Israeli State. The same law, which criminalized Palestinians’ presence in their lands after the Nakba, is used to include contemporary migrants and asylum seekers into the same category of “infiltrators”. This alleged menace coming from outside is often represented in culturalist terms in the public debate: “infiltrators” would be also a threat to the Jewishness (and the whiteness) of the Israeli State⁸⁹.

Like for “illegal migrants”, detention is the obvious output of the Israeli production of Palestinians’ illegality. While much attention has been focused on Palestinian political prisoners, as far as I know scholars have neglected other forms of Palestinians’ imprisonment and their relationship with Israeli repression of Palestinians’ political struggle. Most of the men I met during my fieldwork had been arrested and spent some time in jail because of illegal entry into Israel. Israeli control is occasional, unforeseen and widespread. It is not only deployed in the border zones, where a standardized procedure in the checkpoints is combined with the circulation of border guards⁹⁰ on the hills where the separation wall has not been constructed yet, and with

⁸⁸ *Prevention of Infiltration (Offences and Jurisdiction) Law, 5714-1954*, Article 1(a).

⁸⁹ Claiming the pointlessness of migrants’ protests, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that his government “completely halted the infiltration into Israel and [is] determined to remove the illegal infiltrators” (“Migrant mass in Tel Aviv demanding refugee status”, *The Times of Israel*, 9 January 2014). In 2012, when asylum seekers started to arrive, he had already underlined that African “infiltrators” were a menace for Israel’s Jewish identity. Eli Yishai, a member of the ultra-orthodox political party of Shas and the Israeli Interior Minister under whom deportations began, wrote that “[protesters] pose an existential threat like Iran, but the danger for our future is not merely in the form of nuclear Iran but also an African Israel” (“Asylum seekers, infiltrators or refugees?”, *The Times of Israel*, 6 January 2014). In 2012 he was reported to have said “Muslims that arrive here do not even believe that this country belongs to us, to the white man” (“Israel enacts law allowing authorities to detain illegal migrants for up to 3 years”, *Haaretz*, 3 January 2012). Some contradictions must be highlighted in these statements: the Israeli identity is not merely identified with Jewishness, but it is mostly defined through whiteness as opposed to “Africans”. If we consider that a large share of Israeli citizens is Ethiopian, these statements can also suggest how the racism contained in public discourses crosses the Israeli society itself. In 2013 the Israeli government admitted to have submitted Ethiopian women to birth control injections, often without consent (“Israel gave birth control to Ethiopian Jews without their consent”, *The Independent*, 27 January 2013). In May 2015 Ethiopians got engaged in demonstrations in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to protest against their discrimination as second-class citizens.

⁹⁰ Israel Border Police is called Magav, a military body founded in 1949 as a part of Israel Defense Forces. It later became part of the Israel National Police, but continued to operate in some of IDF operations. Initially established to contrast Arab “infiltrators”, after the Six-Days War it was deployed inside the West Bank and the Gaza Strip “to maintain law and order as part of the military administration”. Beyond the official aim of securing Israeli borders and settlements, Megav plays an important role in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations: “Because of their combat training, border policemen are employed in unique areas, where there are greater risks for riots, violence and even terror. They serve mainly in the countryside, in Arab villages and towns (along with the regular police), near the borders and in Judea and Samaria”. The Shabak, the Israeli Secret Services, directs some of its special units. See

cameras surveillance. Israeli control on illegal entries is also deployed inside Israel: ordinarily taking the bus from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, I was also often subject to documents control that border guards carried on in Jerusalem city center, stopping Palestinian buses that were leaving from Jerusalem. This kind of control is exerted on Palestinians' *exit* from Israel, while they are going back home, because entering the West Bank usually does not require to be stopped and inspected at the checkpoint (control at the checkpoint is only enacted in the movement from the Palestinian territories to Israel)⁹¹. If Israeli control is not expected at the checkpoint, it is thus reinforced in the way Palestinian buses run to take people into the West Bank. In fact, people without a permit often use public transport to go back home, instead of walking through the hills or paying a smuggler, like they do to enter Israel illegally. It is also remarkable that border guards who stop Palestinian buses are usually young female soldiers giving orders to adult Palestinian men: this kind of control is also symbolically violent as it is performed by young women, inverting gender roles and depriving Palestinian adult masculinity of its social authority.

From the information I got from workers' narratives, imprisonment because of illegal entry can last from some days up to two or three years, and prisoners can be freed if ransom is paid. Palestinians usually say they "bought" the time to be freed earlier: "We bought three months" (*shtarīnā talata shuhūr*), a girl once told me whose fiancé had been caught while going to work in Israel with the aim of collecting money for their wedding. Buying one's own freedom is a very expensive endeavor and it is not affordable for anyone. It would be interesting to see how this income fills Israel's finances. B'Tselem reports that, according to the Israeli Prison Services, in March 2014 1424 Palestinians – including 22 minors – were held in Israeli prisons because of illegal entry into Israel, while the approximate number of illegal workers range from 15.000 to 30.000⁹².

<http://garinmahal.com/magav> (accessed on 21/08/2015). Israeli border control inside the West Bank is thus officially justified to counter terrorism and secure Israeli settlements.

⁹¹ The bus I used to catch to go to Jerusalem left from Bethlehem city. It crossed an Israeli checkpoint where only tourist visa, diplomatic cards and Jerusalem residency holders could pass through it. Palestinians from the West Bank were allowed only if they had a work permit requested by a medical institution. At the checkpoint Palestinians are obliged to get out of the bus for permits control, while tourists and foreigners can wait in the bus. While Palestinians queue, two armed soldiers get in and check the interior of the bus, controlling foreigners' visa (although this control looks like a formality and is often not enacted). After Palestinians' papers are also checked, they can get in once again and the bus continues its way. Palestinians without the necessary permits or IDs are held at the checkpoint. Palestinian laborers don't travel to Israel in this way. They must pass through another checkpoint and cross it on foot. They take a bus on the Israeli side (see note 32).

⁹² "International workers' day: No cause for celebration for Palestinians working in Israel" in http://www.btselem.org/workers/20140430_international_workers_day_2014 (last access on 15/08/2015).

According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, between July and September 2013 34.600 Palestinians were working without a permit out of 103.000 Palestinian laborers in Israel⁹³.

The detention procedures concerning worker's illegal entry into Israel should be better inquired. What interests me here is to underline the institutional apparatus that is put in place in the context of Palestinians' criminalization. This criminalization doesn't target only Palestinian political engagement, but also touches people's ordinary life and normal activities, like going to work. The link between these two different forms of illegality is expressed by one of the main condition that Israel establishes for getting a work permit: legal workers must not represent a danger for Israel's security, that means they must be politically inactive. I maintain this is one of the most important points revealing the biopolitical rationale of the Israeli State, trying to separate Palestinian social reproduction from its political dimension. At the same time labor, contrary to its modern elevation as the source of citizens' rights and as a consequent way of access to the public sphere, becomes a social field without conflict, where personal relationships between citizens and non-citizens provide non citizens with limited rights, conceding an exceptional and well circumscribed inclusion into the regime of "legality" defined by the Israeli rule.

During my stay in the West Bank since 2011 I identified at least five forms of Palestinian labor on a continuum that goes from legal labor (according to the normal procedure to obtain a work permit and to the obligation of moving through allowed checkpoints) to illegal labor (without a contract, without a work permit and implying illegal movement). As explained above, if we consider that the permits system does not target merely Palestinians' mobility, but it tries to regulate also Palestinian labor itself (affecting work conditions), the legal-illegal continuum is just produced by the combination of these two different points of Israeli control. In fact, figures of mediation are needed both for obtaining a work permit and for moving, when one's personal profile cannot fit Israeli rule. In this context the permit to enter Israel and the entrance itself can become services to pay to mediators, who are both Israeli citizens and Palestinians. Like the Palestinian Labor Office employees stated, these services are considered to be illegal and are also morally questionable, while Palestinian institutions manage them inside the legal frame that legitimates an official collaboration with the Israeli counterpart. As we

⁹³ "Unemployment spikes in West Bank and Gaza", *Haaretz*, 22 November 2013.

shall see, Palestinian laborers follow other criteria and put into play other forms of moral evaluations related to their everyday experience. Before focusing on this issue, a phenomenological description of Palestinian labor is provided by analyzing the different figures of mediation produced by the legal/illegal continuum.

Figures of mediation

	To obtain a work permit	To move
Palestinian mediators	A subcontractor (<i>muta 'ahed</i> , <i>muqāwel</i>) who employs workers; A Palestinian who makes the connection between a Palestinian subcontractor and a worker (<i>wāṣṭa</i>).	Taxi drivers with Jerusalem or Israeli ID cards; Smugglers who let workers pass through specific points of the separation wall.
Israeli mediators	An entrepreneur who falsely declares to employ a Palestinian worker at the Israeli Tax Authority.	Entrepreneurs or drivers who take Palestinians into Israel by Israeli registered cars and/or displace Palestinian workers inside Israel.
Palestinian-Israeli mediators	A Palestinian and an officer of the Israeli Civil Administration working together to issue entry permits through their informal link and out of the normal procedure.	

The above table illustrates the multiplicity of mediation practices necessary to obtain an Israeli permit or/and to physically move into Israel. Without distinguishing between “legal” and “illegal” practices, my aim is rather to show how an informal economy has been created by the legal system of permits. People’s circulation and entry into the Israeli State have become paid services and correspond to specific money flows. All the mediation figures identified in the table profit from Palestinian labor in Israel and its criminalization, even if they are differentiated according to the risk they take and the amount of money they gain. This table does not pretend to be exhaustive, but it suggests some figures on the base of my fieldwork experience and of people’s narratives. Since in Palestinian daily life these forms of mediation have become widespread and common, they did not constitute a secret to hide in front of me as an outsider, nor did I need to question people about them specifically: being outside Israeli law is a shared experience

among Palestinian men and illegal practices concerning working and moving into Israel is a normality, not an exception. For this reason my methodological choice, oriented to an ethnography of the everyday, favored a free and easy access to this kind of information, as they are a constitutive part of people's everyday life. Inversely, the easiness with which people inhabit illegal practices is not merely an effect of a habit or a form of resignation, but it reflects a socially produced distinction between Israeli juridical regime and Palestinian moral order (see also Kelly 2006).

In order to obtain an entry permit for Israel some forms of mediation and exchange emerged both on the Palestinian and the Israeli side, involving sometimes an informal mixed collaboration. In the Palestinian society mediators are generally those people who recruit Palestinian workers for an Israeli entrepreneur. More commonly, they are Palestinian subcontractors (*muta'ahed, muqāwel*, literally "entrepreneur") of Israeli societies that take Palestinians to work in Israel with different status, sometimes even without a permit, since the basic logic of recruitment is employing people among relatives or friends, and not necessarily among those who are employable following the Israeli conditions to get a permit. There are also people who play a widespread form of mediation in the Palestinian society that is called *wāṣṭa*⁹⁴, connecting workers with subcontractors. They are said to earn 20-30 NIS (4-6 Euro) per day from each worker (a worker in the building sector usually gains 250-300 NIS, that is 50-60 Euro per day).

Israeli mediators are entrepreneurs who profit from the permit systems by imposing Palestinians to pay for the permit they procure them. Some Israeli employers extract a part of their employees' salaries justifying it as a way to pay taxes levied on the issue of permits. Palestinian employees can be demanded to pay half of their daily salary (150 out of 300 NIS). One of the Palestinian Labor Office employees told me that Israeli entrepreneurs usually pay between 450 and 750 NIS per month for each permit, the amount of the tax depending on the daily validity of the permit. According to a Palestinian subcontractor the cost of a permit for an Israeli entrepreneur is 800-1000 NIS per month. This means that the amount extracted from the workers' salaries is bigger than the real costs of the permit and the Israeli entrepreneur can gain more than 1000 NIS (200

⁹⁴ The category of *wāṣṭa* (from the verb *wassaṭa*, to put in the middle), which is different from *samsara* as a form of mediation legally acknowledged (in selling lands for example), includes a set of different practices : from looking for a bride to conflict mediation between families, and even the offering of political favors in exchange of goods or services. The activity of mediation can be free or paid through gifts or money. Anyhow *wāṣṭa* doesn't necessarily correspond to a patronage relationship implying a power asymmetry between the subjects of the exchange.

Euro) per worker every month. Israeli mediators are also holders of an Israeli company who falsely register a Palestinian as their employee at the Israeli Tax Authority. After a Palestinian obtains a work permit, he works in Israel independently and employs his own workers, but he has to pay about 2000 NIS per month to his fake employer. A master builder or a skilled artisan (*mu'allim*) in Israel can gain 500 NIS per day (100 Euro). It is important to consider that the relationship created by the permits system between an Israeli employer and a Palestinian employee is liable to become a power relation: Israeli employees can choose whom, how and when to employ someone and have an exclusive power on the issue of permits (together with Israeli authorities), while Palestinians have to manage employment as a competitive and lacking resource. Some workers told me an Israeli contractor for a big building work had employed them. The Israeli let them work for two months without paying their salary and suddenly revoked their permits. Palestinian workers were unexpectedly pushed back at the checkpoint one morning while going to work: soldiers told them their permits were not valid anymore.

Different sources, and even the Palestinian Labor Office employee, told me about a Palestinian-Israeli joint mediation at play thanks to an informal collaboration between Israeli officers of the Civil Administration and Palestinians. I do not have any information about who these Palestinians are and how they get in touch with the Israeli Civil Administration members, nor how much they respectively gain from this activity. Thanks to his Israeli connections, the Palestinian mediator proposes workers to get a permit valid for six months paying from 2000 to 7000 NIS (from about 400 to 1200 Euro). The provided permits are not work permits, but entry permits for trade or visit. This is a clear case of public officers' corruption inside a bureaucratic system that transforms rights into services to provide.

Even if some Palestinians do not enjoy mediation to get a permit, they can find a job in Israel through their personal relationships. In this case they must enter Israel illegally. Most of these people sleep at their workplaces to avoid the risk of going back home every day or because of the difficult and long trip to reach their workplace. They usually go back home and join their families during the weekend or every two or three weeks, a social condition that also affects masculine authority and women's role in the domestic realm. There are many ways to enter Israel illegally. The information I collected does not come only from people's narratives, but also from my personal experience of accompanying some friends on their trip. The "simplest" way to enter Israel illegally is walking along the paths through the hills from the Palestinian border villages where the

separation wall has not been completed, yet. In some villages you can meet groups of men arriving from all around the area by collective taxis on Saturday evening, at the end of their day-off, and getting off in the middle of the valley from where they walk to reach the Israeli side. In other villages moving in-group is much more complicated because of cameras on the top of the hills and habitual border patrol⁹⁵, so people prefer to walk separately, one by one. Some men go riding a donkey or a mule: they think it is less risky because Israeli border patrols are used to see Palestinian peasants riding and grazing animals on the hills in border areas (it must be considered that the morphology of the landscape between southern Jerusalem and northern Bethlehem is mainly characterized by valleys, abandoned agricultural lands or terraces cultivated with olive trees, and wooded areas). There are also some specific points in the separation wall or next to the checkpoints where people literally *jump* on the other side. Although there are chances of entering Israel “freely”, sometimes people must resort to mediation figures in order to be able to cross multiple Israeli borders and to move inside Israel. This need mainly depends on the particular geographical position of the place they have to reach. On the Palestinian side some people control the passage of workers in some specific places, letting them overcome the separation wall through a simple ladder or a rope in exchange of a payment. Inside Israel some Palestinian drivers with Jerusalem or Israeli ID cards are specialized in taking people entered illegally wherever they want. These routes are very expensive: a 6 km journey from the border into an Israeli city can cost 400 NIS (about 80 Euro). Like Palestinian drivers, there are also Israeli drivers who work with Palestinian illegal laborers. Unlike Palestinian drivers, though, they benefit from the particular privilege of freely crossing the checkpoints without being stopped by soldiers. Palestinians are usually hidden inside the car trunk or a van. These journeys can be very short and can just correspond to the crossing of the checkpoint. There are some meeting places on the West Bank side where groups of Palestinians gather and wait for drivers. Depending on the distance they have to run, Palestinians can pay from 250 to 400 NIS (from 50 to 80 Euro) for this kind of journey. As the table shows, no joint Palestinian-Israeli collaboration can exist in smuggling Palestinian laborers inside Israel due to differentiated regimes of mobility that also differentiates smugglers’ work.

Beyond the informal economy engendered by the system of permits, even entering Israel with a work permit can simultaneously give origin to an irregular mobility and

⁹⁵ In the areas where the separation wall is being constructed the wall police constantly patrols the outskirts of concerning Palestinian villages.

labor. In fact, a Palestinian can legally enter Israel with a work permit, go to work at the Israeli company that employed him, and then benefit from the time validity of his permit to manage some other business, working independently in private houses. At the same time, although people with permits are authorized to enter and exit only through checkpoints, it can happen that after entering Israel one can choose to go back home by walking through the hills paths or passing through checkpoints by Israelis' cars. Even in this case the choice depends on the geographical distance between the point of departure and the point of arrival of the journey, and on the possibility to benefit from some Israeli acquaintances' availability and support. In this sense some practices of work and mobility inevitably exceeds Israeli law.

On the base of the legal-illegal continuum in Palestinian workers' experience and the constitutive indeterminacy of Palestinian work conditions deriving from the regulation of Palestinians' movement and labor in Israel, I consider labor as an apparatus of Israeli colonial governmentality. In 1977 Michel Foucault defined an apparatus (*dispositif*) as "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements" (Foucault 1980b: 194). Judith Revel (2002) has underlined that the concept of "*dispositif*" emerged in Foucault's work as a methodological turn that aimed to study the nature of power not through "the juridical edifice of sovereignty, the State apparatuses and the ideologies which accompany them", but directing research "towards domination and the material operators of power, towards forms of subjection and the inflections and utilizations of their localized systems, and towards strategic apparatus" (Foucault 1980a: 102). Foucault thus considered the concept of "apparatus" in relation to domination mechanisms, disconnecting it from power theories focused on right and State sovereignty. Moreover, if the apparatus consists of a system of relations, this system is strategic: it responds to an urgent need at a given historical moment. Notwithstanding, it is not conceived as an immutable configuration of relations, but it is submitted to readjustments because of its own effects, which produce a reorganization of the connection among heterogeneous elements. The nature of this connection is what constitutes power rationality.

Through the concept of “colonial governmentality” the American anthropologist David Scott has proposed to reformulate the study of colonial rule, considering the emergence of a specific form of modern power in colonialism’s history:

“...a form of power not merely coincident with colonialism – which was concerned above all with disabling old forms of life by systematically breaking down their conditions, and with constructing in their place new conditions so as to enable – indeed, so as to *oblige* – new forms of life to come into being. [...] What is at stake is *how this break is configured* and *what it is understood to consist in*. And where the stories of modernization conceive this break as producing an expansion of the range of choice, the expansion of freedom, the problematic with which I am concerned is interested in the *reorganization* of the terrain in which choice as such is possible, and the political rationality upon which that reorganization depended” (Scott 1999: 26).

Moving from a Foucauldian perspective the American anthropologist has maintained that what characterizes modern power is its *point of application*: “The point of application of modern power is not so much the body of the sovereign’s subject [...] as the *conditions* in which that body is to live and define its life” (Scott 1999: 32). This new political rationality implies that “power works not *in spite of* but *through* the construction of the space of free social exchange, and *through* the construction of a subjectivity normatively experienced as the source of free will and rational, autonomous agency” (Scott 1999: 36).

As I have tried to show in the previous paragraphs, “freedom” was the preliminary condition that constituted labor as a renewed form of domination of the Palestinian population. Palestinian labor in Israel is the point of convergence of different political, economical and social relations that cross and construct the contemporary Palestinian/Israeli space. Administrative institutions, bureaucratic procedures, juridical production, imprisonment, military bodies, architectural dispositions, economical interests, the public opinion, all these elements participate in constructing Palestinian laborers’ experience. The dominant strategic function of labor as an apparatus is to define Palestinians as a foreign population to be integrated in the Israeli labor market in order to better govern it and, simultaneously, disconnecting sovereignty from a territorial power and rather grounding it on the distinction between citizens and non citizens, expanding Israeli sovereignty beyond state borders. In this sense labor serves the Israeli colonial

governmentality as “a distinctive political rationality in which power comes to be directed at the destruction and reconstruction of colonial space so as to produce not so much extractive-effects on colonial bodies as governing-effects on colonial conduct” (Scott 1999: 40). Power relations are thus immersed in, and constructed through, social relationships and their instable and contingent character.

2.2.4. Vulnerability and renewed hierarchies among Palestinians

Beit Jamila, 20th June 2013

“Yazan invited me to visit Beit Jamila [an originally Palestinian village inside Israel] because it’s a very nice village, but also because yesterday the director of a convent called him to propose him a new job. We met at 11 a.m. at the source in Beit Jamila. I arrived earlier by taxi, while he took more than an hour to come from al-Bab by mule through the hills. He left his mule on the hills, in a place where his brother could find it when he went back home from work [from Jerusalem]. At the source we discussed with an Israeli guy who introduced himself as a musician. He was smoking a joint and told us he had been living in Spain and Costa Rica. He spoke a little of Arabic. Yazan told him he was from Bethlehem. The guy said he had travelled all around the world but had never visited the nearby places, so Yazan invited him to come, he could show him around and there should not be problems since he looked like a Westerner (*ajnabī*). They exchanged their telephone numbers. Then Yazan and I left to go to the convent because the director had told him to arrive before one p.m.

Yazan rang the bell. A woman’s voice answered, saying the director was not there, yet. She didn’t open the door. Yazan asked her to open the door anyway, and she did. In the front yard of the convent, under a pergola of climbing plants, an elderly man was sitting: he had a ponytail and a woolen cap, was shabby and wore dirty clothes. The woman who answered the doorbell came out and said she did not know what time the director would have come back. Yazan decided to wait there and asked the woman to have some coffee. He took me behind the convent to show me

the work he had carried out two months before. The convent was a quite new building and was surrounded by a large garden with games for children, a basketball field and even a swimming-pool. Behind the building there was a piece of land with terraces of fruit trees, which Yazan had ploughed in spring. We went back to the front yard and sit with the man, waiting. The man was British and started to tell us about his story. He was in a really bad psychological state and said to have lost all his money, so he was living at the convent. He complained that the nuns gave him only 20 NIS per day for his work of gardening. He said Yazan was lucky because he could go back home to his family, to his “natural environment”, while he was stuck in that place and could go nowhere. I told him it was not easy to be a Palestinian there anyway. He said Palestine was the Roman name for that land, which always had been “Israel” in the Bible, and that my talking was “propaganda”: when Herzl came in the XIX century there was nothing there. I guess Yazan could not follow his British accent, but he commented about the man’s situation saying he knew the director of the convent was not good (*mīsh kwaysa*) and with 20 NIS you can’t buy a pack of cigarettes, neither: in his view it was obvious that the English man spent his day sitting under the pergola instead of working. After about an hour the director arrived by car. She said ‘hi’ from a distance and asked who I was, if I were Yazan’s wife. She got surprised I spoke Arabic. She was also Arab, from Egypt. She entered the convent at once. After a while Tamer came. Tamer was a Palestinian from al-Bab and had been working in Beit Jamila for many years. He was employed as a custodian at a music center. His brother also worked in a hospital in Beit Jamila. He was a plump and sunny man and started to sing me *Lasciatemi cantare...* He knew some Italian words because he had previously worked with Franciscans. Tamer and Yazan already knew each other because they were from the same village: they were kind with each other but kept a certain distance. Tamer took Yazan to see the work he had to do (had the director called him by phone when she arrived at the convent?). We went to the land behind the convent once again: the work consisted of rebuilding a dry stonewall that had fallen down and served as a support to a cultivated terrace. I looked at Yazan and saw he was not happy about the work: it

was really hard and I asked myself how he could do it in such hot weather. Tamer said that wall used to fall every year and every year it was rebuilt, and he mentioned the names of all the Palestinians from Bethlehem villages who had got engaged in the job. Yazan commented that all of them were good workers, and smiled saying maybe *jinn* were there. We went back to the front yard and stood in front of the convent door. Tamer asked Yazan how much he wanted for the job. He added the work could be done in three days. Yazan said it would take him a week and he wanted 1500 NIS [300 Euro]. Tamer entered the convent. After a while he came out and said the director wanted to give Yazan 1300 NIS [260 Euro]. Yazan refused. Tamer went back into the convent and came out again, insisting on 1300 NIS. Finally, the director came out, too. She and Yazan agreed on 1300 NIS and Yazan told her he would start after a couple of days. She told him to go whenever he wanted. Until that moment I had kept at a certain distance and sat under the pergola: I didn't want my presence to interfere with Yazan's negotiations. While Tamer was inside the convent I had asked Yazan – who kept standing in front of the closed door – why the director could not speak directly with him. He simply answered that was the way she preferred. Contrary to Yazan's usual aplomb, I felt angry and upset, I was shocked about the way the director managed the negotiations using another Palestinian's mediation and avoiding talking directly to Yazan, leaving him outside the door. When we left the convent, Yazan told me that 1300 NIS was not a bad salary, but he was not so happy about the job because it was a very hard one. I could not stop myself from expressing my disappointment, but at the same time I was afraid of hurting Yazan with my comments that underlined the weakness of his position. He just told me he had no alternative, if he could he would choose not to take that job.

We went out of the convent with Tamer who took us to the music center, his workplace, and gave us some water. After saying goodbye to Tamer, we went to visit a monastery. I entered the church while Yazan waited for me outside. When I got out of the church I found him speaking with a monk. They were exchanging their telephone numbers: I got surprised about how quick Yazan was in asking for a job. Since the monk spoke

Italian, Yazan asked me to explain that he was not married and could get a work permit only from a religious institution. The monk got alarmed and asked me how Yazan had arrived there if he did not have a permit. I told him he came by mule through the hills. The monk was astonished and said it was dangerous for him and for me, too. Yazan understood the monk's worries and took a paper from his wallet: he later told me it was a paper from Jerusalem Municipality. One of his family's Israeli friends ("ṣadīqnā", "our friend"), a leftist guy who worked at the Municipality, had provided it some years before to attest the family was living inside Jerusalem borders. In this way Yazan was supposed to freely circulate in Jerusalem, but that paper had no legal value at all. The monk said he could not read Hebrew, but he started to tell me about all the problems his religious institution faced to employ Palestinians from the West Bank. He asked me if Yazan was Muslim or Christian. He said the Israeli authorities wanted them to employ Christians from inside Israel and were progressively limiting the yearly number of employable Palestinians. While talking to me the monk kept looking at Yazan, I could not understand if he was suspicious or felt pity for him. Yazan was looking at the ground instead, and had become gloomy. The monk noticed it and addressed to him once again. I guess Yazan had become sad because he felt humiliated and powerless once again: he was continuously reminded of being without the right papers and unemployed. The monk pounded his hand on his leg and told him if he heard someone that was looking for workers, he would have called him. In Italian he told me there was a little room in the monastery and Yazan could sleep there if he came to work in the nearby, without risking to go back home every day. However, he could not help him every time because he had to keep careful, the other monks could make him some problems. We said goodbye to the monk and left.

After this conversation my anxiety grew and I felt even more worried about Yazan. We entered a shop to buy something to eat and Yazan spoke with the shopkeeper in Hebrew. In every one of his interactions with Israelis I was afraid he could be discovered. After eating a sandwich in a little park we had a walk in the village among beautiful Arab stone houses – today inhabited by Israelis – and we reached another convent. Yazan told

me that on the other side of the hill lived an Israeli who had sheep and was his friend. The past week Yazan had given him a donkey in exchange of a smart phone, which he had sold at once. Yazan wanted to visit him, but we finally entered the convent because we found the door open. Yazan met a nun that he knew because he and some men of his family had worked for her in the past years. They greeted each other and spoke Arabic, she was Syrian. However, the nun was intrigued by my presence and introduced herself to me, so we had a chat in French. Yazan and I visited the convent garden, which was a wonderful show of flowers, fountains and trees. He said he wished to work in such a beautiful place. Sitting in the garden we called Dina [an Israeli friend who lived in the nearby] and we agreed to see her at her place one hour later. We went out of the convent and waited for a taxi. Even in the taxi I got scared, the driver could ask about Yazan's permit (according to Palestinians Israeli taxi drivers sometimes do), but this one was more curious about me, told me "welcome" in English and asked Yazan in Hebrew where I came from (I guess he could not speak English). Yazan told him I came from Babylon, the Israeli settlement next to al-Bab. When we arrived at Dina's place, she and her husband were happy to see us and thanked us for the visit. We sat in the garden as usual: from their place we could see the whole al-Bab overturned by the wall construction on the hills in front of us. Before the sunset Dina's husband took us to the checkpoint by his car. While in the taxi Yazan had sat next to the driver, this time he decided to sit in the back: he wanted to avoid being seen by the police that we could meet in the way. When we arrived at the checkpoint we said goodbye to Dina's husband and we entered the cage. Paradoxically, once we got on the other side I felt free, at home. Yazan invited me to have dinner in a restaurant next to the separation wall and ordered a lot of meat, it seemed like we had something to celebrate. That night we went back home with an uncertain mood and overwhelmed by tiredness".

I propose to analyze these pages of my field diary in order to focus on a "social situation" (Gluckman 1940) in which I took part as both an ethnographer and a Palestinian's friend. Starting from my friend's search for a job in Israel, ethnographical description reveals

how this situation took form from an ongoing process of encounters with different social actors: beyond Palestinians and Israeli citizens in an originally Palestinian village which became part of the Israeli State, the place we visited was characterized by a significant presence of Christian institutions, convents and monasteries, anciently inscribed in the history of the “Holy Land” as a part of the Western involvement in Palestine (see Naili 2011, 2012). The heterogeneity that fundamentally constituted this social situation was also proved by Yazan’s and my continuous switch from a language to another one: I spoke Arabic, English, French and Italian, while Yazan spoke English, Arabic and Hebrew. Beyond the variety of people’s backgrounds and the necessary adjustments Yazan and I were both – even differently – obliged to do, it was Yazan’s experience in looking for a job that offered me the lens to read this heterogeneity from a unitary perspective, in order to grasp what Gluckman conceived as the “social structure” implied in the “social situation”. However, my company was also part of Yazan’s experience and its emotional substance, although our feelings turned out to be often contrasting as the result of our different positioning in the same social situation.

The trip in the village, which I have called Beit Jamila, was not the first time I went to Israel with my friend Yazan. He was accustomed to going by himself because of work, and sometimes he took me with him to visit nice places he knew inside the Green Line. We usually walked through the hills together, in ancient paths that had been walked on decades by Palestinians living in the area and that today are used by people entering Israel illegally. However, this time it was not a normal trip, it concerned work, so Yazan had suggested to me to join him by taxi in order to be free to move and leave the mule on the hills for his brother. He knew I was doing research on Palestinian labor in Israel, so he had invited me to go with him. I guess it was because we had become very good friends and he trusted me that he did not look so worried about showing me even the more unpleasant moments of his life as an illegal laborer in Israel. In these pages of my fieldwork diary I describe the first time we entered an Israeli populated area together. We usually went on a trip on the hills, in the area of Yazan’s destroyed village, and we rode on mules in the woods, but we had never moved among Israelis until that time. The fact of entering Israel with a Palestinian friend who had no permit made me constantly nervous and alert, and I kept worrying about him. Moreover, I did not know what I would have said if we were found together: I had a simple tourist visa and I knew my Italian passport did not have enough legitimacy to face Israeli authorities in the case that we were to stop me with Yazan. On the contrary, Yazan kept his usual composure and knew

how to move and how to speak. A year later, once we were sitting on a bench in the park that the Jewish National Fund had created in the lands of his destroyed village, the Israeli police came and started to turn around us. I got nervous and wore my sunglasses to look like an American tourist, but Yazan admonished me to keep calm: he was in his own village, from what should we fear? That day in Beit Jamila was also the first time we overtly experienced the power gap between us: if he considered himself to be in his own country, I as a white Western woman could benefit from a privileged treatment and my presence was paradoxically perceived to be more legitimate than his. People had a different attitude towards us: the Israeli guy at the source found it was strange that I had a Palestinian friend; the director of the convent could not understand why I was with a Palestinian worker (she even imagined I was his wife...); the monk preferred to speak with me in my mother tongue because he could not speak in Arabic nor in Hebrew, although he had been living in Palestine/Israel for more than ten years; the Syrian nun addressed me in French excluding Yazan from our conversation; the Israeli taxi driver was so curious about me that he did not question about the Palestinian (without a permit) inside his car. Furthermore, when the driver had asked where I was from, Yazan himself had linked my presence in the country to Israelis as if I was a foreign guest at his neighbors, the Israeli settlers. In this way Yazan aimed to protect me from himself: it was a way to show I had actually nothing to deal with Palestinians, we were supposed to have met just because we had found ourselves to be neighbors in the West Bank⁹⁶.

Yazan was a middle-aged man, with a robust body carved by hard work, a sweet gaze and a gentle attitude, but he could be nothing more than another Palestinian laborer in Israel. The director of the convent had called him to rebuild the dry stonewall like many other Palestinian workers had done before him. She arrived an hour later after the pre-arranged appointment time and after Yazan had crossed kilometers by mule risking to be arrested. He was kept outside the door twice: when we arrived – as the woman who answered the doorbell hesitated to open the gate – and during his indirect negotiations

⁹⁶ It was not only Yazan that justified my presence in Israel/Palestine through my alleged connections with Israelis. Firstly, I always entered Israel through Ben Gurion airport, where I motivated my entry with the aim of visiting some Israeli friends (who actually existed and let me give the Israeli authorities their names and telephone numbers to prove my version of the story). Secondly, the Palestinian taxi driver (with Jerusalem ID) who took me from the airport into the West Bank always suggested me to say I was going to see my boyfriend in the Israeli settlement next to al-Bab, in the case soldiers stopped us at the checkpoint between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. This shared construction of a legitimate story justifying my presence and my movements obviously changed with regard to the different locations where soldiers could stop us. My taxi driver and I got friends because of this joint effort and shared complicity that had lasted for four years, since his role, beyond driving, also aimed to reassure me and to teach me how to behave in front of Israeli officials.

with the director. Tamer, the Palestinian provided with a work permit who played the role of the mediator between Yazan and the director, enjoyed better conditions than Yazan and could gain his living in Israel, but he was also transformed into the spokesperson of Yazan's possible employer: he was not only the mediator of a negotiation, he was the mediator of two worlds that could not mix together, a world rich of opportunities and a world with no alternatives. As a Palestinian with a work permit, who had been integrated in a sector of Israeli labor market for a long time and was trusted in the micro-society of his workplace, Tamer could only be in the middle of these two worlds. My anxiety had grown throughout that sunny day because of a continuous switch from apparently ordinary situations – sitting at the source, drinking coffee at the convent, visiting monasteries, chatting with people – to Yazan's mood, that swung from the joy of being on a trip and visiting beautiful places to the frustration caused by the ongoing confirmation of his powerless condition. He was in economic need and he had no power in work negotiations both with respect to Israeli employers and to Palestinians with permits. Moreover, everywhere he went he was considered to be illegal and liable to be arrested any time. When he invited me to the restaurant after being back in Bethlehem that evening, he maybe wanted to restore his image in front of me after all the frustrations he had suffered and I had attended during the day. At the same time my anxiety vanished when we entered the Palestinian restaurant: our fear of the Israeli police disappeared. For the first time I grasped the paradoxical sensation of feeling free under military occupation.

This short extract of my fieldwork diary reports how the Israeli system of permits made some Palestinians more vulnerable than others. Like Qays (2.2.1.), Yazan was an unmarried man who found himself excluded from the possibility to obtain a work permit for Israel. He was supposed to get it only through religious institutions, since religious institutions are allowed to employ unmarried Palestinian men. Unlike Qays who had a permit to work in an Israeli settlement, however, Yazan categorically refused to work in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. If his vulnerability derived from his biographical profile and he felt that he had no alternatives, this did not mean that he was able to accept all conditions. At the same time he was compelled to look for illegal jobs in Israel, while Qays had a regular work contract. Moreover, like Qays himself underlined, Palestinian laborers in Israeli settlements do not enjoy the same social benefits that they can have legally working inside Israel. These basic comparisons reveal the multiplicity and the indeterminacy of Palestinians' work conditions under the Israeli system of permits:

legality and illegality are engendered by a constitutive relationship (Yazan's precarious conditions are reinforced by Tamer's legality and consequent mediation, for example) and legality itself does not grant equal rights to all workers (a work permit for settlements does not require the same conditions to be obtained and does not grant the same social benefits that a work permit for Israel does). For this reason the debates that have supported the conception of Palestinian peasants' "proletarianization" due to their labor in Israel appear to be inconsistent not only with refer to Palestinian workers' internal hierarchies in the organization of labor (Tamari 1981: 60), but also because individualization and fragmentation are constitutive effects of the Israeli power.

Like Palestinian officers who are concerned with labor also admitted (see 2.2.2. and 2.2.3.), Palestinians who are granted with a work permit can play a role of connection between Israeli employers and Palestinian laborers. In Beit Jamila, though, Tamer was expected to act as an intermediary not to build a connection (that already existed) between the two parts, nor to help Yazan in obtaining a work permit. Tamer was rather expected to discuss Yazan's work conditions (type of job, times, salary) at the convent director's place, avoiding a direct negotiation between the worker and the employer. If this made Yazan's position even more fragile – as he was also compelled to manage an asymmetric relationship with a supposed peer from his own village – we can imagine the director of the convent was more interested in benefiting from the cheapest workforce for her seasonal demands, simultaneously manipulating Palestinian workers' different status vis-à-vis the Israeli law. These examples show how the individualization of the Israeli control has produced new forms of social vulnerability among Palestinian men and has fragmented men's social identity. Men's hierarchies, which are usually based on a specific work organization where personal dependence is determined by age, have been turned around by the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that the Israeli law engenders. The personal relationships that serve Palestinian labor in Israel are not only a matter of solidarity and support among Palestinians: they also distinguish brothers and fellows from each other, replacing social authority with power relations.

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After the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, a large share of Palestinian men started to work in Israel as a consequence of the radical dismantlement of the agro-pastoral economy on which the Palestinian society was mainly based. A focus on

the Palestinian workers' experiences and narratives leads us to question the rearrangements of the Israeli power and the shift from the initial border policies to the separation project as the hegemonic discourse that nurtured the "peace" process. "Freedom" is what marked this passage among the West Bank Palestinian laborers in Israel, especially in the context of my research, where peasants' dispossession went with a structural integration of the Palestinian workforce into the Israeli labor market. In the Palestinians' discourses "freedom" paradoxically appeared when Israel militarily occupied the West Bank and Gaza after the Six-Day war in 1967. What did such "freedom" mean? First, "freedom" was linked to the opening of the Israeli borders and the beginning of Palestinians' circulation inside Israel after 1967. "Freedom" was also identified as the free exchange of wage labor between Palestinian workers and Israeli employers. Ultimately, "freedom" referred to the autonomous management of work relations among Palestinians, when work in Israel was possibly organized according to social hierarchies and relationships of personal dependence on the Palestinian side.

From the Palestinians' point of view such "freedom" ended with the implementation of the separation policies at the beginning of the 90s. The situation worsened after the Oslo Agreements and the establishment of a Palestinian National Authority, which was supposedly responsible for the Palestinian population. The progressive regulation of the Palestinian workforce stemmed from the distinction between "legal" and "illegal" labor exchanges and mobility according to the Israeli law. The necessary link between the work contract and the work permit structured the Israeli-Palestinian legal frame for which Palestinians had to be sponsored by Israeli employers in order to be able to move and work. In this sense the Palestinians' economical dependence from Israel was converted into concrete relationships of personal dependence between workers and employers, which were also liable to become power relations between a non-citizen and a citizen population. The progressive criminalization of the Palestinians' mobility and labor in Israel further contributed in defining the Palestinian population as a foreign one, while the Palestinian Authority became a proto-governmental structure without sovereignty. The legal frame thus engendered an informal economy in which the right to move and to work became services to be paid to both Israeli and Palestinian figures of mediation.

At the same time the legal frame was produced and managed by the official work of "coordination" and "liaisons" between Israeli and Palestinian institutions, where security and civil matters constitutively intermingled. In such official relationships

unilateral Israeli processes of “authorization” were masked by the supposed “symmetry” of governmental bodies and their bureaucratic functioning. An ethnographical study of Palestinian institutions revealed that their effort to manage the Palestinian workforce still relied on informal social exchanges and personal relationships among Palestinians, and between Israelis and Palestinians. This is also why “compassion” and “solidarity” appeared to be moral values at stake in the Palestinian officials’ job of services provision, in their effort to manage the asymmetrical relationship with their clients. At the same time the distinction between legality and illegality, whose main point of reference was the Israeli law, produced also a moral judgment on whom the good workers were, and which kind of social exchanges could be considered acceptable in order to find a job in Israel. Inversely, Palestinian officials’ discourses contributed in shadowing the Israeli political violence on the Palestinian population, and in presenting labor as a non-conflictual social field between Israelis and Palestinians, where “mix”, “exchange” and “mutual understanding” were supposedly produced by their everyday encounters. In such a context “friendship” described two very different kinds of personal relationships: it was the result of an everyday attending and sharing with Israeli representatives of the Civil Administration as a mode of political relation supposedly developed around “humanity” and “work” as shared domains, and it consisted of social bonds among people, which happened to constitute a fundamental resource to be mobilized in order to make a living in a context of limited opportunities and legal constraints.

Focusing on the laborers’ experience I have shown how labor became an apparatus of the Israeli colonial governmentality, where initial “freedom” included Palestinians into the Israeli labor market for later excluding them as a foreign population whose mobility and work had to be regulated through “quotas” and “permits”. The main effect of this process was the individualization of Palestinian laborers, whose single profiles were identified and scrutinized according to the criteria of the Israeli security regime. In this sense the individuals’ conduct started to be evaluated, producing a separation between their docility as a harmless workforce and their political subjectivity as a population living under the Israeli occupation. Such an individualization fragmented the Palestinian laborers’ experience and produced new forms of personal dependence and social vulnerability. The distinction between legal workers and illegal ones affected the supposed equality of Palestinian men according to the segmentary logics and the honor code, creating new forms of vulnerability linked to men’s access to labor in Israel.

2.3. Work as a moral discourse

2.3.1. Humanity at work: unavailability and friendship in work relations

During the first period of my stay in my large family in al-Bab I kept meeting many different people, so many that I could not remember all their names, and I sometimes confused one with another. Since I was sharing their domestic life (as a woman I was expected to stay at home like most of women did) but I could not follow them outside the safe environment of the *ḥāra* (at least at the beginning of my fieldwork), I tried to identify each family unit from the head's job, so I started to ask men what they did. For men working in Israel this question sounded thorny, although at that time I could not really realize it. In fact, asking what their job was implied inquiring about the conditions under which they moved and worked according to the Israeli law. I was an outsider who was living among them and they knew nothing about me, except that I was doing research in their village because the separation wall was strongly affecting their lives. What I really wanted from them kept being vague and mysterious even some time later (and I sometimes felt it was mysterious to me, too). "What do you do?", I used to ask. "I work in Israel", they answered. "Can you work in Israel?", I insisted naively, that meant: "Do you have a permit to work in Israel?", like a policewoman would have questioned. The ethnographer's naivety can be violent sometimes. "Yes, I'm a good person, I just sit in my house", was one of their ways to reply.

What did being "a good person" mean? I was surprised by this answer. I grasped its sense the first time I spoke with Abu Nadir at his place. We were talking about the wall, that stood just a few meters from his house, and he told me that after it will be completed "good people" will not have problems to go out and come in freely, anyway. Being a good person, in his view, implied to enjoy free movement despite Israeli barriers. Abu Nadir's statements looked as naive as my questions: did he not understand that Israeli power was arbitrary and the gate would be closed whenever Israel wanted? Did he not think that *they*, as Palestinians, were all liable to be shut in their own village? However, Abu Nadir was not naive at all. Firstly, he did not know me, I could also be someone working for the Israeli authorities, I could be a spy. A spy of what? Of what people thought. Secondly, Israeli power is arbitrary but its main objective is to discipline Palestinians' conduct: it is displayed to reward or punish. Work permits are granted only

to Palestinians who are not considered as a threat by the Israeli security regime. Here was what a “good person” meant: a good worker who played the valued role of breadwinner and did not take part in political activity (“I just sit in my house”). This is why this moral connotation was also ambiguous, swinging from the Israeli forced evaluation of Palestinians’ political conduct to the production of a socially legitimated Palestinian masculinity. The fact that even some Palestinians illegally working in Israel described themselves as “good people” showed that, beyond the conditions Israel imposed in order to get a permit, work was presented to me – the foreign researcher – as a non-conflictual field: they just wanted to earn a living and not to “make troubles” in Israel.

Even if these statements can make us be immediately suspicious of what is considered to be the “normalization” of the Israeli occupation – since people seem to talk like they are expected to talk by the colonial power – going ahead with my fieldwork and getting closer to people’s lives things appeared to be much more complicated. On one hand, the same people simultaneously encompassed Palestinian national discourse (some of them had been active in the Palestinian resistance movement during the Intifadas) and they overtly claimed the lands they had lost. They expressed a sense of injustice and iniquity that was strictly political. As we shall see in the next paragraph, if a man gains respect and social authority through work, not every job is considered to be respectable: the moral effort of being a good person necessarily involves a political dimension that distinguishes a legitimate work with reference to the Palestinian national struggle. On the other hand, if work was presented as a field where political opposition was absent, or rather unexpressed, it was crossed however by tensions and conflicts that concerned very concrete and specific situations and entailed a moral judgment on work relations and work conditions. Even when a work or a particular task was considered to be respectable in itself, it could be refused because of perceived unjust conditions or inhumane treatments, that characterized the relationship between the worker and his employer. In this sense a “good person” was not only determined by the Israeli power and its final decision on granting work permits, but it was the product of an ethical construction that reflected on workers and employers reciprocally, on the base of the specific relationship which linked them.

I could grasp these tensions and conflicts spending my daily life with workers. In the evening, after dinner, when the working day was gone, men and women used to sit together and chat. Work has always been a very important issue of discussion that got also the feminine part involved, as women depended on the husband’s income for taking

care of their children and managing their domestic tasks. Men's arguments sometimes appeared to be tough, voices superimposed and got louder: it happened when someone did not want to follow his brother's suggestion or refused to enjoy what other people considered as a good opportunity. These gatherings were also a way to organize work among the same family members, share job chances and divide different tasks, especially for what concerned labor in Israel. If work in the building sector was one of the most common paid activity for Palestinians, informal networks with Israelis provided different job opportunities, like gardening, whitening, maintenance work in Israelis' private houses. These informal networks with Israelis had been created throughout time thanks to a habitual attending of West Jerusalem neighborhoods and were organized through Palestinians' own social networks. As I have stated in the previous paragraphs, Palestinian work organization is mainly based on personal relationships, including family and friendship ties. Moreover, before the Israeli separation policy was enforced, some public places inside Israel became meeting points for workers' recruitment: both Palestinian subcontractors and Israeli employers went and looked for laborers there, where workers used to wait for a job since the early morning⁹⁷. If the Israeli employer was satisfied by the Palestinian's work, he could keep in touch with him and call him anytime he needed. Many of the jobs Palestinians carried out in Israelis' houses while I was in the field derived from this kind of social networks and lasting relationships: in some cases they dated back to the workers' parents' generation and were established by their fathers or uncles, as well as in the present day boys of the younger generation were initiated to labor in Israel by their male relatives. It is important to distinguish this kind of Palestinians' employment from the normal system of recruitment that was introduced through quotas and permits since the beginning of the '90s. If these informal networks and work relations exceed the actual Israeli legal frame (Palestinians usually work without a contract and without an entry permit and their existence is therefore invisible), they probably constituted the main form of Palestinian labor organization after the Israeli occupation in 1967, at least in the Bethlehem/Jerusalem area that was the object of my research (see 2.2.1. and Qays' comparison between today's illegal labor and the beginning of Palestinian labor in Israel after the Six Days war). Moreover, in the context

⁹⁷ As far as I was told by Palestinian middle-age workers who entered Israel for work in the '70s and '80s, Damascus gate was the main place of recruitment in East Jerusalem, while there were also some specific places in Jewish neighborhoods, like the benches in front of the supermarket in Kiryat HaYovel, where Palestinians spent their mornings waiting for someone who employed them. This kind of workers' recruitment concerned short-term jobs.

of Palestinian workers' strong precarization produced by the restriction of Palestinians' movement, and despite its invisibility and lack of rights, this form of labor still assures an autonomous management from the Palestinians' side. In fact, the relationship with the Israeli employer is direct: when some forms of mediation exist, like when a man sends his brother to work at his place, it is the one who carries on the job who negotiates work conditions; differently, relationships of personal dependence and Palestinians' social hierarchies keep being operative, like when sons or nephews work side by side with their fathers or uncles, but their salaries are equally distributed, depending on a shared task. Furthermore, when the relationship between Palestinian workers and Israeli employers is direct as such, Palestinians' gains are net: employers do not need to detract a part of their salary with the excuse of paying taxes on their permits, nor do they profit from Palestinians' illegal movement (2.2.3.). Ultimately, and paradoxically, Palestinians' more autonomous form of work is actually the more invisible one from the perspective of legally acknowledged rights.

It was in the context of these informal social networks and personal relationships with Israelis that I mostly enquired Palestinian workers' evaluation of their work relations and work conditions. The informality that characterized the negotiation between laborers and employers produced a wider range of tensions and conflicts in work relations than regular labor did, although the criteria Palestinians used to judge their situation could be similarly applied to other forms of regular work. Simultaneously, some of the Israelis who had been Palestinians' employers and had been engaged in enduring relationships with them were sometimes described as "friends" (*aṣḥāb*) by workers. Although I will explore what this friendship means for Palestinians in the following chapter, here I want to highlight the tension between work experiences and morality without precluding other forms of social relationships in the definition of morality at work. From this perspective I want to analyze two different ways of refusal of labor in Israel that I encountered in my fieldwork. Palestinians' refusal and claim of their unavailability to work offer an insight into the limits of what is considered acceptable and tolerable both with respect to work conditions and to the treatment received from Israeli employers.

My friend Yazan called me one day because he was upset. He had spent the whole day in Jerusalem (going illegally through the hills as usual) and met some Israelis he knew. A couple of old Egyptian Jews wanted him to paint a room in their house. The man had showed him the work to do and they had agreed on the price he would have paid. Yazan was supposed to start working a few days later. In the same day someone had offered him

a kitchen appliance. Since Yazan wanted to have a walk in Jerusalem, he had asked the Israeli man of Egyptian origin the permission to leave the gift at his place, he would have taken it as soon as he would have been back for work. The man told him that it was not a problem, so Yazan left for his trip in the holy city. While he was going back home, he had got a phone call. It was the man's unnerved wife, who had told him her house was not a storehouse and he should go back and take his bag away. Yazan had answered that he already was on his way home and he would have returned the following day. During our phone call he pointed out that the bag containing the kitchen appliance was not so big and it could not be such a bother. He was vexed and felt offended. I told him he could try to tell the Israeli woman she had exaggerated and she should treat him in a different way. I added in my view this was an honorable way to act. He got even more annoyed by my suggestions and told me he did not want to go and work for these Israelis anymore: "This is honor" (*hadā sharaf*), he said. The following day he went to pick up his bag. When the woman told him she would have waited for him soon to start work, he answered he was not available anymore. Once on the road he put the bag in the rubbish: "I got angry" (*za'alet*), he later told me.

Yazan's sense of humiliation was caused by an unjust treatment that did not concern his work conditions, but his dignity as a human being. Dignity (*karama*) is often associated with honor (*sharaf*) in Palestinian workers' narratives. In this episode his Israeli employer's wife had overcome an essential limit: she wanted Yazan to work in her house, but she was not willing to offer him the slightest form of solidarity. In this way she had denied Yazan an equal consideration, demanding his workforce but relegating his belongings as a bother in her house. For this reason Yazan felt that his honor had been hurt: not only his subordination as an employee had been overtly asserted, but he was denied even the respect due to any person. The way his Israeli employer had treated him was enough for him to refuse the job and claim his unavailability: in this way he could repossess his dignity and his freedom, the two main features that characterize every respectable man according to the honor code. In this case freedom was conceived as opposed to a servile condition, although the structural asymmetry which constituted the work relation was not put into question. It is noteworthy to highlight that Yazan's refusal and need to restore his honor did not arise in response to social judgment and loss of consideration in his own society, even if his feelings were based on shared moral values. On the contrary, Yazan's feelings rather concerned an ethical construction of the self that was socially produced and cultivated, but intimately lived in his relationships with

Israelis. The asymmetry that characterized his work relations and the power Israelis could perform through stigmatization and denial of an equal treatment for their Palestinian employee (already working in very precarious conditions) were liable to undermine not only Yazan's self conception as a respectable man, but also his constant effort to practice such a moral self (Foucault 1984). Refusal of work expressed the refusal to actively embrace a joint condition of overt subordination and humiliation.

Yazan was not the only man I met who engaged in this choice. Even if he had lost a job opportunity, it was a short-term gain that would not have radically changed his difficult economical situation. Moreover, Yazan did not have a work permit and could not obtain it because of his unmarried status, so he moved to Israel and worked there in complete illegality. On the contrary, his brother Rida had been working for many years in a Jewish bakery. He was trusted and well known at his workplace, and he had a good position as a skilled laborer (*mu'allim*). He pointed out that he gained a little more than his Israeli colleagues because "Jews don't look if one is a Jew or an Arab, except in the army. In the army and in the government they distinguish Jews and Arabs. But not at work, not among the people. If I'm a *mu'allim* I gain more". Rida could enter Israel with a work permit and was respected by his own family, he often loaned money to his brothers. If his work conditions were good, he had a very hard life, leaving home at 3 a.m. and going back before the sunset. He was known for being asleep all the time he was at home and I spent many nights at his place with his wife and children playing and screaming around, while he inevitably fell asleep sitting on a chair. In spring 2014 he started to have problems at work: his Israeli employer wanted him to work more without augmenting his salary, and he refused. Their negotiations had been lasting for some time and Rida finally stopped to go to work at the bakery, so his work permit was revoked. He continued to work in Jerusalem in Israelis' private houses and entered Israel walking through the hills, but his economic conditions deteriorated. He later explained to me the conflict with his Israeli employer as follows:

"My boss (*mu'allimī*) was good (*kways*) with me and he used to come to my house and had lunch at my place. In the last year he has not been good with me, problems began between us because the ways he treated me became not good (*ṣarat mu'āmalatah mish kwaysa ma'ī*). He started lying to me. He stopped coming to my house, I stopped letting him enter my house" (Rida, al-Bab 27/4/2014).

In Rida's view a good treatment from his Israeli employer implied a mutual respect and the display of his hospitality: "If I work at someone's and he gives me my rights (*ya 'aḫīni ḥaqqī*), he does not mistreat me (*mā yuthlumni*), there can be friendship", he had explained to me during our interview. The consideration of an unjust salary related to the amount of working hours he was requested to carry out let him break his work relation, although the vulnerability of his work conditions certainly increased (he lost his permit and started to enter Israel illegally). A bad treatment from his Israeli employer also implied a break in the moral conditions that established a legitimate social exchange between the two parts, an exchange that went beyond the work relation itself and was based on honesty (*ṣidq*) and trust (*thiqa*). Even if Rida's problems at work started from an evaluation of his work conditions, like for Yazan such an evaluation encompassed a moral question concerning his honor both as a worker and as a human being. For this reason hospitality as an essential way to perform a respectable masculinity, based on the generosity and the independence of men as equal partners in social exchanges, had to be interrupted. Inversely, if work relations participated in the workers' ethical construction as moral subjects – an effort that exceeded work itself – as I will show in chapter four social relationships with certain Israelis could be described in terms of "friendship" (*ṣuḥba*) by some Palestinian workers. In fact, if Palestinians' moral subjectivation cannot exclude work relations as one of the main field of social contact and sharing with Israelis, their moral scrutiny is constitutively linked to a broader range of norms and values that refer to what is conceived as a common "humanity". I was often told by Abu Nadir and other men that "[Jews] are human beings like me (*humme bashar zayy*), they have a family and children like me". Inversely, Palestinians expect their humanity to be acknowledged and asserted at work and outside of it: this concerns their honor and dignity as respectable men.

Although through the lens of "humanity" moral values seem to acquire a universalistic character, Palestinians must situate themselves in very specific and concrete situations in their particular experience of being laborers in Israel. Since labor in Israel let Palestinian men face unusual situations and uncertain conditions, performing a moral self demands ongoing adjustments and always provisional fulfillments. I refer here to the "differences" that Michel Foucault considered as constitutive of the practice of the self: "Given a code of actions, and with regard to a specific type of actions [...], there are different ways to 'conduct oneself' morally, different ways for the acting individual to operate, not just as an agent, but as an ethical subject of this action" (Foucault 1990

[1984]: 26). The constitutive multiplicity of the moral subjectivation that the French philosopher underlined – multiplicity which is referred to the same domain of actions and to the same codes of conduct – importantly reveals the contingent character of the moral subject. If Palestinian labor in Israel has inevitably become one of the main fields in which moral discourse is applied and renegotiated, moral discourse is simultaneously grounded on specific codes and shared local references. However, rather than constituting a secure base for action, these codes and references also engender and shape Palestinian workers' doubts, tensions and contradictions in a controversial domain, that of work relations and social exchange with Israelis in the context of the Israeli occupation and settler colonization.

Which kind of norms and values defines work as a moral discourse? First of all, honesty is at the root of the asymmetrical reciprocity which constitute work relations: if a laborer expects a good treatment from his Israeli employer, he should also be a good worker. As we saw, the employer's honesty presupposes the payment of a just salary in relation to the job to be executed. This principle was often claimed through the Hadith of the Prophet saying: "Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries" (*'aṭī il-ajīr ajrah qabil yajiff 'arqah*). On the basis of this principle, most of the workers I met considered unjust the detraction of a part of the worker's salary for the payment of the work permit (no matter if Israeli employers or Palestinian mediators did it). As Rami pointed out, it was unjust because "it is the laborer who works and gets tired", so he deserves to get the whole salary expected for his work. If the payment of the salary (considering its amount connected to the requested task and the time of its delivering) is a basic condition for good work relations, the employer's moral quality is not a necessary premise. Yazan pointed out that the employer's respectability is not an essential feature of the work relation, although respectability is at the base of a possible friendship: "It depends on his morals, it depends on how he [the employer] deals with me (*ḥaṣab akhlāqu, ḥaṣab kīf bi'amal ma'ī*). If I work with someone it is not important if he is respectable (*muḥtaram*) or not, it is not important if he becomes my friend (*ṣadīqī*)". Inversely, the employer's or the colleague's respectability gives legitimacy to a personal relationship that can exceed the work relation. As I have showed in 2.1.1., the question of respect is grounded on the conformity to a hierarchical order and on an appropriate behavior towards other people, depending on their position in the social hierarchy. If respect determines the foundation of social authority, respectability is the moral quality that defines a legitimate social relationship. This mutual recognition does not seem to be necessary in work relations:

what Yazan underlined was also that wage labor is autonomous from the domestic system based on relationships of personal dependence and social authority. That is also why work relations in wage labor are supposed to be more easily broken.

Honesty is also what makes a good worker as such: he must not steal, he must not be lazy and he must not arrive at work late. Talking about friendship and work, Rida explained to me what features a friend should have. Since he was a practicing Muslim and belonged to a pious family, religious devotion (*tadayyun*) and sincere praying (*ṣalā ṣādqa*) were at the base of his idea of morality, as he considered that “if one prays, he doesn’t steal. And if he prays, he doesn’t betray (*mā bikhūn*)... He’s not lazy (*mā biksal*) at work”. He added that one should be a morning person (*mubakker*). It was evident that his idea of friendship referred to moral virtues, but he was also speaking about moral virtues connected to work relations. We should consider that work is actually an important environment for masculine sociality and colleagues are often called “friends” (*aṣḥāb*) in everyday discourse. I asked Rida what betrayal (*khyāna*) at work consisted in. He gave me the following example:

“I work in Jews’ house... or in Arabs’ house. The man is not in the house, there is only his wife. This is loyalty (*amāna*): you protect (*tiḥmi*) his wife, you won’t steal from her, you won’t do unseemly things (*fāḥisha*) with her. The day he trusts you (*yammak*) is the day friendship (*ṣadāqa*) can rise between you and him. He went to work, you are in his house and you paint, you build, and his wife is there” (Rida, al-Bab 27/4/2014).

This example clearly shows that Rida was thinking about his work experiences in Israelis’ houses in Jerusalem, since sexual morality in the Palestinian society generally prevents that a man and a woman stay in the same place alone. In this kind of situation, unusual for a Palestinian man, loyalty, trust and friendship are thought and supposedly performed in the relationship between men (the Palestinian worker and the Israeli employer), while the moral attitude towards the woman is described in terms of “protection”. Considering gender asymmetries, what is striking is that Rida’s effort to represent himself as a moral subject even at work had to be adapted to a different arrangement of relationships between the sexes, so that his idea of loyalty (*amāna*) expressed both the right distance to a woman according to the honor code and the respect towards his employer, who was conceived as the head of the house where he worked.

In this sense I consider that, if work relations with Israelis have become an “ethical substance” (Foucault 1990 [1984]: 26), that is an important material of Palestinian workers’ moral conduct, their moral subjectivation at work is not limited to the gaining of a just salary, nor to an idea of “honesty”, “loyalty” and “trust” merely based on an ethics of work relations that confines Palestinians in a morally valued subaltern status, like the studies on patron-client relationships have often underlined (Campbell 1964, Eisenstadt & Roniger 1984, Wolf 1966). To apprehend Palestinians’ moral subjectivation at work we should go back to the question of “humanity” that is at stake.

Abu Mustafa, a 68 year old man who had been working in Israel for his whole life, explained to me how work and friendship mixed together in the experience of Palestinian laborers in Israel as a consequence of their becoming “human relationships” (*‘alāqāt insāniyya*):

“Since 1967, it’s a longtime, more than 40 years, the relationships between Arabs and Israelis were work relations (*‘alāqāt ish-shughl, il-‘amal*). There was not enough work for anyone at Arabs’, so they went to work at Israelis’, and Israelis came and bought from Arabs. These business relations became human relationships (*ṣār fī ‘alāqāt insāniyya*) between a human being and another human being (*beyn insān w insān*). [...] A relationship arose, there was an approach, there is friendship (*ṣār fī ‘alāqa, ṣār fī taqārub, fī ṣadāqa*). Politics is something else. I can have a Jewish friend (*anā mumkin ‘indī ṣāhib yahūdī*) as a human being (*kainsān*), he can come to my place, eat and drink in my house, and I can go to visit him. If someone from his family dies I offer my condolences, if someone marries I go to the wedding... This doesn’t mean that I give up my rights (*hadā lā ya ‘nī innī tnāzalet ‘an haqqī*)” (Abu Mustafa, al-Bab 25/7/2014).

Even if Abu Mustafa mentioned a political dimension that I will explore elsewhere (see 4.2.4.), I am interested here in underling how Palestinian workers’ morality is grounded on the idea of a shared humanity that gets them closer to the Israelis they meet because of their work experiences in Israel. Lasting associations and everyday encounters are supposed to let people perceive their similarity. Honesty, trust and mutual respect are values which fundamentally constitute personal relationships as human relationships between singular individuals, and the mutual recognition that is deployed through

exchange of visits is especially expressed in moments of joy (weddings) and grief (death). In this sense work and friendship, unavailability and hospitality intermingle in an essentially contingent and precarious way. One's dignity, honor and freedom are then defined not as constitutive qualities of the subject, but they are the result of a never-ending practice of the moral self linked to the irreducible effort to exchange respect and esteem with other people. It is not surprising that, in a context of ongoing political conflict opposing Israelis and Palestinians like two different and supposedly homogeneous enemy entities in war, the effort of being acknowledged as singular human beings is always provisional and never fulfilled⁹⁸.

For this reason I propose to consider that a moral economy of friendship emerged as an historical formation created by the 1967 Israeli occupation and the beginning of Palestinian labor in Israel. If we consider work as an apparatus of Israeli colonial governmentality, the progressive restriction of the Palestinians' movement and the introduction of the system of permits have increased the personalization of work relations between Israeli employers and Palestinian workers. This personalization of work relations, simultaneously expressing Palestinians' economic dependence from Israel, is structurally linked to the institutional and legal frame of "coordination and liaisons" between Palestinian and Israeli institutions after Oslo. The hypotheses of a moral economy of friendship regulating Palestinians-Israelis work relations is thus confirmed by Palestinians' moral evaluation of work conditions in the context of their personal relationships with Israelis, which are though separated from "politics". Like Tobias Kelly has underlined in his research on rights claim among Palestinian workers, Palestinians distinguish State law from morality: in other words, law is not conceived to represent and guarantee morality in Palestinian workers' view (Kelly 2006). These ethnographical results support a research on moral subjectivation that takes into account the daily and controversial efforts to conduct oneself as a moral subject *despite* laws and State policies. Like I have showed, Palestinians' moral evaluation of work conditions is not based on the legality/illegality divide, and the most independent form of Palestinian labor occurs out of the Israeli law. It is especially in this form of labor, which provides for Palestinians

⁹⁸ This is a crucial point that would deserve further reflection. Judith Butler got engaged in similar questions when she proposed to think about the precarity of life and the question of recognition (Butler 2004, 2009). In this paragraph I limit my reflections to my ethnographical outputs: I am just interested in highlighting how the idea of a "common humanity" – that I try to describe from my interlocutors' perspective – is the main reference of an ethical construction that both affects and includes social relationships with Israelis in Palestinian workers' moral subjectivation.

autonomously working for Israeli private citizens in their houses, that personal relationships with Israelis can be more often described as ties among “friends”.

My stress on “friendship” is strategic: it is a way to highlight how morality at work is based on a wider range of moral values and on people’s reflective efforts which go beyond work experience itself. In this context “friendship” is considered as a potentiality. Like I showed through Yazan’s and Rida’s choices of refusing work in Israel, a “good treatment” from the employer, his respectability and a lasting relationship based on mutual respect can let a personal relationship be described as one of “friendship”. The question of “friendship” simultaneously leads us to consider the political implications of ordinary social exchanges between “enemies” in a state of permanent conflict and war. From the perspective of Palestinian national discourse, this obliges us to question the suspected “normalization” of the Israeli occupation and the meanings it acquires in the social actors’ lived experience. The fact that social proximity and “friendship” developed in a colonial context are not supposed to make Palestinians give up their rights (paraphrasing Abu Mustafa’s words), invites us to question the substance of the political more deeply.

My use of the concept of “moral economy” is different from that of its founding fathers, Edward P. Thompson (1971) and James Scott (1976), because it does not try to understand popular revolts, but rather their absence. However, these authors fundamentally contributed to avoid an economical reductionism that would describe social actors as essentially moved by interest and necessity, what Thompson defined as a “spasmodic view of popular history” (Thompson 1971: 76). Even if labor in Israel is considered to be an inevitable choice linked to Palestinians’ subsistence and social reproduction, it has also become a critical field of moral discourse: a moral economy of friendship rather privileges an analysis which links the economical dimension to “the production, distribution, circulation, and use of moral sentiments, emotions and values, and norms and obligations in social space” (Fassin in Fassin & Eideliman 2012: 37).

The interest of considering a moral economy of friendship in the context of Israeli occupation and settler colonization of the West Bank and Gaza is multiple: firstly, it leads us to focus on people’s everyday lives and to the tensions, doubts and contradictions that the ethnographer partially shared with people in the field. Anger, frustration and the sense of offense, together with the need for others’ comprehension and solidarity, have been constitutive elements of an ethnography of the everyday, where moral borders have often blurred, political stances have been constantly questioned and reshaped, and unexpected

approaches and emotional exchanges have happened. The ways people engage in practicing a moral self in structurally uncertain conditions is a fundamental issue in my thinking. Secondly, a moral economy of friendship questions the opposition between “enemy” and “friend” as two distinct and opposed categories at the base of Western political theory (Schmitt 1927). Focusing on people’s experiences I aim to grasp local rearrangements and redefinitions of politics, for which Palestinian national discourse plays an important role although it is simultaneously affected by different tensions and conflicts, especially after the Oslo Agreements. My interest is rather to apprehend how social actors appropriate the national discourse in their everyday existences and how they contribute to change its contours in embodying it. Ultimately, a moral economy of friendship in the Palestinian/Israeli space seeks to inquire how moral reflection and practice meet the political struggle and its uncertainties.

2.3.2. Which worker (*‘āmil*) is not a collaborator (*‘amīl*)? Legitimate work and Palestinians’ subsistence

“Take a break after each moan, and tell us who you are”.

By the time he was conscious again, the blood had dried.

“I’m from the West Bank”.

“And why did they torture you?”

“There was an explosion in Tel Aviv, so they arrested me”.

“And what do you do in Tel Aviv?”

“I’m a construction worker”.

The state of affairs in which Arab laborers from the West Bank or the Gaza Strip worked in Israeli cities had not yet become a general condition. Immediately after the last defeat, Arab public opinion expected the Arab laborer to starve in order to maintain steadfastness and rejection of the occupation. No one in a position of responsibility, however, had thought about the question of securing a means of livelihood for those under occupation so that they could continue in their steadfastness and refusal to cooperate with the conquerors.

“When the guns are silent, don’t I have the right to feel hungry?”

What do you say to someone who poses the question this way? We do not have the power to grind national anthems and rousing speeches, knead them, and turn them into bread.

It is most dangerous for the homeland under occupation to turn into a loaf of bread. It is also terrible that the population living under military occupation should be forced to go hungry due to the present circumstances of political and military silence.

“During a state of war when battles are raging, we do not think much about the quality of life. Declare a war or fight a battle and we will make all the necessary sacrifices. But when the guns are quiet, we have the right to feel hungry”.

And why do we forget, or pretend to forget, that Israel itself was built with Arab hands?

What a paradox! And what a shame!

These lines were published in 1973, only six years after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and a few years after their author, Mahmoud Darwish, had finally left Haifa, where he spent his youth as a Palestinian citizen of the Israeli State, to go in exile. They are part of his first prose collection entitled *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*. The above mentioned section constitutes the first of a series of dialogues, hanging between the sharpness of reality and a dreamlike atmosphere, where nameless people speak with each other in an Israeli prison cell. While the text progresses with Darwish’s more explicit reference to his own experiences of arrest by the Israeli authorities, these initial dialogues put us in a common scene – a prison cell – where Arabs coming from different places (the West Bank, Syria, Gaza) share a common condition – that of being confronted to Israeli repression even in the most basic acts of their existence, such as going to work or collect apples in their lands. Darwish concluded his short introduction of the first Arabic edition with the following lines: “The homeland is distant and near, and in this everyday grief and everyday death the writing gets written, or tries to get written, so that this ordinary grief may stop accepting being acceptable”⁹⁹.

Linked to the “everyday grief”, the menace of an “everyday death” is ambiguous. In contrast with the other dialogues, only in the conversation with the Palestinian construction worker in the Israeli jail Darwish inserted a tense digression that broke the lyrical rhythm of the direct speech and became a sarcastic comment on “Arab public

⁹⁹ Mahmoud Darwish (1973), *Awmiyyāt al-Huẓn al-‘Ādī*, Beirut: Dār al-‘Awda (English translation by Ibrahim Muhawi (2010), *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books Edition).

opinion” and his demand for Palestinians’ starvation in order to resist the Israeli occupation. A starvation immersed in a political and military silence: that of the Arab countries, which are blamed for not supporting Palestinians’ resistance in the most concrete form – their livelihood (*ma’īsha*), that is their persistence as living beings (*īsha*) – but maybe also that of the Palestinian population living under political violence and repression. How are these silences linked to Palestinians’ national struggle? What kind of death, and what kind of everyday life, is the poet talking about? If writing is needed to stop accepting the ordinary grief, how can this grief become acceptable?

At a certain moment of my fieldwork a tag written by hand appeared on the separation wall that had already been constructed at the entrance of the village, dividing it from the neighboring Israeli settlement. The writing simply said: “X is a collaborator (*‘amīl*)”. I did not know X, but my friends explained to me that he was the only man from al-Bab working in the construction of the separation wall in his own village. Supposedly, someone from the village wanted to publicly blame X. Paradoxically, the public arena that was chosen to do it was the separation wall itself: an empty board where everyone could write anonymously and that anyone could see. It was X’s work for the Israeli occupation – the constructed wall – that let his objectors’ voice emerge.

The social stigma of collaboration with the Israeli occupiers is the most widespread and heavy form of blaming among Palestinians since the establishment of the Israeli State. Networks of Palestinian collaborators have been actually created by the occupying forces as a strategy to undermine the Palestinian resistance movement¹⁰⁰. Describing the redeployment of the Israeli intelligence networks during the first Intifada, Salim Tamari described Palestinian collaborators as a “visible local enemy”:

“Collaboration became endemic within the underground by the first quarter of 1989. By mid-summer, bands of armed collaborators were roaming the territories, terrorizing villagers and assisting the security forces in the arrest and investigation of suspected activists. The nationalist

¹⁰⁰ The practices used by Israeli forces to compel Palestinians to collaborate with them are various: Israeli jails have been largely used to recruit collaborators among Palestinian prisoners through different techniques, including torture. Collaboration can be differently rewarded through money, a permit to enter Israel, the lightening of one’s sentence. During my fieldwork people often talked about the widespread practice of blackmailing Gazans in search for medical treatments in Israel. Actually, in 2008 the Israeli NGO Physicians for Human Rights published a report on this issue, based on Palestinians’ testimonies (*Holding Health to Ransom. GSS interrogation and extortion of Palestinian Patients at Eretz Crossing*, August 2008). In September 2014 forty-three IDF reservists wrote a public letter to the Israeli Prime Minister to state their refusal to serve the military governance over Palestinians, confirming the over mentioned practices to turn Palestinians into Israelis’ informants.

movement responded with a strategy of counter-intimidation, leading to the killing of a growing number of collaborators (mostly armed operatives and informers but also ‘moral deviants’)” (Tamari 1990: 41).

During the first popular uprising collaboration consisted of some Palestinians’ overt support – even an armed one – to the Israeli occupying forces, something that inevitably reminds us about the “grey zone” that Primo Levi identified in the power structure of German concentration camps (Levi 1986). Conversely, the Palestinian resistance movement organized its own system of collaborators’ discipline and punishment. In the second Intifada the campaigns of arrests moved by the Palestinian Authority followed systematic assassinations conducted by several groups answering to the name of al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, a semi-clandestine armed branch composed of Fatah members. During the last Israeli attacks the punishment of alleged collaborators was carried out by Hamas government in the Gaza Strip and public executions have been exposed to international watching¹⁰¹. Beyond these sporadic but organized forms of physical elimination, rumors

¹⁰¹ See for example “Hamas-led gunmen executed 18 ‘collaborators’ in Gaza”, published by Reuters on 22 August 2014 in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3D0kTDLahcE>. The global circulation of such images together with the simultaneous circulation of ISIS executions of Western journalists and Iraqi soldiers, supported the equation between Hamas Islamic movement and the so-called Islamic State in Israeli public opinion. The Israeli Prime Minister posted a poster on his twitter page where two photographs portraying Hamas and ISIS respective executions were combined and entitled “Hamas is ISIS and ISIS is Hamas. They are the enemies of peace. They are the enemies of all civilized countries” (https://twitter.com/IsraeliPM/status/502830676425461760/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw, last access on 10/09/2015). The online newspaper *The Times of Israel* reported that also some PNA officials were engaged in the same kind of parallelism (“PA official says Hamas executions ‘like Isis’”, *The Times of Israel*, 23 August 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/pa-official-says-hamas-executions-like-isis>). More attention is needed on the political and media construction of such analogies that are so deprived of historical depth and suspiciously used in the name of “peace” and “civilization”. I just want to underline that the parallelism between Hamas and Isis has been based on the aesthetics of the act (armed masked executors standing in front of their victims, convicted people hooded and kneeled down in a public space...) embalmed through its technological reproducibility with the aim of representing the barbarity (recalling an “Islamic” backwardness) opposite to “civilization”. The act is thus excluded from its broader historical contexts and the different political projects in which it is produced. Hamas is self-defined as an Islamic movement of national liberation that has been historically part of Palestinian national resistance movement, in which different groups have flown together despite ideological differences and power conflicts. Isis is a contemporary global phenomenon whose prerogatives and aspirations are completely unrelated to nationalism as a discursive frame, and whose territorial conquests are very far from native people’s claims on their colonized land. It is not surprising that this fundamental difference between the two political subjects was stated by Isis itself in a video diffused in July 2015 where one of the fighters, directly addressing Hamas representatives, declared that “the point of jihad is not to liberate land [...] but fighting for and implementing the law of God” (“ISIL warns Hamas in video message”, *al-Jazeera*, 1 July 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/isil-warns-hamas-video-message-150701042302630.html>). Every informed person knows that Isis and Hamas are opposing forces in the international arena, since Hamas is supported by Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah, that is fighting against ISIS in Syria together with Assad regime forces. In 2015 Hamas has conducted repressive campaigns to hunt down ISIS sympathizers in the Gaza Strip.

and social exclusion are the most widespread and common practices to identify and isolate suspected collaborators in Palestinians' everyday life.

The point here is to question what practices define “collaboration” as a form of national treason. The word *‘amīl* (pl. *‘umalā*’), that was used to blame the Palestinian constructor of the wall in al-Bab, comes from the verb *‘amala* (to work) and literally means “client”. In my everyday experience in the West Bank *‘amīl* has been a concept akin to *jāsūs* (spy, pl. *jawāsīs*), at least if we consider the moral condemnation that both terms imply. Like the “spy”, the “collaborator” is immediately identified with someone who “sells information to the enemy” (*ybt’ ma ‘alūmāt la-l- ‘adū*), as it was explained to me. However, like Tobias Kelly (Kelly in Thiranagama & Kelly 2010) pointed out, the meanings of Palestinian collaboration with the Israeli occupiers are multiple and have changed throughout time, including people who have sold land to Israelis since the establishment of the Israeli State (and even before) or Palestinians employed in the Israeli Civil Administration after 1967 occupation. More importantly, the category of “collaboration” has always been treated as a both political and moral category: the question of “social deviance” has been raised since the first Intifada both by Islamist and secularist groups to accuse collaborators of “moral degradation” (*takhrīb akhlāqī*) (Tamari 2011: 84). Even in my fieldwork collaboration has often been associated with the use of alcohol and drugs, or with prostitution, as a way supposed to be used by Israeli forces to blackmail some Palestinians and compel them to collaborate. Inversely, “moral deviants” are also seen as more exposed to political corruption. This kind of moral condemnation went along with the “ascetic” attitude that characterized the Palestinian resistance movement, especially during the Intifadas, when sellers of alcohol were targeted by activists and even legitimate sexual relations were told to be suspended in order to express an ethics of the struggle, on which all living forces were concentrated: that is why only when the guns are silent Darwish’s workers can claim their right to be hungry.

My fieldwork occurred in a moment of Palestinian history that people described as one of “calmness” (*hudū*’). This did not mean that people denied the problems that the Israeli occupation caused in their daily life, nor that they had got accustomed to the violence they had to constantly face. “Calmness” was rather opposed to periods of Palestinian general uprisings and massive attacks and siege from the Israeli forces, which

is the absence of open conflict on the ground¹⁰². “Calmness” was then used to describe the period following the second Intifada and implicitly referred to a *policy* of calmness, which is a policy that avoids direct confrontations. This calmness was certainly made of what Darwish called an “ordinary grief”, in which the uninterrupted rhythm of everyday life prevails and the unacceptable is something to live with. It seemed to me that in this “calmness”, rather than inurement, accepting the unacceptable was not something given once for all: like the poet’s writing, one needs to invest further reflexivity to question reality and to evaluate daily experience from a certain distance. In “calmness” moral borders become uncertain, social relationships are perceived as fragile and conflicts are latent but still present. “Calmness” contains the ordinary deaths of Palestinians killed while throwing stones to the Israeli army that enters their camp or village in the night – that enters their houses – in order to arrest activists. “Calmness” is also made of the ordinary deaths of people crossing the border illegally to go to work. “Calmness”, it is true, can be an ordinary death in itself: it is bitter, it is tiring, and it is the proof that nothing is going to change. It consists of many silences and forbearances, it can also be a way to conform to the status quo. But “calmness” – in my interlocutors’ words – was an external condition, it referred to a specific historical-political conjuncture: it did not refer to their emotional status, nor to their life conditions.

I assume that in times of “calmness” collaboration acquires more indefinite features. It is in this “calmness” that I want to analyze how Palestinian labor becomes an object of moral evaluation and political reflection, how it can be inserted in the category of “collaboration” and thus seen as a form of national treason, and how this never-ending debate is created by multiple but singular positions that are often conflicting with each another. I also want to stress that “collaboration” in times of “calmness” mostly refers to the “normalization” (*taṭbīʿ*) of the Israeli occupation as a way to act *as if* that oppressive and dominant system is not there.

In September 2013 a new Israeli road started to be built in some agricultural lands of al-Bab that were left outside the wall. The construction of the road had been ordered by the

¹⁰² I consider that this period of “calmness” finished in June 2014 with the suspected kidnapping of three young Israeli settlers in the West Bank and the consequent Palestinian activists’ massive arrests and closures by the Israeli army, until the killing of the Palestinian teenager Muhammad Abu Khdeir by extreme right-wing Jews in Jerusalem on 2 July, the “Days of Rage” Hamas launched – together with rockets from Gaza – to invite the West Bank population to general mobilizations and the Israeli military operation “Protective Edge” that caused more than 2200 casualties among Gazans in fifty days of air raids. “Calmness” ended also from a sensory perspective: from al-Bab we could hear the Israeli bombs falling in the Gaza Strip, being less than 100 km far away from us, and some rockets were seen in the sky upon Bethlehem. Everyday life suddenly became heavy to bear, filled as it was by worries, fear, rage and despair.

Israeli army as a part of the wall security apparatus, despite the fact that a patrol road already existed all along the barrier. The new road connected the upper part of al-Bab, where an Israeli settlement was, with the checkpoint that lied down in the valley on the by-pass road that took Israeli settlers to Jerusalem. The construction company was an Israeli one, but it had subcontracted the job to a little Palestinian enterprise, like it happened most of the times. All the workers were Palestinians. I was already accustomed to see Palestinian workers engaged in the construction of the wall, since Yazan and I often had to walk among them while going to graze sheep in the lands outside the barrier. However, no contact had ever been established between us and them except for once, when a Bedouin had stopped Yazan to ask him how much one of his sheep did cost. As a matter of fact, most of the building works which concern the architecture of the Israeli occupation in the West Bank (roads, tunnels, settlements, the wall...) are carried out by Palestinians. "This is the catastrophe which belongs to us" (*hadā nakbitnā*), my host Abu Yusef used to tell me.

The first time I met the workers of the new road I was with a French photographer. We walked down in the dirt road, where we initially found only dust and high heaps of earth: bulldozers and trucks continued to dig and transfer earth here and there. On both sides of the dirt road there still were some fields of olive trees that belonged to people from al-Bab: the road actually cut among them. The workers were building a support of reinforced concrete because of height difference: it looked like a new wall just a few meters from the "security barrier". I got to know that workers were paid for each meter square of reinforced cement they built: a work paid by the unit was probably the best way to make the workers finish their building more quickly. I addressed the workers in Arabic asking what they were building. They told me it was a road. A road for whom? I asked. The subcontractor (*muqāwil*), a thin man with an innocent appearance, came from Ramallah like some of his workers. They had rented a flat in Bethlehem while being employed in the area. He told me the road was for Palestinians: he probably thought I was a naïve stranger there. I asked him where Palestinians were supposed to go by that road, since they were not allowed to reach the checkpoint and enter Jerusalem. While I questioned him, he kept calm and never showed to be annoyed from my insistence: his answers were kind and seemed innocent like his appearance. I could not understand if he played the role of the naïve or if he really was simple-minded. What was sure was that, as a result of this attitude, he was not focusing on the main issue that interested me. One of the workers, a middle-aged man who lived in the Bethlehem

area, joined our conversation. He told me that no Palestinians were worrying about those lands since they had started to work there, except for one (that was my friend Yazan): “No one has ever come here, except for one”, he repeated. I later got used to this answer: for someone who feels to be blamable the easiest way out may be to put the blame on someone else. This worker knew better than me that in Palestinians’ view those lands were already lost because left outside the wall, he also knew that showing an affective attachment to the land (like Yazan was doing) could not repay the owner for the inevitable loss of it. However, the man’s smiling blue eyes revealed a kind attitude and his availability to discuss. Unlike most of his colleagues, he told me he did not have a work permit: “I don’t need a permit to come and work here”, he said. Although Israel considered that area of the village to belong to Jerusalem Municipality and although it had been already left out of the wall in progress, it still remained a free zone where Israeli soldiers and engineers could mix with Palestinians from the West Bank without a permit. In the closest future, however, Palestinians from al-Bab, the owners of those lands, were expected to demand a permit to be able to work in their fields, if these fields were not totally destroyed by the new Israeli road made by other Palestinians’ hands. “This is our catastrophe”, Abu Yusef said: a national catastrophe that concerned the same people, where everyone was liable to build the other’s destruction and despair. When I went back to see the works some time later with an Italian journalist, new workers had been employed. One of them was quite young, maybe in his twenties, and came from Jerusalem. He was glad to meet us and answer the journalist’s questions, but he was also afraid: “I don’t want to tell you my name. I tell you why: a few weeks ago there was a demonstration in the village. The demonstrators came and started to lash out against us. I know my job is wrong, I know we are working for the occupation, but what can I do? I need to make a living!”. The guy refused to reveal his identity to avoid being targeted as a “collaborator”, like it had happened to X on al-Bab wall. The Palestinian activists’ attack had really disturbed him: his refusal also expressed his sense of shame.

While I was talking with the Palestinian subcontractor and his workers, Yazan came. I was speaking with them on the top of an earth heap that was at the border of the reinforced cement support which they were constructing, and Yazan made me a sign to go down and cross the road in order to reach him on the other side. Since the road had to be built in a part of his family’s agricultural lands, Yazan had started to go there and control the works every day, from the morning to the sunset. He had tried to involve the young people from his family but nobody had followed him, everyone considered those lands

already lost: they complained and suffered, but they felt they could do nothing at all. Some years before, when the construction of the wall had started, two of Yazan's cousins had been sitting under a fig tree for months. They did not want it to be uprooted, so they kept being there. One day, going back to the tree in the morning, they did not find it anymore: it had been uprooted very early that day. They were now the more committed in telling Yazan his efforts were useless.

I reached Yazan on the other side of the road, where he had put some chairs and a little table in a plot of his land. He started to make tea. Of course, he did not want the workers to drink tea with us. I felt a little strange because I had suddenly left my conversation with them and moved to Yazan, who seemed to ignore them. But Yazan wanted their distance to be clear and the denial of his hospitality stated his enmity. Only a month had passed since the works had started. During that period Yazan had tried to talk to the Israeli engineer who was responsible for the works, but he had been welcomed with the engineer's security guards' guns pointed at him. Yazan had opposed the engineer's decision to transfer the earth of his land to some other construction works on the other side of the valley, inside Israel. The engineer had called the border police, who had held Yazan's documents for an hour or two. The police found that everything was ok and the earth was finally left in Yazan's land.

Yazan had also checked the construction plan and verified that they wanted to uproot more olive trees than they were supposed to do. He succeeded in saving a few of them. He compelled the workers to replant the uprooted trees on the other side of the road, in his uncle's land, and supervised in order they took water every day from Israeli reserves. He also asked the workers to level the surface at the entrance of his land by their machines: he would have liked to build a stone house there, but he knew that Israeli bulldozers would have demolished it in a while.

These were Yazan's moves at the beginning. However, the second time I went back to the road construction with the Italian journalist, maybe a month later, I found Yazan's attitude had changed vis-à-vis the Palestinian workers: some of them actually drank tea with us and there was a strange but friendly ambience. The subcontractor had showed up at Yazan's mother's funeral, a fact that surprised Yazan himself. Yazan had gone to Ramallah to visit one of the workers and buy a mule from him. It was clear that daily encounters had favored their approach and that their conflict around the construction of the road in Yazan's land had been circumscribed, while proximity and sharing had grown, maybe reinforcing their sense of similarity. At the same time Yazan's stance

remained incontrovertible and when the subcontractor – who turned out to be really simple-minded – proposed him to become one of his workers, he obviously refused and laughed at him. Yazan had obtained the minimum result he could – saving his trees – and had built with his fellow workers a relationship of force, exploiting their machine and their work time to level his land, deciding when they could drink tea with him, and treating them as partners of an exchange in which he had his own interests. Furthermore, when workers had shown too much enthusiasm and curiosity towards me – it was certainly weird that a young woman discussed with workers in a construction site in the middle of the countryside – Yazan had intervened reestablishing the limits and putting me under his own protection. Ultimately, he made me understand it was I, rather than he, who should keep a certain distance from them.

This story tells how the blaming for “collaboration” concerns social visibility in the Palestinian society. Palestinians usually distinguish labor in Israel, which is inside 1967 borders, and labor in Israeli settlements inside the West Bank. People who work in Israel simply say that they work “inside” (*juwwa*) (see also Bontemps 2015). The distinction between labor “*juwwa*” (inside) or “*fī mustawṭana*” (in a settlement) implies a moral evaluation: many Palestinian men categorically refuse to work in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. This moral evaluation implicitly presupposes a political turn concerning the Palestinians’ claim over their lands: must this claim refer to the English-mandatory Palestine or to the 1967 borders? Palestinians working in Israeli settlements usually maintain “both *juwwa* and the settlements are Palestinian land”: this conviction let them represent the moral burden of their work in Israeli settlements as comparable to that of Palestinian labor inside Israel. This is how Ghassan, a Palestinian worker in Jerusalem, presented me his view on this issue:

“These men who work in the construction of the wall, they don’t like to work in the wall construction, but their children need to be fed, they have to provide for them, they could go and steal for that, they could become thieves... they don’t want to become thieves. They want to work, to get tired and to earn money (*biddhum ishtghilu w yta’abu w ijību masāri*). They have two alternatives (*wasiltīn*): they can become thieves or they can work, or they can work in the occupation. As you said about the German occupation in northern Italy, there were spies (*jawasīs*) who were working for the occupation, like here, there are spies who work for the occupation,

why? Because they earn money. But these people [the constructors of the wall] are looking for a respectable life (*ḥayā karīma*) in order to live and to let their children live (*‘ashān y’īsh w y’īsh awlādak*). [...] You need to know that you earned your money by your dignity (*jibt masāriatak bi-karāmak*), you did not do anything wrong. If you work in the wall because you earn more, but you could work in Jerusalem instead, you don’t offer your children a respectable life. Every time you see the wall you can say “I worked there. It’s me that imprisoned my family, I put a wall around them”. [...] There are two sides of the same coin, they both belong to Israel, and I build for Israelis. But this [the work in Israel] stays a little far from people’s sight (*biḏall bi’īd mīn ‘īn in-nās*). If I work here, everyone can see me, and I work in the wall construction in order to close my family inside it. The people keep looking at you, but if you build inside (*juwwa*, in Israel) you build houses for Israelis on Palestinian land, but this looks a little lighter... There is an Arab proverb that says: “Deafness is lighter than blindness” (*iṭ-ṭarash ahwan min il-‘amā*). I have five fingers in my hand, do you prefer them to cut you only one finger or the whole hand? The land inside Jerusalem, *khallaṣ*, it’s gone (*rāḥat*), it’s difficult that we get it back. But how can I come and help them to take more land (*arḍ jdīda*, new land)? [...] I’m protecting what remains, what is here (*anā ḥāfẓ ‘ala illī ḏall, il-mawjūd*), in order not to lose what is left” (Ghassan, al-Bab 22/2/2014).

Ghassan’s reflections are multilayered. He pointed out that a legitimate work is connected to self-subsistence and to the masculine role of breadwinner that give men responsibility over their children’s living. However, this effort also involves the moral responsibility to provide them with a “respectable life” (*ḥayā karīma*). It does not only concern earning money, but also knowing that you did not do “anything wrong”: a legitimate work implies exertion (“They want to work, to get tired and to earn money”), it is not a theft nor the result of charity. In this way Ghassan also distinguished between earning money in working for Israelis as spies (*jawasīs*) or as laborers. He then distinguished work for Israelis “*juwwa*”, inside Israel and far from other Palestinians’ sight, and in Palestinian villages in the West Bank. If you can choose, even if you earn less, you should work “inside”: this represents the lesser evil. In Ghassan’s view the lesser evil is based on

quitting the claim on Palestinian lands that were seized in 1948 to establish the Israeli State, which simultaneously implies a political recognition of the Israeli State as such. On the other hand Ghassan condemned the workers' possible responsibility to close their families inside the separation wall, the latest horrible evil. Furthermore, Palestinians' involvement in the construction of the wall does not happen "inside", where people can't see it, but among Palestinian people themselves, in the places where they still live and where immediate and tragic consequences are produced in their lives (and in the Palestinian constructors' own lives). Ghassan was conscious that the choice of the lesser evil is violent in itself: it is compared to the choice of letting others cut you one finger instead of the whole hand.

When I started to ask for interviews on labor in Israel, a man from al-Bab immediately declared: "We [the Palestinians] should not work in Israel at all". This was the clear stance through which he tried to avoid my questions, although after some months I got to know he had started to work in an Israeli settlement. Was this man an hypocrite then? Some time before he had created a poultry farm in his land and he had been working on it. His 20-year-old daughter later explained to me that he could not gain enough from his business because poultry from the Israeli settlements were cheaper and lowered the market price, so he had to quit. Like this man, all Palestinians consider their labor in Israel as a contradiction to their national fight. Here is how Abu Mustafa, who had also been working in Israel, expressed this contradiction:

"I go to work in Israel and I know that I work in my land, maybe I work in my own house. Am I happy? No, the one who says he's happy is a liar (*kedhdhāb*). If I am happy I'm not a human being (*idhā bakūn mabsūt mish insān anā*). The money I take is not charity from Israel, it's my efforts (*juhūdi*), I gave my efforts. He [the Israeli employer] considers me nothing more than a donkey that carries goods, he doesn't consider me as a respectable person (*insān muhtaram*) who has morality and dignity (*ilu akhlāq w karāma*). We are forced (*infardat 'alayna*) to work with them and to speak their language. This is our situation (*zurūfnā hīk*). My son who is working in Israel should fight Israel instead" (Abu Mustafa, al-Bab 11/10/2014).

Abu Mustafa clearly stated that Palestinian labor in Israel is the opposite of the national fight. Like Ghassan he also pointed out that the money gained are honestly earned due to

the workers' efforts and exertions ("It is not charity from Israel") and that Palestinian workers' state of mind cannot be one of happiness and satisfaction anyway. He also referred to Palestinians' work as a situation in which their "morality" (*akhlāq*) and their "dignity" (*karāma*) are denied. These words, in my view, do not really question Palestinians' work conditions in Israel, but they rather define Palestinian labor itself like the denial of Palestinians' respectability and dignity. Palestinians are thus represented as donkeys carrying goods: they are reduced to a subhuman state and deprived of their moral sense. Furthermore, in Abu Mustafa's words social reproduction is not just a matter of subsistence and respectability, but it must be linked to the national struggle: his grown-up children should fight Israel instead of going to work there.

The perceived impossibility to fight opens another controversial question among Palestinians over political practice. What is important to know here is that Palestinian workers' doubts, contradictions, and efforts to define the legitimacy of their work clearly involves the threat of national treason as a question that blurs the borders between morality and politics: respectability is not only an individual quality to affirm and exchange in work relations, but is also defined by a subjective political stance vis-à-vis the Palestinian people as a whole. This is why a Palestinian worker (*'āmil*) in Israel can sometimes look like a "collaborator" (*'amīl*), when he seems to privilege his personal interests (his livelihood) despite his national duties. It is important to note that national duties in Palestinian workers' narratives are very concrete and situated evaluations about the land which will be lost and the consequences of the wall construction for your fellows: they involve choice, even when it is a terrible one, since choice can only emerge from a constrained context of "forced" work for the "enemy".

Like Darwish noted almost 50 years ago, most of Palestinians accuse their leadership for neglecting their basic needs and their subsistence and for giving up the national resistance, in some cases even repressing it. The "calmness" that I mentioned above also describes the switch from resistance to "peace" as a mode of political relationship between the PNA and the Israeli State. As we saw, the Oslo Agreements founded a political relationship based on "liaisons and coordination" between the two parts, simultaneously supposed to be symmetric despite the persistent Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. In failing to provide for its people and preventing them to fight against the enemy, the Palestinian National Authority and the Arab leaders are often blamed for treason (*khyāna*) and described as "those who are paid" (*il-mā'jūrīn*): their moral and political corruption is linked to their financial support by Western powers. For

this reason they are considered equivalent to “spies” and sometimes called “Israelis”. This stated equivalence between Arab politicians and Israelis alludes to the disappearance of clear national boundaries that define the opponents engaged in a political confrontation. The uncertainty around national contours, which affects both institutional and personal relationships, gives birth to a regime of suspicion and mistrust pervading Palestinians’ social life. I maintain that a moral economy of friendship is not the opposite, but the interrelated consequence of such a regime of suspicion: if Palestinians fear, they also need to untangle themselves in order to endure both as singular individuals and as a collectivity.

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Researching among Palestinian laborers who work in Israel, work appeared to be a sensitive issue that hid the political conflict and simultaneously compelled Palestinians to engage in moral and political reflection about their single conditions and positioning. Discourses about job opportunities and work permits were pervasive in the everyday life, but silence was the answer to my initial attempts to conduct interviews on the issue. Silence both revealed the shame of working for the occupiers – that undermined the Palestinians’ dignity as national subjects who are expected to resist the Israeli occupation – and the efficient system of repression that Israel enforced to regulate the Palestinian workforce while erasing their political subjectivity. Labor in Israel thus appeared as the opposite of national resistance. At the same time only “good people” were allowed to enter Israel according to the Israeli security regime. I have maintained that work became a moral discourse among Palestinians because workers were nevertheless compelled to manage their everyday encounters with Israelis and to distinguish them according to different criteria of judgment. Such criteria were not merely linked to an evaluation of work conditions, but more generally invested the Palestinians’ moral subjectivation as respectable men. To examine the limits that workers themselves set and produced under the uncertain conditions which defined their work experience, I chose to take into account the examples of refusal of work itself. These examples showed how workers’ attention focused on the ways their Israeli employers treated them. If this treatment was primarily linked to the value of “honesty”, which assured the worker of his rights – so that the payment of a just salary according to the kind and time of a job was the first point at stake – the employers’ behavior was also evaluated on the basis of work relations conceived as

“human relationships”, where the humanity of both sides had to be recognized. The cases of refusal of work thus implied that Palestinian laborers, despite their very different work conditions, opposed their possible degradation to a servile state, conceived as a subhuman state, where people would be deprived of their morality and dignity. This did not necessarily concern economical exploitation, but was more generally defined by a lack of respect, which would endanger a Palestinian man’s honor and dignity.

The tension between unavailability and “friendship”, which constituted the two opposite extremes of the development of personal relationships with Israelis at work, showed how the acknowledgement of the Israeli employer’s respectability could allow a legitimate social exchange in which Palestinian men were able to act as “equals”. In this case visits and hospitality were displayed reciprocally: “friendship” with Israelis, which stemmed from sharing because of work, also exceeded it, implying a mutual recognition especially expressed in moments of joy (weddings) and grief (death). However, for Palestinian workers such personal relationships were separated from politics.

At the same time the blame of “collaboration” as a form of national treason was liable to target also Palestinian workers. For this reason laborers had to engage in a never-ending effort to distinguish what the legitimate job was according to the national discourse. This effort was mainly based on the link between masculine respectability and subsistence. If the valued role of breadwinners made it compulsory for Palestinian men to provide for their families, in order to accomplish their masculinity while contributing in the social reproduction, this role was often in contradiction with national standards based on “resistance”. Work for Israelis eminently represented this contradiction. For this reason a series of distinctions had to be made, although these distinctions could only be contingent in a context of limited job opportunities, differentiated work conditions, and individual positioning. If work inside the 1967 Israeli borders (*juwwa*, inside) was generally distinguished as less reprehensible than work in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, it was the social visibility of Palestinians working for Israel in the Palestinian villages that exposed them to social blame in their own society. However, work itself – implying exertion – was considered as an “honest” way to earn a living and thus opposed to thief or charity. The logics of the “lesser evil” presupposed that one had to choose the most respectable form of subsistence in a context of structural constraints, where labor for Israelis perpetuated the violence of dispossession and occupation anyway. Simultaneously, work for Israelis defined the workers’ permanent state of unhappiness

and uneasiness, and nourished the perceived lack of dignity that Palestinians as a whole lived under the Israeli occupation.

As a consequence, national treason was always potentially there, and could never be clearly defined, especially in moments of “calmness”, when people were busier thinking about their livelihood than fighting against the “enemy”. In this sense also national boundaries blurred: on one side Palestinians could act *as if* the Israeli occupation was not there, while on the other Israelis could look like “friends”. From the perspective of this constitutive ambiguity, which undercut ascribed national identities, it is necessary to explore what kind of political limits Palestinians set to their relationships with the Israeli side: as we shall see, the distinction between “people” and “government” play a fundamental role in the Palestinian workers’ discourses. I have proposed to analyze such a paradoxical situation through what I defined as a moral economy of friendship. Such a moral economy emerged after the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank as an effect of the inclusion of the Palestinian population by Israel, thanks to their allowed circulation inside the 1967 borders and their absorption into the Israeli labor market. Simultaneously, the Israeli state expanded its sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza, and a part of the Israeli civil population moved to live in settlements there. However, while the Palestinian population was kept under the military rule of the Israeli Civil Administration, the Israeli civil law was applied on the Israeli settlers living in the Palestinian territories. The “peace” Oslo Agreements, through the establishment of a Palestinian National Authority, reinforced the separation project that Israel had inaugurated at the beginning of the 90s, during the first Intifada, when the Palestinians’ mobility and work in Israel started to be restricted, and Palestinians were also juridically treated as a foreign population.

The moral economy of friendship thus unites a micro and a macro level. On the micro level – which focuses on a mixed social space – I have shown how the social norms and moral values linked to the ideas of honesty, trust, respect, loyalty, solidarity, were produced and circulated through the personal relationships that Palestinians established with Israeli citizens because of their work experience in Israel since 1967. It is important to consider that both labor in Israel and personal relationships with Israelis became an important “ethical substance” for the Palestinian men’s moral subjectivation, since they were both part of their everyday life (if we consider a synchronous perspective) and of their (or their family’s) life story (if we take into account a diachronic perspective). On the macro level the moral economy of friendship, engendered by the Israeli military occupation and the Palestinians’ economical dependence from Israel, was later enforced

by the “peace” regime through an official collaboration between the PNA and the Israeli state. The supposed symmetry of the two national entities – a national government deprived of state sovereignty and a state expanding sovereignty beyond its official borders – legitimized their public relationships in terms of “security coordination” and “civil liaisons”. In this sense the moral economy of friendship revealed to be a mode of government, in which the Palestinian resistance discourse faded and the Israeli system of domination became institutionally legitimized. Under this perspective the category of “friendship” is caught in a tension: it expresses a possibly ethical relationship between individuals, who construct themselves as moral subjects through it, and it is also a kind of political relation based on the apparent absence of conflict. In the following chapter I will explore how this tension was articulated and deployed in the Palestinians’ everyday life.

3. FRIENDSHIP/S: FROM THE PERSONAL TO THE POLITICAL

3.1. The social language of friendship

After examining Palestinian labor as an apparatus of Israeli colonial governmentality, I have proposed to consider how a moral economy of friendship regulating social exchanges between Palestinians and Israelis has emerged since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, when asymmetrical work relations were established between the two populations in the context of the Palestinians' growing economical dependence on Israel following their violent dispossession and the structural dismantlement of their life conditions. The increasing personalization of such work relations between Palestinian laborers and Israeli employers resulted as a power effect given by Israel's later separation policy, which focused on restricting the Palestinians' movement and introducing their individualized scrutiny through the permits system, but was also nurtured by the Oslo "peace" Agreements through the creation of a supposedly autonomous Palestinian National Authority linked to Israel by official relationships of "security coordination" and "civil liaisons". Giving ethnographical depth to Palestinian laborers' experience, I have showed how labor in Israel has become an important social field of Palestinian men's daily life, where their moral subjectivation is produced and contested through an informal negotiation of work conditions and a more general evaluation of the Israelis' moral qualities on the base of a supposed shared "humanity". In some cases, the mutual recognition of the other as a human being – recognition which is practically deployed by specific social forms of mutual respect – can thus engender personal relationships which both Palestinians and Israelis define as "friendship". At the same time I have shown how the normative discourse of the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation and settler colonization links the moral evaluation of work relations to politics, questioning the legitimacy of labor and work relations with Israelis in order to avoid "collaboration" and "normalization" as forms of national treason and subjective blame. In this sense a moral economy of friendship is just produced by a regime of suspicion in which national contours blur and enemy "otherness" is constantly feared because it is unexpectedly generated. Uncertainty precisely stems from a power rationality combining the differentiation of a citizen (Israeli) population from a non-citizen one through specific political technologies, with the creation of a space of free social exchange supposedly determined by a neutral labor market. This is also why

Palestinians' ethical subjectivation always appears to be precarious and uncertain, depending on the subjects' contingent evaluation of specific social and economical conjunctures under variable historical and political conditions. In this perspective the moral economy of friendship questions the opposition between "friend" and "enemy" as two clearly distinguished categories of the political, which is virtually expressed through war (Schmitt 1927). Friendship is thus conceived as a potentiality in so called "human relationships", both constituting and exceeding national boundaries. What I aim to explore in this chapter is the reconfiguration of the political in such personal relationships.

During my fieldwork the issue of friendship attracted my attention just because friendship as a social language, that is a way to name particular social relationships and situations, did diverge from my personal ideas of possible interactions and human ties in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While living with my large family in al-Bab, it happened to me to find Israeli men sitting comfortably – each one with a *kippah* on their heads – and drinking coffee with Palestinian men, like any other guest would do in the *ḥāra*. When I had asked whom those guests were, young Nadir had told me those were his uncle Rida's friends (*aṣḥāb*). I was later told that those Israelis had come to buy rabbits from Rida's brother, who also worked in Israel yet without a permit, and was hired for sporadic maintenance jobs in private Israeli houses, while simultaneously managing his rabbits farming for his family's consumption and informal sale. Such informal sales concerning animals bred in the *ḥāra* were normally framed as a visit to the family and accompanied by the display of Palestinian hospitality: I had got used to see private buyers or middlemen who came to buy sheep and drank coffee with my family's men while negotiating the animal price. Although these were chiefly men's affairs, I was sometimes invited to join the visitors and sit with men because of my research interest in peasants' work, but also because I represented a special guest – a foreign young woman on whom Palestinian sexual morality could be suspended arbitrarily – to be introduced to other ones. In fact, when guests were in the *ḥāra*, no matter if men or women, even people in the family not directly linked with them (but normally of the same sex) were expected to show up and welcome visitors as a way to honor them. Indeed, that day the Israelis were not only surrounded by Rida and his brother, but many other men had joined the group.

My own wonder about finding Israelis at a Palestinian family's home and hearing them being described as "friends" moved me to focus on the meanings of "friendship" in

the Palestinian society and on the ways such a social category could be used to include Israeli people. The social reality I had personally witnessed and the specific social language in which it was inscribed – that of friendship and Palestinians’ hospitality – radically questioned the political opposition between Palestinians and Israelis as two enemy people involved in a never-ending conflict. I want to underline here how this preconception, which presupposed a permanent hostility in every kind of interaction between the two people, played a fundamental role in defining the object of my research: the ethnographer’s prior categories and prejudices should be taken into account in order to highlight how our research interests are influenced by a realm of public discourses and subjective trajectories which precede and exceed the field itself. This is not only to reflect upon the ethnographer’s own positioning, but also to question the ways we contribute to identify social realities as precise and relatively circumscribed conjunctures of human activity and meaningful production. Retrospectively, my wonder stemmed from two different but interlinked presupposes through which I was interpreting the social situation I was confronted with: the first consisted in conceiving personal relationships as part of a “private” domain which was necessarily and coherently over-determined by politics, chiefly defined by the interplay of conflicts and alliances between historically distinguished groups; the second was an idea of friendship as a personal relationship which should express a free, voluntaristic link between people, based on sharing intimacy and disinterested affective ties in order to guarantee the real Self’s disclosure, on the basis of which the constitutive authenticity of friendship should be weighed. According to these premises “friendship” between Israelis and Palestinians had to be considered both impossible and illegitimate: while its impossibility was clearly contested by my own experience in the field, its illegitimacy insinuated suspicion in my first perceptions, letting me wonder what kind of Palestinians my hosts really were. Such a suspicion was later confirmed by some other Palestinian interlocutors, who were both shocked and irritated by my research interest on such an issue and swung between the denial of its reality and the blame on those who ventured into such connections. Their reactions differently took to the same conclusion: the enemy’s friend should be considered as an enemy, too. Someone even warned me that my writing on Israelis as “friends” would have damaged Palestinians as a whole. Together with my own suspicion, I started to feel not at ease because of these forms of rejection and misrecognition, which drove me to put into question what I had always perceived as my incontrovertible support to Palestinians’ struggle against the Israeli occupation. At the same time, this mix of suspicion,

discomfort and contested loyalty let me understand to what extent Israeli-Palestinian social contacts constituted a sensitive issue in the Palestinian society as a whole. More precisely, it was their emergence into the public discourse that constituted the most problematic point and inevitably produced suspects and fear. However, the candid and apparently easy attitude through which some Palestinians in my fieldwork got engaged in personal relationships with Israelis and defined them as “friends” revealed a sort of double standard creating a mysterious zone of doubt and uncertainty, or was it a real schizophrenia?

My stress was finally mitigated – although never totally extinguished – by comparable findings in different social contexts in the West Bank. It was with some women in one of Bethlehem refugee camps that I started to relax: we were gathered in the feminine area of a party organized for the 2014 release of some Palestinian prisoners from Israel. One of my friends’ uncle had been freed after being imprisoned for twenty years, so people from all the Bethlehem area kept coming and going to greet him and his family. I was sitting with the prisoner’s family’s women and I was asked what I was doing in the West Bank. I told them I was researching Israeli-Palestinian social contacts born from work and sometimes described as “friendship”. They were not surprised at all. We were celebrating a Palestinian activist’s liberation: a major moment to acclaim Palestinian resistance against the Zionist “enemy”. Flags of all Palestinian parties were hung on the walls, journalists were interviewing the prisoner and his mother who ceaselessly repeated “*bidnā nuṣbur*” (“we will keep being patient”), women had sung and danced resistance songs until the night before. In such a heartfelt gathering the women who had questioned me simply said even their husbands’ Israeli colleagues used to take them home in the refugee camp until the second Intifada broke out. In their view after the Palestinian uprising Israelis’ visits could occur only in border zones (*manāṭiq il-ḥudūd*) like al-Bab: in their words “border zones” clearly referred to Area C, where Israeli circulation was normal, while no Israeli civilians moved into the areas supposedly controlled by the PNA like they used to do before the Oslo Agreements. The women distinguished their husbands’ personal relationships with Israelis from organized encounters between Israelis and Palestinians with the aim of reconciliation, which they totally disapproved¹⁰³. Thanks

¹⁰³ The ideas of reconciliation, compassion and forgiveness are at the core of many Israeli-Palestinian initiatives and structured groups of encounter, such as “The Parents Circle”, “One Voice” or the “Sulha Peace Project”. Without aiming to simplify the different perspectives and approaches these organized groups encompass, a supposedly shared humanity is at the core of the recognition of a “nationalized” otherness on the base of a symmetric experience as human beings. The recognition of the other’s humanity

to these Palestinian women from a refugee camp I started to grasp how more complex distinctions were at the base of legitimated social exchanges with Israelis, simultaneously revealing fractures about the limits of the acceptable among Palestinians themselves. At the same time this kind of social legitimacy was not necessarily perceived to be in contradiction with the overwhelming Palestinian resistance stance, like Abu Mustafa had later made explicit to me: “I can have a Jewish friend as a human being. This does not mean that I give up my rights” (2.3.1.).

Since this kind of ties are structurally linked to Palestinian laborers’ everyday experience in Israel, in the previous chapter I have shown how “friendship” arises from workers’ moral evaluation of their work conditions and work relations with their Israeli employers. However, such moral work does not merely refer to labor itself, conceived as an autonomous sphere of human activity, but it is grounded on work relations thought as “human relationships”, expanding norms and values to a wider idea of human life in society. How does “friendship” substantiate such norms and values beyond labor? When I was back in Italy, during a lunch with the father of a Palestinian friend, whose son lives in my country, he was telling me about his Jewish friend (*ṣadīq*), a long-time business partner of his furniture factory in Nablus, with whom he had gone on a journey to Jordan in order to attend a family’s wedding. The man was enjoying telling me a lot of funny situations he and his Israeli friend had shared during the trip. I instinctively turned to my friend – his son – with whom I had often discussed my research, and exclaimed: “Do you see? He calls him a friend!”. My friend – a young man who had left the West Bank after being imprisoned twice when he was a minor because of his participation in the first Intifada – defensively intervened and pointed out that it was “just a way of saying”. Even if he intended to soften the political ambiguity that his father’s words could carry in order to answer my provocation, I was struck by his comment and I started to think about how the word “friend” could be apprehended as “a way of saying”.

Grounding on Wittgenstein’s insights on language as experience and not merely as communication, Veena Das has linked the “pervasive uncertainty of relations” to the

is thus the main principle of reconciliation between enemy populations, often neglecting the historical conditions which produced inequality and political opposition. More research would be needed to compare such a stance with the idea of humanity engaged in personal relationships such as friendship in everyday life. From my point of view the main differences consists in conceiving humanity as a pre-political quality of sharing a life (mankind) or as a moral and political value in itself (humaneness). In this second sense humanity must be analyzed in the perspective of a “humanitarian reason” which supports, rather than deletes, the possibility of war and the production of further divisions on the base of a normative claim about what the sense of being human should be (Fassin 2012).

power of words in ordinary life: words are seen to control people rather than people control them (Das 1997: 185). In her discussion about women's wording and silencing gender violence in post-Partition India, she has explained the gap between narrating domestic violence and freezing the Partition political violence exerted on women's bodies through the Wittgensteinian concept of "form of life". Moving from Stanley Cavell's reading of it, Das has pointed out how the conceptualization of "forms of life" does not only evoke the social nature of language, but rather implies that language should be referred to two distinct forms of "agreement". While the social and cultural production of language can draw our attention to the different *forms* that human life can take (what Cavell calls "horizontal differences"), Das put her emphasis on the second interpretation of the concept (that is, on "vertical differences"), which is liable to test the limits of the human in what is conceived as *life*: "The limits of the idea of the human seem to evoke the sense that life itself has been put into question, as if one cannot fall from being human without bringing this larger sense of life into jeopardy" (Das 2007: 89). In her ethnographical analyses, while domestic violence suffered by women could be still formulated in the everyday fabric of life, made of disputations in the work of culture, the Partition violence resulted to be the "unsayable within the forms of everyday life" (Das 2007: 90). However, such a violence did not merely let the distinction of the human from the non-human become uncertain, but rather questioned life itself:

"Was it a man or a machine that plunged a knife into the private parts of a woman after raping her? Were those men or animals that went around killing and collecting castrated penises as signs of their prowess? These are not, however, simply places of doubt about the human: that is what puts life itself into question. There is a deep moral energy in the refusal to represent some violations of the human body, for these violations are seen as "being against nature", as defining the limits of life itself. The precise range and scale of the human form of life is not knowable in advance, any more than the precise range of the meaning of a word is knowable in advance" (Das 2007: 90).

If we take into account this theoretical approach, my Palestinian friend's caveat that the word "friend", if attributed to an Israeli, was "just a way of saying" among Palestinians, leads us to further reflections. Firstly, naming an Israeli as "friend" produces discomfort because of a precisely Israeli violence exerted on Palestinians as such: the word "friend"

destabilizes this violently produced separation, usually represented by the concept of “enemy”. Consequently, the word “friend” seems to erase, forget, or worse excuse that violence, something intolerable from the perspective of the political claim on the Palestinians’ right to exist. Therefore, the sense of humanity is normatively expressed through political resistance. Yet, “a way of saying” also suggests that an Israeli “friend” can pertain to Palestinians’ ordinary experience. In my friend’s attempt to justify his father’s words, this second use of “a way of saying” neutralized the question of a political division, allowing it to be dispersed in the routinization and trivialization produced by everyday life. It is the same routinization and trivialization of the Israeli domination system which the Palestinians fear as “normalization” (*taṭbī’*). However, my friend’s conception of “a way of saying” did not carry this fear with it: if so, his father’s statement would have not seemed to be much more honorable than the political ambiguity it already bore. We can suppose that “a way of saying” can be considered politically neutral in itself, because it is deprived of a subjective intentionality and it is nurtured by its ongoing and widespread circulation in a society: this implies that language also has an impersonal nature (the relationship between the impersonal and the political is a question that I leave open here). This is why – inverting Das’ terms – the precise range of the meaning of a word is not knowable in advance, any more than the precise range and scale of the human form of life is knowable in advance. Ultimately, this “way of saying” was defined as such in front of me as a foreign friend, who nevertheless represented a threshold between the Palestinian social world (after living in the West bank for a long time) and the resistance discourse which Palestinian people (rather than their actual representatives) aim to claim in the international public arena. It was just in this threshold, created between our personal relationship of friendship and our common though distinct commitment in producing a public discourse on the Palestinian question, that my friend defined “friendship” with Israelis just as “a way of saying”. Like I had already experienced in my fieldwork, “friendship” with Israelis was both part of many Palestinians’ ordinary life and the object of a shameful denial in the public discourse normatively grounded on resistance.

In the following paragraphs I question friendship in the Palestinian society through three perspectives, nourished by my ethnographic accounts. In the first part I situate the social language of friendship in social practice, thanks to my observations and sharing daily life with people. I later examine the discourses on friendship and people’s reflexivity on their personal bonds: rather than elaborating the interviewees’ biographical

profiles in details, I have preferred to let their voices scattered in the text in order to give a polyphonic effect to the discursive dimension of friendship. This can help us to highlight the impersonal character of friendship as a “way of saying”. In the third part, I explore the distinction between a “private” and “public” sphere of social action on the basis of emotional control and the regulation of affects, which I had to personally experience and incorporate in the fieldwork.

3.1.1. Practicing friendship

I maintain that friendship in Palestinians’ everyday life is a language used to express specific individuals’ social inclusion into groups. If personal ties stem from sharing, the language of friendship also involves practices that actively produce social proximity and intimacy. To analyze this point I firstly want to contextualize the social practices that shape friendship as an everyday experience. My way of apprehending friendship in the Palestinian society was inevitably linked to my own ways of living and practicing it during my fieldwork. As a matter of fact, after two years had passed since my first arrival at my Palestinian family in al-Bab, I was introduced as a family friend (“*ṣāhibtnā*”, our friend) to male visitors coming from another village: a “way of saying” my increased closeness to a specific agnatic group, where I was no longer considered as a simple “guest” (*dīfa*). In fact, to state this change the family’s men used to quote to me the Arabic proverb which says: “One who lives with a group of people for forty days becomes one of them” (*man ‘āshir al-qawm arba ‘īn yawm ṣār minhum*).

The relationship between closeness and the concept of *‘ishra* (coresidence) was discussed in many ethnographical accounts on Arab societies. Based on her fieldwork with Bedouin people in Egypt, Lila Abu-Lughod defined *‘ishra* as “the bond of living together or sharing a life”: “Although marked by impermanence, it suggests the kinlike bonds of enduring sentiments of closeness, as well as a more or less temporary identification and the concomitant obligations of support and unity. The bond is symbolized by sharing the food, which in Bedouin culture (like many others) signifies the absence of enmity” (Abu-Lughod 1986: 63). The American anthropologist of Palestinian origin underlined that this kind of relationship based on proximity or a shared life can refer to different social ties, like those among neighbors or patron-client relations. In her analyses *‘ishra* is thus opposed to strangeness (*ghurba*).

Starting from an ethnographical research on a traditionally herding population in Aarsal, a village in the northern Lebanese mountains at the Syrian border, Michelle Obeid has pointed out how the social obligations deriving from *'ishra* are precisely represented by marriage and death as two main events in social life in which the bonds between people encourages participation: "Kin, neighbors and friends participate in both, for it is in happiness and sadness that people demonstrate closeness and care" (Obeid in Desai & Killick 2010: 105). I would add that closeness is not only a prerequisite of such an involvement, but it is rather built by it. Focusing on the relationship between production and sociality, Obeid has shown how new social categories, such as "friendship", emerged from the decline of the herding system of production and the progressive diversification of livelihoods. More precisely, the author has attributed the changing conceptions on the nature of social life to diversified "moral economies of livelihoods", which would let non-kin personal relationships prevail over kinship ties in the context of the increasing "modernization" of people's life due to the injection of new forms of capital. Simultaneously, the local ideology of *'ishra*, based on the ideal values of kinship (permanence, endurance and irreversibility) would inform an "ethics of sociality" able to blur the opposition between kinship and friendship. The "liberal" ideology of friendship as a voluntaristic relationship free from obligations (Carrier in Bell & Coleman 1999), which the Aarsalis claimed as opposed to kinship ties at a discursive level, was then contradicted by the experience of friendship in people's practice and expectations: in the author's view both kinship and friendship belong to "a single principle of sociality in which permanence is a virtue because it provides the endurance necessary for the survival of relationships" (Obeid in Desai & Killick 2010: 109). The virtue of permanence would be represented by "the morality of kinship", which is supposed to bond the individual to imbalanced relationships: Obeid quoted Maurice Bloch who had maintained that "relationships classed by the actor as political, neighborhood, or friendship have a shorter term than those classed as kinship and thus are less moral" (Obeid 2010: 108, Bloch 1973: 77). In fact, in his effort to demonstrate the priority of morality over reciprocity, Bloch had proposed to distinguish different relationships on the base of the "amount of morality" contained into them: "We can, however imprecisely, estimate the amount of morality in a relationship by observing its degree of tolerance of imbalance in the reciprocal aspects of the relationship" (Bloch 1973: 77). Time was thus conceived as the unit of measure of morality.

Contrarily to Abu-Lughod, who underlined the possible temporary nature of a relationship as a socially accepted quality, while trying to distinguish friendship from kinship Obeid has finally brought it back to the normative discourse of permanence supposed to be at the core of kinship morality. On the basis of my fieldwork experience, however, I maintain that permanence is considered as a virtue because of people's widespread perception of the fragility of their social relations, included those with their kin, contributing to give them a sense of insecurity: morality cannot be considered as an increasing quality which stems from permanence as its founding principle, but it is rather moral subjectivation – an immeasurable mode of subjects' construction embedded in every social relationship – which is liable to give social ties their specific lasting character. In this sense, if time is an important element to define the kind of social bonds by which people are linked, it is its relationship with morality in the process of ethical subjectivation that results to be crucial. Furthermore, morality is not a pre-established quality which pertains to certain relationships more than others, but it is constantly defined by practice in contingent situations. In this sense *'ishra* is not merely a local ideology that informs an ethics of sociality, since it is produced by shared moral norms and values that let people living together or, inversely, can determine social exclusion. If the ideology of kinship specifically resides in the naturalization of *sharing* morality (and not in the naturalization of morality itself), which establishes closeness (*qarāba*) as both a specific residential organization for interlinked lineages and a moral space where norms of solidarity and protection are extended to neighbors (Eickelman 1989), kinship works as an ideology just because it simultaneously conceals, and can sometimes even legitimate, the possible moral ambiguity of its members on the base of closeness as a form of political alliance. Without distinguishing *a priori* between personal relationships and relations among social groups, like sociologists usually do (see the notion of “personal community” in Spencer & Pahl 2006), I want to describe here a case in which friendship both expresses an affective bond between single people and a set of practices able to include them into a potentially hostile environment, whose hostility is precisely determined by their belonging to opposing groups.

Faris was a young unmarried man of 25 years old when I arrived in the *ḥāra*. Although his father was a respected professor at a Palestinian university, Faris had always refused to study and devoted himself to breed a few sheep with his uncle. He was known in the *ḥāra* because of his impetuous temperament which could let him look particularly vehement sometimes. I think this happened because Faris had to perform masculine

values (strength, the authority over decision, independence) while having chosen very precarious conditions following his love for agricultural work. At the same time, however, such a job let him experience a relative autonomy and an equal partnership with his uncle, since the sheep ownership was distinguished, but work was often shared because the animals were bred together in the same place. Yet, differently from his uncle who went daily and graze his sheep on the hills, Faris spent most of his time in the *ḥāra* and put his animals to pasture in some little plots of lands around his house, where the family's younger boys looked after them at his place.

Despite his proud character and his relative isolation from the rest of the world, Faris was the only boy in the *ḥāra* who received regular visits from his friends. Asad and Salman, 28 and 30 years old respectively, were two brothers who belonged to the neighboring Abu Mishmish family. Like I have previously described (see 1.1.1.), the Abu Jamil and Abu Mishmish families were two of the largest agnatic groups in the village who still conserved the characteristic spatial model for a lineage, based on the intersection of coresidence, consanguinity and endogamy. They had been opposing for a long time, more than forty years, because of power conflicts which started in the 70s between their male elders, who competed for political prominence in the village. Such a competition for local power was nurtured by the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, where Israeli authorities actually interfered with Palestinians' political life. The conflict between the two families was thus integrated into a narrative which mixed land control, kinship alliances and blame over suspected collaboration with the Israeli enemy, redefining spatial borders through moral and political boundaries. Until the present time the elders' descents kept a hostile attitude towards the opposing family, and this hostility still gave birth to sporadic attacks and youth clashes. As a guest of the Abu Jamil family, I was obliquely prevented to visit the Abu Mishmish family. However, since the two family were also neighbors, they could not radically transgress social norms providing for solidarity and protection towards those who live in the nearby area. When a fire occurred in the Abu Mishmish's neighborhood – one of Abu Jamil's men explained to me – it was the Abu Jamil family who immediately intervened to help neighbors extinguish the fire: “*We went, because we were the closest ones, and not because the relationship between us was so good. In the human circumstances (fī-l ḥāla il-insanīyya), even if the relationship is not good, you have to help everyone*”.

I do not exactly know how the friendship between Faris, Asad and Salman was born. Walking in the village with the Abu Jamil children I had got to know that actual social

exchanges and playful interactions existed between the two family's youth, probably created because the Abu Jamil boys and girls had to daily cross the Abu Mishmish's neighborhood in order to go to school, and school socialization had certainly contributed them getting closer. Moreover, thanks to the girls' confidence, I also got to know that love and desiring gazes – necessarily *secret* affects – circulated among the youngest members of the two enemy families. However, like one of the Abu Jamil girls explained to me, intergroup marriage was impossible because parents would never legitimize the union: the conflict between the two families let them reject marriage as a chance for alliance and such a rejection simultaneously contributed to keep the conflict alive.

On the contrary, Faris, Asad and Salman were good friends. Their friendship was overtly performed through Asad and Salman's recurring visits to the Abu Jamil neighborhood, where they went to meet Faris, but were also welcomed by other members of his family. Since Asad and Salman worked as taxi drivers in the Bethlehem area, Abu Jamil people used to call them when they needed to move out of the village (only three cars existed for more than one hundred people in the *ḥāra*). Faris often accompanied Asad or Salman during their daily runs, just to have fun and spend time with his friends. Furthermore, when Salman got married Faris was the only one of the Abu Jamil family to be invited at the wedding, and inversely, Salman and his brother were invited to Faris' wedding party. These invitations were clearly done on the base of their personal bonds, since wedding invitations are usually addressed to a whole family and participation is expected by only some of the family members as representatives of the invited lineage. Furthermore, this kind of representation is chiefly embodied by adult men and women. Since I had left the *ḥāra* and lived in a nearby town during the second phase of my fieldwork, I usually moved to and from the village by Salman's or Asad's taxi. The first time Salman accompanied me to my apartment in town, Faris came with us and negotiated the price I had to pay, establishing with his friend the good price, that was the same price the Abu Jamil family used to pay. I had got to know both brothers as Faris' friends while I was living at the Abu Jamil's home, although I could not really approach them in the *ḥāra* since those were masculine visits. My familiarity with them could grow later, when they became my special taxi drivers, since the taxi runs were also a confidential occasion to chat without having other people around. While in the taxi with Asad one night, he – who was married and had children – showed me a photo of his "friend" (*ṣāḥibī*, "my friend"), a Palestinian girl living in Jerusalem, whom he had met

after starting to work there for a gardening company. He warned me not to tell anyone in the Abu Jamil family: he specified to me that only his friend Faris knew.

Faris' friendship with Asad and Salman, two young members of an enemy family with whom Faris' family had no official relationships, shows how closeness is not something taken for granted, simply deriving from social norms connected to kinship alliances, nor is it determined by a mere residence arrangement of different groups in the village space, like moral obligations among neighbors would imply. In their case friendship was built *despite* the conflict between their respective agnatic groups (a conflict that Salman snubbed as "a matter of lands") and *beyond* solidarity expected among neighbors: this shows how friendship can also be conceived as an autonomous sphere of social life. More importantly, their friendship was built as a personal relationship between particular individuals based on exclusivity and confidentiality, while the social practice of invitation, visiting and attending weddings let the boys be legitimately included in the wider milieu of the opposing extended family. At the same time visits and mutual invitations kept a selective quality concerning friends as single people, keeping the wider conflict between the two agnatic groups unaltered, at least in the present days. It is on the base of such an exclusivity and selectivity in personal relationships that mutual respect, the fundament of every legitimate relation which is publicly performed through visiting exchanges, takes a specifically affective undertone when it is verbally expressed between two people: without destabilizing social norms, "I respect you" (*baḥtaramak*) captures two specific individuals in one special affective movement. In this sense friendship is "a way of saying" closeness as a form of life which connects specific individuals into a shared horizon of norms, values and affects, and is put into practice through hospitality and participation in the most important events of the friend's life. At the same time the exclusive turn which characterizes friendship ties gives "human life" a particular moral connotation, since friendship can unite what is divided, though without questioning such political divisions and, consequently, the humanity of the other as such.

3.1.2. *Şuḥba* and *şadāqa*: multiple friendships

The ethnographical case concerning Faris, Asad and Salman's personal bonds shows how friendship can be built as an autonomous sphere of social action in

Palestinians' life, both encompassing and exceeding conflicts (social division) and general moral obligations towards others (social unity). Its practical deployment through the social and political institution of the visit comparably brings a personal, affective and intimate relationship, with friends' social inclusion into a "public" realm. Such an inclusion is created and legitimated by the social performance of respect and its mutual exchange between single individuals and specific agnatic groups. This is not to say that friendship is a social language which neglects intergroup relations, like its formulation as a form of closeness allows us to realize. However, if closeness represents a set of precise norms and values regulating human relationships in certain contexts, its necessarily flexible character – by definition closeness engenders *degrees* of closeness – gives a particular connotation to friendship as such.

Despite the focus on kinship and the hegemony gained by the segmentary lineage theory – where the segmentary lineage was conceived as the main principle for political organization – in the anthropological study of Arab (and African) societies since the 40s, Eickelman had the merit to highlight the limits of such theoretical assumptions by focusing on the practical flexibility of "closeness" (*qarāba*), which defined the ideology of kinship in the Moroccan society he had studied. Like in Morocco, in the Palestinian society kinship is also expressed through the word *qarāba*, from the verb *qaruba* (to be close to), and relatives – no matter if related by blood or affinity ties – are called *qarāyb* (literally, "those who are close"). Grounding on his research in Morocco, Eickelman pointed out:

"'Closeness' carries contextual meanings which range imperceptibly from asserted and recognized ties of kinship to participation in factional alliances, ties of patronage and clientship, and common bonds developed through neighborliness. Closeness is constituted by compelling ties of obligations. Often closeness is expressed as a 'blood' tie, even when no demonstrable lineal ties exist, because however such ties are valued in practice, they are considered permanent and cannot be broken. Yet in contexts other than those governed by inheritance law, closeness based upon family ties is generally not sharply differentiated from closeness based upon other grounds. Most frequently, people seek to make the various bases for closeness overlap" (Eickelman 1989: 109).

When I started to conduct interviews on “friendship” in order to explore people’s reflexivity on their different conceptions of personal relationships, most of my interlocutors defined friends as “the closest people to you” (*aqrab in-nās ilak*). However, some people distinguished friendship through the two Arabic words which are used to identify it: *ṣuḥba* and *ṣadāqa*. In Palestinian colloquial Arabic *ṣāḥib* (pl. *aṣḥāb*) is the most common way to call a “friend”: this word comes from the verb *ṣaḥiba* (to associate with) and is usually translated as “companion”. In classical Arabic, however, friendship is also expressed through the word *ṣadāqa*, coming from the root *ṣadaqa* (to say the truth), which in its second form gives birth to the verb *ṣaddaqa* (to believe in somebody): a friend is called *ṣadīq* (pl. ‘*aṣḍīqā*’). The following Arabic proverb plays with these two interconnected semantic shades of the word *ṣadīq*: “Your friend is the one who tells you the truth and not the one who says you are true” (*ṣadīquka man ṣadaqak wa laysa man ṣaddaqa*)¹⁰⁴. Some people I interviewed did not see any significant difference between *ṣāḥib* and *ṣadīq*, but they confined *ṣāḥib* to the colloquial Arabic (‘*ammīa*’), while *ṣadīq* was supposed to pertain to literal Arabic (*fuṣḥā*). Since such a distinction is not pertinent from a linguistic perspective – both words coming from literal Arabic – it rather confirms that *ṣāḥib* is the word most used in Palestinians’ daily life. However, according to Rida, a middle-aged man and worker in Israel, “*iṣ-ṣadīq* [expresses] more closeness than *iṣ-ṣāḥib*” (*iṣ-ṣadīq akthar qarāba min iṣ-ṣāḥib*). Beyond his deeper reflections, which I will describe later, Rida underlined that *ṣāḥib* can also refer to objects or non-human beings and so expresses ownership (for ex. *ṣāḥib il-bayt*, the owner of the house; *ṣāḥib il-baḡhl*, the owner of the mule), while in his words “*iṣ-ṣadīq* concerns only people who trust each other (*wāthqīyn fī ba ‘d*). It’s sincerity from the heart (*ṣidq min il-qalb*), not from outside, from the tongue”.

Some women, while asking me if I had friends (‘*indik ‘aṣḍīqā*?’), also distinguished the two words conceptually: in their opinion *il-‘aṣḍīqā*’ are “those who sit together” (*qā ‘edīn ma ‘a ba ‘d*), at school or at work for example, while *ṣāḥib* is one with whom I would have a relationship (*fī ‘alāqa*), which is forbidden (*mamnū*) – as the women attentively warned me. In this case the word “friends” was related to me as the women’s female interlocutor, so the conceptual distinction inevitably concerned gender relations. The apparent neutrality of the plural form of “friend”, providing a

¹⁰⁴ This proverb can have different interpretations. The person who quoted it to me translated it in English as follows: “Your friend is the one who advises you, and not the one who says to you that you are true”. Better formulations could be: “He who advises you, not blindly follows you, is your friend” or “Your friend is the one who is honest with you, not the one who simply agrees with you”.

generalization declined in the masculine form, let the women turn our conversation to the issue they were more interested in: they wanted me to be clear that a relationship of any kind between an unmarried girl and a boy was considered to be illegitimate, while questioning me through a word that would let them avoid looking too intrusive. If they did not want to produce such an ambiguity, they could have used the feminine form for both words: have you got *ṣadīqāt* (sing. *ṣadīqa*)? Or: have you got *ṣahbāt* (sing. *ṣahba*)? In both cases their question would have incontrovertibly referred to friendship as such. Such semantic shifts let us grasp how operative conceptual distinctions between *ṣadīq* and *ṣāhib* can exist on the base of a moral definition of closeness, that is, of the *right* closeness in practical situations and concerning specific individuals. Even if some of these distinctions, like the one proposed by the women, depart from the etymological origins of the word *ṣadīq* and *ṣāhib* in literal Arabic, pious people can – more or less implicitly – anchor them to Islamic ethics because of their familiarity with the classical Arabic of the Koranic text.

Before exploring the different degrees of friendship, it is important to note how “friendship” and “closeness” can overlap in people’s discourses because of the social obligations they imply. Rida stated:

“The strongest *ṣadāqa* is among relatives (*qarāyb*). If you want to give money to the poor, you have to look for the closest one to you (*aqrab waḥad ilak*) in the family. Let’s talk about my family, dār Abu Jamil. If I want to give money to poor people, I won’t go to Ramallah, I’ll take two parts (*ajrīn*): one is for friendship (*ṣadāqa*) and one is for kinship (*qarāba*), the closest ones to me. I won’t give to someone who lives in Ramallah, if I know someone poor near me. First you have to give to your family. The kinship’s friendship is the strongest one, the other one is a normal friendship (*ṣadāqa ‘ādī*)” (Rida, al-Bab 27/4/2014).

Rida overlapped his idea of friendship with closeness defined by physical proximity, genealogical ties and the display of an asymmetric solidarity. In his view even the relationship with neighbors constituted a form of friendship: “If you steal in ten houses, it’s lighter than if you steal in your neighbor’s house. Why? Because your neighbor is your friend (*ṣadīqak*), he sees what you do, he protects you if something happens to you. An Arab proverb says: ‘Your closest neighbor is better than your brother who is far away’ (*jārak il-qarīb aḥsān min akhuk illī bi ‘īd*)”. Although closeness appears to be a normative

discourse in which social obligations can be diversely framed, Rida gave also a universalistic tone to friendship conceived as a “non-political” solidarity, which is expressed by various forms of support and help due to anyone in need, according to “the human circumstance” (*il-ḥāla il-insāniya*) (see 3.1.1.): “In the human circumstance, even if the relationship is not good, you have to help, you have to help anyone. The sick person, you have to help him, the hungry one, you have to give him food. In this situation you find friendship (*biṣīr ṣadāqa*)”.

Like Rida, even Zafira, a woman in her forties, included friends in a widespread system of solidarity and exchange based on gifts. Although both referred to Islamic morals, Rida talked about giving to the closest “poor” or to people in need, thinking about an asymmetric relationship which corresponds to “friendship” in the way it implies compassion and a practical solidarity. On the contrary, Zafira’s idea of friendship (*ṣuḥba*) was more ambivalent. She stated that, compared to kinship relations, friendship arises “when there is something in addition” (*fī ishī ziyāda*): “Of all my cousins, only Sahar is my friend (*ṣaḥbtī*)”. In order to describe the different nature of friendship, Zafira told me that every year, after the olives harvest, she gives a fourth of her oil production as a gift to her neighbor (“*jārtī*”) or to her friend (“*ṣaḥbtī*”): this is something done in addition (*ziyāda*), because it is not done for duty. However, she defined it as a good deed (*ḥasana*) and compared it to charity (*zakāt*), one of the five pillars of Islam. When I asked her if charity should not be chiefly directed to the poor, she said it can also be a gift (*hadiyya*) made to the closest ones. While Rida stressed the normative frame which defines closeness as a system of mutual obligations among people who can find themselves in asymmetric positions – where the richest one has the moral obligation to give to the poor – Zafira pointed out how the gift can circulate in a personally selected networks and constitute the “addition” (*ziyāda*) which makes some relationships closer than others, beyond ascribed roles. In this second sense the closeness produced by friendship is not thought as an asymmetric relation, although both Rida and Zafira situated themselves on the giver’s side as performers of morally “good” actions based on their generosity. Therefore, Islamic morals are appropriated and adapted to different situations: Zafira implicitly talked about *ṣadaqa* (noun) as alms (from the verb *taṣaddaqa*, to give alms), whose voluntary character distinguish them from *zakāt*, which are considered to be obligatory in most Islamic tradition (cf. entry *ṣadaqa* in Gibb *et al.* 1986).

In any case friendship is thought to stem from “good treatments” (*il-mu‘āmalā il-ḥasana*), like Rida underlined focusing on the value of sincerity (*ṣidq*):

“The most important thing is honesty in the way friends treat each other (*iş-şidq fil-mu‘āmala*). Friendship develops from a good treatment (*iş-şadāqa bişīr bil-mu‘āmala il-ḥasana*). [...] A friend (*şadīq*)... You don’t take anything from him nor you ask for anything, if you are not in need (*idhā mish muḥtāj*). If you ask a friend some money, and you have some money, this is not good (*mish qways*). This is not friendship, this is parasitism (*mutaṭaffel*): I want to take, but I don’t want to give. You deceive your friend (*tihrij şāḥbak*) because you have lied at him” (Rida, al-Bab 27/4/2014).

Reciprocity, even when asymmetric, must be regulated by honesty, which implies saying the truth: friendship cannot exist if “I want to take, but I don’t want to give”. Muna, an unmarried woman in her forties, pointed out “the friend is the one who offers you his services” (*ykhdimek*, from the verb *khadama*, to serve). Ahmad defined a loyal (*amīn*) friend as “the one who can safeguard everything [of one’s belongings]” (*yḥāfez ‘alā kul ishī*), even his friend’s money. In all these definitions the moral values of honesty, sincerity and mutual trust are described through the material stake of the exchange: in men’s discourses they especially concern one’s property, such as the house, money and even women. While talking about the friendship tie which links the head of a family to his guests, Ahmad stated that his house was “open” (*maftūh*) to those who are good-mannered (*mū’addab*) and use good words: “The one who respects my house, I respect him” (*illī biḥtirim baytī anā baḥtirmu*), explicitly connecting the respect for his “house” to the respect concerning his unmarried daughters. Although the materiality of the exchange is usually put in relief, from Ahmad’s words we can grasp how reciprocity is especially related to the exchange of moral consideration, represented by respect conceived as a circular value (see 2.1.1.). We could say that friendship – no matter if it is referred to a broader sense of closeness and social obligation, or to selective networks of exchange – contributes to the circulation of moral values in the social space.

Since exchange, even a material one, is a constitutive part of friendship, interest (*maşlahā*) is conceived as a legitimate part of it. However, friendship limited to interest is distinguished from “true friendship” because of a very important feature: its duration. In Rida’s view this corresponds to the difference between *şuḥba* and *şadāqa*:

“*Iş-şāḥib* can become *şāḥib* for interest (*maşlahā*). For example, I want something from someone, I’m his *şāḥib*, but I don’t become his *şadīq*. *Iş-*

ṣadīq is only when it's from the heart, from inside (*min juwwa*). *Iṣ-ṣadīq* is closer (*bikūn aqrab*). I can be someone's *ṣāhib* for a specific period of time (*fatra mu'ayyana*), for example for work (*'amal*) or business, but when the work ends, *iṣ-ṣuḥba* between me and him ends. Only *iṣ-ṣadāqa* remains" (Rida, al-Bab 27/4/2014).

Without producing the same linguistic distinction, and rather using the two words indifferently, even Ghassan, an almost 50 years-old man, differentiated "strong friends" from other friends with respect to the duration of a relationship: "You know a million of people, are all of your friends strong (*kul aṣḍiqā'k qawyīn*)? There may be a friend (*ṣadīq*) who passes with time (*bimshi ma'a il-waqt*), and there may be another one who remains for the whole life (*yẓall kul il-'umur*)".

In this sense true friendship is especially linked to unconditional solidarity when the friend is in need: "The friend is [such] in tight times" (*iṣ-ṣadīq waqt id-ḍīq*), one of the most common Arabic proverb says. Like all my interlocutors, even Ghassan thought that support in hardships defines a *true* friend. However, while Rida linked unconditional solidarity to general duties due to "human circumstances" (what I have called a "non-political", or better a "pre-political", solidarity), Ghassan interpreted friendship as a question of political positioning. Since "tight times" immediately represented for him his long struggle against the Israeli authorities – his house remaining out of the village because of the wall construction (see 4.3.) – his definition of "true friendship" superposed the moral duty of helping with the political support friends were expected to give: "The true friend is the one who stands by you" (*iṣ-ṣadīq iṣ-ṣaḥ illī biqaf janbak*): when you are falling because you have a problem, you find him standing by you. The true friend is [such] not when you are happy (*farḥan*) or at ease (*murtāh*), the true friend is [such] when you are in troubles". In this sense support does not necessarily presuppose reciprocity, nor does it consist of compassionate acts in asymmetric relations (like in Rida's view), but it is mostly linked to sharing, a very important dimension of friendship, like we shall see below: friends' sharing consists for Ghassan in partaking suffering and troubles, not only joy and fun. Furthermore, since his problems were caused by an exterior threaten (by an "enemy", even if he did not use this word), Ghassan described friendship as a political alliance where friends are positioned on the same side: "The true friend is the one who stands by you" (*biqaf janbak*).

Most of my interlocutors maintained that sharing is what makes friendship arise: “There must be something shared” (*lāzim ykūn fī ishī mushtarak*), Sawsan, a 23 years-old girl from al-Bab, explained to me. What do we have to share in order to become friends? We can share a situation, like at school or at work: in this sense colleagues (*zumalā'*) at work can be called “friends” (*aṣḥāb*), especially in men’s ordinary speech, and young girls can legitimately refer to male “friends” (*aṣḥāb*) only when they talk about their school mates.

Like the over mentioned women told me, friends are often defined as “those who sit together”. Sitting is a metaphor often used in Palestinian everyday language to refer to an action which is going to be done, expressing a sort of present continuous (for ex. *anā qā'eda ashrah shay*, I’m (sitting) drinking tea). Beyond representing the normal display of visiting, which in Palestinian houses normally occurs in a specific space dedicated to guests (*ghurfat id-ḍuyūf*, the guests’ room), where sofas are a fundamental piece of furniture, “sitting together” implies shared time, and indeed the friend can also be called *jalīs* (from the verb *jalasa*, to sit).

However, if a shared situation constitutes the occasion for people to meet and get to know each other, sharing requires a deeper understanding. In Sawsan’s view friends must share both “a way of thinking” (*fīkr*) and “days spent together” (*ayām ma'a ba'd qaddināhā*). During a visit at her house, I had discussed with the girl about the difficulty I had always found in making my different Palestinian friends meet together, when they did not know each other. I usually perceived a widespread diffidence and potential rivalry. Sawsan justified such an attitude as a question of “choice” related to her definition of friendship:

“I like getting to know people at work, for example, or at the university, and after that we can become friends. But if I’m always ready to become someone’s friend (*ṣāḥba*) and to meet someone new... No, [this is not for me]. Friendship, one has to choose it (*iṣ-ṣuḥba lāzim il-waḥad ykhtarhā*), you and your friend are like each other (*tishbahu ba'd*), if you were good your friend will be good, and if your friend is not good you may become like him, not good (*idhā kunti mnīḥa ṣāḥbek ykūn mnīḥ, wa idhā ṣāḥbek mish mnīḥ inti mumkin tṣīrī zayu mish mnīḥa*). [...] Not always making a lot of friends is something good (*mish da'yman tiṣaḥib ktīr ishī mnīḥ*). It’s nice knowing many people, not [having many] friends (*aṣḥāb*): this is nice because everywhere you go there is someone whom you can sit with and

talk to. But the friend is the person who becomes very close to you (*iṣ-ṣāhib huwa ish-shakhṣ illī bikūn ktīr qarīb ‘alayki*), he gets sad when you get sad, he laughs when you laugh. This is a friend, not anyone you know. [...] Friends are very personal (*shakhṣī*), they become very intimate with each other (*ktīr bikūnu dākhlīn ma‘a ba‘d*), but not my normal acquaintances (*il-ma‘arif il-‘ādiyya*), they know my name and where I work, that’s it. I can know the whole al-Bab, but they don’t know anything about me” (Sawsan, al-Bab 21/2/2014).

Sawsan made a clear distinction between acquaintances and friends, without depreciating the first ones. In her view acquaintances are important because “everywhere you go there is someone whom you can sit with and talk to”: we could say their value is linked to the emergence of a socialized Self, included in a system of possible exchanges and solidarity. On the contrary, however, friends are personal (*shakhṣī*) and have access to an “intimate” Self. While the debate concerning the “quantity” which defines friends as such – often stating their rarity – is a classical philosophical theme, it seems to me that Sawsan’s explanation started from different premises. She stated that “making a lot of friends is not always good”: disclosing the intimate Self – a fundamental part of “making friends” from her point of view – is what is not always appreciable, so you have to choose well with whom you want to do it. In this way Sawsan explained to me why Palestinian people avoided meeting each other through a common friend: between two friends “there are private things” (*fī ash-yā’ khaṣṣa*) which cannot be shared with another one, and friends’ encounters are consequently defined as something exclusive.

However, it is not simply a preliminary resemblance which seems to be at the base of friendship, but it is this selective approach which is supposed to produce the friends’ similarity. In fact, Sawsan said that “if you *were* good your friend *will be* good, and if your friend *is not* good you *may become* like him”: friendship appears to be a personal relationship through which friends exchange their moral qualities, and leave the possibility open for each one to become better or worse. In this sense morality is at the base of Sawsan’s idea of similarity (*shabah*), which appears to be both constructed through an endured intimacy and a precondition for such a personal exchange. In Sawsan’s experience such a similarity referred to the ethical construction produced by religious practice. The girl worked in a call center in Bethlehem and had met Christian people there. Before our interview she had often told me about her Christian friend, a girl

from the nearby mainly Christian town, with whom she used to go out once a month, meeting in a coffee shop in the city or exchanging dinner invitations in their respective houses. Sawsan was happy in underling that her friend had fasted one day during Ramadan, and they had breakfasted together at her place. She also wanted to go and prepare the Christmas tree in her house. This is how Sawsan conceived the possibility of such a relationship:

“Yes, I have Christian friends and I am a woman who wears the *niqāb*¹⁰⁵, but this is normal, because when I became their friend (*ajīt aṣḥabthum*) they had things... How could I say? They had things that are fundamental (*asāsiyya*) for me, and they are fundamental for them, too. Their way of talking is respectable (*tarīqat ḥakīthum muḥtarama*). They don’t do shameful (*ʿīb*) or forbidden (*ḥarām*) things. If there are some things which are fundamental in their religion, they are free to do them, it has no influence on me, but what has influence on me is their way of talking with people, and their way of thinking. If they go to pray in the church, and I go to pray in the mosque, it’s normal, both of us do the right thing (*ishī ṣaḥ*)” (Sawsan, al-Bab 21/2/2014).

In Sawsan’s view similarity consists thus of sharing something “fundamental” which is connected to moral principles. The two widespread categories generally used to indicate moral illegitimacy, *ʿīb* and *ḥarām*, refer to different moral discourses, although they are often overlapped and confused in everyday life: *ʿīb* (literally “defective, faulty”) is an action which is not compliant with social norms defined by “customs and tradition” (*ʿādāt wa taqālīd*), while *ḥarām* concerns precise religious interdictions prescribed by God and identified in the Kuran (for ex. the consumption of alcohol or sexual intercourse out of marriage). Like for many of my interlocutors, morality is mainly highlighted by religious practice, implying an ethical construction which gives birth to a good behavior towards others, not limited to friends as such. In Sawsan’s view her Christian friend’s religious devotion was precisely what defined their “similarity”, since they shared a morally acceptable way they talked and acted in their society. A person both verifies and benefits from his/her friend’s good behavior, which nurture affection and intimacy between them, since a friend “gets sad when you are sad and laughs when you laugh”.

¹⁰⁵ *Niqāb* is a kind of veil (usually black) which covers the woman’s body and face, leaving only her eyes uncovered. Although it is not so widespread in the West Bank, in al-Bab it was worn by most of the pious women who regularly attended Kuranic lessons in the mosque.

Like others maintained, even for Sawsan friendship implies an emotional sharing which encompasses both suffering and joy. Yet, if moral values can openly circulate in the social space and let friendship arise, emotions are exchanged in what is conceived as a very personal and intimate sphere.

3.1.3. Secrets and affects

Friendship seems to stand between a “public” and a “private” domain, whose articulation is not easy to grasp. Furthermore, in most of my interlocutors’ discourse friendship is not firstly defined as an affective relationship, stressing shared moral values and solidarity instead, which can refer to broader ideas of closeness. Although a clearly affective tone is often expressed in the ways a friend is called between people of the same sex (*ḥabībī* among men, *ḥabībī* among women, that is “my beloved”), I propose to focus on the regulation of affects and on the legitimate emotional configurations in Palestinian social life in order to distinguish which kind of intimate relation friendship can be. Since personal sentiments and affects are not overtly expressed in the Palestinian society, except for specific forms they can take in the public discourse – like in other societies regulated by the honor code (Abu-Lughod 1986) – I maintain that personal emotions and affects are perceived as a “secret” realm in itself, and cannot easily be shared with someone else.

“Secrets” are central in the definition of friendship, especially in women’s discourses: “A friend is your book” (*iṣ-ṣadīq kitābek*), Muna said while explaining that a friend keeps your secrets and does not reveal them. When I questioned Rida about secrets between friends, he actually circumscribed them to “the intimacy of friendship” (*mawaddat iṣ-ṣuḥba*), which he considered as a special kind of personal bond. In fact, in his words it would imply “friendship in addition” (*fī ṣuḥba zyāda*), that is “real friendship”: “There are things I can tell my friends, but I can’t tell my brother. This is real friendship (*ṣadāqa jaddiya*), not a false one (*mīsh muzzeyyef*)”. Like we saw in the case of Salman, who confided in his friend Faris about his extra-conjugal love relationship, secrets often concern the transgression of socially shared moral values. A respectable man with eight children, who revealed to me he was an habitual alcohol drinker, told me that he could drink only with his Christian friends in their houses in the nearby town. He said that he could trust them because they had known each other for a long time. Since visiting friends

was also a way to access to a “private” space far from people’s eyes, the man particularly appreciated this confidentiality, while he complained that “the society has no mercy” (*il-mujtam‘ birḥamnish*). After stressing mutual respect as a central feature of friendship, he related friendship to a kind of personal relationship in which social control and moral judgment can be suspended: “A friend is the one who walks with you both to the right and to the wrong” (*iṣ-ṣāḥib illī bimshi ma‘ak ‘ala iṣ-ṣaḥ w ‘ala il-khaṭā*). Sharing here is not a question of similarity based on moral grounds, but rather consists in complicity and loyalty for a friend however he is.

However, I do not think that secrecy in friendship must be confined to transgression as such, but it is one’s vulnerability which is kept hidden in a society where “you must be strong” (*qawiy*), like I was often told. Feelings and emotions are at the core of this perceived vulnerability, since they are the proof that people can be affected by others. On the contrary, honor provides for emotional control and containment, a virtue particularly related to masculinity as the symbolic embodiment of rationality, opposed to women’s supposedly prevailing emotional nature, which is connected to weakness and lack of authority. However, if in this dichotomic imagery the feminine is connected to the heart (*qalb*) as the source of emotions, while the masculine is represented by the mind (*‘aql*) as the center of rationality and composure, Islamic ethics reevaluates the heart as the seat of intentionality (*niyya*), which is the main principle to judge an action morally. Although a deeper concern should be focused on these theological questions, it is important to consider that my ethnographic evidences report the heart as the source of sincerity and honesty beyond exterior acts (“Friendship comes from the heart and not from the tongue”, Rida underlined). However, like Saba Mahmood has shown, the subject is not herself the “internal” cause of the act – like liberal Western thinking supposes – since exterior acts (*il-mu‘āmala il-ḥasana*, good treatments) are simultaneously thought to produce the subject in a process of ethical subjectivation (Mahmood 2005). When Sawsan explained to me her choice of wearing a *niqāb* after her young cousin’s tragic and sudden death, she told me “We came into the world to work on ourselves (*ajīnā ‘ad-diniyā nishtghil ‘alā ḥalnā*), in order to be ready for the Afterlife (*il-akhrā*)”. It may be not a coincidence that Islamic morals are called *akhlāq* (from the verb *khalaqa*, to create, to produce, to shape)¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰⁶ The singular form *khuluq* means “character”, which Gidd et al. (1986) translate as “innate disposition”, recalling that the act of creation eminently pertains to God.

Although Islamic ethics gives a particular value to the “heart”, apparently contradicting the centrality of rationality in the honor code, Islam provides for moderation in human affects. During our interview on friendship Zafira quoted one of the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet saying: “Love your beloved moderately, for perhaps he will become hateful to you someday. Hate the one you hate moderately, for perhaps he will become your beloved someday” (*aḥbib ḥabībaka hawnan mā, ‘asā an yakūna baḡhīdaka yawman mā, abḡhid baḡhīdaka hawnan mā, ‘asā an yakūna ḥabībaka yawman mā*). Rida maintained that “without morals there is no friendship” (*idhā mā fī akhlāq mā fī ṣadāqa*) and justified this statement by connecting knowledge (*‘ilm*) with self-control (*ḥilm*): if the knowledge of Islamic morals was related to piety, the capacity to contain emotions was valued positively in human relationships such as friendship. These few and very limited observations are relevant just to sketch the relationship between an interiority (*juwwa*) and an exteriority (*barra*), to which people refer while talking about friendship. The link between these two dimensions is given by human words and treatments, that is why the way of talking and the way of dealing with people is so important in friendship. When Rida said that friendship is “sincerity from the heart (*ṣidq min il-qalb*), not from outside, from the tongue”, he also underlined that words are not enough: he rather focused on the centrality of one’s intention, which is produced and cultivated “inside”. In this sense “saying the truth”, that is sincerity (*ṣidq*), does not refer to an “exterior” reality to which the subject would have to adhere, but recalls an “internal” truth produced by the subject himself/herself in his/her effort of ethical construction. These distinctions are useful to grasp the different ways the Self can be exposed to others, an issue which questions the borders of “public” and “private” situations and encounters.

While living with my large Palestinian family I experienced and was compelled to embody different kinds of emotional regulation according to changing social contexts. Firstly, sex separation defined a “public” situation even in a supposedly “private” place like the house: for example, visiting guests determined the simultaneous distinction of masculine and feminine spaces. The display of hospitality, although representing an inclusive practice building closeness between a kinship group and its guests, thus constitutes a “public” setting for people’s encounter. Mutual respect, represented by the head’s generosity and his guests’ appropriate behavior in his house, does not imply any particular emotional sharing, which is conversely lived in officially public events like weddings and funerals. In a girl’s wedding, for example, the women of the girl’s family are usually devoted to a collective but subdued weeping at the moment of the bride’s

departure, since virilocality provides for women to leave their paternal house. The wedding female guests attend this weeping but do not take part in it, since this legitimated expression of sadness is linked to the women's belonging to a specific agnatic group. Inversely, the new bride often expresses nostalgia for her paternal house, but this nostalgia can take form only in restraint and confidential exchanges with women married through exogamous marriages like hers, since women from her husband's agnatic group would not appreciate it. On the contrary, women visiting a deceased's family are expected to share its suffering through weeping and praying with the hosting women: the three-day mourning, made of hundreds of day and night visits to the deceased's family, is just thought to show participation in the family's grief. The limited time dedicated to mourning was also justified by avoiding lasting sadness: "It is not good to be sad for a long time", a man explained to me at his mother's funeral. These examples show how legitimate forms of collective emotional display, especially concerning sadness and suffering, are connected to specific normative contexts and take particular cultural forms. Inversely, the expression of suffering as an individual experience is not equally legitimated and is often avoided even among the same family's members, except for children who are considered to be "incomplete" people: we see here how norms related to closeness are not necessarily associated with emotional sharing. It happened to me to cry with a friend of mine at his place: he suddenly became very serious and was not at ease, and he had to warn me: "You never have to cry in the *ḥāra* (his family's neighborhood)". Even when I cried at my family's because of one of my relatives' death in Italy, my weeping was welcomed with a discomforted expression of indifference and everyone continued his/her activity. My best friend Muna, who was engaged in a tense struggle with her father because he wanted her to marry while she kept refusing her suitors, nervously told me she would never give him the chance to see her crying. If closeness concerning kinship ties often excludes a particular emotional sharing, we can understand how the family is not the privileged environment where a disclosure of the intimate Self is achieved. The idea of intimacy itself is thus put into question.

The intimacy of friendship, which Rida expressed through the concept of *mawadda*, is not something that can be taken for granted. *Mawadda* (from the verb *wadda*, to love, to show affection) usually characterizes a married couple's relationship and is conceived as a form of respect and affection in a legitimate union between a man and a woman. In this sense love (*ḥubb*) is told to grow after marriage through the progressive construction of the relationship itself, and it is not conceived as the cause of

such a union. It is cohabitation and sharing which are thought to produce affection and love, rather than the inverse. For this reason friendship is normatively described as a personal relationship between people of the same sex, while girls and boys are forbidden to become friends. This is how Sawsan explained it to me:

“A girl’s friendship with a boy remains inside limited borders (*bizall fī ḥudūd muḥaddada*), you can’t add anything to it (*tiqdarish tzīd ishī ‘annaha*), neither a little, *khalas*, there are borders. With your female friend you can talk about anything in the world, but with your male friend, at work or at the university, you can talk only about general things, if it’s your friend at work you talk about work, if at the university you talk about the university. Your personal things (*ashyā’ bitkhuṣṣik*)... For what concerns me, I don’t give a boy anything personal in order to let the borders remain. [...] [If a boy and a girl become friends] they get used to each other (*ta’awwadu ‘alā ba’d*), they sit together and talk together, and they start to think they love each other. Friendship does not remain” (Sawsan, al-Bab 21/2/2014).

Sawsan talked about the borders of intimacy in a personal relationship with a boy. These borders are kept by forbidding him to have access to her “private things”, that is the contrary of the confidentiality valued in her relationships with her female friends. If they get close, a boy and a girl can “get used to each other”, and love is thus expected to replace friendship. *Mawadda* is here a growing affection produced by a prolonged and intimate sharing, which is not legitimate in a relation between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman.

Telling about the Self – connected to the idea of “secrets” which I treated above – appears to be a key issue in such a regulation of gender relations. Also Rida clearly stated that friendship between a boy and a girl is *ḥarām*: “interest”, implied in a social exchange supposedly confined to “sex” or “money”, is thought to limit such a friendship in time. According to Rida, a man does not have to associate with a girl (*yjtima’ ma’hā*), and a boy and a girl do not have to isolate themselves (*yakhtilu ma’a ba’d*) because Islam says that the devil is between them. However, it is interesting to see how Rida imagines the possible revelation of such a relationship:

“We can say that a relationship of friendship (*‘alāqat iṣ-ṣadāqa*) is not a love relationship (*‘alāqat il-ḥubb*). But this also concerns one’s heart. If a

day I want to say something like that, it means it's not hidden (*mish mukhabbā*), but if it's hidden, I won't say. If I'm a girl's friend (*ṣadiq waḥda*), I'll say to people I trust because there's nothing between me and her. But if there is something between me and her I won't say to anyone, when I say to someone it's because there's nothing between us" (Rida, al-Bab 27/4/2014).

Firstly, Rida distinguished friendship from love, but he simultaneously considered them as affective relations because both concerned the "heart". Furthermore, the man confirmed the link between intimacy, secrecy and transgression of social norms, since he maintained that if such a friendship existed, he would only tell the people he trusted. However, the possibility to articulate it through words emerge only because it is not something hidden: a simple friendship with a woman, although constitutively ambiguous and thus liable to be suspected as illegitimate, can be told in circumstances which must be defined by confidentiality. On the contrary, if this relationship is actually illegitimate because "there is something between me and her", an absolute silence would protect this secret. Rida's balancing of words and silence concerning affects in an imagined relationship with a woman let us grasp three different levels of closeness: the first is determined by what can be said, which is related to a morally legitimate situation; the second is defined by what can be said only to someone we trust, like friends; the third is produced by what is "hidden" and cannot be said at all. What is sayable, and to whom, also questions a clear distinction between a "private" and a "public" sphere of social action, and rather recalls a continuous switch through which personal relationships can be adapted to "public" situations (like visiting) or be circumscribed to "private", sometimes secret, encounters. In this sense the personal and the intimate do not necessarily coincide (like in "friendship" among work colleagues), just like "closeness" implies a kind of intimacy which is built in time through prolonged sharing, but does not presuppose the emotional expression of the Self (like in kinship ties). More importantly, Rida's words let us realize the existence of a "hidden" part of the Self which is difficulty socialized – although it is produced by precise social norms and moral values – and can be very rarely disclosed.

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In the Palestinian society friendship is conceived as a form of closeness. Friendship can constitute a language of social inclusion, which is mainly represented by the social practices of hospitality and visiting. Such practices are regulated by the value of mutual respect, determining the condition for amity among people. If amity excludes conflict, it does not aim to contest political divisions: friendship is thus a personal relationship between specific individuals, who can be legitimately – although temporarily – included in potentially hostile groups.

An ethnographical analyses of the discursive dimension of friendship shows how its practical flexibility as a social language can be articulated in terms of different “degrees of friendship” (*darajāt iṣ-ṣuḥba*), if we consider friendship as a form of closeness which does not necessarily imply intimacy. Social norms and moral values construct friendship as an ethical relation which is mainly performed through solidarity and exchange. Since friendship is thought to be grounded on “good treatments” among people, it is just the circulation of moral values that produce the friends’ similarity. These aspects of friendship importantly inform the social actors’ moral subjectivation, which is not based on exterior acts, but on the human “heart” and intentionality. As a consequence, “true friends” are especially those who prove to endure in time.

At the same time the normative control of the expression and circulation of emotions and affects produce differentiated levels of closeness, and simultaneously define varied experiences of friendship. In this sense friendship appears to be situated at the interface of a “public” and a “private” sphere of social action, and inversely contributes to redefine such boundaries. If personal relationships between singular individuals do not necessarily imply intimacy, the affective intensity of such relations vary according to the potential disclosing of an intimate, “private” Self which is produced by what is not sharable with anyone. Intimacy is thus only one of the possible configurations of friendship in the Palestinian society, and apparently the rarest one, while it is the personalization of social relationships in specific contexts of sharing – whose legitimacy is evaluated by moral work – which founds friendship as an ordinary experience.

3.2. Friendship and personal relationships with Israelis

Before presenting some specific ethnographical cases concerning concrete personal relationships between Israelis and Palestinians, I will further define the background in which such encounters do occur. Until now I have identified two different contexts where this kind of interactions deploy: Palestinians' labor in Israel (see 2.3.1.) and Israeli activism in Palestinian villages (see 1.3.2.). In the first case I have shown how the social language of "friendship" (*ṣuḥba*) can be used to describe some of the Palestinians' work relations with Israelis. "Friendship" thus arises from the Palestinian workers' moral evaluation of their work conditions, where work relations are included in a broader range of "human relations" (*'alāqāt insāniyya*) mainly defined by solidarity and mutual respect. It is important to note that "friendship" can be a transversal category to describe such relations and even Israelis can define some Palestinians as "friends" (*khaverim* in Hebrew). During our interview on a completely different issue, an Israeli environmentalist living in Tzur Hadassah (an Israeli town inside 1967 borders, but next to the Green Line) spontaneously told me about his Palestinian "friends":

"Many Palestinians from Wadi Fukkin and Husan [Palestinian villages in the north of Bethlehem] are working in Tzur Hadassah – and they built the new wing in my house and keep coming and working in Tzur Hadassah, and there are good relations basically... There used to be, before 1994 I used to go to Husan and visit friends there. I speak Arabic, I worked in Sinai as a tour guide and learnt from the Bedouins, so I can communicate in Arabic – which helps – and they built my house, and we got along very well and became friends. I mean, I treat people... I don't give a damn if they are religious... They were honest, they were hard workers, they were nice, I enjoyed their company, they did a good job for me, and we became friends. And I used to visit them, not anymore, you don't go there anymore, it changed tremendously in the last twenty years since the creation of the Palestinian Authority and the big push given to the settlement activity in the West Bank. [...] Husan – as far as I know – is zone B, where the Israeli militaries still hold the shots from a military point of view, but the Palestinian Authority is taking care of civil matters. I'm not supposed to go to Husan although Israelis go there but, unlike settlers, I don't push myself to places where I don't feel safe. The fact that I have

friends doesn't give me immunity. It's a truth, unfortunately. If they come to Tzur Hadassah to work – and they do, sneaking to Tzur Hadassah – they come over, they are welcome, but I don't go to Husan anymore” (David, Jerusalem 20/6/2014).

From these words it is clear how the Palestinians' labor experience in the Israelis' houses actually produce ordinary encounters which can give birth to personal relationships conceived as “friendship” even from the Israeli side. Such relationships meet the Palestinian conception of “friendship” in two main points: a moral evaluation of the workers' honesty and the recurring exchange of visits both in Israeli and Palestinian houses. Furthermore, the man stressed the advantage of speaking Arabic – which he learnt from Bedouins while working as an Israeli tour guide in the occupied Sinai – to communicate with his Palestinian friends. Although he asserted his current hospitality, he maintained that the separation policies accomplished by the Oslo Agreements and the increasing Israeli settler colonization of the West Bank since the beginning of the 90s did change the situation: from the Israeli perspective this change mainly consisted in a restricted mobility inside the West Bank – since Israeli citizens are forbidden to have access to areas under PNA control, according to a military warrant issued in October 2000¹⁰⁷ – and in the perception of an increasingly unsafe environment. In this sense the Israeli man, who lived inside the 1967 Israeli borders, distinguished himself from settlers, who kept circulating among, and even inside, Palestinian villages. More precisely, Israeli citizens are free to circulate in Area C, under complete Israeli control, and settlers ordinarily go shopping and buy from Palestinians in some villages, because prices are cheaper there. Like we saw for the case of the Israelis' purchasing group of vegetables (1.3.2.), the Israelis' perceptions of insecurity linked to their movement inside Palestinian inhabited areas vary consistently, so that many Israeli people avoid entering Palestinian villages while others regularly do it. On the contrary, Palestinian workers attend Israeli spaces daily, both inside Israel and in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank: their perception of insecurity is mainly linked to the risk of imprisonment – if they do not have

¹⁰⁷ Although it is a military disposition by IDF, a red panel at every entrance of Areas A indicates that Israelis' entry is illegal by the Israeli law (photo). The IDF warns Israelis not to enter in Area B (under Israeli military control and PNA civilian concern) as well. However, Israeli citizenship is inadequate to be the main reference of the prohibition, since Israeli Palestinians (holding an Israeli passport) normally move inside the whole West Bank because of shopping, business or family and personal ties with Palestinians living in the West Bank. Ultimately, it is the Jewish identity which seems to cause a danger for the Israeli people from the Israelis' perspective. See the informal debate arisen among Israelis in the web <https://www.quora.com/Under-Israeli-law-specifically-how-are-Israelis-restricted-from-visiting-the-Palestinian-Authority-area-s>.

a work permit – and racist violence, like it has increasingly happened since July 2014 after the presumed kidnapping and killing of three young Israeli settlers in the West Bank and the assassination of Muhammad Abu Khdeir by Jewish extremists in Jerusalem. During this period, in fact, Palestinian workers became the main target of extreme right Israeli groups, who started to scour West Jerusalem in search for “Arabs”, and a man from al-Bab actually stopped going to work (without a permit) in Tzur Hadassah, since Israeli men with steel bars were seen buzzing around his workplace. Therefore, violence and insecurity paradoxically define the context of a possible “friendship” between Israelis and Palestinians.

Even al-Bab is a Palestinian village under complete Israeli control and its inhabitants define it as a “Jewish zone” from a political and administrative point of view, beyond the fact that about 500 Israeli settlers live next to them. However, settlers do not enter al-Bab like it happens in other villages, and they can bump into Palestinians only at the gated entrance of their settlement, at the crossing point where the Israeli by-pass road from Jerusalem intersects the road for Bethlehem. Settlers are also supposed to meet Palestinian laborers who work in their settlement. However, like I have already shown (1.3.2.), the Israeli people who attend the village are mainly exponents of a secular and leftist white Israeli middle class who reside in Jerusalem. More generally, it is the personal relationships with Palestinians which take Israelis into the village, so that no such relationships seem to occur with settlers.

I firstly realized to what extent Palestinians in al-Bab were well accustomed to Israeli citizens’ presence through my own experience: being a Westerner in a Palestinian village and embodying a quite different appearance from Palestinian women, I was often confused with an Israeli when I walked in the village alone. I felt annoyed when children had fun in screaming “Shalom!” to me, to whom I immediately felt the need to answer “Marhaba!” in order to let them understand my different positioning. However, if I got bothered to be conferred with what I perceived as a heavy and uncomfortable belonging in that context, they did not seem to be so worried by my supposedly “Israeli” identity. It is also true that the first Israelis I met during my fieldwork were introduced to me by some Palestinians, who really wanted me to get in touch with them. I had initially guessed this happened because of a supposed cultural similarity with the Israeli people, defined by my Western provenience. Yet, one of my Palestinian friends explained to me it was simply because we were all their guests. After I decided to draw my attention to such personal relationships, I tried to avoid getting in touch with Palestinians through Israelis:

trust was a necessary – even if not always gained – presuppose of my relationships in the field, since I wanted to work on people’s everyday life, and I felt that hanging around with Israeli people could radically undermine it for obvious reasons. However, when I was first introduced to Palestinian people by Israelis, I later committed to build an autonomous relation with them through recurring visits, and besides, I kept speaking their language and living in the West Bank.

Although most of the encounters I attended between Israelis and Palestinians looked quite jovial, I could perceive the potential tension they bore once I was mistaken for an Israeli. One day I joined a huge group of Israelis who were devoted to the olives harvest with Ahmad’s family in his lands. Ahmad invited me to go with him and take the olives to the olive-press in the evening. After the Israeli group left, we loaded the olives into his neighbor Salama’s van and he took us to the nearby village, where a modern olive-press furnished with Italian machines could ensure cheaper prices than the old stone press still operating in the little town of Beit Jala. While waiting for our turn, we went to smoke a cigarette outside and Ahmad and I continued chatting, while Salama – whom I was meeting for the first time – strangely remained serious and silent. At a certain point Ahmad told me that Salama had spent eight years in jail. It was in that moment that Salama spoke, nervously adding: “At your place [in Israel]” (*‘indkum*). I was surprised by his comment and I told him I was not Israeli, I was Italian. He had thought I was one of the Israelis who had helped Ahmad in the olives harvest. He started to apologize and then became more relaxed. We kept chatting the whole trip back to al-Bab, while Ahmad remained at the olive-press, and he told me his story and explained his political views.

Generally, Palestinians in al-Bab did not find it so strange to have Israelis in their village, and even in their houses in some cases: it was later explained to me that this was not strange because everyone knew work relations existed between the two sides. One of the Israeli people who came to visit my family, a leftist scholar teaching at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem but living in Tel Aviv, said to be “horrified” by the wall construction in the village, but was surprised that the Palestinian people he knew showed no “bitterness” towards them as Israelis, and did not seem to be “resentful”¹⁰⁸. However,

¹⁰⁸ One of my family’s men had been a Ph.D. student at the Hebrew University and had kept a good relationship with his supervisor’s daughter, who was the scholar’s wife. The old Israeli professor, who had died some years before, was told to have struggled a lot in order to let his Palestinian student obtain a permit to enter Jerusalem and study there. His daughter and her husband were both professors and came to visit my family sometimes. They used to be invited to the family’s wedding parties. I met both the woman and the man by myself in 2012 and had a long conversation with each of them. According to the woman, a feeling of guilt let her keep seeing his father’s ex student, since he had worked in her father’s laboratory for

such an Israeli presence was not neutral at all and resulted to be disturbing for some people more than for others, potentially producing neglect, rage or disdain, although no violent attacks ever occurred towards the Israeli people who used to attend the village. In Salama's case my supposed "Israeli" identity had clearly discomforted him, although he had not refused to take me with Ahmad in his car. The Israelis' presence had immediately recalled him his imprisonment in Israel, which was due to his participation in the Palestinian resistance movement as a member of an Islamist party, as he had later explained to me. Despite his release, and because of the "security concerns" he was supposed to have caused in the past, Salama was prevented to go out of the Bethlehem area and he still felt like he was living in a prison.

Palestinians can distinguish the Israeli population on the basis of different criteria with specific political implications, without considering it as an homogenous "enemy" entity. These distinctions are based on the main and most widespread differentiation between the Israeli government (*hukūma*) and the Israeli people (*sha'ab*): Zionism, as a political ideology on which Israeli politics is grounded, is thus separated from people as such. Furthermore, most of Israelis are often considered as "poor" people (*meskīnīyn*) to whom the truth was hidden, since they were told that Palestine was "a land without people". This sort of mythical unconsciousness through which Israelis are described, however, does not imply that any personal relationship with an Israeli citizen is legitimated through a kind of compassionate attitude. Among the Israeli population, settlers are generally excluded from personal relationships and so called "friendship" ties: no settlers enter Palestinian houses in al-Bab.

In their everyday life Palestinians identify Israelis as "Jews" (*yahūd*). This form of identification must be situated in the historical background which characterized Palestine as a geographical region encompassing cultural and religious differences for a long time: as a part of the Ottoman Empire (from 1516 to 1918), Palestine was a home for Jews, Muslims and Christians of different origins, as well as Turks, Arabs, Europeans, Greeks, Armenians, Druses and many other people who used to live together under the same rule. Before nationalisms arose at the turn of the XX century, these differences had never constituted a legitimate base for political separation, even though they were somehow

some time without being paid (apparently, because of some financial problems at the university). Her father had died before paying his debt to his Palestinian student. The Israeli couple's proposal to give some money to the family in order to buy computers for children was refused by the Palestinian man, who was now a professor, too. Although this personal relationship went on, the Israeli woman did not consider the Palestinian professor as a friend because he and his family were too religious and – she said – she did not have any friends among religious people in the Israeli society, either.

institutionalized. The *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire contributed to distinguish the different religious groups, according to non-Muslim communities a relative autonomy while integrating them into the administrative and political government of the Islamic empire¹⁰⁹. As a matter of fact, encounter and coexistence with various “others” was both an ordinary experience and a mode of government¹¹⁰. Focusing on the late Ottoman period, inaugurated by the 1908 Turkish revolution until the empire decay after the first World War (followed by the establishment of the English Mandate in Palestine in 1920), Michelle Campos has criticized the historical perspective which has attributed the fall of the empire to ethno-religious differences which would have “naturally” produced opposing nationalisms. In her study of the meaning of liberty, citizenship, and public life after the restoration of the Turkish constitution, the author has analyzed how the different social and religious groups were all practically committed in the building of a “civic Ottomanism”, which transformed the empire from an absolutist state to a kind of liberal parliamentary democracy where all citizens were declared to be equal under the Ottoman rule. Drawing her attention on daily life, Campos has shown the mutual dependence and local solidarities which already existed among the different groups, who often shared the same living space. The historian highlighted “relations between Muslims, Christians, and Jews were inexorably linked to political, economic, and social factors that stemmed from local, imperial, and global geopolitical concerns” (Campos 2011: 11). She has maintained that the empire imploded under different and finally irreconcilable imperial citizenship discourses, while competing ethno-nationalist separatist projects were rather promoted by colonial powers through “unmixing” people: “In Palestine, Great Britain’s support for a Jewish National Home (as opposed to Palestine as a state of all its citizens) guaranteed the clash of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism” (Campos 2011: 250). In this perspective the separation between Jews and Arabs has to be considered “as the *result* of

¹⁰⁹ In the Islamic Ottoman empire, the *millet* system provided for non-Muslim communities to be exempted from military conscription, but they were obliged to pay a special tax. This system derived from the Islamic institution of *dhimmi*, which represented the non-Muslim communities (“the People of the Book”, that is Christians and Jews) who had to be protected under the Islamic institutions. Religious leaders acted as political representatives of their communities vis-à-vis the Ottoman Sultan. In the *tanzimat* period, after 1860, when the Ottomans established Jerusalem as one of the main municipalities of the empire directly linked to Istanbul, Jewish, Muslim and Christian representatives sat together in the municipal council.

¹¹⁰ This point involves a current historiographic debate concerning the conflict between competing historical narratives linked to specific groups and the necessity to focus on the “mixed” character of Palestine under the Ottoman rule. Recent research has moved in this last direction. In this perspective see Campos 2011 and the project “Opening Jerusalem’s archives: for a connected history of ‘*citadinité*’ in the Holy City (1840-1940)”, launched in 2014 and directed by Vincent Lemire. Despite the great importance of these research efforts, this historical (re)writing is mostly focused on the urban life, neglecting other local realities.

the Zionist-Palestinian conflict – it was not the cause” (Campos 2011: 19). According to Edward Said, Palestinian nationalism arose in response to Zionism as both a nationalist and a colonialist movement claiming the creation of Israel as a modern, Jewish State in the Palestinian land. However, while the Palestinian national movement was set in the broader context of anti-colonial movements in the Middle East, Said pointed out its historical peculiarity: “Modern Palestinian social, economical, and cultural life was organized around the same issues of independence and anti colonialism prevalent in the region, only for the Palestinians there were the legacy of Ottoman rule, then Zionist colonialism, then British Mandatory authority (after World War I) to contend with more or less all together” (Said 1979: 12).

Therefore, a diachronic perspective helps us to realize how the social identification of “Jews” in Palestine has historically preceded the national identity attributed to “Jews” as “Israelis”. Furthermore, it contributes to distinguish the constitutive variety of the Jewish cultural and social world, and Zionism as a specific political project, born from a particular conjuncture of European history, which intersected anti-Semitism, colonial expansion and the nation-state as the primary model for statecraft.

Furthermore, social distinctions are complex and operative in the contemporary Palestinian society itself, and they do not imply social exclusion nor question Palestinian national identity as a whole, like the significant differentiation between Palestinian Muslims and Christians, especially in the Bethlehem area where I conducted my fieldwork¹¹¹. The perception of a religious distinction is usually considered to be a recent

¹¹¹ Social relationships between Palestinian Muslims and Christians should be analyzed more in detail. During my fieldwork I could verify that latent conflicts and growing tensions do exist, but they must be connected to broader historical and political conditions. From one side, the evident concentration of economical and political control in Christians’ hands, like the number of Christian health centers and education institutions in Bethlehem reveal, let Muslim Palestinians speak about Christians’ “racism” (*‘unşuriyya*) in specific cases, such as when Christian owners refuse to rent apartments to Muslim families or in the case of alleged favoritism in students’ access to the university. Despite the intensity of transversal personal ties and friendship relationships, mixed marriages are generally avoided by both religious groups. While today friendship arises from physical proximity and shared situations, like at school or at work, some little Christian towns in the Bethlehem area hosted Muslim Palestinians escaping from their villages during the Nakba, so that they are nowadays composed by a mixed population. Some of my Christian acquaintances used to complain about the increase of Muslim people in originally Christian inhabited places, but they did not talk about the historical premises which compelled many (Muslim) people to displace. The recent emergence of Palestinian Islamist parties and the general Islamization of the Palestinian society in last decades, has produced further tensions probably linked to worries concerning Christians’ political marginalization. In fact, as far as I know, in the history of the Palestinian resistance movement most of Christian Palestinians have been actively engaged in secularist leftist parties, like the PFPL. In my frequent encounters and informal conversations with Palestinian Christians I also found that they often appropriated the global islamophobic discourse, depicting the nature of Islam as inherently violent and describing Muslims as culturally backward, especially when referring to gender relations. I

phenomenon, since many Palestinians say “once you did not know what religion your neighbors belonged to, except on the feast days”. On the basis of the Palestinians’ social categorizations I was firstly defined as a Westerner (*ajnabīa*) and then as a Christian (*masīhiyya*), while my specific national identity was not always so relevant. Conscious of the stigmatizing weight which “Jews” as a social category bears in the history of European anti-Semitism, and willing to avoid describing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a religious matter, many Palestinians used to specify to me that their use of the term *yahūd* (Jews) did not imply a religious discrimination, but turned to speak about “Israelis” (*isrā’ylīyn*). This intellectual shift, however, did not correspond to the widespread use of *yahūd* to identify Israeli people in the everyday Palestinian language. On the other side, some Israelis did not hide their disappointment when they were welcomed into Palestinian houses and heard children calling them *yahūd*. However, they were positively impressed when a Palestinian woman reproached her sons saying: “These are not *yahūd*, these are our guests”. It is just hospitality as one of the main Palestinian social institutions – and the visit as a fundamental social practice – which let Israelis and foreigners have access to Palestinian domestic spaces and experience that social proximity which is based on the shared value of mutual respect. If we consider “friendship” as a language of social inclusion in the Palestinian society, we would not be so surprised to find Jewish “friends” in Palestinian homes.

3.2.1. Rida and Dina: morality beyond work

The first time I met Dina in the *ḥāra*, she was bringing Rida home in her car after his working day in Jerusalem. When the car stopped in the middle of the family’s neighborhood, in front of Rida’s house, children ran to call me in festive spirits: I had to meet her absolutely. Dina was a nice woman in her forties, she looked warm and smiling. She invited me to go and visit her with Rida. Other men of the family approached the car to say hi to her. Rida was tired and went home, and Dina left after a while.

Dina lived in one of the southwestern Jerusalem residential neighborhoods, which mirrored al-Bab situated on the other side of the valley where the Green Line runs. She lived in a two-storey house with a nice garden full of flowers and trees, immersed in a

could also experience that masculine authority and control on women which was not so differently deployed by Christian Palestinians.

quiet environment made of similar residential buildings which developed along a tree-lined avenue. Basri, Rida's son, who was 10 years old and sometimes went with his father to Jerusalem, told me he really liked Dina's house: in his view all Israeli houses were more beautiful than his place because they were surrounded by green grass, while the *ḥāra* was an aggregation of dwellings cut in half by a closed paved road and clung on the top of a hill whose slopes were made of rocks and shrubbery. Dina lived with her husband and their three children, two girls and a boy. She later explained to me that they could buy their house when it was still cheap: since the 50s that neighborhood had been considered to be disreputable and was mainly populated by so called Oriental Jews (*Mizrahim*). Their neighbors were actually Jews from Iraq. According to her, the arrival of about one million Russian Jews in the 90s – for an Israeli population of about seven million people – had considerably increased the price of the houses.

Dina worked as a professor of history in a high school in Jerusalem, while Nathan, her husband, was a scientist and worked in an Israeli company. We never talked about the story of their respective families, but they were evidently part of an Israeli white middle class of Ashkenazi origin (*Ashkenazim* are called the Jews coming from Europe, mainly from Eastern Europe). They were not practicing Jews. They had been living for some years in London, where Nathan was a Ph.D. student, and they had come back to Israel just at the beginning of the second Intifada. Dina told me about the shock she had got because of such a change in their life, since their children were still very young and buses exploded daily in Jerusalem. When I went to visit her in summer 2013, their son was finishing his military service and in the last months he had been moved to patrol the border with Gaza. Dina was quite discomfited by her son's return because she did not agree with his opinions. She complained that "children are yours until they get 18 years old, then they become the children of the government". She was worried about her son's situation because, after three years in the army, he had to begin his life again and find a job: "From the army: discipline, discipline, discipline... and then, nothing!". Her older daughter, who was 17 years old and had just finished school, wanted to postpone the military service and was planning to spend one year volunteering at a center for Reform Judaism in Jaffa, where her brother had been a volunteer, too. Dina was happy about that because her daughter would live in a place where also Arabs live.

Dina and Nathan had known Rida and his brothers for a long time. They had met each other when Rida started to work in their house painting or gardening. It was Rida who had introduced his brothers to the Israeli couple and let them work at their place. In

fact, Palestinian men used to redistribute job opportunities inside the family and enjoyed a sort of internal division of labor: if one was good in building, another was better in painting, and another one in gardening. For this reason almost all of Rida's brothers and, more recently, their sons who had been initiated to labor in Israel, knew Dina and Nathan and regularly went to their place.

Rida worked in a bakery in Mea She'arim, an ultra-orthodox Jewish (*haredi*) neighborhood established at the end of the XIX century just outside the Jerusalem Old City. Since he had a work permit valid for the whole day (the so called "00" permit), every day at 3 a.m. Rida left his house in order to reach the Bethlehem checkpoint (the so called "300"), where he waited in line with other Palestinian workers until the Israeli soldiers let them have access to the Israeli side. He started to work in the bakery at 6 a.m. and finished around 2 p.m. His work was tiring because of the very high temperature, but he got even more tired because he stood upright the whole time, and he preferred not to have a break so that he could leave work earlier. After work, in fact, Rida reached the Old City and went to pray at al-Aqsa mosque. After taking a rest there, he moved to southwestern Jerusalem, where he worked in some Israelis' private houses gardening or doing maintenance, including Dina and Nathan's house. Lasting relationships with Israelis living in this area had been built by him and his brothers throughout time because of work, and some of their contacts dated back to their father's acquaintances, since he had also worked in Jerusalem after the 1967 Israeli occupation. Furthermore, Rida and his brothers had grown up in that area and had a good familiarity with it (especially concerning a know-how of the paths in the hills) since they used to graze sheep around there when they were children (see 2.2.1.). While Rida's work as a baker was a regular one, and it was the one which let him obtain a work permit, this kind of informal employment in private houses was irregular from a legal point of view, since Rida had no contract and his work permit would not have allowed him to work elsewhere. However, Rida profited from the time of validity of his permit to stay in Jerusalem longer and gain something more. Furthermore, thanks to the physical proximity between southwestern Jerusalem neighborhoods and his village, he used to go back home by walking through the hills, although he would be obliged to enter the West Bank through the checkpoint. On the other side of the Green Line, every evening at sunset, his older son Hasan waited for him and took him home by mule. The fact that Dina sometimes took him home by her car was a big help for him, since he could avoid walking up and down the hills after working hard the whole day, and he did not risk to be stopped by the Israeli border patrol

while crossing the border irregularly. From southwestern Jerusalem to al-Bab Dina drove in the Israeli bypass road and entered the West Bank through the al-Bab checkpoint. However, Dina was supposedly forbidden by the Israeli law to cross that checkpoint with a Palestinian ID holder – no matter if he had a work permit – since that checkpoint was reserved to Israeli citizens only. For this reason, however, soldiers never used to stop Israeli cars and check the driver and the passengers' documents.

Among Israeli “friends” (*aṣḥāb*) this practice was widespread. Even Yael, a middle aged woman who lived in a neighborhood next to Dina's place and was also a teacher in a college, used to take Suher, Ahmad's wife (see 1.2.2.), to her house. She told me once she had also shown Suher her workplace and they had had a coffee together in the Jerusalem city center. Differently from Rida, Suher did not have a permit to enter Israel: Yael told me that Suher used to take off her veil while crossing the checkpoint, in order not to be suspected by the Israeli soldiers. While Dina overtly stated the illegality of this practice, Yael did not explicitly refer to the Israeli law, but maintained that “accepting anything of what Israel is, would mean shaking hands with such [separation] policies”. Yael and Suher considered each other as “sisters”: Yael said it was because she was the only child, and Suher thought the same because her sisters were far away from her, since one lived in Jordan and another one in Canada.

Also Jenna, Ghassan's wife, benefited from friends' support when her husband got seriously ill and was hospitalized in Jerusalem. Everyone was worried about him because he was almost dying in a Palestinian hospital, where his rare disease had not been acknowledged. Jenna, desperate and alone with her three children, had insisted to take him to a famous Israeli hospital (Ghassan already had a work permit to enter Israel). She succeeded, but due to the gravity of Ghassan's illness he had to be continuously checked and was submitted for long medical treatments. He had remained at the hospital for more than a month. Fortunately, he started to be better and was glad because almost every day Jenna and their sons went to visit him thanks to “friends” (*aṣḥāb*) who took them to the hospital by car. At the beginning Ghassan had not told me those “friends” were Israeli, and I had thought they were some of his Palestinian colleagues from Jerusalem. He later explained to me that Jenna, to whom the Israeli authorities had accorded a permit for visiting in Israel, had to go to the Bethlehem checkpoint, where some Israeli “friends” waited for her on the Israeli side and then took her to the hospital by their car. However, since this was a longer road, on their way back they drove on the bypass road connecting southwestern Jerusalem to the village, passing through al-Bab checkpoint. The Israeli

friends had organized themselves in turns in order to be able to take Jenna and her children to visit Ghassan every day. Even I often benefited from the Israelis' ride, both with Palestinians and alone: they normally took me to my apartment, which was in Area A (under PNA control), since they said they did not mind to enter "Palestinian" zones.

Dina had also taken Rida and his brothers' children to visit the Jerusalem zoo some years before: "A friend of mine and I found out that it's completely legal to take children under 16 into Israel, they don't need any permit. We collected the certificates of birth, Rida's wife gave us in a good bag, so we went to the zoo. And Yazid [Rida's youngest son] didn't want to put the safety belt, he kept shouting, he couldn't sit for a minute! [she and her husband laughed]". Children still remembered that experience, which for them had been a funny day out of their ordinary lives: however, once I was helping a girl in writing a text in English for her homework, she chose to write about this trip but she completely deleted the Israelis' presence, describing the nice time she had passed with her cousins looking at strange animals.

Exchanges of food, second-hand technological devices (from Israelis) and also gifts normally occurred between Palestinian and Israeli "friends". Rida's wife was happy to show me the perfume Dina had offered her. Since Dina really liked the cheese Palestinian peasants made from their sheep's milk, Rida often took her some of it – which was made by his brother – as a gift. "Do you know the story of the cheese?" Dina asked me once. She told me the story: "Ariela, she was our neighbor and she was very very old, asked Rida to bring some cheese, and I also asked Rida to bring some to me. All of a sudden, in a Friday morning he called me: 'Dina, I'm stuck with the cheese! Can you come to the entrance of al-Bab?'. So I went there. They [the Israeli soldiers] had told him: 'You can pass – because, you know, he has a permit – but the cheese cannot pass'". Dina had later commented: "I feel ashamed because I have privileges". In another occasion Nathan, Dina's husband, was bringing Rida home and was stopped at the checkpoint. The soldiers told him that Rida could not pass and underlined "he perfectly knows that". Nathan had started to argue with soldiers, but Rida had not liked the increasing tension, got off of the car and went home on foot. Rida's son, 10 year-old Basri, had also experienced the crossing of the checkpoint with his father: in his fancied narratives he used to greet the Israeli soldiers and shake hands with them, and while showing his supposedly adult masculinity to me – as one who dealt with soldiers as equals – he asserted he was not afraid of them.

I often went to visit Dina and Nathan with Rida and some of his brothers. If for some reasons one of his sons were with him, sometimes Rida asked Dina to take care of him while he handled some tasks in her neighbors' houses. These meetings were always joyful and Dina and Nathan welcomed us in their house, let us sit under the patio in the garden, and offered us coffee and sweets. Rida and his brothers could currently speak Hebrew, but Dina tried to say some words in Arabic anyway, especially for addressing Rida's children. They usually spoke about how their respective family was and exchanged news about their life and work. My presence complicated such a communication because I could not speak Hebrew, so Israelis switched from Hebrew to English, while Palestinians passed from Hebrew to Arabic in order to involve me in the conversation. However, I was the only woman who was taken by Palestinian men to visit Israelis in their houses. Once I accompanied Rida's wife to take Basri to a medical examination in a hospital in the occupied East Jerusalem – where he regularly went because he suffered from a bad form of allergy in his eyes – we met with Rida at midday near Damascus Gate, the main entrance to the Old City Muslim quarter. Rida, Basri and I wanted to move to Dina's place, and I asked Rida's wife why she was not coming with us. She replied that she never moved to "Israeli" areas (*'ind il-yahūd*, that is West Jerusalem), and left us to go and pray in al-Aqsa mosque. After that, a bus from Damascus Gate would have taken her straight back to Bethlehem.

After one year I had met Dina for the first time in the *ḥāra*, when I was back to the field Rida told me they had suddenly discovered that she had got a cancer. Her situation was already very bad. She had been operated but there was no much hope, and she was assisted daily by a woman who took care of her while Nathan was at work. Rida started to go and visit her daily at the end of his working day, and he used to take her fresh vegetables grown by his brother in their family's land in al-Bab. He also kept me updated about her, since the situation had drastically worsened and I could not go and visit her anymore:

“During Yom Kippur I went to visit Dina and Nathan, but they were not celebrating, the situation was hard, you know, she was dying. In all Kiryat Benayel [Dina's neighborhood] there are no people better than Dina and Nathan. Just with a few Israelis there may be a strong relationship of friendship (*'alāqat iṣ-ṣadāqa qawīyya*), usually it's a work relationship (*'alāqat il-'amal*), that is, of interest (*il-maṣlaḥa*)” (Rida, al-Bab 27/4/2014).

Rida told me that he considered Dina like his sister, and also his brothers used to underline that “there are not many people like Nathan and Dina”.

During our conversation on friendship Rida told me that he could have two kinds of friendship with Israelis: one was for work, that was an interested friendship (*ṣuḥba*), and one was “*ṣuḥba ṣadāqa*”, like the one with Dina and Nathan: “Even if there’s no work, I go and visit them, not because of work”. When I asked him if he had made some friends at the bakery where he worked in Mea She’arim, he told me that he had only one among his Arab colleagues:

“I have only one friend (*ṣadīq*) among the Arabs, with whom I talk by phone, because this man was honest with me (*kān sādiq ma’ī*). He is from Jerusalem. Anything I needed from him, he was giving me. When my mother died, he came and visited me. The Jews [Jewish colleagues] didn’t come to me, they didn’t offer me their condolences, neither by phone. But there are Jews who called me to offer their condolences. They are friends (*aṣdiqā’*), some of them can’t come here and they talked to me by phone. Maybe they are afraid, not of me, but of the situation. Or they offered me their condolences when I was at their place. Friendship is fire, one must be strong (*iṣ-ṣadāqa nār, waḥad lāzim yakūn qawiy*)” (Rida, al-Bab 27/4/2014).

“Friendship is fire” because one has to take on the challenge of sharing his/her friend’s troubles and pains, and must be able to bear it. Indeed, Rida specifically defined his friends as those who showed up or called him when his mother died: some Israelis also sent him food as a present in order to join his family’s grief. In the previous paragraphs I have shown how practically sharing joy and pain constitute a fundamental base for defining closeness and friendship from the Palestinians’ point of view. This was also part of what Rida himself conceived as “good treatments” (*il-mu’āmalā il-ḥasana*) towards others, from which friendship can arise.

When I asked him if friendship with Israelis was not problematic from his point of view, he told me about his way to distinguish the Israeli people: “There are different kinds of Jews. You have to know the Jew you have in front of you, if he’s for peace or for war, for example. About Dina and Nathan I say they are for peace, they are sincere (*sādiqīn*). They don’t create problems, I can make them my friends (*baqdar aṣaḥibhim*). We say: ‘An educated enemy is better than an ignorant friend’ (*‘adū muta’allim afḍal min ṣadīq*

jāhil)”. The question of knowledge was central in Rida’s conception of friendship: he thought that knowledge (*‘ilm*) and self-control (*hilm*) were at the base of friendship morals. In the previous paragraph I have described how for Muslim practitioners this knowledge is linked to an ethical conduct obtained by embodying moral values through religious practice. In this sense “knowledge” is not the result of an externalized learning, but is directly linked to the construction of a moral Self. Rida just appreciated Dina because “she was learning” (*kānat tata ‘allim*):

“In only one situation it can happen that between us and the Jews there is peace, that is friendship 100%. I want to talk now about the relationship between people (*bayn sha ‘b w sha ‘b*). Once I talked with Dina about this, and she told me that if she had known they took the land, she would have stayed in Britain. This is why I tell you that not anyone is the same, there are people who know and people who don’t know they took our land. She said there was no possibility to go back, her home was here, but she didn’t agree with the situation. There are Jews who like this situation (*rāḍīyn ‘al-waḍ’*), for example they want the wall, they want the closure. But Dina didn’t want this situation, she was learning (*kānat tata ‘allim*). And all her friends (*aṣḥābhā*) were the same, they were learning about the situation (*kānu yata ‘allimu*). I know some of them. And *khalas*, their home got to be here (*ṣār baythum hūn*), they couldn’t go back. I think what is going to be here depends on the government (*il-hukūma*), not on single individuals (*afrād*). Friendship (*ṣuḥba*) between us and the Jews can happen only if they give us back our land, if they give us back our holy places, and preserve our honor and our women (*ṣānu ḥafadhu ‘arḍnā wa banātnā*)” (Rida, al-Bab 27/4/2014).

Talking about friendship with Israelis, Rida made it coincide with “peace”. In his view Dina and Nathan were “Jews for peace” because they were “learning” that they were living in the Palestinians’ land, so they could be “sincere” (*sādiqīn*). Sincerity as a central moral value in friendship is ultimately linked to the historical truth of the Palestinians’ dispossession by the Israeli State. This was also recalled by Dina when she said she was “ashamed” because of her privileges as an Israeli citizen. Feelings of shame and guilt were often stated by the Israeli “friends”. In Rida’s view, however, friendship as an accomplishment of peace between Israelis and Palestinians can only happen when the

recognition of the Palestinians' dispossession provides for a just reparation: obtaining their lands back is thus linked to restoring Palestinian men's honor (*'ard*), embodied by their women. "The land is honor" (*al-ard 'ard*), a popular saying recites. Ultimately, Rida thought this was a political affair which could only stem from the "government" (*il-hukūma*) and not from "singular individuals" (*afrād*): if some Israelis' sincerity can make them "friends", peace is far from being gained.

3.2.2. Walid and Talia: friendship in and out of politics

Like Rida and Dina, also Walid and Talia had met because of work. It was Walid's brother who had taken him to Talia's house the first time, following the usual division of labor among brothers. However, Talia had later told me that she had known Walid since he was a child, because he used to go to her mother's house with his father, who occasionally worked for her family. At that time Walid was very young, while Talia was some years older than him, and she realized that he was that Palestinian child only later, after they had met in their adulthood. Talia's family also lived in the same southwestern Jerusalem neighborhood where Dina lived ("my mother lives near Walid", she initially told me), and she remembered how Palestinians from al-Bab used to frequent the area:

"When Walid came with his father there was no Palestinian Authority, they could come. They used to come by donkey for work. And also the [Palestinian] women sold fruits and vegetables to my mother. I remember there was a woman, Fatma, she used to come by donkey. I was a child and she was an old woman. I was 5, 6, maybe 8 years old, and she called my mother: "Sultana!". My mother's name is Sultana. She came and sat [in the street] and everyone went and bought from her. She was from al-Bab. That's why we know the Arabs, we were good friends with the Arabs! Before Oslo they used to come to us, they used to work with us, and you know my mother... All the times Fatma came, my mother invited her to our house and she gave her tea and food, that's why I know her. Because she was tired, she came from the village at 6 in the morning. And she used to say to my mother: "*Allah ykhalik awlādek!*" (May God preserve your

children!), she used to bless my mother, she used to kiss her, they were like... good friends” (Talía, Jerusalem 24/4/2014).

Therefore, Talía and Walid had known for many years, and when I met Walid in al-Bab he often told me about his Israeli friend (*ṣāḥībī*, “my friend”). His brothers used to joke about the ambiguity of that denomination and they were amused in publicly declaring – sitting all together in the patio in summer evenings – that Talía was Walid’s friend (*ṣāḥībī Walid*): in their funny way they meant she was his girlfriend. The joke was justified by the fact that Walid was not married – although he was already in his forties – and Talía neither.

Talía used to attend the family’s neighborhood, since she used to accompany Walid and his brothers back from Jerusalem by car, and she also used to take bread for sheep and clothes for the children. She joked with Walid’s mother saying she wanted to marry him. Since she was raised in a family of orthodox Jews, she used to refuse the food Palestinians offered her as a sign of their hospitality, because that food was not *kosher*. Her family was of Moroccan origins and she could speak a little Arabic, which she had learnt from her mother. She was a really peculiar woman, absolutely unconventional even in her own society – as she herself later highlighted to me. She spoke a lot and forgot to dress appropriately when she visited Palestinians, so her manners were sometimes perceived as excessive and certainly not in line with the Palestinians’ conception of good behavior. For this reason, when she was not there, Walid’s family talked about her as the “crazy” one (*majnūna*), a comment that was not so pleasing to hear for Walid. However, Talía was funny and made her Palestinian hosts laugh, children liked to gather around her when she arrived. In a way I could see she was really affectionate to Walid’s family, especially to Walid himself – maybe because of their long familiarity – so hospitality was never denied to her.

Walid told me they had become friends when she had started to give him hospitality in her house while he was working in southwest Jerusalem neighborhoods. Since he worked without a permit, he preferred not to cross the border every day in order to go back home, although his house was just a few kilometers from the workplace (about 40 minutes on foot). Once he had to work in some of Talía’s friends’ house, he had to spend the night in a place where there was no bathroom, so Talía invited him to sleep in her house. According to her, Walid used to sleep in public parks in Jerusalem – it actually happened, as Walid told me – and even if he knew he could sleep at her place, sometimes

he preferred to sleep outside because he had to wake up at 6 a.m. and the park was closer to his workplace than her house. Sleeping in the workplace, sometimes in Israeli houses, happened to many Palestinian laborers who worked without a permit in Israel. Even Eyal (see 1.2.2.) told me that Palestinian workers from the West Bank had slept at their place while working there. Since they were the contractor's brothers and did not have a permit to enter Israel, Eyal and his wife had proposed them to stay there "instead of taking the bus to East Jerusalem every time and sleeping anywhere, maybe outside". In the Palestinians' definition of Israeli "friends", sleeping in their houses appeared to be a sign of trust, beyond being a central feature of Palestinian hospitality: according to a young man, no friendship could exist with Israelis because he would have never slept in their houses. Conversely, talking about a couple of French Israelis who used to employ him and his brothers, Walid described them as "friends" saying: "I could even sleep at their place". I think sleeping is linked to trust because one can abandon himself to an unconscious state only in an environment where he/she can feel safe.

Thanks to Talia's hospitality Walid started to spend some time with her: Talia told me that Walid often helped her in fixing things in her house and also accompanied her to the mechanic when her car broke down. At the beginning of my fieldwork they used to chat by phone almost every day. Since Walid had bought some sheep because he could not obtain a work permit for Israel – due to his unmarried status – Talia used to join him at the source where he went to water his animals and sometimes they organized a barbecue on the hills. It was at the water source that I met her the first time. This water source was part of al-Bab territory, but had remained outside the wall route. Although Palestinians could still reach it because the wall was not completed yet, the source was also a main attraction for Israelis coming from Jerusalem, because it was provided with a pool where both Palestinian and Israeli people liked swimming. Palestinian families came also from the nearby villages and used to spend a whole day there: while men and women barbecued under the trees, children enjoyed playing in the water. Simultaneously, orthodox Jews used to come for their ritual bath (*mikveh*) and in those occasions the source became almost inaccessible because of huge groups of naked men. Like Talia and Walid, also Walid's brothers told me that they used to meet their Israeli friends there on Saturday, their shared day off. During the time of my fieldwork (2011-2014) the source remained a mixed place, although it would have soon been transformed into an exclusive Israeli area, made so by its integration into the Israeli national park and by the

accomplishment of the wall construction, which would have definitively prevented Palestinians to go there.

This water source was not the only border place where Palestinians and Israelis gathered together. One day in Ramadan, after going to al-Aqsa mosque with Walid, we moved to the western Jerusalem neighborhood where Talia lived. She picked us up by her car because they had to join Yona, who was “Walid’s friend”, as Talia explained to me. Yona was waiting for us in an archeological site next to the Green Line and very close to Wasim’s village. Roman mosaic and ancient thermal baths could be visited on the site, which was closed and managed privately by an Israeli owner. On the site artisan workshops were organized for Israeli children who wanted to experience their ancestors’ craft, and sheep and goats were also there for entertainment. While entering, Talia turned to me and started to praise the Israelis for having renewed the place making it so beautiful, and continued applauding the Jews’ main role of modernization in the country: “Most of Jews came from Europe, it was them who brought everything here, the computer... everything!”.

Wasim told me that his uncle, his father’s brother, had worked in that place, breeding sheep and guarding the site. Initially, Wasim was supposed to be the one who had to take the job, but his father had decided him to leave it for his brother. He told me that the previous owner was a good person and a good friend of his family, while the actual one was “racist” (*unṣurī*) because he did not want to employ Arabs. Wasim would have really liked to work there: as a matter of fact, it was a wonderful place full of trees and antiquities. While the site belonged to the old al-Bab territory, Talia and Yona considered it to be inside Jerusalem, as it officially was after the Israeli unilateral annexation of half of the al-Bab land following the 1967 occupation.

Yona had also worked in the site as a guardian, but he had recently moved to Galilee. While working there, he had settled in a little house inside the site and bred his own sheep. He had met Wasim because they used to graze their animals in the same area. They had finally become friends, and Yona used to visit Walid in order to take his sheep and let them mate, since Walid had a male. Yona was a middle-aged man who had been living in the United States with his wife. After they had got divorced, he had moved to Israel and was now living in Galilee in an old Arab stone house without water and electricity, which his friend Ibrahim, a Palestinian Israeli citizen from Galilee, had given to him for free. Yona still raised goats and made cheese, which he used to sell to his Israeli acquaintances. Because he had “Arab” friends, he defined himself as an “outsider”

in the Israeli society: “like Wasim”, Yona said, since Wasim was an outsider in his own society because of his unmarried status.

When Walid, Talia and I joined Yona in that place, he was talking to some guys immersed in a water hole under the shadow of beautiful huge trees. Walid stepped away to make his afternoon pray, and then approached the pool and started to speak with an Israeli girl in a bikini. I could not join the group’s conversation because it was only in Hebrew. Apparently, the girl wanted to know about Ramadan because she had been impressed when Walid had told her he had been fasting the whole day. After some time Talia, Yona and Walid said goodbye to the guys in the pool and they let me visit the site. Since Walid had to be at home for the breakfast, we decided to leave one hour before the sunset. Talia invited us to have dinner all together at her place, but we refused because Walid was tired. Yona offered to take us home, so we went back to al-Bab by car. In the car Walid turned to me and in Arabic said that the girl in the bikini was the sister of the previous owner, the one who had employed his uncle and was supposed to be a good friend of his family. She had told him that her brother now lived in Babylon, the Israeli settlement next to al-Bab. I asked Walid if she had talked about it normally, as if it was nothing. Walid answered me that “they [the Israelis] are like that, everything is normal for them, they think they are in their father’s home”. Then he told me that we would have talked more about it later, and he silently nodded at Yona who was driving.

Even if Walid hanged around with his Israeli “friends” and they enjoyed a certain complicity, he set his limits in sharing with them. Despite their lasting relationship, Walid did not completely trust Talia. He told me that he did not want her to know some specific personal things about him, because she used to talk a lot and he was afraid that she could then tell his family. Even if he could sleep at her place and benefit from her rides, he knew a certain distance remained between them. Conversely, even Talia told me about past arguments between them: she got irritated when Walid did not answer her calls for some days, and she also got angry once because Walid took me into Israel by mule but refused to let her join us. Moreover, she could not understand why Walid happened to be so nervous at work sometimes: once he was working in her garden, he had suddenly gone away without accomplishing his task, leaving her garden turned upside down. She admitted that on that occasion she had pressured him, insisting on telling him how he had to carry out the job, but she did not expect his reaction. Since I knew Walid quite well and I also knew his pride, I was sure that he did not want to be subjected to orders, especially as an Israeli’s employee.

Moreover, Talia and Walid often discussed about politics because of their divergent points of view. Talia was not a secular leftist like most of the Israeli people I met in al-Bab, and openly declared to have voted for Netanyahu at the last elections. However, she thought that Arabs and Israelis could live together: maybe after 500 years they will form one nation, but only when Arabs will be “educated”, and so become “modern” and “democratic”:

“There should be the same rights, but they should not be in a position of leadership, like the Prime Minister... [Arabs should have] *almost* the same rights, they can be in the Knesset, like now, but I don’t want them... Maybe after 500 years, after we become one nation, because now we are still enemies, can we take Arabs in the army? No, we can’t. [We are still enemies] because everyone lives by themselves and fight each other and has terror and want to kill. If I meet someone who is from Hamas, I would never be a friend of him, because he wants to kill me, he is terror. But if I meet Walid, Walid doesn’t care about politics. There is a difference between macro and micro. If I meet someone who is nice, we don’t talk about politics. We are friends!” (Talia, Jerusalem 24/4/2014).

It was funny to me that Talia stated the impossibility to have a friend from Hamas: actually, Walid had been actively engaged in the Islamist party during the first Intifada and was still a supporter of it. Evidently, this was one of the things that he could not tell her. Furthermore, although Talia excluded the political confrontation from their relationship, I had often attended their disputes and I contradicted her on this point. She admitted:

“Yes, we can talk [about politics], but if there is a war I would be on the side of my people, not on Walid’s side. We had an argument, he wants a Palestinian state and he wants half of Jerusalem, I told him ‘I will never give you Jerusalem!’. I don’t agree with him, but still we are friends. So why? Because, even if he thinks like that, it is not disturbing for me to be his friend. We still have other things that are nice. But if there is a war, I told him that no, I want the Jewish control, Jerusalem for the Jews. I don’t trust the Arabs because they are primitives! Look at Egypt, Syria... If we had an Arab Prime Minister, he would like to kick the Jews out, because they think we took their territory, we took their lands. They don’t like us to

be here. But after 500 years we'll become one nation, without differences, because we are all human beings" (Talia, Jerusalem 24/4/2014).

Talia continuously shifted between her conviction of the inevitability of the Israeli violence for self-defense ("the control must be Israeli", "Israeli soldiers make order") and her conception of one Israeli-Arab nation in which no "discriminations" would have to occur. She stated that al-Aqsa mosque was a holy place which had to be for Muslims only – although under Israeli control – and she did not care about hosting Palestinians without a permit in her house: "They live here! Why aren't they allowed to come here? It's very stupid!". She told me about her neighbor, a Jewish woman married with an Israeli Arab who had three children, and told me the other children living in the same building did not want to play with them: Jewish children did not want them because they considered them to be Arabs, and Arab children did not want them because they were supposed to be Jewish. In Talia's view the woman was wrong in marrying an Arab, because she should have thought about what life her children would have lived. Talia felt pity for them: "Like the Palestinian people from al-Khadra [another Palestinian village next to the Green Line], they don't have work, they don't have food, I feel pity for them. I help them, I give them, no matter if they are Jews or Arabs. But usually the Arabs are poorer than the Jews".

The people from al-Khadra were also some of Talia's Palestinian "friends". I met them once when I went with her to the "yellow gate" (*il-bāb il-asfar*), like she called in Arabic the place where they used to meet, one of the many Israeli barriers put up to prevent Palestinians from having access to certain border areas. The Palestinians were walking back to their village with their sheep, and Talia gave them bread: they talked from the opposite sides of the yellow gate, which kept being in the middle of them during their whole conversation. Talia used to collect the bread that a bakery threw into the rubbish near her workplace, and took it to cats and the Palestinians' sheep. She also collected second-hand clothes and gave them to her Palestinian friends from the West Bank. However, this form of compassionate giving did not undermine her conception of friendship: "If I give them clothes it's not only because they are poor people, it's because we are friends also. I don't look at them like if they are a lower level than me, like I'm a princess... No! I sit with them, I drink coffee with them, they come to my house, they are my friends! They wanted to come and visit me when I was hospitalized, but I didn't want, how can they come? They don't have the permit. I don't look at them as if I'm better than

them, no!”). She also pointed out that solidarity was mutual: when she moved to a new house, one of her Palestinian friends from al-Khadra went to help and fix things in her apartment: “No money, because he is my friend: I help him, he helps me”. When she had to change the boiler, she proposed her landlord to call Walid: “Walid came and put the boiler, and he got 300 NIS from my landlord. And why did I take Walid? Because I wanted Walid to get money, not someone Israeli”.

The sense of pity Talia felt towards the “Arabs” was especially linked to their work conditions. She maintained that they were obliged to do “the dirty work”, she complained that they were treated as “slaves” and talked about their “prostitution”. She compared their condition to that of the Ethiopian workers she used to meet at work. Talia was a computer programmer and system analyzer, and worked for the Israeli Ministry of Finance. She once took me to her workplace, a multi-floor hyper-guarded building where I was obliged to leave my passport at the entrance. She said that the Ethiopian cleaners earned a pittance because their employer profited from them and took all the money. Simultaneously, she admitted that all the Israelis she knew wanted “Arabs” because they were a cheaper workforce. When I asked her how Israeli people used to get in touch with Palestinian workers from the West Bank, she said that it happened by word of mouth: “You ask to other people: ‘Do you know Arabs who can...?’. ‘Do you know someone from the territories (*me shtakhim*), someone who is not citizen?’ But also Arabs who are citizens, we want them to work... *Shtakhim* are only the Arabs from the territories”. Talia continuously shifted her discourse from the disapproval to the validation of a racialized differentiation between “Jews” as Israeli citizens and “Arabs” as a cheap workforce, divided between Arab Israeli citizens and non-citizens from the territories (*shtakhim* in Hebrew). If her disapproval was articulated in terms of “pity” – simultaneously maintaining that she did not feel to be “better than them” – her validation of such a categorization of Israelis and Palestinians as two distinguished populations was justified by Arabs’ supposed primitiveness and anti-democratic nature, which could not allow them their full political rights in an imagined unified nation. The modernization discourse supporting every colonial endeavor grounded on the domination of the native people was openly deployed in Talia’s words. However, her own everyday life compelled her to include “non-citizens” as legitimate social partners: further, “non-citizens” had a crucial role in Talia’s life story.

Compared to the society in which she lived, Talia felt to be *mishuga* (“crazy” in Hebrew). She underlined that she was not in compliance with social norms because she

was almost 50 years old, but did not want to marry and did not have children. She was just interested in “adventures”, like she said. In her opinion it was her non-conformism which let her be “open-minded” and “without prejudices”. Her relationships with the Israeli people were difficult because she kept having arguments with anyone: with her leftist colleague she argued about the idea of an undivided Jerusalem under exclusive Israeli control, and with rightist people she had disputes because she hanged around with Arabs and went to Palestinian villages:

“They tell me: ‘Why do you give to Arabs? They want to kill you!’, and I say it’s not true, not all the Arabs are terrorists, not all the Arabs want to kill you, not all of them are bad, it’s not true. One told me I am crazy to go to al-Bab: ‘Once you go to al-Bab they will stab you, you can’t trust Arabs’, they say. I was never afraid, I trust Arabs, I go to al-Bab. Everyone says I’m crazy because I go to al-Bab, *inside*. They say ‘ Hamas will kill you!’. My mother doesn’t know I go there” (Talia, Jerusalem 24/4/2014).

Talia was not afraid to go to al-Bab, which was linked to Jerusalem by a bypass road through which she took to drive her friends home. However, she had never gone to visit her Palestinian friends from al-Khadra: “Until now they call me and say: ‘Come!’. I didn’t go to al-Khadra because I don’t know how to go there by my car, maybe there is a way but I’m scared. They [her Palestinian friends] told me there is a way for Arabs and a way for Jews, so it’s not the same way. I told them that I wanted to come with them, but they said ‘You can’t, you go in the road for Jews and we go in the road for Arabs’. But I can’t go by myself and they can’t come with me”. Rather than reassuring Talia, the structural separation from her Palestinian friends contributed to confuse her and let her feel “scared” to move alone.

Talia told me she started to have her independence from her orthodox Jewish family when she moved to live by herself. She began to meet different people and had shared her house for two years with her Romanian boyfriend, who was living in Israel illegally. She thought that non Jewish people had “affected” her, so she had stopped being religious: “I saw another kind of life, of people who are not religious, of people who are not Jewish! People who did not have the same kind of life, so I started to think: ‘Why not?’. They ate meat and milk together, when I saw them I thought: ‘Why not?’. I still don’t eat it because I can’t, but I thought: ‘Why not? It’s stupid!’. But still I cannot, in a way I keep the tradition because it’s inside me”. After two years her Romanian boyfriend was found

without documents and was expelled from Israel with the prohibition of going back in the following ten years. Talia merely commented: “Better for me, I had got tired of him”. However, it was after frequenting foreign workers that she started to meet “Arabs” and have “adventures” with Palestinians from both Jerusalem and the West Bank. While learning the belly dance she had met a Palestinian musician from East Jerusalem, who took her to the weddings where he used to play. He also worked for her in the house sometimes. She said she had also dated an Arab doctor and pointed out that now she could go out with “educated people”, too.

Talia’s family had popular origin. She was born in Israel, but her mother was pregnant when she and her husband moved from Morocco to Israel in 1964. They already had three children. Talia told me both of her parents’ families had been Moroccan for six generations, since their forefathers had been expelled from Spain in 1492: “At the origin we are *sefaradim*”, she said, defining themselves as Jews from Spain (*sefaradim* and *mizrahi* are used as synonymous in the actual Israeli society, both indicating Jews coming from the “East”). Talia maintained to be Israeli, but she still felt *mizrahi* because she knew “the mentality and the behaviors”. Her parents’ brothers and sisters had all moved from Morocco to Israel in 1950: “All the Jews did like that, they heard there was a Zionist Israel, all the time they had dreamt about Zion, they had never forgotten Zion”. However, Talia’s family was very poor and life in Israel was not easier for them:

“My mother had eight children, when my father died the oldest of them was 18 years old. My father died when he was 40 years old, he worked as a cleaner in a school. So my mother just got money from his retirement fund, and from the government. And my brother who was 18 didn’t go to the army, he started to work. So we didn’t have so much money, we were poor people, maybe that’s why I feel sorry for poor people. And we lived five children in one room, we were not rich, we ate simple food. [...] My mother is primitive in a way, she can’t write. She never went to school, she is from Morocco! She is not educated at all, and my father was not educated, neither. [...] They were also poor in Morocco, because my grandfather had also died quite young, my father was a baby when his father died and he never knew him. And his mother was very poor, she used to go and wash clothes in order to get food. She didn’t have food, she had one egg for three children. And my father was a clobber, like his

father. [...] They used to repair shoes in the house. And my mother used to make clothes, they worked very very hard to have food. They lived near Fez. So they heard about Israel, and my father's brothers had already come, so my mother said: 'Let's go to Israel, Israel is the Jews' land. It's better there!'. They came to Israel, it was very hard in the beginning, my mother did not work, she stayed at home, and my father worked as a cleaner in a school... it was a hard life" (Talia, Jerusalem 24/4/2014).

Talia's family had always lived in the same originally *mizrahi* neighborhood, which was not a "good neighborhood" according to her. She felt different from her family, although she was still very linked to them affectively. All of her four sisters had got married in their twenties and had children - "like my mother", she said - and "never had any relationships with Arabs, never talked to Arabs, never wanted to see Arabs, for them Arabs are like garbage, an enemy". For this reason Talia thought that she was born "*mashuga*" (crazy). Even her mother, who used to invite the Palestinian woman who came from al-Bab to sell vegetables for tea, would not have liked Talia to meet "Arabs". It was only at the end of our interview, however, while talking about her family's story, that Talia connected her family's past poverty to her feeling of "pity" and her need to help people. If the Israeli citizenship had constituted a sort of social redemption for her family from their subordinate condition in the Moroccan society, where their ancestors had arrived as Jewish refugees expelled from Spain, their renewed social and economical subordination in the promised "Zion" was concealed by their status of colonizing citizens repulsing the native Arab people. Talia embodied this social distinction, but was also marginalized in her society because of her popular *mizrahi* origin and her strangeness, so that she did not mind to share the margins with non-citizen workers, such as her Palestinian friends.

In the time of my fieldwork Talia and Walid's friendship broke. During the Israeli attack on Gaza in November 2012, while Hamas threw rockets into Israel, the security alarm rang in Jerusalem one day¹¹². Talia sent a short message to Walid saying she

¹¹² The Israeli military operation was called "Pillar of Defense" and started with the killing of Hamas military commander Ahmad al-Jabari on 14 November 2012. The operation was officially launched by Israel because of rockets from the Gaza Strip and some incidents which involved Israeli soldiers on the border. Israeli commentators underlined a new military operation was functional to the coming elections (see "Israel killed its subcontractor in Gaza", *Haaretz*, 14 November 2012). In eight days 167 Palestinians, more than a half civilians, were killed according to the Israeli NGO B'Tselem, while four Israeli citizens and two soldiers died on the Israeli side. According to the Israeli Security Agency, only two rockets were launched towards Jerusalem with no casualties.

wished that the Israeli army had killed all the Arabs. Walid never answered to her message and interrupted any contact with her. She later told me about that day:

“In the morning the alarm started to ring in Jerusalem, so we escaped in the shelter of our building. I wrote to Walid that the Israeli army would have killed all the Arabs. Then my car was full of clothes and I wanted to get rid of them, so I went to give them to [Palestinian] people from al-Khadra. While driving I thought: ‘What am I doing? I’ve just written to Walid that all the Arabs should be killed, and now I’m going to them...’”.

Talia did not explicitly speak out about her own fear, but referred to “terror” as the Palestinians’ weapon. Her personal affects got intermingled with the emotions produced through the political discourse grounded on the conflict between Israeli citizens and “Arab” enemies. Since we met for an interview after the break of her relationship with Walid, while talking about their parents’ long-lasting knowledge I informed Talia that Walid’s mother had died some months before. She was immediately upset by the news: “You know, I used to go to Walid’s mother and tell her that I wanted to marry her son. She was a woman and I was a woman, so I could tell her for fun. And she used to answer me: “*Khudi, khudi khudi!*” (“Take him!” in Arabic). And I kissed her. She was so nice. Wow, I didn’t know, maybe I’ll call him and I’ll tell him I’m sorry. I think it must be hard for him because he lived with his mother, he was connected to her. Maybe I’ll call him, you see, for this reason I want to call him, even if I don’t have a relationship with him anymore”.

Talia and Walid’s friendship was born from the margins of the Israeli State. It was made of affection and solidarity built throughout time between a Palestinian illegal worker in Israel and a lonely Israeli woman who came from a popular environment of *mizrahi* orthodox Jews. Unlike Dina, a white middle-class woman, Talia did not talk about her “privileges” as an Israeli citizen, but she felt “pity” towards people who reminded her about her family’s miserable story. Simultaneously, she mixed friendship and work relations with her Palestinian employees without clearly perceiving the asymmetry between them: work was an occasion to build social proximity, where desires and affects mixed with each one’s interest. Talia already experienced Israel as “one nation”, but was comforted by the power superiority of her government against the “terror” that “Arabs” were supposed to cause to her. Talia did expect that her army would have defended her from the “Arab” enemies. From the “macro” point of view – like she

herself defined it – “Arabs” appeared to be “primitive killers”, like her Israeli acquaintances tried to remind her when they opposed her personal commitment with Palestinians. Yet, in Talia’s life her personal ties with “Arabs” did not stem from an ideological frame: friendship was not made with the aim of contesting the borders separating Israelis from Palestinians, like it was for the white, leftist Israeli middle class. In Talia’s case friendship was rather produced by her familiarity with the humble social conditions of the working-class, simultaneously reproducing social distinctions through ethnic categories, or in terms of “citizen” and “non-citizen” people. While considering “Arabs” not ready to enjoy full citizenship, Talia justified her desire for “one nation” referring to a common humanity: “Arabs” were thus relegated to a subhuman state, which had to develop on an evolutionary scale to let them be politically included. Through her friendship with Palestinians Talia both rejected and appropriated the racist discourse on which the Israeli colonization has been based: the enemy is Arab because the Arabs are “killers” and “terrorists”, although – Talia admitted – not all the Arabs are bad. If, from the “micro” level of her friendship with Palestinians, politics did not seem to really matter, the confrontation between the public discourse she embraced and the personal ties she cultivated in her everyday life led her to a duality which made her confused: “What am I doing?”, she asked herself after wishing the death to her “Arab” friend Walid.

It was the possibility of warfare which let her conceive the impossibility of being on her Palestinian friends’ side, a point on which also Walid agreed with her: everyday friends would thus divide in two opposing enemy fronts in war. In this sense Talia and Walid’s friendship was still out of war and did not appear to be political: it could be just fun. However, political disputes had always pervaded their personal relationship. Walid did argue with her about the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and did claim his rights as a Palestinian: he did want a Palestinian state and Jerusalem also for Palestinians, not only for Jews. He did listen to Talia’s motivations and did contradict her with his own ones. Yet, it was just when Talia affirmed her wish for the Palestinians’ death that Walid disappeared from her life. Apparently, there was no war between them, yet. Despite her supposed separation of friendship from politics, Talia brought war into her personal bond with Walid: scared by the alarm because of rockets supposed to be landing on Jerusalem, the Arab enemy had become her Arab friend. She used her personal relationship to make her personal war: she attacked Walid to defend herself from her fear. Walid answered with his silence: in a way, he had already died. He did not enter the battlefield, he simply

vanished. Even if Talia had not realized it, their friendship had always been a political matter.

3.2.3. Abu Mustafa and Amos: a political friendship

When Amos initially told me about Abu Mustafa, I had not met him yet. We were sitting on Ahmad's patio, while Amos's companions were helping Ahmad and his family in the olive harvest. I had just met Amos, but many Palestinians in al-Bab had told me about him before. Beyond his personal relationships with Palestinians, I wanted to talk to Amos about the Israeli project of a national park in the al-Bab lands, and I knew he, as an activist, was well-informed. After the end of the Palestinians' mobilizations against the wall in 2009, Amos and his girlfriend Sarah were willing to continue supporting al-Bab villagers, but they encountered an official refusal from the Palestinian side. According to Amos, this denial stemmed from the rejection of any form of "normalization", a discourse which was spreading among Palestinian activists at that time: if until that moment al-Bab villagers had contested the separation wall together with Israeli activists, Palestinians would have started to drift apart from those who had been until that time their allies. In Palestinian national discourse "normalization" refers to an implicit acceptance of the Israeli occupation and settler colonization due to recurring encounters and trivialized exchanges with Israelis, which would neglect the conflict and its implications in Palestinians' everyday life. As a matter of fact, the Israelis' mobilization in al-Bab changed its form because of a later Palestinian reaction to the risk of "normalization", like Amos explained to me:

"Palestinians have many definitions, from 'any contact with an Israeli is normalization' or 'to meet and have hummus or music together is normalization'. All I can say is about al-Bab, I know al-Bab. Al-Shajara, the cultural center, will have no communication with Israelis, so for them everything is normalization. During the demonstrations against the wall our contacts were with the Popular Committee, then someone from outside al-Bab came and said 'We don't work with Israelis', so they told us not to come. Lina [one of al-Bab more prominent activists] was very open to us. I think she has become more and more angry over the years, but certainly in the first years all the Israelis had the contact with al-Bab through her. Once

she said they had summer camps for children and asked if we could raise some money. We said we didn't have financial resources, but we could organize volunteers from Jerusalem who would come and do activities for the children, and she said no, this I don't want. So it's ok, but I don't know... This is how I understand the Palestinians' understanding of normalization. [...] When the demonstrations stopped in al-Bab, we continued to come and we would meet mainly with Lina, and tried to think with her what more was possible to do, because there is no fight against the wall but there are many issues in the village, how can we be involved? And she said very clearly people in the village were not interested and she could not make this connection. Very quickly Israeli activists stopped coming, because they are interested in some resistance against the wall, if it's not happening what do they have to do there? And if even the village is telling you 'we have nothing to do with you', why should I come? They can go to other places where they are needed. Basically, because we insisted and we kept on coming and thinking and asking, even just visiting to keep the contact, suddenly after a year the activities that were possible to happen began, which I think are important for Israelis' education but also for the actual support to the people in al-Bab, and we are basically the only Israeli group that is in contact with al-Bab now" (Amos, al-Bab 11/10/2014).

This is how Amos and his girlfriend Sarah started to support Palestinian peasants: "We insisted and we kept on coming and thinking and asking, even just visiting to keep the contact". Visiting Palestinians in al-Bab was their main strategy to get in touch with people's needs and support them in many different problems (land confiscations, work permits, connections with lawyers, health problems...), beyond trying to mobilize their fellow meditation practitioners through shared activities with al-Bab villagers. In my view the most important form of support was Amos who shared all the information he had on the Israeli projects in al-Bab, since he could benefit from an exclusive access to Israeli institutions and their reserved knowledge: for example, he was the one who communicated to the village council that the Israel Antiquities Authority was predisposing archeological excavations inside one of the al-Bab springs, and he was the first to discover the plan of an Israeli park in the village lands, because he could read a sign in Hebrew on the Israeli side of al-Bab checkpoint. The fact that Amos and Sarah

could enter Palestinian houses in order to meet people and actively engage in the village, further shows how Palestinian hospitality can operate as a political institution, able to include and regulate specific social relationships in a supposedly “private” space. Like I have shown (3.1.1.), Palestinian houses are not a mere “private” realm devoted to kinship ties as a “personal”, domestic affair: in this sense the practice of visiting questions a clear opposition between “personal” and “political”, and, consequently, between “private” and “public” spaces. Conversely, Amos and Sarah had appropriated this practice in order to produce a form of political agency, which was not necessarily conceived as “public” in itself, simultaneously contrasting the “public” standing of Palestinian militant groups towards Israeli activists. Furthermore, their personal relationships with Palestinians were not the final objective of their political interest: their main aim was mobilizing Israeli people *through* such relationships, and not *for* them. In Amos’s own sense, a supposed “normalization” of the relationships between Israelis and Palestinians – which were intended as personal encounters apparently deprived of a political dimension – was a strategy to upset the Israeli status quo, rather than a pacifying goal in order to reaffirm it (see 1.3.2.).

Even if Amos and Sarah did consider a few people in al-Bab as their “friends”, most of their personal relationships with Palestinians were not described in terms of “friendship”: on the contrary, it was their overtly stated position as “occupiers” which prevented “friendship” to be a mode of political relation. Sarah pointed out that friendship was neither their main aim nor one of her expectations, since their relationships with Palestinians lacked equality and mutuality:

“I feel their hospitality and I might say people in al-Bab are not my friends, there for me it’s not about friendship, it’s about solidarity, and it’s about what can I do that can help you in some ways, because I have the means that you don’t. [...] There is a personal connection but there is no mutuality, when I have a friend I call them, they call me, there is something happening that is equal and here it’s not like that, and it’s fine, I’m not looking for it. I would never come and visit people in al-Bab just to sit and drink coffee. I come because we want the relationship to continue, because we want to see what they need, they call us because they have a need. And I have Palestinian friends in other places, where I can say I have a friendship with this person, they are mostly Israeli Palestinians, we

worked together on an issue, we are more connected on a personal level. Here I don't allow myself to do that, I feel it's not right, I'm the occupier. I can't expect them to see me as a friend. If they do, it's great, but I don't expect that" (Sarah, al-Bab 11/10/2014).

Amos and Sarah, as a rhetorical strategy to raise the political awareness of the Israeli people whom they took to the village, also used this self-identification with "the occupiers": "We don't say *they*, we make a point to say *we*. In al-Bab we say: 'Look, it's so close to Jerusalem, if you live in Jerusalem you see it from your home, so anything that happens here, you cannot blame settlers on this. This concerns Jerusalem'. Or: 'The settlers are making the decisions, the Israeli government is making the decisions, who chose the Israeli government?'". Simultaneously, they distinguished their mode of speech from the usual militant discourse, because they tried to control the "emotional tone" of the language they used to speak to their fellows, in order not to raise "negative emotions" like rage, but rather focusing on "kindness, friendliness, and compassion" as a part of their "engaged dharma" practice.

At the same time, beyond their activism, their conscious recognition of being on the occupiers' side produced a certain discomfort in their own personal ties with Palestinians. Amos admitted that such relationships were quite different from his bonds with Israeli people: "It's different from my relationships with Israelis, here [in al-Bab] I'll always feel... I don't know if it's something like shame, or guilt, or very unhappy with the situation and the things I'm hearing". Like in Dina's case, feelings of shame and guiltiness are often expressed by leftist Israelis who are in touch with Palestinian people. Sarah conceived the sense of guiltiness as part of the Jewish culture, so that hearing the Palestinians' stories was supposed to engender a kind of frustration produced by shame and a simultaneous sense of impotence. Amos thought that the suppression of guilt was a widespread psychological mechanism – especially among right-wing people – to legitimate the Israeli violence: "The guilt is so strong that if I acknowledge that I did something wrong, then it means I'm completely wrong and I'm not legitimate: it's not possible to say: 'The wall is terrible, but I deserve security' [he chuckles]. People think that if the wall is terrible, then I don't deserve security and maybe tomorrow I will be killed". More than a psychological suppression, however, Amos's reference to the separation wall conceived as a "security barrier" revealed the removal of the Israeli government's own responsibilities from the public discourse, so that "guilt" remained an

intimate, uncomfortable burden lived by single Israelis in their approach towards Palestinian people, while most of the Israeli population was left with the fear of being killed. If the responsibilities of the Israeli government combined the Palestinians' dispossession and confinement, with the Israelis' permanent sense of threat and insecurity, Edward Said precisely wrote about Zionism as practical systems for *accumulation* (of power, land, ideological legitimacy) and *displacement* (of people, ideas, prior legitimacy): "Zionism has hidden, or caused to disappear, the literal historical ground of its growth, its political cost to the native inhabitants of Palestine, and its militantly oppressive discriminations between Jews and non-Jews" (Said 1979: 57). The anti-Zionist effort for replacing "prior legitimacy", which Amos and Sarah tried to promote among Israeli people through the concepts of "awareness" and "compassion", let power asymmetries and the Israeli "guilt" reemerge. Personal relationships with Palestinians were necessarily declined in terms of solidarity: a political solidarity which by definition excluded "friendship". In this conception friendship was not so much linked to a moral evaluation (it was not a "moral" guilt at stake), but to the historical and political conditions which were supposed to establish it as a legitimate form of personal interaction (illegitimacy was thus produced by an "historical" guilt).

However, Amos acknowledged that his way of dealing with the Palestinians was quite different from the Israelis' usual form of solidarity and support. It was the substance of the exchange, the contours of their conversations, which significantly distinguished their relationships with al-Bab villagers. This difference was also noticed by other Israeli activists, who had got surprised when a Palestinian woman, during a demonstration, started to talk with Amos about her child: the other Israelis had asked Amos how he had got so close to her. In turn, he was astonished when this woman, a Palestinian activist, called him one day while it was snowing in Jerusalem: "One day in winter, it was snowing in Jerusalem, she phoned me and she said 'Is it snowing? I heard it's snowing, how is it?'. I was really surprised and I didn't understand what was happening, but it was a nice phone call and I was happy. But then I understood: 'Ah, now she treats me like a friend!'. Since that time I see our relationship is very different".

Friendship could simply happen. However, friendship became also a desire, when Amos felt that he had a special affection and esteem towards certain people. After the "normalization" threat, even Amos' tie with Lina, an activist from al-Bab, had weakened, and Lina had gone to Jordan to work for the United Nations with Syrian refugees:

“Lina was my main contact in the village for the first two years, and I really liked her and appreciated her, she’s very strong, she’s very smart, she’s very independent, I can say many good things about her, and when we met she often spoke about things that are very personal. But now, when she comes to al-Bab, she never tells me she’s here. I heard from Yazan that she’s here for a family’s wedding, I asked him and he said yes, that she is here. So it’s ok, of course she can do what she wants, it’s not really a problem, it’s just an example to say I would like her to call me for a visit” (Amos, al-Bab 26/10/2013).

In this case, however, Amos’s desire for Lina’s friendship was not reciprocated: after their political alliance had weakened, she had stopped calling him and welcoming him in her house.

Amos explained to me that he usually did not have friends only for fun, just to drink a beer or to go dancing: “So it’s me”, he said. If his relationships with Palestinians developed because of specific issues, such as “planning something, doing something, thinking together”, for Amos it would be normal to share also personal things with them because of their long-lasting relationships and the regularity of their encounters. However, his tie with Abu Mustafa was seen as special:

“In al-Bab the person I’m most comfortable with and we can speak about anything is Abu Mustafa. You should meet him. He’s an older man, he’s 66 years old, the wall is in his land, he lost trees, many things... Twenty years ago he was in jail. He’s a very warm person. I don’t know what he was doing when he was younger, he was working as... not as a builder, but as a contractor for building inside Israel, and from his stories it really seems like he went to places and had many Israeli friends and he liked a lot of things in the culture, so he also maybe understands me better than other people here, so I feel very close to him. [...] I really love him and I have a lot of appreciation for him, let’s say tomorrow I stop being an activist, I’ll probably continue and visit him” (Amos, al-Bab 26/10/2013).

Also Sarah felt that she and Abu Mustafa were “on the same level”: “Maybe because he worked so much in Israel. He never visited us because he doesn’t have the permit, but he knows Israelis and we can have really deep conversations about values, about politics, about personal issues as well”. Actually, Amos and Sarah could not explain why they felt

so close to Abu Mustafa, and why for them he was so different from the other Palestinian people they knew. Significantly, they supposed it was for a sort of “cultural intimacy” (Herzfeld 1997) due to Abu Mustafa’s work experience in Israel, which was supposed to have let him “know Israelis” and have a better understanding of them. Yet, almost all the Palestinians Amos and Sarah used to meet had been working in Israel for a longtime. Why were not they “on the same level”, so that they could be considered as friends? I remembered what Rida – a long-lasting worker in Israel, too – had told me once: “Their [the Israelis’] friendship will never be 100%, they don’t feel completely safe (*m’amnīyn*), they are not satisfied by us (*mā birḍau ‘annā*), except if you become like them”. In Rida’s opinion “becoming like them” meant that Palestinians had to acquire “their customs and traditions” (*ādāthim wa taqlīdhim*). Actually, some Israelis had told me that they could not consider their Palestinian acquaintances as friends, because they were practicing Muslims, while they were secular Israelis (*khilonim* in Hebrew) and did not deal with religious people in their society, either.

Leftist Israelis like Amos and Sarah openly stated the power difference between Palestinians and Israelis because of the Israeli occupation, a difference that nailed them on the dark side of the “occupiers”: they did not refer to such a distinction in ethnical terms, as “Arabs” opposing “Jews”, nor as an opposition between “citizens” and “non-citizens”, since their political action constantly claimed equal rights for Palestinians. Apparently, it was a cultural difference that kept them far from the Palestinians and put their closeness to the limits. At the same time, if Abu Mustafa was strangely so close to the “Israeli culture” and people, this culture and these people appeared to be essentialized and now glorified: under this light the Israelis did not look like the guilty occupiers anymore. Equality as the base for friendship – being “on the same level”, like Sarah defined it – involved much more than politics or, inversely, presented itself as the culturalized face of a national identity. Besides, this was a way to conceptualize the inexplicability of such a friendship.

Abu Mustafa was actually a man who had been engaged in the al-Bab demonstrations against the bulldozers which uprooted his trees and upset his and his neighbors’ life. The wall construction was going on only a few meters from his house, and had cut out most of his lands, where his father and his mother were buried. Since Abu Mustafa and his family could not reach their graves anymore, their appeal in court had led the Israeli authorities to opt for a little tunnel which let them cross the wall in order to pass on the other side. However, also the graves would have been guzzled by the new

Israeli park. Abu Mustafa had stopped working because of his old age and his sons now sporadically worked in Israel, sneaking through the hills to reach Jerusalem. Abu Mustafa liked growing vegetables in what had remained of his father's lands around his house. Furthermore, on the second floor of his uncomplete dwelling, in a little unrefined room, he had built his own little world: dozens of birds, canaries, parakeets and parrots were there, to whom he devoted his spare time, sitting among them and listening to their singing. He was also a beekeeper and used to make honey, but the wall construction – with all the dust, the noise and the general upset of the natural environment it had caused – caused all his bees die.

I met Abu Mustafa through my friend Yazan, who was a friend of Abu Mustafa's children and used to plow their lands every year. Since Abu Mustafa had become one of the most public figures in al-Bab and was well accustomed to meeting journalists, I preferred not to directly question him on the sensitive issues which concerned his problems with the wall construction. I had already experienced how people who were used to speak in front of cameras, repeated to me the same official discourse, and they often perceived me as another journalist questioning them. During my visits to Abu Mustafa's home I went with him and his daughter to collect fruit, wild sage and other herbs, which he later gave me as a gift to take home, and I helped his sons in planting vegetables in their land. I often sat with Abu Mustafa in his birds' room, and from his garden he taught me to distinguish the singing of blackbirds, which reminded me of my home in Italy. Over time, I got very close to him and his family, without really looking for it, and I used to sleep at their place sometimes. Amos was right to say that Abu Mustafa was a very warm person, but what especially struck me was his freedom. He always spoke frankly and did not need to look necessarily compliant if I – his guest – said something that was wrong in his view. Although he was not a practicing Muslim and liked mocking religious devotion, he respected his society and defined himself as Muslim. After the Nakba his family had settled in a Christian town and he had grown up among Christian neighbors: he said it was *'ib* (blameworthy) to distinguish people by religion. He reproached me when I attributed to him a specific political affiliation, saying: "I am neither this nor that, I am Palestinian". At the same time he was also sarcastic about the Palestinians: "According to the Palestinians, anything is the occupation's fault!". Amos told me that Abu Mustafa had been tortured in jail, but I never wanted to ask him and other ex Palestinian prisoners about that, if they did not spontaneously raise the subject themselves. From other villagers I was told that Abu Mustafa's older son, who had been arrested with him, had

never come back like before: when I met him he was a big, very quiet man, and his wife made the money at his place.

Towards the end of my fieldwork Abu Mustafa and I started to sit together and openly discuss my research, during quite a critical moment in the more recent Palestinian history: it was July 2014 and protests were spreading in the West Bank following the killing of Muhammad Abu Khdeir in Jerusalem, and Hamas started to throw rockets into Israel. Beyond closing streets, entering villages, revoking Palestinian workers' permits, casual killings in the streets, repressing Palestinian demonstrators and arresting hundreds of Palestinian activists in June and July 2014, Israel launched one of the most brutal attacks to Gaza, killing more than 2.000 people in less than two months of bombardments. The first recorded interview with Abu Mustafa was suspended as a mutual agreement: it was a Friday afternoon and the TV – constantly switched on in every Palestinian house during those days – was transmitting the images of the Palestinian protesters throwing stones against the Israeli army at the Qalandiya checkpoint. It was one of the “days of rage” announced by Hamas from Gaza. After a few minutes of our conversation, which had been overwhelmed by the TV images, I suggested to postpone our interview and Abu Mustafa agreed, saying there were not the psychological conditions to do it. We met again in October 2014, when I went back to the West Bank after the end of my fieldwork, and the conditions for my interview seemed to be better. However, I could grasp he was speaking with a tenser tone, and certainly full of anger after the Israeli killings in Gaza. He started saying that “fear, upset and rage ruin the relationships” (*il-khūf, iz-za'al, il-ghaḍab tikhrab il-'alāqat*). He maintained that “rage comes as a result of the other's behavior (*taṣarruf*) or from his misunderstanding (*sū' fahmu*)”. The Palestinians' rage came from an attack (*'udwān*) against them: this attack was moved not only by Israel, but by the Western powers who had supported Zionism since its beginning.

In July 2014 I had explained to Abu Mustafa why I had started to work on friendship and personal relationships between Israelis and Palestinians. I had also told him some of my personal experiences in the field. He said he knew some Palestinians thought such relationships were reprehensible and not good (*'ib, mish mnīh*), but he did not seem to share this idea. On the contrary, he had explained to me that, in the context of the lack of work in the Palestinian territories, work relations with Israelis had become “human relationships”: they were personal relationships, “between a human being and a human being” (*bayn insān w insān*). In his view these personal relationships did not

concern politics: “Politics is something else” (*is-siyāsa ishī tānī*). Abu Mustafa had condensed the scattered ideas that I had collected through my conversations with Palestinian laborers: most of Palestinian men stated that their “friendship” with Israelis had nothing to do with politics, but was based on their common “humanity”: people often said “they [the Israelis] are human beings like us” (*humme bashar zaynā*) and “if there is something that hurts me, it hurts them, too” (*idha fī ishī buj‘anī, buj‘ahum kamān*). In Abu Mustafa’s sense, the common humanity stemmed from a shared language (*lughā mushtaraka*), so that people “can speak together, discuss, understand each other”. Therefore, even Abu Mustafa did not deny that friendship as a human relation between two human beings could exist between a Palestinian and an Israeli because of their shared humanity. Moreover, he thought that Palestinians and “Jews” were close to each other (*qrāb la ba‘d*): most of the Jews came from an Arab upbringing (*tarbiā*), since they were born in Arab countries, and even European Jews had got used (*tabba‘u*) to Arabs: “[Jews got used to] what makes them [the Arabs] upset, what is good for them, and the Arabs [got used to] what makes the Jews upset, what is good for them, what makes them feel safe”. In this sense the “normalization” of Jews and Arabs’ coexistence led to a sort of mutual comprehension. However, if the possibility of friendship between Palestinians and Israelis was contemplated, Abu Mustafa clearly stated – like many others did – that such a friendship was separated from politics (“*hadī iṣ-ṣadāqa maḥṣūla min is-siyāsa*”):

“I can have a Jewish friend as a human being (*anā mumkin ‘indī ṣāhib yahūdī kainsān*), and he comes to my house, eats and drinks, and I go to his place, and if someone dies I offer my condolences, if someone marries I go to the wedding... This doesn’t mean that I give up my rights (*hadā lā ya‘nī innī tnāzalet ‘an haqqī*). I’m the child of the country (*anā ibn il-balad*), and the Israeli government persecuted me and took my land. That [relationship] remains personal (*hada biḥall khāṣṣ fī*). [...] If a Jew comes to my place, visits me, drinks coffee with me, or I go to him, this doesn’t mean I forgive him (*anā musāmeḥ*) for my land. I keep asking for my rights (*baḥall aṭālib bi-huqūqī*), I keep resisting (*aqawwem*), and if I have the chance to enter the Palestinian army, I go and fight. If he is in the Israeli army, I go and fight against him. This doesn’t mean I gave up my rights” (Abu Mustafa, al-Bab 25/7/2014).

Abu Mustafa clearly stated the possibility of friendship as a human relation between two single people, but also confirmed the simultaneous separation of such personal relationships from the political. Like Walid and Talia had also acknowledged, in the case of war the two friends would have fought against each other. The war horizon defined the political as an opposition between “enemies”, while the apparent absence of conflict in everyday personal relationships let enemies be friends. Rather than the opposition between “friends” and “enemies”, which Carl Schmitt defined as the fundament of the political, this movement of combination and contraposition reminded me of a piece of Darwish’s writing, when he described the separation from his Israeli lover following his imprisonment and her near conscription:

“The following year the war erupted, and I was put in prison again. I thought of her: “What is she doing now?”. She may be in Nablus, or another city, carrying a light rifle as one of the conquerors, and perhaps at this moment giving orders to some men to raise their arms or kneel on the ground. Or perhaps she is in charge of the interrogation and torture of an Arab girl of her age, and as beautiful as she used to be.

She didn’t say goodbye.

And I didn’t say: ‘Go, and come back.’”¹¹³

In Darwish’s writing the beauty of his Israeli friend had vanished in her acting like an Israeli “occupier”: carrying weapons, arresting, interrogating and torturing Palestinians. Therefore, she was not welcome anymore. In October 2014, when we met once again after the war in Gaza and after so many deaths among Palestinians, Abu Mustafa told me that even saying ‘hi’ to an Israeli was a way to recognize his/her presence in Palestine. In his words, any form of recognition was “normalization” (*taṭbīʿ*) and “treason” (*khyāna*):

“Every Jew who lives in Palestine lives in my land, he took my right (*akhad ḥaqqī*). For me it’s forbidden to make peace with him (*mamnuʿ asālmuh*) and recognize him (*ʿatarif fih*), even if there are among them those who are respectable (*muḥtaramīn*), good (*qwaysīn*), and live in their house (*ʿāishīn fī baythum*). The house where he [an Israeli] lives is my house. [...] It’s forbidden to greet him because to greet him is to recognize him (*mamnuʿ asallim ʿalayh, is-salām iʿtirāf fih*). This concerns morality

¹¹³ Mahmoud Darwish (2010 [1973]), *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, cit.

and justice (*akhlāq w ḥaq*). [...] It means you recognize him (*inta m'trif fiḥ*) and you offended yourself (*ahānt hālak*). [...] When I treat a Jew as a human being, I say hi and so on, it happens in the limits of the humanity (*fī ḥudūd il-insanīyya*). I didn't recognize that you are a good man. You took my house, uprooted my trees, expelled me, stomped on my neck, and do I have to kiss your hand? This is called humiliation (*dhull*)" (Abu Mustafa, al-Bab 11/10/2014).

Abu Mustafa talked about a radical irreconcilability, when the recognition of the other is conceived as a self-offense, almost a self-denial, and the Palestinians' humiliation overcomes the human limits. However, he made two distinctions. The first concerned the habitual separation between the Israeli government and the Israeli people: "I don't consider the citizen, the civilian, accountable for it" (*mā baḥāsib il-muwāṭin, il-madanī*). In his and many other Palestinians' view, most of Israeli civilians were victims (*daḥāyā*) of Zionism, and Zionism was represented by the Israeli government and the settlements in the West Bank. Responsibility fell on the "big ones" (*il-ikbīr*), that is not only Israel, but also Europe and America which support Israel as a racist state. Abu Mustafa clearly distinguished Zionism from Judaism: "The Zionist idea became like a religion. Every Jew must be Zionist, they think like that. And they consider Judaism is ethnical (*qawmiyya*), this is new. They planted it in their minds and this is the problem, they lose finally. If I look at Judaism as a religion, I don't have problem with that. A Jew is like a Christian, I don't have problem with him. And the way a Muslim looks at a Christian is the same he looks at a Jew. The important thing is the way you deal with him (*il-muhim kif inta tata'amel ma'ah*)". Ultimately, this was the fundament on which the separation between friendship and politics could be possible: personal relationships between Palestinians and Israelis concerned the people (*sh'b*), no matter what their religion was, and the people were supposed to be something different from their government, they were rather considered as its "victims". Such a perceived separation between the government and its people did not concern only Israel and Israelis, like we shall see, but also touched the Palestinians deeply. However, Zionism was conceived as a national discourse based on the racist premise of Judaism as an exclusive ethnical belonging, and not like a simple religion. The Palestinians' national standing was thus formulated as a matter of "morality" and "justice": an ethical and political posture which was produced by a "human" and "logical" morality (*akhlāq insaniyya w mantiqiyya*).

The second distinction concerned the Israeli people themselves. Like Rida had pointed out, you have to understand which kind of Jew is in front of you. Abu Mustafa declared:

“A racist one, a Zionist one, who says ‘I want to kill you, I don’t want you to be here’, stops preserving my rights as a human being (*baṭal yṣīr yḥāfīz ‘alā huqūqī ka-insān*). It means he became part [of the conflict], he didn’t become a friend (*ṣadīq*). But I know they are influenced (*mutā’ththir*) by the Zionist idea” (Abu Mustafa, al-Bab 25/7/2014).

When Abu Mustafa talked about his rights as “a human being”, it was not the liberal discourse on “human rights” which was in his mind: like I have shown, the Palestinians’ conception of a common humanity was not based on the production of the other’s humanity as a process established by right and law. Furthermore, throughout history they had been experiencing that right and law which engendered their discrimination rather than their equality, although “human rights” had gained a prominent role in the public discourse. If the human rights discourse actually take part in the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation, Lori Allen has shown how it simultaneously produced a widespread form of cynicism among the Palestinian people. According to the author, this cynicism represents a lively critique towards Western intervention and Palestinian politics itself (Allen 2013). I often encountered this form of cynicism in my fieldwork, when people maintained that Israel and the Western world are more careful to animal rights than to human rights: if they, as Palestinians, are thus excluded from the range of the human rights application, they are rejected to a subhuman state which is even subordinate to the animal condition. Furthermore, starting from an analyses of the Israeli settlers’ use of the human rights discourse to protest in court against their evacuation from Gaza in 2005, Nicola Perugini and Neve Gordon have shown how a supposed emancipatory discourse can be appropriated by the dominant group to maintain the current system of domination (Perugini and Gordon 2015).

Therefore, in the Palestinians’ view the condition of a common humanity rather stemmed from “logical morals”: it is pre-judicial and pre-political, that is, it does not need a political order to be established. In the Palestinians’ encounters with Israelis such a condition is given by the shared faculties of the human body: language for the capacity to talk (a shared language to “speak together, discuss, understand each other”), pain as a mode of feeling (“if there is something that hurts me, it hurts them, too”), reproduction as

the fundament of social responsibility (“they have a house and children like us”). According to Abu Mustafa, a Zionist Israeli, a “racist” person, is someone who questions not only my life as a human being, but my life as such: since he longs for my death, it is not only part of the conflict, but takes a specific part in the conflict, so that he cannot be a friend. Obviously, it is not the real possibility of killing and being killed which is at stake here, although Israeli armed soldiers are automatically conceived as enemies, since their weapons represent the virtual killing of the Palestinians. Abu Mustafa’s words gave voice to Walid’s reaction after his Israeli friend Talia wished the death of all the Arabs: Talia had entered the war and suspended her friend’s right to live as every human being, so that she could not be treated as a friend anymore. Conversely, Abu Mustafa could acknowledge Amos as his friend on the basis of his “liberated” status:

“Your friend is the one who is honest with you (*ṣāḥbak illī bikūn ṣādiq ma‘ek*), he’s sincere with you in everything and loves you, he wants your interest (*biddu maṣlaḥtak*). Between Amos and me there is no interest or trade, he’s a friend (*ṣāḥib*). He believes (*muqtan‘*) in my ideas and in my cause, he believes I’m the owner of the right (*anā ṣāḥib il-ḥaqq*), and I welcome him as a person liberated from the policy of his State (*insān mutaharrir min siyāsāt dawlatu*). He speaks frankly (*biḥki id-doghry*), he can be my friend, it’s not a crime if he’s my friend” (Abu Mustafa, al-Bab 11/10/2014).

Once again, sincerity as the base for friendship is linked to saying the historical truth of the Palestinians’ dispossession, and believing in the claim of their rights. In this sense Amos represented a person “liberated” from the Zionist policies of the Israeli state: the separation between Amos, as an Israeli citizen, and his government, becomes radical. Ultimately, it encounters Amos’ disaffection from his state politics of occupation while recognizing its “historical” guilt. However, while for Amos it was his belonging to the occupiers’ side which prevented friendship with the Palestinian people, Abu Mustafa melded Amos’ political standing with friendship as a legitimate personal relationship. In this sense Abu Mustafa joined the Palestinian national discourse which represents “resistance” as the necessary goal of every legitimate relationship between Israelis and Palestinians. At the same time Abu Mustafa defined such a political friendship on the basis of a struggle between equality and mistreatment as two main concepts concerning the human morality:

“The Israelis who come here know that we are the owners of the right (*aṣḥāb il-ḥaqq*), at least they look at me from a human point of view (*min naẓra insaniyya*), that [implies] they and I are equal (*musāwīyn*), their State is inequitable, it mistreated me (*thalmatni*). And they are also mistreated, when they go to the military service to fight in Gaza or in Lebanon or in Syria... They were born as poor ones (*meskīnīn*)” (Abu Mustafa, al-Bab 11/10/2014).

The Israelis who went to al-Bab knew the truth, according to Abu Mustafa: they also knew that they were equal on the basis of their shared humanity. Furthermore, Abu Mustafa compared the Palestinians’ mistreatment by the Israeli State to the mistreatment which the Israeli citizens also suffer because of their conscription and obliged commitment in war. Under this perspective the Israeli citizens appear to be “poor ones”, who in the worst case are brainwashed by the Zionist ideology. Beyond a common humanity, Palestinians and Israelis’ equality is thus established by their shared experience of being captured, deceived and oppressed by the same system of power. It is this sharing which founds the possibility of friendship beyond national boundaries: a friendship conceived as a political alliance between single people, who are part of the civilian population and are not committed in the military and political apparatus of the Zionist state. “They are not soldiers”, a man told me when I wondered what his neighbors would have thought in seeing Israelis entering his family’s house: “They are not soldiers nor representatives of the Israeli government”.

However, it is not only the separation between the official politics of states and governments and their people, which defines friendship as a politically and morally legitimate personal relationships between Israelis and Palestinians. It is also the goal of their encounter which is at stake. Like I have shown, the goal can be considered in light of the tension between a mutual interest (work) and resistance against the Israeli occupation as a “pure” and more “authentic” goal. Between the two, however, Walid and Talia’s case showed how the value of friendship is more deeply defined by the recognition of the friend’s rights to exist and persist in his/her life. In Ghassan’s words, this recognition concerned a “mutual feeling” (*sh‘ūr mutabādel*):

“With an Israeli friend, you build a relationship if his thinking is against killing, against terrorism (*irhāb*). If one comes here and says ‘I’m against the Israeli government that kills any Palestinian people. I want us to live, I

live and you live (*anā ma‘a innā na‘īsh, anā a‘īsh w inta ta‘īsh*), I don’t want to kill you, nor you to kill me. I’m ready to come and stand up with you in your house, in front of the bulldozers that demolish your house’. This is a mutual feeling (*sh‘ūr mutabādel*), you and I want to live, we don’t want death (*anā w yāk bidnā na‘īsh, bidnāsh il-mūt*), we want our children to live (*y‘īshu*), we don’t want our children to die. In this case friendship becomes friendship of a shared aim (*ṣadāqat hadaf mushtarak*)” (Ghassan, al-Bab 22/2/2014).

The “mutual feeling” that Ghassan delineated consists in the will to live. It is mutual because it is shared – both sides want to live – but also because each side must assure life by avoiding the other’s death: “I don’t want to kill you, nor you to kill me”. In this sense “resistance” as a mutual goal goes out of the war logics and its binary opposition between “friends” and “enemies”, essentially defined by national boundaries: it rather consists in the struggle for a shared persistence in life. Ultimately, friendship is thus grounded on the wish for the friend’s life.

*

Each of the three ethnographical cases presented above concern a personal relationship between a Palestinian man and an Israeli citizen conceived as “friendship” both from the Palestinian and the Israeli point of view. Preliminarily, such personal relationships question the concept of “friendship” as a transnational category in the context of the political conflict deriving from the establishment of the Israeli state on the Palestinians’ land, and from the current Israeli occupation and settler colonization of the West Bank. In such a context, friendship defies the categorization of the other as an “enemy” defined by opposing nationalisms. Therefore, my research discloses radically different results from those who studied friendship from the perspective of the national discourse. In his research on the Zionist ideology of *re‘ut*, conceived as a specific form of friendship cultivated in homo-social relations among Israeli soldiers, Danny Kaplan has shown the interlink between personal bonds and national solidarity in what is conceived as a “combat fraternity” in the Israeli army. *Re‘ut* is thus defined as a “national-emotional ideal, reflecting both self-realization and group cohesion, and set most pronouncedly in the ideals of settlement and military activity” (Kaplan 2006: 22). According to the author,

friendship as a “national affect” especially emerges in rituals of commemoration. The identification with the dead friend simultaneously becomes the source of desire: “The citizen brother becomes, via national commemoration, the desired brother” (Kaplan 2006: 151). Kaplan’s reasoning is based on two forms of reduction: firstly, he has studied Israeli nationalism through a gender perspective which focuses on masculinity and men’s sociality, shadowing gender as a relational category. His interest has been to show how homoeroticism is officially developed through the appropriation of “friendship” as a nationalized category, which legitimately links Israeli male soldiers through emotional bonds. Secondly, Kaplan’s ethnography has been conducted in a military environment: the Israeli army is a taken-for-granted social actor for which “war” is a self-evident mission. The ethnographical quotations are obviously full of references to the Israeli wars against the “Arab” enemies, including the Palestinian first intifada, but such an Israeli military ethos is not considered through the historical and political conditions of its emergence. “Enemies” are not questioned, they are just pawns in the battlefield. The gender perspective has contributed to attest that the military is a key site for the construction of the Israeli hegemonic masculinity, so that “male relatedness [is] colored by a military male culture and a relatively undifferentiated military/civilian sociability” (Kaplan 2006: 155): inversely, this justifies an ethnography of masculinity and homosociality based on the Israeli army. The analyses of the two main narratives of a “shared past” and a “shared destiny”, which merge national solidarity and friendship as an individual experience in the army, do not take into account how this sharing is produced by the historical and political production of exclusion. The Israeli society appears to be an autonomous microcosm where its persistent blurring between the military and civilian sphere is just one of its peculiar features among others and, apparently, this does not need to be problematized.

On the contrary, the moral economy of friendship, which has been produced by the Palestinian men’s labor experience in Israel, is situated in the context of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza: personal relationships between Palestinians and Israelis are set in a colonial context where the distinction between a “civilian” and a “military” sphere, and civilian and military actors, essentially matter in the definition of whom can be a friend. From the Palestinians’ point of view, friendship with Israeli people is legitimate only when it arises from sharing among “the people”, producing a radical dissociation of the modern nation-state from what should be its main referent. In this

sense such a friendship is separated from politics, which is represented by the Zionist policies implemented by the Israeli government and the army.

If the Palestinians' labor in Israel has contributed to built social proximity with Israeli citizens, even these latter ones can find in Palestinian workers some of their friends. In the first two ethnographical cases that I have described above, in fact, friendship had arisen from work relations. However, like Rida stated, "you won't see someone who gets up at four or five in the morning because of friendship, nor because he likes [going to Israel], but because he has to take money for his children". Therefore, personal relationships between Israelis and Palestinians are clearly defined by the Palestinians' economical dependence from Israel following the 1967 occupation. Friendship with Israelis is separated from politics also because it is not the Palestinians' political goal, but captures Palestinians as mere living beings. For the purpose of my analyses, this is the first political dimension of such a friendship: it is a personal relationship which is primarily defined by a power asymmetry between a citizen employer and a non-citizen employee, where this latter was denuded by his political status and reduced to a bare workforce.

If labor in Israel constitutes the main social field in which the Palestinians' moral construction is experienced in so called "human relationships" (2.3.), the Palestinians' ethical subjectivation is especially deployed in the tension between "interest" and "true friendship". Partnership limited in time and confined to work is thus distinguished from friendship as a lasting social relationship implying mutual respect, solidarity, honesty, and sincerity. In Rida and Dina's case, his positive evaluation of his employers' treatment engendered a mutual exchange of solidarity, respect, and affects. In these exchanges Rida could act as an "equal" partner and deploy his freedom and independence – two qualities founding every Palestinian man's honor – through visiting, offering hospitality and gifts, and finally mourning his Israeli friend. This ethical subjectivation is mainly based on the concept of a shared humanity, from which "human morals" derive. If friendship is not political, it rather appears to be pre-political, since it is grounded on an idea of sharing which precedes political division: "Friends do not share *something*: they are shared by the experience of friendship. Friendship is the con-division that precedes every division, since what has to be shared is the very fact of existence, life itself" (Agamben 2007).

At the same time the separation of the Palestinian labor from politics also implied a split between the Palestinians' ethical subjectivation and their construction as political subjects. This is the second political dimension of friendship: labor as an apparatus of the Israeli colonial governmentality is supposed to "normalize" the Palestinians' economical

and political subordination, so that single Palestinian friends are expected to be honest workers, erasing their history and political claims as Palestinians. Moral and political subjectivation are thus separated, mirroring the separation of the people from the state.

However, all the ethnographical cases I have presented show how the Palestinians' conception of friendship with Israelis is constitutively linked to a form of political reflexivity and agency. Under this perspective the Palestinian workers in Israel do not look like naïve people, who only think about their subsistence and avoid questioning their everyday experience: like I have shown for the evaluation of a legitimate and respectable work (2.3.3.), their moral subjectivation is constitutively linked to their political subjectivation, even if in extremely precarious and contingent ways. Friendship with Israeli people is not political but, simultaneously, it does not prevent Palestinians to claim their rights. A Palestinian friend often told me about the first Intifada, when Palestinian laborers used to come back from their work in Israel, wore a *kūfiyya* and took part in the popular protests in the streets of the West Bank. If in this case the split was nevertheless produced at a spatial level, friendship with Israelis engages simultaneity. Indeed, if in Rida's opinion the noblest virtue of a friend was sincerity, his appreciation for Dina particularly stemmed from her "sincerity" in asserting the truth of his historical dispossession as a Palestinian. On the contrary, Walid struggled with his friend Talia in order to oppose her Zionist views, and could not completely trust her despite their lasting relationship, although their friendship was not reversed on the basis of these premises. In Abu Mustafa's sense, political subjectivation is a necessary condition for friendship with Israelis:

"You must tell them! You must tell him [the Israeli friend] and let him understand. I don't have to give up my rights for his friendship. Do you want to be my friend, and you took my house and you took my land?! I can tell him 'I didn't take your house and your land, and this is a problem for you and for me'. [...] The first word I would say 'My name is Abu Mustafa, a Palestinian refugee, and you forced me out of my country'" (Abu Nidal, al-Bab 11/10/2014).

Political subjectivation is thus linked to the refugee condition which implies a specifically Palestinian national identification. While the Palestinians' diverse experience of dispossession and displacement caused by the Nakba produced fragmentation and debates inside the Palestinian society (chapter 2), the refugee status reemerges as their specific

political condition in the mirroring effect engendered by their personal relationships with Israeli citizens. In this sense both Rida and Abu Mustafa connected friendship with “peace”, stating that no peace is possible until their rights as Palestinians are recognized, reestablished and preserved. The third political dimension of friendship is thus linked to the possibility to tell: in this case it is not only the friend’s sincerity which is at stake, but the sincerity of the Self which is constituted by disclosing his/her historical truth. This constitutes a practice of freedom moved against the Zionist endeavor of accumulation and concealment.

As a consequence, an eminently political friendship is produced by the Israelis’ recognition and struggle against the Zionist policies and the Israeli occupation together with Palestinians. This commitment proceeds from a realignment of political alliances, which exceed national belongings to embrace a fight for rights and justice. The break of Walid and Talia’s friendship showed how the Palestinians’ tolerability of their subaltern status in work relations, and of their racist discriminations as “Arabs”, hides and simultaneously contains a deeper moral and political limit of acceptability: their right to live must be preserved. When Talia wished her friend’s death because he looked like any other “Arab” enemy, her personal commitment in war destroyed her friendship with Walid. On the contrary, according to Ghassan, friendship is based on the “mutual feeling” of rejecting the other’s death and sharing the desire for the other’s persistence in life. It is here that sharing life itself, which founded the human morals in a sort of “pre-political” friendship, becomes the main political objective. This is the fourth political dimension of friendship: under this perspective, thus, the moral economy of friendship between Israelis and Palestinians is not a politics of friendship, but it is part of a politics of life.

3.3. Fīsh ṣuḥba hūn! The denial of friendship in the Palestinian society

While I was speaking with Rida about friendship, one of his brothers entered the room where we were sitting, and asked us what we were doing. I told him it was an interview on friendship (*ṣuḥba*). He immediately exclaimed: “*Fīsh ṣuḥba hūn!*” (There’s no friendship here!), and left the room without adding anything else. I often encountered this kind of reaction to my demand for discussion around the issue of friendship. Already, I felt shy to propose such an issue to Palestinian men and women, who certainly had something better to do than discussing about such an issue: the hardship of their life let me perceive my own object of research as a fancy and futile one. However, the absolute

denial of friendship, which Rida's brother had overtly proclaimed, seemed to be a *further* discourse about friendship, rather than its definitive eradication from the realm of the Palestinians' sociality. In part, such denial certainly served as a strategy to avoid my questions, like I had already experienced with the issue of Palestinian labor, when I was told to go and interview the unemployed instead. It was like saying: "Go and search where things are not there". I chose to follow the same path: researching on a supposed emptiness. Furthermore, it was interesting for me to see how the social language of friendship in everyday life was combined to a self-confident denial in the public discourse. This also concerned the borders between the sayable and the unsayable, which constructed the distinction between "private" and "public" speech. Moreover, Rida's brother had specified that friendship did not exist "here", referring to the Palestinian society. It sounded even more problematic to state the possibility of friendship with Israeli people and simultaneously denying the existence of friendship from the Palestinian side: it looked like the worst nightmare concerning the "normalization" of the Israeli occupation.

While insisting in making interviews on friendship, Rida's brother's statement was actually widespread. Once I was questioning three women on the issue, our conversation began with their shared opinion: "In our society friendship is not easy" (*'indnā iṣ-ṣuḥba mish sihla*), they said. They referred to the difficulty of sharing secrets with people, which defined friendship as a relationship mainly based on trust. Muna, one of the women, maintained that she could talk about her secrets only with her mother and sister: "The others, I don't give them confidence" (*mā ba'ammen*), she underlined. In Muna's view, confidentiality and trust dwelled in the domestic realm and in the closest kinship ties. While she thought that relatives were chosen by God, and were not all the same for her ("not because I hate them", she pointed out), Muna confined a particular confidential closeness to matrilateral ties. However, Ruba, her cousin, had an even darker view: "One cannot trust (*bi'amen*) her brother, either. Once it was not like that, it got worse because life got worse". I asked the women why they thought that life was worse than in the past. Muna replied that once only the original families used to live in the village, while today nobody knows who is living in it: "There are strangers, once there were only relatives" (*fī gharībāt, zamān kān fī bās qarāyb*). Evidently, in these women's discourses confidentiality in friendship was linked to an ideal of closeness represented by kinship. The traditional spatial organization of Palestinian villages contributed to build this feeling: every Palestinian village was constituted by specific extended agnatic groups

(*ḥamā'il*, pl. of *ḥamūla*), which could both create alliances through intergroup marriages and maintain their clear borders through endogamy. Therefore, every Palestinian village as a whole was a particular spatial locus defined by an easily traceable social identity: a sense of intimacy gathered its inhabitants together. In Appadurai's sense, this intimacy involved a "structure of feeling", which defined locality as such (Appadurai 1996). Muna and Ruba attested that intimacy had disappeared from their experience of dwelling, leaving them with the perception to live in an unfamiliar environment: a change had occurred, since "strangers" had replaced "relatives". According to Ruba, strangeness had englobed even what was supposed to be familiar ("one cannot trust her brother, either) so that suspicion and distrust undermined intimacy in its own definition. Where did such a perceived strangeness come from?

In al-Bab I had never met people who had moved to the village coming from outside, except for women who had married with al-Bab men through exogamous marriages. However, if we consider the original territory of al-Bab before 1948 as a unitary intimate space for its inhabitants – and in a way it was still so for men walking to Jerusalem for work – it was evidently upset by "strangers": Israeli neighborhoods had covered the Palestinians' agricultural and grazing lands, and had reached the outskirts of the "new" al-Bab. Actually, the "new" al-Bab had been shaped by this advance, and Israeli colonies had also spread in the land of the new village after the 1967 occupation. Disorientation was a common feeling expressed by old people who had gone through the Nakba, when they tried to go back to their lands, incorporated in the newborn Israeli state, and they could not find their trees. This was because they had been cut down or uprooted. Without their trees in their habitual location, Palestinian peasants started to get lost. In one of his well-known and most beautiful pages, Ernesto De Martino described how this kind of disorientation produces diffidence and anxiety. The Palestinians' trees can be easily compared to the bell tower of Marcellinara, a village in the southern Italian region of Calabria, where the Italian ethnographer was conducting research in the 50s. De Martino wrote that one day, having lost their route, he and his working team asked for direction to an old shepherd, whom they encountered in the street. Since the indications he gave them were not so clear, they invited him to get in the car and go with them until their destination: then they would have taken him back to the point of departure. De Martino precisely described the shepherd's changing mood while he saw the bell tower of his village progressively disappearing:

“He got in the car with a certain diffidence, as if he was afraid of a hidden danger, and his diffidence slowly changed into anguish, because now, from the window which he was constantly looking out of, he had lost sight of the bell tower of Marcellinara, the point of reference for his extremely circumscribed domestic space. Because that bell tower had disappeared, the poor old man felt completely lost: and it was hard work to take him as far as the right junction and find out what we needed to know. Then we took him back, hastily, as we had agreed: and all the time he had his head out of the window, scanning the horizon, to see if Marcellinara’s bell tower had reappeared: when he finally saw it, his face relaxed and his old heart was calmed, as he had reconquered a lost homeland” (De Martino 2002 [1977]: 481).

In De Martino’s existentialist analyses, “the end of the world”, which the old shepherd had experienced following the loss of the bell tower of Marcellinara from his sight horizon, implied the distressing “crisis of the presence” due to the simultaneous loss of his cultural homeland. Since cultural values had set the conditions for human operativeness in order to let that world be habitable, its disappearance threatened the human existence like an apocalypse. The Palestinians’ definition of the 1948 establishment of the Israeli state in their lands as “the catastrophe” (*an-Nakba*) recalls a similar apocalyptic experience. In the first chapter I have shown how Palestinians struggled to rebuild their cultural world in very harsh conditions, and how women’s strength was glorified in peasants’ memory because of their role of “resewing” the Palestinian society through their reproductive and care work (1.1.2). However, Ruba, Muna and her sister, three women in their forties, still felt disorientated and diffident like their parents had been at that time. Actually, Ruba’s consideration that “it got worse, because life got worse”, attested that “the catastrophe” was only the beginning of the deterioration of their life conditions. This deterioration was embodied by the perceived fragility of social ties and the widespread feelings of suspicion and distrust, which contributed to distancing people from each other and questioning “closeness” as the base of mutual trust and solidarity. Furthermore, the fear of collaborators, who spread among Palestinians since the birth of the Israeli state, had contributed to obfuscate the contours of the national belonging, and profoundly questioned a supposedly “natural” loyalty to the Palestinian cause. It was comprehensible,

therefore, that the three women maintained that friendship is not easy to build in the actual Palestinian society.

Even Ghassan, at the end of our interview, admitted, “today true friendship is a rare coin” (*iṣ-ṣadāqa iṣ-ṣadāqa ‘umla nādīra*). He told me the people whom he had considered as his closest friends (*aṣḍiqā*), had left him at the first problem he faced. Referring to his troubles with the Israeli authorities because of the wall construction, which had led him and his neighbors to organize popular demonstrations against it, Ghassan wanted to underline that his supposedly closest friends did not have stand by him: “Maybe they were afraid because of their children, maybe they were afraid because of themselves, maybe they were afraid they get problems”. He maintained “today people don’t understand the right meaning of the word ‘friend’ (*ṣāhib*), nor its value (*bi-qīmtah*): the value of respect (*bi-qīmta il-iḥtirām*) and esteem (*it-taqdīr*)”. Like for other people, Ghassan thought that the rarity of friendship was a recent phenomenon. While Ruba and Muna talked about “strangeness” insinuating the familiar, Ghassan referred to the easy way people used to change:

“You never know how it will be, everything changes, money makes a difference. Today I have a friend, he’s poor, tomorrow he’ll be rich – money can change him – and he becomes an enemy. There’s a proverb that says: “Today’s friend may be an enemy tomorrow” (*mumkin ṣadīq il-yawm ‘adū fī-l ghad*), and the one who was my enemy yesterday may be my friend tomorrow. You can’t know how people think, I told you, everyone thinks in the way he sees. [...] With all the blows of life... Now I’m 47 years old... Today it’s difficult to give confidence even to the friend (*ta’ammen hattā la-iṣ-ṣadīq*), maybe people change. The situation here, the Palestinian people.... It’s very easy that people change, people do not have principles (*mish mabda’iyyin*). It became difficult, very difficult, in the situation we are, love from people to people...” (Ghassan, al-Bab 22/2/2014).

In Ghassan’s view people are liable to change because they do not have a moral solidity, so in the hard conditions of the Israeli occupation they can be easily corrupted by money. This change, which was declined in terms of unreliability and looked like a tendency to moral corruption (“they do not have principles”), significantly opposed the ethics of steadfastness inherent to *ṣumūd* as a form of the Palestinian resistance. In fact, while a

friend was explaining this concept to me, he underlined that it could be an epithet of God as “the one who does not change”. Ghassan’s reference to money as the cause of people’s change recalled the atmosphere of suspicion engendered by collaborationism: personal loyalty in friendship resulted to be a metaphor for national loyalty, which could be “sold” to pass on the enemy’s side. In a more nuanced way, the tension between personal and national loyalty was also central in determining the legitimacy of work in Israel, which presupposed the evaluation of the adequacy of a monetary exchange (the salary) between Israeli employers and Palestinian workers: “interest” was thus an issue at stake in this kind of relationships, questioning the link between subjective positions and national standings, that is, between an individual and a collective body. This blurring of the personal and the political was at the base of the national discourse itself: more precisely, the debate around the “normalization” of the Israeli occupation scrutinized not only groups’ standing, but also individual behaviors.

Ghassan’s experience, however, showed how personal loyalty in friendship was not a simple metaphor for national loyalty: even if his closest friends had not become collaborators, it was the sense of abandonment Ghassan had suffered because of their absence in his struggle which created a feeling of betrayal. This feeling concerned both the expected solidarity and respect due to the friend, and an immediate commitment to a supposedly shared national cause. In a particular time of his life, due to specific and frightful events engendered by his family’s isolation from the village following the wall construction, Ghassan had especially embodied the national cause as a single Palestinian, so that no distinction could be clearly traced between his personal and national commitment.

Another point was significant in Ghassan’s words. The possibility of people’s change helped him to distinguish “true friendship” from a kind of friendship which did not presuppose confidentiality: “Today it’s difficult to give confidence even to the friend”. The lack of a complete trust did not undermine the relevance of the social language of friendship: the friend remained a friend, but he was not given full access to the personal, “intimate” Self. It was not the first time that I heard the theme of “changing people” as the main reason for diffidence and distrust in relationships conceived as friendship. Muhammad, a good friend of mine, revealed to me he never talked about his sentimental life with Murid, his best friend. Muhammad and Murid had a lot in common: they were two unmarried men in their late forties, and both worked as peasants and loved life in the open air. Sometimes they met in the mountains when they worked in the same

area of the village. They were really close to each other, they often spent the evening together in Murid's house, and used to speak by phone every day, so I used to mock Muhammad and told him Murid was like his girlfriend. Their conversations were typical "masculine" discussions about work, animals, and general issues, although juiced up by gags and jokes. Once we were talking about his relationship with Murid, Muhammad told me he had never confided in him about his personal feelings concerning his beloved. Since I knew how strong their bond was, I was surprised and asked him why. Muhammad told me that you never know how people change, and Murid could be like he was in the present days, but could become something else in the future. Since we were discussing about Muhammad's love – which could not become public because of its illegitimacy out of marriage – in his thinking Murid's possible change could have threatened his own respectability in the society. Consequently, while people underlined that trust and confidentiality were fundamental features in friendship, their concrete experience of it did not necessarily imply the disclosure of an "intimate" Self. Here I use the concept of intimacy in the way it was defined by my interlocutors: if "intimacy" can be described in terms of "closeness" and familiarity due to cohabitation and sharing everyday life, in its narrower sense (*"mawaddat il-ṣadāqa"*, the intimacy of friendship) it is connected to the sharing of "secrets", which is supposed to characterize "true friendship". Exploring the social dimension of secrecy necessarily involves an analysis of its social and cultural construction. Like I have already maintained (3.1.3.), in a society regulated by the honor code, the individual control of emotions is a normative ground through which the values of personal freedom and independence are cultivated. In this sense freedom and independence are mainly expressed by the capacity of not being affected by others: during a farcical and playful dispute with her brothers, a young girl exclaimed "*anā ḥurra!*" ("I am free!"), as a way to show her imperturbability to the boys' authority on her: the play let the girl express her independence without contesting her subordination in the social hierarchy. The claim about one's freedom is often used in everyday life, both by men and women, to refer to a legitimate autonomy of the individual from the potential pressure coming from the group. Under this perspective it is clear how personal feelings and emotions constitute the quintessential secrets, simultaneously representing the core of one's vulnerability in a context of pressing social control, where the values of strength and composure are the most appreciated ones. Muhammad and Murid's personal relationship was evidently constituted by a strong complicity and affection, although it was not primarily defined by intimacy. Conversely, affects were not supposed to result

from a necessarily “intimate” sharing: like for love between two married people, *mawadda* (affection, intimacy) should stem mainly from cohabitation and sharing in everyday life. A margin of strangeness and mistrust was thus constitutive of familiarity and social proximity, without radically undermining the strength of social bonds. People’s potential “change” referred thus to a culturally perceived fragility and precariousness of social relationships, which were supposed to have increased due to the worsening of life conditions under the Israeli occupation. This worsening, however, did not refer to the constitutive fragility of the relationship between the individual and the society, where the personal sphere was legitimately separated from the “public”: the deterioration of social bonds was thought as a sort of moral corruption, which produced the other’s opacity and undermined fundamental social and political solidarities. In this sense the “private” and “public” dimensions of secrecy got intermingled: this was what produced uncertainty and confusion.

Under this light we can further realize the apparent paradox constituted by the combination of a discourse which provided for “friendship” with the Israeli “enemies” as a legitimated social reality in everyday life, and a discourse which denied friendship in the Palestinian society. When I asked Abu Nadir for an interview, he initially refused and told me to go and ask other people in the village. However, since he could not stop telling me about his ideas on the issue, we actually discussed the matter for a long time, but he prevented me from using the recorder. Abu Nadir’s view really struck me. I had always known about his ties with Israel and the Israeli people, and he initially repeated what I had always heard: the Israelis are human beings like us; although they are almost all Zionists, the political responsibility relies on their government and not on them as the people; friendship with them is not political. However, since I had introduced friendship as a specific issue, Abu Nadir pointed out: “Friendship with Israeli people is better than friendship with Palestinians. In this friendship both parts have a white heart, because I know who they are and they know who I am. We understand each other (*fāhmīn ba‘d*). I look for my interest and they look for their one”. He then told me that in 1995, when the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated, and Gaza and the West Bank were under indefinite closure, his Israeli colleagues (whom he called *aṣḥāb*, friends) used to bring him food and regularly went to visit him to see what he needed. If solidarity was a central feature of friendship, in Abu Nadir’s words friendship with Israeli people was “better” because it avoided the confusion between personal and national loyalty, which made the Palestinian identity become ambiguous. On the contrary, relationships with

Israelis were “transparent” (“with a white, pure heart”) because each side knew who the other was: the split between personal and national loyalty was here so complete that it could not engender confusion. For this reason Abu Nadir’s interest as a Palestinian was totally distinct from the Israelis’ interest: beyond opposing nationalisms, this was equally true at work, where he went to gain a salary and they offered him a job. Abu Nadir knew that power relations were equally clear, and maintained, “if they say I should not be here, I let it go in one ear and out the other”. Of course, this attitude was contrary to the political subjectivation, which was considered as a central feature of a politically legitimate friendship with Israelis (4.2.3.). Once more, the official separation of a personal relationship from politics concerned the “normalization” of the Israeli occupation, whose opposition was a recent, main goal in the Palestinian national discourse. However, the ideal adherence of the personal to the political expected as a form of political “purity” in the Palestinian resistance, was inevitably questioned and rearticulated in Palestinian workers’ experience.

3.3.1. Labor, friendship and the question of “normalization”

If the denial of friendship testified a widespread feeling of suspicion among Palestinians, and reinforced the perception of the fragility of social ties, the Palestinians’ work and personal bonds with Israeli people were in the public eye. I have already shown how Palestinian workers differently evaluated the kind of job and their place of work for Israeli employers on the basis of contingent political considerations related to their supposed national loyalty. The blame of collaboration could hit Palestinian laborers, especially if engaged in the construction of the wall or in other Israeli works in the West Bank. This blame was endorsed by the Palestinian national discourse, for which the threaten of “collaboration” and “normalization” had blurred in recent years, and Palestinian activists could verbally attack Palestinians workers. This official stance had an effect on the ways the issue of my research was apprehended by Palestinians: trying to discuss about it with some of my friends – those who mainly came from the urban middle-class and were mostly devoted to commercial professions in Palestinian towns – resulted in being as frustrating as the reality itself. One of them told me that in his whole life he had worked only three hours in Israel, and during the lunch break had asked himself what he was doing, and had left. He continued: “Even if you have been living for

three years here, you have not understood and cannot understand. You do not know what it means when your sick father tells you he wants to see his village before dying. Palestinians who work in Israel have no dignity. I would rather starve than work in Israel". This friend of mine, like others, underlined that I could not understand their life because I had not grown up as a Palestinian. I could agree with him, but what hurt me more was thinking about my friends in al-Bab as "people without dignity": and for this reason I could not agree. I revealed to one of them my previous argument. He commented: "The problem is there is work, through work we have relationships with the Israelis. The one you work with in the day, you cannot attack him in the night. When I think about it I feel bad [he sighed]. The problem is we and the Israelis are woven together (*mitdakhlin*)". My friend's frustration stemmed only from his personal reality: apparently, he did not feel offended by being described as someone without dignity by another Palestinian. He felt desolate because he did attest that work relations with Israelis actually weakened Palestinian political struggle. Both guys had incorporated and actively performed the national discourse: if one saw labor in Israel as the opposite of national loyalty, the other found that political struggle was incompatible with work relations. The only difference between the two was a difference in their everyday experience: the first, who was supposed to be "without dignity", met Israelis daily at work or in his village, and conceived Palestinians and Israelis as "woven together", while the other did not use to see Israelis, since he worked with foreign tourists in Bethlehem. On the basis of their different experience, I started to question Palestinian workers about what "normalization" meant for them.

An official definition of the "normalization" in the Palestinian context was offered by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), and then endorsed by the BDS National Committee (BNC) in a document approved in 2007, conceiving normalization as:

"The participation in any project, initiative or activity, in Palestine or internationally, that aims (implicitly or explicitly) to bring together Palestinians (and/or Arabs) and Israelis (people or institutions) without placing as its goal resistance to and exposure of the Israeli occupation and

all forms of discrimination and oppression against the Palestinian people”¹¹⁴.

This effort of definition inevitably led to define resistance to the Israeli occupation as the normative goal of every legitimated Israeli-Palestinian interaction. Yet, in the contemporary Palestinian society the negative connotation of “normalization” is clear, but its references can vary widely. As far as I could experience during my fieldwork, most of the Palestinian people I met referred to “normalization” as the activities of particular groups, recently developing in Israel/Palestine, whose main goal was just the encounter between Israelis and Palestinians, framed in terms of “reconciliation” and “forgiveness”. On the other hand, people in al-Bab (and elsewhere) did not perceive their own personal relationships with Israelis as “normalization”, since they were mainly linked to their work experience in Israel, in which the goal was not to meet Israelis, but to earn a living. Actually, the official BDS document did not explicitly include labor in Israel as a form of “normalization”. However, since labor in Israel was a form of interaction, which certainly did not nurture Palestinian resistance, people who did not work with or for Israelis could publicly state that Palestinian laborers had no dignity. Such a public statement contrasted with a social reality where almost everyone had at least a relative or a friend “woven together” with Israelis for work. In everyday encounters among Palestinians, the issue about whom was the less respectable one on the basis of his national loyalty was not relevant in most cases: norms of mutual respect did not imply such considerations, and the controversial position of Palestinian laborers in Israel was almost silenced. Furthermore, we saw how labor in Israel had also contributed to produce new forms of economical and social prestige in the Palestinian society, affecting masculine hierarchies (2.1.2.). I think that the “elastic” property of the national discourse, which could be appropriated and suspended contingently, was connected to the coexistence of different public spheres in the Palestinians’ daily life: this simultaneous heterogeneity was marked by people’s interaction with multiple “audiences”, engendering the fragmentation of the public discourse itself. I do not mean to say that in such a context national discourse loses its strength and efficacy – it does not – but it is necessarily appropriated and readapted in contingent situations, so that the “militant” posture can often be put aside. If, from the “militant” point of view, the detachment from an overtly militant standing can correspond, at best, to a guilty indifference, and at worst, to a sort of “treason”, which can

¹¹⁴ <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1749> (English version), <http://www.pacbi.org/atemplate.php?id=100> (Arabic version), accessed on 23/11/2015.

therefore be recongised as a “loss of dignity”, I would rather consider it as an essential social competence in a context characterized by the lack of political freedom. In such a context social opportunities, symbolical capital and, above all, very concrete forms of protection from oppression and violence, are not equally redistributed among Palestinians. Class differentiation is not the only factor, but certainly is key in determining this social and political landscape. In this sense I maintain that, if the exercise of politics is eminently linked to collective action in a public space, most of the Palestinian workers contributed to redefining the political scene, rather than abandon it. It is not my aim here to question if their ways are the right or the wrong ones, whether conscious or unaware: I just want to focus on their lived experience, not conceived as an inert result of the Israeli power, but as something which can be politically generative in itself. The specificity of Palestinian workers’ experience in Israel was thus defined by their everyday presence and circulation in a prevalent Israeli space, hanging between personalized social relationships with Israeli people and their direct exposure to the Israeli public opinion.

While reading the official Palestinian definition of the “normalization”, I addressed one of my friends from al-Bab and told him that, on the basis of that definition, he and his brothers, who worked in Israel, perfectly matched the category. He was surprised by my observation and asked me: “Why?”. He then explained to me: “Normalization [occurs] if I am satisfied (*rādī*) 100 %, if there is no difference between my feelings from inside and from outside (*idha mā fī farq bayn sh‘ūrī min juwwa w min barra*). From inside we are annoyed, but it does not have to appear from outside” (*min juwwa mitḍāyqīn bās min barra mish lāzim ybayn*). According to my friend, normalization is firstly determined by feeling (*sh‘ūr*), and feeling originates from an inner part of the Self. At the same time the Self results in consisting of two parts: beyond its intimate part, the Self is also exposed to others. Like we saw for the definition of intimacy in friendship, personal feelings are not necessarily socialized in human relationships, they are controlled and generally restrained. In the same way the “annoyance” produced by the historical conditions of dispossession which defined Palestinians as such, had to stay hidden in the context of their work relations with Israelis. This is an incontrovertible effect of the Israeli power, which developed in two ways at least: from one side, labor as an apparatus of the Israeli colonial governmentality produced the individualization of the Palestinian people based on their singularized scrutiny and selective inclusion into Israel; from the other side, the Israeli labor market became a public arena where every

Palestinian worker found himself exposed to the Israelis' public opinion. This latter point concerns the public image to which every Palestinian is confronted in Israel. An Israeli woman once told me: "Until the Intifada Arab workers in Israel were like shadows, then they began to have a face". She meant that the Palestinian uprising had made a political subjectivity emerge in the public scene: this passage, however, had affected the image of the Palestinians in the Israeli public opinion, so that they had passed from being an undifferentiated, invisible, and docile workforce, to represent a potential, imminent threatening force that each single "Arab" could embody. Through the story of Walid and Talia's friendship (3.2.2.) we saw how the Palestinians' public image is linked to a hegemonic racialized distinction between "Jews" and "Arabs" as incommensurable ethnic categories. A constitutive dangerousness is attributed to "Arabs" as such: even many leftist Israelis I met during my fieldwork used to distinguish between "dangerous" and "non-dangerous" Palestinians. "Arab" was also the quintessential connotation of the Israeli public enemy: "Arabs" are killers and terrorists. This representation of "Arabs" in the Israeli-Zionist public opinion, whose historical interrelation with the liberal Western discourse was highlighted by Edward Said (1979), was also at the base of the further political distinction between Jewish citizens and Arab non-citizens, whose idiosyncratic character is well represented by the subaltern status of Palestinians holding the Israeli citizenship. As a consequence, through labor as an apparatus of the Israeli power, it was the combined individualization and exposure of the Palestinian workers in Israel which undermined their full political subjectivation: Israel succeeded in separating their bare life from their political existence. However, according to my friend's reliance on the concept of "normalization", the inner Self became the privileged site of the political, producing a radical discrepancy from the outside reality. If labor in Israel became a public situation because it engendered face-to-face encounters between Palestinians and Israelis, friendship as a mode of personal relationship could become an "intimate" space for disclosing and claiming a political Self in front of the other. In this sense "true", political friendship was obtained by the reunification of the "private" and "public" Self, which was liable to be realized in a Palestinian-Israeli shared mobilization against Zionist policies. In this way resistance happened to be once again the form of Palestinian political agency, and did not remain only a sort of intimate desire.

However, such a reunification of the "private" and "public" Self must be distinguished by a very different obliteration of their separation. I have discussed above about how, according to the honor code, the control of emotions served to state one's

freedom and independence, which are defined as the personal capacity of not being affected by others. When my friend pointed out that normalization occurs when there is no difference between one's "inside" and "outside", normalization was exactly described as the obliteration of the separation between a "private" and a "public" Self. On the contrary, resisting normalization consisted in avoiding the "private" Self to be captured and dominated by a "public" Self, modeled by power. This could be similarly considered an exercise of freedom in a system of domination and oppression, in order to contest what is generally called the "colonization of the mind" (*isti'mār il-'aql*), which became the biggest fear for Palestinians. Ghassan commented: "We start to say what the occupation wants us to say. I start saying that settlement is a town, for example. This is what frightens here in Palestine (*hadi illi bikhawwef hūn fī Falasṭīn*)". This is especially the oldest generations' fear: Palestinians are worried that their children grow up under the Israeli occupation and live it as a normality. This also recalls the fear of oblivion, which emerged through Palestinian peasants' memories on the Nakba (1.1.2.). In Ghassan's view the colonization of thinking (*isti'mār il-fikr*) is more dangerous than the colonization of the land: "When they colonize your land, your thinking remains clean (*biḡall nḡīf*), you keep thinking how you can get it back. But when they colonize your mind, *khalas!* When I colonized your mind, you become mine (*bitsīr illi*)". In this sense normalization implies going into a state of total domination similar to slavery, defined by the extreme dispossession of the Self from the Palestinian person. Palestinian resistance is thus originally deployed through the human capacity of feeling and thinking, recalling the ethics of *ṣumūd* as the ability of *not changing* with regard to basic moral and political principles.

Such a split of a "private" and "public" Self produced by the Israeli power contests the exercise of politics as a form of agency, which by definition develops in the public arena. The Palestinian workers' public Self – at least in their daily commitment with Israelis, where a "public" Self is created by their exposure in a hegemonic Israeli space – is thus separated from its political qualities and potentialities. This is the most successful output of political repression, promoted through detention, imprisonment, torture and blackmail. Yet, Palestinians maintain it is not only through violence that Israel tries to produce their political annihilation. Here is how Abu Mustafa, who had been a worker in Israel for his whole life, defined the "normalization" to me:

“In this time what is demanded is normalization at a political level, it starts with human stuff, like I shoot one and then I take him to the hospital for curing him. But why did you kill him first? So then he’s compelled to do the spy for Israel, like what happens to cancer patients from Gaza. If you want to be treated, you have to be a spy. If you help us, we’ll help you. These are not human morals (*akhlāq insaniyya*). This is a type of normalization” (Abu Mustafa, al-Bab 11/10/2014).

Abu Mustafa clearly defined Israel’s humanitarianism as a form of normalization “at a political level”, that is, as a precise policy of the Israeli state. He pointed out the difference between this form of interested “help” (“if you help us, we’ll help you”) – actually, a softer “gentle” kind of blackmail if compared to torture – from the “human morals”, which defined the possibility of friendship with Israeli people. This form of normalization is devoted to transform Palestinians into Israel’s spies, taking advantage of their basic needs as human beings: humanity is here reduced to bare life. Spies and collaborators are the exemplary figures of the confusion and indeterminacy of national belongings as political borders, and of the definitive capture of the Palestinians’ political agency by the Israeli power.

Yet, in most of Palestinian workers’ discourses the loss of the political quality of their public life is not imputed to Israel, which is considered as an incontestable enemy due to its Zionist policies. The normalization, which Palestinian laborers do not feel to embody, but oppose, is the abandon of resistance, the Palestinians’ fundamental political goal, by their political representatives. We go back here to the separation of “people” and “government”, which defined the possibility of friendship with Israeli people as separated from the political domain. Normalization is thus represented by the coordination policies between Israel and the PNA, established by the Oslo “peace” agreements. Abu Mustafa saw in the concepts of “security” and “peace” the core of the normalization itself:

“From where did security come? It came when the Palestinian Authority came. It’s forbidden to fight, there’s no danger for settlers, it’s forbidden to attack the settlers, and they can move in security. [...] The Israeli army can enter any place, take the people they want and go back. The Palestinian police and soldiers gave them the information, they leave the rifle and stop aside. This is in the agreement. [...] I won’t say like Abu ‘Ammār [Arafat], Rabin’s friend (*ṣadīq*)... No, I wouldn’t be Rabin’s friend [he laughs].

Maybe a Jew, a normal person who believes in my cause, can be my friend, but during the first Intifada Rabin was the first who invented the “breaking the bones” for Palestinians. Arafat said: ‘He is my partner in peace’ (*sharīki b-is-salām*). Who’s the partner? He took my house, destroyed my house, who’s the partner? This is treason. [...] The betray of the Palestinian people comes from the Arab leaders, established by Europe and Israel and all the world. They are paid by colonialism (*mā’jūr mīn il-isti’mār*). The Arab countries want to make normalization before getting back our rights, before there’s space for peace. What is peace? Peace is when I make peace with you and you make peace with me. And there’s no conflict (*fish ishī khilāfi*) between us. But you forced us out of our land, it’s not possible to have peace, except peace that gets my rights back (*yaşilni haqqī*)” (Abu Mustafa, al-Bab 11/10/2014).

Using Arafat’s definition of Rabin as his “partner in peace”, Abu Mustafa stated a clear separation between the “personal” and the “political” concerning relationships with Israelis. His reference was to Arafat’s lecture in 1994¹¹⁵, when the PLO leader was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace together with Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, who were at that time the Israeli Prime Minister and Foreign Minister respectively. The prize was justified by their shared commitment in the Oslo Agreements, which had been recently signed, and provided for the return of the Palestinian political leadership in Palestine after years of exile. The creation of a Palestinian National Authority was supposed to represent the Palestinian people and engage in a process of state building, which would have led to the creation of a Palestinian state after a transitional period of five years, established by the agreements. During this transition, the Israeli occupying power would have kept hold over large parts of the West Bank and Gaza, but was expected to progressively withdraw its military and civilian control over the Palestinian population. Such an Israeli withdrawal never happened, and after the Oslo agreements the Israeli settler colonization intensified in those areas (Area C) where the full control of Israel had been legitimated by the agreements. Simultaneously, security cooperation and civil liaisons were officially enacted between Israel and the PNA (see 2.2.). Security cooperation provided for the disarming of the Palestinians and the cooptation of the *shebab* who had fought in the first Intifada. The fighters were integrated into PNA

¹¹⁵ Yasser Arafat, *Nobel Lecture*, in http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1994/arafat-lecture.html.

security bodies (Bucaille 1998). Officially, the PNA became responsible for Israel's security. The inverse would have been hard to think, given the power asymmetry between the two political entities, and a political project which combined Israel's separation policy with the ongoing military occupation and settler colonization of the West Bank and Gaza. In this way the Israeli system of domination became officially legitimated through the "peace" agreements.

For this reason, in the social and political context inaugurated by the Oslo Agreements, "peace" became a suspected idea among Palestinian people. In Abu Mustafa's words "peace" coincided with "normalization", since it became a mode of political relation which aimed to pacify the two parts – officially conceived as symmetrical – without assuring the Palestinians' rights, that is the end of the Israeli occupation and settler colonization, the creation of an independent Palestinian state and the promotion of refugees' right of return. Furthermore, "peace" looked like "normalization" because, while the Palestinians continued to suffer their oppression and dispossession, they were deprived from their political agency by their very representatives, who acted as Israel's officials in favoring the Palestinians' arrests and political repression. If the Palestinian leaders are often described as "Israelis", "traitors" and "spies", their subordination to the Israeli power is supposed to reflect on the Palestinian people's humiliation. Abu Mustafa pointed out "the leader's dignity comes from the people's dignity, and the people's dignity comes from their leader's dignity (*karāmat il-qā'd min karāmat ish-sha'b w karāmat ish-sha'b min karāmat il-qā'd*)". Ultimately, in Palestinian workers' thinking, their lack of dignity was not an exclusive status which pertained to their specific "normalized" condition: the lack of dignity was rather Palestinian people's common status, deriving from the lack of a political leadership determined by the people and from their consequent exclusion from the free exercise of politics in the public arena.

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The widespread denial of friendship in the Palestinian society, which is differently depicted as a "difficult" and "rare" personal relationship, opposes, on the one hand the language of friendship in the social practice, and on the other side the Palestinian national belonging as a guarantee for the full expression of the Palestinians' political Self. Feelings of suspicion and mistrust, which pervade social bonds through the figures of "spies" and "collaborators", tell us about a kind of violence which is deployed in the most ordinary

forms of the social life. In such a context intimacy is necessarily affected by power, which makes the other's identity uncertain, and a mutual recognition always precarious. As a consequence, moral subjectivation is almost never accomplished through a political subjectivation or, inversely, a political subjectivation can only be distinct from the ethical relation that friendship represents in the everyday experience. The separation of morality – regulating personal relationships – from politics – regulating the relationships between national subjects – reflects on the distinction between “the people” and “the government”. Labor as the source, and friendship as a potential form of personal relationships with Israelis, are not considered as effects of the normalization of the Israeli occupation by Palestinian workers: the separation is rather embodied, giving birth to a non-politicized public Self, and to a “private” Self containing a political truth, which is carefully cultivated in silence and can be disclosed only in “true” friendship. According to Palestinian laborers in Israel, the “normalization” corresponds to the obliteration of such a separation, when the “private” Self is captured and dominated by the “public” one: this is also called “the colonization of the mind”. In this sense political resistance to the Israeli occupation and settler colonization is exerted through the human capacity of feeling and thinking, which establishes individual freedom. Steadfastness (*ṣumūd*) thus conjugates the Palestinians' physical anchorage to their lands with an ethical disposition based on a moral and political unchangeability.

Palestinian workers' silence is thus ambiguous: if their national commitment would demand that they speak, their personal everyday experience in a hegemonic Israeli space requires that they remain in silence. Maria Pia Di Bella (2011 [2008]) has shown how the ambiguous nature of silence does not only derive from its possible contradictory connotation as consensus or dissent: silence is an ambivalent strategy of communication because it can also be abandoned and shifted into elocution. For Palestinian workers the production of a public discourse is mainly seized by the racist discourse, through which they are represented in the Israeli public opinion, and by the marginality of resistance, which was produced by the official standing of the Palestinian political institutions. The emergence of a public discourse on their historical truth as Palestinians is no more perceived to be linked to the work of political institutions and supposed Palestinian representatives, but it is negotiated through personal relationships in which personal and national loyalties are continuously intermingled. In this sense their silence does not merely represent their “normalization”, but rather constitutes a potentiality. The potentiality of silence encounters the potential value of “true” friendship as a personal

relationship based on trust and confidentiality. At the same time Palestinian workers, who can be framed as people “without dignity” by the Palestinian national discourse itself, recognize their humiliation as part of the Palestinian people as a whole, and simultaneously struggle for their personal dignity in their everyday life. If neither labor nor friendship are considered as the places of the political, they are both part of the quest for a respectable and honorable life, which conversely defines the legitimacy of a job and the possibility of a friendship.

4. FORMS AND POLITICS OF LIFE

The ethnographic inquiry on the social practices and discourses around friendship in the Palestinian society has shown how the question of “life” defines the limit of friendship with Israeli people. If we reconsider Das’ discussion on the “forms of life” under this perspective, friendship between Palestinians and Israelis appears to be a form of life which both emerges from a shared social experience and redefines life itself in the context of the Israeli occupation and settler colonization of the West Bank.

In the previous chapter I have focused on the social production of “friendship” as “a way of saying” a specific kind of personal relationships, which are engendered by the everyday encounters between Palestinian workers and Israeli citizens. I have proposed to consider that a moral economy of friendship regulates such relationships: honesty, trust and sincerity are at the core of a mutual recognition of Israeli and Palestinian people as “friends”. However, the moral economy of friendship is not the ideal output of a peaceful coexistence between two populations who are supposed to be “enemies” instead: conflict is a constitutive part of it. Conflict is not deployed through an open opposition between the two sides, but is rather expressed in the forms of a “revelation” and a “disclosure” of Palestinian political subjectivity thanks to the intimacy that friendship ties can create. These forms of Palestinian individual revelations must be considered in light of the historical and political conditions by which they have been produced. From one side, the Palestinians’ political subjectivity takes the form of a “revelation” because of the secret character that their historical violent dispossession by the Israeli state acquired: a “public secret” which became hegemonic in the Zionist narrative, and was nurtured by the Western liberal compliance with Zionism as a Jewish nationalist movement resulted by convergent historical trajectories of the European modernity. From the other side, the Palestinians’ “revelation” is also constrained by the “peace” regime inaugurated with the Oslo Agreements, in which the Palestinian political establishment explicitly avoids confrontations with Israel, and turned the resistance national discourse into an efficient deployment of “security coordination” and “civil liaisons” with the occupying Jewish state.

At the same time even Israelis can get involved in a sort of “revelation” through their personal connections with Palestinians: their shame, compassion or sense of guiltiness make clear their dominant position as Israeli citizens, for whom the historical Israeli “guilt” – that coincides with the Palestinians’ historical truth – can only be lived as a

singularized experience due to the hegemony of Zionist public discourse. Furthermore, despite their social stratification and their different political orientations, all these Israelis witness – and in some case have been directly affected by – racist discriminations in their own society. Swinging between a self-recognition on the dominant side, and the widespread fear of the “Arab” enemy, Israelis’ “friendship” with Palestinians can become a personal battleground, where friends and enemies paradoxically combine and oppose each other in unexpected ways. In the case of Walid and Talia (3.2.2.), their personal relationship was overwhelmed by the war regime that the Israeli state, in the name of self-defense against Palestinian rockets, was imposing on the West Bank and, particularly, on the Gaza population through massive arrests, bombardments and killings. Talia’s frightened embodiment of this war regime determined the end of her long-lasting friendship with Walid, just when she converted her Palestinian friend into an “Arab” enemy, and condemned him to death. Walid was thus swallowed by silence once again. From the Palestinians’ point of view the political limit of friendship, conceived as a legitimate “human” relationship with Israelis, appears to be life itself: like Ghassan and Abu Mustafa pointed out, friendship is normatively linked to the wish for the friend’s persistence in life.

If we consider the second aspect of Das’ formulation of the “form of life”, Palestinian-Israeli friendship questions human life through the moral discourse of a “common humanity”. I have defined this dimension of friendship as “pre-political”, since “humanity” is not thought to be established politically, through the exercise of right and law, but it is rather connected to an idea of equality based on the various capacities of the human body: the capacity to feel, to reproduce and to communicate (see 4.2.3.). “Human morals” thus derive from this constitutive form of sharing, and lead to consider the relationships between Israelis and Palestinians in their everyday life as “human relationships”. In this sense “friendship” is ethically cultivated through social and cultural forms of mutual respect and solidarity. At the same time Palestinians exclude such a friendship by the political domain, and confine it to a personal relationship between precise individuals. This separation is grounded on the separation between “the people” and their “governments”, which conversely embody the quintessence of the political. Concretely, Israeli civilians are distinguished from Israeli officials and soldiers. It is important to note that, from the Palestinians’ point of view, the Israeli settlers cannot be considered as a fully civilian presence, since they overtly represent the Israeli policy of settler colonization in the West Bank. As a consequence, “human morals” could

difficultly define friendship with settlers or soldiers, since they constitute the armed wings of the Zionist policies. The aggressive character of the Israeli settlements is not difficult to grasp: beyond the evidence that most of the Israeli settlements had been initially established as military outposts (and only later authorized for civilian residence by the Israeli government thanks to their being “facts on the ground”), so called “ideological” settlers, supported by the Israeli right wing, overtly claim the Israeli annexation of the West Bank as part of the Jewish Biblical land. Settlements concretely represent the political project of the Israeli colonial advance, through the illegal dislocation of a part of the Israeli civilian population into the Palestinian occupied territories. Since this population is submitted to the Israeli civilian law, Israeli bodies become the “place” through which the expansion of the Israeli sovereignty beyond the 1967 borders is realized. Furthermore, a specifically settler violence is exerted against Palestinians in many areas of the West Bank, through attacking people, shooting their animals, and cutting olive trees, until the recent tragic burning of Palestinian civilians. Like the soldiers’ weapons, the Israeli settlers embody the further destruction of the Palestinians’ life conditions through the confiscation of their lands, the appropriation of water resources and the contraction of the Palestinian living space. Moreover, settlements are constantly guarded by the Israeli army, so that the soldiers and settlers’ presence is always combined.

In this sense we see how friendship between Israelis and Palestinians is a form of life in its double sense: it is an intelligible language for social inclusion and solidarity, and simultaneously defines the limits of a shareable human life. It is when these limits are not respected – when this fundamental sharing is put into question – that friendship ends. However, if life is connected to specific capacities of the human body, its value is not given only by the simple fact of living: feeling engenders a human sensibility, reproduction is connected to social responsibility, language provides for mutual understanding. It is the *qualified* human life which demands “human morals” based on mutual respect and solidarity. This is why a merely *virtual* killing (like Talia did to Walid) can make this life die. This conception of the form of life encounters Agamben’s definition of the form-of-life as In this chapter I want to explore these different dimensions of life through the ethnographic analyses of various discourses on life that I often encountered during my fieldwork among Palestinians. More precisely, I want to question the interstitial space created by the difference between the attachment for life, which Palestinians attribute to Israelis, and the repulsion for death, which they claim even

in front of the most violent and lethal forms of their political struggle. Exploring such a narrow, apparently contradicting space, I assume that the moral economy of friendship is part of a politics of life. Didier Fassin has defined “politics of life” as “politics that give specific value and meaning to human life” (Fassin 2007: 501). Dialoguing and criticizing the Foucauldian concept of “biopolitics”, which focused on the political technologies directed to discipline and normalize life through the government of populations, Didier Fassin has proposed to focus on the evaluation of human life on the base of its value and meaning, taking into account the consequent hierarchization of lives. The project of a political anthropology of life thus combines the study of “the logics of physical and social death” at work in different societies, with the “ethics of survival claimed by those who are threatened by physical and social extinction, and whose discourses and acts refuse the supposed alternative between bare life and qualified life” (Fassin 2014: 13). After examining the biopower operating in the Israeli colonial governmentality (Scott 1999) through labor as one of its fundamental apparatuses (chapter 3), I finally draw my attention to the production and distribution of values and meanings attached to life in the colonial Israeli-Palestinian space.

4.1. Conceptions of life under the Israeli security regime

The radical difference, which distinguishes Palestinian and Israeli people in the Palestinians’ discourses, is their approach to life. In different occasions during my fieldwork I was told about the Israelis’ particular attachment to life (*hirs*, extreme care; eager desire; greed): “Israelis love life”, Palestinian people used to point out to me. This “love” for life, which was thought to characterize Israelis as such, should lead us to wonder about its opposite: if so, do Palestinians love death instead? Why should not Palestinians love life?

I was almost at the end of my fieldwork in June and July 2014, when tensions started to increase in the West Bank after the alleged kidnapping of three young Israeli settlers near Hebron, and the killing of the Palestinian teenager Muhammad Abu Khdeir in Jerusalem. When the news of the suspected kidnapping arrived on 12 June 2014, the Israeli government had no doubt that the action had been led by Palestinians: the Israeli army spread in the southern West Bank, especially in Hebron area where the three settlers had disappeared, and started to conduct home inspections and massive arrests. The Israeli government immediately imputed the kidnapping to Hamas’ indisputable responsibility,

so that many Hamas activists, who had been spared by the Palestinian National Authority's repression in recent years, after Fatah-Hamas harsh conflict, were hunted down and arrested by the Israeli forces. Was it just coincidence that the Israeli accusations blamed the democratically elected Islamist group after its political reconciliation with Fatah one month before? I was not surprised when one of Hamas spokesmen rejected the Israeli accusations simply saying they were "stupid". The certain reality was that, from 12 June to 9 July 2014, almost 900 Palestinians had been arrested¹¹⁶. From Palestinian sources and my personal connections it was clear that not only Islamist activists had been targeted, since also FPLP exponents were put in prison in the Bethlehem area where I was living. Until 2 July, the day of Muhammad Abu Khdeir's killing, the West Bank was caught by a sort of siege. Arbitrary closures and the suspension of thousands of Palestinian workers' permits to enter Israel (12.000 in the Hebron area) went with the Israeli arrests. Eight Palestinian boys, the oldest of whom was my same age (31 years old), died under the Israeli fire: if war would work as a mathematical calculation, in less than one month the young settlers' (not discovered, yet) death had been abundantly balanced. For two nights I could not sleep in my house, which was in Area A (under supposedly full Palestinian control), because it was surrounded by Israeli soldiers, who kept spreading inside Palestinian inhabited areas following alleged attacks to their military bases in the West Bank. A sense of disorientation and permanent worry started to nourish daily life, and Palestinians around me could not understand what was happening: because the siege was justified by the search for the settlers' kidnappers, people thought it was impossible that Israel took so much time to find them, since "out of five Palestinians there is an Israeli spy".

The situation further worsened after 30 June, when the kidnapped settlers' corpses were found near Hebron. While Israel promptly committed to demolishing the houses of the *suspected* Palestinians, who had neither been tried nor sentenced, on 2 July the 16-year-old Muhammad Abu Khdeir was found dead in a forest at the outskirts of Jerusalem. It was later verified that the Palestinian boy had been kidnapped from East Jerusalem,

¹¹⁶ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/12643-israel-has-arrested-896-palestinians-since-12-june>. According to statistics provided by the Israeli NGO B'tselem, from May to August 2014 the total number of the Palestinian security detainees held by the Israeli Prison Service and the IDF increased by more than 450 people. See B'tselem, *Statistics table on "Palestinian security detainees and prisoners held in IPS and IDF prisons" (Year 2014)*. According to the Palestinian association Addameer, approximately 3000 Palestinians were arrested between July and September 2014, and 6200 was the total number of people detained by Israel. Addameer highlighted this was the highest number of Palestinians in the detention since 2009. See Addameer, *Quarterly Newsletter – July to September 2014*.

where he lived with his family, and then beaten and burnt alive by three young Israelis, who later confessed their responsibility for the crime. Popular revolts broke out in East Jerusalem and the West Bank after Muhammad's killing. Hamas started to launch rockets into Israel and called for the West Bank Palestinians' general mobilization. As a response to Hamas rockets, Israel initiated its military operation, named "Protective Edge", through massive air bombardments, which targeted also civilians' dwellings and hospitals. The Israeli attack on the Gaza population caused more than 2200 casualties in less than two months. Meanwhile, "hunts for Arabs" were organized by huge groups of extreme rightwing Israelis in the Jerusalem city center, and racist violence increased towards Palestinian workers in Israel. The Israeli army entered Palestinian villages and did not avoid shooting, sometimes killing people in the street: among other "casual" deaths, in a Palestinian village near al-Bab a man was shot dead one evening, while he was closing the shutter of his store.

In such a deadly atmosphere, I was confronted with war for the first time in my life. It was depressing to wake up in the morning, and it was inevitable to stay glued to the news, although the news were not as updated as the people in the street. In the Palestinian homes I had been attending for three years the mood radically changed. The TV was constantly turned on, obsessively showing destroyed houses, blood, and the dead and blessed bodies of people in Gaza. Whole families daily sat in front of these terrifying images, and children were left exposed to them: "So they'll learn", adult people said. In the radical disproportion of military force, from the Palestinians' point of view Israeli casualties (66 soldiers and seven civilians)¹¹⁷ resulted to be paltry, if compared to the thousands of Palestinian deaths: generally, they were softly welcomed and raised no particular comments, although they were inevitably considered as one of their slightest successes in war.

Personally, I did not feel at ease. My spontaneous reaction to the situation was almost stopping entering Israel, if not necessary for my commitments in Jerusalem. I kept discussing with an Israeli colleague, whose son had just begun the military service and had been sent to the Gaza border. She could know almost nothing about him due to the military "secrets". We used to share our so different everyday life – and so different anxieties – living on the opposite sides of the Green Line, while most of the people who moved around us kept being devoted to the society life in Jerusalem, as if nothing were

¹¹⁷ BBC News, *Gaza crisis: Toll of Operations in Gaza*, 1 September 2014. All the civilians were killed by Hamas rockets. Among them, a Thai national also died.

happening. War was so close, and so far. One day my Israeli colleague asked me: “So, what do Palestinians want?”. I started to feel a stranger in West Jerusalem, even more than what I used to do before. My affective attachment to my Palestinian acquaintances grew. I had a strange feeling of solitude staying in my apartment, so I used to spend most of the time at my friends’ homes. I think it was not only me, and apparently people needed to gather together even more than what they used to do before. Clearly, it was a collective feeling through which we were going: an indefinite one, because we were so focused on the present day and so confused about the nearest future. Yet, one day I was with a peasant friend and some children in their land in al-Bab. We were drinking the tea he had made on fire, and we were comfortably sitting in his open-air living room after collecting vegetables from the land. Suddenly, we started to hear the earth trembling: a soft, expanded sound. That was the Israeli bombs falling on Gaza, only one hundred kilometers from us. My friend told me that the day before some Israeli soldiers had been killed on the Gaza border. He smiled, while I was thinking of my colleague’s son. I told him: “Don’t think that I like it”. He answered me: “Don’t think that we like death”.

“We don’t like death” (*iḥnā mā minḥibb il-mūt*) sounded like an echo of “Israelis love life” (*il-yahūd biḥibbu il-ḥayā*). Every Palestinian could pronounce this refrain: “We don’t like death”. It was not repeated as a mere answer to my doubtful thinking: it was one of their silenced truths, while they were ceaselessly depicted as dangerous “terrorists” by the mainstream Israeli and international media. Their representation as “terrorists” was so pervasive that they could also personally embody it: like when Abu Yusef had welcomed one of my Italian friends, who had come to visit me in Palestine, and the first thing he had told her was: “Welcome, we know the world thinks we are terrorists”. The foreign visitor was supposed to represent “the world”. The indeterminacy which characterizes the “Arab enemy” as “terrorist” – liable to target Palestinian civilians as such – is conferred by the strategic vagueness which defines “terrorism” in the context of the global war on terror. I will simply say here that, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the category of “terrorism” has been used to depict a wide range of different political practices (from stones throwing to “suicide bombers”), which Palestinian people frame in terms of “national resistance”: however, it is when “terror” gains hegemony in the global public discourse, that the word “resistance” finds no audience. As a consequence, such a discourse rather redefines the legitimacy of the monopoly and use of violence by national states, simultaneously authorizing counterinsurgency policies. If violence is legitimately used by the state against civilians, who are permanently suspected as “terrorists”, people

without a state, subject to a regime of military occupation by a sovereign state, are immersed in a state of deep vulnerability and perceive to have no “security”: “We only have our bodies”, a Palestinian man pointed out to me. Conversely, when human bodies are constantly exposed to violence and so become the only weapons for struggle, every human activity can be targeted: the definition of “terror” exceeds political practices in the stricter sense, just like it used to happen to the Palestinian peasants who went to pick up fruit from their trees, and were arrested or killed as “infiltrators” in the newborn Israeli state. The indeterminacy of the “terrorist” is precisely given by a regime of suspect and fear where the contours of the other’s identity is kept uncertain, like I have tried to show through the perspective of the perceived fragility of social relations among Palestinians (4.3.). Yet, the specific indeterminacy of the “terrorist”, nourished by the Zionist political establishment and public opinion, confers full legitimacy to the Israeli security regime: the construction of the wall confining Palestinian people’s houses, the habitual presence of the Israeli army in the villages, and the arbitrary closures and control of people’s documents, are only some of the regular and publicly legitimated practices of Israeli “security”, which mainly target the Palestinian civilians’ everyday life. The indeterminacy of the Arab enemy also allows Palestinian people to be killed with impunity.

“There is no security for Palestinians!”, Abu Mustafa exclaimed. In his view security was a further service provided by the Israeli state to its citizens, especially to settlers:

“The government gave them houses, they planted trees, and beautiful zones and all the services are provided: water, electricity, telephone line, streets, everything is there, and even security (*amn*) is there. Security is available (*mitwaffer*). The army protects the settlements. Money is given, too. Maybe one cannot rent an apartment in Tel Aviv for 5000 NIS [per month], or in Jerusalem, so he comes here, he needs only a little fuel, he goes to work and comes back. And security is available, particularly for the new ones: the army protects them in the way, they protect them in the settlement. If a boy wants to go to the school or wherever, the army takes him by jeep and takes him back, they are put in security (*ma’nniyyin*). From where did security come? It came when the Palestinian Authority came. It’s forbidden to fight, there’s no danger for settlers, it’s forbidden to attack (*ti’tidi*) the

settlers, and they can move in security (*ma'mniyyin*). [...] There's no security for Palestinians! The Israeli army can enter any place, take the people they want and go back" (Abu Mustafa, al-Bab 25/7/2014).

Security is conceived as a special service provided by the Israeli state, and guaranteed also by the Palestinian Authority, to the Israeli citizens, especially those who live in the West Bank. If this service is embodied by the Israeli army, moving where the settlers' bodies move, the Palestinians' constant vulnerability is the inevitable result. Furthermore, such a vulnerability is engendered by a sense of abandon by the Palestinian political institutions. Like I have shown, Palestinian people living in Area C are subject to a totalizing Israeli control, since Israeli authorities have the power to take decisions over every aspect of their life, from building a house to farming on the land. Even when incidents or crimes occur to them, Palestinians are supposed to call the Israeli police, since the Palestinian policemen are forbidden to enter the area. For two consecutive years fire happened to spread in some of Abu Jamil family's land cultivated with olive trees: the Israeli firemen came and extinguished the fire, but no inquiry was conducted in order to attest if it had been an arson. When a problem concerning the borders of agricultural land properties opposed Abu Jamil family to another one, Abu Jamil men stated their preference for the tribal form of conflict resolution (*ṣulḥ 'ashā'rī*) as follows: "We don't have law, we don't have a judge, we don't have a court. Where should we go? To the Israeli courts? And if they beat us up, where should we go? To the English courts like once?"

Under these life conditions Palestinian people describe themselves as "living dead" (*miyyitīn 'āyshīn*): "We are living because we breathe, but we are dead" (*iḥnā 'āyshīn 'ashān fī nafas, bās miyyitīn*), a taxi driver told me. In February 2014 he was complaining because his children had not gone to school for two months. The man came from one of the Bethlehem refugee camps, where schools are managed by UNRWA. At the beginning of 2014 school teachers, like other UNRWA employees, had gone on strike, since they had not been paid for a longtime because of the financial crisis which was affecting the UN agency. The man also complained about the high cost of living: "If something breaks in the house, you don't have money to fix it. If your car breaks down, it is the same. You eat *falafel* because you don't have money to buy meat. If you work ten hours per day and you earn 50 NIS, how do you do? You pay 20 NIS for cigarettes, 10 NIS for transport, what is left? What can you give your children?". This man's voice has

largely resounded in the West Bank during the time of my fieldwork. In September 2012 strikes spread all around the West Bank. They were directed against the Palestinian National Authority to denounce price increase and unpaid salaries for public employees, who were 25% of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and 52% in Gaza (PCBS 2012). In Bethlehem, where I was living in that period, public transport strikes, caused by a sharp increase in fuel prices, were massive for some days, and even private taxi drivers did not run in solidarity with their colleagues. The popular wish for a third Intifada, that was thought to be necessary this time both against Israel and the Palestinian Authority, was widespread in the West Bank, even if this claim remained without political consistency during the time of my fieldwork¹¹⁸. People denounced their subjection to a double Israeli-Palestinian occupation. The PNA police had started to repress youth's demonstrations in Ramallah since July 2012, when some activists had publicly criticized official Palestinian relations with Israeli authorities and government representatives, asking for an end to Oslo Accords¹¹⁹. The "economical" protests, which followed some months later, were targeting the same Israeli-Palestinian collaboration according to the Paris Protocol, that provides for Israel to collect taxes from products sold to Palestinians (like petroleum products), and should transfer this money back to the PNA. The refuse of transfer has often been used by Israel to exert political pressure, or as a form of spite, like it happened after Palestine gained the status of non-member State observer at the United Nations in November 2012. Israel's refuse to transfer money to PNA is also justified by the debt (about \$ 483 million) the Palestinian Authority accumulated with the Israel Electricity Company (IEC), which supplies electricity to the West Bank via the Palestinian Jerusalem District Electrical Company. The IEC can cut power whenever it wants, like it happened in February 2015, when different Palestinian cities and refugee camps were blacked out for some hours for several days. In that occasion the Israeli government promised the company to use frozen Palestinian tax fund to offset the Palestinian debt. The financial concept of "debt", used by Israel as a sort of moral

¹¹⁸ At the women's lessons of Quran in the village mosque, that I used to attend in that period, some fliers started to circulate simultaneously to street protests in September 2012, reporting some of the Prophet's hadith. One of them said: "There will come a time when my ummah loves five things and forgets five things. They will love this world and will forget the hereafter; they will love wealth and forget the reckoning; they will love created beings and forget the Creator; they will love palaces and forget the grave; they will love sin and forget repentance. When that happens, Allah will test them with rises in prices, epidemics, sudden death and unjust rulers". Moral considerations about human forgetfulness were not at odds with popular discontent about "unjust rulers", since the fliers circulation was part of a more political protest against the PNA.

¹¹⁹ "Palestinian stage protests in the West Bank", *al-Jazeera*, 3 July 2012.

blackmail, shadows the Israeli appropriation and almost total control of Palestinian resources in the West Bank and Gaza after the 1967 military occupation. The technical and bureaucratic procedures of “national companies” and their bills, are at the core of the modern functioning of the Jewish state, and hide the political link between Israel’s control of resources and its project of settler colonization. Paradoxically, Palestinian “debt” also weighs on Mekorot, the Israeli national water company, which supplies about 40% of the Palestinian population and controls 42 wells inside the West Bank, mainly directed to sustain the Israeli settlements. Moreover, the increasing cost of living in the occupied territories also concerns the VAT calculation: the Palestinian VAT rate depends on the Israeli rate¹²⁰, and VAT revenues constitute about a third of PNA domestic revenues (Kanafani 2012: 46).

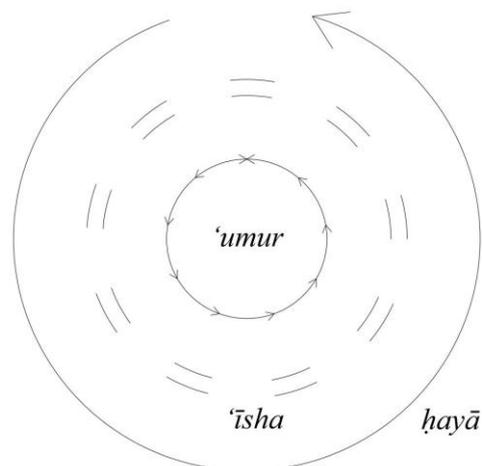
The Palestinian people’s self-representation as “living dead” concerned their social death. Since their life was put at the limits of subsistence, it could be no more considered as “life”. At the same time, in the context of the high rate of unemployment in the West Bank and Gaza (see 2.1.2.), Palestinians who worked in Israel used to justify their controversial position by saying: “We want to live” (*bidnā na’īsh*). “There’s no alternative, no alternative!” (*fīsh badīl*), Imm Mustafa cried, while sitting together and talking about labor in Israel. After her husband, now two of her boys worked for Israelis. Her husband added: “For those who go to work, there’s no alternative to earn a living (*rizqa*). People want to eat, want to live!” (*biddhum yoklu in-nās, biddhum y’īshu*). In this sense “life” coincided with subsistence (*ma’īsha*). The Palestinians’ social death was just defined by this degradation of their life to bare life: since “breathing” and “eating” were not enough to consider life as such, they claimed to be already dead.

“Israelis love life, it is enough for them to stay alive” (*il-yahūd bihibbu il-ḥayā, bikaffī ‘alayhum yzallu ‘āyshīn*). This statement, pronounced by one of my Palestinian friends, seems to contradict the necessary goal of subsistence that Palestinian workers proclaim, or it rather inverts their terms: the necessity to stay alive is here projected on Israelis. My friend’s statement also recalled the particular care for life (*ḥirṣ*), which was supposed to characterize Israelis in other Palestinian people’s discourses. Ultimately, if Palestinians maintain that they don’t love death in the frame of war, and they express their need to live in terms of their basic subsistence in the context of the current economical

¹²⁰ Palestinian VAT rate cannot be more than 2% lower than the Israeli VAT rate and the fuel price cannot differ more than 15% from the Israeli price. Israel had risen VAT and fuel prices at the end of August 2012.

crisis and labor in Israel, what is the meaning of life for Palestinians? What role does their social death play in defining it?

One day I asked Bilal, a teacher of Arabic language from al-Bab, what the difference was between the three words that meant “life” in Arabic: *ḥayā*, *‘umur*, *‘īsha*. He chose to represent it graphically.



He firstly drew a circle, provided with a beginning and an end, which stood for *‘umur*. In this sense life was intended as “a time period” (*faṭra zamaniyya*), which is limited (*muḥaddad*), and goes from one’s birth to one’s death. Actually, the same word is used to talk about one’s “age”. On the contrary, he qualified *‘īsha* as “the way” of life: “It is the way by which we spend the life time (*‘umur*) within life (*il-ḥayā*)” (*iṭ-ṭarīqa illatī nuqaḍḍī fīhā il-‘umur khilāl il-ḥayā*). In his drawing he sketched a sort of road accompanying the circular movement of the life time (*‘umur*). This idea of life thus referred to experience, and it was what determines the quality of life: life can be easy (*sihl*) or difficult (*ṣa‘b*), it can be miserable (*dhalīl*) or good, it can be conducted morally or not (*fī ḥalāl w fī ḥarām*). Bilal also added that one can be oppressed (*ẓalīm*) or an oppressor (*ẓālim*). Under this perspective *‘īsha* resulted to be a mode of life combining social and political conditions with the individual’s experience and conduct. Furthermore, *‘īsha* was indissolubly linked to the fact of being alive: it was the quality that the life of the human beings acquire as living beings. When Palestinian workers said “we want to live” (*bidnā na ‘īsh*), they brought this sense of life to its extreme terms: they meant they had to find a way to subsist (from the verb *‘āsh*, to be alive; to live; to subsist). Ultimately, *il-ḥayā* appeared in Bilal’s drawing as an open circle encompassing the life time (*‘umur*) and the way of life (*‘īsha*). Like others, Bilal made a distinction between the

life (*il-ḥayā*) and any life (*ḥayā*), deprived of the definite article. This indefinite life corresponds to the condition of being alive, which is shared by all living beings, animals and plants included. It is thought as a “provision” (*imdād*): the implicit “provider” is God. On the contrary, “the life is not limited” (*il-ḥayā ḡhayr muḥaddad*), Bilal pointed out. Other people compared “the life” to the idea of “soul” (*rūḥ*). Clearly, this idea of life relies on a religious conception which exceeds the biological existence. Indeed, the sense of “the life” is anchored to “the final life” (*il-akhrā*), which depends on God’s last judgment. *Il-ḥayā* thus combines the shared condition of being alive with the shared horizon of death, both determined by a divine power. If death causes the passage to another life, this final life is differently qualified on the basis of everyone’s worldly conduct, and it is conceived as a “return” to God’s realm. Contrarily to the biological life limited in time, this life has no end. I propose to consider *il-ḥayā* as the value of life, which is thought to be autonomous from physical existence.

When an old man from al-Bab told me about the Israelis’ particular attachment to life, he said that they “care about life” (*ḡarīsīn ‘alā il-ḥayā*). Since I did not know the word *ḡarīs*, I was explained that the Israelis “fear for life” (*ykhāfu ‘alā il-ḥayā*) and that they are “jealous” of life (*yghāru*). The old man added: “By duration we will die” (*bi-l-istimrār bidnā nmūt*). He told me that everyone fears death, but we should think that we will die, so we will behave properly. At the end we will go to God, who is the “observer” (*raqīb*). According to Bilal, Israelis could also live as slaves, it is enough for them to keep breathing. The slave condition was here recalled as an intolerable state of oppression: Bilal wanted to underline how the Israelis’ supposed spasmodic priority for staying alive would have made them accept even the humblest conditions of existence. However, Bilal conceived a mutual dependence, which linked the Palestinians to Israel on the basis of their interconnected physical existence. In his view Israel was the sum of “life” (*ḡayā*) and “security” (*amn*). Life was represented by “bread” (*khubiz*). Since the Arabs make the “bread” for Israel, they constitute Israel’s “life”. Security has no reason to be if there is no life, Bilal pointed out: Israeli security precisely consists in the preservation of life intended as a biological existence. At the same time even Israel is the Palestinians’ “bread”, because they can make a living thanks to it. As a consequence, Bilal described not only an economical, but also an existential interdependence: the sum of Israel and the Palestinians proves to be “life on the land” (*ḡayā ‘alā il-arḡ*).

Ultimately, under the Israeli security regime we find two interlinked but different ideas of life: the Palestinians distinguish their physical existence from life as value.

Subsistence stands between the two as a limit: we could say it is a mode of “survival”, here intended as the fact of staying alive according to their basic needs as living beings. However, this effort does not qualify life as value: in this sense, in their struggle for subsistence, Palestinians describe themselves as “living dead”. Death does not represent here the end of a physical existence, but it rather refers to the loss of the life value as something exceeding a biological survival. The Palestinians’ value for life questions their well-being as living beings, moral agents and political subjects: as I will show, this value is mainly represented by the sense of dignity (*karāma*) in conducting a “respectable life” (*ḥayā karīma*). On the contrary, Israelis are defined by their attachment to life conceived as the fact of staying alive. If physical existence becomes the value of life itself, this implies depreciating life in its qualified forms (that is why Bilal says that Israelis could be also slaves), and in relation to a superhuman power, which provides for life to every living being, establishes a moral order for the human world, and determines the end of a life. The protection of the Israelis’ life, which is the aim of the Israeli security regime, further reveals how the racist policies of the Israeli state relies on a biological conception of life, making the Israelis’ live and letting the Palestinians die. In this sense, if the approach to life distinguishes Palestinians and Israelis radically, life is at the core of the political. This fundamental political distinction, which is produced by a political rationality based on the separation between bare life and its qualified forms, obviously originates from different forms of exposure to death. As a consequence, like the forms of life, the forms of death result to be politically distinguished as well.

4.2. Normalizing Palestinian deaths

In the night between 2 and 3 March 2014 Israel returned the bodies of two “martyrs”, who had died during the second Intifada. One was the body of Ayat al-Akhras, a 18-year-old girl from Dheisha refugee camp, and a member of Fatah political party. The other body belonged to Dawoud Abu Swayy, who lived in the village of Artas and was a member of the Islamic Jihad party. They had both blown themselves up in Jerusalem: Abu Swayy died on 5 December 2001 and Ayat on 19 March 2002. The Israeli state had kept their bodies for 13 and 12 years, respectively, in what are known by the Palestinians as “numbered cemeteries”. The chance to bury and commemorate the “martyrs” was thus an intense emotional moment for their family and for Palestinians as a whole.

Dheisha funeral, 3rd February 2014

Before the midday pray the bodies were taken from Beit Jala government hospital, where they had kept in custody during the night after Israel had delivered them the day before. From the hospital they were taken to the courtyard of the UNRWA school in Dheisha, where they were positioned in front of the Bethlehem mufti, dressed in a white clothing and headgear, who led the pray. A week ago a man from Husan was “freed” and my family’s men had gone to the ‘*azzā*. When I saw the news of Ayat’s “liberation” I asked my friend Noor [who lived in Dheisha] to come with me because I thought it was something “private” at the family’s home, like the other funerals I had attended. On the contrary, when I joined the procession, which went from the hospital to Dheisha, there were a lot of people, and almost all of them were men. The ANP soldiers were escorting the two ambulances, sitting in great number in the uncovered part of their jeeps and exhibiting their military equipment. The other people were walking. Some guys, whose face was covered by a *kufāya* rolled around their head, directed traffic, and stopped in line at one side of the road to let the ambulances pass, starting to sing national anthems. Suddenly, people started to run and I asked a boy why, he told me we were in a hurry because we were late for the midday pray. It was sunny, it was hot, and the fast march made people sweat. When we get the courtyard of Dheisha school the women were there, and also some schoolgirls with written banners. The wood coffins were taken into the courtyard on men’s shoulders. They were adorned with the martyrs’ photos and flowers. Among people there were flags of all Palestinian parties: the FPLP, Fatah, Hamas... The coffins were put on the ground in front of the mufti, who started the pray. As usual, men prayed on the front space and women on the back. The mufti spoke his sermon, which I could not understand, but Noor explained to me he was praying God to have rain, since it hadn’t rained for two months. No one kneeled down during the pray, because it was a pray for the dead: prayers are supposed to kneel only in front of God. I had already lost Noor, who had joined Ayat’s sisters, since they were her friends. After the pray I asked a girl next to me what was going to happen

then. She was crying, and she told me her brother had died as a martyr (*shahīd*), too. She said he was killed while going to work in Israel.

People started to move towards the exit, some men took the coffins on their shoulders and voices started to get louder. The procession left Dheisha school: all the people started to sing to celebrate the martyrs, *allahu akbar* resonated in the street. Men and women marched together. Noor had definitively left me and for the whole procession she supported Ayat's sisters, who were walking in tears behind the coffin. We walked a lot, maybe more than two hours, and we turned around Dheisha camp to enter the village of Artas. The procession always kept the same tension, there were singings, but most of people walked in silence. When we arrived in Artas, I was in the women's "corridor" behind Ayat's coffin. When the road became wider and the pressure of the crowd reduced, I turned to the men who were walking at my left: I felt strange to see men in that way, walking so silently, and two boys were walking arm in arm. The coffins had remained the two focal points for the whole procession: from there shouts and chorus came, the crowd concentrated around them because people wanted to touch the caskets. The guys who carried them on their shoulders were visibly exhausted, their bodies were sweaty, a water bottle continuously passed from hand to hand. However, the men who walked behind had a softer attitude, they did not show the same excitement, their faces were serious, almost inexpressive. When we got Artas, where the cemetery for "martyrs" was, the women started to sing loudly. In some songs Ayat was compared to a bride. Suddenly, hundreds of *shebāb* deviated the procession and started to climb up the slope of the hill: I later understood they wanted to gain the highest position in order to see the burial, since the cemetery was at the base of the hill. The coffins entered the cemetery, but cordons of men stopped the entrance to most of people. I found a way to enter. People were gathered around the graves, but I could not see anything because of the crowd. However, I could realize when the contents were taken out of the coffins, because the crowd became thicker and the agitation grew. One of Ayat's sisters almost fainted: Noor later told me she wanted to see her sister, and got shocked when she saw that the only things which had remained of her sister's body were her bones. She

did not cry, but kept repeating: “I touched her head, I touched her head...”. The agitation further increased, men started to shout to bring water. A boy climbed down the slope of the hill with a water tank, and nimbly jumped up again, with the help of another guy’s hand, on the rocky hillside, which was maybe three meters high.

I had a tour around the graves: most of people had died in 2002 and 2006, and two children were buried near Noor’s cousin’s tomb. Noor told me they had died by drowning in the Salomon pools in Bethlehem.

The procession ended in the martyrs’ cemetery (*maqbara ish-shuhadā’*) in Artas. Even my friend Noor’s cousin was buried there, because he was shot by the Israeli army when he was 16 years old, in a street of the refugee camp where he lived. When we went home after the end of the burial, Noor and I were very tired, because we had walked for kilometers. Her mother prepared tea for us. After the sunset we went to the women’s gathering for Ayat’s funeral at the Fatah seat in the refugee camp, while men were gathered in a hall, which UNRWA had granted the camp refugees for weddings and funerals. I was told that before the crowd used to sit in the street. Abu Swayy’s family and friends gathered in Artas, his village. These gatherings were for condoling with the deceased’s family and praying together. Only dates and bitter coffee was offered to visitors.

Ayat and Aby Swayy’s funeral was a particular – even if not unique – funeral for several reasons: they were “martyrs” who had died after blowing themselves in Israel, and their bodies were returned by Israel after more than ten years. Therefore, their funeral had been forcibly and significantly postponed. Israel usually keeps the bodies of the Palestinian “martyrs” for “security” concerns, with the justification of willing to avoid mass gatherings and protests during their funerals. After the beginning of the so called Third Intifada, in mid-October 2015 the Israeli Minister for Public Security declared that the bodies of the Palestinian “attackers” would no longer be returned to their families and would be buried “in secret”. Palestinian people consider the Israeli practice of holding the Palestinians’ bodies as a further Israeli retaliation, inasmuch as they are prevented to mourn their loved ones. However, the greatest humiliation for them are the “cemeteries of numbers”, where Israel buries the Palestinian corpses. In these cemeteries, which are secret places declared as “closed military zones” by Israel, each grave is identified by a small metal plate with a number. The obliteration of names deprives Palestinians of their

personal and social identity. People also maintain that in some cases, especially during the first Intifada, the Israeli soldiers returned “emptied” bodies: a theft of organs by the Israeli military was thus suspected. What is important to underline here is not the veracity of this suspicion, but the way Israeli violence is exerted not only on the Palestinians’ living bodies, but also on the dead ones. In the Palestinians’ imagery the theft of organs represents a further violation of the human body: such a violation is not only produced by tortures, beatings and killings, but also questions the integrity of the dead body and, consequently, contributes to decompose the social person whom that body incarnated. Ultimately, the greatest violence is represented by treating Palestinians – both dead and alive – as mere bodies, isolating them from the social and cultural work, which constitutes mourning as a fundamental practice for inserting death inside the social horizon of human sociality and signification. In this paragraph I do not mean to focus on the category of “martyrs” itself. Although most of scholars and commentators have drawn their attention on “martyrdom” interpreted as an Islamic belief, I am more interested here in exploring the ways death is treated in the Palestinian society. More precisely, the social and cultural treatments of death are analyzed in relation to the regulation of emotions and, particularly, to the emergence of suffering as a public discourse. In this sense, my aim is to question how the Palestinians’ deaths contribute to redefine the political in the context of a politics of life.

When I asked Noor’s mother how they used to mourn the “martyrs” (*shuhadā’*) kept by Israel during the second Intifada, she told me that, even in the absence of their corpses, they were mourned as usual, but the mourning lasted longer than the usual three-day ritual. Therefore, grief and sadness were not limited in time, but they got indefinite contours. As I have already outlined (3.1.3.), death is one of the main occasions where “closeness” among people is both expressed and produced. Death also legitimates suffering as a public discourse, since this suffering is collectively shared. During my three-year fieldwork I took part in mourning several times, when death had affected people or families (both Christian and Muslim) with whom I had a particularly close relationship. When Badia, one of the oldest women in my family, died – she was the first woman I had interviewed on the Palestinian memory on the Nakba – I remained in the *ḥāra* until the end of mourning time.

The mourning usually lasts three days: this is the time dedicated to condolences (*‘azzā*). In fact, three days are considered enough for sadness, since people are not expected to endure in negative emotions: “It is not good to be sad longer”, one of Badia’s sons told

me. Hundreds, sometimes thousands of people visit the deceased's family to show their closeness and respect. During the time of mourning, sex separation is normative and the family's house or neighborhood is organized in feminine and masculine spaces, while children run everywhere and make the connection as usual. Mourning in the house starts from the moment of the death, even if the deceased person's body is still in the hospital. When I arrived at my family's neighborhood in the middle of the night, women and men were already gathered separately. Men were sitting on the terrace of the oldest man's house, and children (Badia's nephews) were crying outside the women's space, which was in Badia's house. When I joined the women, most of them were sitting silently with dark faces. They were not praying, either. All the women of the four patrilinear branches of the family were there. However, Badia's daughters were weeping and moaning loudly, and some of them almost fainted and had to be assisted by their cousins. I had never attended such a deployment of grief before: it took me some time to realize it and find my way to be there. This weeping and gathering lasted almost the whole night, very late we went to sleep. In the following morning, people started to come for visit very early, and one of Badia's sons' house was arranged to host women, while men sat outside in the courtyard of another house. That morning Badia's body had to be taken from the hospital, so we were all immersed in wait. Suddenly, someone came to call Badia's daughters and they disappeared for one hour maybe. Badia's body had arrived. A competent woman had the task of cleaning the deceased's body, and Badia's daughters had been called in order to attend the procedure. After the cleaning, which lasted more than one hour, some of Badia's sons took her body on a gurney to the women's house. The gurney was laid down on the floor, the men left, and her daughters gathered around it. The crowd became thicker in that room and children tried to sneak through because they wanted to see their grandmother. The woman who had cleaned the body, who was also a *shaykha* (a pious woman who studied the Islamic texts), started to read the Koran aloud and later devoted to comments on general religious matters. Women in the room kept crying, especially the closest ones to the deceased, and praying. People approached Badia to give her the last kiss. However, the house was so full of women that little groups spontaneously created around other matters of chat and discussion.

Badia's body remained in the feminine space until the midday pray. Then some of her sons came and took her to the men's courtyard. The gurney was laid down on the ground and the men positioned in line in front of it, and started the pray, while the women were praying in their spaces. After the pray, the sons took the gurney on their shoulders once

again and the procession towards the cemetery started, while the women remained in the family's neighborhood.

Both in Christian and Muslim Palestinian funerals, only men are expected to go to the cemetery for burial. Furthermore, even in Christian mourning men and women are separated. While men are at the cemetery, women continue mourning at home. After the burial men go back home and go on welcoming guests. Although in al-Bab mourning was always arranged in the deceased's house, people living in town usually gathered in public halls. The first day of mourning in the house no food is offered to visitors, but only bitter coffee and dates – which are considered a symbol of “mercy” (*rahma*) – are distributed to the present ones. Conversely, visitors usually take some food as a present, like sugar, flour, or milk. During the three days the closest relatives of the deceased's family are responsible for cooking: in this way the deceased's family is allowed to be completely immersed in its grief. Each visitor is expected to give her condolences to all the members of the family. The formula to give condolences is standardized. While the visitor wishes God's mercy for the deceased (*Allah yḥarmhā*, “May God have mercy upon her”), the deceased's family members wish a long life to the visitor (*tīsh*, “May you live”). At the end of the third day ordinary life starts to be reestablished. People's mood change and normal activities regain their prominence once again.

After the three-day mourning also visits end. Weeping and sadness are not conceived to be a normal behavior anymore. However, news about deaths continue to circulate among people and redefine the contours of the village community. Every time I was back to the West Bank I was updated about the people – relatives, neighbors or fellow villagers – who had died while I was in Italy, although I had never met them in most cases. These were the first news I was given. In summer 2013, when I went back to the fieldwork and I was still living at my family's home, Rashida came to say hi to me in Abu Yusef's house. Rashida was born and had grown up in Jordan from a family of Palestinian refugees from al-Bab. She had married her cousin (Abu Yusef's brother) and she had finally come to live in the village. That evening she sat next to me and asked me if I had heard her father had died in Jordan six months before. I told her that Maryam, Abu Yusef's wife, had actually informed me, and that I was sorry for her. She pointed out that she expected me to call her from Italy in order to give her my condolences, but I hadn't done it. She told me in details how his death had happened. She had suddenly left for Jordan with her husband in order to join her family for mourning. While talking about her journey to Jordan, underlying she had not seen her father for three years, Rashida

moved to tears. Nadir, the 16-year-old son of Abu Yusef, started to laugh and exclaimed: “She cries!”. Abu Yusef commented that death was good because people go back to God. Rashida went on explaining to me that it had been very difficult for her, because she had stayed in Jordan for only five days and then she had to leave: while her family could be all together, she had been far from her loved ones. Rashida wanted to stress the difficulty of facing mourning alone. Since one of my relatives had also died while I was travelling to Palestine, I empathized with Rashida and I also moved to tears. Once again Nadir exclaimed, amused: “She cries!”, referring to me this time. People’s faces around me remained unperturbed. Even Rashida did not show any particular closeness, and reacted like the others.

After some days I and Maryam, Abu Yusef’s wife, went to visit some of her cousins in the neighborhood. Maryam told the other women about Rashida’s detailed account on her father’s death and started to mock her. The other women started to laugh. I tried to defend Rashida and I said that it was normal she was sad for her father’s death. One of the women answered to me: “If Maryam’s father dies, wouldn’t she be sad?”. I later understood that what was not normal for them was expressing grief in an ordinary situation, out of the ritualized mourning time. That justified young Nadir’s surprise and consequent laughter. Sadness was not put into question as such, like I was maintaining trying to justify Rashida’s behavior. It was the expression of sadness in front of other people which had been perceived to be inappropriate. Furthermore, Rashida’s sadness implicitly recalled the nostalgia for her family in Jordan, and reasserted a stronger link with her paternal house, rather than with her husband’s agnatic group. Since her husband had prevented her to go to Jordan for her brother’s wedding only some months before her father’s death, Rashida’s sadness also expressed a conflict with her husband. For this reason Rashida’s weeping had resulted to be definitively in bad taste in the house of her husband’s brother, and thus deserved to be derided. We see here how the deployment of individual suffering can be perceived as potentially subversive – as a form of disintegration of social bonds – and derision becomes the strategy to reaffirm social normativity on the basis of a legitimate social authority.

Through this ethnographical description of different ways to treat death and grief in the Palestinian society I aim to show how suffering is deployed as a legitimated public event during mourning, whose shared character involves collective participation. This form of sharing redefines the boundaries of a human community when the loss of one of its members occurs, and contributes to reaffirm social bonds inside the community itself.

Hilma Granqvist wrote a very detailed account on death and burial in the Palestinian society, which was under the English mandate at the time of her ethnography in the 20s and 30s. She conducted her research in what she defined as the “Jordanian” village of Artas, near Bethlehem. The Norwegian anthropologist motivated her interest for death by underlying that “customs in connection with death and burial are influenced to some extent by ideas concerning the relationship between the individual and society” (Granqvist 1965: 19). Death affects the ideas of closeness and social inclusion. Under this perspective, Granqvist pointed out that death was especially conceived as the loss of social life: “A man is alive only when he remains among his own people” (Granqvist 1965: 20). Indeed, according to Islam, people who die far from home, immersed in “strangeness” (*fi-l ghurba*), are included in the category of “martyrs”. The mutual dependence between “life” and society was showed by the place that the living accorded to the dead. Granqvist described how the living and the dead were perceived to be constitutively interlinked:

“In some way the dead are always present. The graves are in the village on the mountain slopes below the houses. The dead dwell in the midst of the living. How many stones there were! I had been for quite some time in the village before I realized that many of the stones that I had been passing were grave stones. So well did they merge into the hills and ground. But the villagers knew where they were. Each day they pass the graves, and – if it is afternoon – they say: ‘Good evening’, or ‘good night!’. ‘Let your evening, your night, be happy!’. The living greet the dead” (Granqvist 1965: 110).

Even in al-Bab peasants still used to bury their loved ones in their family’s land, and they used to recite the opening of the Koran (*al-fātiḥa*) when passing in front of the graves. The fact that people in Palestinian villages are still buried in their families’ land further demonstrates how the dead keep being recognized through the borders of interconnected agnatic ties and land property. However, in Palestinian towns public cemeteries do exist, although Christian and Muslim cemeteries are distinct in the Bethlehem area.

Granqvist also drew her attention to the demonstration of grief. She underlined that “a woman takes pride in expressing her violent sorrow”. Women loosened their hair, tore their dresses, shrieked, cried, sang wailing songs, and beat their breasts: “And the most violent of all is the closest woman relative” (Granqvist 1965: 53). However, the

anthropologist reported that the English authorities had forbidden wailing and lamenting in the streets of Bethlehem (Granqvist 1965: 54). Furthermore, a “decent” demonstration of grief was supposed to be recommended by Islamic prescriptions. From an historical perspective, the “moderation” recommended for Muslims in the expression of grief is probably comparable to the same kind of restriction moved by the Christianity against “paganism”. Ernesto De Martino demonstrated how the institution of “ritual weeping”, conceived as a cultural practice aimed to insert death into the horizon of human values and overcome the “human risk of ‘dying with what dies’” (De Martino 2008 [1958]: 14), was widespread in all the Mediterranean area since ancient times. Therefore, the effort of limiting the expression of grief in its public forms is not so much a “cultural” output, but rather a mounting effect of the exercise of power. In this sense, if mourning in the Palestinian society comprises a public, collective deployment of grief, its potentially threatening character – given by the risk of social disintegration – is regulated by the institution of mourning as a limited and precisely regulated time for grief.

The Israeli control exerted on the corpses of the Palestinian combatants died in Israel, and on mourning as a form of public gathering, undermines the Palestinian social practices through which the individual death is reintegrated into the community and, simultaneously, the community relives through the social treatment of such a death. Like I have shown above, the deceased’s body is central to such a treatment, which provides for the ritual cleaning and exposure of the corpse: after being washed by the closest relatives and enrolled in a white cloth, it is touched, kissed and embraced by mourners for hours before interment. Furthermore, a special pray is made in front of the body by Muslims. Israel’s refusal to return the bodies of dead Palestinians denies the possibility for such a ritual and affective treatment concerning their reintegration into their national community. This is why, like Noor’s mother had pointed out to me, mourning for the “martyrs” lasted longer in the absence of their corpses: grief and sadness are not limited in time, but they remain suspended. It is the Israeli power itself that creates the conditions for a never-ending, publicly legitimated, and simultaneously ordinary grief. When bodies are returned after many years, the relatives’ commemoration can only focus on bones: “I touched her head”, Ayat’s sister repeated while getting shocked by the vision of her sister’s body deteriorated by time. The photo of a Palestinian father kissing his son’s skull was posted by one of my Palestinian friends on his Facebook page: while I found it quite macabre, in his view the image expressed the immense tenderness that linked the father to his dead son.

Ultimately, is there a distinction between an “ordinary” and a “political” death among Palestinians? I maintain that, if there ever was a clear distinction between combatants and civilians, and between a death in war and a “normal” death, this distinction is more and more blurred in the actual Palestinian society. Firstly, in the ordinary language “martyrs” (*shuhadā’*) are all civilians died because of the Israeli enemy: both the combatant who blew herself up in Israel or the Palestinian worker killed by the Israeli border police are defined as *shuhadā’*. However, while the combatants’ funeral becomes a public commemoration explicitly inserted in the Palestinian nationalist frame, the worker will be mourned according to the ordinary ritual. Yet, in the special cemetery dedicated to *shuhadā’* near Bethlehem, not only both Muslim and Christian combatants were buried, but also people who had nothing to do with Palestinian resistance, like the two children who had drowned in the Salomon pools. Like the Latin etymology of the Christian concept of “martyrdom”, also the Arab word rely on the verb “to witness” (*shahida*). What do a simple worker, a resistance combatant and a drowned child have in common to witness?

In his vehement critique on the culturalist interpretation of “martyrdom” as a political practice based on a religious conception of “sacrifice”, Talal Asad pointed out how such a category needs to be analyzed more widely. Referring to “older conceptions of death”, Asad pointed out how the *shuhadā’* (whom he refused to translate as “martyrs”) are people who are suddenly hit by a fatal calamity, and so witness the constitutive fragility and finitude of the human life. Therefore, the category has nothing to do with individual motives (for killing others or killing oneself), nor with political expression, but it has rather to do with an idea of violence related to human mortality. In this sense it is not so much single intentions which are at stake: the so called *istishhād*, the subjective act of dying as a *shahīd*, when it is referred to the practice of killing others by killing oneself, is radically distinguished from suicide by Muslim believers. Talal Asad suggested:

“The violent death of all Palestinians in confrontation with Israelis [...] is regarded as a sign that they have died as witnesses (*shuhadā’*) to their faith – although there is no ritualized form to most of these deaths. As such, the *shahīd*’s death constitutes a triumph rather than a sacrifice. [...] I therefore suggest that the reason Palestinian civilians who are destroyed under the Occupation are regarded as *shuhadā’* is twofold: first, they have been struck by a catastrophe, and, second, their mode of death gives them

immortality. [...] All untimely death that is not the result of legitimate punishment is a violation. The believer who dies in a so-called justified war (actively *or passively*) belongs to that category, but the category itself is not defined by participation in ‘justified war’” (Asad 2007: 49-50).

Asad has thus separated the category of *shuhadā’* from political resistance and war. I would also complicate Asad’s analyses noting that, in the Palestinian context, even Christian believers both use the term *shuhadā’* and can be included into it. However, Christian Palestinians refer to the model of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice in his “martyrdom” for the redemption of humanity. This use of the category is in line with Asad’s caveat on the significance of “sacrifice” – used to interpret so called “suicide terrorism” – as deriving from a Christian and post-Christian tradition, which cannot correspond to the Islamic conception of *shuhadā’*. Yet, also Jesus Christ’s story represents a violent death which highlights the finite, mortal nature of human life: that also constitutes the precisely revolutionary character of Jesus as the *human* incarnation of God.

Furthermore, I would add that witnessing is by definition related to truth: it is the truth of the fragility of human life that is witnessed by the *shuhadā’* deaths, but it is also the truth of the Israeli violence that is revealed by the Palestinians’ suffering and deaths as an illegitimate violation of human life. In this sense the politicization of the *shuhadā’* category stems from a politics of life in which Palestinian lives can be suppressed without causing a public outcry in the rest of the world. Moreover, the normalization of Palestinian deaths stems from the Israeli necro-politics as the sovereign right to kill (Mbembe 2003). If the funeral for combatants are displayed as demonstrations where men and women jointly gather in a form of national commemoration, the ordinary deaths of Palestinian civilians killed by the Israeli army are also encompassed by the Palestinian resistance discourse through their inclusion into the *shuhadā’* category. The public suffering deployed by Palestinian mourning responds to the silence which covers all Palestinian deaths – that is why Israel needs to further conceal them by secret burials in secret cemeteries. It inevitably becomes a form of national commemoration, where the individual body of the deceased is reinserted into a national community thus devoted to immortality.

4.3. For a respectable life: individual struggles for dignity

Between the acknowledgement of their social death, and their ordinary deaths under the Israeli security regime, Palestinians claim that they do not like death in war and they would like to have a normal life. However, since normality for them is living in a permanent state of exception, what links their everyday effort to subsist in the precarious social and economical conditions created by their never-ending dispossession, and the value of their life as moral and political subjects, is the search for dignity: only dignity, in fact, can give birth to a respectable life. In the third chapter I have shown how the quest for dignity is part of the Palestinian workers' experience in Israel: dignity is the main criterion for evaluating just work conditions and work relations, these latter rather conceived as "human relationships". In the context of work asymmetries and racist discriminations, Palestinian workers often reestablish their dignity and honor through their refusal and unavailability to work. However, this ethical positioning is individual and contingent: it is the result of a subjective evaluation and it does not give form to collective political claims. In their everyday encounters with Israelis Palestinians' ethical effort is mainly linked to the most basic need of being recognized in their humanity. It is when the Israeli employers do not respect "human morals", that the Palestinians' dignity is undermined and needs to be reaffirmed through the refusal to work. The question of dignity thus implies the limit of what is tolerable for Palestinians. In the widespread debate about the "normalization" of the Israeli occupation, this limit is also produced by the Palestinian national discourse, which affirms, more or less implicitly, the contradiction between Palestinian labor in Israel and the Palestinian resistance: according to the nationalist frame all Palestinian workers in Israel are supposed to be "without dignity". However, I have tried to highlight how workers' dignity is constitutively linked – in their view – to contingency, that is to changing conditions through which they endure in constructing themselves as moral and political subjects. If the capacity to provide for the family is the base of Palestinian men's responsibility and respectability, the mode of subsistence and the legitimacy of a job is questioned through the definition of a "respectable life". Although morality and politics are necessarily separated in the Palestinian workers' experience in Israel, both dimensions are necessarily connected in relation to "truth": Palestinians' dignity cannot be separated by the revelation of such a truth, which can happen to occur in personal relationships with Israelis. Therefore, Palestinian workers' dignity does not only depend on their moral subjectivation, but

particularly stems from their political subjectivation as “refugees” who claim their rights on the land.

The articulation of national commitment, personal experience and the discourse on “dignity” is well represented by Ghassan’s story. I met Ghassan the very first time I went to al-Bab in 2011, because a friend of mine had to meet him for an interview. At that time Ghassan had already become a public figure in the village: his story was told as an example of the Palestinians’ simultaneous oppression and resistance, and circulated internationally through the work of journalists and activists. For this reason Ghassan had got used to be under the public eye: he used to tell me that he could not get tired of it, since it was his duty. When I specified to him that I would keep his identity secret in my research, he told me that he did not care to expose personally. Differently from journalists and activists, however, my aim was to grasp how his nationalist standing combined with – and sometimes departed from – his everyday life and personal experience. Through my visits to his house we got close to each other and we finally became friends, since he was one of the few people in whom I could confide and to whom I could ask for suggestions when personal tensions and conflicts happened to cross my fieldwork. While being in his house, I often attended the public narrative he had constructed upon himself while welcoming international tourists who went to meet his case.

Ghassan’s “case” had gained a public echo because his house had been isolated from the village by the construction of the wall. Ghassan’s family was not the only one to face such a destiny, but other people had preferred to leave their land and moved to live in other areas of the village. Since all these people lived in the area of al-Bab that was unilaterally declared as a part of Jerusalem Municipality after the 1967 Israeli occupation, their problems had started with the Israeli demolition orders, although not all of these orders had had a concrete output, fortunately. I knew another of these people: he was a 76-year-old man, who daily walked from his rented house inside the village to his father’s house outside the wall under construction. Some years before he was living in his father’s land with his family, and with his own hands he had built a road to connect the house to the village. After the wall had cut the house out of the village, he was obliged to move away and had rented a house in the upper part of al-Bab, which was on the Palestinian side of the wall. However, despite his old age, he kept walking everyday to his father’s house and used to spend the whole day there, also farming on the land and often spending the night there. When I went to visit him, he complained that he could add neither a brick

in his house, since the Israeli authorities had taken pictures of the whole building in order to attest any possible change in the construction.

Ghassan was not born in al-Bab, since his parents had fled from the “old” al-Bab in 1948 and had settled in the nearby Christian town, like many others. At the beginning they had rented a house, but his father had later succeeded in building his own dwelling in the Christian town, so they had remained there. However, Ghassan’s father had moved back to the “new” al-Bab with his wife in their old age, and had built a little house in a remaining piece of his land. In 2000, after his mother had died, Ghassan also had gone to live in his father’s house in the village. At that time he was already married and had one child. Since the house was only made of a bedroom, a kitchen and a bathroom, he had started to build in order to make the house bigger. He had immediately received an Israeli demolition order, but he had appealed to the Israeli court. His problems started from that moment, since the Israeli border police stopped him any time they saw him. Ghassan was one of the people whom Israel considered to be as “illegal residents” in the “Jerusalem” part of al-Bab: like many other men, several times he was taken away from his home in the middle of the night and put under arrest. In 2005 al-Bab villagers found the first notice for the construction of the wall, thanks to papers scattered on the ground around their houses. In 2006 Ghassan and other villagers made a petition against the wall to the Israeli Supreme Court. The judge established that he could not consider Ghassan’s case from papers and went to see his situation on the ground. The Israeli authorities’ first proposal consisted in offering him the Jerusalem ID in exchange of the sale of his house and land. They later suggested him to join a cooperative of settlers in order to build a five-star hotel in his land. When the Israeli representatives understood that Ghassan was not interested in their proposals, they started to think how they could isolate his house from the village. In 2010 he received a visit from the representative of the Israeli Ministry of the Interior, the wall architect and the responsible for the wall route in the Israeli Ministry of Defense. They showed Ghassan a map. Their plan provided for an electric fence at ten meters from his house, completely surrounding the dwelling, with a system of four doors which would have opened alternately: two served the passage of the Israeli soldiers’ jeeps, and two were for Ghassan and his family’s movements. The Israeli functionaries specified that no cars would have been allowed to enter his home, while if someone came on foot Ghassan was expected to go out and take him. Furthermore, visitors were forbidden to stay in Ghassan’s house after 6 p.m. or to sleep there. The same prohibitions were applied to the Israeli alternative plan: a tunnel would have connected his house to the village and a gate

would have been inside the tunnel. Only Ghassan was supposed to have the key of the gate, and he was obliged to warn the Israeli army every time a visitor came to his place. Actually, since Ghassan and his family refused both options, the Israeli government decided to build the one-million-dollar tunnel. When I arrived in al-Bab in 2011, the tunnel had just begun to be constructed.

In May 2010 trees started to be uprooted. Large demonstrations were organized in front of Ghassan's house by some villagers, together with Palestinian, Israeli and international activists. These demonstrations were part of the wider popular resistance movement, which claimed non-violence and civil disobedience as the main principles for struggle. People sat on the ground and stopped the way to bulldozers, while Israeli soldiers and border guards dragged them away, and launched tear gas and sound bombs to disperse demonstrators. A sound bomb hit Ghassan's eye and he had to go to the hospital. His oldest son, who was eight years old at that time, was beaten on the head, and Ghassan refused him to be assisted by the Israeli ambulance, which used to accompany the army. After the first demonstrations Ghassan was visited by other Israeli representatives, escorted by soldiers. Ghassan could see they were important generals from the number of stars they had on their uniform: one was the representative of the Ministry of Defense and the other was from the Ministry of the Interior. During their discussion, they alluded to Ghassan's work permit, since the man worked in Israel. They pointed out that Israel was the source of his subsistence. Ghassan asked them: "Who is the source of subsistence?", which is a Jewish rhetoric question. Since the answer was "God", Ghassan and the Israeli authorities were supposed to agree with each other. Ghassan gave them his work permit and told them they could take it back. He stopped going to work for three days. When he tried again, the permit resulted to be still valid.

In his fight against the Israeli authorities Ghassan opposed his humanity to animals' conditions. He maintained that the Israeli government wanted to put him in a cage like an animal, while freedom defined human beings as such. His freedom was stated by his refusal to accept the Israeli proposals and to overtly oppose the Israeli destruction of his land, although such an opposition had not produced the expected results. When I arrived in al-Bab in 2011 the tunnel was under construction and popular mobilizations had stopped. Ghassan continued to go and work in Israel. His wife complained about the dust in her house, caused by the Israeli excavations all around their dwelling. She had to clean the house many times per day. When I discussed with Ghassan about their decision to stay

there, he told me about their initial doubts. When he got to know the Israeli plans on his land, the future he had imagined for his family had been radically upset.

“Five or six years ago my wife and I were planning a nice future. We wanted to live here, to make our family here, and to live here quietly and comfortably and happily. When the Israelis came and said they wanted to put an electronic fence around the house, and we would have been inside a little prison, and then they said they wanted to do a tunnel for us and to put a gate, at that moment all our ideas changed. We stopped thinking about a nice future, a good future for our children. We started to think how our children could live inside a prison. Where are the children’s rights? The world now speaks about children’s rights... If someone hits an animal, the government imprisons him. There are animals’ rights! The Israeli government does not give a person the right to live (*ḥaq il-insān bi-l-‘īsh*), either. So we stopped thinking about a nice future, we started to think how our children’s situation will be, how we will live (*kīf bidnā na‘īsh*). At the end we decided that we had to stay here” (Ghassan, al-Bab 22/2/2014).

Ghassan acknowledged that their decision was taken at the expense of their children’s future, but at the same time this decision was framed by an ethics of the struggle: “It’s true that we sacrifice (*nḍaḥi*) our children’s future, but we will fight (*bidnā nhārib*), we will fight because we want to be here. We are not willing to give up”. Ghassan also admitted that at the beginning he and his wife had thought to leave: they already had a house in the nearby Christian town and could easily move there. However, their decision stemmed from a matter of “conscience” (*ḍamīr*). In Ghassan’s view conscience concerned an intimate relationship with himself: “Conscience will torment you. Conscience is between you and yourself (*baynak w bayn ḥālak*), it’s inside you, it’s your heart (*juwwak, qalbak*). It’s not important to be in front of people, I can lie in front of people, I can say words but every word is a lie. But when I sit in a room by myself, I know I’m a liar, I know I didn’t say the truth (*iṣ-ṣaḥ*)”. If conscience was supposed to engender an uncomfortable feeling which would have torment him in the future, Ghassan’s imagination about the future was affected by his understanding of the Palestinian past. In fact, his decision was taken *in opposition* to his father’s one:

“I used to tell my father: ‘You were afraid and you escaped from the old al-Bab. Fear (*khawf*)! You escaped to the Christian town and left the old al-

Bab to whom? To the Israelis!'. Should I go back and do what my father did? Should I escape and give my land and my home to Israelis? You begin to think 'I'm not willing to do the same mistake'. My son tomorrow will tell me: 'You lost our house in al-Bab'. Tomorrow there will be something that will torment you (*y'azzbak*)" (Ghassan, al-Bab 22/2/2014).

In Ghassan's words this torment was thus generated by a "conscience", which emerged at the intersection of three generations: Ghassan's father's generation, the "Nakba generation", who had escaped from the village during the 1948 war, after which al-Bab had become part of the newborn Israeli state; Ghassan's own generation, who bore the responsibility for both the present and the future; Ghassan's sons' generation, who was thought to judge their fathers' acts. In this way Ghassan also projected the original Palestinian catastrophe into the future, as a possible, infinitely repeated horizon of the Palestinians' existence. However, Palestinian social reproduction was thought to oppose such a frightening reproduction of the Palestinian catastrophe.

In this sense Ghassan's "conscience" was not a singular matter of intimate questioning, but got a national character: "Everyone fights for his country until he dies". This struggle for the homeland (*waṭan*) was not only made by "fighters" (*fidā'yyin*) – Ghassan maintained – but was a collective gathering of different forces. Firstly, he divided people in three categories: the combatants, the spies and collaborators, and the ones who "sit in their house and keep silent". Since he continuously solicited me on my supposed loyalty to my country in order to explain his "national" feeling, I made a reference to my family's story during the Nazi occupation of northern Italy in the second world war. I told him my grandparents' families were not partisans, actually: they were peasants and had kept farming on their land. However, they hid partisans in their houses and took care of them. Ghassan pointed out:

"They provided a service to the fighters so that they fight for the country. They were not less than the combatants. We two together, what can we do? We complete each other, we two become one. Can the fighter fight if no one gives him weapons? Can the fighter go on fighting if no one gives him food? All the people complete each other in order to become one. The one who provides weapons, the one who provides food, the one who provides a place where to sleep, all of them become one, all of them are combatants (*fidā'yya*)" (Ghassan, al-Bab 22/2/2014).

The individual conscience completely blends with a collectivity committed in the struggle, so that “we become one”. Yet, rather than a sum of individualities, this national unity consisted of a convergence of different living forces: eating, sleeping and fighting were all part of the same struggle. Even subsistence, represented by peasants through my family’s story, was anchored to an ethics of resistance. However, the matter of subsistence as a necessary base for the struggle cracked Ghassan’s vision of such a national unity. He also had been a construction worker in Jerusalem for many years. While talking to me, his voice was sometimes covered by the noise of the pneumatic drill, which other Palestinian workers were using to make a new Israeli road in the valley below his house. Ghassan acknowledged that, in the present situation, there were no conditions for “subsistence with dignity” and for a “respectable” way of living:

“We all say: ‘We want to live’ (*bidnā na ‘īsh*), but it depends on how one chooses the way to live (*kīf yartaqy kīf y ‘īsh*). I was working in Israel, in Jerusalem! I was working, why? In order to live (*‘ashān a ‘īsh*). If there was a Palestinian government, it could provide work for the people, and the people would be living (*kān ish-sha ‘b bi ‘īsh*), and they would be happy in the Palestinian land, they wouldn’t go to work in Israel. But there is not enough work, no subsistence with dignity (*il-ma ‘īsha bi-l-karāma*), no chance for people to live in a respectable way in their homeland (*in-nās ta ‘īsh muḥtarama ‘alā arḍ il-waṭan*), so the people are compelled to work for the occupation” (Ghassan, al-Bab 22/2/2014).

I have already shown how Ghassan defined a “respectable life” on the basis of an evaluation of the “way to live”: one had to earn money with dignity in order to guarantee a respectable life for his children (2.3.2.). If in the contingent scrutiny of the legitimacy of Palestinian work, the national discourse became an essential parameter for judgment, I want to highlight here how Ghassan’s conceived “dignity” by appropriating and adapting the national discourse to his personal experience beyond work. Like most of Palestinian people, even Ghassan defined Palestinians’ life as inherently lacking of “dignity”, because the “Palestinian government” did not provide them the conditions for subsistence. Yet, it was not subsistence itself the matter at stake, but subsistence conceived as a fundamental part of the political fight. Abu Mustafa maintained: “We, as Palestinians, have no father” (*fish ‘indnā ab iḥnā ka-falastīniyya*). The weakness of the Palestinian leadership in sustaining the people’s struggle was thus expressed through a lack of responsibility

towards the Palestinian people. The idea of social responsibility and protection, represented by the “father” as the embodiment of the male breadwinner and the social authority, seemed to imply a paternalistic conception of the State. The lack of dignity thus transformed Palestinians in “living dead”, when their effort to subsist was not included in a political project, but became an end in itself. Yet, Ghassan was a Palestinian worker in Israel and simultaneously acted as a political subject, who tried to defend his land from the Israeli appropriation. He did not wait for a “father” – a Palestinian government – to allow himself to act politically: conversely, he took on the very concrete role of the father questioning his children’s future, while looking back at his own father’s “mistakes”. His personal responsibility was not an individual commitment, but it was inserted in a wider political project in which Palestinians became “one”. So, how did Ghassan look for dignity and a respectable life? And what gave “dignity” its consistency in everyday life?

Ghassan’s sense of responsibility implied the fear for “normalization”, that frightened most Palestinians. In his view this fear was connected to a distorted conception of life, which could especially capture young people:

“More than anything I think of the new generation, the youth, who follow fashion, follow the Israeli life (*il-ḥayā il-isrā’yliyya*). If you talk to a guy, he will say: ‘Look how the Israelis live, and we are not living!’ (*talla‘ il-yahūd ‘āyshīn w iḥnā mish ‘āyshīn*), because they go to the seaside, they come and go, they go to disco until morning, they have iPhones... ‘What are we living (*iḥnā shū ‘āyshīn*)?. That is life, here there’s no life, here is death (*hūn fish ḥayā, hūn mawt*)!’. Do you see how it is? This is the mind... These are young guys, 17, 18, 20 years old, they start to think like the Israelis’ mind thinks. This is what frightens here in Palestine” (Ghassan, al-Bab 22/2/2014).

Actually, I had encountered the same opposition between the Israeli “life” and the Palestinian “death” in some young people’s discourses. Some of them worked in Israel, and some had worked abroad. They all said that “there is no life in Palestine” and, conversely, “in Israel there is life”. This conception of life recalled the social death of Palestinian lives as a widespread perception in the Palestinian society, which simultaneously expressed the desire for a better life. A better life was thus linked to the “quality” of life: how this “quality” was defined was the main issue at stake, and it was what frightened Ghassan and many other Palestinians, who were worried their children

started to desire an “Israeli” life and gave up their political fight as Palestinians. In what was conceived as the “colonization of the mind”, this sense of life, qualified as an “Israeli” life, did not imply a fight for freedom and dignity, but a sort of mimesis able to produce a definitive captivity.

When Ghassan talked about his and his wife’s initial doubts about staying in that house isolated from the rest of the world and permanently controlled by the Israeli army, he pointed out that they took their decision in order to guarantee a “good life” (*ḥayā mnīḥa*) to their children, although they knew their future would be “sacrificed”. How can a “good life” be combined with such a “sacrifice”?

“Actually, here I can do my life like I want, beautiful and wonderful, thank God. I am Ghassan, I live happy with my children, we come and go, we go to our friends and our friends come to us, I have a [work] permit and I can go to Jerusalem with my children... Chiara, life, you make it (*il-ḥayā inti bitsawihā*), beautiful or not. And you teach your children and people around you how they can see life here is beautiful, and how those ones, the settlers, took our land. You teach your son to love his life, his house, his land, and to see that his life is beautiful. [...] We decided to stay here with all these problems, because we try to provide a good life to our children and we try to dream about a nice future. We want to make a nice future, we keep dreaming of a dream (*naḥlam bi-ḥilm*). My dream is my son Hammouda will be happy here, that Hammouda will have a house. I dream of a dream, we dream (*baḥlam ḥilm, naḥlam*). It’s enough that we dream (*bikaffy innā naḥlam*)” (Ghassan, al-Bab 22/2/2014).

Ghassan defined a “good life” as the capacity to provide a house for his children and to remain in their land. Such a capacity, however, is connected to the search for “happiness”, which is something to teach and learn, and not something that is already there. In this sense the “good life” corresponds to the value accorded to life: this value transcends life itself and comprises an impalpable dimension, which exceeds the physical conditions in which human existence is immersed, and through which it is defined. The value of life thus implies not accepting the present state of things (*il-mawjūd*): on the contrary, such an acceptance constitutes the terrible fear of the “normalization” of the Israeli occupation and settler colonization. Like I have shown, according to a religious conception “the life” (*il-ḥayā*) is linked to a supernatural horizon of values which let people construct themselves

as moral subjects through a transcendent idea of life after death. For Palestinians who die under the Israeli security regime, this sense of life consigns them to immortality. In Ghassan's words, the impalpable dimension of life is given by "dreaming". Dreams are the conditions for happiness and a "nice future" to be possible. Ultimately, despite living in his own house, transformed in a little prison, and continuing to work in Israel, where the respectability of his life as a Palestinian was continuously put into question, "dreams" were what let Ghassan think about his and his children's life as a "good life" lived in dignity. In fact, like he maintained, for gaining dignity as Palestinians "it is enough that we dream".

*

When Palestinians maintain that they do not like death, they express their dislike for killing and war. However, the difference between their own death and the Israelis' death is connected to the different value lives have in the colonial Israeli-Palestinian space. Palestinians criticize the obsessive care Israelis have for life, since "security" represents the necessity of staying alive as opposed to death. Thanks to the same security regime, Palestinians live in a condition of double vulnerability: a physical vulnerability, produced by the Israeli sovereign right to kill them as enemies of the Jewish state, and a social vulnerability, increased under the economical and political conditions established by the Oslo Agreements. Vulnerability and lack of state protection contribute in defining the meaning of life for Palestinians: life does not correspond to the fact of merely staying alive, but it is defined by dignity. By representing themselves as "living dead" the Palestinian people contest a politics of life that reduces their life value to the struggle for subsistence and physical survival. Only dignity can give birth to a "respectable life" which is worth living. Dignity marks a human condition in which people are more than living beings: they are moral and political subjects. Life as value is thus an infinite circular movement defined by a shared moral horizon and by a national becoming "one". Can a form-of-life overcome its biological existence, that is its individuality? It can, because a single death simultaneously marks the continuing existence of the social group. And if physical death is caused by an Israeli violation of the Palestinian life, it is not death, but opens the way to immortality: an immortality given by faith, collective memory and the national struggle. Mourning becomes the occasion for the public expression of

suffering of Palestinians as one people, that is why it is so disturbing for Israel, which tries to prevent it by keeping the Palestinian dead bodies indefinitely. Just as the distinction between “combatants” and “civilians” blurs in the Israeli military commitment against Palestinian “terrorists”, so too are indistinctly glorified as “martyrs” all Palestinians killed by the Israeli army. Palestinian death is not conceived as a “sacrifice” in the path of national resistance, but it witnesses both the Israeli violence on the whole Palestinian population and the affirmation of the value of their life beyond their biological existence.

Didier Fassin has complicated the dichotomic distinction between biological existence and qualified life by exploring the meaning of “survival”. The anthropologist has recovered Jacques Derrida’s definition of “survival” as “life beyond life, life more than life, [...] the most intense life possible” (Fassin 2010: 82). In the French philosopher’s words, survival results to be “an unconditional affirmation of life”. It is in the furrow of these reflections that Fassin has proposed to consider an “ethics of survival”, going back to the ways social actors define what is life and what makes sense of humanity. Through the concept of a “respectable life” defined by dignity I have shown how Palestinians distinguish their subsistence from their mere physical survival. If we consider survival in its ethical opening, “survival” firstly implies to survive social death: it is not enough to subsist in order to live, since the ways of subsistence determine also *how* one lives. “We want to live” (*bidnā na’īsh*) – Palestinian workers’ claim – thus contains the inherent ambiguity of the concept of life, which includes the human beings’ living condition into the struggle for an ethical and political self-fulfillment able to encompass humanity. Survival *is* dignity: the Palestinian men’s effort is not only to provide their children with food and money, but to provide them with a “respectable life”, whose conception exceeds the mere material conditions of the human existence.

In this sense we can grasp also the second aspect of the Palestinians’ survival, which consists in leaving the good traces. In Ghassan’s story the question of survival was directly interlinked with the Israeli power in two opposite ways: paradoxically, while his life was stifled by the construction of the wall, it was kept, despite a deadly disease, by the special treatments provided by an Israeli hospital. However, even if the Israeli biopolitics separated Ghassan’s life as a living being from his social and political life, Ghassan did not live such a separation as a contradiction. In Ghassan’s struggle for conducting a “respectable life”, dignity was not a mere question of staying alive or subsist, but it consisted in a tight confrontation with his national conscience. His political

stance was not mainly deployed by public action – although he and his family had been engaged in demonstrations against the Israeli works with other villagers. His sense of national unity was rather represented by the question of heritage: in his view, he could not leave his children what his own father had left him, that was the Palestinian “catastrophe”. Ghassan had not survived his father only physically. He was worried about guaranteeing survival to himself and his children in a double sense. Firstly, he did not want to repeat what he saw as his father’s “mistakes”, and aimed to ensure his family a house and a piece of his land. Furthermore, he tried to teach his sons the beauty of their life, since this beauty derived by their dignity as Palestinians who did not give up in front of their ongoing dispossession by the Israeli state. In his own words, the beauty of life depended on the Palestinians’ survival – what is enough – conceived as their enduring capacity to dream.

CONCLUSIONS

The secrecy of Palestinian lives

“Do they listen? They will not listen!” (*bisma ‘ū? Mā biddhum ysma ‘ū!*), Maryam exclaimed. Some months ago I was talking to her on the phone from Italy. She was my “mom” in Palestine, Abu Yusef’s wife, who had hosted me in her home for several months. We were updating about our respective lives after almost one year we had not seen each other. I was telling her I was busy writing my Ph.D. thesis and in March I would discuss it in front of an examination committee of university professors. It was when she heard it, that she exclaimed: “They will not listen!”. Of course Maryam’s concern was not the scientific quality of my work. Her expression was also an ambiguous one, because the verb that she used, *mā biddhum*, can have at least three different shades of meaning in colloquial Palestinian Arabic. She could refer to a future action: “They will not listen”; or express a lacking will: “They do not want to listen”; or even acknowledge a denied need: “They do not need to listen”. I think it is in the interstices of these nuances that the meaning of her exclamation can be grasped: the lack of will simultaneously engendered the denial of the need to listen, and this radically undermined the ability to be heard in the future. Maryam’s caveat did not refer to the possibility to speak: actually, in my case, the case of a Western Ph.D. student that would be confronted to Western academic institutions, the possibility to speak was not really put into question. Maryam talked about the chance to be heard, and this concerned even me in front of a Western public, which Maryam could only wonder about. This is why she started with a question: “Do they listen?”, before her skepticism prevailed: “They will not listen!”. Despite the frustrating scene she was imagining – someone who speaks in front of people who do not listen to her – I felt relieved from Maryam’s remark. Implicitly, she was recognizing me as a legitimate speaker of her and other Palestinians’ story: after so much diffidence and so many refusals I had encountered during my fieldwork, she trusted me, even if she did not really know what I was writing about them. Yet, she did not say like many others: “Go and tell the truth”. She did not expect me to be the Palestinians’ “ambassador”, like international visitors are defined – and asked to be – in the circuits of the Westerners’ political tourism in Palestine. Her pessimism about the Palestinians’ ability to be heard was even more radical. Maryam did not doubt my knowledge of their “truth” as Palestinians – I guess our long-lasting cohabitation and sharing, and her in-depth scrutiny

of me, had fortunately let me achieve good results. However, in Maryam's view, just because I knew that truth, I would be inevitably captured by silence. This silence was just produced by the lack of the conditions for the Palestinians' audibility, that transformed their effort to speak into an aphonic and senseless discourse. At the same time Palestinians *were* that silenced discourse, so that my own attempt to formulate it would have disqualified even my capacity to speak in front of my academic public.

Silence and the ability to tell have been central issues in my work. I encountered the Palestinians' silence at the very beginning of my arrival in the village, when people indicated to me the coniferous forests, which stood in front of them, on the opposite hills. That was for them "*al-Bab al-qadīm*", their original village, which had been evacuated by the Zionist militias in 1948 and later destroyed by the Israeli government in the vain hope that Palestinian people forget to return. The forests planted by the Jewish National Fund had kept the secrecy, which overwhelmed al-Bab existence until the present days. "Does al-Bab still remain" (*bizall al-Bab?*), a Palestinian woman from a nearby town once asked me ironically.

I was surprised when I discovered that my Palestinian interlocutors were not really able to tell. They were limited to say: "That is our old village". However, the impossibility to articulate speech had intensified their capacity to see, which I learnt from them. Their hands moved in the air to sing a point in the space that was actually very near, but had become so far because it was unattainable. The Green Line ran between them and that point. Adults recalled their parents' grief after they had been forcibly displaced: their memory was not made of many words, but was rather constituted by the old men's silent weeping and refusal to eat. Their silence also talked about a violence that had not ended, yet, and about a kind of humiliation that was repeatedly enforced: by transforming their actual village into a little open-air prison, so narrow that it started to look like a "camp"; by demolishing their houses and confiscating their lands; by taking men away from their homes in the middle of the night and putting them under arrest because they were called "illegal residents" in their fathers' land; by compelling people to sneak into Israel to work, like they were thieves, while risking starvation, imprisonment, exploitation, and sometimes even death. Silence was the inner cry of much innocent desperation, which could not be pronounced by single voices, since "one must be strong" – so many times I had been warned about that – and sadness cannot last for a long time. At the same time silence was the inevitable result of a collective voice, which had been constantly suffocated – if you want to work you have to be a good person and not "make troubles".

Even Palestinian officials reproduced Israel's voice while working in "security coordination" and "civil liaisons".

The silence produced by the lack of audience constructs a pervasive dimension of secrecy in the Palestinians' social life. Such pervasiveness relies on at least three interlinked levels of secrecy: the first is the public secret, which contributed in producing the structural dimension of secrecy in the "peace regime". These two levels of secrecy had to be necessarily embodied by the subject as a "hidden" part of the self: silence also stemmed from the uncertain contours of things and people around you, so you would better not expose yourself in order to avoid being blessed.

The public secret affected the construction of the Palestinians' historical truth: this truth concerned their past and ongoing violent dispossession by the Israeli state. The public secret constituted the realm of "politics", produced by the hegemony of the Zionist discourse in the international arena, so that Palestinian people could not avoid considering the politicians' words as "empty words" (*ḥakī fādī*): words had no meaning, they were deprived of meaning, they could not be treated as vehicles of meaning anymore. This sense of being lost in others' words reminded me of the idea of "intelligibility", which Judith Butler has defined as "the general historical schema or schemas that establish domains of knowable" (Butler 2009: 6). According to the philosopher the schemes of intelligibility produce the norms for the apprehension and recognizability of certain subjectivities or certain lives. Maryam's reference to the inability to hear – which constitutes the Palestinians' impossibility to be heard – connected the incapacity to listen to the historically produced unintelligibility of Palestinian lives. Yet, the disarticulation of language, produced by specific discursive formations, did not prevent the subjects to see, move and feel. These three essential capacities anchored Palestinian "peasants" to their land, and founded their relationship with the place they inhabited as a sort of affective bond: they already were refugees, although they were not refugees, yet. This affective bond was expressed by the normative care for what had been left, and those villagers who had not gone back to cultivate their lands, but had preferred to remain in the refugee camps, happened to be blamed. In this sense "staying" was a political struggle, and involved agricultural practice as the most important way to inscribe the Palestinian presence in the land against the Israeli confiscations. When the Israeli works in the village upset the environment by trucks and bulldozers, peasants used to guard their trees daily, and Palestinian landowners mourned their land by attending its destruction. However, agriculture as a political practice contested politics as an essentially public activity: al-

Bab peasants could join the Palestinian initiatives of planting trees in the lands outside the wall, where planting was a half-a-day political demonstration to claim the Palestinian ownership of the land. However, the Israeli confiscations already represented a forcible act of land expropriation from the private domain of the single landowner, so that peasants preferred to plough their fields individually instead of engaging in collective actions, which attracted the Israeli army and prevented them from doing their work.

The public secret of the Palestinians' dispossession by the Israeli state engendered a structural dimension of secrecy. Such structural secrecy was produced by making Palestinian lives more and more precarious. Following the European Union's recent attempts to assert the illegality of the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, one of the quick Israeli answers was: "Do you want Palestinian workers to become unemployed?". Settlements are courtesy of the Israeli state, so that Palestinians can have a job. The economical dependence from Israel, which was founded by the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, went with the restriction of the Palestinians' movement and the introduction of the permits system at the beginning of the 90s. The relationships of personal dependence, which constituted the Palestinians' work organization and internal hierarchy, were both disarticulated and reinforced by the Israeli separation policies. The PNA institutions concerned with Palestinian labor, which were created after the Oslo Agreements, operated as public actors who controlled, filtered and distributed work permits for Palestinians on the basis of their individual profiles. However, the bureaucratization of the Palestinian laborers' government hid the power inequality between the two sides under the appearance of symmetric relationships of "civil liaisons" and "security coordination". Behind this efficient mechanism, what it was not said, or could be said only informally, was that still Palestinians had to rely on personal relationships – "friendships" – to succeed in being employed, like they used to do after 1967, when Israel had opened its borders to their cheap workforce. However, the obligatory link between the work contract and the work permit, that the Israeli restrictions introduced, transformed personal dependence in real power relations, and gave rise to a lucrative Israeli-Palestinian informal economy profiting from the margins of illegality created by the Israeli law.

What became secret then? Despite the necessary secrecy of illegal movements and work – which produced the Palestinians' invisibility in the Israeli society, added to their inaudibility – conflict was silenced. Palestinian laborers, who wanted to be granted with a work permit, had to be "good people", that meant to abandon political activity. The

technical language of the Palestinian officials, who talked about “labor market” and “professional training”, and converted the workers’ rights into “medical reports” to send to the Israeli side, described the Israeli-Palestinian institutional relationships as “mixture”, “exchange”, and “mutual understanding”. Through the bureaucratic and administrative apparatus of the “peace” regime, the Israeli political violence became the heaviest secret. The apparently neutral mechanisms of “coordination” and “authorization” concealed the final decision, which exclusively pertained to the sovereign Israeli state. The presumed difference between “civil” matters and “security” concerns was constitutively blurred, and the PNA institutions actually contributed in managing the Israeli occupation, also covering a part of its costs together with the PNA international donors (Latte Abdallah & Parizot 2015: 8).

In this context the social and economical conditions of single Palestinian lives became a “private” affair. Growing unemployment and the individual criterions to fit in order to be eligible for a work permit undermined social hierarchies based on sex and age, and affected Palestinian social reproduction as a whole. If masculine respectability was conceived as the capacity to make “a house”, founding the man’s independence from his agnatic group, shame was the other side of the coin. Masculine internal hierarchies were reorganized following the Israeli regulation of Palestinian labor: the mutated relationships of personal dependence among men affected the traditional forms of social authority, since it was now those who could be granted with an Israeli work permit that gained esteem and social recognition more easily thanks to their economical success. Abu Yusef, the man who had welcomed me in his house, could be humiliated by his younger brother, who worked as an entrepreneur in Israel thanks to the bribe he paid monthly to his faked Israeli employer in order to get a permit. His brother could wave a roll of bills in front of Abu Yusef’s face, and talk about the expensive fish lunch he had on the Tel Aviv seaside, while Abu Yusef’s silence did not say about his being blacklisted by Israel because of his political commitment in the first Intifada. Furthermore, Palestinians with an Israeli permit acted as mediators in procuring jobs to their fellows, both through legal and illegal ways. Structural secrecy – the denial of conflict in supposed symmetrical relations between Israelis and Palestinians – thus increased political violence in the way it threatened the Palestinian social reproduction by dividing the Palestinian non-citizen population along different forms of access to rights, notably the right of movement and the possibility to work. It was no surprise that some people in al-Bab – notably those who already lived in

the Jerusalem Israeli-annexed part of the village – dreamt about the Jerusalem ID just in order to become able to support their families.

Between a public and a private Self

“My name is Yasar”, my friend Yazan answered to some Israelis, who were questioning him after approaching us. Yazan’s mule always attracted the Israelis’ curiosity. We were going back to al-Bab, riding through the hills after a tiring day in Jerusalem, where Yazan went to look for work. On our way back we found some young Israelis, who were entertaining a group of children in a clearing in the forest. It was probably a summer camp in the nature, what better than a mule that suddenly appears from the wood? They started to speak with Yazan, kindly asking things about his animal. In his fluent Hebrew Yazan answered their questions. They finally asked him what his name was, and Yazan replied: “My name is Yasar”. It was the first time I heard him introducing himself under a false name. The name is a vehicle of personal identity, which is normal to hide in situations of widespread surveillance, where social actors are put into a condition of illegality. Yet, my friend Yazan’s baptism as “Yasar” disguised much more than a simple individual identity.

The Palestinian workers’ exposure in the Israeli society corresponded to their invisibility as political subjects. Labor as an apparatus of the Israeli colonial governmentality fragmented their social existence through the individualized scrutiny of their personal profiles under the Israeli security regime, which accorded the right to move and work to those who had no “security” precedents. Simultaneously, the inclusion of the Palestinian workforce into the Israeli labor market after the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, that workers remembered as a period of “freedom”, until its successive regulation through the restriction of the laborers’ movement, engendered an increasing personalization of work relations between Palestinians and Israeli employers. Palestinians depended on Israelis in order to be employed and get a work permit.

In this context the Palestinians’ work experience in Israel became part of a moral discourse through which laborers were compelled to show their professionalism, honesty and loyalty, while they had to simultaneously distinguish the appropriate work conditions and work relations. Paradoxically, it was the more invisible form of work – work without a contract and often without a permit in Israelis’ private houses – which accorded Palestinians the greatest independence in managing their activity. In their experience of

work in Israel the values that Palestinian masculinity was expected to embody were at stake: on one hand they had to accomplish their role of breadwinners and build their “respectability” by sustaining their families, while on the other hand they needed to take care of their honor and their dignity in a context of structural uncertainty, where their vulnerability as “Arab” workers in Israel was continuously reproduced. Such uncertainty and vulnerability let them construct themselves as moral subjects in always contingent and provisional ways.

I have shown how Palestinian men’s moral subjectivation was hung between two extremes: unavailability and “friendship”. The moral evaluation of their work conditions and work relations could produce the workers’ unavailability, which expressed a refusal to work caused by unjust conditions or inhuman treatments. On the contrary, “friendship” referred to the “respectability” of their employers, who were supposed to give workers their rights (a just salary according to the kind of job and the work time) and to treat them as human beings, assuring them respect. Therefore, workers’ moral evaluation was not confined to labor as such, but opened up to a conception of work relations as “human relationships” (*‘alāqāt insāniyya*) created by a long-lasting attendance of Israel after the 1967 occupation, and by the Palestinian workers’ everyday encounters with Israelis. Work as a “substance” for the workers’ ethical subjectivation thus confirmed my initial hypotheses: mutual respect, honesty, trust, loyalty defined a moral economy of friendship which emerged as a specific historical formation due to the Israeli occupation, and that was later absorbed and reinforced by the “peace” regime inaugurated by the Oslo Agreements. In this way the “peace” process confirmed the invigoration of the Israeli system of domination, rather than its end. However, differently from the supposedly symmetrical collaboration between Israeli and Palestinian governmental institutions, Palestinian workers clearly separated their personal relationships with Israelis from the domain of politics: friendship did not constitute for them a mode of political relation *a priori*.

On the contrary, their experience of work was troubled by compelling anxieties and doubts about the compliance with their national standards. According to the Palestinian national discourse, their position was essentially contrary to the normative ground of “resistance”, and let them be depicted as people “without dignity”. The workers’ ordinary struggle to act as respectable men and be treated as “human beings”, preserving their honor and dignity in an asymmetrical sharing with Israelis because of work, was confronted to their national duties as political subjects. In this tension workers

refused their possible identification as “collaborators” of the Israeli occupation: to do so, it was not enough to judge work conditions and relations morally, but they had to consider the political implications of the kind and the place of a job for Israelis. In al-Bab all laborers working on the construction of the wall, in uprooting trees and building Israeli roads were Palestinians. This flagrant evidence was what some people in al-Bab defined as “*nakbitnā*”, “our own catastrophe”: recalling the Palestinian “catastrophe” engendered by their dispossession in 1948, this renewed catastrophe was being made by Palestinian hands. Labor for Israelis thus condensed both the search for individual respectability and the collective humiliation that Palestinians lived as a whole. If the moral economy of friendship engendered a set of personal relationships with Israelis, it also consisted of a regime of suspicion in which national boundaries appeared to be blurred: it was not enough to be a Palestinian to act – morally and politically – as a Palestinian. Through the Israeli occupation and the inclusion of the Palestinian workforce into Israel the Palestinians’ political subjectivation became constitutively ambiguous, and the other’s identity was suspected and feared.

Suspicion reflected on the perception of social relationships in the Palestinian society. This is also why “friendship” among Palestinians was thought as rare, difficult and sometimes even inexistent. The denial of friendship was accompanied by its use as a social language in defining specific situations and personal relationships. Caught between its possibility in Israeli-Palestinian social contacts because of work, and its denial and simultaneous use in the Palestinian society, what did “friendship” thus mean for Palestinians? Instead of depicting a homogenous social reality, I have tried to show the multiplicity of friendship conceptions and practices, which were produced and circulated in the social fabric of everyday life. I have also described how “friendship” was situated at the interstice of “private” and “public” domains of social action.

Firstly, friendship mainly consisted in “sitting together”: shared space and time were the conditions to possibly describing friendship ties. This form of sharing was regulated by precise norms: although friendship was not primarily described as an affective relationship, “sitting together” was supposed to engender intimacy and affection (*mawadda*). In this sense moral norms, like those concerning gender relationships, played an essential role in defining the “borders” of sharing. Further, “sitting together” represented the main display of Palestinian hospitality: friendship represented a way to include particular individuals into groups, like kinship groups. Even in the case of overt conflict along different agnatic boundaries, friends could be welcomed as single people to

whom respect and hospitality were guaranteed in virtue of personal bonds. Through the social practices of visits and invitations a personal relationship between individuals could be absorbed by wider forms of closeness. Closeness was chiefly defined through kinship, conceived as a system of protection and alliance, which also defined a precise moral space in the residential organization of Palestinian villages. Friendship itself constituted a form of closeness, which was produced by solidarity and exchange. Material exchanges implied the circulation and sharing of moral values, such as respect and esteem. The dimension of exchange in friendship defined two kinds of social relationships: asymmetry could be part of so called “friendship” ties, which expressed different forms of solidarity, and highlighted the moral qualities of the person who acted as a “friend”: the virtues of generosity and compassion were at the base of people’s “respectability”. This form of friendship was linked to the normative ground of “closeness”, which was based on “human morals”: it concerned a way of being in the world and the moral duty of solidarity and material support to those in need. In this sense “closeness” was intended as an ethical disposure, more than a reality defined by spatial and/or social proximity. However, solidarity also contributed to produce selective circuits of exchange. This was particularly evident for women, which managed their personal relationships quite autonomously and sometimes defying agnatic lines. In this sense the dimension of choice and affection was underlined in the conception of friendship as “something added” to the normative ties of kinship. However, I would not isolate this form of friendship to the women’s world, since social practices demonstrated that exclusive and selective ties existed also among men. It was in people’s discourses that gender norms were subtly underlined through a different reflexivity developed around a sexed self: generosity and compassion defined men’s values and social role in the public arena, while simultaneously representing women as the main agents of care in the personal world of affects.

It was just the regulation of affects which produced a separation between “private” and “public” domains. The dimension of secrecy was thus central to distinguish between personal feelings, and the collective and regulated expression of emotions in public events. In this sense men revealed to be part of a “secret” world as much as women were supposed to be. On the contrary, women participated in the weaving of personal ties that could sometimes oppose and contest men’s “politics”. In my family, for example, the system of solidarity based on the exchange of water when some houses of the neighborhood lacked of it activated selective personal ties that followed matrilineal lines,

and questioned the sense of closeness represented by agnatic solidarity. For this reason men talked about “women’s secrets” and perceived feminine relations as a potentially subversive force. If this could be confined to women’s supposedly “natural” emotionality, men’s affects and personal feelings constituted also the core of their vulnerability according to the honor code, which provided for composure and self-control to show the individual’s freedom and independence through his/her capacity of not being affected by others. The virtue of strength and the ability to manage competitive social relationships were general competences that both men and women were expected to accomplish in the respective appropriate ways. It was in this context that trust and sincerity emerged as particular values related to friendship, since it became a rare but possible relationship where personal feelings and secrets could be revealed. In this sense friendship acquired its affective characterization, since friends were supposed to share even their emotional state: “A friend gets sad when you get sad, and laughs when you laugh”. However, this emotional intimacy was not in contradiction with the conception of “friendship” as a form of solidarity based on norms of “closeness”, since even in this sense emotional sharing was contemplated in public events where a collective expression of joy or grief was legitimated, such as in weddings and funerals, where friends were supposed to show their participation and support. Moreover, if the intimate dimension of friendship is more easily described as an affective tie, the “heart” was considered the central source of sincerity even in more general systems of solidarity and exchange. It is important to note that in most of my interlocutors’ view “human morals” were connected to Islamic ethics, which considers the heart as the source of human intentionality. Sincerity is thus not based on rational calculation or public performances, but it is hidden inside the subject as a truth that only God can know. “Sincerity from the heart, and not from the tongue” thus defines “true” friendship, which its etymological origin connects to the idea of “truth” (“friendship”, *ṣadāqa*, actually comes from the root *ṣadaqa*, that means “to say the truth”). We see how friendship experience in the Palestinians’ everyday life relies on the tension between closeness and intimacy, social respect and affect, honesty and trust. In this tension the subject emerges as the result of the articulation between a “public” and a “private” self.

Life as politics

In personal relationships with Israeli “friends” the cultivation of the self was compelled by a contradictory process of moral and political subjectivation. If labor as a constrained social sharing with the “enemies” produced a separation between morality and politics – compelling morality to regulate personal relationships between the two sides, while conflict was silenced – friendship was liable to question such a separation. The Palestinians’ general identification of Israelis as “Jews”, defining their historical experience of contact with “others”, was combined with a nationalized Jewishness promoted by the Zionist policies of the Israeli state, which both distinguished and interconnected Jewish and Palestinian social spaces. Political separation and spatial-social imbrications thus constituted a domination system in which Palestinian-Israeli contacts were defined by a power asymmetry linked to their different citizen or non-citizen status. From the Israelis’ perspective personal relationships with Palestinians concretely contested – although more or less explicitly – separation. This contestation was overtly represented by the leftwing Israeli political solidarity towards Palestinians, which opposed the material reality of borders and could also end up in denying the possibility of friendship with Palestinians through a critical embodiment of the “occupiers” historical role in producing their subaltern condition. In this case power relations between the two populations were overtly stated, but interiorly lived in the forms of “guilt” and “shame” caused by the Israeli citizens’ “privileges” in a structurally unequal political system. However, even when power relations were not publicly contested, and personal contacts with Palestinians rather reaffirmed asymmetry between the two sides thanks to the “fear” generated by the construction of the Palestinian “enemy” in the Zionist public discourse, separation was embodied by Israelis in contradictory and conflicting ways, producing disorientation and discomfort rather than a clear adherence to the Israeli political project. Differently, physical proximity could also engender the conception of Palestinian-Israeli “neighborhoods”, which ambiguously opposed separation thanks to an environmental sensibility, through which the Israeli settlers tried to legitimate their presence in the West Bank via pacified relations with their Palestinian “neighbors” in the name of the nature to be preserved.

In the context of the Israeli military occupation and settler colonization the Palestinians’ work experience was liable to intercept and attract these different attitudes from the Israeli side, in a wider context defined by racism as a precise form of Israeli

violence, which connected “Arabness” to social dangerousness, and precisely targeted Palestinian laborers in moments of growing political tensions. Racism was also explicated by the Israeli security regime, whose main mission was to preserve the Israelis’ lives while making the Palestinians’ deaths an inevitable consequence of the Israeli system of self-defense. How could “friendship” with Israelis be combined with political violence, racial discrimination, and the Israeli necropolitics towards Palestinians?

Like I have underlined above, “friendship” could stem from the workers’ moral evaluation of their Israeli employers. Honesty defined both the employer’s disposition to accord his/her workers just work conditions, and the laborer’s behavior as a good worker and a loyal partner. This social exchange was defined by “interest”: from the Palestinians’ view interest did not deny “friendship” as a legitimate personal relationship, in which mutual respect, honesty and trust were fundamental conditions. Furthermore, on the basis of these conditions both Israeli and Palestinian hospitality could be displayed. However, this kind of friendship was limited in time and thus separated from “true” friendship: when work ended, also this form of social exchange was supposed to end. Moreover, the Palestinians’ political subjectivation was left aside: labor was a non-conflicting social field where “human relations” were conceived as non political – I have rather defined them as “pre-political” – uniting people rather than dividing them. Yet, it must be noticed that not all work experiences could be defined as “friendship” in this sense: the Israeli employer was precisely evaluated on the basis of his/her “human” qualities and simultaneous recognition of the employees’ humanity. This is why mutual respect was a central issue here – and could also legitimize the Israelis’ inclusion into the Palestinians’ domestic space through the institution of the visit: in this sense the Israeli employer or colleague was considered as a legitimate social partner and could be called a “friend” thanks to his/her acknowledged respectability. Under this perspective the social language of “friendship” referred to a wider idea of social proximity that defined the subjects’ moral obligations towards each other, although it was not necessarily described in terms of intimacy and affection. This is why participation in the socially institutionalized occasions of joy and grief, such as weddings and mourning, could be included in this kind of Israeli-Palestinian ties. Furthermore, although limited to “interest”, that was work, this kind of personal relationships could be long-lasting relations between some Israelis and Palestinians created after the 1967 “opening” of borders following the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Through the “human morals” that regulated this form of “friendship”, human life was thus redefined on the basis of a fundamental sharing: both Israelis and

Palestinians had families – so that reproduction was linked to social responsibility; both had a bodily experience of the world – feeling founded their affective lives; and they could communicate and possibly understand with each other thanks to a common language (here intended as the human capacity to speak, and not referred to particular linguistic skills). In this sense I have defined this form of “friendship” as pre-political, since it implied a form of sharing which pertained to people as human living beings. However, in the context of the Israeli domination and racist necropolitics, I would add that this essential form of sharing became inevitably political. Although Palestinians separated their “human relations” with Israelis from the domain of “politics” through a distinction between “people” and “government”, so that personal relationships were not considered as relationships between political subjects, it was just their recognition as humans, which contributed to define “friendship” as such in the context of their work relations. At the same time the Palestinians’ distinction seemed to reproduce a separation between “private” and “public” spheres, but its terms were inversed: if the Palestinian “public” self was exposed to the Israeli “others”, the political was necessarily relegated to their “private” self, which was not revealed. On the basis of this fractured self the Palestinian workers in Israel opposed the threatening “normalization” of the Israeli occupation: normalization was thus defined as the capture of the private self by the non-political public self. We see here how the coincidence of the personal with the private, and the political with the public, is radically put into question.

Despite this fracture, through an in-depth analysis of three cases concerning the bond between Israeli and Palestinian “friends”, I have shown how the Palestinians’ “truth”, which was represented by the “public secret” of their historical dispossession by the Israeli state, could be differently revealed. The Palestinians’ political subjectivation thus emerged through their refugee condition in the mirroring effect produced by personal relationships with the Israeli citizens. If friendship was founded by the moral value of “sincerity”, the Israeli friend was also evaluated on the basis of his/her recognition of the Palestinian “truth”. This recognition was liable to give birth to a “true” friendship as an essentially political one, when personal relations were legitimated by a common struggle against the Israeli occupation and Zionist policies, simultaneously transcending national boundaries. The question of life became a central issue here: friendship was thus conceived as a wish for the friend’s persistence in life.

If the condition of living beings defined Palestinians and Israelis’ common humanity, the different values attached to their lives and the distinct conditions in which

they lived distinguished them fundamentally. Palestinians criticized the particular attachment that Israelis demonstrated for life, while simultaneously representing themselves as the “living dead”. If the Israelis’ conception of life was linked to the defense of their physical existence under the Israeli security regime, Palestinians’ survival was compared to death because it was pushed to the extreme limits of subsistence due to their ongoing dispossession, economical dependence, and political instability. The sense of life thus transcended a merely biological existence, where such an existence was also denied by the sovereign Israeli right to kill Palestinians as “enemies”. If the Israeli necropolitics blurred the distinction between “combatants” and “civilians” under the label of Palestinian “terrorism”, normalizing the Palestinian deaths, such deaths were politicized through their inclusion into the category of “martyrs”. While Israel tried to transform even the Palestinians’ deaths into a public secret, by holding their corpses indefinitely and preventing them to mourn their loved ones, mourning precisely became a public, political act, which expressed the suffering of the Palestinians as one people. The sense of life was thus connected to witnessing the “truth” of the Israeli violence, which simultaneously gave the Palestinian people an immortal existence.

Such transcendence of life did not merely refer to a supernatural afterworld where Palestinian “martyrs” would be glorified thanks to their access to “paradise”. This was also why Palestinians specified that they did not like death, when death represented a violation of human life, that was unnatural death caused by killing and war. On the contrary, life transcended its biological substance because it had to be ethically built through a process of continuity between what had been left and what would be left to future generations. The value of life was thus condensed in the quest for a respectable life defined by dignity. Dignity connected physical, social, and political existence: subsistence was not only a way to provide one’s children with food and money, but consisted of the moral and political duty to give them a “respectable life”. The Palestinians’ survival in a context of social, economical and political precariousness was thus defined by an ethical tension: like one of my interlocutors pointed out, what remained to them – and what was enough – was their capacity to dream.

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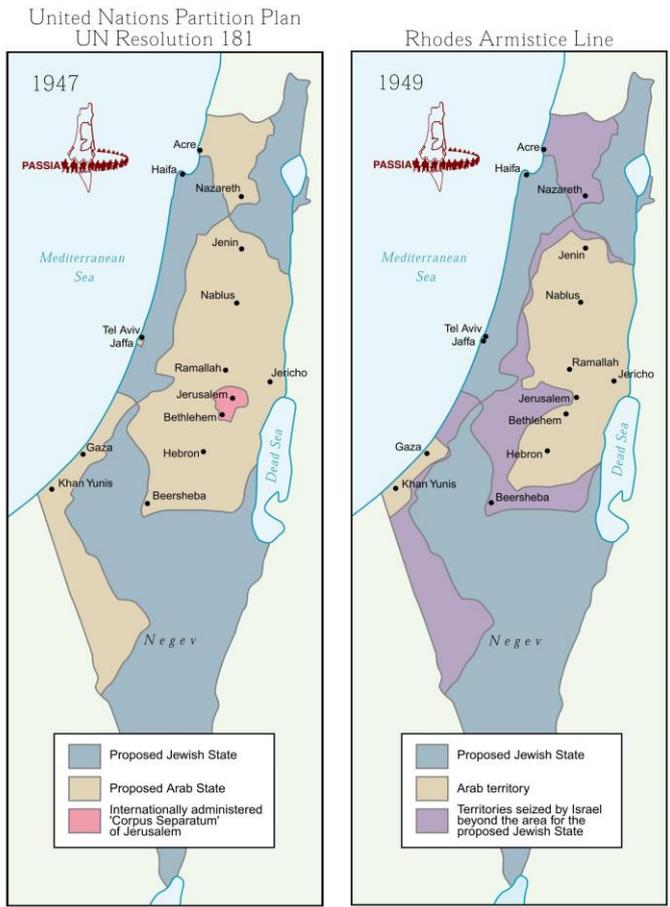


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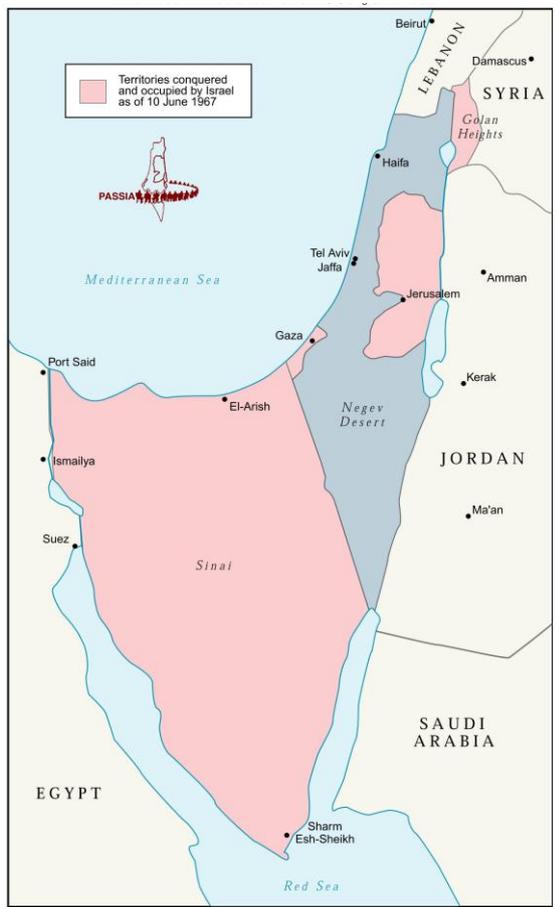


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Figure 6. Area C in the West Bank (Source: OCHA, February 2011)

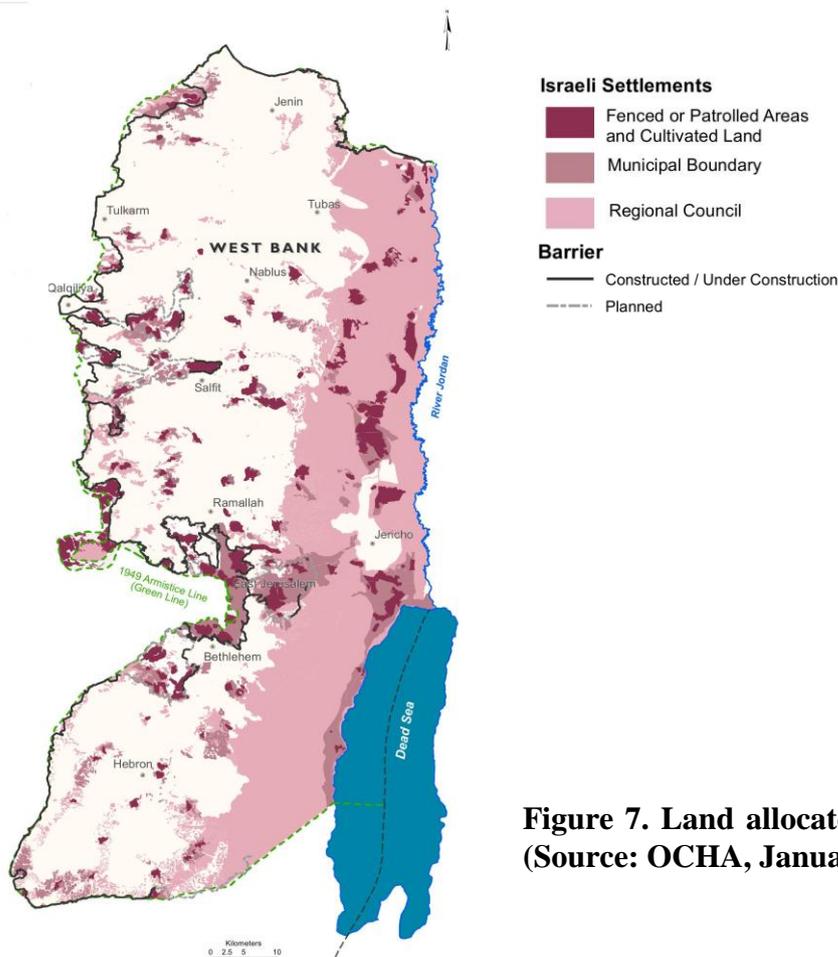


Figure 7. Land allocated to Israeli settlements (Source: OCHA, January 2012)

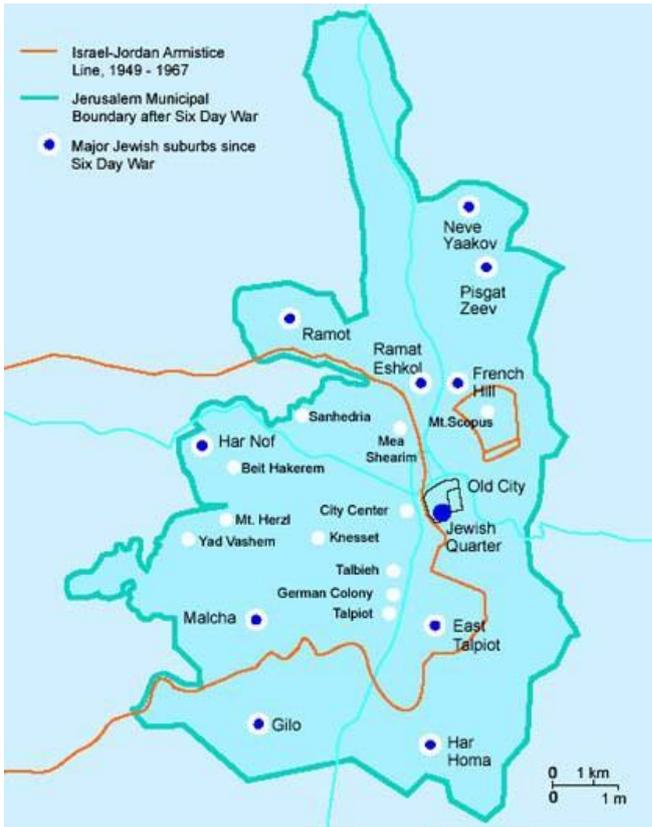


Figure 8. The Israeli “greater Jerusalem” (source: The UK Media Watch website)

Cartography of al-Bab history



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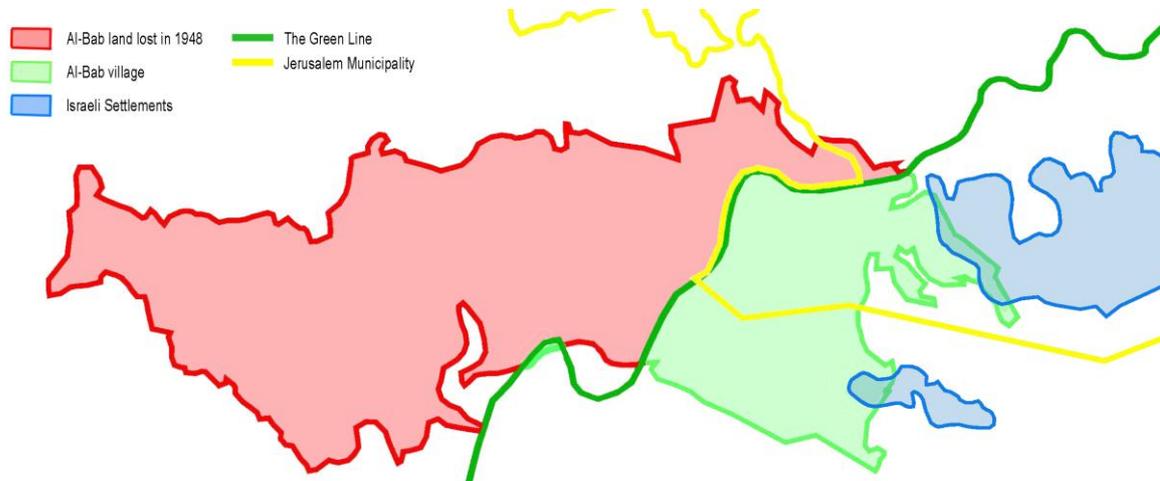


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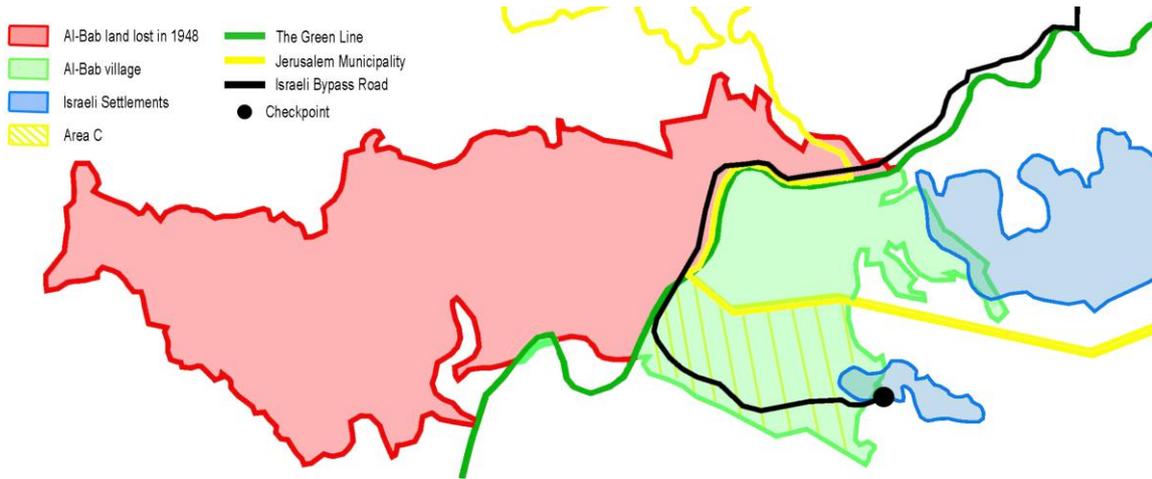


Figure 11. Al-Bab after the Oslo Agreements

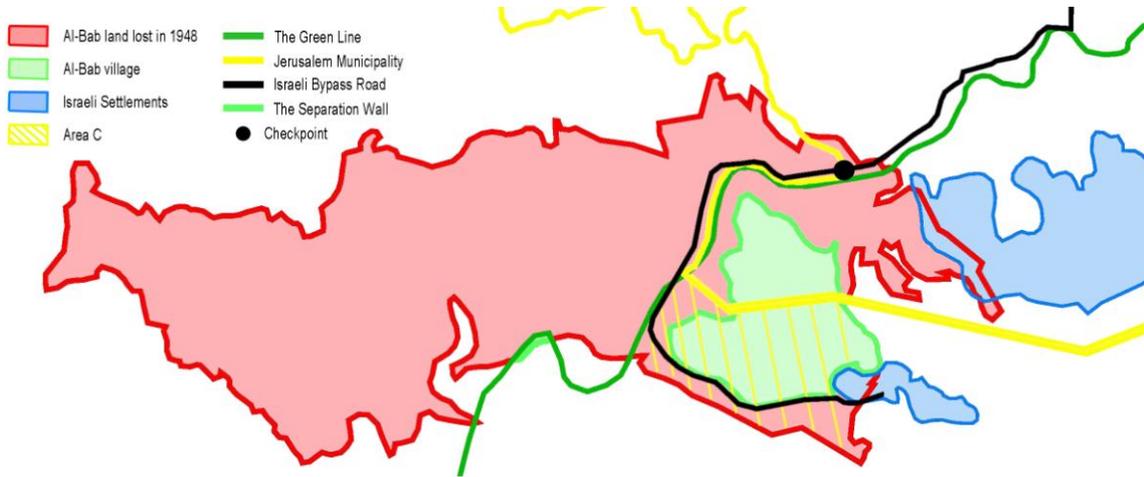


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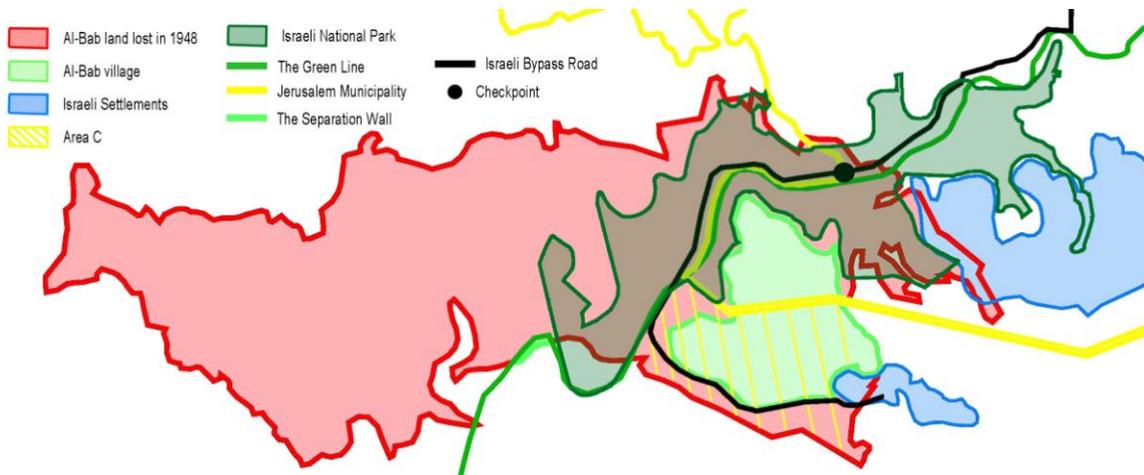


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Photo 1. The valley of the Green Line: the railway Jerusalem-Tel Aviv and the bypass road for Israelis connecting Jerusalem with the Israeli settlement next to al-Bab. On the top of the hill (on the right) another Israeli settlement, today annexed to the Jerusalem Municipality. On the left southwestern Jerusalem neighborhoods. All this land was part of al-Bab village before 1948.



Photo 2. The “new” al-Bab (seen from the “old” al-Bab), which today is encircled by the construction of the wall: most of the Palestinians’ lands, which are cultivated with olive trees, will remain outside the barrier (2012).



Photo 3. Southwestern Jerusalem neighborhoods expanding in the Palestinian fields of the “old” al-Bab (2012).



Photo 4. Destroyed Palestinian houses in the “old” al-Bab and JNF wood of conifers taking their place (2012).



Photo 5. Palestinian children playing in the water pool that their grandparents used for irrigation in the “old” al-Bab, while Orthodox Jews from Jerusalem pray before doing their ritual bath.



Photo 6. Palestinian children riding their donkey in the still-dirt patrol road built around the wall path in al-Bab, at the gates of Jerusalem. Al-Bab checkpoint is in the valley (al-Bab 2012).



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Photo 7. Inside al-Bab (2011).



Photo 8. Israeli houses in the Israeli settlement mirroring Palestinian houses through the separation wall in al-Bab. The Palestinian side is recognizable by the multi-storey unfinished house, whose construction was blocked by the Israeli authorities, who have full control in al-Bab.