

**Why we got used
to this corner**

**Identities in
Occupied Bethlehem**

Annerieke Willemze

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By Annerieke Willemze

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*Place passes like a gesture between us -
What is place? I asked.*

*Senses discovering a footprint of intuition, he said.
Then he sighed, Oh, for that narrow street
that carried me in the ample evening
to her house on the outskirts of solitude.
Do you still keep my heart in memory
and forget the smoke of the city?*

*Don't bet on reality, I told him.
You will find nothing alive like its own image awaiting you.
Time tames even mountains. They are raised up
and cast down lower than you know.*

*Mahmoud Darwish, With the Fog So Dense on the Bridge.
From: Almond Blossoms and Beyond*

CONTENTS

1. Identifying Borders	6
1. Assad's Story	
2. Living Palestine	7
Political Situation	7
Location: Altered Places	
3. It's Personal in the Field	9
4. Methodological Context	10
Combined Qualitative Approaches	11
Life Story Interview	11
Participant Observation	
5. Theoretical Context	13
Defining Identities/Defining Meaning	13
Identity	14
Ethnicity	15
Nationality	16
Religion	17
Memory	18
Map of the Westbank	21
2. Contested Identities	23
1. Rana's Story	23
2. Social Structures	24
3. Challenging Identities	26
4. Oppressed Identities	28
3. Remembering Identities	31
1. Introduction	31
2. Remembering Belonging	31
3. Regulating Memories	34
4. Resisting Forgetting	36
4. Conclusion	38
References	40

Chapter 1:
Identifying Borders



1.1 Assad's Story

The second day the soldiers broke into my house. I thought they would be inside for just one day. They stayed 35 days. They broke all the furniture. They exploded the first door and searched the whole house for me or for clues of where I could be. I was on the most wanted list. I was an activist in the Fateh movement but had never been militant. Friends of mine, they had. That's why I was on the same list. Also I have been in prison many times. The longest period was nine months. Because I was an activist. They also searched the house down ours, where my brother lives. My brother, he was sick. They took him as a hostage because they wanted to find me. They told him they were going to blow up the house and they would leave him in. You see, my brother was psychologically ill. So he suffered from many fears because he was psychologically damaged before. They would tell him over and over 'we want to kill your brother' and 'we will kill you if we don't find him'. So my brother really got worse after that. He was always afraid but his conditions became worse and worse. He has a family but he has not been able to work and provide for them. He is scared to death. They are really poor but we try to help.

Amir: The soldiers would come to our house and interrogate and scare us. After the forty day siege they have been to my home many times. They wanted to catch Assad but he was hiding for two years. They interrogated, asking questions. *Son 1:* And during the forty days tanks were surrounding the house. *Amir:* They would ask me about Assad. They put a gun to my head and said if they would find anything they would kill me. My children were in the room with me, they saw everything. Then they would turn to my son who was only five years old and say that they will bring him a computer if he just tells them where his daddy is. *Boy 1:* We have a storage and they exploded it because they thought my father was there. So really, we suffered... the combination of tanks, soldiers in the house, and guns to our heads... and always they were searching everything even the water tanks. The Israelis were controlling everything, by satellite. They see everything, we were afraid.

[On the years after the 2002 siege when Assad didn't live at home]
Assad: I would come home for just a few hours but Amir was always scared saying that I shouldn't be here, that they would come and kill me. Once, the moment I left they came here... searching the whole house again. I came home because I wanted to eat *Qatayif* [Arab stuffed pancake]. My wife, she is an amazing cook and she did it for me. But when the soldiers came I didn't have time to eat because I quickly left through the back window, I climbed down and ran. Again I hid. This day, we found out, they had raided and searched all the houses of Christian activist in the Fateh movement within Bethlehem and Beit Sahour. They would tell Amir that if they would catch me they would kill me on the spot and finish me. Ah, the Israeli army, the best army in the world... threatens a wife with two young children. One of my comrades, was wounded by a dum dum *[expanding bullet that explodes within the body]* and hadn't been treated. He was in bad shape. And because of the impact the occupation had on us and also the threatening and the fear... people are trying to avoid us. Because they would come to this home, to our family. But everyone was afraid because they have families themselves, they need work and children. It is dangerous for them to see us. It was terrible for us, we felt isolated. We were very afraid, my wife was afraid and we were lonely because I couldn't live at home. They would kill me. We couldn't have a meal together. I didn't live at home for two years. After two years I decided to go back home, no matter what happens. During the two years and also when I lived home...

we had like... social protection circles. People who could... let us know whether there were soldiers coming and also people who would hide me and others. They would call and say a jeep is coming with soldiers or undercover groups are in town... those groups... they come here and look like us... wearing keffiyeh [*traditional Arab scarf*] and driving a Palestinian car. And they come and shoot people on the spot. During this time we would hide, come home, hide and so on. Like there was no end to our suffering. The soldiers... they know that I am not a danger... they might have people on their list who are... maybe... but why should I pay the price. We just wanted to be left alone... to live as normal human beings. Also I suffered from a lot of pain... rheumatism. And fear. Also... the kids... they have traumas. *Amir*: Haraam. My son... he has... he has involuntary urination... he wets his bed. Everyone has been exposed... all of us... we have different kinds of trauma.

They want people to be afraid. The Israelis have lots of prohibition... but I decided to go to work... not to abide with everything they wanted. Also I have my family to take care of so I will provide, no matter how much they threaten us. We want a normal life. But Israel doesn't care about that. We are exhausted. It is painful that... you know... what happened to us... this is our cross... always with us. Up to this moment, there is no one to help us, no one to compensate for what we have lost. So this is painful. It is not over, it is always with us.

1.2 Living Palestine

POLITICAL SITUATION

No study of Palestine and the Palestinians can ignore the momentous impact, significance, and consequences of the two defining moments in modern Palestinian political history, the *Nakba* (literally, disaster) of 1948 and the military occupation of the rest of Palestine in 1967. Understandably, the bulk of scholarship on Palestine in the decades since 1948 has been devoted to documenting and analyzing the impact of wars, dispossession, and military occupation on Palestinian society. Dominated by a macro-level political-economy approach, much of this scholarship, especially that produced since 1967, was preoccupied with structural transformations at the level of the economy, the class structure, and the polity (Khalidi, 2010). In the 1980s, and spurred by the widening of mass resistance to the occupation, a body of more anthropologically oriented works began to appear alongside the ever expanding corpus of political studies. Much of this later scholarship, while attempting to understand Palestinians as they lived their lives, focused on Palestinian political agency and was more interested in understanding Palestinians as political actors who organized, resisted, and otherwise challenged the occupation.

The political-economy and political-agency approaches share a common shortcoming in that they do not render Palestinian lives very approachable or accessible (Taraki et al., 2006). Palestinians are treated as one-dimensional political subjects. The internal dynamics, stresses, and contradictions of the social groups and communities within which people live out their lives, or the sensibilities and

subjectivities of individuals as they negotiate their mundane existence away from the barricades have not received much serious attention from researchers. In Anthropology we often speak about “everyday life”. However, it is often precisely the daily experience of ordinary people that is suffocated under the theoretical point or polemic at issue in some expatiation on “the meaning” of the quotidian. We read, for instance, about “resistance” to institutions or to power in the everyday act of insurgent behavior from subaltern groups. We read about the agonistic process of negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians and the problem of the status of Palestinian citizenship. The attempt in most studies that deal with the issues of Palestinian life and politics today (with the exception of Edward Said and a few other writers of his caliber) is often to present a theoretical framework and illustrate it by a few ethnographic or cultural examples. That is all well and good. But few accounts successfully marry the theoretical or academic discourse with the more unruly and frequently messy testimony of personal life, along with its frustrations and even its inconsequentialities. I have tried to learn more about the reality of life under occupation and especially during the second intifadah through interviews and I participated in and observed daily Palestinian life, always politicized but at the same time highly personal and embedded in the slow pace of an unrolling human life.

This thesis is inspired by a desire to challenge scholarly discourses that are either focussed on nation-making or on micro-ethnographies of Palestinian life without so much considering the immense impact of political events influencing and reinforcing individual lives and discourses. I have thus attempted to explore the meaning of place and memory for the construction of identities. A composition combining more abstract thinking on identity-making and micro-ethnography of Palestinian life provides a conceptual angle from which both political events and individual lives can be investigated and understood.

LOCATION: ALTERED SPACES

The political situation is extremely complex and transnational. Bethlehem and the neighbouring towns are ruled by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), which established itself in the main Palestinian towns in 1995. An area such as Bethlehem, where there is both military and civilian control by the PNA, is called 'area A'. In fact, however, the PNA is far from sovereign; it has no control over water and electromagnetic fields, import and export, and during the nights the Israeli military will be present in Bethlehem to make arrestations or simply to instill fear by being there. The countryside is largely controlled by Israel. Some areas fall under both military and civilian Israeli control, called 'areas C'. Other areas are militarily controlled by Israel while the PNA has established a civilian government there; these are called 'areas B'.

It is impossible for Palestinian citizens with a West Bank identity card to freely pass the

checkpoint between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, since they need special permission. While many do not get such a permit for often unknown reasons, others who do get a permit are usually allowed to go into Israel for limited periods of time only. One checkpoint is open for holders of West Bank identity cards, who would have to walk a few hundred meters and pass through the wall, iron corridors and, after passing two checks, take a bus into Israel. Another checkpoint is only open for Israeli plated cars owned by people who hold an Israeli or Jerusalemite identity card or a foreign passport. While Jerusalem is only 8 kilometers from Bethlehem's Manger Square, the geographical space has been severely altered, thus making a trip to Jerusalem feel like going to another country; the country on the other side of the wall. When Palestinians want to travel from the southern part of the West Bank to the northern part, from Bethlehem to Ramallah for instance, and do not have a permit to enter Jerusalem, they have to take a bypass road through the desert around Jerusalem - called Wadi Nar - which is full of rather dangerous U-turns and, at times of bad weather, slippery. Recently the PNA has started to construct a permanent road with help of US Aid. While this makes the road less dangerous, many Palestinians feel this is a normalization of the fact that they cannot travel through Jerusalem.

Bethlehem is also deeply affected by Israel's settlement policy. There are 18 settlements in the Bethlehem district established on lands expropriated from the towns and villages and connected by by-pass roads which avoid Arab populated areas. These settlements form 'rings' around Jerusalem aimed at strengthening Jewish control over the city. Rachel's tomb, inside Bethlehem, has been an extremely important religious place for both Christians and Muslim and is nowadays completely under Israeli control. Rachel's tomb is completely tucked inside the wall, surrounded by four walls and only open for Jews and tourists since it is seen as 'inalienable property of the Jewish people'.

1.3 It's Personal in the Field

There are so many borders and checkpoints in Palestine, that one might forget the cultural borders that are being crossed by doing research. Indeed, I felt that my “ researcher's identity ” was like a borderland, one constantly imposed to my own deeply internalized cultural values and discourses and the urgency to completely immerse myself into Palestinian culture and values. Immersing myself into Palestinian culture did not only have to do with behaving differently. Rather, by becoming part of a group of people defined as the other, the minority, I started to experience the dynamics of exclusion carried out by the hegemonic group and oppressor. Excluded from full participation, being target of xenophobia, orientalism and blatant racism; it is the order of a Palestinian day. In Israel I went to see my friends' destroyed villages and towns their families were expelled from. Standing there alone, knowing their histories and their deep longing for a place they had never seen, I experienced a strange emotion. A substitute for their longing, it seemed; a yearning for times when almond trees had blossomed and families had gathered to pick its flowers and eat the first green

almonds. There I realized that my identity as a researcher could never be objective, let alone be neutral. What is more, it occurred to me it was foolish to maintain something abstract like a 'researcher identity'. My emotions and opinions following from doing research in Palestine were not confined to my identity as a researcher only. Often times it submerged my whole being and reinforced profound notions of power and oppression. Through doing fieldwork in Palestine I have given way to exercising and examining my *human* identity, on the borderlands of cultures.

1.4 Methodological Context

Carrying out research in Palestine presented me with a few methodological difficulties. First, I had not fully anticipated the hardship I would encounter caused by the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. While I was trying to understand people's narratives, both public and private, I realized I had to try to understand what it means to be occupied, what it means to be stateless; being part of a nation without a state. I do not consider my understanding of oppression sufficient for carrying out an ethnographic research that touches on collective and individual experiences of subjugation. I could capture words and rituals but the emotive world behind it remained hidden from me for most of my time in the field. However, some moments defined little break-throughs, heralding new phases of acceptance and understanding. One Friday, early in my fieldwork, I was teaching a computer lesson to a group of girls from the surrounding villages, at an organization which was situated right next to the separation wall and a watchtower which is 24/7 manned with at least two Israeli soldiers. Between the watchtower and the organization's garden is a steel gate that can only be opened from the inside, where a small military IDF base is housed. This Friday, teenage boys flocked together after the prayer and started throwing stones at the wall, shouting at it that it should go and take the suffering with it. A few boys threw self-made molotov cocktails at the watchtower, leaving black marks just beneath the bullet proof windows. When we heard the shouting and the stones ricochet off the steel, a few girls panicked and started to persuade me we should not stay in the classroom which was in the garden but try to go inside the main building. Some other girls stayed perfectly in place, still focussing on their just acquired facebook-page. I had no idea what to do, or how dangerous this situation was, so I decided to go with the panicking girls, and to bring everyone to the main building. When we stepped outside we saw the steel gate opening and at the same time firing and bomb sounds made us stand still in sudden horror. Slowly we walked towards the main building, trying to make ourselves as small as possible so we would not become targets for the Israeli soldiers. We ran to the windows to see the boys withdraw and reorganize after every blow of teargas, bullets and sound bombs. Two girls sat under the table, the rest was sipping coffee. A little dazzled I looked at my colleague for explanation.

"It's good you see this, but this is nothing. It's good you see this, it is the life." After this incident I noticed that many who had been there with me were much more forthcoming with answering my questions in a more personal way than before. However, trust remained an issue, the second difficulty. Regularly I was put under questioning by interlocutors who insinuated I could be CIA or Mossad. This

accusation unfortunately is not far-fetched. I myself came across internationals who did not seem to have, as Palestinians put it, a white heart. The danger of speaking with me about involvement in the second intifadah or other politically sensitive issues was real. Some people forbade me to record anything and even some did not want me to write anything. Also, in many interviews I conducted, people would start off by underlining they were not militants or had not been in the Church of the Nativity during the siege in 2000, while during the interview they would often change 'they' into 'we'. Cautious of this trust issue, I realized I had to be extremely sensitive to people's non-verbal communication, sensing whether I could ask more questions or not. Also, I did not want to constantly ask questions. Many times I remained silent to let the stories come out without asking questions that could make my interlocutors feel as if I was questioning them. The third difficulty I came across was tightening social control. While this was in many cases more a positive than a negative matter, it also presented me with methodological difficulties. As I arranged most of my formal interviews through the family I lived with, they sometimes denied me access to certain individuals who I thought could make me understand new things. Being looked upon as a daughter, as someone with responsibilities, being disobedient or mistrusting of their good judgement was certainly not part of the deal. Also, since this family was Christian, they tended to introduce me to other Christians until I explained that I needed to meet both Christians and Muslims to gain a better understanding of Palestine.

COMBINED QUALITATIVE APPROACHES

Life Story Interviews

The life story interview is the main research method I used for collecting the data needed to answer my research questions. Storytelling is a fundamental form of human communication and according to Berger and Quinney, it can serve an essential function in our lives (2005). We often think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story (Atkinson, 1998). As Taylor puts it: "Seeing our lives as stories is more than a powerful metaphor. It is how experience presents itself to us" (2001: 4). In order to captivate and understand social reality we need a research method that grapples with the intersection of biography and history in society and the ways in which personal troubles are related to public issues (Berger & Quinney, 2005). Using the method of narrative (i.e. "storytelling") as social inquiring caters the need for such a research method. However, there is at this moment no set of procedures that can be said to have achieved dominance in this field. In general, narrative is about stories and story structure. It is about imbuing "life events with a temporal and logical order," about establishing continuity between the past, present, and yet unrealized future, about transforming human experience into meaning (Atkinson, 1998; Berger & Quinney, 2005).

What may be of greatest interest in the life story is how people see themselves and how they want others to see them. The life story provides a clear and ordered record of personal truth that, of

necessity, consists of both “fact” and “fiction” . This is the most we can ask of a life story. It sets the record straight, as a personal explanation or justification, and often in a very touching way, for what people have done with their lives (Berger & Quinney, 2005). In the description of the key experiences of a lifetime, from conflicts to transitions to accomplishments, we get more than either fact or fiction, we get personal definitions of what it means to be caught in a moral struggle, what it is like to succeed or fail, and what it feels like to witness the unfolding of one's destiny. In the telling of a life story, we get a good sense of how and why the various parts of a life are connected and what gives the person meaning in life. Life stories are “essential in gaining a full understanding of human life, especially the individual life in relation to others, in knowing what matters most to people as they live life, and recognizing how each generation is linked to the other” (Atkinson, 1995: 23).

Atkinson (1995) remarks on life story interviewing as a research methodology, saying that although it is a fairly uniform research methodology that can be applied and much important data can be gotten from a life story (the objectivity of endeavor), there may be quite a lot of subjectivity involved in doing a life story interview. In Berger & Quinney's (2005) view, the life story interview can be *approached* scientifically, but is primarily carried out as an *art*. Though there is a structure (a set of questions or parts thereof) that can be used, each interviewer will apply this in their own way. The life story interview has its own standards of reliability and validity, distinct from quantitative research which can be determined to be reliable or valid on its own merits. The life story interview is a method based primarily on subjectivity, flexibility, and inevitable human variables.

Participant Observation

I used observation and participation to gain insight in the explicit and tacit Palestinian culture. Just being there, or, hanging out, proved important to get a general idea of how Bethlehemite society functions, what people busy themselves with and talk about. This enabled me to learn how and when to ask questions. Not only has participant observation provided me with the deepest understanding, it also enabled me to become part of social groups and build relationships. Building rapport did not take a long time, since from the very start I felt welcome and was almost forced to immerse myself in daily life and meet people. At first I was mainly busy with figuring out what was expected from me and how I should behave. Later on, when I felt I had a 'safe' social group, I was able to ask more questions and to go to farther ends to understand what it means to *live Palestine*. The social ties that were quickly created proved to be of great value, since many people were willing to take me to social gatherings, explain and analyze their and other's behaviours and point interesting meetings and places out. However, participant observation also makes the research extremely personal; every experience can be of value for collecting data. One cannot always be on full guard and thus observations are not interpreted in the right way. In this regard, a three months research is too short to be able to understand a society, especially a society in such a complex situation as Palestine.

1.5 Theoretical Context

This chapter explores the main conceptual framework, by addressing nationalism, ethnicity and religion as networks of meaning that come together to create communal identities, and so become a tool of organising exclusion and inclusion. Every identity, whether individual or social, presents us with a fundamental paradox: an identity establishes itself in relation to a set of differences, and it operates under powerful pressures to fix, regulate, or exclude some of these differences as otherness (Connoly, 1991). I will confine to a discussion of ethnicity, nationalism and religion as the main set of differences, indeed tools of inclusion and exclusion, that defines identities in Palestine. Where identity is established by a set of differences, it is maintained through the operation of memory. I will connect the establishment of Palestinian identity through ethnicity, nationalism and religion with memory.

DEFINING IDENTITIES / DEFINING MEANING

Anthropological theory has been deeply influenced by the chief narrative of nationalism and by modes of thinking about statehood derived directly from experiences with the nation-state. In fact, as Wimmer puts it, “anthropology's terminological totem, the concept of culture, bears a family resemblance to the idea of nation as a culturally homogeneous, clearly bound unit persisting over time” (2002: 19). On the other hand, the close acquaintance with non-modern forms of identity politics has made it easier for anthropology to move away from such essentialising and reifying notions of culture and gradually to develop a theoretical framework within which another reading of social processes became possible. This reading is based on an understanding of culture as an open and unstable process of the negotiation of meaning (Wimmer, 2002). According to Wimmer, this notion of culture is based on three aspects. First, the internalised culture of an individual as a precondition for the negotiation process; secondly, the generally binding world view resulting from this process; and thirdly, the cultural practices that mark the boundaries of the social group within which the negotiating process took place.

Bourdieu's term 'habitus' is usefull for analysing Wimmer's threefold notion of culture. Habitus portrays people as actors, modifying the image of an oversocialised individual who is “overwhelmingly sensitive to the opinions of others and hence obedient to the dictates of consensually developed systems of norms and values, internalized through socialization, so that obedience is not perceived as a burden” (Calhoun et al., 2007: 163). Habitus is established through a collection of strategies for action and cognitive patterns that have become routinised. This concept can be identified with the term 'scheme'; models of “simplified worlds, organised as networks of meaning” (Bourdieu et al., 1999). These schemes, or strategies, are activated in day to day thinking, perception and action. They are not per se imposed through education and socialisation, as classical interpretation of culture would have. Rather, individuals “internalise a matrix that is gradually built

up [...] by means of learning processes” (Wimmer, 2002). This conception of internalised strategies helps understand the dual nature of identity which consists of the individual's identity and the communities with which an individual identifies. The communities with which the individual identifies are the spaces in which the network of meaning is established. In ethnographic research, the day to day thinking, perception and action are of main interest and the researcher thus tries to unravel networks of meaning. Ethnographic research requires the less essentialist view that follows from the concept of habitus, indeed, as Levi-Strauss put it, *a view from afar*. Here I will try to capture this view from afar by discussing three embodied networks of meaning, three fields, that create and reinforce identities and differences.

IDENTITY

According to Connolly, an identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If identities did not coexist as differences, identity would not exist in its distinctness and solidity. Entrenched in this indispensable relation is “a second set of tendencies... to congeal established identities into fixed forms, thought and lived as if their structure expressed the true order of things... Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty” (1991; 64). Identity is thus *relational* and *collective*. My personal identity is defined through the collective constituencies with which I identify or am identified by others (as white, female, Dutch, student, and so on); it is further specified by comparison to a variety of things I am not. Identity, then, is always connected to a series of differences on which you depend in a way that gives privilege or priority to you. Jews, said Kant, are legalistic; that definition allowed him to define Kantian-Christian morality as a more spiritual orientation to duties and rights. Atheists, said Tocqueville, are restless, egoistic, and amoral, lacking the spiritual source of morality upon which stability, trustworthiness, and care for others are anchored. That definition allowed him to honor the American passion to exclude professed atheists from public office. Built into the dynamic of identity is a polemical temptation to translate differences through specification into moral failings or abnormalities.

Connolly calls the relation of identity to difference “the site of two problems [...]” (1991: ix). On the political level, this first problem brings about a series of attempts to protect the purity and certainty of a hegemonic identity by defining those differences that pose the greatest threat to the integrity and certainty of that identity. The second problem emerges out of solutions to the first one. It flows from diverse political tactics through which doubts about self-identity are posed and resolved by the constitution of an other against which that identity may define itself. To explore this territory is to struggle against the evil done by attempts to secure the surety of self-identity. Responding to the second problem involves challenging those political tactics of self-reassurance; problematizing conceptions of identity, ethics, responsibility, politics, order, democracy, sovereignty, community, and discourse through which solutions to the first problem are sustained: and exposing rituals of sacrifice concealed by established presentations of these themes.

Concluding, we can say that identity is relational and abounding with differences, it is not finit but rather an intuitive register, on “thought-imbued feelings of attachment, faith, disgust, shame, ambivalence, love, or disdain that influence action and judgement but fall below direct intellectual regulation” (Connolly, 1991; xviii). If it comes to communal identities in Palestine, this intuitive register of identity is being opened by networks of meaning that I will discuss here; ethnicity, nationalism and religion.

ETHNICITY

To clarify an ambiguous and vague term as ethnicity, the concept of difference and consequently the ability of differentiating is essential. Identities, and thus ethnicities, are not motionless monoliths. Rather, they are fluid and multiple, created and re-created at the level of everyday interaction. According to Eriksen ethnicity emerges and is made relevant through social institutions and encounters, and through people's ways of coping with the demands and challenges of life (1993). Anthropological research has a vantage point right at the centre of local life, a unique position to investigate these processes at the micro level. It enables to explore the ways in which ethnic relations are being defined and perceived by people; how they talk and think about their own group and its characteristics as well as those of other groups, and how particular world views are being maintained, contested and transformed. Ethnographic research is needed to provide a nuanced and complex vision of ethnicity in the contemporary world. Where social theorist Max Weber discarded 'ethnic community action' (*Gemeinschaftshandeln*) as an analytical concept, since it referred to a variety of different kinds of phenomena, he also held that 'primordial phenomena' like ethnicity and nationalism would decrease in importance and eventually vanish as a result of modernisation, industrialisation and individualism (Weber, 1980 [1921]). This never happened. On the contrary, ethnicity, nationalism and similar forms of identity markers grew in political importance in the world throughout the twentieth century, particularly since the Second World War. In the context of the Palestinian case I will here highlight a set of conceptual tools which go beyond the immediate interpretation of day-to-day politics and will help understand the lived worlds of Palestinian ethnicity.

Ethnicity is difficult to define, what is more, it should not be defined specifically, in order to be able to follow the fluidity of the social reality it wants to describe. However, most approaches in anthropology agree that ethnicity has something to do with the *classification of people and group relationships*. According to Eriksen, ethnicity refers to aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive. The fluidity of ethnicity is directly noticeable in the problem of boundaries. Who are the Palestinians? Trying to describe who they are - in which ways they are distinctive from other ethnic groups - is problematic. Language, culture, political organization, etc., do not correlate completely; “the units delimited by one criterion do not coincide with the units delimited by another” (Eriksen, 1992: 12).

Eriksen highlights Moerman's research on the Lue, a people in Thailand. After trying to describe the Lue as an ethnic group, Moerman had to conclude that someone is Lue by virtue of believing and calling himself Lue and of acting in ways that validate his Lueness. Being unable to argue that this Lueness can be defined with reference to objective cultural features or clear cut boundaries, Moerman defined it as an *emic category of description*. Since emic refers to 'the native point of view' - contrasting with etic, which refers to the analyst's concepts, descriptions and analyses - ethnicity is thus defined and validated by the group itself. However, definition of the own ethnicity can only take place when cultural differences regularly make a difference in interaction between members of groups. Ethnicity is thus an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction. If we maintain that ethnicity is indeed a network of identity, then ethnicity refers to aspects of meaning in the creation of identity.

NATIONALISM

The scholarly attention currently devoted to the topic of national identity guarantees a wealth of theoretical material on which to draw and many possible comparisons with the evolution of other national identities than Palestinian identity. There also exists a considerable literature on nationalism, including both classics and more recent works, as well as case studies of specific national movements. At the same time, dealing with Palestinian history in terms of national identity poses problems, because the literature on identity, nationalism, and the nation, is in many instances not applicable to the Palestinian case. It is worth stating at the outset that the treatment of identity in this research starts from the premise that national identity is constructed; it is not an essential, transcendent given, as is often claimed by whom Khalidi calls "the apostles of nationalism" (2010). This can easily be shown as far as the Palestinians are concerned, and their example also has a certain universal applicability for issues of national identity generally. Although it can be argued that the Palestinian case is so extreme that one cannot generalize from their example, the case of the Palestinians is not unique. This is true as regards a number of ways in which the Palestinians mirror other national groups, including the manner in which preexisting elements of identity are reconfigured and history is used to give shape to a certain vision, the impact of powerful shocks and extreme stress on the framing of questions of identity, and the role of contingent external factors in shaping national identity. Whereas, to use Ernest Gellner's terminology, the Palestinian cultural and political communities have not yet coincided in time and space, that is to say, a Palestinian national state encompassing all or most of the world's Palestinians has not yet been established - in no way does this condition diminish the relevance of the Palestinian case for understanding national identity in general, or for substantiating the argument that this identity is constructed.

Several of the most respected writers on nationalism and identity have put forward arguments on which this approach, which sees national identity as constructed, can be solidly based. Hobsbawm agrees with Gellner in stressing that there is "the element of artifact, invention and social engineering

which enters into the making of nations” (1997: 89). Gellner is even blunter: “Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent... political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes preexisting cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates preexisting cultures: *that* is a reality” (1997: 43). In short, nations and the identity linked to them are a construct for Gellner; the nationalism that does this work of construction is a real political force. Benedict Anderson perhaps goes the farthest in this regard, with his argument for the nation as an “imagined political community”, which is “imagined as both limited and sovereign” and which essentially constitutes a shared consciousness of a certain set of elements of identity made possible by a conjunction of factors, including what he describes as “print-capitalism”.

It may be argued (and is, incessantly, in the Palestinian case), that certain identities are recent, filmy, and artificial, whereas by contrast others are long-standing, deep-rooted and natural. A specific identity, the Israeli-Jewish one, is usually mentioned in this context, although similar arguments can be made in favor of Arab or Islamic identities. This is not the place to dispute such arguments, which are often not amenable to rational dispute in any case. As Hobsbawm puts it: “no serious historian of nations and nationalism can be a committed political nationalist... Nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not true”. Later on in this thesis it will become clear whether Palestinian identity is as insubstantial as it is made out to be by tskeptics.

RELIGION

In the framework of nationalism and ethnicity, we must consider the concept of religion as dual. First, religion as network of meaning, second, civil religion; nationalism which has taken on the mantle of religion. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim stated that religion was not to be seen as an explanation of the world, but as a means of making symbolic statements about society. For Durkheim, religion is a projection of the social values of society. Max Weber described human beings as “meaning makers”; It is fundamental to all human societies to impose meaning on the environment, to order, classify, and regulate (Bowie, 2000).

An anthropological approach to religion involves seeing how symbols, myths, rituals, ethics, and experiences of 'the sacred' operate within, and are produced by, society. We need to remain sensitive to the type of symbol we are dealing with, whether it is personal or collective, individually motivated or obligatory, whether or not it is ritualized, and whether it is passively received or actively performed (Peacock et al., 2007). Symbolic systems are markers of identities and construct the boundaries of identities. Every social group, whether we talk about a church, a profession or an ethnic and linguistic group, has boundaries that define who is in and who is out. By examining boundaries, anthropologists try to “understand the rules, often unstated, that determine the characteristics of a particular collective” (Bowie, 2000: 71). As discussed above, we are not consciously aware of a particular identity unless we come up against another group who are different. Identity is not an absolute, but a category within a system of values (Lovell, 1998). This system of values is often represented through religion and matching rhetorics. The boundaries marking one group off from another may be physical;

the separation wall built by Israel in the Palestinian territories separates the citizens of Israel from the residential Palestinians. Boundaries can also be conceptual, expressed in ideas, rituals and belief systems. Joane Nagel shows in her work on race, ethnicity and sexuality how the physical body can act as a symbol of group identity (2003). The boundaries of the human body are a metaphor for the boundaries of the group. The conceptual boundaries of and within Palestinian society may seem fixed and strictly “policed” by a symbolic system that clearly separates insiders from outsiders. In practice, however, in the following chapters we will see that this identity and the semantics that maintain them are fluid.

Robert Bellah argues in his famous essay on civil religion in America, that this seemingly secular state views itself as a “Nation under God”, whose constitution stresses its “duty before God” to ensure, in turn, the “rights of man [that] come from the hands of God” (1966). Indeed, as shown by Anderson (1983), the nation-state and its secularizing nationalist ideology were supposed to be the successors of religious community feeling. At the same time, Bellah's paper shows “how nationalism can take on the mantle of religion even in the most consciously modern of nation-states” (Baumann, 1990). In the chapters 2 and 3 both 'forms' of religion are detectable. Civil religion will be of special interest, since we can clearly see how civil religion, nationalist imaginings, seems to prevail over religion as a network of meaning, spiritual imaginings. But first I will touch on the concept of memory, which will later on help us to understand the making of this 'civil religion'.

MEMORY

Where identity is established by a set of differences, it is maintained through the operation of memory. This is especially interesting in Palestine, where collective commemorations are regular and where every individual practices memory and longing. The term 'collective memory' follows from Olick qualifies collective memory as plural and stresses that shared memories are essential markers of social differentiation; thus we can state that collective memory is a marker of identity. **Memory** consequently can be characterized as minds working together *in society*, “since it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (Olick, 1999: 335). Groups can prod the individual to remember events they did not experience in a direct way. Memories are, in this sense, produced through publicly available symbols and (historical) narratives and are simultaneously individual property. Both history and collective memory are public possessions. We should however, distinguish between history and collective memory; whereas history is the remembered past with which no constitutive relationship exists, collective memory is the active past that forms identities. Accordingly, 'collective memory' indicates two separate, not always incontrovertibly complementary, phenomena; socially framed individual memories and collective commemorative representations (Olick, 1999; Lentin, 2009). However, this two-phenomena theory is a problematic enigma, since both seem to be of fundamentally distinct ontological orders and demand different epistemological and methodological strategies. However,

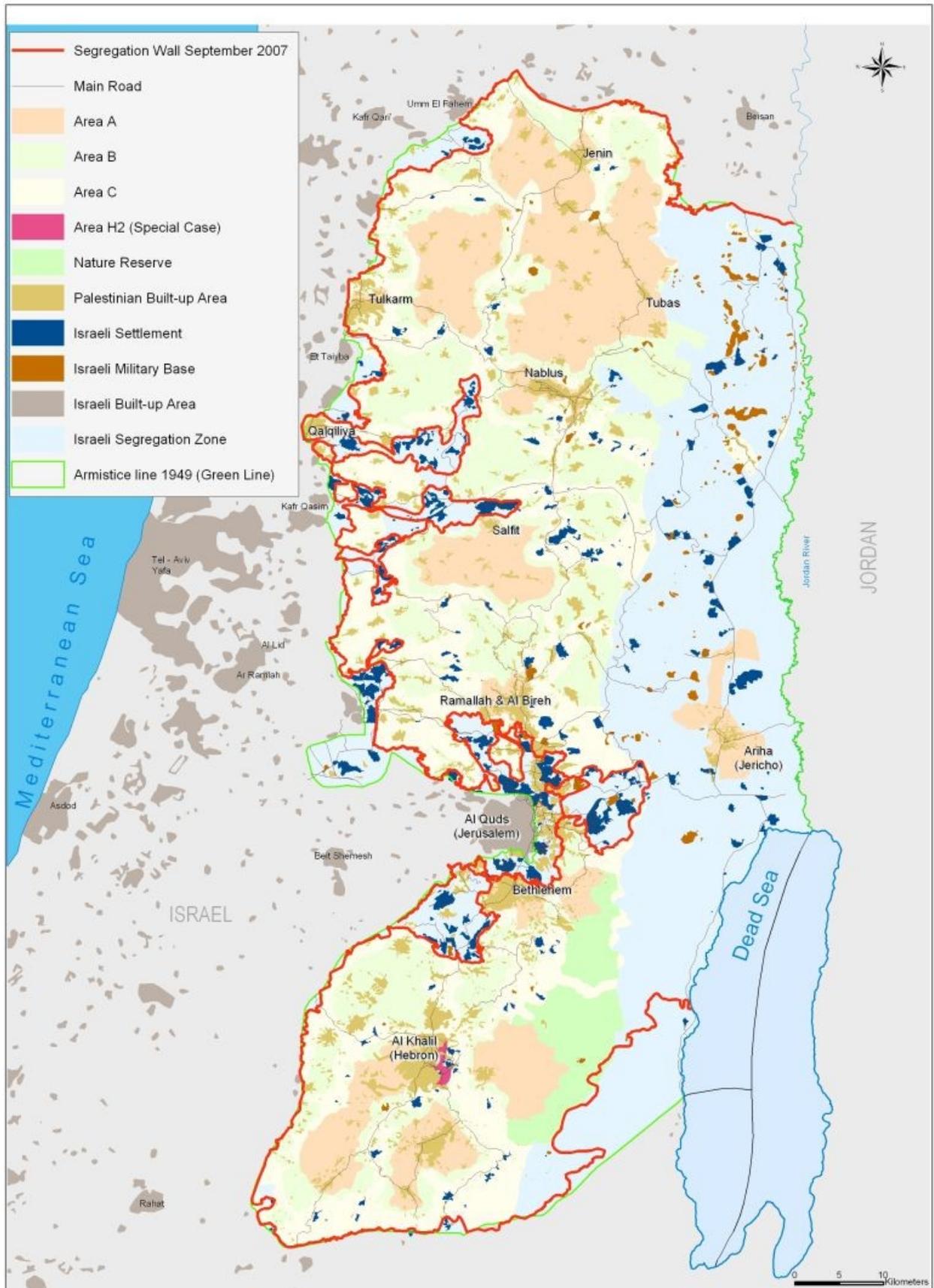
aggregated individual remembrances, official memorialisation and collective representations are said to make up collective memory and are protracted from personal testimony, oral history, tradition, language, myth and popular culture.

The collected memory approach points out notions of collective memory as objective symbols or deep structures that transcend the individual, risk slipping into a metaphysics of group mind; no such metaphysicality of group mind exists. The social structure shapes the remembering of individuals, but ultimately it is the individual who does the remembering. Besides, “shared symbols and deep structures are only real insofar as individuals (although sometimes organized as members of groups) treat them as such or represent them in practice” (Olick, 1999: 338). Groups provide the definitions, as well as the divisions, by which particular events are subjectively defined as consequential (see Halbwach, 1925). What is more, contemporary circumstances provide the clew for certain images of the past. Remembering can thus be seen as an active and constructive process rather than as an individual reproduction: “the past is remade in the present for present purposes” (Olick, 1999). Also, symbolic systems of relations imply a degree of autonomy from the subjective comprehension of individuals. The nature and degree of the individual's autonomy obviously vary on the approach. In this regard, Olick (1999: 342) argues that the collective perspective is essential for providing “good explanations of mythology, tradition, heritage and the like either as forms or in particular, as well as risk reifying the individual”. This is because the modus operandi of collectivism challenges the very existence of individual memory. People remember as members of a group and, even more so, constitute the particular groups and their members and act simultaneously; wittily called 're-membering' by Olick (1999). In this view, individual and collective identities (and thus their memories) are rather two sides of a coin than two entirely different phenomena.

Here we touch on the importance of the discussion on the maintenance of memory for identities in Palestine. We concluded that individual and collective memories constitute identities. Looking at nationalism, ethnicity and religion as networks of meaning that come together to create communal identities, we will see how memory and forgetting is used as means to transform the now through remembering the active past and to re-member a social group. Indeed, the above clarification of both the individualistic and collectivistic culture concepts (collected vs. collective memory approach) is much needed for and well exemplified by the problem of trauma, a problem omnipresent in Palestinian reality. Lentin (2009) argues that trauma does not only exist at a personal level, although the term originally refers to physical and later also to psychic trauma. Indeed, as argued above, no such thing as a 'metaphysical group psychic' empirically exists and trauma is thus in and of itself individual. In line of the theoretical discussion above it is fairly reasonable to argue that a society or group can indeed be tormented by psychic wounds of history. Olick (1999: 344) argues that individuals suffering from trauma can “take out their aggression on those around them, in forms ranging from cynicism to terrorism”. The collected - rather than collective - syndromes from unworked through pasts endanger a group or society. Robben (2005) explains this risk very well in his

case study of Argentina by challenging the idea that violence just bears more violence. Rather, he argues, violence leads to trauma, and trauma bears more violence. The violence - trauma - violence cycle of Argentina's society can well be argued to have led a life of its own, with singular desires, needs, and will. In the case of Argentina, there indeed are myriad individual and, as a consequence, dominant collected trauma's. The same can be said of Palestine, or rather, of Palestinians, since Palestinian refugees and internally displaced Palestinians represent one of the largest and longest-standing cases of displacement in the world today. In Chapter 3 we will see how public markers of nationality and narratives of the occupation are collective memories of oppression, ethnic exclusion and belonging that shape ethnicity and nationality in Palestine. But first, in the next chapter, we will look into Bethlehemite and Palestinian social structures; into ethnicity, nationalism and religion as networks of meaning and tools of transforming collective and individual identities.

Map of the West Bank¹



¹ Source: http://www.poica.org/editor/case_studies/ABC_WB.jpg



Chapter 2:
Contested Identities

2.1 Rana's Story

You know how the Palestinian people think about the roots of Palestine, how people are loyal to this land. My husband, he was involving in Palestine as a freedom fighter for the liberation of Palestine. During the invasion, he was hiding at the Nativity Church. He was a freedom fighter, hiding in the Nativity Church. [...] They [Israel] imprisoned him for three days, and then they let him go, they left him at Etzion [a settlement], he came walking to Bethlehem. I was so worried at the time. We were engaged, he called me and said: I'm OK, I'm released now and on my way to Bethlehem. We got married and after nine months the Israelis came to our house and arrested him. One of the Israeli soldiers, the captain, he told me "don't worry, within ten days, he will be back to you". After ten days they released him. And in three days after he was released, they came back and captured him. They were accusing him that he was shooting at the Israelis during the siege of the Nativity Church. They took him to Gush Etzion and they tortured him a lot. I was pregnant during this time, in the fourth month. They gave my husband four months in prison. During the time... when I would visit him... they would give me a hell of a time. They were so sarcastic with me, they gave me a bad time. After they released him from prison they forbid him to come to Palestine, they deported him to Gaza. When my husband was in prison I was pregnant and after that I delivered my child, Antoine. I got a ten day permit after they refused for more than a year to visit my husband. Tony was already one year and three months. When I reached Gaza I saw my husband and he was confused, unstable... mentally. He has internal conflict, there is external conflict all the time... there is me.. his child. Everything is unclear. I decided I cannot leave him like that so I stayed illegally in Gaza. I spent two years there, being with my husband until I heard that my mother... that she has cancer. I decided that I want to go back to Bethlehem to visit her. When I was in Gaza, I faced the invasion of Gaza in 2005. Also there was the war of Shalit because they kidnapped him [the Israeli soldier still missing]. They were using very awful ways... they were acting like shooting bombs but it was only the sounds above Gaza... we were so afraid... we cannot tell the soundbombs apart from the real ones. My children, at one point... they stopped crying. I was staying alone in the home... my husband wasn't there, he was out with his family. Everyone told me I should get used to war, because this war... it wasn't a real war, the bombs were only soundbombs. Everyone told me: "The next time, it will be worse". And things became worse and worse. In 2006, the division between Hamas and Fateh, it was crazy. They were killing each other, just like that. Muslims against Christians, we are trapped. Then, the war in Gaza in the winter of 2007 and 2008. Physically, mentally, we get depressed. Only three weeks but it was eternity. I kept praying. My Jesus, my Jesus. I feel like the dead. My children, they were at school. They go to the Rosary Sister school. Israel fired a rocket on the play ground of the school. Some of the children... friends of my children... they were teared to pieces. My father in law, he ran to the school and he got my children back to the house. Yes, you saw in the street how the people... how they were partially... here and there... teared... their bodies. We had to go out of our house, during this rocket fire. Because we were surrounded by our neighbours who were with Hamas... we knew Israel would demolish the house... and we went at my parents in law. Eight people, we were living in this small corner. We were trying to protect ourselves... this is why we got used to this corner. We were suffering a lot. We are the least for everyone, we are Christian and Palestinian. I feel like I have my head between two legs, Israeli's and Islamist. I cannot do anything. I miss my husband. What can I do?

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the main argument that identities consist of different lived worlds and that the *habitus* of religion is of special importance to the composition of identities in Bethlehem. Also, I will go into identity politics of ethnicity and nationalism. It is both a story and a study on the importance of religion to Bethlehemites and the construction of a Bethlehemite and national Palestinian identity. Elaborating on the previous chapters' discussion on identity and difference, the emphasis of this chapter is on the markers of identity under occupation. This argument will be set forth as following: subchapter 2.2 - Social Structures - will first provide the social context of Rana's story. The following subchapter 2.3 - Challenging Identification - analyses how religious identification and religious practice often is reversed by national identification. The last subchapter 2.3 - Oppressed Identities - goes deeper into Rana's story and will show how she and many others in a situation of severe oppression struggle to identify and belong.

2.2 Social Structures

The seven Bethlehemite clans - Ghatabre, Farahiyah, Nazjajre, Kasaswe, Tarazjme, Kawase, and Fauwarergh - all claim to be of ancient Levantine rather than Arab origin. The Fauwarergh clan is the only Muslim clan, which seemed strange to me, since Bethlehem population currently only has 20% Christians. A member of the Fauwarergh families however, explained to me that most of the Muslims currently inhabiting Bethlehem are so called *gliffat*, those from the villages. The *gliffat* are perceived as ancient Levantines who used to be Christians but are thought to have converted to Islam during the Mamluk era. The past decennia the *gliffat* have moved into Bethlehem, but only the families of the seven Bethlehemite clans are perceived to be true Bethlehemites. The relationships between the Christian clans and the Muslim Fauwarergh clan is very close, due to historical ties. It has even happened that Christian political groups have asked a Fauwarergh member to lead their group; the Bethlehemite identity and the importance of close clan relationships seem to prevail over religious identity. Bethlehemites call this the "multiplicity of faiths". It is said that the concept of the multiplicity of faiths has been an extremely important part of co-habitation for hundreds of years, although I should note that this used to be a more economical co-operation than a national one.

The clan system is a close-knit network that provides law and order and social care. Indeed the traditional juridical system, the *sulha*, is still very strong, despite the installment of state jurisdiction. Many cases are dealt with in a traditional manner and often the traditional judges are also involved in cases that have been brought to the official court. The *mukhtars* are the clan elders, who are in charge of signing documents, being witnesses at engagements and weddings and are the first ones to be called if anyone needs advice or ruling in case of conflicts. Engagements and weddings are as much a bond between man and wife as they are a renewal of the bond between families, preferably but not necessarily from the same clan. However, it is seldom an arranged marriage anymore, since many

youngsters prefer to marry for love. Still, the marriages must be approved upon by the family and thus most Bethlehemites (and their parents) look for a partner from within the Bethlehemite clans and so keep alive the tradition with a modern twist. Indeed, clan- and family life envelops Bethlehemites' existence. After hundreds of years in the same city the individuals from each family become a type representing the general traits that identify the different families; certain facial features, a specific gait, a typical hand gesture, a manner of speech, and a certain sense of humour. One recognises others, not necessarily as individuals with personal names, but also as representatives of general family types.

Religion is an extremely important actor in Bethlehemite society and indeed Bethlehemite society cannot be understood without it.² Religious difference, which is not inscribed across the landscape, seems also not to be a factor determining the character of interactions between individuals in public spheres. The following quotations are drawn from interviews with Bethlehem residents (both Christian and Muslim):

"We do not remember we are from different religions unless somebody from outside reminds us. We are Christians and Muslims in spirit and in our hearts, but in public we are Palestinian."

"It is you outside who try to make a difference between the Christians and the Muslims. We are a people; we all go to each other's feasts, we visit with each other, we live the same life. We are one people."

"My relation with my god is in my heart and in my house; it does not concern the public. In the street I am Mahmud."

"When it is Ramadan we like to fast with our neighbours and I will sometimes cook for them the Iftar meal and we will eat it together. Now, with Lent, my neighbour likes to bring me rice with lentils because I can't eat meat or dairy. We like it."

"During the siege [of the Nativity Church] we used to sit together in the old cave and the men would play cards. Muslim and Christian, of course. Since we are all neighbours and we help each other out. We were stuck there and we got so bored. There was not much food but with what we had the women made a game of who could make the best meal with the ingredients. Then the men would judge. Of course I won, I have the best recipes. But until now, I am so close with my neighbours. I do not mind if they are Muslim, we are all Palestinian."

²This obviously also goes for other places in Palestine, but I am in no position to generalize to other places since I have only studied the Bethel (i.e. Bethlehem and the conjoining villages Beit Jala and Beit Sahour) context.

"My neighbour wanted to try communion, but she is Muslim. But I told her, OK, I will take you, why not. She is my good friend and why would she not have the body of Christ. It is for everyone. He was born here and he is not just for the Christians, the Muslims pray to him too, they call him Isa. So she came and had communion. She liked it a lot. You see, we have lived together for ages. Why make problems now? We have enough problems and we want to deal with it as Palestinians."

These assertions, like numerous others I recorded, signal an awareness of contextual identities and display a national identity, to which all of the Bethlehemites I interviewed showed a commitment. Indeed these assertions are precisely ones of redefining contexts in which sectarian identities are manifested. This redefinition creates a new public domain in which non-religious, national identities can be evidenced. However, I should note that although people expressed a clear favor towards national identity over religious identity in formal interviews, there is a sure distinction between the Muslim and Christian population when it is *not* narrated to an outsider. Mixed marriages rarely occur, and because marriage in Arab society is an important tool to connect families and communities, marrying within the own religion means a stark social separation between the two religious communities. Since everyone who is related is family and it thus is appropriate to buy services and products from them, the separation also cuts through the economic market in Bethlehem. My main social group consisted of Christians and a few times I was warned that I should be cautious seeing Muslims. At the same time, my acquaintances in the Muslim community often tried to persuade me to read the Qu'ran and pay more attention to the holy truths in Islam that they thought I had not found in Christianity. However, everyone was always quick to emphasize that they were all the same and, varying who I was speaking to, *we also pray to Isa* or *they also pray to Jesus*. Of course, considering the centrality of Jesus to the Bethlehemite psyche - their town, their land as the chosen place of his holy birth - Muslims in Bethlehem have a rather unusual strong leaning towards prophet Isa. What might be part of this unusual religious merge is that the *gliffat* used to be Christians, however, from the Arab conquest on adopted Islam as their religion but have still retained the centrality of Jesus, who, like Moses (Musa) and Abraham (Ibrahim), walked on and lived from their land.

2.3 Challenging Identities

The repudiation of 'public' markers of religious identity in the quotations above does not signal a renunciation of religion itself; it is instead symptomatic of a rearticulation of the place of religion in the formulation of identity. From the evidence I was able to gather in visits to Bethlehemites' homes, many remain committed to the 'faiths of their fathers'. The interiors of the houses in which I listened to the most virulent rejections of sectarianism were dense with signs of religiosity; pictures of the

Virgin Mary (both in Christian and Muslim houses) or of Mecca (Muslim houses) were hung next to photographs of family members and members of neighbour's families who have been jailed or killed by Israelis. A 1 m. high statue of the Virgin Mary graced one of my neighbours' house for a week, since, as the Virgin has been brought from home to home for decennia, it was now my neighbour's turn to have her. I have been unable to uncover evidence of any increase in the rare occurrence of 'mixed' (Muslim-Christian) marriages in town, which suggests that religion and sectarian traditions retain hegemony over areas of life such as faith, worship and marriage and that they framed the appropriate practices and ceremonials. What has changed, I will argue, is that another domain has opened up and has come to be seen as constituting another, supplementary yet subsuming, field of identity; nationalism.

Bethlehem has a long history of Muslim-Christian interaction and, because there are traditions recounted which trace that admixture back to the town's mythical foundations, it is easy for Bethlehemites to rearticulate their past in the light of the imagining of the present community brought about by the Israeli occupation (Bowman 1990: 51 - 52). The new form of 'imagined community' constituted in the context of occupation is, however, substantially different from the identities which have preceded it. In the past, Muslims and Christians have worked together but perceived themselves as Muslims and Christians who happened to be involved in economic exchanges rather than as Palestinians who happened to be Muslim or Christian (Khalidi, 2010). The new identity - 'We are Palestinians first, then Muslims or Christians' - came not from a market situation which brought them into contact with each other, but from a situation of confrontation which forced them to recognize that 'outside' their realm of co-operation was an antagonist equally threatening to all townspeople, regardless of their religious affiliation. In the light of the struggle against this antagonist, certain elements of the town's past are rendered significant and are memorialized in the production of a 'new' history. Various residents told me stories of Muslims and Christians marching together to Nebi Musa, an Islamic shrine in the Jordan Valley which became the focus of Islamic dissatisfaction with British rule. They spoke, in addition, of the long history of support for the 'Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine' and the 'Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine' during the Israeli occupation. Also, I was told how the Fauwarergh clan - the only Muslim clan - had freed the Nativity Church from the Ottoman Muslim occupation. What is significant to these histories is not that Bethlehem has a long history of resistance to various occupiers of the land but that the fractiousness of that resistance, in which residents' allegiances to different factions of the struggles often turned the town into an arena of struggle between parties rather than a united front against the 'outside', was here elided so that the entirety of the community could be constituted as an 'us' which has always resisted the incursions of foreign rule. The Israeli occupation seems to have forced a space for identification that differs from that provided by other occupiers, all of which - as Christian or Muslim regimes supporting capitalist property owners - presented opportunities to factions of the Bethlehem population for identification and collaboration. The Israeli forces, which views 'Arabs' as enemies and saw 'Arab' capitalist successes as a strengthening of 'Arab' power, demonstrated to Christians and Muslims that there is another who is enemy to them both. Bethlehemites have a strong realization that,

as one of my interlocutors told me: *'We see that one day it is one person and the next day another. The following day it may be us'*. At issue here is not the continuance of public co-operation in economic projects which has been a central feature of Bethlehemite life for the past several centuries, but the question of the survival of any form of Palestinian community at all on the site. The 'space' of co-operation is thus transformed and extended, and in that space - which is now that in which Bethlehemites face an Other across a boundary which has come to mark the difference between 'the community' and 'the outsiders' intent on destroying that community. Indeed, many of my interlocutors have told me that they find it unbelievable that people from Russia with a Jewish grandmother are stealing their resources - land and water - and are juridically fully enabled and even subsidized by the Israeli state to do so. The Israelis have constituted the antagonist which delineated the 'boundary' which Barth (1969) saw as constituting the ethnic group; Bethlehemites 'invented' an identity which encompassed all aspects of their lives in the face of an antagonist who threatens their lives in all their diversities. This fixing of identity transforms the elements of everyday community life into emblems of a communal self per se and, as such all these elements - regardless of whether they were originally Christian or Muslim, sacred or secular - came to signify Palestinian life.

2.4 Oppressed Identities

Appadurai observed that “nationalism and ethnicity... feed each other, as nationalists construct ethnic categories that in turn drive others to construct counterethnicities, and then in times of political crisis these others demand counterstates based on newfound counternationalisms” (2000: 162). Indeed, in the case of the Palestinians the ethnic identity has interacted with and reacted to the Israeli nation-building process and, later, its own Palestinian nation-building process. This nation-building process is interdependent with the process of identity-making; both rely on internalised cultures in order to negotiate identities. Rana's story, with which we started this chapter, is a story of oppressed identities. Negotiating her identity includes marking boundaries of religion, ethnicity and nationalism. Her memory takes her to situations that have become significant markers of her identity. Rana's story is unique in that she was the only interviewee that expressed negative emotions towards the Muslim community. I met with Rana, a beautiful young mother, almost every week, and only once I conducted an interview that was completed through the many personal stories she shared with me when she took me out shopping or cooking up a meal for her family. Once I found her sitting angrily on the balcony, where she had been hanging her washing from. She told me she had been to church that morning but that the women drove her crazy, she felt they were watching her and gossiping about her: *“Look at her, poor woman, her husband departed, her life ruined”*. She was frustrated with the church, with the women who were just feeling sorry. Her Jesus, she said, was not in church but in her heart. While many other testimonies and narratives of the fluidity of religious communities in Bethlehem were definitely relevant, Rana offered a glance into the tacit culture underneath the polished surface of explicit culture in which religion has become minor to the national identity. It also

clearly shows how identities are contested; while it is absolutely appropriate to profile yourself as belonging to a religious community, it seems taboo to express non-nationalist sentiments based on religious dividing lines. Rana's identity has been contested, and I found that in this she is not on her own. The traumatic experiences form cultural practices that mark the boundaries of the social group, indeed, often the umbrella identity was narrated as a national identity and the Israeli antagonist as the main danger posed against this identity. Rana teaches us however, that boundaries are contested and identities fluid, especially under the veneer of explicit culture. In the next chapter we will see how public markers of nationality and narratives of the occupation are collective memories of oppression, ethnic exclusion and belonging that shape ethnicity and nationality in Palestine.

Chapter 3:
Remembering Identities



NOW HOPE
REJOICE
PALESTINE
WE
R ALL
GOD'S



3.1 Introduction

As a defence against the complexities of life we all categorize people, generally on very inadequate evidence. In Israel and the Palestinian Territories there are no easy answers to the problems caused by categorization of minorities and imbalances of power, and none is offered in this chapter. However, I will discuss the importance of memory and how it simultaneously forms and is formed by the re-creation of spaces and places, an idea that has gained an increasing amount of attention in recent years (Said, 2000; Hoelscher and Alderman, 2004). One stream of memory studies has focused on the ways in which people remember and create memories and forgettings (Nora, 1989: 13; Bosco, 2004; Sturken, 1997; Feldman, 1991; Casey, 1987; Connerton, 1991). The purpose of this chapter is to discuss memory and forgetting of Palestinians to clarify as much as possible the intimate relations between memory and emotion. The politics of place and memory may be understood as a performative component of ongoing conflict and war. To demonstrate this I discuss how politics of place and memory are intertwined with(in) the conflict over the land of Palestine/Israel. To do this I approach Palestine/Israel as a landscape of memory, in which two manifestations will serve as my focus: the construction of the separation wall and bodies of Palestinian resistance. Through this focus I argue that the base of the conflict is a relational confluence of embodied memories, emotions, and expressions inextricably tied to territorial land claims and transformations and how these claims and transformations are locally negotiated and validated.

My research has focussed on Palestinian memory and placemaking, which can in no way be divorced from Israeli memory and (re)-constructions of space and place. I like to stress that I do not search to polarize Palestinian and Israeli identities as two ends of a twofold existence. However, I feel it is most appropriate for the scale of analysis in this thesis. Indeed, I recognize the mutually constructed natures of these two identities (Said, 2000), as well as the notion that “negotiations of place take place on the move, between identities which are on the move” (Massey, 2005: 158). Also, it is important to emphasize that “ethnocratic states - such as Israel - are typified by (internal and external) colonial oppression of minorities, [which] tends to essentialize identities and polarize spatial and political systems” (Yiftachel, 2005: 126). In regard to Palestinian memory, it is my belief that embodied memories, emotions, and expressions convey the meaning of oppression. Through understanding oppression in Palestine, we will become aware of the public markers of nationality and narratives of occupation that are formed by collective memories of oppression, ethnic exclusion and belonging.

3.2 Remembering Belonging

Palestinian memory is oriented to specific place (land) and time (generations). The concrete places cannot or seldom be visited, and many of the places (villages) have been erased by Israel, leaving

only the memory and a changed landscape behind. Despite the impossibility of regaining ownership of the remembered places there is a strong sense of belonging that Abu Elias put in words when we were watching the Israeli news. The news agency had filmed an event in Jerusalem and Abu Elias sat in his chair with a cup of sage tea. His eyes were glued to the screen and without looking at me he commented with a strain of despair in his voice: *“Look. These are our streets in Al-Quds”*. Rana, a woman very active in women's work and who has travelled a lot, commented in a discussion concerning a one or two state solution that no matter what would happen, Haifa would *'always be mine and Tel Aviv will always be al-Ramlah and Jaffa to me'*. This was not a threat but a deep sense of belonging to a space that has been taken by the Other, the antagonist, Israel. Tel Aviv is almost completely Jewish but is neighboured by the ancient Arab villages of Al Ramlah and Jaffa. Jaffa has been renamed Yafo by the Israelis, as are other ancient Arab towns like Zfat, which is now called Sefad. Although Rana is only in her twenties, has never lived in Haifa or al-Ramlah and is an original Bethlehemite, the collected memories of her people have brought her to experience a strong sense of belonging to the places that mark Palestinian memory. Refugees, no matter whether already third or fourth generation, experience a deep belonging to the lands their families were forced from. Land, throughout the Middle East, is extremely important and leaving the land of the family has been likened to leaving one's own child behind. The lands belonging to a family are internalized in a family's psyche, especially through storytelling. The rituals of storytelling and remembering instill a deep longing for spaces where almond trees had blossomed on the ancestral lands, where families gathered to pick the lemon trees and where the existence of the family had not been threatened. Indeed, the individual is embedded in the family and the (extended) family is embedded in the ancestral land. Sturken (1997: 12) underscores this point when she argues that the body is an object “through which memories are shared, produced, and given meaning” (1997: 9). In other words, the body is not merely a vessel “in which memory passively resides” (Sturken, 1997: 9), but a force which actively re-creates remembering and forgetting. Not all refugees live in refugee camps, but we can state that remembering spaces takes place in its most severe and recognizable form in refugee camps; its inhabitants constantly reminded of who they are and that they do not belong to where they live. In the refugee camps, the public markers of memory of and belonging to other places are present everywhere.

Aida Camp, one of the three refugee camps in Bethlehem, sits on a dusty hillside that turns to mud in the winter rains. Established in 1950 as a U.N. aid distribution point, the site slowly became a built-up tenement of small concrete and corrugated fiberglass-roofed houses haphazardly stacked on top of one another. The build-up occurred organically as expanding families transformed tents into one-room hovels and then into the present-day multistoried structures. UNRWA³ puts the community's population at approximately 4.700 residents. As in other camps, a web of narrow roads and alleyways connects the different sections of the community. The original refugees in Aida camp generally hailed

³ UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) provides – according to their mission statement – assistance, protection, and advocacy for some 4.7 million registered Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territory, pending a solution to their plight.

from 17 villages in the western Jerusalem and western Hebron areas, including Walaja, Khirbet El Umur, Qabu, Ajjur, Allar, Deir Aban, Maliha, Ras Abu Ammar and Beit Nattif. Aida covers a small area of 0.71 square kilometres that has not grown significantly with the refugee population. As such, it faces severe overcrowding problems. The sense of deprivation and displacement that pervades camp identity reconstitutes itself in the daily encounters of camp residents with a socio-physical topography that features an increasingly sharp contrast between opulent villas where P.N.A. officials live and cramped tenements (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Lybarger, 2007). At the same time, however, being a refugee is also to claim special honor: the refugee, not the 'bourgeois' town dweller or the newly arrived, limousine-driven P.N.A. official, is the pulsating heart of the Palestinian national cause. For refugees, the Palestinian narrative is fundamentally the story of expulsion and the dream of return and restitution. Moreover, it is the camps that always have provided the bulk of the battlegrounds and fighters of the liberation struggle. The themes of resistance and suffering that course through refugee narratives are symbolically enshrined at the main entrance to Aida. There, two memorials recall the community's heroism and losses during the first Intifada. The gate is the only remnant of the massive chain-link and barbed wire that once spanned the entire length of the camp. Once a symbol for humiliation and repression, the gate now stands as a testament of the community's heroic perseverance during the the occupation. In such depictions, memorials, and monuments, the message is clear: Aida, and all the refugees, is the heart of the national movement. It is their suffering, their narrative of displacement, and their demand for return that gave the nation its purpose and unity despite any divisions between the politically separated secularists and Islamists (Lybarger, 2007).



3.3 Regulating Memories

Ostensibly, the construction of the West Bank separation wall began in 2002. A new project, the government of Israel claims, that is necessary for the protection of its people. The veracity of this has been challenged by Palestinians and members of the international community, perhaps most visibly the International Court of Justice, which in 2004 declared the wall illegal, “a political measure, unjustified on grounds of security, and a de facto land grab” (Rose, 2005: xvii; see also Dolphin, 2006). While undoubtedly an important topic, I am not interested here in the legalities surrounding the wall. Rather, I wish to explore its effects. Approaching the wall in this way reveals that it is not a new development, nor can it in the long run serve its supposed purpose as a protective barrier. Instead, when understood as an externalized body that works for the passions of some while violently affecting the desires of others, it will be shown that the wall (in its different forms) has been a long-standing force sustaining and perpetuating the conflict in and over the land of Palestine/Israel.

The perception of a wall - a barrier, a separation - and its boundaries may exist emotionally and performatively through the body and its identities long before it is ever imposed on the landscape; working to allow in that which is desirable and blocking out that which is not. Of course, these notions may not be only individually held. When they become part of a collective, whether concrete or imagined (Anderson, 1991), they feed into particular forces of memory and identity which are simultaneously inclusive of some and exclusive of others. Indeed, negotiated extensions and material expressions of passions, desires and power relationships have powerful effects of inclusion and exclusion on people in and through space and time (Wimmer, 2002). Two instances of walls in history - the Berlin Wall and the Great Wall of China - demonstrate as much. Stepping these notions to the emotional and material landscape of Palestine/Israel, the West Bank separation wall can begin to be understood not as a new manifestation, but as a recently concretized one.

Gillis (1996: 3) tells us that “memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena” . Indeed, what the wall means to Israelis and Palestinians (whether individually or as a collective) is greatly contextual and how it helps construct notions of memory and identity can be understood as a subjective process. The wall's restrictions of bodily movement, cutting of access and separation from place impacts memory not only at the scale of the body and its relationship with and to landscape, but works to effect what is remembered territorially in global memory as borders are constantly re-negotiated in the public forum of national legitimization. The restrictions and regulations of bodily movement are dehumanizing experiences that are deeply instilled in the Bethlehemite psyche through the daily encounters with the wall and the realization that, as Shadi put it: “we live in a prison, guarded by those hate us” . The rituals of exclusion - denying permits, huge waiting lines at the checkpoints early in the morning - have become a vital part of the Palestinian memory. My Palestinian friend Walid, who drives the car, does not seem to notice all of this until we reach Bethany, a small village where, according to Biblical records, Jesus' friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. Since it falls under zone B and lies in between settlements, many of the businesses have both Hebrew and Arabic advertisements on their walls. We

pass a gas station where a settler is watching a Palestinian who is washing his car. Walid drives past it and his face darkens. He turns towards me and says:

Look at him. Standing there, letting the one he oppresses do the filthy work for him. Already they have taken and changed our land, they leave us with nothing, because that brat there thinks it is his and he can just come and take it. My grandmother's family used to have land where his settlement is now. He makes me want to vomit. I hate going out of Bethlehem. It is humiliating what they have done to our land.

Besides the seemingly collective memory of the land and the violation of the Palestinian 'body' that can be heard and seen everywhere in the Westbank and in Israel, are the thousands of individual (i.e. collected) memories of trauma during the occupation. Through being treated as the ethnic and dangerous other that needs to be imprisoned in a ghetto, a severe segregation between two worlds is being induced. Not only does Israel create a fake feeling of 'being safe' for its own society, it also creates a ghettoized Palestinian community that, in the face of its antagonist, has no choice but to retrieve into its own nationalism. This is extremely visible in the 'wall art' that is produced; a form of resistance whereby the wall as a symbol of apartheid and oppression becomes a symbol of nationalist memories and hope. In Aida Camp, the wall is graced with a painting of a young Palestinian man, a *sababa*, who is being handcuffed and taken by Israeli soldiers. The Israeli soldiers are faceless performers of oppression and the stark looking boy representer of nationalist resistance.



The body is often used as a metaphor for the nation-state more generally and the land of Israel/Palestine specifically (see Boyarin, 1992: 118; Graham, 2004: 203; Long, 2006: 112). By representing the land as a body, the Palestinians become a disease, a virus, an impurity tainting it. The wall then serves as a panacea and counteraction to this infection and its growing anatomical threats. As Graham (2004: 203) explains in his discussion of the discourse surrounding Israeli bulldozer “urbicide” of Palestinian dwellings and infrastructure, “to the Israelis, Palestinian urbanization is an evasive cancer undermining the order, progress, and existence of the purported organic ‘body’ of the modern State of Israel.” By identifying the Palestinians as barbarians, aliens, or a disease

invading and sully the organic, and therefore natural, body that is the nation-state, Israel can justifiably make them invisible, not only emotionally, materially and demographically through the wall's disconnect of bodily access to the land (for a similar understanding see Long, 2006: 203), but within the current and larger national process of unilaterally finalizing its borders - borders which the wall is violently etching and defining in the landscape.

Palestinian memory and identity related to the land - if recognized at all - is rendered outdated, anachronistic and obsolete. Any attempt by Palestinians to affirm a collective identity and actualize memories in relation to the land then is declared - and often accepted by the international community as - a threat. The commemorations of the Nakba (1948) and Naksa (1967) are always violently repressed and within Israel, remembrance is legally forbidden. In the last subchapter I will therefore look into how this forced forgetting is resisted.

3.4 Resisting Forgetting

Historic Palestine has been turned into the Israeli nation-state almost ridded from any visible memory of the pre-1948 conditions. The Hebrew language signs, the changed names of the Arab towns, villages and lands have caused the reality of Palestinian memory of their historic homeland to be completely different from the Israeli reality. Within the West Bank, the various planning practices, laws, and military actions (Falah, 1996; Graham, 2004; Jamoul, 2004; Gregory, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005; Falah, 2005) - in addition to the unceasing construction of new West Bank settlements - that continue to work to alienate, detach, and/or exorcise Palestinian identification and association with the land. The iron wall then, originally alive in and through weapons, technology and militaristic actions of the early Zionists, Israeli government and its settlers and soldiers - in other words, through what Curti calls "a wall of bodies" - is being violently extended and anchored into the landscape as a "concrete body of walls" .

Palestinian individuals resist the Israeli reality and the forced forgetting of their ancestry and corresponding belonging to a taken land, even if they have never been expelled themselves. I argued above that the collected memories of the Palestinian people bring individuals to experience a strong sense of belonging to the places that mark Palestinian memory. Indeed, these memories take the individual's longing to a collective level, and are often turned into a nationalist longing. Not only places and spaces have been forced into forgetting, also the thousands upon thousands of political prisoners are an eradication of organized *re-membering* of the Palestinian nation. Activists, leaders and freedom fighters have been held as political prisoners, detained, tortured, separated from their families and loved ones, at the mercy of a state dedicated to the eradication of a nation within their own nation-state. However, 'the political prisoner' has - like 'the refugee' and 'the martyr' - become subject of public ceremonial reverence and remembrance displayed by the omnipresent pictures of prisoners. This remembrance has become a reverence, that is, as Anderson puts it "saturated with

ghostly *national* imaginings” . When political prisoners are released, a procession of honking cars, waving Palestinian flags and nationalist slogans come together in a symphonia of reverence for the nation and its sons.



*A released political prisoner greeted by family
and the mother of a young prisoner in a silent protest on Manger Square.*

Another way of resisting forced forgetting of place and history is carried out through the many political demonstrations in which collective memory plays a crucial role. I witnessed a clear-cut example of this during the Unity Protests in the major cities on the Westbank and in Gaza during April and May 2011, in which the role of prisoners became more evident too. During the protests, the chant *Free Free Palestine* was joined by *One One Palestine*. Young Palestinians set up donated tents in

Bethlehem's Manger Square, opposite the Church of the Nativity where they sat protesting and sleeping for weeks. Palestinian folksongs were sung, there was *dabke* (traditional dancing) and many speeches and chantings. When the news reached the tent that that the Westbank premier Abbas and Gaza premier Haniyeh were making arrangements to meet for the first time since 4 years, one of the protesters entered the circle of demonstrators and shouted:

“One One Palestine! Ya Filastin (dear Palestine), listen! We are the people! The people have the power, the power to dictate change! Abbas and Haniyeh have given in to our call. We, we are the people. We are the revolutionaries! We are on the Manger Square, where the Nativity Church has been for almost two thousand years. This church, where Jesus, the first Palestinian revolutionary was born! This church, where during the siege our fighters were locked in for 40 days. This church, where our martyrs died, from where fighters were taken as prisoners, from where our friends were deported! It is a disgrace! A disgrace that they are not honoured by unity! Our leaders who are supposed to represent us are only interested in their own close-minded politics. They give away land, they are weak! But we are the Palestinians. We are united and we will stand for unity, for one Palestine; for the honour of our land (al-ird al-ard)!”

The phrasing of the protesters' rhetorics displays important notions of using place and history as nationalist artifacts in the remembering of the nation. Also, memories of religious identities seem to be subsumed under memories of national identity and its artifacts of public reverence: martyrs, prisoners and refugees. Complex constructions of memory as a collective political and nationalist artifact are constantly created and transformed to serve the fluid needs of the nation. To *not forget* is every Palestinian's resistance.

4. Conclusion

I have argued the importance of place and memory for the construction of identities in occupied Bethlehem. I have discussed the immense impact of political events influencing and reinforcing individual and collective identities. The markers of identity under occupation seem to be increasingly nationalist. However, this is mainly detectable in public discourse and rhetorics, while underneath sreligious identities seem to be of greater importance. These conceptual boundaries of and within Palestinian society may seem fixed and strictly “policed” on the outside. However, I have argued that in practice, this identity is fluid and is maintained by the 'active past'; memory. Palestinian memory is oriented to specific place (land) and time (generations). Since the concrete places cannot or seldom be visited, and many of the places (villages) have been erased by Israel, only the memory and a changed landscape are left behind. I have shown how political behaviour displays important notions of place and history as nationalist artifacts in the remembering of the nation. And again, memories of

religious identities seem to be subsumed under memories of national identity and its artifacts of public reverence: martyrs, prisoners and refugees. Complex constructions of memory as a collective political and nationalist artifact are constantly created and transformed to serve the fluid needs of the nation. Resisting forgetting becomes a tool in identity-making and nation-building. In regard to Palestinian memory, it is my belief that embodied memories, emotions, and expressions convey the meaning of oppression. Through understanding oppression in Palestine, we will become aware of the public markers of nationality and narratives of occupation that are formed by collective memories of oppression, ethnic exclusion and belonging. Not only do we need to understand oppression to grasp the process of identity-making in Palestine, it also will bring more awareness of everyone's ethical responsibility to stand up for justice. A free land, without a “body of walls” . A life for Assad's and Rana's children with less pain than their parents have to bear, this is what I long for. It is my deep wish that this thesis will convey deeper understanding of the hardship of life and the constant invasion of identities in Palestine.

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