Beyond the Wall

A study of Palestinian Narratives

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Foreword

Standing in the midst of burning tear-gas grenades, rubber bullets zipping by, demonstrators shouting obscenities to Israeli soldiers, passed out and wounded victims being carried away on stretchers, kids hurling stones and sound grenades attempting to stun the crowd, I began to wonder, 'How do I feel?' Sure, there was adrenaline, fear even, because of the violence and chaos surrounding me. But maybe there also was a hint of satisfaction? Because after almost two months of staying in the relative calm of Bethlehem I finally experienced a bit of the anticipated Israeli-Palestinian violence and conflict? The weekly demonstrations in the small town of Bil'in, west of Ramallah, to which I refer here, hardly seem like an obvious choice to visit for a researcher interested in the lives of the youth living in Bethlehem, further south. Yet after two months of staying in the West bank I wanted, maybe even *needed* to go there, to see the violence, to see real chaos and conflict.

Was this what we would call disaster tourism? Did I seek to satisfy my boyish desires of experiencing spectacular conflict? Did I just want to come back to Holland with some exiting stories to tell? Honestly, I feel none of these questions can be answered with a resounding 'no'. But besides these reasons, there was an even more confronting answer to the question of 'why did I go there?' Because in a sense, I believe I sought a confirmation of the image I had of this region back in Holland. During the two months of my stay in Bethlehem, I hardly saw anything resembling the images I had gotten to know of the region. No stone-throwing kids, no battles between Fatah and Hamas members, no parades of hooded combatants screaming about their desire to be a 'Shahada', a martyr. The only thing I saw was the immense wall surrounding Bethlehem on its western and northern borders, and a society behind it desperately trying to hold on to the joy of life

Could it be that I had become disappointed after two months? Was I disappointed because my expectations about my fieldwork had not been realized? Looking back on my fieldwork period I can now say that that may have been one of the reasons why I took action to go to Bil'in and experience the violence there, which could not be found in, or near, Bethlehem.

When I returned from the West bank these stories about the demonstrations would be the first stories I would tell to my family and friends. And that is not just because I wanted to tell them first; it is also because people seemed to ask about these kinds of stories first. 'Did you experience violence there?', 'Were you injured sometime?', 'did you witness a suicide attack?' and so forth. Apparently I was not the only person that associated the Palestinian Territories with violence and conflict. In a way, it is as if the concept of terror lurks somewhere in that name; Palestinian Territories…

The duality that is at play here in my decision to go to these violent demonstrations is interesting. On the one hand I may have been interested in seeing the reality of such a

tense situation, to understand all the emotions that come to play in resisting a dominant occupying force. But at the same time it almost seems as though by travelling all the way to Bil'in (a journey which takes hours from Bethlehem because of the numerous by-pass roads and checkpoints) I showed myself to be less interested in the reality and more interested in an image of that reality as it had already been formed in my mind long before I travelled to the West bank.

It is difficult to accept this for yourself as a serious researcher, but it is also incredibly valuable to discover this during your research period, because it showed me how I, as a researcher, was also a subject worthy of analyses, that I should not ignore my own perceptions and feelings during my research and should reflect constantly on my own actions and position. The example that I wrote down here shows that I cannot consider myself to be detached from my research as I was not purely observant. My choices and actions in Palestine were not neutral and my emotions and perceptions were not static throughout my experiences in Palestine. I changed, was influenced by people and circumstances, my behaviour changed, my interactions with the Palestinian youth changed, and concordantly their communications with me changed because of that. In the following thesis about the way Palestinian youth communicate to outsiders I will keep this subjectivity in focus as it defined the data I received from the Palestinian youth.

Secondly, what I want to clarify with this, before anything else, is how I understand the concept of subjectivity. Because understanding, recognizing, and finally accepting this subjectivity can benefit this research. Most importantly; this subjectivity should not be misunderstood as 'being biased' or 'being politically subjective'. It is not about me choosing sides; it is about coming to grips with my position within my research, that I was, as I will clarify further on in this thesis, quite literally both an instrument and a subject in my research. Of course, I have opinions about the situation in the Middle East, but I feel no need to enter political discussions within the frameworks of this thesis. My subjectivity is not meant as a showing of my political colours, it is meant for a better understanding of my role as a researcher in a turbulent environment that continuously influenced me and my methods during my fieldwork.

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I.

<u>introduction</u>

When Joris Luyendijk released his book *Het zijn net mensen* (They're just like humans) in 2006 it quickly became a bestseller in the Netherlands. The book, a popularly written account of Luyendijk's experiences as a news correspondent in the Middle East[1], shed a critical light on the way the western media machine operated in foreign environments like Israel/Palestine. One of the subjects he treated in his book was the role the media played in the Middle East conflict. He argued that the western media had shown to be incapable of objectively reporting on the situation there. The dominance of an Israeli-favoured narrative created, according to him, an unbalanced view of the conflict as the Palestinian perspective was ignored or at the very least communicated inefficiently. In this he blamed as much the western incapability of reaching the Palestinian perspective as he blamed the Palestinian media machine itself for not accommodating or interacting with the western journalists in an efficient way.

Whoever may have been given blame, his argument that something was seriously wrong with the way the western media represented 'the other', the way we viewed those 'others' through our own glasses, proved to be eye-opening for the general public and created quite a stir in the world of the media and journalism. For me, it was especially the title he had chosen for his book that captured my imagination with its sense of irony; 'They're just like humans', as if it would be surprising for people to realize that people living in the Middle East are, up close, actually quite similar to what we know as humans, ie. ourselves. Concurrently, the title suggests that the way they have been represented in our media has made them something *less* then human…

When the book was released in 2006 it, and especially its title, intrigued me. I had been familiar with the conflict in the Middle East, having followed some courses focussed on it, but I had not really approached the situation there from a perspective of representation, communication and, as I would come to define it: narration. In a more general sense however I did have familiarity with these themes, as applied to larger and more abstract concepts and subjects like 'the changing world after 9/11'. For example, the documentary cycle *The Power of Nightmares*, produced by the BBC in 2004 among other things, brought to me the argument that the western world, in general, had the tendency of demonizing a new form of 'others' since the end of the Cold War, namely the Islamic World.

So when I read Luyendijk's book, it connected with a presumption I had had about the situation in the Middle East, and our world in general; that the west was doing

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[1] The fact that Joris Luyendijk had also been educated as an anthropologist brings another interesting dimension to his writings and experiences.

something wrong, and other people were suffering because of it. As naive or uneducated as that presumption may have been, it did motivate me to delve deeper into the issues in the Middle East and reading his book basically renewed my interest in the Middle East conflict, this time from a more anthropological perspective of representation and identity. It was around this time that my plans began to form to go and do my masters research in the Middle East. This planned research had, at first, a similar sort of naiveté as my general thoughts about the situation in de Middle East. Armed with Luyendijk's argument that we, in the west, did not get the real story of the 'other people', I was determined to visit those 'others' and extract their stories from them. More than that, as an anthropologist I wanted to understand the way they communicated to outsiders and question why their stories did not arrive in the west, in my mind already placing the blame beyond the Palestinians themselves, considering them to be purely victims. It was this basic premise that guided me toward Bethlehem, a Palestinian city located just below Jerusalem and cornered in on most of its north-western part by the infamous Israeli 'security fence', which in Bethlehem is nowhere less than an eight meters high concrete wall and completely isolates the city from 'the Israeli lands' west of it.

It was in Bethlehem where I collected my data by interacting with Palestinian youth there and tackling the problem they felt they had with their communications towards foreigners. As my research developed on location, partly enhanced by the use of a video camera and the plan of making a documentary in cooperation with the youth (which I will explain in more detail in the following chapter), I slowly shed some of my naiveté and realised that my initial plan to simply document Palestinian voices did not suffice in tackling the problems that existed in the communication between them and the outside world[2]. Most importantly I began to view the way the Palestinians communicated with me, and the outside world in general, with a more critical eye. This realisation set in motion a continuing process of re-evaluation, not just of the data I had gathered but also the theoretical frameworks I had build up, up until that point. After my return from Bethlehem and the subsequent production and distribution of my documentary I plunged back into my theoretical sources to try and find alternative handles to grab, new approaches to try out and try to penetrate to a deeper level of understanding.

At the end of this long road appeared the thesis that now lies before you. With the support of the documentary 'Beyond the Wall', which has been an essential part of this research, this thesis explores the complexities of the communications between Palestinian

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[2] The concept of an 'outside world' is a vast and vague term, yet it is at the same time as clear a definition for those who the Palestinians communicated to beyond their own society. Basically the 'outside world' as I use the term refers to those people who are not Palestinian, who do not live in the occupied territories. Within my research the outside world also strongly correlates with what is generally seen as 'the west', ie. people from Europe and the United States. I will further explain this in chapter 2, as part of my methodological explanations.

youth and the, for them, outsiders. With this thesis I want to question not so much how *we* communicate with or listen to the Palestinians as much as how the Palestinians choose to communicate with outsiders. I want the create a clear understanding of why the Palestinians choose to speak to foreigners as they do and how that fits within not just the context of the conflict but the general debate about 'us & them', 'west & east'. The thesis is meant as a testament to the diversity of human interaction as much as it is a warning against the way this diversity seems to be threatened by not just a conflict or a wall but a gap in the communications between Palestinians and those who live 'beyond the wall'.

The process between starting the research and finalizing this thesis took more than a year, and in that time many, many people have lent their assistance, support, advice and motivation. These include first and foremost my research supervisor Yvon van der Pijl who tirelessly kept advising, criticizing, and motivating me to keep working on this thesis. Her importance to me in Holland is nicely complemented by the importance of Toine van Teeffelen during my stay in Bethlehem. Toine, a Dutch anthropologist who has been living in Bethlehem for over a decade, helped me with just about every aspect of my fieldwork. From making arrangements for me to come to Bethlehem, setting up the documentary project, and continuously giving feedback on the proceedings to also regularly being a very inspiring interlocutor concerning my research, Toine has been instrumental to me succeeding in the field. The staff at the AEI in Bethlehem, most importantly Fuad Giacaman and Elias Abouakleh, must also be mentioned, because of their hospitality as well as wisdom which they so often shared with me. All of my informants must, of course, also be mentioned, though I will describe those extensively in chapter IV anyway. In general I should thank the Murra family for their unprecedented hospitality and friendship which have touched me immensely during my time in Bethlehem.

II.

<u>Theoretical Framing</u>

§ 2.1 From Luyendijk to Said

From a theoretical perspective the subject I tackled in my research really started to come alive when I was introduced to the writings of Edward Said, especially his 1978 breakthrough work *Orientalism* (Said, 1978). It was in this, now three decades old, book that I discovered a central line of argumentation, which to me felt surprisingly connected to Joris Luyendijk's recent writings. Said's book offered a critical analyses of a specific scientific discipline Said named Orientalism, a discipline which focussed on the study of the eastern 'other'. Said referred to three different, though overlapping, descriptions when talking about Orientalism. First of all he identified Orientalism as the academic tradition which focussed on studying the Orient. Thereby 'anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient... ...is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism' (Said 2003: 2).

Secondly Said identifies Orientalism as a style of thought in which there is made a clear distinction between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'. He identifies this style of thought with a large number of disciplines and professions including poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists and imperial administrators. These people 'have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels...' (Said 2003: 2).

Thirdly he describes Orientalism as a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient. It is 'a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said, 2003: 3). It is in this third description of Orientalism where Said really voices his main criticisms and points the finger. He claims 'because of Orientalism the orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action'. And it is this sentence that condenses the most pressing issues of Orientalism and simultaneously links it to works written decades later, like Luyendijk's book.

Where Said's book was basically an analyses of more academic structures like scientific discourses and popular literature, Luyendijk's book analysed the more practical field of journalistic reporting. Yet they both identify and criticize a dominant narrative, or discourse of 'the west', which suppressed, muted, distorted or outright denied an eastern narrative. Hereby they both in fact tap into Foucault's definition of discourse, with which he proposes that knowledge is indeed power and that by claiming knowledge of an Other, you can in fact dominate that Other[3].

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[3] I understand that the concepts of discourse and narrative feel similar and can indeed overlap in their meaning. I do, however, make a clear distinction between the two concepts in this thesis. I will further explain this in chapter 2.

§ 2.2 No Permission to Narrate

Though Orientalism certainly contains elements that can be applied to specific cases like the Middle East conflict, it was in a later article that Said had written for *The Journal of Palestine Studies* called 'Permission to Narrate' (Said, 1984) where he really applied his theories to the reality of the situation in the Middle East, and his connection with Luyendijk thus becomes more apparent. In reaction to the 1982 war between Israel and Lebanon Edward Said wrote a critical article about not just the actions of the Israeli army, but also the way the west reported on these actions. Furthermore, Said addressed the subject of terrorism, as it was used to define violent actions which were only committed by Palestinian factions. He presented the idea that through subjective reporting of the western media the Palestinians were given the moniker 'terrorists', or at least 'potential terrorists', thus not only labelling the Palestinians as the clear culprits in the conflict, but also clearing Israel of a similar blame.

This meant more than simply forcing a foreign narrative on the Palestinian people, because as Said argued, 'the very indiscriminateness of terrorism, actual and described, its tautological and circular character, is anti-narrative... ...sequence, the logic of cause and effect as between oppressors and victims, opposing pressures- all these vanish inside an enveloping cloud called 'terrorism." (Said, 1984: 36-37). In other words, Palestinians did not receive a negative narrative that was forced upon them, they were in fact attacked with an *anti-narrative*. Through blaming the Palestinians of being terrorists or being supportive of terrorism, and terrorism being defined as something which cannot contain narrative, the Palestinians were denied their own narrative, as if they were a people without the capacity for rational thought. It is an argument which reminds us of Golda Meir's famous words which she spoke in 1969, that 'a Palestinian people' did not exist. For when a people is denied its own narrative, how can it express its identity, how can it define itself? When a dominant force defines a people as being unable to relate stories, to possess a narrative, is that not a clearest example of a process of dehumanizing those people? Another example which continues this line of argumentation comes from a later article written by Said for *The Nation* in 1986 called 'The Essential Terrorist' (Said, 1986). Talking about Israel's strategy of placing the idea of terrorism solely on their enemies, thereby dehumanizing them, Said says:

"...the main thing is to isolate your enemy from time, from causality, from prior action, and thereby to portray him or her as ontologically and gratuitously interested in wreaking havoc for its own sake. Thus if you can show that Libyans, Moslems, Palestinians and Arabs, generally speaking, have no reality except that which tautologically confirms their terrorist essence as Libyans, Moslems, Palestinians and Arabs, you can go on to attack them and their "terrorist" states generally, and avoid all questions about your own behaviour or about your share in their present fate."

Here he clearly explains this idea of an anti-narrative being created by the moniker of terrorism. By isolating a terrorist action from its context, its *causality* as Said writes, you isolate the action from any possible narrative. Thereby you turn your 'enemies' into nothing more than terrorists, and they can never be anything else. As the title of the article 'the Essential Terrorist' already stated; a terrorist is something stationary, solid and unchanging, the oppositional of an actor in a narrative, who has a past and therefore direction. And so Edward Said made his case with these articles, that the reality of the Middle East conflict shows us, the West, denying the Palestinians (as 'the others') a chance to narrate their lives. It is an argument which again feels very connected to Joris Luyendijk's recent publication and suggests that not much has changed in the decades between the two writers.

Yet the truth is that things *have* changed in that time period, both in the intellectual realm as well as in the reality of our daily lives. After the eighties we have had the relative positive decade of the nineties, as far as the Middle East conflict was concerned. There was the Oslo peace process, the Camp David handshakes and for a while it seemed that indeed bridges were being built and Said's attacks on essentialist thought had inspired a new direction in world politics. But then came the outbreak of the second Intifada, the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, a subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the United States which later evolved into a third Gulf War when the US also took on Iraq. And of course there was the construction of a vast security wall in the Palestinian territories, separating the Palestinians physically from any part of Israel. So in less than a decade most of the optimism had waned within the realms of Middle East conflict management.

§ 2.3 The Clash: Huntington's Calling

The intellectual world followed and seemed to permute a similar loss of optimism over late 20th century developments. Whereas some post-modern movements had a certain optimism about them, celebrating and envisioning a world without borders where peoples and cultures moved fluidly across the globe, that optimism dried up in the subsequent intellectual movements from which one scientist has become a sort of figurehead, Samuel P. Huntington. It was his *Foreign Affairs* article *The Clash of Civilizations?* (Huntington, 1993) which seemed to herald a new age. Ahead of the later troubles of the world, Huntington prophesized a new world order, a new field of conflict where 'the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural", and, "...the fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future" (Huntington, 1993: 22). Huntington focused his argument on the importance of culture, seeing that culture, and not for example ideology or politics would be the source of conflict in the coming era. Indeed, where before there were talks about border crossing, constructions of identity and a general sense of cultural fluidity, now words were uttered like 'great divisions' and 'fault lines'.

Culture became, once again, a solid source of irreconcilable differences and conflict. Interestingly it was Bernard Lewis, an intellectual who had been fiercely criticized for his imperialistic ideas by Edward Said back in his 1978 book *Orientalism*, who had first introduced the concept of a 'Clash of Civilizations' in the 1990 article 'The Roots of Muslim Rage' written for *The Atlantic* (Lewis, 1990). Authors like Huntington and Lewis promoted a more essentialist world view. Lewis, for example, had no problem with reducing a religious identity to a single entity in his article 'The Roots of Muslim Rage'. 'The Muslim has suffered successive stages of defeat' he says, without ever clearly defining The Muslim. Considering the fact that there are close to two billion Muslims living in the world today, Said certainly had a point when he later attacked Lewis on placing millions of people all under the same single moniker, generalizing and essentializing for the sake of argument (Said, 2001).

From a standpoint of narrative Huntington's course of writing in fact lends support to the dominance of western discourses Said had criticized before. As Huntington himself categorized the world into segments based on solid cultural markers, he in fact brought support to the dominant discourse Said so fiercely attacked. And just as Lewis summarized millions of people under one moniker, so also does Huntington in his writings, saying for instance, "The Gulf War left some Arabs feeling proud that Saddam Hussein had attacked Israel and stood up to the West. It also left many feeling humiliated and resentful of the West's military presence in the Persian Gulf, the West's overwhelming military dominance, and their apparent inability to shape their own destiny" (Huntington, 1993: 32). Ironically Huntington mentions the 'inability to shape their own destiny', while he in fact is part of the cause of this inability, by more or less writing up and shaping an identity for all the people who fall under his categorization, as if being humiliated is a characteristic that is shared among all Arabs over the world.

§ 2.4 Anthropological wanderings

All of these issues circle around the question of the representation of the Other, how we need to talk about the Other, what the pitfalls are in discussing such a thing as the Other. Even the simple fact that we agree to the existence of, and thus define, an Other, can be subject of criticism and debate. As Edward Said wrote in *Orientalism*, "Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly? By surviving the consequences humanly, I mean to ask whether there is any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say, of men into 'us' (Westerners) and 'they' (Orientals)." (Said, 1978: 45). Said thus seems very critical of even the simple deed of defining someone as Other, questioning the humanity in making these distinctions.

We then arrive in the field of the Anthropologist, who has struggled with this issue since its discipline came into existence or as William S. Sax cleverly claims, "As merchants of the exotic, we have confronted the problem of representing the Other since long before that word was spelled with a capital O" (Sax, 1998: 292). The reason I bring up Sax here goes further than this witty quote, for the article from which this quote originates also covers a sharp criticism on the works of Edward Said, particularly his views about how we approach the study of the Other, if it even is possible. Said has always been critical of this categorization, wondering if 'there is any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say, of men into 'us' (Westerners) and 'they' (Orientals)" (Said, 1978:45). Said thus strongly questions even *the act* of defining an Other. Sax, as an anthropologist confronts this criticism head on because the study of the Other is the core of what anthropology is about. In his article *The Hall of Mirrors: Orientalism, Anthropology, and the Other* Sax suggests that while Said has a strong point in warning us about focussing too much on differences, thus losing sight of universal human values, Said goes overboard in questioning every form of thinking about Others. "his... ...point - that the Self is always valorised and the Other always vilified—is simply not true, or at least not so simple" (Sax, 1998: 299).

To me, this point made by Sax is essential. Edward Said has clearly been a strong influence on my writings, with his theories about the denial of a permission to narrate being particularly resonant to the data I will present in the following chapters, but his criticism of a dominant western discourse should not mean that we have to completely ditch the definitions of Us and Other. I believe it was not Said's intent to ignore the stories and voices of those living outside our own cultural boundaries. If anything, Said advocated a stronger focus on stories and histories beside our own, as he states in *Orientalism*, 'the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West' (Said, 1978: 5). Yet his works, by focusing so clearly on the problems of the western scientific approach, could unintentionally lead us to dismissing the Other and ignoring them once again. Therefore, I value Sax' considerations and his hesitancy in following completely in Said's footsteps.

In fact, as my fieldwork proved to me, Palestinians use the distinction between Us and Them equally themselves, and the differences between their world and the world of foreigners is as real to them as it is to me. Thus, to answer Said's question, I propose that *yes*, we can avoid the hostility expressed by this division. It is essential however that if we allow ourselves to talk about the Others, we also need to let them talk.

§ 2.5 The final positioning

And here we arrive at the starting point of my fieldwork, for this had been my intention, as it always is the intention of well-educated anthropologists; to let the Other speak. It is also

on this point that I feel Edward Said needs to be complemented, as his studies have mostly been pre-occupied with analyzing and criticizing western discourses, thereby not paying much attention to the perspective of the Other, and thus not giving them adequate chance to speak for themselves. Another anthropologist, Aihwa Ong, had also identified this problem with Said, claiming that he depicted those subjected to Orientalism as being "silent participants in western hegemonic projects" (Ong in Inda et al, 2002: 173). Describing the position of the Chinese in a globalized world, Ong rejects this idea that those subjected to Orientalism are nothing more than 'silent participants' and she instead describes the complex manoeuvres that they make to "subvert reigning notions of the national self and the other in transnational arenas" (2002: 173). In other words, Ong argues that those who are subjected to Orientalism, and thus are defined as Others, do not react passively to the dominating discourse that defines them. They react to it, interact with it and might even selectively use it to their advantage. The image Ong thus creates of the Other is one of considerable more agency than the image Said paints of the Other. It is this focus on agency that I believe is a valuable addition to the legacy of Edward Said.

To summarize, though we have to be careful not to reify a people or culture and lock them up in a definition of being Other, we should not be afraid to study those that are different than ourselves. For when we indeed study them with an honest interest in learning from them, we can discover their voices and recognize a humanness that may stay hidden if we stop listening and studying them. And so we can tackle the issue of a permission to narrate in a parallel maneuver to Edward Said. Where he attacked the imperialistic discourse that pushed the Other in a dominated position completely defined from the outside (ie. not by the Others themselves), thus addressing the fact that the Other did not receive an opportunity to narrate their own stories, we can instead tackle this issue by focusing on that same Other and open a dialogue with him/her, thus trying to break through the dominant external discourse and analyze the narratives of the Other. This second approach is based on the presumption, or hypothesis, that the Other is indeed a strong actor, possessing more agency than what might be distilled from Said's writings. Like Aihwa Ong, we need to assume that the Other indeed possesses a voice that, though probably influenced and altered, is not necessarily silenced by a dominant external discourse.

§ 2.6 From Ong to Luyendijk

I remember Joris Luyendijk once appeared in a documentary series called 'Plaats des Oordeels' (Site of Judgement) produced for the Dutch documentary program *Tegenlicht* (VPRO, 2007). The series, which consisted of six hour-long chapters, attempted to give a broad, encompassing and current view on the situation in the Middle East in an attempt to better understand and maybe predict the situation there. I remember Luyendijk was the main focus of the second chapter where he talked about his book and the main arguments he

tried to make therein. He literally made the point that so few Palestinians are given a voice in the media, giving the example of the press-conferences after the failed Camp David accords, where we did get to hear the Israeli prime minister Barak, but did not receive a Palestinian perspective on the reasons for the failing of the accord, no Palestinian response was filmed by the media until much later.

Yet, when I watched the whole series of six documentaries about the Middle East the one thing struck me was that I never heard Palestinians talking. There was a chapter about the Israel-lobby in the USA, a chapter about the Israeli writer Amos Oz, a chapter about Israeli soldiers who left the army out of moral conviction, a chapter about western intellectuals and their predictions of the future, we had of course Luyendijk's piece about the western media and ultimately one chapter about the situation in Iran. This means that only one chapter out of six focussed on the perspectives of our so-called 'Others', in this case the Iranian people, and none brought any focus on the Palestinian people. In a program which specifically tried to give an insightful view of the Middle East, which had the support of Joris Luyendijk and in which Luyendijk himself even said that the Palestinians did not have a proper voice in the media, we never heard a Palestinian voice during the course of the six chapters. On the one hand that struck me as alarming in that maybe our own ways of projecting, describing and talking about the Orient were so flawed that even with good intentions we still could not break out of this tendency to deny the Other's voice. But on the other hand, an example like this may also point out that the problem could lie somewhere else.

Authors like Joris Luyendijk, Samuel Huntington, Bernard Lewis and Edward Said are all different people, coming from vastly different disciplines and have all approached these issues of studying, approaching and understanding the Other in vastly different ways. Yet they do share a common characteristic in that none of them actually focus their attention on the Other. Though Said and Luyendijk certainly seem sympathetic towards the Other's plight, they do not focus on the voice of that Other, instead focusing their criticism primarily on western discourses and structures of power. Huntington and Lewis instead philosophize more about ideologies and a meta-approach to understanding world politics, often approaching their stories from a primarily western perspective. In the case of Edward Said and Joris Luyendijk the point is not that they intent on denying the Other's voice, they seem to promote the exact opposite, yet their writings have not focused on these Others as they instead pointed to the failings of *us*, of western ways of thinking about, analyzing and understanding the Others. This approach risks entering a form of 'inverted European narcissism' (Shohat E. & R. Stam, 1994: 3) as we continually seek the causes for problems and issues even of non-western people by looking at our own actions and history, as if the west has so much power over the other that it also controls the issues and problems them, as

if 'the other' doesn't have the agency to create his own problems, so to speak. The problem seems to be that by keeping the focus on the west, by perspective or as subject, the dichotomisation that separates the west from the rest remains. By moving away from this *us*-perspective and focusing on the Other, I believe that this dichotomisation can be tempered and this seems to me a valuable move to make.

The ideas of Sax and Ong which promote a stronger focus on the Other have been, to me, a clear guide in focusing my own research in Palestine. My focus on the viewpoint of the Other also places me in the company of anthropologists who have previously (and continuously) tackled the issues of studying the Palestinians and representing their stories in their research. Toine van Teeffelen for example, a Dutch anthropologist living in Bethlehem, has functioned as a clear example to me during my fieldwork. In one of his articles, *(Ex)communicating Palestine: From Bestselling Terrorist Fiction to Real-Life Personal Accounts*, which focuses on describing the way Palestinians are represented in popular western bestsellers, van Teeffelen pushes towards a focus on the perspective of the Palestinians. He states, 'Palestinians presently struggle as much for the physical survival in their land as for keeping their national story alive in a power-ridden arena of Western-dominated international communication'. Van Teeffelen then proceeds to suggest a method to, as he puts it, 'promote a discourse of meaningful possibility and choice-making that reaches out from a Palestinian viewpoint towards a Western audience' (van Teeffelen, 2004). He suggests focusing on the method of diary-writing for the Palestinians to document and tell their own stories. This method of writing diaries, which among other things brings to focus stories of daily lives, correlates strongly with the conclusions I will present in this thesis, and I will come back to van Teeffelen's writings in the latter parts of this thesis. For now though, this example of van Teeffelen serves as an illustration of how anthropologists are tackling the issues of representing and studying the Other, and how their intent on bringing the viewpoint of the Others to light can serve as a logical (and necessary) expansion on Edward Said's writings. Even Joris Luyendijk, though educated as an anthropologist, can be expanded upon in this sense. Of course, Luyendijk wrote his book not as a scientific research document, but a personal recollection on his time as a news correspondent in the Middle East. His sharp criticism on western journalism and the failure of us in communicating a Palestinian viewpoint is clear, but I believe a solution to this problem can only be found by shifting our focus away from our own world and instead visit the Other and let his or her stories sound out. I hope that in this thesis I can let these stories resonate and, like the anthropologists who preceded me, find a better understanding of the Other, of the Palestinians living so strongly separated from us, beyond the wall…

III.

Methodology

§ 3.1 There and back again.

So on Valentine's day, 2007, I went to Bethlehem. I had arranged a hosting family where I could stay for a three month period and via a local youth education institute called The Arab Educational Institute, or AEI–Open Windows, I made contact with the Palestinians there. The research question which carried me through most of my fieldwork experiences was formulated as follows:

How does the Palestinian youth in Bethlehem communicate their daily lives to the outside world?

I focused specifically on the youth groups because first of all I myself am a 25-year-old student, so I anticipated that I could relate quickly with those of a similar age. Furthermore, these youth (between the ages of 18 and 28 roughly), seemed most grounded in our current times, as they were the generation that was coming of age at this time, and they had the intellect to understand the reality more than say, young kids.

I chose to call the subject of communication their daily lives. For me this was a container-term which I used to encapsulate as much as possible. In short, I was interested in all the subjects the youth communicated to me. By not defining the subject too closely I maintained a vagueness which prompted the youth to decide the subjects of communication more than myself. I specifically did not choose to use the term 'identity' here, because of its complicated character. I did not want the youth to get tangled up in wondering about what the Palestinian identity was, before they even communicated about it. In a sense, that would have made their communications probably less personal, because the youth would be more focused on a general Palestinian identity, and not their personal stories, which was what I was interested in.

Concerning 'the outside world', the operationalization is a bit more complicated. Quite early on in my research, I decided to approach my fieldwork a little bit different than what could be considered usual. Instead of looking for places like media agencies, tourist attractions or other sites where this communication between Palestinians and 'the outside world' took place, I decided on a different approach. I did not focus on searching out foreign subjects, instead I decided that I myself would represent the foreign subject of my research. So I placed myself in the role of 'the outside world'. To successfully fulfill this role I ascribed to myself I brought along a powerful instrument; a video camera and about 20 hours of tape to film a documentary about the lives of the youth. With this video camera I hoped my presence would expand beyond being 'a foreigner', as I was now, potentially, a line of communication to a larger 'outside' audience via my video camera.

Through participation in group discussions hosted by the AEI I came in contact with the youth and there I introduced my intentions of filming their lives. Though most of them reacted hesitantly at first, within a few weeks I had befriended numerous people and at least a dozen Palestinians were interested in cooperating with me on the film. In general I would ask the youth; 'If you want to show me something, tell me something, or do something with me, *tell me* and I will come with my camera to film it for the documentary'. In this way I motivated the youth to really think about their communication with me, actively thinking about possible subjects, and what part of their lives they wished to communicate, instead of simply answering pre-determined questions. As they knew their interactions with me would become part of a film possibly viewed by many foreigners they were forced to evaluate how they could represent themselves to such an audience.

This process led me to filming almost 18 hours of material about the lives of the youth, which in turn led to the production of the feature-length documentary, *Beyond the Wall*, which accompanies this thesis. What is interesting about the production of this documentary is that it provided me with the exact type of interaction with the youth that I desired for my research. I wanted them to tell me about their own lives while giving them the idea they were communicating with a foreigner, an 'outside world' and as I said, because of the presence of my camera, I believe I succeeded in giving them this idea that they were communicating with an 'outside world'.

By making the documentary in cooperation with the youth in Bethlehem I received a wealth of data about the way they communicate their identity to me, as an outsider. The 18 hours of raw footage that I received through this process are my main source of research data, though they are complemented by extensive field-notes, interviews, observations and diaries which I kept for me personally, as well as a weekly diary which I posted online for friends and family. Through these other forms of data analyses I expanded upon the core of my research as a videographer and thus tried to triangulate several methods of research. Furthermore, after completing the documentary I showed the film to two different audiences in the winter of 2007, one screening in Holland, where roughly 170 people, mostly students, viewed the film and commented to me afterwards, and one showing in Bethlehem for a public of over 250 Palestinians, varying from young kids to adults and elders. The different reactions I received, both positive and negative, form a bookend of this research as they provided me with invaluable answers to the questions about the effectiveness of the Palestinian communication to the outside world, as well as making me reflect strongly on my own role as a researcher and film maker.

Together all this data provided me with information not just on the way the Palestinians narrate their stories, but the diaries also showed the way in which I changed as a subject to them. Because I chose myself to be more subjectively involved in my research

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(on a personal level but more importantly also on a conceptual level) it was important to keep track of myself as a subject and see if my own changing perceptions of the situation and the people in Palestine might influence the communication between myself and the Palestinian youth. As long as I could clearly mark these changes, they could be useful for further understanding of the way the Palestinian youth chose to communicate their lives to me.

§ 3.2 The question of Religion

Palestine is a 'country' with a large majority of Muslims. Secondly, in the western perception of the 'country' it is closely attached to the idea of 'the Islamic world', especially its less virtuous components like terrorism and religious fundamentalism. Yet, as will become apparent in the following chapters, most of my informants were Christian. Of course, being in Bethlehem, the presumed birthplace of Jesus Christ, it is understandable that a Christian population will be significant there, but still it is interesting to note that my informants are so dominantly of a Christian belief. At the same time, this small paragraph is the only place in this thesis which addresses the subject of religion specifically. Why? Most importantly, my research did not primarily focus on religion, it focused on narration and interaction between the Palestinians and foreigners. Should religion have become a subject, it could only be one as a part of the narratives of the Palestinians.

As it turned out, however, religion seldom was brought up in my conversations with the youth. There were moments where we talked about religion[4], for example in group discussions when discussing religious feasts, but often I was more of an observant or side-lined participant in these conversations, not so much an instigator through my film project or research. When the youth actually began talking specifically to me, I noticed religion never was the focus of the conversation. Subjects like the political situation, the occupation, the conflict and even trivial subjects like work and hobbies were much more prevalent. Without jumping to conclusions, which fit better in the final chapters of this thesis, I want to justify here why religion plays so small a part in this thesis. Because a western perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often incorporates religion as a primary cause for the protracted nature of the conflict, it seems logical to question the absence of religion in this thesis. Through associating Palestinians with fiercely religious groups like Hamas or Hezbollah (where only the Hamas has a real connection with the Palestinian people) we assume religion plays a large part in the conflict.

But as my data demonstrates, the situation may be different. Though religion might play a very prominent role in the lives of Palestinians, they do not perceive it to be a main cause for the conflict and apparently they do not feel they have to explain or defend their religion to foreigners. My interactions with the Palestinians in Bethlehem suggest that

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[4] Which is to be expected when you stay in a town called Bethlehem around the time of Easter.

Palestinians see the conflict as being much more a political, ethnic or national struggle, focusing on the reality of the occupation and the historical questionability of the creation of the state of Israel. Our idea that religion should be a major factor in studying the Palestinians could then also be seen as an, in origin, ethnocentric viewpoint based more on our own assumptions than real empirical data. Therefore, religion does not appear in this thesis as an important subject of narration.

§ 3.2 Discourse and Narrative

One of the more confusing concepts handled in this research is how to differentiate between discourse and narrative. These terms are often used for similar purposes, and it can be difficult to clearly separate them. Therefore I feel it is necessary to make it clear how I use these two concepts in my thesis, as I do not intent on using them for similar purposes. I use the word *discourse* in the same vein as Edward Said uses it, meaning it refers to an academic construction of knowledge, which can contain many different works, theories and ideas which are grouped together. Most importantly, Said's usage is itself derived from Foucault's usage of the term, whereby the term is instilled with a sense of control and power, referring to the idea that knowledge *of* the other creates power *over* the other. It thus is a useful concept to describe dominant Western ideas and theories which try to explain the reality of the world of the east. When I use the concept of discourse in this thesis I refer to this construct of knowledge which forces control upon that which it tries to describe.

Narrative, on the other hand, will be used in this thesis as a far less political or academic concept. Though it also refers to a construct of sorts, it is purely a construction of stories. Those stories that a people possess can be grouped under the moniker of the *narrative*. A narrative, then, is a collection of stories, which might influence or create action among the population, but does it much less structured and politically involved than what is suggested by discourse. Narratives are the voices of a people, discourses are the voices of a larger apparatus or power-structure which is less personal.When I talk about narratives in this thesis I talk about those constructs of stories which my informants possessed.

§ 3.3 The appearance of Narratives

Considering the fact that much of my theoretical framework has been concerned with a denial of narrative, it seems logical that I would actively seek out narrative constructions during my time in the West bank. Because, of course, Joris Luyendijk was certainly right, 'They are like humans'. And being human meant that the Palestinians also possessed some sort of narrative, by which I mean they possessed stories about their lives, that they indeed possessed a self-created substance to narrate to foreigners. As I slowly grew closer with the youth in Bethlehem and spoke with them on a daily basis I began to form a framework based on this idea of narratives. As it seemed to me, the Palestinian youth in Bethlehem did not

possess one homogeneous narrative, but several differently framed narratives. These were often overlapping, but certainly distinguishable, collections of experiences, perceptions and stories which would be communicated to me.

Of course, quickly this line of thought could lead to the ultimate relativity claim that there are as many Palestinian narratives as there are Palestinians. But I believe there were frameworks that could be stretched over more than one person. Better still, after having lived with several dozen Palestinians for three months I argue that most of their forms of narration could be categorized in three distinct narrative groups. These groups are named as follows: The Passive Narrative, The Re-Active Narrative, which can be brought together under the moniker Conflict Narratives and finally an Active Narrative.

I distinguished, first of all, stories that were narrated within a passive mindset, stories of victimization and oppression where the subjects did not play an active role in their own stories. Secondly I distinguished stories which were narrated within a re-active mindset. These were stories that were being communicated primarily as a reaction on outside influences/forces/ideas. They were stories of defense, of defending oneself against false claims and faulty assumptions. And finally I distinguished stories which were narrated within an active mindset. These were stories that were communicated in relative neutrality, where the subjects expressed *themselves*, their own lives, and not necessarily reacting to outside interference. Think about stories about hobbies, work, studies, food, relationships etc. I call these stories part of an *active* narrative because they expressed agency and a sense of self-determination, without directly relating the narratives to outside factors

Understandably, making the distinction between these three types of narratives is tricky as the narratives overlap on several levels and some stories or moments of interaction can be placed in more than one narrative-framework. Secondly, it is sometimes difficult to tell what the exact motivations behind the telling of a story are. The distinction is sometimes hard to make. But the analytical value of categorizing their different modes of narration remains important. Furthermore, this thesis does not depend on sharply drawn lines between modes of narration, which are hard to draw in any situation. Instead, by using this framework of three distinctly different modes of narration we *can* recognize general habits among the youth to communicate in a certain way to foreigners.

As it turned out, external forces were the defining factor in labeling the communications within one of these three distinct categories. These external forces function either by physical dominance in the form of walls, checkpoints[5] and all sorts of occupational

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[5] These checkpoints resemble in a way a *Synopticon* (Bauman, 1998: 52) as they are a telling example not of an ever-watching, ever present eye (as the Panopticon was) which keeps track of a population, but instead a limited eye which is designed in such a way (by checkpoints, travel permits etc.) that it forces the Palestinians to move past it, making it very efficient to keep track of a population without being forced to penetrate every part of the lives of the tracked population.

characteristics, or non-physical dominance in the form of accusations, claims of identity, and otherwise external (and often negative) representations of the Palestinians. Either way, as my data will show, two of these three narratives are formed primarily through a relation between Palestinians and the outside world, while the third narrative not necessarily relates to this outside world. What type of stories these narratives contain, how they relate amongst themselves and what the consequences are of using one or another narrative in communications with foreigners will be the main questions I seek to answer in the following chapters.

IV.

<u>The Key Informants</u>

Before I delve fully into my empirical data I want to give a short description of the people who figured most prominently in my research data. I feel it to be valuable to read the following chapters with at least a basic idea of who the people are which I interacted with. In this short chapter I will briefly describe my most prominent friends and informants among the Palestinian youth. I also recommend watching my accompanying documentary *Beyond the Wall*, which features most of these people, to get a better idea of who these people are as the way they look, act, behave, their subtle gestures and remarks are hard to translate fully into writing, and are illustrated best in a visual sense.

As is also the case in my documentary I chose, in agreement with my informants, not to present my informants anonymously in this thesis. This choice seems logical as most of my data was derived from communications with the youth which they purposefully chose to share in front of a camera. So the knowledge that their faces would be associated with the words they spoke was in the open at all times. Therefore, no aliases were used in describing these people.

Anton Murra

Anton was, among the youth, probably the closest friend and support I had during my research. As the eldest at-home-living son of his family (one older brother had moved to Saudi Arabia and one older sister had moved to the USA) he looked after me as his guest. Because Anton also worked full-time at the AEI, where I also often could be found for my research, we also interacted often during working hours and so Anton and I saw each other most of the time. It helped that Anton had been educated well in the English language and was also busy with a Masters-research at the time I was there. He could communicate easily with me and could grasp the more abstract conversations I sometimes wanted to strike up with him.

As a 27 year old student Anton stood right between his youthful life (as a student and all-round fun guy) and his adult life (as the eldest at-home-remaining son and youth director of the AEI), making him someone who at once could be great fun to casually hang out with, yet also be responsible and focused when necessary. He would often sit down with me and discuss the film project and my research, trying to make me understand the reality of Palestine as best as possible. After the first few weeks I also started filming some scenes with Anton and then realized he also possessed a great quality of on-screen charisma that prompted me to incorporate him more into the film project. As such Anton has become the lead character of the documentary as well as one of the most important informants for this research.

Fadi Murra

The second son in age, after Anton, was Fadi, who was 26 years old and also studying at the time of my research. Because Fadi worked and studied away from the AEI I only saw him during evenings and weekends, but it was not long before we also became good friends. Fadi seemed more boyish than his brother at first, mainly because he had a childlike innocence and optimism. In conversations he would always talk with a feverish enthusiasm and could listen with ears that seemed larger than they looked, as if he registered everything you ever said. Yet Fadi also possessed a very sharp mind and could easily communicate with me about all sorts of subjects.

Fadi was also a great basketball player, as the documentary also shows, and took pleasure in teaching me some moves and taking me with him to his basketball practices and games. Beside that I remember we both started practicing basic break dancing moves when Fadi had gotten an instructional DVD (resulting in some hilarious demonstrations in front of his family). As far as politics were concerned, Fadi did not engage in many discussions. He could talk about the conflict, but his stories were always focused on a very personal level. Fadi never really talked in large gestures like 'The Palestinian struggle'. I got the idea that Fadi would never talk about the conflict if it didn't reach him, or his family and friends, personally.

Sami Murra

Sami was the third son, and at 24, exactly my age. Sami had already finished his studies and was working at the UNRWA, the UN relief foundation specifically focused on the Palestinian people. Maybe from a character perspective Sami came closest to my own personality. He had the same sort of ironic humor I often enjoyed and he also seemed more of a dreamer than his brothers. Sami also had interest in learning guitar and I remember many fun nights when I tried to teach him some songs while his mother later complained to me that Sami had been playing the same tune constantly the next day. As far as the conflict was concerned Sami was more vocal than Fadi. He had a clear opinion on the situation and really disliked what Israel was doing in the West bank. As Sami had a job at the UNRWA[6], where he was busy analyzing the infrastructure of Palestinian refugee camps across the West bank, it is understandable that he was so vocal about the situation of the Palestinians as he worked very close to those who suffered most from the conflict. As I have understood Sami has since moved to Berlin for his studies, where he still is these days (spring 2008).

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[6] United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. http://www.un.org/unrwa/

Razan Salameh

Of all the female friends I had in Bethlehem Razan was probably the one I was closest with. As a very open-minded, enthusiastic and well-educated student she was easy to talk to at first and her sharp mind and enthusiasm made it interesting to keep returning to her for conversation.

Razan, together with her close friends Hana and Manar (who often came together to the university group meetings at the AEI) was the kind of girl you could easily picture walking around anywhere in the world. Being very fashion sensitive she and her friends always looked trendy and the moment you started talking to her you had the idea she could easily follow any type of conversation or subject. Because of her optimism and her expressions of happiness she sometimes could be criticized by those who thought she did not understand the reality. This became especially apparent when I showed my documentary, in which Razan plays a significant part, in Bethlehem in December 2007, but I will expand on this later on.

Milad and Manar

This couple needs to be described together, for they were hardly separable when I was in Bethlehem. Aged just past 20, they had fell in love with each other and had been engaged a few months before I came to Bethlehem. Though most of my contacts were Christian, with Manar and Milad specifically I could sense a strong feeling of religion and devotion. Yet they were still very open minded and interested in other ideas and values. Milad had a close friend, for example, in Muhammed, a Muslim. Milad was expanding his role at the AEI when I was there and when I returned last Christmas I discovered he now worked fulltime at the AEI. Manar had been studying at the local university and was finalizing her studies during my stay there. Because Milad's family did not live in Bethlehem but in the nearby village of Abu-Dis, which could only be reached by passing through an Israeli checkpoint, the story of his relationship with Manar (how difficult it had to have been to constantly pass military checkpoints just to visit your fiancé) particularly moved me and has also found its way into my documentary.

Muhammed and Taha

Muhammed and Taha were the only Muslim youth I really came in contact with on a regular basis. Both of them possessed, at the time, little knowledge of the English language, but their enthusiasm for communication and interest in my project made it so that we formed a friendship long before we understood more than a few sentences of each others stories. When at times Anton would act as a translator both of the men could tell fascinating stories as they both had experienced the dark sides of the conflict, having both been imprisoned for several years in Israeli prisons.

Muhammed seemed the more childish of the two, for he had the characteristics of a joker, or funny guy. At least, that was my first impression. True enough, Muhammed always smiled and joked and enjoyed hanging around the AEI and me. But he certainly had a serious dimension and when he could speak freely in his native language (assisted by a translator) his comic appearance would shift into the look of a hardened politician. He became very well spoken in his descriptions of the situation and the suffering and could really move me with his stories. Because of his imprisonment, which lasted three years, he had suffered a lot in his education and had missed opportunities to follow the regular path of university studies most of his friends at the AEI could follow. This gave Muhammed a sort of tragic quality as he would often wander around the city, and get stranded at the AEI with no real purpose. When I asked him what was wrong he would always say 'I did not sleep good. I was thinking a lot'.

Taha in a sense had less of this tragic look around him, mostly I think because he had a job in construction, plus he still went to public university, and so had a real focus in his life. Taha also seemed the more serious of the two from the start. He had a calculated and calm way of conversing, and seemed to enjoy listening more than speaking. His English, at the time of my research, was less developed as Muhammed's, though during my return this Christmas I noticed he had practiced a lot and had made large advances in his English.

Nicholas

Nicholas appeared several times in my diaries though I did not see him as regularly as the other people I listed here. Still, he was an interesting character who had a unique way of communicating with me that stood out from his friends. Nicholas could be described as an extremely vocal person who could speak about the conflict as a real activist or fierce politician. Even when he had trouble talking in English (his skills were moderate), he tried his best to utter his concerns and beliefs. Though his fierce stance on all subjects related to the conflict could sometimes frustrate me as an outsider, he nonetheless fascinated with his colorful personality and vocal expressions.

All of these people have told me dozens of stories. All of them have shared their own narration of their lives. Through their friendships I could construct the system of narratives that I will now proceed to display in this thesis. I will first focus on one of the most prominent narrations which came through in my interactions with these youth, a narrative of victimization, imprisonment and suffering. Herein lay the stories that best describe the dire circumstances under which many of the Palestinians live in Bethlehem.

V.

The Passive Narrative

§ 5.1 The case of the stranger in his own country

On Palm Sunday I went to Jeruzalem for a day with Anton. I had not been outside the wall since my arrival in Bethlehem 6 weeks earlier and I was looking forward to once again seeing 'the other side'. Because Anton had received a travel permit during Easter he could take me with him and show me around the city. I hoped that Anton, since he was living so close to Jeruzalem, would be a great guide for me as I had never been to the holy city. But during our bus trip from Bethlehem to Jeruzalem he already warned me that he did not know much about the city, for he had rarely been there. It became clear to me then how strong a border existed between Bethlehem and Jeruzalem, between Palestine and Israel, between the East and the West.

When we finally arrived at the edge of the Old City I turned on my camera, which I had brought with me to document the trip, and Anton started talking. 'You know Reinout, sometimes I feel really sad coming here. Bethlehem and Jeruzalem are so close to each other, but I barely know Jeruzalem', and his most interesting remark that day, 'I feel like a stranger in my own country'. It seems that Anton's knowledge of the Old City barely exceeded my own. Only minutes after entering the Old City Anton had to ask a local for directions to the Armenian Quarter, because he simply did not know his way around the city. Here was a man who had been living next door to Jeruzalem for over 25 year and he was just as lost and bewildered by the chaotic streets of the Old City as I was. As we maneuvered through the bustling streets it sometimes felt more like we were two tourists than what we actually were, a foreigner being guided by a local resident. Anton was as much a stranger as I was here.

This became painfully apparent when we entered the Jewish Quarter (through some luck with the checkpoints in the city, as Palestinians are rarely admitted into the Quarter, especially during Easter when it is also an official Jewish religious holiday). I still remember the feeling as we arrived at the Western, or Wailing, Wall. We both felt uneasy, like we were entering the den of the lions. As I turned my camera on I could easily capture Anton's feelings. He was tense, felt uneasy and nervous. As we slowly walked towards the mythical wall this feeling of unease only increased. We stood there between dozens of religious Jews and we felt like trespassers. This was not our place to be it seemed. We felt as if all eyes were locked on us, like everybody could see a clear sign over our heads saying, 'These are Palestinians, or supporters of them, and they are here illegally'. It felt as if we were criminals even though we had done nothing criminal. We stayed at the wall for no more than a few minutes and we both were relieved when we left the place.

For me it was fascinating to gauge my own emotions. I was a Dutch foreigner, just a tourist. I had never felt anything close to anti-Semitic feelings, I was a good guy! Yet I felt incredibly uncomfortable. As if the simple fact of me staying with the Palestinians was criminal. It was not even the fact that I was treated like a criminal (outside of the rigourous checkpoint procedures), it was more an abstract feeling, no doubt fueled by the knowledge of the larger conflict and distrust which enveloped the region. I could never have anticipated how awkward I would feel in Israel. Certainly I had not felt like this at the beginning of my fieldwork when I stayed in Tel Aviv for several days before going to Bethlehem. It seemed the wall had effectively isolated me from Israel, so much so that every person, every structure, the very air felt alien to me now. The wall had changed me too. It was not that I had become Anti-Semitic, far from it, it just felt like a gap had grown between the Israeli society and myself, as if I didn't belong on the other side of the wall anymore.

As we left the Western wall, we achieved access to the Temple Mount through even more luck[7]. There the emotions were more positive, though still fascinating. Anton had never been here, he had never seen the Dome of the Rock in person. Today he saw, for the first time in his life, this magnificent structure. The Dome of the Rock, as the second most sacred site of Islam, is probably one of the most amazing cultural sites in all of Israel/Palestine, yet few Palestinians have actually had the chance to see it in person. Here Anton's emotions were nothing more than amazement. We both felt this. We walked around like giddy schoolboys on a daytrip, as if we had secretly had sneaked away from the group and succeeded in going to a place we weren't supposed to be. Even though we were denied access to the Dome itself, just the feeling of standing next to it amazed us, the kind of amazement that only strangers could get in such an environment. That day, we both were clearly strangers in this country…

As I pondered this day after I returned to Holland, I began to recollect certain theoretical articles about borders and movement that seemed to resonate well with this experience. Almost immediately I was reminded of Zygmunt Bauman's concept of *tourists and vagabonds* (Bauman, 1998). He presented a model in which he made a distinction between those who freely and willingly travel across the globalized world (the tourist), and those who are forced to move with it, willingly or unwillingly. When I thought back to Anton's remark about being a stranger in his own country I tried to place his situation within this model. But Anton was neither a willing tourist nor an unwilling vagabond. He did not move freely through the world nor did the world force him to move. As was the case in a prison environment, there was hardly any movement at all. As a Palestinian his options of

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[7] Anton was assumed to be Dutch like me, because of his western appearance, and so wasn't asked about his ID. Normally only tourists and Palestinian Muslims can access the site.

movement were restricted and almost completely controlled. Sure, he had left the country several times, thanks to his position as a youth director at the AEI, but it was not a regular activity. Surely he was not a tourist as described by Bauman. Anton would then appear to resemble more of a *local*, and yet, it feels more complicated than that because though Anton may be a local in that by our standards he is severely immobilized, he felt himself to be a tourist, so his role in his environment was different from being simply a local.

Though Anton himself did not move, during our trip to Jeruzalem on that Sunday, he became a tourist, an *unwilling* tourist. Interestingly Bauman stated, "…the notion of 'involuntary tourist' is a contradiction in terms." (Bauman, 1998: 93) This seems logical because a tourist is always defined as someone who does what he does for his enjoyment. But Anton's case showed me that sometimes people are forced to be more of a tourist than they want to. This is, then, another type of tourist than the one defined by Bauman, one who does not move at his or her hearts' desire, but one who is forced to *feel* like a stranger in places that *should* feel like home. He became a tourist by traveling not more than ten kilometers, a distance that hardly seems to count for anything these days. Half of that distance I traverse daily when I go to my university. So Anton had become a tourist by barely moving at all.

Giving this case as an example it will come as no surprise that most of the youth, when asked to describe their lives in Bethlehem to me, would first of all say, 'We are living in a prison'. For when the world ten kilometers away from your front door is so far separated from yourself that you could as well be a tourist when walking beyond the borders of your hometown, the metaphor of a prison is not that far-fetched, especially when your city is surrounded by an 8 meter high wall, army patrols regularly cross the city-streets and you need to pass extensive checkpoints with proper (and hard to get) permissions to travel beyond those borders.

§ 5.2 'We are living in a prison'

As the sun burnt down on my shoulders I stood in front of the wall, Israel's so-called 'security fence'. Filming the wall with a wide-angle lens it looked even more imposing, watching it through my camera's viewfinder. Eight meters is high, very high, even for an almost two meters tall Dutchman. I was walking over a small asphalt road in front of the wall, accompanied by five Palestinians; Milad, his fiancé Manar, Taha, Muhammed and Nicholas, as well as Mila, a Czech volunteer I had befriended. I had asked the youth to join me for a walk along the wall, to talk with them and film them. I had wanted to capture the sight of the wall for use in my film, and in discussions with the staff of the AEI we had decided that a so-called 'walk & talk' along the wall would be the most interesting way to incorporate the images of the wall into the film. It would also give me the chance to listen to the youth as they told stories about the wall, about what it meant for them. When we went to the wall that day I remember we arrived at the wall over the main road which led to

Jeruzalem. This meant that we arrived at the wall in front of the Israeli Checkpoint. I can still recall the nervousness that I felt walking there. You could feel the eyes of the soldiers following your steps and as we got closer I noticed that all of us tried to avoid direct eye-contact with the soldiers. Of course one of the soldiers approached us to warn us that we weren't supposed to be here, it was after all a military zone (the checkpoint), but we turned right and said to him we just went for a walk alongside the wall.

As we walked along wall I noticed extraordinary graffiti and murals which had been painted on the wall. I remember people said to me there had been arguments against painting on the wall, because it would beautify something as horrible and ugly as the Israeli wall. Yet I could imagine a feeling of resistance emanating from these murals, as if they were defying the wall without punishment. There was a sense of defiance in the murals that were painted on the wall. 'Down with the Wall', 'Build bridges, not Walls', 'Who are the terrorists?' etc. In some places the paintings were even humorous, like a painted button which read 'Press here to destroy the wall', to downright hilarious (two painted windows; one, on ground level, shows the legs of a horse, the second one, 6 meters higher, shows the head of that horse). Humour and art adorned a symbol of oppression: the wall. But it was not humour that adorned the talks of the youth who accompanied me that day. 'It's like we are living in a prison', Nicholas said to me.

At one point Milad asked me what I wanted them to talk about and I answered to just talk about stories that came up to them now that they were here. And so they began to talk. 'You feel it, like, you are in a prison...' Nicholas started, '...and you can't go to your land'. 'It becomes a routine, our life', Milad continued, 'It becomes normal, it is a reality we will face... ...we are very weak people. We cannot do anything... ...all of our dreams, our lives, it stopped when the wall began. We become without hope, a hopeless people. It's like we are animals, we become like animals'. It was this day that I specifically noticed a, what I would later term, *Passive Narrative*. The youth became caught up in a narrative they expressed to me, which was very passive in nature. They did not talk about resistance, they did not talk about what they were actively doing, they talked about what was being done unto them, what other people were forcing on them. In these talks the Palestinian youth presented themselves as receivers, not so much as actors. Mind you, this example does not show us that the Palestinian youth *are* passive, they are not (as will become evident in the subsequent chapters of this thesis), but when expressing these types of stories they do express themselves in a passive manner and so communicate a passive image of themselves.

Another telling example is the first formal, and videotaped, interview I held with Muhammed, one of the youth who often visited the AEI. Muhammed had been imprisoned for three years at the start of the second intifada (and thus had only been released a few short years ago) and he had regularly expressed his interested in me interviewing him. So

one afternoon I had arranged with Anton to interview him. Muhammed would tell his story, Anton would translate and I would film. As was my method up until then I proceeded to ask very general and vague questions, to motivate Muhammed to come up with his own stories. So I asked about his life in Bethlehem about how life was treating him. I noticed that Muhammed answered slowly with pretty standard answers about the general suffering of the Palestinian people. I also noticed him being a bit impatient and jittery. After a while it became clear to me why he was as impatient as Anton said to me that Muhammed asked if I could start asking questions about his experiences in prison. It then became clear to me that Muhammed had primarily been interested in this interview to relate his experiences as a prisoner, a victim, someone who suffered beyond his own control.

And yes, when I started to ask about his prison experiences Muhammed opened up and began to vividly narrate his stories without needing any guidance or encouragement on my part. Continuously stories came out of him describing the torture, inhuman treatment and injustice of his prison life. It appeared to me how good Muhammed was at telling his stories. Even though Anton needed to translate, I could tell that Muhammed told his stories with clarity, conviction and charisma. He mentioned facts and statistics and gave vivid descriptions of events. Gone was the frivolous and joking boy I had known up till then as he suddenly seemed much more serious and full of confidence, expertly narrating his own suffering. His insistence on relating these stories of suffering and his capacity in relating these stories with conviction further proved to me how adept Palestinians were at narrating their suffering.

§ 5.3 Reflections I

This first form of narration, the passive variant, already brings to light an interesting aspect of the way Palestinians narrate their stories to foreigners. Most interestingly, it became clear to me that the Palestinian youth was very capable of effectively expressing their suffering to me as a foreigner. They used clear metaphors like a prison to effectively describe their own emotions quickly, and would often delve into stories, facts or events which were familiar to me as a western (or European) audience. For instance, they compared the Israeli wall to the Berlin wall, claiming how much higher their wall was in comparison. 'This wall was in Germany, there it was only 2 meters tall, here it is 8 meters' Taha told me when we walked along the wall. Anton once spoke to me about the situation in Palestine, while being filmed for my documentary and in conclusion he stated, '(referring to the Jews) Why are those people, who have been oppressed in Europe, oppressing us.. …why is the circle repeating itself with different heroes and different victims'. Furthermore, concepts like Apartheid and cantonization were often called, clearly referring to the situation in South Africa several decades ago. This use of familiar metaphors, of juxtaposing their stories to

stories which are well-known to us in the west, suggests that the way the Palestinians express their suffering is well thought out and designed specifically for a foreign audience. In turn, this suggests that Palestinians possess a certain agency in how they form their narratives and that they indeed possess the ability to adapt their narration to their audience. When looking back to the theoretical framework I set up in chapter two it already becomes clear that Ong's criticism on the idea that those who are targeted by an orientalistic discourse are 'silent participants' is valid. The way this passive narrative was constructed and narrated to me suggests far more agency on the side of the Palestinians. The paradox herein is that this proof of agency is distilled from what I qualify to be a *passive* narrative. It illustrates well that though the style of the narration is passive, this does not mean that the ones who narrate are passive. Indeed, when the narration appears so finely attuned to the audience to which it is narrated it is impossible to deny a strategy, and thus agency, behind it.

Looking back on all of these experiences and observations I can say that the urge to express stories of passivity, to express a passive narrative, was often visible with the Palestinian youth, especially when they were confronted with a more formal atmosphere of communication, like the aforementioned interview of Muhammed. It seemed that especially when the atmosphere was serious, the youth would focus on conflict-related stories, which partly focussed on the experience of being victims, of being *passive*. I say 'partly', because when talking about the conflict the youth did not exclusively express a passive narrative. Besides the stories of victimization, I also recognized stories of defence and resistance, a re-active narrative, which I will describe in the next chapter.

VI.

<u>The Reactive Narrative</u>

§ 6.1 The case of the *too* peaceful non-violent demonstration

On a Friday morning I traveled to the countryside beneath the city of Bethlehem. Near the Palestinian village of Umm Salamoneh all kinds of activists, journalists and locals had gathered to start a demonstration against the construction of the Israeli wall. Here below Bethlehem the wall had not yet been fully constructed and Umm Salamoneh was one place where the construction had only recently started. Since the start of the construction weekly protests, organized by the, in Bethlehem situated, organization *Holy Land Trust*, had taken place. The demonstrations, which took place every Friday morning, were meant to hinder the construction of the wall and bring international attention to the situation there. When I first visited one of these demonstrations I had already been in Bethlehem for close to two months. As I said in the foreword of this thesis, I had developed a strong interest to observe the more confrontational and possibly violent environments of the region, and this demonstration would be my first attempt at this. I had arranged to travel with the people from *Holy Land Trust* to the site of the demonstration because no people from the AEI were able, or willing, to join (more on this later).

I still remember how tense I felt just before the demonstration started. A group of about fifty or sixty people had gathered on a hill just outside the village of Umm Salamoneh and we were being briefed before we went down the hill to the construction site where the demonstration was to take place. 'We will plant olive trees as a protest', the organizer Sami Awad said to the people, 'we expect a very violent reaction from the soldiers, but please do not use violence against them… …we are morally stronger, because we will not use violence!' he proudly claimed. As I stood among strangers (mostly foreign activists and journalists) with my camera clamped in my hand I felt uneasy. Just how violent would it get?

An hour later we stood upon the same hill, having just finished up the demonstration. No people had been wounded, no shots had been fired and no aggressiveness of any serious kind had surfaced. The demonstrators had planted trees[8], they had posed for some photos and camera shots and had occasionally shouted some speeches. Israeli soldiers had indeed come, but they had not been violent. They arrived quickly after we came and then proceeded to watch us, film us (a scare tactic used to dissuade people from joining the demonstrations, as they show to document every participant) and occasionally inform us that we were not supposed to be there. And that was it. That was the demonstration.

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[8]partly in remembrance of the murdered students in Virginia, the result of the shooting at the school, which at that time had recently taken place.

I remember a feeling of disappointment coming over me afterwards. Was this it? Was this the proud resistance I had wanted to observe and experience? Well, on this day and time it was. Interestingly enough I turned out to be not the only disappointed one. Several foreign activists, members of the International Solidarity Movement[9], also expressed their disappointment and decided to move on to another demonstration up north near Bil'in later that day, but more on that later.

The most interesting reaction after this demonstration came from Sami Awad, the organizer of the demonstration, because he not only expressed disappointment, but went as far as to actually apologize to the journalists and foreigners for the lack of confrontation. 'We regret that there was not a strong confrontation with the Israeli soldiers. We want to say to you (the foreigners) that it is still our goal to confront the Israelis and we promise that next week we will more actively confront the soldiers again!' At first I laughed at the absurdity of this. Here I was, at a demonstration which had been clearly promoted as being *Non Violent*, and now the organizer was apologizing because of a lack of confrontation?! It was only later that I began to understand the workings of these non violent demonstrations, and understand how, even though it seemed absurd at first, non violent demonstrations could indeed be *too* 'non violent'.

My first moment of realization came later that same day, when I had decided to join the foreign activists on a trip to Bil'in, near Ramallah. Bil'in was the *big brother* of Umm Salamoneh in that the weekly demonstrations that were being held there (also against the building of the wall) had been going on for years and had received a lot of attention, even from the international press. In Bil'in I did experience confrontation and violence. The moment I arrived at the demonstration with the other foreigners (which had started moments before our arrival) we were engulfed by tear gas clouds. As we proceeded in the direction of the 'front line' of sorts we passed ambulances, stretchers carrying wounded people, occasional volleys of rubber coated bullets, kids swinging rocks like David of old and all sorts of things you would expect at a Palestinian encounter. I say this with a sense of self-awareness, because the events at Bil'in were to me really a confirmation of a stereotype I had not encountered in the months before. But what struck me the most was the overwhelming presence of foreign visitors and press at the demonstrations. When you watch the scenes of these demonstrations featured in my documentary you will recognize this. If I would take out all the foreigners and press figures there would be very few people left to demonstrate.

In total I visited five demonstrations in the West bank, three times I went to Umm Salamoneh and two times I visited Bil'in. Reflecting on my observations from these demonstrations I would argue that indeed the essence of these demonstrations is in their

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[9] http://www.palsolidarity.org/

function as a stage. They form a stage where the Palestinians can perform an act (of defiance) which is then captured by an international audience, through press, visitors and activists. At every demonstration I observed this performance was based on a narrative of peaceful reaction. The Palestinians would provoke the Israeli soldiers to use violence, simply by protesting in front of the soldiers, and then proceeded too explicitly *not* return that violence. This often resulted in a sort of game of dare. Palestinians would dare the Israeli soldiers to react, and the soldiers in turn would dare the Palestinians to try to come closer and continue demonstrating. In this sense the non-violent way in which the Palestinians chose to demonstrate connects with Mark Juergensmeyer's concept of a *Theater of Terror*. Juergensmeyer uses this concept to paint the idea that acts of terrorism always have to be committed on a stage, preferably as large as possible. He argues, 'Terrorism without its horrified witnesses would be as pointless as a play without an audience' (Juergensmeyer, 2001: 141). Similarly in case of the Palestinians you could say that demonstrating non-violently without an audience would be pointless. The difference here is, of course, that Palestinians at these demonstrations aren't out to terrify their audience with their actions, on the contrary, they are out to demonstrate a moral superiority over their opponents. By reacting non-violently to violent actions they show their own moral strength as much as they show the inhumanity of their opponents. Therefore, these demonstrations need not only an audience, they also need a clear antagonist to react to.

Approaching these demonstrations like stage performances, it is understandable that Sami Awad apologized to his 'audience' about the lack of confrontation. Though he had shown himself to be peaceful, it had lost some of its meaning because his peaceful approach had not been countered by the Israelis with violence. Because there had not been a confrontation between the Palestinians (in their own narrative the protagonists) and the Israelis (who filled the role of the antagonists), the performance, or narrative had failed to capture its audience. Bil'in, later that day, showed me the power of this narrative once a confrontation *does* take place. It becomes a captivating performance, easily capturing its audience in a rush of emotions, and it stands as a clear example of what I have come to define as a *Reactive Narrative*.

§ 6.2 'We are not terrorists'

Where the passive narrative communicates mostly feelings of victimization and suffering, thereby focusing on 'passive' feelings and emotions, the stories communicated within the reactive narrative are much more active in nature, though what is communicated through this narrative is always a response to other actions or ideas, hence they are *re*-active. As my example of the non violent demonstrations illustrated, the act of demonstrating non-violently loses much of its meaning when it isn't juxtaposed with acts of violence. It distills its meaning from this juxtaposition, and thus is to be considered reactionary in its essence. I

discovered a similar reactionary nature in many of the conversations I had with the Palestinian youth in Bethlehem. The conversations are more or less encapsulated by the single sentence 'We are not terrorists', which in general means the youth pressed hard to clarify to me that they did not approve of violence in general and supported non violent means of resistance. I define this narrative as reactionary because it so clearly aimed at attacking prejudices they feel the western world has about Palestinians.

During one of the weekly group discussions I joined at the AEI I proposed the question to the youth what they thought was wrong with the media. They then voiced a lot of frustration particularly about Israeli and American media, which to them were the most powerful countries in the world of the international media. They believed the American (CNN for example) and Israeli news agencies only focused on Israeli suffering and defined Palestinians always as terrorists. 'We are always the terrorists' one of the girls said to me. Without entering the debate about whether or not this assumption of the Palestinian youth is correct, it became clear to me that there is little trust for foreign news agencies in reporting accurately the situation in Palestine. Most of the youth believed Palestinians were mostly portrayed as terrorists (the term terrorists refers here to just about anyone who uses violence in resisting the Israeli occupation), and of course none of the youth agreed with this prejudice. So they would often show the desire to combat this prejudice, which reflected in the communications between me, as a foreigner and them.

When I filmed an interview with Fadi, the middle brother of my hosting family, I asked him for whom he had voted in the previous elections. Fadi answered first of all by avoiding the answer, 'I want to tell you something… …I dislike to argue with political issues. ..to participate with the defender fighters (here he refers to what he later phrased as terrorists, though he did not want to use that term himself) to make changes… …I will never, because I want to live'. Only after I asked the question a second time did I receive the answer that Fadi had not voted. That this example shows that Fadi dismisses the idea of joining a violent resistance movement is interesting, but even more interesting is the fact that he communicated his dismissal after I asked a question about a quite different subject. Given the fact that the Hamas movement had won during the last elections, and the west generally beliefs that Hamas is a terrorist organization, I came to realize that Fadi felt the need to distance himself from this, before even answering my question.

This happened a second time with Fadi when I joined him during a basketball match he participated in. That match was part of a tournament that was held in the name of Sadam Hussein. Once we entered the sports hall I saw dozens of posters of Sadam Hussein decorating the walls, and this surprised me. Immediately I asked Fadi about this. Why were there posters of Sadam Hussein hanging all over the walls? Fadi proceeded to briefly explain the reason, but quickly switched into a more apologetic mode as he again clearly distanced himself from these political subjects. 'I don't care, I'm not a politician… just playing, having

fun, so wish me good luck!'. In both of these examples Fadi took a question I asked and expanded on it in this reactionary way. He reflected on prejudices he believed existed about both the Hamas movement and the figure of Sadam Hussein, and then distanced himself from these prejudices, implicitly saying 'I'm not a part of these violent movements'.

§ 6.3 Reflections II

Reflecting on this second narrative the Palestinian viewpoint indeed appears diverse and multi-vocal. Whereas the passive narrative already demonstrated that Palestinians possess agency in how they choose to narrate their stories to foreigners, showing them to be very adept in effectively communicating their stories of victimization and suffering, this reactive narrative demonstrates to us that these stories of victimization are not the sole form of narration they express to foreigners. Even more than in the passive narrative, this reactive narrative shows the Palestinians to be very aware of how foreigners perceive them, maybe even judge them.

Interestingly, their idea on how foreigners perceive them seems rarely deducted from physical interactions between them and outsiders. This is to be expected of course, because of the blockades that exist between Palestinians and the outside world. Travel restrictions, checkpoints and walls hinder foreigners from coming to Palestine and Palestinians from traveling beyond their own borders. Their knowledge of how foreigners think about them is mostly deducted from images and information they receive via the media. Internet (I observed that the youth spent a lot of time surfing the web), television and newspapers form their most important link with the world beyond their borders.

The reactive narrative could thus be seen as something to be placed in Baudrillard's concept of hyper-reality, an image of the real, which is not based on reality, as the reactive narrative appears to be a reaction not directly on a reality, but a representation of reality, i.e. the media. This shows us how the Palestinian form of narration is tightly interwoven with outside narratives, as they react to them and object them. This in turn tells us that it is dangerous to fully differentiate the narration of 'the other' from the narrations of 'us'. Palestinian narration comes not purely from themselves, but is partly created through outside influences. Though the reactive narrative is a very distinct form of Palestinian narration, it is not solely *their* narrative. In the next chapter I will further discuss this fact.

As will be apparent by now, the two narratives I describe here share the common subject of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both of the narratives contain exclusively stories that tackle the issues surrounding this conflict. This separates them clearly from the third narrative I will describe later on: the *active narrative*. In the next chapter, however, I will first focus on the first two narratives, their common subject, and what the effect of communicating these narratives might be.

VII.

Conflict Narratives

§ 7.1 The case of me becoming a stranger again

When reading back the diary I kept during my fieldwork my attention was grabbed particularly by an entry made on the fifth of March. That had been the day that I had visited the Aida refugee camp on my own and had been guided around the camp by a group of kids who lived there (and two women who acted as translators). The segment about Aida, which is featured in the documentary, was filmed on this day. As I read back my diary entry on that day it struck me how depressed I had gotten that day. Several things happened that day which gave me a cold feeling of detachment from the people around me, and I went to sleep that night with a strong longing for the social comforts of home.

First of all there was the guided tour around the camp with the kids. Now I had been to Aida before and had already witnessed how tense the atmosphere there could be, especially in comparison to the relative calm and laid back atmosphere of the AEI, but this was my first substantial visit to the people there, and it felt especially tense that day. The weather played its part, with a grey overcast rendering most of the camp in a dull light, but it was mostly my interactions with the people there that gave me such a cold feeling. Up until this day I had mostly spent time at the AEI, always in the company of people who had quickly become friends. But this day, at the camp, I was alone again. The people with whom I had arranged the tour were not familiar to me, having only briefly seen them on my previous visit, and upon arriving in the camp I felt a stranger all over again. Though the women who joined me on the tour were very friendly and hospitable I did not feel as easy as I had felt the past few weeks. And also with the kids, who walked along with us, I did not feel a strong connection.

What made the whole tour so difficult for me was that the communications between me and the kids and translators never exceeded conversations about the conflict. Maybe because we did not share a lot beside my interest in their lives in an environment clearly created by conflict, but we never went into more informal or deeper forms of conversation. We talked about army invasions, kidnapped relatives, kids being shot on the street, lockdowns, the bad economic situation, how hard life was for everyone, how the kids had nothing to do for relaxation, etcetera. Even when I visited the local institute Al Rowwad, a place where the youth could come to learn crafts like photography, painting and theatre, this feeling of depression persisted as I witnessed the rehearsals of a theatre play about the conflict, seeing children enact scenes of humiliation, checkpoint troubles and fighting.

To me all these stories which were being told to me felt like honest and heartfelt stories which I was glad to have heard, but I recall that I constantly reacted in the same way to all of these stories; I shook my head, nodded, claimed my disapproval of their suffering

and tried to express sympathy and empathy. Even though we remained very friendly with each other, and I eventually was even invited for dinner with one of the translators and her family several times, I did not feel as close to them as I did to the youth at the AEI.

What made matters worse were my encounters with street kids at the end of the day when I returned to my hosting family. The night had already come and I strolled through the murky streets of the camp with a heavy head, digesting all the impressions of the day. Eventually I passed a couple of kids who were hanging around on the street, playing around. Surprised by the sight of a foreigner they approached me with a smile and playfully shouted all kinds of things to me. Being not particularly well spoken in the Arabic language I did not understand them, but I smiled, shook hands when they reached for a shake, and walked on. But the kids persevered and began to irritate me. They started asking for money and became bolder in their actions. Eventually one of them tried to grab my shoulder bag and take it from me. I aggressively pulled it back and pushed the kid away. They then distanced themselves from me and started to throw stones in my direction. Eventually I left the campgrounds and arrived at the main road, at which point the kids had given up annoying me. But not soon after, in another quiet and dark street, I stumbled on another group of kids who had set up a fake 'road block', no doubt inspired by the Israeli checkpoints around their city. They were guarding the barricade with sticks and as I approached them they tried to stop me. Again I smiled and played along for a bit, but I was again taken back by the quite hostile reaction of the kids. They poked me with the sticks, shouting, 'Show me your ID! Fuck You! I kick you!'. Becoming angry now, I pushed forward and kicked away the garbage they had used as a roadblock.

Surely, these kids were just playing around, having nothing better to do on this quiet evening, and there was nothing serious about it, as Anton later also said to me, but I remember when I returned home that night that I was exhausted and depressed. The combination of the whole Aida camp experience and the encounters with these street kids had pushed a feeling of differentiation in my mind, and I felt completely separated from the people I had met that day. I was tired of the depressing stories of the camp, and angry and frustrated by the kids who had bothered me.

As this experience was, to me, so different from the rest of my experiences in Palestine, in my analysis of my data it became an important issue. I began to wonder why this day in the Aida camp felt so different to the rest of my time in Bethlehem. The question arose if the way the Palestinians narrated their stories to me influenced my own perceptions of them. Though the whole experience remains a truly subjective one, I believe it can serve as an example that prompts valuable questions about the way Palestinians narrate their stories. In this chapter I will answer these questions by connecting this subjective example to more grounded theoretical frameworks.

As the people in Aida communicated to me that day as much with a Passive Narrative (in expressing their suffering, and victimization) as a Reactive Narrative (as they often said they were not terrorists, or they did not *hate* the Jews), I now want to group these two narratives under the moniker *Conflict Narratives*. This term then encapsulates all the stories communicated to me and were centered on the conflict. Based on my own response to the narration of the people at Aida camp my hypothesis, which I will test in this chapter, is that these conflict narratives can be harmful to the way foreigners perceive the Palestinians and relate to them and that they can, in fact, dehumanize them in the eyes of foreigners.

§ 7.2 Dehumanizing narratives

Often, dehumanization is associated with our tendency of labeling, for instance, the Palestinians collectively as terrorists and extremists. Edward Said, for example, points in this direction with his article, *Permission to Narrate* (Said: 1984), and Palestinians themselves also expressed to me in that they most worried about their portrayal as terrorists by the international media. But can it not also result from an opposite situation, where we name Palestinians not negatively as extremists but, at least in intent, positively as victims. Might this initially positive image of them being victims[10] lead to a sense of dehumanization, where *we* think Palestinians to be not equally human as ourselves? Based on my own experiences in the Aida camp I am inclined to answer yes to this question. Let me explain why.

The distance I felt between myself and the people of Aida camp that day came from being overwhelmed by stories of suffering, a suffering we obviously did not share, and thus most of what we talked about were things we did not share, which differentiated myself from them. At the end of the day the gap between the people of Aida camp and myself had not been diminished. So I would say the dominance of subjects which differentiated myself from the Palestinians in Aida camp caused a strong feeling of detachment on my side, obstructing the strong feeling of empathy and sympathy I so strongly felt with the people at the AEI.

Why the Palestinians chose to focus their narration to me so much on the conflict and the dire situation in the camp can be explained on two points. First there is the very pragmatic reason that most of the people who live in the refugee camp quite simply live in worse conditions than most of the people who live in Bethlehem proper. The wall is much more prominent there than it is in the centre of Bethlehem as it literally is placed between the houses of the camp and the olive-groves and playfields owned by the people of the camp. Also, the Israeli army visits the camp much more often and arrest people there more often. Furthermore, general living conditions appeared worse when compared to live outside of the camp. In short, given the generally worse living conditions of the people from Aida camp, it is understandable that more focus on these issues is given in their narration.

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[10] By which we basically say that it is not their fault, that they are victimized.

A second answer is maybe even more pragmatic and easy, though there is depth to it to. In short; the time I had spent in Aida camp is significantly shorter than the time I had spent in the city of Bethlehem. In total I had only visited the camp five times during my fieldwork, while roughly 80% of the rest of my time had been spent in the city of Bethlehem. Thus, it is very possible that, had I stayed most of the time in Aida camp, and had only visited Bethlehem five times, I might have observed the inverse of this example, feeling detached from the youth at the AEI instead. This is stated hypothetically and can, of course, not be verified, but the point remains; I had relatively little time in Aida camp to build up a bond between myself and the Palestinians. This answer suggests that conflict narratives are most prominent in short or infrequent moments of interaction between the Palestinian youth and foreigners. As I will show later on in this thesis, I recovered more data during my fieldwork to verify this statement.

For now, however, let us refocus on the concept of dehumanization, because as of yet I have not properly linked the, quite dramatic sounding, term dehumanization to my feelings of detachment and differentiation and before we directly link this perceived differentiation with such a dramatic concept as dehumanization, we need to understand exactly what this concept of dehumanization signifies. For this I turn to Nick Haslam's comprehensive article on the phenomenon of dehumanization, *Dehumanization: An Integrative Review.* (Haslam, 2006). In this Haslam extensively describes the concept of dehumanization, opting to approach the concept in a plural way as he made a distinction between two very different forms of dehumanization, one based on dehumanizing Uniquely Human characteristics (UH) and one based on dehumanizing Human Nature (HN). Haslam proceeds to describe Uniquely Human characteristics as focusing more on culturally learned aspects of being human like civility, morality, rationality and maturity while Human Nature focuses more on primordial traits of humanness like cognitive ability, agency, individuality and depth (Haslam, 2006: 257). The denial of these two forms of humanness subsequently leads to two very different forms of dehumanization, one of an animalistic origin, where the human is reduced to an irrational or childlike being without the cultural constraint normally found in humans, while the other form of dehumanization is mechanical in nature, reducing people to cold, rigid and passive beings.

While dehumanization of UH characteristics seems to connect most with the dehumanization Edward Said describes as he attacked the terrorist non-narrative being placed on Palestinians (reducing them of their rationality, making them more animalistic), it is the second form of dehumanization (dehumanizing HN) that seems to fit best with my own experiences that day in the Aida camp. To quote Haslam, 'When HN is denied to others, they should be seen as lacking in emotionality, warmth, cognitive openness, individual agency, and, because HN is essentialized... ...denying them individual agency

represents them as interchangeable and passive, their behavior caused rather than propelled by personal will. Because they are denied deep-seated characteristics, people denied HN should be represented in ways that emphasize relatively superficial attributes.'

<div align="right">(Haslam, 2006: 258)</div>

This approach to dehumanization, centering on how much control or agency an individual has in influencing his life and environment, is applicable to the narration of the conflict narratives. It reads as a perfect explanation of my own emotions that day in the Aida camp. The focus on, especially the passive, conflict narratives, which express victimization more than agency, are a logical cause for what Haslam defines as HN-dehumanization. Reading Haslam's definition it also becomes apparent that dehumanization is not necessarily as extreme as the name suggests. It does not directly signify a change in the image of those being dehumanized into something inhuman, instead it works more subtly. As in my own example, I continued to feel emotions towards the people in Aida camp, essentially positive emotions of sympathy, compassion and warmth. It is only in the lack of agency that a distinction is made. It can make them, in a way, childish in our eyes, as if they do not have the ability to take control of their lives.

§ 7.3 Reflections III

This very personal example of myself experiencing what appears to be a mild form of dehumanization towards the Palestinian residents of the Aida camp is also connected to the much, much larger orientalistic discourse, the (western) construction of knowledge which dominates the Other, specifically the Islamic world[11]. The existence of an orientalistic discourse is established and has been described in detail by Edward Said. His general critique on this discourse, that it denies the Other's voice, fits in with the concept of denying the Other individual agency, as per Haslams' definition of dehumanization.

It is hard not to see the connection between Haslam's description of dehumanization and Edward Said's question if it is possible to 'survive the consequences humanly' when we divide men into "us" (Westerners) and "they" (Orientals) (Said, 1978: 45). Said also points toward dehumanization, though he does not literally use the term, as he strongly questions the humanity of differentiating between people. As I wrote in chapter two, William Sax opposed this part of *Orientalism*, claiming that we should not be afraid to recognize that there are people who are different and that differentiation does not necessarily mean dehumanization. I agree. But my experiences in Aida camp showed me that if this differentiation is based on abilities like individual agency (claiming our agency differentiate

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[11] though I hesitate to use this moniker as a definition of the Other because it suggests a much more homogeneous construction than there really is. Palestine most definitely falls, for most people in the west, in the category of the Islamic world, yet the country also contains a Christian minority which cannot be ignored (and indeed most of my informants were Christian)

us from *them* who have none), the differentiation becomes much more questionable and in fact risks entering the realm of dehumanization.

Now, this chapter still hinges on what is essentially one strongly subjective personal experience, though I have showed a theoretical context that substantiates my own experience. What is basically stated in this chapter is that my data showed me that while visiting a place for a very short amount of time, the Palestinians there narrated almost purely conflict related stories. As these conflict narratives tend to focus more on passive concepts like suffering and victimization, they may be harmful to the appreciation of foreigners concerning the individual agency of the Palestinians. As in my case, it led to emotions of differentiation and detachment vis-à-vis the Palestinians in the camp, emotions that are altogether undesirable when attempting to connect with, and understand them. In my final chapter, *Beyond the Wall*, I will explore further these moments where interaction between Palestinians and foreigners is based on such short periods. But in the following chapter I will first refocus on the youth from the Arab Education Institute in Bethlehem. As I said in this chapter, the experience at Aida camp contrasts strongly with my experiences in Bethlehem. In the following chapter I will explore this contrast. The way the youth in Bethlehem narrated their stories to me went beyond what I called conflict-narratives and touched on subjects which were sometimes far removed from the realities of the conflict.

VIII.

The Active Narrative

§ 8.1 The case of the salsa dancing Palestinian

Early May, during one of my last weeks in Bethlehem I had arranged an interview with Razan, one of the female university students I had befriended at the AEI. Because of her open character and strong skills with the English language she had become on of my better contacts in Bethlehem and she had already helped me out several times with my research and documentary project, but I had never formally interviewed her and wanted to do this before my departure. So on a sunny afternoon we sat out in front of the AEI to conduct an interview, with my camera present. One of the first questions I asked her was a question I had asked most of the youth already, 'how would you describe life in Bethlehem?". People like Fadi, Jessica (another student from one of the AEI groups), Muhammed (the Muslim student who also participated in my film), Nicholas (who joined me at the walk beside the wall) and Anton had already mentioned the phrase, 'we are living in a prison' to me and I had noted this as an interesting piece of information in that the youth so often and quickly brought up this prison-metaphor. By asking the question to Razan I more or less wanted to confirm my suspicions that this prison-metaphor was the first description they gave of their lives in Bethlehem to foreigners. Yet Razan reacted differently. 'I can't lie to you, I like it here'. Razan then proceed to tell me about the good things in her life. She felt happy to live in such a holy place as Bethlehem for example. She also was glad that she had a good family, good friends, the means to go to university, and the chance to go to salsa dancing. As it turned out, Razan had recently started to follow salsa dance classes with her friends and was enjoying it immensely. It broke a boring routine she described and gave her a chance to do something new and fun. Now the fact that Razan apparently enjoyed her life in Bethlehem was, of itself, not so shocking or interesting, but what *did* interest me was that she chose to communicate her happiness to me, especially since I was filming her and it was clear to her that her stories might be heard by many foreigners who would potentially watch my film. Where most of the youth I had talked with had often focused on conflict narratives, especially when being filmed, Razan wanted to focus on the aspects of her life that did not involve this conflict and may even express an honest feeling of happiness.

Our interview that day really resonated with me and destroyed my hypothesis that the Palestinian youth would only communicate conflict narratives when talking with foreigners. Razan did not communicate these conflict narratives to me, at least not primarily. She instead communicated what I have come to define as an *active narrative*, stories of her own life which were not directly influenced by suffering our degrading outside narratives (which labeled her with the moniker of terrorist or extremist).

§ 8.2 A humanizing narrative

Though Razan's stories can also be defined as being re-active, in that she wanted to relate different stories than what she believed was related most often (stories of suffering and conflict), her stories were internally re-active and not externally. She might have reacted, but she reacted to narratives inside of the Palestinian sphere, not narratives that existed outside of that sphere. Looking back on my interactions with her during my time in Bethlehem I recognize this attitude in most of our conversations. For instance, she would talk about her studies, her hobbies (like salsa dancing), dreams and thoughts not primarily focused on the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Though my interview with Razan on that sunny afternoon is to me a telling and unique example of this avoidance of communicating conflict narratives, she was not the only one who used this active narrative in my presence. Most of my closest friends in Bethlehem have, on some level, expressed an active narrative, and I believe that this provided them with a humanity which I did not find, for instance, during my short visits to the Aida refugee camp, further suggesting that maybe the length of the interaction between Palestinians and foreigners plays a large role in defining their narration.

The difficult part of this is that most of this active narrative is communicated in such a casual setting that it is easy to overlook. The way Anton consulted me about his own masters-research hardly seemed like relevant data at that time, yet when I look back, the fact that Anton struggled with his studies so similarly as I myself struggled at times provided us with a connection. When I was smoking water pipe with Anton, Fadi and one of their friends, and we jokingly began to imitate Michael Jackson dance moves, it did not seem relevant data, yet the joy and laughs that resulted from that evening bonded me with them. When Fadi and I walked together in the evening, on our way to a basketball game he had to participate in, and he expressed his nervousness about the upcoming game, I could feel his nervousness also, and related to it. Even more, when I later showed my documentary, which contained this scene of Fadi and me walking towards his game, to a Dutch friend, who himself had been an active basketball player, back in Holland I remember him saying that he could identity so much with Fadi. Fadi connected, through this scene, so much with my Dutch friend that he later handed me an old basketball shirt which I had to give to Fadi on my return to Bethlehem a few months later. Clearly, all these casual, almost random conversations and experiences with the AEI youth had moved me, and moved those who witnessed them.

§ 8.3 The subjective researcher

As an anthropologist you get to spend plenty of time with your research subjects, often away from formalities and a formal atmosphere. This can create strong bonds between yourself and your subjects which extend far beyond a relationship between researcher and subject. I had become friends with many of my subjects and felt, and still feel, a desire to

remain in touch, even after my departure from Bethlehem. This is, of course, a well known phenomenon in anthropology, and can be one of the primary strengths of our so-called qualitative methodology. However, often it is considered a means to an end, in that our strong bonds with our subjects can provide us with data which otherwise would have eluded us. The case I want to make in describing this active narrative is that those strong bonds, which originate in casual, informal and friendly interactions with our subjects, are not necessarily a means to an end, but valuable data in and of itself. For these stories, these narratives communicated to me a sense of humanity that is not necessarily contained the conflict narratives I described earlier, in fact, as my experiences at the Aida camp demonstrate, those conflict narratives can indeed hinder the perception of the humanity of the subjects.

Here, then, the subjectivity I described in my foreword and methodology fully comes into play. As I had put myself in the position of the 'outside world', I defined myself as a research instrument inside my own research. This provided me with the opportunity to analyze my own perceptions and feelings while being subjected to a constant interaction with the Palestinian youth. Now, as I look back on this experience from the comforts of my home and months of reflection, reading my own diary entries, I recognize how this approach indeed delivered me interesting data. As I compare the emotions I wrote down in my diary after my experiences in Aida camp with the emotions I expressed on my last night in Bethlehem (an emotional night where I had trouble saying goodbye to all my friends) I recognize the significant differences in how I related to my subjects, which guided me in making sense of my research data. This, in and of itself, does not amount to strong empirical evidence of the fact that the communication of conflict narratives damages the relationship between Palestinians and foreigners, but it does suggest that not all the stories are being told when focused purely on those conflict narratives.

§ 8.4 Reflections IV

This active narrative completes the picture of the Palestinian narratives, as I categorized them. The stories told through this narrative proved to me, not so much that there was more to Palestinian life than the conflict (which would hardly be a startling realization), but that there were Palestinians who, when sufficiently comfortable in their relationship with the foreigner, were willing to communicate stories which did not focus on the conflict. Thus, I cannot say that Palestinians only narrated stories of conflict to me. The active narrative showed a plurality in their narration, as different people narrated different stories, not all of them related to the conflict. It is a strong contradiction to what for example Bernard Lewis describes in his article *The Roots of Muslim Rage,* painting a picture of singularity in the opinions and thoughts of the Other, perhaps best illustrated by his approach to define those people who live in the Islamic world by a singular moniker, *the Muslim.* 'The Muslim has

suffered successive stages of defeat' (Lewis, 1990) he claims at one point. Apparently there exists something as distinct as *the* Muslim and apparently all of those who are placed under this moniker have suffered defeat. Lewis then proceeds to link very individual concepts like emotions of rage to this meta-moniker of *the Muslim*. As my empirical data shows us that it is not even possible to link one singular emotion to one Palestinian, it baffles me that someone claims that one such emotion can be linked to millions of people living across half a continent. I believe the three narratives I described in this thesis show clear evidence that a focus on the viewpoint of the Other prevents us from making these preposterous claims that the Other can be defined as a single entity.

The question that remains is how we should approach and understand these three narratives. If my empirical evidence had been limited to my three month stay in Bethlehem in the spring of 2007, I would conclude that two of those three narratives were dominant in the communications between myself and the Palestinian youth but that the third, active, narrative floats to the surface when more time is spent with the youth. I would then also conclude that the Palestinians were also enthusiastic about narrating their non-conflict related stories to foreigners once they felt those foreigners understood the basics of the situation in Palestine (that Palestinians are suffering and are not primarily focused on violent confrontations). Thus I would think that stories like Razan told me about her salsa dancing were incredibly valuable to us as foreigners to listen to, and that Palestinians would appreciate it if foreigners, when documenting their interactions with the Palestinians, would focus on all three narratives and not just the stories about the conflict.

However, my empirical data contains more than my three month visit to Bethlehem, because as I stated earlier, I returned to Bethlehem in December 2007 to present my documentary to the people there. Because of the reactions on my film in Bethlehem I realized that my aforementioned conclusions were incomplete and that the subject of communication between Palestinians and foreigners is more complex. In the next chapter I focus on my return visit to Bethlehem and the way the presentation of my documentary became a valuable book-end to my research.

IX.

<u>Returning to Bethlehem</u>

§ 9.1 The case of the busted bubble

On the 21st of December 2007, I was back in Bethlehem to attend the premiere of my documentary *Beyond the Wall* in front of a large Palestinian audience. After completing my fieldwork I focused primarily on editing and producing the 85 minute long documentary about the lives of the Palestinian youth in Bethlehem. Early November 2007 I wrapped up the final process of editing and fine-tuning and proceeded to premiere the film on the 28th of November in front of a Dutch audience in Utrecht. Roughly 150 people, mostly students of anthropology, attended the premiere at the Utrecht University. The response I received both on the evening itself and in talkbacks later on had been very positive. People appeared genuinely moved by certain scenes and seemed to relate strongly to the main characters from the film. The goal of my film, to project an interesting view of Palestinian youth that would be more realistic and less build upon stereotypes (i.e. by focusing purely on conflict narratives), seemed to connect with the Dutch audience. The success of this premiere had boosted my confidence and enthusiasm about the film immensely and with much anticipation I then prepared for my return to Bethlehem (which I had promised to my friends there) to be present at my own premiere.

I arrived exactly one week earlier and spend the first few days embracing old friends and catching up on what was happening in Bethlehem currently. I felt a genuine enthusiasm from everyone there and I couldn't wait to show the film to my friends. As the date of my premiere coincided with Christmas festivities organized by the AEI they were expecting a large turnout on the 21st of December, so everything was in order for a successful showing of my film. And indeed, on the evening of the premiere it all came together. The AEI had arranged a viewing in a large hall along the central square, just meters away from the famous Nativity church. And people came... and kept on coming. When the film finally started to play over 250 people were present, including the mayor of Bethlehem and his wife, sitting front-row. I remembered joking to myself that my premiere attracted almost three hundred people while Jesus' birth near this place attracted only three (wise as those men may have been). Now that was a nice anecdote!

The premiere started off well enough. Many of my friends had come to watch; Anton, Fadi, Razan and her friends, Nicholas, Muhammed, Taha, Manar, Milad, Deema, Jessica and the AEI staff, and I was very keen on getting their reaction. So the film started and scene by scene it played out. I sat down among the audience, trying to calm my trembling body as the nervousness increased. 'Would they agree with my film?' I kept asking myself. As it turned out, their answer was not what I was hoping for…

I remember I sat beside a Palestinian woman during the viewing who I vaguely knew from the AEI woman's group. She occasionally commented to me during the viewing. At first she was acknowledging in her remarks. As the film showed the proceedings at a Israeli mobile checkpoint she nodded to me and said, 'This is our daily suffering'. But slowly the mood changed. I felt the whole room becoming more and more restless as the film went on and already I could sense that scenes of Fadi's basketball playing and Razan's salsa dancing got some questionable feedback from the audience. During the final chapters of the film the woman beside me commented again, 'It is a good film, but it didn't show enough suffering', 'We suffer every day'. And these comments turned out to be the first of many.

Most of my friends enjoyed the film and especially Fadi and Razan were very positive afterwards but there were also reservations among my friends. Milad and Manar felt embarrassed by the scenes in which they appeared (as they walked along the wall while I filmed them). They felt their informal attitude was wrong and they felt they appeared weak to the audience. In general they believed that the appearance of many of the youth was too casual, informal and even humorous in the film. When I walked around the audience during a dinner event after the premiere I was called on by a number of other people to listen to them and more and more I began to hear criticisms about my film. One woman said for instance, 'I do not agree with this film… …this film does not show reality'. She was especially offended by the character of Razan and her nonchalant conversations in which she claimed to enjoy her life in Bethlehem.

Afterwards Toine van Teeffelen, the Dutch anthropologist who lived in Bethlehem, went on to record comments from as many people as possible about the film and he later emailed those comments to me. Some comments illustrate further the general reception of my film in Bethlehem:

'The film does not serve the Palestinian cause, because what is produced is not our reality'
'People didn't like the scene that showed Salsa dancing'
'The filmmaker gave too many positive pictures of the situation'
'Razan did not reflect the suffering of the Palestinian girls'
'It wasn't realistic'
The filmmaker showed only minor interest in the Palestinian suffering'
'I am afraid that the film will have negative impact if it would be shown abroad'
'There was too much joking and mocking'

This is a small sample out of ten pages of mostly negative comments given by peoples ranging from high school students, university students to adults. As I said, some people seemed to appreciate the film as for example Razan told me this was the first film that showed (her) reality, which her father agreed with, but the general consensus seemed to be

that I had failed to produce a product along the lines of the wishes of the Palestinians in Bethlehem. As such, indeed, I saw a bubble burst.

§ 9.2 The gap

What struck me most about the responses too my film was how the scenes which had the most positive response in Holland (Razan's scenes especially) seemed to create the most negative response in front of a Palestinian audience. Though I had expected a varied response to my film and suspected that not everybody in Bethlehem would agree with my approach, I did not expect this sharp contrast with the reception in Holland. Clearly there was a large gap between what the Dutch audience appreciated to see and what the Palestinians wanted to show. I wanted to give room for a genuine Palestinian voice with my film, but though the film contained almost exclusively Palestinian voices, most of the Palestinians who watched the film, *again*, did not feel their voice was being transmitted through the film.

Furthermore, the scenes which received such mixed responses, when placed in the framework of this thesis, fit within that third narrative category, the Active Narrative as they were all scenes which did not focus on the conflict as much as on daily proceedings and normal life experiences. As I noticed during my fieldwork and in the analyses of its data, this active narrative was not the primary mode of communication between the Palestinians and me, especially when the camera was turned on or the mood was otherwise more serious and formal in nature. Instead, the conflict narratives, both passive and re-active, seemed to dominate.

And now, after analyzing the reception of my film it appears as if the majority of the Palestinians did not appreciate my focus on this active narrative. Part of this criticism may have been directed at the relative progressive, open, and modern appearance of characters like Razan, which might not have been appreciated by more conservative or traditional people. However, when I read through the ten pages of comments I received from Toine it seemed that the main criticism directed at my film was that it did not focus enough on the suffering of the Palestinians, or to put it in relation to my thesis, did not focus enough on conflict narratives.

§ 9.3 Reflections V

Though this chapter shows data invaluable to the understanding on Palestinian narration, it also contains the risk of delving too deep into opinions and judgment because it becomes clear that my own ideas about how to best channel the Palestinian narratives (focusing on all three narratives instead of only the conflict narratives) are not agreed on by many Palestinians in Bethlehem. It is tempting then to ponder on who is right, what is the right way to present these narratives, what is the right way for Palestinians to communicate their

narratives? This is not a question which can be answered by a Dutch researcher, nor should I desire to answer this question in this thesis. Instead we need to reflect on all this data and understand how plural these narratives are, how different the opinions of individual Palestinians are. Then again the risk arises that this data amounts to nothing as we could say that Palestinians narrate many different stories in many different ways and no clear truth can be distilled from it, other than that their narration is plural. Yet, my data does substantiate the fact that conflict narratives are dominant over non-conflict narratives. Thus, factors outside of their own control (conflict and outside opinions) shape a lot of the Palestinian narration.

One chapter remains, as there is one final piece of empirical data which I wish to present. As we now understand the dominance of conflict narratives, recognize the active narrative which lies beyond them and recognize that this active narrative is not fully used in the communications with foreigners (and in fact appears to be an unpopular form of narration for many Palestinians when interacting with a foreign audience) we are ultimately left with the question why this active narrative is not used overtly in (formal) communications between Palestinians and foreigners. The next, and final, chapter of this thesis tackles this question.

X.

<u>Beyond the Wall</u>

§ 10.1 The Case of the 3 hour visit

In the first week of May 2007 the AEI received a visit from a group of about twenty Dutch students who had undertaken a small tour through Israel and the Occupied Territories. Their visit to the Occupied Territories was, however, short, and Bethlehem was the only significant destination they visited. Furthermore the group only visited Bethlehem for one afternoon and did not even spent one night there. Still, they had been in contact with the AEI and had organized an event where they would meet the youth from the AEI for a 'meet & greet' of sorts. The event lasted for just three hours, so there wasn't much time. Already before the event did I notice hints of frustration and disappointment with the Palestinian youth about the shortness of the visit, especially since the Dutch group did stay for a whole week in Israel. Though I sympathized with the Palestinian youth, the event did prove to be very interesting to me, precisely because of its short duration. Because of the fact that the Palestinian youth was very well aware of the short duration of the visit of the Dutch I was curious about how they would behave and interact with them; what would be most important to them to communicate to the Dutch youth? An interesting parallel began to form in my mind, comparing the visit of the Dutch youth to my own short visits to Aida camp. How did these two compare?

Most interesting for me was the second part of the visit. After first introducing everybody to each other and hearing the Palestinians tell about the dire situation in Palestine, indeed opting to communicate the conflict narratives, and playing some funny name-games the group was divided into smaller groups of five Palestinians and five Dutch to talk with each other on a more personal level. I was asked to host one of those groups and guide the conversations. Because I had just finished presenting a series of workshops/discussions about the subject of love to the Palestinian youth, I proposed to the Dutch people to open a conversation on this subject. In my mind that subject would perhaps create a livelier conversation between the Dutch and the Palestinians, since it did not focus on the well-known conflict issues. In a way this idea of me to focus on love is comparable to my focus on the active narrative in my own documentary. And where the documentary had indeed been criticized by many Palestinians for this approach, my suggestion to focus on the subject of love also didn't work very well.

The first few questions were posed by the Dutch towards the Palestinians and focused on subjects like love, school, work etc. The Palestinians answered well enough and the Dutch seemed very interested, but after a few questions the Palestinian youth grew agitated and when they were asked to ask questions to the Dutch the subject quickly changed tracks and before I knew it we were talking about the conflict again. The

Palestinian youth wanted to know what the Dutch thought about it, and wanted to make sure that they understood that Palestinians were suffering and were not terrorists per se.

So, this case once again showed how conflict narratives seem to dominate in communications between Palestinians and foreigners. In this case the example was even more vivid because the communications had to take place in just a few hours (the actual group discussion only lasted half an hour). There seemed to be no time to focus on ordinary and trivial subjects, the important subject of the conflict needed to be tackled first.

§ 10.2 The absence of an active narrative

This last case is the final one I present in this thesis. It shows a further affirmation of what my experiences with my documentary and its showings already suggested; that the Palestinian youth primarily focus, in their communications with foreigners, on conflict narratives, stories which relate suffering or resistance. When the Dutch students visited the AEI in May I recognized the way they communicated with the Palestinians, because I had had similar communications with the Palestinians in the Aida camp when I visited them for a day. It appeared as if these short moments of interaction conflict was the only subject of narration.

The active narrative which I described in chapter 8 is then, in fact, not a substantial type of narrative when we want to describe the way Palestinian youth narrates to the outside world, as its content (stories not relating to the conflict) is seldom brought up in formal communications. When it *was* communicated to me it was often communicated in informal settings (Razan's interview being one of the few exceptions), more subconsciously, as I related to the Palestinian youth at those moments as a friend, not a researcher or a filmmaker, and the youth may not have realized their interactions with me would resonate beyond their moment. Indeed, Milad complained to me that he had not expected that the scenes from my documentary which featured him would actually be used by me in the film as he felt he was just informally conversing with me[12].

Thus, it is confirmed once more that the active narrative[13] is largely absent from Palestinian narration to foreigners. And though the term *active narrative*, as I use it, needs to be understood more as a moniker than a literal description, it does reconnect with the writings of Aihwa Ong (2002) as brought up at the start of the thesis. For if I describe the way Palestinians communicate to foreigners as being based largely on narratives that either portray the Palestinians as victims, or are fully focused on reacting to dominant external narratives, than my findings suggest less a form of agency on the part of the Palestinians than Ong found in her Chinese subjects. Based on my data I wouldn't say that these external

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[12] It needs to be understood that I was not vague and my method was one of Informed Consent, as I clearly stated that I would film scenes for use in the film.

[13] Referring to my own definition of an active narrative: stories which focus on daily life and do not focus primarily on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

narratives silence the Palestinian youth and that they are fully denied a permission to narrate, but their communications are often dictated by external factors, linked to them, maybe even dependent on them. Though this is also apparent in the description Ong gives of her Chinese subjects, the way these Chinese seem to tactically manipulate the Orientalist discourse to play it to their advantage seems less applicable to the Palestinian youth. Because the youth is truly part of an occupied people, living in an occupied territory and their lives controlled by external forces, the freedom they have to form their own personal narratives is limited.

§ 10.3 Getting distance again

Two things can therefore be said about the way the Palestinian youth in Bethlehem communicated to me. First of all, their communication focused primarily on conflict subjects, or narratives. Only in informal situations, when sufficient rapport had been constructed between me and them did they focus on stories and experiences not directly related to the conflict. In a way this was an opposite outcome compared to my expectations, as I expected the youth to only start talking about the serious, and often painful, subject of the conflict after they had come to trust me. As it turned out, it was more a case of the opposite, as the youth would only talk about subjects *not* related to the conflict when they started to trust me.

Secondly, the stories told to me by the youth had strong connections to outside narratives or otherwise external influences. Their stories of imprisonment and suffering related to the Israeli occupation of their own land, while their stories of non-violent resistance connected to external narratives which claimed knowledge and truth over the Palestinians themselves. Especially this re-active narrative relates to Foucault's concept of discourse, of dominance through knowledge, and thus it also echoes strongly Edward Said's writings concerning Orientalism. It affirms Said in his argument, not so much that a permission to narrate is denied to the Palestinians, but that an external discourse dominates them, and thus in a way controls them (through forcing the Palestinians to, first of all, react to this dominant discourse, before they can start to narrate from their own free will and choice).

From these findings I deducted that a third, active, narrative was often ignored in the communications between the Palestinian youth and myself. Even more, the reactions to my documentary showed me that a large part of the Palestinian people in Bethlehem (including many of the youth I worked with) did not feel that this active narrative was appropriate for usage in communication between themselves and foreigners. The trivial, informal, even mundane subjects expressed through the active narrative, to them, felt inappropriate and unnecessary in their communications with foreigners. In their mind it trivialized their predicament and gave the idea that life in Palestine was not so bad, which

contradicted what they thought they needed to communicate abroad; that life in Palestine was far from good.

As brought up earlier, it is here that a gap between the Palestinian youth and myself has become clear to me. As I had entitled me during this research with a subjective role, in part as a director of the documentary *Beyond the Wall*, I had permitted myself to express an opinion about the situation in Palestinian, and more specifically the problems surrounding their communication with foreigners. Thus, more than just observing the situation, I voiced an opinion and judgment about the situation. Especially my documentary showed me to be critical of the strong focus on conflict subjects and also showed my desire to focus on what I have named an active narrative. This opinion came forth out of my field experiences in which I noticed how this active narrative helped me immensely in identifying with the Palestinian youth. In comparing this to the detached feeling I received from my visits to the Aida refugee camp, where this active narrative did not surface so much in my communications with the people there, I felt a stronger focus on every day, trivial and, in the context of the conflict, outright mundane stories was necessary. As said earlier however, a majority of the Palestinians resisted my approach and criticizing me on the choices I had made. Reflecting on this experience I urge myself all the more to now, at the end of the road, not follow this subjective path to a conclusion but again find a certain distance to reflect properly on my empirical data.

§ 10.4 towards a re-humanization

Looking back on this scientific journey I feel the combination of the perspective of Edward Said and Anthropologists like William Sax and Aihwa Ong has proved adept in making sense of the data I gathered in Palestine. With Edward Said I would agree in that the Palestinians, as perfect Oriental subjects, live lives which are severely influenced by outside forces, be they physical or non-physical in nature and that forces beyond their own control dictate their lives. The idea that a western discourse dominates the Orient seems perfectly applicable to the situation in Palestine. However, the idea that the Palestinians are completely silenced by this dominance of a western discourse feels either as too strong a statement, or an oversimplified view of the situation in the Palestinian territories.

Here I indeed turn to fellow anthropologists who have actively sought out the Other subject (in my case the Palestinian youth in Bethlehem) and join those anthropologists in stating that these Others are far from passive subjects. Toine van Teeffelen (van Teeffelen, 2004) remains an interesting author herein as his attempts to document and communicate the lives of the Palestinians to an international audience follow my own conclusions; that the voices of the Palestinians need to be heard, that they need to tell their stories themselves. His suggestion that Palestinian youth should actively keep diaries and present these to

foreign audiences connects nicely with my own documentary project. He brings focus in his article to the Palestinian voices and more specifically, to their *personal* voices. When these voices are channeled beyond the Palestinian borders they, 'create alliances across situations and locations rather than hierarchies and exclusions' (van Teeffelen, 2004).

I am reminded of the working title of my documentary, *Cracks in the Wall*. This title was a reference to the opening and closing shots of the film, which are still present in the final product: the slow zooming into a small crack in the Israeli wall, vaguely seeing some light coming through the crack. For me that small crack still perfectly symbolizes the situation in Palestine. The wall, which might be seen as the ultimate visual expression of the Israeli occupation, so fully cuts the Palestinian people off from life beyond it, that it is nearly impossible for them to adequately communicate with the 'other side'. The moments they do break through the wall and communicate with the 'other side', it resembles looking through a crack; just a tiny window is open and thus the viewpoint is extremely restricted. Likewise, in the spare moments when the youth can actually communicate with the people beyond their wall, they have a very limited opportunity to voice their stories. Understandably, the first thing they wish to voice, when presented with such a tiny window, or crack, is that which impacts their lives most strongly: the Israeli occupation and the related Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Herein then, lies the answer to the question why the Palestinians communicate so often in conflict narratives. I can imagine that when you have so little time to communicate with the 'other side', you do not wish to talk about hobbies, jokes or the so-called *birds and bees*. Thus, I can also understand the reservations which were directed at my film, because what good would it do to take this rare opportunity of communication with a western audience and use it to focus on subjects like salsa dancing, humorous moments, basketball games etcetera?

Thus, to restate my findings: it is not so much important in this thesis to find out what the right way of interaction between Palestinians and foreigners is. In that sense, what started off my whole research project, Joris Luyendijk's book *Het zijn net mensen* (Luyendijk, 2006) has grown less important at the end of the journey. He addressed the issue that so little was heard of the Palestinian voices, but his book proceeded to focus on the problems inside the western media-apparatus. His book pushed towards solutions, and indeed much critical reaction to his book focused on solutions to the problem. My own documentary in a way was my own attempt at solving the problem, but through observing the decidedly mixed reactions to my attempt I realize the focus in this thesis should not be on the so-called solution, it should focus on discussion. And then maybe the discussion turns out to be the solution. The very fact that a debate exists *beyond the wall*, that different opinions *and* different narratives exist, is an important finding, for it shows us the level of agency that

exists within the Palestinian community. As I understood through e-mail correspondence after my last visit to Bethlehem, the youth kept on discussing my attempt at a documentary long after I had left, and opinions differ about what worked, what did not work and what should have been done, or can be done in future projects. Even more, I discovered that both Taha and Muhammed have shown strong interest to start learning to make movies, and wish to produce documentaries about their lives themselves.

Though the Palestinian youth I researched, did not seem as much in control of their environment as might be wished for, they did appear far more active, plural and even divisive than the passive image of the Other as presented by influential authors like Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington and unwillingly even by Edward Said. In that sense the extremely divisive reactions to my film might be seen as a perfect example of the diversity, and in a sense a humanity of the Palestinians through appreciating their multiple and sometimes conflicting voices. If we observe the reception of the film we could indeed be pushing towards a re-humanization of the Palestinian people, not so much through my attempt to bring to the front this active narrative, but through the reactions to my film, through exposing the different voices of the Palestinian youth and showing them to be not just silent victims of a dominant western discourse, passive sufferers of a foreign occupation, or people whose only act of action is re-action. As these images of the Palestinians can *de*-humanize them in the eyes of foreigners, so the portrayal of Palestinians as worried individuals who constantly ponder, discuss, and reflect on the problems they face in their caged-in environment can in fact *re*-humanize them in the eyes of foreigners.

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http://www.maannews.net/en/

Haaretz Daily Newspaper Israel

http://www.maannews.net/en/

Palestinian Media Watch

http://www.pmw.org.il/

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http://www.imemc.org/