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To Be Young in Palestine

Pénélope Larzillière

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To Be Young in Palestine

Pénélope Larzillière

Translation by William Snow of the book:

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Introduction

Who could imagine the youth of Ramallah celebrating Valentine's Day or taking an interest in the latest episode of a Lebanese reality TV show? And yet...! Palestinian society has without doubt been constructed by and around its conflict with Israel; but the lives of young Palestinians are not limited to the strategies of political organisations or power struggles among their leaders. They are also made up of many other facets for which that conflict is merely the context. For those young Palestinians of today, history involves the two Intifadas and dashed national hopes, as well as personal projects aborted by the deteriorating economic situation and the increase in blockades and curfews. How do you get through all the interactions with Israeli soldiers which are part of everyday life? Some act proud and take risks, like the student who went to Bir Zeit University to take his exams. At the entrance there were twenty other students whose way was being blocked by a Jeep full of Israeli soldiers. Their identity cards had been confiscated and they were waiting under the hot sun. The clock was ticking and their exams had already started. Finally he stepped forward, walked towards the Israeli soldiers and said: "Go ahead and shoot if you want to, but I'm going to take my exams", turned his back to them and walked into the building. "No Fear!" cried the other students who remained outside.

The story of Palestinian youth is about exams failed from their inability to concentrate, from fear of being fired at and bombed, from the ambulances shuttling back and forth, from days spent playing chess while stuck at home because of the curfew, from family orange orchards and olive groves ripped apart by bulldozers, from families camping out on the ruins

of their houses.

It is clear to them that they have been deserted by the Westerners, and also by the Arab countries; so they have lost interest in diplomatic initiatives. The desire for revenge towards Israel has taken a firm hold, like the support for suicide attacks, also associated with a feeling of being at a dead end and of a fruitless search for leaders and strategies. The cheers at the arrival of the Palestinian Authority have been replaced by bitterness for what it has become. For some, taking up arms is the solution that brings with it the social status of being a local boss. Some claim to be taking the conflict into the heart of Israel and blow themselves up amongst Israeli civilians. Running around in search of odd jobs to finance their families or studies is the priority for most people. For a growing number of them, the solution lies in exile – a temporary one they hope, but often guilt-inducing because it is seen as dissociating oneself from the Palestinian people in the Territories. But leaving is perceived as the only way to secure a future and plan one's life – independent of whether or not the blockades are lifted, of the possibility of an Israeli incursion, of the latest bombings or reprisals. It's like the son of refugees who spoke in front of his father about returning to his native village, and later was concerned about whether or not his girlfriend would go to the United States with him.

Young Palestinians spend hours "chatting" on the Internet so that the world, which they think suffers from blindness, will finally understand the Palestinian situation – as well as for cruising. They get together with friends for an evening of hookah-smoking, to watch football games and sexy Western TV shows. A group of friends is ideal to hang out with, but they never discuss family affairs together. Fiancés talk discreetly in cafés. Post-Oslo stability (1993) enabled more young women to study and work. Some have become engineers and computer programmers, while continuing to be active in Hamas women's groups. But many can no longer get to their jobs; and it is not an easy thing for a woman to sleep away from home, if a check-point is suddenly closed. Religion can be a lifestyle and a cause for hope, an ideological arsenal and sometimes even a final explanation, i.e. they must not be good enough Muslims if they are still under occupation.

Lives with multiple facets are not specific to Palestinians, but that plurality is often erased when talking about their society. These facets have a definite influence on people's involvement. Young Palestinians are more inclined to judge the situation based on whether or

not the tanks have retreated from their doorstep – or if the checkpoint is open so they can get to their university or their job – than to follow the flurry of diplomatic activity. This dimension should be taken into account in trying to understand when they mobilize.

The First Intifada (1987/1993) was a sufficiently powerful and vivid historic event to turn the youth involved into a “generational group”¹ with specific references that were different from other generations. In fact the uprising gave them visibility, and they acquired their identity through being the driving force behind this First Intifada. The effect of this was the creation of a new heroic figure in society, that of the *shabab* (youth), which unseated the *fedayin*.² When this historic moment was over, part of what these young people had derived from highlighting their involvement vanished. There was a different pattern in the Second – or *Al-Aqsa* – Intifada, where the “heroic” figure for the Palestinians was that of the *shahid* (martyr). It mainly involved young people, while not having a pronounced generational aspect per se. Nevertheless, this group of “young people” remained a coherent entity. But young women were largely absent from this process. Furthermore, only a minority of them had any real time for themselves before marriage. So their experience as young women was closer to that of Palestinian women in general than to that of the young men. Gender supplanted generation.

Can any guidelines be drawn from the patchwork of more or less contradictory references and practices that has just been briefly described? In fact, there is one main line of tension running through the experience of Palestinian youth, which is marked by the national question on the one hand and by private goals on the other.

How can a young person build his identity in the context of a national struggle? There are a number of different paths to take. But it is always the meaning given to the struggle, rather than the struggle itself, which has the greatest effect on the individual. During the First Intifada it was associated with the hope of soon creating a State. The possibility of having a

¹ Karl Mannheim, *Le problème des générations* (1928), Paris, Nathan, 1990, p 59.

² A combatant or partisan willing to sacrifice himself for the cause.

Regarding the transcription of Arabic terms, we have chosen above all to make the words easy to read. English terms have been used wherever possible, even if they are linguistically faulty with regard to the Arabic. For the rest, a highly simplified transcription was used where neither emphatics nor long vowels are indicated, the ‘ayn is shown with an apostrophe, plurals have been anglicised. My apologies to the Arabic scholars for these approximations!

personal life was not inconsistent with this idea. On the contrary, the young people's massive involvement in the fight for independence was also a way of ensuring their own future and, in the short term, of negotiating their place in society in the name of their legitimacy as 'heroes of the national struggle.' But the creation of the Palestinian Authority did not live up to their expectations. It brought neither an end to the occupation nor democracy. This period ended in a retreat by default into the private sphere for most young Palestinians. The potential for linking the two spheres – involvement in the struggle and personal fulfilment – was drastically disrupted by the gradual rise of scepticism about being able to achieve their goal of nationhood. Associated with failure and death, in both the short and long term, that goal was no longer conceivable within the lifespan of a young person.

This situation led Palestinian youth to live in a state of extreme tension during the Second Intifada, between their aspirations to build their own identities and their support for the national cause. Their experience was characterized at the time by a tendency to dissociate their field of reference – between national struggle and the private sphere. The phenomenon gradually worsened as the Palestinian Authority was being established, and reached a peak during the *Al-Aqsa* Intifada:

“In 1987 there was the Intifada, and we were full of ambition. People were fighting to obtain something and we had hope. Then Oslo came along and destroyed our hopes and ambitions. People have felt depressed for a long time. And now they have renewed hope in the Intifada, but we are really losing (...) My ambition is to feel safe above all else, to feel that I have a native country and that I am with my parents. My parents are in Bethlehem now and I'm in Ramallah. I can't see them because of the borders separating us. And I have many other needs to take care of before considering my personal thoughts and dreams. That's what I meant when I told you that my own future cannot be separated from that of my country and my people.”³

Young Palestinians seem to be dragged down and absorbed by the “situation,” by this *wada'* which people are always talking about that is their main subject of conversation. Collectively, the idea of a national struggle, a movement and an ideology, have enabled them

³ Suha, 22, a biology student who was a volunteer worker in a first aid team during the demonstrations. Her father was a shop owner. Interview in Ramallah, October 2000.

to rebuild their everyday lives in a symbolic way and to give them meaning. The importance of the nationhood issue is not just about obtaining a territory and sovereignty for them. Palestinian nationalism also comes from an “epic” narrative which situates the Palestinian exiles in 1948 and 1967 and the current occupation within a collective destiny and history, while also challenging it. It is a central and obligatory reference in the identity-building process for young Palestinians. They use it to avoid assimilating the negativity from their humiliating interactions with the occupier, to escape from what the other’s annihilating looks “say” about them, and to see themselves as part of a collective destiny.

As the consequence of a conflict with the Israelis over land, the daily trials are no longer the source of complete alienation, but have taken on a significant historical and mythical dimension. They then become part of the collective lot of a victimized people who refuse to accept defeat. The situation has been transformed by envisioning a common fate; but do the individuals caught up in it have room in their lives to focus on concerns of a more personal nature? The subjective constructs of young Palestinians are under pressure, between the national struggle which they cannot afford to ignore without turning into the alienated image of themselves imposed by their occupiers, and their private concerns relating to their individual destinies. In this context, it is very hard for them to separate their national and collective destiny from their personal fate, the two being closely intertwined, yet increasingly irreconcilable.

The specificity of that experience does not reside in the “bleak future” of the national struggle; nor can it be reduced to the cycle well described by Albert Hirschman of investment in public action followed by a quest for “personal happiness,” after which the pendulum swings back to group involvement.⁴ The particular nature of the experience of Palestinian youth lies in the impossibility of eliminating the focus on the national struggle from their subjective constructs despite their disillusionment. Their belief in the possibility of success for the national struggle has diminished, but they cannot turn away from it. This inner division, or “split ego”⁵ characterizes young Palestinians nowadays. They circulate, build up and break down their experiences within the general framework of that division. They come up with

⁴ Albert O. Hirschman, *Bonheur privé et action publique*, Paris, Fayard, 1983.

⁵ Bernard Lahire, *L’homme pluriel : les ressorts de l’action*; Paris; Nathan; 1998, p 46.

various responses to the tension and the tendency towards dissociating their national identity and personal interests.

This study, the result of long field work (see details in the annex), focuses on the period from the end of the First Intifada (1993) to the Second Intifada (since 2000). That phase began with a process of mutual recognition between the Israelis and Palestinians and with numerous negotiations. On 13 September 1993, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin signed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (known as the Oslo Agreements⁶). The process was temporarily postponed due to the massacre of an extremist settler who fired on worshippers at the Hebron mosque. This was followed by a bombing campaign carried out by Hamas,⁷ and Israel decided to seal off the Territories. In May 1994 the agreement on the first stage of self-government for the occupied Territories was signed, entitled “Gaza-Jericho first.” After the transfer of power from the Israeli army, Yasser Arafat left Tunis for Gaza. The negotiations were again suspended in October 2004 and the Territories sealed off due to another Hamas operation. Violence broke out between Palestinian policemen and Islamist militants in November. The settlements continued despite the Oslo Agreement, prompting a clash between Palestinians and the Israeli army in December. In September 1995 the Taba Accord (Oslo II) was signed in Washington calling for a Palestinian Council, the redeployment of the Israeli army, the transfer of civil power to the Palestinian Authority and the extension of self-government to six large towns in the West Bank (Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Ramallah and Bethlehem) and partially to Hebron.⁸

⁶ Negotiated in secret in Oslo, they called for: the election of a Palestinian Council to oversee self-government during a 5-year transition period, the transfer of power over education, culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation and tourism, the creation of a police force, the redeployment of the Israeli army, a liaison committee for security and economic cooperation, and final negotiations on Jerusalem, refugees, security agreements, borders and relations with neighbouring countries, three years at the latest after the start of the transition period. Philippe Lemarchand, Lamia Radi, *Israël/Palestine demain*, Paris, Complexes, 1996, p 130 and 131.

⁷ The Islamic resistance movement, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, was created in 1988 after the First Intifada broke out, in particular to avoid the Muslim Brotherhood's being politically marginalized if it didn't participate in the uprising. It has a very large charity network.

⁸ The Oslo II Agreement first created three kinds of areas: the A Areas covering 80% of Gaza and 18.2% of the West Bank (the large towns) had been delegated to the Palestinian Authority, the B Areas (villages) were under Palestinian civil and Israeli security control (22 % of the West Bank / 68% of the population) and the C Areas were under complete Israeli control.

In November 1995, Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by an Israeli extremist, and Shimon Peres took over as Prime Minister. Yasser Arafat was elected president of the Authority in January 1996, and the Legislative Council won a Fatah majority (the main left-wing Palestinian forces and Hamas did not participate in the vote).

In May 1996, the Likud came back to power and Benjamin Netanyahu was elected Prime Minister. The Wye River memorandum, signed on 23 October 1998, called in particular for the transfer of 13% of the occupied Territories on the West Bank. In 1999, the Labour Party came back to power with Ehud Barak as Prime Minister. In September he signed the Sharm el-Sheikh memorandum redefining the interim agreement and called for a rapid start of the final negotiations.

In July 2000, the Israeli-Palestinian summit at Camp David broke off over the issue of the status of Jerusalem and the refugees in particular. From then on the negotiation process, which had never really stopped, seemed increasingly disconnected from the reality in the field that was getting worse and worse. The visit of Likud leader Ariel Sharon to the Esplanade of the Mosques in Jerusalem triggered clashes that soon spread throughout the Palestinian Territories, marking the beginning of the *al-Aqsa* Intifada. In the subsequent Israeli crackdown, 70 people were killed in a few days. The lynching of two Israeli soldiers in Ramallah led to the first Israeli bombings against the Palestinian Authority's infrastructure. Islamist movements resumed their suicide bombings against Israeli civilians, and Israel began liquidating activists in an extrajudicial way.

Ehud Barad resigned in December, and several rounds of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations failed. In February 2001, Ariel Sharon was elected Prime Minister. There were more blockades, temporary re-occupation of autonomous areas and bombings, as well as increasingly bloody suicide bombings. Various American reports and plans (the Mitchell report, the Tenet plan) went unheeded. Yasser Arafat was confined in Ramallah and declared politically out of the game. In March 2002, Israel launched its "Walls" operation of re-occupying Palestinian towns following a particularly deadly attack. On 16 June they began building a "Security Fence" designed to create an impenetrable separation between the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Israel. Expropriating large sections of Palestinian land (ultimately annexing 10 % of it), it also increased the number of separations with the

West Bank. 250 000 Palestinians were closed off in enclaves to the east and west of the fence.⁹

In 2003, the Israeli incursions took place almost daily, including in the heart of Gaza. The suicide bombings continued and were no longer the sole prerogative of Islamist movements. In April, the “Road Map” put together by the quartet (the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations) was once again the focus of diplomacy, while in the field the Territories had been almost totally re-occupied. The Palestinian “executive power” could no longer function and Abu Mazen, the man appointed to the newly created position of Prime Minister, resigned in September 2003. He was replaced by Ahmed Qoraï, president of the Palestinian Council, similarly paralysed.

In February 2004, Ariel Sharon launched a plan for unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the dismantling of most of the settlements there, in exchange for maintaining control over the flow of goods and people, and for having the wall include the largest groups of settlements in the West Bank in Israel. The plan was rejected by the Likud but was supported by the United States. The extrajudicial executions continued, aimed particularly at top Hamas leaders. In May 2004, Tsahal launched large-scale operations in Rafah on the border of Gaza and Egypt.

By the middle of 2004 the final toll of the conflict was 4000 deaths, 3000 of them Palestinians.

⁹ www.btselem.org/english/Separation_Barrier/

Part One: Palestinian Youth

Chapter 1

The National Struggle and the Individual

The First Intifada (1987-1993)

After the evacuation of Lebanon in 1982, the PLO established its headquarters in Tunis. It was seriously handicapped by its deteriorating relations with Arab countries, in particular with Jordan. Support through Arab solidarity was indispensable, even though it seemed unable to provide an answer to the Palestinian problem. Israel's policy of land expropriation in the Territories had intensified since 1979. In 1987, Israel controlled 52% of the West Bank, 42% of the water resources and 11% of the Gaza Strip.¹⁰ There was a high dependency on the Israeli economy, on income from the diaspora and support from UNRWA. It was in this context that the struggle shifted towards Palestinians who had remained in the territories. The task of widespread mobilization was carried out by Palestinian organisations. Starting in 1986, numerous incidents with the Israelis occurred, initiated in particular by the Islamic Jihad.¹¹ That organisation's activism triggered the Intifada in August 1987 through the assassination of the Israeli military police commander in Gaza. The call went out for a general strike, and the movement spread to the West Bank. Orders from the

¹⁰ Nadine Picaudou, *Les Palestiniens un siècle d'histoire*, Brussels, Complexe, 1997, p 219.

¹¹ Islamic Jihad is an organisation that grew out of a split with the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s. It opposed the latter by advocating armed struggle against the Israeli occupation.

“United National Leadership” soon turned the struggle into a massive opposition with demonstrations and strikes.

Young people were the key actors in the first Intifada. The radical side of these young people, brought up in a highly oppressive everyday environment, could be one of the initial explanatory parameters— although it is rather inadequate. Other factors include the high population growth (49% of the population is under 15, and 15-25-year-olds make up 21% of the population¹²) and a lack of job opportunities once offered by Gulf nations. That aspect is clearly part of the backdrop to the uprising, but it does not account for everything.¹³ Lastly, the confrontation afforded young people an opportunity to challenge how Palestinian society was organised and to renegotiate their place within it.

The first Intifada began as a movement within civil society, founded on the Palestinians’ broad network of associations since there was no budding government at the time. It invented a repertoire for struggle that was unarmed (demonstrations, strikes, etc.) and self-sufficient (resigning from Israeli administrative positions, boycotting Israeli products, and developing local production). This repertoire fit in with the popular mobilization favouring massive methods of action, a call for non-violent struggle and civil disobedience.¹⁴ The methods of action in the first Intifada changed towards the end with the increasing number of militant groups and internal score settling; and weapons began to circulate.

Young people viewed the struggle in a positive light. They believed in the possibility of overthrowing the occupation. Action required sacrifices, to be sure, and the dead and wounded were there to prove it. But they were convinced that victory was discernible on the horizon. The compelling heroic figure is that of the young man with a slingshot, a symbol through his youth and weakness of the legitimacy of the cause and of the people’s courage. Young people positioned themselves as highly valued and key actors in the national struggle, as well as on the social front. Indeed, the first Intifada was also a challenge to the patriarchal

¹² Philippe Lemarchand, Lamia Radi, *Israël/Palestine demain*, Paris, Complexes, 1996, p 43 and 139.

¹³ Paul Fargues, *Génération arabes. L’alchimie du nombre*, Paris, Fayard, 2000. p 212.

¹⁴ The campaign to that effect by the United National Leadership (Palestinian leadership in the West Bank and Gaza) in January 1988. See also: Hanna Siniora, “An Analysis of the Current Revolt”, *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, n°67, spring 1988, p 3-13.

structure and power of the leading families. They laughed at the children from Rimal (a chic neighbourhood in Gaza) who “threw chocolate at the Israelis.” Young people used their legitimacy as spearheads in the national struggle to become proactive about their own lives and in society. There are hundreds of anecdotes recalling this reversal. Here is one example among many: it’s the story of a kid who stands in the middle of a crossroads grasping a stone and manages to direct the traffic. As Daoud Kuttab said so expressively: “*to throw a stone is to be ‘one of the guys’; to hit an Israeli car is to become a hero; and to be arrested and not confess to having done anything is to be a man*”¹⁵

Paradoxically, that period was reinterpreted ten years later as both a defeat – through the failure of the Oslo Agreement (1993) – and a golden age. Indeed, while the first Intifada was a period of mourning and difficulties, it was also a time of opening up when everything seemed to be moving – the Israeli occupation and the traditional decision-making structures. The picture seemed all the more positive because, in response to the call for national unity, social differences were denied as such and wealth was hidden.

That vision was shared above all by young men. The young women had a more contrasting approach. For a minority of militants the first Intifada was truly a revelation, and it signalled their entry into politics: “The Intifada was like an exception. Things were permitted and possible for women. It could be seen as an exceptional time for women. Before, society didn’t even allow them to demonstrate in the streets. So there was a qualitative leap. Women really got a lot out of it. Now they are involved in the political leadership.”¹⁶ Others recalled the reinforced control triggered by the fear of dishonour in an uncertain context: “I am 100 000 times freer now than during the Intifada. My mother was always telling me ‘don’t go out, it’s dangerous.’ And now, with the Authority, we have more rights.”¹⁷

During the first Intifada, the investment in the national struggle could therefore be assimilated as a positive element in one’s life story. The national objective allowed an

¹⁵ Daoud Kuttab ‘A Profile of the Stonethrowers’, *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, n°67, Spring 1988, p 15.

¹⁶ A 33-year-old woman who is a member of the Fatah steering committee in Gaza. Interviewed in Gaza, March 1997. I would underline the fact that she was no longer a 20-year old, and thus had more freedom of movement.

¹⁷ A 23-year-old woman in the refugee camp in Jabalya (Gaza); interviewed in March 1997.

interpretation of everyday experiences that made them something other than a series of humiliations, restrictions and failures. It contained those experiences and linked them to a moment in the long history of the struggle. Giving up the national objective would be like accepting to be merely a victim and having that unbearable everyday life as one's only horizon. This transformation of reality brought about through the national objective continued until the second Intifada.

Facing the Palestinian Authority

“I wonder a lot nowadays about the future of this generation,” declared Rauwia Shauwa, Palestinian legislative council member. “What will they found their values on? What does the word peace mean to them, for example? They have lived through violence and the deaths of their comrades, and they have fought for peace. For them today, peace means living enclosed in the 365 km² Gaza Strip. The world – and its appeal for young people – is inaccessible to them. Jerusalem is only an hour and a quarter away, yet it is inaccessible – like another planet to them. They see poverty on the rise, no perspectives ahead, and frustration. They have lived through all that and can find no hope in it.”¹⁸

The Palestinian Authority's arrival in the Territories (1994) and the Oslo Agreements (1993) were first seen as a victory by most people. However, public opinion quickly changed and young people began to see the situation as a failure – first, regarding the goal for national liberation and, secondly, that of setting up a Palestinian state, as well as their own place in society. The Palestinian Authority's status was dependent on the Oslo Agreements and their enforcement. But for most young Palestinians, however critical they might be of the Oslo Agreements, the Authority was the first step towards achieving the national objectives they were fighting for. It had to embody the achievement of all their hopes.

¹⁸ Quoted in Angela Grünert, *Der längste Welt heißt Frieden : die Frauen im ersten palästinensischen Parlament*, Munich, DTV, September 1998; p 82.

A Triple Failure

Post-Oslo first seemed like an external failure because relations with Israel had not evolved. The occupation was only barely less noticeable in everyday life. The territory was chopped up, divided into “bantustans” which created more obstacles to their freedom of movement. The military roadblocks were still there. The settlements continued along the lines of demarcation, depending on water resources and strategic positions.¹⁹ The increased control of the territory continued by creating bypasses and extending the settlements, including in the B areas under civilian Palestinian control. People began to feel that the enforcement of the Oslo Agreements was only a delegation of power that didn’t really change anything. “What’s the difference between asking permission to go out from an Israeli soldier or a Palestinian policeman who transmits the request to the Israeli army?” asked one young man from Gaza.²⁰ Judgements were formed from everyday experiences, not from declarations at negotiating tables.

Within society, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority did not live up to the hopes of the Intifada either. A working economy seemed illusory²¹ outside a few areas (Ramallah essentially) and certain categories of the population. People’s feelings about the Palestinian Authority proved to be increasingly mixed. It was accused of corruption and clientelism, of inefficiency and powerlessness with regard to Israel. The criticism partly spared Arafat himself, however, concentrating on his entourage.

Furthermore, this period corresponded to the end of apparent social and political unanimity.²² Disparities became visible again. Some on the political scene went along with the Oslo Agreements while the Islamists officially refused to. Furthermore, social inequalities were displayed again, in particular with the return of the “Tunisians,”²³ who were reproached for their ostentatious lifestyle and wealth.

¹⁹ After the Oslo Agreements, housing units in the settlements increased 62%. Peace Now, *Settlement Watch Report*, October 2001. www.peacenow.org

²⁰ December 1997.

²¹ From 1992 to 1996, Palestinian GNP dropped 36 %. Anthony Cordesman, *Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians*, Washington, CSIS, 2001, p 61.

²² Starting in November 1994, the Palestinian police began firing on crowds demonstrating after the Israelis assassinated an Islamic Jihad leader. Nadine Picaudou, *Les Palestiniens un siècle d’histoire, op. cit.*, p 251.

²³ Returning from Tunis, PLO officials and their families who came back with Arafat were often called “Tunisians” by the Palestinian people.

Lastly, control over young people was regained by the Palestinian Authority through two methods. The first was by reactivating traditional structures, particularly the power of leading families through the use of cronyism. Not that either of these had really disappeared during the first Intifada; on the contrary, they acted then as an organisational system in the absence of any political and police power other than the occupier. However, they were seriously challenged by the power of the young “heroes.” Groups took control of certain territories; others took the law into their own hands. The patriarchal power structure was no longer enforced in the same way and the young people could make their voices heard, using their legitimacy as combatants in the national struggle to temporarily renegotiate their status. When their legitimacy vanished and the Authority’s power was established, young people lost a large share of that new status.

The Palestinian Authority feared the challenges from these young Palestinians who had stayed in the West Bank and Gaza. They had already tried to neutralize them during the first Intifada by playing local leaders off one another. To bring them back into the fold, the Authority also employed another method – integrating them into the police force.²⁴ It was the largest supplier of jobs in the Gaza Strip, offering young Intifada militants a position and an income, while depriving them of any responsibility. The upper levels in the hierarchy were reserved for returning PLO officials. This policy involved these young people in repression against their former co-militants, the Islamists.

They lost their hero status, which had allowed them to challenge the social hierarchy and to acquire a valued position in society, without other mechanisms of social integration – such as work – taking over. On the contrary, these mechanisms showed themselves to be uncertain. Indeed, the dream of a Palestinian Taiwan crumbled like the many empty and unfinished buildings constructed along the Gaza coast. The economy was undermined by the increasing number of Israeli blockades, the innumerable obstacles to the free circulation of goods, the absence of direct job opportunities abroad and the drop in the standard of living – not to mention the Palestinian Authority’s management. Young graduates of Palestinian

²⁴ Laetitia Bucaille, *Gaza, la violence de la paix*, Paris, Presses de Sciences-Po, 1998, p 95-124.

universities were the first to be affected by the rise in unemployment. The jobs created by the Palestinian Authority did not compensate for the drop in the number of work permits in Israel. They found no work, nothing at their level of skill at any rate. This situation also had an impact on the many young people who had graduated abroad and hoped to come back and help rebuild their country.

The Palestinian public became alarmed in 1997 when the suicide rate doubled.²⁵ It involved young people first and foremost, particularly young women. Suicide attempts were also on the rise. The tendency was clear, even though figures on this subject should be taken cautiously, given the number of suicides not declared to avoid dishonour, or conversely of declared suicides concealing crimes of honour. Interviews conducted by Nifuz Albaqry with close relatives or with young people, who had attempted suicide, as well as various testimonials, clearly indicate that the conflicts with patriarchal authority and the family are a recurring factor in suicides.²⁶ Teenagers who had been involved in the Intifada were faced with a reinforced system of authority and a crisis-ridden model of legitimacy – the nationalist ideology of the Intifada – which had allowed them to challenge that system of authority while preserving an acknowledged place within Palestinian society. They were convinced of their right to make their own decisions about how the community should function, but no longer possessed the necessary arguments to claim that right. In this context, conflicts of authority took on another meaning. Far from a limited confrontation, they became the very symbol of a situation in which any hope of building a project appeared impossible, and what little was offered in the present moment seemed highly precarious. Thus the crisis of the assimilation model proposed to these young people by Palestinian society is probably the place to look for the cause of the considerable increase in the suicide rate for that generation. In Durkheimian terms these are anomic suicides, i.e. occurring in changing societies where the usual points of reference have been turned upside down, and the individual's self-image no longer corresponds to his social position.²⁷

²⁵ In Gaza-City, the suicide rate went from 17 to 36 per 100 000 between 1996 and 1997, the world average being 10 per 100 000.

²⁶ Nifuz Albakri, "Zaherat al intihar" (the suicide phenomenon), Ramallah, Al Hayat al jadida, 28 June 1997.

²⁷ Emile Durkheim, *Le suicide*, Paris, PUF, 1930, p 234.

In the framework of this extreme disappointment with the Palestinian Authority and the feeling of failure, withdrawal into their personal lives was the most common solution. But before examining it, we must consider the existence of two political responses, between the first and second Intifada, each of which provided a way of dealing with and of tempering that failure. One was offered by Fatah, the other by the Islamists.

Two Militant Solutions

Fatah's initial political solution for getting beyond the feeling of a double failure consisted in denying it while ensuring access to resources. Fatah militants were involved in the embryonic national construction which the Palestinian Authority was supposed to incarnate. They were the first to be involved in the daily "fiddling". Although they adapted to it, they nevertheless sought to sustain their belief in the Palestinian Authority as the best solution for the Palestinians. This was their reason for protecting Arafat. Fatah militants thus appeared to be ambivalent. On the one hand, they were strategically involved in the organisation. They were always looking for information about who was responsible for what, who decided what, and how to be on someone's good side, to do a favour for someone and to stand out from the crowd of young militants. Through such moves they got closer to the few suppliers of resources in an extremely closed and limited field. At the same time, however, they felt great bitterness at being reduced to such opportunism. While their discourse consisted in saying "I have no choice, I want to get through this and help my family to get through it,"²⁸ this did not fit into their self-image as national heroes. By protecting Arafat the young militants were also protecting the image of their own integrity. Fatah militants were well-placed to know how the Palestinian Authority really operated, but they held Arafat's assistants responsible instead of him. Maintaining trust in Arafat's policies was an essential condition for continuing to see the beginnings of a real Palestinian state in the current situation. Indeed, that vision – as it developed among Palestinians – resided mainly in

²⁸ A 27-year-old Tanzim Fatah militant, Ramallah, March 2001. Tanzim means organisation and stands for the local branch of Fatah in the Palestinian Territories. The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades mainly come from its ranks but do not represent its official line.

Arafat's strategic ability vis-à-vis the Israelis. Thus the anecdotes recounted among the militants to demonstrate Arafat's intelligence or how he played around with his deputies' expectations. Fatah militants were trying to strategically improve their position in a systemic field structured by the Palestinian Authority.

The Islamists' specificity – with regard to their discourse at any rate – resided in their proposal to overthrow the system rather than to evolve within it. Actually, the Islamist movement could have attempted to negotiate with Israel and the Palestinian Authority. But in fact it proposed an Islamist “solution”, trying to overcome the scepticism surrounding the national struggle. On the one hand, it banked on a change in the struggle's methods and cast the negotiations as a mistake, proven in their eyes by both the situation in the field and by Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. They felt that a different balance of power needed to be established through the use of violence, in the form of suicide bombings. By altering the repertoire of actions and resorting to this new kind of violence, they would open up a situation that was blocked.²⁹

Furthermore, the Islamists brought about a temporal change that enabled them to place themselves in a victorious perspective again. The long time frame of a *jihad* was not that of a short-term failure which could be overcome. On the domestic level, the Islamist solution involved an honest, egalitarian and social Islamic government. Respect for justice and equality would automatically go along with the government's religious nature. The Islamists were thus seen to advantage from the point of view of morality and integrity and, as far as Hamas was concerned, relied on the support of a solid charity network. While the first bomb attacks (1993-1996) prompted widespread hostility among the population, the Islamists' arguments hit home more and more as the situation gradually deteriorated and people became increasingly disappointed in the Authority. However, due to the repression this gain in sympathizers did not necessarily result in a greater number of militants.

Yet, on the whole, the context led to a feeling of scepticism. Some militants clearly joined Fatah or the Islamists, but withdrawal was the dominant reaction towards the political

²⁹ Georg Elwert "Sozialanthropologisch erklärte Gewalt" in Wilhelm Heitmeyer and John Hagan (ed.), *Internationales Handbuch der Gewaltforschung*, Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002, p 330-367.

scene. The huge wave of involvement that had followed the first Intifada subsided. Young people focused on their personal projects by default.

Shifting the Focus to Personal Projects

Young people distanced themselves from their former involvement in the political process, henceforth characterized by failure. But that feeling of failure was not the sole explanation for their disenchantment.

Young people were closed out of the political scene when the Palestinian Authority arrived. It was monopolized by the Authority, which surrounded itself with returning Palestinians, rather than those who had remained, and valued the notables amongst the latter whose power had been challenged during the first Intifada.

The trend among young people to withdraw from politics and focus on their personal lives occurred all the more easily because their personal lives were becoming increasingly attractive just when the national scene had closed down and was associated with failure. “Since childhood... we have already lost everything because of the occupation. You couldn’t come and go or do anything else during the Intifada. I was 12-13 years old at the beginning of the Intifada. I was in the streets instead of getting a good education, which would have enabled me to express my creativity. I was wounded twice, and imprisoned twice. Now I’ve finally achieved many of the things I hoped for, but it would be hard for me to describe myself as happy.”³⁰

The first Intifada was a difficult time of mourning and privations for the population, particularly for young women. As was the case at the end of numerous other conflicts, young people felt like “taking a breather,” relaxing, celebrating and taking care of themselves and their personal projects, which had been set aside during the uprising.

The arrival of the Palestinian Authority had appeared for a short time to bring stability, and the new order was supposed to enable everyone to focus on building their future. It was an encouragement for young people to concentrate on projects related to their personal lives, which did not involve participation in the nation’s destiny, such as forming a couple and a family, studying, working, etc. But given the economic context, and after the short euphoric phase of hope triggered by the arrival of the Palestinian Authority, these projects were soon

³⁰ Iyyad, 25, whose father was a former labourer in Israel. His brothers have minor jobs with the Palestinian Authority. (Interviewed in Gaza, August 1999).

restricted to a more limited horizon. “The future is bleak – because of the social situation. I had thought I might be able to get an education, but we have such a large family³¹ that no one has succeeded in saving up enough for their studies. But I’d really like to work in a kindergarten.”³² Setting up a family means trying to find the necessary resources to build at least one private room in your husband’s parents’ house.³³ Going to university means finding a job to help finance it. Getting a job is more about making sure you’re not without resources than actually choosing a career: “I think my future is going to be catastrophic. The financial situation is very bad and has dashed all my hopes. I’ll try to pursue my studies but I don’t have much faith in it.”³⁴

Among the “solutions” offered, we have not mentioned the ones that could have been provided by leftist organisations.³⁵ Opposed to the Oslo Agreements, and lacking the Islamists’ ideological coherence, they were not perceived as capable of carrying out a political agenda. Indeed, their inability to do anything other than refuse was often denounced.

In fact, most of their militants fell back on what could be called social solutions. Wanting to continue being involved in the political arena, but unable to do so, they created various social projects for teenagers, women, etc. With the advent of civil society, they were able to preserve their hopes for changing the Palestinian situation – but from the inside, by

³¹ Five brothers and five sisters.

³² Iman, a 22-year-old woman with a high school diploma from the Bureij camp (Gaza). Her father was unemployed; her brothers worked as roofers in Israel whenever they could (Interviewed in July 1999).

³³ A quarter of all Palestinian homes have a density of three or more people per room. Majdi el-Malki, (ed.), *Social Monitor, Special Issue 1995-1999*, Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), n° 4, May 2001, p 60.

³⁴ Ra'ed, 20, was studying pedagogy and Arabic. He took on any job he could find. He is the eldest son; his father, a plumber who was remarried after two divorces, has thirteen children (Interviewed at the Jabalya refugee camp, August 1999).

³⁵ Basically the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), founded in 1967, of Communist and Pan-Arabic allegiance, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), which grew out of a split in the former group in 1969, of a Marxist-Maoist persuasion. Both of them advocated active struggle against Israel and conservative Arab regimes, but the latter soon adopted a more moderate position. As for the Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA), which split off from the DFLP in 1990, it has backed the Oslo Agreements.

working with the population. They began working with the NGOs and human rights organisations. In moving to this new sector, they encountered the difficulties of working within a vast network of associations – once a substitute for social services for the Palestinians – that was losing its independence. Indeed, for these organisations, access to international financing became limited because it was now moving to a great extent through the Palestinian Authority.³⁶ Competition arose among the NGOs hoping to preserve their own role and their independence, and the ministries trying to take over their activities and financing. However, independently of these difficulties, the “social” militants insisted on the benefit they drew from these activities on a personal level. The value of their militant actions resided less in some hypothetical results in their attempt to modify the situation than in what they gave them directly – feeling useful, creating a network of relationships, developing their personality, etc. This is how a young activity leader in one centre, a member of the People’s Party³⁷ and also head of an athletic association, explained the benefit he got from it: “I have an hourly schedule. I learned how to get organised. I’m happy in comparison to a lot of other young people because I have a goal, and the closer I get to it the happier I feel, even if I have to work 12 hours a day. My personality has gotten stronger through these activities.”³⁸

Being involved in social work would then appear to be an intermediate path signalling disengagement from national objectives without meaning a complete withdrawal into one’s personal life. Furthermore, the idea of development indirectly prompted hope for enabling Palestinian society to achieve a degree of normality in everyday life despite the occupation. Such projects depended on whether or not the Palestinians had any room for manoeuvring. The multiple destruction by the Israeli army during the second Intifada also aimed at social and youth centres (with computer rooms, etc.) and did not encourage their continuing in that direction. As a result, although efforts by NGOs and human rights organisations improved

³⁶ Cf. Lamia Radi, *L’élite palestinienne : stratégies de survie et modes d’influence (1967/1997)*, Ph.D thesis, IEP, 1997, p 308-347.

³⁷ New name of the Communist Party

³⁸ Wa’el, 28, the eldest son, studied to become a teacher upon graduating from high school, but stopped after two years. His father was a labourer in Israel (Interviewed in Rafah, August 1999).

daily life a bit, they were not seen by most young people as a real solution to bring an end to the crisis. They saw them as totally inadequate and uncertain.

“Social work” therefore did not develop into a large-scale or satisfying alternative to political involvement. Some young people derived financial resources and personal satisfaction from it. Witnessing the poverty of Palestinian society on the front lines, and having little room to manoeuvre, they were very pessimistic the minute their analyses went beyond the most modest level of action. While they were extremely positive about the immediate results of this or that initiative they had undertaken, they had a completely different attitude when discussing the possibility of carrying out more widespread changes or long-term projects.

The return to “personal happiness” thus occurred “by default” since it was more a withdrawal than a real promotion of individuals and their projects. It showed them adapting to a restricted field of possibilities and proposed no replacement for the hero figure. The national objective was not abandoned, although it had failed. Young women experienced this reversal differently. For them, focusing on personal projects seemed less like being “reduced” to that area of life due to the failure of the national struggle. That failure and the difficulty of developing projects seemed to them to be linked, one being the context for the other and vice versa. But they did not say that one led to the other: “If our society was in good hands, we could all have had our own dreams, but in our situation even dreams are sometimes forbidden.”³⁹

Gender identity had already led them to restrict themselves to the private sphere, so having to limit themselves to it was not a source of contradiction. While they had the same sentiment of failure regarding the Intifada, their situation as women had improved, as it was a less troubled and grief-stricken period of time. Social controls relaxed a bit. The arrival of the Palestinian Authority also meant that a police force was established. This naturally came along with the society’s community-based management methods, but it nevertheless provided an outside authority to call upon in a conflict. Prior to that, going to the police meant turning to the Israeli authorities.

After Oslo, young Palestinians felt disillusioned about politics, although they did not

³⁹ Aïsha, quoted above.

abandon their goal for nationhood. What was their subsequent line of reasoning for becoming involved in the Al-Aqsa Intifada?

The Al-Aqsa Intifada

Like every Friday since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the joint demonstration went from downtown Ramallah to the Nablus road, closed off by the Israeli army. Five hundred metres before the Israeli roadblock, the thousand demonstrators stopped. On the horizon were blocks of cement, Israeli soldiers in jeeps and sharpshooters in the buildings. Two tanks sat on the hillside. Most of the participants were spectators of the Friday afternoon ritual. A handful of young people took out their slingshots and moved closer to the soldiers. Their stones fell a few metres from the Israelis. Palestinian ambulances started shuttling back and forth, their sirens screaming amidst the tear gas, plastic bullets, and sometimes real bullets. The jeeps moved forward. One person was severely wounded. The youngsters fled to nearby fields. “Where are the Arabs?” an Israeli soldier sang sarcastically from the jeep’s loudspeaker, referring to a well-known song calling for unity in the Arab world. “At the beginning of the Intifada, they even joked around with us,” contended Hisham, a 16-year-old from the neighbouring Jalazun refugee camp. “They yelled ‘those who want 1 000 dollars on the left, those who want 5 000 dollars on the right.’ They were referring to the indemnities promised by Saddam Hussein for those who were wounded or died in the Intifada.” But behind the deserted houses a few Palestinian militants with roots in Fatah took position, armed with M16s. The stone throwers and spectators rushed back. The Israeli soldiers remained out of range and retaliated with grenades. The gunmen withdrew with their wounded.

Hisham’s father, a refugee from the 1967 war, was a construction worker in Israel. Since the Israeli blockade had been erected, he had been forced to stay at home. His other sons, workers and delivery men, brought home a bit of money when they could find a site in Ramallah. Their sister was studying at the university to become a teacher, but the family couldn’t afford the registration fees for the upcoming semester. In any case, the road to Bir Zeit University was regularly closed.

Hisham was the only member of the family to participate in the Al-Aqsa Intifada. He usually hid it from his relatives, who feared that he will be wounded or killed. Generally

speaking, this Intifada differed from the first one through the lack of participation among the people. “I don’t want to get killed for throwing stones,” exclaimed an economics student from Ramallah. “Naturally we must fight against the occupation. Our towns are overcrowded, open-air prisons. They’re killing us off slowly here. But what can you do about it? I took part in the first Intifada. What have we gained from all the sacrifices? The settlements are gradually surrounding us; the houses are being destroyed, and olive trees uprooted to build their roads. And all the water is going to the Israelis!”

The student pointed to the hillsides covered with terraced olive groves overlooking Ramallah. On top, you could see the white houses with red-tiled roofs of the Israeli settlements surrounded by high barbed-wire fences. The lawns were green and the streets well lit. The water and electricity never got cut off there. “Armed resistance is the last resort, but we need real leaders with a strategy,” added one student close to the left-wing parties. “Not like these little groups that fire at random, not someone like Arafat, who’s willing to sign anything and hand over Palestinian militants as long as he stays in power. But it’s too late for us. As soon as I get my degree, I’m heading for the U.S. There’s no future for anyone here.” Hisham felt the same way. He would never be a student and thought he had nothing to lose. Sporting a T-shirt featuring Che Guevara with his beret and red star, he waved the Lebanese Hezbollah’s yellow flag. The green bandana wrapped around his forehead said: “there is no God but God.” Hisham had no qualms about mixing and matching symbols. The important thing for him was to shed his victim status and to feel like a hero when he went out to face the Israeli army.

In fact, the Al-Aqsa Intifada occurred in an unchanged ideological context and did not profoundly modify the way young people viewed the future of their nation. An end to the occupation continued to be seen by most of them as impossible in the short or long term. That view was reinforced by the wall of Israeli repression which quickly deployed its highest level of striking power. However, a small group moved past their disillusionment and began to speak up, shifting their focus from personal concerns to active involvement.

At first, this Intifada was mainly based on structural changes and on the positions of various political figures. Political opportunities had changed and, consequently, so had the

involvement of the players themselves, without any modification of the meaning attached to the national struggle. At the same time, living conditions worsened, and Israeli demands during the negotiations (a total renunciation – of refugees returning, and of Jerusalem) challenged some core aspects of Palestinian identity. Hoping for at least some recognition from the Israelis – more than actually achieving their goal – the refugees' identity became more fixed on the national struggle. The "refugee" criterion is not a distinguishing characteristic. 80 % of the population of Gaza is composed of refugees; half of them live in the camps. In the West Bank, refugees constitute 31 % of the overall population, and about one third of them live in camps.⁴⁰ Due to the conditions of their everyday lives, refugees feel clearly more concerned about the results of the negotiations than the rest of the Palestinian population. But above all, if the possibility of returning were to completely vanish from the negotiations, they would lose their symbolic status and merely be poor people on the outskirts of Palestinian towns. The refugees are indeed on the very bottom of the Palestinian social scale. They are at a disadvantage on all fronts, even if UNRWA takes care of some services – such as schooling – which compensates somewhat for their poverty.⁴¹ Their identification with the national destiny is therefore particularly strong. Through identifying with that history, their social situation has gone from something humiliating to a symbol of the injustice done to Palestinians. Their resistance, and their attachment to the towns and villages from which they were expelled, have enabled them to transcend their lot while building up sources of identity for Palestinian society as a whole. For this reason the refugee camps have been stigmatised as dangerous neighbourhoods which are hostile to outsiders – not good places to wander around at night. At the same time, they have been highlighted as places where people have held onto the keys to houses dating from before the 1948 and 1967 exiles, and which continue to be organised around people's native villages. In the extremely harsh social reality of the camps, identifying with their collective history – their status as victims through exile and as freedom fighters through the national struggle – has prevented that identity

40 Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), *Agenda*, Jerusalem, 2002, p 265 and Majdi el-Malki, *Social Report, op. cit.*, p 94.

41 Access to services is better for inhabitants of refugee camps than for those living in rural areas. Malki, *Social Report, op. cit.*, p 58.

from being reduced solely to their economic woes. The reference to native villages “where we had a big house, land, etc.” is another way of denying their current economic status by evoking a magnificent past when things were different: “Hell was in the sky and paradise on my plot of earth.”⁴²

In political terms, Arafat’s return from the Camp David negotiations in July 2000 and then the failure of the Taba negotiations six months later were translated internally by a repositioning of the Authority and a reopening towards the base, which was more demanding. This change came from the Authority’s desire for renewed legitimacy, all the more necessary now that it had no more hopes of dealing with discontent through gains obtained in negotiations with Israel. In that light, Fatah’s “young guard” – the local leaders who were involved in the first Intifada in the field – became crucial players.⁴³ They could provide the Authority with a way of gaining back the support of the people. A majority of them came from the refugee camps and were thus in contact with that part of the population most at risk.

The Palestinian Authority, a Factor of Paralysis

The Palestinian Authority began to open up slightly to these local militants, Palestinians who had remained in the territories. This opening up was also due to increased pressure: “Arafat is the one who leads us, he’s our president and we are with him; but there are two things about which the people must decide – the refugees and al-Aqsa. And the refugees are more important to the Palestinians because al-Aqsa is a Muslim issue that concerns all Muslims, whereas the refugees are only a Palestinian issue. But if he signs something against our rights, we shall continue to fight. But he won’t sign something like that because the negotiators are defending our message, although we fear international pressure, especially from America.”⁴⁴

⁴² A refugee, about 60 years old, in the Balata refugee camp (Nablus), interviewed in January 2001.

⁴³ Khalil Shikaki, *Old Guard, Young Guard : The Palestinian Authority and the Peace Process At Cross Roads*, 2001. www.amin.org/eng/khalil_shikaki/2001/00nov2001.html Published under the title “Palestinian Divided” in *Foreign Affairs*, 81/1, January-February 2002, p 89-105. As Jean-François Legrain highlighted, Khalil Shikaki nevertheless tends to raise this internal Fatah generational and structural factor into a “unique and final principal for the internal dynamics of the Palestinian leadership,” which is too broad a statement. Jean-François Legrain, “Les Phalanges des martyrs d’Al-Aqsa en mal de leadership National”, *Maghreb-Machrek*, n°176, Summer 2003, p 14. We will come back to this point in detail in the chapter on armed militants.

⁴⁴ Tanzim Fatah leader interviewed in the Balata refugee camp, February 2001.

The feeling of paralysis became more urgent in this context: “Today I threw stones but I was careful and protected myself.⁴⁵ I didn’t before, in 1996, or during the first Intifada. I threw the stones and wanted to die. But what’s the point now, when you know that Arafat might sign anything at any moment, like in 1996. That’s why people aren’t getting involved. They don’t trust Arafat. Yesterday Arafat decided to march through the streets. People didn’t want to move their cars for him. He waved, thinking it was like before. Not a chance! Nobody reacted.”⁴⁶

The Palestinian Authority’s involvement neutralized the capacity for protest initiatives. The Palestinian nationalist movement was institutionalised from the outside, provoking a number of consequences. First, new leaders were not allowed to develop. The people subsequently became more detached, no longer seeing themselves as the main actors in this mobilization. That role was passed on to the Authority, which was nevertheless perceived at the same time to be ineffectual. Lastly, potential militants feared being “double-crossed” by the Authority, which was liable to supply Israel with their names as part of their security agreement: “There was a time when I wanted to do something, when I wanted to work. Now I feel like many things are unclear. The situation is not clear. The Palestinian leaders are not clear, so I can’t take a stand.”⁴⁷

The internal Palestinian situation, pessimism about the future of the national struggle and the severity of Israeli repression led to poorly strategized initiatives, which were implemented nonetheless, and to a narrower range of possible actions. The mobilization remained limited. Thus, the same methods were employed at the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada as during the first Intifada, which corresponded to a specific situation and had been elaborated beforehand.

Forms of Mobilization

The second Intifada cannot be understood without referring to the first Intifada and to the participants’ memory of it. The types of action employed during the first Intifada were

⁴⁵ This was a demonstration in March 2001 to open up the road to Bir Zeit. For a short period of time, it mobilized students and professors who had not been involved in the Intifada before then.

⁴⁶ Nasser, a student at Bir Zeit and a follower of the PFLP (interviewed in Ramallah, June 2001).

⁴⁷ Ubur, 26, a graphic designer. She came from Jenin, and worked in Ramallah. Her father ran a garage and her mother was a teacher. Interviewed in October 2000.

disqualified because they resulted in the Oslo Agreements, the failure of which led to that of the Palestinian Authority – the symbol of that agreement in the eyes of the people. Other forms of struggle subsequently became a focus of interest. Although the Palestinians saw their situation as unique, they observed what was occurring in Lebanon. The operations carried out by Hezbollah as well as Israel's withdrawal (in 2000), reinforced the reference to another repertory of actions.

The memory of the first Intifada, along with the example of these other groups, had a strong effect on the range of options perceived as possible by Palestinian youth. At the same time the meaning of the national struggle remained unchanged and, due to the lack of hope in the short term, no renewed strategy was conceivable. The struggle became removed from any tangible prospects, thus becoming meaningless and no longer requiring any strategic planning. It got out of control and became a mechanical action, linked to the specific logic of terrorist political violence, as highlighted by Michel Wieviorka.⁴⁸

In this context, people couldn't get involved in organised initiatives with a clear strategy. Indeed, this was the main criticism students voiced about the Al-Aqsa Intifada. It could, however, take on meaning based on its short-term repercussions. The most obvious of these was the possibility of retaliating, not with the goal of overturning the situation, but rather of making the enemy accessible and vulnerable in the short term. Such an attitude would change the Palestinians' feeling of being totally at someone's mercy, of having no options, no fallback position or forum of expression in interactions where they were at a complete disadvantage. Advancing a long-term cause was no longer a strategic intention. Rather, through killing the adversary they would show him, and themselves, that the Palestinians were not out of the picture, that they still had options, that the situation was not as hopeless as it might seem, and the enemy was as accessible and vulnerable as they were. That change in attitude led to a macabre "quantification" in which the number of dead was constantly compared on both sides. The gruesome daily count was staged by the Sakakini theatre company in Ramallah, in a play where the actors were lost in a sea of

⁴⁸ "The ends and means are confused; subsequent projects are reduced to destroying whatever is opposed to the person's subjectivity." Michel Wieviorka, *Sociétés et terrorisme*, Paris, Fayard, 1988, p 21.

newspapers and yelled death tolls at each other, the results of a morbid contest. In the al-Aqsa Intifada, their initiatives were reduced in strategic terms to one plan – inflicting human losses on the enemy. Beyond this unanimously shared initial goal of challenging the enemy’s invincibility and the unilateral nature of the power struggle, the Islamists’ idea was to use as a weapon something perceived as the Israelis’ (only) “weakness” – their different relationship to death. Conscious of the illegitimacy of their occupation, the Israelis would not tolerate dying, contrary to the Palestinians whose cause was just. By inflicting losses on them, whatever the consequences of their retaliation on the Palestinians themselves, they would ultimately make the situation unbearable for the Israelis, who would eventually withdraw from the Territories...

Chapter 2

Young Palestinian Women and Nationalism

For men, the nationalist ideology has been an unequivocal command to get involved and pattern themselves after heroic figures. For women, the national struggle paradoxically linked the call to become involved – in the interest of mobilizing all levels of society (militants urged classrooms of girls to take part in demonstrations, for example) – with the command to preserve Palestinian identity. Yet that identity was expressed in particular through the gender differences which characterize social organisation. Maintaining the social structure and those gender differences was a way of asserting one's pride against the occupier. Gender differences could then clearly be seen as more important than generational ones, to such an extent that it would be erroneous to speak of a generation with respect to women. Only women students enjoyed a specific generational status (5% of young women have benefited from higher education⁴⁹).

The First Call: Enabling an “Enduring Identity”

The “preserved” religious and moral values of Palestinian society are contrasted with the “pernicious and perverted” ones of Israeli society. This clash of values has mainly been expressed through the issue of women's behaviour. Thus, in times of unrest, Palestinian

⁴⁹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *The Demographic Survey of Westbank and Gaza Strip: Preliminary Report*; Ramallah, March 1996.

society would “go overboard” in enforcing social controls to cultivate the “purity” of a society faithful to its traditions and principles. Losing ground on the military front, the Palestinians began to promote an “ethical” plan where they would have the upper hand. The specificity of national struggles lies in their call for change while often emphasizing the need to remain rooted in the land. Other aspects of legitimacy refer to the law, in particular the right to self-determination; but struggles over land rights are often justified through trying to prove a permanent presence of the people on their land. One way of resolving this inner tension within the national struggle – between the demand for change and the desire to maintain a temporal and spatial connectedness – is to divide it up by gender. The men are assigned the struggle for change, while the women are asked to personify permanence. This link between the control of women and identity within nationalist movements is not specific to the Palestinian struggle. On the contrary, it is quite a general characteristic. It has been highlighted by Monique Gadant with regard to Algeria: “it is the women, more than the men, who have been assigned the task of preserving the soul of the community as it strives to assimilate science and technology.”⁵⁰ This was also the case for Egypt in the days of Nasser.⁵¹ Thus the nationalist ideal is often manifested through specific social structures and a focus on gender. A “mythical vision of the world”⁵² based on the reconstruction of the “eternal feminine” is advanced in an attempt to prove its legitimacy. During times of defeat, when legitimacy and identity falter, this focus on women as the upholders of a “permanent identity” is particularly strong.

As guarantors of “permanence” – a crucial source of legitimacy in the struggle to prove an older right to the land – women and their behaviour are a deciding factor in the nationalist cause. In this context, national identity is shaped by reconstructing the past, a task of “reincarnation” and preservation entrusted to women. It is built on three main

⁵⁰ Monique Gadant, *Parcours d'une intellectuelle en Algérie : nationalisme et anticolonialisme dans les sciences sociales*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1995, p 132.

⁵¹ Valentine Moghadam, *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, Cairo, The American University Press, 1993.

⁵² Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy et l'éternel féminin*, Paris, Seuil, 1996, p 11.

areas – aspects of the same quest for permanence raised to the level of a gender-based myth. Women are associated symbolically with the eternal land of Palestine, as well as being the ‘heirs’ and guardians of a lifestyle designed to preserve their inaccessibility, and thus the honour of the community. The Islamists relay that message, but they are not the only ones. The great Palestinian poets have also associated women with the land of Palestine. The different areas of cultural resistance may be associated or only partially asserted.

Women as a Symbol of the Earth

The land has become the Palestinians’ motherland through its women and their constantly repeated gestures. Beyond the more or less martial songs sung in all struggles, the Palestinian struggle has produced a rich poetic tradition which has had a strong impact on the population as a whole, although its forms of expression are not always easy to understand. Anouar Mowaf associates the choice of poetry and the relationship to a lost and idealised land.⁵³ Mahmoud Darwish also comes to mind. He is a herald of this subject, a poet with an international reputation who speaks of Palestine as if it were a woman or, conversely, addresses his loved one as if she were his native land.⁵⁴ Women in this context lose their individuality and are reduced to symbols of the nation or of the land.⁵⁵ Mahmoud Darwish is an important figure in a powerful movement⁵⁶ which reaches beyond Palestine. Indeed, the Palestinian cause has inspired a number of poets throughout the Arab world. Palestine is constantly compared to a woman in these songs and poems, spinning out the same metaphor:

*Jerusalem is the bride of your Arabness!!
So why did you usher all the fornicators of the night into her room,
And stand eavesdropping
from behind the door to the screams of her torn virginity?
You drew your daggers, and swelled with pride
And you yelled at her to keep quiet,
for honour’s sake How honourable of you!!
Sons of bitches, can a woman being raped keep quiet? _⁵⁷*

⁵³ Anwar Mowaf, A., *Thanâ’iya al-ard/al marâ, al kalira*, June 1995, p 62.

⁵⁴ Anwar Mowaf, A., *Thanâ’iya al-ard/al marâ, op. cit.*, p 65.

⁵⁵ Birgit Embalo, Angelika Neuwirth and Friederike Pannewick, *Kulturelle Selbstbehauptung der Palästinenser. Survey der Modernen Palästinensischen Dichtung*. Beirut/ Würzburg, Ergon 2001, p 28.

⁵⁶ For a complete review of this literature, see Birgit Embalo, Angelika Neuwirth and Friederike Pannewick, *Kulturelle Selbstbehauptung der Palästinenser, op. cit.*

⁵⁷ Excerpt from a poem Muzaffar al Nawwab. Translation into English: Bardenstein, Carol; “Stirring words: traditions and subversions in the poetry of Muzaffar al-Nawwab - Modern Iraqi Literature in English Translation”, *Arab Studies Quarterly (ASQ)*, Fall, 1997.
An Iraqi poet now living in exile due to his political criticism and membership in the Iraqi Communist Party. His poems soon acquired a reputation in the Arab world, in particular for their insolence and impropriety.

The same subject of a “raped Palestine” can be found in political speeches and leaflets. The earth is thus given a sexual personification – as a woman liable to be taken and raped, and as a mother. Palestine, the child-bearing, nourishing land, thus becomes a sacred person who should have been shown great respect but to whom violence was done instead. This personification of the earth endows it with feelings, and Palestine is then said to be suffering. It becomes a respectable but weak woman towards whom one has certain responsibilities, and who must be protected. The “rape” of Palestine reveals the men’s failure in their role of guardian and protector. Since maintaining honour is linked to women’s inaccessibility, the honour of the community is at risk.

Associating women with the land has had an effect on how they are represented. In this metaphor, the focus is on sexual vulnerability and on their role as mothers. Conversely, Palestinian women are also observed through those two images. Nationalist representations highlight the need to protect them and make them inaccessible. The subject of fragility is all the more relevant because Palestine has been “invaded”, and the rape has already taken place. While personifying the earth, this association between women and the earth also objectifies women. They become objects that one possesses and disposes of. Women are characterized as having the passivity and powerlessness of an object. They are taken and raped.

Along with its corresponding image of cultural authenticity, this representation of women holds them responsible for ensuring the continuation of “traditional” culture and its customs, presented as unchanging. Through them, this connection to a long time period must continue to be perceived by others, signalling the Palestinians’ deep roots in the land and thus the legitimacy of their presence.

Women as Bearers of Cultural Identity

The Israeli occupation provoked a contraction of identity, which focused mainly on religious aspects and morals, making women the principal “guardians” of cultural authenticity. As Nadine Picaudou has observed, “the peasant women’s embroidered robes seem to encapsulate the memory of the land, itself a symbol of the community.”⁵⁸

In this discourse around the national struggle, women are a vector of cultural continuity and denote the ancientness of their culture on the land. They supply and transmit a fundamental identity upon which their right to the land is also based. Indeed, they represent the ancientness of that civilisation’s presence there, as well as its adaptation to specific conditions of life (water consumption, agriculture, etc.). The women are invested not with the fight against the enemy but with “preserving intact” their rituals and customs despite all the “compromises” and adaptations required in the struggle, or which arise through contact with the occupier. Nationalism distinguishes here between material identity on the one hand, which is indeed in the process of modernizing and needs this renewal for the struggle to be effective, and spiritual identity on the other hand. Women are the guarantors that Palestinian society will preserve its soul in the conflict with Israel and, as with other Arab countries, in its encounter with the West, which is in a stronger position ideologically speaking. That process is not specific to the Palestinians: “a woman’s place in Muslims societies defines the stakes in the process of Westernisation and, beyond the women’s actual living conditions, poses a general challenge to the culture and civilisation.”⁵⁹ This is particularly evident in the distinction between, on one hand, technical progress and consumption (positive), and on the other, morals (to be preserved), which Islamists’ use as a foundation in constructing a modern Islamic identity. The defensive attitude in the Palestinian Territories is all the stronger because of the military occupation and ongoing conflict.

As in many other experiences, the appeal to “tradition” has in fact come from a broad process of reconstruction rather than through transmission of age-old customs.⁶⁰ In the

⁵⁸ Nadine Picaudou, “Identité-mémoire et construction nationale” in Nadine Picaudou, (ed.), “La Palestine en transition”, *Les annales de l’autre Islam* n°8, Paris, ERISM, INALCO, 2001, p 342.

⁵⁹ Nilufer Göle, *Musulmanes et modernes, voile et civilisation en Turquie*, Paris, La Découverte, 1993, p 8.

⁶⁰ In this respect, the research conducted by Emma Aubin-Boltanski on Palestinian pilgrimages has clearly shown the process of re-appropriation and alteration which is taking place. Emma Aubin-Boltanski, “Moïse ou Salâh ad-dîn : pèlerinage religieux/pèlerinage politique en Palestine” in Nadine Picaudou, (ed), “La Palestine en transition”, *Les annales de l’autre Islam* n°8, Paris, ERISM, INALCO, 2001, p 373-397.

Palestinian case, this has gone through the intermediary of the Islamists' discourse. As Graham Usher observed: "the Islamists have also succeeded by 'inventing' an Islamist tradition, which is now experienced – particularly by the generations formed by the uprising – as an integral part of the Palestinian national identity."⁶¹

In that context, when a woman breaks with "tradition" it constitutes a social and symbolic breakdown in which one becomes a traitor to the nation, joins the enemy and is a weakening factor. Any desire to allow women to change their behaviour is frowned upon, unless it reinforces coercion in the name of a reconstituted tradition. On the other hand, signs of excellence regarding knowledge of customs for celebrations, cooking, embroidery, etc. are valued. Traditional arts are infused with nationalist themes – *dabka* dances to revolutionary songs, which are a 'must' at meetings, embroidery blending the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Palestinian flag, etc. Tellingly, exhibitions to the memory of "martyrs" and the national struggle always have a "traditional arts" section with embroidered dresses, old farming tools, Palestinian literature, etc. "Promoting the people's heritage, which displays their attachment to the land, is another strategy of passive resistance against the occupation (*sumud*⁶²)." observed Nadine Picaudou.

Women have been transformed into a symbol of "womanhood", a respectable and inaccessible sacred image; and their behaviour is not meant to challenge the characteristics of that image. This process has been described explicitly in contemporary Palestinian literature, by Sahar Khalifa for example: "You see, my boy, in the first poem I was the mother. Now I am the land. Tomorrow I will surely become a symbol. Wake up, my boy. I am neither the

⁶¹ Graham Usher, "Women, Islam and the Law in Palestinian society", *Middle East International*, 23 September 1994, p 17.

⁶² Nadine Picaudou, *Identité-mémoire et construction nationale, op. cit.*, p 343

mother, nor the land, nor a symbol. I am a human being. I eat, I drink, and I dream. I make mistakes, I lose my way, I suffer, and I speak to the wind.”⁶³ The metaphor goes round in a circle – from the personification of the earth to the objectification of women – to produce a kind of semiotic symbiosis. Thus the loss of the land refers back to the loss of honour, associated with preserving women’s inaccessibility. Losing that sense of honour related to the women’s reputation also means losing the land. This is evident in the Palestinian proverb *al ârd ‘ard* (The land is honour).

Women’s Inaccessibility Preserves Honour

The honour of families, and of the entire community, lies in preserving the reputation of women and in particular of girls. Maintaining gender-based aspects of social organisation vis-à-vis the occupier takes on the additional meaning of restoring honour flouted on the military and political fronts. Controlling women is one of the stakes in maintaining power within societies, as well as between them. Keeping intact a mode of functioning that differentiates gender vis-à-vis the enemy is also a way of holding onto power. This is manifested by valuing a community-based, “moral” lifestyle, to which the Palestinians refuse access to a “perverted” enemy. Women, overseeing a protected private space whose honour is based on inaccessibility, become the guarantors of an “unviolated” space thereby limiting the extent of domination. The power at stake is also perceived by the occupier here. As the Bosnian conflict showed us, destroying the other is also carried out through the destruction of that space and thus through the raping of women.⁶⁴

This aspect is quite clear in interactions with Israeli soldiers. The latter avoid finding fault with women when they do not wish to be confronted with violent reactions in the streets; or, on the contrary, they insult them more when they want to humiliate people, especially during house searches. Conversely, on the Palestinian side, the men are particularly sensitive

⁶³ Sahar Khalifa, *L’impasse de Bab Essaha* (1990), Paris, Flammarion, 1992, p 159.

⁶⁴ Véronique Nahoum-Grappe, « Guerre et différence des sexes, les viols systématiques en Ex-Yougoslavie, 1991-1995 », in Cécile Dauphin and Arlette Farge (ed), *De la violence et des femmes*, 1999, Paperback edition, "Points" collection, 2001, p. 175-204.

to being snubbed by female Israeli soldiers. They feel doubly humiliated – as occupied people and as men. A young Palestinian working in Israel described his latest crossing of the Eretz checkpoint as being particularly and intentionally offensive. Two young women soldiers were doing the checking and giving the orders. They were sitting alone on a little wall as hundreds of workers walked by. His description significantly emphasised their attitude. Domination through body language is particularly striking at roadblocks, a subject I will come back to later on. Here it has a double meaning, as gender hierarchy is also that of bodies and space. The physical “freedom” of these women “sitting above us on the little wall, swinging their legs nonchalantly, with their weapons next to them”⁶⁵ was felt to be proof that the Palestinians were seen as totally inoffensive and laughable despite their numbers, and that gender hierarchy as it is structured in Palestinian society was being transgressed. In this incident the pride of a person who thought “I may be humiliated but I’m still a man” was undermined. The humiliation affects gender identification, as described by Goffman here: “A man can take a whole day of people exercising their power over him, and endure the situation on nearly every level of society; yet, when he goes home at night, he’s back in an environment where he is the dominant one. And wherever he goes outside his home, women may be there to prop up his apparent competence.”⁶⁶

Highlighting the purity of a thousand-year-old custom that has been “maintained” is done to prove it is rooted in the land and to deny that legitimacy to the “perverted and Westernised” enemy. Women are given the responsibility of maintaining their identity– the only place where a sense of power can be expressed and where Israeli domination cannot be exercised. The control over women becomes even stronger in times of trouble when there is a need to stress one’s difference of identity from the occupier. The ideological constructs around the national struggle say “show yourself” to the men and “hide yourself” to the women, “be active” to the men and “be passive” to the women, “occupy the public arena” to the men and “stay within the private sphere” to the women. Women’s behaviour no longer

⁶⁵ Interviewed in Gaza, March 1997.

⁶⁶ Erving Goffman, *L’arrangement des sexes* (1977), Paris, La Dispute, 2002, p 78.

refers solely to the community, but becomes one of the stakes in the conflict. Preserving women, maintaining their reputation and their inaccessibility to soldiers are all part of supporting the national struggle. In the case of the concrete struggle, there is a call for action; in terms of preserving cultural integrity, a call for “inaction”. The consequences with regard to acknowledgement for participation in the national effort are not the same. Women are not valued as heroines for strictly following the precepts of a decent life. On the other hand, they are considered to be traitors in addition to being delinquent if they don’t. There is no show of recognition about the women’s “contribution”, although there is a great deal of it concerning the woman-as-mother in her traditional costume – a symbol of eternal Palestine.

The Second Command: Militating

The national discourse also emphasized the difficulty of the Palestinian struggle and the need to marshal all available forces, including women. It advocated their active participation as militants, if not as combatants. While Palestinian television most often showed women weeping beside a dead child, it also showed women’s demonstrations and their presence in Palestinian training camps for *fedayin* in the 1970s.

The National Struggle and Women’s Liberation

Should women’s liberation be promoted so they can participate more effectively in the struggle, as the women’s organisations in left-wing parties asserted? Or, on the contrary, should the two issues be separated to avoid introducing a division within the struggle for national liberation? The emancipation of women would then be put off until the end of the national struggle, while not excluding women from being activists within the boundaries of their family and social obligations. Contrary to charity organisations, the political women’s organisations sought to bring the two stakes of women’s liberation and national liberation together, in the latter’s interests.

But these changes favouring the emancipation of women were not neutral; they were experienced as challenges to the structure of society, and as such, as a potential weakening element. Therefore they were expected to remain silent about their demands in the name of

sacred national unity. Otherwise, their demands would appear to be created by an internal enemy. The national focus seemed contradictory for the girls whom it was asking to get involved, while simultaneously holding them responsible for the permanence of the social structure. That contradiction made their experience far more fragmented.

A Limited Commitment During the First Intifada

Women, especially younger ones, found themselves in an unusual situation during the first Intifada. Indeed, on a personal level they lost more than anyone else during the uprisings. Social controls, including over them, increase considerably during such times. There are several factors underlying this phenomenon. The first one involves the perception that women are prone to being less safe in public places, with the concomitant risk of dishonour. So their access to those places is reduced. Such periods are also times of mourning inside the community, and most celebrations and other public expressions of joy are suppressed or confined to private environments. Opportunities for legitimate outings are therefore also reduced. Studies in Gaza have shown that young women have given more “conservative” answers than their mothers about how many children to have, what age to get married at, what is permitted/forbidden, etc. This can be widely attributed to the context of mourning and coercion in which they have grown up.⁶⁷

Older women, who enjoyed greater freedom of movement, were thus able to participate in the first Intifada, which they readily described as a time of commitment that established specific modes of participation for them, with a new development in their role as mothers. The women would often rush at the Israeli soldiers in an attempt to rescue teenagers by pretending they were their sons. As for the younger women, they evoked the first Intifada in negative terms as a time of complete control. They in particular appreciated its end and the arrival of the

⁶⁷ According to two corroborating studies: M-S Abou Nijalan, *The Negative Adaptation Mechanisms of Women Their Social Situation*, Gaza, Al Azhar University, March 1997, unpublished, and Rema Hammami, “Women in Palestinian Society” in *Palestinian Society in Gaza, West Bank and Arab Jerusalem: A Survey of Living Conditions*; FAFO, 1993. The observation about “conservative attitudes” is based in the first study on an analysis of how they identify themselves; the results put the young women closer to their grandmothers than to their mothers. The second study asks a series of questions about freedom of movement, age at marriage, money available, etc. Their positions show a regression compared to their mothers.

Palestinian Authority.

During the first Intifada, according to a study by Barber, young women participated almost exclusively in demonstrations (80%) and food distribution (57%). Above all, the intensity of their involvement differed from the men's. More than 50 % of the young men declared having "often" participated in events, against only 20 % of the women.⁶⁸ The study was carried out among young people in Gaza aged 20-27 who were taking part in a UNDP (United Nations Development Program) training programme and university students. Both were already involved in networks through which they were more likely to be politically active.

Gender and Repertory of Contention

During the first Intifada, women were able to find ways of being involved – civil resistance, demonstrations, promoting nutritional self-sufficiency, etc. – which could be reconciled with only a limited challenge to gender identity. Economic independence was based on a return to family businesses in exchange for Israeli manufactured goods. Initiatives that encouraged women to make their own bread and preserves was in perfect agreement with gender identity and an emphasis on tradition – the sign of their legitimacy on the land. The armed struggle was a different story. Although the presence of women among the *fedayin* and figures such as Leila Khaled are often pointed to, they were nonetheless exceptions. Above all it corresponded to a time (the 1970s and early 1980s) when Palestinian nationalism in the wake of the Nasserist movement and clearly less marked by Islamist themes – did not use the same constructs regarding gender and political involvement.

"It's hard to bring girls into our organisation. It's also because there are all kinds of boys – educated or not, coming from villages; there are all sorts of boys, which is great, but it doesn't necessarily make the organisation very correct for the girls. Lots of things have to be changed for the women to become integrated. There were lots of women at the demonstrations at the beginning of the Intifada, but now there are none. The women's groups

⁶⁸ Brian K. Barber, "What Has Become of the 'Children of the Stone' ", in *The New Generation*, Jerusalem, Palestine-Israel Journal, Volume VI, n°4, 1999/2000; p 8 and 14.

are not coordinated and the demonstrations are not publicized enough. Maybe people are tired and don't know how to fight; they kill us and we can't kill a single one of them.''⁶⁹

Limiting the range of action to its most extreme forms reduced the women's potential involvement even more. While engaging in militant actions could enable them to acquire a certain status at the cost of a conflict with their own gender identity, entering into such extreme forms of action created such a huge contradiction that their involvement was nearly impossible. Most of the time they remained on the periphery, engaging in marginal activities reminiscent of the first Intifada – like the handful of teenage girls who were gathering stones for confrontations at check-points: ‘‘Even though I'm little, and even though I'm a woman, I can still do something. But my anger won't be vented even by doing little things like throwing stones. I'm never scared. Ever since I was a little girl, I've dreamt of being like those freedom fighters who used to go up into the mountains. But until now I couldn't do it. I only made it to the military roadblock once in the past seven days. You feel this anger and you don't know how to let it out unless you do something, even if it's just a tiny little thing. You can express your feelings, even if it's just with little stones. Lots of people make fun of these stones. But in my opinion these little stones are going to do a lot; even if it doesn't affect them, it will affect us – as a nation expressing its opinions.’’⁷⁰

Evident in these words is the double challenge required for women to become involved. On the one hand, they must overcome gender representations which consider political involvement outside their sphere: ‘‘even though I'm a woman.’’ On the other hand, they were confronted – specifically in the second Intifada – with being disqualified from this kind of action, which was nonetheless more accessible to them than armed struggle: ‘‘Lots of people make fun of those stones.’’ Older women joined the first aid teams in greater numbers at the scene of the confrontations and demonstrations. The women militants, who already belonged to other groups, had a hard time pursuing their work due to the situation.

⁶⁹ Interview with Rana, a *shabiba* militant from Ramallah (see below more excerpts from the interview and a more precise description of Rana).

⁷⁰ Badria, a 16-year-old schoolgirl, Ramallah, October 2000.

But despite the women's feelings of failure being just as intense as the men's, they were less tempted to take them on as a grim commitment. Other forms of involvement remained valid for them, however unpromising. Yet the general disqualification of forms of civil resistance also concerned them. "I don't want to die just because I threw a stone. And the Authority will never give us any weapons; we are an unarmed people and will stay unarmed. Because if we were to engage in an armed struggle, international opinion would turn against us; but in any case, it's already against us as it is. In France during the Second World War the Resistance movement carried out many operations, and no one thought anything of it; it was the path to liberation. But we Palestinians aren't given those same rights. They don't talk about the settler who killed a Palestinian while he was just sitting in his living room waiting for his mother to finish mending his trousers; they never talk about those things."⁷¹

Becoming Involved Nonetheless

The women's request to enter the public sphere in order to support the national struggle and their effective entry continued to clash with the refusal to accept the concomitant challenge to traditional identities. It seemed contradictory to demand "passivity" in the interests of the struggle, while officially valuing involvement. Women then had the possibility of playing the second command against the first, of appealing to the higher legitimacy of the national struggle against the community-based remnants which might handicap it. This "neutralisation" of the first command did not signal freer morals, but rather access to relative freedom of movement and a degree of mixing between sexes due to the obligations of militancy. This reversal was difficult because it required challenging gender identity, albeit rarely in a direct way. However, since the first command was not explicitly stated, it was difficult to challenge directly. The women's involvement was officially supported in Palestinian public spheres, even though it was seen as less important than the men's.

These images were reinforced by the omnipresent collaboration with the

⁷¹ Rana, a *shabiba* leader, Ramallah, quoted above.

Israelis, and by the rumours and information circulating about the methods employed by the latter to convince or force them to it. A challenge to someone's reputation or a doubt about their sexual conduct had serious consequences, particularly for women. Testimonials by repentant collaborators broadcast on Palestinian television insisted on the existence of such methods. A book of testimonials distributed by resistance committees from the first Intifada left a strong impression on people's minds. It tells the tragic story of a young woman who was drugged while having her hair done, then stripped and photographed with a man. Rather than collaborate because of the compromising photographs, the young woman committed suicide. Rumours circulating about Israeli recruiting methods fed the feelings of insecurity regarding young women's reputations and thus of control over their conduct.

The case of former inmates in Israeli prisons was particularly significant. Their time in prison endangered their reputations. Contrary to the male prisoners, they were considered less as victims or heroines than as women at fault who may have been raped. Their families often hid them when they got home and allowed them no social life.⁷²

Still, some young women became involved in militant structures, defying social taboos in the name of the supremacy of nationalism and the national struggle. Such cases were rare, but the cause of nationalism – and sometimes religion for Islamist women – helped them to confront these taboos, while being challenged and criticised all along the way by their extended families. The following is a testimonial⁷³ from Rana, 28, quoted above. She was a member of the executive committee of the *shabiba* (Fatah) in Ramallah. The *shabiba* claimed 6,000 members in Ramallah and its environs. Rana had a BA in economics. She was from a middle-class family from Ramallah. Her father was a hairdresser, two of her brothers were civil servants with the Palestinian Authority (a teacher and an accountant), another brother was at university, and her married sister lived in the United States.

“I was 15 when the first Intifada began. My whole family is in Fatah, but at the time I wasn't involved in anything. I participated in demonstrations with the other girls at school, but we went to the demonstrations of all the parties without distinction. My older sister

⁷² According to an unpublished study carried out by Shadia Sarraj, director of a rehabilitation centre for women in Gaza. Interviewed in Gaza, March 1997.

⁷³ Ramallah, June 2001.

belonged to Tanzim Fatah; I went into the Fatah women's organisation. I got into trouble with the family right away because they thought I was too young to be involved. But I stuck to my guns. But the women in the organisation were all older than me, and I felt like being involved with people my age. At the time the Fatah youth group (*Shabiba*) didn't exist, but there was the (Fatah) students' union, so I started working with them. The boys and girls were together; we held our meetings in the library. Then I joined the Fatah organisation (Tanzim), where the work was much more secret. But it was shortly before high school examinations, and my four brothers and sisters were in prison. So my mother said to me: 'you've got to stop this and get your diploma; what will we do if you end up in prison too?' I stopped and got my diploma. Then I went to Bir Zeit University. I became a highly active militant in youth movements. My brother and sister got out of prison. They were in a *Shabiba* at the university and I started working with my brother. In 1995, the Fatah *Shabiba* was created. I was a member of the executive committee with nine other women and twenty-five men. It was hard to bring girls into the movement because their parents usually didn't want them to. In my case, my parents are very open-minded, and they knew I wanted to work with Fatah after getting my diploma.

"Now it's different. It's harder because of the situation. For instance, I used to take food to the Palestinian security force roadblocks and get home around midnight. Now my mother keeps saying: 'stay at home; what will people say? All she does at home is sleep and shower.' My father doesn't talk about it much, but my mother! I hear remarks like that all the time. The problem here is that people talk about each other a lot, especially the old women. Our neighbours are very conservative, close-minded people. They did nothing during the first Intifada. On the contrary, they insulted us when we wrote slogans on the walls. That's also why my mother is afraid they'll start talking. So she tells me I'm a woman and should stay at home. I've stuck to my guns so far.

"I think things have also changed now because I'm the only woman at home. My sister is married and lives in the United States, and she was a leader. During the first Intifada, though, my mother used to stand in the doorway to see if there were any soldiers so she could

tell us to go a different way. Don't forget that in those days the soldiers were inside the town. But now I'm the only one of all my friends who isn't married and continues to militate. I'm different from them. I really want to get out and do something to change the ideology and people's mindset. My mother says: 'people forget the ones who die. After a while, during the first Intifada, they forgot that there had been a martyr in So-and-So's house. If you're wounded, even your closest friends will forget you after a while and stop coming by to see you.'

“But I get the same remarks from the men on the executive committee. Now I'm the only woman among 14 men. I'm trying to survive. If you want to work here, you really have to be willing to overcome all the problems and not get stopped by obstacles along the way. For example, if they see me working in the evening they say: 'Go home, what will people say?' But they can clearly see that I'm working. They tell me I have to get engaged and married, then people will stop talking.”

Young women can therefore make use of the contradiction in the national agenda—where the call to join the national struggle is combined with a demand for passivity in order to maintain the national identity. They can strive to neutralise the second command through the first one. The relationship between participation in the national struggle and the subjective construct then takes on a different meaning than for the men. For the women, there is the additional fact that in taking up the nationalist ideology they had challenged the gender identity which was restricting them. They thus acquired greater freedom of movement, as well as the possibility of asserting themselves more broadly than simply in their role as women. “There's a lot that needs to be changed in the way men see women. I have lots of ideas about our organisation, especially about how to give women greater independence. With this situation, many men no longer want to get married because who will be there to look after their families if they are wounded or killed? And if a woman can't go out and has to stay at home and has no education, what will she do if her husband is killed? Wait until someone else comes to take care of her? I'd like to set up classes in English, in self-defence, and courses about our society; I'd also like to do social work, visit the wounded and families of martyrs. (...) But I'm having a hard time with the members of the executive committee; they don't

want to work with me or help me. Perhaps because I'm the only woman. They always think I'm plotting against them. It's really hard trying to get them to change the way they talk to me and think of me. It's really hard, but I'm still trying. I hope to change their way of thinking little by little. (...) It's a lot to change in a short amount of time. I'm not sure what motivates me to do it, but I really hope to change many things.''⁷⁴

For these militant women, their involvement in the second Intifada, however desperate, held fewer contradictions than it did for the young men in that, despite the difficulties, it also signified an immediate benefit in the private sphere. That immediate benefit helped create a new link between the national struggle and the private sphere. A similar phenomenon can be seen concerning Fatah militants, when the immediate economic and social benefits they gained from their involvement counterbalanced the pessimism about political results.

For young women, the national struggle held a different meaning than it did for the men, and gender identity prompted specific negotiations. Their experience was far more fragmented. The gender variable casts a crucial light in analysing the relationships between the national agenda and the private sphere, as well as their evolution. This is summed up in the following table:

⁷⁴ Interview with Rana.

Private Sphere and National Struggle from the first to the second Intifadas: different significance for young men and women

	YOUNG MEN	YOUNG WOMEN
FIRST INTIFADA 1987-1993	Young stone-throwers occupy the political scene and their victory seems possible. Link between national struggle and private sphere	They are called upon to get involved, but are also responsible for the “permanence of identity” and are subjected to increased social controls. A contradictory double relationship
PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY ⁷⁵ 1994-2000	Bleak future. Retreat by default to the private sphere	A feeling of national failure, but greater freedom of movement. Constructive retreat into the private sphere
SECOND INTIFADA 2000-2002	Prospects on the horizon get smaller and smaller. The national goal is pursued, but considered unachievable. Dissociation between the two poles: a desire for exile or a grim commitment	They are less concerned about taking on the national struggle, and when they do become activists, it also means greater freedom of movement. Moderate Dissociation between the two poles due to the double significance of the national struggle for women

⁷⁵ The Palestinian Authority was greatly affected but did not collapse completely; on the contrary, reconstituting power was a crucial aspect of the second Intifada.

Chapter 3

Why the National Objective has not been Abandoned

The Palestinians' image of the national struggle is an essential tool in interpreting daily life. Of course, there are other places where everyday life is also unbearable— composed of humiliation and alienation— but is not reinterpreted in the same way. The Palestinian specificity lies in having built up, with regard to that experience, a conflicting counter-interpretation embedded in nationalism: “The Palestinians have survived crushing defeats and overcome them, and have in a way integrated them into their identity-related legends as triumphs (...) or at least as heroic perseverance against an impossible fate.”⁷⁶

Once that image has been developed, it can only be maintained, no matter how belied by reality. Indeed, its function is not only resistance in the field. It also plays a symbolic part in building a positive self-image.

Hisham is a good illustration of how a nationalist and conflictual interpretation can help an individual rebuild his self-image when faced with physical and symbolic violence. Hisham's private life has been gradually destroyed through pressure from the Israeli security services to become a collaborator. The crucial point is that he lives in Area B of the West Bank but works in Jerusalem, thus requiring a special permit to get there. “I was 15 during the first Intifada. There was no secondary school in the village. So I had to go to Jerusalem. During the Gulf War, Palestinians from the West Bank were forbidden to go to

⁷⁶ Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 194.

Jerusalem. I got there by various means. I was thrown out several times. It was extremely difficult to get to school, which was also closed six months out of the year. I was permanently thrown out before graduating because of my orange card (a card for Palestinians from the West Bank, which doesn't allow them to go to East Jerusalem). My brothers were in prison and married. At home I was forced to work, as my brothers were going in and out of prison due to their political activities. I worked in construction and cleaning. My father is elderly. From ten to eighteen I worked on Fridays and Sundays. I used to go get aluminium and leather from the garbage dump. Then I cleaned the streets of Tel Aviv from six to eleven p.m. I had no childhood or adolescence – I never went out, relaxed or had fun. It would be a lot less tiring to work with the Israelis, but I prefer to collect garbage and keep my dignity. I went to Jerusalem without papers. At the Kishleh or Maskubiye police station they arrested me and humiliated me physically. They held me responsible for a theft and for throwing stones: 'You did it!' Then they acted nice: 'You'll earn money, and if you need anything we'll do it for you. Sign this paper.' I refused to sign. So they started insulting my honour – my sister, my mother. They did that three or four times. Then they came to the house two years ago: 'He has to come to the police station!' I didn't go. Fifteen soldiers came during the day looking for me. People were going to think I'd done something bad, either a theft or something political. They said to my father: 'We just want to talk to your son; it's an honour to have a son like that.' My father said: 'they say you're good; what did you do?' They told me what day to meet them in Jerusalem, and I refused. I have family in Jordan, so I went there. They took my passport at the border and I waited three hours. A guy came and said 'Hi Hisham' in a really friendly way. He forced me to shake his hand as if I was his foster brother – to sully my image. It was impossible to keep my distance. I followed him and we talked: 'They need you in Maskubiye. Why didn't you go? You can't travel.' I told him I'd go see them when I got back and he let me go. When I got back I waited five hours. No one talked to me. They took my papers and told me to go to the Maskubiye police station.'

Then his new job in Jerusalem was at risk: "they called me at work and told me to go over there: 'come after work.' I didn't know what to do. It was going to be bad if I went, and

bad if I didn't. They told me: 'If you don't come, we're going to come and get you.' They told me to come by at around 7 o'clock, after work, so I went to the police station. The interrogation went on from seven o'clock until one in the morning. The place is known for people walking in and being taken away in an ambulance. I was scared. Should I refuse or accept? 'We'll help you. You have debts. If you have the slightest problem, just call us.' I needed to get out, to talk to someone, to get help. They had taken off all my brother's clothes and beat him on the testicles. I was scared. 'You're tired. We're your friends, don't be scared. Come back at two o'clock tomorrow and we'll talk, we'll work together.' Since then I've felt ill-at-ease.'

Furthermore, his relationship with his fiancée in Jordan became impossible: 'I have a wife in Jordan, but it would be impossible to bring her here. It would put even more pressure on me. One day they'd get her, and what if there was a baby too? I want to do the right thing.' This process – condensed here – was spread out over several years. Hisham found a symbolic way out – enabling him to regain his dignity – by adhering to a nationalist and conflict-framed reinterpretation: 'They said, 'Hisham, help your people; help the peace process.' But I had changed and was stronger. I said 'If I do something one day, it will be against you. This is our land, and you are the thieves.' They said: 'We thought you were more intelligent than that.' Whenever they saw me, they used that word 'intelligent'. I hate that word. Intelligent to them meant being a traitor. I started hating myself. Now I feel stronger. Nothing is too dear for Palestine. Rather than living like a mouse in its hole and never going out, except to take down notes on someone or at demonstrations, rather than living like a traitor. They beat me: 'Hisham, you had a chance to get married, to have a car and a pass. You'll be coming back here and kissing our shoes to talk with us.' But I never went back or kissed anyone's hands or shoes.'

But his life was destroyed: 'I don't want to work for you, and life doesn't even interest me if you're living on our land. (...) I won't go into all the ways they pressured me. My life was governed by papers (...) It extinguished my love. The woman I loved vanished from my heart, all of a sudden, when she said: 'what do you say?' when her brother told me to pretend to be working for them in order to bring her here. 'Some people work for them and don't give them any information. It's just to get the pass.' I felt like saying 'make love, not

war' but I lost what I was looking for. I lost my past when I lost my land, and my past is my soul (...) The Israelis talk about giving but never about giving back. I can't tell my story to everyone. And I can't just tell myself 'you're young, live your life; you can't make love anymore and you're full of war inside.' The only thing I have left is my work. I'm waiting to see what happens next time, how they'll get in touch, and what kind of pressure they'll use.''

The national image was both a real and figurative response to this symbolic and physical violence. Failure in the field did not mean that image was unsustainable on a symbolic level. On the contrary, it gained even greater importance that way. The vision was sustained all the more because the images surrounding the Palestinian national struggle had been so well developed. They included a system of symbolic and mythical constructs linked to Arab culture, expressed through a rich cultural output that is extremely widespread and rooted in the Palestinian population. Thus it is hard to find a Palestinian who doesn't know a few excerpts from Mahmoud Darwish's poems by heart.

However, the disaffection for the national struggle was also expressed by young Palestinians through their relative disinterest in that nationalist culture. Asked about their favourite songs, young people in 1998 generally responded with the latest Arab hits, and far more rarely with nationalist songs. But one of these, *The Arab Dream*, calling for unity in the Arab world and featuring most of the stars of Arabic song, was often mentioned. It seemed to be an intermediate proposition— highlighting identity issues while staying within the variety singer genre. Yet, while the nationalist culture no longer corresponded to people's everyday concerns during this intermediate period between the first and second Intifadas, it remained present as a backdrop, enabling them to transform humiliating daily experiences into myth. Arafat, in particular, illustrated the ambiguous figure of a national hero, yet one whose managerial style was much debated.

Getting through Military Roadblocks

“I have border sickness,”⁷⁷ remarked Amr. The daily humiliating experiences were linked to one place in particular – the checkpoints – especially after the A Areas⁷⁸ were created. We will come back to these checkpoints because they are part of people’s daily experience and are the main focus of interaction with the Israeli army. They have proven to be extremely important in terms of the Palestinians’ experience, which can be seen through many stories about the psychological impact of crossing them: “I got to work after having to cross the checkpoint the Israelis had put up on the road again. They made all the men get out of the taxi, lined us up on the side of the road and inspected us one after the other. The soldiers stood in front of us, and if you looked them in the eye they’d hit you; they slapped some of us just for the fun of it. After I got home, it took me three hours to get my concentration back before I could start working again. It’s the same for students; you can tell they have a really hard time concentrating.”⁷⁹

Many similar examples could be cited where concentration has become a recurring problem after such experiences. A young athlete had to leave the national volley-ball team for the same reason. According to his trainer: “He can’t focus on the ball or concentrate anymore due to the situation.” The young man himself was not eager to talk about any psychological problems, which are hard to discuss in Palestinian circles. He simply said it was a pity because he felt in fine physical shape: “At first I used sports to ease the pressure on me. I found release in sports from all the problems and pressures of the situation.”⁸⁰

The important aspect here is not so much the facts themselves, ranging from simple comments to extreme brutality – which for that matter did not necessarily cause the greatest impact. The key element in this experience lies in its meaning. The tiniest details began to

⁷⁷ Amr, 29, works in a democracy study centre in Ramallah. April 2001.

⁷⁸ The autonomy of the A Areas has been challenged since an increase in the temporary or lasting occupation of those areas began in June 2002 when certain areas were put under an almost continuous curfew.

⁷⁹ Conversation with a 32-year-old computer programmer at Bir Zeit University, Ramallah, May 2001.

⁸⁰ Interviewed at the Jabalya refugee camp sports center, August 1999.

take on a great deal of significance, encapsulating the whole situation of Palestinian oppression in one single interaction. Crossing the roadblocks daily, the Palestinians have stopped believing they could “escape” in any way from their situation. On each occasion it is the expression of a power struggle in which they are always at the greatest disadvantage. That disadvantage is also in evidence in many other situations, such as curfews, houses being searched and destroyed, etc. But the particularity of the roadblocks is that they operate even in calm periods and are part of everyday reality. One could say they are a form of “humiliation” in that, in their relations with Israeli soldiers, the Palestinians’ self-determination has been taken away and they are faced with a definition that negates them as individuals. The keynote in these interactions is the refusal to acknowledge them. So it is no accident if the look in a person’s eyes has become such an important part of the Palestinians’ perceptions. For instance, they mention the dark glasses hiding the Israeli soldiers’ eyes, and the stakes implicit in the act of lifting or lowering one’s gaze. The refusal to acknowledge them is also expressed through various gestures at the checkpoints.

Being at the mercy of Israeli soldiers is also tied to their unpredictability.⁸¹ Indeed, for the Palestinians, the soldiers’ decisions lie within an area of total uncertainty, ranging from crossings without any checks whatsoever to flat refusals to let people get through, which may be accompanied by a variety of forms of verbal and physical humiliation. In addition to this range of options, there is a shifting of the rules from one day to the next— and even from hour to hour. New checkpoints are set up, and movable roadblocks established. Furthermore, decisions are usually made by the person in charge of the roadblock, which increases the variability between checkpoints.

Each person in charge of a roadblock can interpret the rules in his own way. Thus the rules regarding crossings are all the more unpredictable to Palestinians, who have no way of knowing the logic behind them. Indeed, roadblocks often do not seem to be set up for security

⁸¹ “The power exercised by an individual or a group – in short, any actor in society – is indeed a function of the amplitude of the *area of uncertainty* which the unpredictability of his own behaviour allows him to control vis-à-vis his adversaries.” Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg, *L’acteur et le système*, Paris, Seuil, “Points Politiques”, 1981, p. 74.

reasons. For instance, the Israeli army sometimes allows lines of taxis to go around them, right under their eyes. The taxis make a detour on a parallel road to get back to the main road about twenty yards from the roadblock. Thus, even security cannot be used as a criterion in trying to assess the rules. And getting across is not the only area of uncertainty represented by the checkpoints. There are also other options employed more rarely, but nevertheless available to the Israeli soldiers— including arrest and imprisonment, pressure and threats to collaborate, physical violence and sometimes death.

For the Palestinians, crossing the checkpoints means entering a space in which they have absolutely no control over the parameters. It means penetrating into an area where one is completely exposed. To a certain extent the soldiers have the power of life or death over the Palestinians, who nonetheless invent strategies in an attempt to reclaim a small part of the decision-making and to offset the balance of power. Their strategies are part of a game in which the criteria are not reliable for them and their chances of success are highly uncertain. The Palestinians' relative success in challenging the blockades therefore depends mainly on how quickly they react and on their constant adaptability. Thus, they immediately take up any communications technology such as the Internet and cell phones, which eliminate the need to move around and increase their reactivity and adaptability. Because of the incompatibility of the Israeli and Palestinian networks and their different coverage, it isn't unusual for a person to have at least two cell phones (with a Palestinian and an Israeli company). These are crucial working tools, especially for shared taxi drivers – to establish their itineraries and multiple detours. In their attempt to get through despite the roadblocks, they obtain regular information about the checkpoints and their directives from those who have gone through before them. They also pass around the latest ways of getting through fields, down dry riverbeds and rocky hillsides. Given the highly variable nature of these situations, exchanging rapid and ample information is crucial to the Palestinians. They rely as much on technology as on close networks where “strategic” information about which routes to take is constantly passed around. A continuous network of information is thus created, with the shared taxi drivers at

the base. It enables them to get around the blockades to a certain extent, if they aren't too strict, especially in the West Bank where the various sectors have only been partially fenced in,⁸² contrary to Gaza.

Other strategies for getting around the roadblocks involve playing with the criteria required for crossing. Putting these into practise is extremely difficult, however, due to the changing rules at the checkpoints. When cars are only being checked randomly, as opposed to systematically, tactics are used to reduce the chances of being picked out for a check. Since women are (were) checked less often, they sit in the most visible seats so that the Israeli soldiers giving the car a quick glance will be less likely to look at the entire vehicle. When no pedestrian checks are in effect, the young men – the most suspicious category – and those who don't have papers to get into East Jerusalem, can ask to be dropped off just before the roadblock, which they cross on foot and are picked up afterwards by the shared taxi. If an untimely check is made on a young woman or man without the necessary papers, family ties can be staged, with elderly women passing themselves off as their mother, which sometimes works. The presence of foreigners, journalists or health care workers, who usually enjoy greater freedom of movement, is also sometimes highlighted in an attempt to get everyone in the vehicle across. This strategy fails more often than not, since the relatively specific status granted such persons is rarely extended to the shared vehicles they are in, and is often challenged in any case. These multiple strategies are only effective, relatively speaking, if the blockade is not total and the crossing is not completely hindered.

The positive self-image that could therefore emerge – from using wiles against strength – is mostly limited by the Israeli army's little consideration for its own security measures during periods of relaxed checks. Succeeding in getting around roadblocks in such cases – which they consciously allow people to bypass, and which handicap and slow down the circulation of cars and human beings to an extreme degree without totally stopping it cannot be seen as a real challenge to the balance of power. Therefore, in most cases the

⁸² The “separation fence” 30% of which has already been built, will lock off the West Bank, like Gaza, creating 81 closed enclaves where 490,000 Palestinians are to live.
http://www.btselem.org/english/Separation_Barrier/Statistics.asp

Palestinians' methods for bypassing the roadblocks are experienced less as positive signs of an ability to challenge the checks imposed on them than as additional examples of humiliation for having to walk hundreds of yards under the hot sun, to climb down a cliff in a suit and tie with a laptop under their arm, or along a rubber water pipe fifty feet away from where the soldiers are blocking the road, and so on.

Thus, a positive self-image – where interactions were presented as unfolding in the Palestinians' favour – developed from situations where the soldiers seemed more accessible. To “succeed” in such interactions, you had to draw the Israeli soldiers out of their “studied” nonchalance, which seemed to show how little they worried about the perfectly submissive Palestinians. Perceiving fear in a soldier's behaviour represented a victory, even if it led to an even more brutal and violent encounter for the Palestinian. Indeed, if the soldier was scared, it meant that the situation was not so clear and one-sided, and that the relationship was not totally in his favour. The Palestinians seemed to have a bit of room to manoeuvre, since the Israeli soldier at least thought so. There are many anecdotes describing the soldier's disproportionate reactions to a threat: a soldier on watch who jumps up when a little girl walks up, another soldier who nervously aims his gun when a Palestinian makes a move to get out his papers, or the one with his M16 slung over his shoulder who jumps back when an old handicapped woman without the proper papers has trouble getting out of the car, etc. Such scenes also show the soldiers' state of mind. Although armed to the teeth in order to control the civil population, they feel exposed both by the sheer numbers (a huge flow of human beings controlled by just a few of them) and by their isolation.

Although the impact of such strategies cannot be denied, their challenge to the balance of power remains minimal. They cannot be considered to have truly overturned a self-image of being completely at the other's mercy in such interactions. Being repeatedly confronted with that image, where even the slightest acknowledgement is refused, explains the profound impact of their experience at checkpoints – like that of being in prison⁸³, although to a different degree. Under such conditions, perceiving oneself as belonging to a community engaged in a national struggle and being a member of a victimised people becomes a decisive factor. These references to Palestinian identity are symbolic resources which enable them to give meaning to such

⁸³ About Israel's incarceration of adolescents and its consequences, see Cook, C.; Hanieh, Ad.; Kay, A.; *Stolen Youth: The Politics of Israel's Detention of Palestinian Children*, London, Pluto Press, 2004.

interactions, to no longer simply allow those in power to impose their meaning, and not to be confronted with them on their own.

The group element is important in this process. Indeed, the interactions are based on a balance of power which brings individual people face to face. The key to this process of reinterpretation lies mainly in the possibility of going beyond that level and adopting a broader, more general vision. In order to overcome what such interactions “say” about the individuals involved – and since they lack the ability to overturn the balance of power – they must turn them into episodes of a different story. The narrative is then built around axiological issues which speak of things other than the ruling power’s concerns.⁸⁴

In the Palestinian case, that reinterpretation needed a collective dimension in order to go beyond the threshold of individual experience. Collaborators, the information agents recruited by the Israeli secret service, often stress that the most painful part of their experience comes from the fact of suddenly finding themselves excluded from the process of reinterpretation and especially from its collective aspect. In betraying, they become isolated, with no possibility of connecting to the collective fate, which puts them even more at the mercy of the Israelis.⁸⁵ To counter this kind of collaboration without going into the summary executions carried out by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades here – the parties strive to connect the individual involved with a group experience and show him that he is only one case among many victims of such well-known techniques. “I know someone like that. Then they asked him to get his sister to collaborate. In the end he talked to a close friend about it. He was about 17. But they took him under their wing. They told him: ‘It’s their usual way. You’re not the first one; that’s how they go about it.’”⁸⁶ After going through this trial individually – and having no way of dealing with it alone – he now finds support through the group. However, these methods – mainly used by the left-wing parties – can only

⁸⁴ A comparable phenomenon can be seen in the way the Indians sought to interpret the phenomenon of the Spanish invasion. cf. Wachtel Nathan, *La vision des vaincus*, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, Coll. Folio/histoire, p 52.

⁸⁵ It should be noted, however, that there are cases of group collaboration; certain villages and families have been designated as such, for example. This kind of information should always be handled with caution.

⁸⁶ Interview with a PFLP militant, Ramallah, May 2001.

be applied when the person involved has talked about undergoing such pressure, which is rare. It is difficult to build a vision or reinterpretation of history on an individual level. It must be shared by the group in order to be effective.

Conversely, the Israeli soldiers strive above all to refuse any personal aspect in their relations which could bring out an individual dimension in the Palestinians. Their behaviour is generally based on an image of “the dangerous masses,” of Palestinians who are by nature violent and thus deserve the kind of treatment they are being given. On the contrary, one of the Palestinians’ strategies consists in trying to personalise their situation for the soldiers. They explain their personal case, their motivations, the reasons for their movement (I’m taking medicine to my sick mother; my boss is expecting me, etc.). In short, they try to take the soldiers out of the context of the conflict over the territory and put them in a different context which has nothing to do with that issue— a private exchange with another set of rules from the ones governing the clash between two peoples. Naturally the Israeli soldiers must try to avoid entering into this kind of exchange in order to continue playing their role of soldier correctly. This strategy, like the other ones, is most often destined to fail. Highlighting personal motivations makes you more vulnerable, providing the soldiers with information and power – unless the reasons given were untrue and just a way of arguing.

The Palestinians have another resource at their disposal by setting the interaction within the context of the national struggle. Although this doesn’t help them get through – on the contrary— the interaction takes on a heroic dimension . The Israeli soldier is looked straight in the eye, silence is maintained no matter what, or nationalist slogans are uttered. Naturally this is a difficult attitude to maintain because of the violence inherent in the balance of power. But it enables them to identify with the national struggle and thereby make the interaction relatively insignificant on a personal level, and even validating. It is further proof of the Palestinian people’s endurance.

Indeed, unable to overturn the balance of power, the “heroes” of Palestinian nationalism identify with a group image of endurance and durability symbolised by the words “we shall survive”, the famous Palestinian *sumud*.⁸⁷ Shifting to a longer time frame

⁸⁷ Constance, the ability to “hang on.”

allows them to move out of the context of defeat. This is displayed in an extreme way through the case of the “martyrs,” as we shall see. But without even taking part in this religious temporality, validating endurance and stoicism in a group process is already a way of entering a longer time frame and of imagining victory in the long term. Every daily experience of domination is then felt to be another trial for the Palestinian people, whose pride lies precisely in its ability to endure and – they hope – finally “wear out” their adversary.

This image can be found in numerous Palestinian paintings featuring a woman walking forward while holding symbols of Palestinian identity like a heavy burden. The following is one example. A taxi driver is going from Jenin to Ramallah. After many detours and after being turned back at ten checkpoints and having a gun aimed at him at one of them, he suddenly notices the way to get through. A railing on the side of the road was removed to allow cars to drive down a steep incline into a field; after crossing the field, one could reach Ramallah by going through a refugee camp. He suddenly veers into the ditch. A car behind him with a journalist inside is unable to avoid him and they have an accident. The taxi is smashed up; the passengers and driver are a bit shaken up. Without saying a word the driver, who has just lost his means of livelihood, in addition to his day’s work, transfers the passengers to the next group taxi, gives the driver the three audio tapes he wanted to take to Ramallah, and calls a friend to come and get his taxi. The passengers don’t utter a word either. Handling such everyday experiences involves pride in knowing how to adapt and endure; thus it would have seemed totally incongruous in the Palestinian context to get worked up about it.⁸⁸

This vision of heroic endurance as the shared identity of a people hinders other kinds of self-expression, in particular complaining. During the interviews, the Palestinians were often glad to have a place where they could express such issues: “I’m sorry but I wanted to talk to you about all this because there’s no one else to talk to about it.”⁸⁹ Verbalising is part of the process of building a victim image,

⁸⁸ Jenin-Ramallah route, May 2001.

⁸⁹ Kamal, 20, an English student. His father works in Israel and his mother is a teacher. He lives in an area with new buildings for inhabitants of the Jabalya refugee camp (who can afford it). August 1999

but it also underscores the narrow margin of expression available to the Palestinians: “Since everyone has his own problems, no one listens to me and I can’t talk about it; then I feel tormented by inner conflicts, and problems could arise because of that at some point. It was a good opportunity for me to express myself.”⁹⁰

Humour is another means of self-expression, in addition to the heroic vision of endurance. A humorous account of certain events is indeed one way of distancing oneself from them.⁹¹

Israel: a Fascinating Enemy

An image of the enemy is built up through interactions with it, such as at military roadblocks. As in a mirror effect, that image owes a great deal to the way the Israelis characterise the Palestinians. Palestinian nationalism has largely developed as inverted Zionism. In a certain sense the two societies are involved in a “dialogue.” It’s not that they are developing a space for communication within which to understand each other; but the conflicting visions they have built up – and their criteria for legitimacy – respond to one another.

The difference lies in the balance of power. Israeli characterisations of the Palestinians are filled with symbolic violence for the latter, who express these internalised definitions through a process of self-denigration described long ago by Erikson: “In any system based on repression, exclusion and exploitation, the oppressed, excluded and exploited unconsciously accept the image with which the dominant group characterises them.”⁹² Thus the Palestinians have taken up certain remarks about the congenital incapability of the Arabs, their leaders, etc.: “If we practised our religion in the proper way, we would be united and there would be

⁹⁰ Ra'ed, quoted above.

⁹¹ Palestinian jokes, which are very political, often involve interactions at checkpoints (in addition to the innumerable jokes where the humour lies in comparing Yasser Arafat with a donkey). A collection of jokes has been published in German: Sharif Kanaana and Pierre Heumann, *Wo ist der Frieden ? Wo ist die Demokratie ? Der palästinensische Witz : Kritik, Selbstkritik und Überlebenshilfe*, Zürich, Chronos, 2001.

⁹² Erik Erikson, *Adolescence et crise : la quête de l'identité* (1968), Paris, Flammarion, 1972, p 60.

no occupation. We would all be together and would live better. It's because Muslims are dogs. We should all be united on the same path.''⁹³

Similarly, the image they have of Israel is far from unanimous. In fact, while Israel appears to be the enemy within the context of the conflict, its dominant position in the balance of power and the symbolic violence it can wield have also led to associating it with the positive image of a "winner." Thus, there is a kind of ambivalent "fascination/hate" construct with regard to it. To be sure, Israel evokes an enemy which is destroying, killing and taking away the land. But it also represents strength, modernity, technology, consumer society, a high standard of living, and so on.

Israel, an Outpost of Western Modernity

This characteristic explains why Israel's image is more widely linked to Western modernity. The double relationship with the West of "fascination and demonization" is a widespread characteristic of young Arabs. Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi noted this in young Moroccans, for example.⁹⁴ Technology and comfort have appeal and are cast as positive values. An ambivalent relationship develops between the desire to possess them and the refusal to owe anything to the enemy. A group interview of three young women shows this ambivalence:

Ahlam: "The West is an advanced world, especially in terms of technology. (...) It's obvious that they have reached a level we haven't attained, and we can learn something in that area."

Roz: "No, we don't want to learn anything from them."

Ahlam: "I'm just saying we should take in their knowledge and technology."

Roz: "They got it from us!"

Ahlam: "It doesn't matter who started. Now we're interested in that knowledge, and the important thing is that they have it. Knowledge is for everyone and has no limits; it should be accessible to Europeans and Arabs. (...) There are many things that we simply don't know about. I hope we'll acquire that level of knowledge with or without the help of the West.

⁹³ Tala't, 22, a student and salesman in his family's shop. His father, now deceased, was a politician. Hebron, May 2001.

⁹⁴ Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, *Soumis et rebelles : les jeunes au Maroc*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 1994, p 65-74.

Roz: “We don’t need their help.”

Ahlam: “Of course we do – since we want to acquire that knowledge.”

Normine: “I hope we reach their level without needing any help.”

Roz: “Without their help and without adopting their ideas.”

Ahlam: “I’m not saying we should adopt their ideas or their lifestyle.”

Normine: “I don’t agree with you at all. They live comfortably, so you can’t compare. There’s a difference. They have technology and advanced knowledge. Why? Because they have a good, comfortable life. They don’t have to think about how to drive out the occupiers. Now we’re just thinking about how to have a good life, how to feel safe and have a secure life. That takes up a lot of our time.”⁹⁵

There is a clear rejection of Western lifestyles, associated with amorality and selfishness: “They have technology in the West, but I don’t like the West at all, mainly because of one thing – sexual freedom – which is really not good.”⁹⁶ This is a way of attempting to turn around the balance of power on an ethical and spiritual level, where Western domination is transformed into an inferior position. Building Islamic modernity is largely based on this approach, which combines a desire to acquire a consumer society and technology while refusing “libertarian” lifestyles: “Western countries are developed and civilised. It’s good to have all those things, but it’s even better to have them and preserve religion and traditions. If I lived in France, I’d keep my religion and traditions. I prefer to belong to my own traditions and religion.”⁹⁷

As a representative of technological, consumer-driven modernity, Israel offers the promise of an appealing combination of know-how and material well-being. Calls to boycott Israeli products are not well heeded, particularly as Palestinian consumers prefer them over Palestinian or Arab products. While they are more expensive, they convey an image of quality

⁹⁵ Three 20-year-old students from Bir Zeit University. Alham and Roz are from Ramallah, Normine lives in the Qalandya refugee camp. Their fathers are, respectively, a plumber, a carpenter and a surveyor. Interviewed in Ramallah, October 2000.

⁹⁶ Mouna, 23, who is looking for work after studying to be an engineer. Her father is a shop owner and her mother runs a centre for social work. Nablus, October 2000.

⁹⁷ Roula, 26, a business student and secretary at the Nablus town hall. She is married and has a daughter. Her father is a university English professor and her mother teaches Arabic. Interviewed in Nablus, October 2000.

and modernity.⁹⁸ Similarly, while Israeli soldiers may be hated, they are also symbols of strength and power. So their style is copied by the young militants, from the military clothing to the sunglasses, as well as their casual, superior attitude. T-shirts covered with Hebrew writing sell very well at markets. Sellers stress the product's "Israeli quality" to convince potential buyers, and so on.

One approach to avoid this kind of ambiguity towards a fascinating enemy consists in dissociating the West from Israel. In this interpretation, the former is supporting the latter because it has been fooled by its propaganda, and Israel has achieved its level of technology and consumerism through a transfer rather than through its own devices: "Westerners listen to and repeat what the Israelis tell them. If only the Israelis would stop distorting the truth for the media! The European media are against our fight in this new Intifada and are supporting what the Israelis are doing to us."⁹⁹

The ambivalent relationship to the West and Israel has made the Palestinians even more sensitive to the way they are portrayed. Their experience of this symbolic violence is even harder for them as they are committed to the idea of modernity yet feel rejected by the image it projects of Palestinians.

Symbolic Violence and Conflict

Symbolic violence affects self-esteem and results in suffering. The stronger it is, the greater the risk of political violence. The humiliated group can oscillate between two attitudes: apathy or violence. As for young Palestinians, violent phenomena have long been seen as part of a strategic vision and conflict-driven intention, in which a political solution seemed possible. The conflict played an integrating role, as observed by Georg Simmel.¹⁰⁰ But that possibility has disappeared, political solutions seem out of reach, and violent phenomena have lost their strategic meaning and turned into a means of self-affirmation, or a "staging" of one's situation and trying to make the other vulnerable despite his power. It is also an

⁹⁸ Interview with Odeh S. Zaghmouri, president of the Federation of Palestinian Industry, February 2001.

⁹⁹ Rula, quoted above.

¹⁰⁰ Georg Simmel, *Le conflit*, Paris, Circé/poche, 1995, from p. 40 on.

attempt to overturn symbolic violence and at the same time assert one's despair by associating one's own death with that of the adversary. Even without any hope of success, the conflict is thereby sustained, not only in its strategic dimension but also because it affords the possibility of self-affirmation countering the destructive images described above. When the realm of behavioural possibilities becomes disfiguring no matter what, and there is no protected space left, violence is as much about making oneself and one's despair visible as about pursuing a structuring conflict, whatever the price.

Mythical Reasoning

The idea of mythical reasoning may be useful in the Palestinian context to indicate a change in the dimension and temporality of explanatory models by drawing on and transforming available cultural resources. When these resources do not offer a satisfying enough meaning, new references may be adopted that are more or less well-known, but do not belong to the immediate repertory. The "mythical" way in which reason operates evokes a "de-historicising" of the explanatory processes. The latter are then linked to a certain number of symbols, heroic figures and values – courage, sacrifice, etc. – which provide ways of reading and interpreting experiences and are highly motivating. Indeed, they imbue everyday life with intense meaning, where the slightest action is part of a mythical narrative that transcends its prosaic nature.

According to Michel Wieviorka, engaging in "mythical reasoning" is characteristic of social antimovements: "The identity principle, which defines the individual and the population in whose name he is speaking, ceases to be a reference to a social identity (...) and becomes an appeal to a human being, an essence, or abstract or mythical figure. Whether deified or naturalised, that identity is then meta- or infra-social; the protagonist in the struggle expresses himself in the name of principles – justice, morality, freedom – more than in the name of any real social force. He defines himself through belonging to a community rather than through his involvement in a social relationship."¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Michel Wieviorka, *Sociétés et terrorisme*, *op. cit.*, p 17.

Independently of such extreme forms, however, it should be noted that myth-making is a general phenomenon characteristic of national mobilisation.

Young Palestinians are attuned to poetry and the Koran, which are readily evoked to supply analyses of situations or to justify one's conduct. Many proverbs have also been attributed to *al hadith*,¹⁰² although their origin is uncertain: "I'm learning English. If you learn the enemy's language, you can understand how he thinks. The Prophet Mohammed said: 'Whoever learns a nation's language protects himself from its wickedness.'"¹⁰³

"We won't obtain our right to Palestine through talking. It will come from Jihad. There is a poet from the pre-Islamic period (Jahiliya) who said: "There is no future other than the sound of swords, which will answer for us. Unsheathe your sword. There is no future that can allow it to be put back in its sheath."¹⁰⁴

Palestinian nationalist poetry— like its songs— are one of the support mechanisms through which an acceptable meaning can be given to everyday experiences by raising them to the status of myths.

Samir is a waiter in a restaurant in Ramallah. His boss has tried everything— from threats to lunch invitations — to stop him from going to demonstrations at military roadblocks. At one of these, he began drumming on a military Jeep after the crowd had surrounded the soldiers and prevented them from throwing tear gas. A soldier promised to target him at the next clash. He continued to go to the demonstrations wearing huge sunglasses and a baseball cap: "When I go to a demonstration and hear 'Unadikum,' I go into a trance and forget about the danger. I forget about everything and just go ahead."¹⁰⁵

Unadikum ("I call on you"), written by poet Toufiq Zayyad, long-time mayor of Nazareth, and sung by Ahmed Qa'bur, is one of the emblematic anthems of Palestinian nationalism:

¹⁰² *Al-hadith* designates the corpus of the Prophet's words and deeds, or his approval of words spoken or deeds carried out in his presence. There are several compendiums. The *hadith* is considered to be the second authority after the Koran.

¹⁰³ Tala't, quoted above.

¹⁰⁴ Badria, quoted above.

¹⁰⁵ May 2001.

*“I call on you,
I squeeze your hand and kiss the earth under your feet
and say to you: I sacrifice myself.
I give you as a gift the light of my eyes and the warmth of my heart.
The tragedy I live is my share of your tragedies.
I did not humiliate myself in my homeland and I did not
lower my shoulders.
A barefoot, naked orphan,
I have risen against the oppressor
I have felt my own blood on my hands,
but I have not lowered my flag.
And I have cared for the green grass
over the graves of my ancestors”.*

For Samir, his real life clearly starts when he enters that altered state at demonstrations where – quite peacefully and without throwing the slightest stone – he gets beat up or narrowly escapes flying bullets. But that isn’t the important thing. Through that commitment he is identifying with the barefoot orphan who has nothing but stands up and says no. He enters the heroic epic and his entire experience is changed.

Through the images in these songs, weakness and defeat are reinterpreted. The weak rise with infinite courage and pay a high price for it: blood, tears, mourning and death are everywhere. Suffering is not hidden. On the contrary, it is staged, but transcended at the same time by being part of a network of symbols and meanings. Thus, however powerless and defenceless, the hero will prevail through endurance and his bond with the land. His tenacity is not only a reference to his own personal time. It is combined with that of all the previous anonymous heroes who have already died and all those who will die. Perseverance and everlastingness are rooted in a bond with the mythical land for which one is fighting and where the dead are resting – a land covered with olive trees, which are long-lasting and symbolise his understanding of his people.

Mahmoud Darwish’s poetry, for example, develops this kind of theme, but also includes very different poems which challenge the martyr figure. Similarly, contemporary literature has approached these themes in a very different way. But this approach has a very slight following, involving only a small circle of people. While knowing many expressions, quotes and poems by heart is part of their cultural heritage,

young people have massively adopted the most lyrical nationalist writings in their discourse rather than a broader spectrum of Palestinian works of literature and poetry. What they are looking for is a heroic reinterpretation of reality.

Heroic Palestinian Figures

There are two kinds of heroic figures that have been created and used by the Palestinians – the impersonal and the personalised. The former are by far the most numerous. Throughout its history, the Palestinian national struggle has generated anonymous heroic figures who have become part of the militants' mythology. Their transformation tells as much about the changes in the struggle as it does about the meanings and images attached to it. Thus, the anonymous Palestinian hero went from being a *fedai*, a resistance fighter willing to sacrifice himself, to one of the *shabab* during the first Intifada, and finally to a *shahid*, or victim-hero. They went from being fighter heroes who put themselves in danger but didn't always die¹⁰⁶ to young people armed with rocks. The act is important, less from the results obtained than from the gesture of putting oneself in harm's way in the public arena and expressing the continued refusal of the occupation. Finally, the last figure is that of the martyr who is only fulfilled through dying. We will explore this idea later on.

Impersonal heroes are mainly celebrated in songs and poems, as well as in film footage continually replayed on Palestinian television. The figure of the *shabab* is presented in this form in particular – as stone-throwers, young men taking down an Israeli flag, a child walking towards a tank, etc. The scenes are broadcast to the tune of nationalist songs and with images of the land of Palestine.

Impersonal figures are highly valued and help the identification process. Above all, the process of myth-making around the Palestinian national struggle uses them to project an image of a people rising up rather than of a few strong figures. Because victory is associated with a future beyond a human lifespan, it becomes necessary to draw on the longer time frame of an entire people. Thus, numerous anonymous figures are highlighted, like signs

¹⁰⁶ The relationship with death was nevertheless already highly present; when Fatah militants signed up and changed their names in the 1970s, they provided a photograph to be used for the poster that would be made if they died.

of the mobilisation of the population at large. Yet there are posters in the streets of a few personalities who were particularly illustrious *fedai*, such as Abou Djihad.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, in order to root the Palestinian national struggle more firmly in a thousand-year-old jihad, the Islamists readily evoke Saladin and ride by on horseback carrying aluminium swords to evoke that illustrious personage. But the heroic figure offered up for identification remains above all impersonal.

A lack of prestigious internal figures is one characteristic of the current Palestinian movement underscored by many young people, who mention in particular their need for a leader. Young people are looking for heroes to identify with in order to give meaning to their everyday lives. The movement's tutelary figure vanished when Arafat lost prestige and was challenged by a whole segment of the population.¹⁰⁸ Various processes may explain the lack of an alternative charismatic leader. Arafat's strategy first aimed to prevent the emergence of a potential competitor. Local organisation and the division of Palestinian territory also made it very hard for anyone to break through outside his own area. Sheikh Yassin,¹⁰⁹ a key figure for Palestinian Islamists, was never really recognised beyond it. Marwan Barghouti, who was often mentioned, was mainly established in Ramallah and its environs. He grew in stature through his imprisonment, but was never a truly charismatic figure with a broad base.

Young Palestinians therefore went far off in search of heroic figures. Judging from symbols highlighted during demonstrations, currently the most popular ones are foreigners who are very distant from one another: Nasrallah, the head of the Lebanese Hezbollah and Che Guevara. Nasrallah's success is not hard to understand. He has been victorious against the same enemy as the Palestinians. Young Palestinians emphasise the fact that he deals with the Israelis on an equal level: "Nasrallah isn't like other Arabs. He isn't cowed by the

¹⁰⁷ Abu Djihad was one of the founders of Fatah in 1959. In the 1980s he ran the Occupied Territories office in Amman and coordinated the first Intifada for the PLO. He was assassinated by an Israeli commando on 16 April 1988 in Tunis.

¹⁰⁸ From November 1998 to June 2002, Yasser Arafat's popularity went from 42% to 24%. Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, www.jmcc.org. He died in November 2004.

¹⁰⁹ Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, one of the founders of Hamas, was assassinated by the Israeli army on 22 March 2004.

Israelis. He talks to them in a natural way, about point 1, point 2, point 3, and just says you either accept or you don't, and that's it."¹¹⁰

Furthermore, unlike other Arab leaders, Nasrallah isn't the double-dealing type, since he has at least partly overturned the balance of power. He can say the same thing to his troops and to the Israelis. And people particularly appreciate the fact that he keeps his promises. So as a symbol of victory, the Hezbollah's yellow flag flies during demonstrations, and new rumours often spread announcing the arrival of Hezbollah teachers and the creation of new cells for the movement. Many young Palestinians see the Hezbollah and its leader Nasrallah¹¹¹ as the only ones who can liberate them.

The charismatic figure of Che Guevara is not that of a winner. First made popular by leftist movements and then adopted in a more widespread way, his image is that of a victim-hero who died struggling to help a legitimate cause. He died, but he was justified; his name will remain in people's memories and the fight will go on after him. In this opposition between Nasrallah and Che Guevara, the choice between the two figures is not based on the social projects they embody but rather on the meaning and reinterpretation they may bring to the situation. The important aspect lies in the heroic figure's capacity to transfigure everyday life and change the images associated with the balance of power.

In the same process of identification, young Palestinians readily watch American TV shows featuring soldiers in Vietnam, but they change what the director intended. Despite the highly negative role attributed to the Vietnamese, they are the ones with whom they identify in the series: "When I watch TV alone at night, I look at those American films with a lot of violence and fighting. (...) Those American films— such as the ones in Vietnam — show us their patriotic myths and how they save their soldiers who were taken prisoner; but I see the Palestinians in the Vietnamese, and how the American soldiers kill the people and slit their throats. I equate their actions with those of the Israeli soldiers."¹¹²

Shiite References

The need to adopt heroic figures and ideologies that provide meaning to their suffering by giving it mythical status goes beyond more or less contemporary historical references. One can see a tendency in Palestinian youth – which can be attributed to Hezbollah, although it is not the sole influence – towards a fascination for the Shiite pantheon and its rituals that allow men to express great grief in public: "I got into an argument with my religion professor during the Intifada. The Shiites are always getting criticised, but despite everything that's said about them, one thing is for sure: Hussein was right and he wasn't given his rightful place. I often thought about Hussein during the first Intifada. Sometimes I cried thinking about him."¹¹³

¹¹⁰ A 24-year-old engineer in Ramallah, June 2001.

¹¹¹ whose name means God's victory.

¹¹² Interview with a student in sociology, organiser at a youth centre and member of the Fatah Youth (Shabiba); his father owned a small local restaurant, Gaza, August 1999.

¹¹³ A computer programming student in Berlin, originally from the town of Gaza. His father is a taxi driver. Berlin, February 2002.

Palestinian students in Berlin were particularly affected by a Shiite ceremony organised after the death of a friend: “At first they told us that whoever wanted to could stay on the sidelines. I sat down in a corner. Everyone at the university knows I’m not religious. But it didn’t feel right. I could see them praying and felt caught up in it, so I joined them even though I couldn’t remember the prayers very well. The most impressive part was when the Sheikh told the story of the death of Ali. He cried, and then everyone started crying one after the other, hiding their faces with their hands. At first I thought they were pretending, but no, they were really crying. And the Sheikh kept on talking and talking. It was very moving, and I began thinking about Palestine, and all the deaths. Tears were welling up in my eyes and I was embarrassed. I looked over at Ahmed (another Palestinian student) but he was choked up too.”¹¹⁴

Thus, when the cultural resources at hand are not well-adapted, or on the contrary when those coming from abroad are particularly well-adapted, these references are taken up. The Sunnis could look on the Shiite reference with hostility, but they are starting to take it up because it is a means of grasping the Palestinian situation and of expressing it. Bernard Lahire has evoked the cognitive gaps of someone who does not have access to the proper models required to grasp a particular situation.¹¹⁵ One way of dealing with it is by taking them

¹¹⁴ A 29-year-old Palestinian student in Berlin, March 2002.

¹¹⁵ Bernard Lahire, *l’homme pluriel*, *op. cit.*, p 69.

from somewhere else. The level to which they have adopted other models is quite relative here, since these young people have not become Shiites. But they remain fascinated by its heuristic capacity.

The more a person's freedom and possibilities are restricted, the more they develop mythical interpretations that enable them to modify the playing field. The less influence the person has over his fate, the more he tends to resort to these kinds of references quite unequivocally.

Rumours and Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories that have flourished in the Arab world – Jewish conspiracies, Israeli conspiracies, by secret services, and so on – are ways of accounting for a feeling of weakness with a single explanation. At the same time, they erase the humiliating side of defeat by underscoring the all-powerful nature of the adversary. Although the general theme of anti-Semitism is present here, in this context it mainly expresses how the defeated strive to recount their failure without losing their positive self-image. The enemy was extremely powerful; moreover, even Western governments have submitted to it. This interpretation of reality through a unique causality is generalised, and most events are included in it. This tendency has been reinforced by the opacity of political decisions and the nature of the conflict, which involves collaboration, secret service and undercover units.¹¹⁶ The context has encouraged the Palestinians to generalise this “shadow” mode of explanation centred around the theory of an all-powerful secret service mysteriously informed about everything. Here, as elsewhere, rumours are built on conspiracy theories.¹¹⁷ The rumours feed on the group's insecurities and usually recount situations where an individual feels totally at the other's mercy: “Beyond their irrational aspects, rumours are part of a strategy for group survival. In their own way they express the thousand sufferings, frights and hopes of a people whose fate hangs on events that are beyond its control. Rumours are a long-lived form of myth and

¹¹⁶ The *duvdarin* or “*musta'ribine*” are Israeli units disguised as Arabs whose job is to assassinate wanted persons directly in the Palestinian Territories.

¹¹⁷ This is a classic characteristic of political rumours and is not specific to Palestinian ones. See Jean Lambert, “Rumeurs et légendes jordano-palestiniennes” in Riccardo Bocco, Blandine Destremau, Jean Hannoyer. (ed.), “Palestine, Palestiniens : territoire national, espaces communautaires”, *Les Cahiers du CERMOC*; n° 17, 1997, p 387.

legend which probably make that dreadful uncertainty more bearable.’’¹¹⁸ Rumours and conspiracy theories are attempts to provide interpretations of reality. They speak of the person’s helplessness, which they simultaneously transform by associating it with the interplay of dark forces.

The national objective has been maintained independently of its chances for success, because the meanings attached to it are what allow the individual to construct an identity. But these images have gradually lost their roots in social conflict and have ceased to be part of what is considered possible. They have been constructed as increasingly uniform, timeless myths in an effort to perpetuate one reading of the national situation despite its being closed off. Shifting into the realm of myth preserves the heuristic impact of the national struggle against the disavowal of reality. The individual is reconstructed in this way despite his lack of acknowledgement during interactions with the adversary. But as this reconstruction of identity gradually occurs through increasingly unequivocal mythical forms, conflict – the basis of this reconstruction – loses its capacity to integrate. Having become enemies, the two adversaries create their relationship through images that answer each other by evoking the same simple, absolute differences so characteristic of myth-building. The conflict goes from being a factor of integration to one of total incompatibility and exclusion. The images answer one another, but they no longer rely on the common social basis within which the conflict must be expressed. I would emphasize that this is an ongoing process that does not appear to be irreversible. Mythical reasons are invoked all the more so because the future seems blocked on the Palestinian side. Yet there is still a powerful tendency to employ a discourse and images that refer back to the integrative conflict agenda and, above all, regain their importance once positive changes can be seen on the horizon. From this point of view, the fascination with the West and Israel limits the process of dehumanisation of the enemy.

¹¹⁸ Jean Lambert, *Rumeurs et légendes jordano-palestiniennes*, *op. cit.*, p 386.

Chapter 4

The Individual and the Community

For Palestinian youth, life is not limited to the national struggle. In fact the private sphere is a specific issue at stake within this society, where communitarian logic is much in use. Meanings associated with that private sphere operate within a more or less conflicting relationship concerning references to the nation on the one hand, and to the community on the other. Earlier in the book we referred to this idea of the private sphere involving political stakes, through the fragmentation of experience and the relationship to honour within the national struggle. The private sphere is what must be preserved in a situation of insecurity and must remain inaccessible to the occupier. The situation becomes even more impossible for people to live with when that sphere is challenged. The violence experienced by the Palestinians also comes from the disappearance of a protected private sphere. That private space therefore involves crucial political stakes.

In the case of Palestine, and Arab countries in general, the private sphere lies at the crossroads of different forms of reasoning and does not only pertain to the binary opposition between public and private as it is chiefly presented in the West. Indeed, one can distinguish three dimensions that reflect different processes, although they overlap in people's everyday experiences. The public space corresponds to the national objective; the private sphere to the individual level; and what could be called the local space, whose importance to the Palestinians has been highlighted by Aude Signoles,¹¹⁹ corresponds to the community-based logic. Information

¹¹⁹ Aude Signoles, "Réfugiés des camps, réfugiés des villes et familles autochtones vers une reconfiguration des pouvoirs locaux en Cisjordanie", in Nadine Picaudou, "La Palestine en transition", *Les annales de l'autre Islam* n°8, Paris, ERISM, INALCO, 2001, p 315-338.

about community-based networks— who belongs to what family, which family is for or against which other family, etc.— are often considered to be one of the most sensitive issues to Palestinians, perhaps even more than involvement in the armed struggle. Political networks often overlap with community-based networks, and in that respect the former type of information leads to the latter.

In analysing the private sphere one must therefore consider the relationship between individuals and the community. That relationship cannot be reduced to a mere opposition between individuals and the group. Farhad Khosrokhavar introduced the idea of the “quasi-individual,” to indicate that the process of individuation is both possible and limited by the reference to a more or less imagined community.¹²⁰ The reference to community, however, does not necessarily signify a loss of the individual in a group-based logic. As communitarian philosophers have shown,¹²¹ being involved in a community can also be a source of support in structuring the individual. The relationship between individual and community should not be considered uniform.

Community is a powerful frame of reference in young people’s experience, and not just with regard to national identity— in particular concerning the issue of honour. For Palestinian youth, it is part of their individual history. Indeed, communitarian logic is a resource through which one can carve out a local, relatively well-protected space, and in which the individual can find a measure of stability, particularly when other means of action are no longer options such as becoming involved in the national struggle or through economic integration.

One development is worth noting. From 1997 to 1999, there was a clear change in the answers to the interviews I conducted. In the first interviews they distinctly challenged the situation — in particular regarding the loss of status for young people — and showed a desire to fight back. Two years later it was no longer a time for challenges, but rather for adhering to the patriarchal hierarchy. A vast majority of young people answered “my father” to a question about

¹²⁰ Farhad Khosrokhavar, “Le quasi-individu”, in François Dubet and Michel Wieviorka, *Penser le sujet. Autour d’Alain Touraine*, Paris, Fayard, 1995, p 235-255.

¹²¹ See for example: Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and Politics of recognition*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton Press, 1992 and Ayse Ceyhan’s analysis: Ayse Ceyhan, “Le communautarisme et la question de la reconnaissance”, *Cultures et conflits*, n° 12, Winter 1993.

who their heroes and models were. Fathers were presented as an ideal to follow – for both men and women – as an image of power and strong personalities: “My father is my ideal. I don’t know why; I love him a lot. I have a lot of respect for his strong personality and I’d like to be as strong as he is.”¹²² When mothers were mentioned – far more rarely and always in association with their fathers for the young men – it was with some reservations due to their “compromises” with society, as opposed to the fathers who had succeeded in imposing their own will, being loved and respected: “My mother is my ideal – but not for everything. She’s so patient with so many people who haven’t been very nice. I couldn’t stand that myself – to have someone put that kind of pressure on me – but my mother goes along with it.”¹²³ The times were no longer about opposition, but rather about restructuring around community-based skills: “My father died when I was one year old, so I didn’t know him. But based on what everyone says about him – friends as well family – I hope I can be like him. He founded our driving school. He was the eldest, he had the power to do anything and was responsible for everything.”¹²⁴

When the father didn’t live up to this image of a social figure who could fix “problems” and knew how to work the social system, other male figures in the family were sought out, such as a grandfather, older brother, a “successful” uncle, etc.: “Since my grandfather was so perfect, he was well-loved by people and conducted himself very well; the same goes for my father, but not quite as much. My grandfather was the oldest member of the family, so everyone listened to him and loved him a lot.”¹²⁵

In 1998/1999 there was what might be called the end of a certain “youth-oriented” ideology. They went from the “we” of the *shabab* who were proud of “leading the revolution” to “my father, the hero.” Unable to obtain status through a revolutionary heroic identity or

¹²² A 21-year-old woman in the Jabalya refugee camp, who left school at 17. She is doing a training course in ceramics at a women’s activity centre. Her father, a bigamist, runs a small shop. Interviewed in Jabalya, July 1999. (4% of marriages were polygamous in the Gaza Strip in 1997, PASSIA 2002, p 287)

¹²³ Hayat, 24, from the Shati refugee camp (in Gaza), a sociology student and social worker at a women’s centre. Her father opened a small shop after he became too old to continue working as a taxi driver (interviewed in Shati, July 1999).

¹²⁴ Ra’ed, 19, a business student and dishwasher in a small restaurant. The family owns a driving school where three of his brothers work (interviewed in Gaza, July 1999).

¹²⁵ Mohammed, 22, a portable phone repairman. His father is a labourer in Israel. (interviewed in Gaza, July 1999).

through economic integration, young people focused on assimilating through their family identity and their fathers' social skills. In fact, the new position proved to be inferior to the one they lost. But by highlighting their identity not as young people, but rather as members of a family with an honourable position in the community and a well-respected father, they assimilated back into society. Unable to progress by constructing a specific identity, they reclaimed their position through family.

However, the image of the individual conveyed by this development stands in opposition to the process of individuation and of creating a truly private space for oneself. Belonging to a community proves to be ambivalent, as it provides access to resources of identification and a support network, yet it also entails behavioural obligations and even obstacles – especially for women: “What I love in this society is the mutual trust and assistance. But at the same time I dream of walking down the street and not knowing or saying hello to anyone. People here make themselves sick by trying to find everything out about each other. They think they have to meddle in your affairs and help you even if you don't want them to.”¹²⁶

The relationship of Palestinian youth to community is driven by tension. The community allows them to carve out private space, yet at the same time it is opposed to individuation due to its group-oriented reasoning. Furthermore, the reference to the individual has powerful axiological connotations because it is considered to be a Western value. Therefore the process of individuation cannot be perceived or presented as an action which is exclusive to Palestinian society.

The Private Sphere and Community

Young people have to respect a number of rules of conduct that indicate their inferior status within the family. Certain attitudes are not permitted towards one's father or eldest brother, whose decisions must be respected. As far as young women are concerned, this holds true for all the male members of the family as well as for older women. This is a general rule, and

¹²⁶ Mahmoud is very involved as a leftist leader and psychology student. He suffered a severe leg wound during the First Intifada and walks with a crutch. He has a visa to go to Canada to have a leg operation and to pursue his studies thanks to a grant; but the Shin Beth has made it hard for him to get through due to his militant activities.

interactions change from one family to another, respecting that structure to a greater or lesser extent and always open to variations depending on whether the family is dealing with the community at large or with its own members. In the former case, it must show that the community rules are being respected so that the father can “save face”.¹²⁷ The strong hierarchical nature within the family unit has led young people to single out several areas of private life depending on their degree of freedom. Being with one’s group of friends is not the same as being at home with one’s father.¹²⁸ For young women there is no real equivalent to the group of friends. Older women may get together, but it is rarer for younger women to do so. Time spent outside the home is more limited and it doesn’t allow them to develop that level of sociability, except with regard to students – in particular for boarders.

Young men adopt a different attitude when among family and if the father is present. They do not stretch out on the sofa, smoke or talk about certain topics, etc. Their group of friends has a different set of rules. It is a space in which they feel greater freedom, and it is referred to as a place where they feel more “themselves”: “Generally speaking, I don’t talk a great deal at home. With my friends, on the other hand, I laugh, tell jokes and talk a lot. I don’t talk very much with my parents because they’re old and can’t understand me. It’s not like with my friends. We’re the same age, from the same generation, so we know how to relate and talk with each other. There may be a difference between male and female friends too. I have both men and women friends. I can say whatever I want to my male friends, but you have to be more careful and more serious with the women.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ “An individual saves face when the line of action he is pursuing projects a consistent self-image, i.e. supported by judgements and indications from the other participants and confirmed by what is revealed in the impersonal aspects of the situation (...) During a specific contact, any interacting person whose personal attributes are known or visible may consider it normal and morally justified that people should help him to save face. (...) As soon as a person enters a situation where he has to save face, he takes responsibility for assessing whatever events are encountered. He must be sure to maintain a certain expressive order.” Erving Goffman, *Les Rites d’interaction*, Paris, Minuit, 1974, p 13.

¹²⁸ These distinctions also exist in societies where the reference to community is extremely weak. Basically, the stronger the hierarchy, the greater the distinction.

¹²⁹ Samir, 21, an architecture student in charge of a computer room. He comes from Salfit, a village near Nablus. His father is a doctor.

Family problems are rarely spoken about within one's group of friends because community ties are at stake. Trust within the group is sometimes challenged when family and community quarrels enter into it: "The difference is in the way you talk about things. There's a particular way of talking with friends, and certain subjects you may talk about, such as women. I only talk about family issues with my family. It's different with the eldest brother."¹³⁰ There are things you can't talk about in front of him."¹³¹

Although behavioural norms must be respected, the family (including the extended family) is usually presented as a resource network rather than as an obstacle – 'my uncle got me out of prison, another family member is helping me find a job,' etc. As a result, when young men talk about the limitations imposed on them, it involves the situation at large or money: "The limits I experience in my life here are solely due to the economic situation."¹³² "Money and the Israeli government are the obstacles in my life. Palestinians are always afraid of doing anything."¹³³

Not directly mentioning the family – or possibly the extended family – doesn't mean it isn't involved in the decision-making process. An individual would not necessarily feel this kind of intervention to be an unwanted interference. He might accept the role he is being asked to play. Moreover, young men have much greater latitude than young women. The latter, on the contrary, emphasise above all the restrictions imposed on them through social controls: "It's very difficult to do anything in our society. Everything is restricted. What's more, my freedom of movement is even more restricted because I'm divorced. They're always watching, to see where I'm going."¹³⁴

Marriage remains a key factor. Between the desire to let the family pick a suitable wife and the wish to keep it a personal matter, marriage is definitely one of the current areas of tension

¹³⁰ When the father died, his responsibilities were assumed by the eldest son.

¹³¹ Tala't, quoted above.

¹³² Razmi, 23, an engineer. His father now runs a small supermarket after working for a long time as a construction site manager in Saudi Arabia (interviewed in Ramallah, October 2000).

¹³³ Sahir, 22, is studying business while working in his father's dry cleaning shop (interviewed in Nablus, October 2000).

¹³⁴ Leïla, 22, is a journalism student at Gaza Islamic University, and a secretary. She lives in the Bureij refugee camp in Gaza. Her father is a jeweller.

between individuals and the community: ‘‘I want to get married through my family, of course – because of tradition. In any case, it won’t work any other way.’’¹³⁵ ‘‘Depending on my destiny, I’ll either meet her through my family or through my circle of friends; but it would be better if it was through my family.’’¹³⁶ ‘‘Definitely not through my family. That doesn’t exist anymore. It’s sheer folly to allow your family to pick a wife for you. I’ll find her myself, when the time is right.’’¹³⁷

Thus, finding a wife through the family is not presented as the only way of getting into a relationship, even if it is hard to come in contact with young women any other way, except through student circles. Various strategies are employed to get around these difficulties and to start a relationship without the community knowing about it – such as sitting next to each other at an internet café and communicating through email on a screen so that no one will suspect they are conversing. One young man from a refugee camp became a newspaper delivery boy in order to correspond with his neighbour through messages he slipped inside the newspapers, which she was always careful to be the first person to fetch.¹³⁸ In any case, consent from both families remains crucial: ‘‘We got married out of our own choice, like in a dream. But then there was a disagreement between our two families and we had to separate.’’¹³⁹

Relations between the two families and between the daughter-in-law and her in-laws (with whom she usually goes to live) are a crucial issue often mentioned in interviews. The young men want a young woman ‘‘who won’t create problems’’: ‘‘I want an obedient wife, with high morals, who accepts my situation as it is without making any comments about it.’’¹⁴⁰ ‘‘I want a woman who has high moral standards and is well educated – someone who finds everything to her liking. If we live with my family, I don’t want her making remarks or saying she doesn’t want

¹³⁵ Khalaf, 22, who has a Master’s degree in Literature and Geography, is a house painter like his father. Gaza, August 1999.

¹³⁶ Mahmoud, 23, a psychology student who lives in the al-Maghazi refugee camp (Gaza). His father is a labourer in Israel. Interviewed in August 1999.

¹³⁷ Ashraf, quoted above.

¹³⁸ Mahmoud, 19, lives in the Jalazun refugee camp (Ramallah) and serves coffee at a company in Ramallah. But his story took a bad turn. After a long correspondence with the girl, they met once in a café in Ramallah, and her father found out. Since then she has not been allowed out, and they communicate by telephone from time to time.

¹³⁹ A 23-year-old woman interviewed in Gaza City, August 1999.

¹⁴⁰ Jamal, quoted above.

that kind of a life and doesn't want to live with my family. I don't want that kind of pressure from her.''¹⁴¹

The situation is different for young women. The involvement of the family and extended family in decision-making is vital. When asked about what obstacles they encounter, they usually mention the extended family and the way society sees them: "There are lots of problems at home with my sisters-in-law. At first there were just problems between them and me; but then they started talking about me, saying I was doing this or that, and everyone began to watch me."

These obstacles speak of their reputations, and therefore of the attention they must pay to gossip if they are to continue living on good terms with the others. Furthermore, all women hoping to undertake anything have stressed the fact that they must start by getting free of these concerns and distancing themselves from remarks of this kind from their families. Young women's strategies for fighting community coercion and their own fear of rumours rely in part on the existence of support groups, where the trust built up may enable them to overcome obstacles to their freedom of movement. Young women therefore seek first of all to play the family unit off the community or *hamula*:¹⁴² "I'm really happy when there's no one at home and nobody meddles in my life. I only feel unhappy when people want to intrude in our private life. They're always asking questions – What are you doing? – and it offends me. And now they're saying: She finished university, so what's she doing, where's she heading? Whenever my cousin the taxi driver sees me, he asks: What are you doing here? Go home!, and so on. I tell him that my own family is aware of what I'm doing and trusts me, so it's none of his business!"¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Mahmoud, 21, a student at al-Hazar University, July 1999.

¹⁴² The *hamula* is usually defined by the Palestinians themselves as their relatives from the same patrilineal descent and is characterised by being linked to the same patronym. In fact, the formation of the *hamula* is also based on other links, such as matrimonial, matrilineal, neighbourhood, political and economic ones. The definition of the *hamula* as a "patronymic association" is therefore more precise. Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East and Central Asia. An Anthropological Approach*, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 2002, p 144-145.

¹⁴³ Aisha, quoted above.

In relying on these emotional bonds, women acquire negotiating room regarding community constraints. They spend a considerable amount of time trying to influence decisions on that level – by putting off wearing head scarves, by going to university, by not marrying such and such a person, etc. Obtaining support from their family can then enable them to free themselves from certain constraints. Consequently it is important for them not to enter into head-on clashes, but rather to focus on the emotional level and a sense of trust in order to develop the best arguments. “I do my best to find my own way in society, but as a woman I encounter many obstacles. Most girls have the problem of being in a patriarchal society. I live far away from my family. I live two hours away from them, alone with just one female roommate. I work. They can’t accept that. They have a hard time accepting it, but I have the right to live alone. But they’re always pressuring me to come home. Even though my own family has accepted the fact that I live alone, the extended family and the people around us haven’t. It’s easier to get my own family to accept it, because they know me, than the *hamula*. But I don’t think I have to live with the *hamula*.”¹⁴⁴

Similarly, as it is very hard for them to be in the forefront, they lay great emphasis on the idea of being an independent couple and on establishing their own family unit to counter the influence of their extended family and especially of their in-laws: “My husband supports me if I have to come home late from work, for example, or if I have to go somewhere. Before, I had five brothers and it was hard for me because I had to ask all five of them for their approval. Whereas now there’s only one person to ask, and my husband understands me, so I can ask him things and we speak freely about them.”¹⁴⁵

Since they cannot act directly, their chances of creating such a unit reside in their husband’s ability to oppose the in-laws’ and extended family’s instructions. This is why they stress their desire for a husband with a strong personality who can take decisions independently:

¹⁴⁴ Ubur, 26, a graphic designer. She is originally from Jenin, and works in Ramallah. Her father runs a garage and her mother is a teacher. Interviewed in October 2000.

¹⁴⁵ Salma, 24, a supervisor in a women’s centre and a sociology student. Her husband is a technician. They live in the Bureij refugee camp. Interviewed in July 1999.

“I want to marry a man with a strong personality vis-à-vis those around him. There is always a fuss with other women, like when his mother says he has to do things this or that way. He must do as he wishes, not as she tells him.”¹⁴⁶

Being in a couple is endorsed by young women as a means of escaping coercion. That endorsement is only possible with the husband’s “understanding” – an extremely important feature for these young women. How much latitude they have depends on it: “There’s not much hope for any improvement in my life. I’d like to learn and become educated, but for personal and economic reasons I can’t. My husband doesn’t want me to continue my education and can’t provide economic assistance. He doesn’t want me to work either, although we haven’t come to a definite decision about that yet.”¹⁴⁷

For young men, however, being in a couple is associated more with tradition, while their group of friends represents an area of more freedom. Being in a couple ensures their position in the community. Maintaining their honour and status depends on their wife’s irreproachable conduct. Therefore they want a “religious, moral and obedient” woman who will guarantee their inclusion in society under the best conditions. The following is the reaction of a student questioned about the expectations of young women hoping for a husband “who has a strong personality, is responsible and understanding”.¹⁴⁸ “I possess the first two qualities. I am independent and responsible, and will support my family. As for the third adjective, it indicates a stupid aspect of modernity letting your wife go out a lot without asking permission, and so on. I can’t accept that. Those are my principles. It’s not about being underdeveloped; but my wife is under my authority and she has to take me into account and respect my decisions.”¹⁴⁹

While some young men found the adjective “understanding” acceptable, this kind of reaction shows the conflict of interest between a man who wants to preserve his honour and authority and a woman seeking greater freedom through being part of a couple. Clearly this gap

¹⁴⁶ Afife, 22. She left school at 15. Her father is deceased. Her older brother is a labourer in Israel and the second brother is a tailor. Interviewed in Gaza, July 1999.

¹⁴⁷ Lamis, 21, whose husband is a tailor. Interviewed in Gaza, July 1999.

¹⁴⁸ These adjectives were taken from my survey of 50 young people in Gaza in July and August 1999. The answers to the question ‘could you give three adjectives to define the qualities you expect from you husband (or your wife)?’ proved to be unvarying from one interview to another.

¹⁴⁹ Udey, quoted above.

partly explains the recent phenomenon of unwanted celibacy in young women who have attended university and whose work is related to their qualifications. These young women from conservative families who allow them to go to university but feel unable to deal with their success – do not want to return to their villages and sacrifice their careers. Since it is not acceptable for them to live ‘alone’ with other young women as roommates, they live in residences for young girls with curfews and other controls.

Young Women in Refugee Camps

Building up the private sphere against the community is not a widespread phenomenon and presumes there is some manoeuvring room. While conducting a survey in a refugee camp, I noticed that this dimension had totally vanished from the young women’s discussions, which only denoted *‘adi* (normal, habitual) as an answer to my questions.¹⁵⁰ They no longer understood the reason for the interviews, as it was totally incongruous to question them regarding a fate so perfectly set and integrated, involving no conflict or distance. Their aspirations and social role were one and the same. The image of an individual who might have taken other decisions lost most of its meaning. “I see my future life as a normal one. We’d also like to have a house of our own if the economic picture gets better. I don’t want anything more than that, as long as we don’t have any more money than that. My father hasn’t earned a shekel in the past three months.”¹⁵¹

Their fate is subsequently robbed of any originality and is seen as an answer to the normal aspirations of every woman: “What would you like to do in the future?” – “The usual, nothing special. Like everyone. Everything comes from religion; it’s natural. There’s nothing else. There are no women who don’t want to get married, have a family and children. Who wouldn’t want that?”¹⁵²

Gender identity in itself is not seen as an obstacle. On the contrary, respect for interdictions shows that the family functions well within the community: “I don’t want to work

¹⁵⁰ Nine young women were interviewed in the survey, conducted in the camp at Jalazun near Ramallah, between January and April 2001.

¹⁵¹ Ilham, 23, left secondary school in order to get married. She has two children. Her father and her husband sometimes work as labourers in Israel.

¹⁵² ‘Abla, 25, left school at age 13. her father is an electrician in a settlement. Interviewed at the Jalazun refugee camp, April 2001.

outside the house. It's normal. My father is very nice. He gives us everything. We never lack anything. My mother doesn't work. It seems natural to me.”¹⁵³

Their aspirations involved corresponding perfectly to the community ideal rather than forming a couple to obtain greater freedom. The young women's position in the community depends on how well they correspond to that ideal. Within this context – of people from a poor background – the future husband is mainly expected to be morally upright and to ensure a sufficient standard of living. The young women left school between the ages of 13 and 16, either because they were failing or because continuing would have meant leaving the camp, since it was not equipped with the educational infrastructure required. They do not appear to have developed a discourse – observed elsewhere – challenging the obstacles to their freedom of movement. It was nearly impossible to carry out an interview with them, since it had lost all meaning – except through the fact of explaining local customs to a foreign woman. And even that dimension faded to the extent that gender identity had supplanted nationality. As a woman, a foreigner should have had the same aspirations. However, one way of reviving the interviews was by talking about television. Television programmes virtually their only entertainment, along with visits, due to their confinement within the camps – give them a view into another world. One Mexican TV series was very popular. The freedom enjoyed by the women in the series was unanimously and severely criticised as amoral and antireligious. But the amorous storms featured on the show fascinated them, even though they denied any possible link with their own lives: “There's one Mexican TV series I like to watch. The actors are foreigners, but they speak in Arabic. It's nice. We also watch Arab and foreign films. They talk about social issues. Problems between people are the same everywhere. Problems about money and marriage are the same everywhere. But in real life there are no love stories like the ones in films.”¹⁵⁴

Other women find support from their families or through emotional ties in their attempt to open up space for negotiation. These women do not even have that option and wouldn't even consider it. But they give themselves space for dreams in the series. “I love the TV series that are

¹⁵³ Inas, 23, whose father is a nurse's aide. Jalazun, April 2001.

¹⁵⁴ Inas.

about love. They're different. There's more freedom between the men and women, which isn't good. But the lives shown on those shows are much better. There's no occupation. Everything is possible. They have so many rights over there."¹⁵⁵

These interviews were conducted in a refugee camp where working in Israel and in the neighbouring settlement of Psagot has spared them from complete poverty. Even though it was divided into upper and lower Jalazun, and between richer and poorer, as well as good and bad families, the camp isn't (wasn't) in completely dire straits. But there were cases where the living conditions were far worse, such as in the Shati refugee camp in Gaza.¹⁵⁶ Images of what constitute a normal life have not changed for the young women I met. But their discourse did not have the serenity of a totally adequate habitus. Girls from Shati were the first victims of the utter destitution that prevails there and casts doubt on the possibility of achieving a community way of life, however limited. Within this context, questions about projects or the future caused the interviewees to break down on several occasions. Having generally spent very little time in school and been saddled with household chores and babysitting for their brothers and sisters at a very early age, these young women could see no prospects for the future. They also suffered from extremely difficult sanitary conditions. They are seen above all as burdens to their extremely poor families, for whom they bring in no money, contrary to men and even older women and young boys, who often enter the informal economy and try to improve everyday life by selling things on a small scale. Furthermore, many men could not raise enough money to get married,¹⁵⁷ which removed one potential way out. Their window of opportunity was closed. Situated at the very bottom of the community hierarchy, and completely dependent on the rare resources which they could not provide, these young women are the ones who suffer the most from the economic situation.

¹⁵⁵ Ilham, 23, whose father is a construction worker. Jalazun, April 2001.

¹⁵⁶ Interviews with five girls were conducted in this camp in August 1999, along with participatory observation in the women's centre.

¹⁵⁷ Due to the many people who died, the collective mourning around the Al-Aqsa Intifada forbids any conspicuous celebrations. Some couples were thus able to get married because the ceremony was far less costly.

As long as that situation ensures the proper functioning of the community, they have the status of dominated individuals, but with certain rights and obligations. On the other hand, when the situation deteriorates to the point where the community no longer functions properly, they are seen as a burden to the rest of the community. While an older married woman may be allowed to look for work in a pinch despite the resulting dishonour – this would be totally unthinkable for a younger woman. However, a certain number of initiatives have been undertaken for them in Shati, where they have been given manual training in embroidery and craftsmanship for instance, and where an attempt has been made to sell their work in order to provide them with an income and to change their image as burdens.

The private sphere is thus a blend of one's family, group of friends and marriage partner, signifying both one's attachment to the community (through the family hierarchy and the transmission of community expectations) and protection against its expectations. This protected space – where an individual can develop his own logic – and its preservation or assimilation constitutes an area of political importance. In this context, promoting a certain form of individuation which could thrive in that space is far from neutral. 'I am the eldest son but I don't want to be responsible for my sisters and brothers. When I go home my father looks at me askance and says 'welcome' in such a despairing way. One day I said I wanted to go to Canada. He asked, 'Why Canada? You could go to Chicago, for instance, where we have family. – No, I want to go someplace where no one knows me.' He just looked at me and sighed.'¹⁵⁸

The individuation process is in tension with a communitarian self-representation that stresses hierarchical order. When the actor must integrate the communitarian dimension to such a high degree in the process of constructing his identity, it then has an effect on his self-image. The association of individualism with Western ideology and values is also an obstacle in the process of individuation

¹⁵⁸ Hisham, an engineer in Ramallah, September 2001.

Fulfilment or Betrayal?

Young Palestinians often use vocabulary involving self-actualisation: “I want to be master of myself and owner of myself.”¹⁵⁹ “I won’t relinquish my right to define myself.”¹⁶⁰ This kind of reference cannot be seen as neutral, however, as it clearly refers to the West. Palestinians customarily try to dissociate personal fulfilment and individualism, and to associate self-actualisation and a rejection of individualism. But trying to promote the private sphere – particularly if it is to the detriment of the national struggle – is not a neutral proposition for young Palestinians since they then have to deal with the reference to the West signified by this attempt. The Arab world is searching for a kind of modernity that is synonymous with well-being, consumerism and technology. At the same time its relationship to Western domination is balanced by a symbolic shift in favour of spiritual values. This change of level is occurring according to a principle we have already explored with regard to Palestinian nationalism and its construct of honour against Israel. Individualism is associated with materialism and hedonism, contrasted with spirituality and Muslim religiosity, as well as with solidarity among Arab countries. This construct is particularly valid regarding the endorsement of Islamic modernity. Yet its ideological coherence, and above all the fact that it shows a proud face to the West, have enabled it to be assertive enough to enter into the modern world while preserving certain values and avoiding alienation.

In this context, the reference to individuality or to personal projects is made possible when it does not appear to be promoting individualism. Otherwise it suggests support for values that take issue with those of the community and of solidarity for the national cause, as well as for the West– perceived as an adversary due to its domination and above all to its support for Israel. Supporting individualism therefore becomes a double betrayal. On the one hand it is seen as the Trojan Horse of Western “perversion;” and on the other hand, by advocating individual destinies

¹⁵⁹ Souha, 22, a pharmaceutical student and volunteer in a first-aid team. Interviewed in Ramallah, October 2000.

¹⁶⁰ A 22-year-old student studying business at Bir Zeit University, originally from Gaza. Answered on an anonymous questionnaire. December 1997.

as more important than the national or collective destiny, it could signal a weakening of the struggling Palestinian people.

Rather than being associated with individualism, personal projects are therefore presented as a source of personal fulfilment which allow you to be more involved in society and help it progress: “Naturally each of us has to work and do something, but in the end it should be of help to other people. I’m studying pharmacy. My goal is to work in scientific research, and as Palestinians we should have the goal of achieving great things. Studying cannot be separated from society. We must work in order to help society and people to develop. I’m working for this organisation¹⁶¹ for that reason. One of my goals is to feel that I’m benefiting young people in society.”¹⁶²

As one might imagine, this dimension is particularly strong in young women, who always stress the social aspects of their projects and their desire to help others: “After finishing my studies I’d like to found an orphanage.”¹⁶³ “I’d like to work to help handicapped and abandoned children.”¹⁶⁴

In hoping to handle everything together— their children, jobs and social work — these young women correspond to a gender identity which forbids them to advance their personal goals, even more than it does the men. The men lay more emphasis on their desire to succeed in their work.

Nevertheless, while highlighting one’s social involvement may neutralise accusations of individualism, it also transforms the meaning of this act of solidarity, which goes from being mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. Support is provided on the basis of the impersonal status of someone in need rather than on community-based family ties. Not involving a frontal opposition, solidarity projects cannot be perceived as imposed by Western values. Moreover, Islamism

¹⁶¹ A first-aid team.

¹⁶² Souha, quoted above.

¹⁶³ An 18-year-old student in humanities at Bir Zeit University, originally from Gaza. Answered on an anonymous questionnaire. December 1997.

¹⁶⁴ A 20-year-old student in pedagogy at Bir Zeit, originally from the Khan Younis refugee camp in Gaza. Answered on an anonymous questionnaire. December 1997.

does use the same process. Its highly active charity networks also redistribute aid based on social criteria and have established a system of solidarity that has nothing to do with community solidarity, and therefore also changes the significance of the individual within Palestinian society.

Palestinian youth's experience of the "private sphere" has developed in relation to the national struggle, to the community and to the ambivalent promotion of the process of individuation, which is hard to separate from its reference to the West. The community provides status and social resources, but it is also a hierarchical network which young people – particularly young women – must often oppose in order to develop their individual plans.

Domination and the Fragmentation of Experience

Palestinian youth live within a split field of experience. They do not correspond to Bernard Lahire's model in which the plural individual may not see different behavioural patterns as contradictory, as long as they come from distinct ranges of experience.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, the individuals find themselves caught in a vital opposition here – between life and death – which cannot be separated into different areas. However, while this opposition fundamentally concerns the same scope of experience, one way for the individuals to "deal with" this contradiction is by not considering it as such. Their discourse thus involves both death and life projects as two different temporalities. The same young person might give a well-argued explanation about wanting to die and go on a shoot-out every night, etc., then take you a few minutes later on a thorough visit of his garden, where he has just planted some trees he hopes to see come to maturity in 25 years: "I want to die. Tonight I went out shooting and didn't crack open a book."¹⁶⁶ That's good news about there being no test."¹⁶⁷

Similarly, an activist convinced that he may die any day now – and has in fact narrowly escaped death on several occasions – refuses to get married because he feels he has no

¹⁶⁵ Bernard Lahire, *op. cit.*, p 47.

¹⁶⁶ A student at Hebron University and Fatah activist. He was referring to his English books. May 2001.

¹⁶⁷ The English test was cancelled because the professor couldn't get there due to the blockade.

future. But he wants to build a house, even though he just escaped from a bombing.¹⁶⁸ The refusal to take the apparent contradiction into account is also expressed in other areas, although in a less extreme way. One young man explained at length why religious precepts had to be respected. Although he was deeply convinced of this, he then went on to describe in detail – and without finding fault with himself – how he did not respect them in his own behaviour. He acknowledged the contradiction in his discourse, but at the same time refused to see it as a problem. Indeed, it *isn't* a problem unless one is looking for coherence on the part of the individual. Yet in the case of such divided experiences, the fact of refusing to look for coherence may also be a way of dealing with the contradiction, which the individual accepts because he has no other choice. He has given up trying to bring his various experiences together. When talking about the national struggle, he is speaking of death. When talking about his personal projects, he is speaking of life. But he can no longer link the two. Accepting the contradiction then becomes a way of coping with living in a contradictory field of experience. Moving through this gap without trying to unify experience then appears, paradoxically, to be a means of staying connected.

This way of coping – involving a rejection of the contradiction in and separation between fields of experience – can be found on other levels as well. Thus, as with the colonized people analysed by Abdelmalek Sayad and Pierre Bourdieu,¹⁶⁹ this double game – which can be seen in some Palestinians is a strategy for responding to domination. To a significant extent, Arafat's double discourse – for which the Israelis have criticised him abundantly – has been viewed as indispensable by Palestinians, given his position in the balance of power in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on the international diplomatic scene. For the Palestinians, he did not possess enough power to have the same discourse on both the Israeli and Palestinian scenes. Dominated on the Israeli scene, he was forced to do what was expected of him there. But that did not mean he was unable to develop other ideas – on the domestic stage where the balance of power was different – corresponding to the people's expectations rather than to those

¹⁶⁸ A Tanzim Fatah activist, Ramallah, March 2001.

¹⁶⁹ Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, *Le déracinement, la crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie*, Paris, Ed de Minuit, 1964.

of the international scene or the Israelis. What was seen as hypocrisy by the Israelis was understood by the Palestinians as a way of dealing with pressure. They often didn't take Arafat's international speeches into account, making do with what he said on the domestic scene. The limits to this mode of operation were reached when Arafat was called upon to take decisions to enforce what he had said. Then his domestic legitimacy fell because his actions contradicted the people's expectations. Furthermore, it was no longer possible for the Palestinians to maintain the double discourse theory. There was no domestic scene anymore, and the domination was spreading.

The issue of domination is crucial here. To be dominated is to see one's experience split up, broken apart and no longer have the means to provide oneself with a sense of coherence coming from within: "dominated individuals and groups have been dispossessed of their capacity to unify experience and to give it an independent meaning."¹⁷⁰ With domination, the injunction to develop coherence comes from the outside and attacks everything that escapes it. There is no protected space left. The feeling of vulnerability became extreme for younger Palestinians when one of the last protective figures- that of the father - was struck down.

As Sylvie Mansour has shown, the images of Mohammed el-Dourra -in which the father was incapable of defending his child - have had a powerful effect on Palestinian children in that they were tackling a strong figure and have destroyed a protected space.¹⁷¹

Is it possible for an individual to find unity within this kind of situation?¹⁷² For Alain Touraine, "you can't talk about a dependent society and look for 'positive' social actors. The peculiarity of this kind of development is that everything seems upside down. Exploitation becomes exclusion, work becomes loss of work; but also, class becomes community, and political action becomes both submission to demagogic manipulation and sudden violence."¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ François Dubet, *opus cité*, p 256.

¹⁷¹ Sylvie Mansour, "Les enfants dont on ne parle pas", *Ici & là*, Jerusalem, Centre culturel français, March 2001.

¹⁷² "A world that is torn apart and disoriented can only be transformed (...) through the demands of an individual who cannot bear to be divided within himself or be subject to double dependency. It is not the individual as such who seeks to rebuild himself, to reclaim his inner unity and his awareness of it. He can only be restored by acknowledging and asserting himself as the Subject, or the initiator of meaning and change, and equally of social relationships and political institutions." Alain Touraine, *Pourrons-nous vivre ensemble ?*, Paris, Fayard, le livre de poche, 1997, p 105.

¹⁷³ Alain Touraine, *Les sociétés dépendantes*, Gembloux, Duculot, 1976, p 154, quoted in Michel Seurat, *L'Etat de barbarie*, Paris, Seuil, 1989, p 127.

Indeed, in the case of extreme domination and totally divided experience, the demand for coherence might appear to be further domination. The conflict built around the image of national struggle provided the Palestinians with a coherent structure to frame their experience and challenge the idea of alienation. But when the domination intensified, and it became impossible to associate victory with the conflict, the latter's structure-building nature came undone and developed into something grim.

In this context, an individual's strategy might consist in trying to separate the different areas of experience, even if they appear in fact to be linked. Here, dissociation is a means of preserving certain areas through the following line of reasoning: "sometimes it is better to lose part of the territory and ensure one's independence than to fight on all fronts and risk losing everything."¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the level of domination here has affected the people's relationship to life itself, as well as their overall self-image. It excludes any protected areas that might totally escape from it. Within this context, the only way to create such areas consists in denying the contradiction and living within a frame of experience that has been split up and accepted as such. The individual denies the reduction of his experience to the fundamental questions of life and death which merge there. However, refusing this simple kind of coherence doesn't mean there is no attempt at all at coherence. In fact it has become more complex, as shown by Carmel Camilleri¹⁷⁵ regarding North Africans in France, who develop conflict-avoiding strategies when confronted with different identity systems which are asymmetrical. Indeed, "the effect of this asymmetry on identity-building processes seems to be constant; the attribution by the dominant group of a set of characteristics to the dominated group is most often induced by the negative value the former associates with the latter. (...) It is the value of the individual, and thus his self-image, which is more or less severely challenged through this prescribed identity."¹⁷⁶ In order to limit the effects of this command to take on a negative identity, young Palestinians use procedures such as diachrony – temporal separation – and differentiating objects. In that way, they can move forward while calling upon contradictory kinds of logic.

¹⁷⁴ Bernard Lahire, *op. cit.*, p 88.

¹⁷⁵ Carmel Camilleri, "Identité et gestion de la disparité culturelle : essai d'une typologie", in Carmel Camilleri, *et al.*, *Stratégies identitaires*, Paris, PUF, 1990, p 101.

¹⁷⁶ Carmel Camilleri, *op. cit.*, p 89.

Chapter 5

Religion's Place in Society

Religion permeates the experience of Palestinian youth, a requisite reference that few individuals reject. Even the extremely rare cases who call themselves atheists stress their cultural immersion in Islam. The omnipresence of religion, however, does not indicate an unequivocal relationship to it—far from it. Its importance changes from one young person to another and from one situation to another. There are four principal modes of relationship: traditional Islam, Islam as culture, Islam as ethics, and political Islam.

Individuals can move between these different modes, which range from a mere cultural context to a form of spirituality. In its most absolute form – usually involving Islamists, although not always it results in a life principle that guides one's entire experience and is presented as a socio-political plan. As Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi has shown with regard to Moroccan youth, there is a potential here for the “coexistence of several kinds of truths, each containing its own specific form of logic”,¹⁷⁷ within the same complex attempt at coherence.

¹⁷⁷ Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, *Soumis et rebelles : les jeunes au Maroc*, op. cit., p 92.

Traditional Islam

Islam may evoke a traditional form of religion based on a set of precepts experienced as customs that mark the community's specificity and constitute its identity. This kind of religious involvement is characterised by a discourse expressed by a "we" rather than an "I": "The Koran is our path and our way of thinking. It is very important to us. We are Muslims."¹⁷⁸

Here, religious rules and community rules are one and the same. The former may never be used to cast doubt on the latter. Respecting religion involves observing other customs as much as religious duties such as prayer and fasting: "For us, a pregnant woman must stay with her in-laws when her husband is away."¹⁷⁹

A study of young women students has helped to identify this type of relationship to religion. It mainly involves women from villages permeated by traditional Islam, in particular during their first year at a university. Confronted with intense stigmatisation and seen as "backward" by the other students, they adopt a defensive position by trying to recreate the rituals from their villages – especially dietary ones – along with other women from the same place. Their relationship to religion is thus the basis for legitimising their community practices. In religious matters, respecting these legitimised customs is far more important than the purely religious rites themselves, in particular with regard to personal practices such as prayer. Group rituals, such as Ramadan, are far more widespread. Thus, in the same breath a young woman may assert the vital role of religion and the unimportance of her own personal practice: "Everything comes from religion. That's the normal way. There is nothing else. I don't have time to pray. I do what feels right. I forget."¹⁸⁰

Group ceremonies around which the community renews its bonds are vital during

¹⁷⁸ Alya, 21, a fourth-year electrical engineering student in Nablus. Her father is a shop-keeper. Interviewed in October 2000.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with a 27-year-old worker at the Inash al Usra organisation in Ramallah, November 1997.

¹⁸⁰ 'Abla, quoted above.

times of trouble and upheaval, where it is also a matter of reasserting the unity and identity of society faced with threats of destruction. The festive nature of Ramadan disappeared almost entirely during the Intifada, as they were mourning victims, had grown poorer and couldn't make as many traditional purchases. Furthermore, they could only visit a limited number of people due to the difficulty of getting around.¹⁸¹ However, many young people joined in the fast who do not usually observe Ramadan, mainly to show they belonged and express their solidarity in a process that was also due to the increased social pressure at such times. Indeed, in this context, not practising would no longer simply mean distancing oneself from religious practices; it would be seen as a challenge to the unity of a weakened society, tantamount to "betrayal": "It doesn't play any kind of role in my life. I don't like religion very much. OK, I believe in Allah, but I don't pay attention to the details, the dictates, praying 5 times a day, etc. I don't usually observe Ramadan, but I think I will this year because the young people I'm living with will, and everyone at the university says you should."¹⁸²

For Palestinian students abroad, observing Ramadan may also connect them to a society about which they feel guilty for not sharing in its hardships, even though they send home as much money as possible: "I decided to observe Ramadan this year, to feel like I was back in Gaza. I never observed it when I was there. I ate in secret; and, naturally, I didn't here in Berlin either. But this year I want to feel like I'm back there. I want to go back, to fight and die with them. What's the point of what I'm doing heremy studies and all that – in this situation?"¹⁸³

Thus, traditional Islam, which above all provides religious legitimacy for community-based customs, can also prove to have political significance. Its practises bring the jeopardized community togethertaking it out of historical time and into the longer time frame of a people, its gestures and "ageless" customs. Arresting time through their circular repetition, those customs become one of the political stakes. The identity thus created and made sacred

¹⁸¹ For a study of the month of Ramadan in 2001, see Stéphanie David, "Un Ramadan sous Intifada", in Bernard Botiveau and Aude Signoles (ed.), *D'une Intifada l'autre : la Palestine au quotidien*, *Egypte/Monde arabe*, n°6/ 2003, p 111-123.

¹⁸² Samir, quoted above.

¹⁸³ Mounir, 28, originally from Gaza, has been living in Berlin for 8 years. He is working in his field while finishing his studies. He was a Fatah militant during the first Intifada and is currently a volunteer with an NGO.

through Islam is also a part of nationalism.

Cultural Islam

Linking Islam to a cultural foundation is in keeping with traditional Islam, where religious matters are defined above all as an identity marker denoting the society's specificity. There is one major difference, however. Islam as a cultural reference loses its transcendent, sacred dimension as well as its legitimising function. The Muslim religious dimension becomes just one element of Arab culture. Interdicts are only followed in the public arena, in order to avoid reprobation and not to shock practising Muslims. But they no longer have any value in themselves and are associated with old-fashioned customs – characteristic of the society – wherein lies its charm for some people. This kind of relationship to religion is mainly found in the wealthiest circles, and especially among the more “detached” from Palestinian society. Young engineers from well-to-do families who have studied abroad feel as comfortable with “Western” lifestyles as with Palestinian society. They do not use their relationship to religion as a frame of reference for their own lives or for society; but they nevertheless appreciate the ways in which it is expressed in society – as markers of their identity and their deep roots in that culture.

Little opposition is expressed towards these interdicts, since the individuals are detached from them. But “modern” young women in Ramallah are often very critical of these prohibitions since they affect their lives. They face great difficulties in trying to get around them; and there is a substantial amount of reprobation and control weighing on them. Young men, on the other hand, may behave more or less as they please, at the cost of a few superficial compromises in certain situations and places. As long as they remain within their own milieu – of young engineers for example – they develop a different view of these customs and interdicts. They readily exchange anecdotes about the deeds of their grandparents, highly appreciated as the archetypes of that Arab and Muslim identity. Thus, even with respect to young people who call themselves atheists, Islam is clearly an indispensable reference that is part of their cultural identity.

Islam as a Code of Ethics

The prevailing relationship to religion lies somewhere in-between spirituality and social orientation: “Religion is a personal matter for me; it is the line I walk down and decides my destiny in life. That means it’s what I use to weigh things up. If it’s something bad, then I don’t do it.”¹⁸⁴ In highlighting Islam as a moral philosophy of life¹⁸⁵ they are confirming an agreement about the principles that must regulate society: “I feel in harmony with my religion. There are certain things— limits in our religion – and we conduct ourselves only according to our religion; we know what we are supposed to do and how to stop, and that doesn’t create the least problem in our lives. There is nothing which I feel is forbidden because of religion. I can do whatever I want, whatever I like. On the contrary, true religion helps me to find solutions to the problems I face.”¹⁸⁶

Through the notion of a “life path”² advocated very frequently in this kind of religious practice— individuals emphasize an idea halfway between a purely private relationship to religion and a more social orientation. However, the mastery of religious “principles” in a direct, individual manner is valued. Consequently, the relationship to religious matters has become more individualised. This has resulted in a refusal to judge other people’s conduct. This approach is designed to underscore one’s detachment from community-related religious customs and to stress their individual nature: “As a Muslim woman, this is between God and me. It doesn’t affect the way I treat others, or perhaps only in a positive way; but it doesn’t mean I don’t wish to meet people practising other religions. I don’t pray. When I was 14, I wore a head scarf. It was my choice, and I prayed all the time. I prayed until I was 20, then I stopped. I stopped because I had long days at the university and gradually could no longer do it, and now I don’t pray anymore. Sometimes I still pray, when I feel really bad.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Elyas, 23, lives in the Al Maghazi refugee camp (Gaza). His father used to run a small local restaurant, but is too old now. Elyas is studying psychology and sociology while working as a coordinator at a youth centre. Interviewed in July 1999.

¹⁸⁵ Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi has observed the same key role of Islam as a moral philosophy of life in young Moroccans. Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, *Soumis et rebelles : les jeunes au Maroc, op. cit.*, p 90-91.

¹⁸⁶ Alham, quoted above.

¹⁸⁷ Ubur, quoted above.

While religion is held onto as the ultimate referent that determines what is good or evil and gives life an orientation and coherence, people still want it to be an individual matter, especially with regard to reading the Koran. They do not want intermediaries. When one girl's family pressured her to wear a head scarf at university— although she had refused to wear one outside her village – she responded by saying: “I’m the one who’ll go to hell.”¹⁸⁸

Some people admit rejecting or not understanding certain aspects of Islam. While not casting doubts on it, they claim the right to ask questions: “I’m a Muslim woman, and there are many things in the Muslim faith about which I am 100% convinced; but there are some things I’m really not sure about, and others which I don’t understand. There are many things that limit your thoughts— many things and systems that restrict your thoughts. I don’t like those things. I want to have an open mind and to express myself. Now there are several things I’m not sure about – maybe later, but not for the moment.”¹⁸⁹

Here, the individual approach to religion has been taken to its farthest limits. It allows you to create your own *interpretation* and to oppose traditions in the name of a “purer” Islam, based on principles rather than on traditions. Young women, particularly concerned by behavioural restrictions, can challenge them in the name of this direct, individual relationship to religious matters: “Some people say our religion forbids women to do certain things. On the contrary, it makes us freer; we can study, and come and go as we like.”¹⁹⁰

This individual relationship to religion sometimes permits arguments that might be opposed to certain traditions. However, the tension thus introduced does not always play out in favour of the religious argument: “I perform all the religious duties. I pray 5 times a day and fast during Ramadan. I wanted to wear the full veil¹⁹¹ (which also covers the face) but my

¹⁸⁸ Islah, 28, in charge of customer service for an insurance company. Originally from a village near Qalqilya, she studied at Bir Zeit and now works in Ramallah. Despite pressure from her family to go back and look after her elderly parents since her sister married and left home (she is the youngest), she has remained in a residence for girls in Ramallah.

¹⁸⁹ Raja, 22, a pharmaceutical student and volunteer in a first-aid team. Interviewed in Ramallah, October 2000.

¹⁹⁰ Normine, quoted above.

¹⁹¹ The various ways of wearing a veil or head scarf are far from neutral. Wearing a full veil, through choice or usually through the husband’s wishes, contrasts sharply with the usual Palestinian head scarf and may be seen as shocking: “when I run into my sister-in-law wearing a veil over her face in the street, I feel like I’ve just seen an extra-terrestrial,” exclaimed one woman at a family meeting in Gaza. At the other extreme, women wearing the “sexy” head scarf – tied tightly around the head and mainly worn in freer circles such as by the students at Bir Zeit or young women working in Ramallah – are sometimes informed on, as they are not considered properly veiled.

father didn't want me to. It's not that he isn't religious; but he said if I did it and – after getting married – it turned out my husband was against me wearing a veil and took it away, that it would be his fault in God's eyes. So he told me to wait until I got married to find out if my husband would accept it or not.’’¹⁹²

Tensions may arise between traditional Islam linked to community-based rules and other forms of religious behaviour that go beyond its bounds. In this example, the patriarchal rules have the upper hand. Yet the young woman's demand to “wear the full veil” – did not imply a request for greater freedom of movement, even if Islamic dress has often been adopted on first contact with new places, jobs or studies. That kind of challenge is the basis for the developing “Islamic feminism” that is very frequent among militants and Islamist sympathizers, whose modes of operation and limits we shall examine later on in the book.

The massive discourse internalising and individualising religion among young people, whether Islamist or not, implies individual immersion in the texts, or a spiritual concept of prayer. Apparently common, it may in fact include various perceptions of how religion is involved in political and social issues, and of how its legitimising principles and rules have been introduced. For young people who have developed the notion of an individual relationship to religious issues through the idea of returning to Islam's pure principles, true religious value lies in one's inner “conviction.” Given that criterion, they may refuse to judge behaviour in the public arena. Religion is thereby made personal, since it only has the authority to judge within a relationship to oneself, within a moral code. It would be a mistake to see this as a process of de-socialisation in which the individual develops a private, ineffable form of religion. Life's rules of conduct and orientation, affirmed through this process of individualising one's relationship to religion, indeed imply certain perceptions of social

¹⁹² Moufida, 21. She studied up to her A-levels in Egypt. Her family belongs to the group of returning Palestinians, but is not among the more well-to-do. Her father, a mid-level manager with the PLO, came back when the Palestinian Authority was established. Moufida is currently giving private English lessons.

matters. But by removing the religious issue from the public arena in the name of “purer” religion – in other words, positioned by moral principles rather than customs – these perceptions lead to a separation between politics and religion, and thus to a quest for other sources for legitimising, founding and organising politics. The foundation provided by religion that transcends good and evil is no longer situated at the community level, but rather at the level of the individual; and politics therefore becomes dissociated. However, the option of returning to the text – to a “pure” Islam and its principles, which in fact provides the basis for individualising the relationship to religion – does not necessarily result in a desire to make religious matters more personal. It may, on the contrary, help promote a new form of social organisation. Then Islam turns political.

Political Islam

The issue of political Islam – i.e. the desire to include principles and rules of conduct in politics that are presented as having religious legitimacy – alludes to the existence of Islamist movements which see themselves as its expression, mainly Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the case of the Palestinians.¹⁹³ The position of political Islam in Palestine is based on two principles. The first alludes to the setting of moral standards within politics by applying religious precepts; the second refers to the perception of nationalism as sacred. The Islamic State is thereby presented as a perfect State where equality and justice reign an ideal State due to the equivalence between each believer’s personal rules and those governing public affairs: “In an Islamic State all people are equal and have the same rights, protected by the State.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ With regard to political Islam in general, see François Burgat, *L’islamisme en face*, Paris, La Découverte, 1996; Gilles Kepel, *Djihad, expansion et déclin de l’islamisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 2000 and Olivier Roy, *L’échec de l’Islam politique*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1992. For a more specific analysis of Palestinian political Islam, see: Pénélope Larzillière, “L’Islam politique et le nationalisme palestinien” in Michel Wieviorka, (ed), “L’avenir de l’Islam en France et en Europe”, Paris, Balland, 2003, pp 155-165, various works by Jean-François Legrain, in particular “La Palestine : de la terre perdue à la reconquête du territoire”, *Cultures et Conflits*, n°21-22, Spring-Summer 1996, Bernard Rougier, “Dynamiques religieuses et identité nationale dans les camps de réfugiés palestiniens du Liban”, in Jean-François Legrain, (ed.), “En attendant la Palestine”, *Maghreb-Machrek*, n° 176, Summer 2003, pp 35-59.

¹⁹⁴ An 18-year-old science student, originally from Hebron, in her first year at Bir Zeit University. This is an answer to the question “What does an Islamic State mean to you?” on an anonymous questionnaire handed out in December 1997.

Political Islam is different from community-based Islam and may challenge its rules. In young people's minds, this form of Islam aims to set moral standards within politics and society. It is based on a double ideal of equality and justice meant to institute a political plan to create an Islamic State and a social plan to establish moral standards at the grassroots level. Connected to a large charity network, this "moralisation" process is to be carried out in particular through enforcing *sharia*, conceived as a locked code for which it possesses the definition and whose potential jurisprudential interpretations (*ijtihad*) are extremely limited.¹⁹⁵

An important debate was triggered within Palestinian society in 1998 by women's groups intent on bringing about a reform of individual rights and a unification of Palestinian law.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, Palestinian law reflects the territorial divisions and the various administrations that have succeeded one another, and it is far from unequivocal.¹⁹⁷ In 1997, Palestinian M.P.s made *sharia* one of the main sources of legislation (rather than *the* main source¹⁹⁸). While the reforms proposed in the debate do not really diverge from Islamic law, the Islamists and the *Ulema* are highly critical of them. As Bernard Botiveau has pointed out: "Islam is certainly a referent, since it can produce at least a consensus, if not unity. Through Islam, everyone can reinforce whatever certainties he needs to believe in and confirm the fact that respecting demands for social justice is highly useful in times of shortage. At the same time, no one has managed to define what Islamic law might bring to the reform, other than in a negative way through interdicts and interpretive restrictions which are also characteristic of times of crisis.

¹⁹⁵ This position is not that of the majority of the *Ulema*. Modifications and interpretations based on historical and social circumstances have been a continual process in the history of judicial Islam.

¹⁹⁶ For an in-depth analysis of this debate and its ramifications, see Bernard Botiveau, "L'Islam dans la construction nationale palestinienne. Le débat sur le droit de la famille" in Nadine Picaudou, (dir.), "La Palestine en transition", *Les annales de l'autre Islam* n°8, Paris, ERISM, INALCO, 2001, p 135-154.

¹⁹⁷ "Regarding individual rights, Palestinian Muslims are subject to at least four different regulations: an outdated "Egyptian" code of law from 1954 survived in Gaza without ever being amended; in the West Bank, a Jordanian code of law from 1967 was in effect to which all the improvements effected in Jordan were applied; Jerusalem was under the same system, while taking Israeli law into account to a certain degree. Lastly, in Israel, an Islamic variation of Israeli family law was in effect." Bernard Botiveau, *L'Islam dans la construction nationale palestinienne. Le débat sur le droit de la famille*, *op. cit.*, p 144.

¹⁹⁸ Botiveau, *L'Islam dans la construction nationale palestinienne*, *op. cit.*, p 146.

(...) In these unsuccessful claims of equality, social opportunities and pluralism, it is hard not to see a kind of competing force for legitimacy that has not managed to establish itself for the moment.”¹⁹⁹ Indeed, young Islamist sympathizers endorse political Islam and *sharia* above all by referring to principles of justice and equality. Given the consensus around these principles, the debate has focused on the issue of determining whether or not the strict enforcement of Islamic law – unclear regarding the Palestinian Territories – is the best way to achieve them.

Contrary to what we have observed about the process of making religion a personal issue, the “moralisation” process has targeted public conduct and does not merely refer to a question of conscience. With its aura of religious legitimacy, this agenda is automatically assumed to provide what is best for people and to show the proper way. For those who propose this plan and are supposed to know the truth, setting moral standards of behaviour is also a public mission designed to elevate the people. It can therefore be prescribed so that – failing a profound change – at least believers will not be sullied or shocked in their everyday lives. Founded on religious legitimacy, the imposition of behavioural norms in the public arena has made it possible to thwart certain Palestinian social developments. The Islamists’ social profile is far from clear or unequivocal, and is often close to that of local Fatah militants. They are often found within the same family. While partisans of the Islamist project may not be identifiable within a single class, we can clearly distinguish their enemies – those who profited from the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, known as returnees or “Tunisians”. The Islamist plan directly challenges their way of life and the role of the prominent people to whom Arafat looked for support when he returned. For the young university graduates who cannot find their place within the Palestinian economy mainly because they don’t have the connections required in an extremely limited marketplace Islamism presented in this way has enabled them to question the elite and their “deprivation” while at the same time taking part to a certain degree in modern technology and the material comforts associated with it. The Islamist movements contain elements of a class struggle.

The social plan is more crucial to the Islamists’ strategy than the political one,²⁰⁰ and

¹⁹⁹ Botiveau, *L’Islam dans la construction nationale palestinienne*, *op. cit.*, p 153-154.

²⁰⁰ Jean-François Legrain, “Le fantôme d’Arafat”, *Critique internationale n°16*, July 2002, p 46.

they focused at an early stage on quietist Islam when the hazards of the political scene subjected them to repression that was too severe and could have been dangerous for them. Through their charity network and assistance to the population, they have developed a social image that explains to a great extent the support they have gained and the respect they sometimes prompt – even from political opponents – as men of principle and conviction. However, promoting ethical Islam may also “catch up” with them. Their social and political agenda is based on ethical principles, and its achievement may be criticised in the name of those same principles, over which the individual is in control, independently of elected authorities. It is not uncommon to hear severe criticism of all kinds of institutions from the same young people who are supporting the establishment of an Islamic State and organisation of society. Thus the Islamic State is presented as a nearly inaccessible ideal, and in any case one that has never been achieved; for them, the Iranian government is not a valid example: “The Islamic State is a dream which I do not think can be achieved. But it has great meaning for me – security, peace and inner peace, for example. But I think it’s very hard for it to exist in the situation we’re currently experiencing.”²⁰¹ The Islamists themselves may even be criticised for betraying the plan they have been promoting.

The Palestinians’ domestic social and political plan of Islamism is coupled with nationalism, a key element in their strength of conviction: “The day the enemies usurp a country belonging to Muslims, every Muslim has an individual religious obligation to fight. We must wave the flag of Jihad in face of the usurpation of Palestine by the Jews.”²⁰² In its Charter,²⁰³ Hamas names the Palestinian lands as a *waqf*. As Jean-François Legrain has

²⁰¹ A 20-year-old student, originally from Hebron, in her third year of English studies at Bir Zeit University. She is a member of a religious organisation. This is an answer to the question “What does an Islamic State mean to you?” on an anonymous questionnaire handed out in December 1997. For other examples of this kind of answer emphasising ideas of justice, equality and security, see Agnès Pavlowsky, *Hamas ou le miroir des frustrations palestiniennes*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2000, p 121-143.

²⁰² Hamas Charter, article 15, 18/08/1988. An English version of the charter is available in Khaled Hroub, *Political Thought and Practice*, Washington, Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000, p 267-291. For a French translation, see Jean-François Legrain, *Les voix du soulèvement palestinien*, Cairo, CEDEJ, 1991.

²⁰³ Article 11

shown,²⁰⁴ this allocation is not accurate in terms of Islamic jurisprudence: “The author of the Charter has totally confused the idea of *Dar el-Islam*, which indeed implies that lands conquered by Muslims must forever remain ‘Islamic land,’ and the idea of *waqf*, a judicial act complying with a very specific law and applying to a particular piece of property.”

But regardless of the Islamic validity of these doctrines, nationalism is in fact a crucial ideological element for many young Palestinians, more often than the social plan. “There are many connections between religion and politics- far more than in other countries. For us, religion includes our holy places and our country, since we have holy places in this country. That’s why there are many connections between religion and politics. There is no racism here in our country. We make no distinction between Christians and Muslims. Naturally, there are movements like Hamas, which is pursuing its goal of creating an Islamic State, but that means nothing as long as Palestine is occupied.”²⁰⁵

In the relationship to religious matters, sacralized nationalism and social projects can be considered separately. Indeed, the religious legitimacy of nationalism, rooted in a sacred land, can be dissociated from supporting the Islamist movements’ social and political plans. The relationship to Islam is thus translated by an eschatological vision – with which the Palestinian national struggle is associated– that is thereby removed from historical time and enters a religious time frame. Religion provides the national struggle with a transcendent and unchallengeable legitimate foundation – and with an image of a victorious future. We shall come back to this question later in the book.

Paradoxically, adhering to an Islamist movement does not necessarily mean associating the national struggle with *jihad*. Thus, certain Islamist militants are keen on separating religion from the national struggle and its methods: “Acts of martyrdom have

²⁰⁴ Jean-François Legrain, “La Palestine : de la terre perdue à la reconquête du territoire”, *Cultures et Conflits*, n°21-22, spring-summer 1996, p 192. In this article Jean-François Legrain analyses the way in which Hamas has endorsed the question of land and associated it with eschatological issues (p p189-196).

²⁰⁵ Raja, quoted above.

nothing to do with religion. They are not forbidden by religion; but they are a weapon, not something religious.’’²⁰⁶

This assertion – surprising at first sight from an Islamist militant – underlines two processes. The first one alludes to the clearly more nationalist than religious nature of the Islamist movements, since many people enrolled for nationalist reasons when these movements seemed to be the only force continuing the struggle. The second process – keeping with what we know about the individualisation of people’s relationship to religion – has tended towards “spiritualising” and internalising the latter in order to preserve its symbolic transcendence²⁰⁷ and to maintain a space sheltered from the hazards of the national struggle.

The two faces – nationalist and social – of Palestinian political Islam, as it is perceived by young people, are not necessarily linked; and the latter has made gender a key issue. Social reform has indeed focused mainly on controlling women’s behaviour. As Joan Scott has shown,²⁰⁸ this is an issue of power, and controlling women is another way for the Islamists to manifest their hold on society. Yet many women are sympathizers or members of various Islamist women’s groups. How can one explain this kind of commitment? In fact, their response to Islamism is different from the men’s reaction to it in many ways. They often use it to legitimise activities they would otherwise be forbidden to engage in. As Olfa Lamloun has shown, “their involvement, which cannot be perceived exclusively from the angle of a fundamentalist religious act, has helped them to assume a new identity. The latter is often constructed against the traditional family, the power structure and the West.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Kifah, a student and Hamas militant in Hebron.

²⁰⁷ As Farhad Khosrokhavar has shown with regard to Iran, the Islamic revolution – which identifies religion with politics – has ended up sapping religion of its symbolic transcendence. Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Le nouvel individu en Iran, Cahiers d’études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien* (CEMOTI), n° 26, 1998, p 146.

²⁰⁸ Joan Scott, “Genre une catégorie utile de l’analyse historique”, *Les cahiers du GRIF*, n°37/38, Spring 1988.

²⁰⁹ Olfa Lamloun “Les femmes dans le discours islamiste” in Olfa Lamloun and Bernard Ravenel (ed.), “Femmes et islamisme”, *Confluences Méditerranée*, n°27, Autumn 1998, p 9.

Islamic “Feminism”?

Young Islamist women stand out through their use of religion as a unifying principle that orients their entire experience. It is an all-encompassing principle manifested through an ideal moral life that is valid for both the private and political spheres. Rights, justice and respect are at the heart of their involvement in Islamism. As Fariba Abdelkhah has pointed out: “to see Islamic designs only as a device for dominating women is once again to confuse on the one hand ideological and theological references (...), and on the other hand, the social movement which by definition cannot be limited to its expression by its own leaders.”²¹⁰ Indeed, these women see their form of Islamism more as a frame of reference enabling them to assert their rights than as a set of interdictions. Thus, as we have seen, the idea of an Islamic State evokes the ideal of an egalitarian, just, safe and peaceful State, which also guarantees women’s rights: “An Islamic State is the key to security. It signifies a dream to be achieved. It signifies political, social and economic peace. It means full rights for women, no more suffering for the people, more chances of studying and equal opportunity in the workplace. It means a society that guarantees civil, political, social and religious rights for the minority. Everyone takes part in political decision-making.”²¹¹

Beyond the general issue of equality, young Islamist women see the reference to Islamic *sharia* as a chance to obtain greater rights than those currently granted them by the community. For instance, sometimes women are completely robbed of their inheritance even though the Koran grants them half (or more, depending on the circumstances). The women can then base their rights on the Koran, thanks to which they have a text recognised as legitimate by the society as a whole. Furthermore, “going back” to the original text enables them to orient the interpretations in a more favourable way. In the same stroke, these young

²¹⁰ Fariba Adelkhah, *Femmes islamiques, femmes modernes, Pouvoirs*, n° 62, Paris, PUF, p 94.

²¹¹ A 22-year-old student, in her 4th year of English studies at Nablus University, who belongs to a religious organisation. Answer to the same questionnaire quoted above.

Islamist women base their rights on *sharia* and use that legitimacy to contest certain social and familial restrictions: “Society and the family set up obstacles, but they don’t interest me because my religion allows me to do what I’m doing and no one can take away a right that has been given to me by God.”²¹²

The rights which these young women insist upon are not seen as a direct challenge to gender identity within the community. On the contrary, religious legitimacy represents a way to make greater freedom of movement compatible with that identity. However, their insistence on the right to work, study, etc. is in fact opposed to gender identity as it has been developed within the community and has altered its image from the inside. Young Islamist women either say they don’t have to take the community’s ideals into account – due to the higher religious legitimacy they allude to, as in the above example– or else they deny that it is challenging anything. They then proceed to emphasise the compatibility between asserting their own rights and the social framework within which they live, developing the idea of ‘restricted freedom’: “Are there women’s rights? Yes. First, there is a woman’s right to live in restricted freedom, on the condition that her freedom doesn’t conflict with the image of Islam, its traditions and culture; her right to freedom of expression; her right to be respected, and her right to benefit from those rights stipulated by our religion; her right to study and to receive alimony in the event of a separation; and her right to choose her own husband and to be treated well. Islam has defined these rights, and women must be pro-active in order to obtain them.”²¹³

For these women, their Islamist involvement helps them to enjoy both political self-affirmation and a personal trajectory aimed at pursuing studies and finding a job. Affirming one’s Islamist involvement and accentuating the man/woman separation – through belonging and through one’s conduct– has the added advantage of limiting the risks of dishonour that could arise from the coeducational nature of universities. Wearing a head scarf and Islamic dress enables them to avoid certain kinds of sexual harassment, given that the slightest

²¹² A 22-year-old student, in her 4th year of English studies at Bir Zeit University, who is originally from Qalqilya and belongs to a religious organisation. Anonymous questionnaire, December 1997.

²¹³ A 19-year-old student, in her 2nd year of computer studies, back home after spending several years in Abu Dhabi.

ambiguity could endanger a woman's reputation and ruin her future. At a very well-attended lecture²¹⁴ at Bir Zeit University, a social worker spoke of numerous cases involving students who had left the university due to sexual harassment. The following is an excerpt from a discussion prompted by the lecture:

The Professor: "The harassment issue is about men, because they think: 'Nothing will happen to me.' Whereas the women have to bear everything – the rumours, no one wanting to marry her, etc. Some women have even dropped out of university because of sexual harassment. It was making life too difficult for them. Making remarks about the clothes worn by a girl one doesn't know is also a form of sexual harassment. Whether or not a woman wears a head scarf, sexual harassment is forbidden and the laws will be enforced in the same way."

A Woman: "Two days ago Hamas said we must stop discussing these issues because they are not part of our religion."

An (Islamist) Man: "The problem is that women wear jeans and don't wear head scarves, and so on."

The Professor: "In all the Gulf States the women wear the full robes, and there's more sexual harassment there than here. Let's talk about the promiscuity in taxis where women sit close to the window while the men sit in the middle and spread their legs wide open."

Young Islamist women form groups marked by their clothing and distant attitude, thereby creating a protected space for themselves. Men take care not to sit next to women in group taxis. They make sure to avoid having a woman sit between two men – by changing places if necessary – and do not sit at the same tables in cafeterias.

Furthermore, being involved in women's organisations within Islamist movements – to which the management of charity activities for women are generally assigned – has in fact helped introduce them into the public arena to the extent that gender differences are carried over into it. This is clearly the method used by Islamist "feminism," and its own self-restriction; but it cannot be deemed as devoid of any short-term results for women. By carving

²¹⁴ On 6 November 1997.

out an exclusively female space in the public arena through a strict separation of the sexes, Islamist movements have enlarged the possibilities for women, who can move around in a legitimate and protected manner. Nonetheless, this mobility comes at a price. Women are essentialized there and reduced to an image of complementarity with men.²¹⁵ While promoting an Islamic organisation of society may challenge current definitions of gender in Palestinian society, it also increases pressure to a considerable degree on women hoping to promote an image based on equality. “Whoever wishes to liberate women must allow them to be active on all levels of society and in all economic areas. Islamist associations limit women’s work to only one area. They are never allowed to represent this movement on television. They are taught to keep doing their women’s work, to produce more children who believe in Islam, and to put pressure on other women to enforce Islamist instructions. When I meet Islamist women, their first question is about my reasons for not wearing a head scarf and whether or not I pray. They tell me I’m not a real Muslim.”²¹⁶

As religious matters are not unequivocal, and yet are a key reference in the Palestinian experience, the power issue at stake for the Islamists lies in their ability to define themselves and compel recognition as having a monopoly on religious interpretation. Contrary to those who are striving to make religious issues a private matter – in order to carve out their own space and keep external moral controls at a distance– the Islamists are trying to impose their collective interpretation and acquire social status through their own moral conduct, based on the fact that they have a hold on ethical criteria. At the same time, through that orientation they have rearticulated their experience around the strict enforcement of self-discipline, offering young Palestinians a solution to their dissociated experience. In this regard, *mutatis mutandis*, the reference to religion as providing structure through such self-discipline brings to mind some of the youth in French suburbs.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ A feminist trend found in other groups besides Islamists.

²¹⁶ Interview with Shadia Sarraj, director of a women’s centre in Gaza, March 1997. On this issue, see also Islah Jad, “Les Palestiniennes face aux mouvements islamistes”, *mujeres in red*, 1998. http://www.nodo50.org/mujeresred/palestinas-ialh_jad.html.

²¹⁷ Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L’Islam des jeunes*, Paris, Flammarion, 1997.

For young Palestinian men and women religion may refer – depending on the particular configuration involved – to their own personal ethical code, to a model for social organisation, to an acknowledged means of obtaining legitimacy in an attempt to broaden their possibilities, etc. Depending on the case, it will involve one field of experience rather than another; or, on the contrary, it may be an active principle unifying them all. Can it really help to rearticulate the young Palestinians’ range of experiences, and reduce tensions between their personal projects and the national struggle? It is true that religion can empower unification through self-discipline and following outer rules that provide a kind of preliminary resolution of an individual’s trials and tribulations. The resulting self-image subsequently introduces another experience of oneself marked by a greater or lesser “will” to stick to the rules and resist temptation. The individual internalises experiential dilemmas and casts them in a moral light. Yet the relationship to religion can only resolve the tension between personal projects and the national struggle at a cost – when that struggle enters the alternative time frame and symbolic system of *jihad*. The individual can then cast the national struggle in a victorious perspective; but that change is also a negation – or at the least a loss of importance – of the time frame of his life’s narrative. Crossing over into political Islam prompts a fusion of the two poles rather than their articulation.

Young Palestinians’ experiences are not limited to these two poles of the national struggle and personal projects. As the meaning of the national struggle evolved from the first to the second Intifada, the existence of a “personal” space was at stake in the tensions arising between a person’s belonging to a community and the association of individualisation with Westernisation. Communitarian logic provided a precise definition of the individual as having a specific role to play within the hierarchical network. Acknowledging its importance meant introducing a dimension that was not to be confused with the national issue or with one’s personal life. As a key frame of reference for Palestinian youth, the community defines the space within which an individual moves.²¹⁸ In the case of Palestinian youth, communitarian logic cannot escape

²¹⁸ In *La démocratie à l’épreuve* Michel Wieviorka has developed a three-pronged construct which he calls a “triangle of ethnicity”: the three poles allude to the national frame of reference, the community frame of reference and to the individual moving between them in an attempt to build up his own references. This construct was elaborated to account for the identity constructs of minorities. The idea of community takes on a different meaning with respect to the Palestinian case in the Territories in that they are the majority. Michel Wieviorka, *La démocratie à l’épreuve*, Paris, La Découverte, 1993, p 125.

the specific dramatization of the national struggle, which has become a “life or death” issue. The experience of domination is not just within Palestinian society. It is part of the regional conflict with Israel and, more generally, in the confrontation with the Western world – not as a civilisation, as Samuel Huntington posits,²¹⁹ but rather as a dominant figure in a power struggle of which Israel is the concrete manifestation in the eyes of the Palestinians. Western values are perceived within this power struggle.

For this reason, their introduction into Palestinian society is also an issue at stake. This situation has led to the fragmentation of the individual’s experience, which he can no longer organise around his own personal logic due to being so totally dispossessed by the amplitude of that domination. But at the same time, in an apparent paradox, the domination has prompted a kind of reunification, turning the individual – through real and symbolic violence – into what the dominant power’s vision “says” about him. For him, the relationship then involves rebuilding his self-image, by engaging in a formative conflict to ensure a re-evaluation of the balance of power and to satisfy the need for acknowledgement. Thus the sustained effort to develop a new interpretation based as is often the case in the “loser’s vision” – on producing a mythical, non-historical and transcendent form of reasoning which has the advantage of symbolically removing the individual from a historical process that has caused him to fail.

As that failure has been gradually acknowledged and has led to despair, the reference to mythical reasoning has become increasingly unequivocal, eventually resulting in the vision of a sacred nation. However, while religion has become a key frame of reference for Palestinian youth, the uses of religion cannot be summed up simply through its patriotic aspects – far from it. It comprises a variety of meanings, depending on whether it is “pulled” in the direction of nationalism, the private sphere or the community.

²¹⁹ Samuel Huntington, *Le Choc des civilisations et l'ordre mondial*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1997.

Part Two: How to Respond: by Merging, Reconfiguring or Dissociating?

Fragmentation is so great within the experience of Palestinian youth that it seems increasingly difficult for them not just to integrate its various levels, but even to juxtapose them. There is a huge gap for individuals who are pressured by contradictory, yet simultaneous, ways of thinking. Thus, the nationalist objective and the private sphere arise from different forms of reasoning but are in effect brought together and made contradictory through death. There are several ways in which young Palestinian men and women can “respond” to these pressures and move between these contradictory focuses. We have examined the main processes in this complex attempt to develop coherence. But there are other trends involved in this dynamic. Beyond the infinite diversity of individual cases, three main ones can be highlighted. We shall present them as archetypes which also correspond to identifiable social groups, even though it may not always be possible to sum them up in specific socio-economic categories.

Particularly identifiable socially as “generational units”, the “responses” provided by these archetypes cannot account for all trends among Palestinian youth. An individual may go from one to another from being a Fatah militant to a “martyr” figure for example. Furthermore, not all Palestinian youth can be linked to generational units – far from it.

We have shown the role of the community focus and the types of reasoning associated

with it. But, clearly, the key area of tension for Palestinian youth is in the interplay between the nationalist objective and the private sphere. Lacking the ability to connect them, one extreme solution to the contradiction is through merging them, which evokes the ‘martyr’ figures that we shall analyse in the next chapter.

Another trend consists in trying to reconfigure them, like during the first Intifada, but in a different way because the latter was based on the belief that national objectives could be achieved in the relatively near future – a belief that has vanished today. We have linked this trend with the figure of the Fatah militant.

Finally, the third trend for resolving the tension consists in dissociating the two objectives, which can only be carried out at the cost of actually removing oneself from the territory.

Chapter 6

“Martyrs”²²⁰

“Cheering and demonstrations of anger echoed throughout the funeral ceremony of the Al Aqsa martyrs. An angry group demanded that their blood be avenged and this insult to the community washed away. I cheered with the group; but I did not state that I would bring honour through vengeance.”²²¹

The Al Aqsa Intifada, in particular in its second year, resulted in an increase in suicide attacks and an expansion into new categories of “martyrs,” no longer just young men but also young women and forty-year-old fathers. In the Palestinian discourse, these “martyrs” are “national heroes,” figures made sacred as grim models. Their success with Palestinian youth is assured since they have helped them resolve the current dissociation between the national objective and their personal plans. On the one hand, these young people support the creation of a viable and independent Palestinian State, which is seen as their only way out and their only chance to achieve decent living conditions. But, on the other hand, they no longer believe that goal can be achieved within their lifetime. They can no longer

²²⁰ Part of this chapter has already been published in Pénélope Larzillière, “Le ‘martyr’ palestinien, nouvelle figure d’un nationalisme en échec”, in Alain Dieckhoff, and Rémy Leveau (ed), *Israéliens et Palestiniens : la guerre en partage*; Paris, Balland, 2003, pp 80-109.

²²¹ Testament of Hamad Abou Hajla; a student in Nablus and a member of Hamas, he was the perpetrator of a suicide attack on 1 January 2001 in Netanya that wounded 55 people.

connect it with their personal expectations. By merging the two levels – national and individual – the martyr figure has emerged as a means of resolving that dissociation.

The term *shahid* (martyr) is used indiscriminately by Palestinians to designate all deaths from the conflict with Israel – from families who have fallen under Israeli bombs to suicide bombers. A reflexive form of that root word (*istishhad*), which originally meant to die as a martyr, is being increasingly used to specifically designate suicide attacks in which the perpetrator “made himself a martyr” and is designated by the word *shahid* after the attack. In this chapter, we are exclusively concerned with that category.

The “martyr” designation for suicide-bombers has been the subject of debate within the Arab world, where some religious condemnations have appeared.²²² They have mainly come from members of the clergy close to their governments. In the public arena in Palestine, the term has given rise to discussions about the issue of the religious legitimacy of suicide attacks and the meaning of martyrdom. Can perpetrators of suicide attacks against Israeli civilians be deemed martyrs? And how should the issue of post-mortem rewards promised to the martyrs be interpreted? Independently of religious condemnations, the debate has also focused on the strategic opportuneness of the suicide attacks. Thus, in June 2002, Palestinian intellectuals and politicians launched a petition against the suicide attacks: “We maintain that these operations have done nothing to advance our national project, which calls for freedom and independence. On the contrary, they have strengthened the unity of the enemies of peace on the Israeli side and provided excuses for Sharon’s aggressive government to pursue its harsh war against our people. This war has targeted our children, our elderly, our villages, our towns, our hopes and national successes. (...)The military operations cannot be judged as exclusively positive or negative, outside the general context of the situation. They must be evaluated based on whether or not they have enabled us to achieve our political goals.

²²² Regarding this subject, see: Dyalah Hamzah, *Intifâda’s Fidâ’ : Suicide or Martyrdom? (Trans)Nationalist Icons, Islamic Consultation and Some Notions of Modern Polity*, in Armando Salvatore and Mark LeVine (ed.), *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemonies: Reconstructing the Public Sphere in Muslim Majority Societies*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan (forthcoming).

That is why these acts must be re-evaluated, considering that encouraging an existential war between two peoples living in the holy land will lead to the destruction of the entire region.’’

The authors of the petition were severely criticised on the Palestinian side, where they were blamed for objecting to the Palestinian suicide attacks without explaining the occupation that has led to them, and without an equivalent condemnation of Israeli military operations against Palestinian civilians. The debate, however, was given a limited reception by the Palestinians.

One side’s national heroes are the other side’s terrorists. The reference to martyrdom is made within the framework of a struggle for legitimacy in which that very allusion is one of the modalities. But faced with such an extreme phenomenon, sociological analysis and especially within the framework of comprehensive sociology must continue to see the meaning of these acts from the actor’s viewpoint. For this reason the word ‘‘terrorism’’ will not be found in this book. It is true that, as Michel Wieviorka has shown,²²³ the use of this term may be helpful in analysing conduct such as suicide attacks. According to his categorization, Palestinian suicide attacks are terrorist methods, although the reasoning behind their action is not, at least in the case of the Al Aqsa Intifada attacks (contrary to those perpetrated in 1996): ‘‘as long as it is the result of actors sustained by a real community and recognised by it as a more or less legitimate expression of its actions, and as long as it is a demonstration of a break experienced or desired by the community, then it does not belong in the category of a terrorist act.’’²²⁴ However, the term terrorism poses a problem in that it brings into the description a judgement about the legitimacy of the act. It generally prejudices the meaning and purpose of the act, and by developing a security-related approach in many cases it assumes a desire on the individual’s part to employ a psychological strategy designed to instil terror within the enemy camp. But that aspect is often a consequence of the person’s act and not always his goal. There are differences as to this point from one group to another.

²²³ For a discussion of this issue, see Michel Wieviorka, ‘‘Terrorismes, une rupture historique ?’’ in Thierry de Montbrial and Philippe Moreau Defarge, ‘‘Les grandes tendances du monde’’, *Ramses*, 2003, p 31.

²²⁴ Michel Wieviorka, *Sociétés et terrorisme*, *op. cit.*, p 20.

Moreover, instilling terror does not necessarily involve perpetrating suicide attacks. For this reason, the idea of sacrificial violence used by Hamit Bozarslan seems more appropriate, in particular because it also enables us to better examine the constructs of meaning underlying the use of the term “martyrdom.”

When we use the terms *shahid* and *jihad* here, it is not for the purposes of entering a theological debate requiring us to examine the meaning of these terms, particularly with regard to Muslim religious definitions. What interests us is the way in which they are used and constructed by these individuals and the meaning they give to them.

It is thus a matter of accounting for the generalisation of a singular mode of action. Why has the figure of the martyr constructed by the Islamists become the key reference for Palestinian youth in their representation of the conflict with the Israelis? How is it that this mode of action has been taken up by certain Fatah groups that were originally opposed to it? And how can one account for the fact that individuals initiate such acts independently of any organisation?

The National Hero Made Sacred

In the Palestinian context, the martyr figure corresponds to the sanctification of a type of national hero. It arises from an association between the Palestinian national cause and a system of beliefs.²²⁵ The Palestinian martyr is a national hero because his purpose mainly alludes to the struggle against Israel; the figure is sanctified because it is part of a religious belief system. Martyr-heroes are linked to *jihad*, conceived as a religious duty to fight against enemies appropriating Muslim lands. But the ‘religious witness’ dimension alluded to in the root of the word *shahid* is clearly overshadowed by their role as strategic tools in the national struggle.

“*Shahid*”: a tool in the national cause

Martyrdom is presented above all as the weak man’s weapon – the capacity for sacrifice transformed into a weapon. The Palestinians see the “martyr” as “the poor man’s

²²⁵ François Géré, *Les volontaires de la mort : l’arme du suicide*, Paris, Bayard, 2003.

atom bomb” – the only way to turn the struggle around in their favour. Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon reinforced their idea that this is the only kind of language Israel understands. “This is the only option we have. We have no bombs, no tanks, no missiles, no planes, no helicopters. We have only light weapons and our kamikazes, and we will continue to use them because it’s our only alternative. That has been proven by the failure of ten years of negotiations. We shall resist with every means we have.”²²⁶

“The Americans are being hypocritical when they criticise our use of suicide as a weapon. We are at war and we have no choice. If we had the kind of weapons the Israelis have, then we would kill them in a way that is acceptable to the Americans.”²²⁷

Similarly, Hamas imagery overplays the military side, featuring “martyrs” posing with firearms or wearing all white, a white mask (associated with the “purity” of martyrdom which we shall discuss later on) and a belt of explosives, sometimes even blended with images of the results of suicide attacks.

This is a tactical method of attack, and sometimes of defence. On 14 August 2001, when Israeli tanks entered Jenin and, after some fighting and bombing, headed towards the refugee camp, a dozen political figures from the camp (and not just Islamists) stationed themselves at the gate wearing explosives around their waists and waited for the tanks. Here too, this was a military discourse: “I had only one idea in my mind: the tanks must not enter the camp.”²²⁸

This does not mean, however, that suicide attacks have been part of an overall strategic vision intended to liberate the occupied territories in the more or less short term. While suicide attacks have made it possible to briefly reverse the balance of power and to

²²⁶ Cheikh Abdallah Shami, one of the leaders of Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip, interviewed in *ABC*, 21 August 2001. The Spanish newspaper article does not include the original text. It is unlikely that the Sheikh would have used the term “kamikaze.”

²²⁷ Dr. Nizar Rayan, a Hamas leader in Gaza. James Bennet, “The New Suicide Bombers: Larger and More Varied Pool”, *New York Times*, 21 June 2002.

²²⁸ Interview with a leader of Islamic Jihad in Jenin, September 2001. In April 2002, the camp was again threatened by an Israeli incursion. The militants – of all political stripes – took an oath at the mosque to fight until martyrdom. After a week of resistance, however, the 35 survivors surrendered, having run out of ammunition and explosives.

inflict some losses on the enemy, their short-term purpose is more about enabling reprisals after Israeli attacks and striking inside Israel. More generally, they are seen as a new type of action enabling them on the one hand to pursue the struggle and to escape their image as passive victims. On the other hand, the change of time frame and normative references by associating the “martyrdom operations” with *jihad* has endowed the struggle with the prospect of victory. Indeed, its future is no longer judged by short-term results or mid-term projections; rather, it is linked to eschatological expectations which no longer have anything to do with a single lifetime.

Sanctification

The *shahid*, a national hero, has replaced the *fedayin*. As a figure of the Palestinian resistance fighter, the *fedayin* were at their peak in the 1970s. They also represented self-sacrifice, as people struggling for their fatherland willing to give up their lives. However, this figure faded completely into the background in favour of the *shahid*, more than the *mudjahid*. The latter, combatants in a war seen at the time as a religious one (*jihad*), grew out of the Islamist parties’ vocabulary and was not as widely used as the word *shahid*. It is true that after dying, the *mudjahidin* and even the *fedayin* become martyrs. Martyrs have always had a place among figures in the national struggle. But, among them, the *shahid* are currently in the forefront. They are characterised by two interconnected aspects – religious involvement and morbidity.

As a *Fedaï*, the hero *takes the risk* of dying, while as a *shahid* he will die no matter what; and his only hope of victory – both against the enemy and in his personal life – is in paradise after he dies. All rewards for this second hero figure are postponed until after death, which is a crucial advantage in the Palestinian context where military victory is absolutely inconceivable for the moment.²²⁹ His sanctification and connection to religious references bring in the notion of the Beyond, enabling him to both accentuate and go beyond death.

²²⁹ Jean-François Legrain, *Palestine : les bantoustans d’Allah*, in Riccardo. Bocco, Blandine Destremau, Jean Hannover. (ed.), ‘Palestine, Palestiniens : territoire national, espaces communautaires’, *Les Cahiers du CERMOC*; n° 17, 1997, p 93.

The Palestinians have developed a feeling of being the losers in any case. In that context, being involved in the national struggle can only result in death, and the hero in that struggle can only be one who dies. Sanctifying death and associating it with a context of religious meaning has enabled them to gloss over it and, on the contrary, to make it a tool for victory and for a better future. For the personal destiny of the *shahid* promised a reward in the Beyond, and for the national struggle, each *shahid* must become a bit more connected to *jihad*, i.e. to the sacred struggle in which victory is certain in the long term. With martyrdom and the linking of the national struggle to religion, both the deaths of the combatants and the failure of the national struggle are surpassed in a double shift. With the religious non-temporality and eschatological temporality of *jihad*, the current failure becomes a mere historical vicissitude before the assured victory. “The destruction of Israel is a Koranic inevitability.”²³⁰

The impact of this reinterpretation is not restricted to the promotion of the martyr figure, and can also be seen in political vocabulary – particularly in fliers – which refers to religious notions on an increasingly frequent basis. Organisations originally opposed to this kind of action, such as the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, have now taken them up and are preparing them in the same way by stressing both the religious aspect of the act and its usefulness for the national struggle: “An intense 20-day period of religious studies and discussion follows between the commander and each candidate. Verses from the Koran about the martyr attaining paradise are constantly recited. The candidate is reminded of the happiness awaiting him in the presence of the prophets and the saints, of the amazing beauty of the *huri*, or beautiful young woman, who will greet him, and of his luck at being able to intercede on behalf of 70 loved ones on the Last Judgement day. He is also reminded of the service he will be rendering his compatriots through his sacrifice.”²³¹

Hezbollah and the Shiite references it employs are another notable influence. It is

²³⁰ An expression used by one of the spiritual guides in the Islamic Jihad movement: Sheikh Ascad al-Tamimi in Beyrouth, quoted in Jean-François Legrain, « La Palestine : de la terre perdue à la reconquête du territoire », *Cultures et Conflits*, n°21-22, Spring-Summer 1996, p 190.

²³¹ Interview with Abou Fatah, leader of one of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades groups in Gaza. Hanna Jaber, “Inside the World of the Palestinian Suicide Bomber”, London; *Sunday Times*, 24/03/2002.

particularly noticeable in the change in propaganda material used by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Posters have changed for example. From a simple military look (with the “martyr” wearing combat gear and holding a Kalashnikov or an M16), they have become more and more symbolic and closer to Hezbollah posters. Likewise, their wills have changed, becoming more like Hezbollah’s highly stereotyped ones with headings to be filled out – my people, my country, the martyrs who have preceded me, my family, etc. These elements as a whole show the increased emphasis on the national struggle as a sacred myth.

Sacrifice and Competing Value Systems

By being sanctified, the national struggle could be reinterpreted and its failure transcended. It also justifies the legitimisation of that struggle and the values it has conveyed in competition with Israel’s. On the one hand, associating the national conflict with a religious one through the martyrs has provided a mirror response to the Israeli religious argument, and it alludes to a sacred legitimacy above mere issues of territory. And, on the other hand, promoting the candidates for martyrdom – and thus for death in the name of the cause – is meant to show moral superiority over the adversary: “We are capable of sacrificing ourselves for our struggle because it is our land. The Jews are too afraid of dying. They don’t know what they are fighting for.”²³²

This position of higher legitimacy is also valid domestically. The martyrs are held up – to those who might doubt the need to engage in the national struggle – as figures who have sacrificed themselves and to whom the living ought to feel indebted. In their testaments, the “martyrs” point out the lineage of their predecessors and call upon the people to struggle while denouncing traitors to the cause: “We’ve had enough torment from our wounds (...) We’ve had enough of seeing what we have had to undergo while remaining silent. The borders have been violated (...) The time has come to seek revenge for the town of Nablus, its commanders and combatants. We must not stop the shooting and we must not stop the martyr operations, whatever the consequences. He who strikes back after being struck is better than he who does nothing. There is no solution other than jihad, and whoever thinks that the blood

²³² Nablus; an interview with a 19-year-old student in her 1st year of business school at Al-Qods Open University, December 2000.

of the leader Jamal Mansour, of Jamal Salim,²³³ Ahmed Marshud²³⁴ and of the engineer Ayman Halawa²³⁵ and of all our martyrs was shed in vain is sorely mistaken.”²³⁶

Palestinian martyrdom has a double face. Highlighting a hero who dies corresponds to the figures of negative exemplariness typically found in narratives developed through the “vision of the vanquished”.²³⁷ Heroes from defeated peoples are “victim-heroes” who die.²³⁸ But the Palestinian specificity is to have intrinsically added through death a victory over the enemy. It is not just because the hero has proven his higher moral value through his sacrifice, but also because through his death he succeeds in killing the enemy even though the balance of power was totally unfavourable to him. Death – impossible to prevent due to the balance of power – is transformed into an ambivalent victory because it comes at the cost of the “hero’s” life story.

The Impact of the Martyr Figure

Suicide Bombers

Why is this figure of exemplariness so resonant for Palestinians and how far does their attachment go? Can one define a sociological portrait of Palestinian martyrs? Shin Beth thought it could draw their profile in 2002 – a youth aged 18-22 from a poor background,

²³³ Jamal Mansour and Jamal Salim were two Hamas political leaders in Nablus. Aged respectively 47 and 40, and originally from the Balata and 'Ein Beit El-Ma' (Nablus) refugee camps, they were both subjected to an “extrajudicial execution,” the responsibility for which was claimed by the Israeli army when a missile was fired from a helicopter on their office on 31 July 2001. 5 other people were killed by the explosion: two militants, one journalist and two children.

²³⁴ A 29-year-old Hamas activist from the Balata refugee camp. He was killed along with another militant when his car exploded on 15 October 2001. Palestinian sources assert that it was an Israeli execution, which has been denied by the Israeli army.

²³⁵ A 26-year-old Hamas activist from Nablus killed by a missile fired on his car from a helicopter on 22 October 2001; responsibility for the execution was acknowledged by the Israeli army.

²³⁶ The testament of Maher Habicha, a 21-year-old Hamas militant and plumber in Nablus, perpetrator of a suicide attack on a bus in Haifa on 2 December 2001. The attack left 15 victims.

²³⁷ Wachtel Nathan., *La vision des vaincus*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997.

²³⁸ Christian Giordano, “Gérer l'exemplarité : les saints, les héros et les victimes”; in Pierre Centlivres (ed.); *Saints, sainteté et martyre : la fabrication de l'exemplarité*; Neuchâtel, Recherches et travaux de l'Institut d'ethnologie n°15, 2001, p 129. The author has developed these categories from Balkan victim-hero figures.

usually from a refugee camp, single, with no prospects and not the eldest in the family.²³⁹ However, one cannot help observing that a large portion of the Palestinian population is in that category, since 60%²⁴⁰ of them are below the poverty line, 16% live in refugee camps, and 21% are between the ages of 15 and 25. Furthermore, a good number of ‘‘martyrs’’ do not correspond to these criteria. Thus, they are not always recruited among the most disadvantaged or those with the least prospects. One of the perpetrators of the Beit Lid attack in 1995 had just landed a steady job as a physiotherapist.²⁴¹ Another (in Gaza in October 1994)

had refused his brother’s offer to pay for him to study in Germany and leave behind his wife and two children.²⁴² There are many more examples among the kamikazes in the Al Aqsa Intifada, in which new categories of people became involved in such operations. An elderly father, a bus driver in Israel who was originally from Gaza, drove his bus into some passersby on the road between Gaza and Tel Aviv.²⁴³ An Israeli Palestinian from Haifa became a kamikaze after training in Jenin. Young women – sometimes students – are sent out by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (Fatah), or more rarely by the Izziddin el-Qassam Brigades (Hamas). In fact it is impossible to describe a specific social configuration, as the Israeli secret services have recognised.²⁴⁴

It is not just that the martyrdom phenomenon cannot be reduced to an exact social category; it is that the range of categories involved is also becoming broader. There is one certainty which stands out, however. Belonging to a refugee camp may be considered as a criterion that is important, although not necessary. Yet that condition seems to allude more to

²³⁹ According to Defence Ministry spokesman Yarden Vatikai, *Khaleej and Times*, 30 January 2002.

²⁴⁰ UNSCO, *The impact of Closure and Other Mobility Restrictions on Palestinian Productive Activities January 2002-30 June 2002*, October 2002, <http://www.un.org/News/dh/mideast/econ-report-final.pdf>

²⁴¹ Philippe Lemarchand, and Lamia Radi, *Israël/Palestine demain, op. cit.*, p 47.

²⁴² An interview with one of his brothers in Berlin, October 1999.

²⁴³ 14 February 2001, the (35-year-old) driver had been working for the Israeli company Egged since 1996 and escorted Palestinian workers when there were no roadblocks.

²⁴⁴ ‘‘Indeed, Israeli officials were concerned by an Israeli national security services study precisely because no specific configuration was identified. All perpetrators of suicide attacks, or attempts at them, were Muslims, and mostly single, but their age and level of education varied.’’ James Bennet, ‘‘The New Suicide Bombers: Larger and More Varied Pool’’, *New York Times*, 6 June 2002.

an ideological and material environment than to a specific condition for the kamikaze, who may very well belong within that camp to the category of “those who have coped” and found work. The refugee camps are also “places of memory” in Palestinian history, particularly for the 1948 and 1967 exiles. Their living conditions, the most difficult experienced by any of the Palestinians, are a daily reminder of that history. From the Jenin refugee camp one can see the villages, located inside Israel, from which the inhabitants came. I have already mentioned how their association with that history of exile has also given them an identity with respect to the rest of the Palestinian population.

Ahmed, a 27-year-old student, lives in a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. He belongs to the category of “living martyrs,” who are preparing to commit a suicide attack. When he does commit it, he wants to be holding the keys to his house in Jaffa, which belonged to his grandmother who went into exile in 1948: “My grandmother represents the history of the Palestinian people. She talked to us about Jaffa, its grapes and its seashore. Through her tears she told us stories about life in Palestine in the old days. I always hoped to visit that place one day. But I let go of my dreams about Jaffa and never claimed my grandmother’s house. I never thought about destroying Israel. I gave them the land that originally belonged to me, but instead of acknowledging that, they have continued to deprive me of my right to live freely and at peace in those few square metres.”²⁴⁵

Perpetrators of suicide attacks are not among the poorest people in the refugee camps. On the contrary, our interviews with families have led us to believe that the attack may occur just at the time when they had carried out their plans. Statements such as “he had just found a job two months earlier,” “he had just assembled enough money to be able to get married,” “we had finally managed to build a room for him and his future wife”, etc. were recurrent.²⁴⁶ Here, two aspects can be evoked as an explanation. They ask the question of the possibility of associating political and private worlds within the Palestinian context. Young people from the refugee camps highlight two sentiments that arise once the goals they have been focusing on

²⁴⁵ Hanna Jaber, *Inside the World of the Palestinian Suicide Bomber*, *op. cit.*

²⁴⁶ Interviews with families of suicide bombers. Jenin, Balata and Jabalya refugee camps, April and September 2001.

– work and marriage – have been attained. The first alludes to their acute feelings of disappointment regarding the Palestinian context: “I wanted a job, and that’s all I could think about. It was my whole life; our lives revolved around everyday life, so I didn’t think about it anymore. But now I have a job and, in the end, what was the point of taking so much trouble. The occupation is still here, and the situation hasn’t changed for us; we have no future.”²⁴⁷

The second feeling alludes to guilt arising from a lack of solidarity for the collective fate due to one’s success. While “escaping from the camp” is the wish of some of its inhabitants, this may appear to be abandoning the group identity upon which their own identity was built. Participating in an attack then becomes a way of declaring the fact of belonging again.

Nevertheless, this broadening of the categories associated with martyrdom shows how involved the latter is in the general context of Palestinian society. Thus, strikingly, experiences at military roadblocks are often considered to be triggers by the “martyrs” themselves, or by their entourage. This observation confirms the crucial nature of such experiences in the Palestinians’ daily life. Thus, a thirty-year-old woman who was an aspiring suicide bomber recruited by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades highlighted an incident that occurred at a military roadblock – just one among many, she added:²⁴⁸ “An Israeli soldier forced me and a man to sit amongst the filth at a military roadblock for an hour. He gave me no explanation for the delay. He began verbally insulting me. The way he looked at my identity card was humiliating, not to mention the advances they make towards us women. Life is not worth living when our people are humiliated on a daily basis.”

The father of Darin Abou Aisheh, a 21-year-old woman who committed a suicide attack on 27 February 2002,²⁴⁹ also spoke about an incident at a military roadblock: “I think that what pushed her over the edge was when she saw a pregnant woman being injured at a

²⁴⁷ Interview with a 24-year-old who had been hired by an NGO two months earlier; Gaza, October 2000.

²⁴⁸ Interview conducted by a journalist at the Tulkarem refugee camp. Gregg Zoroya, “Her Decision To Be a Suicide Bomber”, *USA Today*, 22 April 2002.

²⁴⁹ While she was in a car with two members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, they were stopped at a roadblock near Maccabim in Israel. The young woman blew herself up, wounding three policemen. The two others were killed by policeman. Her brother had been killed a month earlier by Israeli gunfire. She had gotten engaged one week earlier. *Associated Press*, 28 February 2002.

checkpoint near Nablus on 25 February. That was the breaking point, without a doubt. She talked about it constantly.’’²⁵⁰

Women Kamikazes: a Specificity?

The last development in the suicide attacks during the second Intifada involved young women – some of them students – who were sent out by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (Fatah), and quite recently by Islamic Jihad²⁵¹ and Hamas.²⁵² Can the paths and motivations of these young women be considered specific with respect to their male counterparts?

Darin Abou Eisheh lived in the Balata refugee camp and was studying English. She was a member of the student council and a Hamas militant. Hamas and Islamic Jihad appear to have refused to allow her to commit a suicide attack, which is why she is thought to have turned to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. Hamas and Islamic Jihad did not at first send women out to commit suicide attacks, although they had never expressed any public opposition to the idea and later changed their strategy: ‘‘It is the right of Muslim women to fight against the occupation and there is no *fatwa* forbidding them to join the fight.’’²⁵³

In talking about their motives, they displayed no difference from the men. However, with respect to the aspirants’ preparation, it would seem that the male militants in the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades have a hard time adapting their ‘‘training,’’ which could be associated with our previous analyses on the relationship between involvement and gender. Two suicide attack aspirants who gave up the operation evoked the way they were ‘‘trained’’ by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades as their reasons for giving up. Arin Ahmed, 20, a business student from near Bethlehem, gave up a first time. She was removed a second time while accompanying another volunteer, a 16-year-old who blew himself up after hesitating,

²⁵⁰ Daniel Williams, ‘‘Young Bombers Nurtured by Despair,’’ *Washington Post*, 23 March 2002.

²⁵¹ This first attack by Hiba Daraghme, a 19-year-old student of English, was committed on 19 May 2003 in a mall in Afula, killing three Israelis and wounding 90 others.

²⁵² In an attack on 14 January 2004 for which joint responsibility was claimed by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and Hamas, a 21-year-old student and mother, Rim Salih al-Rayasha, blew herself up at the Erez checkpoint (Gaza), killing four Israeli soldiers.

²⁵³ Cheikh Hassan Youssef, Hamas, *Khaleej and Times*, 30 January 2002.

according to Arin Ahmed.²⁵⁴ She backed down again before being arrested by the Israelis on 29 May 2002. She was engaged to Jaad Salem, 26, a Tanzim Fatah leader from the Dheisheh (Bethlehem) refugee camp who was killed by the Israeli army on 8 March 2002 according to Arin Ahmed, who wanted to avenge him. The Israelis maintain that a bomb he was making accidentally exploded in his car. “I was expecting to be trained and asked questions about why I wanted to kill and die. Instead, they told me I was going to join my fiancé in paradise. Even at the time, I thought the idea was completely idiotic.”²⁵⁵

Thauriya Hamamra, 25, a seamstress and florist, lived in a village on the outskirts of Jenin. She tried to join the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. They advised her to think it over. As her motive, she spoke of personal reasons which she didn’t want to talk about in detail and “the daily trials imposed upon my people.” She confirmed her intention a few days later. Due to the lack of explosives in the Jenin area, she was put in touch with a group in Nablus four months later. After a one-hour “training course,” she was sent out towards Jerusalem wearing a belt full of explosives. She changed her mind on the way and went to her aunt’s house in Bethlehem, where she was arrested a few hours later. “After the training, I had a change of heart and decided not to carry out the plan. I wasn’t afraid. I’m not afraid of dying. I left for personal reasons. I was afraid of the way God would see me if I did it for impure reasons. But the main reason for my change of heart was during my training, when they told me to blow myself up if I was found out – even if no one was there. Blow myself up for nothing? What’s that about?! I felt like they were cutting deals with the blood of the martyrs. Walking in the blood of the martyrs, just so my leaders could say they had carried out the operation!”²⁵⁶

Although the female aspirants are strategically useful given their greater freedom of

²⁵⁴ Issa Bdeir, Rishon Letzion attack on 22 May 2002, two deaths. On his farewell video he said: “I am preparing to commit this act in order to avenge the constant Israeli aggression still being committed against our people. Farewell, mother, farewell, father and farewell to my family.”

²⁵⁵ James Bennet, *The New Suicide Bombers*, *op. cit.* and Associated Press, 31 May 2002.

²⁵⁶ Associated Press, 31 May 2002.

movement (in the past), it appears that in fact the Brigades' male "trainers" have a hard time giving the female volunteers the same attention as their male counterparts. They see female involvement as second-hand in comparison to male involvement as a rather ineffective afterthought due to its incompatibility with the social role of women. This image of a gap between social roles and involvement is also manifested in the discourse on the "shame" of men who have not become involved, whereas "even women" have, acting outside their traditional role. In the context of competition among armed groups, the Brigades' men have been reproached for sending out women because they weren't brave enough to go themselves. Paradoxically, suicide attacks appear to be easier for women. Due to their unique character, the attacks do not require the women to be militants beforehand, which might challenge the norms of female behaviour.

It is always difficult to explain in sociological terms the circumstantial conditions and personal motives that have driven one person to commit an act rather than another. But the massive nature of the suicide attacks justifies an analysis re-establishing the social logic behind martyr figures and their broad inclusion within the scope of Palestinian identity. That specific configuration explains the overall impact of "becoming martyrs," as initially elaborated by the Islamists.

Fusion vs. Political Deadlock

The "martyrs" among Palestinian youth have chosen to break through the deadlock we have described – between supporting nationalist principles and scepticism about the possibility of achieving them by transcending that struggle and including it within a religious context and time frame. Entering that new time frame situates the Palestinian struggle within the victorious and millenary perspective of *jihad*, making it possible to deny defeat and raise the young "martyr's" status from victim to hero. Secondly, it resolves the contradiction observed earlier between supporting the goal of creating a State as the primary objective and scepticism about the possibility of achieving that goal in the short term, making it impossible to associate one's own personal story with that goal. Young men who take on the perspective of sacrifice are able to suppress that opposition between supporting

nationalism and self-actualisation because they transcend their own personal story by associating it with that of the victorious *shahid* figure. The argument might be posited in the following way: “my fulfilment will occur through the national struggle which undoubtedly will not succeed now, but that’s not important because I’m willing to sacrifice myself for a goal that reaches beyond me.” The *shahid* responds to the disconnection between the various personal and political levels – characteristic of the Palestinian identity issue – by merging those different levels. On that point, there seems to be a clear parallel with the fusion process in “social antimovements” analysed by Michel Wieviorka: “the transformation of this principle of totality is often brought about by constructing communitarian utopias or myths which assimilate whatever cannot be reconciled with reality in an imaginary fashion.”²⁵⁷ However, the Palestinian case represents an additional step in the fusion process. Indeed, the extreme nature of the Palestinian situation has created a contradiction not merely in certain political and social values, but also in everything connected to individual lives on the one hand and the national objective on the other. Thus, the process of merging with myth that is aimed at surpassing these contradictions – existential ones for Palestinian youth in that they have split up their experience as a whole must also include the level pertaining to their individual lives. Therefore, resorting to violence also involves a suicidal dimension.

Imposing Unanimity

This fusion carried out by the Palestinian “martyr” at his own level is also intended for the social arena, where it is designed to dispel opposition within Palestinian society through a newfound unanimity around the national struggle. I have shown how young people experienced the period during which the Palestinian Authority was established as a “return” to divisions among the Palestinian people. These divisions were political (opposition between the Authority and Islamists), social (*returnees* against those who had remained) and generational (youth against community authorities). In their discourse, and particularly in their testaments, the “martyrs” have expressed a strong desire to establish social unanimity (or rather to re-establish it according to their vision, relating to the supposed “golden age” of national struggle during the first Intifada) and to reject divisions within

²⁵⁷ Michel Wieviorka, *Sociétés et terrorisme*, op. cit., p 18.

Palestinian society. “Traitors,” “the falsely pious” – i.e. the inside enemy who refuses to fight, pursues combatants, or is a wheeler-dealer and forgets the national cause – have been repeatedly criticised. “My soul is crushed when I see the negligence of Muslims regarding jihad on the path of God the Most High. (...) They stand at a distance, gloating and pondering, without moving forward to free the oppressed from their oppression.”²⁵⁸

There is thus a desire on the part of the “martyrs” to transcend social differences by calling for the reunification of Palestinian society around the national struggle. But their gesture is also a symbolic way to reclaim society, both internally and externally, and to achieve recognition. Since that retrieval is only possible through their death, it will indeed never be accomplished; but that doesn’t stop them from asserting their identity in this way. It also alludes to self-affirmation as an independent individual with respect to the Palestinian community.²⁵⁹ The “martyr” is no longer associated with this or that Palestinian family, and thus with belonging to a specific local ethnic group. The “martyr” is no longer the son of his father or subject to his authority, but rather “the son of Izziddin el-Qassam”²⁶⁰ and part of a line of previous “martyrs.”

Martyr figures are always associated with a process of legitimisation around a cause, and the fact of being able to promote aspiring martyrs is seen as proof of the higher value of that cause. This characteristic endows them with particular importance within the

²⁵⁸ Testament of Ismail al-Ma’suabi, a member of Hamas who carried out an attack on 22 June 2001 at the Eretz checkpoint (Gaza) in which 2 soldiers were killed.

²⁵⁹ As Farhad Khosrokhavar has also underscored regarding Iranian martyrs, there is an aspect of affirmation of the ego’s sovereignty in the death of a martyr. Farhad Khosrokhavar, (1995), *L’islamisme et la mort*, Paris, L’Harmattan, p 112. For a comparative analysis of Palestinian and Iranian martyrs, see also Farhad Khosrokhavar (2002), *Les nouveaux martyrs d’Allah*, Paris, Flammarion, 2002 and Pénélope Larzillière, *Le "martyre" des jeunes Palestiniens pendant l’Intifada al Aqsa : analyse et comparaison* ; Politique étrangère 4/2001; Paris; October-December 2001; p 937-951.

²⁶⁰ In the early 1930s Sheikh Izzidin el-Qassam preached holy war against British rule, considered to be solely responsible for the Zionist aggression in Palestine. He founded a secret military organisation which had about 200 members in 1935. His death that same year during a clash with the British police gave him the status of a martyr for the national cause. Nadine Picaudou, *Les Palestiniens : un siècle d’histoire*, Brussels, Complexe, 1997, p 88.

framework of national struggles, where nationalism is construed in relation to an opposing nationalism, and where there is thus direct conflict and competition between values. That aspect flourished in Europe during the First World War.²⁶¹ Today, the rejection of all-embracing ideologies and the emphasis on individual independence have disqualified processes leading people “to die (and kill) for ideas.”²⁶² But the Israeli-Palestinian context where two sanctified forms of nationalism are clashing has remained particularly favourable to this kind of construct. In this context, and in a way comparable to other experiences, promoting martyrs as national heroes – ones who die – seems typical of the defeated side’s vision. According to Elias Khoury, deconstructing the martyr figure was only possible in Lebanon after positive prospects had once again developed.²⁶³ The Palestinian “martyr” remains a figure of despair in that he has no vision or hope for a reversal of the situation, except in the very long term, within an eschatological religious temporality which only makes human temporality all the more insignificant.

The merging of the two levels– national and individual – and the reference to that eschatological temporality are an extreme way of dealing with meaning. Another method consists in relying on an attempt to reconfigure the national objective and the private sphere, which creates a completely different relationship with temporality. The militants went from an eschatological stance to the most extreme form of immediacy characteristic of the constructs of Fatah militants.

²⁶¹ Annette Becker, *La guerre et la foi*; Paris; Colin, 1994.

²⁶² Nadine Picardou, ‘‘Mourir pour des idées’’, Paris, *Libération*, 23 October 2000.

²⁶³ Elias Khoury, *Terminology and Change*, a paper at the *Martyrdom and/in Modernity* symposium organised by Friederike Pannewick, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, 6-8 June 2002.

Chapter 7

Armed Militants

*“Clandestinity and the use of weapons involve habits, they shape ways of being and thinking, and ultimately produce a specific culture and particular attitudes, far more than they are determined by them.”*²⁶⁴

Armed militants were the new actors in the second Intifada. With them, the dividing lines between groups were due less to ideological criteria (groups from this or that party) than to local and familial distinctions.²⁶⁵ Militants from different parties or factions could even be found within the same groups. Membership in a party could also be a function of family traditions, certain families belonging to Islamic Jihad, others to Fatah, etc. These militants showed no fundamental disagreement in their discourse about modes of action. This could be seen in how methods of operation moved from one group to another. Among other examples, suicide attacks – initially reserved for Hamas and Islamic Jihad – were taken up by the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (Fatah),²⁶⁶ and phenomena of secular “martyrdom” were on the increase. Symmetrically, the Islamists attacked military camps and settlements on the model

²⁶⁴ Michel Wieviorka, *Sociétés et terrorisme, op. cit.*, p 486.

²⁶⁵ On this point, see in particular Jean-François Legrain, J-F, “Les phalanges des martyrs d’Al-Aqsa en mal de *leadership* national,” in Jean-François Legrain (ed.), “En attendant la Palestine,” *Maghreb-Machrek*, n° 176, Summer 2003, pp 11-34.

²⁶⁶ Who carried out their first suicide attack on 21 March 2002, after 18 months of the Intifada.

of the PFLP – through infiltration and then more or less blind shooting until running away or being shot down. Furthermore, we should point out that while these militants stand out through the fact of bearing arms or having access to them, one cannot refer to them as true professionals in the armed struggle. In the first place, Palestinian security forces have not been massively involved in activism. On an extremely limited territory with few resources, there is no real training or material. Most of the time their activities have been mixed in with those of traditional militancy – distributing flyers and posters, organising demonstrations and meetings, supervising aid distribution to the population, etc. Group leaders also devote a great deal of their time to management. Finally, most of their energy is focused on dealing with local conflicts rather than on the one with Israel. Groups coming from parties such as Fatah do not have the same clandestine culture as the Islamist groups and didn't undergo the same repression. The result was a mixed, unprofessional side that was also part of the lack of strategy during the second Intifada.

One cannot say that Palestinian parties became involved in the armed struggle in a massive, well-thought-out way. It was more a matter of disorganised resistance carried out by small groups more or less formally connected to this or that party. Their initiatives were uncoordinated, sometimes – but not always – evoking armed resistance. Their objective was above all to gain visibility for Palestinian resistance. Often the groups decided to “go have a shoot-out” after a day in which a large number of deaths had been announced on the Palestinian side, particularly if the deaths involved people from their area. Before Israel reoccupied A Areas,²⁶⁷ “having a shoot-out” usually meant “strafing” the settlements with old M16s from the A areas, thus at a distance that was far enough to keep the settlements from being hit. The same settlements responded with tank fire on the neighbourhoods, leading the Palestinians living there to abandon them. Another mode of action consisted in trying to hit settlers driving on West Bank bypasses and soldiers at roadblocks. After the Israeli army

²⁶⁷ Based on the Oslo II Accords, the A Areas included the large Palestinian towns in the West Bank and were under total Palestinian control.

responded by reoccupying the A Areas, another form of resistance consisted in shooting at tanks and trying to blow them up.

Reconversion of the Shabab

What social categories do these militants in the armed struggle correspond to? In fact, they are the same as during the first Intifada. Laetitia Bucaille's observations on Nablus, through an analysis of the itinerary of *shabab* from the Balata refugee camp (Nablus) from the first to the second Intifada, can be generalised.²⁶⁸ The armed militants belong in their vast majority to the working class sector of the refugee camp. They have generally followed the path of the young militants and stone-throwers from the first Intifada – from the difficult adaptation when the Palestinian Authority was established to the resumption of the struggle during the second Intifada. This does not mean that it included all the same categories of militants from the first Intifada – far from it. On the contrary, there was very little participation in the second Intifada by the middle-class militants who had taken part in the first Intifada: “The only time I demonstrated was at the Bir Zeit demonstration. It was a very unusual demonstration in any case.²⁶⁹ But I went down because from my office window I could see women and children carrying rolled-up blankets and heavy loads across the fields – carrying heavy loads like that on foot.²⁷⁰ I felt like I was back in '48 watching the refugees, as if we had suddenly gone backwards to the same exact situation. So I was really irritated and I went down to throw stones as I had during the first Intifada. We're the generation that carried out the first Intifada, but none of us are getting involved.”²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Laetitia Bucaille, *Génération Intifada*, *op. cit.*

²⁶⁹ An allusion to a demonstration held on 12 March 2001 on a road cut off between Ramallah and Bir Zeit University. The peaceful demonstration was an attempt to fill in the trenches dug by the Israeli army's bulldozers. It was mainly composed of students, professors, trade unionists, etc. It has been called unusual because it was a turning point in the Al-Aqsa Intifada – one of the rare occasions when a different kind of mobilisation occurred both in terms of the mode of action and the segment of the population involved. However, after succeeding in filling in one of the trenches, the demonstrators were dispersed by tear gas, as well as rubber and real bullets. A member of Fatah was killed and a dozen people were wounded.

²⁷⁰ Since the road was blocked off, the Palestinians walked through the fields below it.

²⁷¹ Hilal, 27, an engineer in Ramallah, the grandson of 1948 refugees, interviewed in May 2001. It's interesting to see how the memory of 1948 and 1967 has been transmitted. Hilal speaks of '48 as if he himself had experienced the exile.

The armed militants were indicated both by their social background and personal history. Generally speaking, they were already among the most committed in the first Intifada. They had followed its evolution when the social movement broke up and the movement was gradually restricted to groups that were increasingly limited and violent. Laetitia Bucaille²⁷² has specifically shown the difficulty experienced by militants most involved in the first Intifada – who belonged to or were leaders of small groups – in adapting to “civilian” life after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. To this group must be added another category, the *mutaradin*, or “wanted.” After escaping arrest and going into exile, they were not authorised to return under the Oslo Accords. Some of them received military training while in exile. Many came back secretly, in particular through the tunnels between Egypt and Gaza.²⁷³

The stone-throwers, or “little brothers” as L. Bucaille calls them, were no longer the driving force behind the second Intifada, whereas the armed militants belonged to the *same generation* as those in the first Intifada, and were even composed of older leaders. The “little brothers” were much younger and mainly from the refugee camps and poorest segments of society. They were aspiring to a heroic self-image, which led them to take greater risks in order to assert themselves vis-à-vis the others, and even the Israelis. Some of them would walk forward all alone to throw stones, although the other young people had all withdrawn, taking off their tee-shirts in a dramatic gesture. This gesture is also a teenage ritual of self-affirmation that helps them build a positive image of themselves. For children of refugees in Palestinian society, young people without work or money – have become a symbol of courage. They conspicuously deny the Israeli soldiers’ military advantage by refusing to take it into account in their own actions.

However, these young stone-throwers were aware of no longer being the key figures in the uprising, contrary to those involved in the first Intifada. They were now stone-throwers waiting to have a weapon, and it was not unusual to see them move on to a Kalashnikov when

²⁷² Laetitia Bucaille, *Génération Intifada*, *op. cit.*, p 163-172.

²⁷³ Toufiq Haddad, “The Mutaradeen,” Jerusalem, *Between The Lines*, July 2001, p 13.

they could get one. Nowadays militants no longer identify with the heroic figure of the *shabab*, widely deconstructed due to the change in perception of the conflict with Israel. The shift to armed engagement, while remaining more or less involved in other forms of militancy, was an attempt to reintroduce committed figures. Nevertheless, these figures were not cast against the same background of hope as during the first Intifada. This lack of a defined set of expectations explains the extremely uncoordinated nature of their armed struggle. These groups operate from highly individual initiatives, on the basis of their local setups.

The goal has also changed. It is no longer a matter of harassing soldiers, but of killing them if possible – as well as the settlers and, gradually, the Israelis in general. The lack of a strategic outlook and the high civilian Palestinian losses – also the work of militias of armed settlers – are gradually erasing the distinctions between civilians and the military. This is about showing that it is more or less feasible to offer resistance to the Israeli army. In fact, the Palestinians do not believe in the possibility of really challenging the occupation in the middle term. Failing the ability to imagine a winning strategy for themselves, they are acting under a kind of “as if” rule. This is illustrated by the way people applaud the Palestinian resistance when Israeli incursions are withdrawn.

Before the real reoccupation of A Areas with a permanent curfew, the Israeli army made incursions, i.e. they entered these residential areas with tanks – after bombing them – to “clean out the terrorist infrastructure.” The incursions lasted from ten hours to several days. In any event the planned withdrawal would be celebrated on the Palestinian side as a victory of the resistance, namely the few groups with ill-assorted weapons mixed in with the stone-throwers who had tried to confront the Israelis. The balance of power was so disproportionate that one couldn’t say the Palestinians had the capacity to pose a real threat to the Israeli army. Similarly, the young people who strafe the settlements beyond their reach are acting “as if” they were conducting armed resistance.

It should be noted that the Palestinians have always alluded to the armed struggle. But, as for many theoreticians around the world, it is a double reference to both a practice and a myth: “The armed struggle denotes an overall approach to a regime of occupation or oppression that is designed to get rid of it. (...) It has been embodied in the 20th century by its

own myth. It matters little here whether or not the myth corresponds to the reality in the field.”²⁷⁴ As in other contexts, being connected to myth helps them to forget the lack of a strategic and practical base for their actions. This is the “impossible war” referred to by Michel Wieviorka.²⁷⁵ Unable to actually wage it, they display its attributes.

In fact, the stakes lie elsewhere for these actors. For them, as for most Palestinians, the middle term, when things are planned, has more or less disappeared. Thus, they have been thrust into a time frame of immediacy where the real stakes revolve less around this lost struggle than around the internal Palestinian positioning gained from engaging in such acts. The end of Palestinian prospects, like the extreme division of their territory, has sharply restricted the temporal and spatial dimensions they live in. Their space is mainly local – even at street level – and they live in the present moment. Beyond that, they move directly into eschatological time, into which the martyrs merge. There is hardly anything left in the middle, especially for young people.

However, some of the older militants project themselves not into their own time of life, but into that of their children: “Do you think I like it when my daughter comes home and asks, ‘Daddy, what’s that?’ about my M16? I’d prefer it if she asked me questions about computers or the Internet, like children in France. My future is over now. I’m fighting for my children. We have a lot of horrible things in our heads. If they [the international community] had a real solution, like in Kosovo, we’d lay down our weapons immediately. The only reason we’ve taken up arms is to offer our children a better future, so they can live in safety, get an education and think about enjoying themselves.”²⁷⁶ The militant who said this is 38 years old and is actually one of the mid-level officials who has been more involved in planning than the young people.

²⁷⁴ Roger Heacock, *Système international et création de l’Etat*, in Nadine Picaudou (ed), “La Palestine en transition,” *Les annales de l’autre Islam* n°8, Paris, ERISM, INALCO, 2001, p 24.

²⁷⁵ Michel Wieviorka, *Sociétés et terrorisme*, *op. cit.*, p 406.

²⁷⁶ Tanzim Fatah leader, Balata refugee camp (Nablus), January 2001

Acquiring a Social Position

One of the factors that triggered the second Intifada was the desire of some of the Fatah “new guard” to use the reconfiguration of the political sphere both to win back status within Fatah and to deal with their loss of legitimacy among the population. At the same time, the relationship to charismatic leader Arafat was maintained, and it was those around him who were challenged. Is it enough to see this as the classic outline of a revolutionary sub-elite whom the revolution has passed by and who are trying to get back to centre stage, while maintaining their trust in the charismatic leader to avoid admitting failure? This kind of analysis has been highly contested by Jean-François Legrain²⁷⁷ who criticizes it for putting forward a non-existent generational factor and for not acknowledging the local structure of Palestinian society: “while the local warlords— the leaders whom one only hears about when they are assassinated²⁷⁸ – are quite emblematic of the young leadership in the Intifada, their identity does not involve belonging to a structured group that is antagonistic towards a socially and politically coherent ‘old guard.’ Their approaches to reality are not fundamentally different, and the potential fracture lines have nothing to do with generational and sociological identity. Like their elders, the emerging leaders are simply the expression of the power struggles operating within every group with shared aims in its relationship to the central power structure.”

It is clear that Palestinian groups are set up on a local basis, both in their way of recruiting and in their positioning. In this sense, the local identity has clearly supplanted what could be called a generational conscience. But the latter’s scarcity does not mean there is no generational phenomenon. Indeed, the “new guard” sees itself above all on a local level, but from one town to another one can see a common discourse on the part of these militants against the returnees and bosses in the Palestinian Authority. This convergence has also been

²⁷⁷ Jean-François Legrain, *Le fantôme d'Arafat, op. cit.*, p 47.

²⁷⁸ This depends, however, on the circles involved. Most of the “warlords,” as Jean-François Legrain calls them, are well known by the people in the camps on a local level and transversely by their “peers.”

expressed in the networks created among organised groups in the West Bank, particularly around Marwan Barghouti.²⁷⁹ “I’m in touch with Marwan every day, and with Jihad too.²⁸⁰ We keep each other informed.” This relationship is not a hierarchical one, but rather a transverse one. “Marwan is probably number 30. We have a hierarchical organisation, and Arafat is the one who makes the decisions. The difference with the others is that Marwan is a popular leader. It’s like everywhere else in the world here. There are personality conflicts, but the national cause goes beyond that, and the conflict is a civil process leading to progress in decision-making.”²⁸¹

Entering the armed struggle is a way of acquiring or maintaining social status for some young men from the refugee camps with no degree nor any “vitamin *waw*.”²⁸² Militants have daily experiences there with peer groups involving a specific mode of existence and the acquisition of power: “People come to see me when there’s a problem to be solved. They come to me to find out what’s going on.”²⁸³

The power acquired doesn’t come solely from bearing arms. What is required above all is to have the largest possible group of young people behind you. Yet this is only possible for a group leader who is sure of having enough resources to distribute, such as money, weapons, etc. Otherwise, there’s a good chance those young people will go elsewhere. But Palestinian resources are rare outside Fatah and the Authority. For instance, one activist talked about how he and a team mate ran out of petrol during one operation, and neither one had enough money to fill the tank. So these little leaders spend a great deal of their time

²⁷⁹ Marwan Barghouti, 44, a Palestinian MP, was arrested by the Israeli army in April 2002 and condemned to life in prison. He had already spent six years in Israeli prisons before going into exile in 1987. During the first Intifada, he was a liaison official for the PLO in Amman and Tunis. He returned in 1994 at the time of the Oslo Accords. He is a key Fatah figure in the West Bank, and his popularity goes beyond his actual duties.

²⁸⁰ A leader of the *shabiba* (Fatah youth) then of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Jenin refugee camp, September 2001. He was imprisoned during the Israeli army’s last incursion into the camp (April 2002). The other person he quotes is a colonel in Palestinian security and a (46-year-old) Fatah leader in Nablus. He escaped an attempted extra-judiciary execution by the Israeli army on 23 August 2001 when a ground-to-ground missile was fired at his car.

²⁸¹ Head of the PLO People’s Committee at the Balata refugee camp (Nablus), January 2001

²⁸² Waw, for the first letter of “wasta”: which means connections.

²⁸³ Tanzim Fatah militant, Balata refugee camp, April 2001.

cultivating relationships with various people in the political apparatus of Fatah and the Palestinian Authority who might obtain resources for them. One leader saw his authority challenged when he was unable to find any money to finance certain members of his group who were wanted and in hiding up in the hills. They must also prove their ability to establish authority and particularly to assert themselves in conflicts between theirs and other groups. But the leader doesn't follow his young people in every operation. He proves himself by taking part in an operation from time to time. As Goffman has underscored, "once his strength of character has been proven, it isn't necessary to prove it again; the actor can rest on his laurels for a while. He can count on the others to assume that, if the need should arise, he won't fail to draw on his character."²⁸⁴

The same kind of relationship plays out at higher levels. If the leaders solicited prove to be incapable of ensuring even basic logistics, then group chiefs will knock on other doors. Given the scarcity of resources, most of them seek multiple contacts and allegiances while trying to keep the various leaders in the dark about it: "If Marwan Barghouti only knew I'm also going to see Hassan al Cheikh!"²⁸⁵ Power is measured here in terms of financial, logistical and human resources. A little chief trying to promote himself to a leader will emphasize the number of young people he can muster. The group chiefs bring in the numbers, while the leaders bring in financial and logistical means. And since nearly all resources on this political front went through Yasser Arafat, their ability to obtain his financing had a great deal of influence on their position. During this period, when Yasser Arafat felt that Marwan Barghouti was gaining too much influence, he accepted almost none of the latter's many requests (such as to pay the hospital bills for a certain militant, etc.) while answering all of the ones from Hassan al Cheikh. A transfer of allegiance quickly occurred at the base. However, the group chiefs also tried to get as close as possible to Yasser Arafat by going around the intermediary level of these leaders. To that end, they could also activate ties with the *hamula*.

²⁸⁴ Erving Goffman, *Les rites d'interaction*, *op. cit.*, p.194.

²⁸⁵ Marwan Barghouti and Hassan al-Cheikh were competing for the Fatah leadership in the West Bank at the time. Barghouti was far more popular, but Hassan al-Cheikh had greater support from Arafat.

One of the group chiefs regularly sends his kind regards to Arafat's cabinet secretary, a member of his *hamula*: "I haven't asked him for anything yet, but it's a good thing that will be of use to me."²⁸⁶

Manoeuvres are made more complex through cooperation between Palestinian security forces and Israel. Indeed, the activists must obtain resources and highlight their mobilisation capacity, while at the same time making sure they aren't turned over to Israel in the framework of the security cooperation: "Leave the area immediately or I'll have to put your name down in the register!"²⁸⁷ screamed one Palestinian Authority official into the cell phone of one of his protégés. According to the militant involved, such indications can be used as a means of pressure on the activists. Rather than a direct hierarchical line, it appears to be a subtle game of power and opposition forces. The little chief who is just a cog in the wheel must also take into account this *shabab*'s moods. Involvement in the armed struggle is also a way to shed one's self-image as a mere victim and reclaim one's dignity. In accordance with that image, the *shabab* must therefore react in the event of serious Israeli attacks. If at the same time the Authority wants a minimum of incidents due to Yasser Arafat having declared a ceasefire, the game becomes particularly tricky for the group chief who has to hold it all together. So the decision-making line between Arafat and his groups was far from direct. To summarize, Arafat could push them to act, as he did just after Sharon's election (in February 2001). However, it is much harder to control them in the opposite direction. The instructions will be relayed in Ramallah and Gaza City, but with far more difficulty in the other regions.

Militants and Traditional Power

Armed youth groups constitute a relative parallel power, enabling them to become heavily involved in local conflicts and the way they are dealt with. Judicial resolutions of these conflicts are delicate matters in the Palestinian territories. Independently of the religious tribunals which regulate laws regarding individual rights, there are ordinary jurisdictions for

²⁸⁶ Tanzim Fatah militant, Ramallah, February 2001.

²⁸⁷ Tanzim Fatah militant, Ramallah, March 2001.

civilian, penal, administrative and commercial affairs. Nevertheless, in addition to the lack of means or training, and the problems posed by the multitude of overlapping judicial references, Palestinian courts of law have a hard time establishing themselves as an independent judicial power due to the frequent intrusions on the part of the executive branch which sometimes quashes decisions.²⁸⁸ Moreover, the Palestinian Authority has set up military courts and government security courts whose sphere of competence is constantly increasing. Finally, the effectiveness of the courts has been handicapped by Israeli hindrances which prevent the judges and lawyers from getting around.²⁸⁹ Thus, ‘‘before the second Intifada broke out, the Palestinians already rather willingly sought out substitute avenues of justice, such as the district governor’s office in charge of security, or the security forces themselves.’’,²⁹⁰ Between the Palestinian Authority, the traditional mode of resolution with a *sulha*,²⁹¹ and armed groups, the Palestinians have seen an increase in the powers and opposition forces operating at a local level: ‘‘They had organised a *sulha* to settle a quarrel over money between my brother and another family. I charged into the *sulha*, turned everything upside down with my *shabab* and we fought with the other family. My father was furious. It was like when he saw me in the street carrying weapons and said: ‘what are you up to?’’,²⁹²

This increase in the number of small local power structures involving armed groups that interfere in conflicts – supported by an organisation or clan – has led to an increasingly chaotic situation for the Palestinian people. Israel’s systematic elimination of all the intermediate officials in Palestinian organisations has also led to the loss of people with the necessary authority and experience to limit these groups’ uncoordinated initiatives, and has also radicalised them. The more chaotic the situation becomes, the more the power held by these little groups increases. Thus the growing number of events, which recalls the end of the

²⁸⁸ One typical case was the refusal to free students imprisoned without charges in 1997. Stéphanie David, ‘‘La construction d’une justice palestinienne’’, in Nadine Picaudou (ed), ‘‘La Palestine en transition’’, *Les annales de l’autre Islam* n°8, Paris, ERISM, INALCO, 2001, p 89 and Rema Hammami, Jamil Hilal. and Salim Tamari, *Civil Society and Governance*, in Nadine Picaudou (ed), *La Palestine en transition*, *op. cit.*, p 207.

²⁸⁹ Stéphanie David, *La construction d’une justice palestinienne*, *op. cit.*, p 87-88.

²⁹⁰ Stéphanie David, *La construction d’une justice palestinienne*, *op. cit.*, p 88.

²⁹¹ A meeting of reconciliation between families that calls upon recognised local figures.

²⁹² Tanzim Fatah militant, Ramallah, June 2001

first Intifada and shows the groups' increasing sense of freedom as the situation gradually deteriorates and the Palestinian Authority falls into decay. Presumed collaborators suspected of having supplied information leading to the assassination of an activist by Israel are summarily executed. On 7 October 2002, Rajeh Abou Lehia, a colonel in charge of the Palestinian riot police, was killed in Gaza by a group of masked men probably belonging to the Izziddin el Qassam Brigades. The act was carried out to avenge the death of the brother of one of the group's members, killed a year earlier in a demonstration when the riot police were ordered to fire on the crowd.²⁹³ The increase in this kind of event – as the situation becomes more chaotic – shows how the power wielded by these groups has grown, as well as the danger they represent for each other.

Indeed, the prevailing relationship is not exactly one of trust. The competing groups steal each other's feeble resources in weapons and cars: "We eat, sleep and shoot together. We're like a family. But you know you can't trust anyone. There's always a chance someone may stab you in the back to take your place. You have to be on your guard at all times. It's hard – really hard. The only place I feel safe is in this neighbourhood, where the *tanzim* guarding the street is our family and I feel at home."²⁹⁴ As this militant demonstrates, the hard core affiliation is to the local area, not to the party or to one's team of operations: "I left the PFLP because all the ones from my street were with Fatah."²⁹⁵ In the previously cited example, the territory overlapped with his *hamula*, but this is not always the case. The "local" space doesn't necessarily refer entirely to community networks. The "street" may be the source of a common space around which small groups of young people are organised, without these neighbours belonging to the same *hamula*. This "local" level is often a mixture from the *hamula* and the territory. A particular configuration will win out depending on the militants, places and circumstances.

²⁹³ The man was Youssef 'Aqel. Two other people were killed and 90 wounded while the demonstration broke up on 8 October 2001. His family refused to accept condolences until the assassination of Abu Lehia, indicating its desire for revenge. Palestinian Center for Human Rights, *Press Release, Gaza*, 7 October 2002.

²⁹⁴ Tanzim Fatah militant, Ramallah, June 2001.

²⁹⁵ Former Fatah militant, 30, Berlin, April 2002.

“LOCAL” IMPORTANCE

Localism is key in several respects. As we have just seen, it acts as a “sanctuary”² the only safe place. But its importance shows through even more in one specific phenomenon. The more the relationship to the territory is structured and independent from the Palestinian Authority, the more the armed groups will show themselves to be organised and less divided. The clientele-oriented system operating around Fatah and the Palestinian Authority is particularly entrenched in areas where the power of the Authority and Arafat is strongest – in Gaza-City and Ramallah. Groups in the other areas operate in a way that is far less connected to this pyramid. The Palestinian Authority’s local contacts, not as close to Arafat, have a role as actors but with less power and less to hand out. Their own position within the Palestinian Authority is based on their deep roots in the local area. This phenomenon has increased as the West Bank and Gaza have gradually been divided up and the Israeli blockade intensified. It can also be seen in geographical images. Whatever the distance in kilometres, anything outside the area is now “far off.” Border areas like South Gaza and Jenin facilitate financial independence due to easier access to the outside world. In Nablus, the power of the major families constitutes another clientele network since they have maintained their business resources.’’²⁹⁶ The same is true for Hebron.

Above all, the more the local system is independent and structured, the more the groups are too. Refugee camps, homogenous and well-defined spaces, are the base of an organisation that more or less transcends political rifts and allegiances. Most of the *Popular Resistance Committees* are organised at this level. They bring together all the factions and are more or less operational and have considerable power, although that varies depending on the

²⁹⁶ ‘‘For the most part, entrepreneurs (in Nablus) have been able to pursue their business and protect themselves from economic interventionism by members of the Authority, who did not show the same restraint with businessmen from Gaza (...) Between 1996 and 2000, the *shabab* from the Intifada introduced themselves into a social and political order dominated by the major families. Through their control of charity works, they have tried to stem the dissatisfaction of the underprivileged. The mayor of the town has succeeded in getting the Palestinian Authority and the local bourgeoisie to coexist.’’ Laetitia Bucaille, *Générations Intifada*, op. cit., p 77.

area. For instance, in the Jenin refugee camp, before the incursion in April 2002, activists were organised and well-structured. There were no small groups of the kind that were so typical in Ramallah. The discourse there is far less opportunist than elsewhere and much more ideological. There is a direct linkage between the camp itself and nationalism, without any intermediaries: “We’ve got to get organised on our own. No one is going to come and help us. As inhabitants of the camp, we all stick together. We all know each other. We support one another and work together. The Sheikh is with Jihad, I’m with Fatah, and he’s my best friend. When they tried to enter the camp, we all went together. In any case, we can’t count on anyone other than ourselves. Our liberation lies on our own shoulders. People in town have their comfortable lives, so it isn’t important to them.”²⁹⁷

“The rest of the Palestinian population doesn’t support us. They can’t feel the same things. A person whose finger is in the fire doesn’t feel the same thing as one whose finger is not. But we refugees are the ones leading the struggle against the occupation. We’re the ones. And we won’t give up. We’ll take it to the end. We have nothing to lose in any case.”²⁹⁸

Toufiq Haddad analyses the same phenomenon in South Gaza (Khan Younis and Rafah): “Here « localness » implies quite simply the immediate neighbourhoods and communities within which Palestinians are born and grow up. In southern Gaza, the clannish traditions of original villages that have been carried over into the refugee camps, is now imbued with a street-toughened collective refugee consciousness that is steeped in the colossal failure of the Oslo agreements. Gaza’s hermetic sealing over the past ten years together with the internal siege policies implemented throughout this Intifada have greatly contributed to the importance of the local scene (...) It is where the importance of the extended marginalisation of certain localities gains significance : Quite simply, certain things become possible at the bottom, which are not possible at the top.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Leader of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades at the Jenin refugee camp, quoted above, September 2001

²⁹⁸ A member of the *shabiba*, 26, a waiter in a small restaurant, Balata refugee camp, January 2001.

²⁹⁹ Toufiq Haddad, *The Mutaradeen*, op. cit., p 12.

This group organisation around a territory – which had become a more important reference than political rifts – was observed by Michel Seurat in Tripoli, where he underscored the links between neighbourhood and *shabab*:³⁰⁰ “Beyond the ups and downs of politics, neighbourhoods (...) remain the ‘holy of holies’, the symbol of ‘purity’ and ‘authenticity.’ While everything may be negotiable in the end, a function of the political equation of the moment and the ‘line’ it imposes, it is not permissible on the other hand to compromise on this role of ‘sanctuary’ or the inviolability of the territory. And the *shabab* know it well because – as one of them has explained to us – they want ‘to be able to walk through the streets of the neighbourhood with their heads held high.’”

With regard to the case analysed by Seurat, there is a kind of scale of modifications, ranging from the neighbourhoods most integrated inside the Palestinian Authority’s area of power to the other areas. The closer the groups are to the Palestinian Authority’s centres of power, the more small armed groups you see – changing allegiance from one to the other and heavily involved in the local scene. The actors’ discourse is often focused on their internal positioning. They are highly involved in the quest for immediate benefits, while highlighting their marginal lifestyle with its dangers, constraints and rules, as well as powerful experiences. The farther one gets from these centres of power, the more the groups emphasize the national issue – while maintaining a form of organisation rather tightly structured around local resistance committees that cross over political rifts, thus superseding their local positioning and the immediate benefits of their actions. In fact, for actors involved in a highly structured local system, the desire for independence from the Authority’s power is a given, and they express it in a direct manner. Individuals may then be seen to move from the Authority’s apparatus to the Popular Resistance Committees:³⁰¹ “How did the Authority react to your training? – At the time, they couldn’t really do anything about it because there were a great many (Palestinian) deaths every day. We are aware that there are limits to what the Authority can do, and we don’t necessarily expect them to act with complete militancy. At the same time, we want to have our own freedom and to fulfil our

³⁰⁰ Michel Seurat, ‘Le Quartier de Bâb Tebbâné à Tripoli’, in *L’Etat de barbarie*, Paris, Seuil, 1989, 117-118.

³⁰¹ *Lijân al muqâwama al-sha’biya*. These committees bring together all the parties, including the Islamists.

responsibilities in defending our homes and our children, and in our resistance to the occupation.’’³⁰²

‘‘The resistance committees are now beyond the point where they could be eliminated or influenced, although there were attempts by certain officials in the Palestinian Authority at one time, but they failed. Their work has no more value than the blood of our martyrs.’’³⁰³

To a certain extent this independence has stifled the clientele phenomenon and the resulting extreme competition between groups in a context of scarce resources. Furthermore, it neutralizes the Authority’s repressive capacity during negotiations, when it tries to enforce ceasefires it has proclaimed. Community integration around a particular place – refugee camps being the archetype – has been passed down to the organisation of armed groups.

The most key areas regarding the Palestinian Authority’s power are clearly those where its presence is the most discernible in terms of infrastructure and achievements. The militants’ discourse has tended to strongly uphold the ‘‘old man’’ (Yasser Arafat), as a leader who led the complex dance with Israel and must not be hampered. This aspect is considerably less present in peripheral areas. The ‘‘abandoned’’ militants have no actors other than themselves to identify with the national struggle. Consequently, they asked the Authority not to hinder their actions, not to interfere, and to provide support for members of the party apparatus who want to ‘‘redeem themselves’’: ‘‘Many of our members also work for the Palestinian Authority and have remained honest throughout all these years. These people either join our forces or stay in their uniforms and provide assistance from inside, without publicizing it of course.’’³⁰⁴

Thus militants in the second Intifada built up their self-image through a double reference to the struggle for the liberation of Palestine and to their neighbourhood. The latter is where the benefits provided have been identified and concretized, not through the success

³⁰² Interview with an official in the Popular Resistance Committees in Khan Younis. Toufiq Haddad, *The Mutaradeen*, *op. cit.*, p 14.

³⁰³ Interview with Awni Za’noun, in charge of the Popular Resistance Committees in Rafah. Salah al - Masri, ‘‘Politics is Shaped Through The Barrels of Guns’’, Jerusalem, *Between The Lines*, July 2001, p. 17.

³⁰⁴ Interview with an official in the Popular Resistance Committees in Khan Younis, Toufiq Haddad, *The Mutaradeen*, *op. cit.*, p 14.

of the national struggle, but rather through everything surrounding their actions and what has been gained from belonging to these circles.

Group Culture

The change in social position through entering one of these groups also involves embracing a collective lifestyle with its own particular rules. A specific culture develops there on the margins of Palestinian society with its own appeal, despite – or because of – the risks. That aspect is often underscored by the youngest militants. Resorting to armed struggle requires facing fear and accepting the risk of death, but also means access to powerful experiences. The essentially nocturnal lifestyle is based on putting oneself in harm's way and a culture focusing on the body. Beyond its operational dimensions, the fact of exaggerating this nocturnal lifestyle and emphasizing that one is never at home is intended to highlight their voluntary marginalization with regard to the norm in order to underscore the special status acquired. Once inside one of these groups, it is extremely difficult to get out. When the fiancée of the leader of the Deisheh camp urged him to leave Tanzim, he replied: "It's too late." "They would take him for a collaborator," she explained.³⁰⁵

Not sleeping and courting danger is exhausting, but it generates an exciting everyday life.³⁰⁶ Furthermore, young people feel they have taken back the initiative with respect to Israel that way. At the same time, they appropriate images of strength associated with the Israeli army by imitating the "look" of the Israeli soldiers (dark glasses, bits of uniforms, etc.), their stance and gait. Comments and comparisons about each other's musculature are common within such groups. All aspects of "face"³⁰⁷ – evoking signs of strength and self-assertion with regard to a potential use of violence – are carefully cultivated against an image of

³⁰⁵ James Bennet, *The New Suicide Bombers*, *op. cit.*

³⁰⁶ One may observe here to a certain extent the analyses by Farhad Khosrokhavar on "playful martyrs": "the playful dimension of war is highly present. Because it is so cruelly lacking in everyday life, they cling to war for entertainment and thrills. They become playfully free through an inversion of the social hierarchy." Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L'Islamisme et la mort*, *op. cit.*, p 61-62.

³⁰⁷ "The term face can be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims through a line of action which others assume he adopted during a particular contact. (...) The degree of feeling attached to each face and the frequency of that feeling among the whole are determined by group rules and by how the situation is defined." Goffman, *Les rites d'interaction*, *op. cit.*, p 9.

weakness and victimization. The militants themselves have a clear perception of this image management. In the words of one leader who was asked to settle a dispute between his group and another: “I was exhausted. I couldn’t get motivated.”³⁰⁸ He indicated what he meant by the word “get motivated” by thrusting his shoulders forward. It is also a question of hiding any signs of weakness, knowing how to deal with your fears, and not flinching about resorting to violence. One militant evoked the feelings of nausea he felt when some members of his group beat up a young man they arrested for stealing (another example of the internal importance of these groups). He was careful to slip out without being noticed or suspected.³⁰⁹ While certain groups have turned more professional than others, armed activities are far from being strictly separated from other militant activities, contrary to what is practised by Hamas, which is a great deal more “professional.” Being known and recognised is one of the symbolic benefits of taking up the armed struggle, and it is not uncommon for activists to proclaim their “high deeds” of the night on the following morning. However, as Israeli repression has intensified, these distinctions have become more pronounced. Above all, resorting to an armed struggle has radically changed the meaning of traditional militancy.

I have evoked the failure during the second intifada at using the peaceful mobilization of the masses associated to the first intifada. This was also true for militants. Not all of them resorted to armed struggle; but those who persevered with traditional militancy did not suggest it as an alternative solution. On the one hand, many of them particularly the youngest – were fascinated by the culture of weapons, even if they did not feel particularly concerned by the armed struggle. On the other hand, the militants experienced these activities – distributing flyers, food, etc. – as marginal participation in the resistance effort. The armed groups encompassed an ambivalent reality. Some sought local profits and power, evoking mafia-type

³⁰⁸ An Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades leader, Beit Jala (Bethlehem), April 2001.

³⁰⁹ Ramallah, June 2001.

phenomena, while others, who put themselves at great risk in their confrontations with Israel, were closer to the “martyrdom” phenomenon.

But the first kind of group needed a minimum of involvement in the national struggle to preserve a certain legitimacy vis-à-vis the people as well as in their own eyes.

Slipping into Martyrdom: “Alive due to a Lack of Death”³¹⁰

This expression, used by an armed militant from Hebron, shows that the most committed militants in the armed struggle against Israel are close to the identity patterns of “martyrs.” Death remains their only prospect. They do not believe that a relative reconfiguration by becoming involved in the armed struggle will bring any real hope for the national struggle. But it “restores their honour” while facilitating a change in social status, at the cost of putting themselves at great risk. It does not erase the death prospect. On the contrary, it accentuates it as soon as the militant leaves the time frame of immediacy through which the reconfiguration was made possible. The more the national discourse takes precedence over the idea of immediate benefits, the stronger the expectation of death. Death is referred to constantly, through a refusal to fear it. The martyr’s desire for fusion is clear. Thus, some militants deliberately put themselves at even greater risk, abandoning basic measures of precaution and concealment. The near absence of such measures is one of the evolving characteristics of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. It reveals a lack of training with regard to clandestinity, a group culture where courage has to be demonstrated, and a desire to be involved in the public arena. Indeed, if becoming an armed militant also helps acquire status, then this new role must be acknowledged. This also alludes to an awareness of the derisory nature of such measures against the Israeli army, perceived as all-powerful. One can see the proximity to martyrdom when abandoning such – highly relative – measures of protection becomes a systematic approach, paired with the increasing risk of the operations.

³¹⁰ “*â’ish min qilat al mût.*” This expression is difficult to translate, but basically means: I ought to be dead, but have been given a reprieve.

The infiltration operations— particularly in the settlements — are the most striking example of this shift. They are not conceived as suicide missions. The activists do not write their testaments before going on them, and their perception is different: “There is a huge difference between conducting a military operation where you have one chance in a million of surviving, and blowing yourself up where you have 100% chance of dying. I for one am willing to lead a military operation where I have very little chance of surviving, but not to blow myself up and be certain to die. You have to have psychological problems and problems in your life to do that. Take that student from Bir Zeit.³¹¹ He was a simple person who prayed and didn’t talk much. His family had a lot of problems because they’re so poor. He was more in need of a psychologist than anything else.”³¹²

Nonetheless, the succinct plan for these attacks — going in and shooting a hail of bullets — doesn’t really include any possibility for withdrawal. While some actors rush towards their increasingly certain death, there are also some swings in the other direction. After frequently exposing themselves in highly dangerous operations, some of them “take a rest,” abandoning their missions and focusing on their local positioning. They can then capitalize on the reputations acquired through such missions to have more authority and power over young people, and to strengthen their group while no longer taking a direct part in their feats of arms.

The equilibrium fashioned in this way is extremely precarious. Militants acquire it at great risk, and practically without any strategic image that might enable them to create a purpose during their lifetime — although perhaps for the next generation. Thus, the greater the reference to the national struggle and the more blurred the reference to local positioning, the more one observes people resorting to the construct of martyrdom, which merges the private sphere and the national struggle. The means of connecting the two still seems to be weighed down by the impossibility of relating nationalism to positive prospects. At the same time, the national objective lives on in the form of a mythical image that is essential to an “honourable” reinterpretation of everyday experience. Distancing oneself from Palestinian territory becomes the necessary condition for dissociating a person’s two goals of the national struggle and the private sphere.

³¹¹ Dia Tawil, 19, a Hamas militant and electrical engineering student who committed a suicide attack in Jerusalem on 27 March 2001 that wounded 30 people.

³¹² Tanzim militant Ramallah, June 2001.

Chapter 8

Exile

Returnees, expatriate engineers and students abroad all stand out through their prolonged experience of having lived far from Palestinian territory– the *sine qua non* for breaking away from the national reference. Indeed, distance is the only way to escape from the humiliating experiences and their crucial reinterpretation through a more or less mythical reference to the national struggle. These identity issues are particularly compelling with regard to young returnees. Upon arrival they strongly rejected “conservative” Palestinian society at first. They were in turn rejected by the Palestinians who had remained there and were critical of these “rich and decadent” young people. However, after spending more time in the Territories and seeing the situation change, in particular with the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the returnees showed a renewed interest in nationalist themes.

Armed with degrees and jobs in keeping with their qualifications, the “engineers” have taken the opposite route. In comparison to the rest of the population, they could be qualified – in highly relative terms – as “golden youth,” like the returnees. Leaving the territory is the only way for them to accept their own rejection of the national struggle as it has been conducted – characterised by its grim commitment and lack of strategy. Nonetheless, the very distance that enables the individual to separate the national objective from his personal life opens up the issue of his lack of solidarity with the collective fate. Engineers who become expatriates are confronted with the same questions as Palestinian students abroad, as we have seen in Germany.

Young Returnees

Most of the young Palestinian returnees grew up in Arab countries, mainly in Tunisia. The majority went back – often unwillingly – when their fathers, PLO officials, followed Arafat and helped to set up the Palestinian Authority in 1994. The total returnee population is estimated at between 50 000 and 60 000 since the signing of the Oslo Accords.³¹³ PLO personnel are the largest category, made up of 38 000 people. This category includes PLO officials (18 000), policemen recruited among Palestinians with Egyptian travel documents or a Jordanian passport (12 000), and their family members (8 000). The latter figure is low because many officers, especially those in security departments, went back without their families. Added to this are the far smaller categories of beneficiaries of the family regrouping programme authorised by Israel (6 000³¹⁴) and political prisoners freed by Israel (6 000) after the Oslo Accords were signed.

Finally, there are the “American Palestinians.” This group, the size of which has not been calculated, is composed of Palestinian families that emigrated to the United States after the 1967 exile. Some of them took advantage of the creation of A areas to go back, although the fathers generally stayed in the U.S. for professional reasons. While it is impossible to calculate their exact number – well under the previous categories – they are a striking phenomenon through their concentration in Ramallah and the surrounding villages. They have American passports and, contrary to the previous categories, do not have real residency permits delivered by Israel. As a result, they enter with a tourist visa which must be renewed every three months, unless they choose to remain illegally. The returnee population as a whole is young (47% are between the ages of 15 and 39) and has a higher level of education than the average Palestinian: 14% have a BA or higher (against 4 % for the Palestinian population).³¹⁵

³¹³ Nicholas Van Hear, “reintegrating Returnees : Opportunities and Constraints” in Nicholas Van Hear et alii *Reintegration of Palestinian Returnees*, Ramallah, Shaml- Palestinian Diaspora and Refugee Centre, Publication n°6, 1997, p 35. Same source for all subsequent figures.

³¹⁴ The quota was fixed at 6 000 per year. The programme hasn’t really continued.

³¹⁵ Majdi el-Malki, *Social Monitor, Special Issue 1995-1999, op. cit.*, p 14.

Culture Shock

Coming to the territories was an ambivalent step for these young people. First of all, it meant being torn from countries they liked and didn't want to leave. Nostalgia for Tunisia and Jordan was a recurring theme when they talked about it in 1997. In some American-Palestinian families the young people weren't told it was a permanent move, in order to avoid any refusal on their part.³¹⁶ Furthermore, this transplanting also resulted in a conflict between the memories transmitted to them and the reality in the Palestinian Territories. In their memory, Palestine was glorified as an idyllic and heavenly land from which they had been expelled. This memory was indeed passed down, as well as an attachment through transnational links intensified by communications technology such as the internet. Contrary to what occurred for their parents, however, it was not translated by a sense of nostalgia for life in Palestine.³¹⁷ And so, between their idealised memories and the well-being experienced in the countries they grew up in, their shock upon arrival was particularly great. They found themselves in an ambivalent situation between their obligation to live in a society that was suddenly against everything from their former way of life, and their attraction for the Israeli lifestyle that was more like what they had known before.

The contrast was particularly intense for young women. Indeed, their fathers wanted to prove to Palestinian society that they had remained integrated and had preserved their identity. This was expressed mainly through an "honourable" lifestyle that was measured above all through the behaviour of young women. Thus their criticism of Palestinian society involves issues of reputation, whereas the young men stress the lack of infrastructures, organisations, activities and so on.

Before the second Intifada, some "problem" children were repatriated by their families. They thought they could deal with them more successfully in a far stricter environment. In the

³¹⁶ Tamara Tamimi, "Al Awda : The Negotiation of Identity among Palestinian-American Returnees," a paper for *Palestinian Return Migration : Socio-economic and Cultural Approaches*, a symposium held by Sari Hanafi, Meawards (Population Council) and Shaml, Ramallah, 13-14 June 2002, p 7. http://www.shaml.org/agenda/2001/workshop_1206/tentative/tamimi.htm

³¹⁷ Tamimi, *Al Awda*, *op. cit.*, p 5.

Palestinian diaspora in the United States, for instance, some families decided to return to Ramallah when their teenagers began taking drugs. Paradoxically, as Tamara Tamimi has shown,³¹⁸ some young women have stressed their greater freedom of movement in Palestine. Reassured by the coherence between the environment and the behavioural expectations they have for their daughters, parents impose less restrictions than in “dangerous” American society.

Various strategies are then employed by the young people to hold onto or regain their former lifestyle. First, they create homogeneous circles of returnees that are publicly visible, particularly at university, and through taking part in activities such as going to cafes and parties that would have been part of their former lives. Furthermore, they use their foreign passports to take regular trips to Israel, where they find more freedom and a greater choice of entertainment such as shopping, going to cafes and clubs, far from the watchful gaze of their own society: “There’s nothing here. It’s so boring! The only thing that interests me is to drive over to Tel

Aviv.”³¹⁹ Apart from such diversions, the boredom of a society where there’s nothing to do is a recurring theme: “I’m going crazy here—it’s just back and forth between the university and the women’s residence. I’ve made a few friends, but it’s not the same. I’m used to the American way of life and mindset. Take clothes, for instance. I don’t notice if I’m wearing green pants and a red sweater. But, here, they all make comments about it. Everything’s so superficial here.”³²⁰

Simultaneously, there is an intense rejection of Palestinian society, criticised for its underdevelopment, conservatism and social controls. This social difference is powerfully marked and felt: “We have no more than two children in our families—not like the people from here. They’re crazy here, you know.”³²¹

The social clash between the returnees and native Palestinians is reciprocal. While the returnees feel their way of life is being restricted, most of the Palestinian population feels

³¹⁸ Tamimi, *Al Awda*, *op. cit.*, p 8.

³¹⁹ A 21-year-old student who was born and raised in Tunis, and came to the Territories when his father returned in 1994.

³²⁰ Sana, originally from Amman. She refers to this lifestyle as American, but in fact came into contact with it at the university in Amman.

³²¹ A student at Bir Zeit University who grew up in Tunis.

it is an insolent show of wealth and decadence. They are criticised for not having lived through the hardship of the Intifada and of profiting from the establishment of the Palestinian Authority by monopolizing all the jobs and living the high life. This antagonism has led to some violent clashes.

At first these conflicts were such that the young returnees couldn't be included in the generation of young Palestinians. They proved to be clearly different in terms of financial resources and in their freedom of movement – a crucial element in Palestine – as well as regarding their self-image and identity. Their relationship to the national objective developed in a different way. While their fathers had come back to “build” the country, most of them were highly detached from this vision and stood out rather for their highly apolitical stance. They all wanted to leave and had absolutely no intention of living in the Palestinian territories. Yet, unpredictably, their antagonism did not grow stronger. On the contrary, the returnees developed a greater “understanding” of Palestinian society, and their own references became visible in the Palestinian public arena.

From Rejection to Adaptation

Indeed, although these young people had the necessary resources to have greater freedom of movement and access to consumer goods and leisure activities, their return also meant being confronted with the reality of Palestinian life. Their rejection of Palestinian society gradually became more nuanced as their relationship to the national identity changed and they made their “mark” on the territory. “People don't treat us the same way as before. They no longer say: ‘what are you doing here?’ I couldn't stay in a country where the people asked me ‘what are you doing here?’ This is my country. I can do as I like. But now they've changed because they realise we're better than they are. We're the ones who have done everything here. It was a mess. People were selling their vegetables wherever they could on the road. We built a market. That street with the cafes and restaurants didn't exist before, for example.³²² We've done everything here, and we've changed the mindset too.”³²³

³²² The “we” refers to the Palestinian Authority, his father being an official in that organisation.

³²³ The 21-year-old student previously quoted.

Clearly these young people have embraced their fathers' objectives and taken pride in the Palestinian Authority's achievements. That sense of pride has not suppressed their feeling of belonging to a different or superior social group. But by identifying with these achievements they have developed an attachment to the land, which is gradually becoming theirs in a literal sense. The "American Palestinians" have found their way into the Palestinian social arena in a different way. Ramallah, for example, has been literally transformed by the presence of the returnees, who have created various areas with restaurants, cafés, internet cafes and American shops where young people congregate. Intifada slogans are juxtaposed with American-style tags.

Thus their connection to the Palestinian collective memory has been changed by their relationship with a space which they have modified and to which they have developed a certain attachment. Despite their greater freedom of movement, they have been gradually faced with the reality of the occupation. This is particularly true since the second Intifada during which they lived through the curfews, bombings and increased checkpoints with the rest of the Palestinian population.

As for the American Palestinians, their trips back and forth to the United States have proven to be considerably more difficult since being blocked more frequently at the airport by the Israelis. These changes have led them to modify their identity constructs as they relate more and more to the Palestinian national objective. One rare but significant case involves the young man who used to talk about his "joyrides" to Tel Aviv and became one of the stone-throwers in the Intifada: "I've been going to the clashes, but now the head of the university has forbidden it. But I wasn't stopping anybody from getting to their studies. I said I was going to the clashes, but I left them alone if they wanted to study."

But for most people this greater identification with the Palestinian national objective was not manifested by this kind of involvement. Those who became more involved did so in a civil and peaceful way: "We need new ideas. We can't continue with these demonstrations where it's all talk. I go because I support the idea that we must come together, but not like that. For example, the people here who aren't working in Israel anymore should go plant trees to replace the ones Israel has uprooted. I have a plan with some friends for next semester. It's about creating a club where we'd organise things like planting trees, and two- to three-day seminars about

Palestine for students. Most people don't know about the history of Palestine because it's forbidden to teach it in school.³²⁴ More aware of the international context, they feel concerned by the way the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is presented in the foreign – especially American – media. When they try to intervene, it is often at this level, particularly through the internet.

There has also been an evolution in morals. People have gone from a total rejection of this “crazy” society that imposes extremely powerful social controls on them to a greater sense of “understanding,” which indicates that they are “coping” rather than signalling any real acceptance on their part. This attitude recalls the resignation felt by young women. Contrary to their brothers, they generally are not permitted to pursue their studies abroad. In 1997, Assala emphasized the fact that she would never live in the Palestinian Territories and intended to go back to Tunis or Amman as soon as her studies were completed. In 2001, she had a different attitude, which may also have been influenced by a budding relationship. “I have a friend. We see each other, and I've gone to his family's house. My parents know about us. But my father doesn't know everything. He doesn't know that I've been to his family's house. He told me straightaway: whatever you do, don't go to his family's house. Because his honour is the most important thing to him. So if it turns out we're not made for each other, people will say: she went to his family's house, and so on. But I've only been when his mother was there. We get along well. Our relationship has helped me to put up with the life here. I love this country, but I'm still not used to the mindset. The good thing is that people don't know me yet. They don't talk about me. I'm a stranger in my own town and in Ramallah too. But I'm careful. I know I'm not doing anything wrong. If you start worrying about what other people want, then you never do anything. But I think a foreigner has to adapt to the country's customs. I don't know what I'll do when my studies are over and I have to go back. I like my town because it's very green and beautiful. But I don't like the life here. I don't know anyone and there's nothing to do. Last summer I stayed for two months and at the end I couldn't bear it anymore. I asked if I could take a break in Jordan for

³²⁴ A “Tunisian” studying at Bir Zeit University and working on a water purification project as part of a civil engineering apprenticeship with the town of Al Bireh. Interviewed during a night-time demonstration after the Israeli army killed Abu Ali Mustafa, secretary general of the FPLP, on 27 August 2002.

a week, but my parents didn't have any money. I went anyway, with just 250 shekels in my pocket.

- Can't you stay in Ramallah?

- It would be hard. I haven't talked with my father. I haven't broached the subject yet. Actually, the only way I'll stay in Ramallah is if I find a job or get married. But I'm working on it. My friend and I are thinking about it. We want to get engaged and married, but not until I finish my studies."

One issue that should be stressed in this interview is the specific nature of the city of Ramallah in the Palestinian public arena. It has been widely modified by the presence of the returnees and seems to be a town with greater freedom of conduct, and the possibility of a certain anonymity. It also has sports and cultural infrastructures which increase the number of potential activities. Indeed, some young Palestinian artists and engineers from Jerusalem have found its cultural life richer than in East Jerusalem and have chosen to move there.

A Trans-national Identity

The Palestinian collective memory has been transmitted among the diaspora. Thus, the basis of Palestinian identity, their history of exile, is just as present among returnees and has been reinforced by their trans-national social geography. Yet that identity was only associated with the goals of national construction with their gradual attachment to Palestinian territory and involvement in the everyday Palestinian reality of occupation. Nevertheless, the young returnees have remained strongly attached to the countries they grew up in. Many of them hope to return there, in particular the young men, who have more freedom in this regard than young women.

Maintaining this reference to the outside world appears to be a crucial resource for these young people, especially as the situation in the Territories has become more difficult. It has allowed them to hope for a personal trajectory, whatever the ups and downs of the Palestinian situation. Their self-image involves a coming and going between the Palestinian Territories and the country they have ties with. This movement between identities leads them to see themselves as part of a double elite with links to the diaspora and the nation. Added to the concomitant resources (passports, financial means, degrees, etc.), it spares them the kind of confinement that typifies the constructs of young Palestinians from the Territories. Thus, when their relationship to the

national objective is reinforced, it isn't necessarily associated with a hopeless future. Among them, the American Palestinians have a more nuanced view of the West, which they are more familiar with. They believe in the possibility of influencing Western opinion and can orient their actions in that direction. On the other hand, the young people who have grown up in Arab countries and been involved in establishing the Palestinian Authority have found themselves squeezed more tightly by the collapse of that plan. Their self-image is closer to that of the Palestinians who remained, even if they possess greater resources to escape from the situation.

Engineers

There are no precise statistics on this subject, but it is a noticeable phenomenon. Young Palestinians who are able to – engineers being the most typical example – tend to leave the Territories for the United States and Canada for the most part. This mainly involves young men, who have greater access to higher education of this kind and especially to work at their level of skill. Due to issues involving one's image in society, on the other hand, it is extremely difficult for a young woman to go abroad alone to work.

Their desire to leave involves two aspects. First, it quite simply expresses the wish to escape from a closed situation and to use their assets to that purpose – their skills and, if necessary, funds accumulated in their first professional experience or possessed by their family. These engineers can rely on the Palestinian diaspora to organise their departure; after that, there are university and professional channels, which lead some of them to American universities for specialised skills and others to join the Canadian workforce. Their desire to leave does not mean permanent exile in their minds, but rather a temporary removal in order to achieve something in one's line of work. Nevertheless, if they want to go back, they are dependent on the economic and political situation in Palestine which may or may not allow them to return under favourable conditions.

The second aspect of their desire to leave involves the national struggle. These engineers massively support the Palestinian national objective and are committed to it. They were often stonethrowers during the first Intifada. But their perception of how the struggle has been led

is often highly critical. On the one hand, they know more about – and take into account to a greater extent – the international impact of the Palestinians’ methods. Furthermore, being able to imagine a future outside Palestinian lands has made them less susceptible to *the* grim logic embraced by others. “Our problem is that this is a conflict between a nation with an army and individual people. No one wants to wage an Intifada. Everyone wants the Intifada to stop. The Israelis – who are right about this point – say it’s the Authority that has waged the Intifada. People just want to live normal lives– to have a glass of beer in peace, go out with their girlfriends, get to their jobs, and so on. They don’t want the Intifada to continue. We should have grasped – even before 1948 – that coexistence was the solution and then we would have changed society from within. It would have occurred naturally with the birth rate. In order to lead the fight, we must get rid of the Authority and start from the base. That way we’ll have international support, rather than hearing about how corrupt and dictatorial the Authority is. The Palestinians must get together and define what they want.”³²⁵

The class aspect of the Intifada is once again noticeable here. The Palestinian hydraulic engineer who earns a good living and was partly trained and socialized in Israel does not perceive the specific demands of people in the refugee camps. He is critical about Israel. Through his profession he is constantly faced with the limits imposed on Palestinians with respect to water resources. But, being more familiar with Israeli society, he posits reform from within rather than confrontation. His position of challenging the Intifada as it has been conducted has not stopped him from having as his best friend a student in charge of the Tanzim in Bir Zeit. His idea is to reform Israeli society from the inside, fostering cohabitation. This approach would also be based on promoting a rich cultural identity that wouldn’t prompt fears about assimilation, but would rather be the basis for dialogue. A well-known poet, he has chosen to settle in Ramallah to profit from the cultural environment there. At the same time, he has participated in several poetry contests and performances at Israeli universities. He is very proud of the success of his poetry there, despite the language barrier.

³²⁵ May 2001.

On a personal level these engineers display a certain detachment vis-à-vis the national struggle. They are not always so critical, however. Some of them support the armed struggle and even Hamas, as a nationalist movement. But even when they are supportive, they don't seem interested in being involved personally in any of the groups.

As with the returnees, the dissociation here between the national objective and their personal lives comes from the prospect of living far from the Palestinian territory, which appears to be the only resource likely to afford them any openings for the future. At the same time, being involved in an international arena associated with a positive image of their future also allows them to imagine other potential ways to achieve the national objective. It seems to be part of a more widespread phenomenon. Kamal is a young man in a wheelchair who is a professional table tennis player. He is also a member of the Hebron city government. He too has changed his approach towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after spending time abroad, and has focused all his energy on the issue of information and communication: "People in the West don't know what goes on here because the Israeli news is more influential in the West. They have only a very small idea of what's going on in Palestine. There are people who don't even know about Palestine; they only know about Israel. They must find out more about the situation, or come and see what's happening here. The Western media say that it's the Palestinians who are creating the problem and who are terrorists. But I'm trying to change these ideas through my relationships with volunteers.³²⁶ We're not terrorists, and we have our rights. I try to convince young people that books and magazines aren't the only channels for information. They should come and see for themselves who is responsible. For instance, they know nothing about '48. They know some things about Israel, but not about Palestine, as if there was nothing here before '48. The Europeans don't know how to respond. It doesn't matter if you are Jewish or not. If you're a good person, then we can talk. As far as the Palestinian people are concerned, if you think we have no identity and no claim to this land, then kill us because we don't want to live on a land that's not ours. It's our right to be here. The Palestinians like peace, but peace doesn't mean defeat, surrendering and giving everything up. We need peace that's fair. The

³²⁶ International volunteers with whom he is in contact through his organisation.

people in Europe are good. We can change their point of view by giving them more information. We can be like the Jews and give more information to try to change their point of view – like the Israelis do. We’re a nation like any other. We’re normal. We’re not terrorists. (...)I hope to become a spokesperson for the Palestinians and learn from the Israelis about how they talk about their problems, how they succeed in transforming the murder of Palestinians into acts of self-defence and how they make Palestinians out to be terrorists. So I need to learn from the Israeli experience and from their way of communicating information. I need to be an eloquent spokesperson who can convince the European community about what’s really happening.”

The relationship to other countries here seems to be a crucial resource that fundamentally modifies people’s self-image. What happens when someone succeeds in leaving, when a young Palestinian really settles abroad for a long time? How does he deal with the issue of navigating between his personal life and the national objective? To answer that question, I studied the case of some young Palestinians who went to study in Germany, their main European destination statistically speaking.

Palestinian Students in Germany

Germany has a large Palestinian community, which has been formed in three waves.³²⁷ The first wave was part of the *Gastarbeiter* programme in the 1960s. The second, by far the largest, was composed of refugees in the 1970s and ’80s. It has been estimated at 30 000 to 35 000 people.

³²⁷ It is hard to measure the population concerned here in an exact way. The Palestinians often have Jordanian, Syrian, and sometimes Israeli passports, or Egyptian, Lebanese and Palestinian “travel documents.” Local administrations and European universities have no registration code for Palestinian nationality. I have contented myself with reproducing the approximate figure provided by the *Palästinensische Gemeinde Berlin-Brandenburg E :V* After the Oslo Agreements and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (1994), Israeli travel documents for Palestinian from Gaza and the West Bank were replaced by Palestinian “passports” (in Arabic it says *jawaz al safar*, and in English, Passport/ Travel Document). However, since the final status of the autonomous territories had not been established during that agreement, these passports must not indicate Palestinian nationality. For a complete explanation of the complex judicial issue of Palestinian nationality, see Mu’taz Qaficha, “La nationalité palestinienne selon les principes du droit international” in Nadine Picaudou, N.(ed), “La Palestine en transition,” *Les annales de l’autre Islam* n°8, Paris, ERISM, INALCO, 2001, p 39-77

Most of them (25 000) came from Lebanon, where they had been refugees after 1948 and 1967 and from which they were once again expelled by the civil war. The last and smallest wave (around 5000) is made up of students from the West Bank and Gaza, who should be distinguished from the children of immigrants from the second generation (estimated at 15 000/20 000), very few of whom have reached the university level. An efficient local support network connected to a settled community and to the possibility of financing one's studies by working – facilitated by the German system – has enabled numerous middle-class and even poor families (in particular from the refugee camps) to send their sons to study in Germany. These young people mostly opt for engineering degrees in all fields, including computers, electrical engineering and construction, as well as in medicine and pharmaceuticals.

This is an essentially male population. With a few exceptions, the only Palestinian women in the last wave are ones who have come to be with their student husbands. Some of them have pursued studies, but they are a very small minority.

Opposite Reasons for Going Away

What are the reasons that have prompted people to leave for Germany? There was a noticeable evolution between 1990 and 2000. Indeed, leaving at the end of the first Intifada or having spent several years under the Palestinian Authority would involve significantly different plans with regard to Germany. For some of the most recent arrivals, going abroad corresponds to a new desire that is more about fleeing an unbearable situation than about acquiring new skills: "I want to stay in Berlin because you can't live in Gaza. There's nothing there. And everyone watches you and your every movement. You can't do anything. You can't go out. I don't mind studying and working. I want to be somewhere else."³²⁸ It is no longer a question of studying in order to acquire better status in Palestine or to contribute to preparing the future of Palestinian society. Now it is a matter of finding a way out of the situation at any cost: "I want to go to the US to get my MA. My uncle lives there, and then I'd go back there to live. (...) I don't want to spend the future here. There are so many difficulties and problems. I have no dreams here

³²⁸ Mussa., 24, Berlin, July 1998.

because there are no dreams here due to the problems with Israel. My dream is to go to any other country because there are no dreams here.’’³²⁹

Interactions between the recent arrivals and the students living in Germany for several years already— who are more concerned with returning to the Territories and undertaking projects there – highlight the great lack of understanding between them. Those who have remained in the “spirit” of the first Intifada speak of a united people who are fighting and moving forward. The recent arrivals evoke the failure of the Oslo Accords and thus of the Authority, the collapse of the economy, the deadlock and giving up. This doesn’t mean the recent arrivals will not develop projects within German society. But compared to the other students, it will take them far more time. Having left above all to “escape” from the situation, they are in fact totally caught up in it. They follow the news and the latest developments back home by the hour, and they have a great deal of difficulty concentrating on their studies and planning their future. It often takes them several months, and even up to a whole year, before starting to elaborate plans they can believe in. With time, their geographical distance from the Palestinian situation helps them to rebuild a private life that is less permeated by the sense of deadlock associated with it.

The students who came during the very early years, when the Palestinian Authority was being set up, did so within the context of the first Intifada. They left with the idea of returning laden with new skills. Their analysis basically hasn’t changed with the evolving situation. Challenging it would also upset their image of their own role and their situation abroad. Yet these images are also a way to “neutralize” the issue of lacking solidarity for the Palestinian collective destiny. However, as the situation in the Territories gradually worsened during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, one change did become clear. But this time it didn’t lead them to question their presence abroad; and the attitude of their families towards these stays abroad, which they had previously wanted to shorten, also changed. It was less about coming back with more skills now than about building up an external resource for the family. Their priority was no longer to finish their

³²⁹ Kamal, 20, is studying English. His father is a labourer in Israel and his mother a teacher. He lives in the area with new buildings for inhabitants of the Jabalya refugee camp (the ones who can afford it), August 1999.

studies, but rather to wire home money, however little, which also meant increased pressure on the students. It was part of the Palestinians' strategy to gain or keep a foothold abroad in order to have a less uncertain source of income than their investments in the local Palestinian economy³³⁰. As has been shown by Majdi el-Malki,³³¹ the deterioration of the economic situation in the Territories and the destruction of the Palestinian Authority's infrastructures led the Palestinians to turn to forms of solidarity and reorganisation that followed along family lines. These do not operate according to territorial divisions. A *hamula* outlines a kind of social geography here that is far from the fragmented physical geography of the Palestinian Territories and the diaspora. It is made up of support networks that may be more or less "dormant," but are reactivated during times of hardship, such as the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

What is a Western Society?

For Palestinian students, the values conveyed by German society, and by the West generally speaking, are individualism, materialism, technological modernism and amorality. They situate themselves within a more or less nuanced rejection of these values. The only one that is never rejected is technological progress, which is in any case the main motive for going to Germany in the first place. In fact, they manoeuvre between a desire for individualism and freedom, and a rejection of the Western credo of "every man for himself." Likewise, while saying they reject materialistic society, they also seek to take part in consumer society and are attracted by brand names. In this sense, like the young people in Gaza – but with more access and greater knowledge about the latest fashions– they are also part of an international youth culture.

³³⁰ The total contribution of the Palestinian diaspora to the Palestinian economy was estimated at 410 million dollars in 1997, 76 % in the form of investments and 24 % in the form of donations (although transfers of funds within families remains extremely hard to evaluate). It is almost equal (95%) to international aid for the same year (432 million dollars). Sari Hanafi, "Contribution de la diaspora palestinienne à l'économie palestinienne" in Bernard Botiveau, (ed.), "La Palestine d'Oslo : les avatars d'une construction nationale", *Monde Arabe Maghreb-Machrek*, n°161, July-September 1998, p 64-65.

³³¹ Majdi el-Malki, "Soutien social informel et néo-patrimonialisme" in Nadine Picaudou, "La Palestine en transition", *Les annales de l'autre Islam* n°8, Paris, ERISM, INALCO, 2001, p176-179 and "La sociologie en Palestine. De la sociologie des politiques sociales à la sociologie du 'tenir bon'", a paper for *Palestine : sociétés, normes et institution*, a seminar organised by Bernard Botiveau and Edouard Conte, Programme PICS, Aix-en-Provence, 18-19 October 2002.

Their rejection of materialism and exaggerated individualism can also be seen in their judgement about the destruction of the family occurring in the West in their view. This is the most commonly cited example to highlight the nonsensical turn of Western societies on the decline. In this way, these students attempt to make contradictory references hold together. They tinker with them to produce various identity constructs in order to combine: religiosity, in the spiritual rather than in the customary sense; the individualisation process; a rejection of Western values synonymous with social anomie and moral perversion; consumerism; the community as a solidarity network and model for society; Arab cultural references and technological modernity.

The Islamist model stands out among potential configurations of identity for two reasons. It is a general model expressed by a whole group of students, and not simply by individuals. And it has great legitimacy for the entire population, even if it hasn't been embraced or expressed by everyone. The religious reference suggests an image of total Islam, in the sense that it provides guidelines for all aspects of life including politics. From the resulting notion of Islamic modernity, based on an image of the West, aspects considered positive are chosen, while the negative aspects are counterbalanced by a reinvented Islam removed from its traditional form. The West, fascinating for its technology and consumer products, is rejected for its materialism and moral depravity.

The image of that perversion is crystallized around the issue of gender relations, with Palestinian students stigmatizing their playful and transitory nature. In its place they put forward an Arab tradition founded on the community, mutual aid and solidarity, as well as on moral and spiritual elevation. Thus the idea of Islamic modernity consists of an attempt to blend these two dimensions: "Technology and the improvement of material conditions are part of a process of modernisation that we support and are trying to bring into our own societies. They have gone hand in hand with a huge increase in individual freedom here, without any moral limits. I don't want to integrate that into my life, and I filter things according to my values. For instance, modesty is important in Islam, and I definitely don't appreciate all the advertising billboards displaying female bodies."³³²

³³² Qandil, 28, a student and Islamic intellectual married to a converted French woman. Berlin, January 2002.

But that idea must be understood for what it contributes in building up a proud identity, which is also a way of obtaining recognition. The Western media, and especially the television stations, play a crucial role here. Indeed, young Muslims constantly point out examples in films and TV serials – particularly American ones – where the Arab plays the bad, ridiculous or stupid person with the related stereotypes, such as having numerous women and camels. “This is a Big Brother society.”³³³ Television only shows you a tiny part of reality it has chosen. Over a two-week period there are necessarily times when you are stupid, others when you’re funny, interesting, likable or annoyed. If they only show the stupid moments, everyone will think you’re stupid. That’s exactly what happens with Arabs. Take any American film. The Arab is always stupid, violent and bad, with lots of camels and women around. News about Palestine is even worse. The Israelis are occupying our land and killing us, and we’re the ones they call terrorists!”³³⁴

The principle of identification upon which film and television productions are based works in reverse here. These images appear to them as an injunction to identify with humiliating caricatures. Their virulent discourse against the media shows the extent to which these young people perceive them as the vital basis of *Offentlichkeit*. “The war between civilisations means nothing. In any case, there has been a globalisation of American culture. I’m not even surprised by what I see here – the same brand names, the same films and the same Big Macs. But what really gets to you is the disinformation about the Middle East.”³³⁵ As a result, even if this kind of discrimination is compensated by access to the social system, it strikes them as a basic assault on their dignity and causes a great deal of bitterness. “They talk about democracy, which does exist in terms of the law. But in reality we are never seen as equals. As an Arab, I am never given the same respect as a German.”³³⁶

Islamic ideology plays on these two levels by associating a technological mastery of the modern world and a rejection of its “corrupt” values – a rejection that is to a large extent the

³³³ A reference to a German reality TV show.

³³⁴ A 27-year-old architecture student, Berlin, January 2002.

³³⁵ Mahmoud, 26, who has a Master’s degree in applied mathematics and has been in Germany for six months. Berlin, January 2002.

³³⁶ Jamal, 26, a pharmaceutical student. Berlin, January 2002.

result of their refusal to accept the domination of those who promote these values. This vision of the Western world is widespread throughout the Arab world, extending beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, although the latter is a crystallisation of it. Palestinian students in the West take issue with their lack of recognition, a stance that comes from their particular status and the everyday incidences of domination they may experience; but it should be seen in a more general framework. The issue of recognition, ordinarily reserved for minorities within a country, exists for them on a worldwide scale. Thus Israel might appear to them more generally as an outpost of Western domination. The issue of recognition goes beyond the framework of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, reaching into the broader context of their relationship to the West.

This phenomenon intensified after the 9/11 attacks, which had the secondary effect of making all Muslims more or less suspect. According to a rumour that went around in Muslim circles, certain students stopped going out for a while out of fear of hostile reactions against them. They all felt an increase in hostile looks. ‘‘How do you expect me to feel in my company now? When the towers started collapsing on 9/11, they were all very agitated and rushed into my office saying, come and see, the Palestinians have bombed New York! I didn’t understand anything. Later, I was really relieved to find out that there were no Palestinians in the commando. But now it’s finished. I know I’ll never have the same status as the other engineers.’’³³⁷

Ties between the Palestinian community and German society are thus strongly affected by the behaviour of a few people and security requirements that render an entire population suspect. In this way, they have reinforced the lack of recognition of the reasons why people join the Islamists.

In the exile experience, the distance created results in a re-evaluation of the national objective. The Palestinians have re-evaluated their options through greater knowledge of Western societies and the international system. But that knowledge, highly variable from one individual to

³³⁷ A computer engineer originally from Gaza, who has been in Germany for 10 years.

another, does not lead to only one kind of response or attitude. It appears to be accompanied by the development of a trans-national elite that is relatively at ease in Western societies and with the international media, and above all believes in the possibility of using the referential principles of those societies in its struggle – human rights, democracy, etc. These elites do not see Western societies and their leaders as unequivocal permanent fixtures. In that sense they agree with the analyses and attitudes of what could be qualified as the pacifist trend among Palestinians, which stresses civil forms of resistance and international communication. The increased knowledge has also fuelled confrontational attitudes towards that domination and the negative images conveyed about Muslims. The desire to rebuild an identity full of pride therefore finds support in the development of Islamic modernity, which advocates rejecting certain Western values in the name of spiritual superiority. This rejection has been expressed in a variety of ways and reached varying levels of intensity– from protecting oneself from the above-mentioned values to adhering to Islamist parties or engaging in head-on clashes. Moving between levels is far from automatic. Thus, some people assert their allegiance to Islamic organisations, whose social programmes they support, while being severely critical of violence: “These movements³³⁸ have become a problem for their own societies. They thought they were providing solutions, and that’s why people followed them. But by creating groups that refer to Islam while being potentially violent, they only generate more problems.”

The Palestinian Islamists’ ideology, strongly oriented towards Palestinian nationalism and the Palestinian cause, greatly limits the probability of their adhering to the Al Qaeda network. Ben Laden has often been reproached for discovering the Palestinian cause at a late date and for using it as a justification rather than providing his own support: “The United States ought to ask itself why there is such hatred against it. They are responsible for the thousands of deaths in Iraq and in Palestine, and we won’t forget it. Unfortunately, it is very easy for extremist groups to use that hatred. I think a national liberation struggle such as the Palestinian one should be

³³⁸ Armed Islamist movements. Qandil, previously quoted.

differentiated from that type of action. Ben Laden never did anything for the Palestinian cause and only uses it as a reference to justify his actions.’’³³⁹

In the vast majority of cases, a more or less lengthy stay abroad means an increase in symbolic and financial capital— if it has not been a failure and the person doesn’t go home immediately after obtaining a degree. In the latter case, no capital is accumulated and the person risks being unemployed in the Territories. Not all of these young people will be part of the elite. It depends on where they started out. But all of them will rise further up the social ladder. Some of them will compose the trans-national elite previously mentioned, characterised less by their financial capital than by their ‘‘knowledge.’’³⁴⁰ They are striving for a national objective characterised by independence and development, with an emphasis on the latter. In terms of power struggles, they will certainly have to deal with the local elites involved in the armed struggle who have different social prospects and very different experiences – including clashes and Israeli prisons . Their perceptions of international reactions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are vastly different. Relations between these two groups and their respective weight constitute one of the stakes in the reconfiguration of power in Palestine.

³³⁹ Ahmed, an architecture student and Islamist sympathizer. Berlin, January 2002.

³⁴⁰ ‘‘The way a person experiences, interprets and reacts to his environment varies from one individual to another according to his specific knowledge. Knowledge is the key because it defines our perception of the world based on our specific education and life experiences. It is plausible to conclude that this knowledge seems to be one of the most significant criteria for differentiating the two groups in our sample of politically relevant Palestinian elites.’’

The first group in this sample of 9 people is composed of Mustafa Barghouti, Hanan Ashrawi, Salam Fayad, Ghassan Khatib and Ziad Abou Amr. The second includes Yasser Arafat, Marwan Barghouti, Ahmed Sa’adat and Sheikh Yassin. Ahmed Badawi, ‘‘Determinant of Change in Elite Behaviour and Relative Influence in Palestine,’’ draft paper for the *Elite Change in the Arab World* programme under the direction of Volker Perthes, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, August 2002, p 14.

Conclusion: a Future with no Prospects?

*“The word future doesn’t exist. Everything is black and blurred. Where will it all end? I hope for an improvement in the situation here, but I don’t believe it will happen.”*³⁴¹

Between the rapid and disjointed time frame of everyday events and the symbolic time of memory-identity,³⁴² the middle-term of plans seems to have vanished from the experience of Palestinian youth. Their perception of space reflects that dichotomy. At the most local level, it signals their confinement and attempts at getting around Israeli roadblocks. But it also symbolizes the neighbourhood – a place of reference points, status and power. At the other extreme is the longed-for heavenly Palestine that has grown out of memories adjusted to counterbalance everyday experience in refugee camps. For Reinhart Koselleck, “the primary experience of defeated people is first of all that nothing has occurred the way they had expected or hoped it would. (...) This might lead them to seek long- and middle-term causes that would include – and perhaps explain – the randomness of their singular surprise.”³⁴³ But here, the quest for a sufficiently powerful explanation has led more to the creation of a myth than to any

³⁴¹ A 19-year-old second-year physiotherapy student from Gaza, who also plays music for parties. His father has a small steel factory. Interviewed in August 1999.

³⁴² An expression coined by Nadine Picaudou. Picaudou, *Identité-mémoire et construction nationale, op. cit.*

³⁴³ Reinhart Koselleck, “Mutation de l’expérience et changement de méthode” in *L’expérience de l’histoire*, Paris, Gallimard/ Le Seuil, 1997, p 239.

historical gain. The myth is also a response to any attempt by the victor to develop a “retrospective teleology”,³⁴⁴ or to see their success as a historical legitimisation of their cause.

Caught between two spaces and time frames, the perspectives of Palestinian youth are highly contradictory. Furthermore, their situation is doubly defined – on the one hand by their relations with the occupier, and on the other hand by the inner configuration of Palestinian society. For the Israeli occupation strives to control the territory and people’s movements, but not how the population is managed. There is a place for internal issues involving the Palestinians, although the context itself is marked by Israeli domination. Thus, there was a dimension of internal social struggle in the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The local officials from the camps, young leaders of the Intifada who have also been in Israeli prisons, are to a certain degree opposed to the returnee Palestinians, themselves a heterogeneous category. On one side are the PLO officials, the “old guard” who have lived in neighbouring Arab countries. They were given a large number of important positions in the Palestinian Authority³⁴⁵ and have experience cooperating with the Israelis. On the other side are the skilled diaspora with international experience, who see themselves as a trans-national elite. These divisions operate in local environments, the importance of which has been reinforced by the partitioning of Palestinian territory. The Palestinian Authority is nearly destroyed, but local administrations continue to function in part. Furthermore, these groups are not united and there are further divisions by neighbourhood and *hamula*. Local life is thus largely defined by clan-like networks. The latter have recently been reactivated to provide alternative resources which increase people’s ability to adapt. For their members, they represent a stable base in an uncertain environment. Through the diaspora, they have become trans-national and greatly contributed to the current recomposition of Palestinian society.

Positions and interpretations regarding the situation vary among groups. The “young guard” is trying to obtain higher status on the Palestinian political scene. They see the situation

³⁴⁴ Reinhart Koselleck, *ibid*.

³⁴⁵ Less hegemonic than is usually supposed, according to a survey being conducted by Jean-François Legrain.

as closed, and the more or less sacrificial violence is a “wild card” for them that restores their honour but doesn’t fundamentally change the balance of power. Its references are increasingly mythical. The younger these actors, the more this aspect prevails. As for the “trans-national elite,” they possess resources (opportunities to travel, as well as qualifications and knowledge about international issues) which enable them to have plans for the middle term and often to develop a less pessimistic and more nuanced vision of potential foreign support and relations with Israel. This group has high visibility through its contacts with the international community, whose codes it understands, whereas the “young guard” has gained visibility through violence. But it is deeply disconnected from the self-image of most Palestinian youth.

As for the “old guard,” it had control of the Palestinian Authority but suffered from a glaring lack of legitimacy. Nonetheless, family networks have crossed over these categories, engaging them in a dialogue and introducing vertical confrontations.

In addition, the extremely complex situation in Palestinian society has become chaotic around the edges, where the powers that be and opposition forces have multiplied at the most local levels, including politicians, notables, security service chiefs, activists, etc. (the same person may fit into several of these labels). Such “fluid political circumstances”³⁴⁶ tend to “inhibit tactical activity”³⁴⁷ among the actors. And so, as others may also have observed, “strategic actions aim at the short term, while the middle- and long-term prospects seem to fade away. The space itself seems to withdraw to a mostly local level.”³⁴⁸ But there is an additional structural uncertainty here coming from the Palestinians’ weak position with regard to Israel, a State which has a wide range of options at its disposal, whereas theirs are very restricted. Thus the middle-term prospects also seem hidden by current events. When a desire to launch new projects is hinted at, it always

³⁴⁶ Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, Paris, Presses de Sciences-Po, 1992, p 140. The relevance of this definition to the Palestinian situation was pointed out by Aude Signoles, “Qu’en est-il du pouvoir local en ‘conjoncture politique fluide’?”, *Egypte Monde arabe*, n°6/ 2003, p 37-54.

³⁴⁷ Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des crises*, *op. cit.*, p 150.

³⁴⁸ Gilles Bataillon, “Analyser le chaos,” in Gilles Bataillon (ed.), “Survivre. Réflexions sur l’action en situation de chaos,” *Cultures & Conflits*, n° 24-25, Spring 1997, p 4.

comes with an immediate negation reaffirming that uncertainty: “I want to work as an engineer. And I want to do many things for my people. But it depends on the conditions. It all depends on conditions. It’s difficult when the conditions change all the time.”³⁴⁹ Older people have interpreted the situation in a less gloomy way, but the latest opinion polls show them moving closer to the position of the younger people.³⁵⁰

Nevertheless, opposing a clearly defined adversary limits the level of fragmentation and structural collapse. It prevents the complete disintegration of society by restricting the increase in competing powers, despite all the factors leading to chaos such as a collapsed economy, readily available weapons, etc. A national identity is structured around the issue of conflict with the dominating power. That identity is the basis for greater unity among the population, as well as a focus for the actors themselves: “compensating the loss of a place (a village or territory) by a policy of exclusive (family, community or religious) ties as the condition for survival is both the risk and strength of identity-based motivation.”³⁵¹ This national conflict approach, associated with a memory-identity chiefly based on 1948 and 1967 (memories of exile), has been one of the foundations of their identity-related strategies. It has afforded them an interpretation of interactions with the dominating power that has prevented them from being reduced to the real and symbolic violence done to them. The conflict, however, can only have that integrative nature pointed out by Georg Simmel when it is not being criminalized as such. In order for it to function, there must be a mutual recognition of a certain legitimacy. Yet that foundation has been vanishing in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where, in a mirror effect, national narratives have developed as exclusive monologues.

In an uncertain situation of extreme domination, the Palestinians had succeeded in

³⁴⁹ Alya, 21, an electrical engineering student in Nablus, whose father was in marketing. Interviewed in October 2000.

³⁵⁰ Riccardo Bocco, Matthias Brunner, Jamil Rabah, “International and Local Aid During the Second Intifada. An Analysis of Palestinian Public Opinion in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip”, *Report II*, IUED- Graduate Institute of Development Studies, University of Geneva, July 2001, p 5.

³⁵¹ Riccardo Bocco, Blandine Destremau, Jean Hannoyer, “Les mouvements palestiniens : territoire national et espaces communautaires.” in Riccardo Bocco, Blandine Destremau, and Jean Hannoyer, (ed.), *Palestine, Palestiniens : territoire national, espaces communautaires, les cahiers du CERMOC*, n°17, Beirut, CERMOC, 1997, p 14.

developing a conflict approach that would make it possible for them to envisage a negotiated solution, while enabling a reinterpretation of everyday experience. The failure of the Oslo process took away all middle-term prospects and reduced the potential for strategic action. But it did not render reinterpretation useless, on the contrary. In order to preserve that function the Palestinians plunged into a course of mythical conflict which did not, however, rule out the strategic use of sacrificial violence by organisations trying to establish a new balance of power. This new narrative was characterised by references to a golden age, projections into a glorious future and the martyrdom cult.³⁵²

This last element is clearly essential because it legitimises and embodies the myth at the same time. The “martyr” or “victim-hero” figure is popular with Palestinians because it seems to express the nature of the power struggle while also transcending it. This highlighting of religion through sanctified nationalism is thus largely due to the “syntax of domination”³⁵³ which this sanctified nationalism has enabled people to reinterpret.

Caught in this double everyday uncertainty and divided between immediacy and eschatology, the local arena and the symbolic one, the experience of these individuals seems deeply split. Its fragmentation also corresponds to an identity-related strategy of resistance to domination. Individuals are thus moving in a different time and space involving a type of reasoning that appears contradictory to the observer – one connected to life, the other to death. That movement allows them to say simultaneously: “I want to die. Last night I went out shooting. (...) See that bush I planted? It’s an *askubiyye*. In ten years it will bear fruit.” In fact, Palestinian youth attribute different kinds of reasoning to different time frames and objects, thus avoiding the contradictions that would inevitably result from a desire to unify their identity.

These complex identity formations, which strive to re-establish the – quite relative – possibility of middle-term plans, have been made risky and costly through this uncertainty and domination. Thus, sacrificial violence signifying a merging with a mythical time and a symbolic place, has

³⁵² Hamit Bozarslan, *Violence in the Middle-East : From Political Struggle to Self-Sacrifice*, Princeton, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2004.

³⁵³ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, London, Sage Publication, 1995. Quoted in Bozarslan, *From Political Struggle to Self-sacrifice*, *op. cit.*, p 9.

become increasingly appealing. But for most people, the solution is to leave the Palestinian territory if possible. The choice of one option over another is closely linked to class issues. It also depends on a comparison between social status in Palestinian society and in the host country, as well as on a possible identification with the collective destiny which may make personal success unimportant. Certain young people from the refugee camps who had the material means to go abroad through family support did not go. Some preferred to keep their status as leaders of an armed group despite the risks. Others, totally engaged in a sacrificial commitment, saw no real alternative because it only had a bearing on their personal life.

The tremendous determination regarding the national struggle is largely the result of everyday life being pervaded by the occupation, leaving little room for other concerns. It is a constant in the Palestinian public arena. During the first Intifada, the public scene was monopolized by the issue of the national struggle. The sense of hope created when the Palestinian Authority was established then massively introduced the issue of state-building, and as a result, various questions about Palestinian society and which political and social programmes to set up. Deliberations on legislation and the constitution mobilized parties and organisations. The failure of the Oslo Accords and the worsening of the situation in the Territories put an end to these discussions and reset the focus on the issue of the national struggle. Any other discussion seems vain in the eyes of Palestinian youth, because it is disconnected from reality. Yet this lone preoccupation has not led to any reflection on Palestinian strategies, as the middle-term prospects necessary for such discussions do not exist for most Palestinians. Furthermore, the deaths, extrajudicial executions, houses destroyed, expropriations, curfews, roadblocks, etc. have produced a situation in which every day is comprised of events that seem to render peace strategies and negotiations laughable. In view of Israeli methods, many militants accuse Palestinians who challenge the suicide attacks of betrayal, thus neutralizing any strategic reflection.

Is there a way out? With respect to the Palestinians, a crucial element would involve

rebuilding intermediate levels in all fields. First, Palestinian youth must have middle-term prospects again. Without that base, the sacrificial violence will never lose its legitimacy for the people. Rebuilding is the sine qua non for obtaining not the total disappearance of the “martyrs,” but their marginalisation, which is an essential aspect of an effective crackdown. As Hamit Bozarslan has underscored, the more the dominant group seems to reject compromise, the harder it is to bring the dominated group to a pragmatic way of thinking. Restoring prospects in the middle term means decreasing structural uncertainties in the Palestinian context. This means acting on the uncertainty resulting from the degree of domination, as well as from the increase in local power.

At the same time, the conflict should be decriminalized. Israel’s symbolic recognition of the Palestinian memory of exile seems an important point here. On the Palestinian side, establishing legitimate institutions could serve as a base for creating a new system of mediation both within Palestinian society and in its relations with Israel.

Such institutions would ultimately have no legitimacy without a minimum of manoeuvring room. The process of dehumanisation induced by the teleological sanctification of the conflict is limited by the fascination with Israel. In the eyes of Palestinian youth, that State embodies strength as well as Western-style modernity. While they refuse to adopt a lifestyle they see as selfish and amoral, they are in favour of the consumer society and technological progress; this is a common basis upon which ties – especially economic ones – could easily be reformed. The political arena must lend itself to this process, however, and not simply reconfigure Israeli methods of control – in a form that might also be that of a kind of Palestinian State.

Naturally, in order to be thorough, these orientations should be put into perspective through a precise analysis of Israeli society. But ignoring them as part of an entirely repressive solution doesn’t seem particularly effective either. Social science analyses bring to light certain issues here that are not the ones underscored by the media. To know if Arafat was a valid interlocutor, i.e. if he had the power and above all the will to suppress the armed groups – whether

they were Islamists or from the PFLP or Fatah – was only a key issue if one forgets that these groups had been mainly supported, despite their methods, by a population whose prospects have all but dissolved.

Palestinian youth who have remained in the Territories are increasingly closed off inside a purely mythical interpretation of the conflict. This is the way of thinking that needs to be reversed. The current trend of Israeli operations in the Territories is not moving in that direction.

Annex: Palestinian Youth, a “terrain” like any other?

Field Study

The purpose of the study was to bring to the surface the field of reference in which these young people were operating, in connection to their field of possibilities and the singular configurations developed within that field. The interviews conducted with that aim cannot be seen as the results in a recording studio of a discourse produced out of nowhere. They are the result of an interaction between a foreigner presented as a researcher with a certain number of questions and a young Palestinian man or woman. These conditions most certainly had an influence on the kind of discourse developed. Far from an attempt to reify anyone’s identity, it was a matter of noting the patterns of movement among the different identities and dynamics in play. Thus the need to create a variety of contexts for interaction, in order to obtain the widest possible range of discourses used by the individuals about themselves.

This study is thus based on a large number of interviews, from all social categories and among a young age bracket. But, given the specific conditions of the interviews, a variety of approaches were employed to broaden the spectrum of conditions in which the discourse could be pronounced. Thus, I carried out individual and group interviews, longitudinal interviews, as well as participatory observation with families, youth centres, universities, public places, etc. A variety of places were also included, such as towns, villages, and refugee camps, the West Bank,

Gaza and East Jerusalem. Young people in Gaza and Hebron were asking themselves the same questions; yet, while the importance of their local identity was the same, its content was different. That kind of comparison was based on an equivalence of function but not necessarily of content.

Between 1998 and 2004, one hundred and nine³⁵⁴ interviews were conducted and a longitudinal follow-up was undertaken with the young people. The vast majority of these interviews was held on a semi-directive model. Twenty-six questionnaires were also distributed in a student centre in Ramallah in 1997, as well as fifteen interviews with young women. Participatory observations were held in three sports clubs (Gaza), three youth centres (Ramallah, Jenin and Hebron), two student associations (France and Germany), one women's association (Qalqilya) and two psychology work groups conducted by NGOs (Nablus and East Jerusalem). The field study took place between 1997 and 2004 during seven successive stays, for a total of twenty-one months. Two complementary field studies were conducted among Palestinian youth studying in France and above all in Germany. With regard to Germany, the field study was conducted during several short stays in Berlin in 1999 and 2000, and in particular on a research programme at the Marc Bloch Centre in 2001/2002. The studies were designed to follow the changes in identity among these young people temporarily in the West (and therefore not second-generation Palestinians whose identity constructs mainly involve other issues). It was particularly relevant in Germany, the main destination in Europe for Palestinian students.

Slippery Ground?

The Palestinian “terrain,” far from neutral, has particular features which do not make the task easy for a researcher striving above all to focus on sociology rather than getting involved in controversies. First of all, it is highly charged ideologically speaking.³⁵⁵ The Palestinian cause is associated with “Palestinians,” and in trying to bring forward these individual accounts,

³⁵⁴ 56 in Gaza, 42 in the West Bank, 3 in France and 8 in Germany.

³⁵⁵ Regarding the study of Islamist movements, François Burgat has shown how people's ideological backgrounds generally introduce a bias into their analysis. François Burgat, *L'islamisme en face*, Paris, La Découverte, 2002.

wouldn't it be above all an attempt to produce arguments for that cause? How could one preserve a scientific approach when each assertion can be used as a means of legitimisation by one side or the other? To be sure, scientific analyses do not take place on the same level as ideological assertions. They follow different rules – of coherence, a desire to combine all the representations in an integrated vision, an openness to dialectical discussion, being put to the test by one's peers, a desire to account for one's cognitive tools and position in the field, etc. Nonetheless, the researcher has even less hope here than elsewhere of glossing over his own position as a scientist in a field that is so emotionally charged. However intense his desire to produce science, he cannot ignore that there is a certain porosity between the scientific discourse and that of the actors involved. Explaining in sociological terms the identity constructs developed by a suicide bomber is not – in any manner – a way of legitimising his act. However, in this kind of context, even the desire to understand is often suspected of concealing an axiological position, and certain explanations may be used in an ideological manner by the actors. In so far as possible, all questions of engagement and position-taking have been rejected. Naturally, one cannot claim to be equidistant from the protagonists. On the contrary, as has already been explained, this research is intentionally focused solely on Palestinian society. Thus, it would be vain to see it as something it does not pretend to be – an analysis of Israeli-Palestinian representations regarding the conflict. Israeli actors appear only within the specific context of their interactions with Palestinians and their perceptions. Thus, objectivity here does not signify an attempt to report on both sides in a balanced manner.

In this study, which deliberately seeks to provide an analysis of Palestinian society as such and not solely through the conflict, objectivity revolves not around equidistance but around intellectual “integrity”³⁵⁶ linked to the conditions of the scientific approach described above. It is not a matter of excluding positions drawn from scientific research, but in so far as possible, and

³⁵⁶ “The researcher constantly redefines his neutrality by striving to reconstruct on the basis of honesty rather than equidistance because, as the expression goes, an anthropologist's work always involves ‘participatory observation.’” Abderrahmane Moussaoui, “Du danger et du terrain en Algérie”, *Ethnologie française*, XXXI January-March 2001, p 54.

in the interest of research, to separate different moments – as far as possible, because no researcher works without employing certain values. At that point, it is not a matter of standards or positions regarding a particular issue, but rather of fundamental values. Even considering the actors' attempts to provide meaning is in itself taking a position.

Beyond these issues, the Palestinian terrain is also “slippery ground”³⁵⁷ because it is violent ground where the researcher is “exposed” in all senses of the word: caught in certain interactions, put in danger, affected psychologically or called upon to intervene. Human and ethical questions arise, similar to what is experienced by journalists in areas of conflict. A violent context is not like any other, and learning to operate in one is certainly not part of one's university training.

The protocol for a study cannot be conducted in the kind of ideal conditions advocated. Examples abound of curfews and roadblocks limiting one's freedom of movement, and interviewees refusing to be recorded for fear of being in danger. Emotions are raw, arising from people's fears. There is a feeling that one should judge and become indignant, which the researcher must surpass in order to keep on trying to understand. Through the interviews and his listening ear, he often opens up an ideal space for confidences. Well-informed enough to understand, yet without consequences due to his not being integrated, the researcher is charged with heavy stories involving much violence. What is he to do with them, beyond the research? Their vivid and difficult nature always seems to call for something further – some psychological or social reparation for instance – and challenges the researcher about the status of his work and his position as a citizen.

Neither is the time frame here that of the ideal study – slow and gradual. The researcher is dragged into everyday events, and his time is composed of sudden jolts and consequences. Furthermore, the way events are perceived is not the same for Palestinian society and Western media, and there is friction between these two different time frames. It seems that being informed involves knowing all the subtleties of the latest diplomatic proposals, the ups and downs of

³⁵⁷ This expression was borrowed from Dionigi Albera (ed.), “Terrains minés en ethnologie”, *Ethnologie française*, XXXI, PUF, 2001/1 January-March. 2001.

Israeli and Palestinian domestic politics, and details about the most recent violence. How does the long time-frame of research fit in here? The terrain seems not only defined by a succession of events, but also in a process of perpetual motion in which you feel like you're always missing the latest episode. As elsewhere, one must reject the pre-established questions and interpretations of a social study;³⁵⁸ but because it is a matter of "life and death," that distance seems less legitimate or acceptable than elsewhere, and is not easy to set up.

Once all these obstacles have been considered and worked on, the characteristics of the "slippery ground" are not all handicaps. Living among a population when it is in danger puts the foreigner in a special position because he is "risking his neck." They are grateful to him for being there, despite the situation, and this gives him special access which is different from other times. This was particularly perceptible in the change in my terrain from 1997 to 2002. To be sure, he is also seen as a witness and they would like for him to be a spokesperson on the injustice of the conditions in which the Palestinians are made to live. During the interviews, a specific protocol had to be established in order to "neutralise," in so far as possible, the production of an impersonal discourse designed to underscore for the West the Palestinian's historical victim status. One good method consisted in showing sufficient specific knowledge of the internal Palestinian situation so this kind of discourse would no longer seem useful, since it was already known and presumed to be accepted.

One consequence of this proximity was that the interviewees were often eager to find out about the researcher's analyses. Returning them at the end of the interview and discovering the interviewees' reactions, according to the methods developed for sociological interventions, proved to be highly enriching. Still, one must accept and make acceptable the idea of not providing miracle solutions. "Talking about reality seems to presume a capacity to modify it," highlighted Abderahmane Moussaoui.³⁵⁹

Taken as a whole, these circumstances – relevant to all areas of conflict rather than specifically to Palestine – pose a greater challenge to the researcher as a person. They are far from insurmountable, but they do create a specific context requiring a great deal of thought about the conditions of the study, as well as a course of action appropriate for a tense and changing situation.

³⁵⁸ Louis Quéré, *Pour un calme examen des faits de société*, in Bernard Lahire (ed.), *A quoi sert la sociologie*, Paris, La Découverte, 2002, p 82.

³⁵⁹ Abderrahmane Moussaoui, *Du danger et du terrain en Algérie*, *op. cit.*, p 55.

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