

# “I didn’t ask 2 be Palestinian, I just got lucky”:

A study of actors’ influence on Palestinians’ collective identity



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## Abstract

Identity is formed in the understanding of the self and others, and it is also a consequence of how people perceive the world. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate which actors besides Israel individual Palestinians identify as significant for their understanding of their collective identity. The purpose is also to analyze how these actors have influenced Palestinians' understanding of their collective identity, and their relationship to it. The data was collected through 10 semi-structured interviews with Palestinians living in the West Bank. The collected data was then analyzed in reference to the social identity perspective, which is a perspective within social psychology that aims at understanding identity formation in relation to social context. The findings suggest three types of significant "others": international actors, Arab governments, and Palestinian political actors. These three types of significant others were experienced as non-supportive of the Palestinian cause. The reaction to the non-supportive context can be described in two ways: individualization of identity, and the formation of an activist identity based on international grassroots support.

*Keywords: Palestine, identity, social identity perspective, social psychology, social context.*

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## 1. Introduction

The Palestinian people is not a homogenous people, with a coherent background and a natural place in the world. They are rather scattered around the world, living in the West Bank, Gaza, neighboring Arab countries, and other countries around the globe. The scattered Palestinian people is a result of different events, starting with Al-Nakbah (catastrophe) in 1948 (Habashi, 2008:13). During the events of the creation of the state of Israel, between 500 000 - 900 000 Palestinian refugees fled their homes, mainly to neighboring countries (Forsythe, 1983:90). Other wars and events, such as the Six Day War in 1967, have created new refugees and contributed to the scattering of Palestinians all over the world (Habashi, 2008:13). Palestinians are not only scattered around the world, but their territory is also divided, both geographically and politically. The West Bank is controlled by Fatah, and Gaza is controlled by Hamas, and the relation between these two parties is at best hostile and at worst violent (Palestinian Territories: Country outlook).

The complex situation for Palestinians has of course great implications for their everyday life, but it also has great impact on their collective identity as Palestinians. In the academic world, there is a great body of literature concerning Palestinian identity. Most of the literature focuses on the development of a collective identity from a political and historical perspective, where the collective identity is connected to specific events in history explaining the development of a Palestinian people. The Palestinian collective identity is hence analyzed in the context of nationalism, and through the use of theories on nationalism, the general collective Palestinian identity is explained (Hassassian, 2002; Litvak, 2009; Nabulsi, 2003). The research on the development of a collective Palestinian identity is important, but what is missing is a deeper understanding of people's relation to the described collective identity, and how the experienced social context has influenced people's relation to a collective identity. Research has also been conducted concerning the creation of a collective Palestinian identity focusing on an individual level, but only exploring Israeli influence on Palestinian identity (Habashi, 2008). Collective identity is created through the process of relationships and encounters with people that are categorized as either "us" or "them" (Clarke, Gilmour and Garner, 2007:88). The understanding of the own group is based on comparison with one or more significant "others", which means that a collective Palestinian identity is influenced by the comparison with other categories. Israel is of course a significant "other" influencing Palestinian identity, maybe the most important one, but it is also important to go beyond

Israeli influence, not by excluding Israel as a relevant actor which is impossible, but by exploring other potential significant “others” relevant for the formation of the collective identity (Hall, 1990:222-226).

### **1.1 Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate which actors, besides Israel, Palestinian people themselves identify as relevant for their collective identity as Palestinians. The purpose is also to analyze how these actors have influenced Palestinians’ understanding of their collective identity, and their relationship to it. This thesis investigates the unexplored perspective of how Palestinian people relate to their experienced collective identity. It does so by interpreting how Palestinians experience their collective identity, and their reaction to the experienced collective identity. The thesis also investigates potential actors that are relevant for Palestinians in their understanding of a collective identity. By exploring which actors Palestinians themselves experience as relevant for them, and how they are relevant, this thesis provides a more complex image of the experienced social context by including other relevant actors and categories than Israel and Israelis.

Conflicts, and especially conflicts including people from different countries and/or different ethnic groups, involve the question of identity. The creation of peace is not only something concerning leaders and negotiators; it must also involve the society and the individuals living in the society, or else the peace is a just on paper and new conflict will break out (Bar-Tal, 2000:352). The aim of this thesis is not to describe or explain the conflict between Palestine and Israel, or to come with suggestions on how to solve the conflict. Instead it provides a deeper understanding of how individual Palestinians experience their social context (in which the conflict of course is important) and how the experienced social context has influenced their collective identity. Since conflicts concern society and individuals, the focus on individuals relation to social identity is an important perspective in the conflict I experience is missing. By emphasizing the perspective of Palestinians’ relation to the experienced collective identity, this thesis adds a deeper understanding of that conflict, not by promoting this perspective over other perspectives, but by contributing to a perspective that has not been extensively researched.

## 1.2 Research Questions

In light of the purpose of the thesis my research questions are as follows:

- Which actors are experienced as relevant in the Palestinian situation by individual Palestinians?
- How do they perceive these actors?
- In what way do they experience that these actors have influenced the situation in Palestine?

These questions are answered by data collected through conducted interviews with 10 Palestinians living in the West Bank. The focus of the questions is to establish the context the interviewees experience by understanding the actors that are relevant for them as Palestinians. The purpose of the interviews is not to explain a general Palestinian identity but to identify actors relevant for the individual participants in the social context they experience. Identity is based in social context and without understanding the context the participants perceive, it is impossible to analyze the influence on identity. The second set of questions focuses on the influence of context on identity, and is as follows:

- How does the experienced social context influence the participants' relation to the collective identity?
- How has the experienced social context influenced the participants' identification?

The second set of questions is answered by an analysis of the collected data through interviews in light of the social identity perspective, a perspective within social psychology.

## 1.3 Disposition

This thesis contains five chapters. Chapter 2 consists of a theoretical framework. In the theoretical framework the social identity perspective is outlined, describing the process of identity formation and the creation of a collective identity. The purpose of the theoretical framework is to provide a tool for analyzing the empirical data.

Chapter 3 deals with the methodology of the thesis. The chapter describes how the empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The chapter also describes the process of analyzing the data by using a hermeneutic analysis.

In chapter 4, the experienced significant “others” are described, and the participants understanding of these actors are discussed. In the second part of chapter 4, an analysis using the social identity perspective is in order to explain how the experience of these actors has influenced the participants’ relationship to their collective identity. It is an analysis of how the experience of the described actors has influenced the participants’ identification process.

The last chapter, chapter 5, is a conclusion. In the conclusion the results of the thesis is presented, answering the research questions. The conclusion ends with a discussion concerning the potential gains with the thesis.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze actors influence on Palestinian collective identity, not from a historical nationalist perspective but from an individualistic perspective; specifically how relevant actors have influenced Palestinians' relationship to their collective identity. The collective history, or collective memory, is of course fundamental also for the understanding of the collective identity of individuals, but the aim of my study is not to investigate and explain the development of a general national identity. The aim is rather to analyze individual Palestinians' understanding of their collective identity, and which actors they themselves define as influential to their collective identity. Since the purpose is to analyze Palestinians' relationship to a collective identity, and not the general political and historical process (which has been done extensively), the data collected through interviews is analyzed in the context of social psychology. Social psychology attempts to understand how individual's behavior, feelings and values are influenced by social roles and cultural norms. In the analysis of the identity process the social identity perspective is used. The social identity perspective theorizes the relation between individuals and collective identity, and the process of group formation. The theory is an approach within social psychology that aims to understand how the self is connected to the categorization of people and groups. By analyzing the data collected from my interviews with theory from the social identity perspective I can understand how the experienced relevant actors in the social context have influenced the participants' relation to their collective identity as Palestinians.

### **2.1 Introduction to the Social Identity Perspective**

The social identity theory was developed in the 1970s within the field of social psychology. The theory was originally developed by the British social psychologist Henri Tajfel, and the theory is nowadays one of the mainstream theories concerning self and group identity within social psychology (Hogg, 2006:111). Social identity theory is in this thesis used as a social psychological analysis of self-perception and roles, related to group membership and group processes. The basic assumption of the theory is that phenomenon, processes and identities cannot be explained and understood solely by analyzing individual processes or intrapersonal relations. Identities are dependent on context, and must therefore be understood and analyzed

in the relevant social context for the identity. By explaining the social context the participants in this thesis experience as relevant for them, it is possible for me to analyze how the experienced social context has influenced their identity process, using the social identity perspective.

Groups are a cognitive perception, both by its members and by others, and the creation and understanding of a group is based on the group's distinctive attributes, and the separateness from other peoples and other groups (Hogg, 2006:111). Social structures and processes configure people's individual actions, and social identity theory tries to theorize the link between personality and social context (Hogg, 2006:112), which is how the theory is going to be used in this thesis. The social context experienced by Palestinians is theorized through the social identity perspective which means that I also operationalize the social identity perspective empirically. Social identity theory is committed to interactionism which is a meta-theoretical position within social psychology concerning the connection between the psychological and the social (Oakes, 2002:813-814). According to the social identity theory, social behavior varies along a continuum between the social extreme and the personal extreme. At the social extreme, or intergroup extreme, all social behavior is decided by group membership, while in an extreme interpersonal situation the behavior is only decided by interpersonal relationships, and the persons individual characteristics (Turner, 1999:8-10). The original idea of the social identity theory was developed as a result of experiments suggesting that even minimal difference between groups leads (at least under some conditions) to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. The minimal connection of even belonging to a group can be sufficient for discrimination and favoritism. The outcome is however not predetermined, it is dependent on the social context (Turner, 1999:6-8).

During the 1980s, the self-categorization theory, with its basis in the social identity theory, was developed, initially by John Turner who had worked together with Tajfel (Simon and Trötschel, 2008:103). The self-categorization theory is an extension and development of the original social identity theory. The two theories are not incompatible, but rather doing different work from the same perspective. When used combined the social identity theory and the self-categorization theory usually are referred to as the social identity perspective (Turner, 1999:6-8). The self-categorization theory describes how the categorization of self and others create a feeling of collective belonging, and how it underpins social identity. The focus of the self-categorization theory is on identity process through interaction. People are understood as members of different social groups instead of being regarded as isolated and unique

individuals. Self-categorization theory is an approach of understanding identity formation and it makes a distinction between social identity and personal identity (Hogg, 2006:113-114, Oakes, 2002:821, Turner, 1999:10-11). The bipolar continuum of identity used in the social identity theory is in self-categorization theory replaced by different levels of self-categorization. The different levels of self-categorization derive from the idea that these levels have different dimensions of inclusiveness. For example, a Palestinian who in a specific situation defines himself or herself as Palestinian has a lower level of inclusiveness than a person who in the same situation define himself or herself as Arab. Like all categorization, the level of inclusiveness is context dependent, and a person that in one situation defines himself or herself as Palestinian might in another situation define himself or herself as Arab. The level of inclusiveness is hence emphasized to be context dependent within the self-categorization theory, since categorization is context dependent (Turner, 1999:11-12).

The social identity theory and the self-categorization theory are usually referred together as the social identity perspective. In this thesis, the two theories will be used combined, and they will be referred to as the social identity perspective during the rest of the thesis.

## 2.2 Framework of the Social Identity Perspective

This part of the theoretical framework is divided into five different parts; **Social Categorization, Social Identification, Social Comparison, Identity Strategies, and Context and Salient Identities**. Social categorization, social identification and social comparison are three important concepts within the social identity perspective. They are interconnected and inseparable from each other since they all influence each other and are all part of the development of identity. The three concepts are used to discuss how a collective identity is created, and why people form a collective identity.

The part concerning identity strategies deal with the aspect of how people react to a perceived negative identity. By explaining how people react to a negative experience of a collective identity, their relationship to their collective identity can be analyzed.

The social identity perspective's understanding of identity formation rests on the assumption that context is crucial. For that reason, a separate chapter is dedicated on the issue. Context

does however permeate the whole understanding of identity and it cannot be separated from the process of identity formation in reality.

### **2.2.1 Social Categorization**

Tajfel and Turner defines a group as a: “collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group, and their membership of it” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979:40). The creation of groups is not random; people create groups for a reason. Social categorizations are a cognitive tool helping people order and structure their social environment. Through the creation of groups, people structure their understanding of the world (Tajfel and Turner, 1979:40). Groups are created through social categorization, and through social categorization people define in-groups and out-groups. Dependent on different features, people are categorized into these different groups. Difference between groups, and similarities within, are often emphasized, and groups become more coherent through interaction and a feeling of a common fate and shared goals which strengthens the group identification. (Hogg, 2006:117, Kessler and Mummendey, 2008:297). The formation of groups through social categorization goes beyond personal relationships; it is a perception of the social world not solely based on individual meetings or personal experiences (Turner, 1999:15). The formation of a collective identity is created through the categorization of the self and other people into in-groups and out-groups, and the categorization is dependent on the experienced social context. The own group is always understood in relation to other groups. Social conflict and differentiation are hence not individual processes but collective expressions belonging to a social context. Social conflict and social differentiation are expressions of peoples understanding of their collective identity in a specific social context, and it is also an expression of how they understand the world and their place in it (Turner, 1999:18-19).

The categorization of groups is socially created, but collective categorization is still created through individual people’s understanding of a collective identity. The definition of both in-groups and out-groups can differ between individuals, even if they share a collective identity. The creation and understanding of categories are subjective and socially created at the same time. Therefore, a group can in reality have different attributes and characteristics dependent

on the individual. The difference between groups is not important because of the visible attributes per se but because of the subjective *meaning* and social histories attached to the group categories (Wetherell, 1996:212). The color of a person's skin is not important because of the color in itself; the color is only important because of the meaning people attach to the color, and it is only important if the color of the skin is regarded as an important factor for categorization by the people in the specific social context. A social identity is created through categorization, but it is the meaning connected to the categories that form an identity. Categories are only relevant to people when they find the categories self-defining. People categorize the world to make sense of it, and to structure their understanding of the world. However, categorization does not only concern people's understanding the world, it is also about making sense of the self in a social context. Categorization does not only define the world around you, but also yourself, which means that the understanding of the self and the own identity is based on the categorization of the "other" (Oakes, 2002:812-813).

### **2.2.2 Social Identification**

Social categorization does not only organize cognitive impressions and order people's understanding of the world; it also provides people with identity. Categorizations structure the world and provide people with identity through their positioning of other and the self in that structure. Group identification is a way of understanding the world, and it is connected to value and emotional commitment to the group membership (Wetherell, 1996:212-213). Social identity is strongly connected to social categorization, and involves ethnocentrism, social comparison and discrimination. These categorizations create an understanding of the self as a part of a group; namely it creates a social identity that structures people, events and phenomenon in the world (Hogg, 2006:113). People in the same social group often share a defined understanding of who they are, what they have in common, and how they differ from people in other groups since group membership and collective identity is based in the categorization of "us" and "them" (Hogg, 2006:113-115). Extreme social identification can however lead to self-stereotyping, which also is a process of depersonalization if a person behave normatively and perceive himself or herself in terms of the attributes of the in-group. When a person is depersonalized, the person's individual attributes, and other group loyalties and identities, are taken over by the social identity, and the person tries to behave as the

experienced stereotypical prototype of the group (Hogg, 2006:118-119, Simon and Trötschel, 2008:107, Oakes, 2002:818-819, Turner, 1999:10-11).

By identifying with a group, people find a place in the world, and get an understanding of how the world works, which creates a stable identity. Through the categorization of other groups, and the identification with the own group, people know how to behave in specific situations. Identification and categorization create expectations on how other people are going to behave, which reduces uncertainty. The more uncertain a situation is, the more motivation a person has for belonging. People do also, in uncertain situations, seek groups with clear boundaries and explanations, and an uncomplicated dichotomized world view (Hogg, 2006:120-121). People represent their group and their attributes both internally and in relations with other groups, especially in a context where collective identity is important. As a way of creating a coherent category people identify similarities between people that are regarded as belonging to the same group. In this process differences between members of the in-group, and members of out-groups, are emphasized. People often favor in-group attributes over out-group attributes, and glorifies the prototype character of the group, especially in a context of competition. Group character and the prototype is however flexible and context specific; if the context changes, so does the prototype and the group identification (Hogg, 2006:118). Self-categorization reduces uncertainty since social self-categorization assimilates the self to the social prototype and to the subjective group attributes. Hogg argues that:

“a simple, clearly focused and unambiguously prescriptive prototype may be more effective in reducing uncertainty than a complex, vague, prescriptively unclear and dissensual prototype; the latter is only of limited use in regulating cognition and behavior in unambiguous ways that confer subjective certainty. If people cannot identify or form a satisfactory prototype, they may be unlikely to self-categorize to reduce uncertainty” (Hogg, 2000:241).

Clearly defined prototypes reduce uncertainty if they address the specific context, and a clear and stable prototype is dependent on in-group homogenization and intergroup differentiation (Hogg, 2000:241).

Leaders and authorities are by definition highly prototypical group members and are important for the collective understanding of the social identity. Weak or inconclusive leaders and authorities can destabilize and undermine a stable collective identity, thus influencing people's readiness to self-categorize and adopt a collective identity. Leaders also risk to gradually become distanced from the group. In such a case an intergroup relationship is developed between the leaders and the rest of the group. Leaders are understood not as a part

of the group but as an “other”, which may undermine the experienced group prototype, and influence the understanding of the collective identity (Hogg, 2000:246).

### 2.2.3 Social Comparison

The formation of identity is based on comparison since self-categorization is based on comparison. People strive for a positive identity in comparison with other groups, and if they experience a negative identity in the evaluation with other groups, they use different strategies to reach a more positive identity. Intergroup comparison and behavior serves the need to establish or defend a position of superiority towards other groups, which creates a positive identity (Kessler and Mummendey, 2008:298). Identity is always relational and reflexive, therefore competition and comparison among groups is necessary in the development of a group identity. Since identity is based in relation to other groups and actors, it is important for me in this thesis to understand and explain relevant actors the participants experience. Without understanding relevant actors, it is impossible to analyze the process of identity formation. Groups create, from the comparison with others, values and characteristics that differentiate them from other groups (Wetherell, 1996:213). In-group favoring: “serves to protect, enhance, preserve, or achieve a positive social identity for members of the group” (Tajfel, 1982:24). Groups compete with each other over status and prestige, and the competition creates, at least in some contexts, a collective feeling of belonging, and a biased understanding of the world (Hogg, 2006:113).

Categories like gender, race and class are not just a way of categorizing people, it is also a hierarchical power structure determining people’s possibilities in society, and how resources are distributed in society. A group’s status is always in relation to others, and one group’s domination is dependent on someone else’s subordination (Newman, 2007:37-38). Discriminated and subordinated groups do often develop a stronger in-group bias than what can be found in dominant groups (Tajfel, 1982:19) and a strong social identity is also often connected to a strong in-group bias and out-group discrimination (Huddy, 2001:145).

When acting as group members, people have a need for a positive social identity, which motivate positive differentiation from other groups. Discrimination is one strategy but not the only one. Social subordination motivates strategies to reach a positive identity. Minority groups are often more occupied with the collective identity, and at the same time, they

experience less positive effects of their membership. Power relations exist between all groups in society and are hence important for how people understand their collective identity, and the relevance of the identity (Simon and Trötschel, 2008:104-105). Depending on the context and peoples readiness to adopt a collective identity, people and groups use different strategies when they are confronted with a negative social identity:

1. One strategy is to accept the negative social identity and perceive the subordination as legitimate. This strategy is most common when the dominant group is extremely dominant over time and its ideologies are socially hegemonic (Wetherell, 1996:214).

2. Another strategy is social mobility. Social mobility refers to when individuals within a group strive to switch group, or adapt to the dominant group. This happens independently from the group and is an individual strategy based on interpersonal behavior instead of intergroup behavior. The individuals distance themselves from group attributes and characteristics and instead take over characteristics of the dominant group (Wetherell, 1996:215-216).

3. A third strategy is to change the social belief structure. The strategy is a collective group strategy where people make efforts to change the group hierarchy and challenge the structure. The social identity becomes salient in this context and more important than the personal identity (Wetherell, 1996:216).

4. The fourth strategy is social creativity. Social creativity is when people re-evaluate and create new criteria for the evaluation and competition between groups. It changes the nature of the comparison. Attributes that before were perceived as negative may be revaluated and get a positive meaning (Wetherell, 1996:216, Kessler and Mummendey, 2008:299).

#### **2.2.4 Identity Strategies**

Strategies to change an experienced negative identity can be both individual and collective, and take different directions dependent on the social context. Individual strategies refer to when a person tries to change or improve the own position by leaving, physically or psychologically, the disadvantaged group. Collective group strategies on the other hand focus on changing the experienced negative collective identity. The collective strategy often involves actions to change the perceived context and can include everything from militant

struggle to strikes or group meetings. The creation and involvement in social movements are often used as a strategy with the goal to change a situation experienced as unsatisfactory. Willingness to participate in collective action is influenced by the expected value of the collective outcome, specifically what can be achieved by the collective action. People who feel, or believe that collective struggle is a possible solution to a negative situation are more likely to participate in collective action than people who perceive that they have no or little possibility to change a situation and transform a negative identity (Simon, Loewy, Stürmer, Weber, Freytag, Habig, Kampmeier and Spahlinger, 1998:646-647, Veenstra and Haslam, 2000:154-157). Social identification is however more important than the expected value for involvement in social movements, according to Tajfel. Collective identification is the basic social psychological process underlying social movements (Simon, Loewy, Stürmer, Weber, Freytag, Habig, Kampmeier and Spahlinger, 1998:647). Willingness to participate in social movements (collective action) is strongly related to social identification and the willingness increases when the collective identity is strong (Simon, Loewy, Stürmer, Weber, Freytag, Habig, Kampmeier and Spahlinger, 1998:648). Willingness of participation is as dependent on association and identification with social groups and specific organizations, as it is on personality characteristics. Social identification is a crucial factor to understand collective action (Veenstra and Haslam, 2000:154-157). Empirical research conducted by Simon, Loewy, Stürmer, Weber, Freytag, Habig, Kampmeier and Spahlinger suggests that a specific activist identity is often more important for willingness to participate in collective action than the more general identification with a more abstract group, even though the activist activities aim is to improve the situation for the general group as a whole. Identification with the social movement is more important for willingness to participate than the identification with a broader category (Simon, Loewy, Stürmer, Weber, Freytag, Habig, Kampmeier and Spahlinger, 1998:650-651).

Willingness to participate in collective action is related to collective identification, both with the activist movement and with the broader category. It does however appear that: “identification with a broader, social category increases one’s willingness to participate in collective action only to the extent that it is transformed into a more politicized form of activist identification” (Simon, Loewy, Stürmer, Weber, Freytag, Habig, Kampmeier and Spahlinger, 1998:656). Individual’s willingness to participate in collective action is an expression of identification and commitment to the group. A person who identifies highly with a group has more reason, and is more willing to protect the collective identity than low

identifiers (Veenstra and Haslam, 2000:154-157). Veenstra and Haslam argues: “It is a person’s initial level of group identification which determines whether he or she will show solidarity in the face of threats to his or her identity or whether he or she is likely to set him- or herself apart from other group members” (Veenstra and Haslam, 2000:158) which means that high social identifiers are more keen to protect their identity collectively than low social identifiers.

Low identifiers may instead adopt individual strategies to deal with threats to identity, by distancing themselves from the group and accentuate intragroup variability instead of collective action. By representing the in-group as heterogeneous rather than homogeneous, low identifiers can differentiate themselves from the group and instead emphasize individuality. It is therefore expected that when a social identity is under threat, high identifiers will fight to protect the identity while low identifiers will emphasize individuality rather than collectivity, since high identifiers have more “readiness” to adopt a collective identity. Individualization is a strategy to reduce uncertainty if the collective identity is perceived as unstable. An individual identity becomes salient when the individual identity is perceived as more stable than a collective identity, since it in such a case is a more beneficial strategy to reduce uncertainty (Veenstra and Haslam, 2000:158). These differences are however not chronic and fully individual but relate to the subjective understanding of reality and the broader context. Direct confrontation and threats from an out-group may increase the willingness to participate in action and increase social identification even among low-identifiers. A context of direct threat to the in-group may hence increase social categorization, even among low identifiers, which shows the importance of context for social identification and self-categorization (Veenstra and Haslam, 2000:168). It is however apparent that reference to conflict alone does not automatically increase people’s collective identity, it may even decrease people’s feeling of belonging to a group and enhance individuality. Conflict can increase the strength of the collective identity, but it can also divide a group depending on the context and people’s readiness to adopt a collective identity (Veenstra and Haslam, 2000:169).

### 2.2.5 Context and Salient Identities

The social identity perspective emphasizes the importance of context in the formation of categories and identity, since categorization and identification always is contextual and subjective. People seek categories, both for the self and for others, that can explain a situation out of the person's subjective expectations and beliefs, and the understanding of a specific context (Hogg, 2006:119). In-group identity, and self-understanding, is flexible and context dependent, which means that the group identity is described, understood and exercised different in different situations, and for different purposes (Tajfel, 1982:8).

One of the key issues for understanding social identity is identity salience. According to the self-categorization theory, identity salience is a: "joint function of the person's readiness to adopt a particular identity and the identity's social contextual fit" (Simon and Trötschel, 2008:106). The salient identity becomes salient as an effect of the characteristics of the person, and the person's understanding of the social context. According to Oakes, identities are: "emergent, context-specific outcomes of the interaction between the perceiver and social reality, as expressed through the categorization process" (Oakes, 2002:815). The contextual dependence of identity means that an identity can be highly labile, but that does not mean it must change at all times (Oakes, 2002:817). In theory, all identities are flexible and changeable, but in reality some identities are more stable over time and context, due to a stable social reality and social norms. According to Turner: "the same general processes that predict variation under some conditions also predict stability under others" (Turner, 1999:31). Since social reality and social norms are both part of the identity process; what makes identity fluid is also what can make it stable (Oakes, 2002:816-817). Self-categorization is a process of comparison, interaction, knowledge and expectations, and the outcome in different situations can be stable and similar. Groups and cultures do not change their values at a daily basis, and these values have implications on the individual's motives, which constrains variation. Similarly, general social contexts do rarely change over night, which can create stability (Turner, 1999:31). The self can be experienced as stable, but it is due to stability in the self-categorization process rather than the existence of a stable core identity (Simon and Trötschel, 2008:108).

In reality only one category, or one identity, is seldom salient, but many at the same time. These different salient identities interact with each other, and at times even compete. In every situation, there are several competing ways of identifying oneself, and the process of self-

categorization is a process that creates meaning in social contexts. The salience of identity is based on the subjective understanding of the social context (Oakes, 2002:818-819). Which identities become salient in a specific context is subjective since the understanding of the situation is subjective. The subjective mind is however formed and influenced by social categories; therefore the social and the personal can never be totally separated (Oakes, 2002:820-821).

Identities are not completely decided by context. Instead, identity is formed in the relation between individual features and the social context. The kind of identity used in a situation to represent the self and others do, according to Turner: “vary with one’s motives, values and expectations, one’s background knowledge and theories, and the social context within which comparison takes place” (Turner, 1999:14). The result of the in-group identification is dependent on the context, and the status difference between the groups. The social identity perspective does not suggest any simple positive relationship, for instance that a strong in-group bias automatically leads to discrimination. It rather suggests a complex, possible relationship, since in-group identification is individually subjective and not general for all people in a given group (Turner, 1999:21). The identification with a collective identity does not mean that the collective identity is stable and always dominant; it means that the collective identity is salient in that specific situation and might be of small relevance in other situations. In a discussion concerning the conflict with Israel, a Palestinian engineer might have a strong collective identity as Palestinian, while in a discussion with other engineers, the Palestinian identity is irrelevant. When and how a collective identity is salient might however be an indication of how people construct their identity and reflect the centrality of the collective identity in the understanding of the self. People do have different “readiness” to adopt or use different identities in specific contexts, and peoples “readiness” to adopt the collective identity is an indicator of their understanding of the collective identity in the social context. There is especially a big difference between how high social identifiers and low social identifiers react in different situations, which has been described in the previous section (Turner, 1999:23). People are members of many different social groups, but not all of them are salient at the same time. Identity salience is a function of people’s readiness to adopt an identity, and how that identity fits people’s self-definition in a given social context. People’s readiness is formed by their experiences, expectations, goals and values, and if an identity becomes salient is dependent on how people experience that a collective or individual identity fits the social context (Simon and Trötschel, 2008:106-107).

## 2.3 Reflections on the Social Identity Perspective

The social identity perspective has been criticized for not making any distinction between groups and categories. According to Rabbie, Schot and Visser, a distinction between groups and categories can be made, where a group is a unit that can act as a unit and can be acted upon like a unit, while a category is a collection of individuals with one or more common attributes. A category is an abstract assumption while a social group is connected to a concrete feeling of belonging based on personal relations (Rabbie, Schot and Visser, 1989:172). I agree with the argument that there is a difference between groups and categories, since groups are based on interpersonal relationships, and a feeling of a local community, while categories are based on more abstract features. In my opinion, it can however be problematic to make a clear distinction between groups and categories, even with the definitions above. The abstract notion of being Palestinian and connected to people in different parts of the world can be the basis of a coherent local community which can act as a unit. The basis for the coherent local community is however still a common abstract Palestinian ethnicity. The self-categorization theory's levels of inclusiveness might be more useful and explanatory than a differentiation between groups and categories, since a Palestinian local community can be perceived as a subgroup with a lower level of inclusiveness than the more general and inclusive Palestinian group, who for its part is less inclusive than the Arab category.

The social identity perspective has also been criticized for being a theory so abstract it can explain everything, and therefore nothing. Since the social identity perspective emphasize the essential importance of context in explaining and understanding a phenomenon, there can be no natural or general explanations that are applicable in all situations at all times. In my opinion, the social identity perspective is a useful theory, but if using the perspective it is extremely important to understand and explain the social context people experience, since the social context is the basis of the outcome. The experienced social context explains why people act like they do in specific situations, and the experienced social context also explains how people define themselves and others. Without understanding and defining the subjective social context people experience, it is impossible to understand and explain why people act the way they do by using the social identity perspective. The perspective explains the process of identity formation, and if the social context people experience is explained the social

identity perspective is useful. The focus on context is not a weakness but a strength, since an analysis using the social identity perspective is an analysis of the social context people experience. The social identity perspective looks at the principles of the phenomenon of identity formation in relation to group processes; namely the process, discourses, and structures surrounding the notion of identity. Although identity is always contextual, to be able to theorize and hence analyze data, the process of identity formation must be understood in a theoretical way, or else it is impossible to interpret empirical data. The social context only explains *how* people experience identity, but by analyzing the experienced social context theoretically, the social identity perspective can explain *why* people react as they do in the experienced context.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Qualitative Research**

This thesis is a qualitative study with the purpose of deepening the understanding of which actors that influence Palestinians' experience of their collective identity as Palestinians. The purpose is not to create measurable statistical data used to explain and generalize about the Palestinian population as a whole; the purpose is to create a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (collective Palestinian identity), and to interpret the meaning of the collective identity in people's social world. A deeper context dependent understanding can be gained through qualitative research and qualitative analysis. Through qualitative research, it is possible to investigate specific attitudes and behavior in relation to the social context, and to understand the logic and relation between behaviors, attitudes, and the social context (Kvale, 1997:98-99). Using the social identity perspective to analyze the empirical data, the data must focus on explaining the experienced social context since the experienced social context is the basis of analysis. By using qualitative research, which focuses on understanding a social context, it is possible to analyze the collected data theoretically.

Qualitative research focuses on the understanding and interpretation of a social world. Social action must be understood from within the social context, because the experienced social context can explain social action. The social context does also provide events with meaning (Hollis, 1994:147, 151). Values, morale and attitudes are social constructions which are flexible, and both subjective and socially created. Therefore, there is no big truth out there a researcher can reveal. The social constructions can instead say something about the social context, and people's understanding and interpretations of the world around them and the structures influencing the interpretation (Mason, 2002:226). The focus of qualitative research is on the dynamics of processes, and the understanding of how people construct and give meaning to their experiences and the world around them (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002:199).

### **3.2 The Interpretive Paradigm and the Hermeneutic Perspective**

Researchers work within paradigms, and the paradigm influence the whole research process, from how the research question is formulated to how the data is interpreted. A paradigm is

according to Denzin and Lincoln: “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:245, quoted in Bailey, 2007:50). This thesis works within the interpretive paradigm, which is one of the most influential paradigms within qualitative research. According to the interpretive perspective, there is not one single reality, but multiple ones, and the understanding of reality is also multiple, subjective and contextual. The interpretive perspective emphasizes social relationships, culture, history and context. “The researcher becomes interested in the meanings, symbols, beliefs, ideas, and feelings given or attached to objects, events, activities, and others by participants in the setting” (Bailey, 2007:53). Interpretive research focuses on how social structures are created, maintained, developed and destroyed, and aims at understanding particular forms of social structures (Williams, 2002:125-126). The goal of the interpretive research is to gain understanding of the participants’ experiences and their understanding of the world, and the meaning they attach to events, processes, and phenomenon, which is in line with the purpose of this thesis; namely to gain understanding of Palestinian people’s experiences of the world, and how they construct categories and the understanding of the self (Bailey, 2007:53).

In order to collect data for this thesis I used a hermeneutic approach, and the collected data was also analyzed hermeneutically through the hermeneutic circle which will be described later. The hermeneutic perspective works within the interpretive paradigm, and focuses especially on interpretation and meaning, which makes it suitable for my research. Hermeneutics is a theory of understanding and interpretation of expression, experience and behavior. According to Heidegger, one of the main hermeneutic theorists; hermeneutics is essentially about ontology and deals with the fundamental issue of man’s being in the world. Understanding is not something people do or do not, it is a way of being, and a fundamental part of being human. People’s actions and behavior is based in their unconscious understanding of the world. The unconscious understanding and categorization of the world can be made conscious through interpretation. Interpretation can reveal the meaning of expressions, objects and phenomena, and reveal the structures providing these with meaning (Ramberg and Gjesdal, 2009). The hermeneutic understanding hence focuses on the interpretation of meaning. “The purpose of hermeneutical interpretation is to obtain a valid and common understanding of the meaning of a text” according to Kvale (Kvale, 1996:46). Texts concerns not only written text, but also include discourses and action, and verbal data (Kvale, 1996:46). Using a hermeneutic approach is a way of interpreting human activity to understand the meaning attached to the activity (Kvale, 1996:47).

### 3.3 Qualitative Research Interview

To collect data for my research, I conducted interviews with 10 Palestinians living in the West Bank in the occupied Palestinian territories. I chose to collect data through interviews because: “Interviewing provides a way to uncover the motives, meanings and conflicts experienced by individuals as they respond to social and interpersonal situations and conflicts” (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002:215). The purpose with the qualitative interviews I conducted was to create an understanding of how the Palestinians I interviewed experienced their social context, and to interpret the meaning they attached to actors, groups and events (Kvale, 1997:98-100). The purpose with my interviews was not to search for specific situations and facts, but the participants’ own experience of a situation, and the meaning they attached to their experience (Kvale, 1997:35).

#### 3.3.1 Interview Technique

To collect data for this thesis, I conducted semi-structured interviews, which is a common interview technique within the interpretive paradigm (Bailey, 2007:100). The focus during the interviews with the participants was on understanding their subjective experience and understanding of their collective identity as Palestinians. The subjective meaning the participants attached to the collective identity was in focus, not measurable facts or the truthfulness of their stories. The technique of using semi-structured interviews provided me with the possibility to understand a complex phenomenon (identity formation) through analysis of individual cases (Lantz, 2007:30-31, 34).

The interviews with the participants took the form of conversations concerning the interviewees’ social world. Through the conversation with the participants, I could learn about them and understand how they experience the world. Instead of being a passive and neutral interrogator, I took an active role during the interviews, discussing different topics with the participants. The conversation between me and the interviewees was later transformed to text when I transcribed the recorded interviews. By having a conversation with the interviewees

instead of just asking question, I as a researcher am not only involved in the analysis of the data, I am also involved in the creation of the data (Kvale, 1997:49-50).

Following the methodology of the semi-structured interview, the interview guide used during the interviews consisted of themes and suggestions on relevant questions, rather than prepared explicit questions (Interview Guide in Appendix). Prepared questions were used, but the form and order of the questions changed dependent on the answers and the context during the interview. Questions were also added or removed dependent on the development of the individual interview (Kvale, 1997:118). The gain with using semi-structured interviews is that they provided me with some level of flexibility during the interviews, but at the same time did the interview guide ensure structure. By using the interview guide I could ensure that the conversation stayed on topic but at the same time enabled the interviewees' with the possibility to speak freely (Bailey, 2007:100). My interviews focused initially on different events concerning the Palestinian situation and which actors they themselves defined as important during these events. The events discussed were: the second intifada, the peace process, the terrorist attacks in USA in 2001 and the following wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Palestinian elections in 2006 and the following civil war, the Gaza war in 2008-2009, and the Freedom Flotilla (Ship to Gaza). I chose events the participants themselves had experienced in their lifetime since I was interested in how they reacted to the events, and if the events had any implications on their lives at the time. How they experienced the situation and which actors they defined as important for the situation indicates their categorization and understanding of the world, and hence the formation of identity. The different levels of the events, both global and more local, could also reveal different levels of identification which is interesting in relation to the theoretical framework and the different levels of inclusiveness in group identification. The interviews also consisted of a part more specifically focusing on identity. By defining groups, both in-groups and out-groups, the collective group identification, based on comparison with other groups, can be analyzed. This part of the interviews brought up both external, international actors and Palestinian identity in a more concrete way. By focusing on experienced events rather than beforehand defined actors, I provided the participants with the possibility to define for themselves the experienced important actors. The actors were not defined by me, since my definition is unimportant for the research. The participants' subjective definition and experience of actors provided me with the possibility to analyze the meaning they attached to these actors in relation to their collective identity.

### 3.3.2 Sample

To collect empirical data, I conducted 10 interviews with Palestinians living in the West Bank. As a student at Lund University, I contacted people working at Birzeit University in Ramallah and at Bethlehem University in Bethlehem before arriving to Palestine. They promised to help me get in contact with students I could interview. Once starting to interview students at Birzeit, they helped me get in contact with other students at the same university that were willing to participate. In Bethlehem, people working at the university were more unwilling to help, and instead I had to get in contact with students through personal contacts. Because of the nature of my contacts, most of the participants in the research are students or former students at the universities. I also contacted a person in Sweden who had been involved in a project in Palestine. Through her, I got in contact with a Palestinian woman who helped me to find people willing to be interviewed. The criteria I had for the people in the study were that they had to be comfortable in speaking English, and also they could not be experts in the area of research, namely identity formation. Expertise knowledge in this area could have contaminated the data since the participants in such a case would have been aware of how processes influence identity. Since the interviews were conducted in English the number of possible participants was reduced, thus biasing the sample. However, the possibility to conduct the interviews in English, not using a translator, enabled me to participate in the interview process to a higher degree, and to interpret the answers directly, without gatekeepers involvement in the collection of the data. The possibility to conduct interviews without translators also created a more personal environment during the interviews, which benefits personal interviews. Using translators could also have made it more difficult to keep the participants' identity confidential, and the confidentiality would have been dependent on the translator.

Due to the limited numbers of interviews, no conclusions of the general Palestinian view can be made, and that is neither the purpose of the thesis. The result can however shed light over how processes and structures influence people's collective identity as Palestinians. The interviews were conducted with six women and four men from different parts of the West Bank, and with different backgrounds. The sample was not chosen with the aim of creating a representative image, but instead to gain knowledge of how actors and structures influence people's relationship to their collective identity as Palestinians.

### 3.4 Method

Qualitative data is always related to context, and is always subjective and biased. Because of that, there is no strong, natural method for analyzing qualitative data; the choice of method is dependent on the purpose of the research (Lantz, 2007:97). By analyzing the collected empirical data from the interviews within the social identity perspective, focusing on how the individual experiences described in the interviews are connected to the social (collective) identity, the empirical and concrete interview was transformed to theory (Kvale, 1997:194). All interpretation and understanding of the empirical data was influenced by the theory of identity formation on which the research depends upon (Mason, 2002:225). The purpose of my theoretical framework, how social identity is formed, was to provide a tool for analyzing how the interviewees' experiences and understandings of events and phenomena, which are described in a concrete and empirical way, have influenced their identity. The concrete and empirical description of their social context is understood through the theoretical understanding of identity formation.

The purpose with the interviews was to gain understanding of the meaning people attach to their collective identity. The purpose was not to collect empirical facts but to gain understanding of how the participants structure their world. For my research, it was not important if what the participants told me were true or not, but why they understood it the way they did. The interviewees were perceived as representatives of meaning rather than informants. The important question analyzing the data was not what a specific person experienced, but why he or she experienced it the way he or she did, which is explained through the social identity perspective (Kvale, 1997:197-199).

#### 3.4.1 The Hermeneutic Analysis

To analyze the data collected during the interviews, I used the method of hermeneutic analysis. The recorded interviews were fully transcribed, and the transcriptions were used as the base for the analysis. In a hermeneutic analysis, the researcher interprets text to gain understanding that goes beyond what is explicitly said to develop structures and relations. The

structures and relations are not explicitly visible but can be interpreted through theoretical analysis, in my case an analysis based on the theoretical framework of the social identity perspective. The interpretation of what is said in the text should reveal a deeper meaning than the actual text (Kvale, 1997:182). The purpose with my study is not to investigate and describe the individual person's experience, but through their descriptions of their experiences and understandings develop a broader interpretation of the meaning connected to the collective Palestinian identity (Kvale, 1997:191). A hermeneutic interpretation of a text means entering the hermeneutic circle. According to Heidegger, the hermeneutic circle is the relation and interplay between the understanding of the self and the understanding of the world. The self can only be perceived through the social world, and the social world can only be perceived through the self, which is coherent with the framework of the social identity perspective (Ramberg and Gjesdal, 2009).

Using the hermeneutic circle is a way of analyzing a text and the researcher does so by moving through three methodological steps: the naïve reading, the structural analysis, and the comprehensive understanding (interpreted whole). The benefit of the hermeneutic analysis is the constant movement between the more method focused explanation, and the less method focused understanding. In the *naïve reading*, the text is first read several times with the purpose of getting an understanding of the text as a whole, to make the text "speak" to the researcher. The initial naïve analysis is almost always changed, more or less, by the structural analysis, but the naïve understanding of the text also guides the structural analysis. The *structural analysis* is the methodical part of the interpretation. There are several kinds of structural analysis, and I used a thematic analysis to analyze my data, which seeks to identify themes and abstract concepts. A theme is a pattern of meaning that can be found in different parts of a text, or in different texts. The thematic analysis specific focus on meaning makes it beneficial for my analysis, since the main theme of my thesis is the meaning of a phenomenon. The themes are initially not described as abstract concepts, but rather as short condensed descriptions, focusing on meaning (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004:149-150). Bailey defines themes as "recurring patterns, topics, viewpoints, emotions, concepts, events, and so on" (Bailey, 2007:153). Themes can overlap each other, and can have different degrees in relation to each other (Bailey, 2007:153). A structural thematic analysis can be made in different ways. Initially, I started my structural analysis by creating meaning units of the text, which means a part of the text, long or short, that convey just one meaning. The meaning units were then read through and reflected upon in relation to the naïve understanding. The

meaning units were condensed and described in everyday words, and the essential meaning of the meaning unit was described. Similarities and differences between the units were also regarded. By analyzing the meaning units, how they were connected to each other and if they formed a coherent picture, themes were created out of the meaning units. The themes were also structured dependent on if they were to be considered main-themes or sub-themes (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004:149-150). In relation to my research question and the theoretical framework, main-themes were created on the basis of relevant actors, and then analyzed in the context of identity formation. A good hermeneutic interpretation should form a coherent pattern, something that were created through the analysis of the meaning units and the creation of themes, and how these themes were connected to each other. The themes were also analyzed in the context of the process of identity formation outlined in the theoretical framework. Reality is complex and contradictory, but structures exist, and can be interpreted through the finding of coherent patterns, a pattern that was created through the structuring of themes (Kvale, 1997:58). When the themes formed a coherent pattern that could be explained by the theoretical framework they formed a *comprehensive understanding*, which is the last step in the hermeneutic analysis. A comprehensive understanding means that the phenomenon is explained in relation to the research questions (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004:150-151).

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

All the interviews I conducted in Palestine were completely voluntary for the participants, and no pressure were put on the participants to participate in the research. The participants were neither rewarded economically or in any other way for their participation in the research. Before the interviews started I also informed the interviewees that they had the right to stop or cancel the interview at any time if they wanted to. They were also provided with the possibility to contact me later on if they felt they would like to withdraw from the research. One person emphasized the importance of the person's identity not being reviled, and I offered the person the possibility to read through the part of the thesis where the person's interview was being used, so the person could approve before publishing. After the analysis I contacted him and offered him the opportunity to read the parts of the thesis where his interview was being used, and he then informed me that I could proceed with his participation in the research. Before starting the interviews I also explained the general purpose of the

paper, and explained the personal focus of the questions. I also explained that if they felt that some questions became too personal, they could choose not to answer, or to stop the interview.

The interviewees' identity is confidential, and therefore their names and other revealing information has been changed or left out. The identity of the participants is only known by me and will not be revealed to any other person. The interviewees were also informed about this before the interviews. The Palestinian situation is complicated and involves many different actors, and the main reason for the confidentiality is to protect the interviewees. Since the interviews focused on personal information and experiences, the confidentiality were also crucial in providing an environment of trust so the persons dared to be personal and could speak freely during the interviews.

All interviews were audio taped, and the tapes were later used to transcribe the interviews. Before starting the interviews I asked the interviewees for approval of recording the interview, and all 10 of them approved. The tapes of the interviews are confidential and will not be handed out to any other person, since the tapes can reveal information about the persons' identity. The tapes will be erased to protect the participants after the thesis is finished.

After the interviews, the participants were provided the possibility to ask me questions or come with comments concerning the interview situation. The participants were also provided with my contact information after the interview so that they could contact me with questions, or discuss their participation in the research. I also made it clear that they had the possibility to contact me regarding any topic concerning my research, and had the possibility to withdraw from the research at any time before publishing.

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1 Relevant Actors (Significant Others)**

One of the aims with this thesis is to identify relevant actors for the formation of the participants' collective identity as Palestinians. Since identity according to the social identity perspective is based in the understanding and categorization of others, it is crucial to identify which actors are relevant for the participants in the social context of being Palestinian. Without understanding the actors relevant for the participants, and how the actors are relevant, it is impossible to analyze people's reaction to the social context which influences their identity as Palestinians. My analysis of the conducted interviews hence focused on which actors the participants themselves identified had influenced their understanding of the world and their place in the world as Palestinians, which according to the social identity perspective is the basis for identity formation. The definition of relevant actors is also a way of explaining the social context the participants experience. Since my thesis focus on how actors influence people's relation to a collective Palestinian identity, the social context consists of how they experience different actors, and how they themselves define them. It is crucial to explain how the participants experience the social context, since in using the social identity perspective; the analysis is based on the participants' experiences of the social context. Identity formation is based in the experienced social context, and therefore the experienced social context must be the basis of analysis.

In the analysis three types of significant others occurred frequently: international actors, Arab governments, and Palestinian actors. These three types of significant others appeared to have had great influence on the participants understanding of their place in the world as Palestinians, and they will be explained and discussed in relation to identity formation.

#### **4.1.1 International Actors**

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is a regional conflict situated in the Middle East, but it also has a global dimension. International agencies and bodies are involved and present in Palestine and the most powerful countries in the world have in different ways been involved in the conflict. The participants in my study made however clear that the international

involvement in the conflict is not experienced as neutral. As Palestinians, they feel no or little support, and they experience that international action support Israel rather than Palestine in the conflict. During an interview at Birzeit University outside Ramallah, Sawsan (all names as pseudonyms), a Palestinian woman working at the university told me: *“I feel that most of the time, the international action, or intervention is supporting the Israelis.”* (personal communication, 11 April, 2011). Many of the Palestinians I interviewed for this thesis expressed a feeling of being abandoned by the big actors in the world, and when it matters; these international actors defend Israel rather than defending Palestine. The Palestinians I interviewed also told me that they experience a feeling of being treated differently than Israelis by the international community. According to Fadi, a young Palestinian man studying in Bethlehem, the unequal treatment of Palestinians is especially problematic since some of the actors that are perceived of treating Palestinians differently are also main actors in the peace process and should therefore be neutral. Fadi told me, regarding the big international actors involvement in the peace process; *“they are always with the Israelis. Israel's side. If you want to go in a peaceful way, and have good conditions here, you have to be not with this or not with this (showing two different parts with his hands). You have to be 50% conditions”* (personal communication, 23 April, 2011).

The Palestinian conflict with Israel is always present for the participants, and all of them defined the conflict as an unequal conflict. Israel is experienced as significantly stronger than the Palestinian part, and without external support it is impossible to equalize the relation with Israel. The power balance between Israel and Palestine is big, and since they experience no support from international actors, or even a neutral positioning, they define the peace process as impossible and dead. According to Mariam, a housewife from Ramallah, the world is aware of the unequal situation but despite the awareness does not act: *“But I feel like, they see what is going on. They know. The whole world sees what is going on here, I don't know why they are not acting. Like to put some pressure on the Israelis. I feel that the Israelis, they don't care about nobody. They don't care”* (personal communication, 12 April, 2011).

The perception of feeling no support by international actors in general is strong among the people I interviewed, but they also expressed a more specific disappointment towards the U.S., and their support of Israel, which they describe as problematic since the U.S. is an important actor in the region and in the peace process. The U.S. is described not as a neutral actor and a part of the solution, but rather as a part of the problem. Ibrahim, a student at Bethlehem University described his view on the U.S. relationship to Israel: *“How many states*

*is it in USA, 50? They say that Israel is the 51th. So here Israel make Americans policy....”* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011). The perception that the American government support Israel does however not only affect the participants’ perception of the U.S. as an actor at a high political level, it also affects their perception of American agencies as actors within Palestine. Nisreen, a student at Birzeit University who is active in a grass root organization promoting boycott as a political tool, expressed it like this:

*“....there is a boycott, people they boycott USaid and projects from USaid. If they are funded from USaid, sometimes people refuse to work.*

*Researcher: Because of American politics?*

*Nisreen: Yes because of American politics, and because they are supporting Israel. And a majority of the projects funded by USaid they are also funding Israeli projects.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

The people I interviewed did not only express a feeling of actions taken by international actors support Israel, they also expressed a feeling of being treated differently. According to them atrocities against Palestinians are perceived differently than atrocities against other people, which create a feeling of being dehumanized as Palestinians. According to Sawsan: *“international agencies talk about humanity, and human rights, and when it comes to Palestine, all those concepts, I feel that they are thrown on the ground, as they are nothing, as we are not human.”* (personal communication, 11 April, 2011).

Nisreen expressed a similar feeling. In her opinion Palestinian lives are not as highly valued as other people’s lives. International rights should be global but international rights are not applied when it comes to the situation in Palestine. According to her, international rights do not seem to include Palestinians. Concerning the Gaza war in 2008-2009, she told me:

*“We are talking about, you know, now they are talking about animal rights, they are talking about, you know, they are talking about. Especially the Western, they are talking about rights, and here in Palestine we don’t have the basic rights, about living and feel secure so... So there is a big gap between countries and..... Yes it feels shocking.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

This feeling of being abandoned by the governments and actors in the world and not being treated like human beings was expressed in many different situations; namely concerning the war in Gaza, the peace process, and when it comes to Israeli settlements. Razan, a woman studying at Birzeit University but originally from Hebron, expressed the belief that if the international community, especially the U.S. and Europe, would pressure Israel instead of

supporting them, the situation could change. Instead she feels that the Palestinians are abandoned by the world, and claims it is a fact that no one supports them in the conflict:

*“This is not a feeling, this is a fact. No one support the Palestinians. We don’t need the money, we don’t need the financial support, we need real support of our rights, not financial support. For example, from 2000, from the beginning of the second intifada Israel didn’t stop building settlements, they didn’t stop anything. So Israel take our rights, and no one say stop. If the world told Israel to stop the violence, they would stop, because Israel can’t deal with the whole world. Israel is a small country. You know, Israel have big power, but USA for example, and Europe, they are the first class of the world, and if they would tell Israel to stop the violence, I think that they would stop. But actually no one say that to the Israeli, and Israel don’t care what anyone say because they have the power, and Palestinians don’t have any power. So actually we feel that our issues are in the backwards, not the forwards.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

The feeling of being mistreated by the world is not only expressed concerning the conflict with Israel, but also in the context of domestic Palestinian politics. In 2006, an election was held in Palestine, an election where Hamas succeeded. The election was however followed by an international boycott of Hamas. Out of the Palestinians I interviewed, no one expressed explicit support for Hamas, but they still felt that the international boycott of Hamas after the election in 2006 was wrong, and that international actors interfered with the domestic Palestinian politics. According to Nisreen should the Palestinian people have the right to decide for themselves, even if she did not support their choice:

*“I think that it’s time for the country to decide for itself. Like people can choose, they don’t need international interaction, you know. That is how countries change, and how people change, their point of view, when they see in reality what happens. Not when internationals comes and try to change everything, make them weaker and stronger, it’s not their business.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

According to her, it is not Palestinians who are in charge of the domestic politics, but Western actors: *“I think that they been always in charge, how do you say it, in Palestinian politics.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011). Ibrahim expressed that the international interference in Palestinian domestic politics not only has undermined the trust for international actors among Palestinians, it has also influenced the situation within Palestine and has contributed to a more divided and hostile domestic environment within Palestine:

*“Israel with US, European Union, they cut the support, so everything became terrible, everything was against Hamas. So Hamas go to Gaza, their homeland, and take it. And now we are in problem, what is going on. So it was so shameful for Palestinians.”* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011).

Fadi explicitly expressed to me how he experiences the international positioning towards Palestine, here in the context of the peace process:

*“Researcher: How do you experience the different actors involved in the peace process, besides Israel and Palestine?”*

*Fadi: All supporting Israeli, nothing for us.*

*Researcher: And who, US, Europe or other Arab countries?”*

*Fadi: All all all. No one cares about us”* (personal communication, 23 April, 2011).

#### 4.1.2 Arab Governments

The Palestinian participants in my research expressed anger and frustration about international actors and their actions concerning the Palestinian situation. They especially expressed the feeling of Western countries supporting Israel. According to them Western countries treat Israel different than Palestine. The lack of support for Palestine in the conflict is experienced as disappointing and frustrating, and even though they think that the international actors are handling the conflict in a shameful way, they do, to some degree understand it. They see a connection among Israel, Europe, and the U.S. What they cannot understand however is how other Arab countries act, or rather do not act, in the conflict. The Arab countries lack of support is expressed as disappointing and shameful, since they are neighbors and should be on the Palestinians’ side. Sawsan expressed her feelings towards Arab governments in the context of the Gaza war in the winter 2008-2009:

*“...the biggest disappointments comes from our own expectations. I feel that the countries that live exactly near you, its peoples are living freely, they have those nonsense interests. They know nothing. And it’s not what you expect. I mean. I expects whatever from Europe, but it was a bit disappointing.”* (personal communication, 11 April, 2011).

Rula, a young woman from Ramallah also expressed the feeling of disappointment concerning how Arab governments acted during the Gaza war, and how they did not act in any way to stop it during the war: *“Ok, the Arab governments, they talked about the issue, and the support, after the war happened. They gave financial support after the war. But they should be supporting during the war. They just say words, but they don’t do anything.”* (personal communication, 13 April, 2011).

According to Fadi, there is a connection between the Arab people in the different countries. The connection between Arab people should lead to Arab support for Palestine. According to him, the reason for the lack of Arab support is connected to other international actors, since the Arab governments are perceived as being afraid of, and dependent on, the West:

*“It doesn’t matter which countries, to support us. But I think, as a priority it should have been the Arabs. Because we are from the same……. From the same origin, so they should be the first to give support, but they are giving none. They are just tails behind the big dogs.”* (personal communication, 23 April, 2011).

Razan expressed the same feeling of Arab governments being afraid of, and dependent on other international actors: *“Arab world will never, will never! Support Palestinians. Because all the Arab feel afraid, so they cannot do it.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011). Huda, a young woman from a suburb outside Bethlehem also expressed the perception that Arab governments are non-supportive due to fear of more powerful international actors, especially the U.S. As a response to the question why she thinks Arab governments do not act to protect Palestinians’ rights she told me that: *“They can’t fight because they know they would lose. The Americans would attack them. There is a fear of doing something.”* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011).

### 4.1.3 Relevant Non-Governmental Actors

The people I interviewed expressed a feeling of being abandoned by governments, mainly Western and Arab, but they also made a clear distinction between governments and people living in these countries. According to Razan, Palestinians feel support from people even though their governments are not supporting the Palestinian cause. She expressed these feelings towards the Freedom Flotilla that tried to break the blockade of Gaza in 2010: *“It don’t matter, the nationality of these people that are coming to Gaza. Even if they are from Israel or from Europe, we just feel that these people are with us. It was very nice. And we feel that there is people with us.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011). On the same topic, she continued: *“We thank all the people who go to these ships to Gaza. Because they do something, and these people want to support Palestinians, and we feel so good about it.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011). According to Ibrahim, some Israelis and people from the Western world have a more balanced view on the conflict than their governments: *“Americas people, some people, European people, some European people. And some Israeli*

*people, they support us, they understand the issue, they understand the issue, from both sides, Palestinian and Israeli, not just Israel's side and not just Palestinians' side.*" (personal communication, 26 April, 2011).

There are a lot of international people present in Palestine, people who want to experience the situation for themselves, or people who come to work for different organizations working in the Palestinian territories. International people's presence in Palestine is according to the Palestinians I interviewed appreciated. Huda told me: *"Now everywhere you go you can see a foreign person in Palestine. Everywhere you go. That's good. And you can see that people are more aware what is going on, what is happening, what has happened in the past. People are more aware about it."* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011). Nisreen expressed that she even feels more connected to international activists than to other Arab friends since they make an active choice in supporting Palestinians:

*"I feel more connected, because, you know, it is more sure for me to know that any international supporter, he is leaving all his life to support a case he has never had any connection to, but Arabs sometimes, we have been raised knowing about each other, the conflict and stuff, and that means that you are already supporting the Palestinians' case."* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

Not one of the Palestinians I interviewed defined people, and especially Western people, as a significant other. These people are not described as the enemy, they are rather described as an asset to the Palestinian cause, especially the internationals engaged in the issue who come to Palestine. Most of the participants made a clear distinction between how governments act and how individuals act. They made a difference between people and state. The same goes with Arab people. They did not feel the support from Arab governments, but expressed a feeling of support from the people in the Arab countries, here expressed by Nisreen:

*"I think that all Arabs feel the same. Like there is a lot of common in culture and religion, a lot a lot, and also politically. We know from the inside that the people support each other even though the leaders have some conflict... But the people, they are completely sure about the internal support of each other."* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

Razan, who is involved in a campaign for boycotting Israeli products, also feels a strong support from people in Arab countries, especially when it comes to boycott of Israeli products: *"Arab people support. Not the governments, but the people support boycott."* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011). Despite the strong feeling of being abandoned by the governments in the world, especially Western and Arab, the participants expressed no feeling of being distanced and abandoned by people in the West and in the Arab world, they

rather expressed the opposite. Nisreen explained these feelings clearly in the context of the Freedom Flotilla: “...everybody was so happy about it and they wanted to participate and they wished they could go to Gaza, and they wished they could be with them. It was a big big support for Palestinians, to see the internationals and the Arabs. And the free march that they had in Egypt.” (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

#### 4.1.4 Palestinian Actors

Palestinian domestic politics is dominated by two actors; Fatah who controls the West Bank, and Hamas who controls Gaza. These two actors have acted in different ways to achieve an independent Palestinian state, and to control government. Fatah has preferred negotiations with the Israelis while Hamas has had a more militant approach. In 2006, elections were held in Palestine, elections that turned out to be a success for Hamas. Rula was too young to vote at the time but remembered the environment during the campaigns before the election:

*“Yes, it was peaceful unlike after. It was a democratic process, and it was in a right way here... They got the votes that they deserved. Some votes on Hamas and some votes on Fatah. And Hamas got the highest votes in Gaza, it was a reaction on what Fatah was doing there. And they got control there, and they were just looking for their own benefits, not for the people’s benefits.*

*Researcher: Fatah?*

*Rula: Yes, Fatah, and that is why people voted on Hamas”* (personal communication, 13 April, 2011).

Fatah has failed to reach peace and stability through negotiations. They are partly blamed for the failing of the peace process, since they have invested in the peace process as a possible solution to the conflict. Huda expressed that she has no confidence in any of the political leaders, not even Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of Fatah and President of Palestine:

*“Researcher: Who do you think should be involved in a peace process?*

*Huda: None of the people that exists today in the.... Um.... In the political positions now, none of them. I don’t believe in any them, even the president himself.*

*Researcher: The Palestinian leaders?*

*Huda: Yes, none of them. I think even the president himself, he is doing nothing. He is even afraid if... He is even afraid of Hamas, he can’t do, it’s not his goal. You can feel that he is not a president or a leader, he is a follower instead of a leader.”* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011).

Razan expressed that the reason for Hamas success in the elections in 2006 was due to Fatah's failure in the negotiations with Israel. According to her, the situation in Palestine has gotten worse during the peace negotiations. Fatah are partly blamed by her since they have invested in the peace negotiations with Israel as a way to improve the situation. Razan expressed that since Fatah's negotiations with Israel have only worsened the situation, people voted on Hamas in the elections:

*"Palestinian people are in two parts, Fatah and Hamas. But actually Fatah, from 1994 to 2006, they didn't do anything to support the Palestinian issue. They did the Palestinian issue bigger problem, not smaller. The negotiations with Israel, they didn't back one centimeter from our land, and they didn't let any refugees back, not one refugee could come back to Palestine. So people felt that we need another part, and maybe this part can do something. And actually Hamas, during all the intifada, I don't know the word in English, when a man goes and blow himself up..."*

*Researcher: A suicide bomber?*

*Razan: Yes. Hamas did this bombings. So actually people felt that the negotiations will never do something, so maybe violence. Because Israel is violence, and maybe violence against Israel will do something. Most of the people vote on Hamas, not Fatah because we need another part." (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).*

Fatah invested in negotiations and peace talks with Israel as a solution, something that is perceived has failed, and instead people voted for Hamas who had a more critical and militant approach towards Israel. Among the Palestinians I interviewed, Hamas was however not more trusted than Fatah mostly because they emphasize Islam as the base for their politics. Sawsan expressed skepticism towards Hamas for that reason:

*"When they were trying to convince me to elect Hamas in the university, they were trying to plead to my beliefs, to my religion, to my religious side. They were not trying to convince me in another way. And my answer always was; I'm not a religious person. I believe more in human beings. More than if this human being is Muslim or Christian, I don't care. But yes, I wasn't sure if they had the chance to succeed. Because of them, I felt afraid when they won." (personal communication, 11 April, 2011).*

Huda also mistrusted Hamas because of their Islamist ideology. She would have preferred politics based on secularism rather than religion:

*"Because, and especially Hamas, they rule based on religion. And that is an issue. You can't rule based on religion, and that's a problem, that's their biggest issue. That's why Hamas will never succeed. That's why they will never accomplish anything. Because you have to separate politics from religion." (personal communication, 26 April, 2011).*

Ibrahim also criticized Hamas violent and militaristic approach, which he did not in particular agree with, especially when Hamas motivate their violent actions through Islam: “...*they say religion and Islam Islam Islam, but Islam doesn't say these things, to kill....*” (personal communication, 26 April, 2011). Hamas approach towards Israel is more militaristic than Fatah's, and they have also used violence in the internal Palestinian conflict with Fatah that followed on the elections in 2006, where Hamas took control over Gaza. Nisreen described how the events after the election have influenced people's view of Hamas:

*“People were so happy to vote, they were so happy. I think... The Hamas won the elections, and I think that if they do it again now, maybe people will do the same. But I am not sure, especially after the things Hamas did in Gaza maybe their popularity went down.*

*Researcher: What things?*

*Nisreen: The civil war they did, before the war with Israel.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

Rula even told me that she wished the elections would never been conducted, due to the following violence: “*Hamas was preferring war and violence, so I wish that the elections had not happened.*” (personal communication, 13 April, 2011).

Both Hamas and Fatah, the two dominant political actors in Palestinian domestic politics, are mistrusted by the people I interviewed, even though they are mistrusted for different reasons. The violent conflict between the two parties following on the elections in 2006 has contributed to the non-existent trust towards Hamas and Fatah, and it has also contributed to the mistrust of the whole political system in Palestine. According to Razan, the political system, and the elections, has increased the conflict within Palestine and the gap between Palestinians: “*The community don't like the elections because it divides the Palestinians in two parts, and we don't like that.*” (personal communication, 14 April, 2011). The people I interviewed also expressed that the conflict between Fatah and Hamas is undermining the Palestinian position in relation to Israel. Palestinians should be united in the struggle against Israel instead of fighting internally. Razan wished that the Palestinian people should be more united, something she believed would increase their power in relation to Israel: “*We are Palestinians we are not Hamas or Fatah. We are Palestinian and that is what all people should feel, that we are not Hamas or we are not Fatah, we are all Palestinians. And if that happens, I think. More power to the Palestinians.*” (personal communication, 14 April, 2011). Saher, a young male student at Bethlehem University but originally from Jerusalem described

how the power balance between Palestine and Israel is increasing all the time, much due to the internal Palestinian conflict:

*“...the Israeli side is progressing and progressing but the Palestinian side is only having fights with each other, and getting weaker every year, and it makes it easier for the Israeli side to progress and just to say that we are doing peace but there is no one to do peace with on the other side because there is not one person to talk to.”* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011).

Huda expressed a similar view of how the internal struggle between Hamas and Fatah has increased Israel's power in the conflict. According to her, the domestic Palestinian conflict between Fatah and Hamas is a big reason for the Israeli continuance of occupation: *“Because now they have reached a point where they are fighting against each other. If you are fighting with each other you can't stop the Israelis from doing things to you.”* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011). Huda even blamed the internal fighting, and the political actors in Palestine, for loss of land to Israel; *“what they are doing made us, like, the way we are today. Made Israelian people take so much of our country”* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011). According to Huda, the political leaders in Fatah and Hamas, and hence the most influential Palestinian leaders, do not care about the Palestinian people, only about their own power and wealth; *“they don't care about us, they only care about themselves, to get the biggest position, and get money.”* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011). The feeling that no Palestinian party and no Palestinian leader are working for the best interest of the Palestinian people is expressed by many of the Palestinians I interviewed. They expressed the feeling that the Palestinian leaders do not represent the interests of the Palestinian people but only the interest of themselves or their political party, which of course undermines their faith in the political system in Palestine. According to Fadi, the Palestinian leaders do not care about the people at all:

*“They actually don't care about us.*

*Researcher: The Israelis?*

*Fadi: No, the Palestinian leaders. They don't care.... Israeli leaders only care about their people, they don't care about us, and our leaders they only care about money.”* (personal communication, 23 April, 2011).

The mistrust of the whole political leadership is problematic since it undermines the legitimization of the political leadership and the whole political system. According to Fadi, he

has no trust at all for the democratic political system as it is in Palestine at the moment. As a response to the question if he would vote if there was an election today, he replied:

*“No. I would vote in one way, or in one situation. If they want my vote, they have to pay. Everyone is working for money. And they say; “we will do and we will do and we will do” and they do nothing, and they get all the money and all the power and you live like a dog in the street. So if they want my vote, they have to pay.”* (personal communication, 23 April, 2011).

The Palestinians I interviewed felt that they have no leader, or no party, that can represent them, both internally and against the common enemy Israel. The mistrust of the Palestinian leaders has undermined their beliefs in the political system and their belief of the possibility of reaching peace with Israel. The mistrust of the political leaders has also undermined the belief that a positive development in Palestine can be achieved. It was the general feeling among the people I interviewed that the political system is corrupt. Palestinian political leaders and parties are not representing the Palestinian people’s interest, only their own interests.

## **4.2 Influence on Identity**

In this part of the thesis, the social identity perspective is used to understand how the social context experienced by the participants has influenced their identity. In the earlier sections of the analysis, it has been described which actors experienced as relevant in the social context of being Palestinian for the participants, hence a description of how they understand the social context and how they categorize people and actors. This part of the analysis focuses on the reaction to the experienced social context i.e., how the experienced social context has influenced their collective identity as Palestinians. Two main reactions to the experienced social context can be described, namely; normalization of the situation and an individualization of identity, and the formation of a broader activist identity and grassroots struggle. These two reactions to the experienced social context are analyzed in light of the social identity perspective.

### 4.2.1 Normalization and Individualization

When people experience a negative social identity, different strategies are used to cope or change the experienced situation. The strategies used can be either individual or collective. If a person adopt individual or collective strategies depends on the individual's "readiness" to adopt an identity, and the experienced social context. One described reaction (or strategy) to the Palestinian situation is normalization of the situation where Palestinians try to create a normal life in an abnormal situation. Sawsan described this feeling very clearly: "*...people have reached this point where they just want to live, they just want to breathe, they just want to feed their children, they just want to bring books and bags, and just want to go to school*" (personal communication, 11 April, 2011). The Palestinian people I interviewed experienced no strong Palestinian prototype they could identify with. A strong prototype is often connected to leaders and authorities in the society, but the experience of the own Palestinian leaders has rather undermined a strong prototype since they are regarded as corrupt. The trust in the Palestinian leaders is non-existent which undermines the collective prototype. The political gap between Fatah and Hamas, and the civil war between them has also undermined the feeling of a collective Palestinian society, since a strong prototype is dependent on in-group homogenization. People's inability to identify with their leaders undermines their ability to create a coherent identity as Palestinians. Leaders and authorities are by definition high prototypical group members, and as quoted earlier in the theoretical framework:

"a simple, clearly focused and unambiguously prescriptive prototype may be more effective in reducing uncertainty than a complex, vague, prescriptively unclear and dissensual prototype; the latter is only of limited use in regulating cognition and behavior in unambiguous ways that confer subjective certainty. If people cannot identify or form a satisfactory prototype, they may be unlikely to self-categorize to reduce uncertainty" (Hogg, 2000:241).

None of the people I interviewed experienced a clear and coherent Palestinian prototype, especially none of their leaders were described as a positive Palestinian prototype. The experience of a weak or negative prototype of course influences their likeliness to self-categorize as Palestinians to reduce uncertainty. The prototype they experience is definitely complex and unclear which makes it unfit to reduce uncertainty. Since the prototype is unfit to reduce uncertainty the strategy of strengthening the collective identity as Palestinians is not relevant and because of that not used to create a stable identity.

Beside the negative description of Palestinian actors, the participants in my research neither felt any support from other Arab leaders or governments. Arab governments were described as non-supportive since they are afraid of Western governments and organizations. Due to the experienced non-supportive Arab leaders, the Palestinians I interviewed could not identify with other Arab leaders to reduce uncertainty. The embracing of an Arab identity is because of that neither regarded as a useful strategy to reach a positive identity. The identification as Palestinian or Arab is not useful to reduce uncertainty in the social context the participants experience. The uncertain context does not create a strong collective feeling of being Palestinian, since they experience no prototype and do not experience any benefits in promoting a collective identification. The strategy of collectively enhancing the identity as Palestinians to reduce uncertainty and create a positive identity is not experienced as possible, and the collective identity as Palestinians is because of that not salient in the experienced social context.

The internal Palestinian conflict also weakens the possibility for a strong social identification. Group identification is strengthened by a feeling of common fate and shared goals, a feeling that is absent among the people I interviewed. Rather than experiencing a strong and coherent Palestinian category; a feeling of a very divided and differentiated Palestinian community was described during the interviews. The dividends in the Palestinian community were especially emphasized regarding the Palestinian leaders. During this conversation, Nisreen described how people strive to normalize the situation, by rather seeking to improve their lives in an abnormal situation than trying to change the situation collectively:

*“People try to live normal, even if it’s not normal.*

*Researcher: Between Israelis and Palestinians?*

*Nisreen: No Palestinians by themselves. They try, you know, they are not really scared as you think they are. And when you live here, you feel... It’s not like they don’t care, it’s like they get used to it. And this is a problem because they like normalize the situation, and they start accepting the check-point. They want just to cross, it’s fine if you stop us for two hours at the end we are going to pass. And this way of reacting to things, make me feel, like it’s not really dangerous, but it is even more dangerous when you starting to accept it, that this is a normal life.*

*Researcher: Do you feel it yourself also?*

*Nisreen: Yes that’s what I experience. Because when I came here, I thought, it’s a war and blablabla, and then you just, you feel that people are living normal, they try to live a normal life, except it’s much more difficult now, with the check-points. In 2000 the numbers of check-points were 5000, only on the West*

*Bank, so it is crazy. So it was complicated. Now it's a little bit more calm. Like we don't have a lot of threats, even if it happens, but it's less than before. But the problems with check-points, the problem with people accepting, you know, each year they accept it more. Before they were fighting a little, but now it's like, they are a little bit... They want some years of peace, they don't want to do anything, they want to live more normal or relax. They want to start again.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2001).

Nisreen did however believe that every generation goes through similar experiences, and the new generation might be more willing to struggle against the occupation. On the question if she think people's attempt to normalize their everyday lives is an expression of decreasing anger and frustration, or if people are just hiding their true feelings, she responded:

*“I think that they are hiding it, they are trying to hide it and live a bit normal. They feel that they are tired, and they feel that they have nothing left. They just want to live a little bit. But you know, in Palestine, each generation start again. Like, you can't say, what I said, in two years things can have changed. Completely changed. Because people can't forget that they have lost their children and lost their father. This anger can't just go away. So yes, I think that each five years, something will happen.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

The participants experience that there is no possible solution at the moment, and even a collective Palestinian struggle will not improve the situation. Instead of fighting for an improved situation in general, some of them rather described how people in Palestine now try to create a normal life in an abnormal situation. People expressed a feeling of resignation. Instead of trying to change the situation collectively; they just want to live in peace, as much as they can, as Fadi pointed out when I asked him what would be needed for a positive peace process: *“Well I don't think that it is possible. For me, I just want a good life. I don't care about peace.... Or sure I want peace. I want a peaceful life... That's all.”* (personal communication, 23 April, 2011). Samer, also he a student in Bethlehem expressed the feeling of how people perceive no possible solution to the situation. The situation in general is impossible to change, only the own individual situation is possible to change. Samer described how Palestinians experience the situation: *“They are just depressed, they do not see any future, they have stopped seeing the future.”* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011).

By trying to normalize the situation and create a normal life in an uncertain and unstable situation, people are also individualizing their lives and emphasize a personal identity over a social Palestinian identity. The main objective is not to create a better collective situation for all Palestinians but rather to improve the individual situation. The social context and the level of identification and readiness to adopt an identity leads to a more individual identification since the individual identification is more beneficial and stable than the collective identity.

The individualization of identity is in line with the theory that low identifiers may adopt individual strategies when their identity is under threat, and accentuate intragroup variability rather than collective action. By differentiating themselves from the social group and instead emphasizing individuality, people evaluate themselves in a more positive way. The strategy of individualization helps people cope with a very stressful situation. Since they experience collective struggle as an impossible solution to the stressful situation, the individual identity becomes more salient. The individualization of identity becomes a strategy to reach a positive experienced identity, since the collective identity is experienced as negative. It cannot be changed by strengthening the collective Palestinian identity. In the context of a negative collective identity, the individual identity is emphasized. Huda clearly distanced herself from the collective Palestinian identity, even in situations where Palestinian interests are confronted and threatened: *“All the things going on around me, fighting and war and everything, you are sick of it. Even about when it’s about you own country, your own sorrow (.....) I don’t want to hear, I don’t want to know. You are just sick of the situation, and that’s why I am trying to avoid it.”* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011).

The individual identification is however not chronic but dependent on social context and experienced threat. Huda is not experiencing any direct threat to her person or to her individual identity, and it is therefore more likely that she as a low-identifier is distancing herself from the collective Palestinian identity. During the interview, she emphasized the importance of her individual well-being rather than the well-being of the more general Palestinian people: *“And you hear about it all the time all the time all the time. And you see that the Palestinians are not doing anything they are fighting about the chairs. You become sick of it. All of it. I’m here I’m ok, my country is fine, and I’m ok with it.”* (personal communication, 26 April, 2011). Since she is not experiencing any direct threat to her individual identity at the moment, the individual identity is more stable than the experienced collective identity. To reduce uncertainty in an uncertain situation people seek stable identities. In the social context experienced by Huda the individual identity is more stable than the collective identity. In another context, like in Gaza where the direct physical threat is more apparent, or if the social context changes in Bethlehem where she lives and she experience a more direct threat to her person, it is likely that her social identification as a Palestinian would increase.

The individualization of identity should however not be regarded as a sign that the collective identity is not relevant for them. The collective identity is extremely relevant since it is the

relation to, and experience of, the collective identity that has created the process of individualization. The non-salience of a collective identity is as relevant for the identity process as a salient collective identity, and can reveal meaning of the experienced social context.

#### 4.2.2 Activist Identity

Besides the normalization of everyday life and the individualization of identity, another prominent structure occurred in the analysis; namely the formation of an activist identity. The activist identity and the individualization of identity are two completely opposite reactions to the experienced social context, but the reactions are also strongly connected to each other since they describe a common experienced social context. Among the Palestinians I interviewed who expressed a salient activist identity; boycott was mainly advocated as a way of putting pressure on Israel. By boycott, they experienced a possibility to change the experienced negative understanding of the situation. According to Razan, who is active in a campaign for boycotting Israeli products, boycott might be a way of pressuring Israel to stop the violence:

*“The pressure in negotiations will never do anything. The pressure, something that could do something is... Boycott, to boycott Israel, everything. If all the world boycott Israel, I think that Israel would feel that they do something wrong. And to stop the violence”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

According to her, the boycott is not and cannot be an exclusive national Palestinian movement, the movement has to be global and involve people from all over the world to succeed: *“All the people in the world should boycott Israel. If that happens, I think that Israel will ask what they do to Palestine people. They would feel bad and stop the violence.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011). Razan expressed that a global boycott of Israeli products is possible since she feels support from people around the world. According to her, international solidarity and a global boycott is crucial to put pressure on Israel:

*“I have many friends in Europe, and Americans. And they say that they don’t buy anything Israeli. And I think that God will help us. Actually the international boycott will be more... Will be more power than the national boycott in Palestine. Because Israel they don’t care about Palestinians. But international boycott I think it would be different. So we need international support.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

Nisreen also promotes boycott, but not only to put direct pressure on Israel but also to affect companies and states cooperating with Israel, which wider the movement and makes it even more global. According to her, it is not enough to boycott products from Israel, companies investing in Israel should also be boycotted:

*“There is a lot of supporters abroad, they are boycotting H&M for example, because H&M have a lot of investments in Israel. And for example, we don’t boycott Zara, even though they have some stores in Israel. But their investment is not in Israel, and they are not supporting especial things in Israel. So this kind of boycott. Even like IBM, the computer, they are supporting Israel. So we are trying to boycott. But for now, the next level is to boycott their products.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

The activistization they describe, by promoting boycott and struggle as a way of changing the situation, should not be understood as an expression of a strong collective identity as Palestinians. It is connected to a similar understanding of the social context and the Palestinian situation as the Palestinians who reacted to the situation by emphasizing the individual identity by normalizing the situation. The salience of an activist identity is based on the same lack of positive prototypes and the same understanding that a collective national Palestinian struggle has no way of succeeding. They experience no strong prototype or strong homogeneous Palestinian identity, and because of that, a strengthening of the collective identity as Palestinians is not a satisfactory strategy of changing the experienced negative situation. The social identity as Palestinians has no positive value in the conflict, and a collective Palestinian struggle has no possibility of changing the unstable and dissatisfactory situation. They react to a similar social context, and experience the social context in similar ways as the people whose response is an individualization of identity, but the reaction is different. Instead of decreasing the level of inclusiveness to an individual level, or possible a local community level, they expand their level of inclusiveness to a global level. Instead of trying to normalize their situation by individualization, they are struggling against what they experience as an unjust situation. Their struggle is however not at the national level since they experience no trust for their political leaders, and not at a global political level since they experience no support from governments and political global organizations and institutions. Instead they promote a global grassroots movement, since the only support they experience comes from other activists. The reaction to the social context is collective struggle, but they are not struggling by strengthening the collective social identity as Palestinians since they experience that a national struggle is impossible. Instead, an activist identity becomes salient, and the activist identity is based on Palestinian interests but includes activists that are not Palestinian. The important thing is not that they are Palestinians but that they are activists. It

is plausible that the activists are high-identifiers and have a stronger collective Palestinian identity than the people who normalize the situation since activist activities are based in social identification. It is however also apparent that in the context of activist struggle the activist identity is more salient than the collective Palestinian identity. Group membership is based in the categorization of “us” and “them”, and in the context of Palestinian struggle their activist identity is salient. The “us” is not Palestinians in general but activists whether they are Palestinians or not. According to Nisreen, she feels more connected to other activists than to other Arab friends since they share the same goals and share their active struggle for Palestine, even if they are not themselves Palestinians. I quote Nisreen again concerning international support:

*“I feel more connected, because, you know, it is more sure for me to know that any international supporter, he is leaving all his life to support a case he has never had any connection to, but Arabs sometimes, we have been raised knowing about each other, the conflict and stuff, and that means that you are already supporting the Palestinians’ case.”* (personal communication, 14 April, 2011).

The salience of an activist identity expressed by Nisreen is coherent with other empirical research suggesting that a specific activist identity often is more important for the willingness to participate in collective action than the more general identification with a more abstract group, even though the activist activities aim is to improve the situation for the general group as a whole. Identification with the social movement is more important for the willingness to participate than the identification with a broader category as a collective ethnic group. Willingness to participate in collective action is however related to collective identification both with the activist movement and with the broader collective category, which means that the Palestinians active in activist movements probably have a higher degree of “readiness” to identify with a collective Palestinian identity than Palestinians who adopt individual strategies. It does however appear that, as quoted in the theoretical framework; “identification with a broader, social category increases one’s willingness to participate in collective action only to the extent that it is transformed into a more politicized form of activist identification” (Simon, Loewy, Stürmer, Weber, Freytag, Habig, Kampmeier, Spahlinger, 1998:656), which means that the activist identity is more salient than the collective Palestinian identity, at least in the context of the activist movement.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate which actors, besides Israel, Palestinian people themselves identify as relevant for their collective identity as Palestinians. The analysis conducted in this research suggests three different types of experienced significant others influencing the experience of the participants' collective identity as Palestinians, namely; international actors (mainly Western countries and big global organizations), Arab governments, and domestic Palestinian actors ( Hamas and Fatah). The big international actors are described as non-supportive of the Palestinians in the conflict with Israel. Rather they are perceived as supportive of the Israeli cause, which for them further consolidates the unequal power balance between Israel and Palestine. The participants also experience that other Arab governments do not support Palestine, mainly since they are dependent and afraid of Western countries and organizations. The trust in the two dominant domestic actors; Fatah and Hamas, is non-existent. Fatah is experienced as corrupt, and they have also lost a lot of legitimacy in the failed peace process in which they have represented Palestine. Hamas on the other hand is mistrusted since they emphasize Islam as the base of their political agenda. Hamas is also mistrusted because of their militant approach in the conflicts with Israel and Fatah. The Palestinians I interviewed also experienced that the conflict between Fatah and Hamas has divided the Palestinian people and further undermined the Palestinian struggle for independence from Israel. The participants did not experience any support from political actors whether they are domestic, regional or international. They did however experience support from people around the world, and did not connect government actions with people's actions.

The purpose was also to analyze how these actors have influenced Palestinians' understanding of their collective identity, and their relationship to it. The reaction to the described social context, which is experienced as negative and undermining of a collective Palestinian struggle, take two different forms: individualization and the formation of an activist identity. The individualization of identity leads to an attempt to normalize the everyday life in an abnormal situation. Instead of struggling for an improved collective situation, they struggle for an improved individual situation. In the experienced social context, a strong collective identification is not beneficial to reduce uncertainty and create a positive identity. Because of the experienced unstable situation, the individual identity is more stable and possible to improve than the collective Palestinian identity, and a more individual identity becomes

salient in the experienced context. The formation of an activist identity is the opposite of individualization, but the activist identity is also a reaction to the experience of a similar social context. Instead of decreasing the level of inclusiveness by individualization, they expand their level of inclusiveness as a strategy to reach a positive identity. Since they feel support from other people and activists, but not from governments and domestic political actors, the activist identity becomes salient rather than a strong Palestinian identity. The difference between the people that individualize and the people who promote an activist struggle is that the activists still believe it is possible to change the situation in a collective way. Their strategy is however not to strengthen the collective Palestinian identity, but to strengthen the activist identity which includes people that are not Palestinians. Identity is based on the categorization of “us” and “them”, and in the context of activist struggle, the “us” is not defined as Palestinians in general but as activists in favor of the Palestinian cause whether they are Palestinians or not. This thesis shows that grassroots struggle, and initiatives supporting Palestine are not useless even if they do not influence the political situation. International solidarity is important for Palestinians, and influences how they experience the situation, and hence their identity.

The theoretical gain of this thesis is that it shows the complexity of how identity is formed. By providing the participants with the possibility to define by themselves relevant significant others, it shows on the complexity of identity formation, and how identity never is formed in relation to only one significant other. To understand people’s relation to their collective identity, it is not enough to focus on beforehand defined significant others. The social identity perspective emphasizes context, and when applying it empirically, it is important to understand people’s own experience of a social context and the actors in it. It is neither enough to analyze the impact of actors who are active in the experienced context, because the passivity of actors can be as relevant for the formation of a collective identity as active actors. In this thesis, Arab governments influence people’s relation to their collective identity, not by being active but by being passive. This thesis emphasizes the importance of other actors influence on people’s experience of a context than the obvious one (Israel). That means that studies focusing on only one significant other do not fully grasp the complexity of how people experience a social context. Other groups, actors and people are relevant, both in a direct way, but also in relation to other significant others. This thesis shows how the actions of relevant actors interplay to create a context, a context the participants in my research experience as

negative. It is not the actions of one actor alone that creates the experienced social context, but the experience of many different actors in a combined role.

In this study, I can only draw conclusions regarding the social context the participants experience, but it is my personal belief that the finding in this thesis can be relevant in other situations as well. It would be interesting to do a similar study with participants in the Arab spring, especially in Egypt. I believe similar structures described in this thesis were in play during the revolution in Egypt. The feeling of abandonment by both domestic actors and international actors led to a revolution based on a collective identification as Egyptians. Due to lack of trust in domestic actors, the identification took the form of activistization, since activist struggle were regarded as the only possible way to change the experienced negative situation. When the revolt grew, and the violence and oppression increased, even people who can be regarded as low-identifiers, and who previously had coped with the situation by individualize, started to identify with the revolution since they experienced a more direct threat. The revolution became in that sense Egyptian, but also global since it involved international activists connecting to Egyptian activists, and Egyptian activists connecting to international activists. I cannot emphasize enough that the theory of similarities between this thesis and the revolution in Egypt is just a personal theory. It would however be interesting to investigate if the structures described in this thesis have relevance also in the context of the Egyptian revolution, and in other “grassroot” revolutions.

## Executive Summary

In the academic world, there is a great body of literature concerning Palestinian identity. Most of the literature focuses on the development of a collective identity from a political and historical perspective, where the collective identity is connected to specific events in history explaining the development of a Palestinian people. The Palestinian collective identity is hence analyzed in the context of nationalism, and through the use of theories on nationalism, the general collective Palestinian identity is explained (Hassassian, 2002; Litvak, 2009; Nabulsi, 2003). The research on the development of a collective Palestinian identity is important, but what is missing is a deeper understanding of people's relation to the described collective identity, and how the experienced social context has influenced people's relation to a collective identity. Research has also been conducted concerning the creation of a collective Palestinian identity focusing on an individual level, but only exploring Israeli influence on Palestinian identity (Habashi, 2008). The purpose of this thesis is to investigate which actors, besides Israel, Palestinian people themselves identify as relevant for their collective identity as Palestinians. The purpose is also to analyze how these actors have influenced Palestinians' understanding of their collective identity, and their relationship to it.

### **Theoretical framework**

To collect data for this thesis, 10 interviews were conducted with Palestinians living in the West Bank. The collected data were analyzed using the social identity perspective. The social identity perspective is a perspective within social psychology. The perspective focuses on the relation between individual's identity and social groups. Identity is created through categorization of self and others, and social groups are always created in relation to the understanding of other groups. Social categorization is a mechanism helping people to structure the world, which creates social identity. People identify with a social group to create stability and reduce uncertainty. The need for a stable identity increases in a social context experienced as uncertain. People in the same social group often share a defined understanding of who they are, what they have in common, and how they differ from people in other groups since group membership and collective identity is based in the categorization of "us" and "them". People understand their collective identity in relation to an experienced prototype, how a member of the group should be, and should behave. Clearly defined prototypes reduce

uncertainty if they address the specific context, and a clear and stable prototype is dependent on in-group homogenization and intergroup differentiation. Leaders and authorities are by definition highly prototypical group members and are important for the collective understanding of the social identity. Weak or inconclusive leaders and authorities can destabilize and undermine a stable collective identity, thus influencing people's readiness to self-categorize and adopt a collective identity.

Groups are always relational and created in comparison with other groups. People strive for a positive identity in comparison with other groups, and if they experience a negative identity in the evaluation with other groups, they use different strategies to reach a more positive identity. Strategies to change an experienced negative identity can be both individual and collective, and take different directions dependent on the social context. Individual strategies refer to when a person tries to change or improve the own position by leaving, physically or psychologically, the disadvantaged group. Collective group strategies on the other hand focus on changing the experienced negative collective identity. The collective strategy often involves actions to change the perceived context and can include everything from militant struggle to strikes or group meetings. The creation and involvement in social movements are often used as a strategy with the goal to change a situation experienced as unsatisfactory. Activist involvement to change a perceived negative identity is based on social identification but a specific activist identity is often more important for willingness to participate in collective action than the more general identification with a more abstract group, even though the activist activities aim is to improve the situation for the general group as a whole.

People with a low collective identification may instead adopt individual strategies to deal with threats to identity, by distancing themselves from the group and accentuate intragroup variability instead of collective action. By representing the in-group as heterogeneous rather than homogeneous, low identifiers can differentiate themselves from the group and instead emphasize individuality.

The social identity perspective emphasizes the importance of context in the formation of categories and identity. Which identity, or identities that are salient is dependent on the specific context. In every situation, there are several competing ways of identifying oneself, and the process of self-categorization is a process that creates meaning in social contexts. The salience of identity is based on the subjective understanding of the social context.

## **Methodology**

To collect the empirical data, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Palestinians in the West Bank. The gain with using semi-structured interviews is that they provided me with some level of flexibility during the interviews, but at the same time did the interview guide used during the interviews ensure structure. The focus of the interviews was to provide the participants with the possibility to for themselves identify relevant significant other to enable me to analyze the influence these actors have on the participants' relationship to their collective identity.

To analyze the data collected during the interviews, I used the method of hermeneutic analysis. In a hermeneutic analysis, the researcher interprets text to gain understanding that goes beyond what is explicitly said to develop structures and relations. First relevant actors were identified, and second themes were created that could explain the identified actors influence on the participants' relationship to their collective identity.

## **Findings and Conclusion**

The analysis conducted in this research suggest three different types of experienced significant others influencing the experience of the participants' collective identity as Palestinians, namely; international actors (mainly Western countries and big global organizations), Arab governments, and domestic Palestinian actors ( Hamas and Fatah). The big international actors are described as non-supportive of the Palestinians in the conflict with Israel. Rather they are perceived as supportive of the Israeli cause, which for them further consolidates the unequal power balance between Israel and Palestine. The participants also experience that other Arab governments do not support Palestine, mainly since they are dependent and afraid of Western countries and organizations. The trust in the two dominant domestic actors; Fatah and Hamas, is non-existent. Fatah is experienced as corrupt, and they have also lost a lot of legitimacy in the failed peace process in which they have represented Palestine. Hamas on the other hand is mistrusted since they emphasize Islam as the base of their political agenda. Hamas is also mistrusted because of their militant approach in the conflicts with Israel and Fatah. The Palestinians I interviewed also experienced that the conflict between Fatah and Hamas has divided the Palestinian people and further undermined the Palestinian struggle for independence from Israel. The participants did not experience any

support from political actors whether they are domestic, regional or international. They did however experience support from people around the world, and did not connect government actions with people's actions.

The reaction to the described social context, which is experienced as negative and undermining of a collective Palestinian struggle, take two different forms: individualization and the formation of an activist identity. The individualization of identity leads to an attempt to normalize the everyday life in an abnormal situation. Instead of struggling for an improved collective situation, they struggle for an improved individual situation. In the experienced social context, a strong collective identification is not beneficial to reduce uncertainty and create a positive identity. Because of the experienced unstable situation, the individual identity is more stable and possible to improve than the collective Palestinian identity, and a more individual identity becomes salient in the experienced context. The formation of an activist identity is the opposite of individualization, but the activist identity is also a reaction to the experience of a similar social context. Instead of decreasing the level of inclusiveness by individualization, they expand their level of inclusiveness as a strategy to reach a positive identity. Since they feel support from other people and activists, but not from governments and domestic political actors, the activist identity becomes salient rather than a strong Palestinian identity. The difference between the people that individualize and the people who promote an activist struggle is that the activists still believe it is possible to change the situation in a collective way. Their strategy is however not to strengthen the collective Palestinian identity, but to strengthen the activist identity which includes people that are not Palestinians. Identity is based on the categorization of "us" and "them", and in the context of activist struggle, the "us" is not defined as Palestinians in general but as activists in favor of the Palestinian cause whether they are Palestinians or not.

This thesis emphasizes the importance of other actors influence on people's experience of a context than the obvious one (Israel). That means that studies focusing on only one significant other do not fully grasp the complexity of how people experience a social context. Other groups, actors and people are relevant, both in a direct way, but also in relation to other significant others. This thesis shows how the actions of relevant actors interplay to create a context, a context the participants in my research experience as negative. It is not the actions of one actor alone that creates the experienced social context, but the experience of many different actors in a combined role.

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## Appendix

### Interview Guide

#### **Before**

Present myself and the research to the participants.

Explain the confidentiality and ask of approval for recording the interview.

Emphasize that the interview is completely voluntary.

Explain that they can stop or cancel at any time during the interview.

#### **Second intifada**

I would like to start in the early 2000s and the second Palestinian intifada,

##### **How do you remember it?**

Where were you living?

Participate in any way?

Can you describe the environment during that time?

#### **The Peace Process**

After the intifada, new peace initiatives were tried, but the conflict is still ongoing.

##### **Why do you think these peace initiatives have failed?**

Which actors are involved? How are they involved?

##### **How would you describe the peace process today?**

Positive/negative?

What would need to be done to achieve a positive development?

##### **Which actors do you think should or have to be involved in the Peace process?**

How should they be involved? Why should they be involved?

##### **How have you experienced these actors relationship to Israel?**

Positive/negative? Why do they have that relationship to Israel?

**And how would you describe their relationship to Palestine?**

Positive/negative? Why do they have that relationship to Palestine?

**Do you think that there should be any international presence in this part of the world?**

Why/Why not? Who should be presence?

In what way; military, political, humanitarian?

**A lot of international aid organizations are working in Palestine. How do you feel about them?**

Do they help? Should they be here? Differences between countries?

**9/11 attacks in USA**

How countries work internationally has changed a lot in the last 10 years, especially after the terrorist attacks in USA in 2001. People often remember what they were doing when these kind of things happen. I remember that I woke up after a nap, and just turned on the TV, and the first thing I saw was a plane crashing into a skyscraper. At first I thought it was a movie or something.

**Do you remember what you did during the attacks?**

How did you feel about it?

Do you remember if it was discussed a lot among friends and family, or in the community?

**Do you experience that the Palestinian situation changed in any way because of the attacks?**

How?

Do you think it had any impact on the Palestinian situation?

Positive or negative?

After 9/11, two wars followed, first the one in Afghanistan, and later the war in Iraq. Both these wars were at least in Sweden discussed a lot and got a lot of attention at the time.

**Do you remember how it was in Palestine?**

You and your friends?

In what way were they discussed?

**What are your feelings about these wars?**

Positive/negative?

Who to blame?

**Do you in any way identify with the people in Iraq and Afghanistan?**

How? See any relation between the wars and Palestinian situation?

**Elections and the civil war**

Despite the more or less failing peace process, elections in Palestine were held in 2006. It was, at least internationally called a just election, but despite that no democratic government was formed.

**What do you remember from the elections?**

Democratic/undemocratic? In what way? Environment during the campaigns?

**Did you vote?**

Why/why not?

**How did you experience the reaction to the election from the world?**

Good/bad?

Who responded and how?. Why do you believe they responded in that way?

The election was later followed by a civil war, or at least violence between different sides.

**What do you remember from the civil war?**

Who were the important actors? Differences/similarities? Define who they are?

How influenced your everyday life?

Did it change any personal relations?

**How was the environment in Palestine during the civil war?**

Hostile or not?

Shattered or united?

How do you feel about Hamas/Fatah

## **War in Gaza 2008-2009**

The civil war led to that Hamas took control over Gaza, and Israel responded with a blockade and later the Gaza war followed. Israel got a lot of critique for the war, and I remember that it was heavily debated in Sweden.

### **How did you follow the war?**

Media? Which media, western or Palestinian/Arabic?

Friends or family in Gaza?

### **How did you experience the worlds response to the war?**

Who responded? How?

How did you feel about that response?

Should someone have acted to stop it? Who? Why?

### **How did you feel about the war at that time?**

Did you act in any way? Protests etc?

Palestinian – Israeli war or Israel – Hamas?

The blockade of Gaza is still intact to this day, but about a year ago, the Freedom Flotilla, or Ship to Gaza, tried to break the blockade.

### **What are you feelings towards the Freedom Flotilla initiative?**

Positive/negative? In what way?

How describe it, experienced it? Who were involved?

## **Concepts**

Sometimes I meet people back home, or read about someone in the newspaper, and I just think; that is so Swedish, he acted just like a Swede.

### **Do you ever feel that with a Palestinian?**

In which way? How would you describe how that person acted?

Do you have any example, how you acted, or someone you know, or from a newspaper or TV?

Religious identity?

### **Would you describe yourself as acting Palestinian?**

In what way?

Example?

**How are these Palestinian characteristics expressed in your everyday life?**

Both by yourself, and by the people around you?

Do you think that you act and think in a different way than older generations (mom and dad etc)?

**Would you say that Palestinian people are different from other Arabic people?**

In what way? What is common, what is different?

**How would you describe the relationship between Palestinian Christians and Palestinian Muslims?**

Hostile/friendly? Are they different or similar?

**Is religion important in your life?**

How? How do you express your religion?

**What role has religion in the Palestinian society?**

**Do you have any friends, or know people, that are not Palestinian?**

Where are they from? Do they act different than you and your Palestinian friends?

If not, do you often meet people that are not Palestinian?

How would you say that people from the West, from Europa and North America, are different from you?

Let's say that in 5 years, a free and independent Palestinian state is established and working.

**How would you like it to look like?**

Who included, Gaza, refugees? Palestinians in Israel? Beduins?

**After**

Ok, that was all my questions. Do you have anything to add?

Clarify the purpose of the thesis.

Contact information and how they can get access to the finished thesis.