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Love your Enemy – as a Palestinian

A study on the Reception of Matthew 5:38 – 48 among
Christian Palestinians

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Abstract

What does it mean to follow Jesus' commandment to love your enemy and turn the other cheek, as a Palestinian Christian? In this work, the reception of Matthew 5:38 – 48 is examined in the context of Palestinian Christians under the present-day Israeli occupation. Six individuals were interviewed in September 2012. The thesis takes its starting point in the reception history focusing on the time of Jesus and the writing of the Gospel of Matthew, where at that time 'Turn the other cheek' already is seen as breaking the cycle of violence. This understanding in combination with enemy love gives Palestinian Christians today the chance to live this liberating power the text presents. The way of living it is a non-violent resistance, that empowers the interviewees to leave the passive victim identity and to actively force the self and the enemy to see the humanity of each other. This is seen as the way to justice, equality, and peace, and as one possible realisation of God's will.

Key words: *Enemy love, turn the other cheek, Matthew 5:38 – 48, Palestine, reception, non-violence.*

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Katja Ekman

The Interviewees

Jean Zaru, living in Ramallah, is one of the leaders of the Palestinian Quaker community and in this function the only¹ female church leader in the Middle East. Further, she has served on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and on the Working Group in Interfaith Dialogue of the WCC. In addition, she has been a member of the International Council of the World Conference for Religion and Peace.² Jean Zaru is also one of the founding members of Sabeel.

Zedar Daibes is the only lay interviewee. She is a member of the Anglican Church and a lay theologian living in Jerusalem. Additionally, she is a founding member of Sabeel and was until recently an active board member there. Daibes is also a co-author of the Kairos Palestine document.

Rev. Mitri Raheb (Dr Theologiae) is the pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. Further, he is the founder and president of numerous cultural and social initiatives and institutions in Bethlehem. Raheb is also author and editor of a vast number of books on Palestinian contextual theology.

Father Raed Abusahlia (Dr Theologiae) is a Catholic priest serving in the parish of Ramallah. He is a well-known follower of the nonviolent resistance movement and has even been engaged in interfaith dialogues, for example in Clergymen for peace. Abusahlia has written a vast number of articles that have been published in, inter alia, newspapers.

Father Rafiq Khoury (Dr Theologiae) is a Catholic priest and teacher at the Latin Seminary in Beit Jala (Bethlehem). Almost all of the other interviewees saw him as the most important figure of Palestinian contextual and liberation theology. Khoury is

1 I have not found sources that prove the existence of other female church leaders in the Middle East. Hopefully, I just haven't searched enough, but my personal experience affirms the silence of sources.

2 Cf. <https://afsc.org/story/jean-zaru>.

the author of numerous books, the latest, ‘Open Borders between Time and Eternity: Toward Contextual Theology in Our Native Soil’ was published June 2012.

Father Jamal Khader (Dr Theologiae) is a Catholic priest and teacher at the Latin Seminary in Beit Jala and at Bethlehem university, where he also teaches Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution Strategies. Additionally, he is the Chairman at the Department of Religious Studies and the Dean of Arts at Bethlehem university.

All Bible quotations in English refer to the *New Revised Standard Version*, all quotations in Greek are to be found in the *Novum Testamentum Graece 27*.

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*How should enemies be able to like their enemies?
This is against all reason!*³

Kobi Farhi, member of the Israeli hard rock band Orphaned Land

1 Introduction

To like, or even love, your enemy seems to be impossible for most of us, even if the enemy is only a next-door neighbour making too much noise after 10 pm. However, this is what Jesus was calling for in the fifth chapter of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, and until today, this ethical demand is seen as one of the most central in Christianity.⁴

Living in a society where one barely has enemies who symbolize an existential life threat, it is still considered to be difficult to live up to this command. But what does this Bible verse, and the verse about turning the other cheek, which we read just a few lines earlier in the same chapter, mean to people who live under occupation, a situation in which people's lives and non-lives⁵ are determined by 'the enemy'?

This essay will examine this question, presenting and analysing six interviews with Palestinian Christians on the pericope Matt 5:38–48 about 'Turn the other cheek' and 'Love your enemy'. To approach the reception history of this text, the present-day understanding of these six interviewees will be investigated by comparing it to scriptural understanding and its use in the time of the Roman Empire. It will be argued that both colonialism and imperialistic practice are related to the current

3 Farhi, Kobi in Hallgren, Torbjörn. 'De nya fredsmäklarna.' In *Fokus* 41 (2012), 38-40. My translation.

4 See e.g. Ulrich Luz and Josef Blank, *Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament. Bd 1, Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Zürich: Benziger, 1985), 307; Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love your enemies: discipleship, pacifism, and just war theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Walter Wink, *Engaging the powers: discernment and resistance in a world of domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 275.

5 I use the term 'non-life', as life under occupation does not correspond to various articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, e.g. art. 2, 3, and 9. See <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#>. Accessed 2012-11-21, 9:20.

situation, not least because some informants drew a direct line between the Israeli occupation and the other two systems.

As a qualitative field researcher, I am an adherent of a critical paradigm. The sociologist Bailey explains this paradigm as ontologically interpretive,⁶ i.e. reality is not one thing that exists, for 'social reality is shaped by historical. ... factors, as well as by ethnic, racial, and gendered structures.'⁷ The critical paradigm implies further that the researcher has a great impact on the result of the studies. Another mark is that the researcher is open about his or her own values,⁸ which I interpret as an advantage, as it allows me to ask critical question after having stated my general sympathy. As adherents of the critical paradigm see reality as highly influenced by *outer* factors, the analysis of the material will include these.

I am differing from definition given by Bailey in my ontological position: I do believe that reality exists and is one, but that our perceptions of it may vary and no one can claim that his/her perception is the right one.⁹

As one could expect, this work is influenced by my own and my interviewees political points of view and the current political situation in Israel/Palestine, which is indeed the very reason for my work. I see occupation as an oppressive and unjust system. In the context of my interviewees, religion and politics are not separable, as religion is a marker of identity, not least political identity. My theological perspective in this work is situated in the field of Liberation Theology.¹⁰

1.1 Background

The issue of Palestinian theology of liberation and the need of explanation of the Bible's contextualisation under occupation started to gain attention in the 1980s by publications of Naim Ateek and Rafiq Khoury, the former being known better in

6 Carol A. Bailey, *A guide to qualitative field research* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge, 2007), 55.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 56.

9 Ibid., 50 - 57.

10 For a definition of the term and the field, see Curt Cadorette et al., *Liberation theology: an introductory reader* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

international circles, as he has published mainly in English. Today, the most well known theologians linked with liberation theology and non-violent resistance are Naim Ateek, Rafiq Khoury, Mitri Raheb, Jamal Khader, and Jean Zaru (even though she is not an academic theologian, she still is one of the most heard voices). Most of them have contributed to one of the latest publications on Palestinian non-violent resistance, which has its roots in the teachings of Jesus, the Kairos Palestine document, published in December 2009.¹¹

Some of their ideas are presented here. Ateek expresses, in ‘Justice and only justice’ 1989, a type of approach to the command of enemy love for Palestinians that is of relevance until today: It is, that love is treated by explaining the destructive implications on life of its opposite, hate.¹² Also Raheb uses this polarised example: ‘To love one’s enemy means ... to endure the tension inherent in that conflict without succumbing to hatred.’¹³ In a more recent work, Ateek emphasises the affinity between love and justice: ‘In essence, justice is the other side of love.’¹⁴ But Raheb makes clear that following the command of enemy love is not easy as a Palestinian, because you can be seen as a traitor by your own people.¹⁵ Also Zaru expresses through her stories how difficult the stand as a Palestinian woman is.¹⁶ In the Kairos document, love is mainly linked with resistance.¹⁷ The document argues that real love prevents the enemy from doing wrong against others and wants to change the behaviour of the enemy for the better, for the enemies and for its own sake.¹⁸ It is interesting to note that, next to some quotations from the epistles, the Kairos is only citing Matt 5: 43–48, i.e. not 39a: ‘Do not resist an evildoer.’ This link between love and resistance seems to be a contradiction to the Bible text and is one of the issues that investigated in the interviews.

11 The document can be accessed via <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/?q=content/document>, viewed 2012-04-27, 11:34.

12 Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Orbis Books, 1989), 184.

13 Mitri Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 103.

14 Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian cry for reconciliation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 22.

15 Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian*, 102.

16 Jean Zaru, *Occupied with nonviolence: a Palestinian woman speaks* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 124-127.

17 Kairos, part 4: *Love*.

18 *Ibid.*, 4.1.

Of course, there is also a large number of international scholars who have treated the topic of enemy love and turning the other cheek. As these do not deal with the Palestinian case in particular, they are not listed here, but they will be very helpful in the understanding of the text, and therefore are presented throughout the essay.

Further, I can locate my own research of the reception of the Bible today, with focus on its ethical message, in the context of Richard Burridge's studies, inspired by interpretations of the Bible by anti-apartheid strugglers in South Africa during the apartheid system.¹⁹ Burridge

argue[s] that the biographical genre of the canonical gospels redirects our gaze back to the beginning with the historical Jesus, and in particular to a stress upon both his deeds and his words, his activities as well as teachings.²⁰

Exactly this is, as I will try to explain, also the core of the non-violent struggle of my interviewees: to focus on the life and the teaching of Jesus to find inspiration for one's own life.

1.2 Theoretical framework

As mentioned earlier, postcolonial theory is employed to try to understand how Matt 5:38–48 is received and used by Palestinian Christians, living under occupation. I argue here that occupation can be compared to colonialism.

Colonialism, the daughter of imperialism,²¹ can be defined 'as the takeover of territory, appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation'.²² The field of postcolonial studies seeks then to analyse, among others, structures, ideologies, and identity shaping processes.²³ The *post* in postcolonial studies indicates that colonialism is over and now, we analyse it and its impacts. But if we see it in this way

19 Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus - An inclusive approach to New Testament ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

20 Ibid., 4.

21 Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (Routledge, 2005), 12.

22 Ibid., 11.

23 For a more detailed description of the field of postcolonial studies, see Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the making: postcolonialism and New Testament studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

only, we don't get the whole picture. Ashcroft et al. defines the term in 'The Empire writes back': 'We use the term *postcolonial*, however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonialization to the present day.'²⁴ This indicates on one hand, that ideological structures endure longer than their factual existence, on the other it also gives an idea about that the present day situation of many peoples actually (still) can relate to colonialism. (The Palestinian situation can definitely be seen as a such.)

Postcolonial theory can hardly be presented as *one*,²⁵ as there are different streams, for example a Marxist perspective that focuses on the impacts of capitalism, which is not primarily helpful for this work. Additionally, it is important to note that colonialism is not equal with occupation: the former implies features such as the central position of the *motherland*, which is not of interest to the occupying force. (However, in the case of Israel, the settlements can be seen as colonies in the classical meaning.)

For these reasons, I employ only those elements of postcolonial theory that are of importance for the analysis of the reception of the chosen Bible text under occupation. Those are: structures of power, superior/inferior relations, construction of identity, and one of the possible responses to oppression: resistance.

Another theory that is used in this essay, to complement postcolonial theory, is Walter Winks reading of the Gospels as 'Jesus' Third Way' consisting of 18 *How-to-act-like Jesus* – points. The following elements of it are especially useful for this thesis:

- Find a creative alternative to violence
- Assert your own humanity and dignity as a person
- Break the cycle of humiliation
- Refuse to submit or to accept the inferior position
- Expose the injustice of the system
- Take control of the power dynamic
- Recognize your own power

24 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire writes back: theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2.

25 Loomba, *Colonialism*, 2.

- Be willing to suffer rather than retaliate
- Force the oppressor to see you in a new light
- Seek the oppressor's transformation²⁶

Wink's theory has an obviously normative character, but it will not lead me to a normative analysis. Instead, I use his argumentation about non-violent resistance to understand the interviewees' choice of it in their struggle for liberation.

1.3 Method

There are two different stages in this work. The first stage is a short historical critical analysis of Matt 5:38–48 with focus on the topics that will also occupy us in the reception analysis in the second stage: *Turn the other cheek, the enemy, and love*. The second stage is the collection and analysis of interview material by undertaking a discourse analysis resting on postcolonial theory and Wink's theory about 'Jesus' third way', the way of non-violent resistance.

In September 2012, six Palestinian Christians between approximately 45-77 years of age took part in individual, semi-structured²⁷ and qualitative interviews. Four of them are professional male theologians and two are female lay theologians. Three are Catholic priests, one is a Lutheran Pastor, one is a leader in the Palestinian Quaker community and one is a member of the Anglican Church. They were chosen because my previous research marked them as important persons in the Palestinian Christian non-violent resistance movement or because they were recommended to me through these persons. The interviews were recorded and the transcription can be viewed in the appendix of this work.

The interviews are analysed by focusing on the contextualisation of the two major elements of the Bible text, to turn the other cheek and to love the enemy. Further, the question of justice and resistance is treated, as my interviewees saw these as inseparable from this text. This is undertaken through a discourse analysis, which

²⁶ Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 187 - 188.

²⁷ Semistructured means that I had prepared several questions which I used as starting point, but also adapted to the individual interview. For more explanations, see Bailey, *A guide to qualitative field research*, 100.

helps to see structures of power, oppression, and contradiction. The questions I posed are: How do my informants use these terms while they are speaking? What are they associating them with? If they have an ambition to live these commandments, how are they doing that? To achieve a better understanding of the reception history of Matt 5:38–48 in this particular situation, I frame this analysis by an examination of reception of this text in similar situations, namely during the Roman occupation of Palestine in the first century. I see the postcolonial discourse as a helpful tool in this process, as this stresses the deterministic impact of the ruling power on all of life.²⁸

1.4 Limitations and Precision

A Palestinian taxi driver, when he had heard what I was working on, told me: “The real enemies are not the Jews, it’s the Muslims.” Even if this statement is very harsh and not necessarily representative of the Christian community in Palestine, it still shows that Christian-Muslim relations are another field that would be interesting to examine. However, in order to maintain the clear structure of this thesis, I decided to not focus on that aspect of the situation in the Middle East.

Probably the biggest limitation (as well as resources) in qualitative research is the researcher him- or herself, as he or she is a part of his/her socio-cultural and ideological context. I am aware of my impact on this study, but I believe at the same time that the experiences of my informants and my own experiences can give a picture of (one) Palestinian Christian reality.

The aims of this work are twofold: to present the reception of Matt 5:38–48 among Palestinian Christians today, and to analyse this material with the help of postcolonial theory and Walter Wink’s theory of Christian non-violent resistance, *Jesus’ Third Way*, focusing on power, the identity of the oppressed and the oppressor, and the impact of occupation on the manner of dealing with this text.

28 Gabriel A. Salguero, ‘Postcolonial Theologies: Promise and Challenge for the Middle East,’ in *The Invention of History: A Century of Interplay between Theology and Politics in Palestine* (ed. Mitri Raheb, Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2011), 220.

2 Matthew 5:38-48 in its context

2.1 The scriptural context

The passage this work examines is part of the Sermon on the Mount, which we find in Matt 5–7. The structure of the Sermon on the Mount can be described as follows:²⁹ the setting, Jesus and the people are at the foot of a mountain, is described in 5:1–2 and frames the Sermon until its end in 7:28–8: 1a. The next layer treats the Kingdom of Heaven, e.g. in the Beatitudes, in 5:3–16 and 7:13–27. The speech about the law and the prophets, 5:17–20 and 7:12 frames the triadic main part of the Sermon on the Mount, which is found in (1) the six antitheses 5:21–48 and other ‘social issues’³⁰ 6:19–7:11, (2) the righteousness in front of God 6:1–6 and 16–18, and finally (3) the core of the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord’s prayer with its frames in 6:7–15.

The pericope chosen in this work is located in the main part as the fifth and sixth antithesis. The original nature of several antitheses is debated, not least because their introductory phrases deviate somewhat.³¹ Their general structure, however, is similar. First, a commandment is presented by the phrase ηκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη οὐ ἐρρέθη δέ. Then, this commandment is expanded by Jesus with the words ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν. It is interesting to note that, even if this formulation seems to be a dichotomy, what Jesus is saying is not radically new. The *lex talionis* (the law of retaliation) was a juridic tradition in the Hebrew Bible, but there are also other texts explicitly speaking about non-vengeance.³² It is probable that Jesus has those in mind when expanding the law.

Matt 5:38–48 is to be understood in the context of the social and moral righteousness which Jesus links clearly to the Kingdom of Heaven.³³ The absoluteness in which Jesus formulates these commandments is characteristic of the whole Sermon on the Mount, which is, according to its’ form and content, a part of the Jewish *agada* – tradition. Heshel defines the *agada* as follows, ‘*Agada deals with man’s ineffable*

29 For a graphical overview of the Sermon on the Mount, see Luz and Blank, *Matthäus*, 186.

30 William David Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the gospel according to Saint Matthew. Vol. 1* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 64.

31 *Ibid.*, 505.

32 E.g. Sir 28:1.

33 John Piper, ‘*Love your enemies*’: *Jesus’ love command in the Synoptic Gospels and in the early Christian paraenesis: a history of the tradition and interpretation of its uses* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 69.

relations to God, to other men, and to the world.³⁴ (That means that it is not laws which *must* be followed, but rather interpretations which seek to stimulate the listener/reader to strive after divine perfection) This will be of great importance for the contextualisation of this pericope among the Palestinian Christians I interviewed.

2.2 The socio-historical context

The scenery of this text is a mountain close to the Sea of Galilee around the year 30 C.E. We have in mind though that deeds and words of Jesus are presented to us through the author of the Gospel, Matthew, who lived and wrote approximately 50 years later. Palestine had been annexed by the Roman Empire from 63 B.C.E. and there were tensions between the local Jewish inhabitants and the Roman rule at this time.³⁵ These culminated with the Jewish War 67–70 C.E. and with the fall of the second temple in 70 C.E.

2.2.1 Turn the other cheek

There are different opinions about the meaning of ‘But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.’ While Luz sees it as pure coincidence that the right cheek is slapped first, Davies and Allison try to broaden up for a common argument:³⁶ if one is slapped on the right cheek, the slapper is either left-handed which was not very common, as the left hand was ‘used only for unclean tasks,’³⁷ or he or she slapped with the backhand. If the slapper used the weaker left hand, the slapped could offer the left cheek to show the unrighteousness of the first slap. If the slapper used the backhand, this would have meant a great insult in the ancient Middle East. The backhand slap was used only by masters slapping their slaves, wives, etc.³⁸ To turn the cheek would have the same result as in the example with the left hand. There is,

34 Abraham Joshua Heshel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), 336–337. For the classical definition of halakha and agada see even Haym Nahman Bialik, *Halachah and Aggadah* (London: Education Department of the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland, 1944), 9.

35 As for example in Matt 22:15-22.

36 Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 541.

37 Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 176.

38 Ibid.

however, a consensus on the perspective: it is not the pain that the text focuses on, but the insult of personal rights and honour.³⁹

Turning the other cheek is a form of non-violent resistance.⁴⁰ Even if this behaviour seems to be paradoxical, being dominated and suppressed by the Roman Empire, the idea was not unique for Jesus' teaching in that time. When Pontius Pilate became Prefect of the Roman province of Judaea in 26 C.E., he wanted to install pictures of the Caesar. Gerd Theissen cites Josephus who reports a non-violent protest of Jews who have been *demonstrating* outside Pilate's palace for five days, and finally they offered their necks to Pilate's sword rather than accept these pictures.⁴¹ Further, there are similarities to the Socratic ideas that it is better to be wronged than to be a wrongdoer, as the wrongdoer has to live with this guilt.⁴²

Verse 39a can additionally contribute to the nonviolent reading of the passage: Wink argues that the verb ἀνθίστημι is mainly used in military contexts, where it is translated as *armed resistance*.⁴³ The NRSV translation 'Do not resist an evildoer' means against this background that no violent, armed resistance shall be exercised, but not that the wronged should not resist at all.

Jesus' teaching is unique for its' time, however, in its general non-violent practice and approach that is an ethical demand rather than just a situational behaviour.⁴⁴

2.2.2 The enemy

The hearers of the Sermon on the Mount were probably mainly Jewish, among them a group of followers of Jesus.⁴⁵ The commandments of enemy love and turning the

39 Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 542; Luz and Blank, *EKK*, 289.

40 See Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 175 - 184.

41 Gerd Theissen, *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1979), 192.

42 Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Cornell University Press, 1999), 34.

43 Cf. Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 185.

44 Ateek, *Cry*, 95 - 96; Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn, 'Das Liebesgebot Jesu als Tora und als Evangelium: Zur Feindesliebe und zur christlichen und jüdischen Auslegung der Bergpredigt,' in *Vom Urchristentum zu Jesus* (ed. F. Frankemölle and K. Kertelge; Freiburg: Herder, 1989), 194 - 230.

45 Luise Schottroff, 'Gewaltverzicht und Feindesliebe in der urchristlichen Jesustradition,' in *Jesus Christus in Historie und Theologie* (ed. Georg Strecker; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1975) and others, e.g. James D. G. Dunn, 'The Legal Status of the Earliest Christian Churches' in *The Making of Christianity* (ed. Magnus Zetterholm and Samuel Byrskog; Wiona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012) call this group for 'early Christians', a rather anachronistic term that is avoided by scholars like e.g. Magnus Zetterholm, 'Jews, Christians, and Gentiles: Rethinking the Categorization within the early Jesus Movement,' in *Explorations in Identity Formations* (ed. Kathy Ehrensperger and J. Brian Tucker; New York: T & T Clark, 2010), as there were no 'Christians' in that sense.

other cheek are addressed to those who are following Jesus and the ethics he is presenting. The concrete enemies Jesus (in the light of Matthew) is talking about could be two groups: Jesus' teaching was, according to several parts in the Gospels, not welcomed by the Jewish religious leadership.⁴⁶ They saw him as a threat to their existing faith system. This explanation is probable, especially if we see it linked with the situation described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians. Another Jewish group that many think Jesus had in mind when speaking about enemy love and turning the other cheek, is the Jewish rebel group (rebellious against the Romans): the Zealots.⁴⁷ It is obvious that Jesus didn't encourage their violent behaviour against the empire, but the examples used in the text seem to make both 'enemies' possible, the Zealots as well as the group that is presented next. The view that the enemy was a (non-rebellious) Jewish group may not be the most preferable, if we keep in mind that Matthew is traditionally seen as the gospel which is most positive towards Judaism and is thought to be addressed to a Jewish audience.

The other *enemy* that the socio-historical context offers, is the Roman Empire.⁴⁸ The Romans were an economic (taxes) as well as a religious threat (worship rules). However, not all scholars agree that the *enemy* in this text is connected to the Romans. Schottroff argues that 'the enemies of Christianity are, in these times, ...not Roman organs of state,'⁴⁹ and adds the somewhat unclear statement that the enemies of Christians might have been 'Jewish and non-Jewish ethnic groups.' This statement is not followed by argument and Schottroff admits later that 'in the case of ... Matthew, one could most likely connect it with the non-Jewish environment.'⁵⁰ There are therefore no adequate reasons not to see the Romans as a possible enemy. It is highly unlikely that Jesus (and Matthew) were not influenced by the political situation they were living in.⁵¹ The text itself gives reason to believe that the oppressor the text is

46 Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 551.

47 Cf. Richard Horsley. 'Ethics and Exegesis: 'Love Your Enemies' and the Doctrine of Non-violence' in *The Love of enemy and nonretaliation in the New Testament* (ed. Willard M. Swartley; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 77. Horsley first presents the opinion that the enemy was the Zealots and continues then to dismiss the idea (page 78).

48 Theissen, *Studien*, 177; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 542; Ateek, *Cry*, 180; Wink, Walter, 'Counterresponse to Richard Horsley,' in *The Love of enemy and nonretaliation in the New Testament* (ed. Willard M. Swartley; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 134.

49 Luise Schottroff, 'Gewaltverzicht,' 204., my translation.

50 Ibid., 214, n. 79.

51 Luz and Blank, *Matthäus*, 294; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 542.

presupposing, is connected to the Roman Empire: In v 41, the greek μίλιον is used to describe the latin *mille*, which can refer to a forced *walk* (ἀγγαρεύω) which was a Roman practice.⁵²

2.2.3 Love

The historical setting in which Matthew lets Jesus speak about enemy love includes a variety of different religious or/and political groups. The common identity marker has either an ethnic or moral character, the question is about who is in and outside ones own circle, the only place where neighbour love is practised.⁵³ Here, the usage of love is not to express emotions, love refers to unconditional love that exists ‘despite circumstances and results.’⁵⁴ This makes clear the certain radicalism that Jesus’ words imply. Why should one, then, love his enemy in Jesus’ time? Theissen suggests two categories of motivation for enemy love and non-violence: the motive of imitation of God (*Imitatio Dei*) and the motive of differentiation/superiority.⁵⁵

The motive of imitation is about people behaving like God, that loving ones enemy is divine rather than human. It is people’s ethical behaviour that makes them like God.⁵⁶ (Compare this to the arguments presented earlier, on the weight of the ethical behaviour and its importance for the entry to the Kingdom of Heaven) Through *imitatio dei*, one gains sovereignty over the situation.⁵⁷ The weaker part in the pericope is asked to act in a loving way towards the stronger, and inverses him or herself to the powerful, following an ancient oriental tradition where the superior is to help the inferior.⁵⁸

The motive of differentiation/superiority is partly linked to the formal presentation of the antitheses, and partly to the diversity of social or ethnical groups at that time. The form of the antitheses implies that Jesus’ teaching is something new, even if it

52 Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 547; Theissen, *Studien*, 177.

53 Piper, *Love your enemies*, 91.

54 Davies and Allison, *I*, 551.

55 Theissen, *Studien*, 161. My translation.

56 Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 556.

57 I am summarizing Theissen’ s description of the two different motives, here Theissen, *Studien*, 161-164.

58 *Ibid.*, 174.

expresses a continuation with what was before, it still marks a new group that is not congruent with the others.⁵⁹ This difference is articulated as something positive, something that gives extra credit.⁶⁰ Jesus' emphasis on non-violence and enemy love can also be seen as an anti-propaganda and differentiation from the aggressive Zealots that the Jesus' movement did not want to be compared with.⁶¹

The influences of the situation around the origin of the Gospel of Matthew should not be neglected: the victors in the Jewish War were the Romans and this event has surely had a great impact on the identity of the early Christians, a group that had not separated from Judaism yet. With the concept of enemy love and non-violence, the Matthean community was encouraged and ensured sovereignty in these difficult times, and it is consistent with the Gospel's peaceful power ideal (as e.g. expressed through the 'silent' Messiah in Matt 12:19–21).⁶² Another interesting point for the further examination of this text can be made by turning the focus from the enemy to the one who is persecuted etc. In the context of Matthew, the ones who are persecuted are often the prophets, as named in the last beatitude in Matt 5:11.⁶³ The idea of self-identification of struggling Christians with the prophets is something we should keep in mind.

As I described above, I see similarities between imperialism/colonialism of the first century and the system of occupation, as it is practiced in Israel/Palestine today. In the following, I give a short overview over occupation and how I see it linked to imperialism/colonialism.

59 Schottroff, 'Gewaltverzicht', 217.

60 Theissen, *Studien*, 164.-166.

61 Cf. Schottroff, 'Gewaltverzicht,' 219.

62 Theissen, *Studien*, 179.

63 *Ibid.*, 186.

2.3 Colonialism and Occupation

I tried to sketch colonialism earlier in this work, while explaining post-colonial theory. Before I continue to present and analyse the interview material, the situation of occupation will be described in a few words; naturally, the focus will lie on the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Dikker Hupkes from the Leiden Law School summarizes the definition of occupation of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) as following: ‘[O]ccupation exists when the population of a territory is brought under the effective control of a party to an international conflict by means of that party’s military presence.’⁶⁴ This shows that occupation and colonialism are indeed quite similar, as both are describing a kind of an annexation of land. Occupation is no annexation in its actual meaning, as it does not imply a takeover of the juridical and political system from the occupant into the occupied territories. But, as in the case of the Israeli occupation, the impact on the life of the occupied people is still tremendous.⁶⁵

64 S. D. Dikker Hupkes, ‘What Constitutes Occupation? Israel as the occupying power in the Gaza Strip after the Disengagement’, 2008, 50, n.p. [cited 7 January 2013]. Online: <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/13159>.

65 Ibid., 51.

3 Interpreting Matthew 5: 38 – 48 as a Palestinian Christian

*But if I accept violence, turn the other cheek,
that's violating who I am.*

Jean Zaru

*This is like somebody driving drunk,
and you tell him: 'Give some more gas!'*

Mitri Raheb

3.1 Turn the other cheek

All of my interviewees state that this text is hard to understand and difficult to apply in their current lives. Does it mean to only sit and pray, letting 'the other' take everything they want and encourage them to take even more? None of the interviewees could, obviously, identify him or herself with this reading of the text.

A general consensus of the understanding of scripture is expressed while interpreting the pericope: the language used in it cannot be taken literally, because this would mean that the text does not have a liberating power.⁶⁶ The deeper meaning behind the figurative words is central, as Zaru puts it, 'I don't think that the language here has been understood by people ... they mix between forgiveness and being submissive.'⁶⁷ Khader calls this 'the naïve understanding of this word',⁶⁸ as it only calls for more injustice to happen.

The interviewees see Jesus' demand as a serious quest to change the human behaviour that 'is driven by vengeance, by instinct, by reaction.'⁶⁹ The idea of reaction as something negative is also taken up by Raheb, who compares reaction to action, meaning that action is actively controlling the situation while reacting only is to follow the agenda setted by somebody else. Reacting is even seen as 'falling in the

⁶⁶ Cf. Ekman, *Appendix*, 7, 23, 34, 48.

⁶⁷ Zaru, Jean in Ekman, *Appendix*, 4.

⁶⁸ Khader, Jamal in Ekman, *Appendix*, 26.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

trap'.⁷⁰ Similar thoughts are expressed by Khoury: 'Jesus invites to movement, not to resignation.'⁷¹ That Jesus is demanding something radically new, a new way that is breaking the existing cycle of violence is a fact for the interviewees.⁷²

Another important theme that comes up while discussing the meaning of 'turn the other cheek' is the question of superiority and power. Through the act of turning the other cheek, 'you are triggering something that the enemy is not anticipating' and you force the enemy to 'look at [you] as an equal ... human being with dignity.'⁷³ All interviewees see Jesus' demand as a call for a wakening of the enemy, that will say the oppressor should be confronted with the pure humanity of the oppressed. Jesus' aim is seen to be the empowerment of the powerless that is, actively, 'creating a new type of relationship with [the oppressor].'⁷⁴ This empowerment means e.g. that 'I no longer am humiliated [by soldiers at the checkpoint] because I believe that the soldier is humiliating himself or herself.'⁷⁵

Often, the turning of the other cheek is deeply linked with forgiveness. But even forgiveness is not seen as a passive *laissez-faire*: 'I am willing to forgive, but I am not willing to allow injustice to continue.'⁷⁶ Forgiveness is also seen as a power transforming the enemy to the better, as 'no person who is forgiven can remain untransformed'⁷⁷.

However, this forgiveness is not unconditional, it demands the 'enemy' to take a step as well.⁷⁸ Further, Khader differentiates between the personal level of 'turn the other cheek' and the communal: 'On a personal level, I can turn the other cheek, but not when it comes to my people.'⁷⁹

70 Raheb, Mitri in Ekman, *Appendix*, 12, 14.

71 Khoury, Rafiq in Ekman, *Appendix*, 44.

72 See e.g. Abusahlia, Raed in Ekman, *Appendix*, 35. (In the Appendix, Raed Abusahlia is entitled as Father Raed).

73 Raheb, *Appendix*, 14.

74 Khader, *Appendix*, 28.

75 Daibes, Zedar in Ekman, *Appendix*, 20.

76 Ibid., 26.

77 Ibid., 23. See also Raheb, *Appendix*, 17.

78 See e.g. Khader, *Appendix*, 28, Abusahlia, *Appendix*, 37.

79 Khader, *Appendix*, 28.

3.1.1 Analysis

To understand the interviewees way of interpreting the text, one has to take into consideration, as named above, the quest for the liberating power of the Bible. This quest is bound to the image of God, that is a loving God having created equal human beings. As the interviewees see a strong discrepancy between the equality wanted by God and their factual situation, they see their own call for a change of Israel's behaviour in accordance with God's plan. This plan is for all humans to live in equality and can only be realised through the liberation of the Palestinians from the oppressive structures of occupation. Khader and Zaru express the general attitude when they speak about the naïve literal understanding, the tendency is rather to read the text in the spirit of Jesus, i.e. in the spirit of love. Ironically, it is to some extent an interpretation of the Bible that justifies the right of Israel to the land. This shows the power that these words have and not least how they can be used or, depending on the perspective, misused, for example, as the post colonial discourse shows.⁸⁰

Perceiving Jesus' demand uttered in this pericope as a change of behaviour, the interviewees interpret the text as aiming for a change of their *own* behaviour primarily, leading to the change of 'the other' as well. An identification is happening here: the informants identify themselves as the hit object which is in a need of self-transformation in order to be able to act in a way that resembles the reign of God, which is one of the aims of what Wink calls *Jesus third way*.⁸¹ Cahill argues, employing Tannehill's ideas, that 'turn the other cheek' has to be understood as one of the 'extreme commands ... [that] obviously are not literal language, they center on *focal instances* [extreme, factual practice of an ethical principle] of action that stand *in deliberate tension* with the way in which we *normally live and think*.'⁸² The identification with the transformed/transforming subject implies an important feature: activity. In Raheb's and Khader's eyes, activity is the opposite of reaction, which is a simple answering of the activity of others. The kind of reaction they talk about is obviously not the 'normal' reaction being part of the human interplay of acting and

80 Cf. Loomba, *Colonialism*, 92. See also Hans Leander, *Discourses of empire: the Gospel of Mark from a postcolonial perspective* (Göteborg: Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion, University of Gothenburg, 2011), 89.

81 Cf. Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 183.

82 Cahill, *Love your enemies*, 30.

reacting, but the forced reaction, leaving no space for action. This is what Raheb equals with ‘falling into the trap’. Leaving the circle of violence means to be self-determined, to shift from the status of the victim to the one actively writing the plot. This shift is a shift of power.

Power is uttered through the transforming of the situation and ‘the other’, for, as the post-colonial discourse helps to identify, ‘human beings internalise the systems of repression and reproduce them by conforming to certain ideas of what is normal and what is deviant’.⁸³ That means that the breaking out of a violent system, that seems to teach violence as the only way to respond, demands empowerment – in this case, the empowerment is found in the ethics Jesus is preaching. Loomba is turning against Foucault’s view of power that she describes as follows: ‘Power does not emanate from some central or hierarchical structure but flows through society in a sort of capillary action.’⁸⁴ She is surely right criticising that this view explains minor social structures, such as family, but not a more complex ‘social *formation*’,⁸⁵ as coexisting opposite peoples, where one definitely has power *over* the other. Still, the idea and performing of non-violent resistance, as in the case of Ghandi or Martin Luther King Jr., shows that even the ‘subaltern’⁸⁶ can speak and has real power. The possibility to change, i.e. to use this power, is, as history shows, not only an existing feature, but the belief in it serves concurrently as motivation, as in the case of my interviewees.

To turn the other cheek means to turn existing and oppressing structures of power upside down. As Wink puts it, ‘[Jesus] is formulating a worldly spirituality in which the people at the bottom of society or under the thumb of imperial power learn to recover their humanity.’⁸⁷ This goes with the interpretation of the interviewees that the enemy is awoken by being confronted with pure humanity. The empowerment results in confidence that one is helping to bring God’s will about, that is, the erasion of inequality and injustice. Human judgement is equaled with divine judgement in its aim, as ‘[d]ivine judgement is intended, not to destroy, but to awaken people to the

83 Loomba, *Colonialism*, 40.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid., italics in the original.

86 The term is borrowed from one of the most famous postcolonial scholars, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who coined it, speaking about colonised women, in the essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow-Sacrifice’ (*Wedge*, 7/8, 1985), 120-130. I use it here equally for oppressed women and men, as their voices are often not heard.

87 Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 182.

devastating truth about their lives.’⁸⁸ The *Imitatio Dei* thought is present already here and will be examined further in the following analysis.

Wakening the other anticipates the wakening of the self, i.e. that the subject has to be liberated from the thought of revenge and the cycle of violence. The strongest transforming powers are, as just discussed, the humanisation of ‘the other’ and, as emphasised by Daibes, forgiveness. Forgiveness, because it is seen as the presumption for the strength to turn the other cheek. Surprisingly, Wink does not take up forgiveness as a special topic, even though he states at one point that it is of great impact on the will and possibility of the self to start engaging in the non-violent struggle.⁸⁹ Discussing forgiveness, the normative, sometimes almost utopian, character of the Sermon on the Mount becomes obvious. But not only that, forgiveness is also needed to become real, because the pure and stoic striving after it is not meeting the interviewees’ transforming demands. Forgiveness, here, is not ‘just’ a Christian virtue – it’s a question of (spiritually) surviving in a situation where hate and aggression dominate life.

88 Ibid., 266.

89 Cf. *ibid.*, 275.

*This is the enemy, who is disturbing your normal life,
who is stealing your land, who is amputating your trees,
who is destroying your houses, who is preventing you from move in peace.*
Raed Abusahlia

*[We need to] distinguish the sinner from the sin,
and the sinner is not always the other.*
Rafiq Khoury

3.2 The enemy

A general tendency in the answers to the question who/what the enemy is in the Palestinian context, is that the enemy is seen not as a person, but rather as the oppressing system and structure.⁹⁰ This means that a clear difference is made between the other as a person, who is primarily defined by her being ‘created in the image of God,’⁹¹ and the other, perceived as a submitting occupation.⁹² Zaru and Daibes connect the image of the enemy to the feeling of hate. Hate is here presented as a destructive power, also for the self: ‘If I have enemies, that means I hate. And hate eats me up and paralyses me.’⁹³ Khoury (see above) and Raheb lift the question on another level, where the enemy is not *per se* ‘the Israelis’, but ‘could be somebody from your own people’ and ‘maybe with some Jewish Israeli, I might feel so connected about the values and visions for the future.’⁹⁴

Still, the most likely enemy to think of in the Palestinian situation is, as the interviews show, the Israeli occupation and its impact on everyday life, as Abusahlia describes it above. As already stated, this is occupation regarded as oppression; the enemy is the oppressor. But the status of the oppressor is also differentiated, as ‘he is also kind of imprisoned with his oppression.’⁹⁵ People suffering under occupation, in this case the Palestinians, are mainly seen to be the victims of the pericope, the one that is hit. Raheb sees the victim status critically:

[O]ften the occupied become the double victims. They are victims of the victimiser and also, by reacting, they become victims of themselves. ... the pressure they get

90 Raheb, *Appendix*, 15.

91 Daibes, *Appendix*, 20.

92 Abusahlia, *Appendix*, 37.

93 Zaru, *Appendix*, 1.

94 Raheb, *Appendix*, 13, 16.

95 Khader, *Appendix*, 28.

from above is transmitted ... horizontal. On one hand, this leads to the fragmentation of society.⁹⁶

3.2.1 Analysis

The two quotations introducing the section about the approach of the interviewees towards the enemy show the ambivalent associations with the word. Partly, the enemy is given, it's *Israel*. Partly, the enemy might be my physical neighbour, it might be myself. On one hand, it is the system that is identified as enemy, on the other, there are always people behind the system.

The enemies, the others. Often there are equation marks between them. And often they are thought of in just this category: they, Israel (as a collective term), soldiers; or: they, the Palestinians, terrorists. The systematic plural. The mechanism of pluralisation is well-known in postcolonial studies, as Loomba shows, citing Albert Memmi: 'The mark of the plural is a sign of the colonised's depersonalization: ... anonymous collectivity.'⁹⁷ I agree that the oppressed is the suffering victim of pluralisation, rather than the oppressor. But there is a clear mutuality in act of depersonalising, i.e. pluralisation. Words like 'terrorists' and 'oppressors' work on the same level and fill the same functions here. The imagined terrorist becomes a real terrorist, because the mind is waiting for the terrorist criteria it has put up to be fulfilled. And, on the other hand, acting towards an oppressor precisely as the oppressor converts (or confirms) him/her into the position of an oppressor – as Wink puts it, '[t]reating people as enemies will help create enemy-like reactions in them.'⁹⁸ This does surely not mean that victims have to 'blame themselves'; discovering this process of mutual influence on each other is rather a possibility to understand the power we have over each other's roles. If this possibility is taken seriously, the recognised mutuality will force the subject to a comparison between the self and the enemy – a difficult task, as one does not want to be compared to what he/she dislikes most. Wink explains that this task has implications: 'to face the fear of enemies would finally require us to acknowledge our own inner evil, and that would cost us all our

⁹⁶ Raheb, *Appendix*, 12, 13, 15.

⁹⁷ Loomba, *Colonialism*, 118.

⁹⁸ Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 274.

hard-earned self-esteem. *We* would have to change...'⁹⁹ Again, my aim is not to blame Palestinians for not wanting to change. I present this thought in order to not only show the difficulty that is implicated in trying to turn the other cheek and love the enemy, but also the possibility, the empowerment that these verses offer. Wink uses dramatic words when he says that 'the enemy *can be* the way to God.'¹⁰⁰ Yes, theoretically, maybe and hopefully sometimes even in practise, but this, quite abstract, reasoning is not taken up by my interviewees, which I personally find very understandable. The enemy can be *a* way to God, because, as Wink writes, the enemy is the one that provokes and questions our 'dark' sides, something that friends tolerate or accept. But it is not *the* way, or, at least, it cannot be communicated as *the* way to people who suffer to an existential degree. There are two levels here. One level, that Wink is speaking about here, is the level of salvation. (Or at least, this is my interpretation of his usage of 'way to God') Salvation is about coming (closer) to God. The concern of my interviewees here isn't primarily to approach God, but, with tools given by their faith, to change the injustice they are living under to the better; because they judge this to be God's will. This is level two, the concrete and very human hardship that needs to be disestablished, now. These two levels are definitely related, but the focus and emphasise is clearly on the latter.

This study is implicitly based on the idea that Palestinians are not friends with the Israeli occupation, maybe an external person even anticipates that they hate the Israelis. Loving one's enemy is about not hating (even though you are 'supposed' to hate) because hate is seen as an even more destructive force than the enemy himself. The reasoning of loving the enemy is perceived as relieving by my interviewees as it relieves them from the passive status of a victim. As Raheb stated above, victimisation does not only have a double effect, it also leads to a 'fragmentation of society' (see above). This development is also known in the postcolonial discourse that explains that 'it's colonialism that dislocated and distorted the psyche of the oppressed.'¹⁰¹ And that is not only on an individual level; the strength of this dislocation lies in its pluralisation that makes a whole people take over the role of the

99 Ibid., 30. Italics in original.

100 Ibid., 273. Italics in original.

101 Loomba, *Colonialism*, 112.

oppressed. Raheb describes further how vertical pressure is transformed into horizontal pressure: the oppressed becomes the oppressor – a phenomena that is examined further in 3.5. Finally, the reasoning of loving the enemy is a relief, because it helps to understand the situation of the oppressors as one of at least equal imprisonment; imprisoned in their aggressions and fear.

*Who deserves more my love?
Because no one does not deserve it,
everyone is included.*
Jamal Khader

3.3 Love

To love is a very strong expression, above all an expression that does not seem to be connected to *enemy*. How paradoxical it is in for the Palestinian people in their current situation, is expressed by Abusahlia: ‘It is very difficult to love someone who is aggressing you. We can’t preach love to our people, to tell you the truth.’¹⁰² Whatever love infers, ‘it doesn’t mean to accept what they are doing.’¹⁰³ All the interviewees agree that this is a text they are struggling with, and for them, it therefore is important to define love.

Khader speaks for all when he defines the love that is asked for in this pericope as a non sentimental, but ‘real affective costly Christian love.’¹⁰⁴ Further, enemy love is regarded as love on a ‘higher degree ... this is a divine, angelic behaviour.’¹⁰⁵ Love is, as Zaru puts it, ‘to see them as people.’¹⁰⁶ She also introduces an important aspect reflected in the answers of all interviewees, connecting v 44 to v 39 (‘turn the other

102 Abusahlia, *Appendix*, 40.

103 Zaru, *Appendix*, 5.

104 Khader, *Appendix*, 26.

105 Abusahlia, *Appendix*, 36.

106 Zaru, *Appendix*, 10.

cheek’): ‘Love is not just an empty word that [means that] you accept all the violence that comes to you and sit silently and passively and do nothing about it.’¹⁰⁷ To put it positively, ‘love that transform is the true kind of love, and this is what removes enemies from the formula.’¹⁰⁸

This transformative character Daibes introduces here is uttered elsewhere as resistance ‘to sin and to injustice, to oppression, to slavery’¹⁰⁹, i.e. to love means to actively change the behaviour of the wrongdoer, the enemy. This is so to speak the ‘how’ of to love, to ‘include them [the other] so they opt out of the structure.’¹¹⁰ But as stated by Abusahlia above, suddenly expecting the Palestinian people to love the Israelis is not possible, as Zaru puts it, ‘[love] is not a sudden automatic thing,’ but something that can be ‘built when there is respect for everyone ... so maybe the respect turns into love because you care.’¹¹¹ Khader asked himself the question ‘Where should I begin [to love]? I think I am following the example of Jesus: the oppressed, the poor, the marginalized, those in need, deserve my love first.’¹¹² Jesus demand to love the enemy is taken seriously, but all informants are very clear with their point of view that this cannot happen by neglecting their own people’s rights and needs.

The enemy love is often associated with liberation. Liberation is, as mentioned, one of the most important criteria for the informants while reading the Bible. The demand is twofold: first, for the personal, inner liberation and, second, the political, outer liberation. The first is examined here, the second will be treated while taking a closer look at non-violent resistance discussed in 3.4.

One of the central thoughts is that ‘[l]iberation cannot be liberation if it brings enslavement to the other side. It has to be liberating for everyone.’¹¹³ This liberation comes through love, as it becomes clear in Khoury’s words:

107 Ibid., 7.

108 Daibes, *Appendix*, 22.

109 Khoury, *Appendix*, 44.

110 Raheb, *Appendix*, 18.

111 Zaru, *Appendix*, 7.

112 Khader, *Appendix*, 26.

113 Daibes, *Appendix*, 25.

To be open to the other, to understand the other, to compassion the other, to help the other to get out of this hatred and injustice, that's love. That's why it is liberating for me.¹¹⁴

To strive after liberation and to not only be a passive spectator while injustice is happening, is to 'take your dignity seriously.'¹¹⁵ Liberation is then not only to recognize the other as a human being, but also the self. This is though not happening on an egocentric basis, as enemy love naturally implements an interest in the other, or, as Khader puts it, 'it's going towards the other, I am not at the centre of all. I am liberating myself of my interests to meet the interests of my neighbour.'¹¹⁶

3.3.1 Analysis

Much of the ideas presented in 3.3 are themselves already analyses of the Bible text and life under occupation, and I judge them to be explicative enough for my intents here. The following is a presentation of the points I find in need of further analyse.

Khader's and Abusahlia's introductory, contradictory statements show the absurdity that the command of enemy love is provoking in the context of the Palestinian reality. They express the impossibility as well as the necessity of the command. To ask for love seems to be an assault, without love; one never seems to be able to break the circle of violence and aggression.

The deep semantic connection between 'turn the other cheek' and 'love your enemy' becomes obvious here. To love cannot mean to neglect one's own existence and rights because this type of love is self-destructive, is not to turn the other cheek and stand for one's own and the other's humanity. The interviewees disaffiliate from an emotional definition of love, i.e. Palestinians and Israelis falling in each other's arms with tears in their eyes. Not that this would be wrong, but this is not the type of love needed now, and according to them, not the love Jesus asked for. The love that is described is an attitude rather than an emotion. It is a type of *Weltanschauung*, expressed in an unconditional affirmation of inclusive humanity.

114 Khoury, *Appendix*, 44.

115 Raheb, *Appendix*, 19.

116 Khader, *Appendix*, 34.

Here, we also find the link between love and one of the most important features in the Palestinian non-violent struggle, justice. Ateek goes so far to say that ‘in essence, justice is the other side of love.’¹¹⁷ Because, if love is seen as a genuinely inclusive spirit, one person faces another on the same level, not more and not less. The power of love lies precisely in this inclusivity, as it gives the enemy the chance to leave his/her role as an enemy. Again, the motivation is to act according to Jesus’ demand (because it is judged to be liberating), comparing human love to divine love. And it is the comparison of human and divine justice, human and divine love that has implications:

Jesus’ laconic mention of God’s all-inclusive parental care is thus charged with unexpected consequences for human behavior: we can love our enemies, because God does... This radical vision of God ... is the basis for true human community.¹¹⁸

If love is the other side of justice, then justice has to be as inclusive. And this may be the very core of justice and the struggle for it, that everybody is bound to the same conditions, me, my friends, and my enemy. To not fight back with aggressions but to still insist uncompromisingly on inclusive justice is not only ‘to stand by the side of the oppressed, following God, and through this, act in a non-oppressing way’.¹¹⁹ It means also, as mentioned above, to take your own dignity seriously – the starting point of empowerment. To be able to love the enemy, the awareness of one’s own lovability must be realised and accepted. Here, there can even be drawn a line to liberation: the goal of inclusive love is to liberate everybody, the oppressed from the oppression he/she suffers, and the oppressor from the fear that leads him/her to exercise oppression. Wink argues in *Engaging the Powers*, and the interviewees in their statements, that this is the only way to overcome submission, but also Loomba has seen similar features in the revolt against racism related to colonialism: ‘Many resistance movements have had to struggle to *transform*, and not simply invert, existing discourses about race.’¹²⁰ Here, she not only takes up one of the most central

117 Ateek, *Cry*, 22.

118 Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 267.

119 This definition of justice is found in Stephen R. Holmes, ‘Gerechtigkeit - Theologiegeschichtlich und dogmatisch,’ in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al., Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 711. My translation.

120 Loomba, *Colonialism*, 106. Italics in original.

concepts in the interviewees' interpretation of the impact of the Bible text on daily life, transformation, but also names the difficulty of this, which leads us back to the beginning of this section – to the simultaneous necessary and impossibility of enemy love.

Wink is probably right when he says that 'Loving enemies is also a way of living in expectation of miracles.'¹²¹

If it is not tested [in reality], ... it cannot be true.

Jean Zaru

3.4 How to live this text

How to turn the other cheek and love the enemy then? The answer is the call for justice that uttered throughout all the interviews. This justice is to be reached by nonviolent resistance, the transformative love (see above). Meanwhile, this view on justice and nonviolent resistance has also an important impact on the identity of the subject.

The first matter to present is the definition and importance of justice. Justice has to be distinguished between divine and human justice. Divine justice, as mentioned in v 45, is important in so far as it expresses the equality of all human beings, as Raheb puts it, 'at the end of the day, the righteousness of God is much more inclusive than what we think.'¹²² When it comes to inter-human justice, the factual situation is different: 'I see that the settlers have a different law than me, living in the same territory.'¹²³ Therefore, Raheb states: 'I'm asking for a justice based on human rights'¹²⁴, and also Daibes adds that 'the only way to refer to justice is right now the

¹²¹ Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 276.

¹²² Raheb, *Appendix*, 17.

¹²³ Khader, *Appendix*, 29.

¹²⁴ Raheb, *Appendix*, 17.

UN.^{'125} This kind of justice is the beginning of a new opportunities, as 'peace and reconciliation are the outcome of justice and equality and righteousness.'¹²⁶

To fight for this justice is, in the eyes of my interviewees, to practise nonviolent resistance, indicating to the general public the disproportionality of the Palestinian situation today. This non-violent resistance is motivated partly by general human rights, but for Christians also intimately connected to the life and words of Jesus, as Zaru puts it, 'Jesus was not silent about the structures ... sometimes he even rebuked, not only was upset.'¹²⁷ And Khoury adds that 'in the gospel, Jesus resists ... sin and he resisted society, but he never hated anybody.'¹²⁸ But still, 'nonviolence is not pacifism, ... [it] means proactive, costly work for peace and justice, ... and sometimes you should be prepared to pay the price.'¹²⁹ This emphasises once more that the pericope is not understood passively. The sacrifices that Khader is talking about here are sometimes very physical: 'to have a son in prison is a way of, for the whole family, to give sacrifice for the others. ..., this is giving to the one who asks us.'¹³⁰ Even if this seems very hard, it is seen as the only fruitful way by the interviewees, as it 'is stronger than the violence, because if we use violence, ... this will give them [the Israelis] the excuse to respond with more violence.'¹³¹ Abusahlia speaks ironically of this nonviolent resistance as something 'that you [the West] call terrorism,'¹³² and makes clear the impotent status the Palestinians are living in. The aim of this nonviolent struggle is justice and equality between Israelis and Palestinians. This equality, stressing the humanness of both parts, is also seen as the realisation of 'Gods will on earth.'¹³³

Who is who in the Bible text? This question has, implicitly, already been answered. But the interviewees had interesting analyses of the situation they are living in, connected to the question of their own and the Israeli identity, that are presented

125 Daibes, *Appendix*, 22.

126 Zaru, *Appendix*, 10.

127 *Ibid.*, 2.

128 Khoury, *Appendix*, 45.

129 Khader, *Appendix*, 28, 29.

130 *Ibid.*, 33, 34.

131 Abusahlia, *Appendix*, 37.

132 *Ibid.*, 36.

133 Zaru, *Appendix*, 2.

here briefly. Raheb discusses intensively the bilateral identification with victimhood, stating the danger of it:

The Israeli would like to always claim monopoly over victim[hood], ... If you see yourself only as a victim, you are not taking your dignity seriously. ... You cannot turn the other cheek, you want to be hit all the time, to cry that you were hit.¹³⁴

The Israeli identification as a permanent victim is seen to be founded in the fear that the Jewish people live with, having culminated in World War II, that, according to Daibes, makes them say: ‘Never again!’¹³⁵ The interviewees see this fear and respect it. But, at the same time, they argue that it is used to build up structures oppressing the Palestinian people. ‘They [Israeli politicians] need an enemy, ... and they are doing it very well,’¹³⁶ this is what Abusahlia calls ‘the institutionalisation of fear.’¹³⁷ The interviewees state that the Palestinians are forced to hold the role of the scapegoats, and they are ‘paying the price for the others.’¹³⁸ Being Palestinian, meanwhile, seems to imply an inevitably negative judgement for the interviewees: ‘I am damned if I am good, I am damned if I am bad. They’d rather sometimes hear a fanatic speak, because this reinforces their picture of the Palestinians.’¹³⁹ All the interviewees fight against the stigma of being called terrorists by Israel and ‘the West’, just because they are Palestinians, as Abusahlia expressed ironically earlier. One of the big barriers that hinder the reconciliation process according to my interviewees, besides fear, is the Israeli self understanding as the chosen people of God. This dogma is difficult to accept for the Palestinians Christians I interviewed, because they believe that ‘God does not choose somebody on the expense of the other.’¹⁴⁰ Again, Raheb points out that it isn’t possible to speak about ‘the Israelis’ as such, as ‘those people are not necessarily only actors, they are also objects of the system,’ because ‘identity is set by the empire.’¹⁴¹

134 Raheb, *Appendix*, 18.

135 Daibes, *Appendix*, 24.

136 Khader, *Appendix*, 27.

137 Abusahlia, *Appendix*, 43.

138 Khader, *Appendix*, 34.

139 Zaru, *Appendix*, 6.

140 Ibid., 7.

141 Raheb, *Appendix*, 18, 13.

3.4.1 Analysis

This section differs from the former sections as it is not concerned with terms used in the Bible text, but rather features that the interviewees connected to it, namely justice (already slightly touched on 3.3.1), non-violent resistance, and the question of identity. All these three are related to how the Matthew 5:38 – 48 is lived and realised, for, as Zaru states in the beginning, only when a Bible word is tested in one's own reality, it becomes true. Many ideas that are presented in this section have been touched on before, as the features discussed stand in a mutual relationship to each other. Some thoughts will be taken up again and extended. This will be helpful to understand the last section, 3.5, where text and situation are interpreted by those who not only fight with all the enemies that occupation offers, but also with the patriarchal society they live in: women.

As stated in 3.3.1, the text speaks about two aspects of justice, divine and human. Divine justice, the sun that rises over good and evil, is a source of hope and a role model for the informants. Human justice in the text is rather injustice at the first sight: to be beaten again, to invite to more injustice to happen. The detailed examination, however, that has been undertaken in this essay has shown the opposite. That is exactly the point of the text: factual, experienced injustice is not be responded to with new injustice, but with including love. To reach justice, one has to act in the spirit of that love, working with the tools of human justice, in the case of the interviewees, the UN charter of human rights. It is meanwhile important to recognise that justice in itself cannot be the solitary aim, because then it would sanctify all the ways of achieving it (like *just war*). But 'in the struggle against oppression, every new increment of violence simply extends the life of the Domination System and deepens faith in violence as a redemptive means.'¹⁴² A justice achieved by violence would therefore be counterproductive. To turn the other cheek does not call for hitting to continue, but for the insight that justice based on violence, no matter if it is passively accepted or actively exercised, is not only an oxymoron, but also not persistent. Even if it can show vast effects, '*violence can never stop violence, because its very success*

¹⁴² Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 216. Capital letters in original. The Domination System is one of the terms used by Wink in his explication of 'the Powers'.

*leads others to imitate it.*¹⁴³ But when justice is not achieved through and based on violence, it is, as Zaru stated, the way to peace and reconciliation. Ateek makes clear the power of this justice: ‘the oppressed are not totally powerless. They have the power of truth and justice.’¹⁴⁴ Here, Ateek points out the core in the interviewees’ understanding of justice, it is powerful and, above all, it appears in a symbiosis with truth. Injustice is, therefore, a lie that has to be dismantled. For example by turning the other cheek.

Non-violent resistance is, according to all of the interviewees but one, the single way to reach the transformation of the enemy.¹⁴⁵ It is important, as Khader did, to differentiate between non-violence and pacifism. Khader defines non-violence as ‘costly, proactive work’ (see above) and Wink emphasises the active character further: ‘Nonviolence, in fact, seeks out conflict, elicits conflict, exacerbates conflict, in order to bring it out in the open and lance its poisonous sores.’¹⁴⁶ Precisely this is why *non-violence* and *resistance* belong together in the Palestinian context. To turn the other cheek and to confront the enemies with love forces them to see the injustice they are exercising. This shows that non-violent resistance is not compromising about the values it fights for. Implying a certain degree of radicalism, non-violent resistance is also to be treated carefully, as it also seeks to achieve some kind of power over other, namely the power that makes the oppressor change. Nonviolence has to be connected to (enemy) love, otherwise it’s just another way of oppression.¹⁴⁷ The power non-violent resistance has should though not be underestimated, because

when anyone steps out of the system and tells the truth, lives the truth, that person enables *everyone else* to peer behind the curtain too. That person has shown everyone that it is possible to live within the truth, despite the repercussions.¹⁴⁸

If the enemy is the system, then the dismantling of the system shows the people behind it facing the injustice and inequality that the system produces. It gives them

143 Ibid. Italics in original.

144 Ateek, *Cry*, 20.

145 Khoury was the only who named that, if the non-armed resistance does not stop the aggressor from continuously executing oppression, the last way could be an armed resistance.

146 Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 192.

147 Cf. *ibid.*, 265.

148 *Ibid.*, 98. Italics in original.

the chance to stop nourishing the system. But it also takes effect on the oppressed, it shows that another reality is possible and that the oppressed also contribute to the system by obeying. Therefore, 'nonviolence, at its best, seeks to activate the truth in people rather than to coerce them into *our* program.'¹⁴⁹ By the interviewees, this is seen as the tactic of Jesus; the Bible is both source of and gives authority to the non-violence concept. Khader points out that the following of this concept is not 'for free', but demands a lot of sacrifices. The thought of sacrifice leads us to the next section, the question of identity.

Throughout the interviews the feeling among the interviewees of being the scapegoat is expressed, and that this is *the price* that has to be paid. Simplified, Europe assassinated millions of Jews and had a bad conscience, and the Palestinians now have to make it up with their land and lives, their sons in prison. It is surely a very vast sacrifice, but one that needs to be made in the eyes of many interviewees. The question arises, why this sacrifice has to be made and who asks for it. One explanation of the interviewees was, again, the *Imitatio Christi*. Jesus needed to go through great pain to reach the light. Khader named this as an important argument for the members of his congregation to continue living and not losing faith and hope. From this perspective, the identification with the one who is sacrificing can give strength. The other alternative named above, to argue that a Jewish state on the land of Palestine was an easy way for Europe to *get rid* of its bad conscience is, obviously, very speculative and controversial and nothing I want to spend time on here, but the idea is however an important feature for the Palestinian identity. To see oneself as the scapegoat and victim evokes the feeling of injustice and the demand toward others to help, implying one's own impotence. And surely, the violence people are confronted with leaves them quite powerless, for, as Loomba states within the post-colonial discourse, 'colonial violence is understood as including an *epistemic* aspect, i.e. an attack on the culture, ideas and value systems of the colonised people.'¹⁵⁰ The very act of the Israeli oppression is not just touching the ability to move freely, but is cutting deeply into the self-understanding and the self-determination of the Palestinians. If I perceive myself as weak, if I do not see the value of my own heritage, the oppressing

149 Ibid., 277. Italics in original.

150 Loomba, *Colonialism*, 51. Emphasising in original.

system has succeeded in its intentions. Loomba writes about Aimé Césaire, who equaled colonialisation with a ‘thingification’ which ‘not only exploits but dehumanises and objectifies the colonised subject,’ and adds finally what was argued above about the oppressor, ‘as it degrades the coloniser himself.’¹⁵¹ The thingification goes along with the pluralisation mentioned earlier. The other becomes not only an indefinable group, but also an object, a thing that, in the case of colonialisation, can be used to gain power and wealth, and that, in the case of occupation, is simply a problem in the way to gain all the land. To turn the other cheek makes the oppressor aware of the individuality and humanity of the ‘thing’ he/she is abusing, as he/she has to look into the eyes of the other. The oppressor and the oppressed are therethrough forced to re-think their own identities and the identity of the other. That this step is important has already been shown by Edward Said, cited in Loomba, because the categorisation of ‘us’ and ‘the others’ is in a lot of points only a structural division,

structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’). ...When one uses categories like Oriental and Western as both the starting and the end points of analysis, research, public policy ... the result is usually to polarize the distinction – the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the Western more Western – and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies.¹⁵²

Otherness as such is not a problem addressed here, as far as I see, but the stigmatising of it, the use of the it as fundamentally different and often as something worth less. If it is this kind of otherness that is in focus – and not the definition of otherness based on a mutual recognition of the others humanity and cultural and social heritage – the other becomes a threat to the self, just because of its radical difference, and the polarisation, as Said writes, becomes still bigger. And this happens, obviously, on both sides, but, as seen within the context of colonialism, the party oppressing the other declares itself to be the normative one. Loomba analyses correctly that

151 Ibid., 24.

152 Ibid., 43-44.

Anti-colonial struggles therefore had to create new and powerful identities for colonised peoples and to challenge colonialism not only at a political or intellectual level, but also on an emotional plane.¹⁵³

This is exactly what the Christian community in Palestine is doing when they apply enemy love and the practice of ‘turn the other cheek’ in their daily lives. They had to find an alternative to either the total identification with victimhood or violence, as neither of these was proving helpful in creating a new, powerful, and active identity that does not use the same methods that it fears. Raheb is right in stressing that the empire has great impact on identity, but enemy love, as interpreted in this thesis, seeks not to let the empire make one compromise with one’s values or one’s inclusive view on humanity, but to live them – especially toward the enemy, because they are most needed in this relationship.

*This is the biggest success in my life,
that I have brought up children who don't hate.*
Zedar Daibes¹⁵⁴

3.5 Palestinian women speaking

I am happy to have had the opportunity to interview two Palestinian women, as women in Palestine are usually not theologically involved, i.e. not invoked in public debate. My final task now is to examine if there is a particular female approach to the Bible text expressed by these two women.

One quest toward the text is stressed more by Daibes and Zaru than by their male colleagues, the quest for the applicability of the Bible text in daily life, that is needed to reach the full understanding of the text: ‘But this [the understanding] came after testing it in my own life.’¹⁵⁵ Daibes also states that this ‘is a very practical text, very human.’¹⁵⁶ Both see the identification with the text and the *Sitz im Leben* as an important feature, relevant to loving your enemy and turning the other cheek. The focus in interpreting lies mainly on the individual being put in front of a real life

¹⁵³ Ibid., 155.

¹⁵⁴ This sentence is not to be found in the Appendix, as it was uttered by Daibes after the recorded interview.

¹⁵⁵ Zaru, *Appendix*, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Daibes, *Appendix*, 19.

situation and what this situation does to the individual, for example ‘hate kills me before it kills my enemy.’¹⁵⁷

Another aspect emphasised by the two women was the need for inner strength connected to their own spirituality, resolutely aiming for perfection. Inner strength means to really be able to turn the other cheek, or, as Daibes puts it: ‘I no longer am humiliated [at the checkpoint]... I got rid of my ego.’¹⁵⁸ Even if they do not speak about revolution, they still express a certain radicalism in the way they argue for their case and in their ideals. This is profoundly connected to the strong wish to imitate Jesus.¹⁵⁹ Zaru stated that ‘Jesus was not satisfied with feeding the hungry’ and ‘if you don’t rage against injustice, how will you transform it?’¹⁶⁰ Also the weight of spirituality is accentuated, centring on ‘bringing God’s kingdom to this world.’¹⁶¹ The struggle for the coming of the kingdom is associated with a universal and inclusive spirituality as its base.¹⁶² Daibes states that ‘if you don’t keep growing spiritually, you will die spiritually,’¹⁶³ which indicates the continual struggle for the kingdom of God.

Daibes and Zaru were also talking about the experiences they have had during their lives. Both women agreed on the fact that women suffer differently and ‘are oppressed on more than one level.’¹⁶⁴ Daibes adds that women might be ‘more vulnerable, but also more sensible’ and that ‘the occupation puts the burden on women’s shoulders, and we carry it silently.’¹⁶⁵ Zaru, having been pregnant at the beginning of the Israeli occupation, tells also the inner conflict the occupation invoked: ‘You don’t want to bring a baby into this broken world.’¹⁶⁶

157 Zaru, *Appendix*, 10.

158 Daibes, *Appendix*, 20.

159 See *ibid.*, 21, 23.

160 Zaru, *Appendix*, 2, 5.

161 *Ibid.*, 7.

162 See *ibid.*, 9.

163 Daibes, *Appendix*, 21.

164 *Ibid.*, 24.

165 *Ibid.*

166 Zaru, *Appendix*, 4.

3.5.1 Analysis

I now want to emphasise the female perspective because it is one that is often forgotten. Maybe not in today's academic fields in general, but in the society of my female interviewees. When Daibes says that women are oppressed on more than one level, she is speaking about the occupation on one hand and the patriarchal structures that dominate the Palestinian society, even if a lot is changing with the latter. As Wink states, oppression in patriarchal societies has been transmitted further, 'Power lost by men through submission to a ruling elite was compensated by power gained over women, children, hired workers, slaves, and the land.'¹⁶⁷ This may happen everywhere where there is an imbalance of power, but, as the great amount of feministic works dismantling and challenging patriarchal structures shows, it is a returning phenomena in the imbalance of power between men and women. Loomba describes the feeling of double victimhood expressed by Daibes as follows, 'race and gender categories are not analogous but they remain mutually intensifying.'¹⁶⁸ That means, translated into our situation, it's bad to be a Palestinian, but it's even worse to be a Palestinian woman. Daibes describes that the Palestinian women are carrying this burden silently and sees women to be more vulnerable. Even if Daibes perceives this vulnerability not only as a weak point but also as a positive feature (as it gives women the possibility to show and receive empathy), her view still describes a picture of women who are passive rather than active. The Bible text has potential to liberate and empower even more, if oppressed women can find a way in it to turn both levels of oppression, the political and the societal, into relations of equality and justice.

Daibes and Zaru show that there is a will and they are very eager to fulfil the text. Winks description of non-violence as 'a spiritual challenge of epic proportions [that] calls upon the soul's authentic longing ... for self-transcendence in giving oneself to others'¹⁶⁹ fits well to Daibe's and Zaru's strivings, as it reinforces their frequent references to motherhood. Motherhood or parental care is seen as a base for real love and as the place where non-violence takes its first steps and is applied. As Zaru said earlier, love for the enemy doesn't come by itself, new generations have to see this as

¹⁶⁷ Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 40.

¹⁶⁸ Loomba, *Colonialism*, 140.

¹⁶⁹ Wink, *Engaging the powers*, 207.

a meaningful and viable alternative to violence. The female perspective on the text is therefore still more practice-orientated: if the text cannot be lived, it is just words. If it can be lived, it's life.

4 Conclusion and summary

The task of this thesis was to present and analyse the material I collected in September 2012 by interviewing six Palestinian Christians on their interpretation of Matthew 5:38 – 48.

The material shows that, as anticipated, this text is not easy to interpret for the interviewees, since it seems to ask the impossible from humans. To turn the other cheek is, in the eyes of my interviewees, not to close the eyes and let injustice happen, but to actively provoke the enemy to see the oppressed's equal humanity. This means to transform the enemy, but also to transform the self, which needs to recognise the enemy's humanity likewise, and, not least, to confront the self with its own evil. To understand the interpretation of enemy love, the non-emotional definition of love is anticipated. Love is presented by the interviewees as an attitude rather than a feeling. This love is characterised by its inclusive nature, that embraces hate and aggression in order to give the enemy the chance to change his/her behaviour. Through loving the enemy and turning the other cheek the interviewees seek to liberate themselves *and* the enemy from oppression, the first is freed from suffering evil and injustice, the latter from causing evil and being the one exercising injustice.

Matthew 5:38 – 48 is not only liberating to the interviewees, but also shows how this liberation can take place: through the principle of non-violent resistance. In the non-violent struggle, justice, equality, and through them peace are the aims which are to be realised for all. To see the pericope as an empowering to non-violent resistance to oppression changes the perception of one's identity from being a victim to being the one who is actively taking over a situation and forcing the other to see the mistakes he/she is making. The importance of the non-violent struggle lies also in becoming equal, which means that one of the focuses is the abolishment of 'the other' as a radically different and incomplete human *object*, often expressed through the pluralisation of the other (terrorists, soldiers, etc.). To turn the other cheek is to make oneself an individual subject, to love the enemy is, as Raheb put it above, to include him/her so that he/she opts out of the destroying structure and works toward the realisation of the reign of God. The realisation of God's will is not the primarily

concern of the interviewees, but the struggle for a life of justice, equality, and peace is seen to be corresponding to Gods's will and to affirm non-violent resistance.

However, the ideal of the *Imitatio Dei* is also motivation for the interviewees. Especially the two women emphasise on following the way of Jesus. This may have its cause in their experience, that tells them that women suffer differently and on more levels than men. The mechanism of the oppressed who is becoming an oppressor, is especially obvious when focusing on the status and experiences of women, who often suffer under double oppression – the one of the oppressing system and that of men who have a higher standing in society and take out their anger on women and children.

I have also shown that the situation presented in the Gospel and that of my interviewees corresponds to each other in many ways. In section 2, I have discussed the conditions which the Gospel of Matthew describes: life with an enemy that is likely to be a real enemy, which I argued could be the rule of the Roman Empire. In its examples, the text speaks about an aggressive oppression that mistreats and forces people to accommodate to its conditions. This was the case during the Roman Empire, as explained in section 2, and this is my interviewees experience of the Israeli occupation. As was the case during the first century, Matt 5:38 – 48 is still received as a text that wants to stimulate human beings to strive after perfection (cf. agada – tradition and interview analyses). But as it is written out of the position of the oppressed and is, in the Palestinian context, read by the oppressed, it is therefore found to be particularly empowering and liberating.

One moral question remains for me. It is obvious that non-violence resistance wants to change the enemy to the better, but this implies that *I* know what is right and that I put myself over the other, whom I seek to 'transform to the better'. The interviewees often compared this transforming love to the love of a parent, stating that parents who love their children do not always let them do what they want, but take care of them and try to 'show them' the best alternatives in life. In one way, this comparison is beautiful, because it shows how honest this transforming love is. On the other hand,

the enemies are not children, but other adults, and arguing that the oppressed has to *convince* them of their attitude because this will be for their own good as well, is somehow patronising. I do definitely not want to argue that injustice is supposed to be endured because of the fear that a resistance against it could be patronising! Injustice and oppression are not legitimate and do not correspond to the life and teachings of Jesus. But maybe the awareness of our own humanity is needed for non-violent resistance not to become an oppressing system itself.

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