



**LUND UNIVERSITY**  
Center for Middle Eastern Studies

## Occupied Intimacies:

The implications of occupation for intimate relationships in the  
Palestinian Territories

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
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Author: Hilda Ärlemyr  
Advisor: Nina Gren  
Examiner: Torsten Jansson  
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## Abstract

This qualitative study examines how the Israeli occupation affects and interferes with Palestinian intimate relationships in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The research material consists of semi-structured interviews with female students and graduates conducted during a short period of fieldwork in the West Bank in September 2016. The thesis shows that Israeli mechanisms of control, such as restricted mobility and differentiation of ID cards, interfere with the women interviewees' choice of marital partners. It examines how the unpredictability of checkpoints, border crossings, and imprisonment affect Palestinian women's abilities to plan their social lives. The thesis explores also how the idea of *sumud*, a responsibility of staying in the land, has led to Palestinian self-restrictions on migration. Furthermore, it shows that the informants' everyday resistance to occupation can be contradictory and is always highly entangled with kinship ties and personal aspirations.

The thesis aims to broaden the theoretical perspectives on intimacy, and move beyond the European and American context to explore the reshaping of intimate relationships in a situation of occupation. I develop for the purpose of the thesis the concept 'occupied intimacies', that seek to shed light on how the mechanisms of control connected to occupation interfere with occupied subjects' intimate relationships. Moreover, it highlights how the same subjects find ways to resist the occupation. I suggest also that the concept 'occupied intimacies' may offer fruitful angles to analyse cases beyond that of Israel-Palestine.

**Key words:** occupation, intimacy, intimate relationships, Palestinian Territories, West Bank, matrix of control, mobility, restrictions, everyday resistance, search for the ordinary, *sumud*.

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## I – Introduction

One evening driving back to Jerusalem from Ramallah, a Palestinian friend of mine told me that he had fallen in love with a Palestinian Lebanese girl he had met on a trip to Europe. The relationship had ended however, because the two of them had not been able to find a way to get married and live together without having to give up the relation to their home countries. The Palestinian Lebanese girl was not allowed to enter Israel or the Occupied Palestinian Territories (hereafter referred to as the OPTs). My friend could not move either, because he would then risk losing his Jerusalem residence permit and with it, his right to stay in Israel and the OPTs. It was a sad story, however, not particularly unique. Yet my friend's situation led me to wonder how the conditions of occupation affect and transform intimate relationships more generally. The work of this thesis has thus been guided by a quest to explore the implications of occupation for Palestinian intimacy.

So far, theories of intimacy have treated primarily structural changes of intimate relationships in contexts of liberal democracy in Europe and the United States. Sociologists such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim have argued that intimacy in “the West” has undergone a process of individualization, in which intimate relationships have become sites of choice and difference through which individuals seek to craft “authentic lives”.<sup>1</sup> Giddens has suggested that the individualization of intimacy has led to a democratization of personal life, and Illouz has suggested that intimate relationships have become increasingly defined by economic models of bargaining and exchange.<sup>2</sup> Only peripheral attention has been paid to structural changes of intimate relationships in other settings. With this thesis I seek to address this gap by exploring how intimate relationships are affected by, and sometimes reshaped under, conditions of occupation.

The thesis takes the form of a qualitative study inspired by ethnographic methods. The research material consists of semi-structured interviews conducted during two intense weeks of fieldwork in the city of Ramallah in the West Bank in September 2016. The study participants were Palestinian middle-class women between the ages 18-30, who were either enrolled in university studies or had completed their degrees. Most of them studied at Birzeit University close to Ramallah, the best-ranked university in the OPTs, with the highest tuition

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<sup>1</sup> Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *The Normal Chaos of Love* (London: Polity Press, 1995) in Steven Seidman, *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*, 5th ed. (Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 322.

<sup>2</sup> See Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy* (London: Polity Press, 1992) and Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (London: Polity Press, 2007).

fees. Most of the respondents identified themselves as Muslims, however, one of them was Christian and another was brought up in a Muslim-Christian family and identified herself with both religions. The women came from both urban and village backgrounds and had grown up in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The focus of this study is intimate relationships based on romantic love, sexual relation or family arranged engagements and marriages. Why then can it be fruitful to examine something so ordinary? Anthropologist Tobias Kelly has noted that many recent ethnographies of armed conflict has supported a focus of the extraordinary, ignoring the fact that the vast majority of people do not participate in armed activities but attempt to live instead what passes for “ordinary lives”.<sup>3</sup> I suggest that intimate relationships can be important in forming what passes for “ordinary lives” in midst of occupation. This is not to argue that intimate relationships in the OPTs offer some kind of free zones to escape conflict. On the contrary, I propose that Palestinian intimate relationships in the OPTs are deeply inflicted with the violence and mechanisms of control connected to the occupation. The aim of this study is thus not to examine intimacy in the Palestinians Territories for the sake of knowing intimacy, but for the sake of investigating how power relations connected to the Israeli occupation affect and interfere with intimate relationships. In order to do so I have posed the following research questions:

- 1) How do the conditions of occupation impact or interfere with occupied subjects’ intimate relationships?
- 2) How are young educated Palestinian women negotiating and reshaping their intimate relationships in a context of continuing occupation?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has affected, and continues to affect, the socio-political climate in the Middle East as a region. I suggest therefore that it is highly relevant for the field of Middle Eastern Studies to examine how the occupation affect peoples’ everyday lives in the Occupied Territories.

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<sup>3</sup> Tobias Kelly, “The Attractions of Accountancy: Living an Ordinary Life during the Second Palestinian Intifada,” *Ethnography* 9, no. 3 (2008), 370.

## **Disposition**

The thesis is structured into nine chapters. Chapter II offers a brief background of the current situation in the OPTs, with special focus on restricted mobility for Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Chapter III offers a literature review of relevant studies that have addressed intimate relationships with emphasis on the Palestinian context. Chapter IV introduces the theoretical framework in which I outline the notion of ‘occupied intimacies’, developed for the purpose of this thesis. Chapter V describes the methodology and research procedures of the study. Chapter VI and VII offer an integrated account of the findings and analysis of the thesis, divided into two overarching themes. Chapter VI examines intimate relationships in a setting of restricted mobility. Chapter VII explores intimate relationships and personal aspirations in a context of occupation. The thesis ends with a concluding discussion in which I summarize the findings and suggest areas for further research. Chapter IX offers a bibliography containing the full list of references.

## II – Context

In order to situate the interviews and analysis of the study I will briefly address a couple of important points of reference for the current situation in the OPTs, with special focus on the West Bank and East Jerusalem. When fieldwork for this study took place in September 2016, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem had been going on for 49 years.<sup>4</sup> The nature of occupation has shifted over time, but as should become apparent in the following, the occupation of today is maintained through policies of restricted mobility, intensified construction of settlements and strict military control. Since 1995 (under the terms of Oslo II), the West Bank has been divided into three areas: Area A, under exclusive Palestinian control; Area B, with Palestinian civilian control and Israeli security control; and Area C, under exclusive Israeli control. The idea behind the division was that Israel would eventually transfer increasing amount of territory from Area B and C to Area A.<sup>5</sup> This process has continuously been put off, and the division of the West Bank remains. In the following, I will describe some of the current elements of occupation, such as the ‘separation barrier’, the differentiation of ID cards, and the construction of settlements.

### The ‘separation barrier’

In the early 1990s, Israel had begun restricting Palestinians’ access to Israel and put up checkpoints between the annexed East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank. The restrictions denote that Palestinians in the West Bank are forbidden from entering Israel or East Jerusalem without a special permit from the Israeli authorities. Moreover, Palestinians in the West Bank cannot travel abroad without Israeli approval.<sup>6</sup> These severe restrictions on movement of Palestinian people and goods has been referred to as the Israeli ‘matrix of control’, a concept that will be further explained in the chapter on the theoretical framework. The complex system of checkpoints, settlements, bypass roads and closed military zones has led to an increased fragmentation of the West Bank and contributed to impoverishing the Palestinian population in the OPTs.<sup>7</sup>

After the outbreak of the *al-Aqsa* intifada in 2000, the Israeli government approved to the construction of the ‘separation barrier’, with the stated purpose to prevent violent attacks

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<sup>4</sup> B’Tselem, “Reality Check: Almost Fifty Years of Occupation,” June 5, 2016, [http://www.btselem.org/publications/201606\\_reality\\_check](http://www.btselem.org/publications/201606_reality_check), accessed October 27, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Mark LeVine, *Impossible Peace: Israel/Palestine since 1989* (New York: Zed Books, 2009), 55.

<sup>6</sup> B’Tselem, “Reality Check.”

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Halper, “The 94 Percent Solution: A Matrix of Control,” *Middle East Report*, no. 216 (2000), 15.



by Palestinians in Israel. Since the construction started in 2002, the Israeli Ministry of Defence has requisitioned land from Palestinian landowners through military orders.<sup>8</sup> A UN-report from 2014 states that 85 per cent of the barrier's route runs inside the West Bank, rather than along the Green Line (the internationally recognized border between Israel and the Occupied Territories).<sup>9</sup> According to the report, around 150 Palestinian communities own land located between the barrier and the Green Line. Access to this land has been heavily restricted, as it has been declared a 'closed area'. Palestinians are now obliged to apply for special permits in order to access their land between the barrier and the Green Line, however, permits are often rejected because of security reasons, lack of valid land documents, or because the land is not large enough.<sup>10</sup>

In July 2004 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an Advisory Opinion on the 'Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory'. The ICJ recognized that Israel had faced numerous deadly acts of violence targeted against its civilian population, but that the construction of the barrier was a violation of Israel's obligation under international law. The ICJ called therefore on Israel to stop the construction of the barrier (including in and around East Jerusalem), undo the sections already completed, 'make reparations' for the requisition and destruction of homes and businesses, as well as return the land and other property seized.<sup>11</sup> Ten years later, in 2014, 62 per cent of the barrier had been constructed, including 200 kilometres since the ICJ Advisory Opinion.<sup>12</sup>

The barrier leaves whole Palestinian communities, approximately 11 000 people, stuck between the wall and the Green Line, excluding East Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> Most of these communities lack access to basic health institutions, shops, schools and primary sources of water. Residents living in these areas are obliged to pass through checkpoints to reach workplaces, schools and other services. The barrier has also added to the fragmentation of East Jerusalem, as well as intensified the separation of the city from the rest of West Bank.<sup>14</sup> Due to the barrier, a large number of Palestinians in East Jerusalem have been cut off from the centre of the city, and

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Occupied Palestinian Territory, "10 Years since the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion," July 9, 2014, [http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_10\\_years\\_barrier\\_report\\_english.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_10_years_barrier_report_english.pdf), accessed October 27, 2016, 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

now need to go through a system of checkpoints in order to obtain health care and reach other services.<sup>15</sup>

### **The 'ID-card regime'**

The Palestinian population in the OPTs is further divided through what Tawil-Souri has termed the Israeli 'ID card regime', through which Israel controls different populations differently and unevenly.<sup>16</sup> As Tawil-Souri has noted, the ID cards in large has come to determine Palestinians' geographic, economic and social mobility.<sup>17</sup> First, one must note that Israel is a nation for the world's Jews, not simply for Israelis who may or may not be Jewish. 20% of the population within Israel proper is Palestinian and holds Israeli citizenship; they are often referred to as Israeli Palestinians or Palestinian Israelis. Palestinians in the OPTs on the other hand hold three different types of ID cards: the Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza ID card. Most Palestinian Jerusalemites hold a blue ID card denoting a residence permit, which enables them to move freely throughout Israel and gives them access to Israel's social security system and health care.<sup>18</sup> However, unlike the Israeli Palestinians living in Israel proper, they are citizenshipless, like the rest of the Palestinian population in the OPTs. To travel abroad they use temporary Jordanian passports or Israeli-issued travel permits.<sup>19</sup>

The holders of the West Bank green card or the Gaza orange card cannot enter Israel or Occupied East Jerusalem, nor move across certain spaces inside and between the OPTs, without a permit from the Israeli authorities. It is important to note also that after the Oslo Accords the responsibility of issuing ID cards to Palestinian residents in the OPTs was passed over to the Palestinian Authority, however with the prerequisite of approval from the Israeli state apparatus. Thus, as Tawil-Souri remarks, whether an ID card has a PA or an Israeli seal, the Israeli authorities mandate them all.<sup>20</sup>

As stated above, closure became enforced on the entirety of the OPTs at the beginning of the 1990's, and OPT-Palestinians must since then obtain individual permits to enter Israel and East Jerusalem, whether to work or visit, for example to pray in the Al-Aqsa mosque. All

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<sup>15</sup> ILO, "The Situation of Workers of the Occupied Arab Territories" (Geneva, 2015), [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_368279.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_368279.pdf), accessed November 4, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Helga Tawil-Souri, "Uneven Borders, Coloured (Im)mobilities: ID Cards in Palestine/Israel," *Geopolitics* 17, no. 1 (January 2012), 160.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>18</sup> B'Tselem, "Reality Check".

<sup>19</sup> Tawil-Souri, "Uneven Borders, Coloured (Im)mobilities", 158-159.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

OPT-Palestinian workers who are legally employed in Israel or in Israeli settlements in the West Bank must have Israeli companies or patrons initiate the permit process. This system has been criticized for reinforcing dependency on Israeli employers and rendering Palestinian workers vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>21</sup>

### **Settlements and the West Bank economy**

The Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank form part of the areas declared closed military zones by Israel, and are off limits to Palestinians (except by special permit). During the Oslo period, the construction of settlements in the OPTs was intensified, a trend that has continued in the years previous to the fieldwork of this study. According to a report from the International Labour Organization (ILO), there were four times more settlers in the West Bank in 2014 than when the Oslo accords were concluded.<sup>22</sup> The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem states moreover that the settler population in the West Bank was estimated to be upwards of 547,000 in November 2015. In late 2013, the population of the West Bank settlements was 350,010.<sup>23</sup> The settlement building is prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 49, which states that the occupying power is not allowed to relocate its own citizens to the territory it occupies.<sup>24</sup>

Some academics have argued that the construction of settlements form part of the settler colonial character of the state of Israel. In *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Veracini argues that settlements in general “[...] are made by conquest, not just by immigration.”<sup>25</sup> Veracini suggests moreover that the settler-phenomenon contains a mimetic character, through which colonial practices are concealed behind both the metropolitan coloniser and the settlers’ labour and hardship.<sup>26</sup> Veracini argues that the mimetic quality of settler colonialism involves the production of certain narratives that mask the colonial activity. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian context, the Israeli sociologist Gershon Shafir has argued that Israel should indeed be categorized as a belated settler colony. In his book *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli Palestinian Conflict*, Shafir suggests that Zionism

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 166-167.

<sup>22</sup> ILO, “The Situation of Workers of the Occupied Arab Territories”.

<sup>23</sup> B’Tselem, “Land Expropriation and Settlements,” November 23, 2015, <http://www.btselem.org/settlements>, accessed October 27, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> “Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.” (International Committee of the Red Cross, August 12, 1949), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/380>, accessed November 19, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: An Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 14.

was at the outset merely a variety of Eastern European nationalism and an ethnic movement in search for a state. Shafir argues however that as it unfolded, Zionism may be seen more fruitfully as a late example of European overseas expansion and a settler colony.<sup>27</sup> In a chapter in the *Handbook of Israel: The Major Debates*, Shafir argues that the state of Israel continues the colonization through which it was formed to this day.<sup>28</sup> According to Shafir, one of the most prominent features of this continued colonization is the construction of settlements in the West Bank.

Whether or not one agrees with the categorization of the state of Israel as a belated settler colony, it should be noted that the Israeli restrictions on movement of Palestinian goods and people has had implications on the economic situation in the OPTs. According to the ILO, the unemployment rate for Palestinians in the OPTs was 27 per cent in 2014.<sup>29</sup> One should take into account here that the rates in Gaza were more than double those of the West Bank. The ILO-report states also that tensions in East Jerusalem sometimes resulting in violent incidents are largely due to the lack of economic and employment opportunities. Poverty rates for Palestinian families in East Jerusalem were estimated at around 70 per cent in 2014.<sup>30</sup>

The occupation of today is thus maintained through policies of restricted mobility, differentiation of ID cards, and intensified construction of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. These factors all affect the Palestinian economy and work possibilities for Palestinians in the OPTs. As will become clear in the following chapter, these policies and mechanisms of control have also had an impact on Palestinian marriages and wedding celebrations.

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<sup>27</sup> Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 8.

<sup>28</sup> Gershon Shafir, "Is Israel a Colonial State?", in *Handbook of Israel: The Major Debates*, ed. Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Julius H. Schoeps, Yitzhak Sternberg and Olaf Glöckner (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 749-808.

<sup>29</sup> ILO, "The Situation of Workers of the Occupied Arab Territories".

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

### III – Literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to place the research topic within the wider body of literature that has addressed social and political aspects of intimate relationships in a Palestinian context. A variety of anthropological research touching upon issues of marriages has been carried out since the 1930s in the Palestinian Territories, Israel and in Palestinian diaspora communities.<sup>31</sup> These studies have focused primarily on the institution of marriage and the symbolic and political connotations of wedding ceremonies. In recent years, feminist scholars have especially emphasized how marriage is interlinked with processes of modernization and nationalism.<sup>32</sup> To the best of my knowledge, no scholarly attention has been paid to how people in the OPTs negotiate and strategize around the wider notion of intimate relationships in a context of occupation. One of the aims of this thesis is to partly fill this gap and expand the perspective from a focus on marriage to a wider emphasis on intimacy.

The following sections address three broad perspectives that have been discussed in the body of literature previously mentioned: marriages as expressions of social identities, marriages and the construction of political identities, as well as gender and queer perspectives on intimate relationships. Considering the focus of the thesis I emphasize work on weddings and intimate relationships in a Palestinian context. However, I point also to similar studies across different contexts.

#### **Marriages as expressions of social identities**

The first perspective examines marriages and wedding celebrations as an opportunity to express social and political identities. As Johnson, Abu Nahleh and Moors suggest, wedding celebrations in Palestine are crucial for the "...performance and production of identities and feelings of belonging."<sup>33</sup> Johnson et al. examine the transformation in marriage arrangements during the first and second intifada, with special focus on marriages between political activists. The authors suggest that political activism became of far greater relevance during the first intifada when families were evaluating the suitability of a potential spouse. Especially

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<sup>31</sup> See for example Hilma Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village* (Helsinki: Helsingfors Bokbinderi och Centraltryckeri AB, 1932).

<sup>32</sup> See for example Nira Yuval-Davis and Pnina Werbner, "Introduction: Women and the New Discourse of Citizenship," in *Women, Citizenship and Difference*, ed. Nira Yuval-Davis and Pnina Werbner (London: Zed Books, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Penny Johnson, Lamis Abu Nahleh, and Annelies Moors, "Weddings and War: Marriage Arrangements and Celebrations in Two Palestinian Intifadas," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 5, no. 3 (2009), 15.

among families involved in left wing activism, political affiliation was increasingly considered more important than categories of religion, class, location and kinship.<sup>34</sup> However, this trend shifted dramatically during the Oslo period and the second intifada. If the first intifada was characterized by widespread grassroots activism, the second focused more on violent and armed forms of resistance. This change impacted thoughts on desirability of spouses, and men who were political activists (and thus potentially Israeli “targets”) were gradually becoming undesirable groom-material.<sup>35</sup> However, it was not only the desirability of potential spouses that shifted between the first and second intifada, Johnson et al. examine also a shift in the organization of wedding celebrations. During the first intifada, a new culture of austerity arose and weddings were often celebrated “in silence” at home. Towards the second intifada, weddings were held again in hotels and became highly commercialized.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the authors claim that wedding parties in the post-Oslo period have gradually become sites of self-fashioning and distinction.<sup>37</sup>

In recent years scholars from a variety of disciplines have examined the rise of the bridal industry globally<sup>38</sup> and how weddings and consumption merge in a “commodification of romance.”<sup>39</sup> In the Palestinian context, the combination of weddings and consumption has been examined primarily in relation to status and social position. Erdreich suggests that Palestinian Israeli women’s marriage talk reproduces the hegemony of the Israeli nation state by attaching the women to one of its central mechanisms of sovereignty – intimacy.<sup>40</sup> More specifically, Erdreich shows that the women’s hopes for their wedding celebrations encompass marking themselves as educated bourgeois women. Through their consumption of dress and jewellery, the women attach themselves to culturally defined definitions of taste “[...] that are considered bourgeois or Israeli middle class.”<sup>41</sup> Such aspirations are manifested not only in the bridal party dresses but also through the guest list of the wedding celebration. Today, the invitation list has changed from a demonstration of village solidarity to one of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 21-23.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>38</sup> See Vicki Howard, *Brides, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition*. (Philadelphia: Univ of Pennsylvania Pr, 2008). Rebecca Mead, *One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> See Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Cele Otnes and Elizabeth H Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Lauren Erdreich, “Marriage Talk: Palestinian Women, Intimacy, and the Liberal Nation-State,” *Ethnography* 7, no. 4 (2006), 493.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 507-508.

economic and class relations, and the women wish for a small wedding celebration with carefully selected guests. This trend, states Erdreich, is connected to discourses of modernization and primitiveness, a topic that has been addressed also in relation to family planning among Palestinians in Israel.<sup>42</sup>

Kanaaneh shows in her work on reproduction strategies among Palestinian Israeli women in the Galilee that many have accepted Israel's argument that Palestinian "underdevelopment" has been aggravated by their high fertility rates. Family planning and having fewer children have therefore become important signifiers of modernity in the area.<sup>43</sup> Many of the women in Kanaaneh's study express wishes of having a "modern marriage" and consequently being able to give their children a comfortable life and a fine education.<sup>44</sup> Inherent to the idea of the "modern marriage" is also being able to consume certain products, and become "[...] part of an imagined world or imagined cosmopolitanism [...]."<sup>45</sup>

Whereas Erdreich and Kanaaneh's work on Palestinian women in Israel emphasize the link between discourses of modernity and marriage, work about Palestinian diaspora communities have stressed rather the importance of tradition. As an example, Seng and Wass have shown how village wedding dresses from the beginning of the twentieth century emerged as a symbol of Palestinian national consciousness among Palestinian women in the US, especially after the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967.<sup>46</sup> The authors state that "traditional" dresses worn by Palestinian women at wedding celebrations in the US in the 1990's much resembled the dresses worn at the beginning of the twentieth century. They had however undergone several modifications and lost some of the forms that had practical and ritual meaning to its original bearers.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Seng and Wass argue that the village dress has taken on new political meaning and become a symbol to reaffirm the Palestinian national identity for diaspora communities.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 506-507.

<sup>43</sup> Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 82.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>46</sup> Yvonne Seng and Betty Wass, "Traditional Palestinian Wedding Dress as a Symbol of Nationalism," in *Dress and Ethnicity: Change across Space and Time*, ed. Joanne B Eicher (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1995), 227.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 243-245.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 229.

### **Marriages and the construction of political identities**

The previous section has shown that marriage and wedding celebrations can be sites for expressing social identities. However, marriages can also be conceptualized as channels to construct political identities. This perspective focuses on how groups, political parties, and states attempt to influence individuals' ideas of marriage and wedding celebrations.

In the OPTs, a stagnant economy has led political parties to engage in the development of alternative forms of wedding celebrations. In the Palestinian context, the idea of organizing group weddings was born among Islamist activists of Hamas in 1995, and aimed to reduce wedding expenses.<sup>49</sup> However, Jad shows that group weddings have become sites for political tension between the two major political movements, Hamas and Fateh, as they dispute over which rituals and symbols should be included in the ceremonies. As an example, the Fateh-organized group wedding starts with the Palestinian national anthem, and the Hamas organized weddings begin instead with verses of the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet.<sup>50</sup> Jad suggests that the politicization of both the Islamic and national-secular group weddings should be seen in the context of the competition between the two political parties over what constitutes Palestinian national identity. Jad argues moreover that both Hamas- and Fatah-organized group weddings have serious implications for gender roles as they often underpin certain conservative social perceptions about women's bodies, dancing and music.<sup>51</sup>

The idea that political parties use wedding celebrations to promote their political and social ideologies is not unique to the Palestinian case. Altehenger has shown that governmental attempts to standardize group weddings in the People's Republic of China in the 1950s were common and aimed to create an economical wedding ceremony to suit the "New China".<sup>52</sup> Trevisani has explored a more recent example, and show in his work how the Uzbek government is struggling to create an ideal "modern wedding", through which it can impose government narratives and directions for ritual practice.<sup>53</sup> I would like to suggest that this research shows that attempts to influence peoples' ideas of marriage and wedding celebrations can be highly relevant projects for governments and nation-states. In the case of Palestinian Israeli women, Erdreich argues that the Israeli state has succeeded in attaching

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<sup>49</sup> Islah Jad, "The Politics of Group Weddings in Palestine: Political and Gender Tensions," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 5, no. 3 (2009), 37-38.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>52</sup> Jennifer E. Altehenger, "Between State and Service Industry: Group and Collective Weddings in Communist Shanghai 1949-1956," *Twentieth-Century China* 40, no. 1 (January 2015), 48.

<sup>53</sup> Tommaso Trevisani, "Modern Weddings in Uzbekistan: Ritual Change from 'above' and from 'below,'" *Central Asian Survey* 35, no. 1 (January 2, 2016), 61.



them to discourses of intimacy and genealogy. Talking about their future desires concerning intimate relationships and marriage, they connect themselves to the foundation of the modern nation-state as “bourgeois sovereign individual subjects and genealogically different groups.”<sup>54</sup> Erdreich argues that the Palestinian Israeli women’s marriage talk is steered towards the preservation of the national collective, and thereby also part in the process of reproducing the hegemonic and ethnocratic character of the Israeli nation-state.<sup>55</sup>

### **Marriage from a gender and queer perspective**

Besides studying marriage as a way to construct social and political identities, scholarly literature has examined marriages from a gender perspective. This perspective has shed light upon women and property, the construction of manhood, and social isolation in Palestinian society. Moors states that studies of the Middle East have (in accordance with Orientalist discourse<sup>56</sup>) often emphasized the subordinate position of Muslim women. Therefore, states Moors, writing on women in the Middle East demands critical reflection upon established academic traditions.<sup>57</sup> Whereas anthropologists have concentrated on the rights a man requires through marriage, Moors focuses instead on the rights a woman receives when marrying. Moors shows as an example that for women in the West Bank, marriages have been a major source of property. It is important to note however, that Moors does not take ‘women’ as a given, but is interested in the various positions women take within specific situations with regards to property ownership.<sup>58</sup> As within any other society, gender relations within the Palestinian Territories are constantly shifting and are intimately bound by context. Several studies have noted that the idea of ‘ideal manhood’ as well as what kind of man is considered a desirable spouse, has changed with the conditions of continuing Israeli occupation. Baxter has noted that the high unemployment rate and stagnant economy in the West Bank has led Palestinians to modify what she refers to as the “honour ideology”.<sup>59</sup> One way that Palestinians have responded to the economic difficulties has been to lower their expectations

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<sup>54</sup> Erdreich, “Marriage Talk”, 516.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 516.

<sup>56</sup> See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Group, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> Annelies Moors, *Women, Property, and Islam: Palestinian Experiences, 1920-1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>59</sup> Diane Baxter, “Honor Thy Sister: Selfhood, Gender, and Agency in Palestinian Culture,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (2007): 749.

of what constitutes economic well-being, and by paying less attention to land ownership when evaluating the honour of a potential spouse.<sup>60</sup>

Gren furthermore points out that the political circumstances in the West Bank, such as large scale imprisonment and torture of activists, restricted mobility, and limited work opportunities are indirectly delaying Palestinian men from attaining 'ideal adulthood' by getting married and having children.<sup>61</sup> Gren's fieldwork in the refugee camp Dheishe near Bethlehem indicate the shame connoted to unemployment among men in the camp, who sometimes felt they had to exaggerate the number of days they worked in recent months because of the difficulty to admit that they were failing to provide for their families.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Johnson has suggested that the situation in the West Bank during the *al-Aqsa* intifada intensified a crisis in masculinity for many Palestinian men.<sup>63</sup> It is important to note thus the inextricable connection between the conditions of occupation and changing gender relations in the West Bank.

Whereas ideas of complete adulthood by the fulfilment of marriage and providing for a family are stressed for manhood, another set of requirements are attached to the 'ideal Palestinian womanhood'. Sa'ar's analysis of the interplay between gender and power in Israeli Palestinian families show that for women, marriage is constructed as a form of abandonment by the family. Sa'ar argues that whereas officially Palestinian women retain a lifelong bond to their kin group, they also risk becoming isolated and lonely when married.<sup>64</sup>

Although most of the scholarly literature on intimate relationships in a Palestinian context has explored the heterosexual marriage, a few studies have commented upon queer and homosexual relationships. Habib states in her book on female homosexuality in the Middle East that Palestinian homosexuals are considered outcasts, as they are in most of the Arab world.<sup>65</sup> According to Habib, homosexuals in the Middle East in general face difficulties partly constructed by popular religious mythologies and a dominant rhetoric set to

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 749.

<sup>61</sup> Nina Gren, *Each Day Another Disaster: Politics and Everyday Life in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in the West Bank* (Gothenburg: Phd diss., University of Gothenburg, 2009), 133.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>63</sup> Penny Johnson, "The Search for the Social: Reflections on Gender and the Second Palestinian Intifada" (The New Palestine, The New Europe. Selected Papers from the February 2001 International Academic Conference, Birzeit, 2003) in Gren, *Each Day Another Disaster*, 133.

<sup>64</sup> Amalia Sa'ar, "Lonely in Your Firm Grip: Women in Israeli-Palestinian Families," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7, no. 4 (2001): 734.

<sup>65</sup> Samar Habib, *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East: Histories and Representations* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 143.

misrecognize them.<sup>66</sup> However, this is not to argue that the views on homosexuality in the region have not changed over time. Habib explores how female homosexuality was represented in Arab literature in the Middle Ages and suggest that these representations stand in sharp contrast to modern Arab orthodox rhetoric on homosexuality.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, scholarly literature on homosexuality in the Middle East has pointed to the importance of avoiding assumptions about religion and religious practices as the sole cause of homophobic tendencies.<sup>68</sup> Lundqvist note in her study on marginalized sexualities in Lebanon, that the views on masculinity, femininity and sexual orientations shift across different contexts also within a specific society.<sup>69</sup> In the Palestinian context, Ritchie has highlighted the power-relations between Palestinian and Israeli queer activists. Ritchie argues that when some Israeli gay activists offer stories of “victimized” Palestinian queers “seeking refuge” in Israel; they fall into orientalist discourses stressing the “backward” and “inferior” essence of Palestinian culture. Such depictions, argue Ritchie, can thereafter be used to rationalize the marginalization of Palestinians as well as justify state violence against them.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>68</sup> Erica Li Lundqvist, *Gayted Communities: Marginalized Sexualities in Lebanon* (Lund: Phd diss., Lund University, 2013), 63.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>70</sup> Jason Ritchie, “How Do You Say ‘Come out of the Closet’ in Arabic?: Queer Activism and the Politics of Visibility in Israel-Palestine,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 4 (January 1, 2010): 560.

## IV – Theoretical framework

The previous chapter has highlighted that the literature on intimate relationships in a Palestinian context has focused primarily on marriages and wedding celebrations as means to express and construct social, political and gendered identities. In the following chapter I will suggest that a combination of theories of intimacy and biopolitics can allow for a widened perspective on intimate relationships in the Palestinian context. I will address first the elaboration in recent years of the theoretical literature on intimacy and biopolitics. Thereafter I will describe my own notion ‘occupied intimacies’, developed for the purpose of this study. The concept aims to explore two things, first: how the mechanisms of control inherent to occupation can affect and interfere with (occupied) subjects’ intimate relationships, and second: how the same subjects find ways to resist occupation through their intimate relationships. To develop the first part of the concept I draw on Halper’s notion ‘matrix of control’. For the second part of the concept I draw on Kelly’s notion ‘the search for the ordinary’ and Richter-Devroe’s work on everyday resistance and *sumud*.

### **Towards a widened perspective on intimacy**

As mentioned in the introduction, theories of intimacy have focused primarily on intimate relationships in contexts of liberal democracy. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim have argued that intimacy in “the West” has become a site of choice and difference for the individual, and romantic love a new religion.<sup>71</sup> This individualization of intimacy has been accentuated also by Giddens, who has optimistically described the transformation of intimacy as a “democratization of personal life”.<sup>72</sup> Feminist scholars such as Jamieson have in turn criticized Giddens and argued that the world of relationships in “the West” is still hierarchical as the norm of the heterosexual marriage in combination with parenthood continues to be predominant.<sup>73</sup> Little theoretical endeavour has been devoted to changes in intimate relationships in other settings. One of the aims of this thesis is to widen the theoretical perspectives on intimacy and to combine it with theories of biopolitics. Povinelli correctly highlights that the point of Foucault’s history of sexuality was not to study discourses of sexuality for the sake of knowing sexuality “[...] but for the sake of investigating power and

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<sup>71</sup> Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *The Normal Chaos of Love*, in Seidman, *Contested Knowledge*, 322-324.

<sup>72</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, 177.

<sup>73</sup> Lynn Jamison, *Intimacy* (London: Polity Press, 1998), in Seidman, *Contested Knowledge*, 327.

the discursive matrixes that underpinned it.”<sup>74</sup> Similarly, as stated in the introduction, this study aims to examine intimacy in the West Bank not for the sake of knowing intimacy, but for the sake of exploring how power relations interlinked to the Israeli occupation affect intimate relationships in the OPTs.

Foucault’s analytical notions of biopower and biopolitics were developed to analyse new techniques of population management in the modern European nation state. Foucault suggests that from the seventeenth century and onwards, the art of governing in the European nation state became intimately bound up with “[...] the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life.”<sup>75</sup> This was a shift from what Foucault terms the ‘old’ form of sovereign power, which had been symbolized by the right to ‘take life or let live’. Thus the old power of death was gradually replaced with a series of interventions and regulatory controls aimed primarily to foster life. As an example, the state widened its supervision of births and mortality, the level of health and life expectancy with an increased focus on the performance of the individual body.<sup>76</sup>

In the book *Birthing the Nation*, Kanaaneh draws on Foucault’s idea that one of the state’s most central mechanisms of sovereignty is that of intimacy. Whereas Foucault suggests that sometimes what the individual has to do for the state is to work, produce, consume or at times even die, Kanaaneh proposes that sometimes what the individual (especially the female individual) has to do for the state is to reproduce or stop reproducing.<sup>77</sup> Since Israel is by definition a Jewish state, Palestinian Israeli reproduction is considered highly threatening, and the state has addressed several campaigns aimed to lower Palestinian Israeli fertility rates and raising Jewish ones.<sup>78</sup> Kanaaneh’s fieldwork among Palestinians in Israel show however, that the women have developed strategies to turn from such campaigns and instead employ their reproductive capacity in marriage to contribute to the Palestinian national struggle. The idea of motherhood as an essential component in the Palestinian struggle for statehood has been explored in numerous scholarly work.<sup>79</sup> Primarily, it has referred to women’s responsibility of giving birth to and fostering fighters, heroes, and martyrs to resist the Israeli occupation. Kanaaneh suggests however that there has been a shift

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<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 10.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*, 1 vols. (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 139-140.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

<sup>77</sup> Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation*, 24.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 38 & 105.

<sup>79</sup> See for example Yuval-Davis and Werbner, “Introduction: Women and the New Discourse of Citizenship.”

in dominant discourses of how women best contribute to the national struggle. As an example, she shows that the idea of having as many children as possible to help the collective strive towards independence has gradually become irrelevant for Palestinian women in Israel. Instead, many of the women believe that fostering few, but well educated, children will be more beneficial to the national struggle.

Kanaaneh's work on how Israeli biopolitics have influenced discourses of reproduction among Palestinian Israeli women in the Galilee is highly relevant also for the analysis of this thesis. However, whereas Kanaaneh examines Palestinians' strategies of family planning, I will examine rather the strategies for entering and managing intimate relationships. In order to do so, I have developed the concept 'occupied intimacies'. As mentioned above, the concept aims to explore both how subjects' intimate relationships are affected by occupation, and how the same subjects resist occupation by renegotiating their intimate relationships. First, I will examine how the mechanisms of control inherent to occupation can affect and interfere with subjects' intimate relationships.

### **The occupying power's interference in intimate relationships**

In order to examine how the Israeli occupation can affect and interfere with Palestinians' intimate relationships in the OPTs, I will draw on what the Israeli sociologist Jeff Halper has termed the 'matrix of control'. In short, the concept denotes a series of power mechanisms that allow Israel to control every aspect of Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories.<sup>80</sup> These mechanisms of control include land expropriation, checkpoints, strategic placements of settlements, bypass roads to link settlements and create barriers between Palestinian areas, as well as control over aquifers and other natural resources.<sup>81</sup> As Levine has suggested, the 'separation barrier' (constructed after Halper coined the concept), should also be considered part of the matrix.<sup>82</sup> However, the matrix encompasses much more than merely physical control over territory; it refers also to a web of bureaucratic and legal systems that create restrictions for what the Palestinian population can buy or build on, as well as use of violence such as large-scale imprisonment.<sup>83</sup> According to Halper, the matrix has also contributed to impoverishing the Palestinian population in the OPTs, through the closure of Gaza and the

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<sup>80</sup> Jeff Halper, "The 94 Percent Solution", 15.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>82</sup> LeVine, *Impossible Peace*, 72.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 92.

West Bank in combination with the restrictions on movement of Palestinian people and goods both between cities/regions and in/out of the OPTs.<sup>84</sup>

As Halper points out, the state of Israel frames the legal and bureaucratic mechanisms of control as necessary measures in order to “upholding the law”, “keeping public order” and granting “security”.<sup>85</sup> However, it is clear that the matrix has also enabled Israel to establish almost complete control of the Occupied Territories with “a minimum of brute force”.<sup>86</sup> I suggest that the mechanisms of control mentioned above could indeed be analysed as a form of Israeli biopolitics. Spatial, legal and bureaucratic systems to control where and how individuals live are all parts of biopower, although in this case not aimed to regulate the state’s own population but the subjects under occupation.<sup>87</sup>

The first part of the concept ‘occupied intimacies’ aims thus to describe how the matrix of control interfere with Palestinians’ intimate relationships in the OPTs. In the chapters on findings and analysis of the thesis, mechanisms such as the restrictions on mobility, imprisonment, and closures will be addressed in relation to the women interviewees’ thoughts and decisions concerning their intimate relationships.

### **Everyday resistance to occupation**

In the following section, I will describe the second part of the concept ‘occupied intimacies’, which aims to explore everyday resistance against the occupying power’s mechanisms of control through intimate relationships. To outline the second part of the concept I will draw on the theoretical notions ‘everyday resistance’, ‘the search for the ordinary’ and *sumud*.

From the 1970s onward, the notion of everyday life has become a focus of scholarly attempt to uncover how quotidian social and political practices are not only affected by power and policies but also react to them.<sup>88</sup> As an example, Scott has stated that studies of everyday social practices can reveal new modes of resistance to existing power structures.<sup>89</sup> Hollander and Einwohner have highlighted that sociological literature on resistance has often failed to

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<sup>84</sup> Halper, “The 94 Percent Solution”, 16.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>86</sup> LeVine, *Impossible Peace*, 92.

<sup>87</sup> See also a discussion on biopower and thanatopolitics in Honaida Ghanim, “Thanatopolitics: The Case of the Colonial Occupation in Palestine,” in *Thinking Palestine*, ed. Ronit Lentin (London ; New York: Zed Books, 2008).

<sup>88</sup> Sophie Richter-Devroe, “Palestinian Women’s Everyday Resistance: Between Normality and Normalisation,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 12, no. 2 (2011): 34.

<sup>89</sup> James Scott, “The Infrapolitics of Subordinate Groups,” in *The Post-Development Reader*, ed. Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree (London: Zed Books, 1997), 323.

define the concept and thereby undermined its analytical utility.<sup>90</sup> Hollander and Einwohner outline therefore seven distinct types of resistance that are defined on the basis of the level of intent by the agent, and whether or not the target recognizes and notices the act as an act of resistance. The definition of resistance I use in this thesis falls into Hollander and Einwohner's category of "covert resistance".<sup>91</sup> This type of resistance refers to acts that are intended as resistance by agents; yet often go unnoticed by their targets. Thus, what I refer to as acts of everyday resistance to occupation in this paper are not necessarily acts that are capable of transforming existent power-relations. The act of resistance may indeed go unnoticed by the occupier. The act may however be recognized as resistance by other "culturally aware observers", in this case other Palestinians.<sup>92</sup>

As Richter-Devroe suggests, one should be careful not to romanticize everyday resistance as necessarily being transformative in intent or outcome.<sup>93</sup> As Abu-Lughod has argued, one should instead "use resistance as a diagnostic of power."<sup>94</sup> Thus, when the concept 'occupied intimacies' aims to explore everyday resistance to occupation through intimate relationships, it will necessarily also offer a diagnosis of the current nature of occupation. I suggest that when Palestinian women in the West Bank renegotiate their intimate relationships, they can also reveal ways in which the nature of the occupation has changed over time.<sup>95</sup>

Kelly has, as I mentioned briefly in the introduction, highlighted the importance of exploring the ordinary and mundane in order not to over-determine violence in the midst of armed political conflict. It should be noted however, that violence does by no means stand in opposition to 'the ordinary' in the OPTs but is rather deeply interlinked to it.<sup>96</sup> By the notion the 'search for the ordinary', Kelly describes how West Bank Palestinians during the *al-Aqsa* intifada struggled to maintain "ordinary" life in an abnormal situation. Kelly's definition of the 'search for the ordinary' contains a critique of the status quo and a hope that things could be otherwise.<sup>97</sup> One of his informants, Khaled, strived to become an accountant, get a job,

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<sup>90</sup> Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance," in *Sociological Forum*, vol. 19 (Springer, 2004): 535.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

<sup>93</sup> Richter-Devroe, "Palestinian Women's Everyday Resistance", 36.

<sup>94</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 42.

<sup>95</sup> See Richter-Devroe, "Palestinian Women's Everyday Resistance", 34.

<sup>96</sup> Kelly, "The Attractions of Accountancy", 353.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.



and be able to marry and build a house of his own. Therefore, roadblocks, checkpoints and clashes did not stop him from making his way to the university every day. Kelly argues that Khaled, by continuing the struggle to become an accountant even in difficult circumstances, was engaging in a ‘search for the ordinary’.<sup>98</sup>

Everyday resistance and the search for the ordinary in the Palestinian context are often described through the Arabic term *sumud*. *Sumud* means steadfastness, and denoted in the 1970’s a very concrete form of everyday resistance, namely the refusal to leave the land: a practice that was partly institutionalized through financial support from Arab states.<sup>99</sup> However, with time, the term *sumud* has come to denote a more general insistence to carry on with life: a form of individual, often non-organized, everyday resistance.<sup>100</sup> I suggest here that the notion of *sumud* has implications for women’s negotiation of intimate relationships in the OPTs, a point that will be further developed in the chapters on findings and analysis.

Finally, an analysis of intimate relationships in the Occupied Territories need also to address issues of gender and hetero-normativity in Palestinian society. Richter-Devroe’s research has suggested that everyday resistance of Palestinian women in the OPTs can challenge the Israeli occupation *and* structures of patriarchal control within Palestinian society simultaneously.<sup>101</sup> The delimitations of time and space of this study prevent a deeper analysis of these overlapping tendencies, which will only briefly be addressed in the section of findings and analysis. Thus with the concept ‘occupied intimacies’, I intend primarily to explore how occupation affect subjects’ intimate relationships and how the same subjects resist occupation through negotiating their intimate relationships.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>99</sup> Richter-Devroe, “Palestinian Women’s Everyday Resistance.”, 39.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 34.

## V – Methodology

The previous chapter has outlined the theoretical framework of the thesis. In the following sections I will discuss the research procedures of the study. This includes a thorough account of the circumstances of my ethnographic approach to fieldwork, the procedures for data analysis, my role as a researcher, validity and reliability, delimitations and ethical considerations. I would like first however to briefly mention the epistemological assumptions of the study. Qualitative researchers examine phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them, a process that presupposes an interpretative approach to the world.<sup>102</sup> The aim of this study is thus not to uncover an objective truth but rather to explore how the participants make sense of themselves and the environment they live in. I have emphasized therefore contextual information that helps to comprehend the social, political and cultural outlook of the respondents.

### **Research design: Focused ethnographic fieldwork**

The research design is inspired by ethnographic techniques and methods to which the crucial elements are the understanding and representation of experience and an explanation of the culture in which these experiences are located.<sup>103</sup> As O'Reilly suggests, key features of the ethnographic enterprise is that it involves direct contact with human agents within the context of their daily lives, and that it respects the 'irreducibility of human experience'.<sup>104</sup> These features have guided my approach to fieldwork. However, it is worth noting that traditional ethnographic work usually involves sustained contact with the participants and a combination of research methods (such as participant observation and interviews).<sup>105</sup> As Wolcott suggests, ethnographic work usually means spending a year or more in the research environment, an approach that can be costly. Because of the limited time frame of my fieldwork, I suggest that this study falls better under what Wolcott refers to as a 'focused ethnographic study', than traditional ethnography.<sup>106</sup>

Another key characteristic of the focused ethnographic study is that it is based on a simultaneous process of deduction, induction and theory building, also referred to as an

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<sup>102</sup> Lillemor R-M. Hallberg, "The 'Core Category' of Grounded Theory: Making Constant Comparisons," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* 1, no. 3 (January 2006): 1.

<sup>103</sup> Karen O'Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 2.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>106</sup> Harry F. Wolcott, *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing*, 2nd ed (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2008), 189.

‘iterative-inductive’ approach.<sup>107</sup> By ‘iterative-inductive’, O’Reilly suggests that the research design is continuous and work more like a spiral than a straight line. This process of going back and forth between data collection, theory building, testing and rebuilding has been key to the construction of this study, as it has enabled the development of a novel theoretical concept.

### **Data collection procedures**

The fieldwork of the study was carried out during two weeks in the city of Ramallah in September 2016. During this period of time I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with women living in and around Ramallah and East Jerusalem, who were either enrolled in university studies or had completed their degrees. Additional criteria for the selection of participants were that they were female, between 18 and 30 years old, and spoke a relatively high level of English. Several aspects led me to choose this particular sample. The choice only to interview women was motivated by my interest in examining an overlooked phenomenon in the field of Israel-Palestine studies; namely women’s perspectives on intimacy in a context of occupation. Moreover, issues of access have guided the choice of sample. As Jillian Schwedler points out in the article “The Third Gender: Western Female Researchers in the Middle East”, female scholars often enjoy more access than their male counterparts when carrying out qualitative research in the Middle East, as they are freer to meet with women in a casual setting.<sup>108</sup> I would like to argue that my position as an unmarried, female student has given me access to the female respondents in a way that would not have been granted a male scholar. I suggest moreover that my access to this particular sample has provided deepened scholarly understanding of the overlooked phenomenon of women’s perspectives on intimate relationships in the West Bank.

The decision to focus on students, and more particularly, students from Birzeit University need also to be commented upon. First, one should note that students at Birzeit are known for their middle-class backgrounds and their strong political and activist commitments. Although I was not looking to interview political activists, I was hoping that the female students from Birzeit might be able to reflect upon issues connected to the occupation and everyday life. As I will discuss further in the section of delimitations, this particular sample of respondents has of course impacted the scope of the study. It is important to note that class,

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<sup>107</sup> O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 3 & 27.

<sup>108</sup> Jillian Schwedler, “The Third Gender: Western Female Researchers in the Middle East”, *Political Science and Politics* 39 no.3 (2006), 426.

educational levels, and the urban/village backgrounds of the respondents have most probably affected their views on intimacy.

Another point related to the data collection procedures (which will also be further commented upon in the section of delimitations) is the short period of my fieldwork. The fact that the fieldwork was carried out during two intense weeks led me to book half of the interviews prior to my arrival in Ramallah. I got in touch with different groups on social media, such as Birzeit University English and Biology departments' Facebook-pages, as well as the theatre club on campus. Through these pages I set a date with five participants who were let to decide the place to meet for the interview (often a café) and the time of day.

The initial plan was to find the rest of the respondents on campus at Birzeit University. Unfortunately, the university was on strike for the entire period of my fieldwork, due to a sudden attempt from the board's side to raise student fees. This circumstance combined with the limited timeframe led me to partly use the 'snowball sampling method'. Three of the participants were selected through this method, in which one respondent gave me the name of someone else, making the sample group grow like a snowball. In two of the cases, the respondents asked me if they could bring a friend that could be in the interview, and I agreed in order to make them feel safe and more comfortable with the situation. The snowball sampling method has been criticized for its limitations in representativity, as the research participants are not selected randomly.<sup>109</sup> However, as Cohen and Arieli have argued, it can be used as a complementary research strategy, especially in conflict environments in which the entire population is to some degree marginalized.<sup>110</sup> For this study, I believe it made sense to use it as a complementary method of selection, mostly because the research topic of intimate relationships could be a sensitive subject to discuss with a stranger for young women in the OPTs. Furthermore, I suggest that the snowball sampling method need not impact the study negatively if the scholar is transparent about the research process. Indeed, researchers such as David Romano has argued that one of the most important interview sampling methods available to a qualitative researcher is that of 'snowball interviewing' – as it can give access to otherwise closed environments and informants.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Nissim Cohen and Tamar Arieli, "Field Research in Conflict Environments: Methodological Challenges and Snowball Sampling," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 4 (2011): 428.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>111</sup> David Romano, "Conducting Research in the Middle East's Conflict Zones", *Political Science and Politics* 39, no. 3 (2006), 441.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

In order to get fixed responses for some criteria but also be able to be spontaneous and have a relaxed conversation with the participants I chose a semi-structured interview technique.<sup>112</sup> I had an interview guide with me (see appendix A) but as I wanted to learn about feelings, thoughts and opinions, I mostly let the responses lead me to the next question in an unstructured way. The ten interviews were conducted in English, were recorded, and endured approximately 45-60 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, the respondent was informed that she would be anonymous and that I would delete the recording after transcribing the interview. In most cases the interviews were transcribed in their full length, however in some transcripts I left out parts that did not seem relevant to the research topic with a note on what matter had been discussed. As stated above, all participants had a high level of English, however one cannot exclude the possibility that they would have expressed certain ideas differently if they had spoken their native tongue. Although my Arabic is very inadequate, it helped in interview situations when a respondent could not find the right word or wanted to use a specific saying in Arabic that is not easily translated. I was mostly able to understand these expressions and they were included as transliterations with a translation in the transcripts.

I had anticipated at first that all interviews would be conducted individually with each respondent. However, as noted above, two of the participants asked if a friend of theirs could join the interview. Initially I was sceptical to the idea of interviewing two friends, worrying that we might not be able to have an in-depth conversation. In one of the cases, I was proved wrong. The fact that the two friends were in the conversation together made them soon forget their initial shyness and they creatively bounced ideas off each other. It turned out to be one of the most interesting and in-depth interviews of the fieldwork. In the other case, the two friends were more judgmental of each other and joked a lot, which made the interview seem shallow.

### **Analysis of material**

The interview transcripts were processed through a thematic analysis drawing primarily on Ryan and Bernard's techniques to identify themes. As Ryan and Bernard note, analysing text

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<sup>112</sup> O'Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 116.

involves not only discovering themes and subthemes, but also building hierarchies.<sup>113</sup> When coding the transcripts I was searching primarily for repetitions, topics that occur and reoccur, metaphors, and similarities and differences across research participants.<sup>114</sup> In addition to identifying what can be referred to as ‘indigenous themes’ (themes that characterize the experience of respondents), I drew also on my previous theoretical considerations for the study. However, the theoretical framework was developed alongside and for the most part after identifying ‘indigenous themes’. I was hoping to avoid too much prior theorizing as it can inhibit the forming of fresh ideas and making surprising connections, as Charmaz has stated.<sup>115</sup> The concept ‘occupied intimacies’ was thus shaped by going back and forth between the coding process and the elaboration of the theoretical framework, in accordance with the iterative-inductive approach.<sup>116</sup>

### **Role of the researcher**

It is important to note that this study is inevitably coloured by biases that stem from my personal background and interest in the research topic. To increase the validity of my findings and analysis I attempt to be as transparent as possible concerning the research process and reflect on my role as a researcher. As stated above, ethnographic research includes interpreting, analysing and affecting the outcomes merely by being present.<sup>117</sup> First of all, the choice of research topic was inspired by the car trip with my Jerusalemite friend mentioned in the introduction, in combination with Arabic studies and an interest in the complexities of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

A reflexive approach to ethnographic fieldwork also includes being aware of the interrelationship between researcher and respondent.<sup>118</sup> I have to recognize thus that my background as a Swedish, middle-class, female student schooled in the field of comparative literature and Middle Eastern Studies probably affected both how the respondents apprehended me and how I interpreted our conversations. When meeting with the study participants, I was aware that I might be looked upon as a foreigner who wouldn’t be able to

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<sup>113</sup> Gery W. Ryan and H. Russell Bernard, “Techniques to Identify Themes,” *Field Methods* 15, no. 1 (February 1, 2003): 85.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>115</sup> Kathy Charmaz, “‘Discovering’ Chronic Illness: Using Grounded Theory,” *Social Science and Medicine*, no. 30 (1990) in Ryan and Bernard, 94.

<sup>116</sup> O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 38.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

understand certain cultural references or ways of thinking about Palestinian intimate relationships. The role of the researcher is sometimes discussed through notions such as outsider, insider, 'halfie' or native. Through such a classification I would be categorized as an outsider, and of course in many ways I am since I am not from the OPTs and do not speak the language fluently. However, as El-Kholy and Al-Ali have suggested, these concepts are not always compatible for understanding power dynamics in research and interpretation. They argue that it might be equally important to see how class, gender and education position the researcher in relation to the people he or she studies. The authors have developed therefore the concept of the 'situated self' that aims to recognize that the researcher will be perceived and behave in various ways in different situations, and that power dynamics are not static, but rather fluid and situated.<sup>119</sup> As I commented upon in the introduction, the participants of the study all come from a middle-class background, have continued higher education and were the same age as myself. In some respects and situations, I could thus be considered an insider among female academics from an urban background. However, it is important to note also that being an outsider was to some extent helpful in gaining access to the participants: many of the interviewees were curious about my personal life and told me that they were happy to get a chance to practice their English. Moreover, I found that our similar civil status as unmarried women were helpful in them feeling comfortable being asked about their intimate relationships by me.

### **Representativeness, reliability and validity**

As mentioned above, this study aims to understand how the participants make sense of themselves and their intimate relationships in an environment of occupation. I seek to understand a few cases in depth rather than represent an entire population, and have relied on specific criteria for selecting informants. While the study focuses on the OPTs, I would like to suggest that it could have some relevance to the study of intimacy in other conflict settings. Indeed, I suggest that the approach can be useful when exploring how other types of political conflict interfere with subjects' intimate relationships.

In order to maximize the validity of my findings, I have attempted to be explicit and outline in detail the techniques I have used when selecting informants, interviewing, and

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<sup>119</sup> Heba El-Kholy and Nadge Al-Ali, "Inside/Out: The 'Native' and the 'Halfie' Unsettled," in *Between Field and Text: The Emerging Voices in Egyptian Social Sciences*, ed. Seteney Shami and Maria Herrera (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999), 37-38.

coding the material.<sup>120</sup> To increase the reliability of the study, I have acknowledged my role as a researcher and recognized that my background has inevitably impacted the findings and analysis of the study. It should be noted that strives towards replicability have not guided this study, instead I have attempted to produce a valuable account of the environment at hand and accentuate what O'Reilly refers to as the 'irreducibility of human experience'.<sup>121</sup>

### **Delimitations**

The research is clearly limited in time and space and focuses solely on a few young, well-educated women's thoughts on intimate relationships in the OPTs. It should be clear from the introduction that although the participants of the study have both urban and village backgrounds, they all belong to a Palestinian middle-class. I would like to stress that the class- and educational background in this case is crucial to understanding the ways they discuss and think about intimate relationships. The internal differences in terms of conservatism and more liberal perspectives on intimate relationships in the OPTs are huge, and several of the participants also pointed this out to me in the interviews. It is important to keep in mind thus that if I were to ask the same questions to young women from a village or a refugee camp that have not continued higher education, the answers would probably be very different. Therefore, I do not claim to represent in this study all young Palestinian women. However, I suggest that many of the themes of this study are highly relevant also to other segments of Palestinian society. Issues of restricted mobility, differentiation of ID cards, and large-scale imprisonment clearly affect all Palestinians in the OPTs.

Another important delimitation of the study is the short period of fieldwork. I would like to suggest that this circumstance has limited the content of the study primarily on two points. First, meeting with the respondents on a sole occasion has clearly limited the scope of the study. It is important to note that had I been able to meet with the respondents on a regular basis over the course of six months or a year, they might have confided in me on a different level and presented me with more details and ambivalences. I would have also been able to witness possible changes in their views on intimate relationships over time. Secondly, the brief time frame of my fieldwork has limited the extent of my use of the 'iterative-inductive' approach. As O'Reilly argues, an important part of this approach is that the researcher is able to go back and forth between the coding process, the elaboration of the theoretical framework

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<sup>120</sup> O'Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 104.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



and the fieldwork.<sup>122</sup> Thus, in order to maximize the possibilities that the ‘iterative-inductive’ approach presents, I would have had to go back to my respondents again and again, while simultaneously moulding the theoretical framework and writing up. If presented with the possibility of developing this study into a PhD dissertation, a more fully-fledged version of the ‘iterative-inductive’ approach to fieldwork would be necessary – and presumably also very rewarding.

### **Ethical considerations**

The research has been carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines recommended by the Swedish Research Council.<sup>123</sup> I have ensured anonymity and taken into consideration if the respondents could take harm from participating in the study. I have kept in mind that heterosexual marriage is the only official institution for intimate relationships in Palestinian culture. Some of the participants revealed things about their intimate life that they had not discussed with other people, such as giving me the details of secret relationships, past experiences, thoughts they knew that their parents would find provocative, and homosexuality. I was thankful and touched by the participants’ openness and willingness to share their thoughts and experiences, and have taken extra care to treat the data confidentially. The names of the interviewees have been changed and the study only vaguely states what the participants study or where they work.

I would like to acknowledge moreover, that the process of interviewing, interpreting and representing the views of the respondents has indeed presented me with an ethical dilemma. As Carapico has argued, researchers who conduct fieldwork need to reflect upon the “[...] unequal exchange between the studier and the studied [...]”<sup>124</sup> This is relevant in all fieldwork, but perhaps especially relevant for American and European researchers conducting fieldwork in Middle East (with regards to a history of imperialism and orientalism). An important way for me to handle the ethical dilemma of representation has been to attempt to create interview situations that allow for an exchange of knowledge. I have attempted thus to follow the principle that researchers should give as well as take.<sup>125</sup> As previously mentioned, several respondents told me that they saw the interview session as a chance to practice their

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<sup>122</sup> O’Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 38.

<sup>123</sup> See Torbjörn Lind, *Good Research Practice*, ed. Swedish Research Council (Stockholm: Swedish Research Council, 2011).

<sup>124</sup> Sheila Carapico, “No Easy Answers: The Ethics of Field Research in the Arab World”, *Political Science and Politics* 39, no.3 (2006), 430.

<sup>125</sup> Romano, “Conducting Research in the Middle East’s Conflict Zones”, 441.

English. Moreover, several respondents told me after the interviews that the session had made them reflect upon things they hadn't thought about before, concerning the occupation and everyday life in the West Bank. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that the exchange of knowledge was made more equal as the respondents were all highly educated and well aware of the processes of qualitative research.

## VI – Intimate relationships and restricted mobility

A recurring theme when discussing intimate relationships and possible future husbands with the study participants, were issues connected to restricted mobility. The following chapter will address how mechanisms of spatial and administrative control of occupation interfere with, and reshape, intimate relationships among West Bank Palestinians. More specifically, I will address how the interviewees negotiate their intimate relationships in a context of restricted mobility, unpredictable landscapes, and by staying in the land.

### **Marrying into an ID card**

Getting married as a Palestinian living the OPTs means not only marrying into another family, but also marrying into a geographical location. For several of the women interviewees this was a source of concern, especially for those with a Jerusalemite ID card. Some of them stated that the ID card of a proposer would affect if he could be considered a potential husband or not. Farida was a 22-year old Muslim student who was born in the United States but grew up in East Jerusalem, and therefore had an American passport and a Jerusalem ID card. Farida told me that she would eventually like to get engaged to someone that she met at university or work. As she was studying at Birzeit University in the West Bank, she had thought about what would happen if a man with a West Bank ID card were to propose:

Parents say no from the beginning to having someone with a West Bank green card [marrying their daughter], because it creates problems. For example, I have the [Israeli] health insurance and stuff, and the address is really important in order to be a resident here [in Jerusalem]. If I lose that ID card due to living somewhere in the West Bank, I would be kicked out of the country [...] I wouldn't be able to come back, because I wouldn't be considered a resident.

What Farida refers to here is the fact that any person holding a Jerusalemite ID card must be able to prove that his or her centre of life is in Jerusalem.<sup>126</sup> According to B'Tselem, a primary goal of Israeli governments has since the annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967 been to create a demographic situation that prevent any future attempt to challenge Israeli sovereignty in the city.<sup>127</sup> One of the actions taken in order to achieve this goal has been to increase the number of Jews and reduce the number of Palestinians living in the city. If a

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<sup>126</sup> B'Tselem, "Background on East Jerusalem," May 11, 2015, <http://www.btselem.org/jerusalem>, accessed October 27, 2016.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

Palestinian Jerusalemite who has stayed abroad for at least seven years cannot prove that his or her centre of life is in Jerusalem, Israel will revoke his or her residency and social benefits.<sup>128</sup> Thus if Farida were to live in the West Bank with a future husband, she would run the risk of losing her residence permit and not being able to enter neither Israel nor the OPTs again. To Farida, marrying someone with a West Bank ID card could thus signify losing the right to stay in what she considers her home country. What Tawil-Souri has termed the Israeli 'ID card regime', in which different segments of the Palestinian population are controlled unevenly through the colour of their ID card thus clearly interferes with Palestinian women's prospects of marriage.

Although several respondents agreed that the closures, restricted mobility and differentiation of ID cards would impact their choice of marital partner, I found that the women holding a Jerusalem ID had developed different strategies to tackle the issue. Whereas Farida had given up on the idea of marrying someone with a West Bank ID card, Yusra had decided to take a more positive stance. Yusra was a 21-year-old Muslim student living in East Jerusalem and studying in the West Bank. She had previously thought that it was out of the question to marry someone with a West Bank ID, but had recently changed her mind:

Once my friends asked me [...] "Yusra, will you marry a green [West Bank] ID man?" and I said no, because it will create a lot of problems for me. For example, if I need to go to Jerusalem I will have to go all the way by myself. So it will be difficult for me, and a lot of responsibilities. But I thought about it later [...] and I said like, it's not a problem. Because my aunt got married to a man with a green [West Bank] ID, and now he can go to Jerusalem. At first it was just for one day, and then they gave him a week [...]. And now, he has a blue [Jerusalem] ID card [...] and can move freely [...]. Ok, it took five years to do that, but at the end he has it. So I think that if I like that guy, I will do it.

After watching her aunt struggle in order for her husband to obtain a Jerusalem residence permit, Yusra had been inspired and now believed that it might be possible to marry someone with a West Bank ID card after all. It should be clear however, that although Yusra's aunt and husband had been fortunate, their story is the exception rather than the rule. In 2016 the Knesset voted to extend a law restricting family reunification for Palestinians in the OPTs married to a Palestinian citizen or resident in Israel. The law that was enacted as temporary in 2003 has been renewed annually ever since with reference to the alleged terror threat that

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

Palestinian family reunification pose to Israel.<sup>129</sup> Organizations such as the Human Right's Watch has stated that the law discriminates against Palestinian citizens and residents in Israel on the basis of their ethnic or national origin.<sup>130</sup>

Although Yusra and Farida had chosen different strategies for tackling the issues connected to the 'ID card regime', I suggest that they were both engaging in what Kelly termed the 'search for the ordinary'. Yusra believed that if she truly loved a man with a West Bank ID card, it would be worth risking a long and uncertain struggle with the Israeli authorities that might, or might not, result in the partner obtaining a Jerusalemite residence permit. Yusra framed her decision not to let the Israeli mechanisms of bureaucratic and legal control interfere with her choice of husband as an act of resistance to the occupation. I suggest that her 'search for the ordinary' contained a challenge to the status quo and a hope that things could be otherwise.<sup>131</sup> Yusra had even decided that she was willing to renegotiate her idea of the ideal wedding with a ceremony at a beach if she were to marry a man with a West Bank ID:

What I want is a [...] wedding [...] at the beach. But it's going to be difficult. It's allowed to do it, and it would be beautiful. But it depends on whom you're going to marry. Because if he's a green [West Bank] ID, he can't go to the beach [on the Israeli coast] and his family can't come. So you'll do it in a normal hotel and that's it.

Farida on the other hand believed that the best she could do in search for an "ordinary life" under the circumstances of occupation was to be realistic about the situation and choose partner accordingly. Farida had decided that the Israeli mechanisms of spatial and administrative control would not be permitted to drag her and her family into years of uncertainty and worries. Moreover, she knew that her parents would refuse to put her in such a situation:

A lot of people say based on a love relationship that they will just deal with the consequences, loose insurance, and whatever. But mostly, since it is often arranged marriages, parents refuse that. They don't want their daughter to go

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<sup>129</sup> Jonathan Lis, "Law Restricting Palestinian Family Reunification Extended at Shin Bet's Request," *Haaretz*, June 2, 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.722708>, accessed November 2, 2016.

<sup>130</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Israel: Family Reunification Ruling Is Discriminatory," May 17, 2006, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2006/05/17/israel-family-reunification-ruling-discriminatory>, accessed November 2, 2016.

<sup>131</sup> Kelly, "The Attractions of Accountancy", 365.

through a tough time in the future, when she could just marry someone with a blue [Jerusalem] ID card.

I suggest that Farida and Yusra's stories point to how the 'matrix of control' (to which restricted mobility and differentiation of ID cards are essential components) interferes with Palestinians' choice of marital partner. I argue moreover that the participants employ different strategies in their 'search for the ordinary' through their decisions concerning future intimate relationships. Whereas Yusra had decided not to let the mechanisms of control impact her decision of marital partner, Farida had instead come to the conclusion that the Israeli bureaucratic system would not be let to drag her and her family into future troubles. It is possible to argue that Farida was not engaged in a project of resisting the occupation, as she had chosen not to challenge the principals inherent to it. However, I suggest rather that her ambition to live an "ordinary life" in midst of an abnormal situation can also be a form of everyday resistance.

### **Unpredictable landscapes**

An important element to what Levine has called the 'ongoing architecture and spatialization of occupation' is that of unpredictability.<sup>132</sup> It has been noted that during the *al-Aqsa* intifada, Israeli politics at border crossings were often aimed to generate insecurity, rather than upholding a strict control of the border.<sup>133</sup> When describing their social lives, the respondents often brought up unpredictability as a factor affecting their relationships with friends, family and fiancés. Layla, a 30-year-old Muslim working as an economic researcher at a governmental organization, described to me the frustration of not being able to plan ahead:

For example, if there is a wedding of a friend in another city, and [the ride] takes two hours, you need to have this margin and go four hours in advance because you never know what happens. These days it's better than how it was five years ago, but still you never know, sometimes they just close the checkpoint and you cannot pass. You need to look for alternative roads that are not official; it's not that easy. You need to go between villages and mountains; it's not easy at all.

Layla's description suggests that the unpredictability of checkpoints that close and open, often for unknown reasons, interfere with Palestinians' ability to plan their social lives. Layla's

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<sup>132</sup> LeVine, *Impossible Peace*, 16.

<sup>133</sup> Nina Gren, "A Homeland Torn Apart: Partition in a Palestinian Refugee Camp," in *The Partition Motif in Contemporary Conflicts*, ed. Smita Tewari Jassal and Eyal Ben-Ari (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007), 204.

account also suggests that the unpredictability of the Israeli mechanisms of spatial and administrative control produces feelings of humiliation. Unlike many other West Bank Palestinians, Layla was used to travelling abroad approximately once a year, both for work and leisure. As she has the West Bank ID card she cannot use the Ben-Gurion airport in Israel, but uses the Queen Alia airport in Amman. To get there, she first has to pass through the border control of the Allenby Bridge, controlled by Israel on one side and Jordan on the other. Layla perceived the long and unpredictable procedures upheld by the Israeli border control as unworthy and degrading: “It’s a disaster what’s happening through Jordan. I mean it’s humiliating. It’s really bad. Sometimes I cry, I really cry. Because you spend like a whole day to cross these 20 kilometres.”

Another respondent for which the unpredictability produced by the Israeli mechanisms of control had led to an inability to plan her life was Zeinab. As previously stated, the ‘matrix of control’ is partly upheld by the use of violence and large-scale imprisonment.<sup>134</sup> According to the UN Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, there were more than 6000 Palestinians held in Israeli prison by the end of the year 2015.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, it has been estimated that around 800,000 Palestinians have been detained in Israeli prison for varying lengths of time since 1967.<sup>136</sup> Zeinab was a 23-year old Muslim woman who recently finished her bachelor degree at the university and now worked in a tourist establishment in Ramallah. At the beginning of our interview, Zeinab told me that she was “kind of engaged” and when asked to elaborate, explained: “Kind of because he’s actually in the Israeli prison, he’s a prisoner. But you know like here, the guy’s family comes to your family and asks for your hand, and they already did that and we accepted. It’s just like: we’re waiting for him to come out.”

The man Zeinab had gotten engaged to had been her best friend for years, and had at the time of fieldwork been in prison for 18 months. Therefore, he had not been present when the two families met to seal the engagement. However, I suggest that there was more to Zeinab’s expression that she was “kind of engaged” than the fact that her fiancé had not been present at the engagement. This had to do with the unpredictability of their situation, the fact that the

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<sup>134</sup> LeVine, *Impossible Peace*, 92.

<sup>135</sup> UN Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Israeli Occupation Is the Main Trigger of Humanitarian Needs among Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,” June 13, 2016, <http://www.ochaopt.org/content/israeli-occupation-main-trigger-humanitarian-needs-among-palestinians-occupied-palestinian>, accessed November 1, 2016.

<sup>136</sup> Lotte Buch Segal, “The Burden of Being Exemplary: National Sentiments, Awkward Witnessing, and Womanhood in Occupied Palestine,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 21, no. S1 (2015): 30.

reasons for her fiancé's imprisonment remained imprecise, and that he had still not been convicted:

Well, to start with they gave him seven charges, and then the next morning they became eleven, and he still doesn't know what the extra four were. But like, basically, it's the same charges they give to everyone. Throwing stones, vandalizing, writing on Facebook, stuff like that. Unfortunately to say, it's just the normal for a Palestinian prisoner. [...] He had like more than 30 courts, but they always keep postponing it. They go to court, sit for like two minutes, and then they postpone it without no excuse or whatever. [...] If at least you know an end point [for the imprisonment], you can wait for that day. But not knowing is really messing with everyone's head.

As Gren has noted, prison experiences can indirectly delay Palestinian men from attaining 'ideal adulthood' by getting married, having children and providing for a family.<sup>137</sup> In Zeinab's case the unpredictability of her fiancé's imprisonment had made her family question his suitability as a future husband. It is worth recalling here the study by Johnson et. al addressed in the literature review, in which the authors describe a shift in families' views on political engagements and desirability of spouses. Whereas political activism was often considered an important quality when families were evaluating the suitability of potential spouses during the first intifada, men who were political activists (and thus potentially Israeli "targets") were gradually becoming undesirable groom-material during the Oslo period and the second intifada.<sup>138</sup> According to Johnson et al. this trend was interlinked to the shift from grassroots activism in the first intifada, to more violent and armed forms of resistance in the second. Towards the end of the second intifada, marrying an ex-prisoner was considered acceptable only if the spouse had clearly transformed into a man who could provide for his family financially and build a stable life for them.<sup>139</sup> I would like to suggest that this idea remained valid during the period of my fieldwork. However, in Zeinab's case, it was the unpredictability of her fiancé's imprisonment that was the primary source of concern for her family:

But the thing is that my family always has this fear, like, we don't know when he is coming out, *if* he is coming out. So that actually sometimes makes problem between me and them. They want what is best for their daughter and sister you know. [...] They just keep telling me: really think about him, be sure.

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<sup>137</sup> Gren, *Each Day Another Disaster*, 133.

<sup>138</sup> Johnson, Nahleh, and Moors, "Weddings and War", 16 & 21.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.



The uncertain time frame of imprisonment had become a source of conflict within the family, and had led the family to at least partly withdraw their support for the engagement. Buch-Segal has explored how Palestinian prisoner's wives are requested to set a moral example in order not to betray the Palestinian struggle for national independence. She describes how the wives of prisoners (sentenced to lifetime or more) are expected by the community to accentuate their roles as proud wives of heroic resistance fighters, rather than expressing feelings of hardship and loneliness.<sup>140</sup> One of the reasons to why complaining about their situation or feelings of abandonment is not socially accepted is that the Palestinian family is seen as a stronghold against Israel. Thus to complain would be to threaten this stronghold and to betray the national struggle that their husbands are considered engaged in.<sup>141</sup>

My interview with Zeinab points to a significant difference in the responsibility of women depending on their status of being engaged or married. As Zeinab and her fiancé are not yet married, the responsibility lies primarily on the fiancé who is demanded to prove that he will be able to build a stable life – a remark in accordance with the findings by Johnson et. al. However, as the family had come to doubt the suitability of the fiancé, Zeinab needed to come across as strong and defend her future husband. Zeinab explained that she was trying to be patient but that sometimes the unpredictability of the situation made her sad: “I think these are the days I’m really disappointed about the situation, being depressed about it.” Zeinab’s strategy for coping with the uncertainty seemed to be to focus on her career goals and desires to travel abroad. She had her mind set on working as a translator for an international organization and to start a family catering service. I suggest that Zeinab by working towards these goals engages in a ‘search for the ordinary’ in midst of the unpredictability of the situation. Moreover, her decision not to give up on the engagement despite her family’s concern can be interpreted as a form of everyday resistance to the occupation. However, as stated in the theoretical framework, this does not imply that her act of resistance is recognized by the state of Israel. Her patient waiting for her fiancé will not transform existent power-relations of occupation and will remain unnoticed by the target.<sup>142</sup>

The uncertainty produced by the Israeli mechanisms of spatial and administrative control had also led Zeinab to renegotiate her idea of what a future intimate and married life could contain. Because Zeinab’s mother was from Puerto Rico and her father Palestinian, she had both a West Bank ID card and an American passport. This means that she had a better

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<sup>140</sup> Segal, “The Burden of Being Exemplary”, 34.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>142</sup> See Hollander and Einwohner, “Conceptualizing Resistance”, 545.

chance of traveling abroad than other Palestinians from the OPTs. Zeinab's initial plan had been to help her fiancée apply for an American passport so that they might travel together, but now that he had spent time in Israeli prison, she didn't think it would work. Zeinab had thus had to reshape the plans for her relationship and was now coming to terms with the idea of travelling on her own: "We'll see if he's going to be able to travel or not. Maybe I'll just have to tell him what I see."

In this section, I have suggested that the unpredictability of checkpoints, border crossings and imprisonment interferes with the Palestinian women's intimate relationships and possibilities to plan their social lives. I have argued also that working toward career goals and making travel plans form part of the women's strive to uphold a sense of the ordinary in midst of an unpredictable situation of occupation.

### **Staying in the land**

I have suggested so far that the 'ID card regime' and unpredictability of occupation affect the women respondents' possibilities for intimate relationships and marriages. In the following section I stress that the mechanisms of control over the OPTs have also led to a form of 'self-restriction' on migration. Scholars studying authoritatively controlled societies have pointed to the frequent occurrence of 'self-censorship'. The 'self-censorship' denotes how subjects living in a society where the freedom of speech is severely limited, incorporate the restrictions to their own speech acts out of fear of government intervention.<sup>143</sup> I suggest that the Israeli occupation over the OPTs has enforced a similar kind of 'self-restriction' on Palestinian migration.

Several of the study participants told me that they would like to travel, study or work abroad for a couple of years, both because of the limited work opportunities in the West Bank, but also for reasons of personal growth. However, nine out of ten respondents explained that they were not seeking to leave for good. Many of them stressed the idea that they have a responsibility to stay in the OPTs and framed their decision as an act of patriotism. Amina, a 19-year old Muslim woman studying English at the university, explained that: "[...] despite all the obstacles and the hard life, I love Palestine and would never leave it", and her friend Rania added:

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<sup>143</sup> See for example Svetlana Mintcheva, "Introduction: Self-Policing and Self-Censorship," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (2016), 208.

And if we leave, who will stay here? So actually we have another responsibility, people must stay here [...] We want to change something, that's why we are here. And that's why we have to study, not only for ourselves, but also for the future of our families and our country. I think our country becomes the aim.

I would like to suggest that Amina and Rania's statements form part of the discourse of *sumud* as a way of resistance to the occupation. As stated in the theoretical framework, the Arabic term *sumud* means steadfastness and denoted in the 1970's Palestinian refusal to leave the land. Although the meaning of the term has expanded in recent years, my interviews point to the continued significance of the connotation to stay in the land. Nora, daughter of a Muslim-Christian couple and student of psychology, also stressed the importance to stay in the OPTs. For her, the idea of *sumud* had clearly affected her personal life as it had been a key reason for her to break up with an ex boyfriend who wanted to leave the OPTs for good. She told me that although she knew that it would probably be better for her future to leave the West Bank, she felt an obligation to stay and raise her future children in Ramallah:

Because if I leave, what is left? If every person here thinks that if I leave, it will be better for me. If every person is selfish and wants to do whatever they want, travel, then what is left? What will happen here? Then *khalas* [meaning here: forget it]<sup>144</sup>, it's done. Problem solved.

By "problem solved", Nora was referring to what is sometimes called the 'demographic war' between Israel and Palestine, concerning whom will eventually outnumber whom.<sup>145</sup> Nora was also denoting the ambitions of some Zionists to expand the Israeli state to include the whole of the OPTs.<sup>146</sup>

Although the idea to stay in the Palestinian Territories probably stems from a combination of wanting to live where one has been raised and feels at home, kinship ties, and patriotism, the respondents primarily framed it as a way of silently resisting the occupation. I suggest that although the decision to stay in the West Bank and arranging one's life in accordance can be framed as an act of resistance, it represents also another way in which the nature of occupation has managed to interfere with West Bank Palestinians' intimate relationships. As Richter-Devroe suggested, one should be careful not to romanticize everyday resistance, as it is not necessarily capable of transforming existent power-

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<sup>144</sup> The Arabic word *khalas* literally means: "finished", however it denotes also "enough", "it's over" or "forget it".

<sup>145</sup> Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation*, 38.

<sup>146</sup> LeVine, *Impossible Peace*, 146.

relations.<sup>147</sup> I argue thus that however beneficial to the struggle for national independence the women's self-restrictions on migration may be, they also reveal how Israeli biopolitics are affecting and interfering with Palestinian intimacy.

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<sup>147</sup> Richter-Devroe, "Palestinian Women's Everyday Resistance", 36.

## VII – Intimate relationships and personal aspirations

In addition to issues of restricted mobility and unpredictability, the conversations with the study participants on intimate relationships often revolved around the topics of family, education and career aspirations. In the following chapter I address how the women's thoughts on building a family, not adapting to normative patterns in society, and making a career are partially formed by, and intimately related to, the conditions of occupation.

### **A certain kind of family**

Included in the discussions on intimate relationships and marriage with the female interviewees were thoughts on building a family. It should be noted that in Palestinian society as elsewhere, attaining moral adulthood is closely interlinked to marriage and parenthood.<sup>148</sup> As mentioned briefly in the literature review, Kanaaneh's study on the reproduction strategies among Palestinian Israeli women living in the Galilee in Israel, has demonstrated how different discourses of family planning and nationalism overlap. Kanaaneh describes how Palestinians, living both inside Israel proper and in the OPTs, have often argued that it is important to have as many children as possible in order to fight Israeli oppression. Moreover, scholars such as Yuval-Davis have shown that women have traditionally been recruited for the nationalist project as reproducers: they have had a duty to produce the babies that the nation requires.<sup>149</sup> However, as Kanaaneh points out, having many children or not is of course more complex than simply 'birthing the nation'; it involves a web of calculation, emotions and personal aspirations.<sup>150</sup> More importantly, what Kanaaneh's study shows is that the dominant discourses on reproduction and nationalism have shifted and been reshaped in the Palestinian context. For Palestinian Israeli women in the Galilee, the idea of having as many children as possible to fight the occupation has become irrelevant. Instead, many women believe that having few but well educated children is a better strategy in the struggle for national independence.<sup>151</sup>

It should not come as a surprise therefore, that the well-educated participants of this study expressed similar opinions. I asked Amina, the 19-year old who told me that she would never leave Palestine, what she thought about the idea of having many children to resist the occupation. She replied that this way of thinking was out-dated: "Older people thought this

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<sup>148</sup> Gren, *Each Day Another Disaster*, 122.

<sup>149</sup> See Yuval-Davis and Werbner, "Introduction: Women and the New Discourse of Citizenship."

<sup>150</sup> Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation*, 68.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

way, but I don't think so. Because we don't just want numbers, we want the quality of people. We want them to be educated and know how to resist the occupation in appropriate ways." Similar statements reoccurred in several of the interviews, seemingly confirming the shift in strategies of family planning among middle-class Palestinians described in Kanaaneh's study. Several of the respondents also stressed that having a small family is key to being 'modern' and being able to maintain certain patterns of consumption. Both Layla and Rania stated that the occupation had indirectly impacted Palestinian family planning, as it had had severe effects on the West Bank economy. Rania said that although her father was a professor at the university, he still had to take extra jobs sometimes to make ends meet for the family:

At home we are five children, and I see that our father works very hard to make us happy and fulfil everything we need, so I think it's a very hard job to do here [in the West Bank]. He sometimes needs to do more than one job at the same time to afford everything. So have fewer children, raise them and give them everything they want, and that's better I think. It's not good to have ten children and not being able to give them what they want.

Erdreich has suggested that Palestinian Israeli female university students through their consumption patterns strive to mark themselves as educated bourgeois women.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, the respondents of this study accentuated the hope of having a "modern marriage" and being able to consume certain products. Layla explained that due to the economic circumstances in the West Bank, most of her friends wanted to have few children:

I have many friends who only have one child, or two, or maximum three children, and they don't want to go for more. For a laugh we say: "[don't have more than three kids] otherwise you need to buy a bigger car", and it's not easy here to buy such cars, it's expensive. So I think people have switched to having fewer children.

Thus to many of the respondents, having a small family was key in order to be modern and being able to resist the occupation in "appropriate ways", as Amina put it. However, attaining 'ideal adulthood' by getting married and having children was not an option for all of the respondents of this study. In the following, I will address how two of the women's ways of "being different" present a form of resistance primarily to oppressive norms within Palestinian society.

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<sup>152</sup> Erdreich, "Marriage Talk", 507.

### **“Being different”**

As previously stated, heterosexual marriage is the only officially recognized form for intimate relationships in the OPTs. For two of the respondents, the Israeli occupation seemed to overlap with issues of gender inequality and homophobia in Palestinian society: in combination making it difficult for them to lead the life they wished for. Maria, a 20-year old Christian student, hesitated when I first asked if she would eventually like to get married, and then told me that she was a homosexual. She laughed a little when describing her situation: “It is the worst thing ever. You’re already hated for being Palestinian, for being Arab. You’re under occupation, I’m a woman, I’m Christian and I’m gay. I mean how bad could it be!” As mentioned in the literature review, Habib has argued that Palestinian homosexuals are considered outcasts, as they are in most of the Arab world.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, Lundqvist has suggested that it is important to highlight the intersectionalities of gender, class, ethnicity, age and religion to understand the positions of marginalized sexualities in different contexts.<sup>154</sup> Maria’s statement above further stresses the fact that the different categories overlap and that in her case the Israeli occupation clearly merges with other forms of oppression within Palestinian society. Maria told me that if people were to find out that she is gay, it would be a disgrace for her family. Despite this fear, she had recently told a couple of close friends and one of her siblings:

Some of them, their reactions were bad. They gave me really bad advice, and said that I should try to change myself, like: “go to do something with guys”. That’s the worst advice ever. [...] And some just accepted me the way I am and I was shocked. [...] Others told me that I should go see a priest: that I should pray more. Although I told you I’m a religious person, I fast and I pray. [...] And some told me that I shouldn’t think of it, that I should just live alone, that it’s all in my head. And some told me that I should go see a psychiatrist.

Maria’s strategy for confronting the prejudices seemed to be to distance herself from other Arabs. Twice during our interview she dissociated herself from her ‘Arabness’ by saying: “My lifestyle is different from Arabs. They won’t accept me the way I am” and later: “People [here] are too Arab. [...] They hold on to traditions way too tight even without knowing if those traditions are right or wrong.” Although it is possible to argue that Maria’s statements fall into orientalist discourses of Arab “backwardness”, I suggest rather that they highlight yet again the importance of an intersectional analysis of queer relationships in the Palestinian

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<sup>153</sup> Habib, *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East*, 143.

<sup>154</sup> Lundqvist, *Gayted Communities*, 61.

context. For Maria, a ‘search for the ordinary’ through official intimate relationships cannot work as a form of resistance to the Israeli occupation, as she feels equally discriminated against by her fellow Palestinians. Maria explained that although she would love to stay in her hometown Ramallah, she had come to the conclusion that it was not a realistic possibility for her. She already had a couple of siblings living in the US and had decided also to leave the Palestinian Territories as soon as she got her bachelor degree.

Another woman, who did not follow what is considered ‘a normal life-cycle’ in the Palestinian context, was Layla, the 30-year old single woman working as an economic researcher in a governmental institution, which I mentioned earlier. Layla did not only work full time but was also involved in a theatre group and did volunteer work in her free time. She told me that she was not interested in getting married just for the sake of being married, although she would not reject an engagement if the right person came along. Her attitude had previously caused some tensions within the family, as she had turned down several suitors all while her younger sister got married and had kids. However, her parents seemed now to have given up hopes for her ever finding a husband and refrained from the marriage talk:

They were not exactly nagging, but they really talked about it a lot. [...] In the past it happened that guys came [to propose] and I said no every time [...] So after a specific age, your options, or the occasions when guys come to your parents’ house is going like down, down, down: the number [of suitors] decline. It’s not happening a lot recently, so my parents are not pushing for something like that anymore.

As a 30-year-old single woman, Layla has not yet attained ‘ideal adulthood’ or ‘a normal life’ by getting married and having children.<sup>155</sup> Sa’ar has noted in her research on power and gender in Israeli-Palestinian culture, that Palestinian divorced or unmarried women often find it difficult to earn the respect of their communities.<sup>156</sup> The difficulty of being a divorced woman was confirmed by my conversations with the study participants, who explained that divorced girls have to put up with many forms of insults. Rania noted that: “[...] she [the divorced woman] crosses the street and everyone points at her, [and says] she got divorced, she left her husband’s home.” However, being unmarried is clearly a different story. Layla’s strategy for continuing her life unmarried seemed to be to separate her private life and her family life. Layla lived with a couple of her siblings in Ramallah, but explained that she

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<sup>155</sup> Gren, *Each Day Another Disaster*, 133.

<sup>156</sup> Amalia Sa’ar, “Feminine Strength: Reflections on Power and Gender in Israeli-Palestinian Culture,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (2006): 410.



visited her parents in Jenin regularly. She believed in keeping her private life to herself and said that if she were to have an intimate relationship with a man, she would prefer not to involve her family at the first stage. She explained that there are two ways of getting engaged: the official way with the man asking for your hand at the parents' house, and the other, unofficial way, in which the couple meet without exchanging any promises: "You can be together with him but not officially engaged, it's easier I think. When it's becoming official and in front of all people, your family, maybe they will begin to nag again to go for the next step, you know." I suggest that Layla's strategy to escape the pressure from relatives and her parents' neighbours was to separate her life into different spheres and minding her own business.

For Maria and Layla, the 'search for the ordinary' did not involve attaining ideal adulthood by getting married and having children. I find it tempting to argue that the two women, as Richter-Devroe suggested, show a form of everyday resistance that challenge both the Israeli occupation *and* structures of hetero-normative and patriarchal control within Palestinian society simultaneously. Their way of resisting oppressive structures is simply to stress their right to independently determine what kind of intimate relationships they wish to engage in. However, I must acknowledge that this interpretation might very well be coloured by my own wishes and beliefs. It is possible to argue quite the contrary also; that at least Maria has given up on resisting the occupation, and is focusing her energies on other, for her more pressing, struggles.

### **Career wives**

My conversations with the women interviewees also exposed what kind of life they envisioned for themselves in terms of education, career and personal aspirations. Many of the women stated that they wanted to finish their university degrees before getting engaged and married, as a marriage could interrupt their educational and career aspirations. Moreover, several women stated that it was important for them to eventually find a husband who was open to the idea of having a working wife. Fatima, a 24-year old Muslim woman working as a project assistant, explained that: "In a lot of families, the husbands don't allow them [the wives] to work. [...] For me, it's very important to find a husband who understands, and who values working." I suggest here that the occupation and ideas of how to resist it, has implications both on the women's thoughts on having a career and their intimate relationships.

Baxter has stated in her work on the ideology of honour among West Bank Palestinians that families carefully weigh the economic status of future sons- and daughters-in-law not only because money brings valued commodities, but also because it remains an important part of the honour complex.<sup>157</sup> However, the closures of the West Bank, construction of the ‘separation wall’, and Israel’s replacement of Palestinian workers by foreign labour have also resulted in lower expectations of what constitutes economic well being among West Bank Palestinians.<sup>158</sup> As Kelly has noted: “[...] the search for the ordinary takes place in a situation where the military power of the Israeli state is overwhelming, and economic and political options are severely limited.”<sup>159</sup> These circumstances were often brought up in my conversations with the women interviewees, who stated that a combination of factors such as the occupation, nepotism and gender inequality were potential threats to their career aspirations. Maria, the 20-year old Christian student who wanted to leave the West Bank, told me that the political and economic conditions make Palestinian educated youth in the OPTs feel like they are always prevented from reaching their goals:

It’s like you going after something, knowing that you’ll never get to it. Like, I want to be successful, but successful where? What are the successful companies that we have here in Palestine? [...] This is how we see things, that everything has a limit. And as much as you try, someone is going to put you down, either the Palestinian Authority or the Israelis.

Despite the difficult economic circumstances in the West Bank, it was clear that the women interviewees thought that being able to work also as married women was highly important. As Yusra stated: “I’m not going to university for four years, just to sit at home [when married].” Yusra said moreover that having a career could be beneficial for her future marriage, not only from an economic perspective, but also from a social one:

I think it’s important even for a married girl to go out every day, to meet new people, to talk, to hang out with friends. Because if you stay at home for 24 hours, you will be like a prisoner, just taking care of kids, preparing food. You will not have anything new to talk about.

What is important to note here is that the ideas of what kind of married life the women wished for, was often framed in terms of resistance to the occupation. Rania, the 19-year old student

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<sup>157</sup> Baxter, “Honor Thy Sister”, 749.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 749.

<sup>159</sup> Kelly, “The Attractions of Accountancy”, 372.

whose father takes on extra jobs to make ends meet, said that: “We are restricted here, that’s why I think we should study hard, very hard. Because we can’t go outside we have to achieve something good here that everyone will accept.” Thus, although the individual life-project has become more accentuated since the second intifada, I suggest that it is still highly interlinked to patriotism and nationalism.<sup>160</sup> When Rania states that the only way to resist the current situation of occupation is to study hard and achieve something good, she is linking the individual life project to a collective Palestinian nationalist project. Thus, as Jean-Klein has argued, personal ambitions, kinship obligations and national goals are often highly interwoven.<sup>161</sup>

The fact that many of the study participants stressed the importance of being successful in their studies and future careers could indeed be interpreted also as an indication that they have decided to focus on the individual life-project rather than the struggle for Palestinian national independence. As previously mentioned, the Israeli occupation over the Palestinian Territories have been going on for 49 years, and the young women have grown up in a period during which Israel has intensified the building of settlements in the West Bank, and constructed a ‘separation wall’ that leaves the OPTs even more scattered into pieces and divided than before. Thus, when Amina says that: “If you’re not successful [in your career], then what are you?” she may be expressing a fatigue with the situation and the seeming impossibility to change it. What is left for the women interviewees then, is to make the best they can out of their lives and strive to be successful in what they engage in.

However, it is possible to argue also that the women’s plans to study hard and have successful careers are expressions of the extended meanings of the Arabic term *sumud*. Although the term is still interlinked to the responsibility of staying in the land (described in chapter VI), it denotes now also a determined insistence to carry on with life.<sup>162</sup> One way for the women interviewees to do so, can be to decide not to let the closures and other mechanisms of control interfere with their educational and career ambitions. This implies also that it has become increasingly important for middle-class women in the OPTs to find husbands who will encourage their career aspirations.

Finally, I recognize that the above interpretations on the meaning of the women’s aspirations to be successful in their careers are clearly contradictory. I would like to suggest

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<sup>160</sup> See Johnson, Nahleh, and Moors, “Weddings and War”.

<sup>161</sup> Iris Jean-Klein, “Mothercraft, Statecraft, and Subjectivity in the Palestinian Intifada,” *American Ethnologist* 27, no. 1 (2000) in Kelly, “The attractions of accountancy”, 362.

<sup>162</sup> Richter-Devroe, “Palestinian Women’s Everyday Resistance”, 33.

however, that recognizing these contradictions are perhaps the closest one can get to how the women make sense of their lives with careers and intimate relationships in the current situation of occupation. I suggest that for the women interviewees, there is no such thing as a “pure” focus on the individual life project or a “genuine” form of *sumud*; these aspirations are sometimes contradictory, but more often yet, highly interwoven. I suggest that these ambivalences are deeply interlinked to the concept ‘occupied intimacies’, which will be further addressed in the concluding discussion.

## VIII – Concluding Discussion

While finishing the work for this thesis, I heard from Zeinab, whose fiancé was in Israeli prison and had not yet been convicted at the time of fieldwork. Zeinab told me that she was happy because she had been allowed to visit him in prison for the first time since he was convicted 20 months ago. She was relieved and said that he looked well, seemed healthy, and in good shape. His trial however, had been postponed yet again.

The aim of this thesis has been to broaden the theoretical perspectives on intimacy, and move beyond the European and American context to explore the reshaping of intimate relationships in a situation of occupation. The study focus on intimacy has not been driven merely by a curiosity for women's views on love, marriage and sexual relationships, but by a quest to investigate the current nature of the Israeli occupation over the OPTs. The findings show that mechanisms of control, such as restricted mobility and differentiation of ID cards, interfere with the study participants' choice of marital partners. I have suggested moreover that the unpredictability of checkpoints, border crossings and imprisonment affect Palestinian women's abilities to plan their social lives. However, the analysis indicates also that the women's career goals and travel plans can offer a sense of the ordinary in the midst of an unpredictable situation.

Furthermore, the findings have pointed to how the idea of *sumud* as a responsibility of staying in the OPTs has led to self-restrictions on migration. Although the interviewees tended to frame staying in the Palestinian Territories as an act of resistance against Israel, I have argued that it represents also another way in which the occupation has managed to interfere with West Bank Palestinians' intimate relationships. The thesis has also suggested that attaining 'ideal adulthood' by getting married and having children was not an option for all study participants. I have stated that being a homosexual in the OPTs or not fitting into the normative patterns of adulthood can be interpreted as challenging both the Israeli occupation *and* structures of hetero-normative and patriarchal control within Palestinian society simultaneously. On the other hand it is possible to argue also that the women who challenge the hetero-normative patterns of adulthood, may not always have the time and energy to engage in conscious resistance against the occupation as they by necessity need to persist in other struggles. Finally, I have argued that the women are never pursuing either solely personal aspirations or a "pure" ambition to resist occupation; instead I suggest that these aspirations are often highly intertwined.

As previously stated, the research material of this study has been limited by the short period of fieldwork, the delimitation of using merely one research method, and the very

specific characteristics of the research participants who all belong to a well educated Palestinian middle-class. I have clearly stated therefore the impossibility to generalize my findings to all young Palestinian women in the OPTs. However, this is not to argue that the themes of this study are not relevant to other segments of Palestinian society. Moreover, I would like to suggest that the focus on intimacy can be relevant to Israel-Palestine studies more generally because it may reveal otherwise overlooked aspects of the current nature of occupation. This thesis has pointed to the affects on whom people can marry, the difficulties that the unpredictability generate within families, the production of self-restrictions, and inseparability of personal aspirations and everyday resistance.

Although I do not claim that the interviewees' thoughts on intimate relationships can speak for all Palestinian women in the OPTs, I suggest generalizing my findings to theory. Drawing on Halper's notion of the Israeli 'matrix of control', Richter-Devroe's work on everyday resistance and *sumud*, as well as Kelly's 'the search for the ordinary', I have developed the concept 'occupied intimacies'. The concept was formed in order to shed light both on how the mechanisms of control connected to occupation affect and interfere with occupied subjects' intimate relationships, but also how the same subjects renegotiate their intimate relationships and find ways to resist the occupation through them.

I would like to suggest now that the findings and analysis point to three key features inherent to the concept 'occupied intimacies'. First, that occupation creates an element of unpredictability that affect occupied subjects' intimate relationships. Second, that subjects can create self-restrictions that are aimed to resist occupation, but are not necessarily transformative in outcome. Third, that subjects' everyday resistance to occupation can be contradictory and is always entangled with personal aspirations. Inherent to the concept 'occupied intimacies' are thus different forms of ambivalences.

Through the development of the concept 'occupied intimacies', I have shown how middle-class women can be subversive through "ordinary life". Thereby I have contributed to shedding light on the overlooked phenomenon of intimacy in a context of occupation. However, for future studies I suggest that the concept should be further expanded to include a gender intersectional analysis. The limitations of time and space of this study have curbed the discussion of agency, gender- and queer perspectives that I suggest could be incorporated in the concept 'occupied intimacies'.

Finally, I suggest that the concept might offer fruitful angles to analyse cases beyond that of Israel-Palestine. However, one should note that the mechanisms of control of other occupying powers do not need to be a blueprint of the Israeli matrix of control. When

applying the notion to other settings, the mechanisms of control need to be contextualized. In generalizing my findings to theory, I suggest that the concept could be applicable for other societies that are experiencing different types of occupation, such as Kashmir or Western Sahara. Such studies could hopefully contribute to a further development of the theoretical concept 'occupied intimacies'.

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## Appendix A: Interview guide

Thank you for participating in this study. I am a student at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Lund University, Sweden. For my MA thesis I'm writing about how Palestinian women from the West Bank and East Jerusalem envision their future lives in terms of marriage, career and building a family. The interview will take around an hour. Before we start the interview I would like you to know that:

- I will record the interview if that is ok with you.
- You will be anonymous and your answers will be treated confidentially.
- After the interview, I will transcribe our conversation and delete the recording.
- If there is a question you don't want to answer, that is fine, just tell me.
- You can stop the interview at any time you wish.

### 1) Background of the respondent

- How old are you?
- Are you a student? What major? Do you work?
- Where are you from? / How and where do you live?
- Could you tell me briefly about your family? / What does your parents do (education, work).
- Can I ask you what religion you are? Do you consider yourself religious?
- Are you politically engaged?
- What do you do in your free time? Hobbies?

### 2) Engagement

- How do you envision your life in five years?
- Do you think you'd like to get engaged and married?
- What do you think is important when choosing whom you'd like to marry?
- What do you think of the engagement process, how long should it be?
- Should the couple spend time together during the engagement?
- How should the engagement party be arranged?
- Do you think it's ok to end an engagement?

### 3) Marriage and wedding ceremony

- What kind of marriage would you like to have?
- Would both spouses work?
- Have you ever talked to your family or friends about marriage?
- What kind of wedding ceremony would you like to have? Describe location, what it would look like, whom would you invite?

#### 4) Building a family

- Do you think you would you like to eventually have children?
- How many? Why this number?
- Have you thought of how you would like to raise your children?
- Do you think that the situation of living in the West Bank/East Jerusalem will affect how many children you will have?
- Will it affect how you raise your children?
- Do you want to stay in the West Bank/ East Jerusalem?
- Do you think the Israeli occupation is going to have an impact on your future life?

#### 5) Final remarks

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you very much for participating, this has been really useful. I might be doing a couple of follow-up interviews, would it be ok to contact you again if I need clarifications? Thank you so much for your time.

## Appendix B: Respondents' profiles

**Farida** was my very first interviewee. She is 22 years old and studying English at the university. She has four sisters and two brothers and lives in East Jerusalem. She was born in the United States and therefore has an American passport and a Jerusalem ID card.

**Layla** is a 30-year-old economic researcher at a governmental institution. She is Muslim but doesn't consider herself religious. She lives with her siblings in Ramallah but visits her parents and grandparents in Jenin regularly. She has a West Bank ID card.

**Zeinab** is 23 years old and has just finished her university degree. She now works in a tourist establishment in Ramallah, but dreams of becoming a translator for an NGO and start a family catering service. Her mother is from the United States and her father Palestinian; she has therefore an American passport and a West Bank ID card. She is a Muslim and considers herself religious. She is engaged to a man who is also her best friend.

**Yusra** is 21 years old and living in East Jerusalem. She has a Jerusalem ID card and an American passport. She has travelled abroad several times and spent one semester in Spain for her studies in English and business administration. She is a Muslim and in her free time she likes to go to the gym or read books.

**Rania** is a 19-year-old Muslim student enrolled in a bachelor degree at the university. Her family is originally from Gaza but lives in Ramallah. Her father works as a professor at the university and her mother is a stay-at-home wife.

**Amina** too is 19 years old, and best friends with Rania. She is studying at the university and would like to continue to do a master's degree and a PhD in public relations. Her father owns a store and her mother is a stay-at-home wife.

**Nora** is 19 years old and studying psychology at the university. In her free time she works as a dance teacher in dhabka, a traditional Arab-Palestinian dance. Her mother is Christian and her father Muslim, and she identifies herself with both religions.

**Latifa** is 24 years old and works in a marketing and PR-department in a bank in Ramallah. Her father is a car mechanic and her mother a stay-at-home mum. Latifa is a Muslim but doesn't consider herself very religious.

**Fatima** is a 24-year-old woman working as a project assistant in an NGO in Ramallah. She likes to hang out with friends and go to the gym. She is Muslim but doesn't consider herself very religious. She has a West Bank ID card.

**Maria** is a 20-year-old student from Ramallah. She is Christian and considers herself religious. She lived in San Francisco for a couple of years when she was a child, and has a West Bank ID card and an American passport. In her free time she plays sports and goes out with friends.