

The Construction of Resistance

A Case Study among “Il-Majaneen” Students

In the Occupied West Bank

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A Rabbit with Shiny White Fur

Imagine a rabbit with beautiful, shiny white fur. The rabbit knows it's beautiful, and he's proud of it. People admire his beauty, and keep asking him: How do you manage to keep your fur so shiny, clean and white?

But the rabbit is surrounded by muddy puddles of water, which will make him dirty if he falls into them. He is trying his best to avoid the pools, but it is very difficult, because they are all over the place, and the narrow paths around them are slippery.

On top of that, there are people who want him to fall into the puddles, who try to trick him or push him to go into them. The rabbit has to be really clever to keep his shiny fur clean; always watching his feet to see where he is going, careful not to slip; always watching his back to make sure nobody will push him.

Fortunately, he has a few good friends that he can trust, who helps him through this difficult landscape. They show him paths of dry land and places to rest. Without them, he would not have been able to stay clean and keep his beauty.

I am that rabbit.

(Adonis¹)

¹ This is a story repeated to me by one of my informants who I have called Adonis – not the Syrian poet from whom he got his name.

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Summary

This thesis is the result of a fieldwork over 8 months from 2003-2004, among a group of young Palestinian students in Birzeit University. My main subject in this thesis is resistance, broadly defined: as a cultural model, as expressions of subcultural identity, and as aspects of daily interaction, with the purpose of gaining or evading power. I explore how informants' particular lifestyle choices contribute to express and maintain a distinct subcultural identity, and simultaneously constitute a form of resistance to dominant patriarchal structures within Palestinian society. Exploring the subject of resistance further, I argue that resistance - epitomized as "struggle" - can be seen as a hegemonic cultural model which serves to homogenize the Palestinian population. In daily life, the imperative of "struggle" represents a source of symbolic power that people can contest for in order to access various resources. Yet behind this seemingly uniform emphasis on "struggle", I suggest that there is a continuous symbolic battle between different actors regarding the particular meanings of resistance in specific contexts. On this level, resistance acts as a differentiating process, pitting different groups against each other, in an essentially moral discourse. I discuss how these multivocal, multi-sited aspects of resistance manifest themselves in informants' daily lives, as they search for arenas and expressions of resistance that can incorporate their understandings of "who they are" in relation to others.

Chapter 1: The Field

Introduction

This thesis is the result of fieldwork in Birzeit² and Ramallah in the West Bank for six months from June 2003 to December 2003, and an additional two months in February 2004 until April that same year. My main subject in this thesis is resistance, broadly defined: as a cultural model, as expressions of subcultural identity, and as aspects of daily interaction, with the purpose of gaining or evading power. The writings of Lila Abu-Lughod and Sherry Ortner, among others, make out the theoretical framework for studying aspects of power and resistance and their multivocal, multi-sited expressions among a group of young Palestinian students in the post-Oslo³ period. As a preliminary definition of resistance, I will make use of Haynes and Prakash' words: "Resistance (...) should be defined as those behaviors and cultural practices by subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formations, that threaten to unravel the strategies of domination (...)" (1992:3).

This first chapter concentrates on the research situation: After introducing the setting where my fieldwork took place and where I met my informants, I will describe some of the particular challenges I encountered in the field. A more thorough presentation of key informants ensues, before I finish with an outline of the chapters in this thesis.

Birzeit University

Having never been in the West Bank before, I had signed up for Arabic classes at Birzeit University's international program for an intensive summer course in Arabic colloquial

² Many refer to the University and the village as Bir Zeit; my spelling is in accord with how the University itself uses it.

³ A series of secret talks which were held in Oslo between representatives of the Palestinian and the Israeli leadership, led to the signing of what was termed the Oslo Accords in September 1993. This peace process became known as the Oslo Process, or in short simply "Oslo". The peace process definitely broke down with the outbreak of the second Intifada seven years later, in September 2000 (Waage 2004).

language before I intended to begin my “real” fieldwork. The semester came to alter the direction of my fieldwork, as I met people during my initial weeks that profoundly challenged the ideas I had about what I was about to embark on.

The first month I was sharing a small apartment in Birzeit village, close to the university, with an American co-student. Although student attendance at Birzeit University was significantly reduced during summers, approximately one-third of the regular students remained on campus, trying to catch up with lost classes the previous year. The additional summer semester was a measure taken by the University Administration as an attempt to reduce the impact of closures and curfews that the Israeli occupation imposed on them, and allow students to progress at a close to scheduled pace (BU report 2003, B’tselem 2004). This was where I first met my informants.

Birzeit University boasts of being the highest esteemed university in the occupied areas, attracting students and staff from all over the Arab world, Europe and the Americas⁴. However, most of its current student body is drawn from the West bank and East Jerusalem. Students from Gaza were no longer allowed into the West Bank after the onset of the second Intifada⁵ in 2000, and the many roadblocks and closures affecting the area deterred many potential students from more distant areas of the West Bank and neighbouring Arabic countries from coming there (B’tselem 2004). The international student presence was slowly on the rise after a drop following the violence of the Intifada. In 2003, 7036 students were enlisted at Birzeit University, 52 % of them were female (BU report 2003).

The University campus is picturesquely situated on a hilltop outside the town of Birzeit, only a few kilometres from Ramallah, the regional centre. Birzeit is a predominantly Christian town with a high percentage of students in its population, constituting some 6,000 people (BU Report 2003). The presence of the University and the proximity to the regional

⁴ This claim is in fact supported by scholars. For instance, Kimmerling & Migdal describe Birzeit University as “the most important and the most secular of the Palestinian universities” (1994:271).

⁵ Describe

centre has had its impact on the remainder of its inhabitants, who in general have a higher level of income and education than the population in most surrounding villages. They tend to be involved with petty commerce and the public sector rather than agriculture, and quite a few have been earning money abroad, in the Gulf or the Americas, returning to invest in local businesses and apartments to rent to students and staff of the University (Robinson 1997). English language skills are generally better and more widespread than in other parts of the West Bank. All these factors give Birzeit a rather different flavour than most Palestinian towns and villages.

The Ramallah district

Ramallah, which is located in the heart of the West Bank, about 10 kilometres north of Jerusalem, shares some of the features of Birzeit town. The city has a history of Christian majority dating back to the 16th century, and there has been significant foreign church activity in Ramallah during the past two decades, considerably shaping the regional community. During the British mandate period which lasted until the end of Second World War, close ties were created between the local Arab population and the United States through church activities and emigration, which have been maintained until today. The flight in the wake of the 1948 war and again in 1967 brought a wave of Muslim refugees from other parts of what had been Mandate Palestine to the area, while many Christians sought refuge overseas, causing a reversing of the Christian-Muslim ratio. (Shaheen 1982).

Ramallah has played an important role politically the last years, since the Palestinian Authority (PA)⁶ placed its headquarters there. President Yasser Arafat spent his last years in confinement in the so-called Muqata'a, the administrative building complex of the PA in the

⁶ Alternatively, the Palestinian National Authority, PNA.

West Bank. The compound was bulldozed by the Israeli Army during the 2002 invasion⁷, and parts of it remained in scrambles as a testimony to the destructive forces of the Israeli occupation. A considerable part of the Palestinian political, financial, and artistic elite can be found here, and Ramallah and its twin city Al-Bireh were hosting a relatively large middle-class population (Robinson 1997, Kimmerling & Migdal 1994, Stein & Swedenburg 2005). Ramallah's unique position and characteristics has attracted a number of international organisations and foreign embassies, adding to the number of foreigners in the city. But Ramallah is also very much the urban centre of surrounding villages, attracting farmers, vendors, and customers from all segments of Palestinian society.

These factors are relevant to my material because many of the events and practices that I will describe in this thesis are not likely to have occurred in other parts of the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. The noticeable presence of "Westernized" Arab elite and a big Christian minority, and the residence and flow of foreigners representing many interests, as well as the influence of the self-proclaimed liberal University with its students and staff allowed for a social flexibility that is hard to find outside of the Ramallah district. Although quite unique in this sense, I believe my material still addresses issues of a more general character.

Placing informants in their social environment

Birzeit University constituted the background where the social relations described in this thesis were formed. This was where my informants had met each other, and it was also where I got to know them, and where we spent a lot of time together. My informants were in their early or mid-twenties, students or recent graduates of engineering, finance, and the social

⁷ In the spring of 2002, the Israeli Army invaded Ramallah and other Palestinian cities which had been under the administration of the PA as part of the Oslo Agreement, called "area A". The invasion was part of the re-occupation of the Palestinian areas after the onset of the Second Intifada.

sciences at Birzeit University. They belonged to a network of people positioning themselves to the left in the political landscape, with some moderate students approaching the political centre represented by Fatah, while the more radical spectre leaned towards the socialist alternatives, which were on the decline as the Islamists were becoming increasingly popular (Robinson 1997). All of my informants considered themselves Palestinian, but they represented a wide range of backgrounds socially, economically and geographically. They were connected to each other by a common university attachment and an interest in politics and the arts, but also by a lifestyle of liberal attitudes with regards to gender relations and sexual activities, consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and hashish, and a love of non-mainstream music, literature and movies. They actively created and maintained a set of social codes between themselves, excluding some people and including others in a constant evaluating process.

In the University, their activities had a focal-point in the Centre for Visual Media (CVM), initiated by the students in cooperation with a few committed lecturers in order to increase the general interest in film and spawn related debates among the students. The office of the Centre was, in addition to its intended purposes, a place for this network of students to hang out between lectures, where they were watching movies, having chats and discussions, planning other activities and generally maintaining social relations between themselves. The degree of involvement with the Centre ranged from management and almost daily attendance for a handful of people - who became my key informants - and regular or sporadic visits by ten to 20 others. This informal network of people also included a range of people not involved with the Centre, and they had other important meeting places, such as a handful of favourite cafés and bars, and some private homes that were frequently visited by many of them.

Getting to know the informants

I was introduced to some of these young Palestinians during my very first week in Birzeit. After a few initial meetings together with a group of international students I found comfort with the first days, I accompanied two of them to their apartment one evening, eager to make contacts within the Palestinian community as my fieldwork required. This eagerness made me ignore the fact that I was the only woman among several young men, as I felt safe enough in their good-humoured company. I had not yet been introduced to their female friends. Their roommates had prepared dinner for us. We ate the meal the Palestinian way, right out of the pots and plates, using pieces of bread to shuffle the food with.

The young men stood out from their uniformly short-cut and bareheaded peers at the University with their uncut, unruly hair, a striking feature shared by a majority of the male youth in this group. A couple of them were wearing berets in grey or green, and T-shirts picturing Bob Marley and Che Guevara. The same idols were posted on the walls of the apartment, along with a big poster of Karl Marx. Draped on an opposite wall was the bright red Soviet flag. In addition to these icons of a leftist-oriented youth culture - celebrating many of the same heroes worldwide, yet infusing them with different values and ideas - there was a big round brass tray with the city of Jerusalem carved into it alongside the Palestinian flag, which decorated the wall above the couch. There was also a calendar for the year 2001 featuring a coloured drawing of refugees from *al-Nakba*, the 1948 flight⁸. Both the city, which is called Al-Quds in Arabic, and the flight, along with the flag, serve as symbolic markers of Palestinian national belonging (see for instance Khalidi 1997, Schulz 2003).

After the meal, which revealed a level of cooking skills that by far exceeded my expectations of these young men, they started asking a number of questions regarding the

⁸ The war and flight surrounding the establishment of Israel has been termed *al-Nakba* by the Palestinians, which means “the disaster”. The number of refugees range from 520,000 estimated by Israeli figures, to more than 900,000 by Palestinian and Arab figures. Scholars often refer to the number from UNRWA records (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) at 726,000. (Yahya 1999:6). As discussions on the subject suggest, the definition of refugees is complicated (c.f. Yahya 1999).

purposes of my stay, why I had chosen to come, my views on the current situation et cetera. It was obvious that they were checking my position, trying to figure out who I was and what I wanted from them - and what they could expect from me, if anything. The questions were all asked in a teasing yet challenging manner and my answers often mocked or succumbed to further scrutiny. What did I want to study in an anthropological sense exactly? Why did I come to *them*, in stead of studying my own society or a European one? Was I not aware that studying “the natives” was all a part of the colonial mindset? Had I thought about what use my “findings” would be put to? Wasn’t it my responsibility to think thoroughly about such things before coming? Or perhaps I had a different agenda all together? As the “interrogation” was over, I had the feeling of being stripped of all my good intentions, left with unclear motives, dubious research themes and an uneasy feeling about my readiness for this fieldwork.

My relief was therefore considerable when Muhammad picked up an *oud*⁹ and started to play. He was the only one present whose hair was cut short as norms would have it. After tuning the strings for a while, he started playing. Silence fell on the group as solemn tones filled the room. After a while the others started to sing quietly along, their faces turning sombre. When the song died out, they all sat in silence, each one with his own thoughts, looking grave and vulnerable. Muhammad finally broke the gloomy atmosphere with a new song, this one considerably lighter, completely reversing the spirit of the party, causing them to clap their hands, sing and shout. There was no trace of the sadness just minutes ago, and the rest of the evening proceeded in the same high-spirited manner.

When the night came, the young men found a mattress or a sofa and fell asleep as they were, in their clothes. Who actually lived in the apartment and who were overnighters never seemed to be an issue among them; it didn’t make a difference. Later I was to learn that there

⁹ An Arabic string instrument resembling a guitar.

was never a question of whether or not it was okay to spend the night at their friends' place. I got the feeling of having entered the home of the Lost Boys of Peter Pan, now grown into young men, but still retaining childlike and rebellious characters, refusing to accept the authority of adults – or anybody else - over their lives. Several of these young men were to become key informants in the months to come.

From friends to informants

My interest in the complexities of resistance grew out of a gradual realization that my newfound friends seemed to, directly and indirectly, communicate both adherence and discrepancy to what can be called Palestinian resistance culture¹⁰. They were fiercely loyal to “the Palestinian cause” - the liberation of the homeland - and the Palestinian resistance movements. Yet when I was asking questions about resistance to the occupation, they repeatedly turned my attention to issues that they felt were equally pressing, such as internal surveillance and measures of social control by families and political actors alike. It was in this process of becoming attuned to the differentiating aspects of resistance that those who were becoming my friends also became my informants, reversing the more traditional way of establishing relations in the field (c.f. Nielsen 1996). Naturally, the fact that my informants did not become introduced to me as a student of social anthropology coming to study them specifically influenced our relations, and gave me serious second thoughts as to whether or not I could in fact make such a reversal. I would joke about it at first, and it was their amusement at the thought that finally made me actually do it.

¹⁰ For a discussion of this, see chapter 2.

The imperative of anonymity

To me, this has enhanced the absolute necessity of protecting my informants' anonymity – in spite of the repeated “don't worry about it” from some of them – which is always a factor to be considered by anthropologists in the field. The rather sensitive nature of the material that will be presented throughout these pages does not make the matter more urgent – nor does the intensity of fractional violence characterising the Palestinian political scene as I'm writing these words. Nevertheless I believe that, at the risk of sounding pretentious, the purpose of this project – to nuance to way processes of power and resistance are played out in a particular setting – would suffer from being held back, because if anthropologists were never to write about anything that touched upon sensitive issues, then we would not be able to say anything substantial about the workings of power whatsoever.

There are numerous ethical considerations to be made here. Trust is always an issue in anthropological fieldwork, and its importance does not diminish in a society where the fear of collaborators is real, and past experience tells of frequent misrepresentations between Palestinians and foreigners. “Compromising” information about sexual relations, crimes, or political activities attained by the “wrong” people is systematically put to use in ways that might have serious consequences for the persons involved. To protect my informants I have taken several measures; first of all, I have done all I can to ensure that the information I have made use of cannot be traced back to any particular individuals. Second, by being sensitive to their own “red lines” as I perceived them in daily interaction, and only tell the stories that they were open about within the group, this project does not radically depart from theirs, as will hopefully be clearer throughout this thesis. It is clear to me that while the peculiarities of their activities might have been generally unknown, the fact that such things were taking place and more or less informed guesses about who were involved, must be considered quite common knowledge, at the University at least. In cases where I have been in doubt about certain

information, I have secured a minimum “permission” from informants, omitted the episode entirely, or changed its basic components so as to make recognition unlikely.

The requirements of anonymity, paired with the desire not to remove specific empirical cases which especially highlight the duality of power and resistance, has made me particularly careful not to name actors whenever a case or a certain position can lead to a tracing of the person involved. My goal has been that while the ones who already know about the incidents described might be able to recognise or guess the identity of one particular person, nobody who did not know about it from before should be able to trace particular persons to particular events. Apart from changing names of everybody (no names in this thesis are accurate), and not naming the persons involved in particularly sensitive cases, I have confused some episodes involving one person so that it seems to belong to another, to make sure that “adding” one story on top of another does not lead to a particular individual in an accurate way. I have left out details that I have not considered crucial to contextualise episodes and informants; I have tried to point to elements of their background when I believe it has been relevant, and otherwise left it out, as their mixed backgrounds was precisely a defining feature of the group and most episodes cut across such factors. The result of all these measures is that the personae presented in this thesis are in a sense *aspects* of each informant intermingled with others; their identities as individuals has been split and re-merged into new conglomerates, while retaining – hopefully – some of the characteristics of each individual, and especially of my informants as a group.

The pseudonyms that I have chosen for each informant – Che, Adonis, Don Quijote, Kiffaya, El Mariachi, and Samra – are selected to reflect some of these personal characteristics by association. They also mirror the global influences from popular culture, literature, and politics that were part of what distinguished informants among their peers. I hope that this will not inadvertently create the false image that these Palestinians were not

“really” Palestinians or did not wish to be seen as such; they identified strongly with their Palestinian national identity and heritage, and were proud to do so. They emphasized that they did not “pretend” to be somebody else, and would often comment on people whom they felt tried to “hide” their origins of “become” somebody else, for instance Palestinians who had been living abroad for a while and who over-communicated their foreign attachment. Rather, these names should be seen as a sign of the way contemporary identities are unique blends of a variety of local, regional, and global streams of influence, where meaning cannot be assumed from the outset but is a subject of empirical investigation (c.f. Abu-Lughod 1990).

My position in the field

My fieldwork differed markedly from the descriptions of other anthropologists working in the occupied areas. I had a lot of concerns about my “reputation” the initial weeks, and the consequences this might have for my access to informants and material later on. My status as young, unmarried, foreign woman without any mediating “respectable” Palestinians to secure my reputation would most likely have closed many doors for me, and I did not make the matter any better by associating with a group of “morally questionable” Palestinian students. As my research interest shifted from surrounding society to what was going on internally in the group and *their* relations to their surroundings, these concerns lost some of their relevance. Now, on the contrary, had I attempted to obtain or maintain a good reputation I would not have been able to access my informants’ daily lives in any substantial way. What other Palestinians might say or think about me I dare not say, and it is most likely that well-informed people would judge me as a “bad” foreign woman, but it is a fact that except for a few initial blunders, I only experienced one unpleasant episode during my eight months of fieldwork that communicated that message to me in a way I was able to perceive.

It is a peculiar process that makes us observe the many subtle practices that maintain an image of respectability in a new setting, and I was not oblivious or antagonistic to all of these as time went by. I engaged in discussions among my informants about what was considered right behaviour for me or not; some of the guys warned me about laughing out loud in public, smiling too broadly when greeting acquaintances in the street, revealing a glitch of skin with a particular shirt. These practices and many more became ways for me to secure at least a minimum of “proper” behaviour. Otherwise my standard was that of my female informants, not that of surrounding Palestinian society, and they were at times disappointed at my refusal to join them in one of their excursions to a local coffee house, a site reserved for men by powerful social norms. To them, I did not go far enough in terms of challenging the proprieties. Through the debates of how I should contain myself, my own person became the site of negotiations where the power of patriarchy and resistance against it became increasingly clear to me.

It should be noted that it took me considerable longer time to get access to the more intimate spheres of these liberal Palestinian women than the young men. The “breakthrough” did not happen until three months into my fieldwork, when another foreigner entered the scene, in an episode involving a sexual affair which instantly put me in a position of “insider” versus the new “outsider”, who was subjected to an even more sceptical outlook than me. From then on, I was treated as a “full” member of the group. This is an effect that has been registered by several anthropologists in the field.

That is not to imply that from now on they told me “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth”. My informants carefully selected what they did and did not tell me from the very beginning, and *how* they told me anything. It did not work in my favour that my inexperience with the methods of fieldwork made me notoriously uncertain of how to approach my material, or even where to look for it. Informants’ stories developed

continuously during my stay, adding a piece here, removing one there, or twisting the frame of interpretation completely, and so on. It would be impossible to determine at any point what the “genuine” version of any given story or statement was. Nor do I believe it is necessary, as I don’t think this is radically different from how people in any setting exchange information¹¹.

The material for this thesis has been gathered through spending my days with my informants, and taking part in their everyday activities. I shared an apartment in Ramallah with two of my informants, and as them I would spend the night at another informant’s place when in Birzeit, and vice versa. I was present during defining moments of their life in the course of these eight months, as well as endless hours of daily boredom, playing cards or watching TV. We met every day at the University, in the cafeteria or in the CVM office. We gathered at each others’ apartments in the evenings, or met in one of their favourite restaurants. Sometimes we would catch a movie at Al-Kasaba theatre, or a lecture in Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre. We went to *il-hezbe*, the market place, on Saturdays, shopping groceries. We rented poor quality DVDs or listened to music together.

Once I had become part of the group, they translated their discussions to me, or something they though was funny on the TV, explaining to me all the things I did not understand, answering all my stupid questions – or making fun of my ignorance. This help from informants has been an invaluable resource for me to be able to even remotely get a grip on the material presented in this thesis. For instance, translating their favorite songs has been an important way for me to get to know Palestinian resistance ideology, and to understand the values that have been central in shaping their national identity, but also the content of their subcultural identity.

¹¹ For a discussion of this, see for instance Nielsen (1996).

Some notes on language skills and transliteration

Of crucial importance to the reliance of my material, is the fact that I did not speak or understand a single word of Arabic prior to my arrival. The two semesters of colloquial Arabic that I attended at Birzeit University provided me more of a *sense* of the language than any substantial mastering of it. I gradually learned to differentiate a range of words, especially those repeating themselves or where I had a particular interest, and I incorporated the distinct mixture of English interspersed with Arabic slang words that characterised their parole. But I was nevertheless constantly dependent on informants' translations when the conversations were not in English. This lack of language skills on my part was alleviated by the fact that all my key informants were relatively fluent in English and possessed a remarkable vocabulary due to their extensive readings of English literature and intellectual writings - although their grammar, syntax and pronunciations might have frustrated even the most patient English Grammar School teacher.

In the text I have distinguished between what was translated to me from what was said directly to me in English by putting the latter in quotation marks and simply recounting the translated conversations. I have allowed myself to correct their grammatical and syntax errors, and omitting the parts of the conversations where they were looking for the right word, which leads to a representation of the conversations in a rather more coherent way than their original form. This is not to "beautify" their speech, but because I believe it is a fault of mine - not theirs - that they were compelled to speak in a language they did not master as eloquently as their own. My transliteration is based on colloquial Arabic (*'ammiye*) the way it is being taught at Birzeit University, to the best of my knowledge. This is for instance why I use the prefix *il-* (as in *il-majaneen*) in stead of *al-*, which is the prefix used to designate definite article in classical Arabic (*fusHa*). I use the transliteration of Al-Ahram Weekly when referring to names, places, and terms that have entered the English language.

Presentation of key informants

The informants introduced here are the people I will refer to collectively as *il-majaneen* throughout this thesis. It means “the crazy ones” in local Arabic dialect (singular *il-majnoun*), having all the negative connotations of madness in ordinary speech. Informants would apply it on each other for fun, with a sense of irony. It was a term infused with layers of meaning not evident to people outside the group, exceeding the original denotation in Arabic. While *they* did not refer to the group as *il-majaneen* – or even necessarily regarded each other as a group distinct from the network of friends who shared their inclinations – I found it a meaningful term to designate those with whom I spent the most time, separating them somewhat from their other friends:

Che was a 24-year old man from a village close to one of the West Bank’s bigger cities, where he belonged to a large, Muslim family who had lived there for generations. His extended family had access to some resources financially, but his own parents were rather modestly situated. He was born somewhere in between eight siblings, and his character was marked by the fact that he had had to do his best to stand out in order to get any attention among his elder and younger brothers and sisters. His pseudonym refers to Che Guevara, the internationally active Marxist revolutionary and guerrilla leader turned into an icon by his supporters on a global scale. As already mentioned, Che Guevara was one of the most popular figures among Palestinian “Leftists”, and as such he became a symbol of “leftist” subcultural identity.

El Mariachi, aged 23, was born in the Emirates where his parents had moved to earn a living. The rest of his family lived in one of Gaza’s five refugee camps, where he would visit them occasionally. His father was a teacher and they had a secure income. His five brothers and sisters remained in the Emirates while he went to Birzeit to study, as Palestinians are not

allowed to enter universities in the Emirates. His name was taken from one of his favourite movies by Mexican film maker Robert Rodriguez. The film is about an unemployed guitar player who is mistaken for a hit man who uses his guitar case to hide his weapons, a plot that resonated deeply with his sense of being “misunderstood” in the world because of his Palestinian identity. The mistake actually made a hit man of El Mariachi in the movie, but “our” Mariachi was content to try to learn some tunes on his guitar (much to the dismay of his roommates) and some Spanish vocabulary, and he dreamt of going to South America for his Master’s Degree.

Kiffaya was born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon where her parents had met after her father was expelled from the Palestinian areas on account of political activities in his youth. She had spent her youth travelling between different countries in the Middle East because of her father’s work. After the Oslo Agreements he was appointed an official in the newly established Palestinian Authority¹². Her parents and three younger siblings moved to a small village in the north of the West Bank, and Kiffaya, who was then in her mid-teens and already with a deeply entrenched urban outlook, was outraged at her new, boring existence. When the time came for her to attend University, she finally felt that she had access to “something that resembled a life”. She was 24 when I met her. Her name is inspired by a new Egyptian political movement, the *Kifaya!* (“Enough!”) Movement, which was formed by a coalition of human rights activists, leftists, Islamists and other oppositional groups who wanted democratic reforms and the end of Hosni Mubarak’s rule in Egypt. They represented some of the values of this generation of young people in the Middle East.

Don Quijote was the youngest of my informants. Aged only 21, he had recently arrived in Birzeit to commence his engineering studies. His brother had attended the University before him. They were both from a refugee camp in Gaza, and knew the other

¹² After Oslo, somewhere between 40,000 and 100,000 Diaspora Palestinians returned to the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Sayre & Olmsted 1999). Many of them were people who were to take positions within the newly created Palestinian Authority, and their families (Usher 1996).

Gazans from their childhood. He was passionately trying to instigate his friends into political or social activity, without much success, and he fiercely rejected the position of “the youngest” - and concurrently the most naïve - attributed to him by the others. He gradually got rid of the label, but occasionally his enthusiasm or indignation would cause the others to tease him again. His name comes from the classic work of Miguel de Cervantes, who finds it difficult to unite his ideals, which he follows rigidly, with a quite different reality.

Samra, 22, was born in a refugee camp in the West Bank, but her parents were from a family with resources and they moved out of the camp and built a house in a city in the West Bank, where her father worked in a bank. She was born ten years after her youngest brother and had been pampered by her aging parents, who were rather well-off by the time she reached her teens. When she began studying at the University, she confronted her middle-class upbringing and became a radical “Leftist”. Her name is taken from a song by Mohammad Mounir, one of my informants’ favourite artists, who in spite of his pop-oriented music (a genre which they were generally sceptical of) had managed to capture informants’ hearts as he literally sang out on social issues, against political and religious fanaticism, with a base in Egyptian and African musical traditions. Samra is the feminine version of “black” in Arabic¹³.

Adonis was 23 years old and had spent his last three years in Birzeit as a student, since he moved from his family in a refugee camp in Gaza and six brothers and sisters. Apart from one older brother who was studying abroad, he was facing the responsibility of his younger siblings as his studies were coming to an end, as his family suffered from the closures of the Israeli-Gazan borders, leaving his father unemployed for longer periods of time. His extended family had several politically active members in Fatah, the still-dominant political party at the time of my fieldwork in 2003-2004. He is named after a renowned Syrian-born poet, Ali

¹³ To be precise, *aswad* means “black”, while *asmar* (fem.: *samra*) means “blacker”, to describe degrees of blackness or darkness (often used about the colour of skin).

Ahmad Said, called Adonis. The name reflects his interest in poetry – but also, by association, his popularity with young women.

A remark

Writing about Palestinians is, I dare say, impossible without encountering the multiple dilemmas pertaining to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. I spent the first two years after coming home from the West Bank trying to “grasp” the conflict, and it was not until I let go of it that I saw my material more clearly for what it was, which I have already outlined above: The complex workings of power and resistance as they unfold in numerous sites and with any number of interpretations, expressions, and experiences. The Israeli occupation, central as it is in my informants’ daily lives, remains an omnipresent background to many of the other problems they face. My decision to provide only the most basic historical and political background to issues that I touch upon in this thesis is not a result of my lack of sensitivity or knowledge about it (although I will always feel ignorant and out-of-date as to its complexities), but comes from the conviction that there is nothing profound I can say about it which can “explain” or “illuminate” my material that would not by far exceed the scope of this thesis.

Organisation of the thesis

In Chapter 2 I will expand on the subjects of this thesis and place them in a theoretical and analytical context, and sketch out some of the cultural and political circumstances these processes unfolded in.

Chapter 3 examines some central features of informants’ subcultural identity and their position in relation to their surroundings, especially in the politicized University environment,

as well as how they communicated this identity to others. It also establishes some of the internal values considered important to il-majaneen.

Chapter 4 deals with important lifestyle choices connected to gender relations and sexuality characteristic of il-majaneen's subcultural identity. The chapter reveals how patriarchal power structures were at work in these fields, affecting informants' sexual habits, but also how these areas were potential sites for expressing resistance or dissonance against the moral codes maintaining these structures.

Chapter 5 considers the role of consumption of illicit substances such as alcohol and hashish in fostering *communitas*¹⁴ between informants, and shows some of the responses these lifestyle choices could attract from surrounding society, indicating how the neopatriarchal qualities of Palestinian society manifest themselves in daily life¹⁵.

In chapter 6 I discuss how informants' status as students significantly reduced the potential for social control by families, and how they attempted to increase their self-reliance by becoming economically independent of kin. I explore some of the dilemmas encountered when trying to balance responsibilities, values, and desires, and the risks they were willing to take to achieve this autonomy in relation to family.

Chapter 7 investigates how informants resorted to petty theft, credits and evasions of paying rent to manage financially, and how these strategies were achieved and legitimized by creatively employing resistance ideology in interactions with shopkeepers and landlords.

In Chapter 8 I look into some examples of organised expressions of resistance against the occupation among students, and the way informants asserted their subcultural identity by criticizing or avoiding these events. I also explore some possible barriers for political participation and its possible connections to this lack of participation in such activities.

¹⁴ A discussion of this concept is presented in chapter 2.

¹⁵ The notion of neopatriarchy is defined in the next chapter.

Chapter 9 is set at the checkpoint, where informants explore the potential for negotiating the meanings of power, resistance, and subcultural identity in interactions with Israeli soldiers. I attempt to highlight the creative, random, and multivocal aspects of resistance, in an effort to show how a range of factors interplay in the formation and expression of resistance.

Finally I will try to sum up my findings in these chapters, drawing some conclusions related to the complex workings of power and resistance in the particular setting of a group of Palestinian students in the West Bank, and suggesting some points for consideration when studying these subjects on a more general basis.

Chapter 2: The Frame

Introduction

The first part of this chapter will provide an overview of the analytical and theoretical framework within which this thesis is written, focusing on discussions surrounding the complexities of resistance and power. I will attempt to justify and elaborate on these choices by providing some background information into the setting that my fieldwork took place in, which is the purpose of part two. Here I will provide an outline of some traits of the Palestinian political scene with a focus on generations and the potential for social change. I will suggest that informants' subcultural identity can be studied with an emphasis on what Turner has called *communitas*, since student life entailed a phase of restructuring (or non-structuring) social relations and obligations. I will close this chapter by presenting some important values and concepts in Palestinian resistance ideology, which played and continue to play an important role in shaping and expressing Palestinian national identity.

Part One: Theoretical Perspectives

Developing research questions

The subject matter of this thesis has progressed as I have been working with my material, and was not given from the outset. Initially interested in Palestinian culture as a “culture of resistance” - resistance seemed to me to permeate Palestinian society and culture at practically all levels - I gradually developed an apprehension for the many contexts and ways resistance worked to internally differentiate the population. At the same time, the compelling force

behind resistance as an ideology¹⁶ and its practical ramifications struck me as a particular form of power in itself. From being interested in how resistance against the occupation was manifested in Palestinian culture, I became more interested in the different meanings of resistance in various contexts, and of how resistance was being continuously shaped, and how its meanings are perpetually interpreted in contesting ways. In other words, I was intrigued by both the *homogenizing* and the *heterogenizing* aspects of Palestinian resistance culture. My research questions can be stated as follows:

How is resistance understood, articulated and enacted differently among various groups? And:

What is the connection between resistance and identity, on a national (homogenizing) and subcultural (differentiating) level?

Through an in-depth exploration of the workings of power and resistance in the everyday lives of a group of young Palestinians at Birzeit University, who together with their friends comprised a distinct subculture in Palestinian society, I hope to be able to suggest some points for consideration in relation to these questions, and with respect to the subject of resistance on a more general level.

“Struggle” as a cultural model

Owing to their history of colonialization and occupation, and the way political and social processes have played out in the region, the very concept of resistance has gained a special significance as a cultural model in the Palestinian territories, affecting a range of areas in

¹⁶ I have chosen not to separate strongly between “ideology” and “culture”, following the lines of Abu-Lughod, who uses the concept as “the stuff of definitions of the world, that which allows people to understand and act.” (Abu-Lughod 1986:276).

Palestinian social life. This emphasis on resistance, or more precisely “struggle” (*nidal*), has prompted some to label Palestinian culture a “culture of resistance” (Schulz 2003, Khalidi 1997). As a cultural model, “struggle” represents a standard by which Palestinians in the occupied areas and in exile measure themselves and others. It is a source and a marker of Palestinian national identity, a political principle, and a system of valued symbols, attitudes and practices (Schulz 2003:118-125, Khalidi 1997). It is, in Geertzian terms, both a “world view” and an “ethos”¹⁷ (Geertz 1993:126-127).

The ongoing occupation and the more or less contiguous state of violent unrest have served to increase the sense of importance and urgency associated with these ideals. As a result, “struggle” as cultural model commands conformity on part of its proponents; it acts in a way to homogenize the population in accordance with certain rules or norms. There are social and material rewards to those who manage to embody the ideals associated with “struggle” (e.g. the respect and financial aid bestowed upon martyrs’ families¹⁸), and punishments for those who fail to do so, or who act in violation with these norms (such as the extra-judicial convictions and killings of collaborators by militants¹⁹). However, power and resistance are complex structures that work in ambiguous and often contradictory ways, as more recent literature in anthropology and related fields have pointed out (Abu-Lughod 1990, Haynes & Prakash 1992, Ortner 1995, Gledhill 2000).

So what happens when resistance itself becomes the dominant discourse²⁰? While the homogenizing tendency of power seems clear, keeping an eye on the homogenizing aspects of

¹⁷ Geertz defines “ethos” as “the moral (and aesthetic) aspects of any given culture, the evaluative elements (...)”. “World view” is described as “the cognitive, existential aspects” (Geertz 1993:126).

¹⁸ When a Palestinian is declared a martyr, his or her family was accorded special honour, and their families were entitled to stipends distributed by the PLO (Kimmerling & Migdal 1994:263). However, the system has not been operating fully for the last decade or so (Peteet 2002).

¹⁹ The practice by various Palestinian militias to “convict” and sometimes execute people who are revealed as collaborators will be treated in chapter 5.

²⁰ I make use of Abu-Lughod’s definition of the term *discourse* to mean “a set of statements, verbal and nonverbal, bound by rules and characterized by regularities, that both constructs and is patterned by social and personal reality” (Abu-Lughod 1986:186).

resistance, as well as the internal differences of subaltern groups, represents a challenge. In the context of my fieldwork, resistance to the occupation in its conventional forms had become part of the dominant social structure. But resistance may also serve as a marker of *subcultural* identity: By adopting one set of ideas, symbols and practices connected to resistance rather than others, groups (and individuals) can communicate singularity in relation to other groups. Various ideals or values can be placed in opposition to each other; old symbols can be given new meaning, and aspects of dominant structures may be put to use in subversive ways in another context, creatively shaping new points of identification (c.f. Abu-Lughod 1990:52). Drawing attention to the ways that suppressed groups engage in different interpretations and strategies of resistance can illuminate the complex structures of domination *within* subordinate groups. Resistance can work in manners which are simultaneously homogenizing and heterogenizing. Informants manipulated a range of notions connected to resistance on a local, national and transnational level, in order to delineate themselves as different from other groups in their surroundings.

Approaching resistance theoretically and methodologically

The dynamics of power and resistance have been the focal point for the attention of many scholars, including anthropologists, during the past decades. The debate on the subject of resistance reflects general challenges within the social sciences, such as the question of “agency” versus “structure”, the problem of representation of the other, and the deconstruction of the concept of culture (Gledhill 2000, Ortner 1995). More specifically the preoccupation within this field of study with larger rebellions instigated by suppressed groups in the 60’s and 70’s gave way for an interest in what James Scott termed “everyday forms of resistance” (Gledhill 2000). In his study of Malay peasants Scott described the ways these peasants resisted their repression through subversive discourse, sabotage, foot-dragging and

other more subtle forms of resistance than open rebellion, which was mostly far too precarious for people in these circumstances (Gledhill 2000, Ortner 1995, Abu-Lughod 1990). Scott's work made the question of how to "diagnose" resistance more complicated when delineated not only against open rebellions, but also against e.g. mere strategies of survival (Ortner 1995). While Scott's perspective contributed new methods to observe resistance and everyday life, he has been criticized for his failure to take into account the internal complexities of subalterns, and the manner in which resistance is shaped within the very field of dominance.

The Janus-face of resistance

Abu-Lughod and others have voiced the opinion that adopting this type of theoretical perspective can easily result in a romanticization of resistance. This might occur through a failure to observe how ambiguity and contradictions are components of resistance, as well as the ways in which people simultaneously "resist and support existing systems of power" (Abu-Lughod 1990:47). Abu-Lughod refers to the writings of Bourdieu and Gramsci that "works to undermine distinctions between symbolic and instrumental, behavioural and ideological, and cultural, social, and political processes." (ibid.:42).

Abu-Lughod shows how Bedouin women in Egypt contribute to a subversive discourse through poetry, songs, and stories in defiance of the patriarchal system they live in. The women's activities additionally highlight the limitations of such discourse, and the manners in which women support that very system through acts of deference. Abu-Lughod employs the theories of Foucault (1978) and his works on sexuality. Foucault was a pioneer in the study of power in its less institutionalized forms, and claimed in a much-sited statement that "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault in Abu-Lughod 1990:42). In Abu-Lughod's view, resistance should be used as a "diagnostic of power" rather than the opposite,

countering a romantic or naïve celebration of “human freedom” (ibid.:42). The presence of resistance in some form does not automatically imply the possibility of, or even the desire to, subvert the system. Abu-Lughod examines the historical changes that strategies of resistance have undergone as women’s social worlds change and groups become part of new complex systems of power co-existent with or contrasting to old kin-based system. In accordance with Abu-Lughod’s argument, the fact that informants engage in forms of resistance against patriarchal structures and the structures of occupation could be seen as much as a result of their desire to be different from others, as a genuine attempt to challenge existing power structures.

Abu-Lughod’s perspective is useful with regard to establishing how different systems of power are co-existent, sometimes co-acting and at other times contradicting each other. This perspective highlights the manner in which power systems are affecting their subjects both positively (by shaping the tastes, desires and personal emotions of its subjects) and negatively (by delimiting their behaviour) (ibid.:47). Individuals and groups may use the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in one system of power (for instance, the gap between ideology and practice), or between different systems of power (such as local power structures versus state structures or that of global economy), to assert themselves and resist domination (ibid.:47). These strategies of resistance, however, might immerse its subjects deeper into a power structure at another level, or simply serve to confirm existing power relations.

Contextualising resistance in its shifting fields

Sherry Ortner makes a similar point when reminding us that subaltern groups are internally divided with their own political agendas and that acts of resistance, whether individual or large-scaled, are “conflicted, internally contradictory, and affectively ambivalent, in large part due to these internal political complexities” (Ortner 1995:179). Power and resistance, Ortner

claims, are culturally complex fields, continuously in the making and highly situational. Individuals are involved in “shifting loyalties, shifting alliances, and above all shifting categories (...) [in contending] for power, resources, and legitimacy” (ibid.:183). Ortner advocates “thick descriptions”²¹ with an eye for the complex, the ambiguous and the contradictory when looking at subaltern internal politics, culture and subjectivity. In this manner one might avoid reductionist views of subalterns and the workings of power. At the same time Ortner contributes in seeing resistance as something more than a mere reaction to dominance, by focusing on the creative aspects (ibid.:191). Ortner’s article refers to the ways collaboration and resistance are equally important points of study in order to understand the workings of different forms of power and people’s responses to them. In the extension of these arguments it seems clear that forms of resistance can also be a result of *coincidence*, as acts can illicit unintended yet desired responses which subjects then make use of.

It might mystify resistance more than illuminate it to separate between what people do for their own personal benefit or the benefit of their small group, and what people do from “altruistic” intentions or the good of their people as a whole. This tendency, Ortner suggests, might be a result of Western moral notions. This point becomes acutely relevant when exploring informants’ activities, such as stealing, having premarital sex or doing drugs. The question of whether this is pure hedonism, strategies for coping under difficult circumstances, or expressions of resistance against forms of domination, is constantly present and notoriously difficult to answer. Ortner also attracts attention to the questions of who does *not* participate in acts of resistance, or when resistance does *not* occur. Lack of participation is not always a sign of collaboration (although, in the context of the Palestinian areas, this is an ever-present possibility) or fear, but might be a consequence of the internal complexity of the group (ibid.:179). When connecting Ortner’s point to that of seeing resistance as part of a dominant

²¹ The concept is borrowed from Geertz (1993).

or hegemonic discourse, looking at non-participation can be a way to understand these internal differences - and might even be a form of resistance in itself.

Hegemony and symbolic power

Before discussing subcultures and lifestyles as potential expressions of resistance, a short reflection of the workings of power is in order. Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Bourdieu's ideas on symbolic power are useful tools in combination with the cautions made in the above discussion. The notions of hegemony and symbolic power give additional meaning when considering Foucault's perspective on power:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.
(Foucault 1995:194)

I have claimed that resistance can act as a homogenizing process, pressuring people into conformity with social norms. This process does not necessarily take place without the willingness of its subjects. As such, it can be useful to analyse resistance in certain contexts as a form of hegemony. Hegemony can be defined as "a dynamic lived process in which social identities, relations, organizations, and structures based on asymmetrical distributions of power and influence are constituted by the dominant classes", in such a way that control is perceived as stemming from "self-government" rather than by an external force or group (Mittelman & Chin 2005:18). Hegemony, then, "presumes and requires the participation of subordinate groups" (ibid.:18). Gramsci's notion of hegemony emphasizes power as shifting aspects of interactions between those who dominate and those who are dominated, in a political struggle encompassing a range of various fields and sites – including that of culture (Stein & Swedenburg 2005).

Bourdieu's perspective further serves to nuance the study of power, by separating between different forms of capital that people can possess and contest for. Symbolic power, Bourdieu contends, is:

a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself, an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force (whether physical or economic), by virtue of the specific effect of mobilization (...).

(Bourdieu 1991:343)

This power of definition is one constantly subjected to what Bourdieu calls a "symbolic struggle" between different classes and groups, "aimed at imposing the definition of the social world that is best suited to their interests" (Bourdieu 1991:341). The particular meaning of "struggle" in a Palestinian context is continuously contested and debated between various political groups, as well as among individuals.

Lifestyles and resistance

The role of popular culture in relation to resistance is described by Abu-Lughod in the context of the Bedouins. There, poetry becomes a subversive discourse where the notions of the dominant structure are challenged. Popular culture constitutes a vehicle for expressions of resistance, but it is equally important as a source of symbolic power by which the dominant group legitimizes their domination, and their subjects accept it as legitimate. Haynes and Prakash (1992) expand on the subject:

Popular culture, referring to those activities that texture people's daily lives, provides an especially important arena for studying the 'everydayness' of resistance. For it is in such cultural forms as work, ritual, speech, gossip, oral tradition, lifestyle and

behavioural codes that domination is constantly being forged and fissured.
(Haynes and Prakash 1992:16)

Popular culture represents one possible gateway into the various meanings of “struggle” as hegemonic cultural model in the Palestinian areas, as it is manifested in songs, poetry, slogans and symbols, and integrated in rituals of resistance. But introducing the subject of lifestyle choices into the study of resistance in the West Bank makes it possible to study subcultures and subcultural identities as responses to dominant structures in society, and permits exploring the workings of the “internal politics of subaltern groups” requested by Ortner (1995). In Haynes and Prakash’ anthology on power and resistance in South Asia, Oldenburg contributes with an article on how the lifestyle choice of certain courtesans in India constituted a kind of non-confrontational resistance to the patriarchal culture that surrounded them (Oldenburg 1992). She describes how lifestyle choices connected to sexuality such as celibacy and prostitution (in spite of their seeming contradiction) might both be seen as strategies for resisting the demands of patriarchy by structurally different individuals in self-conscious but covert forms of dissent (ibid.:23).

Practices related to drugs and alcohol can take on a similar significance, as shown by Nieuwkerk in relation to drinking and female Egyptian entertainers (1992). Nieuwkerk describes how drinking among women constitute a breach with moral rules and conceptions of femininity. Drinking coincides with other morally questionable activities such as singing and dancing and affects the entertainers’ reputation in a strongly negative way. However, drinking and smoking and its associations with masculinity becomes a source of strength, along with other forms of “masculine” behaviours, signalling to others that these women are fully capable of protecting themselves against undesired sexual attention by men, warding off suspicions of a even more severe threat to female respectability; that of prostitution (Nieuwkerk 1992). Papagaroufali makes a similar point when she discusses how drinking

practices can be “sites of resistance enacted by women against the established ideas about female gender, sexuality and pleasure” (1992:48).

When exploring lifestyle choices in dissent with the moral codes of surrounding society, the homogenizing tendency of power is accentuated and the sites of power signalled. It has been claimed that (sexual) morality is one of the most important fields where people actively participate in their own subordination (Oldenburg 1992, Peteet 2005). Recalling Abu-Lughod’s remark on the creative force of power in shaping tastes, desires and personal feelings, looking at choices of lifestyle that go against the grain of society might be a channel to understanding forms of power – but also how old forms of power are in the process of withering or being replaced by new ones. By examining informants’ activities of smoking, drinking, and engaging in illicit sexual relations, and the precautions they take in order to escape surveillance and control of these activities by patriarchal and neopatriarchal institutions²², I hope to illuminate the complex workings of power and resistance in a particular Palestinian setting.

In order to appreciate the relevance of these theoretical perspectives in the case of Palestinian students in the West Bank, I see the need for contextualising some of the themes mentioned above within this particular field.

Part Two: Generations, rebellions and social change

The first Intifada: A bid for power

In 1987, events unfolded that came to change Palestinian social and political life in a profound way. In December that year a series of spontaneous riots developed into a sustained, organised mass rebellion against the Israeli occupation that lasted until the signing of the Oslo

²² See definitions further down.

Agreement in 1993. This Intifada²³ did not just change the way Palestinians were perceived in the world and their role in international politics, it also transformed Palestinian social, political and economic relations from within in what Robinson has called an “incomplete revolution” (Robinson 1997). Of relevance to this thesis is that the Intifada represented a challenge not only to the Israeli authorities, but equally to the traditional Palestinian political leadership known as notables²⁴ and the power and legitimacy of exile-Palestinians through the PLO²⁵, to control political processes in the occupied West Bank and Gaza strip. This challenge sprung from the rise of a new elite in the occupied areas who organized the uprising during its first months; an elite that had its root in the emergent student movements in the relatively recently founded Palestinian universities²⁶ (Robinson 1997, Kimmerling & Migdal 1994).

The elite were comprised of younger people who came from lower strata of society, and with mixed geographical backgrounds in camps, villages, and cities. Women were actively involved in the movement. Their agenda was more radical than that of the existing national elite, and they called for a change of social structures within Palestinian society and a more confrontational line against the occupation (Robinson 1997:19-37). The PLO and its leader, Yasser Arafat, were able to prevent the new elite from taking over by allying with the old notable class, aided by Israeli policies of repression of political activities, marginalising the local leaders of the Intifada in the years prior to and during the Oslo process (Robinson

²³ Intifada is now a word well integrated into the English language; its original meaning in Arabic is to “shake off” something.

²⁴ The notables were a land-owning class with roots back to Ottoman rule in the 19th century, who had managed to secure a central role in local and regional political life throughout the 19th and 20th century, largely by cooperating with various colonial rulers (Kimmerling & Migdal 1994).

²⁵ The PLO traditionally had its power base outside of the occupied areas, in Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia. With the founding of the Palestinian Authorities in 1993, the major influx of “returnees” greatly affected the political composition in the West Bank and Gaza as well, to a large extent pushing aside the local activists that had been central during the Intifada, much to their dismay. These internal power struggles remain fundamental to current Palestinian politics. (Schulz 2003, Robinson 1997).

²⁶ The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 war prompted the founding of several universities in these areas, as it became difficult to secure permits for travelling abroad in order to study. Birzeit University was the first one, founded in 1972.

1997). While the social changes brought on by the uprising did not lead to a complete restructuring of power, its message deeply influenced those who grew up in this period of upheaval.

The political leadership that largely took over as the Oslo Process led to the creation of a Palestinian quasi-state in the West Bank and Gaza, constituted of political activists formerly based in exile in Tunisia and other Arab countries, and appointed officials that more often than not lacked popular support in the Palestinian areas. The struggle between the “old guard” and the new elite²⁷ rose again during the second Intifada (called the Intifada Al-Aqsa²⁸). This time the new leaders - like Marwan Barghouti, an imprisoned Fatah leader, associated with the militia Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigade - showed a will to cooperate with people across traditional party lines as Fatah militias sided with Islamist militias (Usher 2004). The internal struggle within Fatah was particularly vivid right before the Palestinian elections, when Barghouti led a group of dissenters in the formation of a new party, only to remerge with Fatah in the last moment (Amayreh 2005). Hamas have not been inflicted by similar processes as they have constituted an indigenous political movement with its own finances and organisational structures, independent of the PLO (Usher 1996). This contemporary power struggle is useful to keep in mind when discussing the potential for social change in the Palestinian areas.

A demographic perspective

Expanding on this subject, Fargues has explored the possible connections between demography, social changes in the family, and political processes. Turning a common

²⁷ The struggle was one particularly affecting Fatah, which for decades have held the dominant position within the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). As the relations of political power are changing, so are the dynamics of the internal struggle.

²⁸ The second Intifada was termed Intifada Al-Aqsa because of Ariel Sharon’s (then Israeli Prime Minister) controversial visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem (Al-Quds).

perspective on its head, Fargues suggests that violent rebellions are expressions of the resistance of patriarchal and neopatriarchal structures to changes induced by economic and educational developments (1995:179). Palestinian society has been characterized by patriarchal and neopatriarchal social structures²⁹, where the first implies the control of men over women, elder men over younger men, and families over the individual, and the latter pertains to state (or quasi-state) policies that foster and perpetuate these structures in a more modernized form (Sharabi 1988, Shukri 1999). Political violence, Fargues suggests, is “mediated by changes in the order of the family”, accelerated by increases in education and economic developments. Looking at outbreaks of political violence in Egypt, Fargues found that rebellions are more likely to occur when new generations rapidly increase their level of education in relation to their elders, raising their expectations, while patriarchal structures prevent them from take up positions of power in society. Statistically, economic factors, although central, are not in themselves a direct cause of violent unrest. “Political violence”, Fargues argues, “appears to be greater where hierarchies inherited from the patriarchal order are still active, but challenged by forces of change” (Fargues 1995:192).

Fargues is supported by Gilbar (1997) when he contends that the proportion of young people in relation to adults is another significant factor for unrest. The Middle East in general, and the Palestinian areas in particular, is characterised by a high proportion of youth in relation to elders: In 1987, the first year of the Intifada, around 70 percent of the total population in the Palestinian areas was younger than 25 years, and the proportion of people aged 45 and above was only 13 percent (Gilbar 1997:56). Gilbar also points to the tendency that societies react particularly strongly to economic recessions when it follows a period of

²⁹ Indications of the pervasion of patriarchal structures in Palestinian society can for instance be found by looking at fertility rates, female labour outside the home, and the practise of honour killings. Palestinian women have among the highest fertility levels in the world, and remain marginal in the job market, even though they are among the highest educated in the Arab world (Fargues 1995:185). (For a discussion of this seeming contradiction, see Fargues 1995:185-186). Honour killings have not been statistically investigated, but there is ample evidence that many women (40 or more each year, some numbers suggest) are killed by close male relatives each year on account of “immoral behaviour” or suspicions of such (Ruggi 2005).

growth, which was the case in Palestinian society prior to the Intifada, where the benefits of incorporation into Israeli market economy and revenues from employment in the Gulf States dramatically declined with the economic recession in the early 1980s (Gilbar 1997:57). It seems from this that demographic factors, economic factors, and social changes (or lack of changes) within the family work together to create tensions between generations that might result in violence.

I found it useful to keep these perspectives on generations and social change in mind, because it helps to explain how different value systems can exist at the same time in a society that demands moral conformity of its members. Seeing how the generation that is currently holding positions of power is significantly more influenced by patriarchal structures prior to the explosion of education in the late 80s, it is perhaps not surprising that the younger generations should embrace more liberal lifestyle practices, even when they are at odds with prevailing moral norms. Informants were strongly influenced by the values of the Intifada leadership, a more radical, liberal segment of Palestinian society than the generation which retained political control at the time of my fieldwork in 2003-2004. Their attitudes do not necessarily constitute a profound breach with established codes of the past, but rather a change over time which continues to be delayed in society as a whole, due to configurations of political power and mechanisms of social control. This brings me to some considerations regarding how these radical, liberal values came to be so central in il-majaneen's lives.

Student life as a restructuring phase

It can be argued that my informants were going through something akin to what Victor Turner (borrowing the concept from Van Gennep) has termed *liminality*; a non-structured interim

phase between different states (Turner 1970:509, 1992:48)³⁰. To all of my informants, University studies implied relocation from their families and their places of origin, with limited chances of regular family contact throughout the period of study. For a restricted period of time, non-kin relations would be the defining relations of their lives (friendships, lecturers, landlords, employers) – before possibly creating families of their own. They were expected to take care of themselves and apart from this and of course making progress in their studies, they did not have any of the responsibilities characteristic of adult life. The structures that had defined them in the past were partly suspended, and the structures that would define them in the future were not yet in place.

Adonis, one of my key informants, described his coming to the West Bank as nothing short of a shock: not only was it his first meeting with these hilly parts of the West Bank and a completely new social environment; it was the first time he ever left the 365 square kilometres of the Gaza Strip. He had grown up in a refugee camp situated on one of the white, sandy beaches lining the Mediterranean Sea. But it was the distance to the all-seeing eyes of relatives, the primordial and most intimate source of social control in Palestinian society, which constituted the biggest alteration³¹. This entailed the concurrent absolute joy and absolute horror of finding the ground underneath his feet suddenly ripped away, figuratively speaking, which induced him to question “everything” he had taken for granted. It brought with it a sense of freedom and opportunity to do whatever he pleased, which he shared with an overwhelming majority of his friends and that represented something genuinely novel in their lives. (Others, like Kiffaya, another key informant, finally met the kind of environment

³⁰ While student life shared characteristics of the liminal phase as described above, there are several diversions from it as well, such as the never-questioned authority towards instructors, and important aspects of the symbolism surrounding “neophytes” (c.f. Turner 1970).

³¹ This aspect of student life has been noted by other scholars as well; Robinson describes it as a normal experience for many students in the West Bank. He also remarks how the universities were an arena for interaction across socio-economic and geographical backgrounds (1997:36). Fargues, on a more general basis regarding the Arab world, mentions the tendency that “internal migration weakens traditional mechanisms of social control, in particular control by the family and the neighbourhood (...)” (1995:191).

she had missed since her family moved from Beirut to a small village in the West Bank.) Encouraged by their University studies – or to be more precise; inspired by a handful of people who were encouraging critical thought *in spite of* the conformist attitudes of the University, as my informants would put it – and their newfound social freedom, they undertook to scrutinize every aspect of themselves and their surroundings in search for another kind of fundament, one that could encompass the radically new point they now regarded their world from.

In place of family relations, which constituted the base of Palestinian patriarchal society, these young men and women forged new horizontal bonds of friendship, their different geographic and socio-economic backgrounds notwithstanding. This friendship was characterized by inter-group solidarity and a candid way of speaking to each other, all in a predominantly relaxed atmosphere, reverberating Turner's characteristics of inter-structural *communitas* (Turner 1970:514-516). This *communitas*, defined as a strong subjective sense of community, was partly created and maintained through a lifestyle that went against the codes of patriarchal society, where practices of drinking, smoking cigarettes and hashish, and engaging in illicit sexual relations were central in shaping informants' subcultural identity (Turner 1992:59). These lifestyle choices became part of how informants saw themselves in relation to others, and how others perceived them. Their pastime activities were kept secret to their families, who they were certain would not accept it. They nevertheless framed their activities as a form of resistance against patriarchal power structures, a subject I will investigate in chapters 4 and 5.

I claimed that informants were influenced by the values of the new elite growing up. So what exactly were these values that inspired my informants? To answer that question it is helpful to look at the influence resistance ideology has had in the shaping of national identity and popular culture.

Resistance as a counterhegemonic discourse

Ever since the formation of the Palestinian resistance movement in exile in the 1960s, resistance ideology has played an important role in creating and sustaining the symbolic significance of “struggle” as part of Palestinian national identity. Through this process, refugeehood, suffering, and victimization were transformed into a form of strength (Schulz 2003:118). This ideology found expressions in popular culture; expressions that were largely suppressed by Israeli policies of occupation (Kimmerling & Migdal 1994, Rosenfeld 2004). In relation to international society in general and Israeli society in particular, Palestinian resistance ideology may be termed a counterhegemonic discourse³², as it provided an alternative perspective on the relationship between the Israeli state and the Palestinian people, past and present. This aspect of Palestinian resistance ideology was especially clear from the late 1960’s until the end of the first Intifada, when Palestinian voices were seldom heard in international or Israeli society (Schulz 2003, Khalidi 1997, El-Rayyes & Nahas 1976). This continues to hold relevance for Palestinians as they find themselves marginalized in the international political processes that decide their fate.

Resistance as a hegemonic discourse

With the uprising, expressions of national belonging were displayed much more openly. The spirit of the Intifada quickly penetrated Palestinian popular culture. Through songs, poetry, literature, plays, movies, political discourse, narratives, symbols, and so on, young Palestinians were socialized into a culture of resistance. The revolutionary values of the Intifada and the stress on social change mixed with other endemic notions of resistance in the

³² Counterhegemony is simply a term for various forms and dimensions of resistance to hegemony (Mittelman & Chin 2005).

Palestinian areas: Through Intifada ideology, youth were symbolically given a position of prominence in Palestinian society, as “the children of the stone” and the martyrs³³ were celebrated as heroes. At the same time the established leadership was criticized, and the corruption and compliance of local and regional leaders was denounced. Distinctive trends could be found among these popular expressions of resistance based on political and religious differences, but its overall language and symbolism reflected notions shaping national identity on a more general level.

The “corrupt” man was a prototypical figure in Intifada ideology, and there were certain negative values associated with this figure that resonated with informants’ perceptions of the “people of power”, politically and financially, in the Arab world. These were negative qualities such as greed, selfishness, cowardice, stupidity, and cunning. In left-oriented resistance ideology³⁴, the “corrupt” man typically came from the “reactionary” bourgeoisie who were content with status quo and who did not want things to change. These were people who worked in collaboration with the Israeli government and “the forces of imperialism” - often depicted as the United States - in their exploitation and oppression of the general public, looking out for their own narrow interests and increased profit. In contradiction to the characteristics of the “corrupt” man were the broadly shared values of Palestinian resistance ideology; courage, honesty, generosity, steadfastness, and a will to sacrifice for the homeland (c.f. Schulz 2003). These values were reiterated and made meaningful by *il-majaneen* in daily interaction with other people, as we shall see in coming chapters.

³³ The martyr, or *shaheed*, is a concept and a practice with long traditions within Islam. Yet it carries meaning far outside the religious realm, and its connection with the protection of the Muslim nation has made it a useful notion in nationalist rhetoric. Its meanings and definitions are constantly shifting, and must be examined within its particular contexts. In the context of Palestine, anyone who dies in an encounter with Israeli forces of occupation gets the label “martyr” – including, in recent years, foreigners. The Martyr has become a symbol of the Palestinian struggle against occupation.

³⁴ Owing to the political preferences of my informants, the material I have based this thesis on was characterized by what one might call “leftist” resistance ideology, created by and for proclaimed socialists, communists and people who identified with their causes. It is particularly this trend I refer to when I use terms such as “resistance ideology” or “Intifada ideology”. I add “Palestinian” when I wish to emphasize its common, unifying aspects.

A Review

I have delineated a framework for studying resistance that calls for looking at how structures of power and resistance merge and fissure in complex and multivocal processes, in manners that cannot be assumed, but require empirical investigation. I have presented some points as to how movements calling for social and political change might not yet have had the implications they sought, but nevertheless have influenced younger generations in ways that might substantially affect Palestinian society some time in the future, when these new generations reach positions of political power. In a Palestinian context, I have argued that resistance ideology represents a counterhegemonic discourse to narratives in international and Israeli media, but also that resistance ideology has come to be a hegemonic discourse within Palestinian society.

The rest of this thesis is dedicated to explore how il-majaneen experienced, interpreted and acted upon these forces in their daily lives. In chapter 3 I will try to place informants in their socio-political environment, in relation to important “Others”³⁵.

³⁵ In social anthropology and other social sciences, the term “Significant Others”, often capitalized, has come to signify the groups that influence and inform your identity, shaping it through relationships of association or opposition.

Chapter 3: Configurations of Subcultural Identity

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe my informants in their social environment based on their own categorisation of it, in the context of the highly politicised University and other arenas that they perceived as important. I shall discuss the relevance of the category “leftist” as a political and subcultural category, and the meanings invested in it. I will portray some of the factors which gave meaning to this subcultural identity, and how they communicated their identity to others. Then I will outline how informants positioned themselves in relation to their “Significant Others” - at least judging from the intensity by which this “Otherness” was pronounced. Finally I will introduce some elements of what I have called informants’ ethos, central to informants’ practises of inclusion and exclusion into their group.

Political activism and student life

Political activism has marked Palestinian universities since their establishment from the 70’s and onwards. As mentioned in chapter 2, the emerging student movement played a central role in the first Intifada, and until today recruitment to Palestinian political organisations has largely been based on people’s activities as students. In addition to its political aspects, student movements had important social dimensions to them. Robinson relates how it was often through social activities and practical assistance, initiated by family members or friends, that political parties recruited new members - a practice which was still active at the time of my fieldwork (Robinson 1997:27)³⁶. In a situation where many young Palestinians found

³⁶ Recruitment is often mediated through family relations and friendships. It has been suggested that this is not so much a result of the patriarchal characteristics of Palestinian society as of the fear of collaborators and the way sentiments of trust work; one tend to intuitively trust somebody who is in one’s own family, or by extension through somebody else one trusts, like a close friend (c.f. Robinson 1997:27).

themselves away from family and community for the first time, many were searching for some kind of belonging. The factionalism of student political organisation and its effect on social life outside of campus is described by Robinson, who portrays how each fraction had “its own” coffeehouse or restaurant in Ramallah during the 80’s, avoided by people outside their political network. He expands on the subject:

Factional life at Palestinian universities was all-consuming: it dictated in large measures the people with whom time was spent, the stores and restaurants patronized, the quality and type of resistance undertaken, the parties attended, and the personal ties which would persist after one left the university.

(Robinson 1997:28)

While these tendencies were currently somewhat reduced, political organisation continued to shape Palestinian students’ social lives. Political organisation had overlapping political and social functions, defining students in relation to each other.

“Leftist” as a political category

Il-majaneen belonged to a political category that had been in recession for quite some time on the Palestinian political scene. Leftist - communist and socialist - ideology had made a relatively strong impact on Palestinian policies in past decades since the foundation of the Palestinian resistance in the 60’s, and had once exerted an influence that by far exceeded their numbers because of its appeal to the radicalized population (El-Rayyes & Nahas 1976). But left-radical activists had slowly and steadily lost their position – some of them to radical Islamism – throughout the 90’s, even in the University which had traditionally been a stronghold of left-radical thought. In general, the so-called Leftists were rendered marginal to political processes, all but disappearing in the shadows of Fatah and the Islamist coalition. Il-majaneen identified themselves as “Leftists” because of their political sympathies with leftist

political thought, although they were not actively involved with any of the leftist parties at the University. As party affiliation was a major way of accessing all sorts of resources, especially for new students, informants' inclinations towards leftist ideology closed some opportunities for them – yet opened others. Perhaps as an effect of their somewhat marginalized position, Leftists seemed to seek each other out and stick together, defying prevalent social structures of class, age and social position. Il-majaneen repeatedly caught the attention of people in different circles, from University lecturers to figures in the cultural elite, because of their argumentation skills, revealing their knowledge of literature and political processes - all rooted in leftist perspectives. Time and again they found beneficiaries in the most unlikely places, a factor that aided them in maintaining their chosen lifestyle and propagating their radical views with few repercussions.

“Leftist” as a subcultural identity

But “leftist” was not simply a political category, it also entailed a range of socio-cultural features, some of which will be described in coming chapters. While not necessarily inherent in leftist ideology, a relaxed view on sexual relations and the use of alcohol and marijuana was prevalent among Palestinian Leftists in Birzeit University – as Islamists would frequently criticize them for. The clothes they wore, the icons they surrounded themselves with, the music they listened to; all reflected aspects of their identity as Leftists. Being a Leftist meant being out of the mainstream, both politically and socially – a position that suited il-majaneen perfectly. As Leftists, they shared in the globally distributed references of intellectual, political and popular cultural material inspired by radical ideology, and made them their own. As part of their identification with “the margins”, they sought out the works of the rebel, the outcast, the underdog. Their prototypical hero was the man or woman going against the grain;

following his own ideas without caring about the gratification of others; living in the streets in close connection with the poor and the neglected.

Communicating “leftist” identity

The distinct style of hair and dress which had initially caught my attention - the picture T-shirts, the berets, the braided or long rough hairstyles, - all of this made its bearers stand out in their social environment. In the city they would often be mistaken for foreigners, *ajnabiyyeen*. Vendors would ask them where they came from, refusing to accept their claims of being indigenous Palestinians. These misunderstandings would incite laughter among the group; they found it amusing that they were so hard to place that even their own assertions and obvious mastering of the language did not sway the questioner. “They don’t understand why we would want to look like this”, Don Quijote claimed, “it doesn’t make sense to them, so we have to be foreigners”. The categorization of these young Palestinians as foreigners might, however, also be a result of the global flavour of the symbols they had made their own. Their dress code resembled that of youth cultures around the world expressing degrees of dissonance with the established order, whatever that would be. The symbols of radical leftist ideologies have, ironically enough, become pop culture on a global scale.

Subculture and global pop culture

While il-majaneen and their leftist friends constituted a distinct Palestinian subculture, they embraced expressions of what might be called a symbolism of resistance distributed on a global scale to the extent that it seems reasonable to label it a global popular culture. This popular culture is expressed through an “iconization” of various radical and Third World thinkers, activists and artists. These are characters that have become symbols of resistance to

unequal distributions of power in existing power structures by means of some form of revolutionary change. By “dressing and expressing” identification with such icons, youth globally express dissonance with status quo, in appearance at least if not in practice. Il-majaneen infused these icons with values pertaining to their specific predicaments as Palestinians in what they identified as a neocolonial society. The writings of Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, for instance, were creatively coupled with traditional Marxist thought. All represented ideological messages which informants embraced and appropriated as their own, mixing them with radical Arab political and intellectual thought and anti-colonial movements from the Arab world and beyond. As symbols, they carried messages of opposition to the forces of power in society. Thus pictures of as varied figures as Karl Marx, Che Guevara and Bob Marley were covering Palestinian Leftists’ T-shirts, their books, and the walls of their apartments. Side by side with these icons were symbols of Palestinian national identity and resistance; a necklace featuring Handala³⁷, the cartoon figure turned national symbol; a drawing of Palestine in its undivided shape³⁸; the Palestinian flag draped on a wall.

Music was an important factor creating, maintaining and expressing subcultural identity. While il-majaneen embraced elements of a global popular culture of opposition, they tended to shy away from the Westernized Arab pop music played on the radio and in bars. Il-majaneen and their leftist friends enjoyed politically expressive artists like Tracy Chapman, Nina Simone and Bob Marley, addressing racism, oppression, political and economic inequality in their songs. In a similar manner they loved the anti-authoritarian lyrics and enchanting rhythms of Manu Chao, and how he would sing in different languages in a symbolic act of embracing oppressed people universally - including Arabic (Oh, what a joy! Being noticed by the world!). These were icons celebrated by a world of youth, yet infused

³⁷ Handala is a cartoon figure created by popular Palestinian cartoonist Naji Al-Ali, who was killed in the 70’s, as a symbol of his childhood and status as a Palestinian refugee (Oweis 2004).

³⁸ Palestinians tend to use the image of Palestine as it was outlined during the British Mandate before the establishment of Israel, much to the annoyance of their critics. It represents their lost homeland.

with locally adapted ideas that gave sense in their own predicament, as was the case with my informants. But most of all they cherished music originating from all corners of the Arab world. Their collections included artists inspired by Marxism as much as Sufi and Bedouin traditions. Through the lyrics of these songs they heard stories about men and women living on the edge of established society, defying the rich and powerful, the state and its representatives and foreign occupiers. With a unique mixture of humor and gravity, these songs celebrated the simplicity of life and love, the strength and joy in being free and doing what you want rather than what you're being told, and inspired il-majaneen in their daily lives.

Significant Others: the bourgeoisie

I have described some of the aspects defining il-majaneen in their University environment, and some of the features they identified with. But other groups were important in defining il-majaneen socially. Outside of the University, the bourgeoisie constituted a "Significant Other" in the construction of informants' subcultural identity. Il-majaneen and other proclaimed Leftists shared many of the same interests and arenas with representatives of what they consistently referred to as the bourgeoisie; the more or less affluent Palestinian middle and upper class. They went to the same bars and restaurants, they listened to the same lectures, and they watched the same plays, and so on. As writings of social anthropology suggests in the field of ethnicity, it might have been precisely their social and cultural proximity to the bourgeoisie that made il-majaneen so eager to communicate in words and appearances that they did not belonging to the same category (c.f. Barth 1969).

In order to fully understand informants' anti-bourgeois attitudes in spite of their apparent common ground in many ways, it might be useful to consider anew the agenda of the budding elite in the first Intifada. The uprising, as we remember, was directed against the

Israeli occupation, but also against local and regional Arab leaders, including the Palestinian leadership. This antagonism manifested itself as an internal political power struggle, but at the same time it found its expression in popular culture, as a theme in songs, poetry, and imagery. One of the recurring themes was the dichotomy of the “simple” man versus the “corrupt” or rich man. The purity, honesty and generosity of the simple man was plotted against the deceitful, greedy, and feeble character of the corrupt man, who was typically described as a man of power and position, taking part in maintaining the status quo of regional politics, leaving the Palestinian people to their predicaments. The highly popular Palestinian cartoonist Naji Al-‘Ali made this dichotomy one of his signatures, where the “evil” man representing oppression is portrayed as a fat, flabby, ugly man without legs (“symbolizing his lack of popular support”) who “betrays and plots against the resistance” and is “a tool in the hands of the US and Israel” (Oweis 2004). The negative perception of the bourgeoisie entertained by informants was thoroughly embedded in Palestinian, and especially in leftist, resistance ideology.

Establishing distance to the bourgeoisie

One of the ways informants marked their difference from the bourgeoisie was by telling stories about them, accentuating perceived negative values associated with them, as the following examples will show. Samra told me and a group of others this story one evening in a restaurant usually avoided because of its rather exclusive, hence “bourgeois” character:

A girl in my class, she is from Jenin, she came to school today and she was so upset, her face was white and she was all ... [illustrating her trembling hands]. She said ‘Oh, my God, what a horrible way to start the day’, and everybody was like, ‘what happened, what’s going on?’ Then she told us that she was out swimming in the morning, you know, in her pool in the garden [raising her eyebrows tellingly], then suddenly she heard shots, and so it turned out that Israeli tanks had entered her

neighbourhood, and they were fighting with the Resistance³⁹. So naturally she became terrified and she had to get out of the water, you know, isn't that terrible!

The group was laughing. "Oh, that poor girl!" Kiffaya commented, her face torn in fake concern. "Did she really, she had to interrupt her morning swim?" "How awful!" another girl added. "The occupation is so cruel!" Kiffaya concluded, still laughing. "'An jadd, it's true, this is what she said," Samra continued.

You know, the same girl she told us another time, she was complaining about how hard the situation is now during the second Intifada, everything was so much worse now, she said. Her family had to cut down from three to two servants, you know, can you imagine how horrible that was for them! [Everybody is laughing again, shaking their heads]. 'And it is hopeless to get a good manicure, just look at my nails', she said, [illustrating, reaching out her fingers as if checking her nails.]

The story says something about the (lack of) values attributed to the bourgeoisie by informants. In this story, the girl was expressing fear at the arrival of the soldiers, in a context presumably revealing the shallowness of the girl involved. She was in a situation of privilege and abundance in the eyes of informants, yet she portrayed herself as being deprived because of the cruel occupation. Her malcontent with having only two servants instead of three was an extreme example of her riches yet lack of will to sacrifice anything, as informants understood it. She attempted to create a sense of shared predicament between herself and the Palestinian population in general, by sharing a story of how the occupation had affected her negatively, but informants "revealed" the fake nature of this sense of unity, and through the codes established by using irony they showed that she has nothing in common with them and no reason to claim that she too was suffering.

Another story, from the dramatic Israeli invasion of Ramallah in 2002, might show in a more direct manner how the negative values of the bourgeoisie were being connected to

³⁹ The various Palestinian guerrilla groups are generally referred to simply as "The Resistance".

anti-nationalist attitudes: One day when we were sitting outside his apartment in Ramallah overlooking the neighbourhood, Che said:

During the invasion [of 2002] we hid for many days in that building [pointing to a ten-storey building across the street]. The [Palestinian] Resistance was positioned around that house over there [a big beautiful villa with a garden close by]. Those who live there came with their neighbours to them [the Resistance] and told them: ‘Why are you here? You cannot stay here; go somewhere else! You will destroy our houses with bullets.’ These people *walla*, really, they have no respect. People are fighting for them, sacrificing their lives for them, and they get no thanks, no nothing, just criticized for destroying their houses! They think only about themselves and their precious *things*. They are not worthy of these men’s lives.

Stories like these accompanied a multitude of incidents interpreted in a similar manner, constantly confirming informants’ views on the bourgeoisie, like an event that occurred during an incursion of Ramallah by the Israeli army: I was going to attend a lecture in the evening with El Mariachi, Che and Adonis given by a famous filmmaker of Palestinian origin settled in Chile. While still in Birzeit, word reached us that Israeli tanks had entered Ramallah, but il-majaneen decided to take their chances, having looked forward to this lecture for a long time. When we arrived in Ramallah they decided to walk the last distance as there were no shared taxis going in our direction because of the incursion, and walking there we could hear the sound of blasts from Israeli tanks in the distance. The soldiers were attacking the Arab banks in the area, after supposedly having found that money was being used to fund “terrorist activities”. The lecture was held in a cultural foundation in Al-Bireh, Ramallah’s twin city and incidentally known as “home of the bourgeoisie”. Most of the audience turned out to belong to this class, as the guys contemptuously remarked upon arrival.

During the lecture, the blasts continued outside, sometimes loud enough to disturb the lecturer, who nevertheless continued undauntedly. Behind us sat a middle-aged woman with bleached hair elaborately arranged in fashion and a shiny golden dress. During the lecture she was continuously wrenching in her chair, whispering on the phone or talking nervously to her

neighbor. In the break, El Mariachi bursted out: “That woman is driving me crazy! *Kuss ukhtha sharmuta* [swearing]. She is so afraid because of the soldiers; if she’s so scared, why doesn’t she just go home?! She is ruining for all of us.” Apparently the woman was calling everybody she knew to inquire about what was happening, expressing concern about the situation. Che continued: “Let’s take her phone and throw it out the window! She would freak out,” he suggested, smiling at the thought. “They can’t stand to lose their things; she would be more upset about that and forget about the soldiers, ha ha!” The guys were laughing now. “This is typical of the bourgeoisie here,” El Mariachi continued, addressing me with a serious face again. “This is how they are, you know. So scared, always worried, always complaining, and never satisfied. *Kuss ukhthum kullhum!* [cursing again]”.

This episode highlights one of the values of resistance ideology: Not showing fear. Communicating to the world that whatever the Israeli soldiers were up to did not affect you notably was an appraised quality, and people would frequently make use of humor and irony to achieve that. To become agitated or afraid, like the woman in this lecture, would commonly be frowned upon or made fun of. Because she belonged to the bourgeoisie, her fear was reduced to material concern.

Bourgeois attributes: “Selling themselves”

The close ties between the Palestinian bourgeoisie and the international community was interpreted as a sign of their role as “puppets” or tools in the hands of Western capitalist and imperialist forces, and informants connected the distribution of wealth and their extensive international relations to an unpatriotic attitude towards Palestine and the conflict. The role of the Palestinian bourgeoisie in the conflict was viewed with angry scepticism; according to informants they had been “sell-outs” throughout history literally and figuratively speaking, and they still were. Questioning the national commitment of the Palestinian bourgeoisie was

one of the ways in which informants created borders between “us” and “them”. Examples such as a story which was downplayed by Palestinian officials but spawned a stream of rumours and anger among the Palestinian public, that Palestinian cement companies owned by officials within the PA were importing and re-selling cement to Israeli contractors who were building the hated separation wall⁴⁰, strengthened informants’ view of the bourgeoisie. One of my informants pointed out a house to me, close to the Muqata’a, the PA administration compound, and told me: “Here they live, the traitors”, repeating the story of the cement scandal. The house was big and with high fences around it, signalling the position of its owners⁴¹.

The conceptual proximity between the bourgeoisie and the established political leadership had its roots in the radical agenda of the new elite in the first Intifada. Political power, economic power and corruption were portrayed as going hand in hand. A position of power, once achieved, would then become a vehicle for serving their own personal interests and benefits, or so the assumption was according to leftist notions. An example might illustrate this: One out of many times Kiffaya and I were sitting in a shared taxi at a West Bank checkpoint, the Israeli soldiers demanded that three men climb out of the car while they would check their IDs with the central. The driver inquired the soldiers as to how long it would take, speculating out loud if he should wait for them, asking his other passengers for advice. One of the men outside, in a suit and shirt, heard his reflections and stepped up to the driver’s window. He opened his suitcase and pulled out a pen and a piece of paper, and threatened to take his car number if he dared to leave without him. The man was recognised

⁴⁰ The rumour was named the Egyptian “cement-gate” scandal in Arab newspapers, and comes in several versions, involving many high-ranking PA officials, including Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei (PM from 2003 to 2005). Supposedly a number of top PA officials reportedly used their influence to import large amounts of cheap cement from Egypt, designated for rebuilding Palestinian infrastructure, only to resell it to Israeli contractors. The cement that ended up in Israel, the story goes, was eventually used to build the separation wall Israel is building in the West Bank (Amayreh 2004).

⁴¹ The house belonged to the Tarifi family. Jamal Tarifi headed the Tarifi Company for Concrete Mix (TCCM), one of the main suspect companies in the scandal. He is a brother of Jamil Tarifi, then-current Palestinian Authority Minister of Civilian Affairs

by the passengers as working with the *Sulta*. The driver's attitude turned from doubt to certainty: He cursed loudly in the man's face and stepped on the gas, supported loudly by the others in the car. Everybody was infuriated at the attempt of threatening the driver into staying on account of his position within the Authorities. "It's so typical", Kiffaya said on our way from the scene, "thinking they can do whatever they want because of their position, trying to scare people into doing what they want. I'm happy the driver didn't give a fuck! See, they're so stupid: We could have waited, but not like this, not under threat." By using his position to manipulate the driver into staying, the *Sulta* official was no longer entitled to Intifada solidarity. He was serving his own interests, not those of the common good.

Informants were strongly critical towards educated or well-off Palestinians who did not have a "conscious" approach to the West and the power structures constantly present in social relations, as they observed it. Il-majaneen took great pride in being Palestinian, and were concerned about removing any sense of shame or fear attached to it. They ridiculed Palestinians and other Arabs who "tried to become Western" in speech, looks and behaviour. This applied especially to the bourgeoisie, who were most likely to have the means to travel and study or work abroad. For instance, I was sitting one day with El Mariachi in one of Birzeit's internet cafés when two young Palestinian men entered. The men started speaking to each other in English with broad American accent, their Arabic accent still strong underneath. El Mariachi shook his head and rolled his eyes in disbelief at what he saw as a ridiculous attempt at "showing off" by relinquishing their mother tongue and signalling to everybody present that they had been living abroad. The idea that this should make them better than anybody else was harshly mocked afterwards. "Can you believe the idiots we heard today?" he exclaimed back home to the other guys and told them about the two men. "It's embarrassing, they're making fools of themselves and they don't even know it. They think they're kings of the world, but they are so small..." The two men were playing roles,

pretending to be someone they were not, discarding their heritage in the process, El Mariachi concluded. Informants interpreted the act as a show of insecurity and had no sympathy for their need to assert themselves.

“Keep yourself” in informants’ discourse

In contrast to bourgeois “sell-outs”, the notions of “not selling yourself” or “not losing yourself” and its positive counter piece, “keeping yourself”, were central to informants’ discourse⁴². They felt the pressure from their surroundings in so many ways to be or do something they did not want, and they struggled in their daily lives to be in charge of their own affairs somehow, economically and socially. “Everybody wants to buy me, everybody wants to control me,” Adonis claimed, “You have to be awake, you have to fight somehow”. Il-majaneen would often mention family as the strongest source of pressure. Family members were pushing for many things: conformity to social norms and codes of behavior; getting more money even if it meant moving away from your friends to the Gulf; establishing a family and getting children, and so on. But there were many other sources of pressure. To “sell yourself” could be to continue working in an NGO⁴³ even though you knew it was operating under false pretences because you needed the money. It could be not speaking your mind in an important matter at work because you were afraid of losing your job. Equally it could be succumbing to pressure from the family and quit drinking and smoking out of fear that they would cut your monthly remittance.

Informants often expressed that “money is not a problem”, a much repeated phrase, meaning that they insisted that if they wanted to, they could get a hold of money, and lots of it – it was the *means* that were unacceptable to them. But what il-majaneen saw as acceptable

⁴² C.f. definition in chapter 2.

⁴³ Non-Governmental Organisation.

means was not necessarily in tune with established moral codes of their society. Thus, stealing was a way to survive without having to “sell yourself” because it did not place you in a relation of dependency to the person you were stealing from. It was a “pure” act because it was a strategy for survival employed by the poor and the oppressed, and it resonated with il-majaneen’s idealisation of life “in the streets”, of the underdog, the outcast. But working in an NGO, which would make you “somebody” in the eyes of society, could entail “selling yourself” because it would immerse you into the exploitive structures that il-majaneen wanted to detach from, and might accustom you to receiving a good salary that could make it harder for you to express dissent. My informants spoke very highly of a handful of people who, in their opinion, managed not to “lose themselves” even in the face of severe consequences of their choices. One of them was a University lecturer who had been ostracized by his colleagues for his unconventional ideas, research and teaching techniques. They loved the way he had not given in to the pressure from his surroundings, but remained true to what he believed in. Che elaborated on their values like this:

Everybody wants something from you, you know, it’s hard to keep yourself. You have to watch out, always. Everywhere you turn, somebody wants to ‘help’ you. Because you’re under pressure, you have no money and you need to eat, or you need to go to school, it’s easy to say yes when they want to give you something. Then you’re in a trap, and they have you by the balls. You lost your freedom. You need to be conscious always not to lose yourself. *Wallahi*, seriously, I don’t even know what freedom is. How can I know, if I never experienced it? I won’t know what it is before I taste it, nobody does I guess, but I already long for that taste, you know, and I imagine what it feels like, and dream about it, and... If I manage to be true to myself, then one day...maybe I’m going there.

Pushing the limits

While “keeping yourself” and related esteemed notions were part of a distinctive value system shared by il-majaneen, subversive action against established norms were otherwise encouraged. It was part of their project of “breaking up the order of things”, which they saw as necessary for something new – and presumably better – to arise. It was all about being “conscious” and alert to whatever was going on around you and inside you. As a group, they challenged and supported each other to go further in their own path of detachment from conventional rules. Il-majaneen strived to be open about their activities as much as the situation allowed for – a dilemma that will be investigated more thoroughly later in this thesis. Their individual and common efforts to scrutinize their own attitudes and “push” themselves further than before, were remarkable features of the group. They continuously attempted to reveal and confront patriarchal sediments that had imprinted them since childhood – “hidden in the mind and in the body”, as Samra expressed it. This occurred by long discussions and arguments, by sarcasm or teasing comments, and by acting as an example themselves, going against their initial inclinations to “push the limits of the thinkable”, as Adonis maintained. As defining assets of the group, openness and self-consciousness were similarly crucial in determining who was accepted by il-majaneen, as the following cases will try to show:

Adonis and Che made sarcastic remarks to Aziza⁴⁴, a friend of Kiffaya, who visited us an evening in July with her hair covered by a scarf. As soon as she came in, she sat down on a chair, removed her scarf, opened the bottle of beer offered to her and lit a cigarette. “What’s up with the scarf?” Che immediately teased her. “Are you trying to hide something?” Adonis continued, more challenging: “Do you really think anybody is fooled by this piece of cloth? You’re only fooling yourself.” “Why do you do it, *habibti* [my dear]?” Kiffaya asked in a softer tone, taking some of the edge off the building tension, “there really is no need”. Aziza

⁴⁴ Aziza was a 24-year-old woman who Kiffaya had met at one of her odd jobs. Except for Kiffaya, il-majaneen did not like her that much, and her efforts to be a part of the group accentuated to me some of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusions involved.

simply laughed at their confrontations, changing the subject, unwilling to justify her choice. “She’s a coward” Kiffaya concluded later that evening, when the subject reappeared after Aziza had left. “Why should she pretend to be something she’s not? She imagines that it makes her better than others, but in fact it makes her weaker”, she elaborated.

The Imam’s daughter

Another example might highlight the complexities of informants’ attitudes. A young woman, Yasmin, who was a student at Birzeit came from a powerful, wealthy West Bank family. Her father held a high position within the regional Muslim religious hierarchy, and was expected to protect his daughter’s reputation in all its aspects. Well-dressed and always veiled in the latest fashion she belonged to a segment of Palestinian society that rarely mixed with *il-majaneen* – nor were they welcomed to. Yasmin had nevertheless befriended several of the people in this leftist network by her own enterprise, and after an initial scepticism she was included into the group. She would join them in their social evenings, participating in the discussions and the laughs until the early hours. When surrounded only by the handful of people she trusted the most, she would share in the alcohol, cigarettes or marijuana that was consumed by the party - but never ever in public. The risk involved for a woman of her status, who compromised the standings of her family in the process, was evident to *il-majaneen*. Her trust was rewarded with loyalty and friendship. She kept her veil on throughout these evenings, her appearance strikingly different from her unruly looking friends. To Yasmin, keeping the balance between “inside” and “outside” was crucial. In spite of this apparent double-standard, she was never subjected to the same criticism as Aziza. The reason for this, informants explained, lay in her self-conscious and fearless approach to her own background and situation.

Informants explained: First of all, they reasoned, by venturing into friendly relations with these “morally questionable”, openly secular or atheist people, she had already challenged herself and her background. She had enough courage to go after these Leftists and become their friend in spite of what people might think of her for doing so. Secondly, she understood the limits that her position put on her and she knew how to play the game – she had a conscious approach to her behaviour. Her compliance with the codes of dress and behaviour was a prerequisite for her activities that she cleverly put on display in order to pursue her other interests, not a cover behind which she hid her “true self”, informants concluded. She had an open mind and a curiosity towards what she did not know that impressed several informants.

Adonis was once welcomed to spend the night at her family’s house when he was stuck as a result of an unexpected curfew imposed by the Israeli army. Contrary to what he expected from their high religious position, her family was open-minded and easy-going. Yasmin maintained her open way of talking and discussing even when surrounded by her brothers and their supervisors. Her family, not surprisingly, held widely different views on the role of religion and tradition in society, but they were not reluctant to discuss such matters in a liberal fashion, not unlike the free discussions among Leftists in which he felt at home. They did not seem to feel threatened by it in any way, as he might have expected. Adonis then understood, he told me, that she had the self-confidence of someone who knew that her back was covered, that her family supported her in her choices as long as she knew the “red lines”. “It was a wonderful experience, that somebody like that could be so open. It was nothing like what I had expected,” he said afterwards.

The shaping of internal differentiation

I will try to draw some conclusions from the above material: It was within the social frame of Birzeit University that il-majaneen's newfound subcultural identity was formed, developed and maintained. Political activities were essential to student life, whether actively sought or passively observed, and constituted the basis for social classification in the University environment. Informants' identity as Leftists had both political and socio-cultural sides. As Leftists, they embraced symbols and icons from what one can call a global popular culture of opposition, as well as local and regional Arab and Islamic traditions. These trends were creatively put together to shape and express a unique identity within which informants felt at home, legitimising their anti-authoritarian, "anti-capitalist" outlook. By associating themselves with certain icons, clothes and hairstyles, and genres of music and films, il-majaneen communicated their difference from the surrounding community.

Outside of the University, the bourgeoisie constituted a group of "Significant Others" against which il-majaneen positioned themselves. The characteristics attributed to the bourgeoisie, as articulated in the stories above, were those of excessive material concern, fear and cowardice, greed and lack of satisfaction with what they had. These negative values created a sense of Otherness by labelling "Them" as unable to live up to the ideals of Intifada ideology, a source of inspiration to informants. To il-majaneen, the bourgeoisie embodied the attitudes that had put Palestinians in their precarious situation, and the antithesis to the path to liberation that could bring Palestinians out of their misery. According to this classification, the bourgeoisie were cowards rather than courageous, selfish rather than willing to sacrifice for the common good, greedy rather than generous, corrupted and deceitful rather than honest, weak-minded and indecisive rather than steadfast. This classification reproduces the negative values of the "corrupt" man versus the positive values of the resistance ideology described in

chapter 2. The negative qualities of the bourgeoisie were continuously reaffirmed through informants' discourse in daily life.

I claimed in chapter 2 that resistance ideology constituted a base for a unifying national identity, shaping ideas of what it meant to be a Palestinian. The upper-class student's attempt to communicate this sense of commonality in suffering might be seen as a sign of how these values were widely shared in spite of class background; through her suffering, she was affirming her Palestinian belonging. Yet it seems from the examples above that resistance ideology simultaneously could be manipulated to delineate internal subcultural categories. Classifying the bourgeoisie and its representatives as "corrupt" established them as different from il-majaneen, through a discourse with moral overtones.

A subcultural ethos

The bourgeoisie's assumed role as "puppets" in the hands of imperial forces, and their desire to "please people of power" (or imitate their looks, habits, and speech) , while at the same time thinking they were "better than others", was contrasted to the pronounced integrity of il-majaneen, manifested in the notion of "keeping yourself". This opposition accentuated the boundaries between il-majaneen and the bourgeoisie. The concept included not giving in to pressure from family, society and authority figures, but remaining true to one's principles and "who you were". Their beliefs prescribed that they should follow their own consciousness and their own mind, and not be swayed by anyone else's. "Keeping yourself" in informant ethos meant retaining a kind of pure quality, a form of innocence, a beauty that came from the inside, something nobody could touch. Informants separated themselves from the established norms of society, but in the process they created their own normative system. Il-majaneen's classificatory system had definite moral undercurrents, and might be seen as a way of creating a distinct ethos, differentiating "insider" from "outsider" through an elaborate, exclusive

system of codes. In a sense, “keeping yourself” was a moral protection employed against what they saw as the destructive forces of corruption, coercion, and “spinelessness” in their society. These evaluating factors were simultaneously establishing borders, influencing who would be included or excluded in the group.

In this context it might become clearer why Aziza’s attempt to gain respect from her surroundings by putting on a head scarf and seemingly acting as a virtuous Muslim woman, yet relinquishing these norms as soon as she was within the “safe” boundaries of her friends’ house, did not go down well with *il-majaneen*. They openly criticized her choice, partly on the grounds of not being a “conscious” choice because it was dictated by her surroundings, by her fear of how people might judge her. Aziza’s effort to please both her society and her friends simultaneously inadvertently pushed her out of the “inner circles” of the group she coveted a membership in. To be “in”, you had to challenge yourself and your society equally. The contrasting case of Yasmin shows that overt defiance of social norms *in itself* was not the issue for my informants. As we shall see, they too carefully considered when it was time to “fight” and when they should “lay low” (c.f. chapter 5 and 9). Rather, the will to challenge yourself and your society *from the position you were in*, from where you were situated at a particular time, was what revealed your degree of consciousness about yourself and your role in society and the world.

While informants found ways to delineate a distance from what they deemed as the moral bankruptcy of the Palestinian bourgeoisie and political elite, they made it a lifestyle to go against established moral codes related to sexuality and gender relations, grounded in patriarchal power structures. This is the subject of chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Gender & Sexuality and Patriarchal Morality

Introduction

In this chapter I will describe the patterns of gender and sexual relations that were typical for il-majaneen and their leftist friends. Palestinian gender interaction and sexual activities were shaped by patriarchal structures, upheld by powerful social norms of propriety. Informants' social interaction went against these norms, with few efforts to conceal it. Il-majaneen forged bonds of friendship across gender barriers and disregarded rules for "proper" gender interaction. A range of premarital sexual relations were pursued, by men and women, with various successes. The configuration of patriarchal morality affected men and women in different manners, and these differences were manifested in the formation of men and women's sexual relations. Il-majaneen insisted that their liberal practices should be seen as a form of resistance against patriarchal power structures designed to control their personal lives.

A friendly warning

At the very beginning of my fieldwork, only a couple of days after my first evening with my newfound friends, I received a friendly warning. Kamal, a Palestinian student assigned as a contact person for the international students, took me aside for a talk. My affiliation with this group of Leftists had obviously caught his attention, and caused him to worry as he felt somewhat responsible for my well-being. "I'm sure you're able to take care of yourself", he said, "but I want you to know that these guys – I'm sure they're nice, I don't know them personally – but this group, they do not have a lot of respect for girls, if you know what I mean". He was struggling to find the right words. He clumsily proceeded to explain that these guys were known for having sexual relations with different girls, "without necessarily caring

for them”, as he put it. He was uncomfortable, ashamed of the implicit insinuations about my chastity, but feeling obliged to warn me about them.

The warning is significant because it says something about the reputation of these young men (and women) among their peers, and the role of liberal gender relations and sexual activities as defining features of their subcultural identity. Breaking the moral codes surrounding sexuality and proper gender interaction shaped their ideas of self and how they were perceived by others in a fundamental manner. This was part of the socio-cultural aspects of their leftist identity, along with their liberal attitudes to alcohol and marihuana. Unlike Kamal, perhaps not surprisingly, they did not think their behaviour indicated their “bad” character. They framed their activities as a form of resistance against the patriarchal structures of Palestinian society, established by the rule of fear – from the father, and from God the Father. Remove the fear, they believed, and they would no longer be subjected to patriarchal control in the areas of gender and sexuality.

Palestinian patriarchal structures

The pattern of sexual and gender relations was far more liberal within the group than what is common practice in Palestinian society. I mentioned in chapter 2 how Palestinian society has been based on patriarchal and neopatriarchal social structures, ensuring the authority of men over women, old over young, and the kin group over its individual members. Palestinian society is characterized by the so-called complementary gender relations typical for the Middle East, where men have responsibility over their female kin, and women are entitled to protection from male family members (Barakat 2005:150). Women are carriers of family honour through ‘*ird*, female sexual modesty⁴⁵. This implies that families tend to have tight control over the movement of their women, lest the reputation and status of the whole family

⁴⁵ For a discussion on the significance of ‘*ird* in a Palestinian context, see Gilen (1999:8-9).

could be jeopardized. Premarital sexual relations, or the suspicions of such, or even the lack of evidence to make probable the contrary, were activities that would cause a woman to lose *'ird*, thus affecting her family's honour. In practice, this meant that unmarried women should not spend time alone with men outside their close family. In the context of the University, this was manifested in how the majority of female students tended to be recruited from the vicinity of Ramallah, making sure they would not have to leave home during their studies.

But patriarchal structures as described above are never absolute. They can be challenged by several factors, such as economic factors, political factors, or differences in social standing based on skills, education etc (Shukri 1999). These situational differences, however, does not represent a challenge to the patriarchal order as such. As suggested by Fargues in chapter 2, patriarchal structures can however be challenged at their roots by generational changes in educational levels, among young versus older and among men and women (1995). Robinson further shows how these challenges can be seen as finding an outlet in the first Intifada, which was a rebellion against occupation, but also against internal divisions of power. Patriarchal power structures were showing signs of withering as family patriarchs lost power to younger sons or various popular committees based on non-kin affiliation in the wake of the first Intifada (Robinson 1997). On the whole, Palestinian society remained strongly influenced by patriarchal values, reinforced by neopatriarchal state-like structures. The children of the first Intifada, now grown into young men and women, tried to grapple with these conflicting tendencies in society in terms of sexuality and gender relations.

Subcultural identity and sexuality

It seems to me that the pattern of gender relations and sexual activities typical for this leftist subculture was a defining feature of the group. These young men and women showed little concern as to maintaining the virtuous reputation of its female members - on the contrary.

Within the subculture that il-majaneen were a part of, the rules of proper gender interaction and sexual conduct were systematically and deliberately broken. In much the same fashion as their alcohol and marihuana consumption that will be described in the following chapter, their sexual activities pulled some people into the group, while it made others keep their distance. Men and women would spend their evenings together, talking and playing cards, watching TV and movies and so on, seemingly without caring that their reputation as virtuous women was compromised. Il-majaneen's overt lack of concern for established social codes surrounding gender and sexuality both fascinated and disgusted their fellow students, subjecting them to ambiguous attentions of curiosity and concern, condemnation and envy.

This interaction had a definite larger stake for women than men, as signalled by the fact that there were more women who spent time with il-majaneen at the University than who spent their evenings socializing with them, since the University constituted a morally "safer" arena. Interacting with these "morally questionable" people at the University did not automatically imply that these women were sexually active – some of the girls were still virgins and would remain so until their marriage, appalled by the idea of premarital sex. Yet these women remained peripheral to the group, and that was probably not a coincidence. Most of the women who were involved with the Leftists did not have much concern for marriage at all or simply claimed they would never marry somebody so narrow-minded in any case. It was typical of Western lack of imagination to believe that all Muslim and Arab women lived their lives in terrified compliance with social norms, dreaming of a good marriage and nothing more, as they pointed out to me. Sure, there were many Palestinian girls like that, but they weren't among them, they claimed.

Sexual relations with foreigners

Sexual activities entangled men and women alike in intrigues and love dramas. The sexual constellations revealed that patriarchal morality continued to influence informants, if nothing else then by outlining the boundaries of their sexual “rebellion”. One of the most striking ways this manifested itself, was in the patterns of sexual relations with foreign women entertained by young Palestinian men. While some young Palestinian women were engaged in premarital sexual relationships of longer and shorter duration, the international community represented a more easily accessible and less problematic source of potential lovers for the Palestinian male students. And relations of this sort flourished – confirming the “immoral” character of foreign women in the process⁴⁶. The high rate of cross-cultural relationships in this particular subculture was a sign of the compatibility of this group with European and American students, as they shared many cultural references.

For men, these relationships had several advantages. For instance, there was no need for the normal precautions that a wise man would take before starting a relationship, as there was no risk of getting the woman’s family on their necks if the relationship became known. Should you happen to have sex with the “wrong” girl, perhaps one who couldn’t keep quiet about it afterwards, there could be consequences. A family could threaten a man with marriage or financial fines, and at worst one’s life could be at stake – although none of my informants had experienced anything like that. In addition, a foreign lover also meant the possibility of travelling abroad, a possibility that was fiercely rejected as a desired goal of the relation, but which nevertheless occurred with increasing frequency. Within a year after my fieldwork, every single one of my male key informants - and several others within the leftist network - had engaged in relationships with a foreign woman and pursued attempts to travel abroad on the base of that relationship, with or without success. This should be read as a sign of the

⁴⁶ Like I mentioned in chapter 1, being an unmarried Western woman implied immorality unless intermediating factors (such as relations with morally respectable Palestinians) could make probable the opposite.

deteriorating living conditions and opportunities for young educated Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, informants convinced me, rather than anything else. They repeatedly insisted that they did not wish to leave Palestine, but that they saw no other options to make some money and a life for themselves.

Although I might have been “shielded” from such expressions on account of my being a woman, there were few signs of anything that resembled a machismo-culture among these young Palestinian men, in spite of their frequent affairs. With few exceptions they did not speak of their sexual relations as “conquests” or displayed any sense of pride in connection with it. Adonis, for instance, who was very popular with Palestinian and foreign women alike, found such talk a “tasteless” sign of sexual immaturity. He was in a serious relationship with a foreigner; he had met his girlfriend through the PAS programme⁴⁷ two years before my arrival, and they had lived together for over a year. Incidentally, he was the only one of il-majaneen involved in a long-term relationship at the outset of my fieldwork.

The young men’s luck on the international “market” varied considerably from individual to individual and for some it was little more than a “wet dream”. El Mariachi seemed not to care a lot about women, and il-majaneen teased him and claimed he was too lazy to get a girlfriend, an interpretation he agreed with. After some months he attempted half-heartedly to engage with a German girl whom rumours had it had taken a liking on him. He was not sure if it was worth his efforts and pretended not to care one way or another. Whether he was a “virgin” or not remained a mystery to his friends, although they were pretty sure he wasn’t; it was not something they talked about.

The difficulties that sexually active foreign women represented to Palestinian men and women alike might be illustrated by the following case: Nabil, a young man labelled as “naïve” by il-majaneen and who was constantly teased for his straight-forward, simple

⁴⁷ Palestine and Arabic Studies, the international language and Social Sciences programme at Birzeit University.

statements revealing a lack of intellectual sophistication, was in love with a virtuous Palestinian girl who had a liking for him too. They would secretly hold hands and look into each others eyes, but eventually he lost his patience, watching his friends engage sexually with different women while he had to wait for a marriage that he had no plan to pursue at the age of 21. His infatuation with a blond, big-bosomed American girl finally made him break off the romance - but he had no luck with the new object of his desire. Later, Nabil admitted that he probably would not want to marry a girl that was not a virgin. While the relationship might have ended before an eventual marriage in any case, Nabil's decision shows the ambivalence of patriarchal values: His desires and the availability of sexually active girls made it intolerable to wait any longer for the girl he had had a huge crush on – even though, in the end, a virgin like her was the only one he would have respected enough to consider sharing his life with.

Palestinian women and sexual activity

I have suggested that sexual activity was more problematic to Palestinian women than men, because of the configuration of patriarchal morality. While other women were more likely to manipulate unexpected curfews and depend on loyal friends and family members to support their lies in order to meet secretly with people of the opposite sex, my female informants spent time with men outside of their families – as lovers or as friends - without trying to conceal it. Sexual activity was an important factor influencing women's choices of female friends. It represented an experience and a practice that created a distance between those who were sexually active and those who were not, which was harder to ignore for women than for men. For women who wished to remain virtuous by reputation, affiliation with women who did not have this standing was risky. For women who were sexually active, these women seemed naïve and immature, giggling like teenagers at mere utterances concerning men.

Once sexually active, young Palestinian women wielded considerable power over their male peers. For instance, Don Quijote was for months hopelessly in love with a Palestinian fellow student who considered him a friend and spent a lot of time with him. For a long time he kept his feelings a secret to both her and his friends, trying in vain to interpret her signals to see if she felt anything for him. After prolonged heartache he proclaimed his love for her, and she revealed that she did not return his feelings as she was in love with someone else - but she wanted to continue to be his friend. He was disappointed, but did not give up, and every once in a while he found signs telling him that she might develop feelings for him after all. A while later they slept together and he got his hopes up again, but shortly after she became the girlfriend of the other man and left Don Quijote with a broken heart. He took weeks to recover.

But the relative power they yielded over their male peers put these women in a double bind; they were frequently more sexually experienced than their lovers, a situation that made it somewhat difficult to attain the satisfaction they were looking for. Kiffaya was a woman who had few inhibitions regarding sexual relationships. After finishing a long-term relationship with Hisham, a struggling poet with a passion for politics, poetry, *arak*, and women, she engaged in a couple of short-term sexual relationships, but found no fulfilment with the inexperienced young men, and remained single for a long time. One of these short relationships was with a cousin of a friend of hers from a more conservative part of the West Bank, who was staying in Ramallah for a period of time. When I asked her about the relationship, which she made no attempts to hide from the rest of the group, she laughingly told me how the young man had never had sex before and now had fallen completely in love with her. After their first night together, he had proclaimed his eternal love and assured her that he would not deny his responsibilities, but would marry her as soon as she wanted. “‘What the hell is he talking about?’ I asked myself. I couldn’t help it, I was laughing out

loud. I told him that was completely out of the question, that I had no intention of marrying him or even being his girlfriend. He didn't understand anything. I swear. He thought that's what I wanted. Poor guy. He is so naïve."

Samra shared some of her experiences; after engaging in a sexual relationship with one of her male friends which ended when his foreign girlfriend came to visit and her friend managed to bring the two women together without telling Samra about the situation, she was disillusioned about men. She didn't care about the other woman, she insisted, they had simply been lovers; but was it even possible to be such a coward and not inform her in any other way? Why couldn't he simply have told her?! After some months of sporadic relationships she settled as the lover (she was *not* a mistress, she claimed, and never would be for anyone) of a married man who was a journalist and had some position in the cultural elite.

Others had more luck in terms of romance, like Jamila, a Palestinian girl regularly involved with the Centre for Visual Media, who had grown up somewhere in Europe and returned for her university studies. She was involved in a long-term relationship with Akram, another Leftist from Gaza. They would not show affection in public, but did not make efforts to try to hide the relationship either, and "everybody" knew about it. She regularly spent the night in the apartment he shared with a foreign roommate.

A quite different case might put these stories of female sexual activity in another perspective, and reveal what was at stake: Adonis had enjoyed several successive relationships with foreign women in between his affairs with Palestinian women since his arrival at the University three years earlier. His most dramatic story began his first year of University, with a Palestinian girl from within the Green Line⁴⁸ who had come to study at Birzeit for a semester. She was his neighbour, and they became friends and kept in contact even when she left to go back home. After a couple of years, on one of her many visits to

⁴⁸ The Green Line is the term for the border separating the area designated by the UN for Palestinians from the new state of Israel, as part of the Partition Plan of 1947. Palestinians often use it to label Palestinians with Israeli citizenships.

Birzeit, they slept together. She was a virgin, and in retrospect he blamed himself for being so careless; he was otherwise careful not to get sexually involved with virgin women, he claimed, it was too risky. “It’s totally unpredictable, how a woman will react to it the first time. They have these ideas in their heads, from childhood, about virginity, and they think they can manage, but then, sometimes, something just ‘clicks’ inside them”. This time, Adonis “bad choice” got serious consequences, as the girl was struggling mentally to cope with the loss of her virginity outside of marriage. Her problems were noticeable the first time he met her after the affair, he said, and later he heard that her family had gotten her committed into a mental institution of some kind.

Her family asked to see him shortly after, and he nervously agreed. To his relief they struck him as rather open-minded people, and their only concern was to know the truth to be able to help her. Her family, it turned out, had become suspicious that something had happened during her last stay, and they asked him directly if they had had sex. He decided to be honest and repress his immediate impulse to deny it, and they were grateful to know the truth, which would make it easier for the doctors to help her recover. It was nevertheless a frightful experience, sitting in a room with her father and two uncles, having to tell them about the intimate affair with the young woman. After the conversation they made it perfectly clear that he should leave her alone in the future, or else... - which he was only too happy to do. Months later, after her recovery, the woman retained contact with him on her own initiative, from a safe distance abroad where she was now studying and living with her brother. Adonis, still nervous from the episode, was reluctant to be too friendly, even at such a distance.

The limits of liberalism

However much informants agreed upon the importance of sexual freedom, gender relations and sexuality came under debate on a regular basis, as issues surfaced that revealed conflicting views and practices. Among il-majaneen debates went high about these matters, as the limits of their liberal attitudes surfaced in various situations.

A few examples might illustrate: The subject of proper dress for women came under discussion once when Kiffaya caught Don Quijote giving me advice to cover a glitch in my shirt that revealed some skin. Kiffaya immediately interrogated him as to the purpose of this: Why on earth should I cover that hardly visible piece of skin? Had he turned conservative all of a sudden? Or perhaps he felt that showing this little piece of skin would make me an indecent woman? Don Quijote tried to defend his position by explaining that he knew “how these guys think” and wanted to shield me - who was already viewed with scepticism in this regard as I was from the West - from their looks and insults. Kiffaya was not satisfied by his answer and challenged him further: Did he feel that she too, who used to dress in tight sweaters and pants, should follow the norms, that she was indecent? Don Quijote insisted that unlike me, who did not speak the language and know the social codes, she was able to defend herself. She knew what to do if a situation should arise; she knew how to scare them off should they become offensive. Kiffaya shook her head in disagreement; in this she would never understand him, she assured him.

A related episode shows the boundaries of her liberal sexual attitudes. Shortly after Kiffaya had broken up with Hisham, he came knocking on her door. Their relationship had been on and off for a period of time, until Kiffaya got tired of him sleeping with other women. She was living with Aziza at that time, who was home alone when Hisham showed up. He insisted on waiting for Kiffaya in the apartment. As it turned out, the two of them ended in bed together. Hisham left, and when Kiffaya came home, Aziza confessed what had

happened. Kiffaya was infuriated, both by the apparent lack of control of his sexual impulses by her ex-boyfriend, but mostly by the betrayal of her roommate. “How could she do this when she knows all about our relationship and my feelings for him and how it ended? She has no limits. I will never be able to trust her again. She cannot be my friend anymore.” El Mariachi agreed totally, “disgusted” by the affair, as he put it. Kiffaya described the incident as if a bond had been cut between them and could never grow back, in an almost organic manner, like cutting of a limb. As an arm could not grow back, neither could her trust.

The border of her liberal sexual attitude was connected to the meaning of friendship. Trust was a key ingredient in the forming of friendships in the group, because they were constantly balancing on the boundaries of the socially acceptable. Crossing these boundaries in the wrong place at the wrong time could ostensibly have serious consequences. Their political and socio-cultural engagement also put them at risk. The degree of surveillance in society made them constantly watch their backs, and they knew how to appreciate people’s ability to keep a secret. Once they had found somebody to trust, they held on to them and treated them well. By sleeping with her ex-boyfriend, Aziza had jeopardized Kiffaya’s ability to trust her friend - and without trust the friendship was worthless in Kiffaya’s eyes. Again, Aziza had shown that she was unable to live up to the internal rules of the group. From being outside the inner circles of the group, but still a part of it, she now disappeared from their gatherings. They would avoid her when she happened to be in the vicinity and barely say hello if avoidance was impossible. A number of apologies would not make any difference. The cut was not an easy one for Kiffaya to do, she admitted, because her uninhibited style of life did not leave that many women for her to bond with. A year later they would see each other on occasion, having a cup of coffee or the like, but Kiffaya kept her at a distance from her personal life.

Challenging the moral order?

Liberal gender interaction and sexual relations was an important component of subcultural identity, defining il-majaneen in the eyes of themselves and others. It influenced their choice of friends, directly and indirectly. But their sexual behaviour was not only a result of them pursuing their desired lifestyle; informants viewed their activities as important means of rebelling against the “closed” Palestinian society. On an individual level, they struggled to be free from fear and “what others were thinking”. On a collective level, they believed that their openness about sexual relationships could open “space” in other people’s minds, around which their surroundings could reflect upon their society and their own role in it. In addition to being a marker of subcultural identity, liberal sexual and gender relations served as a path to individual freedom from the will and control of others, and a form of rebellion against society’s established structures embodied in these moral codes. This, anyway, was how informants’ spoke about it.

According to informants’ world view, exercising sexual freedom in spite of the norms was a means to subvert patriarchal structures. Il-majaneen explicitly expressed the belief that sexual morals were a tool of control as any other means of control society had at its disposal, and they rebelled against it with the same adamancy that they did any other attempt to control their lives. They did it relatively openly and seemingly without shame, and this constituted an important part of their justifications. “I think it’s important for people to see that we live like this”, Che elaborated. “They see that it is a possibility, to do it and not to feel ashamed by it, and that they have a choice. Many people here are so closed-minded; they really need to get a different point of view sometimes. We *are* that other point of view - we live it.” Sometimes they would describe it more as a necessity, an assertion of their “inner nature”: “People want me to do many things”, Samra told me once, “or usually they want me *not* to do things, but I

don't care about that! I can't care about that, I would go crazy, I couldn't live here. I have to do what I do. It's natural for me.”

Going back to Kamal's warning it becomes clear that what Kamal deemed as a lack of respect for women, informants framed as a “liberating” process from a society that kept its citizens under tight social control. Informants would criticise what they claimed was repressive patriarchal norms that kept women sexually restrained under the control of men. They insisted that through this, men were also controlled; thwarting and suppressing their desires. It was not sexual activity that was making *sharameet* (whores) of these young women, they claimed, it was the patriarchal minds of “closed-minded” people. The fact that they were sexually active did not mean that they were “without morals”; it was just that their moral boundaries went elsewhere. The case of Aziza reveals how they had their own internal moral system, where actions and attitudes were judged – and not leniently.

The women tended to emphasize their right to do what they wanted without worrying about what other people were thinking about them. They lived the life they chose, not the life others had chosen for them. “I can't imagine not having sex before marriage,” Kiffaya exclaimed during a discussion on the matter. “How do people manage without sex? I don't get it.” She paused. “On the other hand, I can't imagine getting married either,” she laughed, recognizing that her dreams for the future differed from most women her age.

Il-majaneen stressed that the patriarchal thinking of Kamal and others like him was based on fear, not righteousness. People feared the punishment of their fathers in *this* life should they not live up to the family's expectations, and they feared the punishment of Allah in the hereafter for their sinful thoughts and actions⁴⁹. Il-majaneen stated to me in many ways that they had “broken the bonds of fear” that religion and the family had laid on them from childhood, or society tried to impose on them. No longer subjected to the prospects of the

⁴⁹ The absolute, authoritative role of the father in patriarchal society has been described by for instance Barakat (2005:149).

punishing wrath of Allah - or their fathers -, the path laid open to pursue their desires. This was where the “liberating force” of sexuality laid. In turn, informants claimed their own liberation could have an influence even on their surroundings. “Before, people simply accepted that ‘this is how things are’. Because nobody did anything else, and those who did were full of shame. With us, they have to explain why it should be so”, Samra stated in a discussion. “Even when they argue against us, we have achieved our goal, because being against something also means you have to think about it. They have to ask themselves: ‘Why am I against this?’” Che added.

Generational processes of change

These stories show the broad range of romantic and sexual relationships among informants; from “innocent” romances within the boundaries of moral standards, to short-term sexual relationships between Palestinian men and women, but more commonly between Palestinian men and foreign women, to long-term relationships between both Palestinian and foreign women and Palestinian men⁵⁰. The proliferation of male Palestinian and female foreigner relationships is a testimony to how the patriarchal system affected men and women in profoundly different ways. While the strongest impediment to male sexual activities were those related to his own moral understandings, religious beliefs, and subservience to the rule of the father and what he represented, women were to a much larger degree subjected to public scrutiny, and there were potentially severe reactions to breaking sexual norms for women.

⁵⁰ Interestingly enough I never heard of a relationship between a Palestinian woman and a foreign man, although it is not unlikely that such existed – nor do I have any material on homosexuality, although the subject briefly surfaced on a rare occasion. Religious belonging was otherwise another barrier not to be crossed, especially by Muslim women, but given the secular attitudes of my informants this subject holds little relevance here.

Il-majaneen's emphasis on sexual liberation as an internal process, happening in their own minds and bodies so to speak, can be seen as a comment on how sexual morality, as a form of power, is shaped within the subjects themselves. I argued in chapter 2 that sexual morality is one of the ways that people are actively involved in their own subjugation. Informants expressed this as "bonds of fear" within themselves that they struggled to expose and "get rid of". Adonis' experiences with the woman who had been a virgin exemplified precisely how these "internal moral structures" could spring up in unpredictable ways, even to the women themselves.

An obvious discrepancy in informants' discourse of resistance stems from the fact that their families were largely oblivious of their sexual activities. Yet they maintained that their activities should be seen as resistance to patriarchal structures – embedded in family relations. How could this be so? And where did informants' liberal attitudes come from in the first place – if it was not from Western influence, as some of their more conservative counterparts would have it?

The examples outlined above, and informants' understandings of their own activities, might make more sense when considering Fargues' arguments from chapter 2. Following his perspective, informants' behaviour might be a symptom of the process of "changing hierarchies of gender and generation" taking place in the Middle East (Fargues 1995). First of all; while the generation still in power was characterised by strong patriarchal values, resulting in political policies of a neopatriarchal nature, the coming generations were successively more egalitarian in terms of the proportionate power of men versus women, and younger versus older. This comparative egalitarianism was partly produced by equal access to education for men and women, and the consecutively higher levels of education of younger generations in relation to their elders, which made it more difficult for elders to control the young. It was this process that led to the formation of a more radical ideology that encouraged

a restructuring of society from within, questioning the legitimacy of tradition in defining social life. Following Fargues' argument, the patriarchal and neopatriarchal system will face a serious challenge when younger generations inevitably gain political power.

In the mean time, there existed a gap “between expectations and realizations” in young people's lives (Fargues 1995:190). This gap was explicitly evident to informants in relation to their families, since they were oblivious to il-majaneen's activities. While they were ready to confront their immediate surroundings with their lifestyle regarding gender and sexuality, they were not prepared to do the same with parents and kin. Il-majaneen maintained that they saw no “space” in which to be “who they were” and be accepted for that by their families, a conviction which will be discussed more thoroughly in chapters 5 and 6. Precisely because patriarchal values were at the core of family relations, these were the sites where overt resistance presented the biggest problems – and the highest costs. The profoundness of this “gap” varied according to the strength of patriarchal influence in their respective families.

In this respect, class background, religious beliefs, urban-rural factors, and personal experiences and convictions influenced the effects of these changes in particular contexts. Herein lay the possibilities and the limitations of their sexual liberalism. Their “rebellion” to an extent took place because it *could* take place; because these structures did not reach them or because the power structures were already withering in certain settings. Women's sexual activities particularly exemplify this, in my view. While sexual relationships might be risky for women in terms of their reputation, the ones who were sexually active were likely to come from liberal families where patriarchal values no longer had a strong hold, reflecting these differences in class and geographical background and so on (many of them had spent time abroad, in Europe, the US, or more liberal parts of the Middle East). The force of patriarchal moral structures becomes clearer through the case which did not have such a happy outcome,

and which revealed these high stakes that could be involved in women's sexual relations, perhaps more representative of society as a whole.

I am reluctant to dismiss informants' claims that their activities had anything to do with resistance against patriarchal structures. In a society with powerful mechanisms of social control over the individual, *particularly* related to gender interaction and sexuality, breaking the codes of sexual morality meant going against the fundamental structures of society. Adding the conscious approach by informants on the matter makes this factor hard to ignore. Their lifestyle entailed a certain risk, and required some skills in "playing the game" on the part of its proponents, as they attempted to avoid more powerful sanctions than a "bad reputation". Fargues' perspective reduces the element of "romantic views of resistance" in informants' sexual activities, and makes it is possible to claim that: Yes, their sexual practises were expressions of resistance to the patriarchal order - but not necessarily because of any special propensities on their part, but more as a result of how their generation represented different values, stemming from the gradual weakening of patriarchal structures after changes related to education and an ideology challenging tradition and emphasising social revolution. The internal variations between different groups of this generation can be attributed to the interplay of class, religion, gender, geographic background, political belonging, personal convictions and similar factors, influencing the outlook of young people and their potential to defy these structures.

In chapter 5 I will go into other aspects of il-majaneen's lifestyle choices that went against moral codes. The chapter shows the role of lifestyle practices, such as consumption of alcohol and hashish, in terms of consolidating group identity, while simultaneously furthering the gap between il-majaneen and mainstream society.

Chapter 5: Consumption, Communitas and Social Control

Introduction

This chapter deals with the consumption of illicit substances by informants. I will begin by describing the setting in which this consumption took place, dominated by Arab and Islamic patriarchal moral systems, and the efforts of authorities to control the flow and consumption of these substances. Yet informants were also influenced by tendencies of new habits formed by a growing middle-class population in cosmopolitan Ramallah. At the same time they were eager to mark their difference from this very group. Drinking and smoking were activities that created and strengthened social bonds between informants and their friends, and served to differentiate them from other groups. Alcohol's position within an overall patriarchal moral system made alcohol consumption a somewhat precarious undertaking, along with the illegal consumption and trade of hashish, and informants' leisure activities required measures of prudence in the face of extensive surveillance.

A celebration

A couple of weeks after my arrival I participated in an event that contributed considerably in altering the ideas I had about the subject of this thesis. As the spring semester had recently come to an end, Birzeit University held a ceremony for all its graduate students, including those who had graduated the year before but were deprived of a ceremony because of closures enforced by the Israeli military. My newfound friend Adonis was among several graduates in the leftist network, and il-majaneen arranged to meet with other friends in "Stones", one of their favourite bars in Ramallah, after the ceremony to celebrate. After a few hours of drinking and cheerful discussions in "Stones", the party continued at Akram's place close

by⁵¹, where a heterogeneous group of about fifteen people, women and men from 20-something to 35, found chairs and sofas and made themselves comfortable in his living-room. The imam's daughter was present, so were two of the University's younger lecturers, in addition to regular students from different parts of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. I was the only foreigner present, which my companions did not make me forget, constantly amusing themselves on my unwitting behalf. Hashish cigarettes were passed around the table along with beer and *arak*, the Arab version of the popular anis-based liquor ubiquitous in the Mediterranean region. The atmosphere was merry; people were talking, discussing, teasing each other and laughing. After a while, the doorbell rang. In came two men, one of them carrying a bottle of whisky, the other one a full-length hashish plant the size of his entire body. The advent of the two men to the party was joyously received and their gifts consumed. The party lasted until the early hours of morning; only a few people had left earlier, some had fallen asleep. One man was still rolling cigarettes of hashish, but nobody were able to smoke them (or "drink" them, as one says in Arabic, as the verb for drinking and smoking is the same). Fatigued but blissful *il-majaneen* stumbled home to Che's place close by for a few hours of sleep as the sun was rising on the clear blue sky, causing everybody to squint with their dry eyes.

For weeks afterwards people commented that it had been an exceptional evening, emphasising how wonderful it had been to completely forget all about the seriousness of their predicament and simply enjoy themselves, not worrying about money, future or politics for a short while. The party, however exceptional in degree, accentuated a common way of forming and strengthening social ties within the leftist network. The consumption of tobacco, alcohol and/or hashish by males and females alike was an ever-present factor of these social gatherings – unless they were broke, which was quite often the case. I was initially surprised

⁵¹ Akram was a 26-year-old leftist who had recently finished his studies, and had now began working in one of Ramallah's numerous NGOs.

by the seemingly nonchalant way these young Palestinians engaged in socially and legally condemned activities, especially considering the preconceived notions I had acquired about the still powerful patriarchal character of Palestinian society. It was only gradually that I became attuned to the subtle ways in which informants took precautions in their daily lives to be able to “carelessly” engage in these activities, precluding the many forms of surveillance and social control surrounding them.

Alcohol, hashish and dominant morality

Alcohol is considered forbidden, *haram*, in Islam, and there are powerful moral inhibitions against consuming it in most Muslim societies. That does not mean that Muslims never drink - and especially secular urban Muslims who do not necessarily feel compelled by religious doctrine or social sanctions to refrain from it. New habits of consumption develop along with new forms of economic and social structures, affecting the fears and desires of its subjects. Smoking tobacco and hashish hold a slightly different position in Islam. Unlike alcohol, which has been banned along with gambling as “Satan’s work” since the days of the Prophet⁵², the status of hashish within Islam has a history of ambivalence attached to it. Smoking tobacco and hashish is neither explicitly banned nor explicitly accepted in the Qur’an, but categorised as “rejected” (*makruh*), signalling social disapproval (Nieuwkerk 1992, Rosenthal 1971). On the other hand, the drug was believed by some - including religious leaders - to have the propensity to bring one closer to God (Rosenthal 1971). Attempts have been made throughout history to ban hashish on religious grounds on account of its similar effects to alcohol, but within the legal framework of Islam it has remained “rejected”. That has not hindered Muslim states to illegalize hashish along with other kinds of

⁵² The Muslim calendar begins the year 622 in the Christian calendar, when the first organized Muslim society was founded as Muhammad the Prophet left Mekka for what was to be called Medina (Vikør 1993).

drugs. The somewhat paradoxical result is that, while socially frowned upon, the use of hashish does not imply the same irrefutable immoral character as consuming alcohol, in spite of its illegal status in most Arab countries.

Ramallah: a cosmopolitan city

In the predominantly Muslim Palestinian society, alcohol was not readily available in stores, bars and restaurants except in a few cities, notably Ramallah and Bethlehem. These were cities where the growing Palestinian middle class were adopting new habits, and that also accommodated a significant Christian minority. This process of growth accelerated during the Oslo process, when the proliferation of bars, restaurants and cinemas in cities such as these accompanied the modest yet significant influx of Palestinians returning from abroad during the relative economic optimism of the 90's (Stein & Swedenburg 2005). Along with the presence of international organisations and institutions, and the flow of Palestinians with foreign affiliation and other Arabs and foreigners in and out of the area, Ramallah turned into a somewhat cosmopolitan city. Symptomatic of these processes, the West Bank saw the birth of its own microbrewery during this period, established in 1995 and located in Taybeh, a Christian village which gave name to the beer. The number of bars and restaurants in Ramallah receded as a result of the onset of the second Intifada in 2000, a process that was still palpable during my fieldwork, but some managed to survive the financial recess and the more austere spirit that accompanied the Intifada.

The controversies of alcohol consumption

Although Ramallah was housing a rather more liberal segment of the Palestinian population, consuming alcohol was not socially acceptable among the general Muslim public, and this sat

my informants apart from many of their Muslim countrymen in mutual disparagement. The controversial aspects of sale and serving of alcohol in Ramallah can be illustrated by something that occurred during Ramadan⁵³ the year of my fieldwork. Perhaps courtesy of the increasing power of the Islamist parties on the Palestinian political scene, President Yasser Arafat sent out an order that it should be forbidden to serve alcohol in Ramallah throughout the whole month of fasting as a token of respect to practicing Muslims. While some bars and restaurants upheld the prohibition completely, others changed their glasses to ceramics so that one could not see the content, and proceeded serving beer. During this period it was impossible to get the usual chick peas, carrot sticks and other snacks that accompanied the beer, precisely because it was an indicator that beer was being consumed. My informants were annoyed by the prohibition, and ridiculed the double-standards that followed it. To them, it was yet another restriction placed upon them by a society that demanded conformity by its members, a conformity they fought with all their resources to escape.

Drinking, smoking and group differentiation

The role of drinking in the intersection of identity, culture and power has been noted by anthropologists and sociologists. Douglas and others opened up for a view of drinking emphasising its positive and creative aspects (Douglas 1987). Drinking patterns and their contexts might constitute fields from which to study socio-cultural distinctions between and within different groups, as consuming, or equally important *not* consuming alcohol intersect with differentiations based on gender, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic conditions (Wilson 2005, Gefou-Madianou 1992, Douglas 1987). The same is true for smoking habits and other types of drugs. The attitudes and practices of the state intersect with other formations of power, affecting the availability of various products, the status associated with

⁵³ The month of fasting.

them, and the contexts in which consumption occurs in the process. Drinking and smoking practices has an important role to play in the production and expression of identity in a range of societies, including those in which it is seen as dangerous. In spite of what many would have us believe, the consumption of substances such as alcohol and drugs are culturally sanctioned not because of their effects on the human body and the costs to society as a whole, but within the socially constructed boundaries where this consumption takes place (Gefou-Madianou 1992).

Smoking and drinking contributed in creating what Turner has termed *communitas* among informants and their friends, as suggested in chapter 2 (Turner 1970). The horizontal bonds of friendship between *il-majaneen* went beyond differentiations based on gender and socio-economic and geographic background, and implied an experience of closeness, of community, a chance to “be yourself” (c.f. Turner 1970:516). They had fun together, they relaxed together, and they could speak about anything and everything. The consumption of alcohol and hashish was a part of this *communitas*. This preference for socially sanctioned substances helped to attract some people to their group, while repelling others. Perhaps as a symptom of this, combined with their liberal sexual practices, there were rumours around the University that *il-majaneen* were worshipping the Devil, *sheitan* – but it is doubtful whether anybody truly took these rumours seriously. In addition to influencing who were attracted to this particular subcultural network, the threat of social repercussions of their activities created a sense of compliance between them. This was especially obvious in situations where the social costs were big, as in the case of the imam’s daughter. The trust that Jamila showed her friends by drinking alcohol in their exclusive presence was met by the loyalty with which they kept her secret.

Smoking and drinking influenced which kind of places *il-majaneen* felt comfortable in, further affecting which social connections they would make. They would often hang out in

their favourite bars and cafes, of which Ramallah had a decreasing number since the financial situation gradually deteriorated as the second Intifada lingered on. Rather than the *argile*⁵⁴ clubs of many Palestinian men or the morally “safe”, alcohol-free cafés of most of their young peers, these Leftists would seek the liberal alcohol-serving bars of the upper middle class, many of them Christian. Here they were enjoying the locally produced Taybeh beer and imported Carlsberg, or perhaps a glass of *arak*, while discussing politics and the arts, smoking cigarette after cigarette, gossiping about the “bourgeois” people on another table, and nibbling chick peas and carrot sticks. They would rarely socialize with those whom they did not consider “one of them”.

Being a Leftist and drinking beer and smoking hashish were not the single criterions for entering the group, as the case with Aziza was a symptom of. For instance, another young Leftist who otherwise had revealed himself as an intelligent man with similar inclinations as my informants was ousted on account of his “bad” thinking, stuck in negative thoughts about his past and future, unwilling or unable to lift himself above his predicament. He was classified as *maskiin*, a term connoting poverty and weakness, i.e. somebody who would arouse pity in you or, as the case was with this particular man, who pitied himself. Being *maskiin* was incompatible with gaining the friendship of il-majaneen. Informants’ ethos emphasised “freeing yourself” from whatever kept you down – including your own mind.

Gender and morality: smoking cigarettes

The immorality associated with drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco or hashish on a general basis has different implications according to gender, class, and religious belonging. As Nieuwkerk (1992) shows in her study among Egyptian women, while alcohol and to a lesser extent smoking cigarettes was condemned among all segments of Egyptian society, it was

⁵⁴ Water pipe.

considered especially improper for women to engage in these activities. The moral rules applied more strictly to women, affecting their reputation in a severely negative manner. Smoking cigarettes was perhaps less controversial than drinking alcohol, but was nevertheless deemed highly inappropriate for Palestinian women. For females in Ramallah at the time of my fieldwork, smoking in public was strongly condemned, or rather: it hardly ever occurred. While smoking cigarettes was common for men, and the consumption seemed to be on the increase for women, it was with few exceptions avoided in the public arena – even by the most liberal of my informants. Only a handful of females smoked on occasion in the University cafeteria, a few more in the relatively shielded bars of Ramallah, but practically nobody would smoke on the streets. In private homes, however, a number of leftist women smoked excessively, and the toilets at Birzeit University were constantly reeking of cigarette smoke as young women from all segments of Palestinian society inhaled the perfumed blends while out of view from their male peers.

This says something about the way patriarchal structures influenced people's behaviour in public space. It also reveals the way women and men were affected differently by patriarchal norms. The enforcement of such behavioural codes were undertaken by ordinary people in the streets through derogatory looks, comments, gossip et cetera – hence informants' emphasis on not caring “what other people might think” as a way to detach themselves from these conventional codes of behaviour. The separate lives that quite a few people were leading, displaying deference to moral codes in public yet engaging in “immoral” activities in private homes were fiercely criticized as double-standards by il-majaneen.

Dawwerha: Hashish and music

Sometimes a merry evening in a bar would continue in somebody's apartment, as the case was at Akram's party, drinking more or rolling a cigarette of hashish, playing Arabic popular

and underground music. There exists an old tradition within Arab popular culture dedicated to the celebration of smoking hashish in poetry and song (Rosenthal 1971). Perhaps not surprisingly, Sufi music as well as traditional Bedouin music from all over the Arab world was very popular with *il-majaneen* and their friends, and they would go to great lengths to get a hold of rare copies of underground *sufi* and *bedu* artists. These songs often included an anti-authoritarian content, ridiculing the police and other representatives of the state that sought to impede the liberties of the people, consistent with a historical propensity on part of Bedouin societies to work against the power structures of the state (Abu-Lughod 1986). Informants were amused by artists who were obviously “stoned” as they performed their music, and one of their favourite songs was a tribute to the preparing and smoking of a hashish cigarette, the lyrics going: “Roll it, roll it and give me a puff, before the police are coming”⁵⁵ (c.f. the title of this paragraph).

The ambivalent position of smoking hashish can be exemplified by looking at the name I chose to designate my informants by, *il-majaneen*. The name gained a special significance for the group when, by their own account, they were watching an Egyptian movie with a somewhat prototypical character in it, who is always stoned. In spite of his habit, he tries to show that he is clever and full of wisdom. He is a rebel and an outsider, and at the same time he is a clown, a source of voluntary and involuntary amusement. Informants used the term *majnoun*⁵⁶, which normally designates being mad or crazy, to refer to this character, and eventually it became a word they used to describe each other and certain activities or situations embodying these attributes. The special meaning given to the word was understood only by *il-majaneen*, and became part of informants’ idiosyncratic discourse. These examples illustrates that while alcohol carried the double ambivalent meaning of Western (degenerated)

⁵⁵ *Dawwerha*, literally “roll her”, referring to the rolling of a hashish cigarette, taken from a song by Ziyad Rahbani, son of world famous female Lebanese singer Feirouz.

⁵⁶ *Majnoun* is the adjective (for a male; for a female *majnouna*), *il-majnoun* the definite singular noun, *il-majaneen* the definite plural noun.

social habits adopted by Arab upper classes, hashish had a culturally indigenous position, if mostly a conspicuous one, reflected in music, poetry, movies and other expressions of popular culture.

Within this subcultural community smoking hashish was generally accepted, even if not indulged by all its members. Hashish was nevertheless forbidden by law and carried a definite negative flavour socially, and unlike alcohol it was connecting its buyers to the local criminal network, with all the risks this entailed from representatives of the authorities as well as the drug dealers themselves. The latter was a community reputed for its collaborators, as morality was perceived to be low and the potential for blackmailing into collaborator ranks by the Israeli intelligence equally high, a subject I will describe shortly (Tamari 1990, Usher 1996). The consumption of hashish therefore served to create a further distance to parts of mainstream Palestinian society.

Openness versus secrecy

The imperative of openness was a recurrent theme in informant discourse. Ideally, informants wanted no secrecy or pretence concerning their consumption; as mentioned, they placed great importance of confronting one's fear of "what others might think" and the moral prescripts inscribed in their minds and bodies throughout childhood and puberty. While obviously acting in strict violation of the moral rules of society, *il-majaneen* had developed their own moral system, attaching values to certain kinds of behaviours and sanctions to others. Within the leftist network, this imperative was highly operative, and deviations were reprimanded, as in the case of Aziza and the head scarf in the previous chapter. Jamila was, in that sense, the exception that confirmed the rule. However, there were strong forces in Palestinian society working against such overt "morally subversive" tendencies. The risks involved, which will become clearer throughout this chapter, made "*ilmajaneen*" settle for what they called

“knowing without knowing”; that is, “everybody” knew what they were up to, but nobody felt the need to interfere with it as long as they kept within certain unspoken boundaries.

Informants’ relatively open alcohol consumption was a contrast to the hidden consumption of many of their peers. Informants mocked the social gatherings of their fellow students, where many young men secretly poured vodka in their soft drinks, gradually getting more and more drunk and loud yet pretending they were not. Again, the double-standards of their peers annoyed il-majaneen. In these settings, the few times they would even be present, il-majaneen preferred not to drink rather than to pretend they didn’t in the face of other people. Nor did they approve of Palestinians who would drink exclusively with foreigners, and not with other Palestinians. This was all part of the “hypocrisy” from which they distanced themselves.

But as far as family was concerned, the principle of openness was void. The challenge was to keep their activities a secret to parents and siblings, yet attempt to avoid lying about it directly in violation of their own ideals, which were important to them. This dilemma made many conversations with kin considerably nervous ordeals at times. il-majaneen would often resort to jokes and irony to keep their parents’ inquiries at bay without compromising their own integrity, as they saw it. The resentment and ambivalence towards family members that these lies generated will otherwise be further explored in the next chapter.

Differentiating from the bourgeoisie

While the bars and restaurants of Ramallah (and to a lesser extent Birzeit) were important social arenas for the Leftists, it was also a site for expressing singularity in relation to a group of “Significant Others” which shared the same arena: the Palestinian bourgeoisie. As previously noted, il-majaneen’s preferences for social and cultural activities coincided with those of Ramallah’s middle- and upper-class population, yet they did not wish in any way to

be associated with the Palestinian bourgeoisie. Drinking had become a way for Palestinian Christians and to some extent secularised Muslims to communicate their upper-middle-class status, adapting habits from European and American bourgeoisie (similar processes have been noted in other Arab countries, c.f. Shukri 1999). This was a communication of which my informants were acutely aware and constantly attempted to distance themselves from through derogatory discourse, rough appearances, and a lack of adherence to “bourgeois” social norms. Ironically, or perhaps symptomatically, it was in these bars informants were most eager to make sarcastic comments and tell disparaging stories about the bourgeoisie, as presented in chapter 3.

Immorality and collaboration

Consumption of alcohol and hashish put the group at a certain risk, socially, legally, and physically. The configuration of social control in Palestinian society meant that breaches of moral codes, which included drinking and smoking hashish, as much or even more so than the legal ones could have repercussions if disclosed under unfortunate circumstances. This risk was not only related to family members, although the consequences of being ousted from the family could be serious enough in a still predominantly kin-based society (Peteeet 2005).

Drinking and smoking hashish were typically leisure activities taking place in the evening, which meant that informants normally needed to travel from one location to another in order to get home again.

Ramallah had a different atmosphere at night than during the day, as the activities of Israeli soldiers and to a lesser extent the Palestinian militias they were searching for made it unsafe to move in the dark, along with the enterprise of people conducting illegal business of various kinds. In addition, different groups were roaming the streets of Ramallah seeking to keep order and control according to their own standards. Usher (1996) describes the existence

of multiple groups throughout the Palestinian areas, many of them parts of quasi-state services but lacking formal structure and legal directories, which were undertaking to take care of Palestinian “internal security”. Several of these groups were products of the state building process undertaken by the PA⁵⁷ after Oslo. The proliferation of such “security forces” contributed to the militarization of the Intifada Al-Aqsa (Johnson and Kuttub 2001). Among their self-designated tasks, reported by various human rights groups, were fighting crime, solving clan or family disputes, and “met[ing] out punishments to those accused of ‘moral offences’ such as drug-taking and prostitution” (Usher 1996:25). Consuming alcohol and hashish and engaging in sexual relations against codes of morality and respectability, while entertaining politically radical ideas and a lack of respect for established authorities meant that il-majaneen and their friends potentially represented a threat to “the order of things” in society.

In addition to having the status of “moral offences”, informants’ illicit activities made them vulnerable to accusations of collaboration - and collaboration warded its own retributions, including death penalty in quite a few cases. The many weaknesses of the human being - illicit sexual activity, gambling, drinking, drug use et cetera - were actively sought out by the Israeli intelligence for the purpose of recruitment into collaborator ranks, a well-known fact among Palestinians (Tamari 1990)⁵⁸.

While having to a large extent escaped the all-seeing eyes of kin from their childhood and teens, other “eyes” had replaced them, and il-majaneen were always watching their backs. The existence of a number of groups interfering with Palestinian communities and public life,

⁵⁷ Palestinian Authority.

⁵⁸ These collaborators and the practice of recruiting them was then adopted by the Palestinian Security Forces after the signing of Oslo II, as a part of the overall project of making the Palestinian Authority responsible for Palestinian internal security in accordance with Israeli security demands (Usher 1996). While reliable numbers are difficult to find, Usher suggests that somewhere around 5,000 individuals are directly involved and up to 30,000 indirectly involved with collaboration, passing on information to Israeli security services (Usher 1996:25).

exercising control over the population through various means of persuasion and coercion, was a central feature of daily life to my informants, who were continuously alert to the ears and eyes of their environment. The network of collaborators contributed to this sense of being constantly watched. At the same time they had to be careful not to be judged as collaborators themselves. The many precautions informants took in their daily lives to protect themselves from liability in these respects serve as an indicator of the risks involved. A few examples of their successes and failures might illuminate the issue.

Selecting taxi drivers

My informants showed great prudence when picking the people they dealt with. In a society where surveillance is extensive and trust is a valuable and scarce resource, they were constantly on the lookout for friends as well as enemies. An indication of this risk involved in their nightly social activities was the cautious way these young Palestinians chose a driver to get around Ramallah in the evenings. A driver's strong stance against alcohol could have political implications: A driver who did not approve of drinking, for instance, could give information to others about their activities and whereabouts. Such information could turn out useful for people who did not wish them well, or who worked against them in relation to their political agenda or even the Centre for Visual Media⁵⁹. At least this was the fear of my informants.

There were more mundane concerns as well, as drivers were known to be valuable collaborators to the Israeli intelligence, and *il-majaneen* would not risk a suspicious driver who was tipping others off on their activities. "Everybody knows that if you go to Kalandia⁶⁰ in a taxi and return three minutes later, that you got something "from the other side of the

⁵⁹ More on the activities in the Centre in chapter 8.

⁶⁰ Kalandia checkpoint is a checkpoint on the main route out of Ramallah into Jerusalem and further into Israel.

moon”⁶¹. It doesn’t take a smart guy to figure that out,” one of my informants commented. Careful, seemingly innocent interrogation of drivers in the daytime could reveal whether a driver had a relaxed view on alcohol, which again could mean that he was positive to leftist politics, or did not care about politics at all. Once a “good” driver was found, they could take his cell phone number and call directly to him in the evenings, avoiding the uncertainties connected to unknown drivers.

“Ilmajaneen” had one favourite driver, Abu Mustafa, who was available by cell phone practically every night of the week, all night. Abu Mustafa was a father of a friend of theirs, who had been convicted to many years of prison by Israeli authorities on account of political activities. Initially using Abu Mustafa as their driver was a gesture to their friend’s family⁶², but they were soon to discover that Abu Mustafa was a valuable connection. He knew the streets of Ramallah very well, and was one of the most up-to-date people in the city as to the whereabouts of the Israeli soldiers in the area as well as the *shurta* (the Palestinian police), the opening and closing of checkpoints and so on⁶³. He was more than a regular driver, and informants called him to know whether and where it was safe to move at night. He could be relied on even during army incursions and rumours of curfews when most other drivers would stay indoors with the rest of the population. He would take calculated risks - as long as he was paid for them. He did not pry into the activities of his passengers. Abu Mustafa sympathised with il-majaneens leftist inclinations, and from time to time he would discuss politics with

⁶¹ I.e. an indication that somebody on the other side of the checkpoint was delivering something to you. Palestinians were not allowed to cross Kalandia checkpoint, which was one of the major checkpoints before Jerusalem and hence Israel, without particular identification cards or special permissions. In practical terms, for many Palestinians, the “other side” was out of reach. A transaction like the one described could easily lead to suspicions of illegal activities.

⁶² These displays of solidarity between people, especially concerning imprisonment, injury and death on account of political activities, were common both among informants and in society as a whole – although in many instances they might be more symbolic than substantial acts.

⁶³ The “word on the street” was an important channel of information in the area, as the situation was often unpredictable, shifting swiftly. Whenever “something was going on”, or they needed to take special precautions because of their activities, informants would interrogate people who were expected to carry this news with them, notably taxi drivers and street vendors, to get the latest information on the current situation. This could be crucial in determining whether or not it was safe to go to a particular place, or to know if the checkpoint had been closed, or if soldiers had put up a random checkpoint on the road.

them. He enjoyed a position of respect among other drivers, partly because of his son's political engagement and consequent imprisonment, which was a source of honour in Palestinian society (Peteet 2005, Rosenfeld 2004). He would even drive il-majaneen when they did not have any money, which was quite often, trusting that they would pay him back first chance they got – which they did. Il-majaneen valued his expertise and discretion and used him whenever he was available. People like Abu Mustafa were indispensable aides to il-majaneen to be able to lead the kind of lifestyle they desired in a patriarchal society and “getting away with it”. Under his experienced guidance they manoeuvred through the streets of Ramallah at night, dodging Israeli soldiers and Palestinian *Tanzim*⁶⁴ alike.

A confrontation

So what exactly was it that informants were taking precautions against? To get an idea about the workings of power and surveillance in Ramallah, a couple of more dramatic examples brings to attention how individual actions were “everybody's business”, and the ways different groups attempted to impose their rule on others. Adonis, Che and I were sitting in on of their favourite cafés having drinks one evening⁶⁵. As usual, discussions went lively, as were the laughs⁶⁶. After a while Che made Adonis aware that a man was watching us and making discreet inquiries about the two of them to other customers. Adonis nodded, he had already noticed him. Che insisted we should continue talking like before, but he remained alert. “We should leave”, he said after a while, having a bad feeling about the situation.

Adonis and Che engaged in a discussion of whether or not they should leave: Adonis claimed

⁶⁴ The *Tanzim* is a network of militias, loosely organized, essentially loyal to local leaders associated with to Fatah rather than the Palestinian Authority. Some of its members were part of the official Palestinian security forces, an organisation which in itself lacked formal and legal guidelines (Usher 1996). Most of them were veterans of the first Intifada, and they played a central role in the second uprising.

⁶⁵ The bar, incidentally, was forced to close just two weeks later on account of low income, another sign of financial recess in Ramallah at the time.

⁶⁶ Female (loud) laughter is considered improper in many public settings.

that leaving would be a sign of weakness and we should simply ignore the man, while Che insisted that the situation had become too risky. As the man's looks became more intrusive, Che took a decision, paid the bill in a hurry, and we all left without looking back. The man followed us down the stairs and gave Che a slight push with his shoulder as he passed us at full speed. Che shouted after him, but the man disappeared around the corner. Two minutes later, as we were walking towards Che's house, a car skidded at high speed towards us, making no attempt to slow down when he passed. It was the man again. The car turned around and came back in our direction, this time slightly slower. In stead of backing away, Che jumped out into the street in front of the car and slammed his hands on the hood. The car abruptly came to a halt, and the two of them got involved in a loud quarrel, Adonis occasionally interfering, but being drunk he was more a nuisance than a help, and Che waived him off. After about ten minutes of quarrelling, the man drove away.

Continuing towards the house, Che and Adonis were discussing the event. It turned out that the man belonged to the *Sulta*, the Palestinian Authority, and he had been watching Che and Adoins with increasing annoyance. Especially Che had seemed to attract his disliking. From what Che had gathered, he was provoked by his style of life; his drinking, his smoking, his way of behaving. His threat was meant as a signal that Che should be careful; "People like you think you can do whatever you want," he had shouted during the argument as Che explained it. "He just wanted to show his power, *akhu sharmuta!* [cursing]" Adonis concluded. When the man had made threats against him, Che had repeatedly slammed his hands on the roof of the car, shouting "*Jalla!* Bring it on! Let's see what you have." Then Che levelled the name of an acquaintance within the *Sulta* against him - a name he was sure the man would recognize - claiming that if the man was not careful and left him alone, Che would be able to do a lot more damage to him than vice versa. The name dropping was a scam; Che had no idea if his connection would lift a finger in order to help him, but the very possibility

of it seemed to have the desired effect, because only a couple of minutes later the man drove off, in a much calmer state. Adonis and Che were content with the result of the confrontation. Che had done the right thing, standing up for himself and turning the tables of the situation, scaring the man to understand that his position of power had no effect on Che.

The guys did not know precisely what made the man react in this manner, or how much he knew about them from before. They assumed from what he had said during the argument that it was their lifestyle that provoked him, an assertion that was supported by the fact that the man had seemed to get increasingly annoyed as he observed them at the bar. Regardless of the cause that had spurred his actions, they were both happy with the outcome. Che first tried to avoid the situation by leaving the café, but when the man followed us, he felt it was imperative to show that he did not accept this behaviour, and that he was not afraid. Through verbal argument, he created enough doubt about whether or not he was in a position to “hurt” the man for him to leave. An episode that was supposed to scare Che, ended up as a show of power on his own account. Che had been able to show strength in the face of the unknown man’s obvious intimidations. The underlying assumption was that failing to tell him to “back off” would signal to the man – and to the world - that anyone could do whatever they wanted with them without consequences. Both he and Adonis strongly believed in the necessity for them to “show strength” in situations like these, or else their vulnerability in terms of social and political power would force them into deference.

The power of words

As suggested by Che’s example, one of the ways informants held their opponents - of whom there were quite a few - at a distance was by constantly facing up to whatever hint of a challenge or insult somebody would direct at them. What they lacked in numbers or muscles

they compensated by verbal skills, intellectual strength and youthful fervour. Displays of verbal excellence, often in a competitive manner, could bring material and social rewards to the “victor”, while failure to meet a challenge could entail loss of dignity and integrity. It was all part of the game that allowed il-majaneen to pursue their interests with relative freedom. Gilsenan (1996:206-230) describes the way conventionalized forms of verbal play between actors take the shape of duels in Lebanon, in which contestants “put pressure” on each other in the mode of ridicule and mockery. Similar practices have been noted in many parts of the Arab world and have a counterpart in traditional song (Moubadder 1994). Among Gilsenan’s informants, these games were a form of practising how to exert “real” power, often through threats of violence in verbal coercion. Arab culture in general places great value on verbal and written mastering of the language, an appreciation which benefited several of my informants.

A slip

My last case in this chapter reveals what could happen when informants did not employ their usual care: Adonis had invited some friends over for a small party in his apartment in downtown Ramallah. The evening passed with drinks, music and conversations like any of their social evenings. I had fallen asleep when I was abruptly awoken by Adonis and Che, who were very upset by something happening outside the building. I accompanied them to the window, and in the street outside our house we could see three young men being beat up by a group of older men. A car and a white van were placed in the middle of the road, and several other men around the van were watching the episode. “It’s the *Tanzim*”, Adonis announced with certainty, very upset, claiming to recognize their white van from several nights when they would come and steal gasoline from the gas station across the road, while we would watch them without their knowledge from the rooftop balcony. “We have to do something”, he said, walking back and forth in nervous agitation. He knew that, having drunk that very

night, he was more likely to get into trouble himself than being of any help to the young men. He simply waived his hands and shook his head; he was not in a condition to help any one tonight. Before Adonis had time to take a decision, the young men were led into the van along with the others and the van drove off, except for one man who left alone in the other car.

About twenty minutes later, the doorbell rang. Adonis looked outside and saw the white van, and heard the voice of his friend Nabil, who had left the party half an hour or so earlier with Don Quijote and El Mariachi. Only at this point did he realise that the young men he had seen being beaten in the street were his own friends. He threw on some clothes and ran down the stairs. While Nabil went upstairs, claiming to look for his house keys, Adonis spoke to the men in the van. He recognized the man next to the driver as someone from his refugee camp in Gaza, greeted him, and asked what on earth was going on. The tone of the setting completely changed. As the connection between Adonis and the man in the van became clear to the other men in the van, they apologized both to Adonis and the young men, explaining that they ostensibly thought the guys were “suspicious”, probably out in the streets looking for trouble, being drunk as they were. Now they understood that this had not been the case, and they were so sorry. They had not realized who they were dealing with – but who could really blame them? A group of drunken young men they did not know out in the streets late at night usually meant trouble, they excused themselves with. Now, when the matter had been clarified, they would drive them home themselves, they insisted. Nabil all of a sudden found the key in his pocket, and stumbled out the door and into the van. They all drove off in a much lighter mood. The young men got away from the incident with some bruises and a scare.

The episode illustrates both the possible risks of being out in the streets of Ramallah late at night, and especially after consuming alcohol, which labelled them as “bad people” and generally gave them a weak position. It turned out that the young men, who were on their way

home to Nabil's place on the other side of the city, had entered a car with a driver who had offered them a ride. Being drunk and not eager to walk the long way, they failed to realise or did not care that it was not a regular taxi. But the driver had been drinking himself, as the guys were about to discover when the car slid from one side of the street to the other. The Tanzim saw the reckless driving and pulled them over, and next thing they knew they were receiving punches from the "street police". Being drunk was in itself reason enough for the brutal treatment, as the Tanzim had relayed it afterwards. Adonis himself, however, was convinced that the beating had nothing to do with the boys posing a threat, but simply that bored Tanzim members wanted a show of power. "A friend of mine used to smoke [hashish] with that guy", he said about his acquaintance, "I don't believe that the drinking was the reason. I'm sure many of them are drinking themselves." Whatever the motivation behind it, the boys had taken the wrong decision, and had then been unable to "show strength", whether in numbers, connections, verbal or physical strength, with a beating as a result. As soon as Adonis was able to trace a connection to one of the Tanzim members, by coming from the same camp as one of them, the tone of the setting changed. The man knew that Adonis came from a "strong" family in Gaza, and his recognition changed the interpretation of the situation for all those involved. It might also have helped that Adonis knew the man to have smoked himself, so that he didn't have the moral upper hand.

Kiffaya had a different view on the situation. "It was Don Quijote, no doubt", Kiffaya concluded when she heard about the episode. "He does not know when to keep his mouth shut." Che and Adonis laughingly agreed; they knew what she was referring to. "He talked and talked until they went crazy and hit him simply to make him shut up", she elaborated. "He probably went on and on about revolution and how they [the Tanzim] were assisting in the occupation by stopping them in the street" Che continued. "*Why are you doing this? I'm a Palestinian! We should not fight each other! You have no right!*" Kiffaya imitated Don

Quijote and made fun of his “principles” and how he would relentlessly argue for them, wiping a tear of laughter off her cheek. Once the gravity of the situation was no longer an issue, the encounter was subjected to mocking as was anything else among il-majaneen.

Manoeuvring in a precarious situation

To sum up a few points: Il-majaneen’s newfound habits of consumption brought pleasure to their daily lives. Apart from the buzz of intoxication itself, drinking and smoking was a way to breach the week’s monotony, to have fun and to relax. In addition, informants’ liberal attitudes towards alcohol and hashish consolidated group solidarity and strengthen their sense of *communitas*. By smoking and drinking they experienced a sense of closeness to each other, where they could speak openly and felt that they could “be themselves”. Their lifestyle contributed in defining the borders of the group. It was a way to communicate and maintain difference from their peers who had chosen or felt compelled to follow the narrow path of abstinence. The social proximity to the Palestinian bourgeoisie that their drinking habits brought about along with their intellectual and artistic interests, induced intense efforts to demarcate their idiosyncrasy from that very stratum of society in words and behaviour.

The caution around choosing drivers, and the importance they attached to confronting attempts of coercion, as well as the consequences when they did not take their usual precautions, reveals the somewhat precarious position these young Palestinians found themselves in. They lacked the physical strength to ward off attempts of intimidation. Politically they belonged to a fraction that was losing its position and influence, in a society where political organisation constituted a vehicle for a range of resources, as mentioned in chapter 3. Yet they refused to be humble or soften their unrelenting criticism of whatever and whoever they disagreed with. Few of them had a strong family network in the city to back them up should a situation occur, which made them even more vulnerable, since family

comprised a political force, preventively and de facto, in Palestinian society. As shown in the last example, family networks were nevertheless a source of power when dealing with people who knew their background.

The case with the Tanzim and the man from the *Sulta* reveal the neopatriarchal character of Palestinian society. In the context of my fieldwork, consumption of alcohol and hashish was strongly linked to ideas about morality. This consumption was perceived as occurring side by side with other condemned activities, such as illicit sexual relations and criminality. By association, immorality was connected with collaboration with Israeli authorities. Engaging in these activities entailed risks on the part of informants. Many officials of the PA and the various semi-official organisations loosely attached to Palestinian authorities, collectively and individually saw it as their personal duty to interfere with “immoral” behaviour and coerce people into conformity with social norms. The moral behaviour of family members, traditionally secured through surveillance from family members, was in this context taken care of by the representatives of (quasi-)state power.

Il-majaneen propagated a lifestyle that was in clinch with moral codes - yet in a city that to a certain degree allowed it. This gave them a degree of space to manoeuvre, but required careful balancing on their part. In daily life, this “balance” was partly achieved by their verbal skills. They had built strong networks based on friendship, on *communitas*, accumulated through shared experiences related to consumption of alcohol and hashish and illicit sexual relations. They would back each other up and support each other, and test and develop their argumentative aptitudes. In the end, their strength lay mainly in their verbal and intellectual capabilities and in the intensity and elaboration of their convictions. They averted accusations of collaboration or assumptions made about their integrity by resorting to all these skills and convincing adversaries that they were as dedicated to the Palestinian cause as any

guerrilla fighter. These skills were also put to use in more mundane matters, to access resources or escape bills, as will be described in chapter 7.

In the next chapter I will develop the theme of family relations, and its connections to economic structures and dependency. The *communitas* experienced by *il-majaneen* when pursuing their lifestyle together stood in contrast to the distance, literally and metaphorically, they encountered in interactions with their families.

Chapter 6: The Ambiguities of Family Relations

Introduction

This chapter will deal with the interconnectedness of family relations, economic relations and the potential of social control, and how informants attempted to evade social control by adopting a set of strategies to achieve greater economic self-sufficiency. Family, as we remember, was the determining unit of patriarchy and neopatriarchal society. Informants' economic choices were strained, but different possibilities and strategies existed, including travelling abroad to study or work. Il-majaneen's leftist ideology influenced the choices they made as well as how they interpreted and legitimized their actions. The desire to escape family control pushed informants into other relations of debt not based on kin, which entailed a different set of perils. Despite of their efforts to the contrary, family influence continued to impinge on their direction in life.

Students' economic opportunities and restraints

Although the Oslo process brought with it an economic optimism and a modest dribble of investments, the Israeli closure policy imposed heavy constraints on Palestinian economy, and an already strained economy was getting even more pressed as the Second Intifada erupted (Alonso-Gamo 1999, B'tselem 2004). The closing of the Israeli border to Palestinian workers reduced the income of many Palestinian breadwinners, making it difficult for their children to attend higher education, although many emergency measures were taken to secure education, which was a highly valued resource among Palestinians. The importance placed on higher education by Palestinian families, and their collective efforts to get children and siblings through school, have been noted by many scholars (for instance, Rosenfeld 2004, Fargues 1995). A common pattern in Palestinian families has been for parents to pay for the education

of their oldest son (or daughter), who would support one or more siblings financially through University when finished (Rosenfeld 2004). Pursuing a University degree thus enmeshed young Palestinians in bonds of economic obligations towards their families.

Informants' economic circumstances were to a large extent defined by their status as students. Their studies prevented them from taking full-time jobs and part-time jobs were extremely hard to find as unemployment rates were sky-high. Birzeit University tried to alleviate the increasing number of students who had troubles paying their tuition fees after the second Intifada by postponing payments and securing and administering scholarships, but the need by far exceeded the means procurable (BU report 2003). My informants applied for and occasionally received scholarships directed at economically challenged students, but even these proved difficult to get. Rumours had it that distribution was not based on objective criteria of need, but that you could get them through *wasta* relations; having contacts, especially through kinship, to the ones distributing them. A scholarship, once awarded, was nevertheless rarely sufficient to meet the full expenses of a semester, but might cover tuition fees. Economic considerations greatly influenced young Palestinians' choices of branch of study, and Finance and Engineering were among the most popular subjects for young men, regardless of their particular skills and interests. Thus Don Quijote and El Mariachi were sweating over their books in micro and macro finance, completely incomprehensible to them. They were always surprised whenever they passed an exam since they claimed they had "absolutely no idea what the fuck they're talking about", as El Mariachi expressed it. Other options could guide one's choice, such as Samra who opted for a Master's Degree in Women's Studies not out of interest but because, as she said, she was likely to get a scholarship for it and without a scholarship she was unable to pursue a degree at all.

Another option to manage both financially and educationally was studying abroad, especially in Europe or the US. The possibility of studying abroad held a special appeal

because the accompanying scholarships were designed to cover the entire stay - but the obstacles to achieve this were many. Scholarships demanded excellence in your area of study and the competition was hard, and it was very difficult to procure a permission to leave the Palestinian areas from Israeli authorities even when awarded a scholarship. In addition there were stories of students who had been stopped at the borders of the United States and were compelled to return. Many attributed this to the US “war on terror”, which affected Palestinians as it did other Arabs. In addition, there was a certain emotional ambiguity connected to leaving the Palestinian areas, resulting from complex effects of Palestinian history of flights and the configuration of Palestinian resistance ideology, which affected students’ inclinations for studying abroad.

Distance and the potential for social control

While undoubtedly a curse to most areas of life in the Palestinian areas, the multitude of checkpoints and the prevalence of closures were nevertheless taken advantage of for all they were worth by these young Palestinians. The closed roads made it difficult to travel within and between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, forcing students who might otherwise have continued to live at home to settle close to their place of study, while making it harder for families to visit their children and vice versa. Relatively short distances became time-consuming, expensive, stressful and to a degree risky undertakings (for details, see B’tselem 2004, Abdel-Fadil 2003). This had the most severe consequences for students from Gaza studying in the West Bank – illegally (although often tolerated) according to Israeli policy after the onset of the Second Intifada – many of whom did not see their families at all throughout their period of study. Adonis, for instance, had not seen his family for four years when he finally took a chance to visit them after finishing his degree, and only after deciding to leave the West Bank for Europe. Apart from the emotional stress it caused these students

not to see parents, siblings and other relatives for long periods of time, this situation undoubtedly had its benefits for young people eager to push social boundaries.

The potential for social control by kin, such a defining feature of life in the village or the camp and even in the city in Palestinian society, was significantly reduced as a result of this distance, opening up for experiments with socially sanctioned behaviour as described in previous chapters (Robinson 1997, Fargues 1995). These tendencies were attempted stemmed by institutions such as females-only dormitories and chaperones regulating the moves of young women. Still, while there was always a chance that somebody with connections to their families might hear or see something “compromising” and that this information could be passed on, young Palestinian students generally enjoyed a freedom to go and do what they wanted - restrained more by their own sense of appropriateness and their succumber to peer pressure - that would not have been imaginable subjected to the eyes of family members.

Economic ties and family relations

Il-majaneen were utterly convinced of the connection between economic dependency and control, from international power relations and politics down to more intimate relations within the household, including their own families. On these grounds informants refused certain sources of income that would have alleviated their economic situation substantially, notably aid from family and jobs in the relatively lucrative NGO-sector. The latter subject will be treated in chapter 6, but in short il-majaneen were sceptical to work with local and international NGOs, which they more often than not judged as tools for domination on a larger scale, related to Western hegemony and Palestinian and Arab class differentiation.

By a related logic they rejected economic aid from their families: While taking advantage of the benefits of distance with regards to social control in full, il-majaneen were convinced that accepting economic aid from parents would limit their individual freedom to

do what they pleased, as parents could decide to cut the flow of cash if they did anything they disapproved of - or rather, if they actually found out what kind of lives they were leading. Economic support, in other words, could easily be transformed into persuasion. “It’s obvious”, El Mariachi explained, “if you need this money, and your family tells you ‘I will stop sending if you don’t do this and this’, then you will promise them to do it, and you will be afraid all the time to get caught and your conscience will bother you. If you don’t need their money, they can still tell you, but you can tell them to fuck off, it’s not their business. Big difference.” As a sign of the perceived connections between economic ties and the potential for social control, his comment is supported by the fact that El Mariachi himself was the only one in the group who received a monthly amount from his family. He reasoned that there was no need for him to cut this source of income as his family were situated in the Emirates, far away from the bars of Ramallah and not likely to discover that he did not exactly live the kind of life they imagined.

Independence from family, according to informants’ reasoning, entailed a process of “cutting oneself lose” mentally and emotionally from them, as well as cutting mutual bonds of privilege and responsibilities. Failing to do so would mean that they at any given time could return to the state of dependency that they had spent the last few years escaping. But the process was not simple, as the intimacy of family relations concealed the power structures embedded in them. “You have to cut the bonds that exist in your head. They’re the dangerous ones. I have overcome the idea of the family, and now they cannot control me anymore,” was how Adonis expressed it. As described in the previous chapter, family – and especially fathers’ – control was maintained through fear, installed in you since childhood, according to *il-majaneen*.

Il-majaneen paid for their increased social freedom with a tighter economy and seemingly never-ending efforts of finding other sources of income. Their strategies for

economic independence from their families would often put them in debt to non-kin in stead, like landlords or money-lenders, with the foreseen and unforeseen consequences this entailed. The advantage of this was that strangers had little or no bearing on their social conduct and were not likely to intervene in their doings. On the other hand it was a more unpredictable situation, as they were not sure what measures these people would take if, as the case often was, they were unable or simply unwilling to pay the money they owed. This unpredictability and its possible consequences were better than its options, informants decided. Of two evils it was considered the lesser.

*Masarai, masari, masari*⁶⁷

In these economically challenged circumstances, money (*masari*) – or rather, the lack of money – was an almost daily concern for informants, who were not unfamiliar with going hungry half a day, at least not when they preferred to spend what little they had on a packet of cigarettes rather than food. Even upon mentioning the word money it would often be preceded by a curse – *kuss ukht ilmasari* - reflecting how they felt about it. A lot of energy went into finding ways to secure an income in order to pay rent, bills, tuition fees, and cover daily expenses. Informants had adopted a set of strategies to cope with their economically strained situation, involving among other things a practice of resource sharing within the group, negotiating credits and discounts in stores, very low personal consumption during scarce times, evasion of bills and rent, and petty theft.

First of all, whenever one of them had money, he or she bought food and cigarettes which were basically shared by the entire group. If others had money too, they would contribute according to how much they had. Nobody could afford to help somebody else with the rent and bills, but when it came to daily expenses such as food, coffee, cigarettes and taxi

⁶⁷ *Masari* means “money”. Again, the title is taken from a song that il-majaneen would frequently listen to.

fares⁶⁸, resources floated reciprocally within the group, and to a lesser degree throughout the leftist network. El Mariachi, who received a monthly sum of 300 USD plus expenses for tuition fees, would have been well-off in comparison with his peers had it not been for his never-questioned sharing as soon as he got the money, leaving him as broke as his friends long before the end of each month. Second, il-majaneen became experts in achieving credits and discounts in the stores of Birzeit and Ramallah, cleverly taking advantage of their negotiation skills to convince shopkeepers of the necessity of solidarity during the harsh times of occupation. Further, the shopkeepers who il-majaneen did not like were subjected to petty theft on a regular basis; a bag of bread here, a bottle of juice there, a bar of chocolate on occasion. I will describe these strategies in the next chapter, along with their efforts for evading bills and rent, which deserve a more thorough description.

In addition, when money was extremely short, they could manage with very little food for days in a row without suffering notably from it. They would sometimes eat only one meal a day (“*walla bikaffi*, it’s enough really,” El Mariachi claimed), someone would dig out a bag of dried up tobacco to smoke, they would drink their coffees on credit in the University cafeteria, and walk home rather than taking a shared taxi. These times of utter scarcity had a certain charm, according to il-majaneen. When they had nothing, it was almost as if the worries disappeared for a while. All they could do was to wait until somebody got some money again. In the meanwhile they had to live life in the simplest way possible, a notion that they found quite beautiful and intriguing; it appealed to their radical ideology. They would play cards until late at night, laughing and telling jokes, with the carefree attitude of someone who does not have to think about tomorrow, but lives only in the present. These lovely days would only last for a little while at a time, however, and then the “fucking money” would preoccupy their minds again.

⁶⁸ Shared taxis are the collective means of transportation in the area.

Struggling for economic independence

Informants' financial situation shared similar features as none of them, save El Mariachi, had (volitional) access to a steady income which would suffice to cover their basic expenses. The strategies mentioned above were employed by all informants in varying degrees, which increased their sense of shared predicaments. However, their financial and family background varied greatly, and this influenced the kind of dilemmas they encountered. Yet they all struggled to manage pressure from family members to influence their choices in different ways. The struggle to escape family control and economic dependency can be illustrated by exploring Adonis' and Kiffaya's respective attempts to achieve economic independence.

Kiffaya's admirer

A case which originated a few months before my arrival and developed during my fieldwork, before coming to an end a couple of months after I left, will illustrate the dilemmas of accepting economic aid from family versus non-kin, as a debt to a relative stranger to Kiffaya's distress was transformed into a family matter.

Kiffaya had a long history of conflicts with her landlords, as she was rarely able to procure the means to pay a regular rent, in spite of her efforts. First time I met her, she was living in a small apartment in downtown Ramallah. She was working part-time in a restaurant at a local mall, a job, although far from being her dream job, still gave a regular, small income, and where she could bring leftovers to the house and thus cut food expenses. Her manager was not so bad, she told me, and he even lent her some money occasionally as an advance on her pay-check. During a period when she desperately needed more money than the job could offer her in order to pay her tuition fees at the University, her manager had

directed her to an acquaintance of his, Abu Khaled, who frequented the restaurant and had gotten a liking for Kiffaya. The middle-aged widower had a lot of money, or so rumor had it, and he wanted to help her out with a loan, due to be repaid whenever she got the money for it - no rush, no conditions, he claimed. She reluctantly accepted his offer, suspecting ulterior motives but convinced she would be able to fend him off should problems arise, as she had done with others before him. Besides, she really needed the money and did not feel she could afford to say no, as she explained later.

It should be noted here that for informants to be offered and to accept economic aid from strangers was not unique to this episode. Il-majaneen had more than once been surprised at finding supporters in higher positions, a support that a few times was expressed through economic favors. Che, for instance, told me the following story:

One semester I had no money at all to pay my tuition fees. I went to the Student Office, but nobody could help me. I got angry and yelled at them, told them they had to let me continue my studies. They knew the fucking situation. They just said 'Sorry, there's nothing we can do'. Then, when I was leaving the Administration building, a guy followed me and wanted to talk to me. I was not in the mood and tried to lose him, but he followed me. Then he said that he knew my work and admired it, he had seen me read [some poems] or whatever, and he wanted to pay my fees that semester. He said I didn't have to pay him back. I said: 'No way, I can't accept that.' I had my pride. 'At least I want to pay you back.' But he said: 'Please accept it as a gift, it will make me happy.' What could I do? I had no money, and I had to study. So I accepted.

Although surrounded by ambivalent feelings because of a sense of pride and reluctance in entering relations of debt which might backfire one way or another, it was also interpreted as a stroke of fortune, a welcomed relief from the constant search for money.

Abu Khaled though, not surprisingly, turned out to be more than just friendly, with hopes to move the relationship in a romantic direction: "At the time it was better than my other alternatives, what was I supposed to do really? I would just tell him to go fuck himself," she explained in the usual coarse language of il-majaneen. His interest didn't diminish with

her rejections, and he finally asked her to marry him, and swore he would write his big house in her name and she never had to worry about money again. His affections were met with ridicule and right-out rejection as she told him in clear words that she wouldn't touch him with a stick and scolded him for trying to "buy" her. She told me the story with a mixture of amusement and disgust, at the attempt to buy her and at the thought of sharing a bed with the elderly man.

After a few days, however, Abu Khaled announced that he wanted his money back; he accused her of tricking him into lending it to her in the first place, and demanded all of it repaid at once. She managed to keep him off for a while, paying him a little every now and then when she got her salaries, reminding him that she did not have the money to pay him back immediately; that was why she accepted his offer in the first place. But Abu Khaled became impatient, and one day he sent two men to her door, to scare her into paying, Kiffaya reasoned. She told me the story, quite annoyed:

I woke up in the morning; somebody was banging at my door. I didn't want to open, but they wouldn't leave. Outside were these two guys, yelling and threatening to take me to court and get me arrested if I didn't pay this asshole's money. 'Oh, please do [take me to court]', I told them, 'at least I will have three meals a day and a roof over my head, and I will be protected from rich cowards who sends his puppets out threatening me for money they don't need!' They were in shock; they looked at each other and didn't know what to say. They were so sure I would be all scared and just say anything. After a while they left, they understood it didn't work with me. They thought I was completely crazy. *Akhu sharmuta* [cursing, referring to her benefactor-turned-prosecutor], he doesn't need the fucking money, why can't he just leave me alone?

She claimed she knew he wouldn't really go to court, because then he wouldn't get his money for sure, "and he's so greedy, even more than he wants to get me he wants his money. Besides, what good will it do? Everybody knows there is no money anywhere and I can't pay. So they should spend money on me in jail? I don't think so." Still, after this episode she never opened the door to anyone unless they had a previous engagement. "Why should I? I know

it's just somebody who wants money from me anyway," she sighed. She kept her curtains closed and never entered or left the house without scrutinizing the surroundings first. Her life became more complicated by having to look over her shoulder all the time, she confessed, and shortly after she moved to another apartment, leaving yet another couple of months of unpaid rent behind. The stress of moving around all the time and always dodging previous and current landlords took its toll at her, but no matter what kind of job she took, it never seemed to generate the money promised, leaving her in a repetitive cycle of debts.

The family becomes involved

Whether she was right in her analysis or not, Abu Khaled did not take any legal action against her. In stead he turned to a means which proved to be much more efficient, and perhaps the only one Kiffaya wasn't prepared for and didn't quite know how to defend herself from: Her family. A couple of weeks after the incident with the two men on her door, Kiffaya got a call from her father. Abu Khaled had recently called him and explained the situation, and now demanded that the whole family should take action to pay the amount she owed him, or he would take Kiffaya to court. Her parents were shocked; they could not understand how their daughter had preferred to borrow money from a perfect stranger rather than asking her family for help. Her father had immediately made a deal with him for down-payment, before calling his daughter. In a depressed mode she told us how her parents had decided to leave their village in the north of the West Bank to come and see her in Ramallah; they were very concerned about her. At the same time they would meet with Abu Khaled and pay the first installment. At this, Kiffaya was outraged:

I told them that they shouldn't pay him anything, *walla shekel*, not a penny, no matter what he's saying; it's only talk, he won't do anything! He's a fucking coward. And anyway it's my problem, not theirs! But of course they won't listen. They don't know

him, they believe the things he's saying, they think he can hurt me. I'm not afraid of the old pig; he can't touch me, but *they* don't know that. And they can't understand why I didn't come to them in the first place. They don't understand that I don't want them to worry about me; I can't stand them worrying, asking questions all the time, I don't want it! I had many fights with them to leave me alone, you know, that I'll manage, and finally they did, you know, but now they're gonna worry about me for a long time. Fuck him *walla!*

Some months after my fieldwork had finished I heard the end of the story. Just few weeks after her parents had paid the very last installment, Abu Khaled died of a heart failure. Kiffaya was incredulous as to the irony of the whole situation. "I can't believe they paid all that money to that son of a bitch. And now he's dead. It's as if he did it on purpose, just to annoy me. I can't believe it. All that money. And for nothing. I can't believe it," she repeated. On the bright side, she was earning her way back to her old position regarding her family, after getting a new job as an assistant with a cultural project.

A different kind of responsibility

Kiffaya's family belonged to the middle-class and were not depending on her for income; her father held a higher position within the Palestinian Authority and would have been perfectly able to give his daughter financial assistance. The independent life that she was living was in part made possible because her family, and especially her father, condoned it –although perhaps did not approve of it. Head-strong she had been fighting her mother and father since her early teens pushing the boundaries of what they found acceptable, but she was her father's favorite and he had given her a lot of freedom, much to the disliking of their surroundings. "He's given up on me, poor guy, he realized it's hopeless to argue with me," she told me on another occasion. Her siblings both admired and dreaded her for her outspoken ways. She knew she had her parent's love and support regardless of what she did, and that was exactly why she hated her current situation: They would now once more be continuously worried

about her, losing sleep at night not knowing what would happen to her, asking if she had enough money, trying to convince her to come back to the village, and generally interfering with her life.

Kiffaya herself insisted that she did not fear the consequences of her actions. She knew how to talk herself out of a hazardous situation. “Because I’m not afraid, they can’t touch me,” she elaborated on the threat from her creditors. (Kiffaya’s lack of fear is also a testimony to the inefficiency of Palestinian authorities’ powers in handling such cases.) With her parents it was different; Kiffaya knew they had paid for her independence with their worries. It was in the freedom they gave her in spite of their own beliefs, in spite of their worries, in spite of the talk of neighbors, that she felt vulnerable. She wanted them not to worry about her, but simply let her live her life. Her parents’ love became her weakness: Because they feared that any damage would come to her, because they loved her and would do anything for her, they were easy targets for pressure. They paid her debt, and the treasured independence that she had fought to achieve over the years was undermined; she was no longer in charge of her own affairs.

The end of liminality?

By his own account, Adonis managed to get through his four-year bachelor degree practically without help from his family. He survived by receiving scholarships, taking part-time jobs, eating only one meal a day, receiving random gifts or help from beneficiaries (as we shall see), and so on. Still, Adonis became responsible for his brother’s education, in part by his own sense of obligation, as soon as he had finished his degree. “I do it because I want to, because I love him, not because I have to. But also because if I do it, they can never come to me and say: You left your brother without an education, you didn’t do your part, now you owe us to do this or that,” he pronounced. Adonis felt compelled to start working within his

field of study, which was finance, and he applied and got a job as a clerk in a bank. He was obliged to wear a suit to work, and so he dressed up for his first day. The whole experience was so alien to him; the bank environment, his colleagues, the suit, even the tasks which he supposedly was qualified for, that he decided never to come back when the first day was over. He explained that he had never wanted to study finance in the first place, but had done it to fulfil others' expectations of him. Looking back he did not understand how he had managed to complete his degree in a subject that did not interest him at all. However, working in a bank was pushing it too far, it was impossible for him, he now insisted. His resolution not to let his family decide his path ever again grew stronger by this experience, he claimed. He had to be "who he was", he could not "sell himself".

Retaining financial independence from his family without compromising his own values and sense of identity was difficult enough for Adonis when he only had himself to worry about, but when he became responsible for the well-being of his younger brother as well, the pressure increased. "Before, when I didn't have money, I'd simply sleep in the streets, you know, and eat nothing, or anything, I didn't care. I kept myself. But now it's different. My brother helps me, you know, he understands, but I just can't do that with him." He dreamily spoke of the day when his brother would finish his degree in law and take over his role – his brother did well in his studies, and Adonis had confidence he would get a job when finishing – so that Adonis could pursue his Master's Degree. He pushed all his contacts to the limits to help him get a job to support the two of them, but had troubles finding anything stable. Although he tried his best, he did not manage to carry out his obligations in full the way he wanted to.

Adonis' extended family calls

One day we were all sitting in the University cafeteria when Adonis' cell phone rang. When the conversation was finished, he looked at us, obviously chewing on something in his mind, and explained that it was his family in Dubai who had called. "They want me to come and work there", he said, looking gloomy. "And then they want you to marry your cousin", El Mariachi interjected, teasing him. Adonis laughed, but the laughter got stuck in his throat. "*El'an rabhum* [cursing them]", Adonis exclaimed, shaking his head. He realized that his family in Gaza had been pulling some strings when they heard about his economic difficulties, and now when he was no longer studying it was difficult to argue why he should not leave for the Gulf, where well-paid jobs were still available to young Palestinians such as himself.

Shortly after he got the welcomed message from the director of the Institute that he would receive salary from the University for his work with the Centre for Visual Media (CVM), equivalent of a 50 % position. 400 USD a month would pay the rent for both him and his brother, leaving them a modest budget for daily expenses. He was enormously relieved, a burden had been lifted from his shoulders, and the threat of leaving seemed postponed indefinitely. His disappointment was therefore huge when his salary was held back for almost two weeks along with that of many other University employees' because of poor University finances, and he found himself once more spending all his creative resources searching for other solutions while waiting for it.

At this critical time he received another call from Dubai, while we were sitting in the CVM office. His face changed colour from white to red and back again while exchanging the prescribed polite phrases, as he struggled to manage different emotions. "Why can't they leave me the fuck alone?!" he blurted as soon as he hang up. The next twenty minutes he remained silent, in deep thought, the gloomy look had settled on his face. As we prepared to

leave, he murmured: “Maybe I should just go. Who am I kidding? I will never manage here. Besides, I need a break from the fucking situation [the occupation] and the assholes I owe money. I can work there for a while, a year or something, save money, and then go somewhere else and finish my Master.” He sighed deeply, not too tempted at the thought. In the coming months he received his salary from the University, but more often than not only after weeks of delay, and he said he felt like he was never in a position to stop thinking about the “fucking money”. Gradually the pressure got to him, until he finally decided: “I cannot stay here, I’m going crazy, it’s too much”, he declared one afternoon. And so he started to work for finding a way to leave the West Bank.

The ambivalence of demands and desires

The pressure to make money to support the family, who were constantly in a situation of economic scarcity, was very real to Adonis. He felt the burden of his responsibilities and was adamant to observe them for several reasons. He was close to his brother and wanted him to have an education for his own sake, but also to be able to secure an income for their family and younger siblings in the future. He wanted to be able to do what he pleased, yet retain respect from his family, so that he could look them in the eyes and say he had fulfilled his responsibilities and more than that. As long as he stayed in Ramallah, he had the opportunity to entertain the lifestyle he desired. But the wish to remain in Ramallah seemed more and more untenable as the chance of a decent, reliable income kept evading him, and the prospects of betterment in near future were dim. The jobs he was educated for in the world of finance, and the rather well-paid work in NGOs were not considered options if he was to keep his self-respect, to avoid “selling himself”, as he expressed it. He began contemplating the idea of leaving the Palestinian areas, and then violently rejected the notion, unable to make up his mind, reflecting the ambivalent nature of his sentiments.

Money – and fear - was portrayed as the vehicle that gave their families the power to compel il-majaneen into doing things they did not want, which Adonis felt at this point, after years of self-sufficiency, he was no longer able to stomach. He was struggling to become economically independent of them because he felt it gave him a stronger position should they become aware of the lifestyle he had chosen for himself, involving drinking and smoking habits and illicit sexual relations, which constituted important aspects of his identity. Had they known, he was convinced that they would try to compel him into quitting, or “cut him off” completely. Being “cut” from his family would require powerful measures were he to manage alone in Palestinian society, where kinship was the major principle of social organisation, defining who one was in relation to others and one’s position in society (Peteet 2005). Without a family he would be “no-one” and his position would be precarious. Adonis said he nevertheless preferred the latter; he believed that he had developed the tools to manage even “without family”. Giving up his lifestyle was not really an option. He declared that in a sense he had already “cut” himself from the family, by his own efforts, for they had no hold over him and could not pressure him into doing something he did not want anymore. However, regardless of his struggle to choose his own path in life, his sense of obligation and his aspiration for respect from his family - a desire as much as a need - constantly seemed to push him in one direction or the other.

Working abroad – an opportunity and a curse

Adonis’ dilemma shows the ambivalence connected to having family members abroad who encouraged him to come and live with them and make money. This was experienced as both an opportunity and a form of pressure. The option of working in Dubai was partly rejected because of the implied close connections with family members, as he was most likely to have to live with his uncle and his family during his stay. El Mariachi was in a similar situation. It

represented a not very tempting option but nevertheless a way out if all else failed, which allowed him not to worry so much about his situation. When El Mariachi had finished his B.A. and his family cut the flow of money, he was unable to find a job. After a few months he left for the Emirates to live with his family and work there. He claimed he did not want to, not at all, but he had no other choice. The first thing his father did when he met him, he told me on the phone, was taking him straight to the barber shop to cut his hair short. He sent me pictures on e-mail, and we laughed a lot about his new, slick look. He got a well-paid job with a TV-company, where he “had no idea what the fuck he was doing” and expected them to kick him out every day - but they never did. He was still dreaming about pursuing a Master’s Degree in South America and learning Spanish. He was making good money in his new job, but declared that it was “not a life”, and as expected his family kept him under strict surveillance. He occasionally snuck out to have a few beers at a near-by hotel, but lacking the company of friends he found little pleasure in it. “*Ana dammarei*” he sighed, “it’s the end of me”.

Money, patriarchy and social control

These cases illuminate several central aspects of my informants’ daily considerations and dilemmas, the ideals they held, and the strategies they employed to achieve their goals. Their frame of thought based on leftist ideology led them to place great importance on achieving economic independence, first and foremost from kin, who were seen as the most immediate and intimate source of domination. They could not expect to be able to live their lives in dissonance with their families’ expectancies if they were depending on them financially. Debt or bad conscience, as they pointed out, was easily converted into extortion.

Il-majaneen had revealed, in their own words, that patriarchal morality, economic relations, and social control were different expressions of the same basic power structure.

They were convinced that freedom- individual freedom, collective freedom, even freedom as a nation – could only be achieved through breaking these intimate bonds of dependency and oppression. Money and economic relations had a moral dimension to it in informants’ ideology, as transactions involving money could easily lead to a state of dependency, a “dirty” condition according to informants world view. Borrowing money from non-kin might entail greater perils on one level, but it was also a path to greater personal freedom on another. Il-majaneen celebrated an ideology where the penniless man was a happy man - yet daily life ensnared them in multiple relations of economic dependency.

Adonis’ dilemmas accentuate the way family obligations were connected to changes in status. His time as a student, where his primary obligation was to take care of himself, had come to an end. What he experienced was the pressure of obligations laid on him as he was now expected to take on a position of responsibility towards his family, as an adult man. But for Adonis, his experiences during his studies and the time spent away from his family had made him question the legitimacy of family obligations all together. Once they were no longer controlling his behaviour, he had discovered another life; one that he felt was more in accordance with “who he was”. In the light of distance, he saw family relations as one of multiple relations of dependency and control, keeping him from “being himself” and follow his own values. Even so, he felt compelled to assume his responsibilities, while arguing that “if he only did this”, he would be “free” one day in the future.

Kiffaya’s rather different situation shows how class background, family values and economic status affected the configuration of patriarchal relations. She had no economic responsibilities towards her siblings, as her father was able to put them all through school. Her family had features of the new middle class, where patriarchal power structures were slowly receding to new forms of organisation. The surrounding society and kin group still affected the level of comfort with which her family was able to minister Kiffaya’s rebellions, and her

family exerted influence on her through the price she knew they were paying for leaving her alone. In the end, they interfered with her life without consulting her in a way that she fiercely objected to, impinging on her freedom to deal with her own affairs.

The contradictions of family and identity

Family, in Adonis' and El Mariachi's understanding, was represented as incompatible with keeping their identity. As El Mariachi's experiences in the Gulf confirmed, it was impossible to stay close to one's family and keep what they regarded as their "true" identity, pursuing a lifestyle that the family did not condone. El Mariachi expressed this as "not having a life", because these habits had become part of "who he was". Family members were not really interested in "who you were", *il-majaneen* claimed, they did not want or were unable to make a connection outside the realm of mutual obligations and perceived rights. Adonis agreed: "They don't know me, and they don't want to know me, who I really am. They just want me to do what *they* think is right. I had to overcome the idea of the family in order to keep myself." And he added: "Besides, it's never enough. No matter how much you give, they will always want more." That was one of the reasons why he loved his brother; his brother knew the "real" him and respected him for it.

The view on family was contrasted to the experience of *communitas* within the group. Once they had gotten the chance to be "who they were" in closeness with other people, the distance to those they shared ties of blood with, as well as the defining years of their childhood and teens, seemed bigger than ever. *Il-majaneen* felt compelled to lie to their parents and siblings, because they were certain their families would not accept or understand their lifestyle choices. This became particularly uncomfortable as openness was such an important notion of their ethos internally. This antagonism was increased by the family's constant need of money, as in Adonis' case. Money, as I have already mentioned and will

elaborate on in chapter 7, was associated with mechanisms of control and oppression. Il-majaneen professed that their “real” identities and the values they held high were constantly compromised when dealing with the family. Victor Turner remarks how the comradeship of the liminal group is often spoken of in terms of “be[ing] themselves” (Turner 1970:516). Turner claims that social structure is the “opposite end of the pole” from the unstructured or anti-structured relations within *communitas*. Family, as I have already pointed out, remains the basic unit of organisation in Palestinian society, socially, economically, and politically (Barakat 2005:145). It is perhaps not surprising then, that when informants in turn compared the openness within the group with the pretence of family interactions, they came to the conclusion that their families “did not know them”, because they could never “be themselves” around them.

In the next chapter I will describe some patterns in how informants dealt with non-familial relations involving economic transactions, and how they took advantage of the ideology of the first Intifada in negotiations with people to escape paying rent, bills and food expenses.

Chapter 7: The Power of Persuasion

Introduction

I mentioned in chapter 6 that some of the strategies informants used to manage their economic strain were petty theft, evasion of paying bills and rent, and achieving discounts in stores by means of negotiation. This chapter will explore these strategies, and the conceptual framework that accompanied them in informants' world view. In these interactions, il-majaneen creatively took advantage of the symbolic capital vested in the ideology of resistance to reach their goals. By invoking the values connected to "struggle" they negotiated credits and postponements of bills and rent. These confrontations expressed aspects of informants' world views based on their leftist identities and anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist ideologies.

Petty theft, credits and discount

Stealing occurred regularly and unostentatiously in the course of everyday life. It would often be legitimized by a perception of the people or institutions they stole from as "corrupt" or "greedy thieves", who "deserved" to be stolen from. At the University, informants would double in pairs and slip away with a plate of food or a cup of coffee as often as they got the chance. "They are tricky bastards, the people who run the cafeteria", Che claimed. "They buy food for almost nothing, and they sell it to us, students with no money, at these prices? Somebody's making a lot of money on us." In a similar way, the grocery shops in Birzeit and Ramallah were subjected to petty theft on a regular basis. Most of the theft happened spontaneously, without premeditation, sometimes individually, sometimes by cooperation through looks and signs when the opportunity arose. But a few shops were "sanctified" by il-majaneen and they would not think of stealing there. These were shops where the shopkeepers

had been giving out credits without questions and without “pushing” for the money back, or where the owner sympathised with their political views, or where there was a mutual respect between the parties, or often a combination of these factors. Il-majaneen would simply say *huwwa mnieh*, “he’s good”, to describe such relations.

Abu Khaafas was one such “good” shop owner. He owned a small grocery shop in Ramallah, and one of his sons had been an activist in the PFLP⁶⁹. Il-majaneen commended him for his simple ways; he had a beautiful smile although the lines on his face revealed a lifetime of hard work and worries. He teased them in a friendly manner whenever they came by. During a period when his wife was hospitalized, il-majaneen frequented his shop whenever they had money to support him emotionally and economically with what little they had. After his wife’s release, Abu Khaafas had expressed his gratitude by insisting on letting il-majaneen buy on credit whenever they needed to, an offer which they accepted. They always settled the bill when they had money again. They would never dream of stealing from him.

In addition to stealing, il-majaneen had become experts in achieving credits and discounts in the numerous grocery stores of Birzeit and Ramallah, cleverly taking advantage of their skills in the art of persuasion to convince shopkeepers of the necessity of showing solidarity during the harsh times of occupation. When debts were to be paid as informants finally received money again, they prioritized the shops where they had a good relationship. There was never enough money to cover all their acquired debts during a month, and most shop owners were not as fortunate as Abu Khaafas and had to wait a long time for their money back. We regularly had to dodge shops where informants owed money because they had no intention of repaying their creditors at all. They always seemed to manage to persuade

⁶⁹ The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; a left-radical political party established by George Habash in 1967. The party held a prominent position among Palestinians during the first decades, especially among students. Its relations to the PLO have been ambivalent and strained throughout its history. (El-Rayyes & Nahas 1976).

shop owners to give them credits, in spite of their history of non-payment and their rather crude looks compared to their peers.

A typical example of how informants would argue to get credit in stores occurred one evening as I was accompanying Che and Kiffaya to a grocery shop in Ramallah. They were out of money, and as usual in that situation my companions first collected the items they wanted to “purchase”, and when they came to the counter Che requested to get them on credit. The middle-aged shop owner looked at him, then at Kiffaya, then at me, and back again at Che. He shook his head and rejected his demand. “What about her?” he said and nodded in my direction. Che insisted I had no money either, and that I was to be considered one of them⁷⁰. “Come on,” Che pleaded, “you know the situation; don’t make me beg for it.” The shopkeeper shook his head again, claiming he did not know them and could not trust they would ever return to pay him back. He too was suffering from the hard times, he reminded us. Che took a quick glance around the shop and the street outside, and then he started to challenge the shopkeeper in a voice that was gradually getting louder so the other customers and passers-by could hear him: Did he really want to reject helping a fellow Palestinian? He knew the situation, he knew how hard it was, and still he would sit with all his groceries and tell another human being that he couldn’t help him with his hunger? Would he be able to sleep well that night, would his conscience allow such an act? What would that say about what kind of a person he was? The shopkeeper, realizing the event was turning in a different direction than he had foreseen, took on a new approach and did his best to contain the damage: No, no, of course not, he hadn’t meant it like that, he simply wanted to know what kind of people they were, they should not think that of him, he was only being careful, et cetera. He caved in completely to Che’s argumentation. Che took advantage of his upper hand and made the

⁷⁰ Foreigners were commonly presumed to possess a lot of money, and would systematically be charged extra for rent, fares, groceries et cetera. At the beginning of my stay, informants would regularly argue against this double-charging on my behalf. As I became familiar with price levels on goods and services, the practice occurred less frequently. Being a student, I did not have a lot of money, but I had more than my informants, and shared with them as they did with me in daily expenses.

owner add a packet of cigarettes to the bread, cheese and eggs lying on the counter, winking his eye to me.

What Che was effectively doing, was calling upon the shopkeeper's solidarity to his people in such terms that for the shopkeeper to refuse him would be stingy of him at best and disloyal to the Palestinian cause at worst. Che challenged him in a verbal battle that oscillated between play and gravity. When his initial appeal to solidarity proved unsuccessful, Che swung the pendulum and insinuated that his "contestant" had characteristics that resonated negatively with Palestinian resistance ideology. The shopkeeper was depicted as a greedy, selfish man, reverberating the opposite qualities of the hero in resistance ideology. Taken to its extreme, these negative values implied collaboration with the "enemy"; with the Israeli authorities or the forces that sustained them. The shopkeeper naturally did not wish to get such a label stuck to his name. The curious eyes and long ears of by-passers who did not know the whole situation were enough to make it easier for him to simply give in to Che's demands than to venture into further discussion. Incidentally, this did not prevent Che and Kiffaya from labeling him as "corrupt", and they never repaid him - exactly as the shopkeeper had feared. The shopkeeper's first response, and the way he gave in to the insinuations of collaboration, was enough evidence of his lack of qualities.

Relationship with landlords

As the rent was the number one recurring economic challenge for informants, their relationships with various landlords were proportionally strained. Landlords were viewed with immediate scepticism by all informants, and deemed unreliable scoundrels until proved innocent – which of course rarely happened, since whenever there was time to pay rent and they had no money, the relation would become one of mutual antagonism. Informants would most commonly share one apartment, two or three people with separate bedrooms. Apart from

tuition fees, which each semester instigated a frenzy of activity to find sources of money, the rent was the single most difficult economic challenge to informants – and one they never seemed to be able to overcome. The rent was usually set at 100 USD. Recalling the income of Adonis when he got paid at the AVP, he had 400 USD to pay for himself and his brother. El Mariachi, definitely the “richest” of them, got 300 USD a month. Rent then would consume approximately 1/3 to 1/2 of total income, if not more⁷¹.

The general pattern in informant-landlord relations were like this⁷²: The young students would live for a while in a new apartment, paying rent irregularly. After a few months the landlord would become impatient, and start demanding the rent they owed in an increasingly exasperated mode. As the anger and frustration of the landlord rose, the will to pay declined with informants, allegedly because the landlord (or landlady, as the situation was on occasion) showed more and more signs of being an *akhu sharmuta*, a “bastard”. After a while the situation would become intolerable to both parties, and the landlord would kick them out. This process could take from 6 months to a whole year or so, depending on the ability to pay on my informants, the prospect of finding new tenants who could pay on part of the landowners, and the temperament of each individual landowner.

The potential and limits of Intifada solidarity

Before describing how informants dealt with landlord conflicts, I will describe a case which took place prior to my arrival, but which holds relevance to the theme at hand. The information is based on what informants told me: In the spring of 2002, the Israeli army invaded Birzeit

⁷¹ Foreigners like me usually paid double.

⁷² I’m terming this a pattern because it happened in at least six different cases during the ten months from my first arrival to my last departure. There were, however, several examples of tenancies that lasted longer than one year and where rent was paid in full or almost in full, especially where the rent was lower than average.

and Ramallah, declared “area A”⁷³ in the Oslo Agreement, as part of their complete re-occupation of Palestinian territory after the breakdown of the Oslo Peace Process. The invasion lasted for approximately one month, and completely disrupted daily life while it lasted, paralyzing practically all aspects of Palestinian society. The University was closed, and hardly anybody, save perhaps a few grocery owners, was generating any kind of income. When the army lifted the curfews four weeks later, and daily life gradually found its pace again, the students of Birzeit University organized themselves and demanded that no rent should be paid on their part for the duration of the invasion. The students, and all other affected tenants, were collectively granted their claim by Yasser Arafat himself.

Don Quijote was therefore outraged when the landlord he lived with refused to give in to the request. He moved out of the apartment, owing at least four months of rent including the two months of invasion and a bunch of unpaid electricity bills. This particular landlord was a man with a prominent position in the local legal system, and he had several “contacts” in Birzeit community, informing him of his former tenant’s moves. Don Quijote’s paid him small amounts whenever he met him to keep him calm, but soon moved to Ramallah to avoid bumping into him too often. The landlord kept pushing for his money, sending messages with other people that he would not let him slide. As an attempt to get him off his back, Don Quijote put out the rumour that he was leaving the country, while he was actually only pondering the thought. The landlord picked up the news, and encountering him one day haphazardly in the streets of Ramallah he informed Don Quijote that he had passed on information to his connections at the bridges⁷⁴ that he would not be allowed to pass through until he had paid his debts. The threat spawned discussions among il-majaneen of whether or not the landlord possessed such connections, and they decided that while it was a definite

⁷³ The areas labeled “A” were those where power would be transferred from Israeli to Palestinian authorities, save some areas like external security and settlements, and the Israeli soldiers would withdraw (Waage 2004).

⁷⁴ The border crossings into Jordan from the West Bank go through three bridges over the river Jordan: Allenby Bridge (or King Hussein Bridge), Sheikh Hussein Bridge (the Northern bridge) and Wadi Arabi Bridge (the Southern bridge).

possibility that he knew people there and had mentioned Don Quijote's name to them, it would still be very hard for them to actually catch him when crossing over. Besides, the landlord was under the impression that he was leaving much earlier than he planned to. The threat had little effect until Don Quijote ran into the man in the streets again just a couple of weeks before he genuinely intended to leave, revealing that he was still in the country.

The landlord's disregard of the decision to renounce students' rent during the invasion placed him firmly in the category of a "corrupt" man; greedy, selfish, exclusively focusing on material concerns and how to generate the most money. Don Quijote owed the man a significant sum of money, partly because he had none and partly because he refused to pay what he had to "that son-of-a-bitch". His behaviour legitimized Don Quijote's decision not to pay him his money, as he was obviously the kind of man who ensured the continued occupation from lack of solidarity with his people. Intifada ideology was still classificatory at work, but it did not produce the desired results. Because this particular landlord was a man of some position, with connections within local community and stretching as far as the borders, or so he boasted, he had the ability to make Don Quijote's life complicated. The attempts of persuasion did not work with him; he had no fear for what a mere student might say or do against him. He yielded neither to collective nor individual reasoning based on claims of solidarity, but pursued his claim to the money.

Confronting a landlord

While appealing to Intifada solidarity had been effective for the students collectively – or for most of them anyway – it seems from Don Quijote's example that these claims did not necessarily produce the desired results. Another case will show how informants could be more successful in their negotiations than he was: Kiffaya and El Mariachi were sharing an apartment in Ramallah – on strictly friendly grounds. They lived in a house where other

tenants occupied two floors above them. After having lived there for a couple of months, the landlord came with their first electricity bill. They looked at the bill, and found the amount conspicuously high. A closer examination of the bill revealed no indication of how the company had reached that particular amount, which they thought was especially suspicious since there were two other apartment in the same house. They went complaining to the landlord, and demanded that he produce such information or they would not pay the bill. A few days later the landlord returned with a new bill, this time with some numbers that was supposed to show Kiffaya and El Mariachi's electricity consumption. Nobody understood anything from them, and they were unable to judge whether or not the numbers were accurate. That very day Adonis asked around, and learnt that the landlord's cousin worked at the electricity company. Immediately the situation turned; they were convinced that the landlord had made his cousin trick with the numbers to make them pay. Their initial suspicion of foul play had now been confirmed as far as il-majaneen were concerned. They decided not to pay the bill at all.

One evening not long after this, the landlord's brother came to the apartment. Che and Adonis happened to be present, including me. El Mariachi opened the door. Sitting in the living room, we could hear the conversation soon turn into a loud argument, and Kiffaya joined in to support El Mariachi. They refused to even discuss the matter with him, they said, because it was not his business. His brother should settle his own affairs, but he was obviously a coward, afraid to confront them in person, sending his younger brother to do his "dirty work". And yet he expected respect from his tenants? That was not going to happen. If he wanted something, he should come and see them himself. The visitor of course defended his older brother and denied this was the case, but to no avail. All of a sudden the landlord himself came out from underneath a tree in the backyard, where he had been hiding in the dark, listening to the conversation. Kiffaya and El Mariachi loudly expressed that they could

not believe their own eyes: They had now confirmed that not only was he a coward, but also completely dishonest, as he was listening to a conversation under false pretence, hiding in the bushes. No honest man would even think of hiding like that; why should he? He would have no reason to hide because he would know his hands were clean. The landlord denied that he had been hiding, he had just arrived, he claimed, and had just been looking at something that had caught his attention. Il-majaneen were in fervour: He had now, on top of everything, proven himself as a liar. And to this man they should pay a bill that they had already questioned the authenticity of? No way! The landlord and his brother had to leave with unfinished business.

After that episode, whenever the landlord demanded they settle their debts, Kiffaya and El Mariachi paid no heed to him. They said that he should be very careful what he asked of them after the way he had behaved that night, and think about what would happen to his esteem if people were to find out that he was exploiting his tenants in these hard times when nobody had any money. What if somebody were to investigate the connections between him and his cousin in the electricity company? And what would that say about his moral standards? He had already proven himself to be a coward and a liar, and his cousin was undoubtedly corrupt; such a thoroughly unsolidary man would have no inhibitions towards selling anything for money. The landlord half-heartedly continued his attempts at claiming the money, but his demand increasingly turned into pleads and his case seemed lost.

Conceptualizing economic structures

The connection between economic dependency and control was represented as an established fact according to informant world view. Their Marxist frame of understanding led them to emphasize economic factors as sources of oppression, from the economic structure of class relations to the larger structures of the state and international politics. They spoke about the

Israeli occupation as a capitalist, neocolonial form of oppression and exploitation - not a conflict between two peoples, or even worse, “cultures”. Il-majaneen saw these oppressing structures as penetrating even the most intimate spheres of family life, as suggested in the previous chapter, and only a precious few relationships could avoid this diagnosis.

Their anti-capitalist ideology was expressed in several ways in their daily lives, in addition to the general skepticism towards landlords and “bourgeois” people. Going to the grocery store, they would often make comments along the lines of: “Look at these products. Imported from Israel, all of them”, pointing at labels and instructions in Hebrew. At times they questioned the shopkeepers as to why they kept Israeli products when there were similar Palestinian products available⁷⁵. “It’s not much they can do *walla*, really, it’s all controlled at the borders and checkpoints. They just sell what they can get their hands on, that is cheapest, you know. But they should be conscious of it. They have to see what is going on. Most of them don’t understand the connection between the occupation and the products they sell”, Che argued once when we were leaving a store where he had just lectured the unenthusiastic shop keeper, who just shook his head at this difficult customer.

They also refused to take a well-paid job in the local NGOs, made “dirty” by the capitalist structure they were an extension of. The work of most NGOs, informants claimed, were based on Western ideas and immersed in capitalist structures of dominance and exploitation. For instance, Samra was making a good income working with a local NGO as a tutor for children during her bachelor degree, but quit this job because of what she claimed was a systematic favouring of bourgeois children at the expense of poor children, even though poor children were the target of the NGO’s work. As long as there were “bourgeois” people leading the NGO, this would almost inevitably be the result, she maintained. Many of the NGOs in Ramallah, which otherwise would have constituted potential sources of much higher

⁷⁵ Again, their ideas have roots in the first Intifada. A boycott of Israeli products was one of the initiatives of the Intifada leadership to break dependency of Israel, though it was never very successful (Kimmerling & Migdal 1994:264).

salaries than most other jobs, and often included types of work perfectly suited for informants' interests and abilities, were on il-majaneen's "blacklist" for similar reasons. Their scepticism to NGOs was reflected in how they responded when a friend of theirs began working with one of these organisations during my stay: He was subjected to rude comments questioning his judgement both to his face and behind his back, and although not cutting him off completely they now kept a certain cautious, mistrustful distance. "He always had this bourgeois side to him", El Mariachi deduced.

Undermining capitalist structures

Informants framed all of these acts ideologically - their thefts, the evasions of paying bills and rent, the act of sabotage - as undermining the capitalist structures of their own society; structures imposed on them by a history of foreign colonialization in collaboration with local Arab elites. They saw nothing wrong with stealing food from a local vendor: First of all, stealing was a product of the harsh times of occupation and poverty, and judging it was part of "bourgeois" morality or double-standards. Second, many of these vendors were labeled as "corrupt", and stealing from them could be seen as a subversive act towards the supplies supporting their corruption. Thus, a man who was classified as "honest", "simple", or "good" could escape their snatching, while people who were "bourgeois", "corrupt", or plain "stupid" for instance, were fair game to trick and steal from – it was practically considered a duty. "Every human being with respect for himself should steal from these *akhuat sharmuta*, these bastards," El Mariachi argued. "Why should they be left in peace to continue their exploitation of ordinary people?"

An act of sabotage

Responding to the perceived interconnectedness of capitalism and colonialism, two of the Leftists had set fire to a big Coca-Cola sign in the centre of Ramallah the year before my arrival. They did it at night in the dark when they were quite sure they would not be caught, and poured gasoline on it before they set it on fire and ran away, hearts throbbing. The event was depicted as an act of resistance described with pride and enjoyment, and they were very amused at the way local newspapers had written in confusion about the act and its motivation and possible perpetrators. While *they* saw the big companies' interests in the Palestinian areas as part of a wider process of domination and exploitation, others seemed unable to draw this connection, and were bewildered by the act and unable to interpret it as what it was to my informants: An act of resistance against the dual forces of capitalism and colonialism. Some of them entertained the idea of doing it again, since the sign had been re-erected shortly after, but this did not happen, or at least not during my stay. When a new shopping mall was built in Ramallah during the spring of 2004, it was subjected to the same fantasies of sabotage.

A symbolic struggle

Don Quijote's case highlights some of the dilemmas facing informants regarding rent, and the context in which their negotiations with landlords took place. The fact that the students were collectively able to ratify their economic claim could be seen in light of the widely sustained emphasis on Intifada solidarity, where the individual sufferings of Palestinians as a result of occupation should be considered a collective responsibility. As this case shows, Intifada ideology had the potential of being transformed into other kinds of resources, and can

therefore be considered a form of symbolic capital, in Bourdieu's terms (c.f. chapter 2)⁷⁶. By invoking the paradigm of "struggle", interactions with shopkeepers and landlords got a new meaning or definition: It was no longer simply a material transaction taking place, where goods and money changed hands, but the very national zeal and loyalty of the two which were at stake.

Il-majaneen had created a classificatory system, based on Palestinian resistance ideology and further inspired by leftist thought, where their strategies were legitimized and reframed as a form of resistance to capitalist and neocolonial structures of oppression. Informants legitimized their stealing and non-payment by classifying certain landlords and shopkeepers as "corrupt", and questioning their moral character. Playing with labels of "simple" versus "corrupt", informants could appeal to feelings of solidarity, generosity, and national unity in one minute, only to hint that their adversary was "corrupt" in the next for failing to live up to these standards. In the eyes of informants, their "weak" character was only cemented when giving in to this form of persuasion. The underlying assertion was that Israeli neocolonial rule could only be maintained through the economic and political support from local Arab men of position and power, including the Palestinian elite, and the network of collaborators. By extension, every person who was economically corrupt might easily be a collaborator with the Israeli authorities, literally or figuratively speaking. Classifying landlords along these lines legitimized informants' refusal to pay rent, and placed their "battle" with the landlord in the frame of the occupation: Through informants' discourse, refusing to pay the landlords became part of the struggle against the Israeli occupation and the power structures sustaining it.

⁷⁶ Another indication of the symbolic power vested in resistance was a commercial campaign launched by Jawwal, the Palestinian mobile phone company, at the time of my fieldwork. The campaign promoted huge posters in the centre of Ramallah, featuring a white dove flying above barbed wire, with the words "No to the Wall" in big letters side by side with the company logo. The campaign was still active, at their website at least, at the time of writing this, in 2007.

The particular manners in which informants dealt with landlords and shopkeepers that I have described in this chapter are not dissimilar to how they acted towards Israeli soldiers at the checkpoint, as we shall see in chapter 8.

Chapter 8: Negotiating Resistance and Identity at the Checkpoint

Introduction

In this chapter I will describe how informants interacted with soldiers to assert their subcultural identity and how they were exploring the potential for negotiation within the structural frame of soldier-versus-Palestinian interaction. The checkpoint as a manifestation of the occupying power in people's daily lives, and the most common venue for day-to-day interaction between Israelis and Palestinians, constituted an ample site for displays and negotiations of power and resistance. Il-majaneen creatively invented ways to articulate and enact their resistance towards the occupiers, represented by Israeli soldiers. In turn these events became expressions of "who they were" in stories, underlining the subversive, ambiguous elements and their lack of respect for established authorities.

The ambiguities of oppression

Although the structural frame of interaction with the soldiers permitted only limited protest, il-majaneen were eager to express their antagonism towards the occupation and its representatives every chance they got. The checkpoints, as the only places where they were face to face with their "enemy" on a daily basis, became the notorious stage for displays of power and resistance for both parties. Special episodes of interactions with soldiers were recounted again and again and constituted part of informants' stories about "who they were", i.e. aspects of their identity. One of the typical stories that recurred, here told by El Mariachi, revealed how misunderstandings were part of the interactions between soldiers and informants, and how informants enjoyed these misunderstandings because it made the soldiers insecure, weakening their relative authority:

Once, me and Kiffaya were going through *ilhajes* [the checkpoint] with Mahmoud. The soldiers ordered him to lift up his shirt and show his waist – you know he’s got a big stomach from all the beer he’s been drinking, so they thought maybe he’s got a bomb under there. So he did, and out comes his big stomach and it’s completely covered with hair, and we start laughing. The soldiers look at us; they didn’t like the situation at all. They thought something was going on. ‘What are you laughing at?’ one of them said in a kind of nervous voice. But we were only laughing at the sight of this big, ugly stomach.

Informants repeatedly expressed that they rejected the soldiers’ view of them as potential “terrorists”. Sometimes this rejection would take the form of mockery, where the “truth” of the story – in this case, Mahmoud’s ugly stomach – was placed in opposition to the soldiers’ interpretations of it, accentuating the absurdity of the situation, and the purported cowardice, preconception and paranoia of the soldiers.

Being randomly stopped at the checkpoint, and often being held back, waiting while the soldiers would check their IDs, was part of regular checkpoint experience. This was a form of control that particularly befell young men in their late teens until their late thirties, who were prone to be politically active. Il-majaneen indirectly expressed that while most definitely an agonizing experience most of the time, there were sides to being pulled over that were not all bad. Don Quijote hinted at one of them, demonstrating once again il-majaneen’s idealisation of “the simple life”:

Like for me, it’s a good chance to talk to ‘ordinary’ people if you know what I mean, farmers and such, to hear about their lives and their stories. They would look to me in a certain way, because I’m a student, I’m an ‘educated man’ you know, and I would look down at myself, and my struggles with my studies, and envy them their lives and their simple ways.

The men waiting for permission to leave, usually standing in a line at the side of the road, often under a burning sun, would often be subjected to friendly jokes and teasing. “Have you been standing there since last week?” somebody would call, making the poor man smile and shake his head in his misery. Sharing a cigarette and a sip of water gave a sense of

solidarity between them. Whenever faced with the relative power of the Israeli soldiers, people would usually create a framework for reversing the understanding of the situation, in a way that would depict the soldiers in a far less intimidating role in accordance with counterhegemonic resistance ideology. This would frequently happen in situations where their vulnerability was exposed, such as when soldiers pulled over cars to the side of the road, forcing its passenger to open suitcases with their private belongings all over the asphalt. Yet on some occasions other utterances could be made. Che related a checkpoint experience, standing on the side of the road for an undetermined period of time:

I heard one guy say once, that really impressed me in a way, how open he was, he said: 'What the fuck do we want with Al-Quds [Jerusalem]; I don't want it, I give it up, I want to live a simple life'. At that point he's so frustrated that he can actually say it, you know. At that point, he means it.

What these stories reflect is the spontaneous creation of *communitas* between the actors from different segments of society who are affected by these circumstances. Their shared predicament temporarily put aside everyday structural barriers between different people, and allow for a sense of unity and an open talk that would normally be unthinkable. In these situations, ordinary inhibitions could fall away after a while, and a particular mode of direct talk could occur, breaking taboos otherwise strictly observed. Apart from the mere acquaintance of people with widely different backgrounds, these encounters might have contributed to a sense of unity with other Palestinians in spite of their short durations.

Precaution and thrill

El Mariachi, Adonis and Che had more than once been especially nervous as their bags were regularly full of politically "suspect" movies and books which could make soldiers apprehensive. At the same time, the element of risk was exhilarating whenever they were able

to pass, and the greater the risk, the greater the satisfaction afterwards. This ambiguity of resentment and thrill, of stress and excitement, was typical for il-majaneen's interaction with soldiers, as their stories revealed. The following case, one of El Mariachi's most repeated stories, may serve as an example:

Once, I was going from Ramallah to Birzeit, and it so happened that it was Christmas Eve. I didn't even think about it, but I sure learnt it. They caught me because I was wearing my beret, which attracted their attention to me. It was stupid of me not to take it off, but I wanted to wear it and thought: 'Fuck them!' They stopped me of course, took my beret and asked for my ID. A soldier checked his computer, and they decided that I should be taken. The soldier looked at me with this smile, you know [showing], nodded his head like this and said: 'Oh, so you're from Gaza. Come, come', and I felt sure that I was fucked. Then they tied my hands behind my back and put me in the jeep. I stayed for more than two hours. I was sure that after they finished their shift, then I would go to the settlement [Beit Il⁷⁷], and I started to think what I should answer if this and that question came up. They had taken my phone and everything, so I couldn't tell anyone. Then, after more than two hours, they came and looked at me and started to laugh, and told me, 'Ok, you can go, have a happy Christmas'. I told him: 'You too!' and smiled to the son of a bitch, and I couldn't believe they let me go, I was so relieved. They sure tricked me, I was sure I was fucked. Then I went.

While the distress of the situation was obvious, it was partly downplayed for the relief of being released, which instigated a feeling of euphoria. The story also reveals the perception that soldiers did things for their own amusement, and would "play games" with people, showing off their power.

The aspect of precaution and the accompanying thrill when it went well was not only a by-product of compulsory interaction with the soldiers, but also something il-majaneen actively sought. Calculated risks were common, as there were often deliberations to be made before deciding whether to cross the checkpoint. Should you pass even if your bag was full of films about the brutalities of occupation? How did the mood of the soldiers seem today? Had there been any bombings recently to make the soldiers particularly jumpy? In the evenings, these were fundamental considerations to make, as a misjudgement could put them at great

⁷⁷ Beit Il is the name of a settlement not far from Surda checkpoint, where there is also a military base. It is here the soldiers come and go for their shifts in Surda.

risk in the dark when people were not supposed to cross the checkpoint. However, simply avoiding crossing every time there was risk involved placed additional restrictions on their freedom of movement. But there was more to it than just practical considerations. Taking risks had become a way of expressing resistance as well; by defying the rules of the checkpoint and the decision of soldiers, informants were able to symbolically communicate unwillingness to comply with the “might and right” of the occupation.

One example might illustrate this: After a period of relative quiet, when Israeli-Palestinian relations were comparatively good, the word on the street was that Surda might be reopened as a step in the then-current “Roadmap for peace”⁷⁸. The decreased apprehensiveness of the soldiers led to a proportional increase in the boldness of Palestinians crossing the checkpoint. Suddenly there would be a car lurking past in the ditch at the side of the roadblock when there were no soldiers in sight. The car would then race through the distance of the checkpoint, making the crowd of pedestrians scatter to all sides. One of these days Kiffaya and I reached Surda from Birzeit, and happened to be in a hurry to get across the checkpoint. As we were passing the row of taxis waiting for passengers, all of a sudden we heard a driver crying: “*a Ramallah a’ Ramallah a’ Ramallah*” in a single flow, as drivers usually did when shouting out their destinations to potential passengers. We turned in surprise as his cry meant that he intended to drive pass the checkpoint, a risk that sure enough had been taken by a few individuals, but was unexpected simply for the benefits of a taxi fare. The driver after all took the risk of losing both his vehicle and his licence. The car was almost full, and Kiffaya promptly decided we should go with it. We joined the young men and women, students most likely, who were already sitting there.

⁷⁸ The so-called “Roadmap for peace” was a plan based on a speech by George W. Bush in 2002 about his “visions” of a two-state solution to the Middle East conflict. The plan was developed in cooperation with Russia, the United Nations, and the European Union, called the Quartet. The work with putting the plan into life was on and off during my fieldwork, and few Palestinians I met had any faith in it whatsoever.

The driver got in and swiftly manoeuvred his car around the roadblock while constantly being on the lookout for jeeps from the crossing road which led to Beit Il and the military camp. The left side of his car was climbing the side of the heap of sand and stones which constituted the roadblock. Once passed it, an atmosphere of excited apprehension spread among the passengers, who were scouting for soldiers as eagerly as the driver. Only some fifty meters into the checkpoint, which lasted for a kilometre or so until the next roadblock, the driver cursed loudly and jerked the car into a side-road that led to a house, conspicuously located right along the road of the checkpoint. Some people further down who had a better view of the road to the military camp had signalled to him, and seconds after a jeep scurried down the road towards the checkpoint. The driver had simply stopped the car close to the house, as there was nowhere else to go. Silence fell on everybody in the car as it was still unclear whether or not the soldiers had seen us. Somebody mumbled something and giggled nervously. The jeep reached the checkpoint, halted for a few seconds, then crossed the road and continued further down the road it came from. Deep breaths of relief were heard as people had obviously held their breath in anxiety, and the driver was back on the road while the jeep was still in sight. The atmosphere was now one of blissful deliverance; perky comments were made and everybody laughed; the driver seemed to be in a state of hubris, ready to drive “all the way to Al-Quds”⁷⁹. When we got out of the car on the other side, the experience seemed to have invigorated everyone. The comments made reflected a sense of triumph on part of the driver and his passengers, as if the soldiers had been defeated in a battle, yet were not even aware of it.

⁷⁹ Ramallah, as the rest of the West Bank, was isolated from Al-Quds (Jerusalem) by a number of checkpoints and roadblocks, preventing anyone except those with valid ID cards or special permissions to pass the roads leading to the city. It remained the capital and the spiritual focus of Palestinians and took on some of the qualities of the “lost homeland” in spite of (or because of) its unavailability for a majority of Palestinians on a regular basis (Kimmerling & Migdal 1994).

Creating a resistance symbol

The social construction of identity and resistance in particular contexts can become clearer by tracing meanings attached to a specific clothes item, a military beret, in different settings: Don Quijote had bought his first beret. The beret was a “trade mark” of Che Guevara, whose handsome face covered the T-shirts and the walls in the homes of these young Palestinians. Communist symbols were popular in the group, and wearing a beret as Guevara often had done did not only signal sympathy with Guevara’s cause, but also that of the Palestinian guerrilla movement of the 1960’s. The beret had become a fashionable symbol of leftist identity in Birzeit at the time of my fieldwork. As a symbol, it had little to do with the actual paramilitary resistance other young Palestinians were involved with, except perhaps as a sign of support in the paramilitary struggle against the occupation. “I simply bought it because I liked it; I thought it was nice and looked good on me”, Don Quijote explained. His first beret was purchased in Ramallah, and on his way back to Birzeit he had to cross Surda checkpoint. Two soldiers were manning the checkpoint this sunny day, and immediately noticed Don Quijote with his new head cover. They stopped him, asking him why he wore the beret, requesting that he remove it. Don Quijote inquired as to the reason why, but they simply repeated the demand, according to his own account. They seemed annoyed. After a short debate, Don Quijote gave in to their request, removing the beret, which they confiscated, and turned around on his heels returning to Ramallah, immediately replacing the beret he just lost with a new one. This time he took it off before crossing the checkpoint, but he was happy, a big smile on his face: He had found a new way to trigger the soldiers.

The beret became a favourite item of his. His class mates complimented him on his new look; even teachers gave him positive attention because of the beret. Whenever he crossed a checkpoint, he could be sure the beret would attract the attention of soldiers. “I actually built a kind of relationship with the soldiers because of the beret”, he said:

They started to recognize me – it's the same guys standing there almost every day, you know, they have shifts. It became like a game: They saw me, took my beret, and told me to go; *yalla ruH*. They thought it was funny somehow, but at the same time it made them nervous. They didn't know what to think of me, where to place me.

Whether or not he should wear the beret became part of the general consideration he made before crossing the checkpoint. The benefits he enjoyed from displaying his beret had to be balanced with other, more immediate concerns. Sometimes it was simply a matter of money, as they would often confiscate it and he would have to buy a new one to continue his "game". "I don't know how many times they took my beret", he said, "but I always got a new one. It drove them crazy".

The example highlights the complex interrelations of subcultural identity and resistance, as Don Quijote discovered that a symbol of subcultural identity could also be a potent token of resistance against the Israeli occupation. The beret was one of several ways that Don Quijote signalled to his surroundings that he was a Leftist. Along with his long hair and nonchalant dress it also expressed his lack of conformity to social codes of appearances. Other Leftists could immediately identify him as "one of them", while people unfamiliar with these codes were puzzled by his look, not seldom mistaking him for a foreigner. This in itself was enough for Don Quijote to love wearing the beret.

But coincidence made him realise that the beret could be used as a symbol or expression of resistance towards the occupation as well, simply because it seemed to annoy the Israeli soldiers manning the checkpoint. He was not sure why the beret enticed such a response, was it that it replicated their military style and thus challenged their authority? He nevertheless embraced this newfound meaning of his beret. The mixed response from the Israeli soldiers was to his liking. He enjoyed the way the soldiers looked at him now, with a mixture of concern and curiosity. Don Quijote did not mind that they took his beret – it was

not the beret which was important, but what it communicated, and what *he* communicated when he refused to stop wearing it. In the soldiers' attitudes he found a form of recognition or acknowledgement; from being "anybody" he became "somebody". These consequences made it well worth the inconvenience and delays the confiscations would put on him.

Reversing the roles

Another episode which unfolded over some days in the autumn of 2003 became one of their favourite "checkpoint stories", as the implications of it gradually dawned on the involved actors themselves. Adonis eagerly told me when we met in the cafeteria about the events of the night before:

We were sitting in Zyriab [a restaurant in Ramallah], me and Che, enjoying ourselves. Suddenly there's talk about a scholarship to the Netherlands, and the deadline is tomorrow, and everybody's telling us to apply. It was almost twelve o'clock in the night, and we were a bit drunk, but we decided that we want to do it, you know, we want to do it *now*. You know how it is when we're drunk. So we have to go back to Birzeit, even if it's late. *Jalla jalla*, then we went, we found a taxi and we paid him to go immediately without waiting for it to fill up⁸⁰. Everything went ok, we passed the normal distance between the roadblocks and we were happy. Then, on the top of the mountain, there's a supermarket, you know on the other side of the gas station, and we decided to stop and buy some snacks. Che had finished, I was still in the shop, and on my way back to the car a fucking jeep is coming like crazy from *ilhajes* [the checkpoint]. I saw the fucking jeep and ran to the car, closed the door, it was like an American action movie, you know, and the driver asked 'Should I go?' and Che said 'Go! Go!' Linda, they were ready to hit a car, they came at such a speed; they had no time to stop if they met a car. And the driver – he was really clever, he realized it would take time for the jeep to stop -, he backed the car, and made a circle around the jeep, and the jeep followed us in the circle, like this [showing], until our car was back on track on the main road and we went. After half a kilometre I turned my head and I saw the soldiers, ready to fire at us. So I told the driver to stop, they wanted to fuck us, *khalas*, that's it, we had to stop. They fired a warning shot in the air. They signalled for the driver to go back, and we did. Then they came, with lights in our faces, and told us to get out of the car all of us, and asked for our IDs. They checked them, and then they said that the driver and Che could go, but they saw I am from Gaza, I had to stay while they checked my ID [with the central]. Che refused to accept his card back, he said: 'He's my friend, I will not take my card if you don't give him his'. I told him

⁸⁰ The shared taxis usually wait until all or most of its seats are filled, before driving to its destination.

just to go, you know, both of them, but he refused. They [the soldiers] said 'Ok, then you can stay with him', and he took his card as well. The driver asked the soldiers if he should wait for us, the soldiers raised their shoulders and said it's up to him, it can take one hour, five hours, they don't know. The driver decided to wait with us. Then they went. It was fucking cold, and they expected us to wait for them to get our IDs back. But we decided to go as soon as the jeep had left; we didn't want to wait for them.

The next day Che and Adonis wanted to go through the checkpoint; there was a movie in Ramallah that was only screened that night and they had been looking forward to it for weeks. But the soldiers still had their ID cards, and without them they would not be able to pass should they be stopped. On our way over they were debating what to do, and decided that if the soldiers stopped them, and they told them that some other soldiers took their IDs, they would be in trouble and never be able to pass. They came up with what they thought was a brilliant idea: When we reached Surda, all the soldiers were sitting inside their jeep. In stead of trying to avoid looking at the soldiers, hoping they would not notice them - which was what they usually might have done - Che and Adonis went straight for the jeep. The soldiers took a few seconds to evaluate the situation, and then one of them opened and asked what they wanted. Walking across the checkpoint with the rest of us a few minutes later, Che and Adonis enthusiastically recounted how they had told them that some soldiers had taken their ID cards two days earlier and now they wanted them back. Che animated their response:

The guy said: 'It's not us who took it, it must be another shift, you have to come early in the morning, maybe, to get it', you know, as if he was apologizing. [Laughing] You should have seen the looks on their faces. They never expect anyone to come to them like that, without being told.

Spending the night with friends in Ramallah, they had to cross Surda again to reach the University in the morning. This time the soldiers had organized all the people in a line, waiting to pass. Boosted by their experience the previous day, Che and Adonis confidently walked past the line and went directly to the soldiers, telling them the same story as the night

before. This time their tactic was equally effective, as the soldiers waived them through. A few days later, Che got a message that the *shurta*, the Palestinian police, had received his card and he could pick it up at the station in Ramallah. Adonis had to wait a few more days for his ID until it turned up in Gaza and his family sent it to him. Adonis sounded almost disappointed:

It was becoming like a game, you know? We stopped the jeeps like a taxi, and people started looking at us and asking themselves: ‘What’s the story about these guys?’ We decided that it’s fucking effective not to have an ID, it’s really working. This is the thing: What they control us by, is something *they* give us. They give us the things they control us by. And the moment we get rid of that, then we take control, we take initiative. And when we got it back, it was over.

The stories told about this event gradually evolved and increasingly emphasised a calculated approach to the issue and the number of times they had been able to pass. As the stories were told, Che and Adonis realised how radical what they had done really was. For a short while, they had been in total control of the situation – or at least that was how it felt. They had reversed the roles of soldier-Palestinian interaction by being the ones who took initiative, instead of passively waiting for a signal from the soldiers of what they should do. The feeling of power was exhilarating. Just the thought of it, Che admitted, made him feel that there was a way out of oppression and it was right here, in this episode, in what they had done.

Transforming the experience of oppression

What do these stories and episodes tell us about the construction and expression of subcultural identity, and its relation to resistance? While the structural framework of soldier-informant interaction was set – the soldiers’ purpose was to keep the checkpoint and the population under surveillance and control, which they did through a range of practical and symbolical measures – *il-majaneen* nevertheless found opportunities for interpreting the meanings of

particular interactions and exchanges. The checkpoint was not only a physical manifestation of the Israeli authorities' control over Palestinian land and population, it was also a site for negotiating these meanings.

Interactions with soldiers became sites for il-majaneen to make statements about "who they were" in relation to others, internally and externally. The example with the beret highlights how Don Quijote's attention was initially directed at his peers – yet when opportunity arises, he was quick to realise that his head cover could be used for other purposes towards Israeli soldiers. The beret became a multivocal symbol: Internally, that is within his own community, the beret was communicating his subcultural identity as a Leftist. Externally, in this case in relation to the soldiers at the checkpoint, the beret signified his opposition to the occupation. The references already inscribed upon the beret of revolutionary inclinations and dissonance with established authorities, initially directed at his peers, was reinforced by his encounters with the soldiers - which again enhanced the symbolic meaning attached to the item as an expression of subcultural identity. Refusing to remove the beret every time he crossed the checkpoint, he communicated unwillingness to bow down to the will of the occupier - or at least this was the way he perceived it. Ironically, the beret also created a mutual recognition of some sort between Don Quijote and the soldiers. He was no longer an anonymous part of the masses crossing Surda checkpoint every day under the watchful eyes of the young Israeli soldiers, he became "the guy with the beret", an annoyance, but also, perhaps, a welcomed breach of the day's monotony

The final case in this chapter aptly discloses a recurring feature of informants' attitudes to their surroundings, in my view. When informants took the initiative in soldier interaction, they were effectively reversing the roles of the situation, thereby redefining it. This process took place unwittingly at first, but increased in significance as Che and Adonis were gradually realising the implications of their actions. Their attitudes in the encounters

with soldiers were little different from what they were doing in confrontations with landlords and shopkeepers: They blatantly ignored the fact that they should be “inferior” or were in a position of need, and completely disregarded whether or not they had any right to their claims, trying to impose their own definition of the situation on their adversaries.

While informants’ counterhegemonic discourse could contribute little to alter the facts of occupation, it had significant impact for the *experience* of it. When focusing on other aspects of the interaction, or challenging soldiers’ interpretations of a situation, il-majaneen were dealing with the soldiers *as if* these structures of domination were not present, or *as if* they were defeating the Israeli soldiers. This alternative discourse provided access to pleasurable experiences in encounters with soldiers, such as the feeling of *communitas* with other Palestinians, excitement whenever chances were taken, relief or a sense of “victory” when repercussions were avoided, and a form of recognition or acknowledgement from soldiers through their apprehension. That these interpretations were meaningful to my informants, even though they apparently did not lead to any change in their predicament, were obvious from their responses to these situations and their repeated stories about them afterwards.

The final chapter takes us back to the University, and reviews the ways students participated in and interpreted different forms of resistance against the occupation. Il-majaneen contested mainstream views about the meanings of “conventional” resistance, and focused their energies on cultural work in the Centre for Visual Media - which proved to have a political impact.

Chapter 9: Constructing the Meanings of Resistance

Introduction

This last chapter deals with some of the conflicting and converging views and practices of resistance against the Israeli occupation, as they manifested themselves in the daily lives of my informants. Political organization had implications for how resistance was being expressed and enacted, determining who would participate in a particular happening and the specific symbolism surrounding it. Il-majaneen were searching for an outlet for their political interest, but could not find a place to “fit”. In stead, informants discursively and practically distanced themselves from conventional forms of resistance, asserting their subcultural identity in the process. The Centre of Visual Media played an important role in shaping and maintaining il-majaneen’s identity as a group. Their activities there came to represent resistance to il-majaneen, as these activities were directed at social change “from within”. Their work in the Centre, however, caused them to end up in a controversy with elements of the Islamist movement. This case highlights the meanings of resistance in relation to group identity, morality, and national belonging.

Witnessing a demonstration

One day when the University had been closed by order of the Israeli military, I was walking to a friend’s house accompanied by El Mariachi and Samra. The atmosphere between them was switching between relief about getting a day off from their studies, and worry about the consequences of the closure. If the closure was to continue, study progression might suffer, and it remained uncertain how long they would be able to pursue their degrees under the economically challenged situation that seemed only to get worse. At the same time, the

chance of hanging out with friends and relax with a game of *sheikh*⁸¹ instead of sitting in a classroom was tempting. Approaching our friend's house, we could hear rhythmic shouting reaching us from a distance. Soon we could see a group of demonstrators who were marching towards us: Young men and women, students by the looks of them, many wearing the *kuffiyeh*, the traditional checkered headscarf turned into a symbol of national belonging and resistance, wrapped around their necks. Some were carrying posters with pictures of Yasser Arafat and Marwan Barghouti⁸², the imprisoned Intifada leader, clasping his cuffed hands above his head, smiling self-confidently. All of this signalled that Fatah's student organization, Shabibe, was behind the demonstration. After a while I was able to differentiate the repeated words of an often heard slogan, the first one recognizable to my foreign ears: "*bi'ruH, bi'damm, nafdiq ya shaheed, bi'ruH, bi'damm, nafdiq ya shaheed*" – "by our soul, by our blood, we will sacrifice for you, oh martyr". I interrogated my companions to find out if they knew the occasion for the demonstration, but they just shrug their shoulders in dispassionate indifference. "The University is closed", El Mariachi reminded me, and gave me a look as if to say that there's always some reason to demonstrate here, and I should know that by now.

We paused outside our friend's house and watched the people marching by. "They're on their way to 'Ataara", Samra deduced from the direction of the crowd. 'Ataara is the name of a checkpoint close to Birzeit village, regulating one of the main routes from the Ramallah district into Jerusalem or further north within the West Bank. A bypass road ensured the swift passage for Israeli settlers and soldiers, while Palestinians were redirected through a winding,

⁸¹ *Sheikh* is a popular card game.

⁸² Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti played a central role during the uprising. He is part of the "young guard" of Fatah, sometimes even referred to as the "Barghouti camp", which struggle for power and position within Fatah. Prior to the 2006 elections he formed a new party together with young Fatah leaders frustrated with the current leadership, which re-merged with its mother party in the last minute. He is currently serving five life sentences in Israeli jail for terror charges, which he denies.

narrow dirt road. The checkpoint was mostly, but not always manned by Israeli soldiers⁸³. It was a common venue for demonstrations such as this one. Suddenly two men detached themselves from the group and ran up to the white cement wall surrounding one of the village churches. They were spray-painting slogans on the wall: “Revolution until victory” Samra read to me, and another: “The uprising will continue until the end of the occupation”⁸⁴ in letters in green, red, black and white, the colours of the Palestinian flag. As the crowd was passing us, someone began singing with a loud voice, and soon the majority of the group joined him in a chant. My companions knew the song well, but refrained from singing along. They were compelled to translate the words for me:

We have barricaded the streets
We didn't forget our life in the tents
The bag of flour, and sardines in the cold
In exile we were sleeping
So they thought that we had forgotten
That we came out of the tents in order to fight
That we are the masters of celebrations
And the human being witnessed us

We have barricaded the streets
And gone, throwing ration cards
We have carried the rifle
We have marched and declared:
“No! No!” to foreign citizenship

We have barricaded the streets
And declared, young and old
The right of return and self-determination
We don't accept anything except Palestine
And what will be, will be
And the resolutions of the occupier are rejected
By the decision of the public

We have barricaded the streets
And we have sworn:
Freedom needs blood
So before your eyes, my land,

⁸³ Checkpoints come in many shapes, from the permanent built-in airport-like Erez checkpoint between Israel and Gaza, to the spontaneous checkpoint created by a military jeep on the side of the road.

⁸⁴ “*Thawra hatta nasser*” and “*Intifada mustamirra hatta zawal al-eHtilal*”.

We will give without care

As the crowd continued their march towards 'Ataara, we turned our backs on them and walked to the entrance of the house. El Mariachi was making fun of the demonstrators: "They will march all the way to Al-Quds by the looks on their faces", he claimed sarcastically, and turning his head he shouted in their direction, well aware that nobody would hear him now: "*Allah ma'kum!* May Allah be with you!", imitating concern and insinuating that they certainly needed some help "from above" to be successful at that.

Empowerment through popular armed resistance

Before I go into what this event can tell us about the relationship between resistance and subcultural identity, I want to spend some time reflecting on the hegemonic values of "struggle" as they are expressed in the song, and connecting them to informants' world view and ethos. The ideological message of the song concerns primarily how the victimization of statelessness and refugeehood is rejected in favor of empowerment through popular armed struggle. In the song, the people are marching in the streets not only against the occupation, but also against the idea that anybody can do anything without their consent. The legitimacy of the occupiers and the validity of their decisions are challenged; only the people themselves can accept or reject decisions concerning their homeland and national belonging⁸⁵. What is depicted in the song is a struggle where ordinary people demand to be heard, by violent means if necessary, and wish to reclaim their power vis-à-vis the occupier. Resignation and pessimism are symbolically overcome by popular struggle and celebration (c.f. Schulz 2003, Khalidi 1997). The content of the song can be seen as expressing the counterhegemonic

⁸⁵ In the wake of Oslo, this point has entered the legal arena in connection with the right of return, as there has been a strong effort by Palestinian legal experts, intellectuals and NGOs to convey the message that the right of return is not a right that the politicians can bargain with in order to reach a political solution. According to their view, the right of return is the right of the Palestinian people, as well as of the individual, and cannot be given away on behalf of anybody except the people themselves (Yahya 1999).

message of resistance ideology, negating the victimized situation of refugeehood and occupation.

The streets as a representation of popular resistance

The streets constitute the scenery of this song, as the title suggests, and that is not by accident. The song itself is sung during marches in the streets. The streets represent the popular struggle of the Palestinians, pointing back to the Great Revolt of 1936-39⁸⁶, and the emergence of the Palestinian resistance in the 60's. But first and foremost the streets connect symbolically to the Intifada. The streets are where the Palestinian struggle for independence is unfolding, literally as well as symbolically. Literally, the streets are where the "action" takes place; here the Israeli tanks and jeeps come, here the youth throw their stones, make their traps, hide from the soldiers. The streets are the battleground of the Intifada; where the machinery of occupation meets the Palestinian uprising in turmoil, with people and vehicles, noise, bullets and shells, smoke, and stones and "molotov cocktails" flying in the air. Symbolically, this is the battle not so much of politicians and leaders, but of the people "in the streets", of the ordinary man, woman and child, of the grassroots. The resistance movement is portrayed as growing directly out of the people themselves, and involves the participation and support of every layer of the population, "*young and old*".

Informants' conceptualization of "the street"

The street, as a somewhat idealized concept, but also as experience, was a powerful notion in informants' discourse. It was envisaged as a "true" place, a simple place, an honest place;

⁸⁶ The so-called Great Arab Revolt took place from 1936 to 1939, and mobilized people from all segments of society in what was then the British Mandate of Palestine. The revolt featured prolonged strikes, political demonstrations, guerrilla attacks and sabotage, against British rule and the influx of Jewish settlers (Kayyali 1978).

somewhere you could always go to if everything else failed, and it would provide shelter; somewhere you could always return to if you “lost yourself”, i.e. got caught up in the “false” world of the bourgeoisie or the “lies and illusions” of politics. Similarly, it was a place where you would meet “the truth”; people living on the streets (or spending their days there in work or leisure) would speak the truth about what was happening in society on the level of politics; they were not tricked by the flashes of cameras and sweetness of words. In another fashion, the streets were the place to know “what was going on” at any given time, especially during times of invasion and siege. By reversal, being away from the streets - literally and symbolically - meant not being connected to the people and the truth, not knowing what was really going on, and/or having to rely on the false images of the media and the misguided interpretations of journalists, “specialists” and politicians.

This manifested itself in numerous ways. During times of unrest, when other people withdrew to the confinement of their houses as a precaution, il-majaneen would go out in order to “know what was going on”. They cursed their neighbors for staying indoors. “It’s like everybody is making his own prison cell”, El Mariachi complained once, watching people scurrying indoors. Shouting and car horns had interfered with our card game in my Birzeit apartment that afternoon, signaling the entry of Israeli troops into the neighborhood. “They shouldn’t run inside, now’s the time to stay outside!” he proclaimed. Che continued on the subject when he explained to me why he and Kiffaya had broken curfew and “eloped” from Birzeit to Ramallah during the invasion of spring 2002, even though it was risky. He shared this story with me one day when we were on our way home from the University, and observed that one of the streets were littered with stones after a recent clash between soldiers and youth from the nearest refugee camp. The surrounding shops were opening again, removing the metal shields covering their doors and windows, a routine precaution after years of experience with curfews and street clashes. Che was watching the vendors while reflecting on the

differences between camp refugees and villagers in terms of dealing with the Israeli soldiers. I could detect a sense of admiration in his voice when he was describing the unrelenting readiness to challenge the soldiers shown by the young refugees, now nowhere in sight⁸⁷. He continued to criticize the inhabitants of Birzeit for their “bourgeois manners” and petty concerns, complaining that it was almost impossible to do anything when there was a curfew in Birzeit. According to him, the people were afraid; they were cowards and stayed indoors, so it was impossible to know where the soldiers were at any given time. That meant it was far more risky to venture outdoors, to get some groceries or simply some fresh air after days of curfew, because nobody could help you know when it was safe from soldiers. That’s why they escaped to Ramallah after a couple of days, when they understood the invasion was going to last for a while. Ramallah, he said, was a bit better, at least one could find *some* people in the streets, so one could get out every once in a while.

Having people in the streets did not simply mean that somebody were willing to face the representatives of the occupation, but also knowledge and safety: If there were many people in the streets, they would signal where the jeeps were and which direction they going. If somebody wanted to do something during invasion or curfew, like going to the store or making trouble for the soldiers, he would take a big risk when there were no people outside. He would never know when he could be surprised by soldiers. Don Quijote also talked about this when comparing his childhood in the camp in Gaza with Birzeit:

In the camp, the power balance between us and them [the Israeli soldiers] is different. We know the camp and its streets, they don’t. We are small and quick, they are heavy and slow. And we signal to each other, so we always know where they are and in which direction they are coming. They don’t know where we are unless we’re in front of them. Here, people are cowards, they just stay inside when the soldiers come, and you’re fucked if you want to do something. Then the power is all theirs [the Israeli soldiers]. It’s easy for them to catch who they want.

⁸⁷ Schulz (2003) and others have described this “empowering” role of camp refugees in the Intifada .

The song is portraying a people who in unison claim their agreed upon rights and fight for the same goals. Informants, when positioning themselves in society, criticized their surroundings for not living up to the values of this ideology. The failures to live up to these standards provide the Israeli army with a tactical advantage, as they saw it. The symbolic meaning of “the street” also served as a manner of identifying themselves as a group within their social environment. In accordance with informants’ discourse, the idealization of the streets was contrasted to the assumed corruptness of the bourgeoisie and the political leadership. The truthfulness of “the streets” and the moral virtues of the grassroots were held against the cowardice, falseness and selfishness of the financial and political elite.

Resistance and political participation

Demonstrations such as the one described above were perhaps the most common, and at least the most visible, expression of resistance against the occupation, usually followed by clashes with Israeli soldiers at checkpoints or near military camps. In addition, there were regular arrangements by various political fractions at the University campus featuring parades and speeches directed against the occupation. Songs and slogans were integral parts of these events, and contributed to mobilize, motivate and unify the participants (Massad 2003, Moubadder 1994). There existed a broad consensus about expressing and participating in acts of resistance towards the occupation among the students, and over the years a range of collective forms of resistance had developed. Who participated in each happening was partly dictated by which fraction was organizing the demonstration, since the various political parties tended to chiefly mobilize party sympathizers. This particular demonstration was arranged by Fatah’s youth organization Shabibe, as communicated by wearing the *kuffiyeh*, holding posters of ‘Arafat and Barghouti, and their particular slogans. My leftist companions would not participate in it – although they insisted that they could have, had they wanted to.

Il-majaneen were not concerned about whatever Shabibe youth were up to, and they would barely have noticed the demonstration had it not been for my presence. In stead, as I insisted that we watch as they were passing by, El Mariachi used it as an occasion to mark his difference from the participants through a deliberately disinterested attitude and a few mocking comments.

Political activism and student life

The way students' political and social activities played out in Birzeit University strongly influenced the shaping of different forms and meanings of resistance. Participating in political activities was considered more or less mandatory in past decades; during the 70's and 80's, a Palestinian professor recalls, "university life was so infused by political activity that reluctant students often felt compelled to participate in protests to avoid criticism of their fellow students" (cited in Robinson 1997:21). The universities remain important arenas of political life, and students are actively recruited into political parties, as described in chapter 3⁸⁸. The close connections between student organisations and their "mother" parties was frequently cited by informants as a cause of fractional problems within the student movement, and il-majaneen accused them of having no substantial agendas of their own, thus inevitably being caught up in the internal rivalries of their "patrons".

Searching for an outlet

Political participation proved problematic to il-majaneen, as their left-radical views, strong opinions and anti-authoritarian tendencies made it difficult for them to find an area in which to be comfortable. Access to organized resistance such as demonstrations and campaigns

⁸⁸ Israeli authorities are acutely aware of this aspect of student life, and incursions into and closures of the University campus and university-related arenas (such as students' dormitories), and imprisonment of student political leaders, occur on a regular basis (BU report 2003).

often required, in practice if not on purpose, some kind of political organization on the part of its participants, especially if one aspired to influence the form and content of the events. Il-majaneen were relentlessly searching for an arena to channel their political engagement without compromising their political views and subcultural identity, but the shoe never seemed to fit. In stead these events became contexts where informants would demarcate their difference in relation to their peers, by criticizing or ridiculing them, or by breaking the conventions inherent in the events, or simply by not participating at all.

In spite of this apparent disregard for organized resistance as such, all of them had made attempts at participating in some form of political organization – and all political organization was directed at the occupation one way or another. One by one they had come to the conclusion that it was not for them. Adonis and Che, for instance, told me (but only after months of acquaintance) that they had been part of a clandestine political network when Adonis had made contact with the international students of the PAS program that summer of 2003, when we initially met. He had in fact been on a “stake-out” for possible collaborators among these students on behalf of that network, according to his own account⁸⁹. The two of them insisted it had been a final effort to find somewhere to belong politically within a group that might actually be able to “do something”, not just talk about it. But the network turned out to be “exactly the same as everybody else”, claiming they wanted “real” change but inadvertently being caught up in internal power struggles. Both of them left the network after only a few weeks – long before telling me about its existence.

The “Stop the Wall”-Campaign

Political organizations did not monopolize activities concerning the occupation and their specific situation as Palestinians. Non-political student organizations, NGOs and popular

⁸⁹ International students had supposedly been revealed as collaborators, both previous to and after my stay.

committees created for a single cause, found forms of expressing resistance against the occupation and addressing issues they believed were important. Party affiliation nevertheless wielded influence on participation, as social and political organization more often than not overlapped each other. Informants' responses to these events were similar to that of the demonstration presented above; they did not want to be associated with them. The "Stop the Wall"-campaign in Birzeit University during the spring of 2004 may serve as an example. The campaign was launched at the University as part of a broader initiative by a coalition of Palestinian NGOs and popular committees to mobilize against the building of a concrete wall isolating the Palestinian areas from Israel⁹⁰. As a student at the international program at Birzeit I had already been given a lecture on the subject by one of the initiators behind the campaign, since spreading information to the international community was a stated goal of the coalition. Now, half a year later, a group of people had felt the need to educate their fellow students at Birzeit as well, and instigated a campaign in cooperation with the "Stop the Wall"-coalition meant to arouse the students into action.

If lack of interest had been perceived as a problem until then, there was definitely a bustle of activities among the students during this particular campaign. For a week the engineering building featured pictures of the progressing wall accompanied by information boards, lectures were held on the subject from various angles, a huge map of the planned route of the Wall was displayed on campus, and a cardboard wall was erected outside the entrance of the cafeteria, forcing the students to go around it. Accompanying the arrangements at campus there were joint trips to areas next in line to be razed in order to make way for the Wall, attempting to hinder the destruction of homes and farmland and the uprooting of trees by means of nonviolent resistance. The intention behind this campaign, as explained to me by one of its University coordinators, was to increase awareness among

⁹⁰ In 2002, Israel began building a concrete wall separating the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip from the Israeli mainland. The Wall has been termed a "security fence" by Israeli authorities, and an "apartheid wall" by Palestinian and international activists, highlighting the widely differing perceptions of its purposes.

students and surrounding local communities as to the severe reality and effects of the Wall, and mobilize protest before the building of each part was a fact. “The students are only concerned with issues affecting them directly”, he complained to me, “they fail to realize that what is affecting others today, will affect them tomorrow, and then it will be too late to do something about it”. “But you can’t really blame them,” he added apologetically, “they have so many worries. That’s why we need a campaign like this, to wake them”.

One of the activists in this campaign, a self-proclaimed Leftist and a member of a student organization engaged with cultural activities, related to me why he wished to join it:

I used to go whenever there was a demonstration, to throw stones and show that I reject their [the Israeli soldiers] presence. Now it’s too dangerous, people get killed all the time. Everybody has guns⁹¹. I’m not ready to see one of my friends die, or to die myself. But I have to do something. I have to let them know that it’s not ok, that we don’t accept it.

Il-majaneen did not share his point of view. As I was passing the cardboard “Wall” with Kiffaya and El Mariachi one afternoon, forcing us on a detour, Kiffaya made an outburst: “Idiots! Why on earth do they need to build a wall for me? I have to face the real one every time I visit my family, I don’t need this shit⁹²! If they wonder what a wall looks like, can’t they just go to Qalqilia or something⁹³?” She halted, taking off her shoe and removing a pebble that found its way into it while we were walking the hillside. “No wonder the actions against the Wall aren’t effective”, she continued with annoyance, “they’re too busy building their own!”

⁹¹ The student is referring to the increased militarization of the second Intifada compared to the first. While the first Intifada was characterized by mass participation, Intifada Al-Aqsa has been more influenced by the various Palestinian militias, connected to political parties, fighting the Israeli soldiers – and each other (Johnson and Kuttub 2001).

⁹² Unlike most of the others, she was nevertheless able to visit her family as often as she was up for it, usually once every couple of months. Kiffaya’s family lived in a small village in the north of the West Bank, a trip that took her through seemingly endless dirt roads winding around the landscape and numerous checkpoints before reaching her destination.

⁹³ Qalqilia is the western-most town in the West Bank, where the wall has been built as a huge circle enveloping the entire town, with gates controlled by Israeli soldiers, regulating the flow of people and vehicles going in and out. It is perhaps the most severely affected area from the construction of the Wall.

To il-majaneen, campaigns of this sort seemed naïve at best and contra-productive at worst. Naïve because, as Adonis commented in a later discussion; “It gives us [Palestinians] the illusion that we’re doing something. It keeps us busy so we don’t have to look at ourselves, don’t have to deal with the *real* issues, because they are too complicated, too serious, too... personal”. The very fact that international students had been targets for the campaign several months earlier was pointed out by informants as an example of how Palestinians were still looking to the international community to help them, relying on the “justice” of their case to convince the world that they had to interfere on their behalf – only to be discouraged and disappointed time and again when this did not happen. “When are we going to realize that nobody is going to rescue us?” Che asked rhetorically.

The boring conventions of resistance

As part of the “Stop the Wall”-campaign the Student Council summoned all students for a demonstration. Events like these might have persuaded il-majaneen to join in, if nothing else then for some “action” to counter the monotony of everyday life. But this time they were not interested in going. Similar demonstrations occurred on a regular basis, and il-majaneen had participated in countless of them in the past; they had done their share of stone-throwing and confrontations with Israeli soldiers. Lately they had gotten bored with it, nothing seemed to change, the outcome was already given, and so what was the point? Demonstrations had become part of conventions where the process was already laid out from the beginning, and everybody’s role in it was predefined, and so il-majaneen did not feel completely comfortable with it. They were all about “breaking the rules” - occupation or not. To get across this point, El Mariachi explained to me:

That's how I met Che, you know. We were all at a student demonstration in Surda, and we've agreed that half of us should cross over to the other side, before we begin throwing stones and shit. *Tayyeb* [okay]: When we're about half way through, some motherfucker starts throwing stones, he doesn't wait like he's supposed to, and then it's on, you know, and we're caught in the middle, soldiers on both sides, and we have to run like hell to get away. Guess who threw that first stone? *Akhu sharmuta* [cursing, but with admiration]. That's when I knew, this guy doesn't give a shit, you know, he doesn't care. He's *majnoun*⁹⁴ [crazy]. Then we became friends.

These cases attempt to reveal the typical expressions of the lack of faith in “conventional” forms of resistance maintained by my informants. Resistance as a concept and as a practice was frequently and ardently debated by il-majaneen, between themselves and with other people, Palestinians as well as foreigners. There was never a question of whether it was “right” to resist the occupation, in this they were in complete unison; the questions were more in the lines of what was the most purposeful way to resist, how was one to deal with the negative labels indigenous resistance produced in the international media, and what exactly was one supposed to overcome? The refusal to participate in or endorse campaigns as the one described above, and their need to communicate distance in the face of a demonstration, might be the result of intersecting factors: their partly voluntary, partly involuntary lack of ability to conform to social conventions, which in turn made it difficult for them to access the organized forms of resistance, and their particular world views challenging the very basis of these conventions.

A cultural arena for expressing resistance

Both Che and Adonis dreamed about challenging existing views and perpetual debates on the occupation and “the problem of Palestine” through their writings. The artistic arena seemed more becoming to the kind of resistance informants aspired to convey, plus it suited their unruly aptitudes. “Opening up” was an important component in informants’ discourse, as they

⁹⁴ *Majnoun* is *majaneen* in the singular, i.e. mad, crazy. C.f. further explanation in chapter 5.

classified Palestinian society as a “closed” society and many Palestinian people as “closed-minded” people. Yet they were quick to emphasize that what they sought was not “development” in any way that could be confused with Western notions of “backwardness” and “progress”; they wanted change “from the inside”, based on notions pertaining to their specific, indigenous situation. Showing movies with political and socio-cultural agendas from all over the world was perceived as one step to their goal of disrupting established dogmas of Western superiority as well as religious absolutism, as we shall see shortly. In much the same manner they perceived their lifestyle choices as a form of resistance: By showing people around them that they would do what they wanted regardless of established codes and without being ashamed of it, they wanted to “open a space in people’s minds” in a much-repeated phrase, letting people know that “other ways of life” were possible.

The Centre for Visual Media

The socio-political aspects of il-majaneen’s leftist identity along with their creative and intellectual abilities found an outlet in the Centre for Visual Media. Not only was it central as a focus of activities among this group of students, it also helped creating and maintaining social relations between them. The Centre was created by initiative of the students themselves, turned into reality by the aid of the head of the Department of Cultural Studies at the time, Abu Naim, and funding from the European Union. It was established around a year before my arrival, with the goal of “promoting the interest of film among students and the use of visual media as a means of education” according to an information leaflet. The head of the Department explained that the project had a social dimension to it: “You see, many of the students are very narrow-minded”, he claimed, “it’s good for them to see other places, people and situations and get a broader perspective on things than life here has to offer - especially since many of us do not have the chance to travel ourselves”. The agenda was to screen films

with political, historical or social content that should be of interest to the students either inside or outside of class, to enhance the students' knowledge and perspectives. The Centre was run on a volunteer basis.

The initial response from the students at Birzeit to the activities of the Centre was lukewarm, and il-majaneen lacked the political support to attract a big audience for their screenings. This at least was an assumption shared by volunteers and sponsors alike, and is a testimony to the force of political organisation in the social and cultural realm as well as the purely political. In relation to the current theme, this meant that many screenings were done for a handful of people. But il-majaneen were relentless in their work; it was the principle that was important, not how many people who showed up, they explained. They experimented with new ways of creating an interest. For instance, the Centre established a theme festival at the beginning of every semester, inviting lecturers to speak on a related topic. I joined il-majaneen for such a debate, held in English and translated into Arabic, on "the terms for film-making in post-colonial countries", led by a famous Iranian movie director. The lectures, and probably some of the films as well, suffered from their rather intellectualized subjects which alienated the majority of the students, but occasionally their efforts were rewarded by visitor numbers ten times their modest average of 5-10 people.

The Centre channelled il-majaneen's enthusiasm for open debates and their desire to increase interest and awareness among students regarding their own and other people's situation, politically and socially. It was a place for work as well as leisure, a place to "breathe" and use their creative abilities. It contributed to define my informants in their social landscape. Here informants had access to influences through several channels not available to most young Palestinians. The Centre provided il-majaneen with movies – fictional, educational, documentaries - of their own choosing from all over the world. It offered a range of movies they would hardly have been able to find elsewhere, or probably not even know

existed - not even in Ramallah's many bootleg DVD stores. Popular and underground movies mainly from North Africa and the rest of the Arab world, Iran, Europe and The US gave il-majaneen an inventory of a multinational and international cultural repertoire unknown to many others their age. These movies influenced the way they understood their world and their own role in it. Only a portion of these movies were even considered for screening in the University, where students were still showing little interest in film for its own purposes.

Adonis, Che and El Mariachi spent a lot of their free time in the office of the Centre for Visual Media, chaired by the Department of Cultural Studies. Here they selected movies for screening, writing and hanging posters around the campus, preparing the technical equipment and so on. Occasionally other students would come and say hello, aiding with their tasks, or watching a movie with them to see if it was worth screening. They would debate whether or not a movie was good, which ones needed to be censored and where, and which ones should not be shown at all. Sexually explicit material was systematically removed from the movies. While il-majaneen insisted that they did not wish to censor anything, they claimed that this was the only way they would be able to show many of the films they were eager to screen. Cutting away scenes with nudity or sexual acts rarely proved vital to the message they wanted to convey to the students, they reasoned. The students entertained a fruitful cooperation with Abu Naim, the head of the Department. He was a Christian liberal Palestinian and lecturer in Literature. For the most part he let the students run the Centre according to their own desires, but he also served as a structuring agent for the many ideas the students came up with, and as a brake when they went too far in their social agenda. He feared that the Centre would alienate the students that they actually wanted to reach if they went "too far". This discussion surfaced on a regular basis, and both parties had to give in from time to time.

The Islamist challenge

The Centre met regular opposition from Islamist organizations⁹⁵ represented at the University because of its social-liberal agenda. The Centre thus had a definite political flavour to it, since propagating the idea that every imaginable theme should be open for discussion and critique was not one that was shared with more conservative groups. Even supposedly liberal Fatah members were not always happy about it. “Of course,” Samra said, “there are many things that Fatah want to keep hidden. After all, they are the ones in power – you think they came to that position by their good deeds? I don’t think so.” While Fatah was increasingly associated with corruption on a wide basis, the Islamists had over the past decade built up a reputation of trustworthiness, fairness, social conscience, and a non-compromising attitude towards the occupation. In 2003, the year of my fieldwork, they beat Fatah’s student organisation as the biggest block in the Student Council elections. Under these circumstances, the Centre for Visual Media had no choice but to recon with the Islamists to a certain extent when they selected movies. Trying to balance the desire for social influence with the cost if they went “too far” was a constant dilemma for il-majaneen with regards to the Centre.

The antagonism between il-majaneen and the Islamists, generally played out by mutual avoidance, came to a head after the screening of a Palestinian movie titled “Wedding in Galilee” that autumn. The movie highlights the complexities of occupation within local family and gender structures. The movie includes scenes with a young Palestinian woman who is preparing for her wedding traditional Palestinian style in the *hammam*, the public bath. During the screening of this particular film, neither of il-majaneen was present in the room where the movie was being showed; they had put on the film and left for a cup of coffee. In the middle of the scenes from the *hammam*, a group of ten to 15 students bursted into the screening room, turned on the lights, and removed the tape. This was the story from annoyed

⁹⁵ Mainly the student branches of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

students who had been present, who found Adonis and Che in the cafeteria afterwards. This episode occurred at the end of the day, and they were unable to do anything about it at the time, but they discussed the matter with Abu Naim that afternoon, trying to decide a strategy to deal with the situation.

The next day when il-majaneen entered the campus, they were greeted by so-called manifestos distributed by the Islamists⁹⁶. The manifestos were written in the same general style that was used whenever the Islamist organizations had something to say about the current political situation. It addressed all the students at the University, describing how there were a few “outsiders” who were showing immoral, inappropriate movies at the University while the Palestinian people were suffering under the occupation; movies full of Western ideas and Western merchandise, which did not fit in “the Palestinian frame”. There were verses of the Qur’an to support their claims. It was obvious to everybody who the manifesto was directed against. Discussions went high all over the University campus, among students and faculty alike, about the significance of the event and whether or not the Islamists had done right in reacting.

Che, Adonis and the others were passionately defending their decision to show the film without censoring these scenes. They had in fact removed scenes from the wedding night, because they had realized it would mean provoking the conservative elements unnecessarily. They had held a discussion regarding the scenes in the public bath, but had reached the decision that this was so genuinely Palestinian and such a central part of the film that it should not be cut away. This was part of Palestinian tradition, they claimed, how could it be indecent? If it was, then that would mean that Palestinian tradition in itself was indecent, and that could not sound right for anyone, they argued. “It is part of our heritage, yet they want to make it into something shameful. I refuse that,” Adonis said agitatedly. “And they

⁹⁶ Leaflets were the primary means of communication during the first Intifada, when the UNLU (the United National Leadership of the Uprising) would instruct the population on their strategies, announce information etc. through such communiqués (Robinson 1997).

claim it is full of ‘Western ideas’, when what they don’t like are the Palestinian parts of it. It doesn’t make sense,” Kiffaya continued. They also pointed to what they saw as the obvious double-standards in the fact that the Islamists had come to watch the film in the first place: In order to judge the scenes as “immoral”, they had to watch them first, right? So they would admit that they had been watching these “immoral” scenes before taking action? And so the dispute went on.

The day after, il-majaneen were up for another surprise, this time to their advantage. The President of the University had written and distributed counter-leaflets, stating that he disagreed with the views of the Islamist organisations as expressed in the manifesto, urging everyone to show tolerance to conflicting views about matters such as these. The message was clear: the new technologies of visual media were here to stay and could not be rejected simply as a product of the West, and the Islamists might as well accept it, otherwise they would have to go and “burn every book in the library for its Western influence”. Historical and cultural processes of influence were complex matters that could not easily be reduced to one or the other source, the argument went.

After the President’s interference, the whole matter cooled down, and the Centre continued as before, but not without sparking discussions in lecture rooms all over Birzeit about the borders of freedom of expression and the possible practical consequences of a strong Islamist movement in the University, which many felt were at odds with the stated intentions of the University to be an arena of critical thinking and the free exchange of ideas. Several employees of the University were concerned about the “Taleban-like” elements among the students. Adonis, who had been in the most exposed position as leader of the Centre, claimed that he had not really taken the threat seriously, but interpreted it as precisely that; a threat. They wanted to show their strength, he believed, but the University administration had taken a firm stance and revealed the limits of the Islamists’ power. The

episode constituted both an important victory in a project il-majaneen believed strongly in, but also a reminder of how vulnerable they were as liberal Leftists in contemporary Palestinian society.

An anti-Orientalist view

In debates about the role of Islamists in Birzeit University as well as the society as a whole, Adonis refused to take on the view that the Islamists would force a conservative rule on the Palestinian population, as many Fatah-supporters and Leftists explicitly feared. In spite of the obvious threat to his personal security, he continued to regard the episode as a contest for power, a part of the political game, and not a process to control every aspect of society. He explained in one of his typical speeches:

They [the Islamists] are neither better nor worse than any other party. They're politicians, and do what politicians do; they seek power, how to get it and how to get more of it. It is the West who fears the Islamists. The West and the bourgeoisie. We should not fear them. They know they have no chance to gain power if they start forcing women to wear the *hijab* [the headscarf]. People from the West have these ideas about Islam and Islamists; they believe everything is about religion. They hear the word *jihad* and some Orientalist⁹⁷ 'expert' tells them that this is a Muslim concept which means holy war. So they explain what is going on in our society now by 'reading' the Qur'an. The truth is that we use the word *jihad* in many ways; it simply means war. Some people give it religious meaning, some people look to our history, but you cannot explain us by reading a religious text", he insisted. "Take for instance the electoral meeting in campus earlier this year: Hamas' representative told the people they did not force anyone who did not want to wear the *hijab*. He publicly said: 'If there is anybody here who do not wish to wear the *hijab*, she can take it off right now, and I will guarantee that this person should be able to do so without consequences. I will personally sit and talk with her family and convince them to let her go without it'. Two women took off their scarves, and he held his promise. They know they have to do this, or they will lose their position.

⁹⁷ Edward Said is a renowned Palestinian-American scholar who has written extensively on Arab and Palestinian socio-political and cultural issues. Orientalism, in the perspective of Edward Said, is a tendency within European discourse to describe and analyze the "Oriental" supposedly based on neutral, objective criteria, in politics, academic life, history, economy and so on. Said's perspective holds that these are not neutral "facts" about the "Orient", but constructions of it and of the "Oriental" which serve to sustain and disguise underlying ideologies (Said 1995).

While the controversy with the Islamists seemed more or less inevitable as a result of conflicting ideas in the arena of cultural politics, Islamists were, perhaps surprisingly, not the focus of attention as “Significant Others” in informants’ daily life. On the contrary, some admitted to feelings of a common cause as they were both positioning themselves against Fatah, who were still the main holders of political power in the Palestinian areas at the time⁹⁸. In order not to present a false image of rapprochement between Islamists and Leftists, one could say that the groups were not very preoccupied with the doings of the other, as long as neither overstepped some unspoken lines. For the Islamists such a line was crossed with the screenings of “Wedding in Galilee” – and for il-majaneen with their interruption of the screening and the attempts of interfering with or setting the standards for their work in the Centre for Visual Media.

Unity and differentiation in resistance ideology

I have tried to describe some characteristics of political organization at the University and its implications for the formation of social groups, perceptions of identity, and consequentially of how resistance is understood and enacted. Resistance is understood in different terms, and forms of resistance are debated, contested, professed and undermined. These differences correspond in large part to the way group identity is created and maintained. In the light of the above cases, some suggestions can be made about the configurations of subcultural identity in relation to the hegemonic discourse of resistance.

The national emphasis on “struggle” has turned resistance into a hegemonic discourse, expressed through a set of practices and symbols; demonstrations, parades, political rhetoric, and so on. These practices simultaneously contribute to establish and confirm divisions within Palestinian society, as each party mobilizes its own adherents to their specific displays of

⁹⁸ This tendency was noted by Robinson

resistance, permeated by a particular symbolism that communicate fractional differentiation. By distancing themselves to these hegemonic forms of resistance, either discursively through jokes, irony and ridicule, or physically by refusing to participate, il-majaneen are asserting their subcultural identity, their “uniqueness” in relation to their social surroundings.

According to informants’ understandings it is a matter of choice, but the particular configuration of political organization among different fractions suggests that the problem might be partly structural, leaving non-members peripheral to these events because of feelings of “not belonging”.

Palestinian resistance ideology reflects a view of resistance as essentially moral: It is through moral superiority that the battle against Israel shall be won, by the exhibiting of greater virtues of courage, stamina, and will to sacrifice by the Palestinian people. In opposition to this, the concept of “collaborator” and “corruption” and what these concepts signify is deeply connected with immorality. By employing this rhetoric in various situations, one group tries to impose its definitions of resistance and national commitment on the other.

While many of the notions of the resistance ideology are shared by the population, and communicate a message of unity externally (as the song is meant as an indication of), the same concepts are used to create internal borders between groups of people. These groups engage in a symbolic struggle, in Bourdieu’s terms⁹⁹, about the *content* of these concepts; about who supposedly embodies the “true” meanings of resistance. The notions of Intifada ideology, acclaimed in the song, are used by il-majaneen to justify their images of the bourgeoisie and the political leadership, who are labelled as “corrupt” and as “collaborators”. Interestingly enough, the Islamists make use of a similar rhetoric when applying these labels to il-majaneen: They are seen as “infiltrators”, as vehicles for Western influence, aiding the “forces of imperialism” on account of their “anti-nationalist” inclinations. This rhetoric

⁹⁹ C.f. definitions in chapter 2.

reiterates informants' categorization of *their* antagonists. Defining the meaning of these concepts, and their appliance in a particular situation, is what the symbolic struggle seems to revolve around¹⁰⁰.

¹⁰⁰ Illustrating this point in a literal manner is a case mentioned by Robinson taken from the end of the first Intifada, where a man was found to be a collaborator by Hamas and then killed. Fatah disputed the claim along with the PFLP¹⁰⁰ and the PPP¹⁰⁰, and Fatah subsequently honoured him as a martyr (Robinson 1997:124). This was not a singular incident, Robinson claims. The struggle over the power of definition – “collaborator” or “hero”? – could become a battle of life and death under the urgency of occupation and revolt.

Conclusions

I have described some defining features of informants' subcultural identity and the way this identity was created, maintained and expressed in relation to others – to fellow students, to family, to political opponents, to the bourgeoisie, to Israeli soldiers, and to other representatives of authority. My goal has been to show some of the complex, ambiguous, and intertwined dynamics of power and resistance in a particular setting. The Israeli occupation constituted an important dominant structure in these young Palestinians' lives, and one which they actively sought to resist. But as I have attempted to demonstrate, other power structures were equally compelling in informants' daily lives, generating different forms of resistance.

The main purpose of focusing on il-majaneen's lifestyle choices has been to highlight internal processes of domination, and the specific challenges and patterns of resistance these might produce under given circumstances. Concurrently I wished to convey that the encounter with the forces of domination entails experiences that are not all negative, as power is not a static but an aspect of interaction which different actors can contend for. In my opinion, this point has ramifications for discussions of resistance. Ortner (1995) warns about the Western tendency to separate "altruism" from "self-interest" when observing resistance; I would like to argue that we should be equally cautious about denying the definition of "resistance" to acts that involve some form of pleasure – like that of sexual activity or consumption of intoxicants. In so doing we run the risk of elevating resistance to a point that has little bearing on people's actual lives in specific contexts, where pleasure plays a significant role in processes of oppression and its responses – to "oppressor" and "suppressed" alike.

An overriding argument in this thesis has been that resistance itself can work as a homogenizing force, compelling people to act in compliance with social norms, in accordance with collective morality and popular culture. There is a strong force in the "weapons of the

weak”¹⁰¹ that cannot be denied simply by looking at their negative practical results; the continuing existence of domination and suppression. Resistance can be a source of pride, of unity, of identity and meaning to people who live under oppression. In the prolongation of this, resistance can, in a particular setting, give rise to a particular form of power.

I have claimed that as a hegemonic cultural model, resistance can become a source of symbolic capital that actors may use in order to negotiate resources and positions within Palestinian society. Political actors are acutely aware of this – but as my material emphasize, other actors (like my informants) can use this symbolic reservoir to whatever ends – politically, economically, and socially. Informants’ aptitudes for invoking “struggle” as the relevant framework of a range of situations show their ability to define the parameters of interactions. But as some cases reveal, *il-majaneen* were not always successful at this – because the successful transformation of symbolic capital into resources required some kind of compliance from those they attempted to “manipulate”. This compliance is derived from the comprehensive appeal of “struggle” in Palestinian society as a whole.

The construction of Palestinian national identity is rooted in the values surrounding the concept of “struggle”. This notion has the power of creating “heroes” out of “victims” through a symbolic transformation, based on a deeply moral discourse. On the level of nationalist rhetoric it is by moral excellence that the Palestinian people shall conquer its enemies and return to the lost homeland. But on the level of subcultural identity a similar rhetoric is employed by various actors to delineate their respective “Others” *within* Palestinian society. In other words: Behind the seemingly uniform notion of “struggle” there appears to be an ongoing symbolic battle between actors in Palestinian society to define the *meanings* of the concept according to their own interests - implying that national struggle is not the

¹⁰¹ The term is borrowed from Scott (1985).

unequivocal, unifying symbol it purports to be. The “true” meanings of resistance, and its “real” proponents, are constantly (and at times violently) debated.

This brings me to my concluding argument: The political organisation of resistance serves to constitute a sense of unity between participants in specific resistance events – but these events simultaneously establish a distance to those who do not participate, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Ironically, if we accept that resistance can be hegemonic, it should follow that resistance can yield forms of resistance against it. This “resistance against resistance” can, for instance, manifest itself as non-participation or mockery. Informants claimed that conventional forms of resistance had lost its appeal to them – partly because it was precisely that; conventional, and therefore went against their image of “who they were”. But also because it “had no effect”; it “led to nothing”; it simply maintained the status quo. It can be argued that what informants unwittingly direct attention to is an aspect of Palestinian resistance that is easily overlooked: That of resistance as a ritual re-enactment establishing and confirming divisions within Palestinian society - and between Palestinians and their Israeli occupiers.

A Final Reflection

I entered the lives of my informants at a time when their University days were about to end. Still the relative carefreeness of student life dominated their outlooks, but the demands of economic concerns, job opportunities, responsibility for younger siblings, and desires to pursue higher degrees abroad were about to centrifuge them away from the intense experience of *communitas* among each other, into the society of rights and obligations characterising adult life. From the time I met them in the summer of 2003 until I left in the spring of 2004, the characteristics of *il-majaneen* that has been described throughout these pages increasingly went from relentless practice to nostalgic stories. Even though these features have lost correlation to their daily lives, these stories and memories have retained a powerful hold over the imagination of *il-majaneen*. Whether their cherished ethos and world view during this period will continue to significantly inform their lives in the future remains an open question. Either way I am deeply grateful to them for being allowed to get a glimpse of this unique *communitas* while at its peak.

Khalasat il-gussa tawiile...

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