GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE

INSTITUT DE HAUTES ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT

GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

# Imperfect Struggles

## Jewish-Israeli Activists for Palestinian Rights and the Paradoxes of Solidarity from a Position of Power

**THESIS**

submitted at the Graduate Institute
of International and Development Studies
in fulfilment of the requirements of the
PhD degree in International Relations/Political Science

by

**Alice BARONI**

Thesis N° 1456

**Geneva**
**2023**

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Sur le préavis de Keith KRAUSE, professeur à l'Institut et co-directeur de thèse, de Jonathan AUSTIN, professeur assistant et co-directeur de thèse, de Michelle WEITZEL, professeure assistante à l'Institut et membre interne du jury, et de Katie NATANEL, Senior Lecturer, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, UK et experte externe, la directrice de l'Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement autorise l'impression de la présente thèse sans exprimer par là d'opinion sur son contenu.

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Genève, le 27 février 2023

Marie-Laure Salles
Directrice

Thèse N° 1456

# RESUME | ABSTRACT

*Titre de la thèse | Title of thesis* : Imperfect Struggles: Jewish-Israeli activists for Palestinian Rights and the Paradoxes of Solidarity from a Position of Power

*Résumé en français*: Cette thèse explore les dilemmes et les paradoxes impliqués dans la réalisation d'une critique politique qui se veut structurelle mais qui est toujours, dans une certaine mesure, ancrée dans les discours, les institutions et les pratiques qu'elle se propose de remettre en question. Pour ce faire, la thèse examine les « zones grises » – identitaires, stratégiques et intersubjectives – que les militants naviguent dans leurs expériences contextuelles, à l'intérieur de la lutte et dans leur quotidien. Tout en mettant en évidence les problèmes et les échecs de ces engagements politiques « compromis », la thèse interroge également les possibilités qu'accepter de mener des « luttes imparfaites » ouvre pour une pratique décoloniale et contre-hégémonique. Au niveau conceptuel, la thèse combine les théories Gramsciennes de l'hégémonie avec des épistémologies féministes et décoloniales. Au niveau méthodologique, la thèse s'appuie sur un vaste travail de terrain au sein de réseaux militants Judéo-Israéliens en Israël-Palestine et adopte une approche ethnographique qui reconnaît et intègre l'implication du chercheur.

*English Summary*: The thesis explores the dilemmas and paradoxes involved in carrying out a political critique that attempts to be structural and yet is always, to some extent, embedded within the discourses, institutions, and practices that it sets out to challenge. It does so by looking into the 'grey zones' – identitary, strategic, and intersubjective – that activists navigate in their lived contextual experiences, in the struggle and in their everyday life. While highlighting the problems and failures of these 'compromised' political engagements, the thesis also interrogates the possibilities that accepting to be carrying out 'imperfect struggles' opens for a decolonial and counter-hegemonic praxis. At the conceptual level, the thesis combines Gramscian theories of hegemony with feminist and decolonial epistemologies. At the methodological level, the thesis relies on extensive fieldwork within Jewish-Israeli activist networks in Israel-Palestine and adopts an ethnographic approach that acknowledges and integrates the involvement of the researcher.

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## Note on Terms

Given that, in the context of Israel-Palestine, practices of naming have clear political meanings and effects, a note is due on the choice of terms I make when referring to people and places throughout this dissertation. As a general rule, I have chosen to keep to the terms in more common use among my interlocutors. Given the focus of this dissertation on (Jewish-)Israeli people, discourses, and practices in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, these terms prioritize the Hebrew over the Arabic and echo constructs specific to (Jewish-)Israeli political discourse. As such, far from being neutral or objective, this terminology reflects, and inevitably reproduces, the current state of colonial power relations in the region. The choice not to use a decolonizing language was motivated not only by the need to mirror the realities I experienced in my ethnographic account, but also by the willingness not to superpose an idealized imagination to the current reality. With this choice, I rather aim to expose and denounce this reality, even if this comes at the cost of reproducing it in language.

With this in mind, when I refer to those who belong to the Jewish majority in Israel, I use interchangeably the terms 'Jewish-Israeli' and 'Israeli.' While the former is more accurate, because it accounts for the fact that Israeli citizenship comprises several nationalities besides the Jewish one (among which a large Palestinian minority), the latter is in current use both by Jewish-Israelis themselves and internationally. This reflects the fact that only the Jewish subset of Israeli society is considered the legitimate constituency of the State of Israel, and the Jewish nation the only one that is represented by the State's collective identity, memory, and culture. I this sense, when I talk about 'Israeli' society, identity, memory, and so forth, it is to the Jewish subset of Israeli citizenry that I am referring to.

I use the term 'Palestinian' to designate all those identifying with the Palestinian nation, regardless of their status as citizens of Israel, residents of Jerusalem, inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza, or refugees in the diaspora and citizens of other States. This accounts for the fact that, despite different juridical statuses (and indeed very different degrees and forms of discrimination), they are subjected in Israel to the same framework of denial of recognition and national rights. It is to be noted that, while in mainstream Israeli discourse Palestinian citizens of Israel are generally referred to as 'Israeli Arabs,' this terminology did not appear in the vocabulary of most of my Jewish-Israeli interlocutors who, like Palestinians, rejected it as a construct aimed at erasing Palestinian history and denying related claims to sovereignty. Of course, in the few occasions in which it was used, I report it in quotes.

When talking about Jewish-Israelis, I often distinguish between 'Ashkenazi,' 'Sephardi' and 'Mizrahi' Jews, referring respectively to Jews of Western European origins, of North African origins and of Middle Eastern origins. These labels, just as 'Israeli' and 'Palestinian,' homogenise internally diverse experiences. Once again, this is done to capture the racial structure and segregated nature of social relations in Israel-Palestine, keeping in mind that it conveys a simplified image of otherwise complex social identities.

I use the term 'Israel' when referring to the political and legal authority of the Israeli government, but I use 'Israel-Palestine' to designate the territorial entity over which this authority extends its control. This entity currently comprises the internationally recognized territory of the State of Israel

(within the borders established by the 1949 Armistice Agreements, commonly known as the Green Line), as well as the territories unilaterally annexed by Israel after the war of 1967 (the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem), and the territories that have been under Israeli occupation since that date (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, referred in international political discourse as 'Occupied Palestinian Territories,' and less often as 'Palestine,' in account of the fact that these territories correspond to the prospective State of Palestine, which was recognised *de jure* in 2012 when it was admitted as a non-member observer state at the United Nations). The choice of Israel-Palestine, which challenges the abstract identification of two separate political and geographical entities ('Israel' and 'Palestine') on each side of the Green Line, reflects the actual extension of Israeli sovereignty and the intertwinement of practices of domination and resistance in this space, and responds as such to the need of analysing it as one single political-geographic unit.[1] I still refer to 'Israel' (or 'Israel proper'), 'the West Bank', 'Gaza', and 'East Jerusalem' when considering each of these territories specifically, and the different ways in which Israeli rule – and activist practices of opposition to it – are exercised in each of them. It is worth noting that, in Israeli mainstream discourse, the West Bank is often referred to as 'Judea and Samaria,' a terminology drawn from the Bible and aimed at legitimising Israeli claims to sovereignty over the region based on the ancestral presence of Jewish/Judaic populations. This term was, however, never used by my interlocutors.

To refer to places and cities in Israel-Palestine, I use the English terms whenever available, having in mind that they generally prioritise the Hebrew etymology over the Arabic one (e.g., 'Jerusalem' instead of the Hebrew 'Yerushalayim' or the Arabic 'Al-Quds;' 'Hebron' instead of the Hebrew 'Hevron' or the Arabic 'al-Khalil'). When an English term is not available, I use the term most commonly used by my interlocutors. This is usually the Hebrew name for cities that were built over Palestinian settlements (e.g., 'Be'er Sheva' instead of 'Bir a-Saba'), and the Arabic name for cities and villages in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. Once again, this terminology reflects the colonial geography of Israel-Palestine. Exception is made whenever quoting specific defiant practices of naming, which are reported in quotes (e.g., when Jewish-Israeli activists use the Arabic names of cities with the explicit intention of underscoring their Palestinian history; when referring to the village of Neve Shalom/Wahat-al-Salam, which is always named in its double translation to stress its bi-national character, rather than with the English name of 'Oasis of Peace').

For ease of reading for a wider audience, whenever writing Hebrew and Arabic names I choose the anglicised version over the correct transliteration (e.g., 'Ramallah' instead of 'Ram'Allah').

Finally, all the research participants mentioned in this dissertation have been anonymized to protect their privacy and safety. Exception is made only when I refer to interventions made in public forums, such as public talks, newspaper articles, and publications.

[1] Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 8; see also Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir, *The One-State Condition: Occupation and Democracy in Israel/Palestine* (Stanford University Press, 2012).

# Map of Israel-Palestine

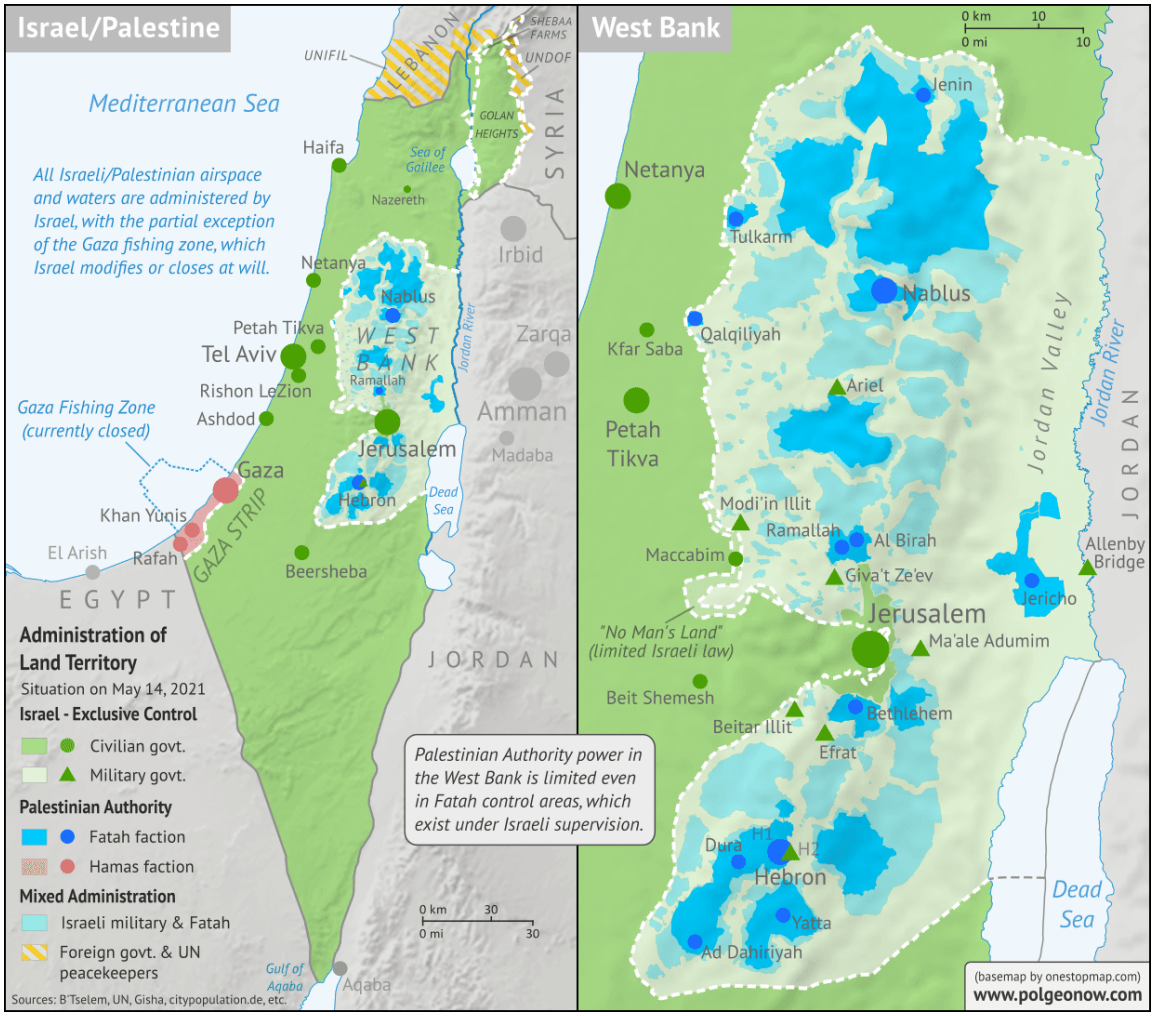



*Figure 1. Map of Israel-Palestine and of the West Bank (source: B'Tselem, 2021).*

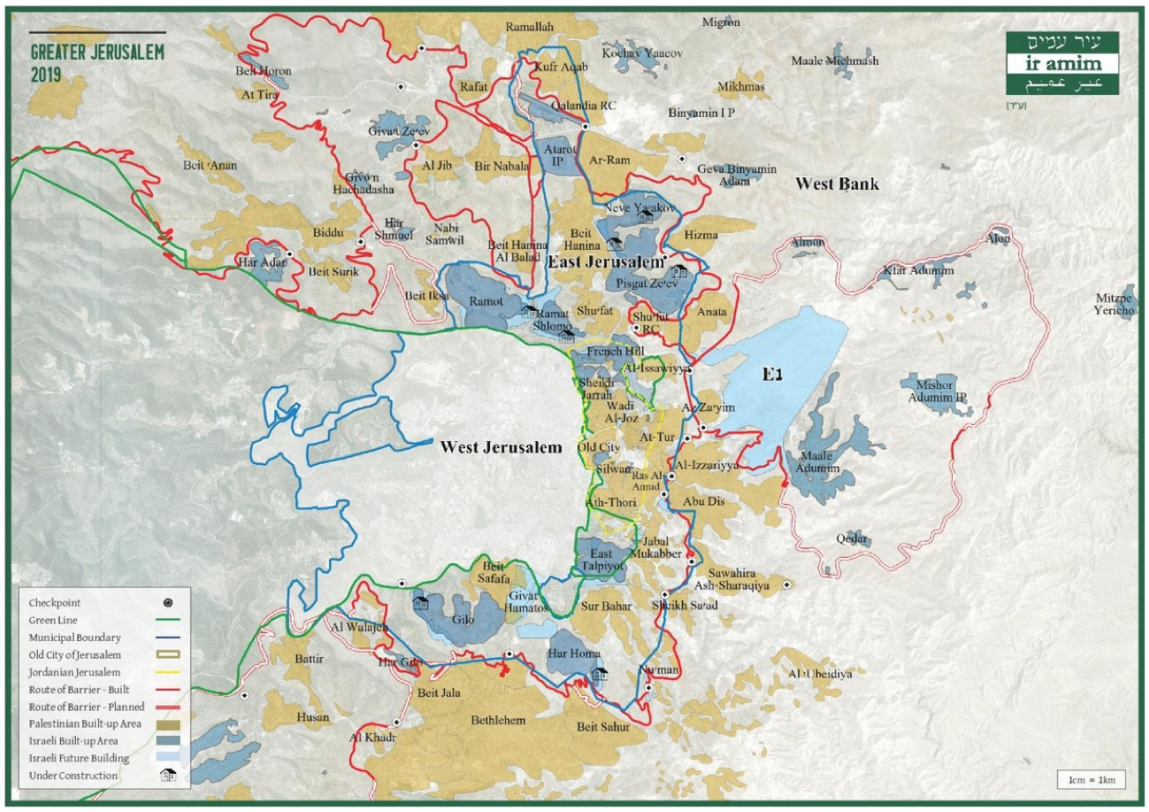



*Figure 2. Map of Jerusalem (source: Ir Amim, 2019).*

تقول : متى نلتقي؟
أقولُ: بعدَ عامٍ وحربٍ
وتقولُ: متى تنتهي الحرب؟
أقولُ :حينَ نلتقي

*You say: When will we meet?*
*I say: When the war is over.*
*And you say: When will the war be over?*
*I say: When we will meet.*

*Mahmoud Darwish*

# Introduction

How do we go about changing the political, social, economic systems we object to while being partially implicated in their sustenance? What to do with our revolutionary fervours once we realize that we are not so 'pure' after all – and that we might never be? Is it possible to mobilize institutional tools, epistemological perspectives, embodied privileges that issue from a relative proximity to centres of power towards the achievement of structural change, or are these attempts destined to reproduce the power asymmetries they inevitably rely on? What does it mean to take seriously our embeddedness in power as we wage struggles against it? And what would this entail for our political endeavours, in the struggle as much as in our daily conducts?

If not universal, these questions concern all those who wish to erode hierarchies of power and yet stand – uncomfortably, though not always consciously – in a privileged position within at least some of them. White anti-racists and cisgender male feminists (race and gender 'traitors'), but also socialists in a capitalist economy, critical scholars in neoliberal academia – I, the author of this work and most likely you, its reader – are all cases in point.

The problem – better, the *paradox* – of whether and how it is possible to do so without reproducing some of these hierarchies has been addressed by many, thinkers and activists alike, who have attempted to 'solve' it by advocating for one or the other 'best' approach from political, ethical, or philosophical standpoints. Taking stock of their insights, but wary of the abstractness of such articulations, this dissertation explores how this paradox unfolds in practice as activists from a position of privilege develop strategies, rearticulate discourses, interact over time – among themselves and with the unprivileged Others that are the ultimate targets of their action – to redress structural injustices. My goal is to disentangle the multiform ways in which power and privilege manifest

themselves and are reproduced – in more or less intentional or predictable ways – precisely as people set out to challenge them. It is through this endeavour that instances are also found in which such reproduction is interrupted and reversed, even if only temporarily. Ultimately, this exploration sheds light empirically, and in ways that not always align with theoretical and normative assumptions, on how chances for subversion may open up even 'from within,' and contribute to the achievement of structural change.

In order to do all this, the dissertation focuses on a microcosmos where these dynamics are particularly visible due to the specificities of the context in which they occur. This microcosmos is offered, I argue, by Jewish-Israeli activists working in various ways for the advancement of Palestinian rights.

Conceptualized as settler colonialism, apartheid, ethnocracy, and more, the system of structural violence against Palestinians these activists set out to challenge is the same that endows them with a corresponding structural privilege. This hierarchy of power is not only – as in many other contexts – engraved in their racialized bodies and manifested in the uneven distribution of their economic resources. It is also enshrined in the laws and institutions of a State whose stated purpose is to further the interests of its Jewish constituency, and is justified by a powerful collective identity that, produced in the entanglement of memories, myths, and spatial imaginations, and pervasively disseminated in society through its various institutions – school, military, and national ceremonies in front – inextricably ties the survival of the Jewish-Israeli social body to the State's control over Palestinian lives.

As Jewish-Israeli activists set out to redress the injustices of this system, their privileged positionality within it plays a fundamental role at once allowing and constraining their action. Partly driving force to their engagement, where political ideals and ethical values intertwine with a sense of guilt and responsibility, their privilege also becomes an important tool in the struggle for Palestinian rights and the very added value of their specific contribution to it, also according to their Palestinian partners. As members of the dominant group, Jewish-Israeli activists can mobilize the increased rights and resources they enjoy to add leverage to Palestinian resistance; they can lobby 'from within' for a change of the Zionist regime; they can 'translate' Palestinian grievances and claims to the Israeli public, and forward the rearticulation of dominant identities towards less exclusionary frameworks. Yet, at the same time, their embeddedness in the Jewish-Israeli social body, whether actively mobilized or left latent, constrains their ability to propose and concretize a structural critique. Even if aimed at their rearticulation in a more just framework, reliance on some of the building blocks of Israeli hegemony – be them State laws and infrastructures, Jewish histories, democratic aspirations, embodied privileges and vulnerabilities and so on – risks ultimately legitimizing the unequal system to which they presently belong. And even when hegemonic tools and constructs are not mobilized,

the embodied experiences that shape Jewish-Israeli subjectivity inevitably influence activists' perspectives (of Self and Other, of the situation and its possible solutions) in ways that may entail the objectification of Palestinians and the mistranslation or dilution of their demands, thus inadvertently contributing to their marginalization as political subjects.

What makes their case all the more insightful for the analysis is that Jewish-Israeli activists are far from oblivious to many of these dilemmas – and increasingly so in a political scenario, that of the past twenty years, in which the hierarchies established by the Israeli State have solidified at both the level of identitary constructs and policy implementations. Albeit with varying degrees of consciousness and political elaboration, activists take account of these dilemmas in their critical endeavours and tackle them in different ways that involve a more or less coherent combination of identitary articulations, political strategies, and relational engagements with their multiple Others.

Taking the ambivalence of their position in the struggle for Palestinian rights as a starting point, this dissertation explores how Jewish-Israeli activists deal with this ambivalence politically, strategically, and ethically, in the contingencies of their lives and political action. A set of sub-questions guides the analysis: How do activists make sense of the situation (the structural violence that privileges them and oppresses Palestinians), and of their place in it? How do they understand the demands of Palestinians, how do they translate and advance them – and to what extent, in doing so, do they activate their connections to Israeli hegemony? How do they, through reflection and relational praxis, re-articulate their identity and their role vis-à-vis both Palestinians and other Jewish-Israelis (who tend to see them, respectively, as oppressors and as traitors)? And lastly, how do these processes affect change in the status quo – can they contribute to a decolonization of the Israeli State and its society, or do they ultimately reinforce its racialized hierarchical underpinnings?

The picture that emerges may seem bleak, or inconclusive at best, to the reader who is seeking a straightforward answer to the last, most important, question. Jewish-Israeli activists always do, to some extent, reiterate the asymmetries of power they rely on as they seek to advance Palestinian rights, regardless of their stance towards hegemonic discourses and tools. As activists attempt to rearticulate their identity and their role vis-à-vis Palestinians, as they try to readjust their power-imbued epistemologies and negotiate their multiple privileges in each circumstance, they are always moving in a 'grey zone' between challenging power and being complicit with it. Whether they choose to settle on moderate or radical views of change, their position is one of irremediable discomfort, the struggles they wage necessarily 'imperfect'.

And yet, as this thesis will show, it is precisely the inescapable impurity of this condition that opens for Jewish-Israeli activists the possibility for a truly counterhegemonic engagement. As activists are forced to acknowledge their entanglements with oppressive structures, they learn to make do with their problematic positionality, to deal with the constant tensions and contradictions it entails

strategically, politically, and ethically, and to live with the discomfort that comes with it. As the cases in this dissertation illustrate in detail, inhabiting these grey zones favours a 'messy' engagement that prioritizes compromises over purity, practice over political ideals, that is rooted 'on the ground' and in encounters with multiple others – Palestinians, but not only – where power and violence work in unexpected ways and so does their subversion. It is here that, in some cases, activists acquire a much subtler understanding of the multifaceted workings of their privilege and of how to interrupt them, however temporarily.

The implications of this argument matter far beyond the case at hand. The Israeli context encapsulates compenetrating issues that are present in other contexts and at the global level: residues of colonial structures in racialized identities and myths, the re-emergence of ethno-nationalism and authoritarianism, the ever-present exercise of white privilege and of permanent states of exception towards non-white Others. As such, the 'imperfect struggles' carried out by Israeli activists within and against these structures of power can shed some light on their workings in contexts where they are more elusive. The appreciation of how resilient power and privilege are to their challengers in the case at hand should serve as an invitation to caution and self-scrutiny towards our multiple engagements with power, and to be aware of the grey zones in which we constantly move, even when we think we are operating 'outside' hegemony. At the same time, the ways in which activists experiment navigating these grey zones – muddling through their embeddedness in power, sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing to challenge it – can serve as an example to others, elsewhere, struggling with similar contradictions. While they offer no recipe for safe and successful challenges of unjust systems, these ways can inspire not only better practices of activism and solidarity from a position of privilege, but a multiplicity of personal engagements towards the deconstruction of our own power-laden subjectivities and understandings.

The remainder of this introduction situates this research within its relevant literature and lays out its conceptual and methodological framework. The first section reviews the literature that has addressed the paradox of the entanglement in power within struggles for more equality. Bringing together two distinct debates, which I frame as around 'resistance from within' and 'solidarity from a position of privilege,' the approaches under review span across theories of hegemony and counterhegemony, social movement studies, research on activism and solidarity, and feminist and postcolonial approaches.

The second section presents the case of Jewish-Israeli activism for Palestinian rights, by highlighting both its specificity and its relevance for broader political issues that intersect in the context of Israel-Palestine.

The third section details the conceptual framework this thesis mobilizes. After having reviewed how the case of Jewish-Israeli activism has been addressed in the literature, the section makes the case

for a different type of analysis: one that takes the paradoxical nature of their engagement as a starting point and, instead of trying to solve it, works within its inherently dualistic nature and attempts to explore it in its unfolding. At its core is a relational understanding of power and resistance that re-centres the role of individual subjectivities, and activist ones in particular, as they embody and weave together micro-, meso- and macro-level re-articulations. To build this understanding I combine Gramscian accounts of hegemony with feminist and decolonial foci on subjectivity and positionality. In particular, I borrow from subsequent elaborations of 'contradictory locations' to formulate my reflections on 'insiders without', 'grey zones', and 'imperfect struggles'.

The fourth section presents the methodological framework, ethnographic at core, as a relational process which, occurring at the encounter between myself and the people who compose Jewish-Israeli activism, but also between the different aspects of my persona (professional and political, research and activism) that have inevitably shaped this encounter, has accompanied the emergence of my research questions and of their answers. Involving a combination of long semi-structured interviews, participant observation to the political actions and lives of activists, and long term stays that have attuned my perceptions to within Israel-Palestine, this immersive approach has inevitably led also to turning the questions back onto myself and interrogate my own problematic positionality as a privileged yet wanting-to-be-engaged researcher in the field. The section details also how I account for this process with auto-ethnographic interludes throughout the thesis.

The final section reiterates the core argument of the dissertation and breaks it down into the subsequent chapters, of which it provides a summary. It further anticipates its relevance and generalizability, which will be developed in the Conclusion.

### *1. The Paradox of Privilege*

The paradox inherent in waging struggles against systems of oppression or in solidarity with their victims from within the dominant group has long haunted those who have sought to theorize or materialize such struggles. From a diversity of approaches and disciplinary fields, debates on this issue coalesce around two intersecting analytical problems.

The first is the problem of whether or not to employ the tools of the system one sets out to erode, irrespective of the position one holds within it. Addressed in particular in Gramscian and Marxian studies of hegemony and social structures, but also in social movement theories, the debate focuses on the relationship between the actors who challenge a particular socio-political order and the actors who defend it, and questions whether the former's efficacy would be favoured or hindered by having a 'foot' in power: that is, by exploiting the available channels for political action and the dominant understandings and sensitivities – or, in Social Movement Studies jargon, the "political and discursive

opportunities" – offered by the system.[1] The second is the problem of acting in solidarity with the victims of an oppressive system from a position of privilege within it, and relates strictly to the asymmetric positions providers and targets of solidarity respectively occupy in the hierarchy of power, and how these positions affect their perceptions and actions. This problem has been addressed within studies of solidarity across hierarches of gender, race, class, legal status, and so on, particularly from feminist and decolonial perspectives.[2]

Core to both debates is the problem of entanglement with power, whether conceived in instrumental terms (i.e. using the system's tools: discursive, institutional, legal, and so on) or as an ontological condition (i.e. being part of the ingroup, with the consequences this entails in terms of embodied practices and interiorized norms). The paradox both debates raise ensues from this condition: the added value that entanglement in power provides to the struggle is the same that constrains the scope of its critique and channels it towards the reproduction of the status quo. While granting 'access' to instruments and understandings available at the 'centre' of the system, reliance on the system's tools also legitimizes them, and the understandings and experiences that come with being in a position of privilege come with the risk of reproposing behaviours and framings that inadvertently reinscribe that privilege.[3]

The most critical contributions to these debates lead to the inevitable conclusion that any form of entanglement in power and privilege should be rejected in the struggle because it ultimately hinders structural change. Crucial to some of these reflections was the Marxian argument that was to become the foundation of the standpoint theory of epistemology: knowledge is a product of material conditions, and only people from the oppressed groups, from their vantage point at the bottom of the social hierarchy, could understand the structure of privileges in society. By contrast, groups privileged by the social system tend to see this situation as natural. Even if they come to question

[1] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the world politically*, (New York-London: Verso Books, 2013); Gregory M. Maney, Lynne M. Woehrle, and Patrick G. Coy, "Harnessing and challenging hegemony: The US peace movement after 9/11," *Sociological Perspectives* 48, no.3 (2005): 357-381; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971); Paul Statham, "Political Opportunities for Altruism? The role of state policies in influencing British anti-racist and pro-migrant movements," in Florence Passy and Marco Giugni, ed., *Political Altruism? Solidarity Movements in International Perspective*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001): 133-158; David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Steven K. Worden, and Robert Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 464-81.

[2] Sandra Bartky, *Sympathy and Solidarity and Other Essays*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002): 163-164; Sally Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); Gary T. Marx and Michael Useem, "Majority Involvement in Minority Movements: Civil Rights, Abolition, Untouchability," *Journal of Social Issues* 27, no. 1 (1971): 81-104; Giugni and Passy, *Political Altruism?*; Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Sara Koopman ""Mona, mona, mona!" Whiteness, tropicality, and international accompaniment in Colombia," *Latin American Studies working paper series* (2012); Patrick Coy "The Privilege Problematic in International Nonviolent Accompaniment's Early Decades", *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace* 4, no. 2 (2011); Alison Bailey, "Locating traitorous identities: Toward a view of privilege-cognizant white character," *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 30-33; Linda Martin Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?," *Hypathia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 6-26.

[3] While the following discussion focuses on critical approaches, it is worth mentioning that not all accounts address the issue of entanglement in power as a problem. Many in social movement and solidarity studies take access to the political opportunities offered by the system as an asset for effecting change (see e.g. Statham in Giugni and Passy, *Political Altruism?*).

their privilege, for feelings of indignation at the suffering of others, or because they recognize their condition relies on it, they still will not be able to see with the eyes of those who actually experienced the oppression because they do not share in their material conditions.[4] In the 1970s, feminist, postcolonial, and decolonial scholarships have given new impetus to this argument by extending the class dichotomy of Marxian thought to more variegated and non-dichotomic forms of oppression, based on gender, race, socio-geographical positionings within the global political order, and so on.[5] The point remained that only from a standpoint of oppression and marginality could come a full understanding of structures of oppression, and thus genuine subversion.

From these and other perspectives, authors have focused on the implications of a privileged standpoint on (conscious) conceptions of the Self and (preconscious) intersubjective behaviours in ways that hinder the possibility of effecting structural change at the individual level even if one genuinely commits to it. Social identities people subscribe to are inherently tied to structures of power and privilege. Identifying as male, white, citizen of a given State, comes with narratives of Self and Other, collective histories and foundational myths, that rely also on experiences of prevarication and discrimination. Engaging in the struggle against sexism, racism, or colonization thus demands a questioning of these underpinnings, or even the entire redefinition of one's identity, that is difficult to come by without jeopardizing one's positive sense of Self (one's 'ontological security').[6] Even beyond the narratives one may be able to construct about oneself and one's collective, coming from a social position of privilege entails a set of embodied 'scripts' for action that tend to reinscribe and reiterate it.[7] Scholars of activism and solidarity action have emphasized how privileged allies in struggles against oppression tend to inadvertently reproduce existing power asymmetries as their relate with their unprivileged partners. This may involve the privileged assuming leadership roles by virtue of possessed skills or an interiorized sense of superiority, adopting patronizing attitudes, imposing dominant modes of behaviour and framings, stereotyping and objectifying the oppressed, thereby ultimately harnessing their demands and inhibiting their empowerment, voice, and agency.[8]

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[4] As discussed in Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, 168-170.

[5] E.g. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, (London: Routledge, 2013); Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, (Boston: D. Reidel, 1983): 283–310; Sandra Harding, *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); see Gurminder K. Bhambra, "Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues," *Postcolonial studies* 17, no. 2 (2014): 115-121; Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 449-514.

[6] E.g. Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?"; Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld, (London: Earthscan Publications, 2010); Sara Ahmed, *Strange encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality*, (London: Routledge, 2013); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, (Cambridge Polity Press, 1991).

[7] Judith Butler "Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory," *Theatre journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-531, see also Bailey on white performances specifically.

[8] Scholz, *Political solidarity,* 152; Sonia Kruks, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, ch. 6 (quoted in Scholz, *Political solidarity*, 162); Bartky *Sympathy and Solidarity*, 81 (quoted in Scholz, *Political solidarity*, 163); Passy and Giugni, *Political altruism*; "Coy, "The privilege problematic"; Marx and Useem, "Majority involvement in minority movements"; Sakhela Buhlungu, "Rebels without a Cause of Their Own? The

Decolonial intellectual Albert Memmi has painfully noted how, for a member of the colonizing collective, also simply getting on with one's life is a way of exercising and reproducing one's privilege that inherently contradicts the ideals and efforts of solidarity to the colonized one may genuinely put in place.[9]

With a focus on the means and actions of change, rather than on the individuals who carry them out, authors have argued that efforts that exploit the resources offered by the existing political order inevitably lead to a change that is only cosmetic, and leaves intact the underlying structures of power. Foundational to many of these is Gramsci's account of passive revolution, a situation where demands that challenge the hegemonic order are co-opted by the existing system in ways that end up reinforcing it by restoring its challenged legitimacy.[10] Gramscian accounts of social movements have emphasized that this is most likely to happen when challenges are carried out through the laws and institutions of the State, because these are bound in their claims and practices by the rules of the legal game, and as such can be easily met by the system with but minor reforms and partial adjustments.[11] Similarly, when challengers favourably reference elements of the dominant symbolic repertoire, even if aimed at their rearticulation, this has the effect to "fuel hegemony by increasing the potency of ideas inextricably linked in the popular psyche with existing social relations."[12] This perspective has been adopted also by feminist and decolonial scholar who cautioned challengers, oppressed and allies alike, against relying on the 'tools' of the system because "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."[13] Although from an entirely different conceptual apparatus, Bourdieu came to the same conclusion: social movements acting within the 'field' inevitably reproduce, through their habitus, the structures of domination that underpin it. The critique they can provide can only be in the form of a 'heterodoxy' that still abides by, and therefore reproduces, the 'doxa', the rules of the games within the field and the boundaries it sets for what is acceptable to say and think.[14]

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Contradictory Location of White Officials in Black Unions in South Africa, 1973–94," *Current Sociology* 54, no. 3 (2006): 427-451; Kwame Ture (previously Stokely Carmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black power: The politics of liberation in America*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992). See also Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Penguin Books, 2021), and Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

[9] Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.

[10] Mouffe, *Agonistics*.

[11] Elian Weizman, "Hegemony, law, resistance: struggles against Zionism in the State of Israel," (PhD diss., SOAS, 2013): 67. See also Stuart Scheingold, "The Struggle to Politicize Legal Practice: A Case Study of Left-Activist Lawyering in Seattle," in *Cause Lawyering: Political Commitments and Professional Responsibilities*, ed. Austin Sarat and Stuart Scheingold, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[12] Maney et al., "Harnessing and challenging hegemony", 362: Agnes S. Ku, "Hegemonic Construction, Negotiation and Displacement: The Struggle over Right of Abode in Hong Kong," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4 (2001): 259–78; Charlotte Ryan, *Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organizing*, (Boston: South End Press, 1991);

[13] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in Audre Lorde, Mahogany L. Browne, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, (Berkeley: Crossing Press (2007/1984): 112.

[14] John Girling *Social Movements and Symbolic Power: Radicalism, Reform and the Trial of Democracy in France*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), quoted in David Landy, *Jewish identity and Palestinian rights: Diaspora Jewish opposition to Israel*, (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2012). 33.

The rejection of any links to power these positions entail poses limitations that did not elude their proponents but left them somewhat trapped in structural determinism. Renouncing 'the Master's tools' prevents challengers to draw from the available resources – be them legal, economic, material, discursive – and to channel their demands within the system. Marx and Gramsci themselves, and others in their wake, recognized the exigency of involving non-oppressed, usually intellectuals, but were left with the conundrum of how to articulate their consciousness. Gramsci's historical analyses also pointed to the need to build alliances with different sectors of society and to draw on the tropes of the dominant discourse ('common sense') if the old hegemony was to be replaced with a new and more just one.[15] More recently, critical authors have noted how reliance on some of the resources of the system – and on the people who have an easier access to them – may be necessary in situations where systemic inequalities are so sharp that the oppressed do not have the voice and access necessary for raising their claims.[16]

Also the very idea of excluding the privileged from struggles against oppression poses substantial problems. Indeed, one of the main objections to the "epistemology of provenance" of standpoint theory has been that, while stemming from the need to ensure more voice to the oppressed, it ends up excluding from legitimate criticism and solidarity all those who, whether oppressed in different ways or not at all, do not partake in the very same lived experience of oppression.[17] This may end up overburdening specific categories of oppressed with the task of not only deconstructing dominant norms, but educating their privileged counterparts in the process, while at the same time relieving the latter from acknowledging and acting upon the injustices there are ultimately responsible for.[18] Several radical intellectuals among the oppressed have stressed this point and emphasized both the ethical requirement and the strategic importance of the contribution of the privileged as allies in the struggle for more equality. Black activists in the Civil Rights Movement, for instance, have stressed how solidary white activists (though generally 'poor' ones), thanks to their insider position in the dominant group could add substantial leverage to their resistance, while advancing a parallel struggle for the demystification of naturalized understandings among their specific audiences.[19] Authors have noted how their insights into how power works and is sustained may add diversity to perspectives on oppression, and thus allow for richer social criticism.[20] Ultimately, achieving a new and more just

[15] Marx and Useem, "Majority involvement in minority movements", referenced in Scholz, *Political solidarity*, 171; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 238-239, 299. See also Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London, Boston, Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979): 168-203.
[16] Scholz, *Political solidarity*, 163; see also Sonia Kruks *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001): 173 (quoted in Scholz, *Political solidarity*, 162). See also Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, on the need for the colonized to use the language of the colonizers, at least at the beginning.
[17] Kruks *Retrieving Experience* (quoted in Scholz, *Political solidarity*, 171)
[18] Ture and Hamilton, *Black power*; Nancy Fraser, "Toward a Discourse of Ethic Theory," *Praxis International* 5, no. 4 (1985): 429; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
[19] Ture and Hamilton, *Black power*, 408
[20] Scholz, *Political solidarity*, 160-161.

society requires transforming the consciousness of society at large, including those who, with various degrees of participation, sustain oppressive thoughts, practices, and social structures. In this perspective, engaging productively with other and even oppositional groups is a necessary step in the process of the struggle, and solidary actors from these groups represent an obvious site where this engagement can be most productively initiated.[21]

Now, all these considerations require to articulate, delimit, and regulate the contribution of privileged actors in the struggle, and the mobilization of privilege itself, such that these may avoid the reproduction of the existing structures of power and privilege. In this attempt, a set of correctives have been proposed to the critical theories above. Studies of hegemony and counter-hegemony have recuperated Gramsci's original emphasis on the need of making alliances and reference dominant discourses in society to elaborate various ways in which engagements with elements of hegemony can withhold a subversive potential. Laclau and Mouffe's famous work on ideology and hegemony has advanced the argument that engaging in a process of disarticulation of the elements of the dominant discourse and their rearticulation within a radically alternative and power-defying web of meaning can achieve the goal of propagating a counter-hegemonic discourse that also resonates with the interests and sensitivities of the rest of society.[22] Various scholars of social movements from Marxist and Gramscian perspectives have argued for their need to capitalize on the networks and infrastructures made available by the integrated capitalist system on the global level while reversing their sign and objectives.[23] Others have advocated for a combination of strategies 'within' and 'without' hegemonic tools – for example using both discourses that "harness" and "challenge" hegemony, or both legal and institutional means and civil disobedience ones.[24] The general argument is that this allows challengers to effectively engage the boundaries of critique considered legitimate in the current status quo but also to push them further, thus maximizing opportunities for achieving change while averting the risk of co-optation. All of these forms of engagement with dominant tools, however, do not grant that the combination of counter hegemonic and hegemonic elements work in the direction of the former. In fact, the contrary can also happen: that instead of pushing towards the radicalization of moderate stances, the combination achieves the co-optation of the radical ones. Ultimately, how these combinations work depend on the contingencies of the specific context – the specific strategies used, how they resonate with their relative audiences, how deep is the grasp of hegemonic articulations and whether alternative discourses are available or not.

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[21] *Idem*, 162-163; see also Fraser, "Toward a Discourse of Ethic Theory", 13, and Jean Harvey, *Civilized Oppression*, (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999). (in Scholz, *Political solidarity*, 163).

[22] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics. (London, New York: Verso: 2014)*. See also Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci".

[23] Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: war and democracy in the age of empire*, (New York: Penguin, 2005); see also Hagai Katz, "Gramsci, hegemony, and global civil society networks," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 17, no. 4 (2006): 332-347.

[24] Maney et al., "Harnessing and challenging hegemony"; Mouffe, *Agonistics*; Weizman, "Hegemony, law, resistance".

Intervening specifically on the issue of how to allow for privileged members of society to support struggles of the oppressed without reproducing power relations, Black Power intellectuals Carmichael and Hamilton advanced an organizational framework based on the alliance between autonomous groups.[25] In this model, which departed from the integrationist approach of the early stages of the Civil Rights movement, black activists and their white supporters would contribute separately to the struggle for self-determination. This would avoid the risk that white participants impose their voices or dilute the claims of the struggle, while at the same time urging them to organize and articulate their own specific contribution to the struggle without relying entirely on black activists for this.[26] One problem with this approach is that it may ultimately entrench segregation, although its proponents clarified since the outset that separation was to be a means rather than an end in itself, and one necessary to compensate for the present conditions of asymmetry.[27] More recent approaches to the issue of combining struggles across different sectors of society have also stressed that too much autonomy across groups risks maintaining a simplified and dichotomic view of oppressions in society that fails to articulate their connection between each other and with the system of domination as whole.[28]

The problem of how to articulate the consciousness of the privileged has been addressed across ideology, feminist, and decolonial approaches. An idea that has always been latently present in intellectual circles and activist groups is that the choice of adhering to a certain ideology, worldview, or identity – that, for instance, of the anti-imperialist – would suffice, if not to put oppressed and privileged solidary actors on an equal footing (though in some cases even so), to legitimize the critique and contribution of the latter.[29] While an ideological commitment of this kind allows the privileged to distance themselves from the discourses and norms of the dominant group, the problem remains of their entanglement within power structures through their lived experiences. Memmi has captured the incoherency of these positions as he noted how it is impossible "to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its actual relationships."[30]

Diametrically opposed is the position of those who demand that the privileged fully renounce their privilege if they want to engage in "authentic solidarity."[31] For authors such as Mills, Ignatiev and Garvey, "race traitors" effectively betray the "white polity" by not only recognizing but

[25] Jeb Aram Middlebrook, "Organizing a rainbow coalition of revolutionary solidarity," *Journal of African American Studies,* 23, no. 4 (2019)" 405-434.
[26] Ture and Hamilton, *Black power*, in Middlebrook, "Organizing a rainbow coalition", 417.
[27] In Middlebrook, "Organizing a rainbow coalition", 409, 413
[28] See e.g. Frédéric Lordon, "Pour favoriser une entente des luttes," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Mars 2021, https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2021/03/LORDON/62828.
[29] See e.g. discussions in Chapter 3 on anti-Zionism and Machover.
[30] *Idem*, 64.
[31] Scholz, *Political solidarity*, 152, 163-164.

"repudiating their whiteness."[32] While important for placing the emphasis on the need for a concrete critical engagement with one's own privilege, the premises of this position are also problematic. As Alcoff notes, "whites cannot disavow whiteness:" "being white will still operate to confer privilege in numerous and significant ways, and to avow treason does not render whites ineligible for these privileges, even if they work hard to avoid them."[33] If this awareness is lacking, attempts to reject one's privilege may be superficial at best and counterproductive at worst, leading to the inadvertent reproduction of power dynamics in multiple ways, such as by overidentifying, appropriating, or violating the experiences of the oppressed.[34] Conversely, when the awareness of the pervasiveness and embodiment of one's privilege is present, the requirement to reject it in all its forms may lead activists to overcommit, chasing an unrealistic 'purity' of engagement, and eventually to retreat in frustration and paralysis in the face of its impossibility.[35]

In between these two opposites there are all the accounts that have placed the emphasis on how the privileged may bridge the epistemological gap that distances them from the oppressed, and from there gain consciousness of the multi-layered privileges they embody, but also learn how to reject them when possible and, when not, how to use them to subvert privilege structures. The forms of reflexivity and self-scrutiny these accounts theorize thus represent the basis also of a rearticulation of the consciousness of the privileged – "a knowing that transforms the self who knows, a knowing that brings into being new sympathies, new affects as well as new cognitions and new forms of intersubjectivity"[36] – that is a crucial part for a counterhegemonic transformation of society at large.

A first way to correct for the limits of the epistemology of provenance was by relying on the insights of intersectionality theory: that oppression does not work along dichotomic axes but intersect and overlap in multiple ways, making it so that someone can be both oppressed and privileged at the same time along different social identities.[37] While born in opposition to the first and second waves of feminism to emphasize the different experiences of oppression of women of colour compared to white women, the framework of intersectionality was also used to flag that those who are privileged on the scale of oppression they set out to oppose in solidarity may also be oppressed on other scales, and can draw from these experiences to find points in common with the perspective of the oppressed and,

[32] Charles Mills 1997, 108 (quoted in Scholz, *Political solidarity*, 182); Noel Ignatiev, and John Garvey, ed., *Race Traitor: A Journal of the New Abolitionism*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), quoted in Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?," 15.
[33] Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?," 17.
[34] *Idem*, 16.
[35] Chris Bobel, "'I'm not an activist, though I've done a lot of it': doing activism, being activist and the 'perfect standard' in a contemporary movement," *Social movement studies* 6, no. 2 (2007): 147-159; Gavin Brown and Jenny Pickerill, "Space for emotion in the spaces of activism." *Emotion, space and society* 2, no. 1 (2009): 24-35; King 2005
[36] Bartky *Sympathy and Solidarity*, 71–72
[37] Brittney Cooper, "Intersectionality", in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Lisa Disch, Mary Hawkesworth, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 385–406. The coining of the term intersectionality is attributed to Crenshaw, Kimberlé Kimberle, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): 139-167.

more generally, draw connections across different forms of oppressions.[38] Now, as their proponents have abundantly stressed, these views should be wary of the risks of lumping all oppressions together, in ways that may simplify and misread specific experiences or overidentify and appropriate the experiences of the oppressed.[39] Even if used carefully, drawing on other experiences of oppression remains something that excludes from claims to criticism and solidarity those who are privileged on many if not all fronts – cisgender white males for instance or, in the case at hand, Ashkenazi Jewish-Israeli males.

Other feminist authors have insisted on how variously privileged actors may draw an epistemological advantage from the encounter with various oppressed and the engagement to learn from their perspective.[40] Authors within care ethics have added the affective dimension of encounters next to the cognitive one, noting that continued interactions and relationships may engender a predisposition to care for the other and also to reflect on their own condition and the appropriateness of their responses.[41] As a common criticism to care ethics goes, however, dispositions to care alone are not enough (are "insufficiently political") to grant that solidarity efforts do not reproduce asymmetries of power through the relationship, for instance through paternalistic, objectifying and romanticizing attitudes.[42] Also the literature on and from activist contexts specifically has given increasing attention to the importance of creating forms of encounter that can trigger a critical reflexive effort, be them with the targets of solidarity action, with other activists in "safe spaces" of self-scrutiny, or with disengaged or oppositional publics who may bring to activists' attention interests, views, and dynamics of power that had been overlooked.[43]

Importantly, feminist and decolonial scholarships have also emphasized how the reflexive effort of the privileged to form critical epistemologies and transform their consciousness in ways that engender non-dominating forms of solidarity and struggle is a continuous process and a never fully achieved engagement. The privileged can never bridge the *experiential* – as opposed to the *epistemological* – gap that separates them from the oppressed, they can never change their position.[44] Similarly to the "outsiders within", the unprivileged who travel from the periphery to the centre of social power structures, also the "traitors" who come to criticize and take responsibility for their structural privileges need to develop a form of "double consciousness" that requires an ever-present

[38] See e.g. Hartsock 1998, 240–41, cited in Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 113; Haraway "Staying with the Trouble.", 191, cited in Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 113.
[39] *Ibidem.*
[40] See most notably Sandra Harding, *Whose science?*, 269, 286.
[41] Rita Manning, *Speaking from the Heart,* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992), 61-63; Sonia Kruks, *Retrieving Experience,* 151-154.
[42] Kruks, *Retrieving Experience,* (in Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, 176).
[43] Brown and Pickerill, "Space for emotion in the spaces of activism,"; Ann Deslandes and Debra King, "Autonomous activism and the global justice movement: Aesthetic reflexivity in practice," *Journal of sociology* 42, no. 3 (2006) 310-327; Debra King, "Sustaining activism through emotional reflexivity," in *Emotions and social movements*, ed. Helena Flam and Debra King, (London: Routledge, 2005): 150-169.
[44] Alison Bailey, "Locating traitorous identities", 30-33.

acknowledgment of the persistent structures of inequality and exploitation and of their historical and ever-operating underpinnings.[45] Alcoff argues that drawing on different, non-dominating, historical experiences of one's social collective may help in rooting the emerging critical sensitivities in alternative yet still deep and ontologically stabilizing identitary frameworks.[46] However, the chances that this effort may be successful or even possible in the first place depends on the specific social identities of Self and Other involved, their historical experiences and the strength with which dominant articulations of identities resonate with the publics at large and with activists themselves.

Bailey, instead, proposes to root and cultivate one's critical sensitivities within a praxis of engagement, a continued practical commitment through which activists sharpen their understandings of how the constant re-inscription of privilege works and develop alternative "scripts" that variously disrupt this re-enactment.[47] This performative engagement may be best pursued, she further argues, if traitors refuse to restrict their movements to worlds in which they are (ontologically) safe and comfortable, and where privilege is difficult to see, and undertake instead an attitude of "world traveling" where they can see themselves with the eyes of Others. While she interprets this literally, in Lugones' original formulation world travelling is more an existential attitude than an act, one that is based on a "flexibility" that is "necessary for the outsider but it can also be wilfully exercised [...] by those who are at ease in the mainstream."[48] In this, Lugones' 'world-travelling attitude' recalls the 'life in the margins' of other decolonial feminists (hooks and Anzaldùa to name just two) who theorized how inhabiting the margins between different worlds forces to confront ambiguities and contradictions, but also "enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives" and as such opens also to radical possibilities.[49] While explorations into the potentialities of the margins have usually been applied to "outsiders", Lugones suggests that their insights can also inform the formulation of privileged efforts at cultivating privilege-cognizant and privilege-defying attitudes.

The approaches to the paradox of privilege reviewed here offer different prescriptive avenues into how it may be overcome – and the reproduction of power interrupted and reversed – in the struggle for structural change. However, as the critiques to each avenue raise, no approach is sufficient by itself, and some may prove unfeasible, ineffective, or even counter-productive in specific contexts. More than anything, this review has shown that the reproduction of privilege happens in multiple, subtle, and often unpredictable ways that depend on the how privileges are structured in each given society. Asymmetries may be more or less pronounced and institutionalized, making the resort to privilege more a necessity in some contexts than others. Asymmetries on different scales also interact

[45] Alcoff, "What should white people do?," 25.
[46] *Ibidem*.
[47] Bailey, "Locating traitorous identities".
[48] Maria Lugones, "Playfulness,"world"-travelling, and loving perception." *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (1987): 3.
[49] bell hooks, "Choosing the Margins as a space of radical openness," in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics,* (New York: Routledge, 2015): 227-230. See also Anzaldúa, Gloria. "Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza." (1987).

in different ways according to the role played by different social identities – of class, race, nation, gender, sexual orientation and so on – in defining one's status in the social field. The discourses and identitary constructs underpinning such identities also vary in terms of how they frame such intersecting oppositions, how strong and pervasive the dominant constructs are, and whether alternative ones are available and widespread. Ultimately, normative approaches can offer invaluable insights on the paradox of privilege, but its unfolding needs to be analysed in situ, and from there the applicability of prescriptions re-evaluated and enriched.

## *2. The Israeli Case: A Microcosmos*

The case of Jewish-Israeli activism for Palestinian rights is particularly fruitful to analyse the unfolding of the paradox of privilege. This, I argue, is for two reasons, having to do respectively with the *structure* of privilege in Israeli society and with its *substance*.

The first reason is that the structure of privilege that orders Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian subjects is particularly clear and explicit, enshrined as it is in the legal framework of the State and sustained by its pervasive Zionist ideology *cum* identity. For this clarity, and for the complex ways in which this hierarchy intersects with other structures of privilege in Israeli society, Jewish-Israeli activism for Palestinian rights offers an ideal microcosmos for observing how privilege is reproduced and challenged in the struggle for its erosion.

Israel has a peculiar legal structure where different conceptions of constituency coexist based on (Israeli) citizenship and (Jewish) nation.[50] Rights and status are allocated differently both within such collectives and between them and the others that are subjected to Israeli government, making for a society that is particularly hierarchical along different and partially overlapping lines. The main social body in Israel coincides with its Jewish population: not with the ensemble of its citizenry, as it is in most states worldwide, but with the majority nation among them. This is by virtue of the core defining feature of Israel as a 'Jewish State' aimed at the defence and promotions of 'Jewish national interests', and results in the fact that only Jewish nationals enjoy collective rights as well as specific individual privileges that issue from their membership to the national collective.[51]

While all other non-Jewish nationals enjoy fewer rights, Palestinians enjoy the least, whether they are citizens of the State or are subjected to its rule in other ways: 'permanent residents' of Jerusalem, who have a particularly weak and vulnerable legal status; occupied subjects of the West Bank, who are subjected to military rule; and sieged inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, whose rights are highly limited

[50] Baruch Kimmerling, "Jurisdiction in an Immigrant-Settler Society: The "Jewish and Democratic State," *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 10 (2002), 1122-1125.
[51] Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness State, Society, and the Military*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 180-182; Kimmerling, "Jurisdiction in an Immigrant-Settler Society", 1124; Israeli nationality does not exist as a concept (see jurisprudence denying Israelis who asked this), thus forcing identification as 'Jews' (ESCWA 35).

despite an autonomous government by virtue of Israel's total control of their border.[52] If we consider both national groups in their entirety (citizens of Israel, those under its rule, but also the diaspora who advances stakes and claims to the land), Palestinians' enjoyment of rights is diametrically opposed to those of Jewish persons. It is especially so in sectors, such as immigration and property laws, that are central in Israeli settler colonial politics: for automatic that it is for any Jewish person worldwide to obtain Israeli citizenship, equally impossible it is for Palestinians not only to obtain citizenship but even to withhold a much weaker 'permanent residency' status; for how easy it is for a Jewish person to buy a house and obtain a state loan, equally easy it is for Palestinians to be evicted or have one's house demolished; for how important and worthy of protection a Jewish life is, equally disposable is a Palestinian life, as testified by the mass retaliations and killings that follow an individual act of terror, and by the null legal protections for Palestinians in the West Bank.[53]

Besides the legal aspect, that between Jews and Palestinians also constitutes the core Self/Other distinction in the national ideology that permeates Israeli State and society. In a relatively young nation-state, and a settler colonial one in its mechanics, Zionism has unified under the banner of Jewishness (itself constructed as a mixture of race, religion, and nation) a disparate group of immigrants from various parts of the world, and fixed their essential difference from the local inhabitants.[54] Vocally advancing a competing claim to the land and embodying a constant reminder of Israel's colonial nature, Palestinians have been conversely constructed as the enemy par excellence, incompatible in values and culture with the Jewish-Israeli collective and threatening to its physical cum symbolic survival as a distinct national group.[55] This construct underlies the dehumanization of Palestinians and the normalization of the legal discrimination towards them.[56]

This Self/Other distinction, and the colonial mechanics that underpins it, also reverberates onto internal hierarchies within Jewish-Israeli society, co-constituting and reinforcing them in important ways.[57] The racialization of Palestinians as colonial subjects reflects the racialization of other non-white Jews – of Arab origins especially – and reinforces their discrimination and exploitation as internally colonized of the white Jews of European descent who have constituted the elite – the ideologues of the Zionist project and the first settlers – since the early days of Zionism.[58]

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[52] ESCWA (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), "Israeli Practices towards the Palestinian people and the question of apartheid", Palestine and the Israeli Occupation, no. 1 (2017): 25-31, https://oldwebsite.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/ESCWA%202017%20%28Richard%20Falk%29%2C%20Apartheid.pdf.

[53] E.g. Law of Return and Jewish Land property law vs. denial of right of return and right to family reunion, facilitated stripping of resident status, legalized dispossessions and eviction through "absentee law" and other mechanisms.

[54] Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 5-9.

[55] See from Ch 1.

[56] Jeff Halper, *War Against the People: Israel, the Palestinians, and Global Pacification* (London: Pluto Press, 2015); Collins, *Global Palestine*.

[57] Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*

[58] Kimmerling, Yiftachel 216 Massad 2006 13-40; Shohat 1988, 25-27 (in Wright 46).

Given this context, Jewish-Israeli activists for the defence and enlargement of Palestinian rights embody the paradox of privilege at its clearest. Coming from the most privileged position in society – activists are not only Jewish, but by vast majority white and of European descent – they set out to support the least privileged ones. The positional component of privilege intersects with the instrumental one, since access to the tools made available by the system to its challengers – legal litigations and political advocacy, funding, access to media, a shared grammar of values and frames of understanding – is precluded or heavily impaired for Palestinians. In this situation, the participation of Jewish-Israelis has clear advantages in terms of the leverage it can add to Palestinian demands for rights, through the making available of legal and funding resources, but also of visibility and of a certain legitimacy within Israeli society. At the same time, it also has clear disadvantages in terms of the reproduction of such privileges, since both the legal and the discursive frameworks activists can draw on are founded on a fundamentally discriminatory principle. Working to advance Palestinian rights means, more often than not, considering these advantages and disadvantages in order to formulate specific strategic choices. Working to advance Palestinian rights means also questioning the system from which discriminations originate and its ideational underpinnings. It imposes to reflect on one's relation to this system not only in terms of one's instrumental privileges, but also of the collective fundaments of one's identity, to which everyone is socialized and adheres to with more or less conviction and personal stake. Moreover, as the Jewish/Palestinian hierarchy reverberates onto other societal hierarchies, so working for Palestinian rights involves broader dynamics of privilege that also become visible through the struggle. Mobilizing for Palestinian rights are generally the most privileged among Jewish Israelis, and their battles near to Left-wing civic battles for feminist, queer, even animal rights, but disjunct from those of the underprivileged, Arab and Ethiopian Jews in front, who subscribe to the dominant nationalist and patriotic discourse.[59]

By virtue of their political and ethical engagement, Jewish-Israeli activists must leave the comfort zone where their privilege is invisible and naturalized and, in different degrees depending on the forms of their engagement, become exposed to its existence and its manifold ramifications. All are forced to face it to some extent. What varies is how deeply and widely the acknowledgment of their privilege goes (in terms of relations with Palestinians but also with other sectors of Israeli society), how much they are willing to take responsibility for it and rearticulate their identity and role in Israeli society, and how they decide to deal with it (that is, negotiate its use or rejection) in the struggle.

Ultimately, thanks to the codification of privilege both legal and ideological and the diversified strategies, actions, and reflections that activists are forced to put in place in order to deal with it, Jewish-Israeli activism for Palestinian rights offers an ideal terrain to understand how privilege unfolds in the struggle for its erosion, and how it can be renegotiated in more or less effective ways. This

[59] Ilan Pappé, "What Is Left of the Israeli Left? (1948–2015)," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 22, no. 1 (2015): 351-367.

understanding can shed light on the contradictions and risks of struggles carried out from positions where privilege is less explicit but no less pervasive, and of the potentialities that are opened in these situations in spite of the difficulties and apparent dead-ends that issue from this embeddedness.

The second reason why the analysis of privilege in this context is particularly fruitful is that its substance (what the privilege is *about*) incorporates a variety of issues that are present, albeit not always in such extreme and compenetrated form, in other national contexts and at the global level. As such, the unfolding of this specific type of privilege in the context of Israeli activism works as a prism that allows to shed some light on how hegemonic and counterhegemonic pushes on these issues may unfold and be dealt with in other contexts as well.

Against a once-predominant argument for its exceptionalism, the Israeli regime, particularly in its approach to the Palestine question, is increasingly seen as a "strong case", a "microcosmos", even a "model" and "laboratory" for political regimes and practices of domination carried out under a democratic *façade* worldwide.[60] Some have talked about these connections – the interpenetration of Israel-Palestine and the global level – in terms of a "globalization" of the settler colonial condition, or a "Palestinization" of the globe.[61] In his book *Global Palestine*, John Collins focuses precisely on the "reciprocal relationship" that exists "between the specific settler colonial dynamic taking place on the ground in Israel-Palestine, and a series of broader global processes" and argues that "the same forces operating to produce Palestine's troubling realities are also operating globally in ways that have implications for all of us."[62]

The first of these processes, and the one from which all the others originate, is of course colonization, intended as the projection of a given polity onto others through territorial, political, economic, or cultural forms of domination. In most of the world, direct territorial and political colonization has been repudiated as a legitimate form of politics, though traces of it remain (and are renewed) in the structural asymmetries of power between former colonies and former motherlands, in racial constructs, and in the shape of the global neoliberal system. In Israel, by contrast, colonization still operates through territorial expansion and direct political domination, and is combined with the ongoing settlement of an exogenous population and the concomitant 'elimination', both literal (through eviction and genocide) and symbolic (through the suppression of their national will) of the autochthonous inhabitants of the land.[63] As former colonies and other settler colonies deal with the fait accompli of their colonial pasts through a mix of indifference,

[60] Collins, *Global Palestine*, 2011, 137; Halper, *War Against the People*, 5-14; Ghassan Hage, *Alter-Politics: Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination*, (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2015): 8-9.
[61] Respectively, Hage, *Alter-Politics*, 6, and Collins, *Global Palestine*, x.
[62] Collins, *Global Palestine*, ix-x. A similar point is raised by Hage, *Alter-Politics*.
[63] Collins, *Global Palestine*, 25-28 ; Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 5; Wolfe, Patrick, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409; Omar Jabary Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie and Sobhi Samour, "Past is present: Settler colonialism in Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 1-8.

apology, and (talk of) reparations, Israel's continued colonization goes on with relative impunity.[64] This is due to a mix of reasons that, while specific to the Israeli context, also align it with a global construction of Self and Other that presents a European-like, modern, Christian, white Western world rightfully defending itself against a Third-World looking, premodern, often Muslim-like threat.[65]

The second and related process is precisely the creation of "permanent states of exception" where these racialized Others are relegated, and where their treatment outside the legal and ethical boundaries that regulate human life becomes accepted and normalized.[66] In Israel, as we have seen, a racial principle of exception is codified, as Jews are legally constructed as a race and the legal apparatus of the State confers rights based on it.[67] Distinct legal frameworks regulate life for Palestinians that strip them of the most basic human rights without this interfering with the perception of Israel as a democracy.[68] As Palestinians are denied the right to movement, to property, to a fair trial, and are regularly subjected to mass retaliatory violence, the complex legal architecture of the occupation, the courts, the occasional 'inquiry' into accusations of atrocities, all work to provide proof that, in spite of pervasive indications of the contrary, the regime is indeed democratic and functions towards its improvement.[69] Although less codified and manifest, these practices are sadly all too common in most countries, where they take place internally against asylum seekers, economic immigrants, subalterns of all kinds, and externally against enemies, 'Islamic terrorists', the "global sea of uncivilized others" who demand a stake into the wealth of the First World.[70]

The third process is the militarization of the State and, relatedly, the securitization of the collective psyche.[71] This results in the emergence of "warring societies," "permanently geared towards war" though war itself is framed as a necessary defence, "where defensiveness becomes the core constitutive element of a society's public culture."[72] Contextually, the "securitization of identity" is at work that fixes the boundaries of collective identity, casts its designated opposite as a threat, and closes down

[64] See e.g. Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?", 6-26. On the monument issue see e.g. Naomi Rea, "Protests Targeting Colonial Statues in the UK and Belgium Have Ignited a Long-Brewing Reckoning Over Racist Monuments in Europe", *ArtNet News*, June 10, 2020, and Yasmeen Serhan, "The Case for a Statue of Limitations. Let communities decide which monuments should stay", *The Atlantic*, June 25, 2020.
[65] Hage, *Alter-Politics*, 8, 20-22, see also Collins
[66] Ronit Lentin, "Palestine-Israel and state criminality: Exception, Settler Colonialism and Racialization," *State Crime Journal* 5, no. 1 (2016): 32-50; David Lloyd, "Settler colonialism and the state of exception: the example of Palestine/Israel", *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 59-80.
[67] ESCWA, "Israeli Practices"; Alana Lentin, *Why race still matters*, (Cambridge-Medford: Polity Press, 2020).
[68] ESCWA, "Israeli Practices"; Mira Sucharov, *The international self: Psychoanalysis and the search for Israeli-Palestinian peace*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2012); Amir Lupovici, "Ontological dissonance: Clashing identities, and Israel's unilateral steps towards the Palestinians," *Review of international studies* 38, no. 4 (2012): 809-833.
[69] The Occupation of Justice, Fig leaf to the occupation; Kretzmer, the occupation of justice
[70] Hage, *Alter-Politics*, 16, 20-22, see also Collins, *Global Palestine*.
[71] Hage, *Alter-Politics*, 15-16; Michael C. Williams, "Words, images, enemies: Securitization and international politics." *International studies quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2003): 511-531; Mark Neocleus, "Don't Be Scared, Be Prepared" Trauma-Anxiety-Resilience." *Alternatives* 37, no. 3 (2012): 188-198.
[72] Hage, *Alter-Politics*, 18-20.

possibilities of rearticulations and alternative.[73] If it may undertake more racist or more tolerant forms, the attitude towards the Other is driven by a similarly dominating posture whereby she needs to be "managed" and "domesticated" in order to ensure the safety of the national space.[74] Once again, in Israel this condition is extremized. The army is a core institution of the State, sacralised as the only possible guarantee against new forms of annihilation of the Jewish people, integral part of the life of Jewish-Israelis due to an early socialization at school and a three-year mandatory service, and celebrated throughout the national ceremonies that punctuate the Israeli calendar. *Dispositifs* of security, such as metal detectors, checkpoints, the 'Separation Barrier' – the same that we see blending seamlessly in our quotidian landscapes (often provided and guaranteed by Israel itself) – are omnipresent in Israel.[75] These experiences and the narratives surrounding them cement a perception of Palestinians as nothing other than 'potential terrorists' and of the State as the victim and the only provider of (physical cum existential) security. As a result, consensus to the status quo and acceptance of its justifications are virtually complete, as successive presidential elections in Israel have shown (and not just in terms of the candidates that win, but also of the minimal differences among them in terms of a security management of the Palestinian question).

The fourth process is the becoming stronger, and increasingly normalized, of political forces that propose aggressive ethno-nationalistic discourses coloured with authoritarian undertones. While we have seen this happening with the wave of right-wing populisms both in the US and in Europe, Israel has once again led the way and dared where others have not (yet). If ethno-national conceptions of identity have always superseded civic ones, the succession of right-wing governments of the past twenty years have made the achievement of ethno-national purity a priority (think for instance of the 'separation' policy implemented by Sharon or Netanyahu's Nation-State Law of 2018), have further weakened the few guarantees that could be offered by the courts, and have invested in virulent campaigns of de-legitimation of those advancing more civic inclusive alternatives as 'internal enemies' of the nation.[76] The common trait to Israel and other contexts is the fact that these forces have been presenting themselves as the solution to the inequalities created by unregulated neoliberal policies, and overtaking in this the traditional role of the Left. As right-wing populisms rely for their success on the easy strategy of divide and conquer between the (internal) poor against the (foreign) poorer, the Left has generally proved unable to intercept the demands and the sympathies of the most unprivileged sectors of the population, and to offer them a convincing alternative. Unwilling to

[73] Williams, "Words, images, enemies".
[74] Hage, *White Nation*, 15, 42, 66, 76.
[75] Halper, *War Against the People*; Yael Berda, *Living Emergency: Israel's Permit Regime in the Occupied West Bank*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); Juliana Ochs, *Security and suspicion: An ethnography of everyday life in Israel*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).
[76] Raffaella Del Sarto, *Israel Under Siege: The Politics of Insecurity and the Rise of the Israeli Neo-Revisionist Right*, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2017).

question the precepts of neoliberalism, the liberal Left is perceived as elitist and detached from the interests of 'the people' (read: the 'nation'), while the radical left, pushed more and more to the margins of the political spectrum and often stuck in outdated narratives, is ridiculed as nostalgic and unreasonable.

Now, Jewish-Israeli activists who challenge the State from within on its treatment of Palestinians engage to a certain extent with all of these issues, allowing to draw parallels between their challenges and negotiations and those of others, in other contexts, coming to challenge similar issues from a position of embeddedness. Because they deal with an extreme-case situation in all of them, Israeli activists' challenges also appear clearer, as through a magnifying lens, both in their articulations and in their effects. Protesting against the effects of colonization as present-day direct colonizers makes it so that past wrongs and present privileges are less easily detachable, and the relapse into forms of recognition that fail to address the deep structures of colonization – structural as well as epistemological – more evident than it may be in other contexts. Opposing norms of exception, militaristic attitudes, and securitization *dispositifs* in a context in which these are legally codified and explicitly articulated as core collective values brings to the surface the inextricable ties between political discourse (and the challenges thereof) and identity perceptions, epistemological perspectives, quotidian practices and forms of relationality, and allows to recognize them even in the absence of an official political ideology. Finally, activists working in a particularly hostile environment to discourses of equality across ethno-national boundaries make more visible the vacuum left by the Left-wing, and the challenges and compromises that come with trying to carve out from civil society up a new and more convincing alternative. For these reasons, Jewish-Israeli activists for Palestinian rights might indeed provide a 'microcosmos', and perhaps even a 'laboratory', where different ways of engagement with structural privilege and the effects each of them has on it may shed light not only on the dynamics of these challenges, but also on their content, and inspire critical and decolonial actors worldwide.

### *3. Negotiations in the Grey Zone: Investigating the Ambiguities of Power and Resistance*

A formerly under-researched phenomenon, Jewish-Israeli pro-Palestinian activism has received increasing academic attention, especially since the "settler colonial turn" in the study of Israel-Palestine.[77] Many critical accounts, often engaged and intendedly themselves "decolonizing" in the field of knowledge production, have addressed the issue of activists' contributions to decolonization

[77] Rachel Busbridge, "Israel-Palestine and the settler colonial 'turn': From interpretation to decolonization," *Theory, Culture & Society* 35, no. 1 (2018): 91-115; Lorenzo Veracini, "What can settler colonial studies offer to an interpretation of the conflict in Israel–Palestine?," *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (2015): 268-271; Salamanca et al.; "Past is present".

in light of their problematic positioning within the colonizing collective.[78] The majority of these studies look at activist groups as split into two 'camps': a moderate liberal-Zionist one, which works within the existing discourse and legal framework to make it more moral and democratic, and a radical anti-Zionist one, which rejects Zionism altogether – and the privileges it grants to Jewish citizens – and envisions the "decolonization," seen as a "de-Zionisation," of the Israeli regime and society.[79] By and large, the argument is that the former ultimately sustains the Zionist structure of privileges, and does so more effectively than right-wing politics because it hides it behind a human face.[80] Conversely, anti-Zionist activism explicitly rejects Zionist tropes, discourses, and institutions and thus is able to advance, through both discourses and praxis, a radically counterhegemonic alternative.[81]

While pointing at an issue that is indeed central in Jewish-Israeli activism – that of the problematic entanglement with the Zionist hegemony – these studies also propose of it a dichotomic and normative analysis that does not reflect the complexities of the reality on the ground. As Wright has noted, these studies start from the underlying assumption that it is possible to "clearly and cleanly disengage from complicity with colonial domination", and that therefore activism – and implicitly also the scholarship that addresses it – "can only be either colonizing or decolonizing, guilty of furthering colonial power or celebrated for challenging it."[82] In this "purist" approach to power and resistance, the inevitable entanglements with power that come with one's positionality are decentred from the analysis, and the contradictions and nuances of this kind of engagement are erased or flattened out in an effort to align reality with pure political categories. The sometimes arbitrary simplification that results becomes apparent in several instances.

To begin with, studies are at a loss in conceptualizing the very role and agency of Jewish-Israelis in the struggle for Palestinian rights. Turner, for instance, from a Gramscian approach to hegemony, conceptualizes only Palestinian activists as "organic intellectuals" (since these can only "develop within the subordinate group") and frames Israeli activists' contribution as counterhegemonic only insofar as they follow the political strategy set by the former – which, as the thesis demonstrates, is

[78] See e.g. Teodora Todorova "Reframing Israel-Palestine: critical Israeli responses to the Palestinian call for Just Peace," (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2014), 33.
[79] Mandy Turner, "Creating a counterhegemonic praxis: Jewish-Israeli activists and the challenge to Zionism," *Conflict, security & development* 15, no. 5 (2015): 549-574.
[80] See most notably Tikva Honig-Parnass, *The False Prophets of Peace: Liberal Zionism and the Struggle for Palestine,* (London: Haymarket Books, 2011). See also Atalia Omer, *When peace is not enough: How the Israeli peace camp thinks about religion, nationalism, and justice*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) .
[81] See Turner, "Creating a counterhegemonic praxis"; Weizman, Elian, "Decolonising Israeli society? Resistance to Zionism as an educative practice," *Ethnicities* 17, no. 4 (2017): 574-597; Todorova, "Reframing Israel-Palestine"; Teodora Todorova, "Vulnerability as a politics of decolonial solidarity: the case of the Anarchists Against the Wall," *Identities* 27, no. 3 (2020): 1-18; Marcelo Svirsky, *Arab–Jewish Activism in Israel–Palestine*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Cherine Hussein, "Countering an Illusion of Our Epoch: The Re-Emergence of the Single State Solution in Palestine/Israel," (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2011).
[82] Wright *The Israeli Radical Left*, 46.

not always the case, also when it comes to "anti-Zionist" groups.[83] Conversely, Weizman, who combines Gramsci and Freire, does conceptualize them as organic intellectuals and sees a "counterhegemonic praxis" in their engagement in "critical pedagogy" towards their audiences – failing to account, however, for the fact that both groups under her analysis are essentially disowned by the Israeli audience, and they themselves admit little concern for changing Israeli sensitivities, preferring to target international audiences instead.[84] In a third example Svirsky, within his work on joint "Arab-Jewish" activism, puts Palestinian and Israeli activists (the "colonized and retreating colonizers") essentially on the same level as they engage in resistance "as one colonized people" – which, however, is problematic insofar as it obscures the inherent asymmetry between them, even as they approach the struggle together.[85]

Also the binary division these studies presuppose between Zionist and anti-Zionist groups overemphasizes certain aspects of their work while overlooking internal contradictions. Some groups may oppose Zionism in framing, but still rely on Zionist laws and institutions in their action. Some may act within a Zionist framing, but perform radically alternative relationalities with Palestinians on the ground. "Nothing here is black or white, we are constantly moving in a grey zone," an activist told me, as I asked her to compare the work of 'radical' activist groups and 'moderate' NGOs, and pointing at how all of them use their privileges at least to some extent, because the option of doing otherwise does not exist.[86] "We don't have the luxury to pick our ideological battles, we have to get our hands dirty if we want to help at all," said another one as he was trying to explain to me what created synergies between groups on the ground, and decentring in this the anti-Zionist *versus* liberal-Zionist divide.[87] Moreover, an increasing number of groups actually avoids tackling Zionism head-on in their framing, preferring instead to "work around it" in order to achieve their objectives.[88] The lack of an explicit uncompromising stance towards Zionism is often interpreted, in purist approaches, as a form of docility towards, or even outright complicity with, the system, with little attention for its reasons, strategic and circumstantial.[89]

The dismissal of contradictions and nuances in activist practice is also due to an almost exclusive focus on the collective level of groups' framings and strategies. A wealth of studies has emerged that praises the counterhegemonic potential of the various types of "reframing" of Israel-Palestine advanced by activist groups – as a settler colonial or apartheid issue, towards a one-state solution as

[83] Turner "Creating a counterhegemonic praxis", 554.
[84] Weizman, "Decolonising Israeli society?".
[85] Svirsky, *Arab–Jewish Activism*, 176.
[86] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019.
[87] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 27, 2019
[88] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 26, 2019.
[89] Ronit Lentin *Co-memory and melancholia: Israelis memorialising the Palestinian Nakba*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

opposed to a two-state one.[90] The problem with these accounts is that they consider the 'politics of knowledge' somewhat in isolation from its context, overemphasizing the weight of discursive articulations and held beliefs while overlooking the situational aspects – the habits, practices, emotions, and affects – that work, in Israel, towards the sustenance of the status quo. Todorova (2014), for instance, admits that "attachments to existing subjectivities [...] pose a barrier to the possibility to think or act otherwise" (i.e. in a decolonizing way) and that a profound rearticulation of Jewish-Israeli subjectivity is still wanting even among radical activists.[91] However, her chosen focus on the organizational level and the collective narratives of groups does not allow her to delve more deeply into why this is and how it could change.

In fact, analyses that integrate also individual-level rearticulations of subjectivity through the struggle – how activists renegotiate their roles, values, routines as they engage in political critiques – are few. Studies that have looked at the possibilities for such rearticulations have largely worked at the macro level of collective identities frameworks, imagining alternatives to the dominant constructs that however seem abstract and unrealistic when confronted with the reality on the ground. Butler (2012), Omer, (2013) and already Boyarin and Boyarin (1995) had pointed at how cross-cultural contaminations foundational to certain conceptions of identity (the 'diasporic' identity of Jews, the 'hybrid' Arab-Jewish identity of Mizrahi Jews in particular) could provide the bases for more inclusive conceptions of Jewish-Israeliness.[92] However, both identities are more often than not conscripted into a strongly ethno-national discourse, as testified by the fact that both recent immigrants and Mizrahi Jews tend to have more right-wing positions than their respective counterparts.[93]

It is only recently that critical scholarship on Jewish-Israeli activism has started to problematize these dichotomies and to interrogate more meaningfully the contradictions and dis-connections of activist practice. Remaining at the meso-level of groups' framings and strategies, Weizman (2013, 2016) draws from Mouffe's late 'mixed' approach to hegemony to caution against the outright condemnation of groups that rely on Zionist tropes and institutions. Emphasizing their importance for "kosher stamping" the movement, bringing issues in the Israeli political debate, and empowering Palestinians by achieving small-scales victories, she argues that these "within hegemony" strategies can be complemented by "without hegemony" strategies to push the boundaries of critique.[94] Only

[90] Todorova, "Reframing Israel-Palestine"; Hussein "Countering an Illusion of Our Epoch"; Hawari, Yara, Sharri Plonski, and Elian Weizman. "Seeing Israel through Palestine: knowledge production as anti-colonial praxis." *Settler Colonial Studies* 9.1 (2019): 155-175.
[91] Todorova, "Reframing Israel-Palestine", 137, 240-241.
[92] Judith Butler, *Parting ways: Jewishness and the critique of Zionism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Omer, *When peace is not enough*; Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the ground of Jewish identity", in *Identities*, ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
[93] Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*; Giulia Daniele, "Mizrahi Jews and the Zionist settler colonial context: between inclusion and struggle," *Settler Colonial Studies* 10, no. 4 (2020): 461-480; Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the standpoint of its Jewish victims," *Social text*, no. 19/20 (1988): 1-35
[94] Weizman, "Hegemony, law, resistance"; Elian Weizman, "The Paradox of Breaking the Silence," *Jadaliyya*, September 13, 2016, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33565/The-Paradox-of-Breaking-the-Silence.

considering the "togetherness of resistance" it is possible to fully appreciate its counterhegemonic potential.[95]

Moving below the level of collective strategies of groups and engaging more fully with affects and subjectivities are the works of Lamarche (2013), Natanel (2016), and Wright (2018). Lamarche offers an account of activists' intimate and affective worlds and how they come to be disrupted as they enter activism "against their own kind".[96] Based on in-depth interviews, this account portrays the complexity and diversity of activists' relationships to the struggle, but it stops short of unravelling how these are situated within and affect the broader structure of colonial relations in Israel-Palestine. Shifting the focus on 'inactive' activists ("former activists," "should-be activists," "couch activists," "recovering activists"), Natanel looks at how they "get by" with being occupiers in their everyday life. Observing how they relate to their peers and their Palestinian Others, she finds ways of "unknowing," "unseeing," and "bypassing" the reality of occupation that, while allowing them to live a 'normal' life, ultimately sustain the status quo.[97] Wright adopts a similar fine-grained scrutiny into activists' intersubjective worlds, but specifically towards "radical" activists and as they relate with their Palestinian partners on the ground of the struggle. She finds that, in all of their interactions and underlying imaginations, Israeli activists cannot avoid re-enacting the asymmetry that constitutes their structural relationship, be it by homogenizing, phantasmizing, or "loving" Palestinians. Her conclusive argument on the inevitable "complicity" of Israeli activists with colonial power is not, however, intended as an accusation or a judgment of failure. Rather, it is an ascertainment of the necessary "entanglement of solidarity and dissent with the normative context of their surroundings," and an invitation to critical scholarship to properly attend to this entanglement it if it wants to produce sharper knowledge on the practice and possibility of resistance.[98]

This dissertation responds to this invitation. Extending the focus to the entirety of Jewish-Israeli activism and to the different levels in which privilege is used and reproduced, it aims to unveil not only its limitations but also the potentials that can still emerge in spite of this entanglement – and, as I will argue, precisely from it. Let me briefly go over the type of epistemological (and political) intervention I put forward and the conceptual framework I mobilize, before summarizing the analysis I propose of Jewish-Israeli activism.

Taking the paradoxical nature of Jewish-Israeli activism as a starting point, this dissertation does not attempt to solve it nor to dismiss it, but rather 'stays with it,' working with and through its inherently dualistic nature.[99] It looks into the 'grey zones' where activist practice happens and

[95] Weizman, "Hegemony, law, resistance", 206-207.
[96] Lamarche, *Militer contre son camp? Des Israéliens engagés aux côtés des Palestiniens*, (Presses universitaires de France, 2018).
[97] Katherine Natanel *Sustaining conflict: apathy and domination in Israel-Palestine*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 2-17.
[98] Wright, *The Israeli Radical Left,* 150.
[99] Paraphrasing from Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, (Athens: Duke University Press, 2016).

acknowledges the ambiguity – the 'imperfectness' – that ensues as not, in itself, a failure to commit, but as the only possible mode of resistance in these circumstances. In an approach that very much mirrors that of activists themselves, this dissertation suspends its judgment, at least initially, on the decolonizing potential of distinct forms of activism, and accepts to 'dirt its hands' with nuances and contradictions. It does so in the awareness that 'staying with the nuance' when analysing a context so asymmetrically violent as the Israeli-Palestinian one can itself be taken as a failure to commit to a clear decolonizing stance, and as a form of complicity with the status quo. Especially considering that my position is undoubtedly one of 'privilege' (external to the violent dynamic of Israel-Palestine, without a direct stake in its solution, and from the 'authorial' sphere of academia), and that the discourse that sustains the status quo politicizes appeals to 'nuance', 'complexity', 'middle ground' to mystify what is otherwise a clear political situation. And while it has been a challenging task, at times, as a politicized person and an academic, to conciliate a clear decolonial political stance with an epistemological stance that highlights tensions and raises questions more than it provides answers, I argue that this type of intervention can still be critical and decolonial, and work to support decolonial practice. It can perhaps do so better than other, more clear-cut, types of intervention precisely because it establishes with such practice a two-way relationship: learning from its messy unfolding and incorporating its lessons as much as it hopes to give back useful insights. I will return to this two-way relationship in the next section since it has been a crucial aspect of my experience as a researcher.

Besides a different type of epistemological intervention, engaging seriously with the paradoxes of Jewish-Israeli activism requires enlarging the focus in two important ways compared to previous studies. Firstly, it requires considering the entire spectrum of Jewish-Israeli activism: only a focus on both 'moderate' and 'radical' groups, liberal-Zionist and anti-Zionist, can allow to appreciate not only the disconnections within each of these given categories but also the connections and similarities that exist between and across them. Secondly, it demands to look conjointly at the discourses of groups and individual activists and at their performances in and out of the struggle, at the 'macropolitics' of representations and strategies and the 'micropolitics' (or biopolitics) of affects and subjectivities, as the co-constitutive arenas where power – and resistance – are articulated and channelled.[100]

In order to do so, I mobilize an understanding of power and resistance that cuts across structural and post-structural conceptualizations, and that is anchored in the concept of positionality. Allowing

[100] For a discussion of views that see the representational and biopolitical forms of power and resistance as alternative, and of biopolitics replacing hegemony as the main form of governing in current times see Jon Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Instead, my view here draws on accounts that extend the scope of 'hegemony' as a concept beyond the sphere of discursive articulations, and demand a conjoint consideration of the politics of knowledge and the politics of bodies and affects in accounts of both government and resistance. See in particular Leticia Sabsay, "Permeable Bodies: Vulnerability, Affective Powers, Hegemony," in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 278-302; Slavoj Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology," in *Mapping Ideology*, edited by Slavoj Žižek, (London: Verso, 2012): 1-33.

to situate individual representations, practices, affects, and bodies into structural hierarchies of power, positionality provides, in my view, the conjunction link between the micro and the macro, and underpins my strictly relational understandings of power and resistance as, respectively, privilege and struggle. Let me briefly go over them since they are the two conceptual poles of the analysis. Understanding power as privilege is rooted in the conceptualizations – found from Gramsci to Butler, from Hall to Weheliye – of society as organized along hierarchies between people and groups that become fixed and naturalized through commonsensical norms and practices which express a sense of one's identity.[101] Power is given as one's position along these (multiple and intersecting) hierarchies: as privilege. It issues from a mix of ascribed and acquired traits, and it manifests as the access to resources and tools available in society, as well as to identity frameworks and ontological frameworks that distinguish the Us from the Others. Resistance is then the struggle engaged by subjects with the boundaries that define their worlds: with the "structuring principles" that organize society, with their manifestations representational and practical, with the norms and performances that bound their position and arrange it in relation to others.[102] Such struggle is expressed in contesting and rearticulating dominant norms, but also in questioning and troubling the performances and relationalities that are socially given and enacting alternative ones. It is a struggle that is as much waged in the collective political arena as it is internal, given in scrutinizing one's automatisms and taken-for-granted beliefs, in allowing these to be "shaken" and to produce something entirely new.[103] It is when these two forms are co-present that alternative political and identitary framings acquire substance and that new subjectivities become fully "politicized."[104]

Anchored in these understandings of power and resistance, and in the core angle of positionality, is the analysis I propose of Jewish-Israeli activism, starting from their conceptualization as 'insiders without.' I employ this definition, which stands in direct and reverse relation to the "outsider within" of feminist and decolonial scholarship, instead of the more common paradigm of "treason," because it centres on the "contradictory location" of activists, and the dynamic associated to it, rather than on its outcome.[105] Traitors – "white antiracists, male feminists, heterosexual antiheterosexists" and, in this case, pro-Palestinian Jewish-Israelis – are taken to "effectively betray" and "repudiate" the norm of their ingroup.[106] However, this outcome is not given since, as we have seen, structures of privilege and privilege reproduction run deeper than identity affiliations and statements of purpose.[107] Instead,

[101] See most notably Stuart Hall, "Race, articulation, and societies structured in dominance", in Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham: London-Duke University Press, 1980).
[102] *Idem*, 339.
[103] Lisa Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), quoted in Wright, *The Radical Israeli Left*, 112.
[104] Sabsay, "Permeable Bodies", 291.
[105] See Harding, *Whose science?*, 268-295; see also Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997); Ignatiev and Garvey, *Race Traitor.*
[106] Respectively Harding, *Whose science?*, 271 and Mills, *The Racial Contract,* 108.
[107] See e.g. Bailey, "Locating traitorous identities".

insiders without are first and foremost 'insiders' – they are and they remain so, since they cannot disavow the privileges associated with their position.[108] It is this insiderness that, crucially, gives them the 'access' to the various tools of power that are unattainable by outsiders, and that provides the added value of their participation in solidarity with them. They are 'without' because, by questioning the norms of the ingroup and getting closer to the perspectives and experiences of the subalterns, they have set in motion a shift that partially severs the bond between them and their national collective. The greater the shift, the smaller the access, and the more illegitimate they and their critique are perceived to be. At the same time, the shift cannot bring them to belong to the Palestinian collective either. Strangers to both worlds, Jewish-Israeli activists inhabit the intersection between the two, the liminal "borderland" that is defined by duality, tension, paradox.[109]

To investigate how they inhabit this borderland I look at how they engage with their privilege: whether and how they use it, reject it, acknowledge it, question it, ignore it more or less consciously as they express their solidarity to Palestinians. As it has emerged from my observations and interviews, there are three core dimensions to this engagement. One is identitary, and concerns activists' engagement with the articulations of Jewish-Israeliness they have been socialized into and that are imbued with colonial meanings. The second is strategic, and deals with whether and how activists mobilize their access to hegemonic discourses and tools towards the achievement of political goals. The third is intersubjective, and concerns how activists deal with their embodied privileges as they conduct their lives and relate to others, both Israelis and Palestinians.

Within each dimension, I analyse the stances of activists and groups as points on a scale of entanglement with power. While drawing on the distinction between within-hegemonic and counterhegemonic forms of resistance, this analysis eschews a dichotomic approach and sees instead the extent of entanglement with power as a matter of degree, going from a maximum reliance and a failure to acknowledge it to a maximum rejection of it. While these two extremes exist, and they work as a useful contrast space, the most interesting – and indeed most – stances are situated in the murky terrain in between. Privilege may be relied upon consciously of the problems and risks this entails, and in the belief that there are no alternatives. Radical stances may be undertaken in the awareness of their limitations and the impossibilities of full disengagement. Stances may also not be undertaken at all, at least not explicitly, as more and more activists suspend their definition vis-à-vis Zionism in the acknowledgment of their ties with it, identitary or embodied as they may be. Importantly, stances of the same groups or activists do not always align across the different dimensions: an activist can subscribe to an anti-Zionist identity and still rely on the tools of critique made available within a Zionist framework and live her life according to the boundaries it establishes. And vice versa. Finally,

[108] Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?", 17
[109] Gloria Anzaldúa, "Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza." (1987).

engagements with privilege vary not only over time, but contingently in the face of different audiences and situations. Activists 'juggle' between different framings and strategies, attempt various definitions of themselves and diagnoses of the problem and solution, variously stand to expose and expiate for their dominant role or opt for concealing it to themselves and to others.

An always imperfect engagement, then, and imperfect struggles. When it comes to ascertaining how these struggles impact the status quo, the first picture that emerges is that of an extremely resilient hegemony. The majority chooses – for how passive this choice may seem – to conform because other paths seem blocked or too costly to undertake (for activists themselves, but also for the targets of their solidarity – think for instance of the choice to boycott the Israeli legal system). And even when they do choose to undertake these paths and pay the consequences, dynamics of domination and appropriation still come back in different forms and sustain hegemonic structures of meaning and relationality.

Yet, it is precisely when activists accept and work with the tensions and inevitable impasses that come with their positionality – instead of trying to avoid them or resolve them once and for all – that spaces for radical critique are open. It is then, when they avoid both self-indulgence and the paralysis issuing from an unattainable pure engagement, that activists expose themselves to messy engagements with their multiple others – Palestinians and the various Jewish-Israelis with whom ideologically they may have little to share. And it is through this engagement that they sometimes come to see their privilege in its manifoldness and depth, as a more-than-binary hierarchy with more-than-one other. Through the combination of this type of reflexivity and a grounded, relational, continued praxis of resistance – of 'struggle' through and against the boundaries that their position sets for them – they actually come to perform genuinely alternative modes of being, intimately and socially. And in some occasions they start articulating them into new and decolonial understandings of Israel-Palestine and of its inhabitants.

Beyond evaluations of quantifiable successes towards structural change, which anyway eschew the sole responsibility of Jewish-Israeli activism, if there is something promising about it, it is in some of the ways activists are experimenting to wage imperfect struggles from a position of privilege. As global asymmetries of power neoliberal and neocolonial are increasingly embedded in our ways of life, and as alternative worldviews seem increasingly distant and unconvincing to the most, serious and self-critical engagements with our uncomfortable entanglements with power may offer an avenue towards the construction of a more sustainable alternative – one that does not require purity in order to be considered effective, or even legitimate. To this, the experimentations in the grey zone of Jewish-Israeli activism can offer valuable insights.

*4. Engaged/ing Ethnography: Taking Privilege Seriously at the Researcher-Activist Encounter*

Rather than following linearly from a question to a choice of methods to an argument, this research has emerged and evolved abductively from an iterative process of engagement within the "encounter" that was the real subject of this ethnographic work.[110] 'Engaged' in the double sense of *political* (i.e. politically motivated and politically aimed) and intrinsically *relational* (i.e. where the reciprocity between researcher and researched is acknowledged and embraced), this ethnography emerges from an encounter that is at least triangular: between myself as a researcher, myself as a politically engaged person, and the Jewish-Israeli activists that formed the 'object' of my study. As a type of "activist research," this ethnography displays some of its characteristic forms of access and participatory methods, as well as an underlying tension between the partly different requirements of intellectual inquiry and political intervention.[111] In addition, my theoretical attention for the paradoxes of critique from a position of privilege has made it so that Jewish-Israeli activists have worked like a mirror to me, critical researcher in the 'field', further pushing me to turn my analytical gaze inwards and reflect on the paradoxes of my own 'contradictory location'. This section explains choices and methods by disentangling the different pushes within this triadic encounter and acknowledging their interplay.

It is useful, to this end, to start with a brief digression into the inception of this project at the 'encounter' between my researcher and political identities. My interest for 'the Palestinian question' was born out of a passion that was political far more than intellectual: exposed to it as a teenager within activist environments, it was the indignation with the violence and impunity of the Israeli State that led me to become politically active on the issue, with several trips to the West Bank as a solidarity actor, and to want to investigate it through my academic studies. It is with this background that I approached this work – initially hesitantly, because I saw my political views on the matter as an obstacle to the tenet of academic 'neutrality'; only later, accepting and embracing the same political passion as the spark that could "breath life" into this work.[112] Approaching the issue, then, as an 'engaged' researcher, I initially wanted to contribute to the understanding of the how-possible of this situation by looking at how Israelis made sense of – and came to accept and normalize – the violence that was being perpetrated so close to them. It was only during my preliminary fieldwork that I came

[110] Mark B. Salter and Can E. Mutlu, ed., *Research methods in critical security studies: An introduction*, (London: Routledge, 2013): 3; see Clifford Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973). On abductive research as an iterative and recursive process see Peregrine Schwartz-Schea, and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*, (London: Routledge, 2012), 27-34.

[111] On engaged research, or 'activist research', see in particular Gillan and Pickerill, "The difficult and hopeful ethics"; David Croteau, "Which Side Are You On?"; Charles R. Hale, "Activist Research v. Cultural Critique: Indigenous land rights and the contradictions of politically engaged anthropology," *Cultural anthropology* 21, no. 1 (2006): 96-120. On the Israeli-Palestinian context specifically see Anne De Jong, "The Gaza Freedom Flotilla: Human rights, activism and academic neutrality." *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 2 (2012): 193-209. On "dual commitments" and their incompatibilities see Hale, "Activist Research v. Cultural Critique", 104.

[112] Hage, *Alter-Politics*, 4.

across the Jewish-Israeli activist scene. Once again, what brought me to it was a personal, political drive more than a research-related one: I actually sought to take a break from my fieldwork to go to a leftist community centre. As I witnessed familiar discourses and aesthetics coexisting with such underlying violence, and felt that this tension concerned activist environments in general, critical research, and *me* very personally, I knew I had found my angle. It would still take me months before I could pinpoint it exactly on the question of privilege, but I decided to investigate Jewish-Israeli activists: how they navigated their socio-political context between challenge and embeddedness in power, defiance and complicity, and what kind of critique could emerge from this endeavour. I then 'designed' my methodology accordingly, and kept developing it as I went along.

First of all, my interest for deep-seated structures of meaning – together with a personal preference for lived encounters and active political engagement – led me to opt for a long-term, in-depth engagement with activists and their context of life and political action. I spent overall six months in Israel-Palestine, divided in two trips (respectively March-June and October-December 2019) to allow myself, in between, to gain some distance and work on refining my theoretical framework. I initially considered being based alternatively in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv, so as to get exposed to the different activist 'scenes' each city provided in view of their different geographical and political identities.[113] After the first fieldwork, however, I decided to keep my base in Jerusalem, so as to capitalize on the connections I had been able to build and given that the (relatively small) activist network of the country was connected enough that events and protests were always publicized throughout. In this situation, Jerusalem's geographically central position and its situation right on the Green Line (the ideal, internationally recognized border between Israel and the West Bank) made it particularly easy to travel to different locations, both in Israel and in the West Bank, and to participate on a daily basis to the activities and protests organized in the city in conjunction with Palestinian residents.

Because I was interested in the spectrum of relations to hegemony (later, to privilege) in the struggle, my focus has been on activism in its broadest sense. Differently from works which have limited themselves to 'radical' grassroots groups or 'liberal Zionist' NGOs, those working 'against the occupation' or towards 'decolonization,' I have deliberately chosen the wide definition of 'activists for Palestinian rights' to comprehend a maximum diversity of both frames and methods. 'Activists' are intended as individuals who work collectively to bring change in their society by advocating for political change and engaging in practical actions to produce it.[114] Whether from within formally

[113] Jerusalem being very much at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian issue due to its political and religious status, physically on the border between Israel and the West Bank, segregated internally and where issues of forced displacement and settlement, asymmetrical rights and violence are most visible; Tel Aviv on the contrary being the epitome of the concealment of all these issues beneath an appearance of normality, a Westernized, secular, fun city where Palestinians are hardly visible at all.

[114] See e.g. Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 6-12. Note that my interviewees did not always adopt this definition of themselves, some preferring to consider themselves 'politically minded' or 'caring' individuals. In some cases, this was done in the attempt to downplay

registered NGOs or through loosely coordinated and spontaneous socio-political collectives, all the people I have included in this study dedicated a varying yet considerable portion of their time to political action. 'For Palestinian rights' is used to include a wide variety of framings of the struggle: from humanitarian assistance to political advocacy; selectively against the occupation regime or aimed at the broader decolonization of Israel-Palestine; focused 'internally' on critiquing aspects of the Israeli State or 'externally' on providing solidarity to Palestinians, whether in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza or in the diaspora.[115] Finally, and perhaps unnecessarily given my theoretical focus, the activists considered are 'Jewish-Israelis': members of the dominant national collective in the 'Jewish State', represented by its stated identity and privileged by its laws.[116] While for the most part this means Jewish citizens of Israel, Jewish nationals are also included that live and are politically active in Israel but have not requested Israeli citizenship.[117]

Given this scope, I have based my analysis on two primary methods of data collection: interviews to Jewish-Israeli activists and participant observation to their political activities. 'Interviews' were long (generally between one and two hours), informal, often intimate conversations, carried out in settings such as cafes, activists' homes, more rarely the offices of NGOs. Starting from a template of the various themes and sub-themes I wanted to cover, itself based on theoretical insights and issues that appeared to be relevant through the first interviews, each interview was tailored to the person's background, political views, forms of involvement into activism, and followed the turns of the conversation and the issues the person felt were most important.[118] As I asked them about personal

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the costs of their investment, in others to refuse a definition that was felt as being too restrictive and ultimately discouraging the majority of society to feel involved in political matters (e.g. interviews: West Jerusalem, April 21, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019).

[115] Note that, for brevity purposes, I sometimes use the alternative formulation of 'pro-Palestinian' activism. This is not to state that all activists treated here are in absolute pro-Palestinian: the definition of this is not given, and may easily be argued to be inconsistent with stances that advocate solely for humanitarian individual rights (vs. political collective ones), or dictated mainly by a concern to preserve the Jewish Israeli state (vs. empowering Palestinians). Instead, the term is used reflecting the widespread perception in Jewish-Israeli society whereby all the above mentioned stances and actions are incorporated under the same rubric, one that empathizes with the outgroup instead of standing united in the defense of the ingroup.

[116] Palestinians are as such excluded from this study: they appear mostly as they are represented by Jewish-Israelis, but not as political agents in themselves (save a few anecdotal exceptions as explained later). While this may be perceived as problematic (i.e. as contributing to the objectification and silencing of Palestinians) it is justified, in my view, by the theoretical focus of this work, which is not on the Palestinian struggle per se (and thus affirming a centrality of Jewish-Israeli subjects in it) but on the specific struggles of the privileged for the oppressed, and thus on their own perceptions and representations. Palestinian perspectives on this still offer an invaluable contribution towards completing the picture of Jewish-Israeli activism. As such, some of them are included for what I was able to do within the practical constraints of this research, but deserve a study of its own to be analyzed systematically and comprehensively.

[117] This makes reference in particular to the 'Jewish-international' activists of the grassroots collective All That's Left, which will be introduced in Chapter Two.

[118] For instance: in the case of a Mizrahi activist, the interview would touch upon the identitary issues related to it and the possibility for merging struggles; for an activist coming from a right-wing environment, the interview would focus on the intimate negotiations activism would entail. Activists that had been around for a long time would be asked about the evolutions of the context and of the struggle, while activists that were particularly invested in the reframing of the struggle (such as academics) would be asked about analytical issues related to framing. And so on. The template itself evolved slightly over time, reflecting the emerging angle of my thesis: at first revolving generally on the interplay of hegemonic and counterhegemonic pushes (e.g. questions were centered around identitary self-perceptions, activists' relationship with collective identities, activists' framing of the struggle, personal and strategic obstacles perceived to their activism, etc.); later

experiences as much as about analyses of the situation, and always in full disclosure of the aim of my research, I considered activists as 'experts' on the issue, and their analytical reflections theoretical contributions in their own right.[119]

By 'participant observation' I mean my participation – as audience, volunteer, protester – to various political actions that were organized during my stay by Jewish-Israeli activists, sometimes in conjunction with Palestinian partners. These included political tours, talks, film and documentary screenings, photo exhibitions, but also protests, sit-ins, internal assemblies, political actions of various kinds (often referred to as 'direct actions'), and the very common actions of interposition (often referred to as 'shifts') meant to deter the violence of soldiers and settlers towards Palestinians. Some of these actions were an established and long-running routine of groups and NGOs; others were extemporaneous and localized responses to specific events or policies.[120] In this regard it is important to note that while the settings, actors, and issues that recur throughout the dissertation reflect the political battles that were more salient during my stay, all of them are tied to issues that are long-standing in the colonial context of Israel-Palestine, and which undergo periods of latency and others of peaking violence and visibility.[121]

These two main methods were complemented by other types of observations that concurred in building my understanding of the context of Jewish-Israeli activism. Some, which I reference as 'observations,' were aimed at getting a sense of what constitutes the hegemonic discourse on the Palestinian Issue in Israeli society as is expressed socially, spatially, and through collective narratives. To this end I visited museums, mausoleums, and archaeological sites, attended national and religious ceremonies, took note, as I moved daily through the spatial architecture of Israel-Palestine, of the segregated spaces of Jewish and Palestinian life, of the barriers – visible, invisible, differentially accessible – that separated them, and of the omnipresent *dispositifs* of security and symbols of Zionist thought.[122] In order to deepen my understanding of activists and activist groups, I also refer

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having a clearer 'privileged positionality' angle (e.g. questions on the perceived dilemmas deriving from their positionality and how they would approach them within the struggle, in their daily life, and, if applicable, in struggles with other sectors of Jewish-Israeli society).

[119] On the issues related to considering activists as knowledge producers and 'co-producers' of research, see e.g. Graeme Chesters, "Social movements and the ethics of knowledge production." *Social movement studies* 11, no. 2 (2012): 145-160. In the present case, activists were not co-producers in the gist of "participatory research" because the research – its aims, methods, and outputs – was not developed in close coordination with specific activists (see e.g. review in Chatterton, Paul, Stuart Hodkinson, and Jenny Pickerill. "Beyond Scholar Activism: Making Strategic Interventions Inside and Outside the Neoliberal University." *Acme: An international e-journal for critical geographies* 9, no. 2 (2010).

[120] Examples of the former include the Saturday 'shifts' of Ta'ayush in the South Hebron Hills, the Friday protests against the evictions in Sheikh Jarrah, Zochrot's memorialization of the Nakba through tours of ruins of Palestinian villages and commemorations. Examples of the later include the shifts organized in response to a period of increased police violence in Issawiya, protests organized in solidarity to the Great March of Return in Gaza and against the military reaction to it, and the boycott actions around the Eurovision Song Contest.

[121] An issue that was not particularly present during my stay was the protest of unprivileged sectors of Jewish-Israeli society in interaction with pro-Palestinian activism. This issue is still treated in this work, though mostly through secondary sources and in terms of its contingent absence.

[122] Museums and archaeological sites include the Yad Vashem, the Menachem Begin Heritage Center, the Theodor Herzl Memorial, Mount Herzl and its monumental cemetery, the City of David. National and religious commemorations include

throughout the thesis to a wealth of material produced by and about them. This includes autobiographies, academic works, documentaries, internal organizational material, groups' websites and social network entries, news articles, as well as the defamation material produced by right-wing groups and governmental agencies.[123] A type of observation that I eventually came to include as a method in its own right was "hanging out" with activists both in action settings and in moments of leisure, which became an increasingly important part of my fieldwork as my relationship with some activists became more and more personal and integrated in my network of friends.[124] The observations I could get within these settings offered me invaluable insights on activists' ways of perceiving themselves, relating to others, and moving into space, that often involved not-always-conscious projections of their position of power as well as attempts at disrupting it. It is for this reason that I decided to include them in the dissertation, in spite of the ethical problems this posed and to which I will turn later in the section. Finally, I also integrated some interviews with Palestinian activists. Due to the practical constraints to conducting an in-depth and systematic investigation into Palestinian activism and its multiple and divided perspectives onto Israeli solidarity, these observations remain mostly anecdotal. Nonetheless, they provided me with a fundamental perspective – that of its ultimate targets – into the strategic advantages and limitations of Israeli activism, and into what compromises may be considered acceptable by them.

My positionality as a European woman, with a specific political sensitivity, history, and 'agenda' towards the Palestinian issue has deeply affected the access to my field of study, the way I carried out my methods of inquiry, and the way I formed my understanding of the phenomenon. My political identity, in particular, has been a most influential factor: it has not only determined my gravitation towards activist environments in the first place, but it has also made my access to them easier and deeper than it would have been otherwise. The fact of having been politically active in Palestine in the past, and of associating research with active participation during my fieldwork as well, has gained me the respect and trust needed in activist settings, especially grassroots ones. In spite of being an external and inquisitive presence, and of a situation in which infiltration and defamation are a reality, I have always been welcomed in groups' public and private meetings. I have been invited to actions even when these were not publicized, and I have had activists vouching for me in the few cases when some group members were hesitant about my presence. Some activists have accepted being interviewed on the grounds that I, also, had been an "activist," and this made me different in their

Holocaust Remembrance Day, Memorial Day (in full: Memorial Day for the Fallen Soldiers of the Wars of Israel and Victims of Actions of Terrorism), Independence Day, Purim. Spaces include cities and neighborhoods across Israel, Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and the areas of the West Bank subjected to different degrees of Israeli control.

[123] Examples of the latter include the well-known NGO Monitor, which on its websites hosts a repository of all NGOs worldwide operating on the Israeli-Palestinian issue with allegedly anti-Israeli positions aimed at delegitimizing their work (https://www.ngo-monitor.org/ngos/).

[124] On hanging out as method of inquiry see Deepak Nair, "'Hanging Out' while Studying 'Up': Doing Ethnographic Fieldwork in International Relations," *International Studies Review*, 23 (2021), 1300-1327.

perception from "yet another researcher" curious to investigating the conflict.[125] Also the unfolding of interviews was positively affected. While I generally avoided disclosing my political views (though I did when asked), the fact of having an interlocutor that felt at once external but also knowledgeable and sensitive to many of the problems activists encountered, and that looked positively at their political engagement in a context where this was met with blame and isolation, encouraged activists to open up intimately on issues that were far from easy to talk about (some activists have even noted how interviews had been "therapeutic" for them).[126]

This same aspect of my positionality has also, inevitably, entailed some limitations, in particular insofar as it has intensified my exposure to a specific portion of the Jewish-Israeli activist network (and thus to the issues and dynamics that were relevant within it): that of grassroots and radical activism. My political affinity with it, combined with its open and fluid organizational nature, has made it so that I have participated more to the activities of grassroots activists than to those of NGOs, and 'hanged out' with anti-Zionist activists more than with others. In order to counterbalance this embeddedness and deepen my reach to other portions of the network I have mobilized channels other than 'snowball sampling' within radical activism: these included the official channels of NGOs and political platforms (websites and e-mails), the contacts provided to me by academic colleagues, journalists, and international friends, and asking my interviewees to put me in contact with activists who would 'cover' specific aspects/they disagreed with or that had a radically different approach.[127] While the fact remains, and probably emerges in the writing, that I had empathized with radical activists more, I have thus been able to represent a variety of interpretations of what being a self-perceived 'pro-Palestinian activist' means and of the different dilemmas it entails.[128] Reaching out to the different portions of the spectrum not only allowed me to look beyond my political affinities, but also led me to problematize some of the preconceptions that underlay them.

It is precisely to this last aspect that I turn in conclusion of this section: that of how my engagement with Jewish-Israeli activism has led me to reflect critically on my own positionality as an engaged researcher in the field. Two factors have concurred in this: my participatory approach to fieldwork, which has inevitably made my presence as a researcher more involved and vulnerable, and my theoretical focus on critique from a position of privilege, which has created a parallel between

[125] Interview, Tel Aviv, 8 May 2019.
[126] Interviews, Ramat Gan, 27 May 2019; East Jerusalem, 17 November 2019; West Jerusalem, 27 November 2019; West Jerusalem, 15 December 2019.
[127] For instance, specific sectors of the Tel Aviv activist scene, Mizrahi activists on Mizrahi issues, or even those organizations and activists with whom radical activists would disagree most.
[128] It is important to keep in mind, in this respect, that the different analytical categories I use to represent these different interpretations do not reflect equal portions of my interviewees nor of Jewish-Israeli activism in general (radical activists were over-represented among my interviewees, while numerically speaking the majority of Jewish-Israeli activism probably belongs to the 'moderate' liberal-Zionist portion of the spectrum). This is consistent with the theoretical aim of this study, which is to analyze the 'mechanisms' of negotiations implemented by activists, and not to offer a representative picture of their numbers.

activists' 'imperfect struggles' and my own political engagement, and prompted me to look at the latter with an equally scrutinizing gaze. First of all, the more I uncovered how deep, implicit, and counterintuitive the workings of power and privilege were among my interlocutors, the more sharply I became aware of the multiple privileges I was also carrying around and reproducing as I related with all those who populated my fieldwork. I understood how my international position was one of privilege not only compared to Palestinians, but also to Israeli activists: I could navigate spaces careless of physical barriers (how many Palestinians have never even *seen* Jerusalem?) but also of the judgments and suspicions of less tangible ones (I could go to Ramallah for a drink and have friends on both sides of the 'border') because I was not perceived as responsible for the situation due to my nationality. The requirements of my research made it impossible to stick to the BDS guidelines as I lived my daily life in Israel, since, even if I chose not to be affiliated with an Israeli university, I was still bringing money to the Israeli economy and to specifically problematic institutions within it (e.g. the Zionist museums of above). My supposedly non-complicit behaviour had all sorts of gaps and problems, and the trust that was confided in me for being an 'activist' felt betrayed every time I prioritized the requirements of my research over those of political accountability (for instance, by choosing a safe point for observation over a position at the forefront of the protest).

As I observed how activists' dilemmas arose from their multiple accountabilities – to their ethical standards and the requirements of effective political action, to their social allegiance to Israelis and political one to Palestinians – I came to view the contradictory pushes I was also experiencing as issuing from my similarly 'contradictory location' as a researcher, an activist, and a friend, and the dis-alignments it increasingly entailed. If at the beginning my intention to produce decolonizing research seemed to align my first two identities, the nuanced picture of Israeli activism that was emerging led me to worry about the political intervention this work could lead to. Moreover, as I became entangled in the social space I was observing, I felt more and more accountable to my interlocutors as persons and not just instances of a wider phenomenon. Reporting on their thoughts and lives, especially as we were 'hanging out,' felt intrusive and extractive, especially since I felt that I was not 'giving back' much, whether by participating to actions or through the output of my research.[129] Torn between these different accountabilities, I found myself engaging in a complicated exercise in balance that, more than a once-and-for-all solution, involved a constant re-negotiation of my role that closely resembled activists' uncomfortable 'juggling' between contradictory expectations.[130]

[129] Gillan and Pickerill, "The difficult and hopeful ethics",136-137.

[130] Others, for instance, have found a solution in clearly separating their roles as researchers or as activists in the field, and reporting only on some (e.g. Valentina Zagaria, "Defiant Engagements", *AllegraLab*, September 2021, https://allegralaboratory.net/politicalengagements-defiant-engagements/.) .

This re-negotiation has accompanied me throughout the research process. During fieldwork, it has entailed, for instance, deciding at times to prioritize activism over research rather than the other way around. It has also entailed accepting that my multifaceted role could be confusing for my interlocutors and that it could keep a barrier between us of uncomplete trust and restrained spontaneity. And it has entailed accepting to 'go native' to some extent, as sharing experiences and risks with my interlocutors brought me closer to their point of view, and actively trying to 'reset' it by seeking other interlocutors and critical accounts. When it came to writing – something that took a while in itself, in the attempt to gain some distance – one way to be accountable to my interlocutors has been to try not to impose my voice on theirs, to render their views faithfully and through often long quotes, and to challenge them mostly through the triangulation of different types of observations and the juxtaposition of different approaches to activism. I have also presented drafts of chapters to some of them, to make sure I was not misinterpreting or misrepresenting their views. Finally, because my personal experience has become part of my research in such important ways – shaping its focus and eventually reflecting its argument – I decided to integrate it into the writing. Not a protagonist of this work, which remains about Jewish-Israeli activists' imperfect struggles, I have relegated it to a separated portion of the text: a few auto-ethnographic interludes in between chapters that 'accompany' the theory very much as they accompanied its development. In conclusion of the thesis, I generalize on what I could learn through activists' imperfect struggles in the hope that this can be of help to other engaged researchers juggling at the intersection of their different accountabilities.

### *5. Thesis Outline*

The first part of the thesis (Chapters One and Two) sets the context for the development of the argument on Jewish-Israeli activists for Palestinian rights. It situates them in the socio-political context of Israel-Palestine, and of Israeli society in particular, and along the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic pushes on the Palestinian question that cross it.

Drawing on academic literature as well as first-hand testimonies and observations from my fieldwork, **Chapter One (The Shifting Hegemony of Zionism)** illustrates how a hegemony based on discrimination and domination between Jews and Palestinians is constructed and maintained in Jewish-Israeli society. Starting by critically engaging with the view that sees a 'new hegemony,' emerged in the past twenty years, shifting the discourse on Palestine towards aggressive and exclusionary ethno-national tones, the chapter retraces the roots of discrimination in the Zionist ideology and in its implementation through the establishment of a settler-colonial state in Israel-Palestine.[131] Drawing on views of hegemony as existing not just in the realm of discourse, but in the interplay between a

[131] E.g. Del Sarto, *Israel Under Siege*.

"system of privileges" that distributes rights differentially among the population, the "system of ideas" that justify it, and the daily practices that normalize it and sustain it, the chapter then examines Zionist hegemony by considering each of these different aspects in turn.[132] The second section argues that the populations under Israeli control are managed according to a racial principle whereby the main distinction between Jews and Palestinians reverberates onto other societal hierarchies, reinforcing them and conscripting them into the settler colonial project. The third section argues that Zionist articulations of Jewish-Israeli identity, of collective memory and of visions of the future justify the pre-emptive right of Jews over Palestinians, and align it with colonial 'white' constructs worldwide. The fourth section argues that these articulations produce disciplined national subjects as they are disseminated in society through its core institution (school, army, media, ceremonies) and the everyday repetition of segregated ways of experiencing space and relationality. The section further looks at how these subjectivities are policed in increasingly coercive ways by a combination of State and societal pressures that include State laws and public discourses as well as the active participation of sectors of Israeli civil society into exposing and delegitimizing the bearers of alternative views on the Palestine question. The chapter thus introduces to the discussion on Jewish-Israeli activism in two important ways: firstly, it clarifies the conditions that determine the added value of Israeli solidarity action for Palestinians in terms of their differential access to epistemic structures as well as institutional and legal resources. Secondly, by clarifying the boundaries that enable certain ways of thinking and acting in relation to Palestinians and foreclose others, it sets the premises for discussing how activists engage with such boundaries, to what extent they challenge or accept them, and how they renegotiate existing articulations.

**Chapter Two (All That's 'Left')** turns to those who view themselves as the challengers of this system. Drawing on secondary sources and on the material produced over the years by activists themselves, it presents a broad picture of Jewish-Israeli activist groups for Palestinian rights in how they engage with the boundaries of Zionist hegemony through their frames and means of action on the Palestinian question. In order to do so, the first section draws on theories of socio-political fields to present Jewish-Israeli activism as situated at the intersection of the different fields it variously interrogates: the Israeli society to which activists belong, the Palestinians whose claims they support, and the transnational communities on the Palestinian issue of which they are representatives. Section 2 follows by situating present-day groups also diachronically in the long wave of Jewish-Israeli dissent on the Palestinian issue and in its evolution in parallel with the social and geopolitical context of Israel-Palestine. In particular, the section presents the distinctive features of present-day groups as a reaction to the failures of the Oslo Process and to the narrowing of their room of manoeuvre that has characterized the past twenty years. Section 3 offers an overview of the main actors of Jewish-

[132] E.g. Turner "Creating a counterhegemonic praxis".

Israeli activism for Palestinian rights today and situates them on a spectrum according to how they frame and carry out their political action in relation to the discursive and institutional boundaries set by the Zionist hegemony. Overall, the chapter sets the groundwork for the analysis that comes by providing a picture of Jewish-Israeli activism in relation to Israeli hegemony that, based on meso-level considerations, will be complexified and problematized through the following chapters' closer perspective on activists' individual negotiations with power and resistance. In particular, by understanding Jewish-Israeli activism as situated at the 'contradictory location' between fields with different hegemonies, and as a field in itself crossed by the different pushes such hegemonies entail, the chapter sets the theoretical basis for interrogating at the micro-level the argument on the possibility of radical change that is expected to issue from this position.

The second part of the thesis delves into the empirical exploration of how activists negotiate their privilege as they carry out solidarity and critique from a position of power. Each chapter focuses on a core dimension of this negotiation: identity rearticulations, strategic choices on the grounds of the struggle, and intersubjective engagements in the everyday. As such, each chapter mobilizes a different conceptual apparatus, and constitutes a building block of the argument as a journey towards increasing complexity and nuance of conceptions of power and resistance.

**Chapter Three (Identitary Grey Zones)** looks at how activists rearticulate their identities in order to align their self-perception to the ethical standards they subscribe to and away from the significations of exclusion and prevarication that are inscribed into the dominant Jewish-Israeli identity. The chapter starts by clarifying how this rearticulation constitutes an important and necessary part of activists' struggles, and why it has become particularly difficult. The first section argues that dominant identity constructs are extremely salient in the self-understanding of Jewish-Israelis, and that they entangle Jewishness, Israeliness, and Zionism in such a way that makes it very difficult to criticize one without incurring in a costly process of deconstruction and reconstruction of the Self. The second section argues that this process is all the more difficult given that alternative articulations that attempted to provide a viable substitute to exclusive ethnonationalism in the past have failed and lost their grasp. The last three sections draw on activists' self-narratives as expressed through interviews to explore how they differently tackle this endeavour. Their attempts are regrouped into three approaches along the spectrum going from withholding to repudiating dominant identitary constructs. The first approach (Section 3) is that of activists who choose to continue subscribing to an idealized version of Zionist identity. The second approach (Section 4) is that of activists who completely withdraw their affiliation to Zionism and either define themselves through this opposition (e.g. being an anti-Zionist) or try to combine this with positive new articulations that often draw on intersectional marginalities (e.g. Palestinian Jew, Mizrahi Jew, Queerness). The third approach (Section 5) is of those activists who, torn between the different

meanings Zionism holds to them, suspend their self-definition in relation to it and either live in the indeterminacy that this entail or also work to imagine different possible articulations (e.g. diasporic identities). In conclusion, the chapter shows how each positive articulation of identity attempted by activists remains at odds with the structural conditions of asymmetry that characterize life as a Jewish-Israeli: not only essentially abstract, it also risks reproducing such conditions through neglect or appropriation of experiences of marginalization. Nonetheless, the reflexive engagement in constant rearticulations reflects a willingness to acknowledge and deal with such dead-ends and to come up with better and more grounded constructs. Activists' concrete engagements with their privilege on levels other than the identitary one are an essential part of this process.

**Chapter Four (Strategic Grey Zones)** moves one step closer in examining these concrete engagements by looking at how activists negotiate their privilege on the ground of the struggle for Palestinian rights. The first section clarifies the role of privilege – intended as an insider's access to the discourses and institutions of the Israeli system – as a strategic tool in the struggle, and one that carries the risk of entrenching while challenging structural asymmetries. The second section explains how the already narrow margin of manoeuvre left for counterhegemonic action in this situation is further shrinking given the contextual changes that have invested Israel-Palestine in the past two decades, leading to forms of activism that seem pragmatic yet 'depoliticized' compared to the past. The following three sections draw on interviews and participant observation to analyse the strategic choices activists and activist groups make in this situation. Here, again, choices are regrouped according to different degrees of willingness to engage with Zionist framings and institutional tools. The first approach (Section 3) is that of those who accept to fully rely on hegemonic tools and discourses – be it because they have complete faith in Israel's capacity to improve as a democracy or because a rupture with them is perceived to be strategically unsustainable. By contrast, activists in the second approach (Section 4) see any engagement with hegemony as complicit. They still rely on their privilege, but only to the extent to which they cannot do otherwise (for instance, due to their Jewish-Israeli bodies) and do so in ways that aim to denounce the discriminatory character of the Israeli system as a whole. Finally, Section 5 regroups those who prioritize compromise in order to maximize their effectiveness within the system while trying to cultivate a space of radical critique. This approach comprises activists who tone down their framing in the search of common ground with Israeli audiences and activists who combine different forms of action, either internally to the same group or through the coordination of many, to reach multiple audiences and achieve effectiveness on multiple grounds. Here again, as in the previous chapter, the contrast emerges between pure strategic choices of various kinds and their murky implementations in a situation in which relinquishing privilege – and its inherent reproduction – is neither desirable nor possible. Yet, the chapter concludes, it is in these murky implementations that possibilities are open for alliances, encounters, and relationships

that may encourage deeper awareness of one's own multiple privilege and begin disrupting hegemonic allegiances through the struggle.

**Chapter Five (Intersubjective Grey Zones)** moves further down to the level of intimate relationships in the struggle and in the everyday to look at how activists reproduce and challenge their privilege through the mundane acts through which they perform their being Jewish-Israelis. After a theoretical review of the ways in which power is manifested and reproduced intersubjectively, bodily, and affectively (Section 1), the chapter explores the ways in which activists negotiate their privileged role within three dimensions of their everyday life. Section 2 focuses on how activists relate to the Israeli space and institutions as they live, work, and move through the web of power stratifications that shape their life as Jewish-Israelis. Section 3 looks at the personal relationships they entertain with their main Other, the Palestinians, within and beyond the struggle. Section 4 shifts the attention to how they deal with their 'other' Others, marginalized Jewish-Israelis that are mostly alien to them and to the bubble of pro-Palestinian activism. Each of these sections retraces how activists' negotiations evolved over time in interaction with the contextual changes in the quotidian of Israel-Palestine and in the relationalities it made possible, and highlights how they always happen on grounds of impurity, where activists can never fully dispense with the traces of colonial power they embody. The chapter concludes (Section 5) by reflecting on the subversive potential of an intersubjective learning process that feeds on shared experiences, practical engagements, relationships experimented day after day with Palestinian and other Others, and on the reflexive attitude that accompanies all of these. It argues that these relational engagements allow for more open and fractured experimentations than do engagements with fixed identity constructs, and thus offer a necessary complement to the articulation of truly counter-hegemonic subjectivities.

The **Conclusion** summarizes how activists conduct always imperfect struggles as they navigate the grey zones of power and resistance in the three arenas examined, and how these imperfect struggles impact the colonial structure of Israel-Palestine. Beyond acknowledging the inevitability of moving in a space fraught with contradictions and compromise, the conclusion argues that it is precisely when these contradictions are embraced and dealt with – practically, relationally, and reflexively – that the possibility opens for temporary, yet profound, disruptions of hegemonic power relations. The conclusion then highlights the core contributions of the thesis: to the understanding of Israel-Palestine, to studies of hegemony and solidarity, and to the methodology of critical research.

Part I

# Setting the Context

## Welcome to Israel!

(Tel Aviv, 2010)




Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv, August 2010 (ph: Alice Baroni)

*"Welcome to Israel" reads the sign above my head – blue block letters on a white background – as I am allowed to pass the passport-control section at Ben Gurion Airport. As I walk towards the escalator, I am struck by a long line of posters on the wall on my left. "Welcome home!", "We are part of you, you are part of us," "Help me get home, brother," "Help them build the Jewish future," "Welcome Jabotinsky, founder of the Jewish legion." It is, I read, is an exposition of the advertisement posters of Keren Hayesod, "the fundraising arm of the Zionist Organization," from the beginning of its operations in the 1920s until today. While the aesthetics reflects the evolution over time of propaganda art, it is consistently patriotic, militaristic, and colonial: men are shown working the land, soldiers taking care of women and babies, even a dove carrying an olive branch together with a soldier helmet, the caption saying: "For the sake of peace, a war loan." Some posters insist on the feeling of identification with the Jewish nation between the individual and the collectivity, across past (the Holocaust) and*

*future (the prosperous Israeli State). Others show the achievements of the organization in "settling the wasteland" and bringing "home" Jewish immigrants from around the world. "Welcome home."*

*I do not feel welcome. These displays make me sick, plunged into some Orwellian setting where "War is Peace" and all the rest. I know they are not aimed at me, and I can imagine how differently must feel at their sight a Jewish-Israeli citizen, or a Jewish person coming to visit his family who moved here during Nazism. My reaction is shaped by my own political exposure to Israel as a State that has settled on a land that was inhabited by someone else, that has waged colonial wars in order to expand it, and that pursues a politics of apartheid in order to maintain it. My hostility seems reciprocal: I have been searched and questioned, undergone stricter security measures than my Jewish travel companions, put in longer lines (together with more dark-skinned and Arabic-speaking travellers), tested for explosive, interrogated in detail about the purposes of my visit, in particular concerning my reasons to visit the West Bank ("tourism," of course, "religious tourism"). I have had to delete my Facebook profile, conceal all Arabic-sounding names from my phone's contact list, leave home any book or piece of clothing that may be considered even remotely connected to Palestine. Precautions to minimize the chances of being denied entry, as everyone who has tried to go to Palestine knows. It is praxis that those who seek to see beyond the shiny image of a "perfect holiday destination" into the realities of the occupation are made to feel like spies, threats, terrorist-lovers.*[1]

*This was in the summer of 2010, when I first went to Israel-Palestine in order to participate to a two-weeks volunteer program in Hebron, West Bank. Other trips followed, marked by even worse experiences of body searches, cross interrogations, travel companions being denied entry and sent back to Italy. Eight years later, as I reached the airport, this time as a researcher for my first fieldwork, my feeling unwelcome had not changed. Despite having attracted much less attention, perhaps due to my innocuous researcher identity, I felt the same resentment towards the security guards, the same rage at the ubiquitous chauvinist aesthetics, the same empathy towards those treated with suspicion for their skin and their language, and the same urge to leave this place as soon as possible and cross into 'Palestine' – the refugee camps, the 'resistance.' But this time it was not what awaited me: the plan was to stay in this very environment, observe it, become absorbed in it so as understand it closely and with a critical eye. The goal, eventually, was to provide a study of how this settler colonial hegemony works intimately, not towards its victims but among its followers.*

*And so, throughout the five weeks that made up my preliminary fieldwork, I was constantly accompanied by those feelings. As I wandered in the streets of West Jerusalem, I could not help but feeling resentful at the omnipresent signs of its "Judaization," even at symbols, such as the Star of David, that I had always associated with antiracist and emancipatory ideas.*[2] *The architecture, which appropriated indigenous elements (the 'golden stone' of Jerusalem, the arches and columns) and distorted them into an imposing aesthetics inspired by European*

[1] Website of the Israel Ministry of Tourism, last accessed: 14 May 2022, https://israel.travel.
[2] Oren Yiftachel, ""Ethnocracy" and Its Discontents: Minorities, Protests, and the Israeli Polity," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000): 725-756; Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

*rationalism, felt ominous and dystopic, and so did the constant reminders of State, Religion, and Army, all inseparably linked. I bit my tongue many times when listening to the hagiographies of this or that 'founding father' of Zionism in the many museums dedicated to them and to the explanations of how Jerusalem, finally 'reunited,' was a 'model of coexistence.'*[3] *I felt like a spy when I took a bus ride through the settlements surrounding Jerusalem to see how they looked, when I sat in the cafes of West Jerusalem and overheard conversations on politics. I was even exposed as one when, at the Hebrew course I attended as part of my intent at cultural immersion, the web-link to my research profile (mentioning, among other things, "Israeli settler colonialism") was circulated among the class without my permission.*



Jerusalem Municipality, West Jerusalem, July 2018 (ph: Alice Baroni)

*Maneuvering in this environment took a toll on me in terms of a constant distress. For how I tried convincing myself that the outcome of this study could be politically useful, it felt wrong participating as I was to the nation-building apparatus, not least economically. It felt oppressive being immersed in what I perceived as being a hostile environment. I felt enraged towards my interlocutors, and at the same time sneaky and dishonest in their regard, for I could not fully disclose the objectives of my research. And I wondered how I could ever produce decent social science while "hating Israel in the field."*[4] *Could I "study the enemy" if I could not get rid of these emotions?*[5] *Could I acknowledge these emotions and yet also find room for a personal connection, for empathy, for understanding?*

[3] Observations: Menachem Begin Heritage Center, July 10, 2018; Herzl Museum, West Jerusalem, July 23, 2018; City of David tour, July 11, 2018.
[4] Ghassan Hage, "Hating Israel in the field: On ethnography and political emotions," *Anthropological Theory* 9, no. 1 (2009): 59-79.
[5] Kathleen M. Blee, "Studying the enemy", in *Our Studies, Ourselves: Sociologists' Lives and Work*, ed. Barry Glassner and Rosanna Hertz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 13-23.

CHAPTER ONE

# The Shifting Hegemony of Zionism

## Norms, Identities, and Practices of Exception in the 'Jewish State'

In April 2019, early elections in Israel, called amidst corruption charges against incumbent Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, had left both him and his main rival, Benny Ganz, lacking the majority to form a governing coalition.[1] As they both struggled to find allies in the Knesset,[2] a heated political debate arose in the political and mediatic arena about the different visions of Israeli politics the two leaders represented.[3] Around that time, I interviewed Adam, a Jewish-Israeli political activist and also a journalist for an independent online newspaper esteemed by the anti-Zionist Israeli left. Asked to comment about the recent elections, and what they could tell about the state of Israeli politics, he reflected as such:

> We could put it like this. There is a 'new' hegemony, the extreme and religious right-wing, fighting an 'old' hegemony that has its representatives in the Supreme Court, the mainstream media, and some portions of the army. Neither has really won: it's an ongoing struggle. [...] These elections are a good example: you have the fundamentalists on one side [Netanyahu] and the army on the other [Ganz]. These guys [Ganz's party] claim to represent democratic values against the right-wing, but they are definitely not democratic either. [...] The basic ethos of Israeli society is undemocratic. There is a lot of talk about democracy, equality, freedom. But the truth is that Jewishness comes way before democracy as a value of the State. This did not happen with Netanyahu. The question has always been: "Are you with Us or with Them?"[4]

[1] Raoul Wootliff, "The final results of April's election are in: No one won, Netanyahu lost," *The Times of Israel*, May 30, 2019, https://www.timesofisrael.com/the-final-results-of-aprils-election-are-in-no-one-won-netanyahu-lost/.
[2] The Israeli Parliament.
[3] Yousef Munayyer, "Israel's opposition campaigned on democracy. Netanyahu won on Zionism," *+972 Magazine*, March 3, 2020, https://www.972mag.com/gantz-netanyahu-corruption-zionism/; Philip Weiss, "Two words that strike terror into a liberal's heart: 'Jewish democracy'," *Mondoweiss*, March 3. 2020 https://mondoweiss.net/2020/03/two-words-that-strike-terror-into-a-liberals-heart-jewish-democracy/.
[4] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 27, 2019.

Undoubtedly, a new ethos has emerged in Israeli politics in the past twenty years which has consolidated itself in the Knesset as well as in society at large. A right-wing, populist, authoritarian ethos.[5] One that has normalized blatantly supremacist positions towards Jewish nationals and openly racist and aggressive positions towards Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank. This ethos has been regarded with concern by the liberal sectors of Israeli society, who have raised their voices to denounce a dangerous departure from the liberal, democratic, and moral, values of Israel.[6] A 'clash' between two views of Zionism, the 'traditional' and the 'new', has ensued.

Yet, as Adam pointed out, there are two fundamental points in common between these two views: the primacy of Jewishness over democracy, and the framing of the relationship between Jews and Palestinians in terms of a radical and oppositional alterity. These are, in fact, the core tenets of the Zionist ideology of the Israeli State: one that conceives of the Jewish population as its referent collective and of the Palestinian one as an existential threat to be treated as within a legal, ontological, and ethical "space of exception."[7] This chapter argues that it is this shared ideology – which lies outside of the political debate, is unquestioned and taken-for-granted by the vast majority of Jewish-Israeli society – that constitutes the hegemony in Israel.

This chapter offers an overview of this hegemony that aims at showing how it structures the collective imaginary of Jewish-Israelis, as well as the very fabric of daily life in Israel. In particular, given the topic of this dissertation, the chapter focuses on how the Zionist hegemony structures Jewish-Israeli's relations to the 'issue of Palestine' and to Palestinians by enabling specific ways of seeing, understanding, feeling, relating, and interacting with them, while foreclosing others.

In order to analyse such structuring forces, I mobilize the concept of hegemony. Drawn from the original formulation of Gramsci, but also from the developments offered by Althusser (notably the notion of 'interpellation' and the production of subjects) and Laclau and Mouffe (the notion of 'articulation'), and from further work that expanded on the embodied and practical aspects of the disciplining of subjects (Foucault and Butler most notably), my understanding of hegemony is one

[5] Roee Kibrik, "The Israeli right: authoritarianism and ethnic supremacy," *The Progressive Post*, January 21, 2021, https://progressivepost.eu/the-israeli-right-authoritarianism-and-ethnic-supremacy/; Gayil Talshir "Populist Rightwing Ideological Exposition: Netanyahu's Regime as a Case in Point," *Advances in Applied Sociology* 8, no. 4 (2018): 329–349; Yonatan Levi and Shai Agmon, "Beyond Culture and Economy: Israel's Security-Driven Populism," *Contemporary Politics 27, no. 3 (2021): 292-315*; *Robert Kagan*, "Israel and the decline of the liberal order," *The Washington Post*, September 12, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/09/12/liberal-world-order-helped-israel-flourish-now-state-is-pushing-back/.

[6] Nimrod Goren and Gil Murciano, "Israel Now a Key Battleground in the Global Clash of Liberal Democracy and Its Enemies," *Haaretz*, August 11, 2019, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2019-08-11/ty-article-opinion/.premium/israel-elections-a-battleground-between-liberal-democracy-and-its-enemies-worldwide/0000017f-f8c4-d044-adff-fbfd3d280000; Zack Beauchamp, "Israeli democracy is rotting from the inside," *Vox*, April 10, 2019, https://www.vox.com/world/2019/4/10/18304567/israel-election-results-2019-democracy-palestinian; Ayelet Gundar-Goshen, "Benjamin Netanyahu's Toxic Win in Israel Election", *Time*, March 5, 2020, https://time.com/5795793/benjamin-netanyahus-israel-election/.

[7] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

that conceives of ideology, materiality, and subjectivity as co-constitutive.[8] As such, it allows to tackle the intertwinement of norms, collective identities, practices, bodies, and affects and to tie them to the material structure of rights and privileges in society.

Analysing Israeli hegemony through this lens thus requires considering different aspects of society in their interaction: the system of ideas and values that, 'articulated' together in certain ways, fix social meanings, as well as the legal, political, and economic architectures that distribute rights unevenly;[9] the top-down processes of nation-building as well as the participation of individuals to their re-production through daily habits and interactions; the concurrent work of manufacturing consent and policing dissent in the creation of disciplined subjects; the deep-level structures of a social order, resilient and often "transparent," as well as the additional articulations that fluctuate over time and circumstances.[10] In the attempt to cover these intertwined dimensions, the chapter proceeds as follows.

The first section examines the changes in Israeli politics in the last twenty years and ponders their significance in terms of the emergence of a new hegemony. The section concludes that, while there has been a significant change in societal ethos and political practice, this change is a matter of degree rather than of substance of the structuring principles of Israeli society. The section further argues that this change needs nonetheless to be taken into consideration, and especially so in the context of this study, because it has particularly impacted the experience of critical Jewish-Israelis. The second section focuses on the 'material' dimension of the Zionist hegemony. It reviews the legal-political architecture of Israel-Palestine to show how the Israeli regime manages the populations under its control according to a racial principle. The section argues that the distinction between Jews and Palestinians, rooted in the settler colonial formation of the Israeli State, is the core socio-political divide, and that societal hierarchies internal to the Jewish collective intertwine with it in important ways. The third section turns to the discursive articulations that justify such social organization and make it consistent with a perception of Israel as moral and democratic. After retracing the origins of Zionism as a national ideology born out of an experience of persecution and implemented through a settler colonial process, the section analyses its core articulations and shows how they configure a collective identity premised on a particularly virulent relationship between the Jewish Self and the Palestinian Other. Finally, the fourth section looks at how these articulations are disseminated throughout society to

[8] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971); *Louis Althusser, "Ideology, and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in Slavoj Žižek, ed., Mapping Ideology, (London, New York:* Verso, 2012): 100-140; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics. (London, New York:* Verso: 2014); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York; London: Routledge, 1999).

[9] Articulation is, for Laclau and Mouffe, the practice of linking together different elements (floating signifiers) in a particular discourse in such a way that modifies their character and fixes a new meaning. See Kevin DeLuca, "Articulation theory: A discursive grounding for rhetorical practice," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 32, no. 4 (1999): 335.

[10] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019 (c.f. Section 4 in this chapter).

constitute disciplined national subjects. This is the result of three processes: the massive mobilization of traditional nation-building apparatuses, the choreographing of space, architecture, and social interaction, and the conscription of the wider society into mechanisms of reciprocal policing. The section shows how the third process has hardened in the past two decades, configuring a particularly repressive climate towards dissenting voices on the issue of Palestine.

The chapter draws on the extensive academic literature that has addressed these issues and combines it with first-hand testimonies and observation from my fieldwork. By doing so, it seeks to bring particular attention to how the Zionist hegemony works at the personal level.

## *1. The Right-wing Turn in Israeli Politics: A New Hegemony?*

Since the start of the 21st century, and especially over the past ten years, the barycentre of Israeli politics has shifted more and more to the right, and with it its social consensus on the 'Palestinian issue.' Two watersheds have marked this development.

The first was the definitive demise of the Oslo Peace Process in 2000, and with it the end of the hopes for peace that had accompanied the 'Oslo years' (1993-2000).[11] In July, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak came back from the Camp David Summit with the diagnosis that the Palestinians were "no partner for peace."[12] This catchphrase was to become the axiom of Israeli sentiments towards Palestinians for the years to come, sanctioning the way of thinking that, no matter the efforts and concessions Israelis were willing to make, Palestinians would understand "nothing but violence."[13] In September of the same year, the provocative visit to the Temple Mount by right-wing Likud party leader Ariel Sharon, in an assertion of power over the most symbolic site for Palestinians, fuelled Palestinian resentment on the outcome of the Oslo Peace Process and triggered the uprising that came to be known as the Second Intifada.[14] This Intifada was characterized by the widespread

[11] Edward W. Said *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

[12] Yoram Meital "Israel's Perceptions of the PLO: From Recognition to the 'No Partner' Paradigm", *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 1, no. 4 (2014): 355-370; Uri Ben-Eliezer, *Old Conflict, New War: Israel's Politics Towards the Palestinians*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): Ch. 4: "No Partner for Peace". Over time, that of the supposed intransigence of Arafat during the Oslo Accords has been widely debunked as a "myth". See Robert Malley, "Fictions about the failure at camp David," *The New York Times*, July 8 2001, https://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/08/opinion/fictions-about-the-failure-at-camp-david.html. It has been noted how Israel, throughout the peace process, refused all the core demands of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO): the dismantling of settlements remaining after land swaps, the sovereignty over East Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, and the right of return of refugees. See Hilde Henriksen Waage, "Postscript to Oslo: The Mystery of Norway's Missing Files," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38, no. 1 (Autumn 2008): 54–65. Moreover, at Camp David Israel demanded further compromises from what initially agreed (most notably, the fragmentation of Palestinian territory into sealed zones whose access remained controlled by Israel, and the permanence of Israeli military presence at the borders as well as in Palestinian territory), as well as the promise that no further demands would come from Palestinians in the future. See Robert Wright, "Was Arafat the Problem?", Slate, April 18, 2002, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2002/04/was-arafat-the-problem.html.

[13] Raffaella Del Sarto, *Israel Under Siege: The Politics of Insecurity and the Rise of the Israeli Neo-Revisionist Right*, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2017): 2.

[14] Jeremy Pressman, The Second Intifada: Background and Causes of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 23, no. 2 (2003): 114–141. 'Intifada' means 'uprising' in Arabic.

recourse to violence by Palestinians, particularly in the form of suicide bombings. While Israeli retaliation was comparatively more lethal on civilian populations in both the West Bank and Gaza, the coming of violence 'at the door' of the Israeli public engendered a long-lasting trauma and a perception of insecurity that sealed the image of Palestinians as irreconcilable foes.[15] In Israeli society, hatred for Palestinians grew and the slogan "Death to the Arabs" became more and more commonplace.[16] In this climate, Ariel Sharon was elected Prime Minister. He inaugurated a unilateral policy of 'separation' (*hafrada*) which involved the construction of the Separation Barrier, the militarization of checkpoints, and the withdrawal of Israeli presence from the Gaza Strip (which, presented as a concession made to Palestinians, actually laid the conditions for the large scale military attacks that were to follow).[17] At the same time, the emerging framework of the 'war on terror' at the global level, coupled with the rise of the Hamas Islamist party, facilitated inscribing Palestinians within the image of an insidious Muslim threat endangering the West, thus further justifying, in Israel and abroad, the need for an uncompromising attitude.[18]

The second watershed was the nomination of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister in 2009, which inaugurated a 12-year-long leadership that was to give further impetus to the right-wing politics of the previous decade. Consolidating in power an alliance of ultra-nationalists, messianic Zionists, and settler organizations, Netanyahu's successive governments have revamped the public discourse of intransigence towards Palestinians and substantiated it in openly racist and aggressive policies.[19] I will briefly review them according to three domains: the hardening of maximalist and aggressive policies towards Palestinians, a domestic legislation aimed at increasing the gap of rights between Jewish majority and Arab minority, and an unprecedented crack-down on internal critical voices.

The past decade has seen a steep increase in Israeli human rights violations against Palestinians, including dispossessions due to Jewish settlement expansion, indiscriminate detention and killing, and the systematic recourse to large-scale military operations in the Gaza Strip ('Cast Lead' in 2008-2009, 'Pillar of Defence' in 2012, 'Protective Edge' in 2014, lethal repression of protesters at the

[15] Ruchama Marton, The Psychological Impact of the Second Intifada on Israeli Society", *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 11, no. 1 (2004), https://pij.org/articles/18/the-psychological-impact-of-the-second-intifada-on-israeli-society.

[16] Hillel Cohen, "Joint Israeli–Palestinian Political Activity in Jerusalem: Characteristics and Challenge," in *Locating Urban Conflicts*, ed. Wendy Pullan, Britt Baillie, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 137.

[17] Avi Shlaim, "Ariel Sharon's War against the Palestinians," *Logos: A journal of modern society & culture 3*, no. 3 (2004), http://www.logosjournal.com/shlaim.htm; Yoav Peled, "Dual War: The Legacy of Ariel Sharon," *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 34, no. 2 (2006): 197-203.

[18] Ilan Pappé, "The inevitable War on Terror: De-terrorising the Palestinians", in *States of War since 9/11: Terrorism, sovereignty and the War on Terror*, ed. Alex Houen (London: Routledge, 2014): 84-102; Hanna Notte, "It's the Same War": Explaining the Durability of States' Partnerships with the United States in its Global War on Terror", (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2014).

[19] Raffaella Del Sarto, "Back to Square One? The Netanyahu Government and the Prospects for Middle East Peace", *Mediterranean Politics* 14, no. 3 (2009): 421-428; Joel Peters and Rob Pinfold, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election 2015", *Mediterranean Politics* 20, no. 3 (2015): 405-412.

Great March of Return in 2018 and 2019, and 'Guardian of the Walls' in May 2021).[20] While new legal instruments were mobilized to facilitate the expropriation of Palestinian land, plans for the outright annexation of vast territories in the West Bank were made openly for the first time, supported by the bold legal argument that Israeli presence in the West Bank "cannot be considered an occupation."[21]

Domestically, new laws have been issued that discriminate against the Palestinian minority in Israel and seek to erase their physical presence as well as their collective history, memory, and political consciousness.[22] The most blatant example is the so-called Nation-State Law of 2018, a law of constitutional value ('Basic Law') that reiterates and further regulates the "Jewish character of the State" expressed in other laws.[23] The law clarifies that "the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish People," establishes Hebrew as the official language of Israel, while downgrading Arabic to a language with "special status," and asserts that "Jewish settlement – without specifying where – is a national value," as such to be encouraged and advanced by the State.[24] Designed, in the words of its proponents, to "prevent even the slightest thought, let alone attempt, to transform Israel into a country of all its citizens," as has been for decades the proposal of Palestinian representatives, the law ratifies the supremacy not only of Jewish nationals over Palestinian citizens, but also of Ashkenazi Jews over Jews of Arab origins, codifying the racial boundaries of the national collective as a 'white' and Western Jewish one.[25]

Finally, Netanyahu's government has orchestrated and supported a large-scale campaign of de-legitimation towards any criticism raised in Israeli civil society against these developments. If stifling political organizing and dissent among Palestinians is not a new element, this phase has seen an

[20] B'Tselem and Kerem Navot, "This Is Ours – and This, Too: Israel's Settlement Policy in the West Bank," March 2021, https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/202103_this_is_ours_and_this_too_eng.pdf; "Administrative Detention", B'Tselem, last accessed August 8, 2022, https://www.btselem.org/administrative_detention; Euro-Med Monitor for Human Rights, "Israel's Arbitrary Killings and Its System of Structural Violence," October 2015, https://www.euromedmonitor.org/uploads/reports/ArbitraryKillings.pdf.

[21] Omar M. Dajani, "Israel's creeping annexation," *American Journal of International Law* 111 (2017): 51-56; Tovah Lazaroff, "Legal report on outposts recommends authorization," *The Jerusalem Post*, July 9, 2012, https://www.jpost.com/diplomacy-and-politics/legal-report-on-outposts-recommends-authorization; Geoffrey Aronson, "No Occupation, No Problem: Netanyahu Committee Recommends Moving Toward De Facto Annexation," *Settlement Report* 22, no. 4 (July-August 2012).

[22] Examples are the successive amendments of the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law, meant to hinder the process of family reunification; the Nakba Law of 2011, which delegitimizes commemorations of the war of 1948 from the Palestinian perspective, and a law allowing for establishing Jewish-only residential communities. See Amal Jamal, "The Hegemony of Neo-Zionism and the Nationalizing State in Israel – The Meaning and Implications of the Nation-State Law", in *Defining Israel" The Jewish State, Democracy, and the Law*, ed. Simon Rabinovitch (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2018): 163-164; see also Yifat Gutman and Noam Tirosh, "Balancing Atrocities and Forced Forgetting: Memory Laws as a Means of Social Control in Israel," *Law & Social Inquiry* 46, no. 3 (2021): 705-730; Revital Hovel and Jack Khoury, "High Court Upholds Residential Screening Law, Enabling Jewish Villages to Keep Arabs Out," *Ha'aretz*, September 18, 2014, https://www.haaretz.com/2014-09-18/ty-article/.premium/court-allows-villages-to-veto-residents/0000017f-e5a1-df5f-a17f-ffff98fd0000.

[23] Basic Law: Israel, The Nation State of the Jewish People, Jewish Virtual Library, July 19, 2018, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel-s-basic-laws-the-israel-nation-state-law. See also Rabinovitch, *Defining Israel*.

[24] Emma Green, "Israel's New Law Inflames the Core Tension in Its Identity," *The Atlantic*, July 21, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/07/israel-nation-state-law/565712/.

[25] Jamal, "The Hegemony of Neo-Zionism". See also Jen Marlowe, "Israel's Mizrahi Activists Are Fighting the Racist Nation-State Law," *The Nation*, May 27, 2020, https://www.thenation.com/article/world/israel-racism-mizrahis-palestinians/;

unprecedented targeting of dissent also internally to the Jewish majority. Started against criticisms raised about the human rights violations during operation Cast Lead, a campaign of "branding traitors" carried out by political figures and mainstream media has publicly exposed critics of Israeli policies as 'enemies of the state,' 'fifth columns' of foreign interests, 'race traitors,' and 'self-hating Jews.'[26] Around 2015, the process has evolved into a "frontal attack" through the promulgation of laws aimed at limiting the possibility for action and speech, and eroding the legitimacy, of human rights organizations and critical civil society actors more broadly. [27] Finally, more and more right-wing civil society organizations (often referred to as GONGOs – Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations), funded and supported by the State, have taken an active role in this process by spreading misinformation and fuelling resentment, and often violence, against critical individuals and NGOs (often obtained through infiltration).[28]

This political climate has exacerbated and emboldened sentiments already present in Israeli society, further cementing a social consensus based on the need to segregate, control, and annihilate Palestinians.[29] Quotidian vocabulary conveys the idea of a borderless and greater Israel, where Jewish settlements in the West Bank are simply 'neighbourhoods' and 'occupation' is a contested word.[30] Racist and violent attitudes towards the 'Arabs' have become the norm, which has resulted in an

[26] Mairav Zonszein, "Breaking the Silence: Inside the Israeli Right's Campaign to Silence an Anti-Occupation Group," *The Intercept*, March 3, 2019, https://theintercept.com/2019/03/03/breaking-the-silence-israel-idf/;.

[27] HRDF (Human Rights Defenders Fund), "By All Means: The various ways Israel is targeting Human Rights Defenders," June 2019, http://hrdf.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/By-all-means_web.pdf. Examples of laws include the so-called NGO Law, which exposes NGOs that receive most of their funding from foreign governments (as is the case for most organizations working to advance Palestinian rights), the so-called Anti-BDS Law, which criminalizes the public promotion of boycott of Israeli products, and a number of laws designed to target specific organizations (such as the so-called Breaking the Silence Law, aimed at preventing the organization from speaking in schools, and the so-called B'Tselem Law, forbidding citizens from doing their national service with the organization). Laws that were upon consideration at the time of writing include a law which proposes to outright ban critical organizations, and a law forbidding to film soldiers during their service (thus undermining one of the most effective legal instruments against army abuses towards Palestinians). See also ACRI (Association for Civil Rights in Israel), "Antidemocratic legislation: Ramifications for Human Rights and the Work of NGOs," May 26, 2019, https://fef8066e-8343-457a-8902-ae89f366476d.filesusr.com/ugd/0aadc5_d526315c60bd4ae19196e17052136320.pdf; ACRI, "Overview of antidemocratic legislation advanced by the 20th Knesset," October 2018, https://law.acri.org.il/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Overview-of-Anti-Democratic-Legislation-October-2018.pdf.

[28] Examples of right-wing organizations include NGO Monitor, which provides a full list of anti-occupation groups and their members, presenting them as threats to the state; Academia Monitor, which similarly identifies and warns against academics who have 'pro-Palestinian' stances; Im Tirzu and Ad Kan, which target anti-occupation groups by framing their activities as treason in the public arena (with information often gathered through infiltration and other illegal means), and suing their activists under various pretexts. See HRDF, "By All Means". See also Dahlia Scheindlin, "Israel's volunteer thought-police," *+ 972 Magazine*, January 15, 2016, https://www.972mag.com/israels-volunteer-thought-police/; Mairav Zonszein, "WATCH: Incitement against the Israeli Left just got a lot scarier," *+972 Magazine*, December 15, 2015, https://www.972mag.com/watch-incitement-against-israeli-left-just-got-a-whole-lot-scarier/; Itamar Bazz, "StandWithUs to Take Cash, Messaging from Israeli Gov't," *+972 Magazine*, January 13, 2015, http://972mag.com/standwithus-to-take-cash-messaging-from-israeli-govt/101314/; Yossi Gurvitz, "What is NGO Monitor's connection to the Israeli government?," *+972 Magazine*, April 29, 2014, https://www.972mag.com/what-is-ngo-monitors-connection-to-the-israeli-government/.

[29] "Israeli Public Opinion Polls: Regarding Peace with the Palestinians and a Palestinian State (1978 - 2022),", Jewish Virtual Library, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israeli-polls-regarding-peace-with-the-palestinians.

[30] Participant observation, Breaking the Silence tour, July 9, 2018; Interviews: West Jerusalem, July 24, 2018; West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019; Herzliya, December 2, 2019.

upsurge in verbal and physical attacks.[31] While the Jewish population has shifted more and more to the right-wing, also in adaptation to the new prevailing discourse ("After all, no one wants to be called a traitor"), liberal-Zionist ideas that used to occupy the centre of the political spectrum have come to be perceived as treacherous and alien as radical anti-Zionist ones.[32] Initiatives of 'dialogue' and 'coexistence' with Palestinians that were common in the Oslo years are met with contempt and often violence.[33] Being publicly labelled as a 'leftist', a category that has come to assimilate a vast and extremely diverse array of positions, is insulting and stigmatizing, with often very real consequences on one's life conduct, private and public alike.[34]

Given the magnitude and pervasiveness of this shift in Israeli political life, several scholars and political commentators have interpreted it as the emergence of a new "neo-Zionist" hegemony in lieu of the hegemony of "traditional" Zionism that had dominated Israeli politics since its beginnings.[35] In this view, the tension intrinsic to Zionism between democratic and universalistic elements, on the one side, and ethnic and exclusivist elements, on the other, would have resolved decisively in favour of the latter.[36] "Israel has moved into a Neo-Zionist era [...] in which democratic values are abandoned and the gatekeepers of democracy are weakened."[37] The "neo-revisionist hegemony" would combine "the perception of an inherently hostile environment [...] with ethnoreligious conceptions of politics and the principle of territorial maximalism."[38]

In a variant of this position, the struggle between the 'new' and the 'old' hegemony is still ongoing, as argued by the journalist with whom I opened this chapter. Indeed, many scholars and commentators, especially in Israel, have noted how in the past two decades progressive Israelis in the media and academia have come "to the rescue" of Israeli politics, and of Zionism itself, against the

[31] CERD (Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination), "Concluding observations on the combined seventeenth to nineteenth reports of Israel," December 12, 2019, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/ISR/INT_CERD_COC_ISR_40809_E.pdf; CERD, "Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention, Israel," March 9, 2012, https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/cerd.C.Isr.Co.14-16.pdf.

[32] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019. See also TSC (Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research) and PSR (Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research), "Palestinian-Israeli Pulse: A Joint Poll," August 13, 2018, https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/731; Pew Research Centre, "Israel's Religiously divided society," March 8, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/03/08/israels-religiously-divided-society/.

[33] Participant observation, Alternative Memorial Ceremony, May 7, 2019. See Adam Rasgon "Thousands of Israelis, dozens of Palestinians hold Tel Aviv Memorial Day event," *The Times of Israel*, May 8, 2019, https://www.timesofisrael.com/thousands-of-israelis-palestinians-mark-memorial-day-in-joint-tel-aviv-ceremony/.

[34] Interviews: West Jerusalem, March 27, 2019; Tel Aviv; May 7, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 27, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019.

[35] Del Sarto, *Israel Under Siege*; Jamal, "The Hegemony of Neo-Zionism". On the evolution of Zionist leadership and ideology over time see Uri Ram "From Nation State to Nation-~State: Nation, History, and Identity Struggles in Jewish Israel", in *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics*, ed. Ephraim Nimni, Pnina Werbner, and Richard Werbner (London: Zed Books, 2003): 20-41.

[36] On this tension see Uri Ram, "National, Ethnic or Civic? Contesting Paradigms of Memory, Identity and Culture in Israel", *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 19 (2000): 405-422; Ilan Pappé, "The Square Circle: The Struggle for Survival of Traditional Zionism", in *The Challenge of Post-Zionism*; Ephraim Nimni, "Introduction", *The Challenge of Post-Zionism*.

[37] Jamal, "The Hegemony of Neo-Zionism".

[38] Del Sarto, *Israel Under Siege*, 2-3; 211.

"damage" that is being done to it by its racist and fanatic interpretations.[39] The end of Netanyahu's 12-year-long leadership and the political crisis that accompanied it, with four rounds of elections being held in less than two years, has been interpreted, as seen at the outset of the chapter, as exemplary of this ongoing struggle.[40]

According to others yet, the right-wing turn in Israeli politics, while factual and significant in its consequences, does not justify thinking in terms of a new hegemony. Scholars of settler colonial studies and Palestinian analysts in particular have emphasized the elements of continuity across the different versions of Zionist leadership, 'new' or 'traditional,' in dealing with the Palestinian question. Jamal, for instance, argues that "both strands encapsulate the Zionist continuum" by advocating for "supremacist, exclusivist, and *volkish* rights for Jews with disastrous consequences for the indigenous people of Palestine." He further contends that:

> [...] the categorical distinction between mainstream Zionism and Neo-Zionism is misplaced and that the variance between them is not substantial but is rather a matter of presentation. It is true that manifestations of Neo-Zionist policies and the way they are justified and propagated are radical and repulsive [...] Nonetheless, the justifications provided by Neo-Zionists are based on principles propagated by central leaders of classical mainstream Zionism. The continuous expansionist drive for new settlements in Palestine based on the Biblical right of Jews over the land, the unconditional, sole right of Jews to immigrate to their exclusive 'homeland', and their need to secure their rights form the major components of the strategy utilised to normalise Israeli-Jewish hegemony in the largest space of historical Palestine.[41]

Indeed, as the next sections illustrate, despite the claims to the contrary of 'traditional' Zionists, neither version of Zionism is fully 'democratic.' The political and legal architecture that privileges Jews and violently discriminates against Palestinians has been in place since the birth of the State of

[39] Pappé, "The Square Circle", 45-46; Peter Beaumont, "EU leads criticism after Israel passes Jewish 'nation state' law," *The Guardian*, July 19, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/19/israel-adopts-controversial-jewish-nation-state-law. See as example of this rescue operation: Gadi Taub, *The Settlers and the Struggle for the Meaning of Zionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

[40] The unfolding of the crisis seems to suggest that this 'battle' leans in favour of the extreme right-wing. The new ruling coalition, sworn in in June 2021, while excluding the Likud includes extreme right-wing parties with positions on the Palestinian issue more maximalist and messianic than Netanyahu's. See "Naftali Bennett: The rise of Israel's new PM," *BBC News*, June 13, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56969598; "Who is Naftali Bennett, Israel's potential prime minister?," *Al Jazeera*, May 31, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/31/naftali-bennett-who-is-israels-new-potential-prime-minister. While it is too early to fully assess the new direction taken by Israeli politics, the initial impression is that it does not mark a break from the features outlined above, as exemplified by the extremely high levels of lethal and structural violence carried out against Palestinians and the continuing crackdown on internal dissent. See e.g. Euro-Med Monitor for Human Rights, "Israel killed five times as many Palestinians in 2022 than it killed in the same period in 2021," April 15, 2022, https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/5059/Israel-killed-five-times-as-many-Palestinians-in-2022-than-it-killed-in-the-same-period-in-2021; OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), "Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, issues first report," June 7, 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/commission-inquiry-occupied-palestinian-territory-including-east-jerusalem; Andrew Carey and Abeer Salman, "Israel labels six Palestinian civil society groups 'terrorist,' setting challenge for international donors," *CNN World*, October 23, 2021, https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/22/europe/israel-palestinian-civil-society-groups-intl/index.html.

[41] Amal Jamal, "Neo-zionism and Palestine: The Unveiling of Settler-colonial Practices in Mainstream Zionism," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 16, no. 1 (2017): 47, 50.

Israel, orchestrated and progressively implemented not by religious fanatics, but by representatives of traditional Zionism in its socialist and liberal versions.[42] From a Palestinian perspective, the recent policies that have sparked outrage among liberal circles in Israel and worldwide, such as the Nation-State Law, are just adding a layer of codification to practices that were in place well before the advent of Netanyahu, and whose legitimacy went largely unquestioned by the majority of Israeli society.[43] Coming back to the past elections, a look at the 'progressive' candidate further illustrates the point. While labelled as 'centre-left' in the Israeli political debate, Gantz's positions on the Palestinian issue are far from accommodating, and "in any other country around the world, he would be labelled right-wing, if not extreme right-wing."[44] Besides vague calls for pursuing peace with the Palestinians, he actually remains a stark supporter of security with all means, including "bombing Gaza to oblivion."[45] Indeed, for many Palestinians, Netanyahu and Gantz are but "two sides of the same coin."[46]

From this perspective, centring the debate around 'hard' *versus* 'soft' versions of Zionism has driven attention away from the points they have in common. These consist essentially of the exclusion of Palestinians from the Israeli social collective (which is unequivocally defined as Jewish), of their casting as radical and threatening Others, and of their relegation into a "permanent space of exception" where the norms that apply to the ingroup are suspended.[47] As Section 3 will show, what varies across versions of Zionism is the 'extent' of this exception (how much undemocratic and inhumane treatment can be justified) and the emphasis of its justification (whether security and necessity or nationalist and religious claims), but not its existence. As such, portraying neo-Zionism as a "deviation" from traditional Zionism, as many progressive thinkers in Israel have, not only mystifies the intrinsically undemocratic nature of Zionism at large, but works towards the legitimation of traditional Zionism via the comparison with a more "repulsive" version.[48]

This dissertation contends, together with the last interpretation examined, that it is Zionism at large, in its shared political and ideological articulations, that constitutes the hegemony in Jewish-

[42] David Kretzmer, *The occupation of Justice: The Supreme Court of Israel and the Occupied Territories*, (New York: Suny Press, 2002); Ghazi-Walid Falah, "The geopolitics of 'enclavisation' and the demise of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 8 (2005): 1341-1372; Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, (London: Verso Books, 2017); Neve Gordon, "From Colonization to Separation: exploring the structure of Israel's occupation", *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2008): 25-44.

[43] Gavin O'Toole, "Israel's nation-state law to unleash 'deepening apartheid'," *Al Jazeera*, April 28, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/28/israels-nation-state-law-to-unleash-deepening-apartheid.

[44] See the following article quoting Haifa-based Palestinian analyst Diana Buttu. Arwa Ibrahim, "Israel election: Where do the parties stand on the occupation?," *Al Jazeera*, September 12, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/12/israel-election-where-do-the-parties-stand-on-the-occupation.

[45] *Ibidem*.

[46] Ali Younes, "For Palestinians, Netanyahu, Gantz are 'two sides of same coin'," *Al Jazeera*, March 3, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/3/for-palestinians-netanyahu-gantz-are-two-sides-of-same-coin.

[47] Ronit Lentin, "Palestine-Israel and state criminality: Exception, Settler Colonialism and Racialization," *State Crime Journal* 5, no. 1 (2016): 32-50; David Lloyd, "Settler colonialism and the state of exception: the example of Palestine/Israel", *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 59-80; Ghassan Hage, *Alter-Politics: Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination*, (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2015): 19-22; 155-160; Agamben, *State of Exception*.

[48] Jamal, "Neo-zionism and Palestine", 49-50.

Israeli society. Indeed, the fact that the commonalities outlined above were left entirely out of the debate that accompanied the political 'crisis' of the past few years suggests that they constitute the taken-for-granted ideas that define hegemony in the Gramscian sense: the "common sense," the "doxa," the "shared grammar" within which, only, contestation and antagonism are possible.[49]

Notwithstanding this underlying continuity, the shift to the right of Israeli politics remains a significant change, and one that needs to be taken into consideration. This is particularly true given the topic of this dissertation, which centres on Jewish-Israeli dissent on the question of Palestine. Arguably, in fact, it is precisely within Jewish-Israeli society that recent right-wing governments have marked a discontinuity with their predecessors in terms of a considerable narrowing of the margins of legitimate critique. Truly enough, anti-Zionist ideas – that is, counterhegemonic ones – have always been delegitimized in public debate. Anti-Zionist dissidents are used to being framed as 'traitors' and 'self-hating Jews,' and a Basic Law of 1985 forbids political platforms that contest the Jewish character of the State from running in the elections.[50] This belies the claim, made by some proponents of the 'new hegemony' framework, that before the shift Israel used to be "an open society where fervent political debates were the norm."[51] Still, the legal and public-shaming campaigns initiated under Netanyahu have made the repression of internal dissent at once more comprehensive and more violent, rendering it difficult and even dangerous to raise any critical voice.[52] The quasi totality of my interlocutors had suffered some consequence for their activism – either in the form of arrests, public attacks, physical attacks, career costs, and so forth.[53] All of those who work in NGOs have detailed the various obstacles to their action in consequence of the new laws – from budget cuts and operational constraints to infiltration, public exposure, and legal retaliation.[54] I have personally witnessed in several occasions the violence with which protests and actions are met by right-wing extremists – from insulting and spitting, to throwing water onto the protesters, to cutting tyres of their cars and following them home.[55]

[49] John Schwarzmantel, *The Routledge Guidebook to Gramsci's Prison Notebooks*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2015): 93; 180; 218–21; 244; 252; Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London, Boston, Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979): 184-187; Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question* (London: Sage, 1993): 73; Karin M. Fierke, *Changing Games, changing Strategies: critical investigations in security*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998): 3-26

[50] Interviews: Tel Aviv, May 27, 2019; Tel Aviv, March 31, 2019. See also Basic Law: The Knesset, Jewish Virtual Library, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/basic-law-the-knesset.

[51] Del Sarto, *Israel Under Siege*, 9. See also Taub, *The Settlers*.

[52] HRDF, "By All Means".

[53] Interviews: West Jerusalem, March 27, 2019; West Jerusalem, April 21, 2019; Neve Shalom, May 2, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 27, 2019; West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.

[54] Interviews: West Jerusalem, April 20, 2019; West Jerusalem, April 21, 2019; West Jerusalem, May 3, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 14, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 27, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.

[55] Participant observations: Protest in solidarity with the Great March of Return, Tel Aviv, March 30, 2019; Direct action in solidarity with the Great March of Return, Sderot, May 3, 2019; Alternative Memorial Day, Tel Aviv, May 7, 2019; Nakba commemoration, May 8, 2019; Protest to end the siege in Gaza, May 14, 2019.

It does not come as surprising, then, that it is particularly in the eyes of progressive Israelis that the right-wing shift has been perceived as a major, substantive change in their political scenario. Indeed, many of my interlocutors have referred to the present political climate as an "ominous" one, one of "witch-hunt," and one that "has all the features of Fascism."[56] Also the anti-Zionists among them, for whom the situation was dire even previously, have acknowledged the shift: "Suddenly it was not just us… it was everyone!" "We were never liked, that's true, but it was never like this either… now, there are people who want us dead."[57]

In sum, while not configuring a new hegemony, which was and remains Zionist at core, the right-wing shift of Israeli politics has significantly impacted the sphere of Jewish-Israeli activism for Palestinian rights. This has had important consequences on the formulation and organization of dissent and solidarity, as this dissertation aims to show.

### *2. A Society Structured in Race: Jews, Palestinians, and Internal Others*

In spite of Israel's self-promotion as a thriving multi-ethnic democracy, rights and privileges are assigned to the populations under its control on the bases of race. Race is, in other words, the core "structuring principle" of Israeli social and political hierarchies.[58] This racial structure distinguishes primarily between Jews and Palestinians: the former privileged and allowed to thrive and the latter systematically discriminated and pushed towards physical and symbolic extinction.

The cornerstone to the racial hierarchisation of Israeli society is the constitutional nature of Israel as the "State of the Jewish people," whose stated purpose is to protect and further the interests of the Jewish nation above those of its non-Jewish citizens.[59] This purpose is achieved legally via the distinction between 'citizenship' (Israeli) and 'nationality' (Jewish or not) and the assignment of equal basic rights within the former but very different ones according to the latter.[60] Jewish nationals, in fact, are the only national group to enjoy collective rights: they exclusively hold the right to self-

[56] Interviews: West Jerusalem, July 24, 2018; West Jerusalem, March 27, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019.
[57] Interviews: Tel Aviv, May 27, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019.
[58] Stuart Hall, "Race, articulation, and societies structured in dominance", in Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham: London-Duke University Press, 1980): 339.
[59] See "Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel", https://m.knesset.gov.il/en/about/pages/declaration.aspx. This character and mission are further clarified and made explicit in the Nation-State Law of 2018, but were already present *in nuce* in the Declaration. See also ESCWA (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), "Israeli Practices towards the Palestinian people and the question of apartheid", Palestine and the Israeli Occupation, no. 1 (2017): 25-31, https://oldwebsite.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/ESCWA%202017%20%28Richard%20Falk%29%2C%20Apartheid.pdf. Jewishness is taken to be a racial marker because it is consistently defined on the basis of descent, and only marginally of faith, both by Zionist thinkers and in Israeli jurisprudence. The emphasis on descent, as Tilley and Falk note, is not casual insofar as it allows to justify the Jewish people's right to self-determination in the land of Palestine by tracing a continuity with its ancestral inhabitants. See ESCWA, "Israeli Practices", 24.
[60] Baruch Kimmerling "Jurisdiction in an Immigrant-Settler Society: The "Jewish and Democratic State," *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 10 (2002): 1119-1144. See also Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness State, Society, and the Military*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 180-182

determination, and they are exclusively represented in the state's symbols, national and religious ceremonies, calendar, language, religion, memory and culture.[61] Moreover, Jewish nationals are granted privileges that other nationalities do not have, also thanks to international Zionist lobbies which the State mandated to invest in the development of the Jewish population in the country.[62] Their mandate ranges from matters of immigration to public planning and property and land use (which must serve 'national' interest, and as such cannot be transferred to non-Jews),[63] with the consequence that the Jewish collective has been growing and thriving since the early days of the State much more than other citizens.[64] Moreover, social security benefits such as subsidies, tax exemptions, or facilitated loans, are assigned on the basis of being a *oleh* (a recent Jewish immigrant) or on having done military service (indirectly favouring Jewish nationals for whom service is compulsory). Finally, Kimmerling notes that, in the legal sphere, "when cases involving the limitation of individual rights [...] are brought to court, the court tends to protect what is perceived as 'Jewish national interests,'"[65] thus further disadvantaging non-Jewish nationals. As a result of these policies, Jewish citizens systemically enjoy better political, cultural, and legal rights, better infrastructures, better access to education and professional opportunities.

This situation has been defined as per the oxymoron of "ethnic democracy," whereby the democratic elements (equal citizenship rights and periodic free elections) are just a façade posed on a system that works to the benefit of the privileged ethnic group:

> [T]he state is identified with a core ethnic nation, not with its citizens. The state practices a policy of creating a homogenous nation-state, a state of and for a particular ethnic nation, and acts to promote the language, culture, numerical majority, economic wellbeing, and political interests of this group.[66]

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[61] *Ibidem*. See also Frances Raday, "Religion, multiculturalism, and equality: The Israeli case", *Israel Yearbook on Human Rights* 25 (1995): 193-241.

[62] World Zionist Organisation–Jewish Agency (Status) Law, https://www.adalah.org/uploads/oldfiles/Public/files/Discriminatory-Laws-Database/English/18-World-Zionist-Organization-Jewish-Agency-Status-Law-1952.pdf. See also the Covenant signed between the World Zionist Organization/Jewish Agency and the State of Israel in 1954, which states for instance that the organizations are in charge of "the organising of [Jewish] immigration abroad and the transfer of immigrants and their property to Israel; participation in the absorption of immigrants in Israel; youth immigration; agricultural settlement in Israel; the acquisition and amelioration of land in Israel by the institutions of the Zionist Organisation, the Jewish National Fund and the United Jewish Appeal; participation in the establishment and the expansion of development enterprises in Israel; the encouragement of private capital investments in Israel; assistance to cultural enterprises and institutions of higher learning in Israel; the mobilisation of resources for financing these functions; the coordination of the activities in Israel of Jewish institutions and organisations acting within the sphere of these functions with the aid of public funds." ( www.israellobby.org/ja/12311970_JAFI_Reconstitution.pdf ,appendix I.)

[63] Basic Laws of Israel: Israel Lands (1960), Jewish Virtual Library, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/basic-law-israel-lands.

[64] Uzi Rebhun, Gilad Malach, and Ruth Gavison, *Demographic trends in Israel*, (Jerusalem: Metzilah Center for Zionist, Jewish, Liberal and Humanist Thought, 2009).

[65] *Ibidem*.

[66] Sammy Smooha, *Arabs and Jews in Israel*, Volume I: *Conflicting and Shared Attitudes in a Divided Society*. (Boulder, London: Westview Press, 1989): 199–200. See also Sammy Smooha "Minority status in an ethnic democracy: The status of the Arab minority in Israel,", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13, no. 3 (1990): 389-413; Yoav Peled, "Ethnic democracy and the legal construction of citizenship: Arab Citizens of the Jewish State," *The American Political Science Review* 86, no. 2 (1992): 432-443.

Moreover, the definition of Jewishness on the basis of descent and religion, which is also codified in Israeli jurisprudence, disconnects the dominant right-bearing group from the boundaries of citizenship and identifies it instead with the Jewish people worldwide, in what has been defined "a major deviation from any acceptable definition of liberal democracy."[67] As a consequence, Israel has extra-territorial obligations with regards to the Jewish diaspora, which it claims to represent, that it does not have towards its own citizens. These obligations include promoting and facilitating the "mission of gathering in the exiles," furthering the identification of world Jewry with the Israeli State, and garnering their political and financial support.[68] It materializes in the Law of Return (which grants automatic citizenship to any Jewish person worldwide who demands it), in the historical promotion of Jewish immigration to Israel (*aliyah*), and in educational and fundraising programs aimed at Jewish diaspora communities worldwide.[69]

The pre-eminence of the ethnic element over the democratic one belies the claim, a given in Israeli political discourse and in the imaginary of its (Jewish) constituency, that Israel is at once 'Jewish' and 'democratic,' at once 'the homeland of all Jews' and a 'State for all its citizens.'[70] Indeed, it is largely acknowledged among Israeli analysts, policy makers, and even the general public, that actual democracy – equal rights to all citizens – is incompatible with maintaining the Jewish character of the State, because it would allow other nationals to vote against it. For instance, when, in the 1990s, Arab nationals accepted their minority status in exchange for their recognition as a national minority, the demand was rejected and framed by politicians and courts as a threat to Israel's right to exist – that is, as a Jewish state.[71] Another central way in which Israel has historically worked to square the circle of a Jewish and democratic State has been to maintain an overwhelming Jewish majority.[72] Such a majority "allows the trappings of democracy – democratic elections, a strong legislature – without threatening any loss of hegemony by the dominant group."[73] Its maintenance, however, once again

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[67] Kimmerling, *The Invention*, 182.

[68] See "The Jerusalem Program," World Zionist Organization/Jewish Agency for Israel, last accessed May 30, 2022, www.wzo.org.il/The-Jerusalem-Program.

[69] "Basic Laws of Israel: Law of Return," Jewish Virtual Library, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel-s-law-of-return. Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN), "Extra-territorial obligations of the State to uphold economic, social and cultural rights," http://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/ETO-JNF%20and%20WZO%20cut.pdf. Aliyah is a Traditional Jewish concept that literally means 'ascent.' It has historically referred to the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to the historic land of Palestine, but was sporadic prior to Zionism. With Zionism, aliyah came to refer to waves of mass immigration to settle the land, and with the creation of the State to the acquiring of Israeli citizenship by former diaspora Jews under the Law of Return.

[70] See Alexander Yakobson and Amnon Rubinstein, *Israel and the Family of Nations: The Jewish nation-state and human rights*, (London, New York: Routledge-Taylor & Francis, 2010). The Jewish and democratic character of the state is implicit in the Declaration of Independence, and has been made explicit in the already mentioned Nation-State Law. See also Yossi Klein Halevi quoted in Joshua Mitnick, "Does new law tilt Israel away from its democratic values?", *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 24, 2018, https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2018/0724/Does-new-law-tilt-Israel-away-from-its-democratic-values.

[71] Z. Asli Elitsoy, "A "Jewish State" or a "State for All Its Citizens?": Palestinian Demands for Redefining the Boundaries of the Israeli National Identity and the Jewish Response," *İsrailiyat: Journal of Israeli and Judaic Studies*, no. 7 (Winter 2020): 4-17.

[72] Rebhun, Malach, and Gavison, *Demographic trends*.

[73] ESCWA, "Israeli Practices", 31.

requires derogating to the tenets of actual democracy by disproportionately encouraging the growth of the Jewish population and, crucially, by countering the growth of the Arab population.[74] I turn to this issue now as part of the wider system of discriminations imposed on Palestinians.

The second aspect to Israel's racial political structure is its systematic discrimination against Palestinians. This discrimination pertains not only to Palestinian citizens of the State – the 'Arab' national minority – but also to all Palestinians who are subject to its rule in what are internationally recognized as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip) as well as to Palestinian refugees and involuntary exiles worldwide. The extent of such discrimination, and the legal framework through which it is carried out, varies depending on the different status of Palestinian subjects. For this reason, it is useful to go over each of them separately.

*a) PALESTINIAN CITIZENS:*

Palestinian citizens of Israel (the largest non-Jewish minority, comprising 20% of the population) suffer additional discriminations to the ones of other non-Jewish nationals, and are as such second-class citizens. They see actively erased the memory of their historical presence in the land, they are particularly marginalized in the access to educational and professional opportunities, they suffer limited budget allocation and live in segregated and under-serviced areas, and they are disproportionately targeted by highly racialized police surveillance and violence.[75] Among them, Bedouin populations living in the Negev are made particularly vulnerable by the threat of demolition and resettlement.[76] While Arab citizens can take part in national elections, they "can campaign for minor reforms and better budgets, but are legally prohibited by the Basic Law from challenging legislation maintaining the racial regime."[77]

*b) JERUSALEM RESIDENTS*

Palestinian residents of Jerusalem are not citizens of the State but are governed according to permanent residency law. This means that, beyond the *de facto* discriminations above, they cannot vote in national elections, thus being excluded from the possibility of electing their representatives in the parliament that governs them. They are also particularly subject to the risk of eviction and house

[74] Justyna Stypińska, "Jewish majority and Arab minority in Israel-demographic struggle," *Polish Sociological Review* 157, no. 1 (2007): 105-120.

[75]Smooha "Minority status"; Magid Shihade, "Settler colonialism and conflict: The Israeli state and its Palestinian subjects," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 108-123; Ghazi-Walid Falah, "Living together apart: Residential segregation in mixed Arab-Jewish cities in Israel," *Urban Studies* 33, no. 6 (1996): 823-857; Noah Lewin-Epstein and Moshe Semyonov, "Local labor markets, ethnic segregation, and income inequality," *Social Forces* 70, no. 4 (1992): 1101-1119; Badi Hasisi, "Policing minorities in a deeply divided society: Police performance and presence in Israel," in *Plurality and citizenship in Israel*, ed. Dan Avnon, Yotam Benziman, (London-New York: Routledge, 2010): 178-196.

[76] Ghazi-Walid Falah, "Israeli state policy toward Bedouin sedentarization in the Negev," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 2 (1989): 71-91; Tawfiq S. Rangwala, "Inadequate housing, Israel, and the Bedouin of the Negev." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 42, no. 3 (2004): 415.

[77] ESCWA, "Israeli Practices", 4, in reference to the 'Basic Law: Knesset' prohibiting political platforms that challenge the Jewish nature of the State (see Section 1 in this chapter).

demolition to the benefit of the expanding Jewish settlements in the city, famously in areas such as Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah. Finally, their residency status can be easily revoked by Israeli authorities for a variety of reasons, from having failed to prove that one's 'centre of life' is in Jerusalem to the identification with Palestinians in the West Bank, thus making Palestinian residents of Jerusalem particularly vulnerable to political blackmail.[78]

*c) WEST-BANK PALESTINIANS*

Palestinian residents of the West Bank, as occupied subjects, are governed by military law administered by the Israeli army. The extent of Israeli control over their lives varies according to the area in which they live, the West Bank having being partitioned since the Oslo Accords into three areas: Area A, Area B, and Area C. Area A, which comprises about 18% of the West Bank and the major Palestinian cities, is managed by the Palestinian Authority in both civil and security matters, but the Israeli army can still enter regularly and submit the area to lockdowns and curfews. Area B, which comprises about 21% of the territory, is managed by the Palestinian Authority in civil matters and by the Israeli army in security matters. Area C, which comprises about 60% of the territory, is under full Israeli army control, which means that it is the Israeli army that manages the concession of working, building, and business permits, which results in a systematic denial of rights.[79] Moreover, Area C is particularly targeted by the expansionist ambitions of the Israeli State. Palestinians see their lands expropriated by the State for a variety of reasons, from the establishment of military zones and the construction of the Security Barrier, to the establishment of national and archaeological parks and the construction (or post-facto legalization) of Jewish settlements, illegal by international law.[80] The presence of settlers, in particular of messianic and ultra-nationalist ones, poses an additional threat to nearby Palestinian communities in terms of violent attacks, with the Israeli army systematically failing to intervene (or intervening to protect the settlers).[81] In this situation,

[78] Aseil Abu Baker, "Laws targeting East Jerusalem: Discriminatory intent and application," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 21, no. 3 (2016): 55; Meir Margalit, *Discrimination in the Heart of the Holy City*, (Jerusalem: International Peace and Cooperation Center, 2006); Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights, "Trapped by Planning: Israeli Policy, Planning and Development in the Palestinian Neighborhoods of East Jerusalem," 2014, http://bimkom.org/eng/wp-content/uploads/TrappedbyPlanning.pdf; B'Tselem, "Revocation of residency in East Jerusalem,", last accessed July 15, 2021, www.btselem.org/jerusalem/revocation_of_residency.

[79] "Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Oslo II)", Annex I: Protocol Concerning Redeployment and Security Arrangements: Article I—"Redeployment of Israeli Military Forces and Transfer of Responsibility", par. 6, 9–10. https://web.archive.org/web/20021125095250/http:/knesset.gov.il/process/docs/heskemb2_eng.htm; "What are areas A, B, and C of the occupied west bank?," *Al Jazeera*, September 11, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/11/what-are-areas-a-b-and-c-of-the-occupied-west-bank.

[80] Yifat Holzman-Gazit, *Land expropriation in Israel: Law, culture and society*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2016); Johanna Schreiner, "Three forms of land grabbing in Palestine," *Visionscarto*, September 10, 2020, https://visionscarto.net/land-grabbing-in-palestine#:~:text=Colonization%2C%20occupation%2C%20annexation%2C%20these,the%20application%20of%20the%20other.; B'Tselem, "Land Grab: Israeli settlement policy in the West Bank", May 2022, https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200205_land_grab; Michael Galchinsky, "The Jewish settlements in the West Bank: international law and Israeli jurisprudence," *Israel studies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 115-136.

[81] Peace Now, "West Bank Settlements – Facts and Figures,", last accessed April 4, 2022, https://peacenow.org.il/en/west-bank-settlements-facts-and-figures; OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), "Israeli

Palestinians in the West Bank undergo a wide range of basic human rights violations, ranging from restrictions to political activity and to the right to movement, to incarceration without trial, torture, dispossession, house demolitions and extrajudicial killing, to name a few.[82] In addition, Israeli management keeps Palestinian lands and people in a condition of "active de-development" that has crippled Palestinian economy and society, suffocating their growth and welfare.[83]

*d) PALESTINIANS IN THE GAZA STRIP*

Palestinian residents of Gaza have an autonomous government and, differently from the West Bank, do not have a stable presence of the Israeli army since Sharon's 'disengagement plan' of 2005 (cf. previous Section). They remain, however, occupied subjects, Israeli military law continuing to control their movement and trade in and out of the territory and a 'security zone' being placed by Israel along the perimeter fence and in the sea preventing access and economic activities. It has been noted how this situation constitutes a state of siege, which has stifled Palestinian economy and life in the Gaza Strip. Moreover, Gaza residents are regularly subjected to indiscriminate heavy military attacks by the Israeli army and the lethal repression of protesters.[84]

*e) PALESTINIAN REFUGEES*

Finally, there are the millions of Palestinian refugees and involuntary exiles, who fled their homes following the war of 1948 and the following ones, now living in other countries. While not subjects of Israeli sovereignty, Palestinian refugees are discriminated against insofar as Israel denies them the right to return or to be compensated for the properties lost and appropriated by the State (a right sanctioned by UN Resolution 194). This right has been at the core of Palestinian demands and is

Settler violence and the evacuation of outposts", November 2009, https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/ocha_opt_settler_violence_fact_sheet_2009_11_15_english.pdf; ICG (International Crisis Group), "Israel's religious right and the question of settlements". Middle East Report no. 89, July 20, 2009, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/103512/89_israels_religious_right.pdf.

[82] Lentin, "Palestine, Israel and State criminality"; Yael Berda, *Living Emergency: Israel's Permit Regime in the Occupied West Bank*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); Mona Rishmawi, "Administrative Detention in International Law: The Case of the Israeli Occupied West Bank and Gaza," *The Palestine Yearbook of International Law Online* 5, no. 1 (1989): 83-128. Kathleen Cavanaugh, "The Israeli military court system in the West Bank and Gaza." *Journal of Conflict & Security Law* 12, no. 2 (2007): 197-222; Alison P. Brown, "The immobile mass: Movement restrictions in the West Bank," *Social & Legal Studies* 13, no. 4 (2004): 501-521; Ilan Peleg, *Human Rights in the West Bank and Gaza: legacy and politics*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

[83] Rema Hammami, "Precarious politics: the activism of "bodies that count" (aligning with those that don't) in Palestine's colonial frontier", in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 168-169. See also Jeff Halper, *War Against the People: Israel, the Palestinians, and Global Pacification* (London: Pluto Press, 2015); Erika Weinthal and Jeannie Sowers, "Targeting infrastructure and livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza," *International Affairs* 95, no. 2 (2019): 319-340.

[84] Ilan Pappé, *The Biggest Prison on Earth*, (London: Oneworld, 2019); Yves Winter, "The siege of Gaza: Spatial violence, humanitarian strategies, and the biopolitics of punishment," *Constellations* 23, no. 2 (2016): 308-319; A. A. Thabet, Abu Tawahina, Eyad El Sarraj, Panos Vostanis, "Siege and quality of life of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip," *Arabpsynet E Journal* 20 (2008): 157-64; Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé, *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013); Lisa Gleeson, "Palestine: Protests defy Israeli bullets," *Green Left Weekly* 1178 (2018): 15; Tristan Dunningand Imad Alsoos, "The latest violence in Gaza is nothing new," *Australian Outlook*, May 15, 2019, https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/latest-violence-gaza-nothing-new/.

denied by Israel on the explicitly racist bases that Palestinian returnees constitute a 'demographic threat' to the Jewish nature of the State.[85]

Taken together, these discriminations configure a situation in which Palestinians are held in a "hyperregulated" "permanent space of exception" where the rights they enjoy are diametrically opposed to those of their Jewish counterparts.[86] Against Jewish people that are encouraged to immigrate, offered land and opportunities, allowed to thrive, Palestinians are kept outside, dispossessed, expelled, controlled, silenced, and killed, all in the pretence of democracy.

This situation has been widely interpreted, both in academic arenas and by international human rights bodies, as a system of apartheid, aimed at the oppression and domination of one racial group over another.[87] What the apartheid framework fails to grasp, however, is the settler colonial aspect of Israel's racial political architecture.[88] Contextualizing the current apartheid regime in Israel-Palestine within its settler colonial history allows to better understand the rationale behind the discriminations it establishes, and to trace its continuity over time in the face of changing historical circumstances.[89] Indeed, the fundamental aspect of a settler colonial formation is not the domination of one racial group over another, but the *replacement* of the indigenous population by the settler one.[90] This drive towards replacement comprises the complementary aspects of an expansion of the settler society (through immigration, territorial conquest, and the establishment of political regimes and of related political identities) and a corresponding "elimination" of the indigenous polity (either physically – through deportation and extermination – or symbolically – through the denial of collective political

[85] ESCWA, "Israeli Practices", 5; Rashid I. Khalidi, "Observations on the Right of Return," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 2 (1992): 29-40; Kathleen Lawand, "The right to return of Palestinians in international law," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 8, no. 4 (1996): 532-568; John Quigley, "Displaced Palestinians and a Right of Return." *Harvard International Law Journal* 39 (1998): 171.

[86] Saree Makdisi, *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*, (New York: Norton, 2008); Lloyd, "Settler colonialism"; Lentin, "Palestine-Israel and state criminality".

[87] Amnesty International, "Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity", 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/; Human Rights Watch, "A threshold crossed: Israeli authorities and the crimes of apartheid and persecution, 2021, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/04/israel_palestine0421_web_0.pdf; B'Tselem, "A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean sea: This is apartheid", 2021, https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid; ESCWA, "Israeli Practices". In scholarly literature, comparisons abound. See for instance: Ran Greenstein, "Israel, Palestine, and Apartheid," *Insight Turkey* 22, no. 1 (2020): 73-92; Oren Yiftachel, "Between colonialism and ethnocracy:'Creeping apartheid'in Israel/Palestine," in *Pretending Democracy: Israel, an Ethnocratic State,* ed. Na'eem Jeenah (Afro-Middle East Centre: 2013): 95-116; Abigail B. Bakan and Yasmeen Abu-Laban, "Israel/Palestine, South Africa and the 'One-state Solution': The Case for an Apartheid Analysis," *Politikon* 37, no. 2-3 (2010): 331-351.

[88] Lana Tatour, "Why calling Israel an apartheid state is not enough", *Middle East Eye*, January 18, 2021, https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-calling-israel-apartheid-state-not-enough; Raef Zreik, "Palestine, apartheid, and the rights discourse," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004): 68-80; Ran Greenstein, "Colonialism, apartheid and the native question: The case of Israel/Palestine," in *Racism After Apartheid: Challenges for Marxism and Anti-Racism*, ed. Vishwas Satgar, (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019): 75.

[89] Omar Jabary Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie and Sobhi Samour, "Past is present: Settler colonialism in Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 1-8; Lorenzo Veracini, "What can settler colonial studies offer to an interpretation of the conflict in Israel–Palestine?," *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (2015): 268-271.

[90] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.

rights) in ways that vary depending on contextual factors.[91] Both of these aspects have been the (often openly stated) goals of the Israeli enterprise since the early years of Zionist settlement and through various stages of territorial conquest.[92] And both remain at the core of present-day discriminations between Jews and Palestinians which, as we have seen, centre on issues of demographic, territorial, political, and cultural expansion of the former to the detriment of the latter.

Finally, there is a third aspect to Israel's political structure that does not concern the racial distinction between Jews and Palestinians but hierarchies within the Jewish-Israeli collective. While not enshrined in law, these hierarchies are so profound that they lead to highly sealed communities which enjoy socio-economic rights very differently from each other.[93] Several studies and human rights reports denounce how, while Ashkenazi Jews (Jews of European descent) disproportionally occupy élite positions in society, Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews (Jews of Arab descent) are systematically disadvantaged in the access to economic, social, and political opportunities. The same goes for Ultra-Orthodox Jews and Jews of Russian descent, as well as for Ethiopian Jews, the latter being also particularly targeted by police violence. Finally, within and beyond these communities, women and queer people are particularly vulnerable.[94]

I argue, along with several others, that also these hierarchies find their rationale in the settler colonial history of Israel-Palestine, which has led to the creation of 'underclasses' within the colonizer group.[95] In fact, the attribution of social capital in Israeli society depends not only on the ascriptive trait of Jewishness, but on the degree of "functionality to the colonization project."[96] The forefathers of Zionism and the first settlers – the 'pioneers' of the colonial project – were all European Jews, and shaped the image of the State around European political thought. Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews, culturally distinct and generally poorer, were encouraged to come to join the settlement process but were employed as cheap workforce, sent to populate peripheral areas (the so called 'development towns' in the Negev desert), and forced to endure hardships, discrimination and confinement.[97]

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[91] *Idem*, 387-409; Lorenzo Veracini, "Understanding colonialism and settler colonialism as distinct formations," *Interventions* 16, no. 5 (2014): 615-633.

[92] Lorenzo Veracini, "Israel-Palestine through a settler-colonial studies lens," *Interventions* 21, no. 4 (2019): 568-581; Jamal "Neo-zionism and Palestine"; Ilan Pappé, "Shtetl colonialism: First and last impressions of indigeneity by colonised colonisers." *Settler Colonial Studies*2, no. 1 (2012): 39-58; Neve Gordon, "From Colonization to Separation"; Falah, "The geopolitics of 'Enclavisation'". See also Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict 1882-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Ilan Pappé, *The ethnic cleansing of Palestine*. (London: Oneworld, 2007).

[93] Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline*.

[94] CERD, "Consideration of reports"; "Report: Ethiopians, Arabs face most racism in Israel", i24 News, March 21, 2022, https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/society/1647876705-report-ethiopians-arabs-face-most-racism-in-israel; Nadine Sayegh, "Racism: In Israel some Jews are more equal than others", TRT World, July 9, 2019, https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/racism-in-israel-some-jews-are-more-equal-than-others-28109.

[95] Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline*, 9-10; Oren Yiftachel, ""Ethnocracy" and Its Discontents: Minorities, Protests, and the Israeli Polity," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000): 7.

[96] Gerardo Leibner, "HaTikva Encampment, 2011: The ambiguous agency of the marginalized," *Current Anthropology* 56, no. 11 (2015): 159-168.

[97] Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the standpoint of its Jewish victims," *Social text,* no. 19/20 (1988): 1-35; Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006):

Guilty of carrying traces of the (Palestinian) Other in their skin colour, culture, and language, they have been themselves colonized, pressured to deny their Arabness and to assimilate to the Western culture of the élite.[98] Ethiopian and Russian Jews, who arrived in Israel through the 1980s and 1990s, went through a similar process: they were welcomed to Israel often through population-transfer operations filled with propaganda, but have largely remained at the margins of society both culturally and economically.[99]

While Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews share with Palestinians the colonial and racial nature of their discrimination, only sporadically have they identified with them (c.f. Chapter 3). Instead, many of them have been among the staunchest supporters of the Zionist project, often embracing virulent ultra-nationalist positions. They have disproportionately supported right-wing parties over time, especially the nationalist Likud and the Orthodox-nationalist Shas, who have based their campaigns on the communal interests of Jews (and of Arab Jews specifically in the case of Shas) against Palestinians rather than on the grievances they share.[100] Yiftachel explains how this relates to the settler colonial history of Israel-Palestine in these terms:

> Given its inferior position vis-a-vis the dominant ethnoclass, the immigrant group attempts to minimize the difference between the two groups. But its opposition to ethnic discrimination is complicated by its own ethnic prejudice vis-a-vis indigenous groups. This leads to the adoption of rightist nationalist positions, which attempt to locate the immigrants as political partners to the founding ethnoclass and raise their communal and political status. For the immigrants, then, nationalism constitutes important political capital.[101]

Russian and Ethiopian Jews have also been co-opted in similar ways into the Zionist colonial project: it has been noted how many Ethiopian Jews attempt to "prove their worth" by conscripting into the most violent sectors of the Israeli army, the Border Police, and by adhering to racial anti-Palestinian discourse in the framing of their grievances and demands.[102] It has been noted how also

ch. 9; Oren Yiftachel, "Nation-building and the division of space: Ashkenazi domination in the Israeli 'ethnocracy'," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 4, no. 3, (1998): 33-58.

[98] Aziza Khazzoom, "The great chain of orientalism: Jewish identity, stigma management, and ethnic exclusion in Israel," *American Sociological Review* 68, no. 4 (2003): 481-510; Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel"; Giulia Daniele, "Mizrahi Jews and the Zionist settler colonial context: between inclusion and struggle," *Settler Colonial Studies* 10, no. 4 (2020): 461-480; Joseph Massad, "Zionism's internal others: Israel and the Oriental Jews," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (1996): 53-68; Ella Shohat, "The invention of the Mizrahim", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 1 (1999): 5-20.

[99] Shoshana Neuman "Aliyah to Israel: Immigration under conditions of adversity", IZA Discussion Paper No. 89 (1999); Vladimir Khanin, "The Israeli 'Russian'Community and Immigrants Party Politics in the 2003 Elections," *Israel Affairs*10, no. 4 (2004): 146-180.

[100] Ehud Ein-Gil and Moshé Machover, "Zionism and Oriental Jews: a dialectic of exploitation and co-optation," *Race & Class* 50, no. 3 (2009): 62-76; Sami Shalom Chetrit, "Mizrahi politics in Israel: Between integration and alternative," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 4 (2000): 51-65; Baruch Kimmerling and Dahlia Moore, "Collective identity as agency and structuration of society: the Israeli example" *International Review of Sociology* 7, no. 1 (1997): 25-49; Kenneth Brown, "Iron and a King: the Likud and Oriental Jews", *Middle East Research and Information Project* 114 (1983).

[101] Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, 228.

[102] Josh Guetzkow and Idit Fast, "How symbolic boundaries shape the experience of social exclusion: A case comparison of Arab Palestinian citizens and Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *American Behavioral Scientist* 60, no. 2 (2016): 150-171; Steven

many Russian Jews have sought to attain a higher status in Israeli society by rearticulating their "insider-outsider" identity within the culturally European Ashkenazi collective and by adopting racist views towards Palestinians that borrow on (post-)Soviet orientalist discourse.[103]

Ultra-Orthodox Jews have been cast as an underclass for other reasons. Epitome of the pre-Zionist Jew, diasporic and persecuted, they are exploited for propagandistic needs when it comes to emphasizing the Jewish people's Biblical links to the land of Palestine and their need for security and statehood. At the same time, they are seen as antipodal to the image of the "New Jew" that Zionism has constructed: conservative when the new Jew is progressive, weak and immersed in Biblical studies when the new Jew is strong and combative (c.f. next section). Exempted from participation to the military effort for religious reasons, they are widely depicted as living at the expense of other sectors of society while projecting of it an image that contrasts with that most Israelis have: that of a haven of modernity among 'backwards' Arab States.[104]

In a similar logic, women and queer communities are held in great value in public discourse to the extent that their emancipated status serves to distinguish Israeli society from the 'backwards' and 'misogynous' Arab world. Both groups, however, suffer heavily from the pervasive patriarchal mentality derived from the integration of Halachic (Judaic religious) law in the legal framework and from the military culture predominant in Israeli society. In a process similar to the one described above, these minorities often seek social acceptance and status by adapting to the roles that are praised in society: those of mothers, soldiers, spearheads of the Zionist modern and combative model of society.[105]

### *3. The Tropes of Zionism and the Israeli Collective Identity*

The discursive articulations that justify and legitimize the political order described so far are the fundamentals of Zionism: the ideology that underlies the constitution of Israel as a Jewish State and on which its collective identity was moulded. Shared across the different versions into which Zionism

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Kaplan, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin? The Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews) and racial discourse," *African Affairs* 98, no. 393 (1999): 535-550.

[103] Dimitry Shumsky, "Post-Zionist orientalism? Orientalist discourse and Islamophobia among the Russian-speaking intelligentsia in Israel," *Social Identities* 10, no. 1 (2004): 83-90; Edna Lomsky-Feder and Tamar Rapoport, "Homecoming, immigration, and the national ethos: Russian-Jewish homecomers reading Zionism," *Anthropological Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2001): 1-14.

[104] Carol Gordon, "Mutual perceptions of religious and secular Jews in Israel", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 33, no. 4 (1989): 632-651.

[105] Tamar Rapoport and Tamar El-Or, "Cultures of womanhood in Israel: Social agencies and gender production," *Women's Studies International Forum* 20, no. 5-6, (1997): 573-580; Nitza Berkovitch, "Motherhood as a national mission: The construction of womanhood in the legal discourse in Israel," *Women's Studies International Forum* 20, no. 5-6 (1997): 605-619; Bat-Sheva Margalit Stern, "Who's the Fairest of Them All? Women, Womanhood, and Ethnicity in Zionist Eretz Israel," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 11 (2006): 142-163; Saffo Papantonopoulou,""Even a Freak Like You Would Be Safe in Tel Aviv": Transgender Subjects, Wounded Attachments, and the Zionist Economy of Gratitude," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1/2 (2014): 278-293.

evolved (secular and religious, socialist and liberal, humanist and supremacist), these articulations form the basis of the self-perception of Jewish-Israelis as a "people apart" – separated from the others and that needs to remain so in order to survive – and of Palestinians as a radical and threatening Other that needs to be controlled.[106] The section begins by illustrating the emergence and consolidation of the Zionist worldview along specific historical circumstances. It then summarizes its structure as a combination of nationalist, colonial, and victimhood tropes that align it with other Western colonial imaginaries while configuring a particularly virulent version of Self/Other opposition. The section then delves into the specific tropes of Zionism by reviewing, in turn, its constructs of History, of Jewish-Israeli Self, and of Palestinian Other, and emphasizes how these tropes pervade Jewish-Israelis' interpretations and perceptions.

Zionism originated as a "simple utopian nationalist idea" in late 19th century Europe, and it morphed into the comprehensive worldview that it is today as a result of the historical circumstances of its development.[107] Modern Zionism was initially formulated by Theodor Herzl, in his 1896 pamphlet *The Jewish State*, as a secular nationalist movement for the Jewish people. Forged in the European nationalist ideas of the time and in reaction to recent waves of antisemitism, Zionism established a few basic tenets: that the Jewish people constitute a 'nation' in modern political language, that as such they are entitled to self-determination in a State of their own, and that statehood would free them from centuries-old persecution and antisemitism.[108] Zionism's peculiarity as a national movement was that it established a right to self-determination for an "extra-territorial population," as such to be realized via their ingathering from around the world into a third territory.[109] While not initially present in Herzl's formulation, this territory was soon elected to be Historic Palestine, then a province of the Ottoman Empire, in reason of its historical and religious ties to the Jewish people, ties which were believed to allow for effectively rallying world Jewry around the new-born Zionist project.[110] This is how Zionism began incorporating religious and messianic elements. But it was only during the settler colonial process of its implementation that Zionism developed into a full-fledged worldview. During the various stages of settlement of the land – before and after the foundation of the State – and through the conflict that ensued with Palestinians, the Zionist worldview needed to unify a culturally diverse immigrant society and to rally it around the

[106] Asher Arian "A people apart: Coping with national security problems in Israel", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 33, no. 4 (1989): 605-631.
[107] Avishai Ehrlich, "Zionism, Anti-Zionism, Post-Zionism", in *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics*, ed. Ephraim Nimni, Pnina Werbner, and Richard Werbner (London: Zed Books, 2003): 64.
[108] Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2019). See also Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2003).
[109] Nils Butenschøn, "Accommodating Conflicting Claims to National Self-Determination. The Intractable Case of Israel/Palestine," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 13, no. 2-3, (2006): 289.
[110] Ehrlich, "Zionism, Anti-Zionism, Post-Zionism", 70. See also Anne De Jong, "Zionist hegemony, the settler colonial conquest of Palestine and the problem with conflict: a critical genealogy of the notion of binary conflict", Settler Colonial Studies 8, no. 3 (2018): 367-368.

military effort against the hostile indigenous population, all while legitimizing the colonial nature of this enterprise.[111]

Zionism, as such, reproduces some of the tropes found in other national and colonial narratives: a mixture of '*terra nullius*,' civilizational and messianic justifications to the Jewish colonization of Palestine and a 'myth' of the origins that weaves an incontestable tie between the Jewish settlers and their 'homeland' while portraying the presence of the indigenous Palestinian population as insignificant and inconsequential.[112] Moreover, Zionism inscribes Israel within a Western tradition and in a First World/Third World colonial dichotomy. Through a combination of Western political categories, civilizational thrust, and biblical connotations, Zionism affirms a cultural and "Orientalist affinity" with the Western perspective on the world.[113] This was further sealed with the experience of the Holocaust, which has a foundational role in both narratives as a "symbol of ultimate evil."[114] Moreover, as we will see, Zionism frames the Jewish nation as essentially a "white nation" in Hage's formulation: a "spatially empowered white modern First World Self facing a Third World-looking Other."[115]

However, Zionism also stands out from other colonial ideologies. It has been noted how the peculiar convergence of the historical facts of persecution, self-determination, and settler colonialism made it so that the boundaries of identity established by Zionism in its nation-building process are particularly rigid, and the relationship to the Other violently oppositional.[116] The logic of exclusion inherent in every nationalism combines with the logic of erasure of the native inherent in settler colonialism: "a logic not only of 'us against them,' but even of 'us, not them'" that legitimizes "unconscionable violence."[117] On top of this, the narrative of victimhood built on the experience of past persecution and antisemitism is mobilized to cast the present-day Other as the incarnation of a timeless existential threat, and at the same time to portray the Self as a "righteous victim:" a stance that immunizes from criticism and justifies aggression as 'self-defence.'[118] Hage notes how the

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[111] Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, politics and scholarship in Israel* (London: Verso Books, 2008): 62-68; Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline*, 4; Daniel Bar-Tal, "Societal Beliefs in Times of Intractable Conflict: The Israeli Case," *International Journal of Conflict Management* 9, no. 1 (1998): 22-50.

[112] Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism*, 55-57. See also Tate A. LeFevre, "Representation, resistance and the logics of difference: indigenous culture as political resource in the settler-state," *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 2 (2013): 136-137.

[113] Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens, *Blaming the victims: spurious scholarship and the Palestinian question*, (London: Verso, 1988): 6.

[114] Jeffrey C. Alexander and Martin Jay, *Remembering the Holocaust: A debate*, (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): x.

[115] Hage, *Alter-Politics*, 8. See also Ghassan Hage, White Nation: Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society, (Annandale: Pluto Press, 2000).

[116] Hage, *Alter-Politics*, 154-160

[117] Respectively, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security theology, surveillance and the politics of fear*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 16; and Lloyd, "Settler colonialism", 70.

[118] Todorov, *Hope and memory: lessons from the twentieth century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Daniel Bar-Tal, et al. "A sense of self-perceived collective victimhood in intractable conflicts," *International review of the Red Cross* 91, no. 874 (2009): 229-258; Kirkland Newman Smulders, "The Battle for Victimhood: Roles and Implications of Narratives of Suffering in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", in *Narrating Conflict in the Middle East: Discourse, Image and Communications Practices in Lebanon and Palestine*, ed. Dina Matar and Zahera Harb, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2013): 165-171.

compresence of these forms of "narcissism" (of the nationalist, of the colonizer, of the victim) leads to an "inability to live with the uncertainty of the other:" in what he calls a "fantasy of omnipotence," "the other needs to be made secure" because "I cannot accept even a modicum of danger emanating from it."[119]

Let us now turn to the articulations of Zionism. Zionism proposes a teleological view of History oriented towards the triumph of the Jewish people.[120] Beginning in the Biblical 'golden age' of the Israelites, the history of the Jewish people was 'interrupted' with the exile from the Promised Land, which resulted in two millennia of hardships and persecutions. This condition is to be reversed with the 'return' of the Jewish people to their national homeland, in which they can recover their ancient glory. The promise of Zionism is, as such, the passage from the era of 'decline' to that of 'rebirth.'[121] This passage materialized in the conjunction of two events of the 20th century which became foundational in the Zionist narrative: the Holocaust – which marks the culmination of the era of decline – and the foundation of the State of Israel – which marks the end of decline and the beginning of rebirth. This view of History is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence:

> The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books. After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom. [...] The catastrophe which recently befell the Jewish people – the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe – was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by re-establishing in Eretz-Israel the Jewish State, which would open the gates of the homeland wide to every Jew and confer upon the Jewish people the status of a fully privileged member of the comity of nations.[122]

Importantly, this view of History traces a continuity between the Biblical past and the national present of the Jewish people which erases the period in between. This is referred to as the 'negation of exile:' the Jewish people is identified with the ancient Israelites and is disassociated from the experience and cultures of the diaspora.[123] This claimed continuity is a fundamental trope in Zionist narrative because it establishes a "narrative of 'origin'" that, at once, unifies an otherwise very diverse

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[119] Hage, *Alter-Politics*, 160.
[120] Yael Zerubavel, "The" Mythological Sabra" and Jewish past: trauma, memory, and contested identities," *Israel Studies* 7, no. 2 (2002): 115.
[121] *Idem*, 115-116.
[122] Israel Declaration of Independence, https://m.knesset.gov.il/en/about/pages/declaration.aspx.
[123] Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): ch 1; Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered roots: Collective memory and the making of Israeli national tradition*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995): ch 2.

society of immigrants and legitimizes its claim to the land.[124] More than legitimizing colonization, framing Jewish immigration to Israel as a 'return' negates the very colonial character of the formation of the State, and affirms the Jewish inhabitants as the 'real' indigenous.[125] It was to affirm this continuity that the new State adopted as the official language the ancient Hebrew of the Bible, which had to be reinvented and learned, while the more used Yiddish was abandoned.[126] In the same spirit was the ongoing practice of "renaming" with Biblical names both the landscape of Palestine, thus contextually erasing the Palestinian heritage of the land, and the new immigrants who, in a symbolic rite of passage, "shed their exilic foreign name and adopted a new Hebrew name."[127] Piterberg notes that it is for this reason that references to the Bible abound throughout Zionism, across secular and religious versions: not as a religious *belief* but as a historical *proof* of the entitlement of the Jewish nation to the land.[128]

The era of the exile is erased exception made for the memory of past persecutions, which remind to the Jewish people the threats of annihilation they face when not united as a nation in their homeland. The memorialization of past atrocities, which emphasizes their antisemitic rationale, works to depict an external world that is hostile to the Jewish people, in what has been called a "siege mentality."[129] This recollection of the past shapes interpretations of the present in such a way that present hostilities towards Israel – from Palestinian revendications to international criticisms – are interpreted as instances of the same antisemitic hatred, and as such delegitimized. Constructions of this type abound in Israeli political discourse: from late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's famous reaction to critiques to the military occupation of the West Bank ("The whole world is against us – when was it not!") to present-day equations of anti-Zionism, an anti-racist stance, with antisemitism, the racist stance *par excellence*.[130]

In the face of this timeless threat, goes Zionism, the Jewish people must perpetually secure their safety, and the only way to do so is by living as the exclusive ruling nation in their own State. Ensuring the safety of the Jewish people against persecution is, indeed, the second fundamental legitimation offered by Zionism to Israel, and that which provides its *raison d'être* as a Jewish State: only if they are

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[124] Julie Peteet, "Words as interventions: naming in the Palestine–Israel conflict," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2005): 159; Maoz Azaryahu and Arnon Golan, "(Re) naming the landscape: The formation of the Hebrew map of Israel 1949–1960," *Journal of Historical Geography* 27, no. 2 (2001): 178-195.

[125] Veracini, "What can settler colonial studies", 270.

[126] William Safran, "Language and nation-building in Israel: Hebrew and its rivals," *Nations and Nationalism* 11, no. 1 (2005): 43-63.

[127] Nur Masalha, "Settler-colonialism, memoricide and indigenous toponymic memory: The appropriation of Palestinian place names by the Israeli state," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 14, no. 1 (2015): 3-57; Zerubavel, "The" Mythological Sabra"", 117.

[128] Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism*, ch 7.

[129] Michael Barnett, "The Israeli identity and the peace process: re/creating the un/thinkable", in *Identity and foreign policy in the Middle East*, ed. Telhami, Shibley, and Michael N. Barnett (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002): 58-87.

[130] Dov Waxman, *The Pursuit of Peace and the Crisis of Israeli Identity: Defending/defining the nation*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 109-144.

the ruling majority can the Jewish people avert the risk of being annihilated again, hence the need for demographic engineering and the systematic exclusion of Palestinians from full political rights.[131]

But being separate is not enough: the Jewish State needs to be militarily powerful in order to survive in the hostile environment of the world, in general, and of the Middle East, in particular.[132] This idea is at the bases of the doctrine of the "Iron Wall," the idea that only the use of force can ultimately guarantee Israel's very existence, and of the myth of the "nation in arms," a nation of soldiers, permanently geared towards war – both ideas consistently adopted over time by Israeli leaders.[133] The existential role of military strength in Zionism determines its "sacred" status in Israel, which justifies massive state investments and a compulsory military service, and the default resort to military force as a response to strategic problems.[134] Importantly, the resort to military force, however frequent and punitive it may be, is never immoral, because it is intrinsically "defensive."[135] Indeed, within the Zionist view of the external environment as hostile, every Israeli act is defensive *by definition*. This view underlies the consistent framing of Israeli violent endeavours – starting from its establishment, through the conflicts with its Arab neighbours, to the subjugation of the Palestinian population – as "wars of no choice," in which Israel has been regrettably drawn into.[136] Finally, even when drawn into such wars, in the Zionist vision Israel is intrinsically moral because it acts according to a "purity of arms:" a set of religious and humanitarian principles that allegedly guide the Israeli army and make it restrained and compassionate even during confrontations with the enemy.[137]

The construct of the Jewish national Self in Zionism is consistent with this view of History. It reflects the complementarity of the narratives of decline and rebirth, exile and return, military might and victimhood, by weaving together oppositional traits: the victim and the warrior, the settler and the indigenous, the advocate of Jewish prerogative and of multi-ethnic democracy. This synthesis, which is often seen as configuring an inherently contradictory and "schizophrenic" collective identity,[138] actually allows for the Zionist identity paradigm to incorporate very different aspirations, ultimately making for a very strong and resilient identity.

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[131] Ephraim Nimni, "Introduction", in *The Challenge of Post-Zionism*, 2; 6-7.
[132] Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline*, 211-229.
[133] The first doctrine was originally formulated by Vladimir Jabotinsky in the 1920s, while the latter formula is attributed to Ben Gurion. See Del Sarto, *Israel Under Siege*, 155; Halper, *War Against the People*, 39.
[134] Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline*, 212-214.
[135] Mira Sucharov, "Values, identity, and Israel advocacy." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, no. 4 (2011): 375. See also Yaron Ezrahi, Rubber bullets: Power and conscience in modern Israel, (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1999): 274.
[136] Mordechai Bar-On, "Conflicting narratives or narratives of a conflict: Can the Zionist and Palestinian Narratives of the 1948 War Be Bridged?", in *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History's Double Helix*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007): 142-173; Waxman, *The Pursuit of Peace*.
[137] Ehud Luz, *Wrestling with an Angel: Power, Morality, and Jewish Identity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Noam Zion, ""Purity of Arms": Educating Ethical Warriors in the Israeli Army," In *The Warrior and the Pacifist* (London: Routledge, 2018): 104-131; Avishag Gordon, ""Purity of arms,""preemptive war," and "selective targeting" in the context of terrorism: General, conceptual, and legal analyses," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 5 (2006): 493-508.
[138] Edward W. Said, "New history, old ideas", in *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics*, ed. Ephraim Nimni, Pnina Werbner, and Richard Werbner (London: Zed Books, 2003): 197-202.

First of all, the Israeli is at once a victim and a warrior. Victimhood and trauma are core identity traits of the Jewish national: he carries the trauma of persecutions past and present, which define him in terms of a perduring sense of vulnerability and fear of annihilation, but also of a morality that results from having endured injustice across centuries.[139] At the same time, the Israeli is the Jew who stood up against this injustice and said: "Never again!"[140] He is radically different from the exilic Jew of the past, who accepted to be sent "like sheep to the slaughter."[141] He is the pioneer of a new era, assertive and master of his own destiny, strong and powerful, the moral warrior of the State of Israel. This identitary shift has been explicitly articulated by Zionism in order to underscore the passage from the era of decline to the era of rebirth. In the words of late Zionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky:

> Our starting point is to take the typical Yid [the derogatory Russian term for Jew] of today and to imagine its diametrical opposite [...] Because the Yid is ugly, sickly and lacks decorum, we shall endow the ideal image of the Hebrew with masculine beauty. The Yid is trodden upon and easily frightened and, therefore, the Hebrew ought to be proud and independent. The Yid is despised by all and, therefore, the Hebrew ought to charm all. The Yid has accepted submission and, therefore, the Hebrew ought to learn how to command.[142]

Articulations of this sort established a hierarchy of value between the victimized diasporic Jew and the empowered Israeli (the "Hebrew"), while also racializing their difference: while the old Jew reproduced the antisemitic tropes of the Jewish physiognomy, the ideal "masculine beauty" of the new Jew aligned with Western standards. Epitomized in the ideal-typical figure of the Sabra (the Israeli-born descendant of the first settlers), he was tall and sturdy, blonde and blue eyed. It has been noted how this racialized distinction was at the basis of the stigmatization of Holocaust survivors in the early years of the State.[143] Today, it materializes in the perception of Ultra-Orthodox Jews as separate and non-representative of the broader Israeli society.

The Israeli is also at the same time a settler and a 'real indigenous.' He is proud of his colonial roots: the early settlers are celebrated as national heroes, and there are streets entitled to the "colonizers" (in the positive connotation embedded in the concept of *hityashwut*).[144] The Israeli is framed as a Western subject not only in its physiognomy, but in his cultural and political values, traits

[139] See e.g. Luz, *Wrestling with an Angel*; Robert Wistrich and David Ohana, eds. *The shaping of Israeli identity: Myth, memory and trauma*, (London: Routledge, 2014); Galia Plotkin-Amrami and José Brunner, "Making up 'national trauma'in Israel: From collective identity to collective vulnerability," *Social Studies of Science* 45, no. 4 (2015): 525-545.
[140] Yechiel Klar, Noa Schori-Eyal, and Yonat Klar, "The "Never Again" state of Israel: The emergence of the Holocaust as a core feature of Israeli identity and its four incongruent voices," *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 1 (2013): 125-143.
[141] Yael S. Feldman, ""Not as Sheep Led to Slaughter"? On Trauma, Selective Memory, and the Making of Historical Consciousness," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 19, no. 3 (2013): 139-169.
[142] Jabotinski, quoted in Smulders, "The Battle for Victimhood, 172
[143] Zerubavel, "The" Mythological Sabra"; see also Feldman, ""Not as Sheep Led to Slaughter"?".
[144] Jamal, "Neo-zionism and Palestine", 60-62; Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The dynamics of multiple citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Boaz Neuman, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism* (Tel Aviv: UPNE, 2011).

which allowed him to 'civilize' Palestine and to make Israel a "villa in the jungle" of the Middle East.[145] At the same time, as seen, the Israeli is the 'real' indigenous of Palestine, the descendant of the ancient Israelites. Besides the myth of origins that establishes him as such, Zionism crafts an indigenized identity not only through Biblical language and names, but through the manufacturing of a culture that is Middle East-specific and yet "de-Arabized," and that involved the appropriation of the Palestinian cultural heritage while contextually erasing its Arab and Palestinian origins.[146]

Finally, the Israeli is a strong advocate at once of Jewish prerogative and of democratic pluralism. He is convinced of the need for the State to represent Jewish nationals exclusively, and to ensure their "demographic 'purity' at best and demographic majority at worst," even if this means infringing the rights of national minorities.[147] Yet, at the same time, the Israeli also upholds his State as a model of multi-ethnic democracy, as well as of gender equality, queer rights, environmental rights, and human rights.[148] Indeed, that between Jewish prerogative and democratic pluralism is the most significant tension in Israeli collective identity: one that not only has been frequently addressed at the political level for reasons of legitimation, but that is heartfelt also at the personal level by those Israelis who do interrogate the ethical repercussions of their Zionist identification (c.f. Chapter Three).[149]

Within the Zionist worldview, Palestinians conversely represent the Other *par excellence*: an antithesis that works not only to justify Israel's colonialism and aggression, but also to reinforce its self-portrayal as a as a moral, modern, and democratic Western State. Depictions of Palestinians have varied in emphasis over time across the constructs of absence, uncivilized subject, and security threat.

Especially in the early stages of the settlement project, Palestinians were represented essentially as an absence: they were "made invisible."[150] In early Zionist propaganda, Palestine was represented as an unpopulated desert, "A land without people for a people without a land," as in Golda Meir's famous dictum.[151] After the war of 1948, and until today, Zionist leadership has made an effort to

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[145] Eitan Bar-Yosef, "A Villa in the Jungle: Herzl, Zionist Culture, and the Great African Adventure," in *Theodor Herzl: From Europe to Zion*, ed. Mark H. Gelber and Vivian Liska, (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2012): 85-102; Aluf Benn, "The Jewish Majority in Israel Still See Their Country as 'a Villa in the Jungle'," *The Guardian*, August 20, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/20/jewish-majority-israel-villa-in-the-jungle.

[146] Luma Zayad, "Systematic cultural appropriation and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," *DePaul Journal of Art, Technology and Intellectual Property Law 28, no. 2 (2018): 81-125*. The designation of hummus and other dishes as the typical Israeli food, or of the Jerusalem golden stone as the signature of Israeli architecture, are examples of this trend. See e.g. Ronald Ranta, "Re-arabizing Israeli food culture." *Food, Culture & Society* 18, no. 4 (2015): 611-627; Nadi Abusaada, "Jerusalem stone: the history and identity of Palestinian stereotomy," April 12, 2022, https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/city-portraits/jerusalem-stone-the-history-and-identity-of-palestinian-stereotomy.

[147] Pappé, "Shtetl colonialism", 47.

[148] Mira M. Sucharov, *The international self: Psychoanalysis and the search for Israeli-Palestinian peace*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2012); Neta Oren, *Israel's national identity: The changing ethos of conflict*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2019).

[149] See e.g. Sucharov, *The international self*; Amir Lupovici, "Ontological dissonance: Clashing identities, and Israel's unilateral steps towards the Palestinians," *Review of international studies* 38, no. 4 (2012): 809-833; Ephraim Nimni, "Introduction", in *The Challenge of Post-Zionism*; Said, "New history, old ideas".

[150] Laleh Khalili, "Palestinians: The Politics of Control, Invisibility and the Spectacle,", in *Manifestations of Identity: The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, ed. Muhammad Ali Khalidi (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2010).

[151] See e.g. Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 101

physically erase the traces of Palestinian presence from the landscape: parks have been built on the ruins of villages, cemeteries and monuments hidden behind high walls.[152] Even when acknowledged, Palestinians were – and largely still are – denied in their national and cultural specificity, designated as 'Arabs' and as such disconnected from any tie with the specific territory of Palestine.[153]

As 'Arabs,' Palestinians have been depicted as per classic colonial and orientalist tropes that could justify their subjugation: technologically primitive, culturally backwards and close-minded, apathetic and disorganized, treacherous and untrustworthy, evil and immoral in combat.[154] These tropes, which largely survive in Israeli everyday perceptions and language, make it so that relationships to Palestinians are conceived as per the frame of the 'good' *versus* 'bad savage.' Palestinians may be accepted as "tolerable Others" if they accept the conditions (and the superiority) of the colonizer: if they become compliant citizens of the Israeli State or its 'good neighbours,' thankful for the progress it has brought to the region.[155] Conversely, whenever they refuse these conditions (they "foolishly reject" the "hand stretched out" to them by good-willing Israelis) they are depicted as unreasonable, ungrateful, and intransigent enemies that need to be dealt with with the language of force.[156]

The latter construct, that of security threat, is by far the predominant one. Over time, this construct has expanded to include a wide variety of behaviours that configure a 'threat' and hardened in the type of reactions these behaviours would justify.[157] Palestinian violent responses to Israel, from the revolts preceding its foundation to the intifadas, the suicide bombings, and the rockets of Hamas, have been at the bases of this construction. This violence has been framed not in its political reasons, but as driven by the willingness to annihilate the Jewish people as such. Indeed, rhetorical comparisons between the Palestinians and the Nazis have been and remain frequent in Israeli political discourse, as have been the efforts at tracing ideological links between the Nazi regime and the Palestinian resistance.[158] Over time, however, Palestinians have come to be depicted as a threat irrespective of what they do. Shalhoub-Kevorkian has shown how this process has led to justifying as

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[152] Observations: Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018; Canada Park, May 3, 2019; Beer Sheva, November 5, 2019. See also Saree Makdisi, "The architecture of erasure," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (2010): 519-559; Noga Kadman, *Erased from space and consciousness: Israel and the depopulated Palestinian villages of 1948*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

[153] Shihade, "Settler colonialism and conflict"; Maria Holt, "An 'invented people': Palestinian refugee women and meanings of home," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 14, no. 2 (2015): 452-460; Andreas Hackl, "Immersive invisibility in the settler-colonial city: The conditional inclusion of Palestinians in Tel Aviv," *American ethnologist* 45, no. 3 (2018): 341-353.

[154] See e.g. Daniel Bar-Tal and Yona Teichman, *Stereotypes and prejudice in conflict: Representations of Arabs in Israeli Jewish society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Kathleen M. Christison, "Myths about Palestinians," *Foreign Policy*, no. 66, (1987): 109–27; Gordon, "From Colonization to Separation"; Pappé, *The ethnic cleansing*; John Collins, *Global Palestine*, (London: Hurst, 2011).

[155] Andreas Hackl, "The good Arab: conditional inclusion and settler colonial citizenship among Palestinian citizens of Israel in Jewish Tel Aviv," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 26, no. 3 (2020): 594-611. Lana Tatour, "Citizenship as domination: Settler colonialism and the making of Palestinian citizenship in Israel," *The Arab Studies Journal* 27, no. 2 (2019): 8-39.

[156] Pappé, "The Square Circle, 46; Christison, "Myths about Palestinians," 109–27.

[157] See e.g. Del Sarto, *Israel Under Siege*.

[158] Waxman, *The Pursuit of Peace*, 49-56 ; Joseph Massad, "Palestinians and Jewish history: Recognition or submission?," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30, no. 1 (2000): 52-67.

a "security necessity" all forms of violence perpetrated against them, ranging from surveillance to house demolition, from the killing of civilians to birth control.[159] Indeed, references to the fact that "there is no such thing as an innocent civilian in Gaza," or that "any Palestinian kid is a potential terrorist" have become more and more frequent in political discourse and in public sensitivity, not only from the right-wing, in an extreme expression of the Zionist worldview that sees anything external as a latent yet real threat.[160]

Whether under the frame of absence, uncivilized subject, or threat to be averted, the Zionist construction of Palestinians ultimately produces their dehumanization: they become an ontological exception to 'Us' and as such unworthy of understanding, sympathy, and compassion. This makes it so that violence, subjugation, and biopolitical control against them are accepted and even envisioned without this breaching the perception of oneself as moral, victim, democratic, and essentially a force for good, in what has been defined as a "bifurcated consciousness:"

> That bifurcated consciousness expresses itself in two discrete narratives: one tells the story of 'who we are;' the other tells the story of 'our' engagement with the indigenous people. [...] [T]he two narratives must remain discrete and, like Euclidian parallel lines, must never converge.[161]

In this view, Palestinians cannot be seen as equal subjects with legitimate or at least intelligible claims, and even less as victims. Indeed, conceiving of Palestinians as victims would entail looking at oneself as a perpetrator: a reversal of the roles postulated by the Zionist narrative that would be ontologically unsustainable (c.f. Chapter Three). In the extremized version of this logic that is being proposed by the right-wing, any attempt at humanizing Palestinians and framing them as victims becomes offensive and even sacrilegious. An example of this is the stark opposition to the so-called Alternative Memorial Day, a ceremony that, differently from the official one (c.f. next section), mourns both Israeli and Palestinian victims of the violence perpetrated against each other. Even if it refrains from mentioning the disproportion of power (and of victims) between the two groups, the ceremony is considered a

[159] Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security theology*, 15-18. See also Ronnie Olesker, "National identity and securitization in Israel," *Ethnicities* 14, no. 3 (2014): 371-391.
[160] Eiland Giora, "In Gaza, there is no such thing as 'innocent civilians'", *Y-Net News*, May 8, 2014, https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4554583,00.html; Asa Wistanley, "Israel treats every Palestinian child as "potential terrorist": government-backed UK study," *The Electronic Intifada*, June 28, 2012, https://electronicintifada.net/content/israel-treats-every-palestinian-child-potential-terrorist-government-backed-uk-study/11447.
[161] Gabriel Piterberg "Israeli Sociology's Young Hegelian: Gershon Shafir and the Settler-Colonial Framework," *Journal of Palestine studies* 44, no. 3 (2015): 23. Hage refers to the same process as a "splitting of the Self:" "This characteristic splitting of the self [...] allows the colonial settler to support the inhuman practices being meted out on the 'evil other' without actually feeling that their own humanity and good essence is being destroyed" (Hage, *Alter-Politics*, 21).

"disgracing of Memorial Day," "a show of bad taste and lack of sensitivity that hurts the bereaved families" by placing their grief on the same level as that of "relatives of terrorists." [162]

The articulations of History, Self, and Other this section has illustrated are largely shared across different versions of Zionism: what changes is the emphasis on some elements over others. For instance, religious Zionism emphasizes the religious aspects of Jewish entitlement to the land, while secular versions emphasize the need for protection against annihilation.[163] Still, the Bible remains also in secular versions as a source of legitimation of the Jewish claim to the land.[164] Maximalist versions of Zionism extend this claim to the whole of Historical Palestine – the 'Greater Israel' (*Eretz Israel*) – while liberal versions compromise on a smaller territory as a guarantee for security.[165] Still, the claim remains to an exclusively Jewish sovereignty.[166] Finally, liberal and right-wing versions vary in terms of the degree of violence and control that can legitimately be exerted on Palestinians – with notable disagreements on the occupation of Palestinian territories, the establishment of Jewish settlements, and the waging of wars of aggression.[167] Still, the claim remains that all Palestinians are a radical Other and a threat, and as such need to be excluded and dealt with in a "managerial" way.[168]

Most importantly, these articulations permeate not only official political discourse, but the everyday understandings of Jewish-Israelis as they perceive and interpret the world that surrounds them. In this sense, as one of my interviewees put it, "Zionism is not an ideology, that one may or may not have… It is a very powerful identity, that everyone here has written within oneself."[169] This identity is so deeply interiorized that, as another interviewee noted, "For Israelis it is impossible to distinguish between being Jewish, being Israeli, and being Zionist: it is one and the same thing."[170] And, as a powerful shared identity, Zionism guides individuals' interpretations of events past and present, of themselves and of others, that open some possibilities and foreclose others: "Zionism erases all alternative connections… It becomes very difficult to imagine the Holocaust as something other than a crime against the Jewish people, and a reaction to it different than all the Jewish people uniting against the rest of the world."[171]

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[162] Yotam Berger and Yotam Landau, "Netanyahu Bars All 181 Palestinian Participants From Attending Joint Memorial Day Ceremony", *Haaretz*, May 1, 2019, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2019-05-01/ty-article/.premium/netanyahu-bars-all-palestinian-participants-from-attending-joint-memorial-ceremony/0000017f-f83e-d318-afff-fb7fde8c0000.

[163] Arye Naor, "The security argument in the territorial debate in Israel: rhetoric and policy" Israel Studies 4, no. 2 (1999): 150-177;

[164] Jamal, "Neo-zionism and Palestine", 55-60.

[165] Barnett, "The Israeli identity; Yaniv Voller, "From periphery to the moderates: Israeli identity and foreign policy in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly* 130, no. 3 (2015): 505-535; Falah, "The geopolitics of 'enclavisation'".

[166] Jamal, "Neo-zionism and Palestine", 65-71.

[167] See e.g. Dov Waxman, "From controversy to consensus: Cultural conflict and the Israeli debate over territorial withdrawal," *Israel Studies* 13, no. 2 (2008): 73-96; Efraim Inbar, "The 'no choice war'debate in Israel," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 12, no. 1 (1989): 22-37.

[168] Hage, *White Nation*, 15; 42; 66; 76. See also Hage, *Alter-Politics*.

[169] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 14, 2019.

[170] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019.

[171] Interview, West Jerusalem, April 23, 2019.

*4. Disciplined Subjects: The Making-Pervasive of Zionist Sensitivities Across Jewish-Israeli Society*

How are the articulations just examined made so pervasive and interiorized across Jewish-Israeli society? How do they become the common-sensical, taken-for-granted, subject-producing norms that define hegemony in a Gramscian sense? This section answers these questions by illustrating the processes through which Jewish-Israeli subjects are disciplined into the norms of Zionism, and in particular into their framing of the relationship to Palestine and the Palestinians.

Creating national consensus around Zionism – what Althusser called "interpellation," the "hailing" of subjects into a particular ideology and identity so that these become naturalized – is a paramount objective of the Israeli State.[172] Zionist ideology materializes ubiquitously in the landscape through symbols and aesthetics; it is pervasively propagated by the media and by State institutions, which stretch into the most intimate spheres of life; it is continuously reproduced in ceremonies and collective "acts of repetition" that tie it to particular "structures of feeling;" it is embedded in everyday practices and relationalities as they unfold in a space that actualizes a "world particular to Zionism."[173] This prominence of ideology and nation building processes is largely attributable to the relatively recent formation of Israel, to the specific circumstances of such formation (as seen the need to homogenize a diverse settler population and to mobilize it against a hostile native population), and to the protracted situation of warfare that ensued, which continues to fuel the need to rally the nation around the State.[174] The extra-territorial dimension of the Jewish nation has also made it so that Zionism's nation building efforts have been traditionally targeted not only to its Jewish citizens, but to the Jewish people worldwide. A global network of lobbies, funding organizations, religious organizations, schools, and universities work to 'hail' the Jewish diaspora into identifying with Israel and with Zionism (with particular emphasis in the United States, where the majority of diaspora Jews live).[175] While this section will not delve into their workings, this aspect needs to be kept in mind in order to understand why Zionist norms are largely interiorized also by diasporic Jews, as it will emerge in the analysis of international Jewish activists' identitary negotiations (c.f. Chapter Three).

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[172] *Althusser, "Ideology, and Ideological State Apparatuses,* 11.

[173] Katherine Natanel, *Sustaining conflict: apathy and domination in Israel-Palestine*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016): 28, 37; Raymond Williams, Raymond Henry Williams, Raymond L. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 132.

[174] See e.g. Dorothy Willner, *Nation-Building and Community in Israel*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Bar-Tal, "Societal Beliefs".

[175] See e.g. Dan Lainer-Vos, "Diaspora-Homeland Relations as a Framework to Examine Nation-Building Processes," *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 10 (2010): 894-908; Dov Waxman, "The Pro-Israel Lobby in the United States: Past, Present, and Future," *Israel and the United States*, (London: Routledge, 2018): 79-99. A Jewish-American activist I interviewed recounted her experience in a Jewish school system in the United States as such: "At school there was a very pervasive Zionist narrative. The best day was the celebration of Israeli Independence: there were flags all around, we would sing national songs. We had summer camps where we would dress up as IDF soldiers and do war-like activities. In the summer of 2005, everyone in my camp dressed up in orange to support the settlers after the disengagement plan. When I was in high school, I was sent to Israel for three months as a formative experience, part of which was living and training with IDF for four days [Gadna program]. The greatest honor among us was to make *aliyah* and enrol in the IDF for real." (Interview, West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019).

As of today, there is a remarkable convergence across Jewish-Israeli society around the core tenets of Zionism and around the need to exclude and control the Palestinian population.[176] If many people adhere to mainstream racist and aggressive narratives around Palestinians, others "simply don't know, don't see, and don't care about the injustices that are going on next door," in what has been labelled a form of "active disengagement" that underlies the acritical acceptance of a discriminatory status quo.[177] This convergence is achieved through the combination of exposure to a monolithic and one-sided narrative of events (many of my interviewees used the term "brainwashing"), of embeddedness within a way of life that conditions people into accepting and partaking in everyday forms of domination over Palestinians, and of a strong societal pressure into conforming to dominant norms. The reflection of Tamar, a Jewish-Israeli activist in her 30s, brings together these aspects:

> Since we're young, we're told that Israel is one, that there is no 'occupation' and no Green Line. All the names remind us that it's the land of the ancestors, from Hebron to Susyia and every tiny village. [We're told] that Palestinians are terrorists, that the occupation and the settlements are for our security. Throughout our life, we never really see the conflict… If you do, you do as a soldier, with all the brainwashing that comes with it. […] I never really stopped to think about it. It was perfectly normal to go around with friends and carry rifles at the bar, or to go for the weekend out to the springs in the desert… Those are actually settlements, but you don't see that. I wasn't very political then, I was just, you know, living my life.[178]

Let us now review in turn these processes of nation building.

The first process consists in the massive mobilisation of traditional institutions of nation building around the Zionist narrative.[179] They comprise government-led propaganda, academia, the media, the school, the army, and the specific institutions of collective memory. The importance of government-led propaganda is testified by a specific term, *hasbara* (literally meaning "explaining"), which indicates a "sophisticated mechanism of lobbying and public relations […] in the service of the nationalist cause at home and abroad."[180] An official policy of the Israeli government, and one considered of utmost importance, *hasbara* (which the state calls 'public diplomacy' but is also referred to as 'branding') is

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[176] A 2016 poll finds that "Virtually all Israeli Jews (98%) agree that it is the birthright of all Jews around the world to make aliyah to Israel. Most Israeli Jews (79%) also say Jews deserve preferential treatment in Israel;" that "Nearly half (48%) say Arabs should be removed from Israel ;" that "A plurality of Israeli Jews (42%) say the settlements help the security of Israel," and that "A large majority (88%) say Palestinian leaders are not sincerely pursuing a peace settlement" (Israel's religiously divided society, Pew research centre). See also TSC and PSR, "Palestinian-Israeli Pulse" and "Israeli Public Opinion Polls".

[177] Interview, West Jerusalem, April 21, 2019; Natanel, *Sustaining conflict*, 7–8, 15, 87, 116, 178, 196–98, 200. See also Ami Pedahzur and Yael Yishai, "Hatred by Hated People: Xenophobia in Israel, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism," 22 no. 2, (1999): 101-117; Abby Martin, "Israelis Speak Candidly to Abby Martin About Palestinians," Empire Files, available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1e_dbsVQrk4.

[178] Interview, East Jerusalem, December 2, 2019

[179] See e.g. *Althusser, "Ideology, and Ideological State Apparatuses.*

[180] Ephraim Nimni, "Introduction", *The Challenge of Post-Zionism*, 2. See also Gideon Kouts, "From Sokolow to" Explaining Israel": The Zionist" Hasbara" First" Campaign Strategy Paper" and Its Applications," *Revue Européenne des Études Hébraïques* 18 (2016): 103-146.

"meant to influence the conversation in a way that positively portrays Israeli political moves and policies." It does so for instance by framing Israel's military operations as responses to threats, by emphasizing the State's multicultural and progressive character (in what is often referred to as 'whitewashing' – and 'pinkwashing' and 'greenwashing' when it comes to feminist/queer and environmental issues – because specifically meant to drive attention away from its discriminatory policies), and by portraying Palestinians in negative terms.[181] Hasbara means include directing the discourse of political and military élites, training opinion makers and education professionals, having a direct presence in mainstream and social media, funding propaganda tourism, and conscripting lobbying groups at home and abroad, in what has been defined "the most widespread and ambitious state-run propaganda effort in the world today."[182] Such efforts have seen a particular increase during Netanyahu's government, when a dedicated Ministry has been created to redirect public discourse particularly "against the delegitimization and boycott campaigns against the state of Israel."[183]

Coming to institutions of knowledge-production, a vast literature has shown how the academic sphere, historians and sociologists in particular, have been conscripted historically into providing scholarly proof for the Zionist narrative, for instance by constructing the mass expulsions of Palestinians in 1948 as a voluntary emigration and the wars fought by Israel against its neighbours as 'wars of no choice.'[184] Similarly, Israeli mainstream media "serve the patriotic cause" by reporting news in such a way that frame Palestinians as not interested in peace and that justify indiscriminate and deadly violence towards them through security arguments.[185] In parallel, alternative sources of news are discredited as biased towards Palestinians, and Palestinian ones in particular are

[181] Noam Sheizaf, "Hasbara : why does the world fail to understand us?", *+972 Magazine*, November 13, 2011, https://www.972mag.com/hasbara-why-does-the-world-fail-to-understand-us/. See also Fadi Zatari, "Israel: the state of Hasbara", *Daily Sabah*, May 9, 2018, https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2018/05/09/israel-the-state-of-hasbara; Sarah Schulman, "A Documentary Guide to 'Brand Israel' and the Art of Pinkwashing," *Mondoweiss*, November 30, 2011, https://mondoweiss.net/2011/11/a-documentary-guide-to-brand-israel-and-the-art-of-pinkwashing/.

[182] Sheizaf, "Hasbara". See also Molad: The Center for the Reneewal of Israeli Democracy, "Israeli Hasbara: Myths and Facts. a Report on the Israeli Hasbara Apparatus", 2012,www.molad.org/images/upload/researches/79983052033642.pdf; Bazz, I. 2015. Bazz, "StandWithUs"; Itamar Benzaquen and The Seventh Eye, "Israeli ministry paying for anti-BDS propaganda in major news outlets," *+972 Magazine*, January 14, 2020, https://www.972mag.com/anti-bds-propaganda-ministry-media/.

[183] Minister of Strategic affairs and public diplomacy website, https://www.gov.il/en/departments/Units/ministry_of_strategic_affairs_and_public_diplomacy. See also Eyal Hareuveni, "Such a Mysterious Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs", *Orient XXI*, October 28 2018, https://orientxxi.info/magazine/such-a-mysterious-israeli-ministry-of-strategic-affairs,2709; Max Blumenthal, "Israel Cranks up the PR Machine," October 16, 2013, *The Nation*, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/israel-cranks-pr-machine/.

[184] See most notably Ilan Pappé, *The idea of Israel: A history of power and knowledge*, (London: Verso Books, 2014); Kimmerling, Baruch. "Sociology, ideology, and nation-building: The Palestinians and their meaning in Israeli sociology." *American Sociological Review* (1992): 446-460 ; Baruch Kimmerling, "Academic history caught in the cross-fire: The case of Israeli-Jewish historiography," *History and Memory* 7, no. 1 (1995): 41-65; Uri Ram, *The changing agenda of Israeli sociology*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1995).

[185] Ata Qaymari, "Israeli Media: Serving the" Patriotic" Cause," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 10, no. 2 (2003): 23; "Representation of Palestinians in the News: A Discourse Analysis of Israeli Media News Reporting," *Tercer Milenio*, May 12, 2011, http://www.periodismoucn.cl/tercermilenio/representation-of-palestinians-in-the-news-a-discourse-analysis-of-israeli-media-news-reporting/;

delegitimized as reporting facts that are exaggerated and often fabricated (what is referred to derogatively as "Pallywood").[186]

The school system and the army are the core institutions mandated to weave together the core values of the collective Israeli Zionist ethos. Research has emphasized how Israeli school curricula partake in the construction of collective memory according to the Zionist narrative by establishing the continuity between ancient and modern Israel, largely erasing the experiences and cultures of the diaspora, and proposing a one-sided account of the conflict with Palestinians.[187] Schoolbooks have been shown to portray the Arabs in stereotypical and racist terms, and to convey a 'Judaized' image of the historical and geographical landscape of the country.[188] Schools participate in the construction of a collective nationalist ethos also through their extra-curricular activities: several of my interviewees have reported how since the youngest age they were made to write letters to soldiers, engage in playful activities related to the army, and attend "orientation sessions" with the army about the roles that would best suit them.[189] Commenting on the participation of schools into nationalism and militarism, one of my interviewees noted: "Politicization here happens very early… just before you start thinking for yourself."[190]

And it is indeed the army that constitutes perhaps the most influential nation-building tool. The pervasiveness of the army in Jewish-Israeli life – with every Jewish-Israeli being conscripted in war preparations and active combat, and the army being constantly present and celebrated in everyday life – creates a "total militarism," a blurring of distinctions between army and society that reifies the Zionist myth of a 'nation in arms' and structures individual mind-sets as well as the very sociopolitical boundaries of the collectivity.[191] Going to the army is not only compulsory, but it determines one's belonging to and one's value in society. Former generals and officials are by far the most respected figures, also in politics, and having served in combat units is a prerequisite for having one's voice heard, especially if it is a critical one ("I paid my duty, I have the right to speak," told me one of my interviewees, interpreting a widespread perception in society).[192] Conversely, those who are exempted from service are not considered full members of society (Palestinians *in primis*, but also Ultra-

[186] See as an example Alexander H. Joffe, "The rhetoric of nonsense," *Middle East Quarterly* (2012), 15-22.
[187] Elie Podeh, "History and memory in the Israeli educational system: The portrayal of the Arab-Israeli conflict in history textbooks (1948-2000)," *History & Memory* 12, no. 1 (2000): 65-100.
[188] *Ibidem*. See also Nurit Peled-Elhanan, *Palestine in Israeli school books: Ideology and propaganda in education*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[189] Informal conversation, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019; Interview, West Jerusalem, March 27, 2019. See also Daniel Fontaine, "Des Israéliens engagés pour la paix quittent leur pays: "Il n'y a plus de place pour nous en Israël"," *Rtbf.be*, June 21, 2020, https://www.rtbf.be/article/des-israeliens-engages-pour-la-paix-quittent-leur-pays-il-ny-a-plus-de-place-pour-nous-en-israel-10524287.
[190] Interview, West Jerusalem, March 27, 2019.
[191] Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline*, 214-215 ; Halper, *War Against the People*, 38-39
[192] Asher Arian, "Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2003," (Jaffa Center for Strategic Studies, Institute for National Security Studies, Memorandum n. 67, 2003); Interview with a member of Combatants for Peace, Tel Aviv, December 1, 2019. See also Adi Kuntsman and Rebecca L. Stein, *Digital militarism : Israel's occupation in the social media age*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

Orthodox Jews), and those who avoid combat units less worthy ones (often women, queer, and disabled people).[193] Other than delimiting and ordering society, the army structures individual mind-sets in a way that has been called a "militarism of the mind:" every Jewish-Israeli is "oriented towards permanent war preparation in order to defend the collectivity's very existence."[194] During service, Jewish-Israelis internalize the army's discourse of defensiveness (it is not by chance that the army is called Israeli *Defence* Forces – IDF), morality, and 'purity of arms.' They also internalize a soldier's gaze on Palestinians as essentially 'targets' and 'security threats.' As a former soldier described:

> All we learn about Palestinians we learn it in the army. The little Arabic I know, for instance, comes from 'checkpoint Arabic.' It's a two-weeks training, there is a checkpoint and the whole reproduction of a Palestinian village. They give us a booklet with a few words to use: 'stop or I'll shoot you,' 'open your bag,' 'give me your passport'... all we need for occupying. [...] I went to the army because I was 'intoxicated' – I wanted to avenge my people. But what I learned was how to oppress another people: to 'make my presence felt,' as they teach us, and to see it as something that we are perfectly entitled to do.[195]

Finally, there are those institutions expressly mandated to craft the collective memory of the nation and to link it to the present. The discourse they propose binds together two thousand years of Jewish history in an "endless iteration of [Zionism's] founding narrative: persecution, trauma, perseverance, and triumph."[196] The highly celebrated national holidays of Israel's memorial cycle see Holocaust Remembrance Day followed closely by the Memorial Day for the Fallen Soldiers and the Victims of Terrorism, followed the day after by Independence Day. This contiguity is not casual, but aimed at linking causally, and emotionally, past events in a "strong reminder of the price Israel has paid and continues to pay for its independence."[197] The emotional charge of these events is huge, accompanied as they are by highly choreographed ceremonies, the daily streaming of national songs and films, and by a war siren going off up to twice a day for two minutes, uniting the whole nation in collective acts of mourning.[198] As I witnessed one of these moments with one of my interviewees – in a square in Tel Aviv, with everyone around us stopping still and observe two minutes of silence – he noted how "weirdly effective" this device is: "It forces you to stop and really think about the Holocaust, and even if I don't want to do it, there is a lot of pressure to do so. It is compelling."[199]

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[193] Del Sarto, *Israel Under Siege*, 157; Interview with a member of New Profile, Ramat HaSharon, May 26, 2019; Uta Klein, "The gender perspective of civil-military relations in Israeli society," *Current Sociology* 50, no. 5 (2002): 669-686.
[194] Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline*, 214-215.
[195] Observation, Breaking the Silence Tour, South Hebron Hills, July 9, 2018. For more soldiers testimonies, see Breaking the Silence website, https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/testimonies/database.
[196] Natanel, *Sustaining conflict*, 27.
[197] Israeli tourism website, https://www.touristisrael.com/yom-hazikaron-in-israel/6019/. See also Mooli Brog, "Victims and victors: Holocaust and military commemoration in Israel collective memory," *Israel Studies* 8, no. 3 (2003): 65-99.
[198] Natanel, *Sustaining conflict*, 35-37.
[199] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 7, 2019.

Along with the ceremonies, there are the physical places purported to be the depositaries of the nation's past: the many museums dedicated to the forefathers of Zionism, to the army and pre-state armed groups, and to the Holocaust; the archaeological sites testifying of the Jewish presence on the land in Biblical times. Each proposes a narrative that reiterates Zionist articulations and erases any perspective contrasting with them: the forefathers of Zionism are portrayed monolithically as heroic and moral beings; archaeological sites are linked to to Biblical figures overlooking scientific disagreements; the portrayal of the Nazi period refrains from linking the experience of the Jews with that of other minorities and erases the non-Zionist components of the resistance to it (most notably that of the Jewish internationalists).[200] The teleological progress from persecution to rebirth is rendered also architecturally, as exemplified by the Connecting Path that leads from the Yad Vashem to Theodor Herzl's museum through a series of panels that illustrate the hardships the Jewish people had to go through towards the achievement of national sovereignty.[201]

This use of architecture points to the second set of processes of dissemination of meanings and sensitivities particular to Zionism. These have to do less with the explicit transmission of content specific to the Zionist ideology, and more with routinized – yet very choreographed – ways of experiencing space and social relations that invite ways of seeing, doing, knowing, and feeling that are attuned to the Zionist worldview. Notes Rifkin that settler colonial logics come to be naturalized by settler populations "not necessarily [] as a set of political propositions or as a specifically imperial project of dispossession," but also through very "mundane dynamics" through which "settler geographies come to be lived as ordinary, non-reflexive conditions of possibility." Through these dynamics, "settler dominance is actively reconstituted as a set of actions, occupations, deferrals, and potentials that slide from view."[202] This idea of passive conditioning was recurrent in my interviews, as activists talked about being "set up to be Zionist" in their everyday, having their experience of a securitized and segregated landscape feel "natural," and of never questioning the type of encounters they could (or could not) have in it.[203]

Several studies have looked at how spatial arrangements in Israel produce compliant political subjects by "sustain[ing] national narratives of belonging while short-circuiting and even blocking other narratives."[204] I have already mentioned how the Judaization of space, and the concomitant erasure from the landscape of the Palestinian historical presence, have created the impression that

[200] Observations: Menachem Begin Heritage Centre, July 10, 2018; Theodor Herzl Museum, West Jerusalem, July 23, 2018; City of David, East Jerusalem, July 11, 2018; Yad Vashem, West Jerusalem, July 23, 2018. See also Amos Goldberg, "The 'Jewish narrative'in the Yad Vashem global Holocaust museum," *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, no. 2 (2012): 187-213.
[201] Observation, Connecting Path and Mount Herzl, West Jerusalem, July 23, 2018.
[202] Mark Rifkin, "Settler common sense," *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3-4 (2013): 323.
[203] Interviews: West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019; East Jerusalem, December 2, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019.
[204] Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 26. See also Gil Z. Hochberg, *Visual occupations: Violence and visibility in a conflict zone*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Juliana Ochs, *Security and suspicion: An ethnography of everyday life in Israel*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). On the spatializing logic of settler colonialism more generally see Phil Henderson, "Imagoed communities: the psychosocial space of settler colonialism," *Settler Colonial Studies* 7, no. 1 (2017): 40-56.

Israel has been forever Jewish. One of my interviewees recalled the realization, in his youth, that the ruins nearby his village were Palestinian, and how destabilizing this was for his whole self-narrative.[205] While creating a Judaized space, architecture also defines 'Jewishness,' by materializing links at once with the Bible and with the European culture of Ashkenazi Jews (this is exemplified by the Bauhaus architectural style of Tel Aviv, which has been argued to posit Ashkenazi culture as Israeli culture).[206] At the same time, the architecture of the occupation – the Separation Barrier, the checkpoints, the Jewish-only bypass roads connecting Israel to Jewish settlements in the West Bank – constructs an experience of space and time that is entirely different for Jews and Palestinians: while for the latter it configures an endless set of obstacles and barriers, for the former it gives the impression of a borderless Israel, where one can move freely and swiftly, and always feel at home.[207] This seamless spatial continuity gives Jewish-Israelis the impression that "all the land here is one, and ours" and makes it so that "even settlers sometimes they don't realize they are such," managing, as Weizman notes, to "simultaneously obfuscate and naturalize the facts of domination, while constructing Jewish and Palestinian subjects as asymmetrical."[208]

Within Israel proper, the ubiquitous *dispositifs* of security – metal detectors in stations and cinemas, gates and fences in cafés, police watchtowers and roadblocks in the streets – work less to proscribe violence and more to reinforce attachment to the State and to military authorities.[209] If many of these *dispositifs* were implemented during the Second Intifada in the face of real dangers posed by Palestinian attacks, notes Ochs that they "ultimately affirmed the sense of disorder they purported to prevent, eliciting the very vulnerabilities they claimed to temper.[210] The result is that Jewish-Israelis constantly perform a set of securitized routines that, in everyday practice, reorganize speech, thought, and emotions that reaffirm the Zionist ethos of being under siege and permanently geared towards war.

Finally, the segregation of spaces of life between Jews and Palestinians – with the latter mostly living in separate cities or separate neighbourhoods – reifies the Zionist framework of relations between the two as based on separation and superiority. Indeed, as many of my interviewees noted, "encountering Palestinians in our daily routines is very difficult, almost impossible," let alone having Palestinian friends of spouses.[211] It is often the case that the only Palestinians encountered are bus drivers, shop owners, construction workers, and that this is perceived as a positive instance of a

[205] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 27, 2019.
[206] Sharon Rotbard, *White city, black city: Architecture and war in Tel Aviv and Jaffa*, (London: Pluto Press, 2015).
[207] Emile Badarin, "Settler-colonialist management of entrances to the native urban space in Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (2015): 226-235; Hagar Kotef, *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On liberal governances of mobility* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Weizman, *Hollow Land.*
[208] Interviews, East Jerusalem, May 26, 2019; West Jerusalem, July 24, 2019; Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 8.
[209] Ochs, *Security and suspicion.*
[210] *Idem*, 12
[211] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.

perfectly working coexistence.[212] This type of asymmetrical encounters, and their acritical perception, reinforces the impression that hierarchies of status and relationships of dependency between Jews and Palestinians are natural phenomena. To further reinforce this impression of asymmetry is the fact that Palestinian-inhabited areas are kept intentionally in a state of under-development, in a way that visually nurtures the colonial imaginary of an inferior and uncivilized other.[213] "Welcome to the Third World!" said jokingly a supposedly progressive tour-guide of an anti-occupation NGO as the bus drove into the Palestinian village of Sur Baher.[214]

The third and last set of processes of nation building consists in the involvement of society at large, until its most intimate spheres, into creating a strong pressure to conform to the norms of Zionism and reciprocally 'policing' dissent. Many of my interviewees have noted how "indoctrination starts in the family:" it is at first in the home environment that the experience of the Holocaust, often lived directly by family members, is linked to a sense of loyalty and sacrifice towards the State, which expresses itself among other things in the taken-for-granted prospect of serving in the army.[215] To my question of whether he had a Zionist upbringing, Natan, a male activist in his 40s reflected as such:

> Well, it's hard to tell… Zionism here is so natural it is *transparent*. I was not raised in a particularly ideological home, but there was definitely this sacralised image of the State, of 'our' victims. And it was obvious that I would go to the army, [laughs] there was no question about that.[216]

Several others reported conflicts with their families (also left-wing ones) due to their choice of refusing military service and the sense of shame and guilt that was conveyed to them for this choice.[217] In this sense, notes Natanel, the institution of the family is profoundly imbricated with the army and the education into nation building: "'home' becomes a site of stability, […] a place where repeated norms, values, and narratives might be laid to rest at the same time as they gain new purchase."[218] The same goes for most sites of social interaction: the university, the workplace, one's networks of friends. Several activists mentioned the need to self-censor their political views for the sake of getting a job, advancing in one's career, and simply to avoid unpleasant interactions and accusations of being 'traitors' from their peers.[219]

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[212] Interview, West Jerusalem, April 29, 2019.
[213] See e.g. Issachar Rosen-Zvi, *Taking space seriously: law, space and society in contemporary Israel*, (London: Routledge, 2017): ch. 2 and 5; Daniel Monterescu, *Jaffa shared and shattered: Contrived coexistence in Israel/Palestine*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015): ch. 1; Oren Yiftachel, "From Sharon to Sharon: Spatial planning and separation regime in Israel/Palestine," *Hagar: Studies in Culture, Polity & Identities* 10, no. 1 (2010): 71-103.
[214] Participant observation, Ir Amim Study Tour of East Jerusalem, April 22, 2019.
[215] Interviews: West Jerusalem, March 27, 2019; East Jerusalem, December 2, 2019; East Jerusalem, November 17, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.
[216] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.
[217] Emphasis mine. See Interviews: Jaffa, March 31, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 7, 2019.
[218] Natanel, *Sustaining conflict*, 34.
[219] Interviews: Ramat Gan, May 27, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019; West Jerusalem, May 16, 2019.

In the past two decades, social pressures of this kind have become stronger and more coercive. As political sensitivities have shifted towards the extreme right-wing, also societal norms have settled on more aggressive and exclusionary versions of Zionism, and even the slightest criticism to Israeli policy has come to be policed and socially repressed. These endeavours are invited and actively encouraged by the State. It has been noted, for instance, how *hasbara* efforts have increasingly been directed to regulating political discourse also in private settings:

> The Israeli government encourages all citizens to actively engage in Hasbara. Recently, it even distributed brochures with talking points to all Israelis traveling abroad. [...] Israelis are asked to engage in politically oriented conversations with their hosts and contacts abroad. Rather than discuss the Palestinian conflict, they are advised to cite Israeli technological achievements, mention environmental policies and take pride in notable cultural works. The West Bank is to be discussed – under its ancient Hebrew name, Judea and Samaria – as a potential tourist marvel.[220]

More and more, individuals and groups of civil society are voluntarily conscripting into this effort, in a form of "citizen activism" (as one such groups presented itself) that is however closely overseen in its content and modalities by government officials.[221] Right-wing groups, often with direct governmental funding, have increased their presence on campuses and in other social settings to spread information on recent events that amplifies the State's Zionist narrative, to incite support for the military, and to fuel anti-Palestinian sentiments.[222] Much of their work is also directed at exposing, delegitimizing, and often harassing left-wing organizations and supposedly pro-Palestinian individuals. This includes filming lectures of academics considered too critical and demanding their removal, publishing lists of names (often correlated by photos and personal information) of people considered to be 'enemies of the State,' infiltrating left-wing organizations to then report on their views and methods so as to make them look as 'friends of terrorists' and terrorist organizations themselves.[223]

As anticipated in Section 1 of this chapter, the atmosphere of 'thought policing' that has resulted from this situation constitutes perhaps the most significant aspect within Israeli society of the right-

[220] Sheizaf, "Hasbara".
[221] Bazz, "StandWithUs"; Gurvitz, "What is NGO".
[222] Halleli Pinson, "Neo Zionist right-wing populist discourse and activism in the Israel education system," *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 20, no. 2 (2022): 124-137.
[223] Marissa Newman, "The shadowy right-wing group infiltrating lefty organizations," *The Times of Israel*, February 11, 2016, https://www.timesofisrael.com/the-shadowy-right-wing-group-infiltrating-lefty-organizations/; Dahlia Scheindlin, "Academic Freedom Under Attack? Interview with Prof. Neve Gordon," *+972 Magazine*, April 19, 2011, https://www.972mag.com/academic-freedom-under-attack-interview-with-professor-neve-gordon-ben-gurion-university/; Edo Konrad, "Right-wing group seeks to dismantle Israeli NGO dedicated to Palestinian return," *+972 Magazine*, September 24, 2013, https://www.972mag.com/right-wing-group-seeks-to-dismantle-israeli-ngo-dedicated-to-palestinian-return/; Edo Konrad, "Human rights groups smeared over actions of one man", *+972 Magazine*, January 8, 2016, https://www.972mag.com/smearing-human-rights-groups-over-actions-of-one-man/; Oren Ziv, "Israeli activist persecuted by far-right group marks one month in custody", *+972 Magazine*, February 4, 2020, https://www.972mag.com/israeli-activist-persecuted-by-far-right-group-marks-one-month-in-custody/; Mairav Zonszein, "WATCH".

wing shift of the past two decades, and one that has had a huge impact on the possibilities and framings of internal critique concerning the Palestinian question in ways that the coming chapters set out to examine.

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By illustrating the various dimensions of Israeli Zionist hegemony across continuities and changes this chapter has set the stage for the analysis that follows: a geographic, legal, and socio-political landscape made of supremacist and discriminatory laws and practices, segregated spaces, and racialized subjectivities. Boundaries of the social collective are established, and continuously reproduced, that exclude Palestinians from the legal and ontological realm of the 'human,' while at the same time stratifying Jewish-Israeli society internally in ways that largely depend on and intersect with the main colonial divide.

Understanding this context is paramount in order to assess the counterhegemonic role of the activists this dissertation is about. It is in fact this context, with its structural dynamics, that at once enables and constrains possibilities of critique and of solidarity with Palestinians. As the following chapters analyse in detail, on the one hand, the racial structure of privileges established by the Israeli State lays the conditions that determine the value of Jewish-Israeli activists' contribution to the Palestinian struggle. Jewish in a Jewish State, and also by majority Ashkenazi, they can mobilize their privileged access to resources made available by the State so as to challenge its policies and deter its violence. As members of the ingroup, they can also appeal to the values and norms that constitute its shared ethos and work to expose their inconsistencies and deadlocks from within. On the other hand, these same structures insinuate themselves also in activists' views and practices, hindering the possibility of emergence of a truly counterhegemonic critique in crucial ways. Radically rejecting dominant understandings of Self and Other is a difficult task: not only because such understandings have become particularly normative, but because in most cases they operate through deep-seated articulations and taken-for-granted ways of interacting that are hardly detectable even for committed activists. Having an idea of how such dominant symbolic boundaries and articulations work allows to assess how activists engage with such boundaries, to what extent they challenge or accept them, and how they work to renegotiate existing articulations.

The picture that emerges from this chapter is that of a particularly strong hegemony: one that articulates views that result compelling to most; that is deeply interiorized and pervasively regulates the most intimate sectors of life; that resiliently adapts to various historical circumstances and co-opts progressive ideals and aspirations. At the same time, the chapter has emphasized the co-constituted character of such hegemony: one that requires and relies on the participation of the entire social

collective in repeating, re-producing, and policing the boundaries of what is or is not acceptable. This aspect invites to think about subversion as a set of micro-level interruptions that, in such a totalizing context, carry great counterhegemonic potential.



Jerusalem Old City, August 2018 (ph: Alice Baroni)

*During that first fieldwork, the only moments in which I felt I could actually breathe – a very physical sensation of a weight being lifted off of my chest – and finally feel 'at home' were as soon as I crossed into 'Palestine.' It happened as, after a long day of explorations in West Jerusalem, I walked past Damascus Gate and into Nablus road and its market, in the neglected streets of Bab-al-Zahra, my neighborhood. As I sat in its bars and restaurants, enjoying an* argila *or a Taybeh beer lulled by the call of the muezzin. As I worked in its bookshops and cultural centers, all with a marked political ambiance, among their (internationalized) Palestinian and (pro-Palestinian) international customers. No more Israeli flags hanging from the windows here, only on the nearby police station and on the police cars of the occasional patrols.*

*I was well aware that I was not actually 'at home' there, and that my enthusiastic feelings could very well not be reciprocated. Despite an always welcoming and warm attitude, for some I certainly was yet another well-intentioned European coming to live off the business that the 'conflict' has become, and raising the prices of living without really changing anything. I was also aware that my approach to this space was problematic: savoring the* argila, *the* hummus, *the* taboon *bread, rejoicing at the view of mosques and historical buildings, I sought the 'original', the 'traditional', the 'native.' However motivated by the sense of revendication of existence against*

*erasure these cultural expressions contain in Israel-Palestine, my rejoicing in them was tainted with an orientalist gaze. My imagined Palestine was that of a foreigner, a white, desiring and inevitably appropriating the Other.*

*The Palestine I sought and in which I felt reinvigorated was especially a political imagination, one shaped by my own political desires as much as by the realities I had encountered. It was the Palestinian 'cause', the 'struggle,' the 'resistance.' It was my naïve fascination with it as a teenager and the knowledge of it I had accumulated over time. But it was especially the people that had filled with life and love those abstract concepts over almost ten years. Every time I could take some time off my fieldwork I would go visit friends in Hebron, Jericho, Bethlehem. We would reminisce common friends and old anecdotes, update each other on our lives running at different speeds – theirs stuck in the stillness (at best) of the ever-worsening situation. They would take me to see the latest developments of the occupation (settlements sprouting here and there, houses burned or reduced to rubble) and of the struggle (old communal centers growing and new ones being born, new projects and new actors of solidarity). With them, on the other side of the Wall, in touch with their subdued grief and fiery defiance, I was able to 'reconnect,' and refill my quickly dispersing energies.*

*It was this looking for 'Palestine' in this political and emotional sense that led me to my encounter with the Jewish-Israeli activist scene. One of the last days of my first stay, a July evening of 2018, I found publicized on social networks an event, the screening of a documentary called "The Antifascists", at an address in West Jerusalem I did not know but described as a "communal space for co-resistance in Jerusalem."*[1] *Intrigued by the description and keen on taking a break in a context that portended to be both socially and politically refreshing, I convinced my flatmate, a Catalan journalist, to come along, and we went. The place, Imbala the name, was at the beginning of West Jerusalem, near the Green Line and not far by walk from our neighborhood in the East. It was a tiny room, no more than 20 squared meters, with a small bar counter and a kitchen in the back. Its aesthetics was remarkably familiar, not so different from that of other 'leftist' political community centers in Europe and, in that, very comforting. Every surface was covered in flags, posters, and stickers with political messages, in English, Hebrew and Arabic, spanning from antiracism and refugee rights, to feminism and queer struggles, to animal liberation and veganism. They expressed solidarity to struggles near and far: from Sheikh Jarrah and Gaza to Rojava and Europe. The crowd was also familiar: mostly young white people, alternative or political clothing, piercings and colorful hair. What made it 'strange' to me was its situation, its 'fit', into the context I have described so far. As the film ran (itself a documentary not on 'local' antifascists, as I initially thought, but on Swedish and Greek ones organizing against the rising extreme right), I wondered who they would identify as a 'fascist' here: was it the hyper-nationalist settlers? Or the 'average' Israeli – their families, their colleagues? And how, if that was the case, would they engage with that – politically, personally? Why were there no Palestinians in a place of 'co-resistance'? And what can 'co-resistance' even mean here?*

[1] Respectively, Facebook event « The Antifascists – film screening", 23 July 2018, https://www.facebook.com/events/2080932778894147/, and Facebook page, Imbala, https://www.facebook.com/imbalacoop/.

*That evening, I took a sticker that read "Jewish Antifascist Action," the red and black flags incorporated not in a circle, as usual, but in two intersecting triangles forming a red and black Star of David. Back home, I pasted it on my notebook and scribbled frantically all around it. I was excited: perhaps, these activists could make a good subject for my study, one that was analytically interesting and less politically and ethically problematic. They could provide me a window into the culture I sought to investigate, but without being the "enemy:"[2] after all, we had similar frames of reference, we could establish a contact both political and personal, and they surely would make for a much more pleasant fieldwork experience. At the same time, they offered me the possibility to study the 'resistance,' but without studying the 'Other', the 'subaltern': being all of us white and relatively privileged, lacking – or so I thought – an asymmetry of power, I could be free to be critical without having to worry constantly about my own white gaze and the risk of reproducing it. A convenient subject, indeed. What I did not know then was that we were more similar than I thought, and that studying the 'similar' came with its own set of issues.*



Graffiti of Leila Khaled on the Separation Barrier, Bethlehem, July 2018 (ph: Alice Baroni)

[2] Blee, "Studying the enemy".

CHAPTER TWO

# All That's 'Left'

## Mapping the Field of Jewish-Israeli Activism for Palestinian Rights

As I introduced myself to my interviewees, they often met with sarcastic pessimism the explanation that my research centred upon Jewish-Israeli activism for Palestinian rights, or, as it is commonly called in Israel, the activist 'Left:' "Oh, the Left that doesn't exist!," "Sure, we can talk, but I don't think there is much to say about the Israeli Left," "We are too few even to mention."[1]

Indeed, the scenario painted in the previous chapter sets a rather discouraging stage for those in Jewish-Israeli society who try to cultivate a more just and equal approach to the Palestinian issue. In a socio-political space where Jewish privilege is unquestionable and the demonization of Palestinians endemic and normalized, it is difficult to propose any alternative vision, no matter how far it goes in questioning Zionist hegemony. The intrinsically contradictory position of Jewish-Israeli activists for Palestinian rights as 'insiders without' – members of a society of settlers who side, in a way or another, with the colonized – structurally delegitimizes them in front of both. Race traitors for the former, they still represent the oppressive occupier for the latter, jeopardizing their chance to find political allies and audiences to mobilize. On top of these structural constraints, in the past two decades Israeli pro-Palestinian activists have been carrying out their work in a rapidly deteriorating political climate, as the previous chapter has shown. Amidst legal attacks and public-shaming campaign, activists have encountered in Jewish-Israeli society an often-violent ostracism. At the same time, they have been experiencing an increasing rejection also from Palestinians who, after decades of failed attempts at seeing their claims conveyed and listened to, have been more and more distrustful about joining in struggle with the Israelis.

[1] Informal conversation, Susya, March 23, 2019; Text message to author, May 6, 2019; Interview, Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018.

In this climate, the few Israeli activists that remain live their activism with a sense of retreat, powerlessness, and despair.[2] This perception was well captured by the name of one such groups, 'All That's Left,' which I borrowed for the title of this chapter. My aim here is precisely that of taking stock of what is 'left' today of the Jewish-Israeli pro-Palestinian Left and to offer a general picture of its main features. In order to do so, the chapter situates Jewish-Israeli activism within its broader socio-political areas of intervention and along the changes that have affected them over time.

Borrowing from Bourdieu, I look at the ensemble of Jewish-Israeli activism as a 'field' operating across multiple socio-political fields, each governed by different hegemonic norms ('doxas,' to say it with Bourdieu) that pose conflicting requirements to activist action. Departing from Bourdieu's analysis of fields as rigid units, however, I highlight how the fields activists operate in are characterized by porous borders that allow for overlaps and intersections across them. It is in this space of intersection that activist action occurs, and it is here that their transformative action finds its rationale. I also highlight how 'doxas' are not fixed but shift over time in ways that reverberate from one field to the other, shaping (and partly reacting to) the forms of activism most prevalent at any given time. The intersecting 'field' of present-day activism can then be read as a resultant of these successive adaptations and as structured along dimensions that largely reflect the contrasting hegemonic norms of the different fields it interrogates.

The first section conceptualizes Israeli pro-Palestinian activism as a field at the intersection of three fields: the Jewish-Israeli society to which activists belong and try to change; the Palestinians whose claims they set out to support as outsider allies; and the transnational communities involved in the Israeli-Palestinian issue of which they are part. The section argues that it is precisely this location that delineates Jewish-Israeli activists' peculiar role as actors of change, its possibilities as well as its inherent constraints and paradoxes. In this 'contradictory location' activists' political claims and actions can be understood as situated responses to the need to 'juggle' between the multiple, shifting, and often conflicting requirements of different fields.

The second section takes a genealogical perspective to trace the trajectories undertaken by subsequent waves of pro-Palestinian activism in reaction to contextual changes within the Israeli, Palestinian, and transnational field. This historical excursus shows how each of these fields has evolved over time resulting in partially shifting norms on the 'Palestinian issue' and on reciprocal relations. Moreover, looking at how groups emerged, faded out, and interacted with each other over time allows to better understand the panorama of present-day groups in terms of the genealogical links that connect them, the fault-lines that divide them, and the features they developed in reaction to previous and other groups' attempts.

[2] Interviews: West Jerusalem, July 24, 2018; Tel Aviv, May 7, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019; Ramat Gan May 27, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019; Tel Aviv, December 1, 2019.

Finally, the last section 'maps' the spectrum of present-day Jewish-Israeli pro-Palestinian activism. It presents its main actors and distinguishes the different ways in which they advance Palestinian rights by situating them along dimensions that capture the extent of their critique to the Israeli hegemony in terms of their framings (from liberal-Zionist to anti-Zionist) and means (institutionalized and mediated or grassroots and direct). This categorization follows previous analyses of Jewish-Israeli activist groups that have sought to assess their counter-hegemonic potential. While helpful to provide an indicative sketch of the variegated panorama of Jewish-Israeli activism, the section also begins to raise how this neat categorization fails to grasp the complexity of the reality on the ground: one made of connections, fluctuations, and nuances that eschew ideal-typical and pure categories. The rest of the dissertation takes these categories as a starting point to show how it is indeed mostly in the 'grey zones' in between them that activists move, negotiate, and compromise, in such a way that delineates a new, more micro-level framework for potentially counter-hegemonic endeavours.

### *1. Activists at the Intersection: 'Juggling' Political Instances Across Different Fields*

Jewish-Israeli activists for Palestinian rights operate at the intersection of different socio-political fields. They belong to Jewish-Israeli society, whose institutions and collective identities they inhabit, albeit critically. At the same time, they empathize with its Palestinian Others, whose grievances they are sensitive to and seek to advance as part of their critique. In addition to these two main oppositional fields, activists also relate to the different transnational communities that are variously involved in the Israeli-Palestinian issue, of which they are a localized expression.

This 'contradictory location' – and the peculiar positionality that ensues, of being simultaneously insiders and outsiders of different fields – is the most defining feature of Jewish-Israeli activism for the present analysis. It determines their specific role in the struggle for Palestinian rights and it both enables and constrains their transformative potential as actors for socio-political change. As such, the claims these groups make and the actions they undertake are to a large extent shaped by this location at the intersection. The conceptualizations of field proposed by Pierre Bourdieu and by others in his wake are helpful for understanding these dynamics at the meso level of collective action and framing, as the present chapter seeks to do.

For Bourdieu, the drives of social life are field-dependent: "fields" – the "structured space[s] of relations" that each of us inhabits in our social life – determine the forms of "capital" one possesses and the "status" one holds by consequence, the durable dispositions ("habitus") that fix the ways things ought to be done, and the discourses and values that "resonate" and those that are felt as alien.[3]

[3] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic*

Bourdieu's deterministic view of these constraints made him pessimistic towards the possibility of social change from within the field: because actors cannot escape the given rules of the game and its structures of power, internal critiques are only seemingly antagonistic but actually reproduce the dominant discourse (the 'doxa'). According to him, truly counterhegemonic change can only come from a rupture external to the field.[4]

In a critique to Bourdieu's determinism, other authors pointed out how people do not inhabit one single field, but multiple fields simultaneously, and how these fields are not sealed from one another but separated by "weak" and porous borders:

> It is more reasonable to characterize fields as having weak boundaries to alternative fields, of people's habitus being formed in a multiplicity of fields, and therefore of the 'outside' being brought into each particular field at a number of levels on a continuous basis. This is not something Bourdieu seems to have considered, arguing that "Once one has accepted the viewpoint that is constitutive of a field one can no longer take an external viewpoint on it" (Bourdieu 2000: 97). Such hyper-integration of field habitus is of course possible in cases of total institutions like prisons, but rare. More common is a situation where ordinary people's habitus (especially the dominated fractions) are continually out of alignment with the fields they inhabit, due to their inhabiting several separate fields.[5]

According to this view, it is precisely in the overlaps between fields, embodied by the individuals who inhabit them at the same time, that the transference of ideas and habits can lead to social transformation. Landy, looking at Jewish diaspora critics of Israel, applies this reasoning specifically to social movement actors who operate across different fields. By virtue of being insiders/outsiders of various communities, they are able to "speak the language of the local field" without "being wholly inhabited by that language to the extent of forgetting the content of the message they feel it is necessary to deliver." As such, these actors can act as "translators," or "embodied carriers" of a "back-and-forth transference" that in turn allows for the fields to be transformed.[6]

However, being located at the intersection of different fields also poses constraints and limitations to movements' potential for change. Neither fully insiders nor fully outsiders, they can be regarded with suspicion respectively from within and from outside the field. This is clear in the case of Jewish-Israeli activists. As seen in Chapter One, they are regarded as traitors of their ingroup, and as such

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*of Practice*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990). See also Jeremy F. Lane, *Pierre Bourdieu: A Critical Introduction*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

[4] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. For a critical discussion of Bourdieu's determinism and pessimism towards bottom-up social change, see for instance Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, (London: Routledge, 2002) and John Girling, *Social Movements and Symbolic Power: Radicalism, Reform and the Trial of Democracy in France*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[5] David Landy, *Jewish identity and Palestinian rights: Diaspora Jewish opposition to Israel*, (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2012): 35. See also Nancy Naples, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis and Activist Research*, (New York London Routledge, 2003); John F. Padgett and Walter W. Powell, *The emergence of organizations and markets*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[6] Landy, *Jewish identity and Palestinian rights*, 19, 37.

delegitimized. They are insiders 'without,' stripped of the requirements of allegiance that would make them legitimate members of the Jewish-Israeli collective. Conversely, no matter how distant they claim they are from the Israeli ethos and close to Palestinian grievances, they are still considered 'insiders' by Palestinians: members of, and most likely complicit with, the settler society.

In addition, mediators across fields are by definition pulled in diverging directions by the different, sometimes opposite, norms of different fields. For Landy, finding the right balance between these oppositional pulls is key to movements' success:

> Success within the field depends on attentiveness to the local field *and* on adherence to the integrity of the external discourse. Too much attention paid to the concerns of the field leads to actors being co-opted and institutionalized within the field, internalising its censorship. Over-strident demands that the 'other' is heard and that the self-censorship of the field is challenged lead to charges of 'left-wing infantilism' and rejection by the field. The way actors walk this tightrope ensures the failure or success of their movement.[7]

This is why he likens activists to "jugglers" who need to balance simultaneously, as if balls in the air thrown at them by the different audiences, conflicting political stances, in the effort to find resonance with one audience without alienating the other.[8]

In the case of Jewish-Israeli activists for Palestinian rights, this 'juggling' is made particularly challenging by the fact that the two main fields in which they gravitate have largely incompatible norms: each collective bases its identity on equal and mirroring claims (i.e. to the land, to being the 'native', to being the victim), and frames the other as its main enemy. The boundaries of acceptable critique are equally incompatible: within Zionism in Israel, against Zionism in Palestine. In this situation, activists base their claims on a necessary trade-off rather than on attempts to find common ground, and tend to formulate them differently depending on which audience they want to communicate with.

If Landy's model of fields and social movement action adds to Bourdieu's in important ways, it still largely takes fields as internally coherent and stable units. Instead, fields tend to be divided internally, with different sectors of society holding different values and visions, and to evolve over time, largely interdependently with other fields. These divisions and fluctuations need to be accounted for in an analysis of social movements 'at the intersection' because they affect movements' action in several important ways, as the rest of the dissertation shows in more detail. Firstly, divisions within fields multiply the audiences available to activists, offering them the possibility of 'picking' among these audiences those that are the least incompatible across fields. This increases the chances to find some common ground among at least some sectors of the respective societies. Secondly, the

[7] *Idem*, 37.
[8] *Idem*, 99.

co-dependent evolution of fields suggests that movements can influence this process of change across fields through their work of 'back-and-forth transference.'

Let me now turn to a brief description of each of the three fields to which Jewish-Israeli activists relate in the context of their struggle. Because the norms of the Jewish-Israeli field were at the centre of the previous chapter, the first subsection will focus mostly on delineating the social positioning of pro-Palestinian activists within Jewish-Israeli society and along other claim-making groups.

*a) JEWISH-ISRAELI SOCIETY*

Jewish-Israeli activists for Palestinian rights are first and foremost members of the Israeli Jewish collective, and oppositional ones in this insofar as they envision a change in the dominant discourse surrounding the Palestinian issue. It is by virtue of this insider position that they can advance Palestinian claims using a familiar language and the privileges they enjoy. As the previous chapter as illustrated, this is no easy task because of the pervasiveness of Zionist articulations that frame the relationship with Palestine and the Palestinians in radically oppositional, and increasingly racist and aggressive, terms. This makes critical claims both within Zionism and questioning it particularly difficult to resonate with large portions of society. Also when it comes to other antagonistic groups within Jewish-Israeli society, possible allies in the opposition, the pre-eminence of the Jewish/Palestinian divide makes it difficult to find common ground over shared civil, social, and economic grievances.

Pro-Palestinian activists generally belong to the 'Left' of Jewish-Israeli society. A mostly Ashkenazi and socio-economically privileged, albeit politically minoritarian, sector of society, the Left in Israel is defined by 'progressive' positions on the Palestinian issue, a stance which however is very variegated internally.[9] Premised on the common opposition to the occupation of the Palestinian territories, the Left comprises various and reciprocally antagonistic positions: from those who uphold a 'benign Zionism' and advocate for a Jewish State retreated within the territorial borders of 1967, to those who oppose Zionism entirely and demand the recognition of its past and present responsibilities and the full equality between Jews and Palestinians.[10] The Israeli Left – and pro-Palestinian activists make no exception – has also been historically characterized by a progressive stance on civil rights. However, as noted by several Israeli scholars, the Israeli Left is peculiarly disassociated from issues of socioeconomic justice, so much so that over the past forty years mostly right-wing parties have catered to socioeconomically disenfranchised groups in Jewish-Israeli society.[11] Pappé further observes that

[9] See, among others, Ilan Pappé, "What Is Left of the Israeli Left? (1948–2015)," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 22, no. 1 (2015): 351-367.

[10] The former are represented politically by the Meretz party (the heir of Mapan and Ratz), while the latter find at least partial representation in Hadash and Balad. With the partial, brief exception of Meretz, all of these parties that have been excluded from government coalitions over the past forty years (with a brief exception of Meretz).

[11] Baruch Kimmerling and Dahlia Moore, "Collective identity as agency and structuration of society: the Israeli example" *International Review of Sociology* 7, no. 1 (1997): 25-49.

the Left's inscription within a secular, Western mind-set has further widened the gap with generally conservative Mizrahi, Sephardi, and Ultra-Orthodox Jews.[12] Even if this reasoning applies more to the Zionist Left, the Left as a whole is associated with the élite, and blamed for its detachment from the needs of the Jewish population.

These features of the Israeli Left contribute to structuring the chances pro-Palestinian activists have to intersect with other struggles in Jewish-Israeli society. In general, it has been easier historically for pro-Palestinian activists to find allies within the liberal and civil rights camp. In the 1990s and 2000s, for instance, several groups combined feminism and queer struggles, environmental and animal rights struggles with the struggle against the occupation.[13] Over time, however, also these groups have increasingly distanced themselves from the Palestinian struggle, so as to avoid ostracization and have better chances of advancing their claims.[14] Save few exceptions, pro-Palestinian activism has remained mostly separated also from the socio-economic struggles of Mizrahi, Sephardim, and Ethiopian Jews, notwithstanding the shared criticism towards the racist structure of Jewish-Israeli society.[15] Indeed, even when these groups have advanced claims partly aligned with those of pro-Palestinian groups, they have tended to pursue them separately, for reasons that span from differences in values, to historical grievances towards the Left, to the need to avoid further stigmatization from the general public (c.f. Chapter Four and Five).

*b) PALESTINIAN SOCIETY*

Jewish-Israeli activists also relate to the Palestinian field as outsiders who nonetheless empathize with their grievances and seek to support their claims. As seen above, they can be valuable allies in the Palestinian struggle as mediators with the Israeli State, with the Jewish-Israeli audience, and with the Western public opinion more broadly.

Palestinian perceptions of this partnership, and of Jewish-Israeli activists in general, vary widely. Commenting on the status of joint political activity in the early 2000s, Cohen notes that "most Palestinians who take part in the struggle prefer not to do it together with Israelis."[16] He attributes this to a general mistrust towards Jewish-Israeli activists and their willingness to genuinely struggle against their State, and to the absence of a shared ideological and cultural terrain.[17] When it comes

[12] Pappé, "What Is Left of the Israeli Left?," 351-353.
[13] Chen Misgav, "With the current, against the wind: Constructing spatial activism and radical politics in the Tel-Aviv Gay Center," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 14, no. 4 (2015): 1208-1234; Michael M. Laskier, "Israeli activism American-style: Civil liberties, environmental, and peace organizations as pressure groups for social change, 1970s-1990s," *Israel Studies* 5, no. 1 (2000): 128-152.
[14] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019.
[15] Giulia Daniele, "Mizrahi Jews and the Zionist settler colonial context: between inclusion and struggle," *Settler Colonial Studies* 10, no. 4 (2020): 461-480; Gerardo Leibner, "HaTikva Encampment, 2011: The ambiguous agency of the marginalized," *Current Anthropology* 56, no. 11 (2015): 159-168.
[16] Hillel Cohen, "Joint Israeli–Palestinian Political Activity in Jerusalem: Characteristics and Challenge," in *Locating Urban Conflicts*, ed. Wendy Pullan, Britt Baillie, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 145.
[17] *Idem*, 147.

to the political framing of the Israeli-Palestinian issue, Palestinian perspectives have historically gone much further than most Jewish-Israeli activists' ones since they have tended to frame their situation, across the occupied territories and Israel proper, as a colonial condition that cannot but be resolved through a process of decolonization.[18]

As a long history of joint political activity testifies, however, common ground was nonetheless found over time – first through a shared anti-imperialist reading of Israel-Palestine, later in the compromise agreement on a two-state solution (c.f. next section). Both positions were subsequently upheld by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) of Yasser Arafat, which managed for decades to unify most Palestinians under its representation. With the failure of the Oslo process, however, Palestinian perceptions on cooperation with the Israelis changed importantly. A first reason was the fragmentation of the Palestinian national movement: Islamist factions emerged next to secular ones, and also Palestinian resistance emerged fragmented. Notwithstanding moments of unity and coordination, Palestinian activism remains today comparatively atomized and lacking a unitary vision on the future of Israel-Palestine.[19] A second reason was the growing resentment towards Israel and a strong unwillingness to accept compromise solutions.[20] This reverberated also on attempts at establishing forms of cooperation and joint struggle at the level of civil society. 'Anti-normalization,' the refusal to engage in behaviours that fail to expose and denounce the structural injustices of the *status quo*, has gradually become the golden rule of relationships with Israelis – often interpreted as the need to avoid of any form of contact, including forms of joint action against the occupation.[21] In fact, engaging in joint struggle with Israelis exposes Palestinian activists to the risk of being viewed as 'collaborators.'

As part of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) Movement, launched by a coalition of Palestinian civil society organizations in 2005, 'anti-normalization guidelines' were proposed in the attempt to define the boundaries of what is to be considered normalization, and thus to be boycotted. The same guidelines define as acceptable "and indeed welcome" relationships "between those from the oppressor community and those from the oppressed community" those that meet two conditions: having a "co-resistance rather than co-existence" approach and recognizing the "comprehensive

[18] See e.g. Rami Younis and Orly Noy, "Let's stop talking about a false 'Jewish-Arab partnership'", *+972 Magazine*, April 17, 2019, https://www.972mag.com/false-jewish-arab-partnership/; Omar Zahzah, "Palestine solidarity requires challenging the flawed logic of Zionism," *Middle East Eye*, June 10, 2021, https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/israel-palestine-solidarity-flawed-logic-zionism;

[19] See e.g. Jamil Hilal, "The fragmentation of the Palestinian political field: Sources and ramifications," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*11, no. 1-2 (2018): 189-216. Important attempts at unified political elaborations include the Second Intifada, the formulation of the Future Vision documents, and the BDS call. See respectively Julie M. Norman, *The second Palestinian intifada: Civil resistance*. (London: Routledge, 2010); Amal Jamal, "The political ethos of Palestinian citizens of Israel: critical reading in the future vision documents," *Israel Studies Review* 23, no. 2 (2008): 3-28; Omar Barghouti, *BDS: Boycott, divestment, sanctions: The global struggle for Palestinian rights*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011).

[20] Tareq Baconi, "The demise of Oslo and Hamas's political engagement", *Conflict, Security & Development* 15, no. 5 (2015): 503-520.

[21] Interview, Beit Sahour, October 29, 2019. See also Cohen, "Joint Israeli-Palestinian Political Activity".

Palestinian rights under international law."[22] The former is premised on the recognition of Palestinians' fundamental right to resist oppression, of the fundamental asymmetry between the two parties, and on supporting Palestinian struggle by following their agenda-setting. The latter consist of three fundamental rights: the right of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to be liberated from military occupation and siege; the right of Palestinians inside Israel to live as equal citizens; and the right of Palestinian refugees to return. As such, official anti-normalization guidelines establish acceptable Israeli-Palestinian cooperation to be rooted in non- (if not anti-) Zionism. However, Palestinian activists' views on the matter still vary from the outright refusal of any form of contact with Israeli activists to an enduring engagement in coexistence projects that frame the two parties as symmetrical.[23] In between these two extremes, there are Palestinians who tend to accept Israeli solidarity only if happening within a clear and unconditional opposition to Zionism, and those who pragmatically acknowledge the constraints of Jewish-Israeli solidarity, for instance by accepting that Zionist identity is difficult to give up even for activists who are "fundamentally not racist," or by accepting that Palestinian claims may be diluted in order to seek an impact on wider Jewish-Israeli audiences.[24]

This situation has had a dual impact on Jewish-Israeli activism. On the one hand, the absence of a unitary political strategy from Palestinians on the future of Israel-Palestine and on the role of Jewish-Israelis, leaves activists disoriented, especially those who wish to stick to the co-resistance framework and follow the Palestinian lead. Pappé has gone so far as to argue that "the inability of the Palestinian national movement to show unity of purpose and to clearly define its liberation project [...] is one of the main reasons for the lack of progress in the more progressive and leftist strategy" among Jewish-Israelis.[25] On the other hand, the divergences among Palestinians allow Jewish-Israeli activists to be engaged in different forms of critique and solidarity that appear legitimate to at least some sectors of Palestinian activism.[26]

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[22] "Guidelines for the International Cultural Boycott of Israel," PACBI (Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel), BDS Movement Website, July 16, 2014, https://bdsmovement.net/pacbi/cultural-boycott-guidelines. See also "Israel's Exceptionalism: Normalizing the Abnormal", PACBI, BDS Movement Website, https://bdsmovement.net/news/israel's-exceptionalism-normalizing-abnormal; Omar Barghouti, "Opting for justice: the critical role of anti-colonial Israelis in the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement," *Settler Colonial Studies* 4, no. 4 (2014): 407-412.

[23] Respectively: Informal conversation, Aida Refugee Camp, December 16, 2019; Participant observation, Roots event, Gush Etzion, July 25, 2018.

[24] Interviews with Palestinian activists, East Jerusalem, July 24, 2018; Beit Sahour, October 29, 2019; East Jerusalem, December 10, 2019; Hebron, December 16, 2019. See also Omar H. Rahman, "Co-existence vs. Co-resistance: A case against normalization,", *+972 Magazine*, January 3, 2012, https://www.972mag.com/co-existence-vs-co-resistance-a-case-against-normalization/.

[25] Pappé, "What Is Left of the Israeli Left?", 364.

[26] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019.

*c) TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES ON ISRAEL-PALESTINE*

Finally, Jewish-Israeli activists are also situated within a global transnational network of advocacy for Palestinian rights composed of grassroots movements, NGOs and international organizations. As local actors in this network, they constitute important nodal points in a two-way exchange: gateways for access to facilitate international observers' and activists' access to groups and initiatives on the ground, they also represent important first-hand sources of information and practical knowledge 'from within' on Israeli violations and how to address them.

While Palestinian activists also fulfil this role, Jewish-Israeli activists, by virtue of their structural privilege, have more resources to mobilize and more freedom to do so with comparatively less consequences. Moreover, as members both of world Jewry and of the white Western world, Jewish-Israeli activists can in principle 'resonate' with these worlds more effectively. As Israeli Jews, who thus embody the Zionist call, they are best placed to interrogate the equivalence between being Jewish and being Israeli that Zionism has naturalized, to question Zionist ideology, and to partake in the debate on Jewish identity and nationalism without (immediately) being accused of antisemitism. In addition, they can mobilize their ontological belonging to the white Western world to better trigger the sympathy and trust of its audiences.

Activists' work and the claims they advance are thus shaped not only by the constant need to juggle between the largely incompatible requirements of the Israeli and Palestinian fields, but also by the feedback loop that runs between the local and the transnational fields. This loop was exemplified most recently by the series of reports on Israeli apartheid that have been issued alternatively by Israeli and international NGOs, and that built on each other's different sources of legitimacy in providing comprehensive and highly visible critiques to the Israeli regime.[27]

While relations between local and transnational civil society actors do not represent the focus of this analysis, they need to be taken in consideration because they are becoming more and more relevant in forms of resistance in Israel-Palestine. As Israeli violations grow bolder, Palestinians lack resources and leadership, and third States prove unwilling to hold Israel accountable and incapable to broker a just solution, pressures for change from transnational civil society (such as in the forms of condemnations and boycotts) are gaining ground as an important source of struggle. This is testified by the growing international responses to the Palestinian BDS call and by the increasing anti-Zionist critiques also among Jewish diaspora communities.[28] The potential these developments have to erode Israel's international legitimacy and longstanding immunity finds confirmation in Israel's

[27] Smadar Ben-Natan, "The Apartheid Reports: A Paradigm Shift on Israel/Palestine (Part I)," *OpinioJuris*, April 12, 2022, http://opiniojuris.org/2022/04/12/the-apartheid-reports-a-paradigm-shift-on-israel-palestine-part-i/.

[28] Marisa Kabas, "Young American Jews Have Reached a Tipping Point With Israel,", *Rolling Stone*, May 21, 2021, https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-commentary/israel-palestine-jewish-american-support-1172309/; Michael Sfard, "'An illegitimate regime': How a top rights group shed Israeli myths to recognize apartheid", Interview by Amjad Iraqi, *+972 Magazine*, July 9, 2020, https://www.972mag.com/michael-sfard-yesh-din-apartheid/.

succession of harsh responses to this situation, which have included the outlawing of support to BDS and the insistence for other States to criminalize anti-Israeli criticisms by equating it to antisemitic hatred.[29] If Jewish-Israeli activists are, for the most part, timid actors within the broader international solidarity movement, the radicalizing pulls of the transnational field could have the effect of empowering the most radical actors in the local network and provide more resonance to their voices.

## *2. Retracing the Genealogy of Present Groups: A Brief History of Dissent on Palestine in Israel*

Despite being always minoritarian, dissent on how Israel managed the Palestinian issue existed in Jewish-Israeli civil society since the early days of the State. Over time, Jewish-Israeli pro-Palestinian activism has evolved in response to a multitude of socio-political changes across the three fields identified in the previous section and in the geopolitical asset of the Arab-Israeli conflict more generally. Retracing the evolution of these forms of dissent can help to understand the shape of present-day Israeli activism. Indeed, some of its distinctive features – the main fault-lines that exist between the liberal-Zionist 'peace' camp and the anti-Zionist 'decolonization' camp, as well as between institutionalized NGOs and grassroots activism – trace back to its early beginnings, and some of the present-day strategies groups employ emerge as a reaction to past choices and the failures and successes they led to.

The excursus that follows briefly exposes the main historical developments of each time period before focusing on the forms of activism that emerged in them.

### *a) 1948-1967: THE ZIONIST CONSENSUS AND THE DECOLONIAL FRINGE*

After winning the war of 1948, Israel was established on a territory much wider than the one attributed to it by the UN Partition Plan. The newfound solution, heralded by the Labour party of Ben Gurion, met almost unanimous consensus in Jewish-Israeli society. The destruction of Palestinian villages and their replacement by Jewish settlements, the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who fled to neighbouring countries, and the military rule imposed on those who stayed, seemed to most Jewish-Israelis the natural consequences of the Palestinian hubris in not accepting the Partition Plan.[30]

This broad consensus was initially breached by intellectuals affiliated with the Israeli Communist Party. They condemned Israeli military rule, were initially in favour of the return of Palestinian

[29] Ronnie Olesker, "Delegitimization as a national security threat: Israel and BDS," *Israel Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (2019): 33-54. See also Nadav Tamir, "The way Israel dealt with BDS played into the hands of its enemies", *Mitvim*, August 2020, https://mitvim.org.il/en/publication/the-way-israel-dealt-with-bds-played-into-the-hands-of-its-enemies/.

[30] Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Benny Morris, *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947-1949*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim, *The war of Palestine: Rewriting the history of 1948*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

refugees, and advocated for a two-state solution long before this would become the norm of the Israeli left.[31] This position, albeit radical for the time, did not challenge the Zionist conception of Israel as Jewish State. Starting in 1962, the Israeli Socialist Organization, better known by the name of its journal, Matzpen ('Compass' in Hebrew), started challenging the consensus from an anti-Zionist perspective. Following the analyses that Palestinian thinkers had been advancing since the 1950s, and inspired by the global revolutionary fervour of the 1960s, Matzpen proposed a Marxist reading of Israel as an imperialist State imposing the domination of Western élites on Palestinians and disenfranchised Jews alike (c.f. Chapter Three, Section 2).[32] It identified the root problem in Zionism rather than in Israel's policy-making, and envisioned as a solution the 'de-Zionisation' of Israel and its integration in some form of socialist Arab Middle Eastern Union.[33] As such, despite its small numbers and marginality within the political debate, Matzpen was the first, and for a long time the only, counter-hegemonic actor on the Palestinian question, and one whose analyses remain among the most structural and comprehensive to this day.

The differences between these two early radical movements prefigures a distinction that would be carried out throughout the history of Jewish-Israeli left-wing activism: namely that between those supporting the Zionist project, albeit within certain ethical and political boundaries, and those waging a systemic critique that contemplates its demise.[34]

### *b) 1967-1977: THE 1967 WAR AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE LIBERAL CAMP*

In the 1960s, Palestinians started organizing their resistance through the PLO. Throughout the 1970s, Arafat's leadership and its secular framing of the Palestinian struggle as one of liberation against colonial rule resonated both with the Pan-Arabism of the Arab States and with the socialist sympathies of the Western public. Albeit never intervening directly, in this period many socialist parties in Europe saw the claims of Palestinians as legitimate.[35]

In Israel, however, the situation was different. The 1967 war was met with a consensus similar to the one manifested in 1948. The war was framed as a defensive act, a David *versus* Goliath situation where the small Jewish state was surrounded by big and hostile Arab states, and the sweeping victory

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[31] Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, 201. See also Sondra M. Rubenstein, *The Communist movement in Palestine and Israel, 1919-1984*,( Boulder: Westview press, 1985); Dunia Nahas, *The Israeli Communist Party*, (London: Croom Helm, 1976).

[32] Ran Greenstein, *Zionism and its discontents: a century of radical dissent in Israel/Palestine*, (London: Pluto Press, 2014). For early Palestinian analyses of Zionism as a settler-colonial movement see, among others, Fayez Sayegh, "Zionist colonialism in Palestine (1965)," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2.1 (2012): 206-225.

[33] Ran Greenstein, "Socialist Anti-Zionism: A Chapter in the History of the Israeli Radical Left," *Socialist History 35* (2009): 20-39. See also Arie Bober, ed., *The Other Israel: The Radical Case Against Zionism*, (New York: Doubleday, 1972); Moshé Machover and Akiva Orr, *Peace, Peace, When There is No Peace (Israel and the Arabs 1948-1961)*, trans. Mark Marshall, https://www.marxists.org/subject/jewish/peace-peace.pdf.

[34] Fiona Wright, *The Israeli Radical Left: An Ethics of Complicity*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018): 14. See also Reuven Kaminer, *The Politics of Protest: The Israeli Peace Movement and the Palestinian Intifada*, (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1996).

[35] Colin Shindler, *Israel and the European Left: Between Solidarity and Delegitimization*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).

Israel obtained was largely taken as proof of the triumph of good over evil, causing a moment of widespread euphoria. Matzpen was the only political actor who proposed an analysis of the war as one of aggression and colonization.[36] This analysis was briefly backed by the (Israeli) Black Panthers, a political movement active for a few years in the early 1970s. Composed by disenfranchised Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews, who had been facing a brutal treatment in the new-born Israeli State, the group took inspiration from the eponymous American organization their combination of class and ethnic dimensions of their struggle, which they directed against Ashkenazi Zionist oppression (c.f. Chapter Three, Section 2).[37]

The mainstream consensus started cracking over the beginning of Israel's colonization of the territories occupied after the 1967 war. Both the Labour party and the messianic right-wing, at the time coalescing in the settler movement of Gush Emunim, for different reasons agreed on the need to colonize parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which was framed towards public opinion as a security necessity.[38] Contextually, a liberal left started emerging as a critical voice in civil society who demanded to stop the settlement process and withdraw from the occupied territories. They advanced reasons of conceding 'land in return for peace' and of 'restoring the morality' of the Israeli State and its army, and pressured the government through lobbying and petitions.[39]

### *c) 1977-1987: THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE PEACE FRAMEWORK*

Starting in the late 1970s, the global and regional geopolitical scene experienced several shifts, which affected the evolution of the global discourse on Israel-Palestine. Anti-imperialist political visions progressively lost traction and gave way to a new neoliberal consensus at the global level, heralded by the rise of the Thatcher and Reagan governments in the UK and US. In Israel, the year 1977 marked the rise to power of the Likud party, thus ending the leadership of the Labour party and sanctioning the beginning of a succession of right-wing governments that lasts, with few parentheses, until this day. Externally, the Likud managed to improve Israel's relations with its Arab neighbours. The signing of the peace treaty with Egypt in 1979 led to the improvement of Israel's diplomatic relations also with Arab as well as African countries, the Soviet bloc, India and China, and to the progressive normalization of Israel in the region.[40] Gradually, also the leadership of the

[36] See most notably Machover and Orr, *Peace, Peace, When There is No Peace.*
[37] Oz Frankel, "Blackness in translation: The Israeli Black Panthers, 1971," in *Blackness in Israel: Rethinging Racial Boundaries*, ed. Uri Dorchin, Gabriella Djerrahian, (London: Routledge, 2020): 91-112. See also Deborah Bernstein, "Conflict and protest in Israeli society: The case of the Black Panthers of Israel," *Youth & Society* 16, no. 2 (1984): 129-152.
[38] Gershom Gorenberg, *Occupied territories: The untold story of Israel's settlements*, (London: IB Tauris, 2006); David Newman, "Gush Emunim and the settler movement," in *Routledge Handbook on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. Joel Peters, (London: Routledge, 2013): 274-284.
[39] Pappé, "What Is Left of the Israeli Left?", 353-356. See also Akiva Eldar and Idith Zertal, *Lords of the Land: The War over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007,* (New York: Nations Books, 2009).
[40] Greenstein, "Socialist Anti-Zionism".

PLO, represented by Fatah, shifted towards the acceptance of a compromise solution which would see an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.[41]

In this situation, decolonial and anti-Zionist perspectives among Jewish-Israeli civil society seemed more and more anachronistic. Matzpen went through a multitude of schisms and was eventually dismantled in 1985.[42] Some of its members flowed into the Alternative Information Centre, which continued to regroup the radical fringes of Jewish-Israeli and West Bank Palestinian activism (most notably the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), albeit in a less structured form.[43]

Opposition on the Palestinian question coalesced around the liberal camp, which framed it as an even conflict between two national collectives and embedded its solution in a discourse of peace and coexistence. It is in this framework that the baseline for discussion of rights and responsibilities became, as largely is until today, the occupation of 1967: the withdrawal of Israel into pre-1967 borders (which later evolved in the 'two-state solution') became the golden standard for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, Palestinian refugees from 1948 became a non-issue, and the discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel came to be treated under the rubric of individual human rights and civil equalities, rather than collective political and national rights.[44]

Since its foundation in 1978, the main representative of this camp was the NGO Peace Now, which managed to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people in demonstrations against the occupation.[45] The Liberal camp was further consolidated in 1982, following the beginning of Israel's war against Lebanon. This moment saw the emergence of groups of conscientious objectors, such as Yesh Gvul ('There is a Limit' in Hebrew), which condemned the war as one of 'choice' that thus run against the allegedly defensive character of the Israeli army.[46] While the critiques proposed by these organizations were still framed from within a militaristic and Zionist ethos, they had questioned the assumption of righteousness of the Jewish State, and of proposing moral boundaries for its existence as such.

Towards the end of the 1980s, a new critique started emerging in Israel's civil society, though in academic forums more than in activist ones. Following the declassification of governmental documents on the pre-State period and the war of 1948, the so-called 'New Historians' brought evidence of these events as largely different than what their representation in Zionist historiography

[41] Greenstein, *Zionism and its discontents,* 189-190.
[42] "About," Matzpen, last accessed April 14, 2022, https://matzpen.org/english/about-matzpen/.
[43] Greenstein, *Zionism and its discontents*, 191.
[44] Tikva Honig-Parnass, *The False Prophets of Peace: Liberal Zionism and the Struggle for Palestine*, (London: Haymarket Books, 2011).
[45] Jon Simons, "Promoting Peace: Peace Now as a Graphic Peace Movement, 1987-1993," *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History 5* (2013): 124-159; Magnus Norell, *A Dissenting Democracy: The Israeli Movement 'Peace Now'*, (London: Frank Cass, 2002).
[46] Mark L. Hage, "Yesh Gvul: There is a Limit," *Objector* (2002): 9; Yulia Zemlinskaya, "Between militarism and pacifism: Conscientious objection and draft resistance in Israel," *Central European Journal of International & Security Studies* 2, no. 1 (2008): 9-35.

was. The New Historians – Baruch Kimmerling, Gershon Shafir, Ilan Pappé, Benny Morris, Adi Ophir, and others – began to question the very nature of Zionism, and to expose its links with ethnic cleansing, colonization, and oppression.[47] Overall, such positions were more timid and less prescriptive than Matzpen's, as their frame of reference has indeed come to be identified with 'post-Zionism' rather than 'anti-Zionism.'[48] Still, the problems posed by the New Historians from within the core of Israeli liberal academia had a vast effect on the public in the long term, if not immediately on activist mobilizations, in terms of instilling the doubt that Zionist articulations of history, identity, and State may not be the only ones possible.[49]

*d) 1987-2000: THE OSLO YEARS AND THE PROLIFERATION OF NGOs*

In 1987, the First Intifada (Uprising) broke out. Palestinians, loosely organized at the level of local community councils, protested the injustices of the occupation through mass demonstrations and organized civil disobedience acts such as strikes and boycotts.[50] To stone-throwing and Molotov cocktails, the Labour government of Yitzhak Rabin responded with long-running curfews, lethal violence and the infamous 'broken-bones' method, whose images circulated widely in Israeli and international media.[51] This sparked a wave of mobilizations among Jewish-Israelis as well, with groups forming in Israel to protest in solidarity against the occupation (e.g. Dai LaKibush, 'End the Occupation' in Hebrew, and Women in Black) and NGOs being born to monitor and respond to human rights violations in the West Bank (e.g. HaMoked, B'Tselem).[52] Channels of dialogue and joint activities started being established, mostly unofficially given that the PLO was outlawed in Israel, between Palestinian groups tied to Fatah and those of the Israeli peace camp.[53]

In 1988, the PLO officially endorsed a two-state solution, which led to the opening of negotiations with the US administration. The Israeli liberal left followed suit by lobbying strongly for a two-state solution and reinforcing the channels with the PLO.[54] These conditions set in motion the diplomatic

[47] Anita Shapira and Ora Wiskind-Elper, "Politics and Collective Memory: The Debate over the" New Historians" in Israel," *History and Memory* 7, no. 1 (1995): 9-40.
[48] Greenstein, "Socialist Anti-Zionism," 14. See also Ephraim Nimni, "Introduction," in *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics*, ed. Ephraim Nimni, Pnina Werbner, and Richard Werbner (London: Zed Books, 2003): 6.
[49] Ephraim Nimni, "Introduction", 1-19. See also Laurence J. Silberstein, "Postzionism: A critique of Zionist discourse," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 9, no. 3 (2002): 97.
[50] Eitan Alimi, *Israeli Politics and the First Palestinian Intifada: Political Opportunities, Framing Processes and Contentious Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2007).
[51] Shatha Hammad, "Stories from the first Intifada: 'They broke my bones'," *Al Jazeera*, December 10, 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/10/stories-from-the-first-intifada-they-broke-my-bones; Yoel Elizur and Nuphar Yishay-Krien, "Participation in atrocities among Israeli soldiers during the First Intifada: A qualitative analysis," *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 2 (2009): 251-267.
[52] Mordechai Bar-On, "Israeli reactions to the Palestinian uprising," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17, no. 4 (1988): 46-65.
[53] Pappé, "What Is Left of the Israeli Left?", 359.
[54] *Ibidem.*

process that led to the Oslo Accords in 1993, where Israel and the PLO agreed on the two-state solution and on the 'roadmap to peace' that was meant to achieve it.[55]

The Oslo years were a moment of euphoria for the Jewish-Israeli Left. Its driving forces were the liberal groups, Peace Now in the lead, later joined by the group Gush Shalom ('Peace Bloc' in Hebrew), but also the anti-Zionist left, for the most part, went along with the solution, albeit with some scepticism.[56] The flow of foreign funding that went into the peace process led to the proliferation of civil society NGOs working within that framework, and to the institutionalization of some of the existing grassroots collectives (e.g. the Alternative Information Centre).[57] Some of them were meant to monitor violations against Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank (e.g. the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, Adalah, Settlements Watch as part of Peace Now), while the majority worked to foster a culture of peaceful 'coexistence' between the two peoples, most notably through initiatives encouraging dialogue and mutual understanding (e.g. the Parents Circle/Families Forum, the Jerusalem Link, the Negev Coexistence Forum).[58]

While the Oslo framework allowed for an unprecedented mobilization and prestige of the Left in Jewish-Israeli society, it also had consequences in terms of a 'NGOization' of activism, in Israel and even more in the Palestinian territories.[59] Activists became professionals, "moved away from the streets and turned into NGO bureaucrats," which lowered the numbers of grassroots mobilization, tamed its spontaneity, and aligned its stances with the objectives and constraints posed by the donors, in a way that greatly limited criticism of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority.[60]

### *e) 2000-2009: THE SHATTERING OF HOPES FOR PEACE AND THE RETREAT TO CO-RESISTANCE ON THE GROUND*

In the second part of the 1990s, the peace process reached a deadlock. The solution it was delineating resembled less two independent states and more a ratification of the current asymmetries of power. The Israeli State continued extending well beyond its pre-1967 borders and stretching its control over much of the remaining Palestinian territory and resources, while the Palestinian territory

[55] Avi Shlaim, "The Rise and Fall of the Oslo Peace Process," in *International relations of the Middle East,* edited by Louise Fawcett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 285.
[56] Pappé, "What Is Left of the Israeli Left?", 359; Michel Warschawski, *On the Border*, (London: Pluto Press, 2005). See also Interview, West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019. Apprehensions towards the Oslo Process were expressed most vocally at that time by various Palestinian militant groups and intellectuals, see e.g. Edward Said, "The Morning After," *London Review of Books 15*, no. 20 (19 3) : 3-5.
[57] Sami Adwan and Dan Bar-On, *The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Peace Building Between Palestinians and Israelis*, (Jerusalem: Peace Research Institute in the Middle East, 2000).
[58] See e.g. Ifat Maoz, "Peace building in violent conflict: Israeli-Palestinian post-Oslo people-to-people activities," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 3 (2004): 563-574.
[59] Tariq Da'na, "Disconnecting civil society from its historical extension: NGOs and neoliberalism in Palestine," *Human rights, human security, and state security: The Intersection*, ed. Saul Takahashi, (Praeger Security International, 2014).
[60] Interviews: Beit Sahour, October 29, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 18, 2019. See also Sari Hanafi, and Linda Tabar, "The Intifada and the aid industry: The impact of the new liberal agenda on the Palestinian NGOs," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23, no. 1 (2003): 205-214.

was reduced to a semblance of State without full sovereignty or territorial contiguity. The nail on the coffin of the peace process was placed at the Camp David summit of July 2000, where Israel not only reiterated the refusal of all the core demands of the PLO, but demanded further compromises from what had been agreed at Oslo. Arafat refused (c.f. Chapter One, Section 1).[61]

Among Palestinians, the perception was that of having been trapped in a false effort at cooperation and then humiliated and demanded to surrender. The further provocation of Ariel Sharon's 'visit' to the Temple Mount in September 2000 was the spark that triggered the Second Intifada.[62] While this upheaval involved mass mobilizations and was perceived by Palestinians as a moment of collective empowerment, what distinguished it from the former was the widespread use of violent methods, in particular suicide bombings. These were often carried out by new Islamist groups, primarily Hamas, whose popularity raised in these years leading to their winning the election in 2006.[63] Concerning relationships with Israelis, 'anti-normalization' became the official policy of both Fatah and Hamas, and a widespread sentiment in civil society and activist groups.[64]

At the same time, both in Israel and in the West, the failure to come to an agreement was largely attributed to Arafat, whose intransigence allegedly made him refuse the "generous offer" made by Israel.[65] As seen in Chapter One, this period was marked in Israel by a growing anti-Arab sentiment in public opinion and by the coming back in power of the right wing which, with Ariel Sharon, inaugurated a policy of 'separation' from the Palestinians (materialized most notably in the construction of the Separation Barrier and in the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip). Also at the global level, the generalized identification of Palestinian resistance with Islamic terrorism made possible its inscription within the global framework of post-9/11, compacting the consensus on the Palestinian enemy also abroad.[66]

The year 2000 thus marks a major watershed in Jewish-Israeli pro-Palestinian activism. Bringing forward a discourse of dialogue and peace in Jewish-Israeli society became more and more difficult.

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[61] Shlaim, "The Rise and Fall", 285; Norman G. Finkelstein, "The Camp David II negotiations: How dennis ross proved the Palestinians aborted the peace process," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 36, no. 2 (2007): 39-53.

[62] Jeremy Pressman, "The Second Intifada: Background and Causes of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 23, no. 2 (2003): 114-141.

[63] Nada Matta and René Rojas, "The Second Intifada: A dual strategy arena," *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 57, no. 1 (2016): 65-113.

[64] Cohen, "Joint Israeli-Palestinian Political Activity", 147.

[65] Baruch Kimmerling, "From Barak to Road Map," *New Left Review* 23, (2003): 134-144; Jeremy Pressman, "Visions in collision: What happened at Camp David and Taba?," *International Security* 28, no. 2 (2003): 5-43.

[66] Gargi Bhattacharyya, "Globalizing racism and myths of the other in the "war on terror," in *Thinking Palestine*, ed. Ronit Lentin (London-New York: Zed Books, 2008): 46-61. See also John Collins, *Global Palestine*, (London: Hurst, 2011); Ghassan Hage, *Alter-Politics: Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination*, (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2015); Mark Featherstone, Siobhan Holohan, and Elizabeth Poole, "Discourses of the War on Terror: Constructions of the Islamic other after 7/7," *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 6, no. 2 (2010): 169-186.

Due to the fact that official channels of cooperation opened during Oslo were shut from both sides, the liberal camp dissipated and its organizations entered a dormant phase.[67]

Smaller, but more radical, what remained of Jewish-Israeli activism reorganized. Outraged by the generalized and retaliatory violence of the Israeli response to the Second Intifada, activists came together to bring solidarity and supplies to Palestinians over the lines of curfew (Ta'ayush, 'Coexistence' in Arabic) and to demonstrate with them against the construction of the Separation Barrier (Anarchists Against the Wall).[68] The International Solidarity Movement was also created, jointly by an Israeli and a Palestinian activist, with the specific intent of bringing international activists in the villages of the West Bank, opening two-way channels of solidarity between the local and the international at the direct and grassroots level.[69]

The forms of the post-Second Intifada activism developed in opposition to those of the previous decade: groups formed spontaneously and remained staunchly non-institutionalized and non-hierarchical. They acknowledged that their role in the struggle was one of support to Palestinian resistance, loosely organized in the Popular Struggle Coordination Committees, the choices of which were to be followed unconditionally (an approach of 'co-resistance' that itself respected the condition posed in those years by Palestinians to Israeli participation).[70]

Finally, while these groups prioritized pragmatic over intellectual systematization, the critique they mounted towards Zionism was nonetheless generally more radical and more comprehensive than that of the groups that preceded them. In face of the brutal treatment of Palestinian citizens of Israel at protests, they learned from experience (rather than from political ideals) that the very nature of Zionism was to deny equality between Jews and non-Jews, and started seeing that the struggle against the occupation and that for more rights within Israel were indivisible.[71] It was in these years that the group Zochrot ('Remembering' in Hebrew) started what later became their signature symbolic actions aimed at raising awareness about the destroyed Palestinian villages of 1948.[72] Also Tarabut ('Connecting' in Arabic) was born in these years, a group, including some of Ta'ayush members, which attempted to link the discriminations suffered by Palestinians to those suffered by marginalized

[67] Neve Gordon, "The Israeli Peace Camp in Dark Times," *Peace Review* 15, no. 1 (2003): 39–45. Interview, Herzlyia, December 2, 2019. See also Melita Piercy, "Who Has Space to Talk? Navigating People-to-People Initiatives in Palestine/Israel in a Post-Oslo Era," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013): 99-100.

[68] Interviews: West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019. See also Uri Gordon and Ohal Grietzer, "Anarchists against the wall," *Millennium, Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013): 483-501.

[69] Charmaine Seitz, "ISM at the crossroads: The evolution of the international solidarity movement," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32, no. 4 (2003): 50-67.

[70] Interviews : West Jerusalem, November 11, 2019 ; Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 12, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019. See also Karine Lamarche, "Political Activism and Legitimacy in Israel," *Civil organizations and protest movements in Israel*, ed. Elisabeth Marteu, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 73-90.

[71] See e.g. Polly Pallister-Wilkins, "Radical Ground: Israeli and Palestinian Activists and Joint Protest Against the Wall, Social Movement Studies," 8, *Social Movement Studies* 8, no. 4 (2009):393-407; Eléonore Merza-Bronstein and Eitan Bronstein-Aparicio, *Nakba: Pour la reconnaissance de la tragédie palestinienne en Israel*, (Paris: Omniscience, 2018): 242.

[72] Meera Shah, Eitan Bronstein, and Norma Musih, ""A Different Kind of Memory": An Interview with Zochrot," *Middle East Report* 244 (2007): 34-38.

sectors of Israeli society, Mizrahi Jews in particular.[73] At the same time, especially in Tel Aviv an alternative scene was forming that brought together cultural rebellion and political critique and combined in doing so pro-Palestinian stances with feminist and queer (Black Laundry), environmentalist and animalist (One Struggle).[74]

### *f) 2009-2021: THE CLOSING SPACE FOR DISSENT AND THE SEARCH FOR A NEW COURSE*

A new watershed for Jewish-Israeli activism followed in 2009, this time determined internally to Israel. The election of Benjamin Netanyahu gave further impetus to the right-wing turn of the previous decade and set the pace of Israeli politics until today. As seen in the previous chapter, Netanyahu's agenda has been characterized by an aggressive politics both towards Palestinians and towards the 'internal enemies,' now identified with the entire spectrum of the Left.

With Western political leaderships largely indifferent to Israeli violations, the imbalance of power between Israel and Palestine has been growing wider than ever. The Palestinian population, exhausted by siege and occupation in Gaza and the West Bank, and getting used to the relatively better position of second-class citizens in Israel, has seen a wavering and increasingly fragmented resistance. While Palestinian activist groups and NGOs have survived both in Israel and the West Bank, in spite of being treated as 'terrorist' by Israel (c.f. Chapter One, Section 1), the wider population has carried out the struggle primarily through the passive means of *sumud* (Arabic for 'steadfastness'),[75] and rarely through sporadic and atomized outbursts of violence.[76]

In this context, the space for pro-Palestinian activism in Jewish-Israeli society has shrunk even more, with "a few hundred people at most" able to mobilize across the whole country according to one of my interviewees.[77] Many people abandoned activism and retreated into their private lives, others chose to leave Israel and to continue their action from abroad, where they could hope to have better chances for visibility. Old NGOs from the past have remained active, although many in a "survival mode" with little funds and resources (e.g. Coalition of Women for Peace).[78] At the same time, new organizations and groups have emerged to tackle the ever-increasing problems faced by Palestinians (e.g. Free Jerusalem) and to the new challenges faced by activists and human rights

[73] See Maia Hallward, "Building space for peace? Israeli and Palestinian activism in the Second Intifada," *Global Change, Peace & Security* 21, no. 3 (2009): 309-323.
[74] Interviews: East Jerusalem, November 11, 2019; Beer Sheva, May 11, 2019. See also Misgav, "With the current," and Aeyal Gross "Israeli GLBT Politics between Queerness and Homonationalism," *Bully Bloggers*, July 3, 2010, https://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2010/07/03/israeli-glbt-politics-between-queerness-and-homonationalism/.
[75] C.f. Chapter Four, introduction.
[76] Erik Skare, "Insulated eruptions of discontent: Palestinian protests in the absence of trusted organisations," *Contemporary Levant* (2021): 1-12.
[77] Interview, Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018.
[78] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.

organizations (e.g. the Human Rights Defenders Fund).[79] These activists have been looking for ways to continue having an impact. While Chapter Four comes back to the strategic challenges and responses developed by activists in the present context, I present here a simplified overview of the main trajectories they undertook.

A first feature of Jewish-Israeli activism of this time is the increasing interconnection among the organizations that compose it, interconnection that largely cuts across ideological and institutional differences. The increasing number of interventions required in the present political scenario, combined with the small number of people involved, makes it so that groups cooperate with each other in more or less informal ways in order to make the best of small numbers and to increase their chances of effectiveness through multiple angles of intervention (e.g. legal and political, short term and long term). In this sense, a new configuration of Jewish-Israeli activism seems to have consolidated where the big political movements of the past are replaced by a loose network of smaller organizations with more flexible political directions.[80]

A second feature has to do with how groups adapted the framing of their work in face of a narrowing space of legitimate critique on the question of Palestine. In what has been called in mediatic debate a "chilling effect," some groups have 'tamed' their critique in an attempt to tap into wider publics. Some portions of the liberal camp have tried to regain an appeal towards their traditional audiences by tapping into the critiques of Netanyahu's policies and allegations of corruption (e.g. Peace Now); others have abandoned even the basic baseline of opposition to the occupation in order to return to the mass mobilizations of the 1980s (e.g. Women Wage Peace). Some NGOs and activist groups have focused on humanitarian support or shifted towards liberal-Zionist positions in the attempt to eschew public branding as political 'enemies' (e.g. Physicians for Human Rights and the Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement). Others instead, in the face of the decreasing marginal benefits of moderating one's terms, have mounted a more radical critique. Some have mobilized a colonial framework to connect the grievances of 'externally' colonized Palestinians and 'internally' colonized Mizrahi Jews (e.g. Zochrot); others have adopted a class-based approach to aggregate the grievances of Jewish and non-Jewish populations who suffered particularly the undisciplined neoliberalism of Netanyahu's years (e.g. Standing Together). Between the extremes of political taming and radicalization, others yet have side-lined political framings entirely, adopting instead a pragmatic approach that prioritizes concrete engagement on the ground over political elaborations (e.g. Free Jerusalem).

Another fault-line between responses to the new climate has been the groups' choice of their main target audiences: while some groups, like the ones above, have continued targeting mainly internal

[79] Interviews: West Jerusalem, December 18, 2019; Ramat Gan, May 14, 2019.
[80] See e.g. Ronit Lentin, "The memory of dispossession, dispossessing memory: Israeli networks commemorising the Nakba," *in Performing Global Networks*, ed. Karen Fricker and Ronit Lentin, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).

audiences, others have turned away from them to look for connections and resonance with Palestinian partners and/or at the international level. The latter trend has been on the rise also because both Palestinian and international civil societies have recently mounted a more vocal and more radical critique to the Israeli regime in the past few years. Palestinian popular resistance has appeared more widespread and united across the territories of Israel-Palestine that it had been since the Second Intifada. The 2018 Great March of Return in Gaza, the 2019 protests against the Nation State Law in Israel, and especially the 2021 upheaval across Israel and the West Bank have indeed led to talk about a new 'Unity Intifada.'[81] In parallel, at the level of international civil society, the Palestinian BDS call has been gaining momentum, anti-Zionist voices have been rising among solidary actors, including within the Jewish diaspora (e.g. Jewish Voices for Peace), and more and more international organizations have been designating Israel an apartheid regime.[82]

Following these developments, Jewish-Israeli groups have emerged to mobilize in solidarity to Palestinians protesting through actions on the ground (e.g. Return Solidarity) or by becoming active part in their call for boycott (e.g. the Boycott From Within campaign, Who Profits?). Others have come together with them in political platforms to elaborate alternative programs for the future of Israel-Palestine (e.g. the One Democratic State Campaign, Two States One Homeland). Some existing groups that used to pressure Israeli authorities to stop human rights violations have started bypassing them and turning to international platforms instead (e.g. B'Tselem, Breaking the Silence). Finally, the link with the Jewish diaspora is becoming more and more important. Exemplary of this link is the consistent presence in Jewish-Israeli activism of young Jewish international activists coming to do solidarity work in Israel-Palestine (e.g. All That's Left). The distinctive trait of their activism rests precisely in the mobilization of their diasporic identity, which they use to connect between different audiences (the local Israeli one, the international diasporic one, and the Palestinian one).[83]

### *3. Actors, Frames, and Means: The Spectrum of Jewish-Israeli Activism Today*

In order to provide the reader with some benchmarks for orientation throughout the empirical chapters of this dissertation, it is useful at this point to give a clearer idea of who are the people and groups populating the panorama of Jewish-Israeli activism today, of how they relate to each other, and of the different ways in which they advance Palestinian rights. I start by providing a short – and certainly simplistic – description of who the individual activists are, to then turn to the group level.

[81] Lana Tatour, "The "Unity Intifada" and'48 Palestinians: Between the Liberal and the Decolonial," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 50, no. 4 (2021): 84-89; Abdel Razeq Farraj, "Palestine Rises in Rebellion," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 50, no. 4 (2021): 68-72.
[82] Ben-Natan, "The Apartheid Reports"; Kabas, "Young American Jews; Sfard, "'An illegitimate regime'".
[83] See e.g. Landy, *Jewish identity and Palestinian rights*.

Activists for Palestinian rights come from the most part from relatively privileged socio-economic backgrounds. Most of them are of Ashkenazi origins, with only a few identifying as (often only 'partly') Mizrahi or Sephardi Jews. Many were raised in left-wing families, and as such were used to at least mild criticism of Israeli policies. Many pursue university degrees or have high-skill jobs in academia or the NGO sector. This inscribes them within the social realm of the Israeli Left as described in Section 1 and sets them apart from most of the unprivileged sectors of the Jewish population, with consequences that will be explored especially in Chapter Five.

Activists are however very heterogenous in terms of their gender, age, and political views. Based on their age and, mostly, on the formative political experiences that have shaped their activism, I regroup them into five 'generations.' The oldest generation is composed by the old socialist and communist guard, former members of Matzpen or of political groups of the countries in which they lived before immigrating to Israel. These activists grew up in less divisive times, when the dominant discourse was a secular and comparatively less aggressive Zionism, and when a still 'young' occupation left Palestinians some margins of movement in and out of Israel, making encounters easier. The political views of these activists have been shaped by a coherent ideology that prioritized class-based identities over national and communal ones, and as such many of them identify rather unproblematically as anti-Zionists. Based on intellect rather than experience, and only limitedly exposed to the reality of the West Bank, their anti-Zionist views however not always come to terms with the factual power asymmetries in which they were embedded, as next chapter explores.

A second generation of activists, mostly between 50 and 70 years old, is composed by those who identify deeply with Zionism, having experienced the Holocaust in more or less direct ways and seeing a Jewish State as the best solution, but who became disappointed at Israel's aggressive treatment of Palestinians, starting with the occupation. This generation comprises secular and religious Jews with liberal and humanist ideals, who wish for an improvement of Zionism and a restoration of its morality, convinced that the problem is of policy rather than of principle. Many found a political home in Peace Now and in the coexistence and dialogue organizations of the Oslo era, and mostly still hold on to the idea of a two-state solution, albeit with decreasing faith.

The middle generation is composed by those who were formed politically in the grassroots activism of the years 2000s, mainly around Ta'ayush and Anarchists Against the Wall. It was a moment of rage and disappointment with the system, but also of political reawakening, worldwide with the no-global movement and locally with the Second Intifada. Less structured both ideologically and organizationally, these activists refer to a combination of anarchism, nonviolence, feminism, spiritualism, and concern for the environment, and many espouse a view of activism as a way of life. They were the first to root their political action in the West Bank and next to Palestinians, something that shaped their understanding of Zionism as a set of power dynamics in which they are deeply

embedded. More 'practical' than intellectual, this understanding also gave way to a more troubled relationship with their identity and positionality as occupiers.

The youngest generation comprises those activists who grew up during the Second Intifada, and for whom the fear and trauma of the Palestinian suicide attacks of those years formed an integral part of their formative experience. Having been socialized their whole lives to an uncompromising, bellicose, and openly racist political discourse, many of them have undergone (and some are still undergoing) a difficult process of rearticulation of their identity and values in relation to Zionism. Disoriented by the lack of alternatives (political, ideological, identitary), they are driven in their solidarity by a mix of sympathy, guilt, sense of justice, and urgency to change a society that does not match their dreams and expectations. Their activism is the least aligned with traditional political views, and as such also with the traditional allegiances and antagonisms that tend to come with them.

Finally, among the younger activists, there is the already mentioned new generation of 'international' Jews, some two hundred people revolving around the group All That's Left. For the most part from the US, Europe, and Australia, these activists received a Jewish education, and some were politically socialized in diaspora anti-occupation groups (e.g. J-Street and If Not Now). Many came to Israel as part of religious or political programs and ended up staying several years or even permanently, although they continue to identify as per their diasporic hyphenated identity (Jewish-American, Jewish-Australian, etc.). As the following chapters unravel, their self-perception as external to the occupier collective, however problematic, allows them to be less affected by the feelings of guilt that characterize their Israeli counterparts, while their inscription within the diaspora Jewish community informs their attempt to rearticulate their Jewish identity in ways that problematize the chains of equivalence established by Zionism.

All of these activists gravitate around groups and organizations based on their political affinities with them. Sometimes they are employed by NGOs, but in most cases they carry out their activism on a voluntary basis and have multiple and fluid memberships, being part of more than one group at a time and with different intensity over time.

Let us now turn to an overview of the main groups that compose the panorama of Jewish-Israeli activism for Palestinian rights today. In this panorama I include both NGOs and grassroots collectives, and both exclusively Jewish-Israeli and joint Jewish-Palestinian groups (as long as the latter have a substantial portion of Jewish-Israeli members).[84] I include groups that carry out their critique from a social, political, or human rights framework, and exclude those who work from a strictly

[84] Mixed groups include ActiveStills, the International Solidarity Movement, Academia for Equality, +972 Magazine, HaMoked, the Popular Committee Against Torture in Israel, Gisha, B'Tselem, the Negev Coexistence Forum, Sadaka-Reut, Combatants for Peace, Roots, the One Democratic State Campaign, Two States One Homeland, Women Wage Peace.

religious and theological standpoint.[85] Rather than offering a description of each group, I 'map' this panorama along the dimensions that are most relevant for the present analysis, and which I now turn to describe. A graphic representation is provided in *Figure 1*.

The two main dimensions of classification are *framings* and *means*. For the present analysis, the framings and means groups choose for their action exemplify their approach towards the boundaries posed by Israeli hegemony, respectively discursive and institutional. As such, groups are situated on a spectrum that goes from 'most compliant' to 'most subversive' towards such boundaries (c.f. Chapter Four, Section 1). This spectrum delineates to a certain extent also the type of trade-off groups choose between internal and external field as illustrated in Section 1: how 'close' groups remain to the norms of the Jewish-Israeli field, and how far they move towards those of the Palestinian field.

Groups' *framings* refer to what they 'think,' their diagnosis of the situation and the kind of solution they propose. Along this dimension, groups' positions range from liberal Zionist to anti-Zionist according to the extent of the critique they wage towards hegemonic Zionist articulations. Going from most to least accepting, these positions include: a generic 'pro-peace' stance (*peace*); an explicit opposition the occupation, usually coupled with a two-state solution (*anti-occupation*); a generally more systemic critique but without a specific stance towards Zionism (*agnostic*); a critique of Israel as an apartheid regime (*apartheid*); a critique of Israel as a settler colonial regime (*settler colonialism*).

Groups' *means,* on the other hand, refer to what groups 'do' to put that thinking into practice and achieve results, and includes their organizational form and their modes of action. Along this dimension, groups are divided between 'institutional' and 'non-institutional' according to the extent to which they rely on the institutional channels provided by the Israeli State. In terms of organizational forms, institutional groups include NGOs and other types of registered associations, while non-institutional ones include spontaneous and grassroots collectives. In terms of modes of action, institutional groups engage prevalently in: advocacy towards political solutions (*political advocacy*); dialogue and understanding initiatives (*dialogue*); monitoring and awareness-raising on Israeli violations of Palestinian rights (*monitoring & info*); legal assistance and advocacy towards legal change (*legal action & advocacy*); humanitarian assistance (*humanitarian action*); research and information to the public (*research & information*); questioning the military culture and supporting conscientious objection (*conscientious obj.*). Non-institutional groups' modes of action include:

[85] E.g. Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR) belong to the first category because, while relying explicitly on the Torah, the sacred text of Judaism, they emphasize the "Jewish tradition of justice and human rights" in universalistic terms, and count among their members both religious and secular Israeli Jews (See Interview, with RHR member, July 2017; see also website: https://rhr.org.il/eng/about/). Neturei Karta, on the other hand, belong to the second category. While they take stances towards Israel and the Palestinians that are arguably more radical than many secular Left groups (insofar as they advocate for the dismantling of Israel as a Jewish state and the de-colonization of Palestine), the do so for theological reasons (a reading of the Torah according to which a Jewish state will only be established after the arrival of the Messiah). As such, they cannot be considered as part of the "Left" (see Norman Lamm, "The Ideology of the Neturei Karta: According to the Satmarer Version," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 12, no. 2 (1971): 38-53).

political claims carried out through symbolic actions (*symbolic actions*); solidarity through co-resistance on the ground (*action on the ground*); solidarity in combination with community building (*community building*); empowerment through giving voice to instances of resistance (*media*).

Of course, mapping groups along these dimensions simplifies the picture in important ways. For instance, groups tend to engage in more than one mode of action at a time, combining several in most cases. The graph assigns groups to the forms of actions that are most defining of their activity. Moreover, groups' framings are not stable, but they tend to vary over time. The most relevant of these shifts for the present analysis (i.e. those that occurred in reaction to the current political climate) are signalled through arrows indicating whether the group has become more moderate or more radical in its critique to Zionism over the past ten years.

Besides framings and means, I also classify groups according to their mobilization capacity. Groups are classified as 'big,' 'medium' or 'small' based on an aggregation of factors: the number of their members; the number of their followers of sympathizers; their visibility and mediatic presence; the extent of their connections and partnerships; and their presence on the ground. Once again, due to several reasons that I will address shortly, this classification is rather simplifying but serves nonetheless to give an idea of the different 'sizes' of groups.

Finally, I account for the networked character of the panorama of Jewish-Israeli activism as mentioned in the previous section by highlighting the groups that are most connected to each other in their work.

The remainder of the section goes over each of these dimensions in more detail and describes the different groups of Jewish-Israeli activism according to them. A list of the groups, with a short description and the relative websites, is provided in the Annex.

*Figure 1. The Spectrum of Jewish-Israeli Activism for Palestinian Rights.*



*List of groups:*

| *FULL NAME* | *ACRONYM* | *FULL NAME* | *ACRONYM* |
|---|---|---|---|
| +972 MAGAZINE/LOCAL CALL | +972 | MOLAD | |
| ACADEMIA FOR EQUALITY | AFE | NEGEV COEXISTENCE FORUM | NCF |
| AKEVOT | | NEW PROFILE | |
| ALL THAT'S LEFT | ATL | ONE DEMOCRATIC STATE CAMPAIGN | ODSC |
| ASSOCIATION FOR CIVIL RIGHTS IN ISRAEL | ACRI | PARENTS CIRCLE – FAMILIES FORUM | PCFF |
| B'TSELEM | | PEACE NOW | PN |
| BIMKOM | | PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS – ISRAEL | PHRI |
| BORN EQUAL | | PSYCHOACTIVE | |
| BOYCOTT FROM WITHIN | BFW | PUBLIC COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE IN ISRAEL | PCATI |
| BREAKING THE SILENCE | BTS | RABBIS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS | RHR |
| COALITION OF WOMEN FOR PEACE | CWP | RETURN SOLIDARITY | RS |
| COMBATANTS FOR PEACE | CFP | ROAD TO RECOVERY ROOTS | R2R |
| COMET-ME | C-ME | SADAKA-REUT | S-R |
| DE-COLONIZER | | STANDING TOGETHER | ST |
| EMEK SHAVEH | ES | TA'AYUSH | |
| ENGAGED DHARMA | ED | TAG MEIR | |
| FREE JERUSALEM | FJ | TWO STATES ONE HOMELAND | TSOH |
| GISHA | | WHO PROFITS | |
| HAMOKED | | WOMEN IN BLACK | WIB |
| HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FUND | HRDF | WOMEN WAGE PEACE | WWP |
| INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT | ISM | YESH DIN | YD |
| IR AMIM | IA | YESH GVUL | |
| ISRAELI SOCIAL TV | IST | ZOCHROT | |
| KEREM NAVOT | | | |
| MACHSOM WATCH | MW | | |
| MESARVOT | | | |

*Legend:*

| | |
|---|---|
| → (arrow) | Shift |
| **BTS** (bold) | Closer network |
| ATL | Big group |
| RHR | Medium group |
| ED | Small group |

*a) FRAMINGS: LIBERAL-ZIONISM, ANTI-ZIONISM, AND THE IN-BETWEEN*

While political framings are not equally important for all groups – with some prioritizing political programs and others practical action – all groups have at least an implicit framing within which they carry out their work. This depends on the political views of their members, their target audience, and the specific 'field' towards which they perceive themselves as most accountable. Given Zionism as the baseline for discrimination towards Palestinians in Jewish-Israeli society, I classify groups' framings based on their attitude towards it. This classification is consistent with much of the literature on Jewish-Israeli activist groups, which classifies them into two main camps: the 'liberal', or 'peace', camp, and the 'radical', 'anti-Zionist', or 'decolonial', camp.[86] The main difference is that I see these not as two sealed 'camps' but as the extremes of a continuum.

As it should be clear by now, the liberal camp is characterized by a critique that happens within Zionism and aims at its improvement. Groups see the violence between Israelis and Palestinian as resulting from a situation of conflict occurring between two national collectives raising rival claims on the same land. They do not question the rightfulness of the Jewish claim to the land and the need to ensure that Israel remains a Jewish State, nor that it needs to prioritize its needs for defence and security. As such, they do not support the implementation of full equality between Jewish and non-Jewish populations or the right of return of Palestinian refugees (both of which would jeopardize the Jewish character of the State and pose to it a security threat). However, they maintain that Israel can reinstate its fundamentally democratic character by containing the expansionist, messianic, and explicitly racist versions of Zionism.

While solutions and foci of each group vary, they most often advocate, internally, for the protection of basic human rights of all Israeli citizens and, externally, for a two-state solution with an Israeli State retreated into its pre-1967 borders.[87] Exemplary of this approach are Peace Now, Combatants for Peace, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, Breaking the Silence, Yesh Gvul, and Machsom Watch. On the far end of the spectrum there are also groups that advocate for 'peace' but without demanding the end of the occupation (Women Wage Peace), or that explicitly defend the need to maintain exclusively Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories (Roots).

The radical camp, on the other hand, comprises groups which move within a framework of criticism of Zionism as a whole, and thus of the Jewish State as such as inherently incompatible with

[86] Mandy Turner, "Creating a counterhegemonic praxis: Jewish-Israeli activists and the challenge to Zionism," *Conflict, security & development* 15, no. 5 (2015): 549-574; Wright, *The Israeli Radical Left*; Elian Weizman, "Hegemony, law, resistance: struggles against Zionism in the State of Israel," (PhD diss., SOAS, 2013). It is to be noted, however, that most people across both camps tend to perceive themselves as 'radical' irrespective of their position towards Zionism. This is largely due to the highly contested nature of the Palestinian question and to the increasing backlash against any form of critique, moderate or radical (c.f. Chapter One).

[87] There is also one political platform, the Two States One Homeland, that advocates for a nation-based confederal solution where Jews and Palestinians would live anywhere on the territory of Israel-Palestine but being represented each by their own government. Because it involves a Jewish-national Israeli State, where Jewish demographic majority is ensured, I still classify it as working within an explicitly Zionist paradigm.

full equality and democracy. This criticism has different degrees and framings. At the far end of the spectrum, and closer to the Palestinian consensus, there are groups who oppose Zionism explicitly, diagnose it as a settler colonial movement and Israel as a settler colonial State, and advocate for its decolonization framed as 'de-Zionisation' of its ethos (Zochrot, De-colonizer, ActiveStills). Among these, one political platform explicitly advocates for uniting the entire territory of Israel-Palestine under a single democratic supernational State (One Democratic State Campaign). There are then groups that criticize the ensemble of Israel's policies, internally and in the Palestinian territories, from within an apartheid rather than a decolonization framework (Boycott From Within, Return Solidarity, the International Solidarity Movement, and, most recently, B'Tselem). Finally, there are groups who do not formulate an explicit opposition to Zionism but advocate for full equality within Israel and for the right of return of refugees, both conditions that indicate at least a non-Zionist framing (Ta'ayush, the Coalition of Women for Peace).

In between liberal Zionist and anti-Zionist groups, there are many that avoid positioning themselves with respect to Zionism. For many anti-Zionist critics, this lack of engagement is a form of depoliticization that underlies an attitude of docility towards (or even outright complicity with) the system.[88] While this disengagement does, in some cases, imply an agreement with the Zionist framework, it is also part of a broader lack of investment in systemic political framings that is one of the core features of present-day Jewish-Israeli activism. The rest of the dissertation, and Chapter Four in particular, explores this disengagement in more detail: its causes and what it entails in terms of the possibility of emergence of counterhegemonic critiques. For now, suffice it to say that groups may avoid this engagement for a combination of reasons, including: the strategic need to achieve results within the legal constraints posed by Israel and to reach the Israeli audience and recruit new activists; the uncertainty in elaborating a political vision for the future of Israel-Palestine; and the personal challenge of disarticulating one's views from an often deeply interiorized Zionist collective identity.

Groups that avoid positioning towards Zionism are situated at the centre of the spectrum. Their positioning towards the left-end or towards the right-end takes into account the presence of an 'official' structural critique as well as the 'unofficial' position of their members as per my interviews. So, for instance, Mesarvot is placed at the right-side of New Profile because it provides a structural critique of the military regime in Israel, while New Profile limits itself to providing technical assistance to conscientious objectors. +972 Magazine and Free Jerusalem are placed on the right-side of the middle portion because many of their members share a non- or anti-Zionist stance, although this is not stated at the group level.

[88] Interview, Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018. See Wright's discussion on the limits of certain decolonial frameworks, in Wright, *The Israeli Radical Left*, 45. See as examples Marcelo Svirsky, *Arab–Jewish Activism in Israel–Palestine*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Turner, "Creating a counterhegemonic praxis"; Tikva Honig-Parnass, *The False Prophets of Peace: Liberal Zionism and the Struggle for Palestine*, (London: Haymarket Books, 2011).

Finally, it needs to be emphasized that groups' framings may shift over time. As the historical excursus showed, the last period of Jewish-Israeli activism has seen different reactions to the shrinking space of critique, with some groups moving from more to less radical positions towards Zionism (Physicians for Human Rights Israel, Psychoactive, Akevot) while others radicalizing their positions in various ways (e.g. B'Tselem, Breaking the Silence). For instance, B'Tselem has recently moved from a framework of cooperation with Israeli authorities for ending human rights violations in the OPT to cutting its ties with them in the refusal of acting as the "occupations' fig leaf," and has framed the Israeli regime as an apartheid system on the whole of its territory.[89] Conversely, Physicians for Human Rights continues maintaining a systemic critique of Israel's system of oppression, but has recently distanced its members with explicitly anti-Zionist positions and adopted an overall less critical approach. These shifts are explored in detail in Chapter Four.

*b) MEANS: NGOs, GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM, AND SECTORS OF INTERVENTION*

Civil society actors are conventionally distinguished according to the institutional form they undertake and the channels (or 'political opportunities') they mobilize in their action.[90] On the one side there are 'institutionalized' groups: NGOs and other types of registered associations. These organizations have regulated links with State authorities, transnational bodies, and funding organizations, and they channel their demands via the political and legal tools made available by these actors. They are internally organized according to a hierarchical structure that usually includes a board of directors, a limited number of employees, and a wider number of more or less regular volunteers. By virtue of this institutionalized framework, and a relatively stable source of funding, formal groups usually have a greater and more long-term capacity of mobilization. Moreover, the 'access' they have to State and international authorities (e.g. in Israel NGOs may take part in the Knesset, or be invited to speak at the UN Security Council) is often taken to lead to an increased effectiveness in achieving their objectives, although, as Chapter Four shows, at the price of constraints in the type of claims they can make and the type of actions they can undertake.[91] The most long-lived and internationally well-known Israeli activist groups are NGOs: Peace Now, Combatants for Peace, Breaking the Silence, and B'Tselem to name a few.

[89] B'Tselem, "The Occupation's fig leaf", May 2016, https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/201605_occupations_fig_leaf_eng.pdf.
[90] See e.g. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social movements: An introduction*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory", in *Social Movements in an Organizational Society*, ed. Mayer N. Zald and J. D. McCarthy, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987); Hanspeter Kriesi, "The Organizational Structure of New Social Movements in a Political Context", in *Comparative Perspective on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framing*, ed. Doug McAdam, J. McCarthy, and M. N. Zald. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 152–84.
[91] Kriesi, "The Organizational Structure".

On the other side there are 'non-institutionalized' groups, born spontaneously out of the will of people to come together and self-organize to intervene in their society through forms of grassroots mobilization. This is what is commonly intended as 'activism' proper. The choice not to become institutionalized usually follows from the desire to remain autonomous from political authorities and free to develop claims and actions independently from, and often openly breaching, the constraints these pose. Characterized by loose structures and fluid memberships, informal groups prioritize the unmediated experience of coming together in reciprocal acts of solidarity and care, over the mediated channels provided by institutions. Internal hierarchies still exist in most cases, but are based on implicit norms of what a 'good' activist is (c.f. Chapter Five). While this type of organizing allows in principle for more radical critiques to the status quo, it also has limitations usually associated with shorter life-cycles and reduced visibility and impact at the State level.[92] Among these groups, the most famous are perhaps the Anarchists Against the Wall, which however no longer exist as such. The most long-lived non-institutionalized group still around today is Ta'ayush, which was born during the Second Intifada. Next to it, other groups have formed in the past years, among which Boycott from Within, Return Solidarity, Free Jerusalem, and All That's Left.

Within this broad distinction, groups still vary in terms of what they actually do in order to improve the status of Palestinians. Of course, usually groups engage in more than one type of action at a time, typically combining political claim-making with work on the ground of various sorts.[93] The following description emphasizes the sector of intervention that is most defining for each group.

Formal groups have, by default, a mandate which determines their area of intervention in clear terms. There are political platforms focused on advocating for change to the Knesset and to the public opinion, which they usually do through campaigns, petitions, parliamentary interrogations, marches, and the like. For example, Peace Now advocates for an end to the occupation; Women Wage Peace for negotiating a rather underdefined 'peace' with Palestinians; the Two States One Homeland for a confederation of two nation-States; the One Democratic State Campaign for the unification of Israel-Palestine in a democratic entity; Standing Together for a socialist Israel that grant equality to all of its citizens. There are then organizations aimed at fostering mutual understanding and empathy between Israelis and Palestinians through the tools of personal testimonies and dialogue. These do so with different foci (political, of target groups, or of target area): Combatants for Peace and the Parents Circle-Families Forum work with former combatants and victims of violence; Tag Meir works on instances of racism between Jews and Palestinians; Zochrot and De-Colonizer work mostly on the issue of the Nakba and the right of return of Palestinian refugees; Rabbis for Human Rights and

[92] Elaine H. Lindgren, "The Informal-Intermittent Organization: A Vehicle for Successful Citizen Protest," *Journal of Applied Behavioral Research* 23, 1987): 397–41; Della Porta and Diani, *Social movements*.
[93] See e.g. Florence Passy and Marco Giugni, ed., *Political Altruism? Solidarity Movements in International Perspective*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

Roots work through inter-faith dialogue; Sadaka-Reut operates in schools; and the Negev Coexistence Forum has a geographical focus in the Negev region. Other groups focus on monitoring and raising awareness on the different kinds of violations perpetrated against Palestinians: the occupation regime at large (Breaking the Silence, Machsom Watch, B'Tselem), the problems issuing from the expansion of Israeli settlements and the erasure of Palestinian neighbourhoods and villages (Kerem Navot, Ir Amim, Emek Shaveh),[94] the complicity of corporate actors in the occupation (Who Profits), and on several issues at once (Coalition of Women for Peace). Many groups provide legal action against human rights abuses, usually through a combination of individual assistance and pressures on the legal system through petitions and advocacy: Gisha is specialized on residents of Gaza; the Popular Committee Against Torture in Israel on instances of torture and ill treatment in Israeli prisons; HaMoked, Yesh Din, and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel work on a wide variety of violations in Israel and in the Palestinian Territories; and the Human Rights Defenders Fund works specifically on the legal protection of human rights defenders in the face of recent attacks. Some groups provide humanitarian support to Palestinians and other populations targeted by occupation and structural violence, through medical (Physicians for Human Rights Israel), psychological (Born Equal), and infrastructural assistance (Road to Recovery, Comet-ME, Bimkom). There are groups focused on providing information to the public, whether as research centres (Molad, Akevot) or as independent media outlets (+972 Magazine/Local Call, Israel Social TV). Finally, there are groups whose work is centred upon supporting conscientious objection, both technically and through providing a space for questioning the military and its ethos (Yesh Gvul, New Profile, Mesarvot). While not strictly of solidarity or support of Palestinian rights, these two final sectors of intervention open important spaces of criticism in an otherwise monolithic discourse, and are for this reason included in the analysis.

Informal groups, on the other hand, have broader and more flexible sectors of intervention. Without a clear mandate, they tend to have a more reactive attitude and to maintain several foci at once – practical engagement and political critique, 'external' solidarity and 'internal' community building most notably. Some groups place the emphasis on political campaigning, often carried out through symbolic actions: Boycott from Within participates, primarily via virtual means, to the Palestinian BDS call; Return Solidarity responds, via protests and direct actions, to the Great March of Return launched by Gazan Palestinians; Women in Black demonstrates weekly in Israeli cities against the occupation; Academia for Equality criticizes the university system in Israel for the discriminations it involves, ethnic as well as socio-economic. Then there are groups who focus primarily on solidarity and co-resistance through ensuring a constant presence along Palestinians in

[94] The Negev Coexistence Forum also engages in this kind of activity, in particular for the Palestinian Bedouin community of the Negev.

the OPT: primarily Ta'ayush, as well as the International Solidarity Movement (which, however is comprised mostly of international activists and as such will not appear prominently in the analysis). Other groups combine solidarity on the ground, both in Israel and in the West Bank, with a strong effort at building a community of activists focused on self-learning and mutual support: the already mentioned diaspora Jewish collective All That's Left as well as Free Jerusalem are youth groups invested in this, as well as the small group Engaged Dharma (which has more of a spiritual framework) and Psychoactive (which particularly works in supporting and assisting activists, as well as other vulnerable populations, through psychological assistance). Finally, ActiveStills is a well-known collective of photographers and activists which is responsible for offering mediatic visibility, and empowerment, to actions of resistance in Israel-Palestine.

*c) MOBILIZATION CAPACITY AND MUTUAL CONNECTIONS*

The mobilization capacity of activist groups is usually considered an important criterion for their possibility to have an 'impact' in the socio-political arena: that is, to influence policies or at least raise issues in the political debate.[95] This definition of impact is too restrictive for the present analysis, since it fails to grasp another important element, which is the capacity of groups to politically empower both the communities they target (in this case, the Palestinians) and the activists themselves. As it will emerge from the analysis, this type of impact is not necessarily related to the mobilization capacity of groups. Nonetheless, since the panorama of Jewish-Israeli activism is composed by very different groups, ranging from political organizations with thousands of members to tiny collectives with less than a dozen members, it is important to give at least an idea of these differences.

Assessing Jewish-Israeli activist groups' mobilization capacities, however, is no easy task. In social movement literature, mobilization capacity is the result of different indicators: the number of active members, the number of followers or sympathizers, the visibility and mediatic presence, the connections and partnerships established, the territorial presence and its consistency over time.[96] The first problem is that the number of members of most groups is very difficult to assess. Even formal NGOs are quite opaque about this, with their websites usually listing the board of directors and staff (which never exceeds twenty people), but rarely other employees, and never volunteers. Moreover, some organizations consider 'members' those who adhere to it once, for instance by signing a petition, which is clearly another thing from people actively working for it on a daily basis. So, for instance, Women Wage Peace proudly states that it counts "44,000 members."[97] The issue becomes even trickier for informal collectives, whose members fluctuate constantly depending on the socio-political

[95] See e.g. Erik W. Johnson, "Social movement size, organizational diversity and the making of federal law," *Social Forces* 86, no. 3 (2008): 967-993.
[96] Karen Ross, Charla Burnett, Yulia Raschupkina, and Darren Kew, " Scaling-up peacebuilding and social justice work: A conceptual model," *Peace & Change 44,* no.4 (2019): 497-526.
[97] "About Us," Women Wage Peace, last accessed April 3, 2022, https://womenwagepeace.org.il/en/about-eng/.

moment. One activist of Ta'ayush spoke in terms of "concentric circles:" the circle of the core members, totalling dozens at its most, the circle of occasional participants, totalling "maybe a hundred people," and the circle of sympathizers, "possibly a few thousands, but I may be optimistic."[98]

The second problem is that the indicators are not equally important for all groups. For instance, the number of (active) members and the consistency and spread of their presence are more important for groups aiming to bring concrete and immediate support, such as through interposition and accompaniment (the case of Ta'ayush), humanitarian assistance, or legal action. By contrast, masses of sympathizers and mediatic visibility are more important for groups prioritizing political claim-making and lobbying to State authorities or international audiences, such as political platforms (the case of Women Wage Peace), advocacy groups and information groups.

In consideration of these problems, I inferred from the information I had groups' approximate 'scores' on different indicators, and weighted them by the relative importance they have for different types of groups. As a result, I identified three sizes (big, medium, small) which give an idea of groups' mobilization capacities and allow to compare them at least within a similar typology of group. So, for instance, All That's Left, with over three hundred between core and occasional participants, and a wide network of partnerships both at the local and transnational level, is a big solidarity group. Ta'ayush, with around twenty core members and up to a hundred occasional ones, a constant weekly presence in the South Hebron Hills and the Jordan Valley, and several informal partnerships with local and national groups, is a medium solidarity group. Engaged Dharma, with less than ten members, occasional solidarity action, and little partnerships with other groups, is a small solidarity group. For what it concerns institutionalized organizations, the Human Rights Defenders Fund, with three stable employees and twelve consultant lawyers, and an outreach that is limited to activists affected by legal issues, is a small legal organization. With slightly more permanent members, several volunteers, and a much wider outreach to human rights violations against the population in general, HaMoked, Yesh Din, and Gisha are medium legal organizations. Peace Now, with thousands of sympathizers, established channels with State authorities, and a consolidated visibility at the international level, is a big political organization, despite a sporadic presence on the ground.

Finally, as mentioned in the previous section, groups of Jewish-Israeli activism cooperate more or less formally with each other in a loose network. These connections, however, do not run across all groups equally. One element to connections across groups is the political affinity between them: groups may have similar framings of the problem in Israel-Palestine, or similar approaches to mobilization, which often results in a certain portion of their members overlapping. For instance, Combatants for Peace and the Parents Circle – Families Forum both work from a framework of conflict and through an approach based on dialogue and the sharing of experiences of suffering. As

[98] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019.

such, they cooperate on a number of events, most notably on the annual Alternative Memorial Ceremony.[99] In some cases, groups are tied by 'genealogical' links, one being the offshoot of another, or some groups having absorbed the members of a dissipated one. For instance, De-Colonizer is an offshoot of Zochrot, and both continue working together in Tel Aviv on advocating in different ways for the right of return of Palestinian refugees. In another example, Boycott from Within and Return Solidarity have similar anti-Zionist perspectives and grassroots modes of action, and both count several members of the dissipated Anarchists Against the Wall.

In other cases, however, groups may have very different political approaches and yet cooperate on the ground capitalizing on their different points of strength: economic resources for NGOs, legal expertise for legal ones, on-the-ground presence for non-institutionalized collectives, and so on. This gives rise to informal partnerships that mix up political affinities and antagonisms. For instance, in the hills of South Hebron, an area of the West Bank where Palestinians are particularly targeted by systematic dispossession and settler violence, there is a certain synergy between Ta'ayush, Rabbis for Human Rights, All That's Left, but also Yesh Din, B'Tselem, and Breaking the Silence, each variously contributing activists, legal expertise, resources, and visibility in spite of different positions towards Zionism and the Palestinian issue. In Jerusalem, where Palestinian residents face discriminations and the risk of house eviction, several organizations also come together to address these issues from different perspectives: Free Jerusalem and All That's Left are present on the more direct action side, Ir Amim and HaMoked by mobilizing legal and institutional channels. Then there are NGOs, like the Coalition of Women for Peace and the Human Rights Defenders Fund, which mobilize their greater resources to provide activists from various grassroots groups with logistic support, funding, and legal protection in case of violent or political attacks.

By contrast, some groups remain rather isolated. Sometimes this is due to political and personal antagonisms. For instance, Women Wage Peace, with a very pro-Zionist stance and lacking a clear opposition to the occupation, carries out its work mostly separately from other groups and is generally antagonized by them. Likewise, Roots includes Jewish settlers in its initiatives of dialogue and understanding in the West Bank, something that other groups consider a "line not to cross."[100] As we will see in Chapter Four, Molad was created following the demise of the Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement by people who were largely considered responsible for its pro-Zionist shift, and as such it is also regarded with suspicion and mistrust by the grassroots community in Jerusalem. In other cases, groups' marginality in the network is due to the fact that they have very limited presence on the ground, either because they reduced their activities considerably (e.g. Yesh Gvul, Women in Black),

[99] "The Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Ceremony: Sharing Sorrow, Bringing Hope", Combatants for Peace, last accessed April 4, 2022, https://cfpeace.org/the-israeli-palestinian-memorial-ceremony/.
[100] Interview with Combatants for Peace members, Tel Aviv, December 1, 2019.

or because on-the-ground presence is not the focus of their work (e.g. One Democratic State Campaign, Two States One Homeland).

As such, the network of Jewish-Israeli activism is tighter in some portions than in others. This was clearly visible during my fieldwork in the fact of seeing the same people being present across many territorial arenas and political issues as part of different groups, but also of hearing certain groups mentioned often in interviews with different activists. By contrast, groups that are more isolated in the network were rarely present at protests and events and rarely mentioned during interviews. As a result, these groups inevitably appear less prominently in the analysis.

Having given an idea of the networked configuration of Jewish-Israeli activism, Chapter Four will come back to these synergies in more details and explore their causes, features and impact for counter-hegemonic action.

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This chapter has situated the field of Jewish-Israeli activism for Palestinian rights both synchronically, within the broader socio-political fields it refers to, and diachronically, in the long wave of successive historical developments across those fields. By doing so, the chapter has illustrated the contrasting norms that, by virtue of activists' work at the fields' 'intersection,' 'pull' them in different directions, and has looked at how these norms have evolved over time. A first conclusion is that the space of manoeuvre within Jewish-Israeli society for critical action in relation to the Palestinian question, already structurally narrow, has shrunk over time as a result of increasingly hardening positions of both the Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian societies vis-à-vis each other. At the same time, the chapter has also emphasized how each field is not monolithic in its social components, offering activists the possibility of tapping onto different grievances and needs of different sectors of the population. Moreover, recent developments show that to a radicalizing discourse on Palestine at the level of international civil society, and to the reigniting of Palestinian resistance at the local level, is corresponding also a radicalization internal to the Jewish-Israeli activist field, if only to some portions of it. The interdependencies existing across the different fields suggest that these radical pulls may reinforce each other in the long term, depending on how activists are able to navigate these developments and deepen their connections within and across fields.

Against this background, the chapter has then offered a portrayal of the panorama of present-day Jewish-Israeli activism as a field in itself structured along different dimensions and poles of attractions. Firstly, it has introduced the activists and sketched their profiles according to the 'generation' of political activism they belong to, each having specific consequences on activists engagements with their own identities and positionalities as occupiers and colonizers. Secondly, the chapter has mapped

the main groups in which activists organize along dimensions that reflect different relationships to hegemonic discourses and tools. Groups' framings have been mapped along a continuum that goes from liberal-Zionism to anti-Zionism, while groups' means have been distinguished in embedded within the institutions of the Zionist State or avoiding them to privilege direct action.

The schematized bird's-eye view that emerges, while helpful for orienting the analyses that follow, has important limitations that the chapter has already begun to emphasise. These can be summarized in the inability to account for instances of activism that eschew an easy classification along the compliant/subversive spectrum with respect to Zionist hegemony, either because groups' framings remain undefined or because groups cooperate with each other across political lines almost as much as within them. These features, which are prominent in present-day Jewish-Israeli activism, invite to look beyond the rigid classifications between Zionist *versus* anti-Zionist frameworks on which most analyses of counter-hegemony in Jewish-Israeli activism have been based so far.

The core of the dissertation, to which we now turn, moves to the micro-level to look at the ways in which activists inhabit this context and navigate through its opportunities and constraints. Taking as a starting point the categories illustrated so far, the coming empirical chapters show that activists stretch and trouble them in various ways as they negotiate their identities, make strategic compromises, and encounter multiple Others in a context crossed by colonial asymmetries. What emerges is a fluid and messy framework of struggle that troubles 'pure' political and categories.

Part II

# Imperfect Struggles




Sheikh Jarrah protest, East Jerusalem, April 2019 (ph: Alice Baroni)

*That in Imbala on that summer evening of 2018 was not my first encounter with the Jewish-Israeli activist scene. Through my previous visits, I had learned of their existence; I had even been in the same protest with them several times in the West Bank. But I had never spoken to them, nor really interrogated their presence. In my perception, filtered by that of the Palestinian and international activists I traveled with, they were a peripheral presence, if not an unwanted one. I remember some young Palestinians referring to them as* Yahudi, *the Arabic word for 'Jews', with a tone of scorn, and experienced international activists resenting the arrogance with which they would approach protests, 'as if it was their struggle.'*

*I remember my outrage the first time a similar perspective was returned to me, reversed. It was an American Jewish woman, staying in Tel Aviv to make a documentary on instances of "coexistence," who could not wrap her head around my interest for the "conflict." Her initial puzzlement ("Oh so you are not Palestinian? And you are not Jewish either?") betrayed a certain annoyance as she noted how so many internationals who "have no*

*stake here" seem to want to be involved in a way or another, as if this was not a conflict between two peoples and it was not up to them, and them only, to solve it.*[1]

*During my fieldwork, the fact of spending time in a variety of social environments – international, Palestinian, Israeli – exposed me quickly to the intersecting gaze different actors had on each other, at least publicly. There were Palestinians who had nothing but words of respect and gratitude for international 'friends', but were much more lukewarm when it came to Israeli activists. There were international activists who carried Palestinians in the palm of their hands as the epitome of resistance and looked down on Israeli activists for their responsibility in the situation and their wanting good intentions ("They have all been in the army" told me once an Italian activist at a direct action "and then they come to protests...").*[2] *There were international Jews who resented the involvement of international non-Jews because they had no stake, and at the same time criticized Israeli activists because they had too much at stake and couldn't approach the struggle from the right angle. There were Israeli activists who criticized Palestinians for their lack of organization, international activists for their naiveté, Jewish international activists for their obliviousness to their own responsibilities. And then there were international non-activists who, made cynical by years of stay in the country, criticized each and everybody else.*

*It is easy, in a context like Israel-Palestine, to attribute responsibilities and to think one has the moral high ground. But it is also easy, if one is willing to look, to see how responsibilities interlink in a web that leaves nobody untouched. I saw this web almost graphically at protests, where different actors came together and 'staged' their different roles. 'Circles' of privilege – concentric, intersecting, tangential – surrounding bystanders according to what they had at stake and what price they were willing to pay for their presence. There were Palestinians in the front line, there because their house and their livelihood was threatened by Israeli policies, and who risked their freedom and their lives in the protests. There were Israelis putting on the line not so much their freedom, but certainly a comfortable life, the respect of their dear ones, and their very ontological security, exposing themselves to being tagged as 'crazy', 'traitors', 'self-hating Jews', and still being perceived as on the wrong side by their non-Israeli comrades. There were Jewish and, especially, non-Jewish internationals who could choose risky forms of engagement knowing that they would suffer little consequences, and that they would always have the option of a disengagement, of 'going back home' somewhere they would not be haunted by a creeping sense of guilt. And there were us – researchers, journalists, functionaries of consulates and international organizations – the transitory members of 'international (East) Jerusalem', sympathetic with the Palestinian cause but there for other reasons. Hardly ever on the front line, we observed things from afar and reported them to our newspapers, universities, organizations. We risked nothing, we had nothing at stake: not our freedom or our life, not a safe future for our people, at most a career in those environments where criticism of Israel is considered inadmissible.*

*Reflecting on these circles of privilege led me to slowly reverse the order of whom I thought was the most 'privileged' in this context: not Jewish-Israeli activists, but us internationals. We had the privilege of going in and*

[1] Participant observation, Kibbutz Kalia, Dead Sea, April 24, 2019.
[2] Informal conversation, Mukhayyam Fari'a, October, 26, 2019.

*out of the 'conflict' as we pleased, of not suffering any consequences for our political engagement (or non-engagement), of crossing borders physical and metaphorical without the risk of being perceived as either occupiers or collaborators due to our national affiliations. The privilege of molding our identities and our relationalities free from the tracks marked by this colonial structure. It was in this sense, and not in the one inferred by my American Jewish interlocutor of above, that we had "no stake." It did not mean that we should not get involved but, on the contrary, that we could get involved more and better, each in our own ways.*



Ta'ayush interposition action, At-Twani, South Hebron Hills, April 2019 (ph: Alice Baroni)

*Helped by the parallels I could draw with my Jewish-Israeli interlocutors and the ways they dealt with their complicities, I became much more aware of the gaps and problems of my own "troubling good intentions."*[3] *I came to understand that, even if I tried to make my stay in Israel politically sustainable (for instance by living and shopping in Palestinian areas, and by avoiding affiliations to Israeli universities), I could not avoid participating to the economy, institutions, and infrastructures that were implicated in the perpetuation of the status quo (I contributed to the Israeli economy in countless ways, raised prices in East Jerusalem and contributed to its gentrification, relied on my whiteness and my international passport to pass checkpoints, and so on). Learning to recognize these complicities, to avoid them when possible and when not to accept the discomfort that ensues without trying to find refuge into illusions of purity and moral high grounds, was perhaps the most precious personal lesson I could draw from my studying the 'similar'.*

[3] Sarah de Leeuw, Margo Greenwood and Nicole Lindsay, "Troubling good intentions", *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3-4 (2013): 381-394.

CHAPTER THREE

# Identitary Grey Zones

## The Rearticulation of Cumbersome Identities in Activists' Self-Narratives

We are sitting at the little terrace outside Imbala, sipping a beer in the evening breeze of May. From inside the window of the cooperative – which is at once a café, a library, and a political home for various groups in West Jerusalem – hang a mix of flags, posters, and stickers: in Hebrew and Arabic, they call for peace and anti-fascism, for feminism and refugee rights, for solidarity in struggles near and far. There is no one else except the two of us and the two volunteers tending the bar, ready to close soon.

I had met Natan a few weeks earlier during a shift with Ta'ayush in the hills of South Hebron. Chatting while we were accompanying Palestinian shepherds to graze their sheep, he got curious about my research project, and seemed both intrigued and intimidated at the idea of doing an 'interview.' In his forties, a "normal" job at the university, he makes it clear from the outset that he got to identifying as an "activist" only recently: "My political understanding was very simplistic for a long time, and it developed so slowly… I mean, look at those kids! [he points at the young volunteers going in and out of the bar] They got it so fast, and so sharply! For me, no, it was a really long process, and so full of backs-and-forths it is even hard to pinpoint specific moments." As we discuss this process, the different stages and encounters that shaped it, I ask him how he would define himself now, in relation to the collective identities and values of his society. He pauses for a moment and continues seriously:

> I've been grappling with this question a lot in my life. I have never really identified as Israeli. When I was a teenager – I was a bit punk – I remember not liking the idea of the State as some sort of 'sacred concept.' We would organize silly alternative things on memorial days… but just as a rebellion, you know, nothing specifically critical to Israeli politics. […] It always felt weird walking around in a uniform. […] Now, I identify

> even less: I don't do what I do because I think that Israel *is* a different set of values than what it *does*. [...] What is worse, is that I've also been questioning the fact of being a Jew. That has always been an important part of my identity: my mother is a survivor [of the Holocaust], that's who we are. But what can that mean if I'm an atheist, and anti-Zionist moreover? And if I'm not a Jew either, then what *am* I?[1]

The feelings that Natan describes, of not knowing where to turn to find some peace with one's sense of self, are very common among activists, especially of the younger generations. They live trapped in a situation where all available identities – Jewishness, Israeliness, Zionism – by virtue of their mutual entanglement, are enmeshed in meanings of exclusion and prevarication, and where alternative articulations from the past have lost their grasp and new ones struggle to emerge.

This chapter looks at how this situation came into being and explores the different ways in which activists negotiate their belonging to available identities as they attempt to imagine a role for themselves as critical Israeli Jews. The first section answers the preliminary question of why it is to some extent unavoidable for Jewish-Israeli activists to measure themselves against the dominant constructs of Zionism, and of why it is so difficult. Building on the discussion started in Chapter One, the section argues that the collective identity made pervasive by Zionism appropriates collective experiences of suffering and victimization, as well as the cultural and religious meanings of Jewishness, and binds them to the settler colonial and ethnocratic practices of the State. As such, the equivalence drawn between being Jewish, being Israeli, and being Zionist makes it impossible to question such practices without incurring in a costly process of deconstruction of the Self. Drawing on classic accounts of identity and ontological security, the second section shows how alternative collective identities carry the promise of shifting the border of inclusion/exclusion in a way that allows to frame the relationship with Palestinians in non-oppositional way, and thus of recovering a sense of self coherent with one's activism. For this reason, attempts at articulating new collective identities have been a constant effort of Jewish-Israeli activists over time. The section illustrates the main alternatives that have been proposed to the dominant Zionist constructs respectively from internationalist socialism, from ethno-class-based anti-imperialism, and from certain versions of socialist and liberal Zionism. After having illustrated how each identity theoretically shifted the border of inclusion/exclusion, the section emphasises how none of them was ultimately successful neither in providing a viable substitute to the dominant identity, nor in concretely redrawing the boundaries of colonial relationships on the ground.

Having clarified why it is difficult, why it is necessary, and how it has been done in the past, the last three sections are dedicated to describing the different ways in which activists deal with their cumbersome identities today. The sections draw on interviews carried out across the spectrum of Jewish-Israeli activism to illustrate how activists position themselves in relation to Zionism and where

[1] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.

– within and beyond it – they find sources of identification. These self-narratives are regrouped into three 'moves' along the spectrum going from withholding to repudiating Zionist articulations. The first move, *entanglement*, is that of those activists who, despite having developed a critical stance, continue to identify with Zionism in reason of the collective meanings of empowerment, distinctiveness, and safety it represents to them. The second move, *rejection*, is that of those activists who, having reached the conclusion that the Zionist identity paradigm is inevitably supremacist and colonial, decide to withdraw their affiliation to it. The third move, *suspension*, is that of those activists who, while aware of the contradictions between Zionism and their commitment to justice, are yet unwilling or unready to fully cut ties with their communities of belonging and the definition of themselves that came attached to them, and therefore 'suspend' the definition of their identity in relation to Zionism. Of course, it needs to be kept in mind that each individual narrative depicted here is the snapshot of just one step in a journey of constant adjustment to one's desires, needs, life experiences and expectations. Hopefully, some of the stories will render the idea of this journey, which is sometimes of radicalization and other times of retreat.

As the sections illustrate, each of these moves gives rise to contradictions with which activists deal in different ways. Activists who remain entangled in Zionism experience the contradictions existing between an idealized 'community of good' and the reality of oppression they witness on the ground. Activists who reject Zionism, on the other hand, need to live with the contradiction – which Memmi called the 'impossible situation' of the 'colonizer who refuses' – of repudiating a political stance that they nonetheless embody and enact every day. Finally, activists in the third move live with the inherent contradiction of a liminal identity construct, that does not fully condemn nor fully absolves Zionist constructs. Overall, the sections show how hardly ever do activists find a solution to these contradictions – and a comforting ontological security – in single identities, within or outside Zionism, because each carries the risk of unseeing or reproducing existing dynamics of power. However, it also appears that, more than in the past, activists construct their self-narratives less from an abstract intellectual standpoint and more in the constant interaction with their life experiences, and through this interaction they question and reinvent them. What seem to emerge, then, are multiple, fractured, and transient forms of identification that may offer more promising ways to disrupt the equivalences established by Zionism by cutting across them in manifold ways.

Finally, a methodological note. This chapter seeks to present activists in their own terms, and for this reason I have privileged long quotes and minimal interventions on my part. Hopefully, this stylistic choice will manage to convey the intertwinement of activists' reflections and experiences, and to remain true to their accounts, sometimes coherent and reflective, other times fragmented and impulsive. In the regrouping and juxtaposition of narratives, these are nonetheless put in conversation with one another in a way that, I think, makes emerge the core arguments of the chapter.

A downside of leaving intact the complexity and intertwinement of activist narratives is that several themes will be raised that will be only treated in the next chapters, such as activists' reflections on the asymmetry of their role on the ground of the struggle (Chapter Four), or on the everyday and emotional impact of their privileged positionality (Chapter Five).

### *1. From 'Being Blinded' to 'Coming to See': Facing and Coping with Ontological Dissonance*

As eminent decolonial scholars have argued time and again, "the colonial situation manufactures colonialists just as it manufactures the colonized."[2] Overcoming these imposed identities is no easy matter. For the colonizer, doing so poses the problem of *assumer* (in the French meaning of both 'acknowledging' and 'accepting the consequences of') identities that have gained meaning through experiences of prevarication and discrimination – in the past or, as in the case at hand, still in the present. It is the problem of coming to terms with one's story, as an individual and as a collective, and finding somewhere a positive identification with it without brushing away its wrongs.

Rearticulating collective identities constructed around the prevarication of others is all the more difficult when such identities are also, at once, rooted in experiences of oppression and victimization suffered by one's group. Writing about white people in the US, Alcoff notes that:

> [W]hite people's sense of who they are in the world, especially in this country, depends deeply on white supremacy. And this dependence may often operate precisely because they are themselves oppressed; that is, because their immigrant relations were a humble lot without other cultural resources from which to draw a sense of entitlement. [...] [F]acing the reality of whites' moral culpability threatens their very ability to be moral today, because it threatens their ability to imagine themselves as having a socially coherent relation to a past and a future toward which anyone could feel an attachment.[3]

In this case, acknowledging the wrongs made to colonized others comes at the price of not only putting in question one's identification as a victim, but also of losing the source of the sense of empowerment and 'entitlement' that came from the establishment of a national polity of which to be proud of.

The intertwinement of past oppressions and present supremacy Alcoff describes resonates deeply with the collective identity articulation proposed by Zionism. As shown in Chapter One, such identity binds the persecutions suffered by the Jewish people and their enduring fear of annihilation to the entitlement to a strong and exclusively Jewish State where they found security and national cohesion. The challenge posed by acknowledging that such State was formed through a violent settler process,

[2] Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld, (London: Earthscan Publications, 2010): 100. See also Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Penguin Books, 2021); Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
[3] Linda Martín Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?," *Hypathia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 18-19.

thus, is dual: accepting that one is both a victim and a perpetrator of oppression, and finding a sense of empowerment and pride elsewhere than in a process of self-determination that is dependent on the oppression of others.[4]

This task is made particularly challenging by the fact that Zionism, as seen, has succeeded in erasing all alternative articulations. Non- or even anti-Zionist exploits of Jews during the Holocaust have been erased, as well as the cultures of the diaspora, particularly of the Arab one. At the same time, cultural and religious elements of Jewishness that used to work independently from a national culture have been appropriated and weaved into the ethnocratic logic of the State. As such, Zionism has succeeded in equating being Jewish with being Israeli and Zionist, and in making this identity the most salient trait in the self-understanding of most Israeli Jews, and of many Jews outside Israel as well.

As a result, it is impossible for Jewish-Israelis to become critical, in one way or another, of their State and of what it represents without incurring in some sort of ontological 'short-circuit.' Acknowledging the State-planned destructions of the War of Independence, or the daily harassment of soldiers towards Palestinians to 'make their presence felt,' puts into question a whole set of beliefs about the righteousness of one's people, State and army:

> How can my army – which really is my brother, my friend, it's *me*, born and meant to protect us – be systematically violating human rights, killing with no reason, torturing prisoners?[5]
>
> How can my people, who have been chased away, discriminated against, persecuted in all possible ways, be today, in their very Promised Land, the persecutors?[6]

If even the slightest doubt can bring one to question taken-for-granted truths about one's collective, embracing more and more radical stances can cause veritable ontological earthquakes. As one activist poignantly put it: "To say 'I am not Zionist' is to destroy everything you know about yourself."[7] Progressing from a critique internal to Zionism to an anti-Zionist and settler-colonial framework entails, as another activist put it, "realizing that the problem is not just 'the settlers' [i.e. those who live in Jewish settlements in the West Bank] because *we* are the settlers! And this is not about coming to terms with history, but with the present. What does it mean being in opposition, and still acknowledging you are part of the problem? It's a very practical question."[8]

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[4] See e.g. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, "The Morality of Acknowledging/Not-acknowledging the Other's Holocaust/Genocide," *Journal of Moral Education* 27, no. 2 (1998): 161-177; Ilan Pappé and Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, "Beyond the Destruction of the Other's Collective Memory: Blueprints for a Palestinian/Israeli Dialogue," Theory Culture & Society 20, no. 1 (2003): 93-108; Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and memory: reflections on the twentieth century*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2005).

[5] Informal conversation, East Jerusalem, November 10, 2019 [paraphrased].

[6] Interview, Tel Aviv, December 1, 2019 [paraphrased].

[7] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 14, 2019.

[8] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 1, 2019.

Indeed, many of the activists I spoke to described the process of going from being "blinded" to "coming to see" the many realities of oppression, as very traumatic.[9] Recall Tamar, the young Israeli from Chapter One, who described how she had been normalizing the reality of occupation and militarization in which she was living. During our interview, she told me how she began to question herself as, through travelling abroad, she was troubled by the *décalage* between her own view of Israel as a perfectly normal democracy, and that of the people who saw it as a regime of apartheid.[10] While at the time she felt the "need to be defensive" of Israel, it was in light of these very conversations that she later decided to take part in a political tour of Hebron organized by Breaking the Silence. This is how she described that experience and its aftermath:

> [During the tour] I was crying the whole time. And on the bus, on the way back. After, I became so angry. I was angry at everyone: my parents, my friends, my schoolmates. I felt like everyone had been lying to me. I was crying and shouting all the time: "How can you go along with this? How can we put Palestinians in a *ghetto* and go on with our life as if nothing happened?" [...] It took me months to stop being angry and accusing everyone. All the time I felt... ashamed. I understood I needed to stop isolating myself and to start looking for connections [...] I eventually found this kind of connections in solidarity work. [...] But it took me a long time before I could share [with family and non-activist friends] what I was doing because it creates this... *rift* between you and the others... even now, I only share this when I feel comfortable.[11]

A similar feeling of having been lied to and betrayed recurs in the recollection of Maya, a very young Jewish-American who came to live in Israel a few years ago. Maya was raised in a religious environment and was exposed, as is usual, to pro-Israeli propaganda both in her family and at school. Israel had always been very central for her: "I was eight years old when I decided that I was going to move here [...] In high school, I founded the Israel club, I studied Hebrew on my own, I read about politics and I learned all the songs... I was really obsessed!". In Israel, she had started a promising career in the army when a series of encounters made her change her views and her life path:

> I always thought that Israel was this great force for good, you know, and that even if it made some mistakes they could be fixed from the inside. That's why I went in the army. What really shifted things around for me was learning about the legal system, how this [she gestures to everything that surrounds us] is not *accidental*, it's actually very systematic, and it's not an 'unfortunate conflict': the system is rotten to the core. [...] I also started to pay attention at how people talk about the Arabs... it reminded me of what my parents told me about Gentiles who hate the Jews. [I: how so?] I don't know, the crudeness of it... it just really got

[9] Terms recurring in multiple interviews, March-December 2019.
[10] The encounter with other perspectives on Israel-Palestine while travelling abroad, as well as through university studies, emerged in interviews as being a recurrent trigger of a critical mindset. For a focus on activists' journey into activism, which mentioned this aspect as well, see e.g. Karine Lamarche, *Militer contre son camp? Des Israéliens engagés aux côtés des Palestiniens*, (Presses universitaires de France, 2018).
[11] Interview, East Jerusalem, December 2, 2019 (emphasis mine).

> under my skin. [...] I became very uncomfortable, I couldn't cope with this *cognitive dissonance*, so eventually I broke my contract with the army, and later I started getting involved [in activism]. *It was a huge relief*.[12]

Both Tamar and Maya make a parallel between past discriminations against the Jews (the 'ghetto,' the racist stereotyping and hate) and the lived experiences of Palestinians at the hands of the Israelis. Besides infringing one of the most sacred taboos in Zionist discourse (that the tragedy of the Jews is unique and incomparable to any other), they make a further move and identify the 'righteous victims' with the perpetrators, in a reversal that has profound ontological implications. As I asked Maya what consequences her change of views had in terms of her self-identification – with Israel, with Judaism – and of her social relations, she replied:

> I was never a strong believer anyway, so that didn't change that much. But I did have a strong sense of my Jewish identity, and that huge mindfuck (of Jews reminding me of Gentiles and everything) really affected it. I used to believe (well, my social conditioning was so strong) that Jews were moral in their blood, and kind, as a result of thousands of years of oppression, you know? Then I understood this wasn't rational... and then more and more that they're actually really racist! I mean, look at the Nation State Law![13] And it's not so different from the rest [of the legal framework]. This really *took away my reason to be Jewish*. I still do identify as Jewish sometimes, but mostly when I'm out of here, when I'm a minority, and not the one benefiting from a system of oppression. [...] Socially, it is very isolating. Even in random conversations I keep thinking that if they knew what I do they'd hate me! This is especially relevant for me because I really cared about being part of *something* when I came here. [...] I gradually lost all my friends among lone soldiers,[14] they're all in combat units in the West Bank. With [the events of] Issawiya,[15] I told my parents about what I was doing... they were shocked, but they took it better than I thought. Still, they can't reflect too much on this. For them it would be a huge loss... it's a huge blow to your identity and your worldview. They're smart and they understand this, so they don't want to *cross that line*.

Anger, shame, betrayal. A "huge mindfuck." A "huge blow to your identity and worldview." A "cognitive dissonance." And then detachment and isolation, losing the sense of being "part of something." Both Tamar and Maya report finding some relief through taking part in activism as a way to ease that dissonance, by placing themselves finally on the 'right side,' actively working to redress the injustices they felt their community was perpetrating, and by building new social connections with more like-minded people (I will come back to this towards the end of the Chapter).

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[12] Interview, East Jerusalem, November 17, 2019 (emphasis mine).
[13] See Chapter One, Section 1.
[14] Lone soldiers are Jews who come from abroad, mostly from the United States, to serve in the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) but do not have any immediate family in Israel. They receive various forms of support from the IDF, the government, and other organizations, and generally form close ties among themselves. See e.g. Timrah Schmutz, "'Lone Soldiers' in the Israeli Military: A Research Note on the Conceptualization of Foreign Fighters," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 8 (2022), 1665-1678.
[15] The reference is to a particularly violent wave of police repression that hit the East Jerusalem neighbour of Issawiya starting in June 2019 and that was still ongoing at the time of the interview. In this period, Palestinian and Israeli activists coordinated efforts in order to maintain a nightly presence in the neighbourhood in an attempt to deter indiscriminate police violence.

Yet, while activism can offer a sense of relief to ethical issues (what is sometimes referred to critically as a 'feel-good effect'),[16] it does not solve the deeper *ontological* dissonance that one feels towards Jewish-Israeli society. On the contrary, many activists feel that the more and the deeper they got engaged into solidarity work, the more the gap widened between them and the society they once felt they belonged to. In this process, as in the narrative of Maya here and Natan in the introductory vignette, the progressive detachment from Zionism can end up dragging with it one's relation with Jewishness as well, because its meaning has also become entangled with racist and supremacist articulations in a way that is difficult to un-know.

"Crossing the line" into criticism and activism entails, no matter the radicality, finding oneself in an identitary 'grey zone' that offers no easy way out. As the next Sections show, once crossed the line, both embracing a more radical critique and remaining entangled into past certainties is extremely costly. In the first case, because one remains embedded in a structural situation of oppression, it is frequent to come to "hate oneself" for it and not to know how to cope with this. Next to Maya, who finds it problematic to identify as Jewish in Israel as opposed to elsewhere, where she is "a minority," we'll see the story of Mariam, who spends most of her life abroad because she feels like in Israel she is "necessarily part of the problem," and of Dana, who "wish[es she] was European."[17] In the second case, one can also, and sometimes simultaneously, "hate oneself" for the very opposite reason, as in the narrative of Eyal: for being against one's community, a 'traitor,' resentful and rejected at the same time.[18]

Indeed, guilt is a feeling that permeates activists' self-perceptions in innumerable ways, intersecting feelings of responsibility at once towards their community and towards Palestinians, and self-judgments about their previous non-engagement and their present engagement alike. For instance, some activists acknowledge that telling about how they 'opened their eyes' after having been 'brainwashed' is somewhat de-responsibilizing, and wish they had realized sooner and taken action against what was happening "right next to them."[19] Others feel guilty about the fact that engaging into activism eases their sense of guilt, and prevent themselves from enjoying any aspect of it.[20] Finally, the quasi totality of them feel guilty about complaining about the prices they pay for their activism, because so minor compared to what Palestinians endure every day.[21] Almost ironic in its recursiveness, guilt has become the object of jokes among activists and researchers alike: "Oh no, I

[16] The feel-good effect of activism refers, in the literature, to feelings of satisfaction, personal enrichment and fulfilment that derive from engagement into solidarity action, and is often used to show how an action that is justified as altruistic is ultimately self-interested. See e.g. Robert Wuthnow, *Acts of compassion: Caring for others and helping ourselves*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) and Florence Passy and Marco Giugni, ed., *Political Altruism? Solidarity Movements in International Perspective*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).
[17] Interviews, West Jerusalem, respectively November 21, 2019 and November 26, 2019.
[18] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 4, 2019.
[19] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019.
[20] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019.
[21] Recurrent in interviews, March-December 2019.

cannot take anymore analyses of Israeli activists' guilt!"[22] told me once a fellow researcher in Jerusalem who had previously worked on self-exiled Israeli activists; "Guilt? That's the only Ashkenazi feeling!" joked Natan applying to Israeli activists an *adagio* about the Jewish people. The last sections of the chapter return to how guilt is experienced by different activists, while Chapter Five will look into the ways in which they come to deal with it.[23]

What alternative constructs of Jewish-Israeliness offer is a way out of this grey zone: a way to reconstruct a unitary and coherent sense of self where one's ethical position is reconciled with one's role in society. The next section turns to this issue and looks at how identity constructs alternative to Zionism have been proposed in the past by Jewish-Israeli activists. These constructs promised to do just this, by shifting the border of Self and Other in ways that allowed to establish a non-oppositional and non-hierarchical relationship with Palestinians.

## *2. Separated by the Border? Exclusive Identities, Fallen Ideologies, and the Longing for an Alternative*

Scholars of identity have theorized how a stable and coherent sense of Self is fundamental to achieving "ontological security:" a sense of being secure with who one is, that in turn can provide a sense of agency and purpose.[24] This concept, which began as a psychological one, was applied to social collectives and even States, and used to interpret the need to distinguish between insiders and outsiders and, among these, between friends and foes.[25] Indeed, ontological security is "formed and sustained through relationships," and in particular by "routinizing relations with significant others."[26] As such, a necessary precondition to it is the drawing of a border that demarcates the Us from the Others, that characterizes both, and that delineates what kind of relation ought to run between them.

The most famous conceptualization of this identity border is perhaps that of George Simmel. For him, "the spatial formation that we call a boundary is a sociological function," one that "has strong repercussions for the consciousness of the relationship of parties" because it marks "the differentiation of relationship between the elements of a sphere among one another and between them and the elements of another."[27] In other words, the definition of Self and Other and the

[22] Conversation with a friend, East Jerusalem, April 8, 2019.
[23] The themes of guilt and burnout among Israeli activists are central in the ethnographic account of Lamarche, *Militer contre son camp?*, and in Katherine Natanel, *Sustaining conflict: apathy and domination in Israel-Palestine*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).
[24] See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, (Cambridge Polity Press, 1991), and Ronald D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969): 41-42.
[25] See e.g. Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological security in world politics: State identity and the security dilemma", *European journal of international relations*, 12, no. 3 (2006): 341-370; Brent J. Steele, "Ideals that were really never in our possession': Torture, Honor and US Identity," *International Relations* 22, no. 2 (2008): 243-261.
[26] Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological security in world politics: State identity and the security dilemma", *European journal of international relations*, 12, no. 3 (2006): 342.
[27] Georg Simmel, *Sociology: Inquiries into the construction of social forms*, trans. and ed. Anthony J. Blasi, Anton K. Jacobs, and Mathew Kanjirathinkal, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009): 551.

relationships that run through them are co-dependent with the relationships existing within them. This "living energy" of the border is one that at once separates and connects, indeed where the two actions "are only two faces of one and the same action" because the meaning of one necessarily depends on the existence of the other.[28] As a social formation, the border is entirely man-made, and as such it can be shifted and changed, or opened to let things through, as in the metaphor of the door:

> Precisely because it can also be opened, its closing produces an even stronger sensation of a separation from all that is outside this space than that produced by a mere undifferentiated wall. The wall is mute. But the door speaks. It is essential to man in the deepest sense, placing a limit on himself, but with the freedom to take it away again, of being able to go outside it.[29]

What is at stake in the rearticulation of identity, then, is the possibility of conceptualizing a different Us and a different Other, as well as of redefining the connotation of the relations within and across the two. This has particularly important repercussions in the case of Jewish-Israeli activists because it provides an answer not only to the question of what their new communal Self is, but also to the question of how the relationship with Palestinians can be reconceptualized.

Would it be possible to conceive of a Us that includes Jews and Palestinians together? If so, in what direction would this inclusion happen – of Palestinians into an Israeli body, or of Jews into a Palestinian one? And would this be enough to make those in the in-group equal? If it is not possible or it does not work, what other options are there? Would keeping Palestinians outside the identity boundary, and excluding from it only some conceptions of Zionism, be enough to reframe relations across the boundary in terms of equality or at least of non-enmity?

Jewish-Israeli activists have addressed these questions in different ways over time and have come up with alternative articulations of their identity vis-à-vis Zionism and the Palestinians. While none of them has succeeded in ultimately replacing the dominant Zionist one, it is useful to consider them: firstly, because they offer an analytical contrast space that helps fully appreciating the uncertainty in which present-day activists move. Secondly, because their failure offers insights on the problems that remained and how new generations are addressing them from a different perspective, one that decentres unity in favour of fragmentation.

The first alternative came with the framework of internationalist socialism.[30] As mentioned in Chapter Two, this appeared in Jewish-Israeli activism starting in the 1960s through groups such as

[28] Georg Simmel, "Bridge and door", *Theory, Culture & Society* 11, no. 1 (1994): 3.
[29] *Ibidem*.
[30] Not to be mistaken with the framework of Zionist Socialism, which will be considered later.

Matzpen.[31] While never dominant among the Israeli left, this alternative matters because it offered activists a radically new basis of identification. This new identity entirely erased the border that set Israeli-Zionist-Jews on the one side and Palestinians and global antisemitism on the other, and replaced it with a global class-based divide whereby the Us comprised globally oppressed classes, including colonized Palestinians, and the Other the imperialist regimes that oppressed them, among which of course the Israeli Zionist one.[32] The feeling of community offered by this alternative Us, which was not only imagined but made of international connections, assemblies, and journals, was of paramount importance for activists to overcome the isolation and rejection, often violent, they experienced within their society. Michel Warschawski, a former activist of Matzpen known in the Israeli leftist circles by the name of Mikado, writes in his autobiography:

> If [Matzpen] activists felt excluded – or excluded themselves – from the national collective, it was in order to integrate into a much larger framework. The internationalism of the group was a sharp break with mainstream opinion that clung to the concept of Jewish or Israeli specificity. [...] Although Matzpen activists [...] found themselves "beyond the border of national existence" [...] they soon learned to feel at home beyond those borders [...]: Vietnam, on which Michaël Löwy [...] developed a committee; in the European capitals, where students were making revolution (Akiva Orr, who was living in London, sent daily reports); even in Warsaw, where Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski's Open Letter appeared [...] published in Hebrew even before appearing in French. [...] Without its ongoing and deep ties with left movements throughout the world, it is doubtful that Matzpen would have been able to remain impervious to the lures of nationalism.[33]

This new Us also involved a new relationship towards the past: what lessons to learn from history, what historical figures to look back to as examples to commemorate and emulate in the present. In a break with an institutionalized collective memory that selectively remembered only those Jewish resistance fighters who were strong supporters of Zionism, and which obliterated the multiple histories of the diaspora, internationalist activists took as examples Jewish anti-Zionist revolutionaries such as those of the Bund, who fought in the Russian revolution, the anti-Nazi resistance in Germany

[31] To be sure, internationalist ideals were already pursued in pre-state Israel/Mandate Palestine in the first half of the Twentieth Century, most notably by the Palestinian Communist Party which involved both Palestinians and Jews. See Ran Greenstein, *Zionism and its discontents: a century of radical dissent in Israel/Palestine*, (London: Pluto Press, 2014).

[32] Ran Greenstein, "Socialist Anti-Zionism: A Chapter in the History of the Israeli Radical Left," *Socialist History 35* (2009): 20-39.. See also Moshé Machover and Akiva Orr, *Peace, Peace, When There is No Peace (Israel and the Arabs 1948-1961)*, trans. Mark Marshall, https://www.marxists.org/subject/jewish/peace-peace.pdf., and the collection of Matzpen documents edited by Arie Bober, ed.,*The Other Israel: The radical case against Zionism*, (New York: Doublebay, 1972).

[33] Michel Warschawski, *On the Border*, (London: Pluto Press, 2005): 34-36. A similar idea emerges from the interview with a couple of former Matzpen activists (Interview, Jerusalem, November 21, 2019): "The 60s were coming and they had a huge influence on us... We learned about Cuba, and the Cultural revolution in China [...] We went to Cambridge [Massachusetts] for six years, where we acted like informal representatives of Matzpen. We talked at the university, wrote in newspapers, went to demonstrations. We were active on Palestine, and the Middle East in general, the imperial war over the Suez Canal, but also on Latin America, and Vietnam...".

and France, the internationalist brigades in Spain, and saw no motherland in Israel.[34] The horrors of the Holocaust, still so near in time and fresh in the memory of survivors, were not read primarily in terms of antisemitism and of a necessary Jewish sovereign solution, but as the extreme product of racist and fascist ideologies and exploitative regimes that could only be fought through rejecting fascism and racism in all its forms, from Europe to the Middle East.[35]

Most importantly for this analysis, another natural consequence of the new 'border' was that it placed the Palestinian people unproblematically on the same side of Jewish-Israelis, in a way that is hardly thinkable today in Israel. Writes again Mikado:

> The debate with Arab activists and organizations were a matter of course for us, no different from discussions we might have with Belgian or Italian activists, and we never felt like traitors or history-makers. Some years later, interviewed by an Israeli journalist about the first Israeli-Arab contacts, I tried unsuccessfully to convince him that those first encounters were so much a part of our general internationalist outlook, and therefore so routine, that I had troubles remembering the details [...] For the activists, those meetings were not encounters between enemies or negotiations before their time. They were discussions between comrades of different countries.[36]

Moshé Machover, another former activist of Matzpen, offers an explanation that touches more directly upon issues of equal standing across asymmetrical partnerships:

> [...] joint action, genuine comradeship, and personal friendship between socialists belonging to oppressed and oppressing national groups is not only possible but in fact fairly common, because they share a common socialist outlook and an overriding internationalist commitment, and regard their respective national identities as a matter of mere accident of birth rather than of positive active choice.[37]

But this partnership in struggle was not as unproblematic as it seems. In fact, even if the *ethnonational* border between Jews and Palestinians was erased, the *colonial* one still remained, and this gave rise to problems and contradictions among activists. The first order of problems had to do with how to combine an internationalist outlook with the implementation of Palestinian national

[34] Interview, Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018; Observations at the Yad Vashem, West Jerusalem, July 23, 2018. The contested memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 is a case in point, where the Yad Vashem celebrates only the Zionist fighters while activists stress the role of the Bund. The Bund, common name for The General Jewish Workers' Union in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, was a Jewish socialist autonomist party that opposed Zionism and advocated for equal rights for Jews within the countries of their residence (Alfred Katz, "Bund: The Jewish Socialist Labor Party," *The Polish Review* (1965): 67-74). There were Bundists also among Jews living in pre-state Israel, the most notable example being those who went volunteering against Franco in the Spanish Civil War (Gerben Zaagsma, *Jewish Volunteers, the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); documentary by Eran Torbiner *Madrid Before Hanita*. The title refers to these Jews' reversal of the Zionist slogan "Hanita before Madrid", that prioritized the Zionist national struggle (epitomized by the name of a *kibbutz* in the north of Mandate Palestine) to that of internationalist anti-Fascism).

[35] Warschawski, *On the Border*, 17; 35; Interviews, Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018; West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019.

[36] Warschawski, *On the Border,* 38-39.

[37] Moshé Machover, "A peace activist on the border," in *Israelis and Palestinians: Conflict and Resolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 251.

rights. While both were stated aims of Matzpen, the issue of which one to prioritize in the present engendered harsh debates, and eventually led to splits within the organization.[38] Unsurprisingly, many Palestinians considered colonial liberation and self-determination a more immediate goal, sometimes causing a certain disappointment among hardcore socialist Jewish-Israelis.[39] This issue also related to the problem of which State configuration was to be envisioned in the de-colonized future, and what collective identity Jewish-Israelis should undertake then: would they integrate into a Palestinian nationality as Palestinian Jews (the view of those who saw de-Israelisation as the only way to fully break with colonial past) or could they remain a distinct nation within a Socialist pan-Arab entity (as was for those who saw de-Zionisation as sufficient)?[40]

A second order of problems, more down to the ground of everyday relations in and out of the struggle, was inherent in the assumption that "a common socialist outlook and an overriding international commitment" was enough to place oppressed and oppressing groups on an equal footing in the struggle. If being Jewish or Palestinian could indeed be considered a "mere accident of birth", the embeddedness of their partnership into highly asymmetrical power dynamics was likely to have consequences not only on how each group made sense of what oppression was – and hence of priorities and solutions – but also on the very relational dynamics between each other in the unfolding of the struggle. While the official position of the organization was to let the Palestinians decide ends and means of the struggle,[41] how this would unfold practically in day-to-day action was not as central for them as it is for present-day activists, also partly because in the organization's work intellectual-political talks took the upper hand over concrete action.[42] This debate emerged more prominently decades later, as sensitivities shifted and Matzpen activists looked back at those years with a mix of nostalgia and disillusionment. There is one exchange between two of them, Mikado and Machover, already representatives of the two factions of Matzpen that split over priorities in the struggle,[43] which is particularly relevant for the present discussion because it centres on how the self-identification of activists impacted mutual relations. In his book, Mikado, once a convinced internationalist, disowns this identification, which he describes as "personally destabilizing" – because it involved cutting ties with a community to which he felt strong feelings of belonging – and "politically sterile" – because it ultimately didn't provide a viable solution:

[38] Greenstein, "Socialist Anti-Zionism"; Matzpen website (https://matzpen.org/english/about-matzpen/); Interviews and discussions with activists: West Jerusalem, respectively May 30, November 21, and December 18, 2019).
[39] See for example Machover, *Israelis and* Palestinians, 252. The issue of the 'disappointment' of the left is beautifully treated by Albert Memmi in his *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, as he describes with depth and irony the bewilderment (*dépaysement*) of the (European) leftist vis-à-vis the liberation struggles of the colonized, whose aims and means are perceived as radically at odds with his values.
[40] Warschawski, *On the Border*, 50-51.
[41] "General Declaration by the ISO", 22 March 1968, quoted in Greenstein, "Socialist Anti-Zionism".
[42] Warschawski, *On the Border*, 24-40.
[43] The split occurred in 1972 and the two factions were known respectively as 'Matzpen Tel Aviv' and 'Matzpen Jerusalem' according to the location of their main branches, although many of the members of Matzpen Tel Aviv, among which Machover, had emigrated in Europe. See Greenstein, "Socialist Anti-Zionism".

> There was a high price to pay for that internationalism. [...] In all aspects of political and social life, we took the opposing view to the society to which we belonged. We spoke of Israelis in the third person – "their flag," "their army," "their policy;" only a few of us observed Jewish holidays, largely for family reasons and most of us made it a point of honor to pretend that they didn't exist at all. [...] Thus, that uprooting was not viable and might explain why many of us chose to live overseas for more or less prolonged periods.[44]

Mikado, then, reverted to embracing his Jewish-Israeli identity, and decided to work from within it in order to challenge its Zionist articulation in society. By doing so, he placed himself "on our side of the border" – in a move that indeed *re-established* the ethnonational border in the first place – and from there set out to struggle with Palestinians "not as Palestinians [...] nor as citizens of the world, but as Israelis [...] who had chosen to break with the dominant practices and ideology of their own society."[45]

In his review of Mikado's book, Machover, loyal to his internationalist *credo*, harshly criticizes this shift towards what he calls "ethno-patriotism." In his view, this identity, albeit allowing for genuine solidarity and anti-Zionist stances, inevitably precludes the forms of partnership that were 'natural' in socialist internationalism:

> But where this common overriding commitment to socialist internationalism is lacking, matters are quite different. A person who actively embraces Jewishness as a primary identity and a Palestinian nationalist are not equal partners in a common struggle. The former, even if s/he is anti-Zionist, can at best extend solidarity and support to the latter, but must refrain from offering any programmatic opinion and advice, lest it be interpreted as a colonialist patronizing the colonized. The two remain politically separated by the Border – hence the title of the book! – even when trying to bridge it. And in such circumstances "an intimacy in personal relations that does away with ethnic or religious belonging, and which one can call friendship, is almost impossible to achieve."[46]

He illustrates this point via an episode recounted in Mikado's memoir, where Israeli and Palestinian activists discuss the signing of the Oslo Accords a few months prior. An Israeli militant is reported criticizing the Palestinians for having betrayed the struggle and their very ideals by signing the accords. A Palestinian activist responds that she should not take it upon herself to judge the Palestinians' settling with a suboptimal option, because it was not her who would have had to endure more years of occupation and violence. While in Mikado's account the Israeli militant is presented as mistakenly paternalistic, Machover insists that it was indeed "her duty," as someone who had a "clearer insight (based on something like inside knowledge)" to warn the fellow militant against falling in the Oslo

[44] Warschawski, *On the Border*, 39.
[45] *Idem*, 52-55.
[46] Machover, *Israelis and Palestinians*, 251.

trap.[47] During one interview I had with Mikado, we discussed this point and he elaborated further on his position:

> There is no symmetry between Israelis and Palestinians, there cannot be! Even if we share the same values, we have to remain deeply aware of who we are, precisely because of our anti-colonial framing. We are embedded in colonialism, we always speak from a position of privilege. Even if we want to de-colonize ourselves, that is a permanent process. Being "internationalists" is a fantasy, we should not live in that illusion. We carry our Israeliness, our colonial Israeliness, in our very bodies – such as when we pass a checkpoint with no fear that we will be stopped and searched. We can bypass it ideologically, but not existentially. It's better to be aware of this, to never forget it. Plus, if we want to change Israeli society, it's by being Israelis, for the worse and for the best. Trying to be a Palestinian, on one hand is not possible, on the other it takes away our possibility to have an impact. [...] Joint struggle is still possible, but not as equals. When we demonstrate together in the West Bank, we cannot be in the front, we cannot decide things! I had so many fights about this... The first condition is that we be modest, otherwise we're being colonial again! Then of course we can disagree, we can discuss [I: we can criticize?] of course, we should criticize! But in order for the criticism to be heard we have to keep our place, and our place is with them, not uncritically but unconditionally.[48]

I will come back in the following chapters to the issue of how privilege manifests itself, and is dealt with, in relationships of asymmetric partnership in struggle. My goal here was to show how an identity framework that put Israelis and Palestinians on the same side of the border promised a way out of the dilemma, but one that left many doubts.

As socialist internationalist ideals gradually faded, in Israel as in the rest of the world, the debates they had contributed to raise were also gradually forgotten. It is quite interesting in fact, given the notoriety of Matzpen abroad and the recent revival of the settler colonial framing of Israel-Palestine in academic circles, that the legacy of Matzpen is hardly acknowledged at all by younger generations of activists. Even the handful of activists who still subscribe to a socialist outlook, mostly from within the youth ranks of the Hadash party, have never mentioned Matzpen during our interviews.[49] Also the Alternative Information Centre, which was the organization that the most took up its narrative, closed its Jerusalem base because it was unable to gather new affiliates, and the Bethlehem office that remains has little connection with the youth groups on the Israeli side.[50]

There existed for some time a different version of an internationalist Us, which didn't fare much better in terms of convincing masses, but whose legacy has remained more in present-day activism. It is the one articulated by the movement of the Israeli Black Panthers, a group active in the early 1970s

[47] *Idem*, 252.
[48] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 18, 2019.
[49] Interviews: West Jerusalem, respectively April 21 and 23, 2019. Hadash is a left-wing political coalition composed mainly by the Israeli Communist Party (Maki) which defines itself as economically Marxist-socialist and politically non-Zionist, advocates for the right of return of Palestinian refugees, and supports the boycott of companies operating in the OPT.
[50] Interview with Mikado, West Jerusalem, December 18, 2019.

mostly in the Jerusalem district of Musrara. Formed by Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews, the group ontologically existed *on* the 'border' between Israelis and Palestinians: Jewish by religion and nationality, Arab by culture and descent, Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews were also closer to Palestinian experiences of discrimination and oppression than Jewish-Israeli Matzpen activists ever were, being them mostly from relatively privileged Ashkenazi backgrounds. The group had little ideological framing, its members often receiving their political education by Matzpen members with whom they shared their activism, but took inspiration from the American Black Panthers in adding to the class dimension of the struggle also an ethnic one.[51] In the Panther's view, it was the Arabness they shared with the Palestinians that placed them at the bottom of the Jewish social body. It was this intertwining of culture and experiences of oppression that provided the basis for a shared struggle, and indeed for a partially shared identity: "It wasn't like we were fighting for Palestinian rights – not in the way the privileged [Israeli] left-wing does now, but we understood that when we're fighting for Palestinian rights, we're also fighting for our own rights."[52] The Panthers' 'border' then placed Arab Jews and Palestinians on the same side, and placed on the other side the "White Jews," right-wing and left-wing alike, who occupied positions of power in Israeli society. Reuven Abergel, one of the founders of the Panthers, explained in a public talk:

> The idea of a united Jewish people is a lie… our struggle must be against the White Jews.[53] They thought that we, just like the Palestinians, were primitive by birth. We were never treated as equals. They imported us as cheap labour, put us to live in border areas where nobody wanted to live, they put us in prison and re-education facilities, they experimented on us.[54] They treated us like they were treated by the Nazis. […] We started being ashamed of our identity, we thought we needed to forget our language, culture, music, food, everything! Our parents told us not to "act like Arabs". But then they [the White Jews] didn't give us any recognition in return, just poverty. […] This is why it was easy for us to understand the Palestinians.[55]

The Panthers succeeded in bringing the 'Oriental question' (the question of the inferior life conditions suffered by so-called 'Oriental' Jews of Arab origins) to public awareness. However, the question was then successfully hijacked by the newly born Likud party, which reframed it in national and populist terms, playing on the divide with the Palestinian enemy.[56] The group disassembled

[51] Jaclynn Ashly, "When Israel's Black Panthers found common cause with the Palestinians," *The Electronic Intifada*, March 7, 2019, https://electronicintifada.net/content/when-israels-black-panthers-found-common-cause-palestinians/26821. See also Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews*, (London: Routledge, 2009).
[52] Reuven Abergel, quoted in Ashly, "When Israel's Black Panthers".
[53] Reuven was unhappy with the term "Ashkenazi" that the translator used to translate from Hebrew to English, which he corrected for the literal "White Jews", possibly to refer to a more global phenomenon of white privilege.
[54] The reference is to the so-called "ringworm affair", a series of forced medical treatments to which many Mizrahi Jews were subjected in Jerusalem in the 1950s. See for example the documentary *The Ringworm Children*, by David Belhassen and Asher Hemias (2003).
[55] Political talk given by Reuven Abergel, Imbala, West Jerusalem, May 12, 2019.
[56] Baruch Kimmerling and Dahlia Moore, "Collective identity as agency and structuration of society: the Israeli example" *International Review of Sociology* 7, no. 1 (1997): 25-49.

within a few years, most of its activists converging into political parties and groups promoting the Mizrahi agenda largely from within a Zionist framework. Yet, the idea of an identity shared between Mizrahi Jews and Palestinians survives among Mizrahi activists. Besides it being immediately visible in how easily they find common ground on language and cultural bases during solidarity actions, this idea is also increasingly being picked up by those who reappropriate their Arab roots and articulate them as an important part of their identity: "For us [left-wing Mizrahim], the Panthers [...] gave us the voice, the vocabulary and infrastructure. They gave us everything we do and write today. They are heroes for us."[57] This reappropriation is extremely valuable not only because it can help Mizrahi activists carve a place for themselves in the struggle and in an imagined de-colonized Israel – as we will see in Section 4 – but also because it can provide a strategic framing that directly connects solidarity for Palestinians to the struggle for a more democratic society among Israeli Jews themselves.

Next to these views, and far more widespread among Jewish-Israeli activists and leftists at large, there was another 'alternative' to the dominant articulation. I put quotes because this one did not really reject the border that pitted Jewish-Israeli-Zionists against Palestinians. Rather, it embraced it, and in doing so, it promised the impossible: to keep Zionism as a primary identity trait (with the narratives of trauma and return, safety and defensiveness, separation and *mission civilisatrice*) and at the same time to be on a completely equal footing with Palestinian Others. This vision was – and largely still is – at the core of both Socialist and Liberal Zionism, at least in their idealistic versions. As seen in Chapter One, both, albeit in different terms, prioritize Jewish nationalism and its fulfilment within the State of Israel, but at the same time assume that upholding socialist and humanist principles respectively can ensure that equal rights are granted to other nations, in and outside the State. Because they placed nationalism at their core, they didn't face the problem of theoretically accommodating the issue of Palestinian nationalism. In fact, nationalism can be thought of as the very basis of the relation of equality they formulate: 'We are not equal because we are *same* (within the same Us), but because we are *similar* (two distinct national collectives aspiring to the same thing).' It is, of course, the idea at the basis of the two-state solution, and as such was and is still shared by many 'peace' activists on both sides.

As is well known, both these visions also failed to deliver what promised, and while they are still quite popular among some Jewish-Israeli activists, the cracks and contradictions within them are becoming increasingly clear. As seen in Chapter Two, a series of events – the findings of the New Historians, the occupation and settlement expansion ongoing during the peace process, the right-wing turn of the past two decades – made emerge the racist and violent elements of Zionist politics at large. This created a polarizing effect whereby, an activist noted, "it is increasingly difficult to be a

[57] Mizrahi activist quoted in Ashly, "When Israel's Black Panthers". Observations: During solidarity actions in South Hebron, November 2, 2019; Issawiya, October 30, 2019.

liberal Zionist:" not only because liberal Zionists suffer an ostracism that was once reserved only to anti-Zionists, and with which they do not know how to deal, but also because they are at a loss with the system of beliefs they had embraced until now.[58] While it is always possible to resort to idealized versions of liberal and socialist Zionism, the accumulating evidence of their discriminatory character is making it difficult for them to keep inhabiting the comforting identities they always have, as the next section shows in detail.

Today, as compared to the past, there is no vocal or shared alternative to the ethnonational border. Activists must actively seek new, often multiple and transient ontological sites where to find some sense of self. Some hesitate between a sticky nationalism and a renewed diasporic identity; others oscillate between cynical refusals of any belonging and the hope in the emergence of a new global movement; others yet find answers in intersectional forms of marginality, which temper the feeling of being the 'oppressors' while establishing social connections across ethnonational borders. The sections that follow explore these identitary peregrinations through the three moves of *entanglement*, *rejection*, and *suspension*.

## *3. Entanglement: The Sons of Zion Between Unseeing and Appeasing Troubling Contradictions*

The first move is that of those activists who, in spite of having developed a critical stance and often being extremely dedicated in political work, choose to remain entangled in the identitary articulations of Zionism. Survivors of the Holocaust, recent immigrants who are building a life in Israel, or 'Sabras' who were born into the Zionist web of meanings, the stitching together of a Jewish-Israeli-Zionist identity is what represents their personal link to the land and inscribes them within a powerful community. Remaining entangled in this identity as activists for Palestinian rights, however, imposes to deal with the contradictions seen in the first section: between this imagined community of good and the reality of oppression witnessed on the ground and, at a more abstract level, between the different elements of a worldview that justifies both at the same time.

Activists deal with these contradictions in different ways. Some downplay or entirely deny their existence. Attributing the ills of Israeli society to a specific interpretation of Zionist ideals, they cling instead to 'their version' – an idealized one (akin to that described in Liberal and Socialist Zionism) in which 'Jewish and democratic' stand together seamlessly – and 'unsee' its historical failures and inherent vices. Others, when pushed to confront these contradictions, justify them in a way that confirms how race-conservative drives outweigh democratic ones in the identitary articulation of Zionism. Others yet are deeply aware of these contradictions and live painfully with them, in a constant internal struggle between their own justified fears and a heartfelt sense of justice and

[58] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 27, 2019.

empathy with the suffering of others. Finally, some appear to relapse into a Zionist identity after having detached themselves from it, embracing its contradictions seeming ultimately a more bearable price to pay than a life as outcasts. Most of the people that appear in this approach are men and women in their 50s or above and, perhaps unsurprisingly, many work in NGOs that act within a liberal Zionist framework. Let's turn to their stories.

Among those who cling to the liberal Zionist ideal there is, for instance, Reut, an Israeli-born woman in her 50s who recalled:

> I was very much drawn to Peace Now. I grew up in the 1980s-90s and back then it was *the* movement: massive, mainstream, filling the streets against the Lebanon war, I wanted to be part of it. I went to the army – because, well, that's what you do, and I was in an intelligence office anyway so I had nothing to do with the occupation – and when I came back I started my way in activism. [...] I know no one uses this term anymore, but I still call it the 'peace camp,' and I still am very much a 'Peacenow-nik' because I believe that change can come from the Israeli people. [...] It is the DNA of our organization, and it reflects my identity too.[59]

To my question of whether for her being a Zionist activist was problematic, she responded:

> There are different definitions of Zionism! The mainstream version is that if you're against settlements you're against Israel. Mine is different: Zionism is the right of the Jews to have their State and still be democratic. Why couldn't Israel be a model for the best treatment of minorities?

The fact that this has not been the case so far, and moreover that minorities, in particular the Palestinian one, are such due to a policy of demographic engineering that has been carried out by left-wing and right-wing leaderships alike, does not pose a fundamental problem here, as doesn't the fact of doing military service *per se*. The problem from which contradictions emerge is limited to the occupation and settlement of the West Bank, as Joshua, another Peace Now employee who self-identified as Zionist, clarified: "There is no questioning that the West Bank is the cradle of Jewish civilization. But land comes with rights, so if you want to take the land you need to be willing to give out rights. *Otherwise* it's apartheid."[60]

Carl, an American Jew who made *aliyah*[61] in the 1990s when he was 30 years old, from his office at Rabbis for Human Rights gave me a similar perspective on the varying definitions of Zionism:

[59] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 11, 2019.
[60] Interview, Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018.
[61] For the meaning of *aliyah* see Chapter One, Section 2.

> Look, there is the Zionism of the Nation State Law, but there is also the Zionism of the Declaration of Independence![62] They are very different! The Declaration is a beautiful text, profoundly humanist and democratic. Together with the Talmud, we use it as a teaching text in the organization.[63]

As I asked more questions about Zionism and the principle and practice of Jewish sovereignty, he became quickly impatient: "Sure, some people connect it with colonialism. *I* think about the 'here and now': nobody can be kicked out, so what do we do? Debating Zionism in this situation is a distraction." Brushing away the colonial foundations of Israel as something, at best, of the past and for which nothing can be done in the present, appears here as a way to be pragmatic, but also to make do with contradictions that would be otherwise very difficult to face, politically and personally.

The fact that contradictions are indeed present and felt even when they are denied was testified by Menachem, who was born in Argentina and there received a Zionist education before moving to Israel in his 20s:

> When I first arrived, I did have a bit of an identity crisis when I learned, you know, about the history of dispossessions and the reality of occupation. It was the 1990s, it was fervent times: the New Historians had just come out, and I was studying Sociology at the university, I came in contact with people that were a bit… subversive! [laughs] Eventually, I reconciled with Zionist ideology. The Jewish people do have the right to feel protected in their State, especially after the Holocaust, and it's ok as long as it's democratic. I came to think that the best solution is a confederation where each State has a demographic majority. Of course! If you want a democracy, you need to have a majority.[64]

If Menachem appeased his "identity crisis" by *unseeing* the contradictions between wanting a democracy and cheating in the democratic game by manufacturing the majority (de facto reversing the logic of a democratic regime), what supports his clinging to the ideal of a Jewish and democratic state is also *seeing* (as in *wanting* to see) instances of that ideal as already existing in the folds of the "conflict:"

> If you look around, a peaceful coexistence already exists. Think about the hospital here [in Jerusalem]: it's a microcosmos of coexistence. There are doctors and nurses that are Israeli and Palestinian and they live together perfectly! People also forget about all the security cooperation that exists between Israeli and Palestinian forces. This is happening now!

Again, the fact that the nature of this "coexistence" is deeply problematic (with access to jobs being highly uneven and security cooperation happening in a framework of denial of the right to a Palestinian autonomous State and security forces) is not – indeed *cannot be* – part of the equation.

[62] Both laws are discussed in Chapter One, respectively in Sections 1 and 2.
[63] Interview, West Jerusalem, July 25, 2018.
[64] Interview, East Jerusalem July 24, 2018.

As I went on with the interview process, and kept hearing similar answers from liberal-Zionist perspectives, I started to raise more explicitly – provocatively even – the contradictions they contained. This led some interviewees to resort to justifications that placed the blame of Israel's violence towards Palestinians for not being the complacent neighbours they were expected to be, and that resonated with the Zionist narrative of the good *versus* bad savage (c.f. Chapter One). Take Ariel, for instance, a 30-year-old Israeli-born man who self-identified as "a Zionist, a socialist, and an anti-fascist," was a member of the Hashomer Hatzair and spent several months in socialist *kibbutzim*.[65] For him, the 'true' Zionism was a secular, socialist and collectivist project committed to the "brotherhood of nations." In his view Israel, save few exceptions (mostly, the Ultra-Orthodox and some settlers) embodies this: "Look around!" – he said as he opened his arms to embrace the West Jerusalem bar where we were sitting and by extension the whole State – "It's a progressive place. It's pro-environment, it promotes gay rights, it has great nightlife. And there are so many examples of coexistence – look at all the Palestinians sitting here!" Since I seemed unpersuaded, he continued on:

> The problem is of policy, not of law. Zionism is possible with equality. If we annexed the Territories, and gave equal rights, there wouldn't be a problem. [I: What about ending the occupation instead?] Ending the occupation… It might be the right thing to do, but it's risky. We need to make sure that it's a peaceful neighbourhood. […] The problem is the Palestinians. They never accepted the peace agreements, what should Israel do? People stopped trusting them. We offered them a state many times after Oslo, and they never accepted. They keep choosing violence. When Israel retreated from Gaza in 2005 there was a huge increase in rocket launches. Hamas is a terrorist organization: they want to establish sharia law, they use violence, they deny human rights, they're corrupted. I mean, if you think about it, it's the whole Arab world… there is something there [he points his finger to his head, as in "they're a bit crazy"].[66]

While the idea that "Palestinians never accepted the peace agreements" reproduces almost word by word the mainstream narrative that depicts Israel as constantly stretching out its hand to a non-complacent partner, the escalation from historical blaming into racist stereotypes recurred in the conversation with another activist. Nadav, an Israeli-born man in his 40s, defined himself as a

[65] Interview, West Jerusalem July 25, 2018. The Hashomer Hatzair (The Young Guard) is a Socialist-Zionist secular Jewish youth movement founded in Europe in 1913. Today it is one of the largest youth movements in Israel, and it operates worldwide as a scouting movement. Hashomer Hatzair advocated that the Jewish people would be liberated by settling in the Land of Israel as pioneers and live in *kibbutzim* according to socialist collectivist principles. Members of the movement settled in Mandate Palestine from 1919 and founded their first *kibbutzim* then ("Hashomer Hatzair", Jewish Virtual Library, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hashomer-hatzair). A *kibbutz* is a Jewish collective community in Israel-Palestine whose establishment began in the early 20th century. Born as utopian communities based on agriculture and inspired by socialist collectivism and Zionist nationalism, the term today encompasses a wide variety of establishments, ranging from religious communities to tourist sites to productive ones (e.g. intensive farms, industrial plants, high-tech enterprises), some of which existing illegally in the West Bank.

[66] Interview, West Jerusalem July 25, 2018. This kind of reasoning is also the average response of Jewish-Israeli bystanders when awareness-raising actions happen in the streets. This was personally observed at the actions of sensibilization on the Nakba organized in the streets of Tel Aviv during the celebrations for Independence day (Participant observation, May 8, 2019), and it was reported by activists as being the kind of response they get most often in these occasions (Several interviews, March-December 2019).

"politically minded individual, simply a man with a conscience," which led him to partake in political initiatives and work for a Jerusalem-based NGO.[67] As the interview went on, he warmed up:

> I was there during the Second Intifada. There were suicide bombings every other day, on the buses, in the malls, everywhere. The Wall changed this, that's why we have to keep it. If we tear it down, they'll start all over again. [...] Palestinians are no saints, you know? They're disorganized, they're apathetic, they're not clean – I mean look at East Jerusalem! [I: couldn't it be the municipality not taking care?] No, it's a cultural fact! At least part of how the situation is, is their fault. We have a state because in 1948 we had a leadership, a purpose, and we worked strategically to our objective. At some point, you get what you deserve.

While most of the people I regroup into this approach ascribe themselves within a generally left-wing tradition of universalism and human rights, one stood out as exceptional. Shaul belongs to the right-wing end of the spectrum, as he explicitly stated when he proudly identified as a religious Zionist and an ideological settler.[68] In fact, in order to meet him I had to take the 'settlers' bus' that drives from Jerusalem southwards, deep into the West Bank, in and out of the fenced and heavily guarded suburban oases of green that so sharply stand out from a landscape otherwise barren. After some difficulties finding my way in the schorching sun, I eventually found Shaul's centre, a dusty barn just outside the gates of the Gush Etzion settlement. There, he runs a project, Roots, which brings together Jewish settlers and Palestinians from the surrounding areas into initiatives of 'dialogue:' both parts come to share their experiences of suffering with the aim of triggering mutual understanding, empathy, and, eventually, peace. Long white beard, *kippah*[69] on his head, and a strong American accent (he made *aliyah* in his 20s but has been living between Israel and the US since then), Shaul impressed me from the outset for the radicality of his views, which echoed those of settler-colonial analyses:

> The problem of modern Zionist settlers [i.e. compared to the Jews who were here before the establishment of the State of Israel] is that they did not take into account the human beings that were already here! It was the whole worldview that prevented them. Arabs could only be part of the landscape, they saw no point in getting to know them or in taking part in the socio-cultural framework that already existed. This closing-off of course led to stereotyping and, if you add the violence, to fear and dehumanization. [...] The whole society is organized so as not to see the Other but as an enemy. Even liberals, mostly, don't see the Other, and they are not even conscious of it.

I was initially puzzled by how these views could match the fact that his peace initiative was taking place from a settlement – actually, from just outside it, because otherwise Palestinians would not have been able to participate. However, it soon became clear that the objective of the initiative was to keep

[67] Interview, West Jerusalem, April 29, 2019.
[68] Interview, Gush Etzion, July 25, 2018.
[69] Jewish religious garment, literally meaning "dome," which consists of a small cap worn by Jewish males.

the settlements *and* achieve peaceful relations, so as to secure Palestinian acceptance of a Jewish sovereign presence not only in Israel, but also in the West Bank. In this framework, all contradictions were acceptable:

> Sure, there are tensions! [He smiles and opens his hands in a gesture of serene resignation] We want a State that is Jewish, but we know that it poses a problem in terms of democracy. We want the State, but we also want Jewish settlements here [in the West Bank]. I know that not giving Palestinians right to the land is racist, but if we did, there would be too many Palestinians.[70] There are tensions! [...] We want to live in a land that feels Jewish, we want our kids to have a strong Jewish identity, and to marry among Jewish people. We want a separate community, but at the same time we fear insulation, so we need to remain in contact, to avoid de-humanization. [I: What if then they fall in love?] Haha! I know, that's what our enemies say. Human contact is dangerous, but it's a risk we have to take.

Next to the cases brought so far, there were also activists who not only were deeply aware of the contradictions, but for whom these engendered profound ethical and ontological dilemmas. Moshe, for instance, a man in his 50s who lived in the US for twenty years and came back to Israel about a decade ago, spoke very emotionally of the trajectory that then led him into activism and "against [his] own army:"

> We [him and his wife] went to the Alternative Ceremony organized on Memorial Day,[71] a friend had told us about it. It was so emotional! We were sitting there for two hours and just crying. [...] It was the first time that I heard a different perspective. [...] For me, it was the beginning of the transition. [...] As you act, you go through transitions again. At a certain point, I decided I was ready to go against my own army. I had been questioning myself a lot about this you know, and it was all the things I had shared with the Palestinians [i.e. through his volunteering work] that got me there.[72]

Later, as I asked him what peace and equality would look like for him, he described a two-state scenario, but with less enthusiasm than others, in account of his unease with the contradictions there, and the awareness that he was not ready for a bigger change:

> I want a Jewish and democratic State. I know it's a major problem, but my father came here from Europe in 1905 to create a Jewish State and I want to continue his story, the story of my People. I know there is a conflict between this and a democracy... I don't know. I think there should be a right of return for Jews, but for Palestinians... I wouldn't want that. It would be too big a change.

[70] In reference to land property laws in Israel, see Chapter One, Section 1.
[71] Officially, the Memorial Day for the Fallen Soldiers of the Wars of Israel and Victims of Actions of Terrorism. The Alternative Ceremony refers to the annual unofficial ceremony organized jointly by the NGOs Combatants for Peace and The Parents Circle, where both Israeli and Palestinian victims are mourned (c.f. Chapter One, Section 4).
[72] Interview, Tel Aviv, December 1, 2019.

I encountered another instance of these internal struggles when I met Eilat. It was during a shift with Machsom Watch at Qalandia Checkpoint, and among the four participants there was an old lady who walked with a stick. The situation was very quiet that day, so we could chat. She recounted an episode she had witnessed during a shift: an old Palestinian lady was forced to stand up from her wheelchair and go through a narrow turnstile with great difficulty. As she told the story, she became emotional for the empathy it still triggered and got overwhelmed with tears. Later, as we crossed the checkpoint to the Palestinian side, she went straight to have a chat, in a broken Arabic, with a Palestinian vendor she knew, and bought from him a few *ka'ak*.[73] When we met for the interview a few days later, she told me her story. She had immigrated from South Africa when she was very young. Initially she was "quite right-wing:" "It was the 60s, in '67 it felt like the Arabs forced us into a war we didn't want. We were scared! I really hated them!" [74] This changed as she saw, in her daily bus travels to go to work, the treatment that was reserved to Palestinians, and as she gradually learned about the occupation and the settlements. "Now I consider myself left-wing, but not extreme (I vote Meretz, I wouldn't vote for Hadash or Balad):[75] the thing is that I am not sure that if there was a war we wouldn't be exterminated again." Since a few years, and despite her age, she is very engaged in political actions on both sides of the Green Line, especially of grassroots solidarity. As she explained what she saw as the main problem in Israel, she oscillated between blaming the government of Netanyahu and acknowledging that racism and discriminations against Palestinians trace back to earlier than that. At one point, she paused to ask me how I saw Israel from the outside. I replied, sincerely but trying not to bring too much of my perspective in the interview, that I found it a very ideological place, where people are not really free to think and feel for themselves. She sat in silence and seemed a bit saddened, then spoke again: "Even with the ethnic cleansing and all, I wouldn't want Israel to fall. Israel is not the worst, at least we are not exterminating…" Before concluding I asked, as usual, if she wanted to add anything, and she said: "I wish people like you don't think we are all the same."

The last story I want to tell is that of Eyal. It rang as particularly relevant because it tells of a journey where entanglement in Zionist identity takes on the meaning of a retreat, at once recomforting and unavoidable. He proposed as a place for our meeting the Sira, an alternative bar in West Jerusalem and also a historical 'safe place' in the city for Israeli activists and Palestinians alike. The first thing he did, as I explained this was an interview about his activism, was to specify: "I *was* an activist. Between 2002 and 2007."[76] Eyal then started by recounting his youth years in the 60s as

[73] Participant observation, Qalandia checkpoint, May 1, 2019. *Ka'ak* is a typical Palestinian bread from Jerusalem.
[74] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 13, 2019.
[75] Meretz is a moderate left-wing political party opposed to the occupation and which sees itself as the representative of the 'peace camp' in Parliament. Balad is an Arab political party that advocates for the creation of a Palestinian state and for Israel to become 'a state for all its citizens', thus opposing its Jewish character. Hadash is described in the previous section.
[76] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 4, 2019.

a real "Sabra:"[77] he was born and raised in Israel, in a right-wing environment, and joined the settler movement as a teenager:

> It was different than it is now. I had no fear of the Palestinians. They were the enemy, sure, but also the 'native', and I wanted to know everything about them: their language, their culture, their history. So instead of studying the Torah I would leave the settlement to go to the Palestinian villages nearby and talk to the people. I became very familiar with the way they see things, and with their stories – evictions, confiscations, suffering and all. With some bullshit of course, as ours, but I accepted it as their narrative. I sympathized with it – of course! It felt really unfair that we should have such different rights.[78]

He told me how he first got engaged in forms of dissent "by chance," because an organization needed a good Arabic-speaker ("People told me I was a leftist, I didn't know!"). Eventually, he left the settlement and became more politically engaged. However:

> I always felt different. It was difficult for me to participate, because I wanted to be part of *my* mainstream too, I sympathized with *my* people too, after all it is *my* narrative! [...] When they insulted me, I felt deeply hurt. During the Second Intifada I radicalized, and it was a mistake. [...] I used to shout at soldiers and settlers. I watched an old video the other day and I saw myself shouting in a demonstration: it was disgusting, I was so ashamed to look at it. I hated myself, this is not the person I want to be.

Eyal told me of how he eventually ceased being an activist ("although I still go to things, if they really need support") and now engages in less confrontational politics through his teaching, where he can talk to 'his people' and convince some that "there is a way to continue being a Zionist and yet care for Palestinian rights."

While he emphasised how ties with his community were the major factor in his choice of withdrawal, other elements emerged during the course of the interview, as he stopped his chronological reconstruction to digress on different issues. These had to do more with the disillusionment towards a kind of engagement that felt not only painful in terms of belonging, but also 'impossible' in the sense that we will see in the next section. Part of this disillusionment concerned the very possibility of a joint struggle with the Palestinians:

> There can be no such thing as a joint struggle. We have our narrative, they have theirs. They are both right but they are not compatible. Or if there is, it is very limited: against the occupation, that's it. For the rest, we have too different values, too different objectives: we work for equality, they work for freedom. They're different things! [...] Once I was at a demonstration and a Palestinian mistook me for an Arab, and he told me, pointing at the Jewish activists: "I feel sorry for them, they will all go to Hell."

[77] Term with which Zionist propaganda in the Thirties referred to Jews born in Israel, and who incarnated the 'new Jew', strong and 'native', as opposed to the old and weak diasporic Jew (see Chapter One, Section 3).
[78] Note that this kind of exchange between settlers and Palestinians today would be extremely unlikely (see Chapter Two, Section 2).

Another source of frustration came from Eyal's awareness that Zionism is embedded in every quotidian act of Jewish citizens of Israel, making anti-Zionist Jewish-Israelis a contradiction in terms:

> I don't believe in anti-Zionist Israelis. It's nonsense. If you live here, you live off Zionism. We enjoy its privilege, we practice it every day. We can still choose the least harmful version: it's a lot, but it's not anti-Zionism. [...] This is why Zionism is so strong: it can include anti-Zionism! Once, I was at the university, it was around the Second Intifada, there was a delegation of ambassadors and I gave a very critical speech about Israeli politics. But then the Israeli Foreign Minister talked next, and he said something like "See? We disagree so sharply, and yet we are very proud of this!". He used my speech as a proof of what a democracy they were. I had been fully co-opted. It was terribly frustrating.

### *4. Rejection: The 'Impossible' Position of the 'Colonizer Who Refuses'*

The second 'move' is that of those activists who, having reached the conclusion that the Zionist identity paradigm is inevitably supremacist and colonial, decide to withdraw their affiliation to it. Besides the 'old' anti-Zionists of Matzpen that we saw in Section 2, many of the activists in this category come from the generation of activism of the early 2000s and gravitated then around Anarchists Against the Wall (c.f. Chapter Two, Section 2).

To describe the move to anti-Zionism I use the word "decide" because their withdrawal appears in most cases to be – perhaps necessarily – a conscious choice, even if only rationalized *a posteriori*, and one that comes as a final stage in a process of radicalization. Exemplary of this, Leah, a Jewish-American activist in her 20s who was a member of All That's Left, explained to me:

> It was a process of *unlearning* and *decolonizing* myself. At first, I used to refer to what is going on here as a 'conflict,' then as 'occupation,' now I'm pretty comfortable with 'settler colonialism.' The same happened for my identification with Zionism. At first, I was Zionist by default [...] Then, for a while I was using 'post-Zionist.' [...] Now, I always say 'anti-Zionist,' even if it means potentially sacrificing ties with family and friends. Zionism is a racist colonial project: I don't want to be 'not' that, I want to be against that. It's like saying "I'm non-racist:" I don't want to be that! I want to be anti-racist![79]

Hagit, a Russian-born activist in her 40s, part of the Psychoactive collective, put it as a more emotional, tormented process. Immigrated to Israel when she was very young, she had started becoming critical of Israel while she was living in California for her Psychology degree:

> Going abroad was very important for me. There was a lot of information available, and I was far from all this. I started looking for groups of activism. I joined an anti-occupation synagogue in San Francisco... I had

[79] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.

> a number of meaningful experiences really. The most important for me was the Playback Theatre:[80] it was a sort of community theatre, specifically on the issue of Israel-Palestine, and it was really therapeutic, healing. There, I realized that I was traumatized by the Second Intifada, that I'd only care about Jews being killed, not Palestinians. When I moved back here I wanted to be more politically active. Progressively, I became even more radical than those Californian Jews who helped me open up.[81]

For Yoni, an Israeli-born activist in his 40s, who now places it as the most salient of his identity traits, anti-Zionism came as a result of his practical engagement in activism with Zochrot, and following the realization that what he was doing ran counter the established narratives of Zionism:

> In the army, I met Eitan [founder of Zochrot], another Ratz affiliate.[82] We talked a lot about politics. He came up with the idea of putting signs where there used to be Palestinian villages. I loved the idea, and so we just started doing it! There was no such thing as a theoretical decision of 'being' anti-Zionist… just, after a while it became clear that what we were doing was… not Zionist at all![83]

Whether framed as subsequent analytical steps, phases in the elaboration of trauma, or the result of practical engagements, the process of radicalization leading to anti-Zionist identification marks a progressive distancing from society whereby the activist's deepening rejection of societal core beliefs is reinforced by a parallel rejection experienced from society. Natan – the Ta'ayush activist whom we saw at the outset of this Chapter – talked about this step in his process of radicalization with a sort of resentment:

> Then, Sheikh Jarrah happened.[84] I was lazy, I was comfortable you know, and I thought "Fuck, now I *have to* participate to this!". So I went, and… I got arrested! Quite naturally this got me more involved: I got arrested for *nothing*! Criminals get arrested, you don't get arrested for just standing there. You find yourself arrested, and lied about in courts and in the media, and they're constantly telling you: "You are not one of us." Well, so then you know what? Fuck *you*! I don't want to be part of you either! […] Later, I went to Nabi Saleh.[85] It was the first time I was there, my Arabic was bad, and I found myself next to a commander [of the Israeli army]. It suddenly struck me that we both grew up in exactly the same environment, we watched the same TV shows and all, and yet somehow I felt much closer to this Palestinian stranger I had just met

[80] A form of improvisational theatre, inspired by Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed and Jacob Moreno's psychodrama. Using role play and dramatization as a form of psychotherapy and political empowerment, in this form of theatre audience and group members tell stories from their lives and watch them enacted on the spot. See Hannah Fox, "Playback theatre: Inciting dialogue and building community through personal story," *The Drama Review* 51, no. 4 (2007): 89-105.
[81] Interview, Ramat Gan, May 27, 2019.
[82] Ratz was an Israeli left-wing political party, focused on civil rights and opposed to the occupation. It merged into Meretz in 1997.
[83] Interview, Beer Sheva, November 5, 2019. He refers to the initial actions that eventually led to the founding of Zochrot (treated in detail in Chapter Four, Section 5).
[84] He is referring to the systematic plan of evictions of Palestinian families from the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, which started in 2009 and was accompanied by a wave of protests that brought to the neighbourhood many Israeli activists in solidarity (treated in Chapter Four, Section 3, particularly in relation to the now dismissed Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement).
[85] Village in the West Bank where Palestinian activists organized, most notably between 2010 and 2016, weekly marches to protest the occupation, to which participated also international and Israeli solidarity activists.

> that day and with whom I could barely speak. Simply because one was right and the other wrong. That was an unexpected feeling, a weird feeling of… derangement, of you not wanting to be part of that society, and of them not wanting you either.[86]

From a different perspective, that of a much more recent immigrant who still identifies mostly as an American Jew, Leah, the activist seen earlier in this section, recalled:

> I think a breaking point for many American Jews, one that leads to more questioning, is realizing that Israel doesn't give a fuck about us. We are taught that our whole world revolves around Israel, we receive alerts on our phones when there is an attack, we have this idea that they are sacrificing themselves for us. We adjust our identities to Israeliness, like, speaking Hebrew without an accent makes you the coolest and sexiest kid in school. But then they know nothing about diaspora Judaism, they don't care! Of course this is not the main reason to be an anti-Zionist, but I do think it's a breaking point in the process.[87]

This double rejection seals anti-Zionist Israelis firmly outside of Jewish-Israeli society. Yet, despite the closeness they sometimes feel with Palestinians, as in Natan's description, the *structural* conditions of colonization do not *allow* them to feel part of that society either. Stuck with Jewish-Israeli society but "orphans" of any belonging to it or elsewhere – much more so than Jewish-Israelis that do not reject Zionism so starkly, and than those who reject Zionism to the benefit of wider, internationalist identities – they are especially at a loss in making sense of their position.[88]

Albert Memmi provides of this condition one of the sharpest and most heartfelt descriptions as he dissects the "colonizer who refuses" as one the few "impossible historical situations."[89] Considered by his own people the 'race traitor' *par excellence* – because he challenges their very existence as a socio-political entity – he cannot nevertheless be "adopted" by the colonized.[90] He remains part of the oppressing group, and as such is "condemned to share its destiny as he shared its good fortunes."[91] Uneasiness envelops the future and the present of colonizers who refuse: in the desired outcome of decolonization, it is far from certain that a place will be granted for them in the new country. At the same time, the adherence to the most counter-hegemonic ideal, while solving certain ethical dilemmas (by undertaking a political and ethical stance that is uncompromising with the injustices of colonization), also engenders other, more concrete ones:

> [The colonizer who refuses] recognize[s] that he has simply changed difficulties and discomfort. It is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its actual relationships. From now on, he lives his life under the sign of a contradiction which looms at every step,

[86] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.
[87] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.
[88] Lamarche, *Militer Contre Son Camp?*, 115.
[89] Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 83.
[90] *Idem*, 65.
[91] *Idem*, 82.

> depriving him of all coherence and all tranquillity. [...] He participates in and benefits from those privileges which he half-heartedly denounces. Does he receive less favourable treatment than his fellow citizens? Doesn't he enjoy the same facilities for travel? How could he help figuring, unconsciously, that he can afford a car, a refrigerator, perhaps a house? How can he go about freeing himself of this halo of prestige which crowns him and at which he would like to take offense?[92]

The colonizer who refuses is therefore condemned to a "constant state of uneasiness" (*malaise perpétuel* in the original).[93] The inevitable conclusion of Memmi's hopeless account is that the only way for him to put an end to this contradiction is to cease being a colonizer – in his case, to go back to the "motherland." Yet, what is this motherland in the case of Jewish-Israelis?

Torn between isolation and unrelinquishable privilege, wanting – as we'll see in Chapter Five – to always do more and knowing it will never be enough, anti-Zionist Israelis are the most exposed to exhaustion and burnout. Indeed, as in Memmi's prediction, many end up at some point choosing the option of a more or less definitive self-exile, but not to a non-existent motherland. They integrate as diasporic Jews and Israeli "dissidents" in foreign countries where they do not have to carry the weight of being the structural oppressor.[94] Even then, the awareness that also leaving is a privilege, and that they still carry their Israeliness with them, does not make for an unproblematic life.

Take the story of Dana, for instance. A woman in her early 40s, alternative clothing and haircut, I met her at several actions of Zochrot, De-Colonizer, and Return Solidarity, but she was always very reluctant to sit for an interview ("I don't really live here you know, I'm not sure I can count as Israeli..."). [95] When she finally accepted, her discomfort at the idea of dissecting her Israeliness was so strong that we had to keep the interview short, and my interventions erred on the empathic rather than the provocative side. Dana was born in Israel in a socialist *kibbutz* where she received a leftist upbringing, opposed to settlements and the occupation but still within the idea of changing the system "from within."[96] After having done military service she left the country, as many Israelis do in the attempt to disconnect from what they have experienced:

> I went to India, New Zealand, Europe... The more people I met, the more I felt I didn't belong here... Oh, I wish I was European! [...] [In Europe] I got involved in activism: anti-capitalist, feminist, with refugees... but not BDS. I... Palestinians didn't even want to sit in the same room with me. I felt awful. Even not living here I still carried this... weight. The whole time I kept having very hard feelings for Israel.

[92] *Idem*, 64.
[93] Jean Paul Sartre, "Introduction", in Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 18.
[94] Interview, Jaffa, March 31, 2019.
[95] Informal conversation, Tel Aviv, March 30, 2019.
[96] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 26, 2019.

Dana had been coming back to Israel for only short periods at a time, when the government notified her that she would lose her residency rights and that in order to maintain them she should have lived in Israel for at least six months continuously:

> It was a problematic decision. I have considered also renouncing my residency right, and my citizenship as well. It's a powerful political act. But then my family is here… it's still my home. I started getting some therapy, reconnecting a bit, and I decided that I needed to get to know this place, try and resolve my relationship with it. […] I discovered the amazing activism that exists here. I thought "Wow, this could be my political home!". So I decided I could come back regularly, but still not for living. [I: why not?] I feel very responsible for this place, but maybe I'm too sensitive, maybe I just want an easier life… I'm fed up with always having this huge conflict every time I come back. Being here touches every sense I have, *it's like my skin is open here*. I get angry at everyone in the streets, my cousin is the Shabak and I'm afraid of him![97] There are very good activists here, I admire them for having the strength to stay, but for me, I feel like I have a better energy if I come for short moments at a time.

A similar need to escape the weight of guilt and responsibility was reported by Mariam, a woman slightly older than Dana, also reluctant at first to have the interview, and for similar reasons. She too left the country right after the army ("Like those who go to India to forget all the Arabs they killed") and went in and out of Israel several times before settling abroad. At the time of the interview, she had had to come back for a longer period of time due to family reasons, and she was not taking it well. The several times we met, she mentioned how unbearable it was for her having her kids in schools where they were taught to "love the soldiers," driving around streets that were built on Palestinian villages, being surrounded by nationalist symbols and feelings.[98] And while she tried to avoid being in "very Israeli places" and took part in political actions as much as she could, living in Israel was taking a high toll on her:

> I cannot live here, the weight of privilege is too strong. I cannot enjoy going to the beach with my children. Every time I do not participate [to an action] I feel like I am *abusing my privilege*. I feel that it's better to stay outside and do the little I can when I can, although even then I am still privileged because I had the choice to leave. […] I paid a very high price, and still I have privilege, I cannot give it away. But I am aware constantly that I am practicing it.[99]

Next to the self-exiled, there are also those who decide to be anti-Zionists from within, and pay the price this embeddedness has in terms of stigma, guilt, and exhaustion. Some put these 'costs' upfront in their self-narrative, like Hagit, whom we saw earlier in the section:

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[97] Hebrew acronym for the Shin Bet, Israel's internal security service.
[98] Informal conversation, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019.
[99] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019. Chapter Five comes back in detail to the issue of dealing with privilege daily in Israel.

> The demonization is strong… You are constantly told you're very bad, that you're 'misbehaving' (that is *so* paternalistic!), even for a post on Facebook. I can rationalize that this is not true, but emotionally I cannot help but suffering from it. You internalize it. I went back to therapy myself, and I go often abroad where I can get some positive feedback, which I really need. […] There is also a career cost that comes with this kind of stance. […] I am an ambitious person, very career oriented. I wanted to have an academic career, but there are already many places where I cannot teach. That's done for me.[100]

Others, by contrast, downplay the price they pay very much: allowing themselves to complain, even to suffer from it in the first place, is seen as one more instance of their privilege (c.f. Chapter Five, Section 2). Instead of trying to juggle between their personal and political aspirations and the reality, between their private life and their activism, they become completely absorbed by the latter in a form of 'expiation.' Uri, for instance, a former Anarchists Against the Wall activist in his 40s, widened his eyes in astonishment when I asked him about the price he paid for his anti-Zionist activism: "Price? Me? I pay no price, I'm a white Jewish man!". For him, being an anti-Zionist Israeli meant dedicating his life to exposing Israel's criminal nature and using every occasion to express his withdrawal from its values. We met for our interview on Independence Day, the most important and Zionist of national holidays. As I asked him what his plan for the rest of the day was, he replied: "I'm not doing anything today, just trying to avoid anything celebratory. Some friends invited me to a movie, but I won't go. I don't think we should be enjoying… Maybe I'll do some homework for the BDS."[101] As he spoke, a sense of tiredness and defeat came across, both from his choice of words and his overall appearances – fallen shoulders, a sad look in his eyes.

Some even hesitate calling themselves "anti-Zionists" because, much like Eyal at the end of the previous section, they are aware of their embeddedness in a Zionist mode of living. Omer, an activist in his 30s who had refused military service, told me: "Well, I am definitely not Zionist, but here it's impossible really. Anti-Zionism mostly exists *outside*… It's easier from there."

Is it then truly "impossible" to be a "colonizer who refuses"? The accounts brought so far seem to lend confirmation to Memmi's bleak thesis. We will see in the next chapters how this 'conceptual' impossibility is played out and dealt with in the practice of activism (Chapter Four) and in the daily life and relationships of activists (Chapter Five). For now, and sticking to identitary issues, it is important to flag that there exist also more positive ways of articulating one's being an Israeli anti-Zionist, ways that are not just negations but also affirmations of belonging. Overall, these articulations are different from the past, more fragmented and therefore also more effortful because unable to rely on a unitary feeling of we-ness, but not for this less meaningful. On the contrary, precisely because

[100] Interview, Ramat Gan, May 27, 2019.
[101] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019.

reflecting a sharper awareness of the multifaceted and rarely relinquishable embodiments of privilege, these new articulations provide partial attempts at framing more radical decolonized identities.

Recall Natan, with whose identity crisis the chapter opened. The way the interview continued, the way he came to answer the "who am I?" question and find some closure, counterposes to the conceptual impossibility of above a very practical matter of *existence*:

> As I was having all these complicated and abstract thoughts, I had a conversation with my mother that was kind of revealing. I don't usually talk about these things with her, not in these terms – it's a delicate matter for her [because she is a Holocaust Survivor]. But then she said very matter-of-factly: "Well, but that's who you are!". And it's true, that's who I am, so that *must be* possible. There was this other episode, a conversation with a stranger I had met while hiking on the Pyrenees. He said: "Don't give up on your grandfather just because they took him hostage." Zionism used Judaism and the Holocaust as currency, but it doesn't have to be that way. Actually, when I started looking for sources of inspiration, I found plenty of wonderful examples from the past: the Bundists for instance![102] Many were rooted here, and they were Jews and atheists and anti-Zionists.[103]

As the interview drew to a close, I asked him if he had ever thought of leaving the country. He heated up:

> Leave? Why should I leave? What are you telling me, that I should go back to being a 'wandering Jew?' I don't think that being Jewish or Israeli makes you a war criminal. If anything, it makes you responsible. And I don't mean that I work from within some sort of good essence of Israel, because I don't think there is any, but then again, I don't think States are sacred concepts, and this works both ways: politics is not States or parties, but the science of relation between the people, right? So why shouldn't I have a say in this? I am a Jerusalemite much more than I am Israeli, this is my place and I care about it, and that is precisely why I am anti-Zionist! If I left, I'd feel guilty about it, it would be as if I was running away. And by the way there are problems everywhere, I'd probably be part of the problem in Germany too. Here I do what I can, for small that it is and maybe even not that useful, but what a good friend used to say is that "We don't have the luxury to be asking ourselves that question."

If Natan anchors his identity in Jewishness and recognizes himself – not unlike internationalist activists in Section 2 – in the anti-Zionist Jews of the past, others resort to other identities they also embody, generally marginal ones, to rearticulate their Jewish-Israeliness in a way that feels less oppressive. Sarah, an Israeli-born woman in her 50s with a mixed Askhenazi and Mizrahi background, placed at the forefront of her self-identification the fact of being feminist and Mizrahi. She explained to me how her intersectional activism helped her to better understand the Palestinian issue and the multidimensionality of her own privilege:

[102] For the Bund see Section 2 in this chapter.
[103] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.

> With some friends we founded a feminist journal. A debate that came out as very important was if you can be both a Zionist and a feminist: can you call yourself a feminist if you fight for women's rights in the army – if you support the oppression of Palestinian women at the same time? [...] As I got more involved on the Palestinian issue, [...] we started focusing more and more on these issues also in the Journal. Palestinian voices were very important for us, we wanted to bring them to the Israeli audience. The problem was that, while they liked us and our work, they didn't want to write for us in Hebrew. This made me understand the complexities of their point of view. It also made me think about my personal history: I had the revelation that I was standing on someone else's ground. It was pretty shocking. This is really the key issue: it's about the personal story of all of us.[104]

More recently, she continued, the Mizrahi identity had taken a more important role both in her self-identification and in her activism on Palestine through the NGO Zochrot:

> The Mizrahi issue is central. We [at Zochrot] have created a study group specifically on the different relations Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews had with the Nakba, the different responsibilities they bear, and so on. It was very interesting! Many places, al-Manshiyya for instance,[105] were first settled by Mizrahis, but then they too were evicted in the 1960s! The relation is very strong: when a society is based on hierarchy and segregation, the same mechanism is played out over and over again on different people. [...] Many injustices [within Jewish-Israeli society] are based on the fear of Arabness and the need to be associated with Europe and Whiteness. But if we welcome Palestinians, we won't need those hierarchies anymore! No need to deny Arab culture, which is also of many of us. [...] We, as Mizrahis, could gain a lot by rebuilding relations with the whole Middle East. Dismantling the whole colonial framework is necessary for all of us to become true Middle Easterners. [I: for all Israelis or just for Mizrahis?] For all Israelis! It's true that we came mostly from Europe, but we've been here a hundred years, we *want* to belong here, and in order to do that we need to embrace Middle Eastern culture! [...] Decolonization doesn't mean expulsion of Israelis, as doesn't the right of return of Palestinians. It's possible, if we are willing to give up some privilege. Of course, this will involve giving up privilege! Especially for Ashkenazi Jews. But if acknowledging one's wrongs and renouncing one's privilege comes as part of a process of becoming a better society, one that is more equal and just, it's not about self-negation, it's about self-fulfillment!

In the explanation of Sarah, recovering her Mizrahi identity is not just a way to find an identitary narrative for herself that complexifies her role as an oppressor. It is also a way to connect experiences of oppression and privilege across ethnonational lines, and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the intersecting processes of colonization that occurred in Israel-Palestine.

In a similar vein, Yoni, the Zochrot activist we have seen earlier, places his feminism, queerness and sensitivity to animal rights at the forefront of his self-identification, right after anti-Zionism. For

[104] Interview, Tel Aviv, November 30, 2019.
[105] A neighborhood of the historical Palestinian city of Jaffa, now no longer existing. Information on this neighborhood as well as of most other destroyed Palestinian villages is meticulously researched by Zochrot, and can be found on their website (e.g. for this specific neighborhood, see https://zochrot.org/en/village/56077).

him, however, the relationship between the different parts of his intersectional activism was less straightforward. This testifies of the co-optation of internal Jewish-Israeli grievances into the Zionist narrative, and of the difficulty of disarticulating such narrative and provide alternative connections:

> I came out as gay, vegetarian, and politically critical all at the same time, when I was about 15. [...] In the army (I didn't want to go, but I did it for all the social pressures...it was the worst decision of my life), they loved my profile because I was gay. When the first [Israeli] Gay Pride happened, they gave me permission to go, and I arrived straight from there, still in uniform. This made a lot of noise! I became an unintended landmark for what was to become the Israeli pinkwashing machine – an important part of which is presenting the army as LGBTQ-friendly. [...] I became involved in groups that tried to tackle the connections across struggles. Black Laundry[106] was the first to use the slogan "No Pride in Occupation." This really struck a chord in me, precisely for that first Pride where I felt 'used.' [...] I was also in One Struggle.[107] They tried to combine the struggle for animal rights – which was quite radical at that time, with groups burning fur shops and all – with Palestinian solidarity. The point was to raise the contradiction between fighting for animal rights while being fine if Palestinians are abused. The group didn't last long, but it had a big relevance in Israeli anti-Zionist activism: many of the Anarchists [Against the Wall] came from there. [...] Now it's much more difficult to have this kind of cross-struggle groups, especially on environmental issues. But I'm still trying![108]

Finally, Mariam, whom we have already encountered among the self-exiled, made throughout her life attempts at re-articulating her identity. These were particularly interesting because of the genealogical links she established not only with the Arab world, but with Palestine as such. The first time I met her, I noticed that she never used the term 'Israel' but always 'Palestine' in reference to the whole of Israel-Palestine. She was also proud to tell me that her surname was Arabic, because her family was originally from Algeria: "We are Sephardi Jews."[109] Much later, during our interview, she retraced the subsequent evolutions in her self-identification:

> In my family [a family of former Matzpen activists], I grew up as anti-Zionist. I was still part of a Zionist left youth movement, Hashomer Hatzair, but it was a space where it was possible to criticize Zionism. [...] My group didn't have any *kibbutzim* in the West Bank, and I went to one that was *supposedly* not built on an ancient Palestinian village (of course they're all built on Palestinian land anyway!). [...] The two-state solution was the golden standard, we thought that we could have an inclusive Israeli democracy next to a Palestinian

[106] LGBTQ+ organization, active during the years of the Second Intifada, who strived to stress the connection between different forms of oppression, and in particular that of lesbians, gays and trans people on the one side and Palestinians occupied and discriminated by Israel on the other. The group opposed pink-washing within Israeli society. See Aeyal Gross "Israeli GLBT Politics between Queerness and Homonationalism," *Bully Bloggers*, July 3, 2010, https://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2010/07/03/israeli-glbt-politics-between-queerness-and-homonationalism/.
[107] Active in the 2000s, the group focused on the struggle for animal rights but insisted on its connection with all other forms of oppression, including that of Israelis towards Palestinians. See One Struggle website, https://web.archive.org/web/20070128181912/http://www.onestruggle.org/, last accessed 18.06.2022.
[108] Interview, Beer Sheva, November 5, 2019.
[109] Conversation, on the way to an action in Sderot, May 3, 2019.

> State. [...] I joined Sadaka-Reut,[110] I went regularly to meetings in Wahat al-Salam,[111] I met Palestinians from '48,[112] we did that kind of 'coexistence work' that was very popular in the Oslo years. Identity politics discourses were common, you know, "What are you first – Israeli, Jewish, human," and so on. I would identify first as Israeli, I thought it could mean something inclusive. [...] Then I started losing faith in an 'Israeli identity' and in the whole Zionist left framework. I started seeing that it was wishful thinking. Palestinians don't want to be Israelis! Until the 1970s, there was the military rule [in Israel], so the important claim was to become fully Israelis. Then this changed: they wanted to be Palestinians! Now, I no longer say I am from Israel. For a while, I reidentified as a Palestinian Jew: I have the extra privilege of being a descendant of two generations of Jews from here, and this makes me more accepted by Palestinians. But then I'm not really Jewish either, so I said: "Palestinian from Jewish background." Now, I say it less and less, because I don't want to appropriate their suffering. I just say I'm from Jerusalem. [...] Recently, I started identifying more with my Sephardi identity. This was never really a thing in my family (well, not even the fact of being 'from here'... They came as migrants, and they did so before the State, so they always called it 'Palestine'). Anyway, having a Mizrahi identity is also a privilege: it gives you further legitimation, the idea that you will be able to stay here even after the revolution because you are 'Arab.'[113]

As this excerpt shows very well, articulating one's Jewish-Israeliness by drawing on intersectional marginal identities is not exempt from difficulties and problems. First of all, the very fact of reclaiming for oneself some sort of marginality makes activists feel better about themselves because somewhat less an integral part of the dominant oppressors' group. And while they may well be so – and, as intersectionality theory teaches, an experience of oppression does provide a point of view in common with the oppression of others[114] – the parallel can be seen, sometimes also by the very activists, as inappropriate given the comparative magnitude of Palestinian oppression. In Mariam's case, the mobilization of a Palestinian identity, while being in a way the most 'radical' identitary stance because it completely reverses the paradigm of Zionism, borders on the appropriation of an identity that has come to be defined in terms of the shared experience of a colonized people longing for national rights. Precisely because they can be seen as a *laissez-passer*, a way to carve out for oneself a legitimate place in the struggle and in a future decolonized society, such identities are often problematized by activists themselves. Besides, they are often framed as a privilege, that of being able to 'pick and

[110] Sadaka-Reut is an Israeli Jewish and Palestinian student-led group focused on education on bi-nationalism, anti-racism and socio-political activism ("About Us", *Sadaka-Reut – Arab Jewish Youth Partnership*, https://www.reutsadaka.org/about-us-2/).

[111] Wahat al-Salam ('Neve Shalom' in Hebrew, 'Oasis of Peace' in English) is a village situated in Israel composed by Jewish and Palestinian citizens. The community aims to serve as a "model of equality, mutual respect and partnership that challenges existing patterns of racism and discrimination as well as the continued conflict" ("Community", *Wahat al Salam*, https://wasns.org/-community-). See also Chapter Five, Section 2.

[112] 'Palestinians from '48,' or ''48 Palestinians,' are alternative ways to designate Palestinian citizens of Israel. The formulations refer to the fact that these were the Palestinians who after the war of 1948 remained in their homes within the borders of what became Israel and obtained Israeli citizenship.

[113] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019.

[114] The term intersectionality, coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, underscores the 'multidimensionality' of marginalized subjects' lived experiences (Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): 139).

choose' from a basket of possible identities those which work best. This is indeed not a possibility for everyone: for "Jewish white men" like Uri, for instance, who have no Sephardi grandparents to refer to. This shows how intersectionality, perhaps the most promising identitary answer for contexts riddled by power hierarchies like the Israeli one, is also not safe from problems and contradictions.[115]

Finally, recurring to marginal identities is important also because it can provide communities of belonging broader than one's circle of activist friends. However, like the interviews with Yoni and Sarah showed, marginal communities like the feminist and especially the Mizrahi one are often unwelcoming to anti-Zionist activists, for the reasons seen in the previous chapters. They too, then, end up mostly referring for their belonging to a small circle of like-minded activists, for whom anti-Zionism is, if not embraced, at least not a taboo.

### *5. Suspension: Young Generations Living and Dealing with an Indefinite 'Post'*

The third move is that of those activists who, aware of the inevitable contradictions between Zionism and their commitment to justice, are yet unwilling or unready to fully cut ties with their communities of belonging and the definition of themselves that came attached to them. Therefore, they 'suspend' the definition of their identity in relation to Zionism. Falling in this category are especially the younger generations of activists, both Israeli and from the diaspora, for reasons that the section will illustrate.

More than in the other moves, this form of identification is not always fully rationalized. "Neither pro- nor anti-Zionist," some will simply say they have not thought about their identification much, while others will define themselves as 'non-' or 'post-Zionist.'[116] Leah, who as seen at the outset of the previous section eventually came to identify as anti-Zionist, explained to me what she felt was the difference between these formulations:

> I used to always say I was 'post-Zionist,' and not 'non-Zionist,' because I wanted to flag that I was coming from a very immersive Zionist background. I didn't want to pretend this wasn't the case, it would be unfair. It's the same with being white: I remain so even if I use a settler colonial framework, and I don't want to deny it.[117]

[115] Indeed, since its birth among black feminists, there has been a huge debate on the concept of intersectionality and how it was used as currency by white feminists to appropriate racial experiences of suffering. For critical engagements that highlight in particular the problem of appropriation see e.g. Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89, no. 1 (2008):1-15; Rachel E. Luft and Jane Ward, "Toward an intersectionality just out of reach: Confronting challenges to intersectional practice," in *Perceiving gender locally, globally, and intersectionally*, ed. Vasilikie P. Demos and Marcia Texler Segal (Emerald Group Publishing, 2009).
[116] Interviews, West Jerusalem, May 16, 2019 and November 26, 2019.
[117] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.

Notwithstanding this nuance, these positions are usually taken by activists to signify an in-between stance with regards to Zionism: one that condemns what the discriminatory ideology Zionism represents today, but that absolves its past role as a national movement for the Jewish people, legitimated as long as Jews were facing tangible threats. Look for example at how Pablo, an Argentinian-born Israeli now in his 60s, active in Ta'ayush, explains his stance:

> I've always been against the occupation even in my socialist Zionist group in Argentina, but we didn't question the core idea of Zionism: that having a Jewish State is just, especially after World War II. I thought we all had the right to live here, with two States. Then my vision changed. I wasn't aware of '48 Palestinians [Palestinians who took Israeli citizenship after 1948] and the issue of refugees. I ignored this willingly, I made myself an easy life. But here, being an activist, meeting activists more radical than I was, meeting Arabs both here and in the West Bank, I gained awareness: we need to take responsibility for '48, otherwise there can be no just society. [...] They say that 'Arabs didn't accept the partition', well, they had no reason to negotiate! If they come to your home and say it's theirs, you won't agree to give them even half of it! [...] Even if they want to stay, there is the problem of the "Jewish and democratic State", which I am more and more convinced is an oxymoron. I think there should be one democratic State, that adopts the symbols of all its communities. I wouldn't fear being a minority if minorities are protected. [...] People are afraid of leaving Zionism. Me, I am not Zionist and not against. It's just not relevant anymore. Zionism was very important for building a home for the Jews. But now that that aim is fulfilled, it's ok to abolish it.[118]

Despite Pablo's very radical stance towards the foundation of Israel and the national rights of Palestinians, he is unwilling to condemn Zionism's colonial enterprise.

This kind of ambivalence was at the core of 'post-Zionism' when it emerged as an intellectual movement in the Israeli political debate in the 1980s. This happened in association with the work of the so-called 'New Historians' who, in light of declassified governmental documents of the pre-State period and especially about the war of 1948, began to contest the official narrative proposed by Zionist historians and the established truths of Zionism more in general. More about raising questions than about giving answers, post-Zionism has always encompassed a wide array of positions since its beginning.[119] Equated to anti-Zionism by its critics, but also by those supporters who saw it as decidedly emphasizing the democratic over the ethnic element in the definition of the State, post-Zionism has also illustrious ambassadors in those who denounced Zionism's crimes while ultimately justifying them through the refrain that 'there was no other choice.'[120] Ultimately a fuzzy concept, indeed criticized by many for lumping together such different meanings, what remains as a common

[118] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 16, 2019.
[119] Greenstein, "Socialist Anti-Zionism", 14.
[120] Among the first ones, see e.g. Israeli historian Shlomo Avineri, "Post-Zionism doesn't exist," *Ha'aretz*, July 6, 2007, https://www.haaretz.com/2007-07-06/ty-article/post-zionism-doesnt-exist/0000017f-e9ac-da9b-a1ff-edefd3f50000; among the second ones, see Ephraim Nimni, "Introduction", in *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics*, ed. Ephraim Nimni, Pnina Werbner, and Richard Werbner (London: Zed Books, 2003):1-19; among the third ones, see e.g. Benny Morris and Zeev Sternhell, cited in Said, "Appendix: New History, Old Ideas," in *The Challenge of Post-Zionism*, 200.

denominator is the fact of indicating a liminal position, suspended between condemnation and acceptance.[121] The appeal of such suspended judgement for Jewish-Israelis is understandable, if considered that legitimizing Zionism's past role as a national movement means legitimizing also its result and absolving, by extension, one's own presence in the land. Still, this liminality entails – in the words of Palestinian scholar Edward Said – a "profound contradiction, bordering on schizophrenia" for, having "established beyond any reasonable doubt" that Zionist policy was and is violent and colonial, the post-Zionist is nonetheless "reluctant to draw the inevitable conclusions" and reject Zionism entirely.[122]

It then comes perhaps at no surprise that the idea (if not the term: today 'non-Zionist' is prevalent) seems to have made a comeback recently among Jewish-Israeli activists, especially of the younger generations. Activists in their 20s, who more than others used this formulation with me, are people who developed their political criticism largely in an ideological void of alternatives to Zionism. Born well after the internationalist dream had shaken the consciences of other youths, they didn't experience the brief liberal-Zionist enthusiasm for Oslo nor the less ideological but still unifying 'anarchist' wave of the early 2000s. Instead, they grew up in the atmosphere of fear and normalization of anti-Palestinian hatred that has characterized the past two decades. Many remember as traumatic the years of the Second Intifada, when buses were exploding in Jerusalem and the sound of war sirens was a daily occurrence. It is for these reasons too that, in spite of having many examples of anti-Zionist activism and settler colonial critique, their relationship with Zionism is more complicated, their critical stance more uncomfortable.

So, for instance, Noam, an Israeli-born activist in is 20s, combined an abstract internationalism with a stance on Zionism that recalls that of Pablo:

> I'm Jewish secular, Israeli, and non-Zionist. I'm not anti-Zionist because I don't think it's our mission to fight against it, but to work around it. As a historical movement, it did good and bad things, like many others. But that's what it is: a historical movement, now it's not contemporary anymore, not important anymore. But then I am not a nationalist, so it's easy for me. [I: what about the national ceremonies, do you go?] I mean, they're not that important to me. I do the standing up and all because it would hurt people if I don't, but obviously I don't connect with how they present things now.[123]

In another interview, the question on ceremonies made emerge clearly the links between personal and collective traumas and identification with the collective body. Yael, an activist in her early 20s,

[121] See e.g. Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness State, Society, and the Military*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 7.
[122] Edward Said, "Appendix: New History, Old Ideas," in *The Challenge of Post-*Zionism, 197-201. See also Perry Anderson, "Scurrying towards Bethlehem," *New Left Review*, no. 10, (2001): 22-25, and Tikva Honig-Parnass, *The False Prophets of Peace: Liberal Zionism and the Struggle for Palestine*, (London: Haymarket Books, 2011): 109-120.
[123] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 26, 2019.

was particularly uncomfortable when we switched from talking about the organization where she worked to more personal issues. She glanced often at the other activists who were working at Imbala, embarrassed at the idea that they could overhear our conversation and judge her, as it came out later, for being "still not that radical."[124] Born in Jerusalem in a left-wing Zionist family, she did military service and then started to volunteer for a number of human rights organizations which treated Palestinian rights only tangentially. Only recently she had started engaging in the grassroots activist scene with Free Jerusalem and working for an organization, Ir Amim, that dealt directly with the occupation. When I asked her about how her relationship to Zionism evolved throughout her life and activism, she reflected as such:

> Growing up, I was performing in every ceremony. It was 'cool' to sing at Memorial Day, I also really enjoyed the social aspect of it. Now I still feel connections. For instance, when the siren [of Memorial Day] went the other day, I was at work, I stopped what I was doing and stood up, but my other two colleagues didn't. It was awkward, afterwards we talked about it a bit… The thing is that my surroundings have changed. Standing up used to be such a *given*, I did it also if I was alone! I also think it's important to mourn, not just individually but as a country, as a State. I am not cynical! So many people have died! Then of course this ceremony is connected to a narrative of glorifying the military that I don't want to be part of. Same for Holocaust Memorial Day. I do feel connected, my grandfather is a survivor! But of course, we should make sure it never happens again and look what we are doing. I don't know… also with the question of Zionism… Before, I would have replied that the word has lost meaning, now I'm not sure, it can have so many different meanings…

Identification as non-Zionist was particularly frequent among the 'internationals,' Jewish activists from the diaspora who came to the country for periods ranging from a few months to several years and in some cases ended up staying (c.f. Chapter Two). An element that recurred in interviews with them was how important they deemed the "deep connection" that tied them to the land, both as a personal feeling and as something they needed to see recognized. Identifying, as they do, with their diasporic identity more than anything (i.e. Jewish-American, Jewish-Australian, and so forth), establishing that connection becomes essential for legitimizing their role in the country – as activists or otherwise. For the same reason, a full break with Zionism becomes particularly complicated. Chana expressed this very poignantly. A young Jewish queer woman from Europe, she told me how she came to Israel ten years prior and how since then she has undergone a process of self-questioning:

> I grew up in a religious community, Zionist of course. I had this feeling that if I wanted to understand, to be *really* Jewish, I had to come to Israel. It was my sister that pushed me to be critical. When I started looking for critical information, I became overwhelmed quickly. I had to leave. I went to South America for six months. When I came back, I wanted to engage more. […] [I: How did your relationship with Zionism

[124] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 16, 2019.

> evolve?] Oh, it was complicated. I was always very attached to the term: *if I throw Zionism away, what am I doing here?* What is my relationship to this place? Also, after having lived here for a while, I do have a deep connection. So I guess it was a process: first I approached the criticism of the occupation, the '67, and then slowly the issue of '48 and of the Nakba. Now I don't consider myself Zionist. Not even anti-Zionist. I *learned to be comfortable with not defining myself* in relation to this, although I know it's problematic.[125]

Maya, another young Jewish-American activist, also had an ambiguous stance towards Zionism in spite of a harsh criticism of the 'brainwashing' she had undergone throughout her upbringing (c.f. Section 1 in this chapter). "I am not anti-Zionist. I feel that's also a form of nationalism. Zionism was a step that was needed… I haven't really thought about it much." The 'special link' to the land came out later, when she was talking about Western critics of Israel she met during her studies:

> It was the first time I got exposed to the Western anti-Israel/anti-Zionist/BDS kind of discourse, and I didn't like it. I was annoyed at them: they were constantly shitting on Israel, in a way that was objectifying and one-sided, and I had the feeling that they were antisemitic. They have no stakes here, no personal attachment to this place![126]

The idea that non-Jewish internationals who take an interest in the Palestinian cause have "no stakes" in the issue came up several times with Jewish-internationals (c.f. also *Circles of Privilege*), although never with Jewish-Israelis, once again testifying of how particularly important establishing this link is to the former.[127]

Another Jewish-international activist, by contrast, had a more programmatic approach. Rachel, an Australian/American-Jewish woman in her early 30s, had come to Israel several times before establishing herself there about ten years prior, although she never took Israeli citizenship as a political choice. She explained how Jewishness was a very important part of her identity, one that "she carried with her" every time she moved with her family to another country, one that connected her to the story of her family, and in which the memory of the Holocaust played a major role. Yet:

> The first time I came here I didn't feel much of a connection, it didn't feel like the homeland I was told it was. It felt foreign, it felt… like a show. The language was the same, but it felt distant and cold. For me, being Jewish is about culture, here it was only about nationalism and religion. […] When I moved here [my Jewishness] became problematic. Every aspect of it here is inherently political: even for *Shabbat*,[128] I have a hard time celebrating because for me it's tied to restrictions towards other people.[129]

[125] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 28, 2019 (emphasis mine).
[126] Interview, East Jerusalem, November 17, 2019.
[127] Informal conversation, Khan el Akhmar, April 24, 2019.
[128] Shabbat is Judaism's weekly day of rest, which is observed between the dusk of Friday and the dusk of Saturday. Shabbat observance entails refraining from work and engaging in restful activities. Shabbat is celebrated traditionally with festive meals that begin with prayers recited over a cup of wine and two loaves of bread.
[129] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.

While she too identified as non-Zionist, as opposed to anti-Zionist, in virtue of the "relationship that does exist between Jews and this land," for her the focus should be on trying to re-articulate, individually and collectively, what that relationship can mean:

> Doing activism from a diaspora perspective doesn't necessarily imply making a claim to the land. It actually means acknowledging that Judaism can exist even out of this place – although it still defines it in *a* relation to this place in a way. The point is trying to define what this relation can be. For me, as a Jewish person, I feel an obligation towards what this State does in my name: I want to hold it accountable to act according to a value system that reflects what I believe. As a community targeted by antisemitism, we should uphold the idea that everybody deserves rights, and hold the Jewish State accountable to that.

Indeed, precisely because non-Zionism and post-Zionism are liminal concepts, the meaning of such identities is not given *a priori* but awaits definition. As such, they can be seen as one step in the process of rearticulation of what it can mean 'being a Jew in Israel' beyond the fixed meaning established by Zionism. Truly enough, it does entail the risk of resulting in an apologetic stance. One that not only absolves Zionism's discriminatory core, as it happened for illustrious post-Zionist scholars of the past, but also that, by reaffirming the idea of a special relationship between World Jewry and the land, excludes from the debate on the Palestinian issue all those who are seen as 'not having a stake' in it, thus contributing to maintaining the discursive power imbalance that allows for colonization to continue. However, non/post-Zionism can also evolve into a more critical stance, as exemplified by the case of Leah, who went through a post-Zionist phase and then became anti-Zionist. This radical potential is all the stronger if considered that non/post-Zionism implies, unlike anti-Zionism, a dialogue with identitary issues that are deeply felt by Israeli and diaspora Jews alike. For this reason, a radical rearticulation of identity that nonetheless starts by acknowledging these issues may have the capacity to appeal to larger numbers of people, and to accompany them in a severance that would then feel less challenging and isolating.

This conception of non-Zionism as a step in a process seems to find validation in the important role that young non-Zionist activists attribute to the communities and 'safe spaces' of their activism. In the case of anti-Zionist Israelis, networks of like-minded people represent a matter of fact: the only intimate friendships activists can hold on to within a general rejection of and from society. But here, such networks seem to be more than that. Partly occasions of relief, where activists can "stop measuring their words" and "feel welcome" for who they are, they are also thought of as spaces of elaboration of a political and social sense of we-ness that accompanies their process of politicization.[130] Indeed, as Chapter Five will explore in more detail, the 'internationals,' in particular through the network of All That's Left, have dedicated more consistent efforts at cultivating a community of this

[130] Interviews: East Jerusalem, November 17, 2019; West Jerusalem, May 22, 2019.

sort, where they can share their different experiences and reflections as diaspora Jews in relation to Israel. Chana, for instance, emphasized how important this community was for her, both personally and politically:

> I stumbled upon ATL and it felt very welcoming, not like other activist groups… I still felt different from most of them because I didn't come here *for* activism, but I didn't feel judged for that. The fact that it was a community that was specifically Jewish was also very important for me, also because it helped me see how Judaism as it is used here can be reversed for other purposes, like in the prayers, in the *megillah* we had for Purim for instance.[131] It's a framing [that of Judaism] that most activist groups here reject, but for us it's important, as it is for most diaspora communities abroad.[132]

Besides being a community at the local level, international Jewish activists also cultivate links with diaspora groups in their home countries, and take these to further elaborate their connection to the land and the articulation of a new diasporic identity. While this has not been the focus of the present study, a few analysts have noted how the recent emergence among some diaspora activist groups, such as Jewish Voice for Peace in the US, of an uncompromising anti-Zionist stance could be a promising sign in this sense.[133] Landy, for instance, finds that the "identity work" of recent radical diaspora-Jewish opposition to Israel rearticulates a diasporic Jewish identity in a way that is centred on the experience of the diaspora rather than on the return to Israel, that reverses the Zionist discourse on diasporic Jews from one of cowardice to one of braveness and pride, and that recovers internationalist constructions of Jewishness from the past, again such as that of the Bund. As such, it fundamentally challenges the hegemonic equation of Jewishness with Zionism.[134]

Finally, among the internationals there are also those who find a sense of community and, in a way, of identification, less with other activists and more with Palestinians. This was particularly the case for two young American Jews of Russian origins, who reflected as such:

> We don't really fit neither with ATL nor with the Israelis [activists]… ATL is *so* American! […] We were not raised 'the American way', we come from very Jewish religious contexts… actually they're more similar to Palestinian communities! Many kids around, the family living under the same roof, that kind of thing. […] [Compared to Jewish-Israeli activists] we have very different ways of relating to Palestinians: it's like they feel

[131] She refers to the "Purim Against Kahanism" event organized by ATL, where the group celebrated the religious holiday of Purim with a prayer that commemorated, instead of Jewish victims, the Palestinian victims of the massacre perpetrated by American-Israeli settler Baruch Goldstain on Purim day in 1994. The text of the call to action reads: "[…] we also do not want to give this holiday and these texts over to people who espouse violence and racism. These texts are ours as well, and we are their loving and faithful inheritors. We will use them for the pursuit of justice." (Observation and internal material, West Jerusalem, March 18, 2019).
[132] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 28, 2019.
[133] See e.g. David Landy, *Jewish identity and Palestinian rights: Diaspora Jewish opposition to Israel*, (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2012); Philip Weiss, "'The agony' – Young Jews shattered by Israel's conduct dominate J Street stages," *Mondoweiss*, October 30, 2019, https://mondoweiss.net/2019/10/the-agony-young-jews-shattered-by-israels-conduct-dominate-j-street-stages/.
[134] Landy, *Jewish Identity and Palestinian Rights*, 41-55.

> this barrier, this obstacle to make more personal contact… for us it's not the case, I love being in Issawiya, playing with the kids, I feel at home![135]

One of them further reflected that, in the face of increasing isolation and exhaustion she was facing as she got more involved in the shifts in Issawiya, she felt that she was being "adopted" by the Palestinian community there, with whom she developed very strong personal bonds.[136]

These narratives suggest the possibility of an identity where Jewishness and Palestinianness are not opposites: one that decentres the role of religion *cum* nation and centres instead the fact of sharing places, habits, foods, family conventions and so on. Similarly to the marginal identities seen in the previous section, however, this kind of articulation risks being inherently 'violent' – unilateral and appropriating – in a situation of structural, colonial asymmetry. It is no coincidence that this type of discourse is presented in these terms only by internationals, never by Israelis, and mostly by those among them who have lived in Israel-Palestine for shorter periods of time. Chapter Five (Section 3) comes back to this issue from the perspective of asymmetric relations and how they play out – and are dealt with – in daily encounters and intimate relationships.

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This chapter has looked at the different ways in which Jewish-Israeli activists have been attempting to rearticulate their relationship with the hegemonic construct of Jewish-Israeli identity provided by Zionism. The chapter has shown how each of these attempts embeds tensions and contradictions that intersect feelings of guilt and responsibility (both towards Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis), need for both detachment and belonging, willingness to establish some sort of 'sameness' with Palestinians and awareness that such sameness can be violent and appropriating.

Indeed, activists' reflections and the impasses they face have shown how each identitary 'move' establishes with Zionism a relationship that is less straightforward than what dichotomic categories would suggest: none of them is 'purely' power-reproducing or power-defying, hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, colonising or decolonising. Articulations internal to the Zionist discourse do reproduce many of its racist and supremacist tropes, but offer a way to reconcile with one's need for belonging that is not offered by anti-Zionist articulations. These, by ccontrast, do not only leave activists 'orphan' from a much needed sense of belonging, but also remain unable to provide them with any certainty on how to go about their daily interactions in a situation of enduring colonialism. The third, liminal approach, keeps together the perks of remaining entangled and of rejecting Zionist identifications in

[135] Informal conversation, West Jerusalem, November 17, 2019.
[136] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 17, 2019.

ways that are appealing but also deeply problematic, and leads to a form of identity that is suspended and 'schizophrenic.'

Likewise, activists' attempts at drawing on multiple, intersectional identities in order to reconstruct a positive sense of we-ness also remain riddled with tensions and contradictions. Constructs recovering experiences of marginality – of Arabness, of Queerness – allow to positively reconceive oneself as something other than an oppressor, and to draw connections between different experiences of oppression and struggle. Yet, this option is not available to everyone and, even where it is, it carries the risk of appropriating and erasing difference, obfuscating the present colonial relationship. Constructs recovering different incarnations of Jewishness – be them anti-fascist, pre-State, or proudly diasporic – offer the opportunity of remaining grounded in foundational histories and powerful collective identities, while rearticulating them into something anew. In other words, they offer a chance to *assumer* one's collective history in its diversity and complexity. Yet, finding a way to weave together the condemnation of a colonial past and the withholding of positive ties with it is a very thin line to walk, and one that risks fostering a sense of distinctiveness and entitlement.

Overall, activists' identitary peregrinations have shown that the fixed identities of Simmel, with their clear demarcations of Selves and Others, easily lead to dead ends of this sort. At the same time, the incessant effort at elaborating identitary constructs notwithstanding such dead ends testifies of how important these constructs are for activists to make sense of themselves and for anchoring their life-changing activism into visions to go back to. Without these visions, actions, even if radically defying, risk remaining fragmented and directionless, and as such incapable to propose an alternative to a highly structured hegemonic discourse.

In this sense, what seems to emerge as the most promising aspect of Jewish-Israeli activists' process of identity rearticulation lies in the way this has evolved over time, going from purely intellectual constructs to constructs that emerge and become questioned in the lived experience of activists in the struggle and in their daily interaction with multiple Others. We have seen how the intellectual anti-Zionism of Matzpeners, while admirably attuned with decolonial analyses and cutting across ethnonational borders, struggled to measure up with concrete interactions with Palestinians, and risked glossing over the endurance of a colonial structure. Following generations of activists, thanks to a more practical and 'organic' political engagement, have become more deeply aware of these impasses and of the difficult entanglement between abstract political agendas and their own embodied positions of privilege. Today, activists' mobilized identities are more than ever rooted in their daily experiences of life and struggle: they emerge from multiple interactions (with Palestinians and Jewish feminists, family members and people encountered abroad, fellow activists and those who attempt at co-opting their political challenges), and it is in these experiences that they are put to the test, questioned, acknowledged in their limits, and reinvented.

Mikado, the Matzpen activist who renounced internationalism for a Jewish 'ethno-patriotism,' concludes the account of his identitary journey as an activist "on the border" with a proposal: that one should embrace a "border identity." By this, he means that one should eschew the present identities available to Jewish-Israelis and choose instead one that is "forged in an exchange, a permanent interaction with his neighbours," "an identity that is pluralistic, open, and mixed."[137] He sees this epitomized in a diasporic identity, which by definition exists on the borders of national belonging. Based on the obstacles, dilemmas, and hopes of activists in this chapter, I suggest instead that a border identity of the sort that Mikado describes may more likely emerge from a process of multiplication and fracturing of available identities, one that is rooted in lived experience and continued interaction with multiple Others. These forms of identification are more likely to trigger, precisely through their coexistence in tension, a reflexive attitude towards how each of them reinstates power in unpredictable ways. At the same time, their transient and constantly problematized nature is more attuned to the counter-hegemonic task of disrupting the fixed equivalences and allegiances established by Zionism by cutting across them in manifold ways, as the following chapters will further demonstrate.

[137] Warschawski, *On the Border*, 211-212.




Protest in solidarity with the Palestinian Great March of Return, Sderot, Israel-Gaza border, May 2019 (ph: Alice Baroni)

*Another issue with researching the 'similar' was that an immersive approach to fieldwork became a lot easier, and with it the blurring of the boundaries between the different roles I undertook in the 'field.'*

*Researching activist environments involved seeking out groups whose values I often shared, going to assemblies where the discussions engaged me, partaking in protests of which I shared the rationale and enjoyed the emotional momentum. Not always (there were also groups I found objectionable and people I did not like), but often, spending my time with activists was a fun and uplifting experience, both politically and personally. Once, as I was picking out flyers of events and protests from the counter of Imbala, an activist observed me and said: "I never know if you do this for work or because you actually like it."*[1] *I felt lucky to say that it was often one and the same thing.*

*It took me a while to see how this merging of different spheres – the analytical, the political, the personal; my roles of researcher, of 'activist', and, in some cases, of friend – was not all good and fun, but raised problems I had to deal with. Each of these roles presupposed different ways of doing things, different criteria of accountability,*

[1] Informal conversation, West Jerusalem, May 16, 2019.

*different measures of what was acceptable and fair. Sometimes they aligned, but other times they didn't. I was relieved, for instance, when an activist reassured me, rather matter-of-factly, of the usefulness of my presence at protests: "It doesn't really matter if you do this for research. You are there, and we always need more people there, so that's good."*[2] *Other times, however, going to protests as a 'researcher' felt unfair to the people I was with. This thought struck me in particular at the 'briefing' before a protest at the border with Gaza.*

*We were a small group of people, fifty at most, gathered from all corners of the country. The protest had been only limitedly publicized in order to prevent the infiltration of right-wingers and maintain a surprise effect with the soldiers. I was there as a researcher, but much thanks to my political engagement of the past that had gained me the trust of a few 'hardcore' activists. The protest was expected to trigger a violent reaction from the army: teargas and batons were to be expected, as well as arrests (this is telling of how 'violent' was a relative concept, considering that the Palestinians protesting on the other side of the border were being shot with live bullets: two were killed that day). We were instructed on what to do in case of escalation ("Stay calm, but try to hold your ground"), we were told to cover our mouths against the teargas and were given specific tissues for the eyes. I was very anxious. I had not been in that kind of protest for a while. My mind rushed to all possible scenarios: "What if I am arrested? Will I be deported back to Geneva? Will I be able to come back for continuing my fieldwork?" Almost as if interpreting my thoughts, one of the organizers asked to the crowd "Whoever* really *can't afford to be arrested today, please raise your hand. We will keep an eye on you and have a designated car for you to go back in case things get messy." My heart raced and I remained for a few seconds weighting the options in my mind. The temptation to raise my hand was huge, the sense of relief at my fingertips. But it also felt unbearably wrong – considering the 'circles of privilege' of before and the trust that had been confided in me by activists – to place myself in a position of complete immunity by upholding my 'observer' status. I decided not to raise my hand. Needless to say, I was not arrested and I could continue my fieldwork until the end as planned. But what stayed with me of that day was, next to the memory of the stress it involved, the idea that when being an 'activist-researcher', one is always choosing which of the two roles to prioritize, and it is in most cases the latter.*[3]

*Other times, it was less the activist sphere and more the personal one that I felt conflicting with my role as a researcher. The 'human' component – the fact of having to deal with people in flesh and blood and weaving with them intimate relationships – is without a doubt what most drew me to ethnographic methods. I loved the intensity and intimacy of sitting down for long introspective interviews; I loved coming back from protests after having shared collectively moments of fear, joy, relief. This created personal bonds that in some cases became akin to friendships. With some activists I would spend moments of leisure as well, drinks and dinners without a research-oriented goal. Still, it was not rare that in these moments the conversation would move onto political matters, or that the situation in itself, for its political and social attributes, would stir my analytical interest, and I would often scribble a few notes on my notebook after going back home. Intentionally or not, I could never completely*

[2] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019.
[3] Participant observation, Sderot, May 3, 2019.

*take off my researcher 'hat'. Because my activist friends knew this, I did not see the problem at first. It was only when it came the moment of writing that I realized how the intrinsically extractive nature of research clashes with the reciprocity of personal relationships. It struck me in retrospect how restrained in their spontaneity my interlocutors must have felt at times in my presence. I pondered over and over whether to include in my writing some of the impressions I had noted down. And when I chose to do so, because I felt it could offer an important layer to the analysis, I did so feeling all the inappropriateness and intrusiveness of my researcher gaze.*



Imbala cooperative, West Jerusalem, July 2018 (ph: Alice Baroni)

*My own version of a participatory approach has been one in which I chose – or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that I found myself – not to clearly demarcate between my multiple roles. Doing so would have been possible, and probably 'easier' in terms of managing the tensions between them. And yet I think that working through these tensions is what made my fieldwork the beautiful, rich, intense, difficult, exhausting, and formative experience it has been. Once again helped by observing how activists dealt with their conflicting accountabilities, I came to the conclusion that perhaps it is precisely the constant exercise of negotiating our multiple roles that allows us to develop a sharper sense of our various power-laden positionalities: to see the different norms that govern them and how they infiltrate other spheres, and to eventually gain control over this mutual influence and try to direct it where we want to.*

CHAPTER FOUR

# Strategic Grey Zones

## Negotiating Insider's Privilege on the Ground of the Struggle

It's an early Spring morning in the hills south of Hebron. The landscape, usually barren and scorched by the sun, is now slightly lusher after the winter rains. We left Jerusalem at dawn, a dozen people in total: a few veterans of Ta'ayush and some young internationals, mostly Jewish. Emmanuel (a Jewish-Israeli man in his 70s and one of Ta'ayush founders) gave us a little briefing as the old van drove us out of the city: we will split up in two groups, the more experienced with the least, and go where Palestinian partners requested our presence today. And then the usual recommendations: stand your ground, try to avoid confrontation with the settlers, take a lot of photos and videos.

I get off with the first group in Susya. Susya is in, in Israeli settler-colonial jargon, 'contested land.' Historically a rural Palestinian village located in what is now known as Area C of the West Bank, Susya is also the name of the religious Israeli settlement that was established here in 1983. Since then, the Israeli government has been chasing Palestinians out of the land in various ways to allow for the settlers to 'feel safe,' and expand.[1] The Palestinian community that remains, now composed of less than a hundred people, has been resisting this dispossession though legal petitions, mobilizations, and by simply 'staying' (*sumud*):[2] carrying on with their harvesting and shepherding despite the daily harassment of soldiers and settlers, and rebuilding their village as it is destroyed time and again. As a

[1] On the issue of Susya see, for instance, William Booth "Israel wants to bulldoze this ramshackle village, but Europe is providing life support," *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/a-miserable-little-village-at-the-center-of-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/2016/08/28/50ce6266-661f-11e6-b4d8-33e931b5a26d_story.html), and Nir Hasson "Should 250 cave dwellers interfere with the fence?," *Haaretz*, September 13, 2005, https://www.haaretz.com/1.4838246.

[2] Sumud is an ideological theme and political strategy of resistance of the Palestinian people. Taking the meaning of "staying put despite continuous assault," it is not merely about passive endurance, but "an act of unyielding resistance and defiance." As a concept closely related to agricultureand indigenousness and sense of rootedness in the land, it is often represented symbolically by the olive tree, ubiquitous throughout Palestine. See Helena Lindholm Schulz, and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland*, (London: Routledge, 2003): 105-106.

result of these mobilizations, some of which carried out in conjunction with Jewish-Israeli activists, some areas have been formally recognized as Palestinian-owned, and any unjustified impediment to agricultural activities has been forbidden. Formally.

The van leaves us on the side of the road and drives on. On the other side, we can see the some buildings of the Jewish settlement, now a small town. Behind us, a hill covered in sparse yellow grass and a small patch of land with a greener pasture. We wait for Bilal, a Palestinian shepherd from Susya who is an old acquaintance of Ta'ayush. It's quiet. After a few minutes, a group of settlers in religious garments exits the gate of the settlement. It's *shabbat* and they are going to pray. Emmanuel stiffens, but they walk past us and disappear into the bush. Bilal appears from behind the hill with his herd. After the usual greetings, we follow him at a distance while he grazes the sheep. Not even ten minutes pass before military jeeps start to arrive: one stops on top of the hill, a second one by the settlement's gate. The soldiers approach Bilal: "You can't stay here. Military order." We move closer: while some activists act as a buffer allowing Bilal to continue shepherding, the more experienced ones start negotiating with the soldiers: "There is a court ruling, this is Palestinian land, you must let him stay!". The soldiers ignore the documents that the activists wave before them, and refuse to provide proof of what they claim to be the order of a General. More jeeps arrive: three, four, five. Soldiers become aggressive, shout, demand our passports and take photos of them. "What are you doing? And you call yourself a Jew? You should be ashamed of yourselves!". Bilal, scared, had started walking away and has almost disappeared behind the hill where he came from. Emmanuel is frustrated, almost in tears, as he realizes that this battle is lost. "We should have kept him here, they cannot do this." Others joke: "Emmanuel is ready to get himself arrested today!". In the meanwhile, a group of soldiers is chatting amicably with settlers by the gate. A Jewish-American activist overhears what they say and translates for me: "They're talking about us. They're saying: 'These people are not normal, it's impossible to talk to them!'"[3]

As I participated to this and other actions in which Israelis mobilized in solidarity with Palestinians or against their own government, I witnessed the manifold display of power and privilege that is involved in such actions. That of soldiers and settlers, of course. But also that of Israeli activists, as they use the relative advantage they enjoy compared to Palestinians in order to protect them, empower them, support their stances. This use of privilege, which is a constant and indeed the core rationale of the activism of those coming from the ranks of the oppressors in solidarity with the oppressed, is not without problems. As noted by activists and scholars of social movements alike, it reiterates to

[3] Participant observation, Susya, April 13, 2019. This was a typical example of the actions of interposition that Ta'ayush does in the South Hebron Hills, and an average one. There are better ones – where not much happens and activists accompany and help Palestinians in their activities – and much worse – where settlers get violent and soldiers arrest Palestinians and Israeli activists. See also David Shulman, *Freedom and Despair: Notes from the South Hebron Hills*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

some extent the asymmetric structures it relies upon, and thus may crystallize, rather than disrupt, the discourses, legal frameworks, and relationships, in which the oppressed remain the dominated and silenced object of the oppressors' agency. Due to the institutionalization of discrimination against Palestinians in Israel-Palestine, this issue is particularly clear to observe in this context compared to others, and Israeli activists tend to have at least some awareness of their relative privilege, its use and counter-productive effects.

Shula Keshet, a Mizrahi Israeli activist, criticizes this use of privilege harshly: "[T]he desire to help, the (illusory?) feeling of power that we as Israeli activists enjoy and the urge to exercise that power, are hard to resist [...] It is a very Israeli conferring of dominance: a mix of goodwill and arrogance, both towards the Palestinians and towards the soldiers."[4] Yet, activists also have good reasons, both ethical and strategic, to justify this use of privilege:

> Sure, we have privilege. The question is: what do we do with it? The thing is... privilege cannot really be *shed*. Even if you leave, if you change citizenship, you are using yet another privilege – a different passport, resources. We can feel guilty about it, sure, and we do, but that is not very helpful. Therefore, I believe in using this privilege. First, there is a 'realpolitik' reason: it is useful to use it and, sometimes, it works. And second, because Palestinians ask us to do so. Not all of them, of course, and in this sense we also 'pick and choose' which Palestinian leadership we want to listen to. I have some Palestinian friends who won't work with me because they're against any form of joint struggle. Their request would be for us to leave. But there are others who are very clear that we should use that privilege. [...] The problem is how to use it in a way that *perpetrates it the least*.[5]

One way or another, Israeli activists' paths are paved with continuous, albeit not always aware, choices on what do to with their privileges as they take part in the struggle to erode them. They may try to relinquish them, and fight alongside Palestinians on a supposedly equal footing, like internationalist activists seen in the previous chapter. They may also wrap themselves in a cloak of morality and good-doing, and become oblivious of their existence. And if instead they acknowledge their existence, and accept to use them as a tool in the struggle, they need to make sure that, in the process, they remain strategic allies for Palestinians and not 'normalizing' actors of a discriminatory order.

This chapter explores how activists navigate these choices, that is, how they negotiate their privilege – intended as an insider's access to the discourses and institutions of the Israeli system – on the ground of the struggle for more equality. The first section clarifies what forms of privilege activists mobilize, and the strategic added values and pitfalls associated with each of them. It does so by drawing on the literatures that, across studies of social movements from Gramscian, feminist, and

[4] Shula Keshet (2006: 126), quoted in Ronit Lentin, *Co-memory and melancholia: Israelis memorialising the Palestinian Nakba*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013): 209.
[5] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019. This issue came up in similar terms in other interviews (Jaffa, March 31, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 27, 2019).

decolonial angles, have dealt with this issue. The second section deals more specifically with the situation in which contemporary Israeli activists find themselves as they confront these dilemmas. The space of manoeuvre for insiders who wish to become 'bridges' to outsiders' demands, already narrow due to the structural constraints of a settler colonial situation, is further shrinking due to the political shifts of the past two decades. In this situation, the achievement of a short-term effectiveness, which is often what can be obtained through the reliance on systemic tools, seems to be hopelessly at odds with the advancement of a broad counter-hegemonic critique. Activists are then left with the choice of "where to draw the line:"[6] of what degree of engagement with institutional tools and dominant discourses they are willing to accept.

The last three sections describe these strategic choices by regrouping them in three macro approaches that, once again, delineate different degrees of distancing from the Zionist hegemony, this time intended as the ensemble of 'political opportunities' available in the Israeli system. Because strategies are often articulated collectively, groups will appear more prominently as actors next to individual activists. In this sense, the chapter develops and complexifies the discussion started in Chapter Two on the framings and means of different groups. Finally, once again, strategic approaches need not be taken as sealed compartments, but as partially overlapping and shifting ones. Indeed, as the third approach will show more clearly, many individuals and groups rely on more than one instrument. The chapter will also show how groups have shifted their approaches over the course of the last two decades in response to the changes occurred in their political context.

The first approach (Section 3) is that of those who accept to fully rely on hegemonic tools and discourses – be it because they have complete faith in Israel's capacity to improve as a democracy or because a rupture with them is seen as ethically unsustainable due to the short-term human costs it would entail. To the opposite end of the spectrum, activists in the second approach (Section 4) see any kind of engagement with hegemony as complicit. They still rely on their privilege, but only to the extent to which they cannot do otherwise (for instance, due to their Jewish-Israeli *bodies*) and do so in ways that aim to expose, rather than 'fix,' the discriminatory character of the Israeli system. Because their action has little following in Israel, their focus is mostly on direct solidarity with Palestinians and/or on reaching out to international audiences. Finally, activists described in Section 5 opt for a compromise attitude that strives to maximize effectiveness within the system while also cultivating a space of radical critique. The most diverse of the three, this approach comprises activists who tone down their framing in the search of common ground with Israeli audiences, mainstream or marginalized, and activists who combine different forms of action seeking effectiveness on different grounds, either via an internal diversification of their group's strategy or through the coordination with other groups in the Israeli activist network.

[6] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 11, 2019.

As we will see in the next section, according to much critical literature each of these choices entails clear consequences on the extent to which hegemonic structures will be challenged or, conversely, become reinforced. Yet, as the unravelling of each approach will show, reliance on hegemonic structures is not always a choice of complicity or self-indulgence, and withdrawal from them does not always result in a disengagement from privilege. Once again, strategic choices happen in a grey zone where compromise is to some extent unavoidable. With respect to counter-hegemonic change, this grey zone bears both risks and promises. Engaging with hegemony does for sure entail the risk of becoming co-opted and neutralized by it, as theories of hegemony and revolution have warned time and again. And yet, if we look more closely at the relationships and practices established through this engagement day after day, it appears how radical spaces of counter-hegemony are also opened. Indeed, as the next chapter will develop, it is precisely this type of engagement that allows activists to develop a more reflexive attitude towards their multifaceted entanglement in structures of power and to tie alliances and bonds across the social divides established by Zionism, thus offering the possibility to build from the bottom up a profound counterhegemonic challenge.

### *1. The Insider's Dilemma: Mobilizing the 'Master's Tools' Between Efficacy and Reproduction*

As anticipated in Chapter Two, Jewish-Israeli activists' strategic role in the struggle for Palestinian rights issues from their insider position within Israeli society. Even if they may not be perceived as insiders by other Jewish-Israelis, as Jewish, mostly Ashkenazi, people they nonetheless enjoy an access to the institutional tools and universes of meaning – the "political opportunity structure" of the system in its broadest sense[7] – that is mostly precluded to "subaltern" Palestinians.[8]

The manifoldness of this access and its value to the struggle are testified by those Palestinian activists – indeed not all of them – who look positively at the idea of a joint struggle. Take for instance Youssuf, a long-term member of the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee and an academic working on the theory and practice of nonviolent resistance:

> BDS is not the whole of the story. Our struggle needs a triangular approach: building Palestinian resistance, putting pressure on Israel at the international level, and changing Israeli society. Israelis can play a role in all of these areas. [...] They can talk to their society and produce a shift in their government – something that we cannot or don't want to do. [...] Their presence on the ground is also helpful for us in many ways. Sometimes they manage to make the soldiers *think*. At protests they can 'de-arrest'[9] us [...] They give legal support, and that is very important because they have much better chances to win cases [...] They can leak

[7] For a discussion of the term and its progressive conceptual expansion see, for instance, Della Porta, Donatella, and Mario Diani, *Social movements: An introduction*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006): 17-19.
[8] See Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
[9] Strategy the meaning of which is explained in Section 4.

> information to us that we wouldn't have access to [...] When we tour together abroad, they give credit to our narrative... it becomes harder to accuse us of being terrorists.[10]

Other Palestinian activists stressed similar points and added more: Israeli activists (and internationals for that matter) can deter soldiers' and settlers' violence that is routinely carried out against Palestinians; they can bring mediatic visibility to issues that would otherwise go unnoticed; they "hold the keys" to understanding the Israeli system; Jews – Israelis and otherwise – who take a stance against the occupation undermine Israel's claim to represent World Jewry[11] (some Israeli activists actually downplayed their role, especially vis-à-vis their own society and government and joked that "Some Palestinians think that we are much more influential than we actually are"[12]).

To begin with, let us clarify the different ways in which privilege is mobilized, and to which goals. To this end, there is a vast literature to draw on that has addressed the issue of privileged-oppressed – or insiders-outsiders – strategic alliances in struggles for more equality. Concerning the goals of the struggle, the contribution of insider supporters is generally seen as twofold: challenging the system of supremacy from within its constituency – thus complementing the resistance of the oppressed in an arena that largely falls outside their scope – and supporting the self-determination of the oppressed by adding leverage to their struggle, at both the local and international level. The latter is what is sometimes considered solidarity strictly speaking, and includes logistic support, co-resistance, and actions that can raise the political 'cost' of rights violations by the oppressive authority.[13] In each of these sectors, the privilege that insiders can mobilize is not monolithic, but composed of different dimensions, each of which grants different types of 'access.' While mostly intertwined in practice, it is useful to distinguish these dimensions analytically. I identify three such dimensions: *institutional*, *discursive*, and *ontological*, which I now turn to describing.

*Institutional* access is the access to the institutions that compose a socio-political system – the parliaments and the courts, the army, the university and the medias, institutions of social aid, and so forth – as well as to a set of tools, resources, and infrastructures – ranging from legal litigations to the very physical channels of movement. Theorists of counter-hegemony and revolution have highlighted

[10] Interview, Beit Sahour, October 29, 2019.
[11] Interviews: West Jerusalem, November 26, 2019; Sheikh Jarrah, November 26, 2019; East Jerusalem, December 10, 2019; Hebron, December 16, 2019.
[12] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 27, 2019.
[13] Formulations of this can be found across cases of solidarity struggles – from the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power, to Apartheid South Africa, to Untouchability in India, as well as in transnational solidarity regimes. See, for example, Kwame Ture (previously Stokely Carmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black power: The politics of liberation in America*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); Nelson Mandela, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, (NB Publishers, 2013); Gary T. Marx and Michael Useem, "Majority Involvement in Minority Movements: Civil Rights, Abolition, Untouchability," *Journal of Social Issues* 27, no. 1 (1971): 81-104; Sakhela Buhlungu, "Rebels without a Cause of Their Own? The contradictory location of white officials in black unions in South Africa, 1973–94," *Current Sociology* 54, no. 3 (2006): 427-451; Florence Passy and Marco Giugni, ed., *Political Altruism? Solidarity Movements in International Perspective*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001); Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

how this type of access allows not only an insider's understanding of the system of injustice, but a way into "the social and political circles that could change policies and laws."[14] Being "armed from the enemy's arsenal" entails the potential of working with its tools, and not just against them, and eventually "turning [them] back upon their makers."[15] Having a 'vanguard' of activists who have easily developed, by virtue of their socio-economic status, a set of skills – from speaking the language of power, to being used to its ways of organizing, propagandizing, fundraising, and so on – can help the struggle formulate and channel its claims more effectively.[16] Members of the ruling group are not the only ones who have access to these institutions, tools, and skills, and not all of them have it in equal measure. In this case, Palestinian citizens of Israel do have the right to be elected and appeal to courts. Most Palestinians, in Israel and in the West Bank, speak perfect Hebrew, and many activists have education and skills that equal and exceed those of their Israeli counterparts. Mizrahi Jews, on the other hand, often lack cultural and economic capital due to their socioeconomic marginalization. Yet, the fact remains that the system is built so as to disproportionately favour Jewish-Israelis in all above respects. *De facto*, they have much better chances to be elected, admitted to university, have their voice heard in courts and medias, and to garner internal information on – for instance – the workings of the army, the settlement enterprise, or the corporate entanglements with the occupation. They can obtain access to social and medical services with an alacrity that is precluded to most Palestinians, and unlike them can move freely across most of Israel-Palestine.

*Discursive* access is access to the collective ideas and values of society into which members of the social collective are socialized by State institutions, and through which they interpret and make sense of the world. From Gramsci onwards, theorists of ideology have highlighted how actors who want to forward structural change in society need to engage with this "common sense:" only by recovering some of its elements, after having "disarticulated" them from the web of meaning in which they are entangled, and by "rearticulating" them into new forms, can actors of change hope to co-opt the rest of society into a counter-hegemonic sensitivity.[17] Scholars of contentious politics have referred to this process as "frame alignment" and stressed how it is necessary for social movements to frame their

[14] Sally Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008): 163. See also Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), and Jean Harvey, *Civilized Oppression*, (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

[15] Ernesto Che Guevara, *Che Guevara Reader: Writings on Politics and Revolution* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2022): 78; Jonathan Luke Austin and Anna Leander, "Designing-With/In World Politics: Manifestos for an International Political Design," *Political Anthropological Research on International Social Sciences (PARISS)* 2, no. 1 (2021): 16, 18. See also Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971): 238-239; Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the world politically*, (New York-London: Verso Books, 2013); Ernesto Che Guevara, *Che Guevara Reader*; Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: war and democracy in the age of empire* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 359.

[16] Marx and Useem, "Majority Involvement in Minority Movements", p. 90; Buhlungu, "Rebels without a Cause of Their Own?", 437.

[17] See most notably Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*, Verso Trade, 2014. See also Mouffe, Chantal, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London, Boston, Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979): 168-203.

claims consistently with what is perceived to be the common good both in front of the State and of other sectors of society.[18] Many scholars have emphasized how actors who have been socialized into popular beliefs and cultural traditions are better equipped to engage in this process: to identify the contradictions and fallacies of the dominant discourse and de-naturalize them,[19] to recognize how the oppressed group's claims speak to the interests and sensitivities of other sectors of society,[20] and to use a reworked symbolism, as well as their own identities as members of the dominant collective, to bridge between these groups and theirs.[21]

The third type of access insiders have is to the same *ontological* ground of the dominant majority, and subsequently to the normative subconscious scripts that apply to it. This access is enjoyed by virtue of who one *is* in terms of embodied features: in this case, Jewish, white, and Western subjects.[22] Indeed, as scholars of the biopolitical have theorized, dominant Western and colonial norms establish "hierarchies of corporeal nature" based on racialized bodies that distribute vulnerability – and indeed humanity – unevenly.[23] On the one side, there are the "grievable bodies" of the dominant Us, which are intelligible to us and therefore "count" when it comes to violence and application of the law.[24] On the other side, there are racialized Others who, unrecognizable as peers, are not subjected to our sympathy, and therefore are perceived as "ungrievable," disposable, not even human.[25] The corporeal aspect here, the 'body,' is the medium on which power is inscribed,[26] and as such it matters as it encapsulates all the "racialized assemblages" – the "discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts" – that together ensure the maintenance of political structures and institutions that bar non-white subjects from being considered fully human.[27]

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[18] See Paul Statham, "Political Opportunities for Altruism? The role of state policies in influencing British anti-racist and pro-migrant movements," in Marco Giugni and Florence Passy (eds.), *Political Altruism? Solidarity Movements in International Perspective,* Rowman and Littlefield (2001), pp. 133 – 158; David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Steven K. Worden, and Robert Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 464-81.

[19] Karin M. Fierke, *Changing games, changing strategies: Critical investigations in security*, Manchester University Press (1998).

[20] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy,* pp. 127-134.

[21] Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, p. 163; Jeb Aram Middlebrook, "Organizing a rainbow coalition of revolutionary solidarity" *Journal of African American Studies*23.4 (2019): 405-434.

[22] Rema Hammami, "Precarious politics: The activism of 'bodies that count' (aligning with those that don't) in Palestine's colonial frontier," in *Vulnerability in resistance,* edited by Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, Duke University Press (2016), pp. 167-190.

[23] Hammami, "Precarious politics," p. 175. See also Alana Lentin, *Why race still matters*. John Wiley & Sons, 2020.

[24] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009); Jennifer Hyndman, "Feminist Geopolitics Revisited: Body Counts in Iraq," *Professional Geographer* 59, no. 1 (2007): 35–46. See also Keith Krause, "Bodies count: the politics and practices of war and violent death data," *Human Remains and Violence: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 3, no. 1 (2017): 90-115.

[25] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Butler, *Frames of War*. See also Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.

[26] Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation,* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2017): 47.

[27] Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 3. The experience of the racialized body here is close to what Mignolo calls a "border epistemology", "the bio-graphical sensing of the Black body in the Third World anchoring a politics of knowledge that is ingrained both in the body and in local histories" (Walter D. Mignolo, "Geopolitics of sensing and knowing: on (de)coloniality, border thinking and epistemic disobedience," *Postcolonial Studies*, 14, no. 3 (2011): 274.

In recent years, studies of social movements have highlighted how these hierarchies can be exploited in nonviolent practices. These reflections build on the original theorizations of nonviolence and compute in the reasoning the differential vulnerabilities that different populations can mobilize. For instance, practices of so-called 'protective accompaniment' or 'interposition,' where first-world volunteers accompany local civilians in order to deter and expose violent abuses, 'apply' differential ontological privilege to the age-old tactic of political jiu-jitsu.[28] In political jiu-jitsu, responding to the violent repression of the State with peaceful endurance turns that violence against itself by making it appear all the more reprehensible.[29] If political jiu-jitsu mobilizes vulnerability as a tool in the struggle, interposition accounts for the fact that mobilizing vulnerability does not work for everyone in the same way. When first-world volunteers are there, the mere presence of their 'bodies that count' – irrespective of whether particular skills or discourses are mobilized – is enough to trigger the activation of normative scripts of humanity in the audience – be it soldiers, settlers, or the public that watches a video of the action. The violence that is integral part of the ontological condition of the Other is momentarily de-naturalized, the notion of rights becomes applicable, and this vicariously increases the potential of ungrievable bodies to be finally seen and heard.[30] This logic is not only at work on the physical ground of interposition practices, but also, albeit in a less immediately bodily fashion, in instances, like political talks and tours, where members of the two sides concur in denouncing oppression. In these situations, the presence of someone belonging to 'Us' provides the ontological bridge that attracts the attention of the media and triggers the indignation of the wider public.

As we will see in the empirical sections, Israeli activists mobilize, more or less consciously, all of these kinds of access as they struggle to uphold Palestinian rights, and do so across the different foci of internal change, solidarity on the ground, and solidarity at the international level.

Now, each of these privileged accesses comes at the risk of consolidating the frameworks – institutional, discursive, and ontological – that establish them in the first place. Gramscian studies of social movements have highlighted how critiques that engage with the discourses and tools of the status quo are more subject to the risk of co-optation by the system, leading to what Gramsci termed "passive revolution:" "a situation where demands which challenge the hegemonic order are

[28] Patrick Coy, "The Privilege Problematic in International Nonviolent Accompaniment's Early Decades", *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace* 4, no. 2 (2011); Sara Koopman, ""Mona, mona, mona!" Whiteness, tropicality, and international accompaniment in Colombia," *Latin American Studies working paper series* (2012); Ivan Boothe and Lee A. Smithey, "Privilege, Empowerment, and Nonviolent Intervention," *Peace and Change* 32, no. 1 (2007): 39-61; Liam Mahony and Luis E. Eguren, *Unarmed bodyguards: international accompaniment for the protection of human rights*, (Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, 1997).

[29] Borrowed from a martial art that uses the attacker's greater strength against himself, the term was first used by Richard Gregg in relation to the activism of Gandhi, and then made famous by Gene Sharp (Jonathan Sutton, Charles R. Butcher, and Isak Svensson, "Explaining political jiu-jitsu: Institution-building and the outcomes of regime violence against unarmed protests," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 5 (2014): 559-573; Gene Sharp, *The politics of nonviolent action,* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973). The idea of mobilizing vulnerability in struggle has since then been elaborated widely and has found new impetus recently, see e.g. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, ed., *Vulnerability in Resistance*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

[30] Hammami, "Precarious politics."

appropriated by the existing system so as to satisfy them in a way that neutralizes their subversive potential."[31] This co-optation occurs as the system makes concessions to its challengers – in the form of reforms or minor adjustments that address partial demands of protest groups – which eschew the core of the contention while at the same time re-establishing the hegemon's leading role and restore its challenged legitimacy. As in Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* famous dictum on the resourceful ways of power, these concessions may "change everything so that everything can stay the same."

At the same time, challenges that harness hegemonic structures also directly validate them by the very fact of relying on them – however strategic this reliance may be. For instance, forms of resistance and solidarity enacted through the law accept the "rules of the legal game," which bound them to the arguments, practices, and actors that are considered legitimate in that game.[32] For instance, advancing Palestinian claims in courts entails mostly restraining those claims to individual human rights issues while leaving outside political issues of Zionism, colonialism, and collective indigenous rights that the system would not recognize as legitimate. As such, the occasional victories that may be achieved fail to tackle the foundations of the system (and may additionally backfire by prompting the system to perfect its workings, as we will see in Section 3).

When it comes to discursive tools, drawing on resonant ideas and emotions in society to support oppositional claims may not only "dilute them to the point that winning changes very little," but also inadvertently fuel hegemony by perpetuating the mentalities to which these ideas are linked in the collective psyche.[33] For instance, drawing on the fear of war and annihilation, or on the idea that Israel should be held accountable as a 'haven' of progress and civilization in 'jungle' of the Middle East, may convince many Israelis of the need to withdraw territorial claims on the West Bank, but at the cost of bolstering a sense of siege and of superiority towards the Palestinians (cf. Section 3).

Finally, strategies that rely for their effectiveness on racialized hierarchies of vulnerability may reproduce, rather than challenge, those very hierarchies. Practices that seek to provide protection and visibility to ungrievable Others, "albeit not necessarily linked to paternalistic powers, do still enforce paternalistic logics, or rely on figures of victimhood that assume that those who are vulnerable are therefore without agency."[34] Moreover, it needs not be forgotten that the activation of normative scripts of grievability discussed above remains vicarious: when Jewish-Israeli activists mobilize their

[31] In Mouffe, *Agonistics*. See also Gregory M. Maney, Lynne M. Woehrle, and Patrick G. Coy, "Harnessing and challenging hegemony: The US peace movement after 9/11," *Sociological Perspectives* 48, no.3 (2005): 357-381.
[32] Elian Weizman, "Hegemony, law, resistance: struggles against Zionism in the State of Israel," (PhD diss., SOAS, 2013): 63. See also Stuart Scheingold, "The Struggle to Politicize Legal Practice: A Case Study of Left-Activist Lawyering in Seattle," in *Cause Lawyering: Political Commitments and Professional Responsibilities*, ed. Austin Sarat, and Stuart Scheingold, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[33] Maney et al., "Harnessing and challenging hegemony," 362. See also Agnes S. Ku, "Hegemonic Construction, Negotiation and Displacement: The Struggle over Right of Abode in Hong Kong," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4 (2001): 259–78; Charlotte Ryan, *Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organizing*, (Boston: South End Press, 1991).
[34] Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, "Introduction," in *Vulnerability in resistance,* 4. See also Coy, "The privilege problematic"; Hammami, "Precarious politics"; Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders.*

privileged bodies, it is on themselves that they draw the eyes and empathy of the audience. Palestinian bodies, by contrast, remain essentially ungrievable and unintelligible, and violence towards them can continue unnoticed as soon as the 'bodies that count' leave the stage.

There is one final point to keep in mind when considering the side effects of mobilizing privilege, and it is the risk of inadvertently reproducing power asymmetries in the very relationships between partners in struggle. This may involve the privileged assuming leadership roles by virtue of possessed skills or an interiorized sense of superiority, imposing dominant modes of behavior and standards, adopting patronizing attitudes, stereotyping and objectifying (or by contrast overidentifying and 'appropriating') the 'oppressed' thereby inhibiting their full empowerment, voice, and agency.[35]

All of these counter-effects, importantly, are at work irrespectively of activists' intentions to bring about radical social change, because the constraints and hegemonic counter-pushes raised operate at a structural level. This has led some – activists and thinkers alike – to the bleak conclusion that any attempt at bringing change by exploiting the tools and privileges afforded by the system is doomed to fail. In Audre Lorde's famous terms, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."[36] By this conclusion, the only alternative left is a struggle that is waged entirely outside and in open rejection of the system. If applied to the role of privileged insiders, this perspective demands that they fully relinquish their privilege and adopt a "purity" of engagement that is safe from reproducing asymmetric structures.[37]

It goes without saying, however, that there are problems with this idea as well, as examples in Section 4 will clarify. Firstly, and most self-evidently, refusing to use certain privileges means also renouncing the possibilities they open. This may be extremely costly in terms of the achievement of short-term changes which, however cosmetic, may provide substantial improvements in the lives of those concerned, and also in terms of the ability to reach entire sectors of the population, and potential allies among them.

Secondly, while exploiting systemic tools might facilitate the possibility of being co-opted by the system, doing without them does not exclude that possibility either. As seen in the example brought

[35] Scholz, *Political solidarity*; Passy and Giugni, *Political altruism*; "Coy, "The privilege problematic"; Marx and Useem, "Majority involvement"; Sakhela Buhlungu, "Rebels without a Cause of Their Own? The Contradictory Location of White Officials in Black Unions in South Africa, 1973–94," *Current Sociology* 54, no. 3 (2006): 427-451; Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*. See also Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Penguin Books, 2021), and Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, (London: Routledge, 2013). This is one of the central problems of solidarity from a position of privilege, and because it has to do both with strategic issues and with power dynamics across asymmetric relationships, it will be treated in this chapter as well as in the next.

[36] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in Audre Lorde, Mahogany L. Browne, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, (Berkeley: Crossing Press (2007/1984): 112.

[37] Paul Chatterton, ""Give up activism" and change the world in unknown ways: Or, learning to walk with others on uncommon ground," *Antipode* 38, no. 2 (2006): 259-281. See also Chris Bobel, "'I'm not an activist, though I've done a lot of it': doing activism, being activist and the 'perfect standard' in a contemporary movement," *Social movement studies* 6, no. 2 (2007): 147-159.

by Eyal in the previous chapter, also struggles carried out in stark opposition to the system can be used by the hegemon as 'proof' that the system is in fact plural and open to the democratic game, thus reinforcing its legitimacy.

Finally, as poignantly expressed by an activist in the introduction to this chapter, relinquishing privilege is more easily said than done, given its embeddedness in all aspects of political and everyday life. This is true for all societies, and particularly so in the Israeli case in which hierarchies of privilege are particularly regulatory and pervasive. Activists may try to do without – and in overt contestation of – laws and dominant beliefs, but they cannot remove themselves from society as they live their lives, nor can they disown their privileged bodies and the meanings that others attach to them. As seen in the previous chapter, people cannot "choose to *become* marginalized" even if they want to, nor can "whites disavow whiteness," because "one's appearance of being white will still operate to confer privilege in numerous and significant ways."[38]

If, then, using the 'master's tools' reinforces the system, and doing without them may be ineffective when not utterly impossible, those who work to bring about change encounter dilemmas at each strategic choice they need to make. Facing these dilemmas is always difficult, and all the more so in the present Israeli context where the space of manoeuvre for insiders working as mediators across different fields is particularly narrow due to both structural and contingent factors. It is to these constraints that the next section turns.

## *2. Manoeuvring in a Shrinking Space: Depoliticization or Radicalization?*

Besides the inherent limitations of mobilizing access to hegemonic tools and discourses, there are further constraints to activists' strategic interventions as insiders that derive from the specific context in which they operate. Some of these are structural: they derive from the settler colonial structure of Israel-Palestine, which makes the space for radical critique narrow both within Israel – whose institutions are particularly averse to decolonial change – and across the Israeli and Palestinian societies – separated by a colonial divide which shrinks the space for a shared ground of critique. In addition, the socio-political changes that have invested Israel-Palestine in the past two decades have further sclerotized both of these traits, further narrowing the margins for legitimate dissent in Israel and further polarizing the public opinion of both Israeli and Palestinian societies vis-à-vis each other. While we have reviewed both of these kinds of constraints in Chapter Two, it is useful here to emphasize how they impact the possibility of activists to effectively rely on their access to hegemonic tools and discourses.

[38] Respectively Sandra Harding, *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991): 295, and Linda Martín Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?," *Hypathia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 17.

Firstly, within Israel, a settler colonial regime built from the outset to prevent the reform of its ethnocratic structure has strengthened its institutional mechanisms to deter such kinds of critique by criminalizing and delegitimizing even mild forms of dissent. As seen in Chapter One, if using the 'democratic' platform to challenge the Jewish character of the State was illegal since 1985, the Nation-State Law has further hindered the possibility to advocate for the collective political rights of other nationalities. If it was already illegal for Israelis to question military service on political grounds, now organizations that criticize the occupation are prevented from offering their alternative voice in school meetings or as part of the National Civil service. Left-wing NGOs, already 'tamed' by the rules of the game in the institutional arena, have been further hindered in their operational capacity by the criminalization and delegitimation of their work. Individual dissent is increasingly policed as well, and often met with coercive measures – such as being called in for a 'talk' by secret services, being arrested or subjected to police violence – for reasons as simple as having participated to a demonstration, having criticized the army in a classroom, or having commemorated the Nakba on Independence Day.[39] As raised by Israeli lawyer Michael Sfard, "Legislative action has an immense chilling effect [...], even if it does not end in enactment. This hurts Human Rights Defenders and human rights organizations. It creates anxiety, a constant sense of danger, fear of sanctions. And, obviously, it creates a clear sense of being 'outside the fence.'"[40] As such, while hindering the practice of internal critique, this situation further casts its actors outside of the Israeli social field, undermining their ability to reach internal audiences and mobilize their 'ontological' status as insiders.

Secondly, across Israeli and Palestinian societies, already incompatible perceptions of the Palestine question are polarizing even more from both sides, making it very difficult for Israeli activists to find a common ground of critique. The shared (if marginal) decolonial reading of the 1970s and, later, the agreement to compromise on a two-state solution, have become unthinkable after Camp David. In the polarization of frames of reference that followed – with Israelis seeing all Palestinians and their 'Israeli friends' as terrorists, and Palestinians seeing any form of cooperation with Israelis as a form of collaboration with the status quo – Israeli activists are left with very little audience for their claims.[41]

Yet, along these developments, the unprecedented scale of rights violations towards Palestinians – and in a different way also of Jewish-Israelis, culturally or politically marginalized such as Mizrahi Jews and activists – multiply the sites that require civil society intervention as well as its urgency, and compels activists to act in any available way.

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[39] Multiple interviews, Jerusalem, 2019.
[40] Michael Sfard, quoted in HRDF (Human Rights Defenders Fund), "By All Means: The various ways Israel is targeting Human Rights Defenders," June 2019, http://hrdf.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/By-all-means_web.pdf., 15.
[41] An activist noted: "There are the Israeli radicals, there is the middle ground, and then there are the Palestinians. The space left in between is very tiny, if it exists at all!" (Interview, West Jerusalem, May 16, 2019).

The combination of these factors has led to a general lowering of the bar of expectations for change among activists, whereby short-term goals and basic demands have gained priority over broad political visions and long-term solutions. Upholding human rights in front of blatant violations, deterring physical violence, slowing the pace of settlement expansion, and the general framework of 'ending the occupation' have outnumbered – in a 'whatever works' kind of attitude – the calls for decolonization, de-Zionisation, or even a Palestinian State. "The 'red line' in public discourse is anything beyond the 'occupation' framing. Apartheid, right of return, not to mention the boycott, all need to be avoided if you want to be listened to in Israeli society. And even with the 'occupation' [framing] you need to make it clear that you're still Zionist, that you come from the army, and all that."[42] Focusing on a shared project for the future, and conditioning to it the possibilities of joint struggle and cooperation between different actors, seems to some so far off that it is not worth spending energy on at this point in time. Doron, an activist in his 40s, reflected as such:

> I used to think that it was very important to situate our work, and ourselves… But what I think now is that our differences will be relevant the moment they will *become* relevant. And that is such a long way from here! And this applies to differences among us [Israeli activists] but also between us and Palestinians. Take Rashid for instance [one of his closest Palestinian partners and friends], he's very religious! I am sure that in a normal situation we would be on very different sides politically. But now what is relevant is the occupation.[43]

This has led to seeing present-day Israeli activism as 'depoliticized' comparatively to past forms, especially by the older generations. Many of them are bitterly disappointed by this depoliticization, which they see as either a form of docility towards the system or of disengagement from responsible political critique. See for instance how a couple of former Matzpen activists discussed the new generations of activists:

> *A.*: Many of them are young, you know, they go for the injustice that happens, they don't really have a political motivation…
> *E.*: That's true!
> *A.*: But you also have to see, they come from bourgeois families, they have everything, and still they decide to come [to activism] anyway. That's very touching! […]
> *E.*: But it's true that younger generations feel much less the importance of forming a general point of view and understanding, a logical analysis, an ideological movement… We believed in this… They are different, they act to help the weak, as if they would help a small child who fell in the street… […] Their concern is towards a localized kind of harm: there is harm to the people in the West Bank, so you need to help. But they don't say that there is a whole project of displacing a whole nation and creating an apartheid society. […] They choose to do it this way because it's *undisputable* – helping the weak is undisputable, right, I agree!

[42] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.
[43] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 27, 2019.

> But Matzpen refused to put it in these terms. What they say is not too bad for the establishment either. They're 'correcting our mistakes,' 'helping our victims' (the unfortunate victims of our projects – everyone makes victims in the pursuit of greater ideals, right?) and in this sense they can be part of the project. The system is even proud: they're the 'good Jews' helping the weak! [...]
> A.: It's good for democracy![44]

From a very different political perspective, also Reut, the self-defined "Peacenownik" encountered in the previous chapter, criticized present groups' depoliticization, this time for their means of action more than for their framings. For her, this was evident in their going "completely grassroots" compared to past movements which organized and channeled their actions through more or less formalized links to political parties:[45] "Being in the field, gathering first-hand information… that's great, but it's not enough. You need to make the fight at the political level! The link with the political leadership is very important."[46]

From yet another perspective came decolonial activist and scholar Jeff Halper, the director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition (ICAHD) and now also prominent advocate for a one-state solution through the platform One Democratic State Campaign (ODSC).[47] He criticized the lack of structure and political programming of contemporary Israeli activism, putting it in relation with issues of activism more globally:

> There aren't really groups in the Israeli [activist] left… they're individuals, very fragmented… [...] Going to a demonstration every week doesn't change much, if the political platform is missing. I wanted to pass ICHAD onto the next generation, but nobody wanted it! "We don't want an organization, we want to do direct action." They don't believe they can change anything, so why bother? The issue is so big that they feel like they cannot grapple with it, they're disempowered. Also, activism is become very bourgeois. They grew up in the neoliberal world and they don't want to give it up, they have no reason to. It's the same globally… The No-Global movement failed because they had no structure. There was this very popular sticker in the 1990s: 'Think global, act local." But if you think about it's terrible! Who acts globally then? Only corporations.[48]

However, when I discussed the issue of depoliticization with younger activists, while they were not flattered to be called 'non-political,' they also resolutely defended their position and did not hesitate in some cases to define their actions as "more radical" than those of their predecessors. When I raised

[44] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019.
[45] Peace Now had links with the Labor party throughout the 1980s and 1990s (before the second intifada broke the consensus within the 'left'), and also later through the work of Yossi Beilin and the Geneva Initiative. Matzpen also run for elections in 1982 as the Progressive List for Peace, before the law against political parties that challenge the Jewish foundations of the state was passed.
[46] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 11, 2019.
[47] ICAHD was an Israeli "direct-action organization" established in 1997 focusing on resisting Israel's policy of demolishing Palestinian homes from within a systemic critique of the Zionist regime. The organization closed its Israeli branch in 2015 and now carries out its work from its international branches. (Home, ICAHD, *https://icahd.org*).
[48] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.

the problem of framing with Raz, a very young activist who had been the main referent for West Jerusalem-based events about Issawiya in her dual role of activist of Free Jerusalem and employee of Ir Amim, she replied a bit vexed:

> Look, we [at Free Jerusalem] didn't really produce a manifesto or anything like that… we did have a conversation once, but we didn't come up with a satisfying solution so we dropped it – we didn't have huge disagreements either. Our framing is quite simple: solidarity is the main thing (that is, following a struggle that we are needed for). […] We also never have the *time*! We are very few people, and we are always running from one emergency to the other… Though for sure we'd stay away from anything that could be perceived as normalization. With Ir Amim it's a bit different, we have a broader scope, more resources, and a strategy that is long term (that Jerusalem should be the shared capital). With Free Jerusalem we don't think about what the future in twenty years will be.[49]

Another Free Jerusalem activist elaborated further as we discussed the matter via e-mail:

> Groups with older members, or that have been around for very long, tend to have different and *less radical* choices of action and ideology. For me, I experience that the younger generation of activists, those of Standing Together or Free Jerusalem or Mesarvot, don't find the anti-colonialization analysis crucial, nor do they find opinions on Zionism relevant as a political frame of action. Yes, we don't agree with those who demonstrate with Israeli flags, but for us it's not something we would want to highlight. It's not effective nor does it relate to our point, which is to end the occupation. In a sense, […] the loss of a Palestinian united plan has made us just focus on the now and offer no real alterative – because we are not the ones that should offer it but they are. Complex. The older activists have served in the army, they worked in co-existence groups, they grew up without a wall and in a different atmosphere. They have less financial troubles so they can continue fighting and not just do it as volunteer work at nights. In that sense, to my eyes they cannot be really compared to other groups that are small, insignificant, and rather short-lived.[50]

From these excerpts, a quite different perspective on depoliticization (and indeed on 'bourgeois' privilege) emerges. Next to a sense of impotence towards long-term solutions and analyses, activists are also proud of the fact that they are nonetheless managing to navigate a context, the one they have inherited for their activism, in which the needs for intervention have multiplied while the room to do so politically has shrunk considerably. They do not deny that the possibility of a meaningful political critique 'from within' has eroded. However, they do not see a solution in running after the forms of critique that were popular in the past – comprehensive, systematic, programmatic – as their older counterparts propose. They choose instead to do with the situation, and the constraints, in which they find themselves – to embrace them in a way – in what seems to be less a lack of strategy than a strategic choice in itself – one of pragmatism and engagement, and one that is very 'political'

[49] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 18, 2019.
[50] E-mail to author, September 2, 2020.

nonetheless. Indeed Doron, the activist whom we saw before reflecting on the (ir)relevance of ideological differences in the current moment, returned Matzpen's criticisms back to the sender, finding fault in the rigidity of its ideological framing which had led to splits he saw as self-referential, and praising instead new groups' ability to find common ground based on concrete, if politically 'messier' engagements:

> Think about Matzpen, divided on such small issues, and for what? We need to learn from those mistakes. The same goes for NGOs. Take Breaking the Silence. Politically, it wasn't natural for me to work with them. At the beginning I kept a distance. But Yehuda [the director of Breaking the Silence] is an amazing activist! We have a tendency to classify organizations according to their formal status (NGOs, human rights, movements) or to their stance (Zionist, non, anti), but I think that what creates a commonality between groups is not this, but the willingness to put your hands in shit! Breaking the Silence, B'Tselem, Ta'ayush, are much more similar than what separates them. Other organizations, like Peace Now, are not like that, there is gap between them and reality. For me, activism is the willingness to put your hands in shit, and there are people who are willing to do this from very different starting points.[51]

This attitude is shared also by some Palestinian activists, especially those facing particularly dire situations. Take for instance Jamil, an activist in Hebron, a city that has suffered for decades under continuous settlement expansion:

> Now it's not the time of solutions, it's about protecting whatever is left. Cooperation is on very short-term goals, it's not even about ending the occupation. [...] We don't talk [with Israeli activists] about whether Israel is a settler colonial project, or whether Zionism is racist. Some of the organizations we work with don't have stances on issues that are important for us, but, in the end, we decide to cooperate depending on the benefits it brings to our cause.[52]

This is often taken by Israeli activists as one more justification not to engage in the subtleties of political analyses (either because "Palestinians don't care whether we are Zionist or not" or because "we are not the ones that should offer [a united plan], but they are").[53] Of course there are problems with this. The first is the fact that this position is not that of all Palestinians: some, with whom I spoke, had grown very impatient with Israeli activists' hesitancy to take clear stances against Zionism.[54] Others, who refused to be interviewed for this dissertation, outright refuse any form of cooperation precisely for this reason. Moreover, Israeli activists could fairly assume that even the most compromising Palestinians would still prefer an anti-Zionist ally, if they had the option, and could

[51] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 27, 2019.
[52] Interview, Hebron, December 16, 2019. Similar points were made by Palestinian activists also in the neighbour of Sheikh Jarrah.
[53] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 11, 2019; e-mail exchange September 2, 2020.
[54] Interviews: Beit Sahour, October 29, 2019; East Jerusalem, December 10, 2019.

take into consideration the different situations from which each of them come from when weighting the reasons for underspecified political platforms.

Still, the fact remains that side-lining political framings is, for many Israelis and Palestinians, less a sign of being privileged and "bourgeois" than a matter of necessity. And that the opposite – focusing one's effort on defining stances and programs – may instead be a sign of privilege and detachment from the most concrete consequences of Israeli daily violence.

Moreover, accepting to compromise for Palestinians does not mean that anything works, and conditions are still put to collaborations. The interview with Jamil continued as such:

> It depends on the level of normalization. Are they ready to be in the field and really expose the occupation? Are they attacked in their society for this? These things are important: that they come to the frontline with us, and that they really talk about the occupation, not about 'peace' or 'democracy.'[55]

These conditions resemble closely those of 'putting one's hands in shit' depicted by the Israeli activist above: a full, bodily, 'frontline' engagement. While this may involve a problematic 'sacrifice' attitude (c.f. Chapter Five), it also signals the importance of creating bonds of trust through a personal and relational engagement continued in time. It is in this sense that what is described as 'depoliticization' by older activists may instead be taken as a sign of a 'more radical' political engagement: not only because it creates bonds across political divides, but because it brings people on the ground of the struggle, where a radical intersubjective transformation can be triggered. We will see examples of the unfolding of this through this chapter and the next.

If the one delineated so far is a general trajectory of activism, present-day activists' strategic engagements with the structures of Zionism are far from uniform or fixed in time. The next empirical sections will examine them and emphasise how activists opted for one or the other as a best response to the current situation.

### *3. Fighting from Within: 'Peace,' 'Democracy,' and Human Rights*

Some activists tackle the strategic dilemma by opting for struggling for Palestinian rights essentially from within the hegemonic framework of Zionism. Premised on an incremental approach to change, this strategy aims at improving the Israeli system one step at a time by twisting existing discursive articulations and operating in the interstices made available by the legal framework. Israeli society and politics are viewed as the primary loci of change. Solidarity with Palestinians is primarily humanitarian rather than political, since Palestinians are expected to rely politically on their own separate authorities. This is the approach of the largest and most established activist organizations in

[55] Interview, Hebron, December 16, 2019.

Israeli civil society, usually registered as NGOs so as to be able to work on a more long-term basis, with secure funding, and through political channels. As one activist put it: "Fighting powerful bodies requires powerful resources, and this requires investing time in the structure of the organization and doing things as bureaucracies require them."[56] Their work can be variously focused on political, legal or humanitarian ground.

Those who fight battles on political grounds aim at shifting public opinion and the government, generally towards the two-state solution of the Oslo framework, to which many of these organizations still refer. They do so by variously mobilizing a discourse of 'peace' and the need to 'restore' the democratic and moral character of the State and the army against the 'moral corruption' brought about by the military occupation of the OPT started in 1967, and against 'unjustified' – as in, 'not defensive' – violence. The reliance on Zionist tropes is justified strategically by the need to tap into Israeli audiences, and it is often stressed how this choice is justified as long as it does not surpass a personally established line of acceptability. Take for instance these excerpts from an interview conducted with a member of Peace Now:

> In Peace Now, we are explicitly Zionist and for a two-state solution. We try to go against the zero-sum game that everything is presented to be: that if settlements and occupation are bad for Them they must be good for Us, that if peace is good for Them it must be bad for Us. We try to show how occupation is actually bad for us too. *This is strategic*: if we say we are there to help 'poor Palestinian families' it doesn't work with the public, they don't care. [...] For sure it's a difficult balance to find. We wouldn't go as far as the Commanders for Israeli Security, who basically say "we need to withdraw from the territories because we want to get rid of all of those Arabs."[57] In that way for sure the public will join you, but that's a line we don't want to cross. But still, maybe our discourse will not be accepted by the radicals.[58]

Peace Now is among the most well-known Israeli political NGOs and indeed, together with Combatants for Peace (CFP), relies heavily on Zionist tropes. It was stressed by several activists, both critical of their work and otherwise, that both organizations inscribe the legitimacy of their critique in the fact of coming from within the military environment. Peace Now was initiated with an open letter written by army generals, and garnered mass support when it decided to demonstrate against the First Lebanon War as a war of aggression that was inconsistent with the discourse of 'purity of arms' of the Israeli state.[59] Much later, when Combatants for Peace was born, it mobilized a similar

[56] Interview, West Jerusalem, April 21, 2019.
[57] Commanders for Israeli Security is a group composed of retired senior officials of Israeli security agencies advocating for a regional process of political-security arrangements with the Palestinians and the Arab States aimed at the achievement of a two-state agreement. According to the movement, such achievement is the only way that can "ensure Israel's security and its solid Jewish majority" against the threat of a "bi-national state and the end of the Zionist vision".(See the website of Commanders for Israeli Security, last accessed May 5, 2022, *http://en.cis.org.il*).
[58] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 11, 2019 (emphasis mine).
[59] Galia Golan, *Galia Golan: An Academic Pioneer on the Soviet Union, Peace and Conflict Studies, and a Peace and Feminist Activist*, (Springer: Pioneers in arts, humanities, science, engineering, practice, v. 22, 2018). These were the same grounds on which

framing by emphasizing that, as former 'combatants,' they could best testify against the endless cycle of violence engendered by the 'conflict' and advance a discourse of dialogue and peace.[60] See how one member describes the Alternative Memorial Day, a ceremony CFP organize in parallel to the official State-mandated one and where they bring testimonies from both Israelis and Palestinians who suffered the consequences the conflict (cf. Chapter One):

> It's a huge event because it makes you look at the conflict from a different perspective. [...] That's why it drives them crazy: we desecrate the memory of our soldiers by presenting them as *equal* with Palestinians who also fell and suffered. That is our point: blood is blood, pain is pain. [...] The situation is not simple. There is a lot of violence, there have been wars, there is no trust. When we talk about peace, the reaction is "What are you talking about?" [...] My friends accept me because I proved myself, I paid my duty, I did service and was wounded in the war. [...] We are mainstream, but in a good way... We can reach also people who are far away, not the usual suspects.[61]

In another example, Women Wage Peace is arguably the NGO with the least oppositional framing to Zionism, which is what allows them to be allegedly "the largest grassroots movement in Israel."[62] One of its members (who however shifted in and out of identification with them, as exemplified by her using alternatively "we" and "they") described it as such:

> It's for sure the most visible movement in the Israeli press – we work very hard on visibility. And it's institutional: many members have never been activists before. By the radical left it's perceived badly, they think it's a bunch of bored women from Tel Aviv. I once brought a radical friend of mine to a demonstration, and she said "It's not for me" because we don't talk about the occupation. [I: Why not?] Well, there are also people from the right-wing, and we want to keep that diversity, but if we talked about 'occupation' they would leave. The movement does not want to oppose the government, or use confrontational language in general... It's all about using positive language. *They* don't want to be perceived as 'leftists', that would be a very bad thing. Also the proposal for 'peace' is not very clear, they basically just say: "We want you [politicians] to sit and talk and find a solution." And many sign in because of the word 'peace': everybody wants peace! With big numbers, we can influence politics.[63]

Next to pre-eminently political organizations, there are the legal ones, whose engagement is not as much with Zionist framings as it is with the laws of the Zionist State (although, as seen in Section 1, the two often go together). Mostly, this entails working on a case-by-case basis to defend Palestinian rights: legal organizations gather complaints and requests from Palestinians who have been denied a

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the first groups of refusers were formed, and most notably the organization Yesh Gvul (see Perezz Kidron, ed., *Refusenik! Israel's Soldiers of Conscience*, (London: Zed Books, 2004).

[60] CFP website, About, https://cfpeace.org/about/. See also interview, Herzliya, December 2, 2019: "Their discourse always was: we are soldiers, we are Zionists, we are refuseniks."

[61] *Ibidem*.

[62] Women Wage Peace website, About Us, https://womenwagepeace.org.il/en/about-eng/. Where membership just entails registering once and for all (Interview, Givat Ram, November 28, 2019).

[63] Interview, Givat Ram, November 28, 2019.

building permit, who are under threat of house eviction or demolition, who are jailed without reason, or injured by settlers, and so on, and bring their cases to the courts. The collection of thousands of testimonies of rights infringements often allows these organizations to build huge archives that paint the picture of a structural system of injustices – an information that is sometimes used in advocacy reports directed to local and international bodies, where more political critiques can be advanced.[64] In general, however, these organizations revolve around a discourse of *individual* human rights, as opposed to collective political ones, and refrain from questioning the logic of discrimination that underlies the Israeli system.

The oldest and largest of these groups is the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, whose mandate is to protect the "human rights and civil liberties of all people living in Israel and the OPT" and to "*uphold the strong bases of Israeli democracy*." Well inserted within the institutional framework of the state, the organization works "with the courts, the Knesset, government agencies and civil society," and is allegedly "widely respected within the legal community and among decision makers, the media and the public at large."[65]

Another long-lived legal organization, largely respected among Palestinians in the OPT, is HaMoked, which was established in the period of the First Intifada and the State-led repressions that followed it:

> We wanted to focus on what people really needed: the 'disappeared' whose families were looking for, the conditions in jail, issues of family reunification, permits, freedom of movement… […] There was never a mission to end the occupation, but to *make life more acceptable* for the people who lived under it. The name of the organization says it too: "Center for the Defense of the *Individual*:" for us, it is the individual that counts, more than the principle.[66]

Finally, there are also humanitarian NGOs that act as monitors of rights violations or as service providers. Machsom Watch ('Checkpoint' watch) is a well-known organization of Israeli women whose physical presence at IDF checkpoints is meant to both deter and document human rights abuses, with a focus on "influencing public opinion in Israel" and "restoring the fabric of Israeli society and the values of democracy."[67] Machsom Watch is openly critical of the occupation, and this makes it so that its activists frame the organization as 'radical' within the spectrum of women groups ("We're not like Women Wage Peace… they're not good, they're not political at all!"[68]). At the same time, activists stress how they respect the army and the soldiers and work with them to 'humanize,' rather than dismantle, the checkpoints:

[64] See e.g. reports from Yesh Din and B'Tselem.
[65] ACRI website, https://www.english.acri.org.il.
[66] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 24, 2019.
[67] Machsom Watch website, https://machsomwatch.org/en.
[68] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 13, 2019.

> We are never rude to them, never call them fascist or anything… they are mostly kids who lost someone in the war, and so they hate. We try to open their eyes […] The other day, one of the soldiers treated me so rudely… she kept screaming at me that I couldn't stay there and treated me like a dog. "Is this how you treat your grandmother?" I said. Imagine how she treats Palestinians […] Another senior official came up and said that I could stand there because I was from Machsom Watch. He was very polite and I was told that he had seen to it that soldiers wouldn't eat, drink, or smoke in sight of those fasting [for Ramadan]. Then, he said to his soldiers that Machsom Watch is one of the *guardians of Israeli democracy*. [She pauses and smiles] This made me feel great, precisely because it came from a soldier that upholds an occupation, *because it means that it can be done humanely*.[69]

An example of a service provider is Road to Recovery, a volunteer-based organization, "apolitical and driven solely by humanitarian interests," whose work is focused on driving Palestinians needing medical treatment between the West Bank and Israel. As an activist who had volunteered with them told me:

> The Palestinian Authority pays Israel a lot of money to treat people they cannot treat because they don't have the technology, but Israel doesn't provide the transport from the checkpoint to the hospital. That's what they do. I liked it a lot, because it was very practical and effective work, and also because you create a deep connection while you're in the car together. At the same time, it embodies the occupation: we are the ones creating the conditions by which they cannot get treatment, and at the same time they depend on us for getting it… Those trips where always a pain in the stomach, I never felt better afterwards.[70]

As the space for the work of critical Jewish-Israelis narrowed, some organizations and activists have stepped more surely into this approach or shifted towards it from more radical positions. Some older members of Peace Now, for instance, have noted how the organization has further tamed its critique and modes of action since the Second Intifada:

> When the Second Intifada broke out, Palestinians couldn't understand why we weren't mobilizing, they were very disappointed at us… But we couldn't really do anything! There were [suicide] bombings every day, we couldn't just go out and demonstrate for the 'poor Palestinians.' Our frames of reference went completely apart. And we needed to have a modicum of legitimacy towards our society, or we would have lost them. That's when we chose to change our image. We closed off all contacts with Palestinians (and it was mutual). We supported the disengagement plan from Gaza, even if it was unilateral, and the year after we chose not to come out against the Second Lebanon War. That's when I came out of it. Peace Now shifted its focus only on the settlements, although of course it wasn't the only issue, and went completely out of the field. Now it's all about visibility, it's always in the press, and that's how they choose the issues they work on.[71]

[69] *Ibidem* (emphasis mine). See also Machsom Watch, "Ramadan report", internal document.
[70] Interview, East Jerusalem, December 2, 2019.
[71] Interview, Herzliya, December 2, 2019. See also interview, West Jerusalem, November 11, 2019.

A case of a group that tamed its previously radical critique in order to recover a respectable image in front of the Israeli audience was Physicians for Human Rights – Israel (PHRI). By mandate a humanitarian organization focused on medical assistance to people with limited access to it, "primarily migrants, refugees, and Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza," the group nonetheless provided a structural critique to the Israeli system, a position primarily embodied by its founder Ruchama Marton.[72] The group advocated for political rights next to human rights, and organized in ways that put coordination with Palestinians at the centre ("It is never a delegation of white colonialists going out to rescue the natives. We work together in full agreement with our Palestinian partners; they say where they need us and in the absolute majority of cases that's where we go").[73] Like others, the organization was harshly ostracized since 2009, and eventually decided to distance Marton due to her explicitly anti-Zionist positions, in what other activists have termed a "Zionist coup" within the organization.[74]

Perhaps the most paradigmatic case of a shift towards within-hegemonic strategies and framings, however, is that of the Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement, which was mentioned time and again in the interviews I conducted and is worth being treated at length. The movement started in late 2008 as a spontaneous mobilization of Israeli activists supporting Palestinians targeted by house evictions in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah.[75] Initially, protesters were acting accordingly to their Palestinian partners' framings and claims, and were mostly anti-Zionist.[76] As the protests attracted more Israeli Jewish followers, "the movement became mainstream and fashionable, it was all over the news, big personalities were involved, from Israel and from abroad."[77] At that point, part of the movement's leadership preferred to adopt a more moderate approach in order not to upset its new base, composed mostly of liberal Zionists: demonstrations gradually moved away from the East Jerusalem neighbourhood and into West Jerusalem, in a geographical shift that reflected the new target audience of the protest; Israeli flags outnumbered Palestinian ones, Hebrew language took the lead over Arabic, and Palestinian demands were intentionally mistranslated in order to make them

[72] PHRI website, About, https://www.phr.org.il/en/about/.
[73] Alon Mizrahi, "War crimes and open wounds: The physician who took on Israeli segregation," *+972 Magazine*, September 12, 2017, https://www.972mag.com/war-crimes-and-open-wounds-the-physician-who-took-on-israeli-segregation/.
[74] Interview, Jaffa, March 31, 2019. See also BDS Movement, "Distinguished Israeli doctor supports BDS," October 5, 2017, https://bdsmovement.net/news/distinguished-israeli-doctor-supports-bds.
[75] On the issue of house evictions in Sheikh Jarrah see Oren Ziv, "After a decade, evictions set to return in Sheikh Jarrah," *+972 Magazine*, December 3, 2018, https://www.972mag.com/after-a-decade-evictions-set-to-return-in-sheikh-jarrah/.
[76] Interview, Jaffa, March 31, 2019.
[77] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019. Several activists advanced an explanation to why moderate sectors of Israeli society were attracted to this protest in particular. This had to do with the legal stratagem used to dispossess Palestinians in this case: an application of the Israeli laws on absentee property that was diametrically opposed if the owner were Jewish or Palestinians, making the discrimination particularly blatant. In fact, if until then the absentee property law had been used to strip of their property rights Palestinians who left their houses in 1948, the same legal bases were now being applied to protect the rights of Jews who left in 1948 to reclaim their property instead (Interview, Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019).

more palatable to Israeli audiences.[78] It is worth quoting at length how Dov, one of the advocates of this shift, explained his choices:

> The mobilization was a success: we managed to legitimize it, to make it look not anti-Israel but actually patriotic. We worked a lot on making the framing good for the broad Israeli left. We emphasized the injustice, not the occupation or the oppression [...]: you can always justify occupation with security reasons, but it's hard to justify such a different application of the law if you think Israel is a democracy.[79] [...] We emphasized that politically we were aligned with politicians for a two-state solution. [...] Once, I think it was 2012, there was a huge demonstration, with thousands of people. One of the speakers was a young Palestinian woman who spoke in Arabic and was translated live because 99% of the public was Israeli. But then at some point she started talking about having "one Palestine from the river to the sea" – you, know, this was the discourse she was used to – and the translator had to improvise... He basically re-wrote the speech completely, because he understood that otherwise it would be a disaster![80]

Palestinians and radical Israeli activists eventually left the movement and kept organizing weekly small-scale protests in the neighbourhood which last to this day. The new leadership restructured it and renamed it, rather ironically, Solidarity, at the same time deciding unilaterally to stop going to Palestinian protests in Sheikh Jarrah because deemed not useful.[81] The movement quickly died out, and its new leadership went on to establish a think-tank whose goal was to "realign the arguments of the left and the public opinion."[82] Dov, who was among them, explained the work of the think-tank as such:

> We want to understand public opinion and produce arguments on why ending the occupation is good for the Israelis, because that is the only way we can win. [...] Once, we did a report on the impact of settlements on Israeli security: it emerged that they're hugely detrimental, even high-rank generals said that. Another time we wrote a paper that demonstrated the success of the Gaza disengagement plan in terms of security: we've had a lot less Israeli casualties, and still the IDF can enter Gaza whenever they want! *This is the best case the left can make*, but they don't want to.[83]

It comes across quite clearly how, in this case, the choice of a within approach follows from a specific vision for change: one that envisions not to review but to better pursue Israel's national interest, and where Palestinian demands are a secondary aim.

[78] Interviews: Jaffa, March 31, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019. On the issue of intentional mistranslations see also Budour Youssef Hassan, "The sham solidarity of Israel's Zionist left," *Electronic Intifada*, July 28, 2011, https://electronicintifada.net/content/sham-solidarity-israels-zionist-left/10213.
[79] See previous footnote.
[80] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019.
[81] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 6, 2011.
[82] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019.
[83] *Ibidem*. See also Molad website, http://www.molad.org/en/.

In other cases, however, activists do envision such radical change but, disillusioned by the prospects of it, opt for engaging with hegemony as the lesser evil option: one that allows to achieve at least some improvements, while relieving them from a feeling of impotence. One such example is Tavor, a well-known and respected activist who worked his whole life against settlement expansion for different organizations. Recently, he established his own small NGO, specialized on agricultural land grabbing, where he "uses his privilege" to obtain information from the State and spends his days driving around in the West Bank to monitor settlement expansion. He voiced a pragmatic, yet very aware, approach:

> I know we are puppets. As all the liberal left, we allow the system to claim it's being ameliorated over time, and in a way or another we improve the occupation as well. [I: Ok but your work is still important?] Very few Palestinians have benefited from my work over time. Some have even lost their house for our fault! Take Amona. It's true, we managed to have the outpost evacuated. But none of that land has become available to Palestinians (it's still 'closed military zone'), and the settlers have been relocated to another area, still on Palestinian land! The new settlement was even called Amikhari, which means "my nation lives."[84] [...] We are a settler society, part of a much greater phenomenon of European colonization. But tackling this is pragmatically unfeasible: what do we do with it? Do we send back all the Jews to where they came from? Do we create a binational State that would be an apartheid state just as it is now? [...] I used to say: "'48 is the problem, '67 is the solution." Now I'm not even sure it's still relevant. The point is, you cannot fix a broken life. It's impossible to go back to a pre-'48 situation. [...] The question is: where do you start? I start with the settlements. It's the most pressing and the least questionable: '48 can still be justified, from a certain perspective, as a set of circumstances that led to a zero-sum game. The issue of '67 [the occupation and the settlements] is also the easiest to approach because it's outside, it doesn't deal with the fundamentals of Zionism as it would if we talked about equal rights inside Israel – which no one, not even the left, would want.[85]

A similar reflection, though more focused on the choice of working within the institutional tools of the system, is the one brought by Israeli activist and human rights attorney Michael Sfard in his recent book *The Wall and the Gate* (2018). In the book, Sfard unravels the dilemmas he has faced over a lifetime of human rights work in Israel-Palestine. In the episode that gives the title to the book, Sfard recalls a discussion he had with Palestinian community leaders on how to fight the construction of the fence that, in order to protect a settlement, had also swallowed their farmland:

[84] The reference is to the case of the Amona settlement, successfully dismantled by the government after a legal battle, however just to resettle its inhabitants to an adjacent plot of land. See also Edo Konrad, "The man on the heels of Israel's settlement enterprise," *+972 Magazine*, June 1, 2017, https://www.972mag.com/the-man-on-the-heels-of-israels-settlement-enterprise/.

[85] Interview, West Jerusalem, July 24, 2019. When he talks about '48 and '67 he is referring to the differential 'baselines' from which critiques within and outside Zionism start: '48 is a more comprehensive critique of the State since its formation, while '67 criticizes the turn taken by Israel since the beginning of the occupation and the settlement process (c.f. Chapter Two, Section 3).

> "So, I think we have a pretty strong case and not a bad chance of convincing the Israeli courts, too," I said. Silence. I went on enthusiastically. "I propose we petition the High Court and argue that the route is not legal, even under Israel's own criteria. We'll demand that they dismantle the fence, get it out of here. If they want the fence, they can build it right next to the houses in the settlement." The council heads exchanged glances. They looked at the map, and then gazed at their orchards, which they had not been able to access in some two years. "How long will it take?" one of them asked. "I estimate two to three years," I said, somewhat uncomfortably. The two men exchanged glances again. "Maybe, sir, you could ask them to put a gate here in the fence for us?" one of them asked. I wasn't sure I'd heard right. "If there's a gate here, where the gas station is, and they open it for us so we can pass through, we can harvest the olives," the others said.[86]

He then ponders:

> What does a human right lawyer want in his professional life? To defend the good guys and fight the bad. [...] Any sort of complexity that intrudes into the dichotomy between advancing good and serving evil is an unpleasant dissonance that ruins the harmony of legal human rights activism. [...] Asking the army to put a gate to give the farmers better access to their land would mean putting ourselves exactly in the position the army would like human rights activists to be: *collaborators in the management of a human rights violation* – in this case, the fence. We would show the army what it could not or would not find out for itself, and while we're at it, we would extend the fence's shelf life, because adding a gate would temporarily alleviate some of the difficulties it has created for Palestinians living nearby and give some credence to Israel's claims that things are not so bad as they seem. On the other hand, how could we ask the village residents, who had been suffering for two years as the fence destroyed their livelihoods, to sacrifice a few more years of income for the larger fight? What is the correct "human rights" approach: opting to fight for comprehensive change of an injurious policy, or protecting the rights and needs of an individual victim?[87]

Throughout the book, Sfard exposes clearly how the complex legal apparatus of the occupation – one in which "every draconian authority and injurious power is codified in orders, procedures, and protocols" – was constructed in such a way to be reinforced, rather than challenged, by litigations. Lawyers have no choice but to avoid radical lines of arguments and settle on what jurisprudence allows, and by doing so they help support the image of fairness that the regime wants to project.[88] Moreover, at each blow received from human rights organizations, the system is able to perfect its workings and produce more legislation that fill the holes that were left.[89]

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[86] Sfard, *The wall and the gate: Israel, Palestine, and the legal battle for human rights*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2018): 3.
[87] *Idem*, 3-5.
[88] *Idem*, 16-19.
[89] On this, see also David Kretzmer, *The occupation of Justice: The Supreme Court of Israel and the Occupied Territories*, (New York: Suny Press, 2002). A good example of this is the so-called Regularization Bill, the drafting of which started right after the Amona case mentioned earlier, and which aimed at legalizing settlements retroactively (Interview, West Jerusalem, April 20, 2019; see also Ian Fischer, "Israel Passes Provocative Law to Retroactively Legalize Settlements," *The New York Times*, February 6, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/06/world/middleeast/israel-settlement-law-palestinians-west-bank.html?_r=1.

Yet, the activist's conclusion is to accept to play this game, albeit with great political and ethical discomfort. Indeed, he drives attention to the fact that, while radical critiques are better in the long-term, they're sometimes a privilege that not everyone can afford. And that 'dirtying one's hands' – being willing to meddle with tainted powers – may in this case be justified.

*4. Fighting from Without: Withdrawing Compliance, Exposing 'Apartheid'*

The diametrically opposite response to the insider's dilemma is an outright refusal to abide by the rules of the hegemonic game and to wage one's struggle 'from without' it instead. From this perspective, the trade-off of 'losing' the Israeli public and the possibilities offered by the system is not perceived as costly because the former is deemed "irrelevant," and the latter "inevitably complicit."[90] The assumption is that "the solution cannot come from the inside:" it is deemed unrealistic, in some cases even "irresponsible" to expect those who are privileged by the system to rebel against it and demand its demise.[91] "The struggle is outside," and the role Jewish-Israeli activists can have in it is less of mediating Palestinian demands to Israeli audiences and more of adding leverage to Palestinian resistance both on the ground and in international arenas. Activists in this approach are a minority within the panorama of Jewish-Israeli activism, and they usually work individually or in loosely organized political collectives.

In this perception of the struggle, the strategic mobilization of Jewish-Israeli privilege remains an asset, but it is carried out differently from the previous approach. What is exploited is the type of access that would be unrelinquishable anyway: that to the ontological realm of the Jewish, white, Western Us. This is variously employed in order to shield Palestinian bodies from military violence, empower them in their acts of resistance, bring visibility to their struggle, and lend legitimacy to their claims. Discursive and institutional privileges are also employed, but the sign of their use is reversed: instead of trying to show that they speak the same language, or that they play by the same rules, activists use their insider positionality in the Jewish-Israeli collective to expose how that language and those rules are intrinsically discriminatory. In this logic, Jewish 'first-class' citizens use their status not to fight in seemingly democratic arenas, but rather to denounce how the ethnocratic element supersedes the democratic one in the very conception of the law.[92]

From this perspective, the narrowing boundaries of legitimate critique in Israel are seen less as a constraint and more as an opportunity that facilitates the job of proving Israel's undemocratic

[90] Interviews: Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018; Jaffa, March 31, 2019; West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.
[91] This does not entail thinking that no Jewish-Israeli could be capable of doing this, but that the system is structurally built to make this option unlikely for the majority.
[92] Elian Weizman, "Hegemony, law, resistance: struggles against Zionism in the State of Israel," (PhD diss., SOAS, 2013). See also Amal Jamal, "Strategies of Minority Struggle for Equality in Ethnic States: Arab Politics in Israel," *Citizenship Studies* 11, no. 3, (2007): 263-282.

character.[93] Conforming to them, so as to still be able to operate, is seen not only as less strategic than it used to be – because, as one activist put it, "if you're treated just as bad, why even bother making the compromise?"[94] – but as actually detrimental to activists' work because it takes away one of their most powerful weapons: that of using discriminatory laws and discourses to their advantage.

The rationale of this strategic approach was epitomized by Daniel, a former Anarchists Against the Wall activist, who is worth quoting at length because he delineates both the framings and modes of action of this approach:

> It's simple: there is no point in asking Zionists what they think of apartheid. We can't try to change their views, we don't want to. What we can do from the inside is not about the numbers, but about the quality of the message: Israel cares about public opinion and about passing as a democracy, and if we can play a role it is of exposing all the ways it is *not*. [...] Good activism is clearly and unequivocally anti-Zionist: it's about apartheid, not 'occupation;' it's about '48, not '67; it's about the nature of the Jewish race-state, not its policies; it's about Palestinian refugees all over the world, not just in the West Bank and Gaza. Any framing that tackles part of the problem and not the whole is *actively working against Palestinian rights*. [...] I'm talking about the liberal Zionist organizations that say that some policies are 'unconstitutional' when we don't even *have* a constitution, that distinguish between 'Israel' and 'Palestine' when in practice there is no such distinction, that talk about apartheid but only in the West Bank and not in Israel, or that advocate for boycott but only of settlement products and not of Israeli ones. [...] They're the real enemy, far more insidious than the right wing, which at least is honest in its intentions. [...]
>
> Resorting to what is legal in an apartheid state makes no sense. It makes no sense to fight on technical grounds so we have better chances to win, or to play the victims because "Oh, poor us, we cannot speak up anymore." Supporting BDS makes you illegal? Great. Getting arrested is a *tool that we have*: we can afford it, we shouldn't be afraid of it, and it's something that gets in the media. [...] How cool would it be if we had hundreds of activists from all over flying into Israel and declaring at security that they want to visit Palestine and support BDS? They would be rejected from entry in mass, it would make huge news![95] [...]
>
> The only right struggle is one of co-resistance, of the privileged and unprivileged together, as it was in South Africa. For that, it is fundamental that we use the same language and the same narrative – at least that of the BDS anti-normalization guidelines. And that when we go in solidarity to the West Bank, we *never* tell them how to struggle, or how to eat, or how to treat women. That's the basics, and yet it's not so obvious to everybody.[96]

Before moving on, it is important to emphasise that not everyone who adheres to this approach would agree entirely with this specific analysis in what concerns the condemnation of any activism that falls short of respecting these criteria. Many activists who prefer a non-compromising attitude

[93] Weizman, *Hegemony, law, resistance*, 53, 121, 212.
[94] Interview, West Jerusalem, March 17, 2019.
[95] The reference here is to two laws: one targeting Israeli citizens who support BDS (Damage to the State of Israel by Means of Boycott Bill) and one targeting foreign citizens who support BDS (Amendment N. 28 to the Entry into Israel Law). Cf. Chapter One.
[96] Interview, Jaffa, March 31, 2019.

still welcome the existence of a spectrum of critical positions, and appreciate the type of resources they can provide to the struggle in terms of legal support, resources, and so on.[97]

In terms of framing, this approach is premised on a systemic critique of Zionism rather than on its rearticulation, and one that seeks to remain close to the demands of recognition advanced by Palestinians. Given that the most unitary version of such demands is presently represented by the BDS call, this represents the baseline on which all groups in this approach converge. As seen in Chapter Two, the call involves demanding, next to Israel's withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, also its accountability for the ethnic cleansing carried out in 1948, the acknowledgment of Palestinian refugees' right of return, and the implementation of full equality between Jewish and Palestinian citizens in Israel.[98]

Very few groups and activists, however, explicitly adopt a framework of settler colonialism in their framing of the situation in Israel-Palestine, despite its being rather consolidated among Palestinian activists and scholars.[99] Most activists in this approach prefer instead the framework of apartheid. The reasons put forward by activists revolved around a logic of effectiveness: the crime of apartheid is illegal by international law, and States have the legal obligation to prevent and punish it, which, together with an historical precedent of at least partial success, make a solution seem more easily achievable.[100] Moreover, highlighting the "striking similarities" with a regime that is by now universally considered inacceptable may more easily trigger the outrage of the audience – internationally and possibly in Israel as well.[101] An activist also noted how the framework of apartheid did not require the difficult work of "undermining the entire foundations of our history here," suggesting that reasons are also personal and have to do with the profound uncertainty about the future that advocating for decolonization entails for members of the colonizers.[102]

This hesitancy has been criticized by Palestinian scholars and activists alike, who have highlighted that, while the solution envisaged may be formally similar – a State where the rights of everyone are equal and restorative justice is applied – the framework of apartheid centres on a legal, as opposed to a political, solution, and on the agency of international legal bodies rather than of the Palestinian people. This entails the risk to trade decolonization with a "liberal equality" that does not acknowledge the history and legacy of colonialism.[103]

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[97] Interviews: Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019; Ramat Gan, May 14, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 24, 2019.
[98] C.f. Chapter Two, Section 1.
[99] This troubles the classifications that are usually made of the "Israeli anti-Zionist left" as "decolonial" (c.f. Chapter Two, Section 3) and suggests that to the distancing from the Jewish-Israeli field corresponds an only partial move towards the Palestinian 'field.'
[100] Interviews: Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018; West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.
[101] Interview, Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018
[102] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019. C.f. Chapter Three, Sections 1 and 4.
[103] Lana Tatour, "Why calling Israel an apartheid state is not enough", *Middle East Eye*, January 18, 2021, https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-calling-israel-apartheid-state-not-enough; Ibrahim Saïd and Alice Baroni,

An exception to this is the already mentioned One Democratic State Campaign (ODSC), which is also the only group in this approach to propose a full-fledged political program for the future of Israel-Palestine. "Palestinian-led," this political platform nonetheless includes a number of "critical Israeli Jews," among which academics Ilan Pappé and Jeff Halper.[104] One of the most vocal advocates of the program, Halper wrote about the initiative that:

> [Settler colonialism] clarifies more than any other term ("occupation," for instance) the situation in the entirety of Israel/Palestine while pointing the way to decolonization, the only just and feasible political resolution. [...] It does so by shifting the political outcome from a compromise between a dominant occupying state enjoying the support of governments and a weak occupied "authority" to a process of decolonization in which, as in South Africa, the settlers remain but the structures ensuring their domination are dismantled. A kind of "deal" or "swap" becomes possible: we the indigenous will grant "belonging" (legitimacy) to you settler colonists – which you will never get any other way – in return for your recognizing our indigenous sovereignty, narrative and rights.[105]

Importantly, the achievement of future equality between the two peoples is framed as a 'concession' from the Palestinians, who grant "settler legitimacy in return for native rights." Moreover, emphasis is placed on the fact that the solution must be "formulated and led by Palestinians, with the strategic support from critical Israelis and the international civil society."[106] While mostly targeted to international audiences, the initiative considers Jewish-Israeli activists key allies because they are "able to fathom the fears and aspirations of Israeli Jews" and as such they can "help fashion a vision of post-colonization [...] that also addresses mutual suspicions and insecurities."[107]

Most groups in this approach, however, prioritize concrete action over political elaboration. Following the criterion of co-resistance, such action is premised on following the lead of Palestinians by responding in solidarity to their demands. Such actions often entail operating at the margins of legality and using one's ontological privilege to bring visibility to, protect, or empower Palestinian partners. A frequent way of doing so is attracting mediatic attention to Palestinian protests or the

"Deliberating the Question of Palestine from Within: Jewish Question, Colonial Question, and the Prospects of Decolonization," *Ardd*, forthcoming.

[104] ODSC website, About Us, https://onestatecampaign.org/en/about-us/. Next to the ODSC, other groups that adopt a settler colonial perspective are the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), ActiveStills, Return Solidarity, Zochrot and De-Colonizer. I do not treat ICAHD because it is led by Jeff Halper and therefore its settler colonial perspective can be subsumed in the analysis that follows. ActiveStills and Return Solidarity are mentioned later in the section, where modes of action are treated. Finally, I treat Zochrot and De-Colonizer in the next section because, despite a clear settler colonial premise, they employ a mixed within/without strategic approach.

[105] Jeff Halper, "Choices Made: from Zionist Settler Colonialism to Decolonization," *Counterpunch*, October 12, 2018, https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/10/12/choices-made-from-zionist-settler-colonialism-to-decolonization/. See also Jeff Halper, *Decolonizing Israel, Liberating Palestine: Zionism, Settler Colonialism, and the Case for One Democratic State*, (London: Pluto Press 2021.

[106] Halper, "Choices Made".

[107] Jeff Halper, "Liberate Palestine, Decolonize Israel," *Roar Magazine*, April 27, 2021, https://roarmag.org/essays/decolonizing-israel-liberating-palestine/; Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.

injustices they suffer, in the effort to "make the occupation costly."[108] For instance, during my fieldwork, the group Return Solidarity organized "flash actions" in closed military zones on the Israeli side of the fence encircling Gaza in order to support and bring visibility to Palestinian protesting for the right of return.[109] Similarly, the group Boycott From Within supports the Palestinian call for boycott by using both institutional and ontological access to Jewish-Israeli society to gather information about and expose the complicity of State and corporate actors in the Israeli regime.[110]

Another common strategy is for Israeli activists to join protests organized by Palestinians in the West Bank and protect them from getting arrested by throwing themselves in between Palestinians and soldiers, a practice known as 'de-arrest.'[111] In this case, Israeli activists exploit their ontological and institutional privilege by trying to both deter soldiers' violence and accepting the chance of being arrested, knowing that in that case they would risk comparatively little. In certain occasions, Israeli activists take this privilege one step further and use it to expose the discriminatory treatment reserved to Palestinians in the West Bank who, as per the Israeli military law that governs them, can be arrested and put in prison for months in absence of trial.[112] Such was the case for Jonathan Pollack, who was arrested in 2020 and instead of paying a bail to walk out of jail chose to refuse this possibility and wrote an open letter from jail in which he voiced the need to denounce the court's legitimacy as well as the privileges disproportionately enjoyed by Israeli Jews:

> [...] my refusal to recognize the court's legitimacy is based on two main grounds. The first is that my Palestinian comrades do not enjoy the luxury of being tried in the relatively comfortable conditions of the Israeli courts. [...] The second, more fundamental ground to refuse to cooperate is that all Israeli courts, military or otherwise, lack any legitimacy to preside over matters of resisting Israeli colonial rule, which employs a hybrid regime, ranging between a distorted and racially discriminatory democracy in its sovereign territory and a flat-out military dictatorship in the occupied territories. [...] To join the fight to topple Israeli apartheid, the few Jewish citizens of Israel willing to do so will first have to recognize that they are overprivileged and be willing to pay the price of relinquishing that status. An open rebellion against the regime has been taking place for decades, carried out by the Palestinian resistance movement. The price paid by those involved in it is immense. Jewish citizens of Israel must cross over and walk in their footsteps.[113]

Other activists instead privilege actions that involve not so much noise and mediatic visibility, but a constant presence next to Palestinians in their acts of daily resistance, something one of them

[108] Interview, Jaffa, March 31, 2019.
[109] Return Solidarity website, About, https://returnsolidarity.wordpress.com/about-return/. Participant observation, Sderot, May 3, 2019. Interview, Tel Aviv, May 7, 2019.
[110] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019. See also Boycott from Within website, https://boycottisrael.info.
[111] Participant observation, Mukhayyam Fari'a, October 26, 2019; Interview, Beit Sahour October 29, 2019.
[112] C.f. Chapter One, Section 2.
[113] Jonathan Pollack, "To prison, again, for protesting Israel's colonial rule," *Haaretz*, January 7, 2020, https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-to-prison-again-for-protesting-against-israel-s-colonial-rule-1.8368980.

referred to as a form of silent, yet persistent, "unheroic resistance."[114] One of the first groups to put forward this strategy was Ta'ayush, which started in the years of the Second Intifada to bring solidarity to Palestinians facing repression. This is how two of its founders reflect on its strategy:

> At that time, we felt we really needed to build trust from below… That's why we chose an ascetic media politics: we wanted to do things not just for the camera, but to actually do them *together*.[115]

> We didn't know how to be on the ground: we all had experience in demonstrations, some of us had worked in NGOs, but this was different! It was about being there, taking risks, breaking the law. We adopted what we later understood were passive civil disobedience methods: when an unjust order would come, we'd refuse to follow it, and face the consequences. It was thrilling, intoxicating work.[116]

The scope of Ta'ayush changed considerably over the years, going from mobilizing thousands of Israelis "bringing busloads of medicaments, dismantling roadblocks with our bare hands, marching in thousands against a demolition order" to being only a few dozen people going weekly to the West Bank to accompany shepherds and helping with reconstruction work, as seen at the beginning of the chapter.[117] However, the gist of its approach remains the same, and is advocated for notwithstanding the discouragements of the current situation:

> Our most important strategy is being there, constantly, with our bodies on the line. […] It's a tedious process! We go back week after week and we do the same thing over and over again: we bring the court order, we talk to the soldiers, we take photos and videos… We haven't ended the occupation, but there have been some successes. Two thirds of the lands of South Hebron went back to their owners. And this was done meter by meter. There is nothing heroic in what we do, just stubborn persistence.[118]

> The pace of the colonization process is so fast, it's very hard for the resistance to keep up with it… the bulldozers work faster than our discourse. Still, we did have some successes […] Sometimes you need to focus on the daily struggles, and only later can you imagine bigger changes… Without those struggles, there is no dignity. How tall people walked in the villages where there was resistance![119]

From these excerpts, it emerges how the 'effectiveness' of this strategies is not measured only in terms of quantifiable results (themselves often obtained as a result of a coordination with other, legal organizations, as the next section will explore), but in terms of building relationships, trust, and political empowerment with Palestinian partners on the ground. Another activist emphasized the importance of a continuous, albeit quiet, presence in the context of Sheikh Jarrah, where the risks of

[114] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019.
[115] Interview, Tel Aviv, December 1, 2019.
[116] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019.
[117] *Ibidem*.
[118] *Ibidem*.
[119] Interview, Tel Aviv, December 1, 2019.

evictions, and the protests of Palestinians, continued after the dissipation of the big Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement. Most of the time, these weekly protest look more like quiet vigils, where a few dozen people stand at the main crossroads, with signs and tea-trays brought from home. Insults and jokes from passing-by settlers are not uncommon, but rarely the situation escalates:[120]

> The Sheikh Jarrah protests seem useless, I know. But it's them that allow bigger ones to happen. [...] It doesn't really matter whether you go once in a while at a demo in Bil'in [in the West Bank]... What matters is that you're there also in boring times, also when nothing happens. Not only because they want us to come, and that's their decision to make. But also because it's really being there that allows you to have the pulse of the situation, to anticipate what's coming, and to mobilize many more when it's needed.[121]

In all of these actions, notwithstanding the refusal to cooperate with the system's framings and tools, Jewish-Israeli still mobilize their insider privileges and, to a certain extent, reproduced them, entrenching asymmetric power dynamics also in the relationship with their Palestinian partners. Yet, activists also developed, much thanks to a practical knowledge gained through the same continued engagement on the ground, a subtle awareness of these unwilling reproductions, and came up with strategies to try and counter them. For instance, several activists expressed awareness that, by attracting public attention thanks to the fact of being more relatable for being "white" and having "a nice English accent," they were also "perpetrating the fact that people will listen to white people more," thus entrenching asymmetric regimes of visibility and grievability.[122] And how they would "step back from the front of the action" or "make sure that there are always more Palestinians speaking."[123] One ActiveStills photographer told me how, in their collective, they always put forward photos of their Palestinian members, knowing how much more difficult it is for them to have visibility in the media.[124] A member of Ta'ayush explained to me how, in face of the damage done by the IDF to Palestinian agricultural water systems, they once brought tanks of water, "but it was a mistake. We don't want to be bringing water from Israel, it creates dependency. Since then, we only ever helped in rebuilding their own water systems, which work very well."[125] A member of Psychoactive told me how, when concerting actions with her Palestinian partners, she was so afraid of entrenching structures of dependency, also in personal relations, that she felt she had to "become smaller and smaller to the point of actually disappearing" in order to compensate for her privilege, something which eventually frustrated her enthusiasm and her own sense of empowerment in the struggle. At

[120] Participant observation: Sheikh Jarrah, April 12, 2019; November 22, 2019.
[121] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 27, 2019.
[122] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019.
[123] Idem ; Interview, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019.
[124] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019.
[125] Informal chat, Susya, November 2, 2019.

the same time, she could see how the struggle was "not about [her] own empowerment in the first place," and could accept to step back.[126]

This last reflection in particular points to the difficulty for Jewish-Israeli activists to find a balance between using and abusing their privilege, a negotiation that often requires shrinking and weighting one's agency in the struggle. Once again, activists work out different ways to navigate this situation. Some distinguished between situations in which the main target was Jewish-Israeli society and others in which it was the Palestinians: "We are in charge of demonstrations when they are in West Jerusalem, but in the West Bank we do what Palestinians say."[127] Others had a more intersectional approach:

> Privilege is never zero or one, it comes in layers. Deciding where the struggle is going, that's up to the Palestinians. But on certain issues, of course criticism is possible. And voicing opinions is not the same as making decisions. On issues of gender roles and harassment for instance, or on animal rights. There are times when we have separate meetings among women – there are lots of feminist activists among Palestinians as well – and then we try to push our agenda in the big meetings, which are usually led by men. We've also tried to push for having *iftar*[128] meals that are vegan, because some of us don't see why we should struggle for humans' rights while feasting on animals. There is always the expectation that someone who's vegan should also care about human rights, and that's fair enough. But the opposite is never the case, and I think that's a problem. We can work on that together, and we should.[129]

The problem of agency and criticism is indeed a central issue in the context of the alliance between oppressors and oppressed, and one to which will return in the next chapter.

Before moving onto the next section, it is important to mention the trajectories of three NGOs which, in the past few years, have shifted from operating fully 'within' hegemonic framings and methods to progressively disengaging from them. While still far from delineating a 'without-hegemonic' approach, they nonetheless illustrate a reaction to the present context that is opposite to the one of increasing 'taming' seen in the previous section. Breaking the Silence, Yesh Din, and B'Tselem should not be taken as representative of a general trend of NGOs, but they do show that the narrowing of the space of manoeuvre in Israeli civil society, especially for what it concerns moderate critiques, does not necessarily lead to its silencing through the 'chilling effect,' but can push it towards a more radical challenge of the political system as a whole.

Breaking the Silence (BTS), one of the most prominent Israeli NGOs, was created by former IDF soldiers who decided to expose to Israeli publics "the true job of the occupation: not defence, but the

[126] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 27, 2019
[127] Interviews: West Jerusalem, November 27, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 26, 2019.
[128] Evening meals that break the fast of Ramadan.
[129] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019.

control and subjugation of an entire population."[130] Their function has never been that of a systemic critique, but rather of improving the system in the name of its own stated values.[131] As such, BTS always framed its discourse firmly within Zionism: their critique is based on their respect of the institution of the army and aims at restoring its values of morality and defensiveness; their interest is towards Israelis (not Palestinians) to whom they want to show the price *they* pay as a consequence of the immoral acts they unknowingly support.[132] Yet, since 2009 the organization became, rather unwillingly, "public enemy number one" in the country. As stated by its director, Yehuda Sheul: "We didn't sign up to be the Israeli opposition, but now we are."[133] As a result, instead of taming its critique, BTS shifted its ground of operation and, partially, its audience. No longer welcome in the official places of the Israeli public – classrooms, exposition rooms, the parliament – they shifted their operations to the West Bank, where they organize political tours of the occupation in cooperation with Palestinian and Israeli activist groups ("When we started, we wanted to 'bring Hebron to Tel Aviv'… now it's more about 'bringing Tel Aviv to Hebron!"[134]). Also their audience has started to shift to the international: representatives of the organization have intensified their presence abroad, especially in the US, for tours and talks, and nowadays most of the participants to their tours are internationals.[135] According to many activists, as a result of these shifts BTS is gradually 'radicalizing': not only have they become a "valuable partner in the struggle," showing a willingness to "dirt their hands in practice" that reveals a political critique more radical than do their official positions on Zionism and militarism.[136] Even their framing has started to shift: "They stopped framing their campaigns in purely militaristic tones – like, 'only we can say these things, because we are ex combatants:' when they did, we told them, and they understood our point. They proved they can learn and change, and this is quite impressive given the type of organization they are."[137]

A legal organization, Yesh Din works to protect the human rights of Palestinians in the West Bank combining case-by-case advocacy with larger legal petitions to the High Court. As such, the organization has always operated within a liberal Zionist framework of occupation, but recently this framework has shifted towards a more radical critique. In an act that sparked much outrage in the Israeli public, the organization published a report in June 2020 that concludes that:

[130] Participant observation, Breaking the Silence tour, South Hebron Hills, July 9, 2018.
[131] Elian Weizman, "The Paradox of Breaking the Silence," *Jadaliyya*, September 13, 2016, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33565/The-Paradox-of-Breaking-the-Silence.
[132] *Ibidem*. See also BTS website, About, https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/about/organization.
[133] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 13, 2019. See also Mairav Zonszein, "Breaking the Silence: Inside the Israeli Right's Campaign to Silence an Anti-Occupation Group," *The Intercept*, March 3, 2019, https://theintercept.com/2019/03/03/breaking-the-silence-israel-idf/.
[134] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 13, 2019.
[135] *Ibidem*.
[136] Informal conversation, East Jerusalem, May 31, 2019.
[137] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019.

> [T]he crime against humanity of apartheid is being committed in the West Bank. [...] The crime is committed because the Israeli occupation is no 'ordinary' occupation regime (or a regime of domination and oppression), but one that comes with a gargantuan colonization project that has created a community of citizens of the occupying power in the occupied territory.[138]

Importantly, Yesh Din's diagnosis of apartheid remains concerned only with the West Bank, and not with Israel as a whole, and it did not imply ending further collaboration with Israeli courts.[139] Some activists have criticized the restraint of this scope, while others have highlighted how, by breaching the liberal Zionist consensus on 'occupation', this move could open to more radical critiques among Israeli NGOs.[140]

The latter rang true when, only a few months later, B'Tselem, one of the most prominent Israeli NGOs, documenting human rights violations in the OPT since the First Intifada, made the news worldwide for publishing a report that denounced how Israel carries out apartheid on the whole of the territory under its control. B'Tselem's shift had started earlier. In 2016, the organization announced that it would cease all cooperation with Israeli military authorities, which used to be aimed at igniting internal reforms, because it no longer wished to serve as a "fig leaf to the occupation:"

> B'Tselem's many years of working with the military law enforcement system have not brought the victims justice, because – as detailed below – the system operates in a way that fails to hold accountable soldiers who caused harm and fails to deter others from similar actions. [...] Now, after a long process of careful consideration, B'Tselem has reached the conclusion that continuing to file complaints to the military law enforcement system does more harm than good. Because B'Tselem has no desire to help the system create a mere semblance of doing justice, we have decided to stop applying to the military law enforcement system.[141]

Such stance, which has since then been reinforced as shown in further reports and declarations,[142] has been interpreted by both sympathizers and opponents as a shift from human rights work towards political advocacy, and as an "embrace of the radical fringe of Israeli politics."[143] The shift in

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[138] Yesh Din, "The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the crime of apartheid: Legal opinion by Adv. Michael Sfard," *Position Paper*, June 2020, 57, https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.yesh-din.org/Apartheid+2020/Apartheid+ENG.pdf.

[139] See also Amjad Iraqi, "'An illegitimate regime': How a top rights group shed Israeli myths to recognize apartheid," *+972 Magazine*, July 9, 2020, https://www.972mag.com/michael-sfard-yesh-din-apartheid/.

[140] See e.g. Facebook conversation between anti-Zionist activists Ronnie Barkan and Jonathan Ofir, July 10, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/ronnie.barkan/posts/10157845085072054.

[141] B'Tselem, "The Occupation's Fig Leaf. Israel's Military Law Enforcement System as a Whitewash Mechanism," May 2016, 5, https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/201605_occupations_fig_leaf.

[142] See e.g. B'Tselem, "Fake Justice: The Responsibility of Israel's High Court Justices Bear for the Demolition of Palestinian Homes and the Dispossession of Palestinians," February 2019, https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/201902_fake_justice.

[143] Naftali Balanson, "B'Tselem Must Take Responsibility for the Consequences of Its Actions," *The Tower*, February 22, 2017, http://www.thetower.org/4600-btselem-must-take-responsibility-for-the-consequences-of-its-actions/.

operations corresponded also to one in the organization's target audience, as one of its board members explained to me over an interview:

> Our strategy has failed: we had assumed that bringing actual data to the authorities about how the occupation worked, they would act on it… or at least that the people, once they knew, would pressure the authorities to stop with the occupation. But we were wrong. Israelis don't want to know, and even if they do know, they don't want to connect the dots and 'see' the system. […] We still write reports, but we publish them for people outside: for researchers who are interested, for the UN, where we also go talk, which has a huge impact because it goes in the media. Overall, the new strategy has been way more effective![144]

The final step came in 2021, when the organization published a short paper which states that:

> [T]he entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River is organized under a single principle: advancing and cementing the supremacy of one group – Jews – over another – Palestinians. […] A regime that uses laws, practices and organized violence to cement the supremacy of one group over another is an apartheid regime.[145]

The report received widespread international media attention and was described as a "watershed moment for the Israeli human rights community"[146] – to which eventually followed more reports accusing Israeli of apartheid issued by important international organizations.[147] Once again, however, the heightened attention this report received when Palestinians have been denouncing Israeli apartheid for decades further confirms that, in the interplay of more and less privileged actors, asymmetric regimes of visibility tend to be reproduced.

### *5. A Good Compromise? Empathy, Synergy, and the Pursuit of Common Ground*

The last strategic approach is that of those activists and groups who still want to cultivate a radical critique of the Zionist regime, but without entirely giving up the channels they can mobilize by virtue of their being part of Jewish-Israeli society. Be it because they do not want to give up on Israeli audiences, or because they seek to pursue a diversity of approaches, both through institutions and outside of them, activists put in place different sorts of pragmatic compromises that involve combining 'within' and 'without' strategies. Some of these compromises involve an internal diversification of frames and means within the group; others, a coordination across groups with different foci that capitalizes on the networked nature of Israeli activism; others yet, the specific effort

[144] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 21, 2019.
[145] B'Tselem, "A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean sea: This is apartheid", 2021, https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid.
[146] See e.g. Yumna Patel, "In 'watershed' moment, B'Tselem labels Israel 'apartheid regime,'" *Mondoweiss*, January 13, 2021, https://mondoweiss.net/2021/01/in-watershed-moment-btselem-labels-israel-apartheid-regime/.
[147] C.f. Chapter Two, Section 1.

at combining struggles with other sectors of the Jewish-Israeli population, often by shifting or side-lining political framings on the Palestinian issue.

This kind of mixed approach has been identified as a solution to the insider's dilemma by various authors in the literatures examined at the outset of the chapter. Weizman, for instance, in her work on the possibilities of using the law as an instrument of counter-hegemony, concludes that this can be the case if legal battles are combined with civil disobedience strategies, where activists can "push the boundaries of political action together with the boundaries of legality."[148] Maney et al., talking about the framing strategies of social movements, argue that activists who engage in mixed attitudes towards hegemonic discourses (both "harnessing" and "challenging") are more successful because able to resonate with the symbolic repertoires of vaster audiences.[149] Finally, much literature on hegemony and social movements emphasises the importance of alliances and links established across different actors – grassroots and elite; movements, parties, and unions – that can bring the counterhegemonic struggle to different sites at the same time.[150] The general argument is that combining 'within' and 'without' hegemony strategies can allow to keep at bay the problems related to each approach: being effective in moderate audiences and institutional arenas, while compensating for the risk of co-optation by maintaining links with more radical claims. However, as it will emerge throughout the section, mixed strategies withhold both perks and pitfalls of each approach, and as such may facilitate the radicalization of moderate claims, but also the co-optation of radical ones.

Among the groups that mix within and without strategies internally, a quite unique example is Zochrot, a Tel Aviv-based organization that uniquely combines a most-radical decolonial framing with an NGO structure and a target on the Jewish-Israeli audience.[151]

Zochrot identifies as the main problem not the occupation or apartheid, but the "continued adherence of Jewish-Israeli society to colonial concepts and practices" and hence "believes that peace will come only after the country has been decolonized."[152] Contrary to other groups that, as seen in the previous section, work to this aim by building pressure on Israel from the outside, Zochrot acts specifically to "challenge Israeli Jewish publics preconceptions" and "generate processes in which Israeli Jews will reflect on and review their identity, history, future" in what the organization calls an

[148] Weizman, *Hegemony, law, resistance*, 182, 65-66, 202-212. Her already mentioned work on whistleblowers extends the argument to other forms of within-hegemony engagement (of framing, of positionality)(Weizman, "The paradox of Breaking the Silence").
[149] Maney Woehrle, and Coy, "Harnessing and challenging hegemony," 362.
[150] See e.g. Mouffe, *Agonistics*; Hagai Katz, "Gramsci, hegemony, and global civil society networks," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 17, no. 4 (2006): 332-347.
[151] The discussion that follows can be applied also to De-Colonizer, an offshoot of Zochrot created in 2015 by its founder and former director Eitan Bronstein Aparicio. The two organizations respond to the same rationale and often do actions together, with the difference that De-Colonizer has an additional focus on research and on the cross-fertilization between academia and the public (website, https://www.de-colonizer.org).
[152] "Our vision" Zochrot Website, https://zochrot.org/en/content/17.

"identitary decolonization."[153] While there is an underlying conviction that Jewish-Israeli publics can work towards their own decolonization, this premise is not dictated by naiveté:

> It is an effort for us… many gave up on the Israeli public a long time ago, but I still think there is a little bit of hope. Also, if there are any chances at all, it is to us that they will listen to more, certainly not to Palestinians… We have this responsibility, we can be this *missing link*, and we have to at least try.[154]

Zochrot's activity is centred specifically on fostering among Israeli publics the acknowledgment of the Nakba ('catastrophe' in Arabic), the exiling, destructions, and ethnic cleansing that were perpetrated against Palestinians by Zionist militias and the Israeli army during and after the war of 1948.[155] More recently, Zochrot has expanded its focus onto promoting the right of return of Palestinian refugees as a necessary step towards the creation of a just and equal post-colonial society.[156]

As such, Zochrot's discourse and practice cross all the red lines of what is considered acceptable critique within Zionism: the victimization of Palestinians, the placement of Israelis in the role of perpetrators, and the delegitimation of the Zionist project of the Jewish State. The challenge, as one activist put it, is to "get the message through in Israeli society, to bypass the Pavlovian rejection that they have when they hear these words, and to do so without compromising on our ideology and our vision."[157] To take on this challenge, the organization elaborated over the years a veritable strategy of communication, informed also by thinkers such as Freire, Moscovici, and Azoulay, centered on the pillars of empathy, creativity, and what they call "body politics" – the bodily engagement of both activist and audience on a personal level.[158] Two members explained the group's approach as such:

> It's a long process, and we go by degrees… Someone may start by coming to a tour [in a destroyed Palestinian village], and they will be shocked by what they learn. In the second tour there are usually less people, but it's likely that they'll ask: "What can we do?". The next step is that we talk to them about return: that's when we lose most of them! But still, it's important that we keep pushing this.[159]

> It's important to understand where they come from: it's a place of fear. Obviously, we disagree with these fears, but we need to understand them if we want to dismantle them. With the right of return it is very clear: they imagine millions of people who are different from us who will come back here, and they are

[153] *Ibidem*; Eléonore Merza-Bronstein and Eitan Bronstein-Aparicio, *Nakba: Pour la reconnaissance de la tragédie palestinienne en Israel*, (Paris: Omniscience, 2018): 295.
[154] Interview, Beer Sheva, November 5, 2019 (emphasis mine).
[155] Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU), "The Nakba and Palestine Refugees: IMEU Questions and Answers," May 5, 2022, https://imeu.org/article/the-nakba-and-palestine-refugees-imeu-questions-and-answers. See notably Ilan Pappé, *The ethnic cleansing of Palestine*. (London: Oneworld, 2007).
[156] "Our vision" Zochrot Website, https://zochrot.org/en/content/17.
[157] Interview, Tel Aviv, November 30, 2019.
[158] Merza-Bronstein and Bronstein-Aparicio, *Nakba*.
[159] Interview, East Jerusalem, July 24, 2018.

> scared. Instead of guilting them, we try to show them that this future can be easier than they imagine, and a win-win for everybody.[160]

Founder Eitan Bronstein-Aparicio, in his book, particularly insists on the importance of inventing always new symbolic actions that, through creativity and personal engagement, can "momentarily shatter the hegemonic consensus and spark moments of reflections."[161] Zochrot's initial signature activity was that of memorializing destroyed Palestinian villages by replacing street and park signs with the original Arabic names, a practice now rather common in feminist and decolonial protests worldwide.[162] In the context of Israel-Palestine, this practice is performative in the double sense of appropriating and reversing the Israeli colonial space politics of naming (cf. Chapter One, Section 3) and of "embodying in the present a bi-national future through the remembrance of the past."[163] Another established practice is that of organizing symbolic actions to commemorate the Nakba on Independence Day to performatively bring to light what was its dark and silenced 'other side.' Carried out in the heart of Tel Aviv at the peak of celebrations, actions are intended to trigger the curiosity of passers-by, and for such reason they are thought anew every year.[164]

Finally, the ways in which Zochrot tries to open the debate on return is less by discussing abstractly its political and moral dimension, which is highly dichotomized and dogmatized in public discourse, and more by focusing on imagining its concrete implementation. This is done, for instance, by organizing tours on the sites of potential reconstruction, where both participants and locals are engaged in discussions on how they would feel if Palestinians came back to rebuild their homes.[165]

Pursuing radical discourses while being an NGO and engaging in Israel's institutional arena – something that the organization members justify as necessary in order to work regularly, professionally, and systematically[166] – requires compromise solutions. For instance, actions that are illegal (such as Nakba commemorations) are not organized officially by Zochrot, but ad hoc collectives are created or single activists mobilized.[167] When the organization involves activists and Palestinians

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[160] Interview, Tel Aviv, November 30, 2019.
[161] Merza-Bronstein and Bronstein-Aparicio, *Nakba*, 172; Interview, Tel Aviv, May 27, 2019.
[162] Interview, Beer Sheva, November 5, 2019. This practice has evolved into organizing tours in Palestinian villages that were destroyed during the Nakba, producing about each village informative booklets in Hebrew and Arabic, and even creating a map, iNakba, that allows users to locate and learn about the villages (see Zochrot Website). The organization's historical research is essentially based on oral testimonies of Palestinians.
[163] Alain Epp Weaver, "Remembering the Nakba in Hebrew: Return visits as the performance of a binational future," *Holy Land Studies* 6, no. 2 (2007): 125-44.
[164] Participant observation, Nakba commemoration, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019. See also the action from 2016: Zochrot, "Would you bear the Nakba on the Israeli Independence Day?" *Youtube*, July 14, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdkSnUegJV4&t=99s.
[165] Interview, Tel Aviv, November 30, 2019; A tour on return can be watched at: Zochrot, "Return Vision," *Youtube*, May 20, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWkeghOmWXI.
[166] Interview, Tel Aviv, November 30, 2019; See also Merza-Bronstein and Bronstein-Aparicio, *Nakba*.
[167] Participant observation, Nakba commemoration, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019. See also Merza-Bronstein and Bronstein-Aparicio, *Nakba*, 147. The reference is to the 'Nakba Law' (c.f. Chapter One, Section 1).

that refuse to participate in Israeli institutional settings for reasons of anti-normalization, alternative spaces are provided in coordination with grassroots radical groups that do not take Israeli funding.[168]

Of course, none of these solutions are a perfect fix (indeed, the organization remains 'normalizing' in terms of its links with Israeli institutions), but overall the radical discourse and aims of Zochrot insert it in the panorama of anti-Zionist organizations. The organization receives criticism from more radical perspectives, for instance for framing Israelis as victims also, for focusing on coexistence rather than on taking responsibility for past wrongs, and for reproducing, although in a reverse sense, the colonial practice of naming.[169] However, Zochrot has also been highly praised for having succeeded in popularizing the understanding of the Nakba in Jewish-Israeli society at large and for contributing to the paradigmatic shift of the baseline of the left from the 'end of the occupation' to equality and right of return.[170]

Instead of trying to make radical framings palatable to larger audiences, other groups diversify their strategies and framings to include larger audiences and reach out to a larger pool of potential activists. Free Jerusalem, for instance, in spite of the fact that many of its members identify with anti-Zionism, chose to maintain an official framing based on occupation and injustice, and to switch between more and less radical framings according to the circumstance and audience of their intervention.[171] An example of this is the way in which the group organized the mobilization against the heightened police violence that had been targeting the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Issawiya during my fieldwork.[172]

The mobilization, which was organized in collaboration with Palestinian activists from the neighbourhood, was carried out on different fronts: next to granting a daily presence of interposition and deterrence through on the ground nightly 'shifts,' activists organized awareness-raising events in West Jerusalem as well as demonstrations aimed at putting pressure on local authorities that were responsible for the violence (the Major of Jerusalem and its Police District). Some younger activists have highlighted how, while older Jerusalemite activists insisted on the need to focus on interposition

[168] For instance, the '48 mm Film Festival" organized by Zochrot in 2019 took place in two sites: the Tel Aviv Cinemathèque, a municipal cultural centre, as well as the 'Left Bank Cineclub,' a space internal to a radical political community centre, where Palestinian directors and actors Annemarie Jacir, Mohammed Bakri and Saleh Bakri chose to present their film (participant observation, 48 mm Film Festival, Tel Aviv, November 29-30, 2019).
[169] See most notably Ronit Lentin, "Zochrot: Nakba co-memory as performance," in Lentin, *Co-memory and melancholia*.
[170] See e.g. Adi Ophir, "Regime change passes through its zero year: 1948", Zochrot Website, May 2012, https://www.zochrot.org/publication_articles/view/53780/en.
[171] Interviews, West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 18, 2019. See also Free Jerusalem Facebook page, Information, https://www.facebook.com/freejerusalem/about/?ref=page_internal.
[172] OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), "Daily police raids and clashes result in casualties and disruption of daily life in East Jerusalem neighbourhood," *The monthly humanitarian bulletin*, August 2019, https://www.ochaopt.org/content/daily-police-raids-and-clashes-result-casualties-and-disruption-daily-life-east-jerusalem#_ftn5; Nir Hasson, "Israeli Police Bully East Jerusalem Neighborhood Over Clashes With Youth, Palestinians Say," *Haaretz*, July 7, 2019, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israeli-police-bullies-east-jerusalem-neighborhood-with-fines-and-false-arrests-1.7451914; Miriam Deprez, "Issawiya — the East Jerusalem neighborhood at the forefront of occupation," *Mondoweiss*, December 23 , 2019, https://mondoweiss.net/2019/12/issawiya-the-east-jerusalem-neighborhood-at-the-forefront-of-occupation/.

shifts, as asked by Palestinians, they felt this strategy was ineffective, and pushed for mobilizing their insiders' links more: "Shifts are great for solidarity, but they don't change the policies… It's exhausting and it takes up all our time, so we end up always postponing other things that we also want to do. Like mobilizing our links to US congressmen. We know they'd be available to intervene, they've done it in the past, and this would a lot of pressure on Israel."[173] Moreover, the way the group frames the problem in Issawiya changed according to the target audience they had, in ways that were sometimes contradictory. In private and radical settings, activists explained what was going on in the neighbourhood as part of practices of occupation and colonization.[174] However, when speaking to general Israeli audiences, activists (including the Palestinians that were regularly present at talks as first-hand 'witnesses') framed the question variably in terms of unjustified violence, human rights violations, and legal discrimination – even if this meant side-lining the fact that the neighbourhood is under occupation:[175]

> We need to find the right trigger for everyone… Even talking about the brutal violence doesn't always work: people are used to it, they justify it in their mind because they're made to think they're all terrorists in that neighbourhood. But if we tell them that Palestinian drivers get fines for nothing, and Israelis don't, they're outraged because they think traffic laws should be applied consistently.[176]

The diaspora Jewish collective All That's Left (ATL) is also emblematic of an internally mixed strategic approach. Like Free Jerusalem, also ATL adopts a variety of strategies, ranging from direct solidarity in the West Bank, to presentations and social events directed to Jewish-Israeli audiences, to meetings, workshops and social events directed internally to its members. These aspects, combined with the overlapping membership of many of its members to other NGOs and activist groups in Jerusalem, allows them to function as a node in the network of local activism, and to channel their members to different groups and modes of engagement according to their political affinities.[177] Members of the group have noted how activists initially attracted to the group for its relatively moderate approach often radicalize after having experienced first-hand the gravity of the situation through on the ground actions. In this way, the group's moderate stance works less as a 'gatekeeper'

[173] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 17, 2019.
[174] Informal discussion, Issawiya, October 30, 2019. Encircling certain Palestinian areas, densely populated and generally considered problematic by Israeli authorities, into 'no man's land' zones that are geographically annexed but not managed by the Jerusalem municipality, is a practice that responds to the settler colonial logic of annexing maximum territory, but minimum Palestinians, so as to maintain the demographic balance (cf. Chapter One). This practice was used in other areas surrounding Jerusalem, such as Kufr Qaddum and Shu'fat refugee camp. The highly mediatized depiction of Issawiya as a dangerous and untamable neighborhood during the period of heightened violence seemed to confirm this hypothesis.
[175] Participant observation: Free Jerusalem event at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, November 11, 2019; Free Jerusalem event at Poundak venue, November 26, 2019; protest in West Jerusalem, November 23, 2019; protest in West Jerusalem, December 7, 2019.
[176] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 17, 2019.
[177] Internal documents; participant observation to internal meetings; see also All That's Left Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/AllThatsLeftCollective.

of the moderate boundaries of legitimate critique and more as a 'gateway' to more radical forms of engagement.[178]

However, it is mostly in ATL's positioning as insiders/outsiders of Jewish-Israeli society that the group performs its peculiar way of navigating the within/without divide. It was interesting to note, for instance, how activists would emphasize alternatively one or the other side of their positioning so as to appear more legitimate in front of different activists: when they related to Palestinians, they would stress their being outsiders ("Being American-Jews makes it easier, because we are not the 'occupier'"[179]), while when relating to local activists they would emphasize their being insiders ("We have been here for so long, we have proven we are trustworthy allies"[180]). They also play variously with their institutional insider status: while their Jewishness already grants them the ability to enter Israel without problems (differently from international activists), they sometimes seek an even more insider status by asking for Israeli citizenship, which they can obtain automatically as per the Law of Return. This is justified in terms of the opportunity to "fight more effectively within, going to the frontline without the risk of being deported out of the country," although this also entails endorsing one of the most clearly discriminatory policies in Israel.[181] As I'll discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Five, this 'opportunistic' approach to the various possibilities offered by their status is often criticized by Jewish-Israeli activists as a "ride on privilege" that fails to engage reflexively and critically with their entanglement in power.[182]

A different way groups have of combining within and without approaches is through acting in coordination with other groups that have complementary strategies. As seen in Chapter Two, this coordination is mostly informal, also due to the fact that official partnerships can be detrimental to the image groups have towards their respective audiences.[183] Still, this coordination allows to diversify the instruments groups have at their disposal when tackling a problem, and to capitalize on the respective advantages of each of them. A clear example of this is when NGOs and activist groups come together to combine the advantages of their respective formal arrangements. A synergy of this kind exists between the collective Free Jerusalem and the NGO Ir Amim, who collaborate on various issues in Jerusalem and have many overlapping members. Raz, a member of both, explained:

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[178] David Landy, *Jewish identity and Palestinian rights: Diaspora Jewish opposition to Israel*, (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2012): 109-112.
[179] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 22, 2019.
[180] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.
[181] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 22, 2019; Informal conversation, Mukhayyam Fari'a, October 26, 2019.
[182] Interviews: West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 25, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019.
[183] For instance, a former member of Peace Now noted how the organization "would always be very careful with their partnerships, because we didn't want to look too radical" (Interview, Herzliya, December 2, 2019). A member of Ir Amim noted how presently the organization is targeted by a campaign of de-legitimation led mostly by right-wing GONGOs who "would use anything to target us… Saying that we have employees who are radical left wing activists and 'friends of terrorists' would certainly help them" (Interview, West Jerusalem, December 18, 2019).

> Our work is complementary in many ways. For instance, in Free Jerusalem we wanted to organize occupation tours for groups of students, and Ir Amim helped us for free with the logistics. [...] The research Ir Amim does, all the data they collect, becomes very useful for groups who don't have much time and resources to spend on this. It provides the 'factual base' that we can refer to in our protests, and it 'directs' our work with a long-term perspective. In a way, you could say that it's Ir Amim that provides the analysis... [...] In Free Jerusalem we are much more flexible, there is no hierarchy for approving anything, so we can mobilize much faster and bring people where there is need, also in the middle of the night. [...] It's also more radical, we can challenge the system from a more radical perspective. And it's bottom-up, which is very important because that's where political change really comes from. [...] NGOs can support this. Actually the information, like photos and videos from protests, also flow from Free Jerusalem to Ir Amim, they become published and are used for their reports. Ir Amim can offer a 'stage' to what we do as activists, although nothing is official.[184]

A certain synergy has also come to exist in the South Hebron Hills, an area of the West Bank where Palestinians are particularly targeted by the violence of the settlers and by state-led land evictions, between groups as different as Ta'ayush (a direct solidarity group), Breaking the Silence (an army whistleblower NGO), Yesh Din (a legal NGO), B'Tselem (an information center), and ATL (a diaspora collective). Thanks to its continued presence on the ground, Ta'ayush can provide immediate help to Palestinians and rely, if there is a need for a bigger mobilization, on the pool of activists that ATL can provide. The first-hand information and evidence of abuses collected on the ground are channeled to organizations, like B'Tselem and Yesh Din, that use them to compile archives of structural violations that can be reported to international organizations and media. Yesh Din can act upon individual violations also through legal assistance, which occasionally leads to results in terms of lands restituted to Palestinians. However, given that these results are rarely implemented by Israeli military authorities, Ta'ayush can, again through direct action, expose the routinary practice of not applying the law, thus belying the Israeli pretence of rule of law in the OPT. Finally, Breaking the Silence can, thanks to its institutional means, provide technical support, insights on the internal workings of the army, and increased visibility to co-resistance groups via their tours in the region.[185]

While these synergies present the advantage of offering a larger spectrum of angles to each problem, it is not straightforward whether this has the overall effect of pushing the network towards more radical critiques. Indeed, creating routinized moments of shared struggle across groups with different political frameworks offers the occasion to exchange ideas and practices, which has led some groups to radicalize over time (as seen in the case of Breaking the Silence in the previous section). However, it needs to be kept in mind that synergies issue often from the need to respond to situations

[184] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 18, 2019.
[185] Participant observation, Susya, April 13 2019; Ta'ayush presentation, West Jerusalem, November 4, 2019; Interviews: West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 27, 2019.

of emergency with scarce resources, and in this scenario collectives may become essentially a terrain for recruitment and their role of providers of radical views swept away as they delegate the task of political analysis to NGOs – as the previous quote seemed to suggest. The potential of strategic coordination, then, could be reversed, and the risk of co-optation extended to activist collectives as well. Activists are not unaware of this, however. Raz concluded her reflection by admitting that the synergies established are "still a work in progress: we need to figure out where to draw the lines and how to find the right balance, and we are trying to do it together."[186]

Finally, there are groups who engage in strategic compromises with the specific aim of linking the Palestinian question with other struggles in Israeli society – be them those of the broader 'left' (the liberal-democratic camp, that of civil rights, LGBTQ+ rights, animal and environmental issues) or those of socio-economically marginalized sectors who have been traditionally co-opted by the right-wing nationalist discourse (Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jews most notably). The strategic importance of this kind of linkages, especially of the second kind, should not be underestimated: theories of hegemony have not stressed enough how alliances across the different sectors of society who envision change are essential for forming the "historical bloc" that might succeed in proposing a new hegemony.[187] Not only rearticulating the Palestinian issue in terms of broader demands for change and equality would enlarge its base of supporters, but it would also connect the issue of the discrimination of Palestinians with the internal hierarchies of Jewish-Israeli society which, as Chapter One has shown, are co-dependent with each other.

Here is how two Mizrahi activists, Yifat, a young woman, and Isaac, a man in his 50s, reflected on the potential of connecting struggles between the pro-Palestinian Ashkenazi left and other, less privileged sectors of society:

> Mizrahi voices are of paramount importance when considering counter-hegemony in Israel. They have always been the most vocal against the hegemony of Ashkenazi Jews. [...] It is extremely important to have their voice in the solidarity for Palestinians, because it's the only voice that is not Ashkenazi, that is not privileged, and this allows them to get to those who, otherwise, just wouldn't listen.[188]

> You cannot just do solidarity [with Palestinians]... You need to connect this also with the issues that exist within Israeli society. Coming from a Communist background, and having Ta'ayush as a learning ground, made me understand that colonialism is about privilege and about profits. The majority of settlers are not nationalists, they're just poorer, or want a better life. We need to understand what is driving these people to the frontiers of colonization. [...] We need to keep in mind the connection between colonialism and

[186] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 18, 2019. See also Shahaf Weisbein, "Nonprofits are of paramount social importance. It's time to take them seriously," *Local Call*, November 17, 2019 [HEB, translated by the author], https://www.mekomit.co.il/רפורמה-במגזר-השלישי-עמותות/.

[187] Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, 79, 332; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. (London, New York: Verso: 2014). Cf. discussion on alliances in Section 1.

[188] Skype interview, November 3, 2019.

> neoliberalism: if you work against colonialism, you need to offer a political solution to those who don't wish to become colonizers but are pushed to it by neoliberalism. If we can do this, a struggle for public housing *becomes* a struggle for decolonization: decolonization is no longer a moral imperative, but a very practical issue.[189]

However, as seen in Chapter One, precisely the intertwinement in Israeli politics between neoliberal and patriarchal structures and a colonial logic of race and 'politics of fear' makes Israeli hegemony so resilient, and joint struggles so fragile when they eventually occur. Isaac continued on with a reflection on the experience of Tarabut, a now-dismantled joint-struggle group that was trying to do precisely this:[190]

> Tarabut got to places where no segment of the Israeli left ever arrived. We had demonstrations in Jerusalem where you would see Palestinian and Mizrahi women come together despite their differences. We had an orthodox rabbi help us writing leaflets [...] Then the Gaza war came along, and suddenly the fact that people tell you that you are "consorting with Arabs" becomes all the more powerful... Warfare, besides schooling, is a huge instrument to keep hegemony in place. It's the politics of fear: it keeps you vulnerable enough to hate and dehumanize. Two, three rockets, and you're ready to accept anything. We may achieve something at the grassroots level, but it's very fragile. One military campaign is enough to destroy the trust built over many years.[191]

As a result of these difficulties, many of the activists I interviewed had "given up" on trying to connect struggles, and were rather quick in dismissing Mizrahi Jews as "terribly right-wing" or liberals as "just as racist as Netanyahu."[192] Some, however, insisted that this is of paramount importance, and actually see the present scenario as an opportunity. With the recent 'branding traitors' campaigns becoming so undiscriminated, liberal Zionists are feeling stigmatized for the first time, they are being censored in the press and uprooted from places of power. The attacks on Palestinian culture are affecting Mizrahi Jews more and more, as the Nation State Law delegitimated their culture and language together with that of Palestinians (c.f. Chapter One, Section 1). Tom, a Jewish-American activist in his 40s, noted: "Never have democratic rights been so eroded within the Jewish-Israeli society. [...] The two issues have always been connected, but now it's much clearer how they are."[193]

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[189] Interview, Tel Aviv, December 1, 2019.
[190] According to its website, Tarabut was "a joint Arab-Jewish social movement seeking to address the most burning issue – the division in Israeli oppositional politics between struggles against the occupation and struggles against inequality and for social justice within Israel itself. Its members come from very different backgrounds: long-time activists against the occupation, activists involved in projects against unequal access to education, Arab activists involved in campaigns for empowerment and equal rights for the Arab minority within Israel, experienced activists against the exploitation and discrimination of oriental Jews and the delegitimation of Arab culture, young refuseniks, feminists involved in local campaigns for women's empowerment, students involved in campaigns to defend public higher education against creeping privatization, and so on." "About us", Tarabut website, http://www.tarabut.info/en/articles/article/about/.
[191] Interview, Tel Aviv, December 1, 2019.
[192] Interviews: Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019; West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.
[193] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 27, 2019.

Danya, a Jewish-Israeli activist of the same age, former activist of Anarchists Against the Wall, reflected further:

> Even people who couldn't care less about Palestinians see that it's their own freedom that is at stake. [...] A lot of activists don't respect this: they'll complain that these people don't want real change, that they don't see the full picture. I get it. But we cannot miss this moment... and it's so easy to miss! [...] If we want to face this challenge, we need a complete change of strategy, we need all discourses, we need to merge struggles.[194]

One way of doing this is framing the struggle so as to make these connections visible, and stress that fighting Israeli colonial practices and mentalities is a winning strategy for all. This is an integral part of the strategy of Zochrot that we have seen at the outset of the section. The activist who talked about making it clear that fighting for return could be a "win-win for everybody" continued by explaining that this could be done by emphasizing how "welcoming back Palestinians will help us deal with lots of inequalities we have within our 'democracy': Mizrahi rights, women rights, the whole militaristic oppressive mentality."[195]

A group which was created recently precisely to undertake this challenge is Standing Together. Inspired by new left-wing political parties such as Syriza and Podemos, Standing Together has the ambitious objective of "filling the void left by left-wing parties and occupied by NGOs" and building a new, comprehensive, proactive, and socialist-inspired "political home for the Left in Israel."[196] At the core of the group's vision is "recognizing the interconnectedness between struggles, including the growing social and economic disparities in Israeli society, the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories, attacks on democratic freedoms, and the hardships faced by minorities such as Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, the LGBTQ community, women, and immigrants."[197] As such, since its birth in 2015 the group, which is still composed mainly by young Ashkenazi Jews but is "trying to expand [its] base also towards Palestinian citizens and other minorities," has been active on multiple grounds, and partnering with groups that were active on each issue at hand: from the turmoil in South Tel Aviv that pitted the residents against communities of asylum seekers, to campaigns to push for the official use of Arabic language against the Nation State Law; from the battles of the Ethiopian community against police violence to those of the Hasidic community for an improvement of their life conditions.[198] According to one of its activists, Noam, a Jewish-Israeli in his late 20s, what singles out Standing Together's approach compared to that of the liberal left and human rights NGOs is that:

[194] Interview, Ramat Gan, May 14, 2019.
[195] Interview, Tel Aviv, November 30, 2019.
[196] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 26, 2019.
[197] Standing Together Website, https://www.standing-together.org/english.
[198] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 26, 2019.

> We don't go help them because it's the right thing to do *morally*, but because we share the same *interest*: to get recognition to work legally, to have proper housing, to have equal rights and opportunities. This isn't just much more helpful if you want to create a partnership, but it's also what can really *break the strategy of the government*, which has always been to make people hate one another – asylum seekers and Mizrahim, Palestinians and Ethiopian Jews, and so on.[199]

Noam emphasized the importance of focusing on the practical issues felt as relevant by the targeted populations, to build political empowerment bottom-up, and to try to keep the connections with them alive beyond momentous mobilizations so as to be able to create a shared analysis over time:

> If they're depoliticized, such as many Palestinians of Israel, we talk about the things that are relevant to them: not the 'occupation' in abstract, but discrimination at work, transportation, housing. If we know they think very differently from us, we don't hide who we are (we always have our t-shirts with Arabic slogans and so on), but we still go, even if others criticize our presence there. Once, we organized protests with Mizrahi communities for the construction of a park in South Tel Aviv: there were lots of right-wingers there, but now a lot of them became leftists, and they kicked the Likud out! That's what we try to do: to go to local needs, but with our broader picture, our platform. [...] Some of these campaigns were successful, and eventually ended, but we try not to leave those places and the people we partnered with. Like in South Tel Aviv, the deportations were stopped and the movement disappeared because it had been created ad hoc. But there are still great activists there, and we are going to meet next Sunday to organize a joint struggle against the Major.[200]

Standing Together also receives criticism from other activists: for being 'normalizing' for proposing a discourse that, without tackling Zionism ("We prefer to work around it"), risks to sound like simple "coexistence;" for "leading the struggle" instead of supporting Palestinians in their own; and for taking the merit for actions that were organized and carried out by others.[201] Still, its attempt to build a radical platform on the intersectionality of struggles makes it a unicum in the current panorama of the Israeli left.

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[199] *Ibidem*.

[200] *Ibidem*. The activist refers to a period of mobilization in South Tel Aviv, a poor neighborhood inhabited mostly by disenfranchised Jewish-Israelis, many of which Mizrahi. When thousands of asylum seekers arrived, between 2006 and 2013, and settled in the neighbourhood, the government fuelled the discontent of the residents towards racist discourses, which eventually led to their mobilization advocating for the deportation of refugees. Left-wing Ashkenazi activists came to the neighbourhood and, in coordination with local Mizrahi community activists to try and support the right of refugees, which made emerge the tensions between the instances of the 'left,' perceived as the stance of the privileged, and those of the residents. The mobilizations led to some successes in drawing connections between these different struggles. See e.g. Tsafrir Cohen, Einat Podjarny, "South Tel-Aviv: An Essay. A microcosm of struggles indicative of Israel's future,", *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung,* September 2019, https://www.rosalux.de/publikation/id/40958/south-tel-aviv-an-essay/; Melanie Lidman, "South Tel Aviv residents supporting migrants' deportation reject 'racist' label," *The Times of Israel*, February 25, 2018, (https://www.timesofisrael.com/south-tel-aviv-residents-supporting-deportation-reject-racist-label/; Levin, Lia and Maya Nahum, "Public Community Work in Neighborhoods with Both Citizen and Asylum-Seeking Residents: South Tel Aviv as a Study Case," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* (2022): 1-13; Fiona Wright, *The Israeli Radical Left: An Ethics of Complicity*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018): 98-99. The issue will be treated also in Chapter Five, Section 4.

[201] Interviews: Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018; Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019.

Indeed, there are other activists who have tried over time to do the same, although mostly as individuals and not through political frameworks. Danya, mentioned above, recalled how with some other pro-Palestinian activists she had participated in 2015 to the demonstrations organized by the Ethiopian Jewish community following the disappearance of Avera Mengisto, who trespassed the Gaza border and was allegedly held captive by Hamas with the Israeli government reportedly taking few steps for his release (fewer than he would have done if he was an Ashkenazi Jew):[202]

> We went to the protests they organized to bring him back. One of their demands was for Israel to forbid family visits to Palestinian prisoners until he was released… a collective punishment with which we deeply disagreed. But we were there, and we didn't say anything. The police brutality they suffer, the racial profiling, is very similar to what Palestinians undergo. […] But the first step needs to be going *there*, and unconditionally, not for 'recruiting' people to our cause. That never works.[203]

As she puts it, the challenge of basing one's actions on finding practical (as opposed to *ideological*) common ground is that one may have to not only shift between different framings and vocabularies, as do the groups seen previously, but to bracket one's political beliefs entirely, in a strategic compromise that feels very costly. The compromise seems, however, worth the costs in terms of the chance of developing a political framework that gets at the full hegemonic picture, and not just at solidarity with Palestinians. As we will see in the next chapter, the value in doing this remains irrespective of whether one actually succeeds in 'merging' the struggles, because the encounter with multiple others ultimately allows activists to develop a much subtler awareness of the complex networks of privileges in Israeli society.

The potential that working concretely on "uncommon ground" has for the emergence of shared sensitivities and analyses was captured by David, a Jewish-Israeli pro-Palestinian and environmental activist.[204] He focused on these possibilities less across the pro-Palestinian left and disenfranchised sectors of the population and more across radical and liberal sectors of the left, as he spoke about his experience working in HaMoked:

> HaMoked was a very good model. The fact that it was centred on the mission, and not on programmatic discussions, allowed for people to focus on the bulk of the work without minding too much about the differences between them. And by working together, people eventually grew up and changed their perspectives. Even people who were raised Zionist liberal got to a kind of shared vision that was anti-authoritarian and developed a very strong empathy against the occupation. This really came from the intensity and 'on-the-groundness' of the work, the fact that it wasn't centred on sort of floating ideological

[202] The demonstrations protested the inaction of the government, and denounced the differential treatment Israeli citizens receive depending on their being non-Ashkenazi. See e.g. Elior Levy and Itay Blumenthal, "Hamas takes a jab at Israel over missing Israeli Ethiopian," *Ynet News*, September 7, 2015, https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4678288,00.html.
[203] Interview, Ramat Gan, May 14, 2019.
[204] Chatterton, ""Give up activism".

> things but concrete ones. This is what we need to do: the key, also on the issue of intersectionality, is to find concrete campaigns on which people can find common ground… and things go from there! Palestinians can become vegan, and Israelis can become anti-Zionists![205]

The tiny portion of the Jewish-Israeli left that is currently anti-Zionist, together with the fact that successful instances of merging struggles remain very rare, run against David's optimist. However, the reflections seen in this section, as well as the reported instances of shifting political paradigms that do exist, lend further support to the idea that the 'de-politicization' of Israeli activism which we have seen in Section 2, one based on 'on-the-ground' work and 'dirty hands,' may indeed offer ways for a more radical politics: one that involves more personal costs and challenges than a struggle carried out from pure ideological convictions, and that can in some cases be conducive to a 're-politicization' in a more comprehensive, and thus more counterhegemonic, way.

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This chapter has explored the different approaches Jewish-Israeli activists undertake in the mobilization of their insider's privilege on the ground of the struggle. It has done so following a synchronic line (how activists engage with Zionist hegemonic structures through 'from within,' 'from without,' and mixed approaches) and a diachronic line (how such engagements with hegemony have evolved as the margins for critical action have become narrower in the past two decades).

As in the previous chapter, none of the three approaches identified delineates a clear-cut path towards counterhegemonic change. Within-hegemonic approaches configure a "loyal opposition" that ends up absolving, indeed even reinforcing, the Zionist discourse and its system of structural injustices towards Palestinians.[206] By placing the blame on the occupation and the settlement enterprise, selectively opposing only the most aggressive forms of military violence, and adopting a vocabulary of 'conflict' in relation to Palestinians and of 'democracy' concerning Israel, these groups ultimately sanction as legitimate Israel's settler colonial formation, its architecture as a Jewish State, and its militaristic 'defensive' ethos, and obfuscate the structural colonial asymmetry with Palestinians.[207] While some activists within these groups pursue this strategy willingly because they ultimately oppose a systemic and decolonial change, others are troubled by these long-term dynamics and yet choose nonetheless to work within Israeli hegemony, albeit with discomfort, because of the

[205] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 24, 2019.
[206] Keshet (2006: 126), quoted in Ronit Lentin, *Co-memory and melancholia*.
[207] For similar arguments on the 'liberal' Israeli organizations see for instance Mandy Turner, "Creating a counterhegemonic praxis: Jewish-Israeli activists and the challenge to Zionism," *Conflict, security & development* 15, no. 5 (2015): 549-574, Tikva Honig-Parnass, *The False Prophets of Peace: Liberal Zionism and the Struggle for Palestine*, (London: Haymarket Books, 2011), Rami Younis and Orly Noy, "Let's stop talking about a false 'Jewish-Arab partnership'", *+972 Magazine*, April 17, 2019, https://www.972mag.com/false-jewish-arab-partnership/.

short-term improvements they allow to achieve. Their reflections on the human costs of doing otherwise, such as from Israeli attorney Michael Sfard, point to the fact that uncompromising attitudes are sometimes a luxury for the privileged.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, without-hegemonic approaches allow activists to wage radical systemic critiques to the Zionist hegemony – although the section has shown how these rarely go so far as to meet the decolonial analysis adopted by Palestinians. While smaller and less organized, the groups in this approach achieve effectiveness in the empowerment of Palestinians through actions of co-resistance. Most importantly, the section has shown that even activists in these approaches mobilize strategically their systemic privileges and inevitably reproduce them by entrenching asymmetric regimes of visibility and grievability, structures of dependency, and asymmetric power dynamics with Palestinian partners in the struggle. Activists though learn, through the struggle, about these inadvertent reproductions and strive to counter them, in ways that are however always imperfect.

Finally, in the 'compromise' approach, groups seek to reach diverse audiences, both mainstream and marginalized, and to be effective in institutional arenas, while cultivating and pushing forward radical claims on the Palestinian issue. The section has shown how this approach is also not the panacea some theorists of social movements see it to be, since the connections it establishes risk toning down the claims of radical groups as much as they can radicalize those of moderate ones. However, this approach is, among the three, the most conducive to 'impure' forms of struggle, where activists of different backgrounds come together and interact with partners and audiences often very different from their usual ones. This in some cases allows for the emergence of shared sensitivities, and indeed for connecting grievances, across the radical/moderate and the Jewish/Palestinian divides in society.

In terms of diachronic developments, the political changes of the past two decades also do not delineate a univocal trajectory in the strategies of Jewish-Israeli activist groups. Some groups have retreated into hegemonic frames and strategies in the attempt to adapt to the increasing limitations imposed by the current climate and to run after the mainstream right-wing consensus. Others, instead, have reacted to these limitations by radicalizing their frames and means and by reaching out to audiences other than Israeli one, with often important successes in terms of amplifying Palestinian claims in the international arena. What the narrowing of boundaries of critique seems to have facilitated across these different trajectories are pragmatic engagements on the part of activists: engagements that prioritize the presence on the ground and an attitude of compromise over the elaboration of long-term solutions and clear-cut political programs. Against those who see this trend as one of depoliticization of Israeli activism, the chapter has argued that it is precisely in the opportunities opened by these concrete, impure, compromised engagements that reside the best

chances Jewish-Israeli activism has today for developing a critique of Zionism that is at once more comprehensive and more profound. As examples across the chapter have shown, as activist accept to 'dirt their hands' in situations that may run counter their political beliefs, and to be 'on the ground' continuatively, *unconditionally*, they put themselves in situations in which they become more attuned to the various and sometimes connected needs of different populations. Irrespective of whether this leads immediately to alliances and merged struggles, what emerges is a broader understanding of the complex network of privileges in Israel-Palestine that deepens the framework of Jewish-Israeli solidarity and extends it to the whole spectrum of colonial relations established by Zionism, ultimately providing the basis for a more radical counterhegemonic challenge.

The counterhegemonic potential of this impure, grounded engagement materializes particularly at the level of the individual transformations that can be forwarded through the struggle and through encounters with multiple Others as activists are pushed to interrogate their own embodied privileges and work towards their disruption. It is to this level that the next chapter turns.




Sira pub, West Jerusalem, November 2019 (ph: Alice Baroni)

*Towards the end of my fieldwork, I 'returned' to one of the settings that had been the standard of my previous visits to Palestine as an activist. This time, however, coming to it with an Israeli car and after months of being among Jewish-Israeli activists, my reading of it was very different, in particular for what it concerned their role.*

*The setting was a three-day convention organized by Palestinian activists in Area A of the West Bank. Revolving around the topic of international solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, the convention saw the participation of several grassroots collectives from around the world, and involved talks, workshops, and a direct action at a nearby illegal Israeli outpost to conclude the event. Jewish-Israeli activists, while present, remained very much in the background of the talks, never acknowledged publicly by none of the organizers and easily confused with internationals. Yet, I could see clearly how they were involved in the backstage in a role of active supporters much more than the international 'guests' who were mostly there to learn. It was their work, more than that of unexperienced international activists, that proved determinant in deterring the arrest of many that*

*day, Palestinians and internationals alike. I could see how they could come across as arrogant or imposing, especially as in the aftermath of the action, as we were taking refuge from the soldiers' searches in a Palestinian's orchard, they sat separately from the others and refused to leave with them when there was the chance ("I really think you should leave with us, you might not be realizing that you are putting our host in danger," noted a Spanish activist before turning away). And yet, what they were also doing there, busy on their phones and laptops, was continuing their supporting role by coordinating with lawyers and media. When only a few of us remained, an Italian activist, understanding that I was a fellow Italian researching Israeli activism, came to ask me about them. As she voiced the perplexities that I well knew, I told her some of my impressions on what it entailed doing activism from within the Jewish-Israeli collective, the obstacles it posed, the impossibility of having an irreprehensible commitment and yet the importance that commitment still had, strategic and political. Was I* justifying *them?*[1]

*During the car-ride back to Jerusalem that night, as my Jewish-Israeli companions complained about the problems of the Palestinian organizing and the unnecessary risks it had entailed, I reflected upon how my different 'affiliation' over the past months had affected my perspective. Definitely more aware of the problems of international solidarity than I used to be, I had become perhaps too apologetic towards that of Jewish-Israeli activism.*

*Studying the 'similar,' and doing so with an approach that was at once participatory and self-reflexive, had led my perspective to become entangled with that of my interlocutors. The long hours of interviews had led me to share in their reasoning and empathize with their difficulties and dilemmas. Going to actions with them made me absorb some of the practical knowledge of their activism and brought me also emotionally closer to their lived experiences. Also the fact of trying to go to 'everything all the time' (there were political actions every day for those who wanted to get involved), albeit for different reasons, made me share in their sense of exhaustion, of doing too much and yet never enough. Discussing over drinks and dinners with my closest interlocutors, about past events and the criticalities of this or that group, sometimes had my criticisms aligned with theirs.*

*I did reach out to people also outside of the Jewish-Israeli activist network (Palestinian activists and friends primarily, but also international friends and fellow researchers), in an attempt to broaden my understanding and also somehow 'reset' my shifting point of view. But the fact remained that I was immersed in a Jewish-Israeli activist environment, where the various shades of political opposition (the liberal/non/anti-Zionist stances) had me consider as 'radical' stances that would be considered timid, to say the least, from the 'outside.' I worried that my understanding had become too close to that of 'my' activists. That I had 'gone native' and lost my critical distance. And that my analysis, that wished to be true to them and get at their complexities with nuance and sensitivity, would end up lending justification to commitments that were partial and ambivalent, and perhaps contribute to reinforce a sense of rightfulness that often went together with attitudes of protagonism, self-praise, and self-indulgence.*

[1] Participant observations, Mukhayyam Fari'a, October 25-26, 2019

*During the last months of my fieldwork I had also started to feel heavily the pressure that the context was exerting on me. Living in Israel-Palestine for an international is way easier than it is for Palestinians, and in many ways also for Jewish-Israeli dissidents. But it is not without consequences. Inhabiting a segregated reality, even if you can navigate more or less freely on the surface of it, affects you. It makes you angry, especially if you are actively paying attention to instances of injustice. The news of Palestinians getting killed at this or that checkpoint (a 'mistake,' a 'security check' gone wrong, in any case a 'potential terrorist' stopped), not to mention evicted from their house or harassed in other ways, were so frequent that they became a sort of numbing background noise. I shiver at this choice of words, but that is what it was: an outrage that did not explode and burn as it did at the beginning, but rather seeped in quietly, leaving just a constant sense of malaise. Was I normalizing this violence, becoming inured to it? After all, I had learned how disengagement and desensitization are effective strategies for those who have the luxury of opting for them.*



Checkpoint 300, Bethlehem, March 2019 (ph: Alice Baroni)

*In November, a new war on Gaza began. With the pretext of the unrest surrounding the Great March of Return, Israel had begun launching airstrikes on Gaza City, allegedly targeting Jihad leaders but killing tens of civilians per airstrike along with them. As the death toll rose (40 one day, 63 another: I noted it down day per day, at the beginning), the news in Israeli newspapers reported about newlyweds being unable to go on their honeymoons.*[2]

*I felt tired, exhausted. As I dragged myself to more interviews and actions, I was relieved to realize the information I gathered had started to repeat itself, that perhaps I had reached the point of 'saturation.' Aware and uncomfortable about the privilege I was, once again, exercising, I nonetheless felt glad to decide to end my fieldwork. I looked forward to putting some distance between myself and my interlocutors, for work, but also with Israel-Palestine and all its burdens, for myself.*

[2] "Israeli attacks: All the latest updates," *Al Jazeera*, November 14, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/14/israeli-attacks-all-the-latest-updates/; Melanie Lidman, "Rockets on Tel Aviv prick city's bubble of nonchalance", *The Times of Israel*, November 12,2019, https://www.timesofisrael.com/first-rockets-in-tel-aviv-in-five-years-pricks-citys-nonchalant-bubble/.

CHAPTER FIVE

# Intersubjective Grey Zones

## Relationality, Intimacy, and the Daily Praxis of (De)Colonization

*There is also just life.*

Loud chatter and music fill the air, mixing with the smoke coming from dozens of lit *argilas*.[1] Perched on the high tiers of the terraced beer-garden, I enjoy a drink in the company of friends and absorb the beauty of the place: immersed in the forest, colourful pillows scattered on the terraces, lanterns and canvases hanging from the trees, an atmosphere at once festive and relaxed.

The Snowbar is an institution in Ramallah, a nightlife spot appreciated by Palestinians and internationals alike, many of whom gravitating around the NGO sector and Birzeit University. I am here for the farewell party of a friend, a Spanish aid-worker, with a group of internationals and Palestinians who met each other through common friends, work, and activism. There is an Israeli friend too, also an activist. For her, coming here was not as simple and self-evident as it was for us. Unlike us, she is not *supposed* to be here.

Legally speaking, this is Area A of the West Bank where, as stated by the red warning signs placed at branch-off points of major Israeli-controlled roads, "entrance for Israeli citizens [Jewish is implied] is forbidden and dangerous to your lives." "I don't have the privilege of being spontaneous here," she wrote in the group-chat where we organized car-rides. In order not to "look suspicious" at checkpoints, she refused to take her car ("It screams young Israeli!") and arranged going with someone else's diplomatic car, hoping that her white skin would be interpreted as a marker of being an 'international.'[2]

[1] Waterpipe commonly smoked by Palestinians and throughout the Middle East.
[2] WhatsApp group conversation, April 24, 2019.

But there are deeper reasons too for her not being supposed to be here, which I could fully understand only on the way back, as I discussed with a Palestinian friend in the car. "It's not cool that she came, it's *normalizing*." In my mind, immersed as I was in feminist and decolonial scholarship, sharing moments of leisure over a framework of political solidarity had all the 'disruptive potential' of 'performing an alternative' to the segregationist norm that kept Israelis and Palestinians strictly separated. "Even if she is an activist?" I asked. "She is one of the most committed I know. She crosses all the time for actions. If *she* comes for a drink, is it not different than just any Israeli?" "Sure, it's better if she's an activist, but if she comes for fun, it's normalization. She is still the occupier."

Back at the bar, I noticed her smiling, filling her eyes as I was, but remaining mostly on the side. I read in her body language, perhaps mistakenly, a sort of restrained happiness for being there, a mix of delight, fascination, and discomfort. At a certain point, some of us walked down to the centre of the bar to dance. She came with us and immediately, despite the chill of the April night, took off her jacket, revealing the tattoos covering her arms and shoulders. Political, but in Hebrew. Heads around us turned, and she seemed more uncomfortable than ever, but she did not put her jacket back on. Why did she do it? Was this an act of *honesty*? Of refusing, now, the easy deception of passing as international, and confessing instead her Israeliness, although this would inevitably attract disapproval, perhaps worse?[3]

The following morning, she posted on Facebook a photo of the bar, the caption saying "There is also just life."[4] And yet, how many tensions there were behind this assertion of normality! Longing and guilt, desire and calculation, intentions of defiance that were also, simultaneously, acts of domination.

It was episodes like this one that allowed me to fully grasp how pervasive and complex issues of power and privilege are in the social context of Israel-Palestine. How power and privilege are manifested and reinscribed, more or less consciously, not only through ideological constructs and the unfolding of solidarity action, but also in the mundane acts that weave, through their daily work, the colonial fabric of Israel-Palestine. For Lefebvre, everyday life is "defined by 'what is left over' after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis."[5] And it is indeed in what happens in the background of solidarity actions, beneath identitary work and political elaboration, that activists 'perform' their being Jewish-Israelis through their every move: through how they live their life as first-class citizens; through how they move into space and across barriers; through how they inhabit (or not) relationships woven with Palestinians and with other Jewish-Israelis. Each banal act may, as feminist scholarship teach us, conform to social norms and thus reiterate established

[3] Hanging out, Ramallah, April 25, 2019.
[4] Facebook post, April 25, 2019.
[5] Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Volume 1*, ( London: Verso, 1991): 97.

power dynamics; but it may also attempt to subvert them – although both things happen in ways that are not always simple or straightforward, as the anecdote above illustrates.

This chapter looks at this 'residual' realm and asks how activists deal with their privileged positionality in their daily life, where power displays are least apparent but most sustaining of the *status quo*. Activists' different approaches span, once again, between the opposites of full compliance with or full defiance of what a Jewish-Israeli is expected to 'be,' and do so in ways that variously intertwine with their ideological and strategic choices. Most importantly, as the following sections will show, once again such endeavours happen in a grey zone where achieving full defiance is impossible (and the effort towards it often counter-productive) and where compliance is not always apologetic or hypocritical.

Through examining these cases, the chapter shows how decolonial subjectivities can come 'from below:' not only from the elaboration of new identities and political frameworks, but from an intersubjective learning process that feeds on shared experiences, practical engagements, relationships experimented day after day, and on the reflexive attitude that accompanies all of these. It further argues that it is when activists acknowledge and deal with the ambiguities and impurities of their engagement that subversion can be most profound. Because it is most attuned to dealing with these impurities, contemporary activism is the one that, compared to older forms, reveals the greatest potential in this sense.

The chapter begins by offering an overview of the debates on the workings of power that, by recentring the role of subjectivity, relationality, body, affect, and the everyday, have progressively shed light on its most elusive ways. The section then focuses in particular on how this problem unfolds and is addressed in the context of activism, where a certain consistency is attempted between the ground of the struggle and that of everyday life conducts. The second, third, and fourth sections explore the ways in which activists deal with their embodied privileges in three dimensions respectively. Section 2 looks at how activists relate to the Israeli space and institutions, as well as to their inner selves, as they live, work, and move through the web of power stratifications that shape their life. Section 3 looks at the personal relationships they entertain with their main Other, the Palestinians, within and beyond the struggle. Section 4 shifts the attention to how they deal with their 'other' Others: Jewish-Israelis like them and yet foreign to the bubble of pro-Palestinian activism and to their self-perceptions. Each of these sections retraces how these issues were addressed differently over time, in interaction with the changes in context that have impacted in many ways the quotidian of Israel-Palestine and the relationalities it made possible. The chapter concludes, in Section 5, by reflecting on the subversive potential of subjective engagements with power through struggle, and makes the case for impurity.

There is a methodological challenge in seeking to analyse how people "do" or "undo" being Jewish-Israeli.[6] How to retrace the micropolitics of everyday actions and interactions, how to "make the invisible visible"?[7] Not a trained anthropologist, I cannot say I really 'immersed' myself in the lives of the activists I have been studying: my fieldwork only lasted for six months, and even then, I did not 'shadow' activists throughout their days.[8] The empirical material for this chapter is thus mainly drawn from my main methods of data collection, interviews and participant observation, although my focus has shifted on what was happening 'behind the scenes:' the preparations for actions and the moments of decompression afterwards; the things unsaid and the bodily reactions that accompanied the things said during interviews; the small talk that happened at the beginning and at the end of interviews, and that my informants considered unrelated and unimportant. In addition to this, something that turned out to be quite useful for this analysis were the moments of leisure I shared with activist friends, such as the one described in the vignette that opened this chapter – what is increasingly referred to in research methodology as 'hanging out.'[9] The choice to write about these moments was not straightforward and involved weighting ethical and analytical issues at length, something which I addressed in the Introduction and to which I will return to in the Conclusion of this dissertation.

## *1. The Elusive Ways of Power: Performing Abidance, Attempting Treason*

This chapter takes as a starting point the idea that hegemony is sustained and reproduced also, if not mostly, through ordinary and passive means, inscribed in often pre-reflexive habits and interactions, and in the very bodies and materialities that constitute the social world. Power, in other words, does not flow only from governments downwards, but is sustained through people's obedience and cooperation, which in turn arise from a mix of routine, perceived moral obligations, fear of sanctions, and zones of indifference.

This idea has been applied and investigated with increasing sophistication as testified by various 'turns' of the past few decades – "practice," "material," "corporeal," "affective," "quotidian," to name a few – which span across a variety of disciplines and epistemologies.[10] While for some this focus on the micro level is post-structural, and as such at odds with the structural focus of ideology and hegemony theories, the take of this chapter is that it provides an additional perspective to look at

[6] Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing gender", *Gender & society,* 1, no. 2 (1987): 125-151; Judith Butler, *Undoing gender*, (London-New York, Routledge, 2004).
[7] Ben Highmore, ed., *The everyday life reader*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2002): 2.
[8] See, respectively, Bronislaw Malinowsky, "Proper conditions for ethnographic work," in Highmore, ed., *The everyday life reader*, and Harry F. Wolcott, *The Man in the Principal's Office: An Ethnography*, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003).
[9] See e.g. Deepak Nair, "'Hanging Out' while Studying 'Up': Doing Ethnographic Fieldwork in International Relations," *International Studies Review* 23, no. 4 (2021): 1300-1327.
[10] A review of such turns as applied to Security Studies can be found in Mark B. Salter and Can E. Mutlu, ed., *Research methods in critical security studies: An introduction*, (London: Routledge, 2013). For affective and quotidian turns respectively see Patricia T. Clough, "The affective turn: Political economy, biomedia and bodies," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 1 (2008): 1-2, and Highmore, ed., *The everyday life reader*.

hegemony work more comprehensively.[11] In fact, the idea that power operates pervasively and passively in the social world was already present *in nuce* in classic Western theories of ideology and power. Already in *The German Ideology* (1846), Marx and Engels argued that ideology is the product of relationships and conducts – the "material life-processes" of a society – rather than merely the result of intellectual elaborations.[12] This conception was later at the core of Gramsci's conception of hegemony, his emphasis on the role of civil society and on the "social conformism" of the "mass man,"[13] and was picked up in Althusser's early conceptualization of subjectivity – his idea that subjects are *produced*, and not *given*, as they respond to "interpellations" as members of race, class, and sex, and that it is in conforming to these memberships that they support ideological structures.[14]

However, it was only insights from psychoanalysis, on the one side, and feminist and subaltern studies, on the other, that offered both the tools and the standpoint for exploring the micropolitics of subjectivity and power more fully. An elaboration that remains foundational to present-day theories of subjectivity is Butler's seminal work on gender and performativity, indebted to Foucault's work on the disciplining of bodies and the phenomenological theory of acts of Merleau-Ponty and others. In her famous 1988 essay, Butler argues that gender identity (but the reasoning can be applied to other social identities as well) is a "performative accomplishment," a "stylized repetition of acts" which have been rehearsed, much like a "script" made of "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds."[15] Such acts are regulated by social conventions and "sedimented expectations of gender existence" that entrench asymmetries of power.[16] As individuals constantly actualize them through their actions, systems of oppression are maintained and reproduced. Like gender, also race as a social construct comes with expected performances and pre-established scripts that differ with a subject's location within systems of domination, and its abiding performance reinscribes and reinforces such hierarchies.[17]

Subjects are thus constituted and reconstituted as an assemblage, always situated and relational, of somatic traits and bodily awareness (i.e. how these traits are constructed, hidden or emphasized),

[11] See e.g. Jon Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). A counter-perspective can be found in the work of, e.g., Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Slavoj Žižek and, specifically, in Leticia Sabsay, "Permeable Bodies: Vulnerability, Affective Powers, Hegemony," in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 278-302.
[12] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985): 47.
[13] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971) as discussed in Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London, Boston, Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979): 168-203.
[14] Althusser, Louis, "Ideology, and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Mapping Ideology*, (London, New York: Verso, 2012): 100-140.
[15] Judith Butler, "Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory," *Theatre journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-531.
[16] *Idem*, 524.
[17] For a recent elaboration see Alana Lentin, *Why race still matters*, (Cambridge-Medford: Polity Press, 2020).

gestures, attitudes, vocabulary, concepts of personal space and gut reactions to situations and others (what is sometimes referred to as "affect").[18]

These micropolitical workings of power are all the more effective as they are elusive to subjects themselves. Individuals' daily collaboration in their maintenance depends less on conscious adherence than on a pre-reflexive wish to conform to social expectations. Performing an abiding self is reassuring, while distancing oneself from it generates social anxiety and discomfort.[19] To many, this is what explains the resilience of hegemonic structures in spite of a general critical judgment:[20] while conforming performances do depend on political institutions and ideological constructs, they are likely to outlive their change, because their reproduction has grown autonomous of them.[21] It is on this that Mignolo and the modernity/coloniality research project placed emphasis when they argued that decoloniality entails a much bigger shift than decolonization, because it is a matter not only of governments, but "of knowledge and of being (gender, sexuality, subjectivity, and knowledge)," and one that, differently from liberation, encompasses both "the colonized and the colonizer."[22]

The problem of the elusiveness of these ways of power becomes particularly salient in the context of activism, and of solidarity (that is, asymmetric) activism in particular. Embodied privileges, according to standpoint theory, are less visible to those who have them, because their pervasiveness makes becoming aware of them more difficult (this is why whiteness is often not considered a racial identity by whites, or barriers to movement are believed to be absent by those who live in the First World, and so on).[23] Activists, who for a wide array of reasons mostly belong to relatively privileged sectors of the populations, are often criticized (and in many cases it is also a self-criticism) for a certain disjuncture between their ideals and their practice, within the struggle and even more so in everyday life.[24] "Doing activism" often involves invoking a certain purity of ideas, roles, and solutions, that is at odds with the many intimate collusions that activists – just as everyone else – have with the *status quo* they criticize.[25] It might even be that such ideals of purity act as a shield from seeing such collusions, and thus from scrutinizing one's own participation in power more deeply. To paraphrase Žižek: it may be precisely when we think we stepped out of what we experience as ideology that our

[18] See e.g. Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995): 83–109.
[19] Butler, "Performative acts", 528. On the ontological anxiety that derives from betraying one's membership see also Linda Martín Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?," *Hypathia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 6-26.
[20] E.g. Sabsay, "Permeable Bodies," 291.
[21] Butler, "Performative acts", 525.
[22] Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 451; 457.
[23] See e.g. Ruth Frankenberg, *White women, race matters: The social constructionof whiteness*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
[24] Paul Chatterton, ""Give up activism" and change the world in unknown ways: Or, learning to walk with others on uncommon ground," *Antipode* 38, no. 2 (2006): 259-281; Andrew X, "Give up activism," *Do or Die* 9 (1999): 160-166, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/andrew-x-give-up-activism.
[25] Chris Bobel, "'I'm not an activist, though I've done a lot of it': doing activism, being activist and the 'perfect standard' in a contemporary movement," *Social movement studies* 6, no. 2 (2007): 147-159.

enslavement to reveals itself.[26] Activist contexts have been singled out for opposing capitalism while benefiting from its products, for perpetuating sexist stereotypes and militarized mentalities or, as in the previous chapter, for re-enacting dominating postures vis-à-vis their 'subaltern' solidarity targets and partners.[27] Activists have also been criticized for their engagement in often sectorial forms of solidarity while ignoring, or even in some cases worsening, the problems suffered by other sectors of the population.[28]

In the case of Israeli activism specifically, recent studies have addressed the issue of this disjuncture. Natanel (2016) has focused on how liberal leftists and "couch activists" "sustain conflict" by pursuing their aspiration to live a "little life" in Israel (and thus benefiting from the web of privileges it entails), and by adopting more or less consciously paternalistic and racist attitudes in their daily interactions with Palestinians.[29] Wright (2018) has focused instead on "radical activists" and showed how they still reproduce power dynamics in their intimate relations with their Palestinian partners through mechanisms of objectification, romanticization and appropriation.[30]

A core aspect of challenging existing socio-political orders, then, is disrupting these passive acts of compliance and support. Far from being defeatist, theories of the micropolitics of power share the core idea that everyday practices and performances can be a "training ground for conformity" as much as "the place where conformity is evaded," where subjects can reinvent their social beings in alternative ways.[31] Indeed, if the subject is conceived as a "set of possibilities to be continually realized," then the possibility exists for a "different sort of repeating" that interrupts and subverts the performance of a disciplined self.[32] More than this: notwithstanding the conservative pushes of habits and social conventions, some have seen in the everyday co-constitution of subjectivities the arena *par excellence* where relations of power can be "contested, or at least negotiated in relatively interesting ways."[33] This is because this arena is where individuals are allowed to be more plural and heterogenous than their imagined identities would concede. In the situated contingencies of their lives, people enact different selves according to their different roles, in often concomitant and

[26] The paragraph reads: "By means of this externalization of the Cause, the subject is no longer engaged in what is happening to him; he entertains towards the trauma a simple external relationship: far from stirring up the unacknowledged kernel of his desire, the traumatic event disturbs his balance from outside. The paradox in all these cases is that the stepping out of (what we experience as) ideology is the very form of our enslavement to it." In Slavoj Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology," in Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Mapping Ideology*, (London, New York: Verso, 2012): 6.
[27] See e.g. Myra M. Ferree and Carol Mueller, "Feminism and the women's movement: a global perspective," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, (Malden, CA: Blackwell, 2008): 576–607; see also the works quoted in Chapter Four on asymmetric activism (e.g. Coy, Marx and Useem, Buhlungu, and others).
[28] Chatterton, "Give up activism;" Sally Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).
[29] Katherine Natanel, *Sustaining conflict: apathy and domination in Israel-Palestine*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).
[30] Fiona Wright, *The Israeli Radical Left: An Ethics of Complicity*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).
[31] Highmore, ed., *The everyday life reader*, 5.
[32] Butler, in reference also to the work of Merleau-Ponty, "Performative acts", 520-521.
[33] Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, 5.

contradictory ways. Goffman brings the example of how a waiter may perform polite deference on the restaurant floor (in his terminology, the "front region") and a more unruly version of the self in the kitchens (the "back region"), and it is through this plurality that individuals may find the sources and tools for non-conforming behaviour.[34]

But how can activists begin these disruptions, and thus integrate this level of counterhegemonic challenge alongside the identitary and the strategic ones?

A necessary first step is gaining awareness of embodied privileges and submerged mechanisms of domination. In this respect, several authors have emphasized how encounters with marginalized Others play a central role. If these encounters are paramount sites where broader relationships of power and antagonism are enacted and re-inscribed, then it is also here that such relationships can be questioned and reinvented, and the "boundaries of bodies and communities" can be shifted.[35] Harding (1991) placed emphasis on the epistemic advantage that can be gained from such encounters, when she argued that the starting point for the privileged who want to act in solidarity with the unprivileged must be to learn from their experience: "We can all learn about our own lives at the centre of the social order if we start our thought from the perspective of the lives at the margins."[36] Other feminist authors added to this picture by emphasizing the importance of the affective dimension of encounters next to the cognitive one. Within work on care ethics, for instance, day-to-day interactions with Others are seen as creating a disposition to care: a "willingness to receive others, a willingness to give the lucid attention required to appropriately fill the needs of others."[37] This "affective predisposition," that is akin to empathy, provides both the motive for acting in solidarity with others, by committing to the erosion of one's privilege, and the practical knowledge to do so consistently.[38]

Within literature on and from activist contexts specifically, increasing attention has been given to the importance of creating spaces of reflexivity that can help trigger self-scrutiny. Chatterton (2006), for instance, has argued that this is favoured by engaging with the 'public,' disengaged or oppositional, on the "uncommon ground" of non-shared political frameworks and value systems. This engagement requires setting aside simple slogans and pure ideals, and being open instead to the discussion of the interests upheld or overlooked by activist practice, in a way that makes emerge its contradictions, disconnections, and unintended consequences.[39] Other authors have emphasized the importance of

[34] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (London: Penguin, 2022).
[35] Sara Ahmed, *Strange encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality*, (London: Routledge, 2013): 6-8.
[36] Sandra Harding, *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991): 269, 286.
[37] Rita Manning, *Speaking from the Heart*, (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992): 61.
[38] Sonia Kruks, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001): 152. Another term often used is "fellow feeling" of "feeling with," see e.g. Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, (Hamden: Archon Books, 1970); Sandra Bartky, *Sympathy and Solidarity and Other Essays*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002): 77; Scholz, *Political Solidarity*.
[39] Chatterton, "Give Up Activism."

creating "safe spaces" where activists can voice their doubts, fears, frustrations, and feelings of inadequacy, allowing not only to cope with them in a way that allows to "sustain activism" over time, but also to acknowledge and articulate more fully the tensions embedded in activism, particularly when coming from a position of privilege.[40]

But gaining awareness is not enough to disrupt embodied hierarchies of power: activists need to take responsibility for their structural privileges, and "cultivate traitorous characters" by interrupting as much as possible the enactment of the scripts that sustain them.[41] Such interruptions may be carried out publicly, either on a large scale or through highly symbolic staged actions. It is, for instance, the case of white people who, in the Civil Rights Movement, would sit in the back of buses in the seats reserved to African Americans. It is also what happens in well-known methods of civil disobedience such as strikes and boycotts, whereby people, by their own individual acts, bring to public attention the complicity of everyday institutions in systems of oppression.[42] But interruptions may also happen privately and less dramatically, through the quiet refusal to comply to social expectations and interiorized norms. Individuals can choose to adjust their everyday habits by shifting them only slightly, such as by choosing to do groceries in a shop, live in a neighbourhood or send one's children to a school that represent a break with dominant norms – such as non-segregated ones in ethnically segregated contexts.[43] Individuals may also commit to work on themselves to recognize and reverse their attitudes and gestures that remain shaped by interiorized stereotypes, such as tensing up involuntarily in the presence or certain racial markers, or adopting paternalistic attitudes towards the socially unprivileged.[44] Finally, acts of interruption may also happen on a cultural level, such as when dominant identitary and cultural codes are disavowed through behaviours considered 'desecrating' of national myths, or through dress-codes or entire lifestyles that signal a break with the dominant norm and a choice of an alternative system of life instead – as it happens within subcultures in general and with political subcultures in particular.[45] Sometimes, cultural subversion can take the

[40] See Gavin Brown and Jenny Pickerill, "Space for emotion in the spaces of activism," *Emotion, space and society* 2.1 (2009), pp. 24-35; Ann Deslandes and Debra King, "Autonomous activism and the global justice movement: Aesthetic reflexivity in practice," *Journal of sociology* 42.3 (2006), pp. 310-327; Debra King, "Sustaining activism through emotional reflexivity," in *Emotions and social movements*, edited by Helena Flam and Debra King, Routledge, 2005, pp. 150-169.

[41] Alison Bailey, "Locating traitorous identities: Toward a view of privilege-cognizant white character," *Hypatia* 13.3 (1998), pp. 27-42.

[42] For a famous compendium of such strategies see Gene Sharp, *The politics of nonviolent action*, Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973, Volume 2, Chapters 3-6.

[43] See Gene Sharp, *From dictatorship to democracy: A conceptual framework for liberation*, Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2002. Note however that, for Sharp, "the similarity of such types of action to people's usual activities and the limited degree of departure from their normal lives may make participation [...] much easier" (p. 32). In contexts like the Israeli one, however, the compelling nature of social norms is so strong, and their respect associated with so concrete privileges, that individual departures from habits may actually be much harder to implement than occasional acts of public treason.

[44] See Alcoff, "What should white people do?".

[45] See Chatterton, "Give Up Activism," and on the everyday rejection of normality by subcultures more generally Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, ed., *Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain*, (London: Hutchinson, 1976).

form of an incorporation of elements of the culture of the socially-rejected Other, or of symbols of their struggle.[46]

None of these strategies for subverting embodied and habitual ways of power projection, however, are easy or unproblematic in their concrete implementation. To begin with, realizing the pervasiveness of such ways to all social interactions, and the all-encompassing extent of the needed rebellion, may generate "perfect standards" of commitment that are unattainable by most.[47] If being a "true activist" – someone who acts consistently with her values across the realms of political action and everyday life – "suggests that you have to live outside the norm [and] give everything up," many may feel paralyzed and defeated from the start, and not even try.[48] Conversely, activists may fall into a spiral of guilt and sacrifice behaviour that ends up crystallizing such unsustainable standards, and entrench rather than challenge hierarchies within activism that reproduce those in society (e.g. 'true' activists are often those who can afford such big sacrifices as a consequence of socio-economic privileges, or those who are more prone to adopt aggressive 'frontline' behaviour following a masculinist conceptions of political commitment). This kind of approach may lead to disengagement just the same, as a result of exhaustion and burn-out issuing from such unsustainable commitment.[49] At the same time, allowing room for partial engagements and dedicating time and space to self-care can be perceived as an excess of self-indulgence. Partial engagements accept that a portion of one's life actively supports the *status quo*. Too much emphasis on self-care may shift the focus of the struggle from solidarity and social change to the activist subject itself, and make activist practice fundamentally self-referential. It is especially the case when the spaces for reflection systematically exclude activists' Others, targets of solidarity or otherwise, because their presence would not allow activists to feel 'safe' in expressing their feelings.[50]

Moreover, each and every attempt at subverting existing power relations carries the risk of inadvertently reproducing power dynamics on other fronts. As the vignette that opened this chapter began to show, 'crossing the border' towards the spaces and bodies of the Other may amount to a reassertion of domination in a context still fraught with inequality. And so choosing to live, study, or spend time 'on the other side' or in non-segregated spaces, while signalling a willingness to give up some privileges and comforts, can reproduce a colonizing gesture as long as the reverse would not be possible in the same way. Likewise, the choice to celebrate the Others' culture and struggle by wearing

[46] See for instance Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey, ed., *Race Traitor: A Journal of the New Abolitionism*, (New York: Routledge, 1996).
[47] Bobel, "'I'm not an activist'".
[48] *Idem*, 154.
[49] King, "Sustaining activism" and Brown and Pickerill, "Space for emotion".
[50] This problem emerges for instance in Judith Katz, *White Awareness: Handbook for anti-racism training*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978). In this training manual targeted to whites in universities and movements, Katz, who is highly critical of white guilt fixations as paralyzing and not useful for action, explains that such criticism led her to move from black-white group encounters to all-white groups so as to avoid that white people focus their efforts on getting acceptance and forgiveness from their non-white partners.

their symbols, listening to their music, speaking their language, and so forth, may easily transcend into an act of cultural appropriation that reasserts white privilege – especially when at its core there is the "ability to consume anything, anyone, anywhere."[51] Most importantly, building relationships of affection and care across different positionalities risks erasing the "ineradicable distance" that still exists between them.[52] The temptation to over-identify with the Other, even when arising from profound understanding and genuine empathy, may "rob the disadvantaged of her specificity and uniqueness," and negate an "otherness" that needs to be preserved to some extent.[53] Lather puts it beautifully when she writes that empathy, with its supposed mutuality of dialogue and emotional attachments, risks in circumstances of power asymmetry being just "a liberal embrace [...] that reduces otherness to sameness" and reproduces, while concealing it, an objectifying posture.[54] Finally, when great effort is dedicated to recognizing and unearthing deep-seated mechanisms of power reproduction towards the 'main' Others (the ones constituted as such in collective identity constructions), this may overshadow dynamics of power that appear less salient, such as those with other marginalized members of one's own 'kind.'[55]

The coming sections illustrate how these dynamics unravel as Jewish-Israeli activists deal with their multiple entanglements in power and privilege through passions, tensions, frustrations, and hopes.

## *2. Living the Israeli Life: From Guilt and Perfect Standards to Acceptance and Self-Care*

Sitting for an interview in the living room of a well-known activist, someone who had dedicated much of his life to solidarity in the West Bank, I could not help but thinking that his beautiful old house, with vaulted ceilings and golden-stone walls, must have belonged to a Palestinian family once. I wondered if he was aware of that, and how it made him feel.[56]

A situation like this is hardly exceptional in Israel. As Chapter One has already discussed, colonial dynamics are present in every aspect of everyday life. The landscape one inhabits carries traces of dispossessions past and present, and the ways one moves in it reflect the differential privileges accorded to colonizers and colonized – from the state of the roads and public transports each is

[51] Alcoff, "What should white people do?", 19, criticizing the approach proposed by Ignatiev and Garvey. On this, see also Keith M. Booker and Isra Daraiseh, *Consumerist Orientalism: The Convergence of Arab and American Popular Culture in the Age of Global Capitalism*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).
[52] Bartky, *Sympathy and Solidarity*, 80.
[53] *Ibidem*.
[54] Patti Lather, "Against empathy, voice and authenticity," *Kvinder, Køn og Forskning 9, no. 4 (2000): 19*.
[55] See e.g. Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, 139 and following. This problem has been treated widely in critical feminist approaches, which flagged how a prioritization of gender binaries over racial ones often led to flawed conceptions of "sisterhood" that overshadowed the internal asymmetries of power between women of different races and classes. See, among others, Marilyn Frye, *The politics of reality: Essays in feminist theory*, (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 1984), specifically the essay "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women", 43-67.
[56] Observation, West Jerusalem, November 18, 2019.

allowed to take, to the likeliness of being stopped at checkpoints. Furthermore, because all the institutions that regulate life are to various degrees invested in the normalization, concealment or outright celebration of colonial violence, everything, from studying at university to asking for social subsidies, from enjoying a holiday to going to a concert, entails performing a certain abidance to the colonial ethos.

Among critical Israeli Jews, there is increasing awareness of the pervasiveness of these collusions, thanks to a mix of factors. At the global level, the 'return' of settler colonial frameworks of analysis in academic circles combined with the rising condemnations of Israeli apartheid among civil society movements and international organizations, have shifted the focus of critique from single policies to the continuities, spatial and temporal, of the Israeli system.[57] Within Israel-Palestine, several developments have fissured the imaginary wall that seemingly separated living a normal life in Israel from the conflict and violence that was happening 'outside,' and made the 'moral costs' of the Zionist dream more evident. As the history of the Nakba entered public consciousness – thanks to the work of the New Historians, first, and of organizations like Zochrot, later[58] – it has become more difficult to conceive of life within the territories of '48 as free from historical responsibilities, even when expressing a strong condemnation of the occupation and the settlements. Thanks to the work of monitoring and advocacy groups, it has become clearer how the wealth and opportunities available to Israelis are linked to the dispossessions and erosions of Palestinian rights.[59] Finally, the replacement of the discourse of 'coexistence through dialogue' that dominated the Oslo years by a policy of 'hard separation' (*hafrada*) between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza, changed the possibility and nature of encounters with Palestinians.[60] Quotidian encounters, which were frequent until the border was kept permeable for Palestinians to go to work in Israel, became rare: "You don't see them around anymore… They have become this weird *concept* that lives beyond the mountains."[61] At the same time, encounters motivated by solidarity have shifted away from offices and party headquarters in Israel and into the fields and villages of the West Bank, where violence and power are more clearly visible.[62] Experiencing first-hand this violence, as well as the extent of their own embodied privilege, is something that activists carry with them as they go back to their homes, and that disrupts their feeling of normalcy:

[57] C.f. Chapter Two, Section 1.
[58] C.f. respectively Chapter Two, Section 2 and Chapter Four, Section 5.
[59] Conversation during an action, At-Twani, April 13, 2019. Also, Interviews: Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019.
[60] C.f. Chapter Two, Section 2.
[61] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.
[62] C.f. Chapter Two, Section 2.

> The hardest part is after the action, when you come back to Tel Aviv, and you have to deal with that gap, mentally. That's why I don't judge the people who leave. It makes you feel like you don't have the right to have a normal life here at all.[63]

As a result of these processes, many activists are fully aware that in everything they do, and very much in everything they are, they live and perpetuate the power that Zionism bestows on them. They cope with this awareness in different ways, which I regroup into two main attitudes. The first, of *disjuncture*, is of those who engage in political action but, before and after it, still try to live a 'normal' life – and where one is often seen as making the other possible. This attitude, far from reflecting passivity, involves continuous ways of "bypassing" the evidence of the privileges and violence embedded in everyday life.[64] The second attitude, of *alignment*, is the attitude of those activists who strive to make the two coincide at least to some degree, to make their everyday conduct as much as they can consistent with the principles they uphold through political action. This attitude involves, contrary to the first, a constant status of alertness and self-scrutiny towards the privileges activists embody and practice daily, which leaves much room for feelings of guilt and powerlessness. However, the consequences that this has on activists' conducts and private lives has changed over time: while activists in the early 2000s were largely overwhelmed by these feelings and dealt with them by chasing always higher standards of commitment, later generations increasingly try to accept the inevitability of their collusions, and to adopt towards themselves an attitude of understanding, tolerance, and care. I will examine these attitudes one after the other in the remainder of the Section.

The first attitude manifested first of all in the fact that everyday life, and connected feelings of discomfort and guilt, hardly emerged as a relevant topic in interviews. It was the case with many NGO employees and activists who identified with a liberal Zionist identity, but also with some of the more grassroot and 'radical' ones. Take for instance Eldad, a Jewish-Israeli man who, although he cared to clarify apologetically that he was "no upfront activist," still got arrested "a few times" and proposed an elaborated and comprehensive analysis of the political context that linked Zionism with colonialism and capitalism.[65] It was only as we left the bar and started walking that he told me more informally about his life and work. My impression that he saw them as unrelated from his activism was confirmed by the way he told me about his job:

> Oh, I work in something totally unrelated, tourism. It's what I like! Although I do have to be a bit careful with what I say… I mostly keep my political views for myself. For sure I don't go around writing them on Facebook!

[63] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019.
[64] Natanel, *Sustaining Conflict*, 92.
[65] Interview, West Jerusalem, April 21, 2019.

The tourist sector in Israel is actually highly political, as everyone who has been there as a tourist would know. Dealing as it does with re-constructions of history and geography, tourism is highly implicated in fabricating a narrative that legitimizes Jewish claims to the land while delegitimizing Palestinian ones, and very useful in building a positive image of Israel worldwide.[66] That the two were not, in fact, unrelated, emerged also in Eldad's admission that he had to engage in forms of political self-censorship in order to keep his job.

Contrary to Eldad's downplaying of his commitment, Yanai, a man also in his 30s, told me about how he had decided to "make activism his life" by undertaking a job in an NGO while continuing to be engaged in grassroots activism on the side.[67] While to him this amounted to achieving full consistency, the way he conducted his everyday life suggested that he still separated his activist *persona* from his private one. As we chatted our way towards the beginning of the interview, in his apartment in the alternative neighbourhood of Florentin in Tel Aviv, he told me enthusiastically how much he loved the city ("It's the best place to be!") and how "lucky" he was to live a few meters by the sea, in an area full of nice bars, and with nice weather all year round. Later, as I asked him how being an activist affected his life and his relationships, he reflected:

> I haven't lost any friends 'from before' [from school, from the army]. Sometimes it's difficult with them because they don't really get me, and I don't really get them. But then with them I don't really talk about politics. We do other things: we watch movies, we tell stupid jokes. It's also a way for me to take some time off, to avoid breakdown, you know, otherwise it's just too much pressure.

Here, having spheres of life 'disconnected' from politics is justified as a mechanism of self-care that allows him to avoid breakdown and therefore maintain his involvement in activism high over time (I will come back to this later in the section). Other activists emphasized the opposite relationship: how their involvement in activism made having a 'normal' life possible, because it made it feel more legitimate: "If I didn't do this, I don't think I could live here at all" said an activist talking about the protests he regularly attended in the West Bank.[68] Activism here becomes the 'price to pay' to keep on with life in an occupying country, something that makes the person feel better about themselves, with a relatively clearer conscience, in the face of enduring complicities.[69]

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[66] See e.g. Rebecca L. Stein, *Itineraries in conflict: Israelis, Palestinians, and the political lives of tourism*, (Athens: Duke University Press, 2008).
[67] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019.
[68] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019.
[69] For literature that cautions against the "feel-good effect" of occasional activism as something ultimately self-serving and that may actually obfuscate the importance of more concrete commitments see, e.g., Anna C. Merritt, Daniel A. Effron, and Benoît Monin, "Moralself- licensing: When being good frees us to be bad," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 4 (2010), 344- 357; Stuart W. Shulman, "The case against mass e–mails: Perverse incentives and low quality public participation in U.S. federal rulemaking," *Policy & Internet* 1, no. 1 (2009): 23-53; Florence Passy and Marco Giugni, ed., *Political Altruism? Solidarity Movements in International Perspective*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

Finally, some activists dedicated a portion of their political organizing to collectively learn about involuntary complicities with power and develop strategies to interrupt them.[70] It was the case for the diaspora group All That's Left (ATL) which, as part of their self-learning workshops (the "Freedom School"), in 2018 organized a cycle on "People Power." Inspired by the work of Gene Sharp, the workshop focused on understanding the "pillars" of political power, what composed them and how to weaken them through changing one's behaviour.[71] However, the reflections and outputs of the workshop centred on proposing mass actions directed to the public (e.g. "talking to diaspora tourists," "street theatre actions to educate the public," and so on) rather than on an inward scrutiny of activists' own behaviour. This absence was especially remarkable given the problematic positionality of ATL's members as 'outsiders' who decided to become 'insiders.' As already noted in the previous chapter, by choosing to come to live in Israel for long periods of time, or to take Israeli citizenship, many ATL activists embody Zionist ideology at its best, and directly endorse settler colonial laws such as the Law of Return which grants citizenship automatically to Jews worldwide while the same is impossible for Palestinian refugees. While this was justified in terms of the possibility to "fight more effectively from within," the general lack of acknowledgment of these problems signalled little concern for embodied ways of power.[72] This was in fact at the centre of much of the critique the group attracted from other Israeli activists. One of them expressed it as such:

> They come here with their Jewish status and US passports… Whether they come for an 'occupation holiday,' often paid with Jewish funds, and then leave, or they take citizenship with the Law of Return, how unaware of your privilege can you be? This is not the only way to be useful. Once you have spent enough time here to become aware of the situation, there are better ways to be 'diaspora activists' from abroad.[73]

The activists discussed until here variously operate a disjuncture between what is deemed political (the 'macro' of occupation and violence, and of their activism) and what is deemed private (the 'micro' of work, friends, everyday life). This disjuncture however, as Natanel argues, should not be seen as a form of 'passivity' towards their own entanglements with power, but rather as a form of "active disengagement" that requires continuous mechanisms of "bypassing" perceptually the materializations of violence and exclusion that are omnipresent in one's relationship with the Israeli context.[74] These mechanisms of "unseeing," while never fully erasing the discomfort that comes with the underlying awareness of activists' multiple complicities, are central for activists to "get by" with

[70] Participant observation, ATL Freedom School event, October 29, 2019.
[71] ATL internal documents.
[72] These issues were not debated in this workshop or in others I attended. Some activists assured me that they did discuss these issues as a group and that they left them open, while others told me this was not the case (Interviews: West Jerusalem, May 22, 2019; December 15, 2019; November 25, 2019. Informal conversation, Mukhayyam Fari'a, October 26, 2019).
[73] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019.
[74] Natanel, *Sustaining* Conflict, 7: 92.

such awareness, and allow them to preserve a world where a certain normality is possible.[75] In this sense, such mechanisms operate similarly to those, examined in Chapter Three, whereby activists also 'unsee' the troubling aspects of Zionist identity and history in order to be able to fit their political values in their persisting allegiance to a Zionist identity.[76]

By contrast, many other activists – indeed all of those with whom the 'problem' of everyday entanglements with power came up as a topic in interviews and conversations – strive instead to make their activism and their private lives align, at least to some extent, by renouncing some of their privileges or by withdrawing their daily cooperation to the Israeli regime whenever they see feasible. Here, as it was the case for strategies of solidarity examined in the last chapter, achieving consistency is a perceptual matter, based on where one 'draws the line' between what is considered, or not, an acceptable compromise with the context of one's life situation, and knowing that 'pure' noncompliance can only be found in self-exile.

For many activists, a first important way to disrupt the socially expected performance of their Israeliness is to refuse being a soldier and becoming, instead, a *refusenik*.[77] As seen in Chapter One, the army is an integral component of everyday life in Israel, and being a soldier is a matter of pride, a shared experience of all Israelis, and one that is linked to the enjoyment of social services and career opportunities. As such, refusing to enact this role is far from self-evident, even for critical Israelis. It entails first of all a form of de-familiarization with the fact that being Israeli goes together with being a soldier. Recall the activist who, to explain his feeling an outcast, said: "It always felt weird walking around in a uniform. [I: why?] Well why wouldn't it? A civilian walking around in a uniform… I never felt proud, more kind of annoyed."[78] It then entails deciding the form of one's refusal, and thus the extent of one's 'treason:' refusal can be selective or full, based on political, pacifist, or technical grounds, and the more one's objection is in open critique of the Israeli political system, the worse the social stigma and the legal consequences.[79] The forms and values associated with refusal have also changed over time: in the past, refusing specific duties related to the occupation was more defiant

[75] *Idem*, 111.
[76] C.f. Chapter Three, Section 3.
[77] Term used derogatorily to indicate Israeli soldiers or reservists who refuse to serve in the occupied territories or in the Israeli army altogether. The term has been reclaimed by refusers themselves and is now associated to a sense of pride. See e.g. Peretz Kidron, ed., *Refusenik! Israel's Soldiers of Conscience*, (London: Zed Books, 2004).
[78] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019. C.f. Chapter Three, introduction.
[79] There are several forms of refusal: selective refusal (enlisting but refusing to serve in specific contexts or for specific duties, e.g. in the occupied territories); so-called 'grey' refusal (finding medical or technical grounds to be sent to non-combatant units, or to be exempt from service entirely); conscientious objection (refusal to serve in the army for general reasons of pacifism that must be proven to apply to all aspects of life of the person); political objection (refusal to serve in the army in opposition to its political role in the specific context of Israel-Palestine). While conscientious objection is considered legal (but is very rarely granted), both selective refusal and political objection are considered illegal and punished with imprisonment, generally for up to one year (Interviews: West Jerusalem, April 23, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 7, 2019; Tel Aviv, November 27, 2019; Tel Aviv, November 30, 2019).

than it is now, even if it happened within a discourse meant to defend the morality of the army.[80] It has been only since the 2000s that activists have started using the tool of political objection, thus embodying a more comprehensive rejection of the militarized ethos demanded to Israeli citizens.[81]

Another way of disrupting expected performances happens in the context of work, and in particular in the attempt to bring their political *personas* within their 'normal' jobs. An activist who works in the university reflected as such: "I don't think of activism as a different part of my life. I am myself also at work. I am trying to change the environment I live in."[82] While he was "lucky enough" to have an employer who empathized with his political views, in other cases there can be important career costs. Take the example of Hagit, a psychologist for whom it was important to act to change her profession from within:

> Everyone in this profession thinks they are perfect, but then they are really scared when it comes to reviewing their policies. Why do [psychological] organizations have on their website statements like "Our members proudly served in the military"? It's not even about publicly opposing, but just starting to reflect on these things! And why are there pretty much no Palestinians among us? Sure, there are problems [of underrepresentation of minorities] everywhere, but here it's striking. [...] It's important to bring up this discourse. I wish I could do it. But it's difficult, because there are so many other things to do and we are very few. [...] There is also a career cost that comes with this kind of stance. A friend of mine almost lost her job, and another got expelled by her organization. [...] I wanted to have an academic career, but there already many places where I cannot teach. That's done for me.[83]

Achieving consistency is also a matter for activists to de-familiarize the way they relate to the geographical space: to become aware of and try to interrupt the colonial enactments it entails. While we were driving to a demonstration near the border with Gaza, an activist categorically refused to take the fastest way, because it would have entailed taking an Israeli road that illegitimately cut through the West Bank.[84] Similarly, many activists refused to use Google Maps as a GPS navigation device because it systematically suggested to take Israeli and 'settler roads' instead of Palestinian ones to travel through the West Bank, thus *de facto* normalizing the *status quo* of the occupation. Some activists questioned the places in which they lived, and made the choice to move to places they felt were less associated with colonial privileges. For instance, an activist who had just come back to Israel

[80] See for instance the discourse proposed by the organization Yesh Gvul, which was born in response to the Israeli aggression of Lebanon in 1982 and has accompanied individuals' selective refusal. Yesh Gvul website, http://www.yesh-gvul.org.il/english.

[81] A first important case was in 2003 with the trial that resulted in the conviction for two years of five Israeli activists: Haggai Matar, Matan Kaminer, Shimri Tsameret, Adam Maor, and Noam Bahat. See Igal Ezraty and Freddie Rokem, "The Trial of the Refuseniks," *The Drama Review* 50, no. 3 (2006): 131-153. This shift is reflected also in the evolving framework of the organizations that support activists in their refusal: from Yesh Gvul (supporting selective refusers from a 'moral' army kind of discourse) to New Profile (supporting refusers on technical grounds), to Mesarvot (supporting the choice of political objection from an anti-militaristic standpoint).

[82] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.

[83] Interview, Ramat Gan, May 27, 2019.

[84] Participant observation, road from Jerusalem to Sderot, May 3, 2019.

after many years of self-exile decided, in order to make this return more bearable in terms of her feelings of guilt, to give up her family home in a *kibbutz* on the coast (a place where she could "live just right the beach for free, well, paid by Israel"), and to rent an apartment in West Jerusalem instead. This choice had for her an important economic cost, but still did not fully appease her sense of guilt because she knew she would still live on "stolen Palestinian land."[85] Another young activist chose to live in Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam, a village built with the purpose of serving as a "model of equality, respect, and partnership, that challenges existing patterns of racism and discrimination as well as the continued conflict."[86] As we discussed, sitting on the terrace of the beautiful two-story house immersed in the quietness of the forest, Nili seemed very aware that living there was a choice of privilege ("Houses here are very expensive, and the process of getting accepted by the community is very long") and one that could hardly be exported elsewhere ("Everyone here votes Hadash[87]… it's not very representative"). She did not, however, see living there as accepting of the *status quo*: instead, she saw it as a way to "*normalize an anti-occupation reality*, instead of an occupation one."[88] Indeed, normalizing an anti-occupation reality was what made living in Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam for her beautiful and difficult at the same time:

> We have very close relationships with our neighbours. We are all like-minded, which makes things easier. It's very easy to meet people through dinners, cultural events, Arabic courses. We have workshops where we talk about the Nakba and we think about the return, whether it would be possible and how. Whenever something happens, people talk about it, either in organized or spontaneous ways. At the same time, it's not always easy. It's hard to talk about certain things and remain friends afterwards (and there is also the very practical problem of the language we use: it is usually Hebrew, and that is an issue). If you get offended, you always have to try and contextualize what someone said within their experience, their suffering. We know that it's unfair to ask Palestinians to be understanding, because they are still oppressed. There was this time when a Jewish kid was killed, and we had debates and cross-groups to discuss whether and how we should commemorate him. Personal bonds mattered a lot in that case. […] It is also the beauty of this place that helps, the fact that it feels so distant from everything else… It makes it easier to think about difficult things.

Contrary to 'normal' Israeli cities that make forgetting and "bypassing" possible, living in Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam exposes its residents to thinking and *feeling* the dynamics of power and privilege that make steps towards each other difficult and uneven in the present context. As another

[85] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 26, 2019.
[86] Website, https://www.wasns.org. The village, whose name in both Hebrew and Arabic means "Oasis of Peace," was originally founded by a Dominican Father and is now inhabited by about seventy families, Jewish and Palestinian in even numbers, all citizens of Israel.
[87] Marxist-socialist left-wing political coalition (c.f. Chapter Three, Section 2 and 3).
[88] Interview, Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam, May 2, 2019.

resident of the village wrote, "The Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam experience humanizes the conflict. [...] The village has many difficulties but at least we are not being *broken*."[89]

Finally, attempts at finding consistency may affect the most inner spheres of activists' lives, their intimate relationships and felt emotions. Censoring one's political *persona* in friends or family circles, avoiding mentioning the taboos related to the Israeli sense of identity and history, or simply accepting to sit next to a family member in military uniform, feel to some "normalizing" and ethically inconsistent.[90] This entails deep internal struggles between the wish to break such conventions and that of not hurting loved ones. Some activists choose painfully to completely cut some of these ties, while others engage in "extremely tiring, constant processes of 'code-switching'" as they try to negotiate between these two desires.[91]

In the recollection of some activists, it emerged how they defied the emotional interpellations of their society by 'imposing' themselves to feel in ways opposite to the ones prescribed, in veritable acts of emotional rebellion to normative structures of feeling. During a dinner, two young activists reminisced about how it was part of their being rebellious teenagers to joke about the Holocaust or the latest 'terrorist attack,' a behaviour highly desecrating of the national bond found in the experience of persecution and victimhood.[92] Others manifested troubled relationships with the collective emotions triggered during Israeli national ceremonies: some proudly refused to stand up for the minute of mourning during Memorial Day; others weighted their conflicting sympathies (for Palestinians and for their peers) with more emotional conflict; others yet reacted to the collective hype of Israeli Independence Day by either isolating themselves or actively mourning, in sympathy with Palestinians, for the concomitant Nakba.[93] The activist with whom I opened Chapter One recalled how he used to "organize silly alternative things on memorial days... but just as a rebellion, nothing specifically critical to Israeli politics:"[94] what was this, if not an act of emotional rebellion to a prescribed sadness?

The heightened awareness and constant self-scrutiny that permeate the lives of these activists are difficult to sustain, and even more so is the never-achieved attempt to interrupt their everyday embodiments of power, as we began to see in Chapter Three speaking of anti-Zionist activists.[95] It is indeed, as Memmi wrote, a "tormented dance" that of the "colonizer who refuses, [...] trying in vain to adjust his life to his ideology," and the words "tiring," "exhausting," "draining," were recurrent in

[89] Grace Feuerverger, *Oasis of Dreams: Teaching and Learning Peace in a Jewish-Palestinian Village in Israel*, (London: Routledge, 2001): 141 (emphasis mine).
[90] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.
[91] Interviews: Tel Aviv, July 18, 2018; West Jerusalem, March 27, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019.
[92] Hanging out, East Jerusalem, May 31, 2019.
[93] Interviews: Tel Aviv, May 7, 2019; West Jerusalem, May 16, 2019 (c.f. Chapter Three, Section 5); Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019. Participant observation, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019.
[94] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.
[95] C.f. Chapter Three, Section 4.

my interviewees' reflections.[96] As anticipated in the previous section, the risk associated with this is entering a vicious cycle of guilt and expiation that may drain activists' energies and optimism and may nurture, through the effort to reach unattainable perfect standards of commitment, toxic versions of activism. If everything that is familiar and normal is associated with a sense guilt for being the colonizer, activists may be pushed to expiate that guilt by engaging in ever-costlier forms of activism – going on the 'frontline,' engaging in high-risk actions, seeking to be beaten or arrested. Paying a price becomes an integral part of activism, and of the very acceptance of themselves as individuals. As the costs of activism rise – in terms of stress, violence witnessed and lived, social isolation, and so on – taking care of them or even acknowledging them is perceived as a form of complaint – a luxury activists are not entitled to. This can reach the point that any way of feeling good about one's activism is perceived as undue and inappropriate, leaving little room for positive reinforcements.

This kind of attitude was particularly present among the so-called Anarchists Against the Wall (AATW) in the wave of grassroots activism that emerged in the early 2000s, and is still visible among activists of that generation that join the protests organized by Palestinian resistance committees in the villages of the West Bank.[97] The AATW came after forms of activism – the socialist and anti-imperialist groups of the 1970s, the peace and coexistence NGOs of the Oslo era – that had failed to grasp the depth of asymmetries of power between Israelis and Palestinians and of their own embeddedness in them. They were the first to centre their activism in the West Bank and in support to a Palestinian-led movement. They espoused a view of activism as a way of life, where anti-imperialism went together with feminism, veganism, environmentalism, animal rights struggle. They were thus better placed to grasp the pervasiveness and intersectionality of their privilege, and this may be among the reasons why they ended up falling in the cycle of guilt and expiation that I described earlier. Danya, one of them who remained in Israel and continues to be politically engaged, summarized this as such:

> Back then, being an activist was about being hardcore. We would count our rubber-bullet scars and the times we had been arrested as a measure of our worth. We were there all the time, we saw so much violence, some of us had Palestinian friends dying in their arms… But we didn't talk about our traumas, or our weaknesses. We couldn't! If we did, we would have opened a Pandora's box… We thought that the risk was to break down, which means that then you cannot be active anymore, and that was very important for us! But it was also about a feeling of guilt for complaining: how can we complain when Palestinians suffer so much more? So you silence yourself. […] We paid a very high emotional price, but we didn't realize it until it was too late for some of us.[98]

[96] Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld, (London: Earthscan Publications, 2010): 89; multiple interviews.
[97] Participant observation, Mukhayyam Fari'a, October 26, 2019.
[98] Interview, Ramat Gan, May 14, 2019.

Many of them "became very angry," an anger that concretized for some in becoming uncompromising to a point that seemed "narcissistic," for others in a nihilism that resulted in depression and social isolation.[99] Many left the country (a recurrent joke was that "All the anarchists are in Berlin now"), while others disengaged from political action entirely.[100]

Present-day activists, especially among the new generations, tend to have a different attitude towards their embodied privilege: one that is less oriented to guilt and more to emotional reflexivity and reciprocal care. This is encouraged by those of previous generations who came to see the problem in their forms of engagement, like Danya. Actually, the first time I saw her, she was leading a "Rights and Safety training" dedicated to activists where, among providing legal information and strategy considerations, she wholeheartedly insisted:

> Occupation is violent. We don't suffer what Palestinians suffer. [...] But preventing yourselves from whining is extremely dangerous for you: you *will* burn out! You need to be in solidarity also with yourselves, express yourselves and how you feel, be supportive with each other. This is the only way to keep your activism going for a long time – and we will need that! Solidarity with Palestinians is everything, but you are also important, even if you are a privileged white Jew. You are still paying a toll, and it's important to acknowledge it, and to feel proud about it; not broken, or alone.[101]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, many activists now feel that guilt "is not that helpful."[102] Taking "time off" of activism, as the activist seen earlier in the section did, or finding enjoyment in activist practice, is reclaimed as something not hypocritical, but legitimate and necessary.[103] Also seeking psychological support, or collective moments of sharing, in order to cope with traumas related to activist practice is something more and more common – although the need to justify this in terms of being able to be more and better engaged was recurrent.[104] Much of the work of the psychologists collective Psychoactive is focused on supporting and encouraging this:

> A fundamental part of what we do is to just listen. We help them recognize the symptoms of PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], which many have, and teach them ways to release some of that. Placing boundaries to what they do, and understanding that where that boundary needs to be is a different story for everyone. We also develop things like body-mind techniques, which work very well, and we insist on strengthening relationships, which usually suffer a lot from these traumas.[105]

[99] *Idem*. Also informal conversation, West Jerusalem, November 3, 2019.
[100] Interview, Ramat HaSharon, May 26, 2019 ; West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019.
[101] Participant observation, Imbala, West Jerusalem, March 26, 2019.
[102] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 6, 2019.
[103] Interviews: Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019.
[104] Interviews: Tel Aviv, May 7, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 17, 2019.
[105] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 27, 2019.

This new sensitivity affects the way activist practice itself is conceived. Young activists especially are critical of the "militarist attitude" of some versions of activism, of which they doubt the usefulness and resent how it is often accompanied by masculinist dynamics within the groups.[106] Instead, the needs and fears of activists are increasingly acknowledged and incorporated in activist practice via the diversification of contributions to the struggle. "You don't need to get arrested in order to be a good activist:" staying in the back of the action to record what is happening, postproduction and circulation of photos and videos through social media, using emotions and empathy towards the public in order to "reverse the emotional strategies of the right-wing," are all forms of contribution to the struggle whose value is emphasized.[107] Interviews and observations confirmed the resonance of this approach, and how it helped many activists get involved who otherwise would have had a hard time doing so. One, for instance, told me how it was fundamental for her to find a group that offered a "softer approach": "It was a period of terrible violence, I was scared – of Palestinians too, because there were stabbings almost every day. I hardly left my apartment at all. […] They [the group] really allowed me to defuse those fears by welcoming them, and making me feel safe."[108]

Some groups place emotional coping at the core of their practice. Engaged Dharma activists, for instance, combine solidarity action with meditation sessions within an overall approach premised on emphasizing the connections between spiritual values, social practice, and self-awareness:[109]

> We always begin and end with meditation. Before, we set the intention of what we want to do, how we want to achieve it – if we feel like being more or less assertive with the soldiers and this kind of things. Afterwards, we share our doubts but also the good emotions that we felt. […] This does not happen together with the Palestinian partners. It's just among us. [I: why?] Because it's supposed to be a safe space, where you don't feel regret, or judgment. There are other occasions to do collective meditation, but this is a different thing. […] It really helped me accept the contradictions of what we do, of what we are, as a part of reality.[110]

Other groups kept a more traditional approach, but incorporated some of these elements by seeking, before and after actions, moments of 'briefing' and 'debriefing' where activists can discuss strategic

[106] Interviews: Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019; East Jerusalem, December 2, 2019. Informal conversation, West Jerusalem, November 17, 2019.
[107] Participant observation, Imbala, West Jerusalem, March 26, 2019. Interview, Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019. Informal conversation, Mukhayyam Fari'a, October 26, 2019.
[108] Interview, December 18, 2019. The activist refers to the period between 2014 and 2015, also known as the 'Knives Intifada' or 'Singles Intifada,' terms used in Israeli mediatic discourse to point at the fact that Palestinian violence was uncoordinated, carried out by individuals unaffiliated to groups, and mostly through stabbings. See e.g. Uri Avnery, "Understanding the causes of the 'Intifada of the Individuals'," *Arab News*, November 22, 2014, https://www.arabnews.com/columns/news/663566.
[109] From the group's website: "Engagement within society is part and parcel of Dharma practice. The split between practice and social action is an artificial one. Social action is the natural response of a heart that was awakened to the presence of Dhuka and to the commitment to reduce it. On the other hand, social action which lacks means for introspection, self-empowerment and clarification of motives can easily lose its way (see https://engagedharma.wordpress.com/english-2/english/)."
[110] Interview, East Jerusalem, December 2, 2019.

approaches, voice their concerns and critiques, and spend a moment together 'decompressing' from the accumulated tensions before partying ways.[111]

Importantly, groups try to practice collective self-care also beyond actions, trying to nurture a positive relational environment for activists more generally, a community where people can share moments of reflection but also simply of relax and sociality. The most invested in this kind of approach is ATL, as acknowledged with words of praise by many activists, both members and not.[112] One of its longest members reflected as such:

> To me, the greatest strength of ATL is that it provides a sense of community that is political, but not only. This is really the first thing needed in a place where being an activist is so difficult! We need to be able to make each other feel supported, and to maintain our optimism. [...] We are not just a group of activists, we are really good friends![113]

This importance is reflected in the structure of the group, where one of six committees is dedicated specifically to care, with three sub-committees dealing respectively with supporting activists overcome the obstacles to their engagement (one initiative, while I was there, was creating a group-chat for activists whose families were particularly right-wing), providing support to traumatized activists, immediately and in the long term (for instance by offering occasions to talk, or by directing activists to specialized services such as Psychoactive), and a "Fun Committee" in charge of organizing social events.[114]

While this aspect has been mostly lacking in Israeli groups, who tend to have a more 'task-oriented' approach due to the reasons explored in the previous chapter, things seem to be changing. Pablo, a veteran member of Ta'ayush, told me about how he brought in the group the conversation about the need to create moments of socialization, and that this resulted in them meeting "just for a drink, and it was really nice! It was the first time in months that we actually talked and looked at each other. We need to do this more often, because the situation is extremely hostile, and we need to 'nurse' our volunteers."[115] Also the 'younger' (in life-span and age of its members) group of Free Jerusalem took a step in this direction by investing in the opening of Imbala in 2018. A cooperative café hosting internal groups' meetings as well as political and cultural events, Imbala is especially meant to be, as its manifesto states, "a warm, loving, and nurturing home for Jerusalemite activists and communities

[111] Participant observation, Sderot, May 3, 2019.
[112] Interviews: West Jerusalem, April 20, 2019; Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019; West Jerusalem, May 22, 2019; West Jerusalem, May 28, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019.
[113] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 22, 2019.
[114] Interviews, West Jerusalem, May 22, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019. Participant observation, ATL general assembly, West Jerusalem, November 17, 2019; ATL internal documents.
[115] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 16, 2019.

that don't feel safe in this city," and indeed represents an important "safe space" for many of the activists I spoke to.[116]

As these examples show, the recent emphasis on self-care, while allowing activists to establish a more balanced relationship between one's political and inner worlds, is not without problems. The fact that "safe spaces" are meant to relieve activists from feelings of guilt means that they are generally 'Palestinian-free' spaces, as made explicit by the activist from Engaged Dharma. This imposes a reflection on how safe spaces are intended in the first place: born out of the need of protecting the 'unprivileged' from the power dynamics that, voluntarily or not, risked emerging in mixed groups (e.g. women-only assemblies, and so on), here they become a way to protect the privileged from sustaining the "Look of the Other" – the way the Other sees us – thus essentially allowing them to feel a little less bad about their privilege.[117] In general, if the emphasis on self-care becomes preponderant in activist practice, it risks shifting the focus of the struggle away from the (Palestinian) object of solidarity to its (Israeli Jewish) subject.[118]

Activists' different ways of coping with their everyday and embodied privilege show that there is no pure or right way to do so. Each way has its limitations and drawbacks, and each consists in negotiating rather than completely shedding or endorsing privilege in everyday life. On the one side, selfless commitment to questioning one's embeddedness in power can never be complete, and it can itself arise from a situation of privilege; moreover, it can result in toxic forms of activism if it is not accompanied by a willingness to acknowledge its own limitations and contradictions. On the other side, excessive tolerance towards such limitations can make it easier to entrench dynamics of oppression, by 'bypassing' or justifying them as inevitable, and may make activism more about learning to cope with such embeddedness than about forwarding political change.

As the conclusion of this chapter will come back to, for activists' everyday negotiations with power to preserve a disruptive potential it is fundamental that they happen in presence of two factors: a reflexive effort, that maintains a critical self-awareness continuous and sharp, and a relational engagement with activists' multiple Others, that nurtures this effort with grounding and perspective.

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[116] Imbala Manifesto, available at: https://imbala.community/en/manifesto/. See also Interviews: West Jerusalem, April 20, 2019; West Jerusalem, April 21, 2019; West Jerusalem, May 16, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019; West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019.

[117] Lewis Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*, (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1995), although Gordon uses the mechanism to explain racism. A problem more similar to the one treated here emerges for instance in Katz, *White Awareness*. In this training manual targeted to whites, Katz, who is highly critical of white guilt fixations as paralyzing and not useful for action, explains that such criticism led her to move from black-white group encounters to all-white groups so as to avoid that white people focus their efforts on getting acceptance and forgiveness from their non-white partners.

[118] Ronit Lentin, *Co-memory and melancholia: Israelis memorialising the Palestinian Nakba*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013): 194.

## *3. Palestinian Partners, Palestinian Friends? Rewriting the Colonial Encounter Between Border-Keeping and Border-Crossing*

As anticipated in Section 1, encounters are paramount sites where relations of power and antagonism are enacted and reinscribed, and thus also where they can be reinvented. Encounters with constitutive Others have the potential of breaking down subjectivities from below, and "becoming-other-than-one-now-is."[119] The problem is that when structures of hierarchy and domination are contextually given, such as in colonial contexts, encounters cannot escape colonial subjectivities, but just work through them, renegotiate them.[120] As much as one may be willing to imagine and perform relationships existing on bases of equality, such willingness remains necessarily a tension, a longing-for, as long as, *de facto*, one body belongs to the colonizer and the other to the colonized. In this context, embracing the Other – bridging the distance that separates her cognitively, physically, emotionally (that is, articulating her as similar, approaching her, loving her) – while in itself an act of subversion to racist and discriminatory politics, is never untroubled, but carries the risk of concealing dynamics of domination (by conveying an illusion of parity), or even entrenching them (by inadvertently reproducing colonizing postures).

Previous chapters have touched upon how this risk materializes in the context of identity rearticulations (Chapter Three) and strategic elaborations (Chapter Four) that try to overcome existing asymmetries of power. In attempting to narrate themselves as other than the colonizer, activists have formulated 'socialist-internationalist' or 'Palestinian Jewish' identities that, based on ideology and territoriality respectively, bridged the distance with the Palestinian Other in ways that problematically negated the existing asymmetry of power. In formulating strategies of joint struggle, activists have realized how their agency – their criticisms, values, and skills – needs to be scaled down in order to compensate for a position that remains inscribed in power, and would otherwise reinscribe it. Such asymmetry of power runs so deep that even such strategic considerations entail intimate consequences: recall the activist who, talking about her efforts at compensating for her power, said that she had the impression of "becoming smaller and smaller to the point of actually disappearing."[121]

These kinds of tension permeate Israeli activists' relationships with Palestinians also in the realm of intimacy and the everyday: in how they think and speak about them, trying to overcome the Othering representations dominant in society, and in how they weave with them ties of affection and

[119] Maple Rasza and Andrej Kurnik, "The Occupy Movement in Žižek's hometown: Direct democracy and a politics of becoming," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 2 (2012): 240.
[120] Ahmad, *Strange Encounters*, 6-11.
[121] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 27, 2019. C.f. Chapter Four, Section 4.

friendship, trying to bridge, without erasing, the distance that separates them. I will look at these dynamics one after the other in the remainder of the section.

Much work has been dedicated to uncovering the ways in which representations of unprivileged Others that try to counter dominant exclusive ones (e.g. in multiculturalism and postcolonialism) still end up being essentializing and objectifying, continuing to perpetrate on the Other a form of epistemic violence that denies its uniqueness and complexity.[122] Alternative representations may do so by inadvertently reproducing deeply interiorized stereotypes of the Other as an enemy to be feared or despised, or conversely they may elevate the Other as the – equally fetishized – "origin of difference" to be uncritically celebrated and welcomed.[123] Israeli activists' representations of Palestinians make no exception, as authors such as Lentin, Butler, and Wright have thoroughly examined.[124] Because this work has already been done, I will keep this analysis brief and focus on connecting it with the framework I propose of how hegemonic and counterhegemonic dynamics unfold at the micro level.

Unsurprisingly, only a minority of the activists I interviewed uncritically reproposed explicitly negative hegemonic stereotypes of Palestinians (recall, for instance, those who, in Chapter Three, described Palestinians as violent, untrustworthy, disorganized, and generally uncivilized).[125] More often, traces of hegemonic representations emerged more subtly, in conceptions of Palestinians as simple-minded people, rooted in the 'land' and in pastoral life, the epitome of the 'native' Jewish-Israelis are so distant from. Recall for instance how Sfard described the conversation with the Palestinian members of council in Chapter Four: how they respond to his political passions and strategic reflections with a mix of reverence for the Israeli lawyer and a simple, caring concern for their orchards.[126] The representations I encountered most often however were those in which Palestinians were depicted in idealized terms as the victims of the occupation and the heroes of the resistance. This idealization emerges, I argue, from the willingness to evade negative stereotypes at all costs, resulting in a sort of overcompensation, and concomitantly from an elevation of Palestinians to the emblem of resistance to the colonizer, resistance with which activists also (want to) identify. See for instance how an activist wholeheartedly spoke in the aftermath of an altercation with settlers and soldiers:

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[122] See, among others, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A critique of postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, Chapter 6.
[123] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 4.
[124] Lentin, *Co-memory and melancholia;* Judith Butler, *Parting ways: Jewishness and the critique of Zionism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Wright, *The Israeli Radical Left,* specifically Chapter Two.
[125] Interviews, West Jerusalem July 25, 2018; West Jerusalem April 29, 2019. C.f. Chapter One, Section 3. Note in fact that in one of these cases the use of these categories was already in 'reaction' ("Palestinians are no saints, you know?) to what was perceived as a wrong general idealization of Palestinians in leftist circles.
[126] Michael Sfard, *The wall and the gate: Israel, Palestine, and the legal battle for human rights*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2018): 3. C.f. Chapter Four, Section 3.

> Every time, I am amazed at how they keep responding with non-violence. After humiliations that go on from dusk to down – you want to visit your family? You can't. You want to go to school? You can't. You want to work? You have to work for the Israelis. …you feel suffocated, you can't even breathe anymore! But still, they remain where they are. And when they protest, they do non-violently. Oh, I don't know if I would be capable of doing the same! They are 'rooted' in the ground, "no matter what you do, we won't move," this is what they mean by *sumud*.[127]

Here, Palestinians are still represented as per the tropes of the 'native' but, in addition, their constitutive bond to the land becomes the source of their steadfastness, and the righteousness of their claim the source of their moral standing.

That the direct experience of oppression gives the oppressed, especially from the point of view of the privileged, a superiority that is both epistemic and moral emerges also in the reverence with which Palestinians are treated with when they are invited at talks and actions as witnesses or survivors.[128] A young Palestinian man told me about his experience as a member of ATL:

> I played the role of the Palestinian guy who 'explains' things. They were sort of showing off on me ("Look, we have an Arab friend!"), and still now part of my role is to make American Jews become acquainted with the "Arabs." […] They seemed to have this internal struggle: they were curious, they wanted to talk to me, but they also wanted to 'fish' for information – like if I hated Jews, or if I liked Hamas, how religious I was, if my sister wore the hijab… they had all these stereotypes, and they wanted to check whether I was that kind of 'cute' Palestinian they *wanted* me to be.[129]

Here it emerges how idealized representations of Palestinians, in this case by American Jews, coexist with the fears interiorized from the hegemonic discourse. More than that, it emerges how encounters with Palestinians 'in the flesh' are 'used' to some extent to deflect these fears – something that works only as long as they can fit a positive new imaginary, which however remains entirely produced by American Jews themselves.

Conceptualizations like this one are correctly defined as appropriating because they perceive the Other according to the needs of the Self.[130] However, there is even a more direct meaning to 'appropriation' in activists' imaginations of Palestinians. As both Lentin and Wright noted, Palestinians become, for the colonizer who refuses, a sort of Freudian 'object of desire,' which embodies all the traits the former longs for and would like to incorporate into herself – the purity of the outsider and the victim, but also the unquestionable bond with the land they manifest through every expression of their culture.[131] Therefore, instances where this culture is celebrated, even if with

[127] Informal conversation, At-Twani, April 13, 2019. For *sumud*, see Chapter Four, Introduction.
[128] Participant observations: West Jerusalem, November 11, 2019; November 26, 2019. On the moral and epistemic superiority of the oppressed see, e.g., Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, 159.
[129] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 25, 2019 (emphasis mine).
[130] Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, Chapter 6.
[131] See Lentin, *Co-memory and Melancholia*, 73, and Wright, *The Israeli Radical Left*, 62-63.

genuine appreciation and within a strong commitment – such as when *kefiyas*[132] are worn as a symbol of the struggle, or when Arabic is spoken and learned to connect with Palestinians on their ground – acquire the further signification of a gesture of appropriation that is all the more undue because it comes from the colonizer. I perceived this problem, for instance, as an activist took me for a tour around his city, Beer Sheva. He only ever used the Arabic version of the name, Bir-a-Saba, and told me enthusiastically that he "loved the city so much" because its architecture showed many traces of its Palestinian past, with old ministerial buildings from the time of the Mandate, and old mosques that activists managed to keep intact against the municipality's willingness to destroy them. In his descriptions, he often used Arabic terms – he proudly told me that he was taking lessons. He also took me to the "best *hummous* places," where he told me knowledgeably about the different types of *hummous* one can get.[133] His love and appreciation were undoubtedly genuine, and surely also admirable in a context where any expression of Palestinianness is being erased or demonized. But it is also a context where such expressions are systematically appropriated, in the attempt at re-constructing Israelis as natives by reclaiming traditions that are local – such as *hummous* precisely – as 'traditionally Israeli.'[134] And in this sense, even a genuine 'love' is inherently problematic.

In these examples, activists' ways of thinking Palestine and Palestinians remain as if entangled in the web of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic representations that inevitably frame their relational world in the present context, and in which Palestinians are necessarily *made object* – whether of fear, celebration, or desire. The only way to avoid this objectification is 'normalizing' Palestinians, thinking of them as neither demons nor heroes, "just like everyone else."[135] One activist used these terms when he reflected, in provocative tone:

> The more I get to know them, the more I understand that they're just like everyone else. They are actually very similar: students talk about exams in the very same way, there is nothing different or special. They're human, and like most humans they're assholes! And they shouldn't be praised or justified in everything they do. They are not always right, and they don't have to be! They don't have to be this morally superior thing in order to be worthy of not being oppressed.

When we met for a drink in the aftermath of a joint action, other activists spoke critically of the Palestinian partners and their sense of organization – something that did not happen often. And I could tell it was not something they did comfortably, or would have done at all, had they not been strong of a long-term political engagement with those very Palestinians.[136] Finally, as we chatted over issues of privilege in informal terms, an activist told me with a laughter how she had felt for a long

[132] A headdress usually worn by Arab men, the kefiya has also become a symbol of the Palestinian identity and struggle.
[133] Interview, Beer Sheva, November 5, 2019. Chickpeas-based spread that is found throughout the Middle East.
[134] See e.g. Ronald Ranta, "Re-arabizing Israeli food culture." *Food, Culture & Society* 18, no. 4 (2015): 611-627.
[135] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.
[136] Hanging out, East Jerusalem, November 3, 2019.

time compelled to like and listen to Palestinian music, and how she had finally managed to admit to herself and others that, actually, she did not like it at all.[137]

While more (and more reflexive) encounters with Palestinians certainly help, this kind of attitude remains difficult to achieve in the present context. This is because as long as activists are engaging in a process of reconstruction of a new, decolonial subjectivity, representations of Palestinians – the constitutive colonized Others – are necessarily part of this process, functional to this rebellion, at least in its first stages. Therefore, a certain objectification – a certain (epistemic) violence – is unescapable. As Wright notes:

> [Israeli activists'] acts of resistance to certain histories of enmity through narratives of love and affection thus at once create a space for a transformative relation with, *and* risk erasing the subjectivity of, their Palestinian interlocutors. Much of that risk emanates from the ways in which such relationships are forged in interplay with Israeli activists' desires to disavow the politics and militarism of Jewish Israel. Such desires lead them to forge a relationship with Palestinian Others in a way tightly intertwined with the rejection of a part of the self, or of the sameness postulated among Israeli Jews by the state regime. It is not that there necessarily *is* any other option. [...] This becomes all too obvious when thinking about the predominant alternative in the Israeli context; that is, the silence about or active participation in the state violence perpetrated on Palestinians.[138]

Israeli activists' expressions of appreciation for Palestinians then do, as critical Israeli academic Ronit Lentin notes, represent a form of "narcissistic affirmation" of the Jewish Israeli self.[139] But there is no alternative (beyond of course silence or active participation in the hegemonic discourse of violence), and in the process activists are still affirming a powerful decolonial imagination – if, for the time being, it cannot be more than an imagination.

Beyond the realm of representations, I want to focus now on the more grounded and dynamic aspect of activists' actual attempts at weaving affective relationships with Palestinians, as partners or as friends, in a move of approach, a becoming-closer that is not only mental but physical and concrete. The problem activists face here is deciding, to the extent possible in alignment with their Palestinian interlocutors, whether to cross or keep the 'border' that separates them, knowing that the first move is one of subversion of present relationalities, but one that risks reasserting power, and that the second is one that, out of respect for the ineradicable colonial cleavage, also re-inscribes a dynamic of segregation that is what activists would want to challenge.

The anecdote that opened the chapter illustrates how border-crossing in Israel-Palestine is a multi-layered act accompanied by tensions and contradictions. For the Israeli activist, going to spend an evening in Ramallah entailed the crossing of a border at once physical and metaphorical. First of all,

[137] Hanging out, West Jerusalem, November 23, 2019.
[138] Wright, *The Israeli Radical Left*, 62-63 (emphasis in the original).
[139] Lentin, *Co-memory and melancholia*, 73 and elsewhere.

she breached Zionist laws and norms in multiple ways. As she crossed into Area A of the West Bank, she broke the law that prevents Israelis from doing so, which engendered the need for her to devise stratagems that would allow her to 'pass as an international.' More importantly, even before that, she crossed into the West Bank not as a soldier or a settler, but as a friend, thus disrupting the only border-crossing performance that is accepted and even encouraged in Israel, one premised on the assertion of domination. And finally, by crossing in order to enjoy an evening among Palestinian friends, she challenged the Zionist ethos that designates Palestinians as a distinct and hostile social collective with whom assimilation is abhorred. At the same time however, these border-crossings entailed also a violation of Palestinian space, as was perceived by my Palestinian friend in the car. Area A is the only territory left in the whole of Israel-Palestine where Palestinians enjoy a modicum of autonomy from Israel (although never full sovereignty), and as such is seen by some as a space that should be 'free' from Israelis ("They can go everywhere else, at least they should not come here"[140]). Moreover, by going 'just for fun', and not for political reasons of joint struggle, she was perceived as violating the norm of anti-normalization many Palestinians have established as the golden rule for Israeli-Palestinian relations in the aftermath of Oslo – one by which interactions that are not explicitly and vocally against the occupation are normalizing of the *status quo*.

This multi-layered act of border crossing then incorporates both power-disruptive and power-reproductive aspects, that coexist together simultaneously. As a result of this, its performance is accompanied by conflicting passions: the fear and anxiety of defying hegemonic and interiorized norms; the pride that ensues from doing so; the longing (the 'desire' in the terms used above) for being on the 'other side' free from the burden of being the colonizer; the discomfort and guilt for knowing it is not the case and for having to face, in the "Look of the Other," the reflected image of oneself as the colonizer.[141] These conflicting passions permeated, for what I could observe, every act of border crossing, and underlay many decisions not to. But it has not always been the case in the history of Israel-Palestine. Mariam, an activist in her 50s, recalled how it was for her being an activist at the time of the First Intifada – before the separation policy was implemented and the discourse of anti-normalization became the norm among Palestinians – and how this changed over time:

> It was just a 'quiet' occupation. The checkpoints were a joke, even for Palestinians. They could come here for work and we were invited at demonstrations in the West Bank all the time, we had assemblies with students at Birzeit University – now it would be impossible! [...] When I finished university, I went to live in Ramallah with my Palestinian boyfriend. [...] When the Second Intifada happened, it was awful. Our Palestinian comrades would tell us not to come, because it was hard to justify collaboration. I was so frustrated... finally, the wall was there for me as well. I would still go to Ramallah, 'personally' not politically,

[140] Informal conversation, Ramallah, April 25, 2019.
[141] Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism,* Chapter 14.

> but it was different. [...] I get it: it was difficult for me, but I get the point of anti-normalization. For my parents it was different, they felt betrayed, and still feel so.[142]

Borders, physical and otherwise, have changed over time, and so have the relationships made possible between Israeli and Palestinian activists. While before it was ok, and even 'cool,' to cross the border, to have Palestinian friends and boyfriends, now this is no longer the case. To the physical barrier erected by Israel, and to the failed attempts at joining struggles under the auspices of Oslo, Palestinian activists have responded with the political barrier of anti-normalization, whose regulation of political partnership trickled down also to personal relationships. However painfully, the generation of Mariam understood the need for Palestinian activists to place that barrier, to demand, at least to activists, recognition of their terms (interestingly, this was not the case for her parents, both former Matzpeners, and likely for whom the fact of being in the struggle together put them and Palestinians on an equal footing). The generation of AATW not only understood this, but made it part and parcel of its 'code of conduct': that of the solidary activist from the oppressor's ranks, who is supposed to follow the struggle as it is framed and decided by its main agents, and to be aware and critical of the multiple projections of his privilege.

Newer generations of activists were raised politically into this new sensitivity, and as such they tend to prefer, when it comes to everyday interactions, an attitude of border keeping. Crossing into Palestinian spaces still happens, but within frameworks of struggle; profound personal bonds are created and valued greatly, but as political partners more than as friends. Activists, for instance, spoke to me enthusiastically about the recent wave of solidarity actions in Issawiya:

> Even if we couldn't stop the violence, we still come because what is happening is very important: I'm talking about real bonds with the residents. At the beginning it was just the leaders of the community, but now it's really the whole village. They want us to keep coming. And also on our side, we had many people, even activists, who at the beginning were afraid of coming, but now they overcame all their fears and suspicions.[143]

But things are different when it comes to crossing for reasons not related to the struggle. Still early on in my fieldwork, I would ask my interviewees if they went to the West Bank, to gauge the extent of their willingness to disrupt expected performances and interiorized fears. One activist responded in a way that I initially dismissed as 'justifying':

> Well, of course I have been to protests and actions, but I wouldn't go alone. I would be afraid... not of Palestinians, but of what their reaction might be, they could feel offended, you know, invaded. I would love to go actually, but it's complicated.[144]

[142] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 21, 2019.
[143] Participant observation, Issawiya, October 30, 2019.
[144] Interview, West Jerusalem, April 21, 2019.

This idea was further elaborated when, a few days after the Ramallah night out happened, I asked to the Israeli activists who were there to discuss the tensions and contradictions of that evening, and what they would think about living in the West Bank. One of them explained to me:

> One thing is to go for activism, a different thing is to go for fun, or to live there. It's not that I wouldn't love it, I would. But while I can go there, they cannot come here; if they do, they get arrested, while if I get caught in Ramallah nothing much would happen to me anyway. [...] I guess that I would be ok with going for a drink every now and then – I mean, look where we are now – but living there is a whole different issue. You would have to buy or rent a house. It is *concretely* proceeding with the occupation. I would be perceived as a settler, and I would actually be one.[145]

That evening, we were having dinner at the apartment of an international friend in the Muslim neighbourhood of the Old City of Jerusalem. It was Ramadan, and after dinner we proposed to go for a walk in the Old City, which for the celebrations was beautifully lit and filled with a festive atmosphere all night long. After some hesitation, the activists accepted. I had the impression that they wanted to see the celebrations, and that they really enjoyed doing so, but also that they would not have come had they not been with 'internationals' and could pass as such. This instance, together with the one of the activist showing her tattoos in Ramallah, also shows that the conflicting feelings involved in border crossing interplay together at all times, and that activists negotiate more or less consciously to which to give more space: the desire of being on the other side can overrun the rigor of not trespassing, and the discomfort of being there can be dealt with differently in every occasion, sometimes choosing to expose one's Israeliness upfront, other times preferring instead to dissimulate it, and thus deflect the Look of the Other and the accusations it carries with it.

This preference for border keeping pertains also to the 'safe spaces' of activists' socialization I wrote about in the previous section. I was surprised, at first, by the absence of Palestinians from places of alternative sociality like Imbala and, although less, by the absence of Jewish-Israeli activists from the social and cultural venues of East Jerusalem (which were, for 'us internationals', the background of daily social interactions). When I asked about this, the explanation I got was, in line with the reasoning done so far, one of respect for Palestinian safe spaces, even at the cost of entrenching social segregation:

> Imbala is not primarily a joint space. It's a space for 'activists in Jerusalem', and while we try to make it as welcoming as possible for Palestinians as well, we don't want to 'recruit' them in here. It's great if they get here through friends, or if they want to come to the language classes, or if they want to organize an event – but it doesn't happen much. I guess we could do more to encourage that, but a part of us is very hesitant,

[145] Hanging out, East Jerusalem, May 31, 2019.

> and anyway, when we tried, they said no. Why would they come anyway? They have their spaces in East Jerusalem. *[I: what about having some partnerships with spaces in East Jerusalem?]* We tried to reach out to the Educational Bookshop once, but they were not too keen… They have nothing to gain from a partnership with us, and they risk being accused of normalization.[146]

I had a completely different impression, however, when talking to international Jewish activists from the network of ATL. When it came to personal relations with Palestinians, their attitude was one much keener on border crossing. As already mentioned when discussing identity narratives, some activists of Russian origin brought their involvement in Issawiya a step further than mere political presence, and had developed with Palestinian families in the neighbourhood strong personal ties and intimate connections. They saw the "barrier" that prevented Israeli activists from doing so, but did not understand it.[147] Another activist, Jewish American, told me about how much she loved spending time in Nablus with her Palestinian boyfriend, and how lucky she felt at having the chance to "build relationships across this divide."[148] Not only did she not problematize the act of border crossing, but she actually criticized border keeping as an excuse advanced by activists in order not to face their fears and their responsibilities:

> Actually, many Palestinians I spoke to care less about Israelis respecting their space… Like, it's more 'just' if they go in that space, and they feel guilt and shame and all those feelings, and don't know what to do with them… "If you really wanna help, then suck it up and help!" – kind of thing. It's important to think about the actual reasons why you don't go in that space: is it really respect? Or is it fear? Or shame?[149]

While these elements are certainly there as well, as the section has shown, international Jews are less affected by such feelings of guilt because they perceive themselves as largely 'external' to the colonial relation. As one ATL activists put it: "Being American Jews makes it easier for us [to relate to Palestinians], because we are not the 'occupier'."[150] This is of course problematic and, as already discussed in Section 2, denotes little awareness of how much their current presence in Israel is imbued with and entrenches colonial privilege, in spite of the fact that their families might not be directly responsible for the settler colonization of Palestine. Nonetheless, the fact that they come to the realm of relationships with "less baggage" allows, as one Israeli activist conceded within her critique, to bring a different perspective into Israeli activists' tendencies to "overthink" the ways in which they are perceived, and to feel constrained in their actions.[151] A combination of the two perspectives, then, may help, on the one side, moving beyond the paralysis that may ensue from 'too much' awareness

[146] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019.
[147] Conversation, West Jerusalem, November 17, 2019. C.f. Chapter Three, Section 5.
[148] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 15, 2019. C.f. Chapter Three, Section 5.
[149] *Ibidem*.
[150] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 22, 2019.
[151] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 17, 2019.

of privilege and guilt, while, on the other, keeping this self-awareness intact and mechanisms to avoid entrenching privileges in place.

In spite of all these tensions and contradictions, the bonds established between Israeli and Palestinian activists are longstanding and profound, and even if they unfold mainly on the terrain of political action, they reveal ties that go beyond mere political partnerships and are more akin to actual friendships. One episode in my fieldwork that encapsulated the contradictions and strengths of such relationships was the United in Struggle Popular Resistance Conference. This was a three-day meeting on the possibilities and strategies for building an international joint struggle, organized by Palestinian popular committees and funded by a Spanish NGO, to which both international solidarity groups and Jewish and Israeli activists were invited. The meeting took place in a village in the north of the West Bank, in Area A, and ended with a direct action against a nearby newly established settlement. During the talks and workshops, Palestinian activists refrained from even acknowledging the presence of Israelis, preferring to refer to 'internationals' only. For their part, Israeli activists did not partake in the discussions highlighting the risks of the action, which led some groups to not participate. They left the decisional role to Palestinians, participated, and had a major role in deterring arrests. But they did, both before and after the action, criticize privately the problems and risks of its organization. Yet, in the moments preceding and following actions, Israeli and Palestinian activists related to each other in ways that showed not only profound mutual trust and respect, but also intimacy and complicity. As we sat for dinner at a table separated from the international groups, sharing a plate of *makloubeh*[152] that Palestinians had managed to bring over, activists joked about episodes from joint actions of the past, reminisced common friends who died or left the struggle, and discussed topics political and mundane, showing the legacy of years and even decades of relationships that were kept alive despite all the obstacles.[153]

The conflicting moves of approaching and distancing involved in these relationships, just like Israeli representations of Palestinians imbued with projections and desires, are the only ones possible between subjects separated by a colonial border. At the same time, such 'imperfect' relationalities testify of attempts at rewriting the colonial encounter by working with and through existing power asymmetries without ignoring them, by working across the border without erasing it, and where finding the 'right' distance is given not as an achievement but as a continuous negotiation. As I will come back to in the conclusion to the chapter, it is this open and messy engagement that opens the possibility for beginning to cultivate, from the bottom up, truly decolonial subjectivities.

[152] Typical Palestinian dish, meaning 'upside down,' made of rice, meat, and vegetables.
[153] Participant observation, Mukhayyam Fari'a, October 25-26, 2019.

## *4. The 'Other' Others: Encounters Beyond the Colonial Divide, or, What Is at Stake in an Absence*

I just love those
socialists who hate capitalism
so ostentatiously, wear ugly sandals
and torn t-shirts, wrapping themselves in a homeless look
without telling a soul about grandma's inheritance or dad's real estate
(they look homeless too)
and criticize the culture of affluence with bombast
as if they were prophets of vengeance with gurgling stomachs.
I just love those
who wish their Arab brothers
Ramadan Kareem[1]
and sign petitions legalizing
the sale of hametz[2] during Passover.

I just love those
who relish in the muazzin's call[3]
and see the Chabad or Breslav[4]
truck in the neighborhood
as the devil's wheeled messengers.

I just love those
who call the settlers messianic
and crazy because they believe in this land
by some godly decree
and cry the pain of the Palestinians
for having been expelled from this land
which they believe to be theirs
by some godly decree
(the very same decree from the very same god, by the way).

I just love those,
third generation to the
plunder of lands by the kibbutzim,
who boycott the settlements
because Occupation and stolen land

(I dream one day
to have the privilege
of boycotting cultural events on kibbutzim
as a political act, in the meantime
I suffice with charging them weekend rates
on weekdays).

I just love those
sensitive Jews who demonstrate against the Occupation
and go home to their
Arab house in Yaffo
which they call Yaffa
with a melancholy glance of
shared fate over hummus
at Abu something-or-other
licking their lips with every
wipe of the pita and
murmuring about ending the Occupation,
dreaming of two states for two nations
because – walla[5] –
(they fumble for the Arabic)
Occupation Occupation
(or nakba nakba):
next to them but not with them,
they're Arabs after all.

[1] Wish reciprocated among Muslims during the month of Ramadan, translatable as "May Ramadan be generous to you."
[2] Leaven or leavened food banned during the Jewish holiday of Passover, a seven-day holiday involving holiday meals, special prayer services, and abstention from work.
[3] The Muslim call to prayer, resonating five times a day from speakers placed outside of every mosque.
[4] Branches of Hasidic Judaism, a sub-group of Haredi ("ultra-Orthodox") Judaism, traditions of Eastern European origins known for their religious and social conservatism and social seclusion.
[5] Arabic common expression akin to the English "I swear".

An Arab friend said about them once
that they'll never make peace,
because if there'll be peace
all the arsim[6] will come.[7]

In this *j'accuse* against the snobbism and hypocrisy of a certain pro-Palestinian left, Israeli Mizrahi poet Roy Hasan manages to weave together different critical points, some of which I have attempted to address in this dissertation. The poet's targets are called out for preaching socialist ideals from the comfort of their high socio-economic backgrounds; for ostensibly supporting Palestinian grievances while refusing to give up their colonial privileges (they demonstrate against the occupation, but "go home to their Arab house in Yaffo"); for appreciating Palestinian culture, but in a romanticizing and appropriating way that belies an enduring sense of superiority ("they're Arabs after all"). Most importantly for the topic of the present section, the appreciation for the grievances and culture of these "Arab brothers," for how superficial, is shown to stand in stark contrast with the scorn towards similar expressions that come from 'other' Others, unprivileged sectors within the Jewish-Israeli society: the conservative religious Jews of East European origins (exemplified by the Chabad and Breslav trucks) and the Jews of Arab origins (which are referred to with the derogatory term '*arsim*').

It is especially in putting the finger on this inconsistency that the poem has been able to interpret a perception that is widespread in Israeli society: that the left-wing (that is, the relatively 'pro-Palestinian' side of the political spectrum) focuses exclusively on empathizing with and voicing Palestinian grievances, while failing to do the same for, and often advocating against, the socially, economically, and culturally marginalized sectors of the Jewish population.

While the poem seems to be targeted specifically at the traditional Zionist left (given the focus on the occupation and a two-state solution), the problem exists also in the circles that are comparatively considered radical. Grassroots and anti-Zionist activists, who generally denounce the complicities of the Zionist left on matters of responsibility towards Palestinians, have also largely failed to scrutinize their own lacunae and responsibilities towards internal Others. This has left those among these Others who hold "radical leftist views," such as the poet in question, feeling like they "will never have a real political home [...] until a different kind of left is created," one that is willing to grapple with the complexities of socio-political and ethnic cleavages in Israel-Palestine.[1] This frustration was in fact shared by all of the (few) Mizrahi activists I could meet and interview. Some of them had more accusatory tones akin to the one in the poem, others blamed the complexity of a context where colonial pushes intertwine with internal hierarchies. But all shared the impression, confirmed by

[6] Israeli Hebrew slang derived from Arabic. It is a derogatory and racist term almost exclusively directed at Mizrahi Jews and typically used to insinuate low-class taste in music, clothes, and so on. The term has recently been reclaimed by some young Mizrahi activists and poets.
[7] Roy Hasan, "If there'll be peace, all the 'arsim' will come," trans. from the Hebrew by Ron Makleff, *+972 Magazine*, July 12, 2015, https://www.972mag.com/if-therell-be-peace-all-the-arsim-will-come/.
[1] Madison Margolin, "The Mizrahi torn in the side of the Israeli Left," *Forward*, September 3, 2015, https://forward.com/culture/320255/the-mizrahi-thorn-in-israels-leftist-side/.

their limited numbers, that pro-Palestinian activism, whether grassroots or not, essentially represents only the Ashkenazi Jews, both in composition and in the content of their political claims.[2]

This lack of encounters with other Others and their struggles emerged from the observations I could conduct over the time of my fieldwork.[3] The groups I attended were remarkably homogenous in terms of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds: the vast majority of members were white Jews of European origins (although some of them, as seen in Chapter Three, made a point of emphasizing their 'mixed' Ashkenazi/Mizrahi backgrounds), mostly secular or mildly religious, not rich but relatively privileged (they all had university degrees and highly skilled jobs). As seen in Chapter Four, mobilizations in solidarity with unprivileged sectors other than the Palestinians were rare and, although some groups had started to mobilize also in this sense, the Mizrahi activists I interviewed essentially carried out their Mizrahi politics in separate groups.[4]

Now, the reasons of this absence are, as we have seen, complex and longstanding, not reducible to the hypocrisy or snobbism of Ashkenazi activists. There are historical grievances of left-wing Mizrahi Jews towards the Ashkenazi left in general. There are objectively conflicting values and interests, with Ultra-Orthodox Jews being extremely conservative on social and gender issues, Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jews being often right-wing and anti-Palestinian, and poorer Jewish-Israelis in general seeing Palestinians as competitors for the distribution of residual resources. Moreover, even when views and interests align, there is the fact that internally marginalized people often prefer not to carry out their demands in association with pro-Palestinian groups, for fear that doing so would delegitimize them publicly and limit their chances of success.

Still, while many activists acknowledge this absence as a problem, as a lacuna of their activism, the ways in which they discussed the reasons to it suggested that they felt like there was not much they could do about it, because ultimately the responsibility for it lied with the Others, rather than (or as well as) with themselves. "I get it that they don't mobilize on the occupation, they have a lot on their plate," commented an activist on the small presence of Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jews in pro-Palestinian activism.[5] "Of course we tried, but they don't want us," was the slightly annoyed reply of a former Anarchists Against the Wall activist to my question of whether they had tried representing the

[2] Interviews: Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019; West Jerusalem, May 22, 2019; Tel Aviv, December 1, 2019. Informal Skype conversation, November 2, 2019. C.f. Chapter Two, Section 1.

[3] The time and place of my fieldwork however could have played a role in this. I was based in Jerusalem, and as such mostly inserted in the network of activism of the city, which is historically and for geographic reasons centered on the Palestinian issue. Contexts like Tel Aviv or the Negev are contextually more exposed to problems issuing from internal divides, and it is not a coincidence that most of the Mizrahi activists I interviewed were based in Tel Aviv. However, in the time of my fieldwork, I was not aware of actions organized that involved instances other than the Palestinians', whether in connection with the latter or not.

[4] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019. C.f. Chapter Four, Section 5.

[5] Interview, Neve Shalom, May 2, 2019.

instances of unprivileged Jews as well.[6] Another one, a decolonial activist involved in the One Democratic State Campaign, explained about Mizrahi Jews:

> We want to bring them on board eventually, but it's not our priority now. It's very difficult: either they have been co-opted by Shas,[7] who have put a religious hat on a political movement, or they have gone full-on into the identity politics of the Likud, bought into the Zionist anti-Arab narrative and came to hate the 'Arabs' instead of the Ashkenazi.[8]

Another activist, a middle-aged woman from Ta'ayush, had a more vehement reaction:

> They are all right-wing! They go with the discourse, that is made by the Likud and others, that the left is all 'intellectual' and privileged and detached from the 'real problems.' It's a typically fascist discourse by the way. And it's true that I am privileged, but still, if anyone has ever done anything for them, it's the radical left [...] Also the reasoning of Mizrahi activists is inconsistent: you want respect for the Arab culture, but where are you when they are slaughtering your kin in Gaza?[9]

The attitude towards other Others and their grievances in these quotes ranges from a certain defeatism towards the possibility of involving people that "have a lot on their plate" or simply "don't want us," to the judgmental attitude and even disdain for the sectorial ways in which they chose to frame their grievances. What emerges is a general reluctance to engage with such grievances in a sympathetic and self-critical way: one that acknowledges the impact of different life conditions, that interrogate one's position in such differences, and questions one's ideological framework for failing to attract the people it ostensibly proposes a solution for.

This lack of self-critical engagement contrasts starkly with the attitude that often the same activists held towards Palestinians in the face of not so dissimilar problems. As we have seen, Palestinians rarely share with Israeli activists broad political views (many of them being religiously and politically conservative), and many are hesitant or unwilling to accept the solidarity of Israelis, for reputational or political reasons of anti-normalization. Yet, it is rare to hear dismissive or judgmental views like the ones above about Palestinians. The few who voice them are perceived by other activists as fundamentally racist, while the majority engages in the reverse process of romanticization (the activist who dismisses Mizrahi Jews as "all right-wing" is the same who unconditionally praised Palestinians for their steadfastness and nonviolence). Those who have critiques regarding political views and strategies of Palestinians tend to feel uncomfortable about them and address them with great caution,

[6] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019.
[7] Israeli political party born to represent ultra-Orthodox Jews from Mizrahi and Sephardi origins against the mostly Ashkenazi religiously conservative party Agudat Israel. The party is politically located in right-wing Zionism and socially in religious conservatism.
[8] Interview, West Jerusalem, May 29, 2019.
[9] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 19, 2019.

often within activist 'safe spaces', for fear that expressing such critiques may signal their own lingering colonial posture. Yet, the *malaise* activists derive from becoming aware of their privileged positionality vis-à-vis Palestinians, and the effort they put in constantly working to redress it, is essentially absent towards other Others.

Underlying this dual posture there is, I argue, a simplified binary conception of colonial relations and of one's role in them, whereby if Palestinians are the oppressed and Israelis the oppressors, all reflexive effort at rewriting power-laden encounters must be directed towards the Palestinians, and not towards disenfranchised people within the oppressor's ranks. Quite the contrary: the claims of these disenfranchised Jews are often considered to be against the interests of the oppressed, and dedicating time to rewriting this encounter secondary if not entirely counter-productive. Yet, internal hierarchies in Israel are far from unrelated to the macro colonial divide between Israelis and Palestinians. As illustrated in Chapter One, the Zionist Ashkenazi leadership has historically exploited and sustained the divisions internal to Israeli society, building on racialized categories and militarized masculinities to conscript non-white and religious Jews into the settler colonial project, thus proceeding to a 'colonization' that was also internal to Jewish-Israeli society.[10]

Engaging with internal stratifications, therefore, does not require setting aside the colonial framework, but rather expanding and complexifying it, and acknowledging that internal Others are victims as well, and moreover victims of a system that privileges activists as Ashkenazi Jews. But this is not banal, for it profoundly unsettles the decolonial subjectivities activists are struggling to perform in what is an already difficult and painful process. Yet, the stakes are high. Failing to situate one's colonial positionality within the wider fabric of intersectional privileges ultimately misses the chance of challenging hegemonic subjectivities at their deepest level, and contributes to making subversive performances more fragile and superficial, exposed to the risk of relapsing into essentializations of both Israelis and Palestinians that rest on the same stereotypes even when reversing their sign, as we have seen in the previous sections. If the antagonism between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews is left unchallenged, and so is the one between Ultra-Orthodox and progressive Jews, the racialized and gendered civilizational ethos that underlies the settler colonial mindset remains at work. Moreover, the absence of encounter between Mizrahi Jews and Palestinians that could provide a bridge between Jews and Palestinians more generally – not only cultural and linguistic, but in the political experience of being colonized by the same leadership – contributes to maintaining an essentialized division between a romanticized image of the distant Other and a demonized image of one's own kind.

For these reasons, encounters that may trigger this sort of reflexivity are of paramount importance for activists to cultivate truly decolonial subjectivities. The few times that I have seen Mizrahi activists and Palestinians interact, on the ground of the struggle or sharing a chat after it, the connection

[10] C.f. Chapter One, Sections 2 and 3.

created was immediate, with activists bonding over a shared cultural past, memories of customs and terms that Mizrahi Jews had to abandon in exchange for integration into Israeli society.[11] For what it concerns encounters between activists and other disenfranchised Jewish Israelis, although within a general absence, some positive developments are visible. Some Ashkenazi activists are joining their Mizrahi partners in the conviction that tackling internal hierarchies is essential. The one who brought the poem that opened this section to my attention, for instance, reflected as such:

> Mizrahi Jews are seen as right-wing and bad, but activists often come from the centre of power, from the élite, and they don't even realize that. [...] We have to be present on the Mizrahi issue, and support their demands when they're right, even if this means siding with people who are very right-wing on the Palestinian issue.[12]

Another one had just organized a mobilization against the Nation State Law that was framed specifically as coming from Ashkenazi Jews:

> There has been a Mizrahi petition against the law, because it discriminates also against Jews of Arab origins of course. And this made me think: what about us? We can support them, but we can also engage directly, acknowledge that if they are 'inferior' [for Israeli law] it means that we are 'superior,' and that we need to refuse that vocally. The reception was not so good: it's much easier to ask to stop oppressing others than to renounce your own privilege. There is a lot of talk about 'Ashkenazi privilege' but it needs to stop being just a buzzword: we need to take concrete action and do something about it.[13]

If not its frequency, the type of engagement with struggles other than the Palestinians' signals an important shift in activists' encounter with other Others. As seen in the previous chapter, efforts are being made by some groups to be present in other struggles on "uncommon ground," when broad political views are different and even opposite (such as when requests are informed by racism towards Palestinians and hyper-nationalist discourses), and activists accept to put aside their political views and "go there, not for recruitment but because we genuinely care and want to support their demands nonetheless."[14] This stance, which was expressed especially by activists from newer generations, is very different from the one of the older activists I quoted above. Some of the activists who proposed precise analyses of settler colonialism and class struggle were, despite their awareness of being privileged, essentially disappointed at the lower classes' failure to gain consciousness of their position. If setting aside these analyses, activists of newer generations still show a deeper and more concrete understanding of their position of privilege, one that replaces with humility the presumption of

[11] Participant observations: Susya, November 2, 2019; Issawiya, October 30, 2019; Issawiya, December 3, 2019.
[12] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 8, 2019.
[13] Interview, Tel Aviv, May 27, 2019.
[14] Interview, Beer Sheva, November 5, 2019. Also recurrent in Interviews: Ramat Gan, May 14, 2019; West Jerusalem, November 26, 2019. C.f. Chapter Four, Section 5.

having the right solution and thinking of themselves as central in advancing it. Looking at the recent mobilizations of Mizrahi and Ethiopian communities against the discriminations and violence they suffer from the Israeli state, one activist pointed out:

> New generations [of Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jews] are much more open to talk about their Arabness or their blackness. They can do so much more than us to reverse the Israeli discourse… even if they wouldn't use our pro-Palestinian narrative of apartheid, colonialism, etc. *They* are 'the people,' not us. Groups are getting more organized, and there is more political thinking going on, so they are asking themselves questions, and some of them are starting to make the connections between the treatment reserved to them and Palestinians. There is [among us Ashkenazi activists] a lot of 'low-expectation racism:' you give them discounts, because you don't think they can do much better than that. But we have to give them credit, and be there for them, if we can, because they don't need us as much as we think they do, but we definitely need them.[15]

I wish I could write more about how the actual interactions unfolded, how privileged positionalities were dealt with, in the encounters between Ashkenazi activists and Mizrahi Jews in Tel Aviv, Ethiopian Jews in the Negev, or Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem. However, I was not aware of any of these participations to others' struggles happening during the time of my fieldwork, and I can only report on the way in which activists talked about the nature of their engagement. A particularly fruitful moment in this sense was the period of mobilization in South Tel Aviv between 2007 and 2015, when political rifts internal and external (between Mizrahi and other disenfranchised residents on the one side and asylum seekers, Palestinians and left-wing activists on the other) came to the fore as tensions but also as attempts to find a common ground for the struggle.[16] One Ashkenazi activist from Standing Together recalled the difficulty of compromising on their own political visions, but also the satisfactions when such compromises paid off, and they managed to create enduring bonds of trust and even to shift the political analyses of some of the residents.[17] Wright (2018) provides a first-hand account of the early stages of these mobilizations. She emphasizes the mistrust of the residents, who looked at Ashkenazi activists as privileged leftists and gentrifiers, and the arrogance with which the latter came into the neighbourhood, wanting to support the refugees' struggle but with little empathy for the residents' concerns and fears. The tension was so high that Mizrahi community activists of the neighbourhood, who were also acting as a liaison between the residents and the Ashkenazi activists, organized a protest against the "white left protesters" accusing them of "hypocritical engagement."[18] However, Wright could observe how, over time, Ashkenazi activists managed to "allow themselves to be shaken"[19] by a further problematization of their colonial

[15] Interview, Ramat Gan, May 14, 2019.
[16] C.f. Chapter Four, Section 5.
[17] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 26, 2019. See also Chapter Four, Section 5.
[18] Wright, *The Radical Israeli Left*, 97-102.
[19] Lisa Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014) quoted in Wright, *The Radical Israeli Left*, 112.

positionality, one that encompassed their implication in the violence towards multiple Others, internal as well as external:

> When both the Ashkenazi activists were able to recognize their own implication in the oppression of Israel's Mizrahi citizens and the Mizrahi activists were able to act in solidarity with Israel's non-Jewish Others, the political coalition created indeed presented a voice both radical and subversive in the context of Israel/Palestine. Thus, on occasion, the movement's activists from different backgrounds arrived to demonstrate in solidarity with Palestinians facing evictions in Jaffa or at a rally for refugee rights in central Tel Aviv, and these were genuinely novel moments in a politics of protest that has in many ways become routine and ineffective in Tel Aviv as more broadly in Israel/Palestine. Vulnerability, when it remains a framing through which specific injuries are abstracted into a generalized victim/perpetrator binary, indeed creates an impasse in this political context. When it moves to expose different subjects' implications in the violence done towards Others, however, it can open moments of political possibility and transgression.[20]

And this is indeed the full potential of concrete encounters with other Others: one that is not only strategic, but intersubjective at core, and that lies in the possibility to trigger a full-fledged reflexive attitude towards one's multiple and intersectional colonial privileges. Only by striving to rewrite these encounters, as well as the ones with Palestinians, can activists learn how to perform truly subversive subjectivities and begin to erode the loyalties that sustain colonial structures. This reflexivity can be the antidote to the risk of projecting one's power in unexpected ways, and to the enduring essentializations of both Israelis and Palestinians. Coming to terms practically with the similarities and differences in various experiences of oppression (of Palestinians and Israeli Jews) and in various ways of oppressing (of the right-wing and of the left-wing), recognizing the Palestinian Other in the internal Other and the internal Other in oneself, can allow to draw connections between Self and Other in ways that avoid both the essentialization of difference *and* its erasure through overidentification. In this sense, the practical knowledge of oneself and others formed performatively through these encounters could also provide concrete and less problematic bases to the rearticulation of Jewish-Israeli decolonial identities that we have seen attempted in Chapter Three, and which always entailed the risk of simplifying, appropriating, or erasing substantial differences across experiences of marginalization and oppression.

### *5. Transformations Through the Struggle: The Decolonizing Potential of Living Across Multiple Borders*

As activists sought to explain to me (and I suppose also to themselves) what made their activism worth it – in spite of high personal costs, the awareness of its intrinsic limitations and bounded effectiveness – what came up repeatedly and across generations was the meaning they found in the personal, bodily,

[20] Wright, *The Radical Israeli Left*, 117.

and affective engagement it entailed. In the previous chapter, we encountered several activists who emphasized the meaningfulness of the sustained presence of activists on the ground of the struggle, both in times of action and in times of calm, and in spite of ideological differences and the limitations of each solidarity strategy. For them, it was this combination of "on-the-groundness" and "willingness to put one's hands in shit," to muddle through the impurities of activist practice in Israel-Palestine, that allowed for building relationships across divides, both with Palestinians and with other Jewish-Israelis, and for growing as rebellious subjects in the struggle. Bringing to the fore the intimate aspect of this work, a young Jerusalemite activist reflected as such:

> The bottom-up aspect of activist engagement is what matters the most. Take shifts,[21] for instance: we can go any time, day or night, whenever the need arises. Besides being solidarity at its best, it's this kind of personal commitment that really matters, and that makes shifts the *educational* tool that they are. The moment you go, you *cross a line* that most people here live all their lives without crossing – and once it's done, there is no coming back. It's an entirely different experience, where you really put yourself together with others, to be arrested or whatever. And this is so important, for both Israelis and Palestinians! It's what make people want to go, and what makes Palestinians welcoming. This kind of *unmediated* experience is something only spontaneous and *organic* movements can bring.[22]

Taking a more philosophical perspective, David Shulman, a veteran activist of Ta'ayush, elaborates on similar issues in his book *Freedom and Despair* (2018).[23] Shulman finds on the ground of his struggle, the hills south of Hebron, a situation that offers him the opportunity at once to recognize oppression and to make the choice to act against it:

> A faithless person like me needs a *body* to know what is true and what is right. [...] I feel my heart kicking into protest; I feel nausea in the pit of my stomach. I know wickedness when I see it. [...] My moral conscience, such as it is, seems to inhabit the surface of my skin and to inform my ability to love. It comes from a site where the word 'moral' has not yet been born, and only from that dark place does it reach towards my mind.[24]

It is his concrete and bodily engagement in a situation fraught with ambiguity ("the true ground of almost all human action") that creates the "room of manoeuvre" for him to slip out of the "well-oiled groove of habit and collective possibility."[25] As he makes this choice – which is always a "matter of shifting, ephemeral sub-tectonic slips [...] not a dichotomous black-and-white division in the self but a flesh-and-blood sort of thing" – he asserts his freedom: "I protest therefore I am. [...] Conversely, I

[21] With 'shifts' activists refer to actions of interposition assured on a regular basis, e.g. weekly for Ta'ayush in the South Hebron Hills, daily for Free Jerusalem activists in Issawiya.
[22] Interview, West Jerusalem, December 18, 2019. Emphasis mine.
[23] David Shulman, *Freedom and Despair: Notes from the South Hebron Hills*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).
[24] Shulman, *Freedom and Despair*,169; 173-174 (emphasis mine).
[25] *Idem*, 76, 91, 77.

am, therefore I am free."[26] Yet, again, he emphasizes how this freedom is always a situated and transient one, because:

> Where would I put a transcendental freedom in the hills of South Hebron? Could it survive outside amid the rocks and thorns? Could it heal the suffering of our friends, or the pain we feel with their pain? I say again: give me contingent, embodied, transient, compromised freedom and its consequences. [...] Is there any other ground for action?[27]

From all of these quotes, it emerges how subjective and intersubjective engagements that happen in the struggle – intended here as on the concrete grounds of its daily and personal interactions – are the fundamental sites where individuals can transform themselves and their embodied relationships with power. Theories of individual 'revolutions' echo in the vocabulary used by activists to describe the meanings of their engagement: from Gramsci's idea of "organic" movements rooted in revolutionary praxis, to Freire's argument that it is in this praxis that lies the "educational" function of the struggle (its potential to trigger the "conscientizaçao," the becoming-conscious of its members); from Butler and Foucault's view of bodies not just as tools to be deployed in the struggle, but as sites through which power works and can be challenged, to the idea, echoing Sartre and Camus, that it is by resisting the conforming power of habits that individuals can assert, time and again, their freedom.[28]

In the context of Israel-Palestine, these engagements can disrupt colonial dynamics at the most personal and intimate level, and in ways that can scale up to the social and structural. In this sense, intersubjective challenges to hegemony complement the identitary and strategic ones explored in the previous chapters. More than this: they allow to bypass some of the stalemates those other challenges entail. In fact, where identitary and strategic approaches to counter-hegemony see obstacles and dead-ends, a subjective approach sees possibilities for social and political treason. This potential stems from a performative focus on treason that emphasizes process over achievement, fracture over fixity, and relapse over linear progress. As Bailey argues:

> It is a mistake to think that becoming traitorous is tantamount to completely overcoming racism. There will be times when our traitorous practical wisdom will be a bit off and we will fall back into privilege-evasive scripts, often without being aware that we are doing so. An account of traitorous character recognizes this instability.[29]

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[26] *Idem*, 76, 95.
[27] *Idem*, 100-101.
[28] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, (London: Routledge, 2013); Judith Butler, *Gender trouble*, Routledge, 1999; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).; Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Subjectivity?*, trans. David Broder and Trista Selous, (London: Verso Books, 2016); Albert Camus, *L'Homme Révolté*, Paris: Gallimard, 1951.
[29] Bailey, "Locating traitorous identities", 39.

In this processual understanding, every choice of noncompliance, every slippage out of habit, even if situated and temporary, intrinsically builds counterhegemony. As the activist above pointed out, each is a line crossed to which there is no coming back. Take, for instance, the actions of interposition explored in Chapter Four. The analysis pointed out that putting one's privileged body on the line between Palestinians and soldiers did have a deterrence effect, but could not escape reproducing existing hierarchies of corporeal value in the long run.[30] Hence the stalemate of using this strategy. However, from an intersubjective standpoint, actions of interposition actually do bring about a powerful counterhegemonic challenge, which is at once intimate and highly political. As Hammami notes:

> [I]t is actually in the everyday coming together of grievable and ungrievable bodies [...] that we can see how the constant defiance of hierarchies of corporeal value *begins to break them down*. [...] Not only are [activists'] bodies "out of place" (as Israeli/Jewish bodies who are not soldiers or settlers); they are also "our" bodies that have unravelled from "us" and woven themselves into "them," the enemies we aim to eliminate. The rage of soldiers and settlers toward Israeli activists is not simply about their being on the wrong side, but of quite literally embodying an existential threat to the Zionist nationalist imaginary of an ethnically bounded Jewish Israeli nation. Instead, Israeli activists are a constant reminder (or, in the eyes of settlers and soldiers, a nagging insistence) of a possible national future that is not based on ethnic privilege and exceptionalism. [...] But beyond these more obviously political effects, there are the ways the activists and communities themselves still bounded by these hierarchies and binaries increasingly begin to elude them in relation to each other. And this process opens a space in which transformative relationalities begin to emerge.[31]

These "transformative relationalities" are at work whenever activists manage to see their privilege mirrored in every banal interaction they have with their multiple Others and with their surroundings, and as they reflect on them individually and collectively, and thus learn how to recognize – and can begin to question – their passive participations in power.

As the cases in this chapter have shown, this transformative work is especially happening whenever activists embrace the conditions of impurity that characterize their activism, because the hesitations and constant negotiations issuing from this acceptance are most conducive to reflexive engagements. It is as activists remain entangled in the web of privileges that compose their existence in Israel (more than if they remove themselves from them through self-exile, in an illusion of pure disengagement) that activists can become able to grasp their pervasiveness and imagine ways to expose or avoid them. It is as they embrace their sometimes conflicting emotions (more than if they repress them trying to conform to ideals and perfect standards) that they can recognize the emotional appeals of both

[30] C.f. Chapter Four, Section 1.
[31] Rema Hammami, "Precarious politics: the activism of "bodies that count" (aligning with those that don't) in Palestine's colonial frontier", in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 184-185.

conformism and rebellion, of both the demonization and the romanticization of Others, and channel them towards building entirely new affective and relational universes.[32] It is by engaging with multiple Others (in encounters that happen not between ideals or identities, but on the murky terrain of intersecting oppressions, and when to the choice between separation or integration is preferred the constant search for an always-imperfect 'right' distance) that the multiplicity and multifacetedness of one's positionality(ies) becomes apparent, and activists can learn to tackle this complexity with less risk of renouncing privilege in one direction just to reassert it in another. From the cases explored it also emerges that this type of engagement is found in present-day activism more than in the past of Matzpen, of Oslo, or of the post-2000 grassroots groups. Newer generations seem more attuned than previous ones to accepting to deal with these impurities, and as such are perhaps the best placed to begin constructing decolonial subjectivities from below.

Finally, what seems to emerge from these engagements is a novel attitude towards 'borders' in general, and perhaps a different conceptualization of border entirely. When I speak of 'borders,' I am invoking the different meanings this spatial metaphor covered in this chapter as well as in the previous ones: the boundary between Self(ves) and Other(s), at once identitary and affective, cultural and spatial, collective and intimate; but also the 'line to be drawn' between what is considered complicit and what is considered rebellious strategy, and between an abiding and a traitorous self. Dealing with these borders has been, in this chapter, less a matter of discerning whether to keep or cross them, and how much so, and more a matter of interrogating and troubling them: of multiplying them, breaching them temporarily and the next time reinstating them, blurring them and expanding them. As a result of this, the border becomes no longer a *line*, but a *space* that can be inhabited. The border so conceived is, as hooks and others have theorized, the place *par excellence* of impurity and ambiguity, inhabiting which causes "extreme derangement and alienation" but also opens for a radical possibility of resistance: it is "a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives."[33] Anzaldùa expresses this ambivalence poignantly as she talks about her own experience of living on the border as a *mestiza*:

> I am a border woman... [...] It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. However, there have been compensations for this *mestiza*, and certain joys. Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element. [...] I have the sense that certain "faculties" – not just in me but in every border resident, colored or noncolored – and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened. Strange, huh? And yes,

[32] "Emotional reflexivity," in this sense, is not just functional to "sustaining activism" but a necessary step towards building alternative socialities. C.f. King, "Sustaining activism through emotional reflexivity".
[33] bell hooks, "Choosing the Margins as a space of radical openness," in bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, (New York: Routledge, 2015): 227, 230.

> the "alien" element has become familiar – never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable but home.[34]

This understanding of border, while ensuing from the performative and processual focus specific to this chapter, can nonetheless shed a different light on the shared traits of activists' attempts at overcoming their privileges in previous chapters, and capture the subversive potential of 'imperfect' struggles more broadly. In the 'borderland,' the aspects of impurity and contradiction that were conceived of as problems in domains – identity and strategy – rooted in fixity, can better be seen as values in themselves. In this light, the 'border identity' mentioned in the conclusion of Chapter Three should be seen as premised not on choosing an identity categorization that 'contains' openness within itself (such as the diaspora identity advanced by Mikado) but on cultivating that openness through flexible engagements with multiple Selves and Others. On embracing the fact that one can be at the same time Jewish and Arab, privileged and oppressed, dissident and compliant, and knowing that each places us a bit closer to some Other. In the same vein, the compromises faced by activists as their wish to fight 'from without' hegemony clashed against the conflicting needs of concrete struggles can be seen not as a loss of consistency and a depoliticization, but as opening the possibility to be political in new and more radical ways. Because they allow for dangerous solidarities to be born across colonial divides, and for learning through practice the deep meaning of privilege and how to disrupt it.

[34] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987: *iii*.

## The Right Distance?

(Geneva, 2021)



Israeli bombing of Gaza, May 2021 (ph: Mahmoud Hams, Getty Images)

*Once returned to my place in Geneva, the violence that had been part of my daily experience quickly went back to being a footnote in the Middle East section of the newspapers. Quiet Geneva, with its lake-side promenades and parks that I had once found so boring, soothed me in its embrace of comfort and wealth. Soon, this quietness was spoiled by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. If with the anxiety and distress it brought with it, the confinement of the following months also gave me an excuse to retreat in a solitary and slow-paced life, where I could sit and contemplate the work of the previous months from a distance, and from a place of calm.*

*It took a long time before I could write anything. At the beginning, all I could do was the rather mechanic job of systematizing the thousands of pages of my fieldnotes into a huge Excel file, where I transcribed bits of interviews and observations according to 'codes' and categories of analysis. For the slightly compulsive organizer that I am, this job was oddly satisfying, and it managed to keep me at bay, for a while, from the fearsome task of engaging with my sources in a more assertive way.*

*When I finally accepted that eventually I had to "start writing" (as my supervisors had solicited me to do for a while), began a long and difficult journey to find my own voice among the different 'pulls' I felt, a journey that has yet to reach its end. There was the pull of academic thinking and writing, which demanded categorizing, simplifying, ordering the world in linear arguments. There was my accountability to my interlocutors, the subjects*

*of my work, the perspectives of which I wanted to render truthfully, in their manifoldness and internal complexity and nuance. And then there was my wish to produce politically emancipatory work, work that could further, from the academic sphere, the prospect of decolonizing Israel-Palestine. The frictions between these different pulls emerged forcefully as I submitted my attempts at writing to different audiences: my supervisors, who wanted to help me get to the end of my Ph.D. with a theoretically and methodologically solid product; my interlocutors, to some of whom I sent drafts in order to make sure that I was not misrepresenting or misinterpreting their views; critical and Palestinian colleagues, who were made uncomfortable by the nuancing – for some of them bordering on apology – with which I was representing the panorama of Jewish-Israeli activism. Juggling between these different perspectives, exposing my work and my emerging voice to their scrutiny, has been destabilizing, but it has also made it so that I felt increasingly at home in that destabilization.*

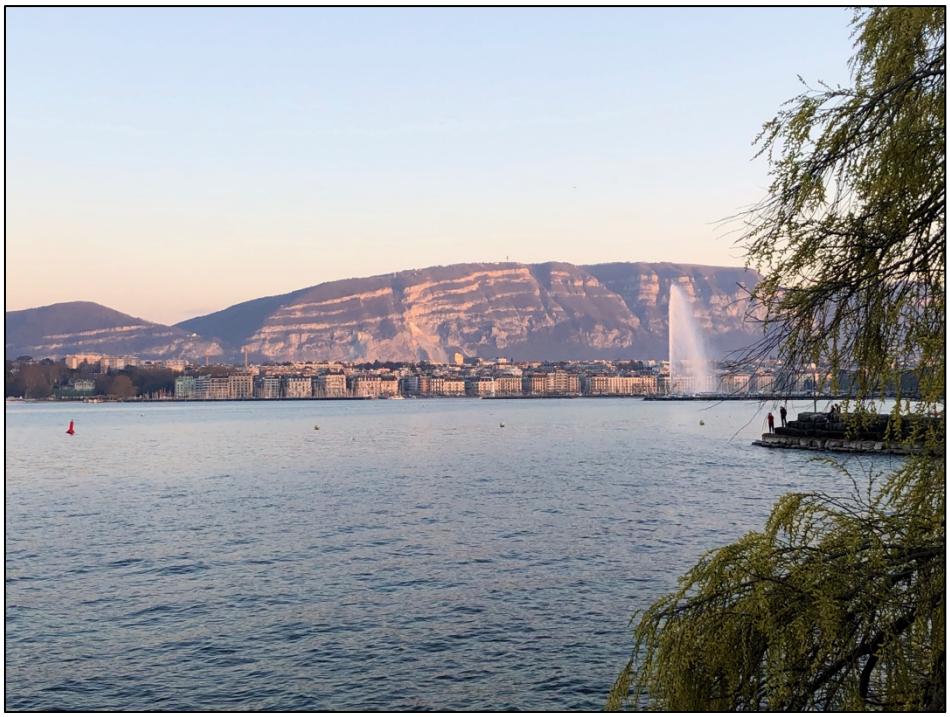
*In the Spring of 2021, when I finally thought I had put enough distance between myself and my fieldwork and my writing seemed to have taken off, violence in Israel-Palestine rose again out of the 'ordinary.' Tensions had begun to rise in Jerusalem as Israeli authorities prevented access to the Temple Mount to Palestinian worshippers during Ramadan.[1] Protests and riots of Palestinians spread from Jerusalem to other 'mixed' cities in Israel and to the West Bank, leading to talks of a new Intifada.[2] Next to the usual waves of arrests and killings with which they were met, mobs were also reported of right-wing Israelis who went house by house to lynch Palestinian residents and set afire their houses and cars.[3] Eventually, the violence escalated in a new retaliatory war on Gaza. As rockets were launched into Israel from Hamas fighters – the quasi totality of which intercepted by the Iron Dome defense system – Israel bombed Gaza for eleven days straight, targeting media outlets and hospitals, killing hundreds of civilians and destroying their sources of livelihood for years to come.[4]*

*I was drawn right back into 'fieldwork.' I was constantly reading live updates from first-hand sources, Israeli and Palestinian activists who shared videos and reports from the ground which rarely made the news. I was, once again, overwhelmed by rage and outrage at the genocidal violence of Israel and its endless impunity. I was also saddened to tears for its victims, all of them, including those Israelis who try to do something different in their country and suffer the consequences of it, even if these consequences are incomparable to those suffered by Palestinians.*

*What is the 'right distance' between being too involved and too little? Between having too much empathy or no empathy at all? I don't think I have found it. Perhaps, the best a researcher can do – certainly the best I could*

[1] Ir Amim, "A Jerusalem day like no other," May 9, 2021, https://mailchi.mp/e07a10efa632/a-jerusalem-day-like-no-other?e=39d6531c24.
[2] Zena Al Tahan, "October 2000 vs May 2021: How Palestinians defied fragmentation," *Al Jazeera*, October 4, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/10/4/october-2000-vs-may-2021-how-palestinians-defied-fragmentation.
[3] Toi Staff, "4 arrested, 1 hurt, in Jewish-Arab clashes in Jerusalem; reporters assaulted," *The Times of Israel*, April 22, 2021, https://www.timesofisrael.com/4-arrested-1-hurt-in-jewish-arab-clashes-in-jerusalem-reporters-assaulted/.
[4] Khuloud Rabah Sulaiman, "Gaza attacks: Fear, finality, and farewells as bombs rained down," *Al Jazeera*, May 22, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/22/gaza-attacks-fear-finality-and-farewells-as-bombs-rained-down.

*do – is working in a state of "vacillation"*[5] *between the spheres that ethnographic work involves – personal, political, analytical – and find in that state the capacity not to lose touch with any of such spheres, to bring them all in, and thereby to hold a picture that is complete, even if messier than it would have been otherwise.*



La Perle du Lac, Geneva, March 2020 (ph: Alice Baroni)

[5] Ghassan Hage, "Hating Israel in the field: On ethnography and political emotions," *Anthropological Theory* 9, no. 1 (2009): 61; 77.

# Conclusion

## *1. The Counterhegemonic Potential of Imperfect Struggles*

This thesis has looked at the ways in which Jewish-Israeli activists deal with their structural privileges as they struggle to advance Palestinian rights and has interrogated how this shapes the possibilities for counterhegemonic change in Israel-Palestine.

The thesis has conceived of these struggles of solidarity as paradoxical: the discriminations against Palestinians that Jewish-Israeli activists oppose are the same that grant them the privileges they hold, and which constitute the value added of their contribution to the struggle. Both issue structurally from the Zionist hegemony that fixates and normalizes a social stratification, colonial at core, which places white Ashkenazi Jews on top and 'Arab' Palestinians at the bottom, and conscripts all other divides of race, gender, and class in between.

As 'insiders without' – defined by their embeddedness in this hegemony as much as by their moving against it – activists also necessarily deal with their constitutive privileges. This thesis has shown how this engagement is rarely dichotomic, either fully rejecting or fully endorsing the universe that Zionism builds. In this 'grey zone', activists' engage in a constant process of negotiation that takes into account deep-seated fears and alternative imaginations, short-term achievements and long-term goals, present power relations and envisioned futures.

The thesis has illustrated how these negotiations unfold in the three core realms of activists' engagement with hegemony: identity narratives, strategic choices, and intersubjective relationships. The first set of negotiations occur as activists question the bases of their self-perception as Jewish-Israelis and debate the extent to which they can detach themselves from the exclusionary aspects of

dominant articulations while keeping intact a sense of Self, and conversely the extent to which they can resort to alternative sources of identification without erasing their past and present responsibilities. The second set of negotiations occurs as activists weight the costs and benefits – both strategic and personal – of using or refusing to use their privileged access to the legal and institutional tools of the State, to the repertoire of experiences, values, and understandings they share with Jewish-Israeli society, and to the embodied privileges they enjoy as white-Jewish 'grievable' bodies. The third set of negotiations occurs as activists attempt to find an always-provisional conciliation between their political struggle and their daily life as privileged Israelis: sometimes abhorring, sometimes unseeing their quotidian complicities with the status quo; sometimes bridging, sometimes keeping the distance that separates them from Palestinians; extending, or not, their critical self-scrutiny to encounters with Others other than Palestinians.

These negotiations are shown to be the only avenue available for a critique that is entangled in the very forms of power it opposes. All activists carry them out, regardless of the radicality of their vision, although with varying degrees of awareness and discomfort. Also the outcome of these negotiations varies – from person to person and from moment to moment – depending on the experiences and memories that shape one's attachment to Zionism, on the contingencies of one's life that affect the risks one is willing to take and the price one is willing to pay, and on the very state of the struggle: the demands made, the relevant audience, the relative strength of the actors at play and the viability of radical options.

As the thesis has dissected the unfolding of these 'imperfect struggles,' it has also interrogated what avenues they open for change in the status quo, attempting to assess in particular whether they can contribute to the decolonization of Israel-Palestine or whether they are condemned to dilute this kind of structural change. In doing so, the thesis has taken as a starting point the 'paradox of privilege': the idea that reliance on privilege in the struggle for its erosion does always, to some extent, reproduce it, thus entrenching existing hierarchies.

The thesis has demonstrated not only that the paradox holds true in the case of Jewish-Israeli activism – that their reliance on privilege reproduces and entrenches it – but also that it cannot be resolved – because such reliance is ultimately inevitable in the present context of *de facto* asymmetry. As such, the thesis extends the assessment made by critical scholarship on liberal-Zionist groups to the whole spectrum of Jewish-Israeli activism: it is not only by remaining within the discursive and institutional boundaries placed by Zionism that activism reinforces its normative authority. Zionism is upheld also in less obvious ways, because even when opposing it outright activists cannot avoid mobilizing – and thus partially entrenching – their privileges both in the struggle and in their everyday life. The picture that emerges is of a strong, totalizing, and resilient hegemony, one that comes back strengthened also from attempts at disrupting its logics and workings in radical ways.

And yet, within this stifling scenario, the thesis has found the instances of localized yet profound disruptions to Zionism's deepest logics, disruptions that can contribute to its structural subversion. It has found such instances less in clear decolonial programs and in attempts at finding an impossible consistency between them and the lived experience of activists, and more in their commitment to act despite the lack of such consistency. When activists accept to navigate through the compromises their position entails in ways that eschew both paralysis (that ensues from realizing that there is nothing one can do that does not project power) and self-indulgence (the temptation, then, to justify every endeavour in a 'whatever works' kind of attitude), they find themselves in a favourable position to experiment entirely new ways of relating to themselves and to their multiple Others. These ways can erode from within the fixity of Zionist articulations and build from the bottom radical alternatives that ground projects of decoloniality in the lived, relational experience of all its subjects.

The thesis has found that the present state of Jewish-Israeli activism provides a fertile ground for the emergence of these kinds of disruptions. The internal ostracization of dissent and the absence of political worldviews that delineate a clear path for the colonizer, combined with the persisting urgency to act nonetheless in order to deter the most nefarious effects of Israeli policies, are all factors that have pushed many activists to concretize their commitment to change into 'messy' political engagements. Such engagements fracture and multiply activists' ways of being in the struggle and bring to the fore how each involves both power-defying and power-reproducing dynamics. In this situation, if activists are willing to let themselves be 'shaken' by the tensions that emerge,[1] to submit themselves and their struggles to deep reflexive scrutiny, they can become aware of the different sets of privileges they embody as Israeli citizens, Jewish nationals or white bodies, and they can tackle in subtler ways the rearticulation of their positionalities, identities, and solidarity endeavours.

This kind of self-critical attitude arises in particular whenever activists live the struggle as a concrete, bodily, relational engagement that extends over time and embraces a variety of different Others. It is on this ground that they are made more vulnerable, their 'skins exposed,'[2] their emotions most engaged and their ideas most challenged. At the same time, it is also here that such self-criticisms can be grounded in the positive experience of a common ground found despite absent shared ideologies, of trust built over frequent failures and occasional successes, and in the self-empowerment that comes from shrinking and expanding one's agency to the benefit of the empowerment of others. It is this relational engagement that thus allows for the struggle not only to be sustainable in the long run, but also to be an endeavour that is at once critical *and* constructive of new subjectivities and relationalities. Living through messy engagements with this combination of reflexive attitudes and bodily, relational praxis allows for imperfect struggles to be the ground of experimentation of ways of

[1] Lisa Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), quoted in Wright, *The Radical Israeli Left*, 112.
[2] Interview, West Jerusalem, November 26, 2019.

being critical that can breach the fixity and thus undermine the normativity of existing constructs of friends and foes, of what is thinkable and doable as individuals and collectives, and lay the bases for building new, decolonial imaginaries.

The instances of struggle this dissertation has illustrated testify of the possibility of cultivating a radical critique in spite of and *through* an entanglement with power that makes such critique all the more subtle, complex, and comprehensive. The 'contradictory location' of activists, the reversed 'borderland' of their being 'insider without,' can thus be the locus of an alter-politics that, emerging transversally to different approaches to the struggle and from the sum of the lived experiences of those who wage it, ground the agenda for the decolonization of Israel-Palestine from the part of the colonizers.

Indeed, the production of this kind of alter-politics is far from being the inevitable outcome of imperfect struggles. On the contrary, structural constraints and hegemonic pushes work to suppress such production. The thesis has shown how many activists choose not to leave the comfort zones of illusionary pure struggles, shaped around the reassuring imaginations of a moral Zionism or of an uncompromising anti-Zionism, thus remaining impermeable to the unsettling effects of messy, bodily, and reflexive engagements. Even for those who expose themselves to such effects, persisting in this endeavour is extremely costly, and the temptation is strong to leave the country or the struggle, or to artificially relegate politics into a separated realm and continue living one's life on the side.

Yet, still, for how localized, episodic, and temporary these disruptions may be, they are not lost. After all, "defiance – collective or individual; articulated as politically-motivated or as a necessity; carried out to challenge mainstreams in the field or within academic circles – is a *puncturing of small holes in canvasses of power*."[3] These holes are the flesh and blood of a counterhegemonic endeavour in Israel, and need to be valued in themselves and considered for enriching, complexifying, and expanding decolonial re-imaginations of Israel-Palestine.

The remainder of this conclusion highlights what these findings tell us about the present and future of Israel-Palestine and how the framework of imperfect struggles contributes to the understanding and practice of critique from positions of entanglement in power in other contexts, including our very academic one.

[3] Valentina Zagaria, "Defiant Engagements", *AllegraLab*, September 2021, https://allegralaboratory.net/politicalengagements-defiant-engagements/.

*2. Grounding Prospects for a Decolonization of Israel-Palestine: The Colonizer's Share*

This thesis has contributed to the understanding of the evolving socio-political context of Israel in relation to the Palestinian question via a focus on an internal actor of critique: the panorama of Jewish-Israeli activism.

Against a literature that has tended to focus on specific sectors of this panorama, and to do so via analyses of the meso level of frames and strategies, this thesis has offered an analysis that is both 'broad' – across the entire spectrum of forms and modes of activism – and 'deep' – focused on the micro level of individual experiences.[4] It has considered 'activists' across the usual divide between liberal-Zionist and anti-Zionist groups, between members of informal grassroots collectives and formal NGOs. It has cut across a more theoretical distinction between internal critique and solidarity proper by looking at groups focusing on either or mixing both. It has added a historical perspective by including also representatives of older movements and the young Jewish internationals that represent a new phenomenon in Israeli activism. And it has done so without compromising on the depth of the investigation via an immersive ethnographic approach carried out across the entirety of the spectrum. Long interviews, participant observations, and 'hanging out' have not been confined to informal collectives, but extended to NGOs as well, adding a fine-grained analysis to the group-level insights usually formulated about them via the analysis of organizational material and documented strategies.

With respect to theories of Jewish-Israeli activism, this methodology has allowed to problematize the often-assumed unitarity of both actors, and to develop an understanding of their practice of critique that brings to the fore the connections and similarities between them in the *dis*-connections, internal to each group, between framings and praxes, the political approach and the everyday life conduct of their members, their conscious representations and their subconscious imaginations. By so doing, the thesis has troubled the usual dichotomy proposed by critical scholarship between liberal-Zionist and anti-Zionist groups, colonial and decolonial endeavours, and has shown how both reproduction and challenge of colonial logics happen in the interstices of complicity and defiance within which all Jewish-Israeli activists move by virtue of their entanglement in existing structures of power. These insights invite to expand the framework of 'co-optation' proposed by Gramscian studies

[4] Tikva Honig-Parnass, *The False Prophets of Peace: Liberal Zionism and the Struggle for Palestine*, (London: Haymarket Books, 2011). See also Atalia Omer, *When peace is not enough: How the Israeli peace camp thinks about religion, nationalism, and justice*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Mandy Turner, "Creating a counterhegemonic praxis: Jewish-Israeli activists and the challenge to Zionism," *Conflict, security & development* 15, no. 5: 549-574; Elian Weizman, "Decolonising Israeli society? Resistance to Zionism as an educative practice," *Ethnicities* 17, no. 4: 574-597; Teodora Todorova, "Reframing Israel-Palestine: critical Israeli responses to the Palestinian call for Just Peace," (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2014); Teodora Todorova, "Vulnerability as a politics of decolonial solidarity: the case of the Anarchists Against the Wall," *Identities* 27, no. 3 (2020): 1-18; Marcelo Svirsky, *Arab–Jewish Activism in Israel–Palestine*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Cherine Hussein, "Countering an Illusion of Our Epoch: The Re-Emergence of the Single State Solution in Palestine/Israel," (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2011).

of Jewish-Israeli activism to include micropolitical dynamics next to strategic ones, and subsequently to extend it to the whole spectrum of critique within and outside Zionism. At the same time, they invite to complexify the understanding of 'subversion' by looking deeper than clearly formulated decolonial programs and by dwelling on the localized, temporary, relational disruptions to colonial norms that are created on the ground of the struggle with or without such framings.

In addition to the literature on Jewish-Israeli activism, these insights also contribute to the broader body of work that has been shedding light on the various aspects of Zionist hegemony. By illuminating the ways in which it seeps into the political and everyday practice of activists, this thesis follows in the footsteps of those who have looked at how the macrostructural logics and apparatuses of Zionism are sustained at the intersubjective level through the interiorization of imaginaries of Self and Other and the repetition of ways of being, doing, and relating to others that reify relations of power particular to Zionism.[5] Moreover, it has shown how this happens not only via the actions of supporters or the 'apathy' of bystanders, but also via the active critical work of well-intentioned opponents.

Furthermore, the thesis has situated the current hegemonic and counterhegemonic dynamics of Jewish-Israeli activism in interaction with its evolving geopolitical context and with the broader network of actors, both local and transnational, that partake in reshaping the socio-political space of Israel-Palestine. By doing so, it has contributed to understanding the future prospects for Israel-Palestine more generally. In particular, the thesis has shed new light on the present trend of a 'shrinking space' for internal dissent in Israel by highlighting its duality. Where others have emphasized the retreat of actors of dissent in the 'hostile' political climate emerged after the Second Intifada and throughout Netanyahu's leadership, the thesis has emphasized how the pressures coming from different social fields – the Israeli, the Palestinian, and the international – do pose constraints and obstacles to traditional forms of activism, but also create a terrain favourable to the experimentation of new and more radical forms.[6] To the contraction in the numbers of activism and the fragmentation of the few big political movements of the past into a multitude of smaller and less 'political' (read: programmatic), groups has corresponded the emergence of a network of entities that

[5] See e.g. Adi Kuntsman and Rebecca L. Stein, *Digital militarism : Israel's occupation in the social media age*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, (London: Verso Books, 2017); Gil Z. Hochberg, *Visual occupations: Violence and visibility in a conflict zone*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Lori Allen, "Getting by the occupation: How violence became normal during the Second Palestinian Intifada," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2008): 453-487; Juliana Ochs, *Security and suspicion: An ethnography of everyday life in Israel*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Ronen Shamir, *Current Flow: The Electrification of Palestine*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Yael Berda, *Living Emergency: Israel's Permit Regime in the Occupied West Bank*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); Katherine Natanel, *Sustaining conflict: apathy and domination in Israel-Palestine*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

[6] E.g. Matthew Burnett-Stuart, *An Uphill Struggle*, 2012,https://www.academia.edu/6233489/An_Uphill_Struggle_Israeli_Peace_Activism_Since_the_Second_Intifada. Ilan Pappé, "What Is Left of the Israeli Left? (1948–2015)," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 22, no. 1 (2015): 351-367. See also Karine Lamarche, *Militer contre son camp? Des Israéliens engagés aux côtés des Palestiniens*, (Presses universitaires de France, 2018), and, through not focused on the 'left', Raffaella Del Sarto, *Israel Under Siege: The Politics of Insecurity and the Rise of the Israeli Neo-Revisionist Right*, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2017).

are highly interconnected both among themselves and with other actors of critique – Palestinian communities and activist groups, both in the West Bank and the diaspora; Jewish internationals in the U.S. and worldwide, transnational solidarity movements supporting the Palestinian BDS call and demanding to end Israel's impunity. In this context, to the 'depoliticization' of centralized, coherent proposals formulated by the traditional Left (whether liberal or radical) has corresponded also an emerging, fractured and localized 're-politicization' that has tapped into other means of struggle and other audiences.

These findings suggest that it is precisely in the connections developed with other actors of critique, local and transnational, that new frames and modes of struggle can not only materialize, but emerge reinforced and enriched from the feedback loop created across different portions of the network. The thesis has brought the example of one such feedback loop in the recent consolidation of the apartheid framework: forwarded for decades by Palestinians and in academic circles, and diffused into the global movement of solidarity thanks to the BDS call, the apartheid framework has imposed itself only recently in the realm of Israeli and international human rights organizations, first proposed (and immediately withdrawn) by UNESCWA, then reproposed in a milder version by Yesh Din, then in a more comprehensive version by B'Tselem, and finally being sanctioned by important international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Another example is the recent strengthening of anti-Zionist discourse among diasporic Jews in the US, which can be put in relation with the critical voices that are increasingly emerging from Israel itself, and with the consistent presence in Israel-Palestine of international Jewish activists than then liaise with their home communities.

Looking into the connections and interactions among the actors involved in these examples (as well as in other examples so far less successful, such as the consolidation of the settler colonial framework and the one-state solution) would allow to understand whether indeed there has been a process of contamination in their discourse, through which mechanisms it has become consolidated and spread, and what kind of understandings, practices, and relationalities have been relied upon and rewarded in the process. Importantly, this would allow to assess whether and how the localized disruptions engendered through the relational and reflexive engagements of Jewish-Israeli activists can be integrated in the articulation of decolonizing frameworks for Israel-Palestine. In line with the findings of this thesis, this would reinforce the subversive potential of such disruptions locally while, at the same time, gearing decolonization frameworks towards a more comprehensive emancipatory project that sees and aims to subvert the multiple hierarchies that have been co-opted into Zionist colonialism.

*3. Laboratory Israel 2.0: Experimenting Resistance in the Grey Zone*

This thesis has contributed to the understanding of the practice of dissent and solidarity from a position of power through the in-depth exploration of a paradigmatic case. By looking at the microcosmos of Jewish-Israeli activism for Palestinian rights, where the constitutive asymmetry of this kind of solidarity is most evident, the thesis has developed a framework of analysis that can shed light on situations where the workings of power and privilege are more elusive. This framework of analysis, which I have termed 'imperfect struggles,' allows to see how hegemonic and counterhegemonic pushes coexist and intertwine in the practice of resistance, and how its actors can work through this paradoxical endeavour in ways that accentuate its subversive potential.

Via an eclectic engagement with theories and concepts from various disciplinary approaches, this framework contributes theoretically to the existing literature on resistance and critique across the fields of social movement studies, critical studies, feminist, decolonial, and postcolonial studies. Firstly, the thesis has shown empirically how a focus on the micropolitics of power can complexify analyses based exclusively on collective strategies and framings of resistance. By doing so, it has highlighted the importance of recentring the individual and her bodily, affective, and lived experiences in studies of hegemony and social movements that tend to focus on the macro and meso levels and to overlook this aspect.[7] In particular, the previous chapters have demonstrated how the normative thrust of hegemonic constructs, and their co-opting mechanisms, should be appraised also by looking at ontological (in)securities, scripts of quotidian behaviour, and mediated emotional attachments. They have shown how the 'political opportunities' the system offers to its challengers go beyond the institutional and the discursive to include the ontological realm of what one is, and is perceived to be, and how through this too they reconfirm its normative authority.

Secondly, the thesis has proposed a theorization of the role of privileged actors in struggles of solidarity with the unprivileged anchored in a spatial understanding of their contradictory position as 'insiders without' the dominant collective. This theorization combines a social-field perspective borrowed by Bordieuan approaches with the focus on power differentials between centre and margin proposed by feminist decolonial accounts of 'outsiders within.'[8] Via this combination, the conceptualization of privileged actors as insiders without allows to see how their critique occurs at

[7] See e.g. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social movements: An introduction*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory", in *Social Movements in an Organizational Society*, ed. Mayer N. Zald and J. D. McCarthy, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987); Hanspeter Kriesi, "The Organizational Structure of New Social Movements in a Political Context", in *Comparative Perspective on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framing*, ed. Doug McAdam, J. McCarthy, and M. N. Zald. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 152–84.

[8] David Landy, *Jewish identity and Palestinian rights: Diaspora Jewish opposition to Israel*, (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2012); Sandra Harding, *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); John Collins, *Global Palestine*, (London: Hurst, 2011); bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, (New York: Routledge, 2015); Alison Bailey, "Locating traitorous identities: Toward a view of privilege-cognizant white character," *Hypatia* 13.3 (1998), pp. 27-42; Linda Martin Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?," *Hypathia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 6-26.

the intersection of different fields governed by incompatible logics, and attempts a detachment from dynamics of power that is never fully possible. This spatial understanding allows – more than frameworks centred on 'treason' and 'monstrous identities' – to grasp the productive potential of this 'borderland.'[9] Indeed, it allows to see this space as one crossed by contradictory pushes, dualities and ambiguities, where critical action unfolds as a constant process of negotiation, and where the learning process is rooted in contaminations but also in the trauma and wrench of a condition of estrangement. By doing so, this approach has integrated the idea of change in Bordieuan accounts usually stuck in fixity and, at the same time, has integrated a framework for the privileged in critical, feminist, and decolonial approaches that have generally attributed the possibility – and indeed the responsibility – for engendering change almost exclusively to oppressed subjectivities.

The way in which Jewish-Israeli activists navigate this space of critique, the mechanisms they put in place to face obstacles and dead-ends, and the ways these lead to more or less successful disruptions of structural asymmetries of power, while situated in the specific configuration of power of the Israeli-Palestinian context, can nonetheless travel to other contexts and other struggles. A first, most direct avenue for generalizations is towards contexts in which a systemically privileged group mobilizes in solidarity with a group that is systemically oppressed on the same line of discrimination. The participation of white people in the struggle for liberation in regimes of colonialism and apartheid of the past, where racial privilege was regulated and institutionalized, are the most direct comparisons, as testified by the wealth of literature that has drawn parallels with different aspects of the Israeli regime.[10] But the paradoxical mobilization of privilege is still at work in all the scenarios of solidarity to the struggles of disenfranchised people, irrespective of whether racial and patriarchal privileges are institutionalized or whether they no longer are but still persist in making rights differentially enjoyable by different sectors of the population. The struggles of citizens for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers (think of the mobilizations in Italy, France, Greece for migrants across the Mediterranean Sea), of white people against racial discrimination towards non-whites (think, as the most recent example, of the Black Lives Matter movement and its escalation from the U.S. worldwide), of cis-gender males to trans-feminist struggles (a movement that has become stronger and stronger in the

[9] Harding, *Whose science?*; Bailey, "Locating traitorous identities."

[10] Uri Ram, "The Colonization Perspective in Israeli Sociology: Internal and External Comparisons," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 6, no. 3 (1993): 327-350; Donald H. Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Farid Farid, "Terror at the Beach: Arab Bodies and the Somatic Violence of White Cartographic Anxiety in Australia and Palestine/Israel," *Social Semiotics* 19, no. 1 (2010): 59-78; Maya Mikdashi, "What is Settler Colonialism? (For Leo Delano Ames Jr.)," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 2 (2013): 23-34; Steven Salaita, *The Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006); Micaela Sahhar, "An Alliance of Forgetting: National Narratives of Legitimacy on the Occasion of Israel-Australia's Joint Stamp Issue Commemorating the Battle of Beersheba," in *Australia and Israel: A Diasporic, Cultural and Political Relationship*, ed. Shahar Burla and Dashiel Lawrence, (Eastbourne: Sussex University Press, 2015): 175-91; Lorenzo Veracini, "The Evolution of Historical Redescription in Israel and Australia: The Question of the "Founding Violence"," *Australian Historical Studies* 34, no. 122 (2003): 326-45; Waziyatawin "Malice Enough in their Hearts and Courage Enough in Ours: Reflections on US Indigenous and Palestinian Experiences under Occupation," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 172-89.

past few years), are all cases in point. In point are also cases in which, as is the case for some Jewish-Israeli activist groups, the solidarity with a specific oppressed group is secondary to an internal critique waged by members of the dominant collective towards their representatives, such as when citizens demand more inclusive regulations of citizenship, or when members of former colonies (or present settler colonies) demand to take action against the perduring traces of their colonial endeavors (think of the recent protests in Europe against the celebration of colonial history, or at the demands for land acknowledgment in Australia or Canada).

But generalization can be drawn also towards the more general asset of the white, Western Left: a Left that, both in its institutional and grassroots incarnations, has been failing for decades to offer a convincing political alternative partly due to its incapacity to deal critically with its position of privilege. The imperfect struggles of Jewish-Israeli activists can – through both their failures and their localized successes – offer a prism of interpretation as well as an inspiration for more subversive practices of activism and solidarity from a position of privilege and, more generally, for working towards the acknowledgment and deconstruction of our own power-laden subjectivities and understandings. The thesis has identified in reflexivity towards one's positionality and in the engagement on-the-ground, bodily, and relationally with multiple others two mechanisms that are both encouraged by imperfect struggles and that mutually reinforce each other in engendering subversive, alter-political outcomes. More concretely, 'lessons' can be drawn from how activists put (or not) these mechanisms at work in the various circumstances of their imperfect engagements. From how they acknowledge their complicity with the Zionist system as they use their privilege to the benefit of others, but take this as an opportunity not to excuse or justify such privilege but to become more vocal about it and more aware of its multiplicity and intersectionality. From how they accept to negotiate their presence in the struggle with a variety of other actors, and not to impose the frameworks of solidarity and critique they deem more appropriate. From how they accept to collaborate on 'uncommon ground' with unlikely allies and difficult audiences, and cultivate a radical critique by weaving over time relationships of trust across multiple divides. From how they manage to shun both the toxicity of 'perfect standards' of activism and the comfort zone of 'whatever works,' to find a sustainable balance between self-criticism and self-care, and to rearticulate their relation to Zionism in ways that denounce its wrongs without denying they are its offspring, and not its victims.

Ultimately, the framework of imperfect struggles offers a new way to look at Israel as a 'laboratory' of experimentation of practices that can be exported elsewhere. Not only of control, discrimination, exception, and securitization.[11] And not only of resistance for those who are the targets of the violence

[11] Collins, *Global Palestine*; Halper, *War against the people*; Ghassan Hage *Alter-Politics: Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination*, (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2015); David Lloyd, "Settler colonialism and the state of exception: the example of Palestine/Israel", *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 59-80; Ronit Lentin "Palestine-Israel and state criminality: Exception, Settler Colonialism and Racialization," *State Crime Journal* 5, no. 1 (2016): 32-50; Omar Jabary

of these systems, indigenous peoples and racialized subjects worldwide.[12] But also of a decolonial engagement on the part of those, the majority, who take an active part in these systems, whether they want it or not. Often left un-scrutinized in their problematic endeavours (in literatures that are not 'critical'), or else left out entirely from frameworks of resistance and structural subversion (in those that are most 'critical'), privileged actors, through the defamiliarization and deconstruction of their own deep-seated privileges, play a fundamental role in shaping political and social configurations that be fully liberated by interiorized norms of domination and oppression. Jewish-Israeli activists, with their many failures and few successes, are an important case to turn to in order to build an understanding of how to encourage this effort.

### *4. Border Academics? Lessons from Imperfect Struggles*

Among the fields of critique that can learn from the lessons of Jewish-Israeli activists' imperfect struggles there is, I argue, also the very practice of critical research. As a growing number of auto-ethnographic accounts have highlighted, this endeavour is crossed by tensions engendered by the researcher's different accountabilities and her entanglement in intersecting power dynamics. As I have tried to address in the Introduction and in the auto-ethnographic interludes that have accompanied the chapters of this thesis, I too felt such tensions strongly as I carried out my fieldwork and after, throughout the writing process. Here, as in the realm of political activism, the peculiarity of the Israeli context makes these tensions particularly visible, and the researcher who is willing to see them particularly vulnerable to the dilemmas and discomforts they pose. In this context, it was precisely by looking at and contrasting my experience with that of Jewish-Israeli activists that I not only became more aware and more critical of my own complicities with power, but that I also began to see that coexisting critically with them, instead of remaining stuck in the dilemma of how to overcome them, could generate insights that would have been otherwise impossible to achieve, and offer innovative avenues for subversion also in the way we do research. As a conclusion to this work, I wish to highlight how, through this parallel, the framework of imperfect struggle can offer a contribution to the methodology of critical research.

Scrutinizing the positionality of the researcher, the conditions and consequences of her engagement with the matters of her inquiry, is a practice long established by interpretative paradigms against the positivistic norm of an external, God-like observer, unaffected by and unaffecting the

Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie and Sobhi Samour, "Past is present: Settler colonialism in Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 1-8.; Veracini, Lorenzo, "Israel-Palestine through a settler-colonial studies lens," *Interventions* 21, no. 4 (2019): 568-581.

[12] Collins, *Global Palestine*.

matters of her inquiry.[13] Beyond allowing for the appreciation of the 'trustworthiness' of the claims made by the author, this scrutiny assumes a particular political relevance in research that wants to be emancipatory, and not only through the type of knowledge it produces but through the sites and methods of its production.[14] Researchers of this kind have found themselves taken in the dilemmas of how to align the power-defying message of their work with the power-reproducing practice of research. How to avoid establishing a hierarchy between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' – a relationship that is extractive, objectifying, and often epistemically violent? How to be accountable to the tenets of academic inquiry as well as to our own commitments for social and political change, and produce research that is 'relevant' for both?[15] In sum, how to disrupt the hegemonic hierarchies of people, themes, and practices that academia reproduces while being implicated in it?

The solutions proposed to these dilemmas have tended to coalesce around two poles: upholding the 'norm' of separation between one's academic and political personas, and 'fusing' them within the figure of the "activist researcher."[16] The first response is given, for instance, when researchers find that ethical responsibility towards their interlocutors is best achieved by clearly demarcating between when one is 'doing research' and when one is being a fellow activist, a friend, or an acquaintance. This response prevents particularly intrusive methods of inquiry such as 'hanging out', but also admits that an extractive attitude is justified whenever one is 'doing research.'[17] Another argument is that accountability to one's commitments to social change is best achieved by producing knowledge that is emancipatory in its intent, but also perceivable as 'objective,' and therefore more authoritative towards target audiences and more useful to concerned actors. As it appears, this response finds some ethical consistency within the hegemonic hierarchies of academic inquiry, but fails to challenge its logics.

The second response, by contrast, proposes to uphold the same standards for one's commitment to social change within and outside research endeavours. It argues for the need to break down the boundaries between academic and activist roles: to "reject the false distinction between academia and wider society in conceptualisations of valid sites of struggle and knowledge production" and to refuse the "ivory tower syndrome" that views academics as "professionals" meant to "assist the social and

[13] Donna Haraway, "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective," in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, ed. Carole R. McCann, Seung-Kyung Kim, Emek Ergun, (New York: Routledge, 2021). See also Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*, (London: Routledge, 2012).
[14] See Charles R. Hale, "Activist Research v. Cultural Critique: Indigenous land rights and the contradictions of politically engaged anthropology," *Cultural anthropology* 21, no. 1 (2006): 96-120.
[15] David Croteau, "Which Side are you on? The Tension between Movement Scholarship and Activism," in *Rhyming Hope and History Activists, Academics, and Social Movement Scholarship*, ed. David Croteau, William Hoynes, and Charlotte Ryan, (Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 2005).
[16] Paul Chatterton, Stuart Hodkinson, and Jenny Pickerill, "Beyond Scholar Activism: Making Strategic Interventions Inside and Outside the Neoliberal University," *Acme: An international e-journal for critical geographies* 9, no. 2 (2010); Hale, "Activist Research v. Cultural Critique".
[17] Zagaria, "Defiant Engagements".

political struggles of others [...] rather than as citizens jointly challenging the broader social system."[18] Especially advanced within scholar activism, this proposal has resulted in the formulation of often highly articulated methodological approaches (think for example of Participatory Action Research) based on the alignment of research and activism, both by involving the 'subjects' (generally social movements) more at all stages of research and by encouraging reflexive accounts on the part of the researchers.[19] While animated by the best intentions, this kind of endeavor has tended to set 'perfect standards' of commitment to researchers that are at once hardly attainable – and exhausting for those who try – and in many cases counterproductive.[20] In a painfully reflexive piece, Chatterton, Hodkinson, and Pickerill (signed the Autonomous Geographies Collective) note how activist researchers are still rightfully perceived as "capitalizing" on the unpaid work of activists "for their own career development" and creating "a class of highly paid activist/intellectuals who [...] are highly paid, mobile, powerful and following academic agendas."[21] The authors are ultimately forced to acknowledge "the actually existing boundaries between academia and activism, however much we would wish them away."[22]

It is by showing a way to work critically within these enduring boundaries that Jewish-Israeli activists' imperfect struggles can offer valuable insights to critical researchers. After all, as Hale noted, social movements are "both inspiring and compromised", and should be inspiring precisely *because* they are compromised, and in their compromises produce a "generative tension."[23] Very much like their activism, critical research also occurs in a 'contradictory location' at the intersection of different identities that respond to different norms and are crossed by multiple hierarchies of power that make good intentions have paradoxical effects. In this 'borderland', looking for purity, by either upholding or bringing down those boundaries, is perhaps a misplaced effort. Perhaps, the best we can do as critical researchers is to inhabit this borderland and to struggle imperfectly in it in a never resolved but highly productive tension.

Inhabiting this borderland includes letting our political passions inspire and drive our research endeavours, listening to them carefully and critically, and letting them 'be shaken' in unexpected ways. It involves engaging personally and deeply with those who populate our 'fields' and allow us access into their lives, making ourselves vulnerable in these engagements, becoming entangled and

[18] Chatterton et al., "Beyond Scholar Activism," 246, 250. See also Kevin Gillan and Jenny Pickerill, "The Difficult and Hopeful Ethics of Research on, and with, Social Movements," *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 2 (2012): 133-143; and Ian Maxey, "Beyond Boundaries: Activism, academia, reflexivity and research,", *Area* 31, no. 3 (1999): 199-208.
[19] For a summary of these approaches see Rachel Pain, "Social geography; On action-oriented research," *Progress in Human Geography* 27, no. 5, 2003): 649-657.
[20] For a pessimistic account that concludes that activists researchers need to prioritize one role see Croteau, "Which side are you on?." For an analysis of the counterproductive effects of activist research for both social movements and research itself see Chatterton et al., "Beyond Scholar Activism," Gillan and Pickerill "The Difficult and Hopeful Ethics", Chesters "Social movements and the ethics of knowledge production".
[21] Chatterton et al., "Beyond Scholar Activism", 251.
[22] *Idem*, 260.
[23] Hale, "Activist Research v. Cultural Critique", 98, 103-104.

negotiating a distance but without creating too big a "gap" between our world and theirs.[24] It involves turning our analytical gaze also inwards, allowing our research to be an unsettling process of learning about ourselves as much as about the people and processes we seek to understand. It may involve setting aside our urge to find analytical closure and political gratification in neat categories and embracing instead "a methodology of getting lost [...] in the quest for a less comfortable social science."[25] These efforts may lead us to theories that are "broken" – that 'stay with' paradoxes and tensions and raise more questions than they answer – and that are "lived" – made of an irreducible polyphony of bodies, voices, and experiences.[26] But it is precisely in working (imperfectly) through these tensions and this heterogeneity that lie our best chances to bring forward our own subversive contributions.

[24] See Paul Routledge, "The third space as critical engagement," *Antipode* 28, no. 3 (1996): 402: "when it comes to researching resistance, there has traditionally been what de Certeau (1984: 24-25) refers to as a gap between the time of solidarity and the time of writing. The former is marked by docility and gratitude towards one's hosts, while the latter reveals the institutional affiliations, and the intellectual, professional, and financial profit for which this hospitality is objectively the means."

[25] Patti Lather, "Against empathy, voice and authenticity," *Kvinder, Køn og Forskning* 9, no. 4 (2000): 23

[26] Respectively Wright, *The Israeli Radical Left,* 20; and Routledge, "The third space", 403.

Annex

## Cited Groups

**+972 Magazine**. Independent, online, non-profit magazine, founded in 2010 by a group of Israeli and Palestinian journalists, providing reporting and analysis "directly from the ground in Israel-Palestine." The magazine is "committed to human rights, democracy, and freedom of information, and actively opposes the Israeli occupation." Since 2011, +972 Magazine has been published by a registered non-profit, and since 2014 the same non-profit, together with Just Vision, also co-published the Hebrew-language site Local Call. *Website: https://www.972mag.com (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Anarchists Against the Wall (AATW)**. (Disbanded.) Group of Israeli activists who, during the years of the Second Intifada (2000-2005), started supporting the popular Palestinian resistance to the Israeli Separation Wall through direct action, mostly in the West Bank. Started spontaneously as a number of Israeli citizens joining demonstrations organized by the Palestinian Popular Struggle Coordination Committee, the group eventually adopted the name given to them by the press. *Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/אנרכיסטים-נגד-הגדר-Anarchists-Against-The-Wall-184879698210917/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI).** Israel's "oldest and largest human rights organization," born in 1972 and "dealing with the entire spectrum of rights and civil liberties in Israel and the Occupied Territories." ACRI mainly operates through legal action, documentation and advocacy. *Website: https://www.english.acri.org.il (last accessed: 02.06.2022).*

**ActiveStills**. Collective of Israeli and Palestinian documentary photographers established in 2005 and operating locally in Israel-Palestine. The collective operates "out of the conviction that photography is a vehicle for social and political change," and views itself as part of the international and local struggle against all forms of oppression, racism, and discrimination. One of ActiveStills main foci is to expose the "Zionist settler-colonial project led by Israel against the Palestinian population," and to document the various forms of resistance against it, on both sides of the Green Line. *Website: https://www.activestills.org (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Academia for Equality (AFE).** Organization working to promote "democratization, equality and access to higher education for all communities living in Israel" and "against the complicity of Israeli academia with oppression and denial of education in the occupied Palestinian territories." The organization works to combat "abusive labor relations, sexual harassment and the silencing of critical voices" through actions on the ground, education campaigns, and international calls for solidarity. *Website: https://en.academia4equality.com (last accessed: 04.06.2022).*

**Alternative Information Center (AIC).** Born in 1984 as a socialist-oriented collective of Israelis from Matzpen and Palestinians from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Intended to promote the idea and practice of a joint revolutionary struggle, it used to focus primarily on the production and dissemination of political analyses. At present, the Israeli branch of the AIC has been disbanded, while the Palestinian branch still operates as a cultural and political center in Beit Sahour (West Bank). *Website: https://aicnews.org (last accessed: 12.06.2022).*

**All That's Left (ATL).** Collective of Jewish activists from the diaspora "unequivocally opposed to the occupation and committed to building the diaspora angle of resistance." The collective operates both in Israel-Palestine and abroad across four goals: building a local community for diaspora anti-occupation activists, connecting local and diaspora activist networks, supporting Palestinian civil resistance through solidarity and partnership, and modelling a Jewish way of living in Israel that "rejects and challenges the prevailing narratives of occupation." *Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/AllThatsLeftCollective/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022). Blog: https://allthatsleftcollective.com (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**B'Tselem**. NGO born in 1989 with the broad aim of ending Israeli occupation, and working primarily through documentation of Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. *Website: https://www.btselem.org (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Boycott Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS).** Palestinian-led international movement calling for boycotts, divestments and sanctions as a form of non-violent pressure on Israel until it complies with international law by meeting three demands: ending the occupation and colonization of the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights; recognizing the rights of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and upholding the right of return of Palestinian refugees. Inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement, the movement was launched in 2005 by a consortium of Palestinian civil society bodies. *Website: https://bdsmovement.net (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Boycott from Within (BFW).** Movement of "Palestinians, Jews, citizens of Israel" joining the Palestinian call for a boycott, divestment and sanction campaign against Israel. The movement operates mainly through conducting research into corporate, cultural and State involvement with Israeli occupation and through publicly pressuring public figures and international citizens to abstain from establishing uncritical relations with Israeli institutions. *Website: https://boycottisrael.info (last accessed: 06.06.2022).*

**Black Laundry.** (Disbanded.) LGBTQ+ organization, active during the years of the Second Intifada, who strived to stress the connection between different forms of oppression, and in particular that of lesbians, gays and trans people on the one side and Palestinians occupied and discriminated by Israel on the other. The group opposed pink-washing within Israeli society and became famous for bringing the slogan 'No Pride in Occupation' in Israeli Pride parades.

**Born Equal (BE)**. Collective of Israeli (Jewish and Palestinian) mental health professionals aimed at raising awareness on the psychological costs of "inequality, injustice and the denial of safety for children," and in particular for those "living in the shadow of occupation, ongoing war, racism and discrimination." The collective operates through campaigns of education of relevant professionals, support and partnership with those directly impacted, and the creation of a platform for communication and exchange of ideas. *Website: http://born-equal.net (last accessed: 06.06.2022).*

**Breaking the Silence (BTS).** Israeli organization of former soldiers created after the Second Intifada (2004) and aimed at bringing an end to the occupation by "exposing the Israeli public to the reality of everyday life in the Occupied Territories" and stressing the 'price paid' by Israeli society as a whole for the oppression and subjugation of Palestinian civilian population that such reality entails. The organization works through collecting and publishing testimonies of soldiers, in the forms of booklets, expositions, and educational talks. *Website: https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il (last accessed: 03.06.2022).*

**Coalition of Women for Peace (CWP).** Israeli NGO founded in 2000 "committed to ending the occupation and creating a more just society, while enhancing women's inclusion and participation in the public discourse." CWP works mostly through initiating public campaigns and education and outreach programs. *Website: https://coalitionofwomen.org (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Combatants for Peace (CFP).** Non-profit, volunteer organization of ex-combatant Israelis and Palestinians who have "laid down their weapons and rejected all means of violence" and "work together to end the occupation of Palestine, bring just peace to the land, and demonstrate that Israelis and Palestinians can work and live together." Born in 2006, the organization operates mostly through educational and dialogue-based activities, as well as through direct actions of solidarity in partnership with Palestinian communities in the West Bank. *Website: https://cfpeace.org (last accessed: 03.06.2022).*

**Commanders for Israeli Security (CIS).** Movement composed of retired senior officials of Israeli security agencies advocating for a regional process of political-security arrangements with the Palestinians and the Arab states aimed at the achievement of a two-state agreement. According to the movement, such achievement is the only way that can "ensure Israel's security and its solid Jewish majority" against the threat of a "bi-national state and the end of the Zionist vision". *Website: http://en.cis.org.il (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**De-Colonizer**. Israeli "research and art laboratory" aimed at changing public discourse and building a society that rejects Israel's "colonialist and racist regime" and embraces "equality and peaceful cohabitation." Activities are premised on the cross-fertilization between academia and the public space and include alternative tours in Israel-Palestine and seminars on alternative memory and narrative. *Website: https://www.de-colonizer.org (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Emek Shaveh (ES).** Israeli NGO working to defend cultural heritage rights and protect ancient sites against their use as political tools to "dispossess disenfranchised communities," and instead constructing them as "resources for building bridges and strengthening bonds between peoples and cultures." The organization works in partnership with communities in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Israel to monitor and document archaeological activities and the infringement of Palestinian rights for policy makers and the general public. *Website: https://alt-arch.org/en/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Engaged Dharma (ED).** Israeli voluntary group of people seeking to apply the spiritual practice of Dharma to change the social and political situation of injustice in Israel-Palestine, through "direct action to make society better" as well as work that can "shift the prevailing psycho-social beliefs and value systems that created the current state of affairs." The group joins solidarity actions in the WB, and accompanies them with meditation, self-care and spiritual practices. *Website: https://engagedharma.wordpress.com/english-2/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Free Jerusalem (FJ).** Voluntary-based activist group in Jerusalem, born after the dismantling of the Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement and including many of its original members, that "works to increase awareness and activity against the occupation in general and in East Jerusalem in particular." *Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/freejerusalem/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Friends of Roots (Roots).** Founded by Israeli rabbis and settlers in the West Bank, and involving Palestinian partners, the group is aimed at "challenging the assumptions our communities hold about each other, building trust and creating a new discourse around the conflict in our respective societies" through dialogue initiatives. *Website: https://www.friendsofroots.net (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Gisha**. Israeli not-for-profit organization, founded in 2005, whose goal is to "protect the freedom of movement of Palestinians, especially Gaza residents." Gisha promotes rights guaranteed by international and Israeli law through legal assistance to individuals and organization and through public advocacy. *Website: https://gisha.org (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**HaMoked – Center for the Defence of the Individual.** Israeli human rights organization founded in 1988 following the outbreak of the First Intifada with the main aim of assisting Palestinians of the occupied

territories whose rights are violated due to Israel's policies. Originally working through a "hotline for victims of violence" and for helping Palestinians locate their arrested family members, it expanded its activities to handle human rights violations in spheres including detainee rights, residency rights, travel restrictions, violence by security forces and settlers, punitive home demolition and more. *Website: http://www.hamoked.org/home.aspx (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Human Rights Defenders Fund (HRDF).** Founded in 2011 amidst increasing violations of the rights of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and restrictions on the work of human rights organizations in Israel and the OPT, the Fund provides HRDs with legal support needed to ensure that they can continue carrying out their activism. The fund also provides legal and professional tools through research and documentation, training, and information sharing, and raises global awareness about the status of HRDs in Israel and the OPT. *Website: http://hrdf.org.il (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Imbala**. Cooperative café and cultural center established in West Jerusalem in 2017. Organizing political debates, film screenings, language courses and other social initiatives, it is described as a "communal space [...] for Jerusalemite activists and communities that don't feel safe in this city, namely Palestinians, leftist activists, the LGBTQ community, Mizrahim, people with unique needs and people with revolutionary ideas," a space that can "recreate and redraw the face of this city through furthering joint political and social initiatives." *Website: https://imbala.community/en/ (last accessed: 10.06.2022).*

**International Solidarity Movement (ISM).** Founded in 2001 by one Israeli and two Palestinian activists, it is a "Palestinian-led movement committed to resisting the long-entrenched and systematic oppression and dispossession of the Palestinian population, using non-violent, direct-action methods and principles." ISM aims to support and strengthen the Palestinian popular resistance by mobilizing international participation both on the ground and abroad. *Website: https://palsolidarity.org (last accessed: 20.07.2022).*

**Ir Amim.** Founded in 2000 and active as an NGO since 2004, the organization's mission is to "render Jerusalem a more equitable and sustainable city for the Israelis and Palestinians who share it and to help secure a negotiated resolution on the city" as "the shared capital of two sovereign states." Political in aim, the organization operates through monitoring, reporting, public and legal advocacy, public education and outreach to re-orient the public discourse on Jerusalem. *Website: https://www.ir-amim.org.il/en (last accessed: 07.12.2022).*

**Israeli Black Panthers (IBP).** (Disbanded). Movement active in the 1970s, particularly in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Musrara. Founded by Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews, the group protested against the discrimination they suffered at the hands of the dominant Ashkenazi Jewish elite in Israel, and explicitly connected their struggle to the one of Palestinians.

**Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD).** Israeli "non-violent direct-action organization" established in 1997. Within the broad aims of ending Israel's occupation and achieving a just political settlement, one that revolves around the "creation of a single democratic state," ICHAD specifically focuses on resisting Israel's policy of demolishing Palestinian homes, both in Israel and in the OPT, through resistance on the ground, advocacy within Israel and at the international level, and cooperation with Palestinian communities. The organisation closed its Israeli branch in 2015 and now carries out its work from its international branches. *Website: https://icahd.org (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Kerem Navot (KN).** Israeli NGO founded in 2012 to monitor and research the Israeli land policy of land-grabbing and Palestinian dispossession in the West Bank. By using "comprehensive land-use research, employing methodologies developed over years of experience in the field," KN seeks to illuminate gaps that exist on the subject. *Website: https://www.keremnavot.org/english (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Machsom Watch (MW).** Volunteer organization of Israeli women who are "peace activists from all sectors of society" and oppose the Israeli occupation, the appropriation of Palestinian land and the denial of Palestinian human rights. The organization, founded in 2001, works by monitoring and documenting human rights violations at checkpoints, and has the aim of "influencing public opinion in Israel and throughout the world" and restoring "the fabric of Israeli society and the values of democracy." *Website: https://machsomwatch.org (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Matzpen – The Socialist Organization in Israel.** (Disbanded) Founded in 1962 by Jewish and Arab former members of the Israeli Communist Party, the organization was active during the 1960s and 1970s, went through a series of splits and was eventually dismantled in 1985. The organization, which had a socialist ideology premised on both class-struggle and the support of Palestinian national rights, viewed Zionism as a colonizing project, and strove for an "Arab-Jewish revolutionary struggle for a united socialist Arab East." *Website: https://matzpen.org/english/ (last accessed: 02.06.2022).*

**Mesarvot**. Meaning 'refusal' in Hebrew, Mesarvot is a "network of activists whose goal is to support political refusal and promote discourse on insubordination among the Israeli public," seen as a central political act against military occupation and the general social consensus in Israel. The network supports Israeli refusers at all level of service through providing a platform for political-critical discussion and through individual support to conscientious objection. *Website: https://mesarvot.wixsite.com/mesarvot?fbclid=IwAR0bG-tfmyHItV9HULfUAsovN5AfdwlMM3h-n7jgkgoe8onbjq6cI_aKl7w (last accessed: 06.06.2022).*

**Molad**. Israeli think tank founded in 2012 by two academics who were also prominent members of the Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement. Guided by a combination of "progressive values" and "a realistic approach to the political and geopolitical challenges of Israeli reality," the organization conducts research and policy advice that speak to Israeli society concerns for security and attempt to rearticulate them in more democratic terms. *Website: http://www.molad.org/en/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF).** Organization founded in 1997 by ra partnership of Arab and Jewish residents of the "Negev/Naqab" region and aimed preeminently at addressing the discriminations against the Arab-Bedouin communities of the area and the achievement of "full civil rights and equality." The organization works mainly through monitoring and documentation and legal actions. *Website: https://www.dukium.org (last accessed: 17.06.2022).*

**New Profile (NP).** Inspired by feminist and anti-militarist values, this Israeli NGO works to problematize the Israeli mainstream approach that glorifies the military, and to advocate for a de-militarization of Israeli ethos. The organization targets mostly Israeli youth in age of conscription and offers logistical help to those who eventually decide to avoid it. *Website: http://newprofile.org/english (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**One Democratic State Campaign (ODSC).** Jointly launched by Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish activists, intellectuals, and academics in 2018, the campaign calls for "the end of the colonial Zionist regime" and the establishment of a "single democratic state in historic Palestine, based on political, social, economic and cultural justice." The founders' aim is to "transform the campaign into a broad popular movement" by mobilizing and coordinating with civil society actors in Israel-Palestine and worldwide. *Website: https://onestatecampaign.org/en/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**One Struggle.** (Disbanded). Active in the 2000s, the group focused on the struggle for animal rights but insisted on its connection with all other forms of oppression, including that of Israelis towards Palestinians. The group took distance from other Israeli left-wing groups considered fixated more on ideological debates than on practice. *Website: https://web.archive.org/web/20070128181912/http://www.onestruggle.org/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI).** Organization established in 1999 and aimed at the eradication of the culture of torture in Israel through legal action for torture victims, training of medical and mental health professionals, and public advocacy. *Website: http://stoptorture.org.il/?lang=en (last accessed: 17.06.2022).*

**Peace Now (PN).** Self- defined as the "largest and longest-standing Israeli movement," the organization was founded in March 1978 to "advocate for peace through public pressure." With the stated political goal of achieving a two-state solution based on 1967 borders, it preeminently works for ending Israeli occupation and settlement in the West Bank. It does so through the gathering of information from the field (mostly through the department Settlement Watch) and its dissemination across Israeli public through "demonstrations, calls for action, lectures, debates, tours, public campaigns and more." *Website: https://peacenow.org.il/en (last accessed: 02.06.2022).*

**Physicians for Human Rights – Israel (PHRI).** Humanitarian organization working to grant the right to health to all people under Israel responsibility. The organization works mostly via the provision of medical services to people with limited access to medical care ("primarily migrants, refugees, and Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza"), and takes advocacy action against the "discriminatory and abusive structures" that endanger right to health, in particular the occupation. *Website: https://www.phr.org.il/en/ (last accessed: 10.06.2022).*

**Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC).** Coordinating body of the Palestinian popular committees organizing non-violent resistance against the various forms of Israeli occupation and colonization across the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Formed in 2009, the PSCC works to re-ignite Palestinian resistance in the spirit of the First Intifada.

**PsychoActive.** Group of mental health professionals, including Palestinian ones, focusing on the psychological consequences of the situation of occupation and tension "for occupied and occupier." The group aims at sparking reflection among the medical health sector on the specific socio-political context in which it operates, and provides psychological support and training to people variously affected by the occupation, including Palestinian and Israeli activists. *Website: https://psychoactive.wixsite.com/website (last accessed: 06.06.2022).*

**Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR).** Rabbinic organization founded in 1988 and comprising rabbis and Jews from different traditions. The organization forwards the Jewish humanitarian tradition of caring "for the safety and welfare of the stranger, the different and the weak" against the mainstream Israeli "nationalist and isolationist" understanding. It acts mostly through interposition activities in the West Bank as well as through religion-based educational activities towards the Israeli public. *Website: https://rhr.org.il/eng/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Return Solidarity (RS).** Self-defined as a "group of anti-Zionist Israelis working in solidarity with Palestinians in support of the Great March of Return," the group was founded in 2018 shortly after the beginning of the march and the following Israeli military response. The group organizes direct actions and protests, such as those at the Gaza fence, in coordination with and following the lead of Palestinian activists. *Website: https://returnsolidarity.com (last accessed: 06.06.2022).*

**Road to Recovery (R2R).** Non-profit humanitarian organization of volunteers providing logistic and medical assistance to Palestinians. The organization's main activity is to drive Palestinians who have permits for medical assistance in Israel from the checkpoints to the hospitals. *Website: http://www.roadtorecovery.org.il/Site/en/EnIndex.html (last accessed: 06.06.2022).*

**Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement (SJSM).** (Disbanded). Movement originated in the 2010s from a spontaneous mobilization of Israelis in support of Palestinian residents and activists of the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah impacted or threatened by house eviction at the benefit of Jewish religious settlers.

**Standing Together (ST)**. Israeli group forwarding a political analysis that stresses the interconnections between the ongoing occupation, the growing social and economic disparities within Israeli society, and the attacks by the government on democratic freedoms of both Jewish and Arab-Palestinian citizens. The group has different sections across Israel and focuses on movement-building strategies, including the participation and coordination with different socio-economic struggles across the country. *Website: https://www.standing-together.org/english (last accessed: 04.06.2022).*

**Ta'ayush**. Born in the years of the Second Intifada, this grassroots collective used to bring hundreds of Israelis to the West Bank with food, medical supplies, and physical presence. Today, Ta'ayush counts fewer numbers and is active preeminently in the South Hebron Hills and in the Jordan Valley to help Palestinian farmers and shepherds carry out their agricultural activities through the practice of interposition. *Website: https://www.taayush.org. Blog: https://touchingphotographs.com/tag/taayush/ (last accessed: 20.07.2022).*

**Tag Meir** (TM). Israeli organization born in response to the violent and desecration attacks perpetrated against Palestinians by a group of right-wing settlers (Tag Mechir, meaning 'price tag'). The group is inspired by democratic values and "traditional Jewish values of loving our neighbors," and acts mostly by bringing symbolic solidarity in the forms of vigils and "condolence visits" to victims of violence. *Website: https://www.tag-meir.org.il/en/ (last accessed: 06.06.2022).*

**Tarabut**. (Disbanded.) Joint Arab-Jewish social movement seeking to address the problematic division done by Israeli politics between struggles against the occupation and struggles against inequality and for social justice within Israel itself. Tarabut was founded in 2006 and has been active in a number of ways, namely against the house evictions of Palestinians as well as of residents of Tel Aviv popular neighborhoods, and with a particular focus on the issue of discriminations against Mizrahi Jews. *Website: http://www.tarabut.info/he/home/ (last accessed: 20.07.2022).*

**Two States One Homeland (TSOH).** Political initiative of Israeli and Palestinian activists promoting as a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the idea of "Two States, One Homeland," i.e. the creation of a confederation of two nation-states based on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as capital of both, freedom of movement across the two states, the possibility of Israeli citizens to live as permanent residents in the Palestinian state (and vice versa), and sharing a number of institutions to regulate aspects of security, economy, human rights, reparations and reconciliations. *Website: https://www.alandforall.org/english/?d=ltr (last accessed: 06.06.2022).*

**Who Profits (WP)**. Founded in 2007 as a project of CWP, it is a research center dedicated to exposing the commercial involvement of Israeli and international corporations in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Syrian lands. The center publishes reports and maintains an online database of corporations complicit in the occupation. *Website: https://whoprofits.org (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Women in Black – Israel (WIB).** Group of Israeli women holding weekly vigils at Israeli crossroads against the occupation. Born in Jerusalem during the First Intifada, the group's core idea has spread and today several WIB exist worldwide inspired by values of "peace with justice" and anti-militarism. *Website: http://womeninblack.org/vigils-arround-the-world/middle-east/israel/ (last accessed: 06.06.2022).*

**Women Wage Peace (WWP).** The group was founded in 2014 with the aim of "promoting a political agreement to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" mainly by lobbying among Knesset members and by organizing marches throughout the country. Inspired by feminist and peace values, the group "does not support any one particular solution to the conflict" and, with several thousand adherents, is allegedly the "largest grassroots movement in Israel." *Website: https://womenwagepeace.org.il/en/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Youth Against Settlements (YAS).** Group of Palestinian activists acting to oppose the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the city of Hebron. The group follows the principles of non-violent resistance and acts primarily through information tours, often conducted in partnership with Israeli organizations, as well as through activities of protection, education and empowerment of the targeted Palestinian community. *Website: http://www.yashebron.org (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Yesh Din (YD).** Israeli non-profit legal organization working to protect the human rights of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. The organization combines case-by-case legal assistance with public and legal advocacy against structural violations of Palestinian rights. *Website: https://www.yesh-din.org/en/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Yesh Gvul (YG).** Born during the Israeli war on Lebanon in 1982 as a political movement aimed at supporting conscientious objectors, the organization still supports reserve soldiers who want to refuse service through legal petitions and information work. *Website: http://www.yesh-gvul.org.il/english (last accessed: 06.06.2022).*

**Youth of Sumud (YOS).** Informal group of Palestinian youth active in the South Hebron Hills to conduct non-violent struggle against occupation and settlements and to provide logistic support and empowerment to targeted communities. *Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/youthofsumud/ (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

**Zochrot**. Israeli NGO founded in 2002 and working to "promote acknowledgement and accountability for the ongoing injustices of the Nakba and the reconceptualization of the Return as the imperative redress of the Nakba and a chance for a better life for all the country's inhabitants". The organization employs various means to engage the Israeli public, such as film festivals, workshops, debates, and tours that focus on the spatial rearrangements of the landscape of Israel-Palestine. *Website: https://zochrot.org (last accessed: 18.06.2022).*

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