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“Palestinian Resistance and International Solidarity:
Variations of Identity/Alterity in Local and Transnational
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1 Introduction

The title of the present thesis already indicates much of what it offers. Firstly, the term resistance in “Palestinian resistance” presupposes an offensive defence as political activism of people against a somewhat more powerful opponent. And since the people who resist are Palestinians who live and act predominantly in a specific locality – the village of Bil’in - this “Palestinian Resistance” is also essentially a local struggle. Although Bil’in can be called a local village, it is much more than that. The continuous influx of Israeli activists and foreigners from Europe, North America and elsewhere changes the local place into a multi-levelled and transnationally connected stage of activism. Nevertheless, as a struggle against the local outcomes of the Israeli occupation and of settlement policy, Bil’in’s resistance is also essentially local. The local stage of activism represents a single site where human interactions and the construction of meanings take place; it is a multi-dimensional field, both local and transnational, where identities can be studied among people who participate in the “same” resistance, but who have very diverse backgrounds, aims and motivations. The present work is the product of anthropological research on variations of identity/alterity among political activists in local and transnational spaces. Moreover, it should be read as an argument against essentialist approaches to identity because it highlights and tests the many dimensions and variations of identities.

1.1 My Ways to the Field

My interest in Palestine and Israel grew from a fascination for the Arabic language and the people who speak it. Beyond that, I have been engaged with what is usually referred to as “Peace and Conflict Studies” through my studies in anthropology and political science. The combination of these two personal interests consequently enthused me to discover more about the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Palestinian culture and politics

Summer 2008 was when I first travelled to Israel and the Palestinian West Bank, with the original aim of further understanding the country and improving my Arabic language skills. During the course of this first encounter I was heavily confronted with various political

issues, including international activism. Within two weeks of staying at one of East Jerusalem's busy hostels I met several activists and learned about their activities, motivations and reasons for joining Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. Soon more after I found myself regularly attending one of Bil'in's weekly demonstrations, where I realized - through participation and observation – that it is an exceptionally valuable field for anthropological research.

It came as no surprise that I decided to conduct two months of research in the West Bank prior to the summer of 2009. While I had originally planned to cover various aspects of international activism in the whole of Israel/Palestine, it soon became clear to me that I would have to narrow my scope and clarify the focus of my topic. I finally chose to focus on a single stage of activism, so that the processes of communication and complex interactions at a local junction (Bil'in) would be researched. Retrospectively it should be said that narrowing my field and choosing a specific site of human experience and action was the best decision I could have made. The West Bank village of Bil'in provided the necessary base and stable variable for my research according to the requirements of my research aims.

1.2 The Topic

Bil'in is a small village of roughly 1.800 inhabitants located northwest of Ramallah and several kilometres east of the Green Line. At first sight it seems like a peaceful place with a scenic view overlooking surrounding valleys and hilltops. In fact it is the most prominent face of contemporary Palestinian grassroots resistance to Israeli occupation in the West Bank.

There has been a continuous presence of international and Israeli activists in popular Palestinian resistance since the founding of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) and Israeli solidarity groups. Activists primarily come to support Palestinians in their local struggle against Israeli occupation through solidarity groups and other networks. The village of Bil'in can be seen as a local stage of interplay between foreign (so called “international activists”), Israeli and Palestinian individuals who undertake certain roles and have varying motivations, expectations and reasons to come. These roles are created by diverse and flexible senses of identity and alterity and are shaped by the interplay on the local stage of activism. The most important event of activism in Bil'in is the weekly demonstration where hundreds of

Palestinians, Israelis and internationals regularly confront the Israeli military at the Separation Barrier.

1.3 Research Question

So what exactly is it that I wanted to find out by doing research among political activists in the village of Bil'in? The following research question represents the main riddle I hope to solve with the present work.

How do international, Israeli and Palestinian activists who are or were active in the village of Bil'in view their own and each other's roles in regard to identity and alterity, and how does the interaction between and within these groups influence their identities and alterities?

In short, this inquiry should identify and analyse the various meanings arising out of activists' actions and interactions and their relevance for their identity/alterity. The question raised above represents the core of my research interest and since it should include everything covered in the present thesis it is rather open and not very detailed. In order to specify the research interest it seems necessary to introduce a few influential sub-questions:

- What are the activists aiming at with their actions?
- How do Israeli and international activists interpret their involvement in Palestinian resistance?
 - How do they evaluate their own role and how do they see the roles of the other parties involved?
 - How are the images of such roles shaped?
 - How do respective forms of identities and alterities of Israeli, international and Palestinian activists relate to agency?
- How can situational flexibility and multidimensionality of identity/alterity be shown on the basis of empirical data?
- How are the images of activists and role-understandings produced socially and figuratively?
 - How are these images influenced by existing narratives, collective action and preparatory trainings?

- What is the interplay between the local and the global world of activism?
 - To what extent do power and space matter for activists' identities and alterities?
 - What transnational functions do international activists provide?

1.4 Aims and Scopes of the Thesis

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is often portrayed in terms of binary oppositions and of dichotomies, i.e. as consisting of two irreconcilable monoliths. *The* Palestinians against *the* Israelis, Muslims against Jews, and so forth; specific stories of everyday struggles and the meanings involved in and reasons for acts of resistance often are left out. By researching resistance in Bil'in as a local stage of political activism, where people from all over the world as well as Israelis join in Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation, I hoped to find new insights about the many dimensions of the conflict and to contribute something to the academic discourse over identity. By integrating various concepts such as space, power, agency, symbolism and ritual into one single framework surrounding a core idea of identity/alterity, I also aim at highlighting the many interconnections and mutual influences of these concepts. Above all, I understand the present work as well-grounded empirical research that stands in sharp contrast to ideologically based essentialist approaches to identity, and to reductionist representations of a conflict that has always been and still is multidimensional and complex.

1.5 Writing on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Writing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict represents a demanding challenge for every academic. The first major problem is the quantity of already existing works on the topic. The second is the danger of bias. Although there are mountains of books on innumerable aspects of the conflict, not many of them are based on intensive fieldwork and almost none are anthropological works. As an anthropologist who has done intensive fieldwork on a very specific topic in – at least this is what I hope – an innovative manner, I want to fill an existing gap and open a new perspective.

The problem of balance and objectivity is the second major challenge for those writing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Accusations fly over the smallest indication of writing in favour of one or the other side. I would not be writing on identity if I aimed at providing objective results since identity always designates social subjectivities which make sense in relation to context, culture, ideology, and so forth. This is why the present work cannot be objective, although I strive for balance and fairness. The subject and its position relative to others is essential for the understanding of identity and true anthropological research can only translate and interpret these subjectivities. In doing so, one can be accused of leaning towards one or the other side. The present work is not intended to advocate either Palestinian or Israeli interests; it is rather aimed at explaining processes of identity and at answering questions. I believe that “the purpose (and genius) of anthropological ethnography is surely that it takes people seriously” (Cohen 2000a: 6). Ultimately, this is the only guarantee I can provide.

2 Research Design

“The value of empirical evidence can only be properly evaluated by understanding the details of how the research was conducted” (Johnson 2000: 132). In order to make a research process successful and comprehensible after completion, it is advisable to develop a research design with a clear strategy or plan for how to reach the ultimate research goal. As the ultimate goal is hardly ever clear at the onset of a research process, the design should also be flexible. Besides good planning and organizing, a methodological approach that fits the research topic and the field is equally important for successful research. It is important not to use idealized prescriptions of research design, but a comprehensible mix of exploratory and explanatory tools to meet the individual requirements of a given topic and field. In order to make the field I have studied comprehensible, it seems necessary to explain it and structure it in a simple way before turning to more specific methodological matters.

2.1 Structuring and Explaining the Field

Metaphors are powerful tools of explanation. Edmund Leach explained the communicative system of ritual processes by using an orchestra as a metaphor in his famous book “Culture and Communication” (Leach 1976). Inspired by Leach, the metaphor of a theatre play consisting of a “stage”, “actors”, a “screenplay” and “producers” is employed here in order to provide the reader with a dense and clear introduction into the processes within the field of activism in the village of Bil’in.

First of all, I understand the stage on which our imaginative “play of activism” takes place as having two interconnected analytical dimensions: a local and a transnational one. International activists take part in local struggles, and local stories are communicated into a transnational space. The actors on the stage are Israeli, international and Palestinian activists, the Israeli army and the local Palestinian population. The focus of my research lies on processes which influence identity and alterity of Israeli, international and Palestinian activists. For this reason the Israeli army and the general Palestinian population of Bil’in are not included within the scope of my research.

Israeli and international activists participate together with Palestinians in demonstrations and other actions. Both these groups are outsiders who come to support the local population. The Israeli activists are inside-outsiders, because they come to resist the politics of their own country together with the Palestinian population in the occupied territories. The political views of these Israelis are mostly anti-Zionist and some of them call themselves Anarchists. They challenge aspects of the nationalism they grew up with by showing solidarity with the Palestinians, who they were raised to see as enemies.

The international activists are outsiders who voluntarily chose to become involved as insiders. Whereas their national identity might play a considerable role back home, all foreign activists are simply referred to as internationals throughout their stay in the Palestinian territories. An international expects and is also expected to play a very specific supportive role in the resistance struggle. Privilege, power and agency are important aspects of this role.

In Bil’in, Palestinian activists are the locals and as such the main reason for the other two groups to join. They are the ones everybody comes to support. For them, resisting the local impact of the Israeli occupation developed out of a necessity. They suffer from political

suppression and mobility-restrictions; for them participation in demonstrations is risky; they are much more vulnerable and often subject to military law. On the contrary, Israelis and internationals are much less vulnerable and they voluntarily chose to be part of the struggle from a privileged position.

Besides the actors and a stage, a theatre play needs a “screenplay”. The screenplay of activism can be understood as a “socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al. 1998: 52). Such a realm is the web of interpretations over activists’ roles and self-understandings that exist within the figured world of activism. The following question underlines how specific figured worlds can be: “What if there were a world called academia, where books were so significant that people would sit for hours on end, away from friends and family, writing them?” (ibid: 49). Like academia, activism in Bil’in is a specific world of interpretation where meanings are implicit but often not understood in the same way from people outside this world.

The figured world of activism is influenced by “producers”. Every individual is a producer of meaning within many interpretative realms. Beyond that, meanings are produced in specific preparatory activist-trainings and collective action. For instance, the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) is very important as a source of potential role-interpretations. ISM coaches and trains foreign activists and also confronts individuals with certain role-expectations and diverse sets of identity-offerings. Like theatre-actors who are confronted with a screenplay, activists are able to accept certain aspects of their own role whilst they might deny others. Consequently, one’s management of the various meanings within the screenplay impacts upon respective role-interpretations as aspects of identity and alterity.

In order to comprehend all elements of the field described above I have done anthropological research on various levels. I will start to explain this research process with a short chronological overview.

2.1.1 The Research in Three Phases

Before I started the actual research, I had already collected some experience among activists the year before. Shortly after having decided to focus on international activism and identity in

the West Bank I began to read more specific literature and talked to some local experts about the topic. After these early inquiries, I came to the conclusion that narrowing my scope by researching solely among those activists who are or were active in the village of Bil'in is legitimate and fruitful. This restriction is legitimate because Bil'in represents a specific stage of activism and as such allowed me to integrate a concept of space and its relation to power and identity into my research. As a first sample I had informal conversations with coordinators of the ISM and Palestinian activists, who could be called "local experts". The interpretation of these combined with observations made on my first visit to the village led to the formulation of various categories which in turn influenced the selection of readings. Data-collection, reading and interpretation formed a circular process. The simultaneous involvement of data-collection and analysis also helps to keep control over the research process (Charmaz 2001: 248). Grounded theory methods also "force the researcher to attend closely to what happens in the empirical world" (ibid: 249). In order to be able to attend closely to the empirical world I had to be where action takes place.

In the second phase of research, participatory observation provided the key tool for researching activism in Bil'in as it took place. I spent much time with activists and tried to participate in everyday life by joining in various actions. In doing so I had to find the right balance between observation and participation; between being an anthropologist and an activist (see chapter 3). During participation in demonstrations and night patrols, I constantly took field notes and asked questions wherever possible. Besides these rather informal and participatory investigations, interviews were conducted among those activists who appeared most promising regarding my research interest. Throughout this research process I tried to engage in participant observation, interviews and interpretation as parallel as possible. After returning home to Ramallah from a field trip I usually interpreted and structured the research material and often discovered new ideas after doing so.

The third phase of research consisted of a computer-assisted process of structuring and interpreting the material. By using the German qualitative-research program "Atlas.ti", a well-structured process of interpretation and the development of categories and first conclusions were made possible. Field notes, interviews and literature-excerpts were all accessible through one file on the computer and the user interface of the program helped to combine data with anthropological theory.

2.2 Methodological Approach

If doing research among people is about the understanding and the explanation of socio-cultural processes, “the researcher seeks to learn how they [the people] construct their experience through their actions, intentions, beliefs, and feelings” (Charmaz 2001: 248). I chose to work in the style of the “Grounded Theory Methodology” (see Glaser/Strauss 1967; Charmaz 1990, 2001; Strauss and Corbin 1990), although I did not base my research on any predetermined process. Instead, I used the foundations and main arguments of it as a landmark throughout my research.

According to Charmaz (2001: 248), the main characteristics of Grounded Theory Methodology are the following: a) simultaneity of data-collection and data analysis; b) codes and categories are gained through analysing data and not by preset hypothesis; c) the continuous writing of so called Memos (comments and interpretations) bridges data-collection with the first pieces of writing; d) well-guided theoretical sampling and e) literature research as a process paralleling data-analysis while also representing an ongoing circular process. These characteristics, besides some others, represent the cornerstones of the theoretical approach used throughout my research.

While I initially had the intention to research among Palestinian, Israeli and International activists by using the same research questions, it soon turned out that even though all of these activists join in the same actions, they were so different regarding identity/alterity that I had to develop a special approach for each of them. While the “Grounded Theory Methodology” provided the keynote - the design - in my research, other deployed methods such as participant observation, interviews and data-evaluation need separate attention.

2.2.1 Participant Observation

“Participant Observation is accepted almost universally as the central and defining method of research in cultural anthropology” (Dewalt et al. 2000: 259), and its application is easy and difficult at the same time. One could say that mere participation and observation was an easy task. In fact, quite the contrary is the case, especially because handling this method means finding the adequate balance between two extremes: observation and participation. The term

“participant observation” represents an oxymoron; it is an antithesis because it suggests that one should *not only* observe, but also *not fully* participate (see Illius 2003: 76). One of the main advantages is that participation makes empathic understanding possible. “When we want to know the reasons or purposes underlying the meaningful behaviour (including speech) of other people” (Schweizer 2000: 58), we need to become like the other, or at least we can learn to understand the other through experiencing similar situations as he or she does. Hannerz writes that “as a fieldworker, one should participate in just about everything, become a well-known and accepted person –simultaneously ‘stranger and friend’” (Hannerz 2003: 31).

What makes participant observation a fruitful method in anthropological research is not only participation and observation but also the systematic use of the collected information for scientific purposes. It is an analytic tool because it enhances the quality of interpretation and it is data collection through “active participation” (Dewalt et al. 2000: 262ff). “Being actively engaged in the lives of people brings the ethnographer closer to understanding the participants’ point of view” (ibid: 261). Ultimately I was able to interpret what activists told me in interviews and conversations against the background of the experiences collected by doing participant observation.

2.2.2 Interviews

While my Arabic language skills certainly contributed to an enhanced understanding in participant observation and informal conversations with Palestinians, they were not developed enough for adequate use in interviews. Such informal conversations are no less valuable than structured interviews. They are what Spradley calls “friendly conversations” which, according to him, were like ethnographic interviews. Moreover, he writes that “it is best to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants” (Spradley 2001: 334). Such friendly conversations complemented and inspired much of the information gathered in more structured interviews. In contrast to “friendly conversations” held in a mix of English and Arabic, all interviews were conducted in the English language, with the exception of one in German. As I am aware of the limitations of my restricted understanding of Arabic and other relevant languages, I won’t make any effort to hide these flaws. In a multilingual and multinational field, such as activism in Bil’in where Arabic, Hebrew and English are present

alongside a handful of European languages spoken as mother tongues, it is clear that language barriers will exist as one can hardly be expected to speak all of them. Well-guided theoretical sampling was possible in spite of this lack of language competences.

Here, well-guided means both theoretical guidance and following new directions emerging out of continuous data-interpretation. Most of my interview-partners were chosen on the basis of insights gained through participant observation. The first person interviewed, an international activist, was chosen more or less freely and the interview had exploratory character. The questions asked during interviews were semi-structured and based on my research interest in dynamic processes of identity/alterity. They often changed in reaction to new directions emerging out of new insights. Thus sampling has to be understood as a process influenced by the simultaneous involvement in data-collection, reading and interpretation. It follows that emerging theory and empiricism always determine each other.

In total eight interviews were conducted. Four of them with international activists of which one was Jewish-American and as such treated as a special case, three with Israeli activists, none among whom was Christian or Muslim, and one with a local Palestinian coordinator. The obvious imbalance – four internationals, three Israelis, and just one Palestinian – derives from my focus on foreign activists. Investigating in more detail the subjective meanings emerging out of regular resistance for the Palestinians of Bil'in would have been an admirable goal. Unfortunately, this would have demanded a far more extensive inquiry into the village life and politics, for which I simply did not have the resources. In addition to this restriction, I decided relatively early in my research process that what interests me most about activism in Bil'in is its international, “non-native” and supra-local component. Keeping in mind these reasons, the unbalanced selection of my interview partners – which is leaning towards Israeli and international activists – might be understandable, even though it is not a valid excuse.

Interview questions included both specific categories relevant for a single interviewee and categories used in all interviews. For instance all interviewees were asked about how they viewed their own roles and those of the other activists within local resistance; on the other hand each of them provided specific and often very unique insights. Using a semi-structured format facilitated “the collection of new information, providing the flexibility to explore different topics in-depth with different informants” (Weller 2000: 373). The openness of the interview-structure didn't result in a lack of comparability since many of the categories complemented and contrasted each other.

2.2.3 Structure and Interpretation

Interpreting in Grounded Theory means building categories out of potential topics which arise out of the interpretation of small but presumably significant parts of text. The analysis of relations among emerging categories by comparing and contrasting them - together with the taking of notes (“memo-writing”) about hypothesis and new directions for the research - allows the analyst “to become more and more ‘grounded’ in the data” (Bernard/Ryan 2000: 608). Memo writing binds the analyst to the data and forces him or her to adopt an ongoing process of interpreting data against the background of emerging theory and hypothesis.

In order to know where to find data and how to link categories and codes with each other it is indispensable to structure the data in a suitable manner. The computer program “Atlas.ti” formed an important part in the overall research design because it contributed much to a successful and effective research process and proved especially helpful in simultaneous coding and memo-writing; thus, it supported the grounded development of categories. By having everything from interview-transcripts to emerging hypothesis and literature-excerpts in one so-called “hermeneutic unit” – which is a single window on the computer screen that lets one access, overview and link everything very easily – I was able to concentrate all my energy on the process of interpretation. In short, the process of interpretation as applied in the present research could be described as follows: initial free coding, focused coding, comparison and interpretation, building of categories, testing the categories against the data and more focused coding and memo-writing throughout the whole process. “Memo-writing is much like free writing or pre-writing” (Charmaz 2001: 260), it provides the bridge from emerging hypothesis and theory to writing the first paragraphs.

3 On Researching Activism and Arising Dilemmas

“Anthropological researchers must expect to encounter ethical dilemmas at every stage of their work, and must make good-faith efforts to identify potential ethical claims and conflicts in advance when preparing proposals and as projects proceed. A section raising and responding to potential ethical issues should be part of every research proposal” (AAA Code of Ethics).

One of the often ignored aspects of research is the role of the researcher throughout the process. As “anthropological fieldwork underlines a commitment to empirical research and to the task of interpreting culture and identity, one’s own as well as that of others” (Rew/Campbell 1999: 21), I intend to turn a critical view of inquiry through 180 degrees towards myself in order to provide the reader with background information about the advantages and disadvantages of my position as an embedded researcher.

Carolyn Nordstrom has conducted extensive ethnographic research in fields connected with crime and conflict and writes in her book “Fieldwork Under Fire”: “To be able to discuss violence, one must go where violence occurs” and “research it as it takes place” (Nordstrom/Robben 1996: 4). In order to become positioned where identity processes take place, I had to place myself in the daily actions of activists and the locations where they were carried out. Therefore, I joined demonstrations, followed activists on night-patrols and stayed in the same homes they lived in. Hence, I was partly embedded.

In addition to the physical proximity between a researcher and his field, the necessity of being socially close to the people needs to be considered. In my case this included building trust and showing a considerate amount of solidarity with activists’ aims. However, despite articulating solidarity with both the local and international resistance in Bil’in, I had to be aware of some critical dilemmas.

One was that I had to draw a line between my political involvement and my position as a researcher. Advocacy and anthropology are to a degree incompatible. I entirely agree with Hastrup and others when they write that “to be advocates anthropologists have to step outside their profession because no ‘cause’ can be legitimated in anthropological terms” (Hastrup et al. 1990: 301). It should be understood that stepping outside the profession allows much flexibility, because as a researcher one is able to step in and out of various situations and contexts and can thereby react on the ever changing demands of the field. One of these demands is trust and social proximity. By articulation of sympathy and participation in demonstrations and actions, this can help to overcome these demands, but as a means to an end and not as an anthropological objective. Only then is it possible to fulfil the aim of ethnographic research which is primarily to explain and not to change. I aim to explain variations of identity and alterity among activists, therefore I consequently advocate this aim, but through knowledge.

Another difficulty to address is that of political bias. One could criticize that my work is unbalanced and biased because the “other side” – the actors of the Israeli military - has not been the primary aim of my research, which is to explain variations of identity and alterity among activists and not to explain interactions between Israeli soldiers and activists. Nevertheless, the “other side” and their interactions do play a role as a subjectively interpreted other which will be shown later on. Ultimately, every research has dark spots uncovered by its scope. However, a political bias is something different.

Another alleged reason for accusing my work of being biased might be that I am an Austrian citizen. Experience by critics of Israel has shown that one has to expect accusations over being anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish if he or she criticises Israeli policies. These accusations often come very easily and usually mistake criticism directed towards Israeli policies for Anti-Semitism. There is no magic formula that helps to avoid such accusations. Moreover, there is no need for defending honest and fact-based criticism of Israel since in the most cases accusations over allegedly anti-Semitic content are unjustified.

4 State of the Arts

The amount of books available about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is certainly huge. At first sight it seems as if almost every topic has already been covered by someone at some point. This might hold true for the number of publications, but not necessarily for their quality and their variety. Those publications based on extensive fieldwork are especially difficult to find. I would like to introduce the anthropological foundations on which the present thesis is built and the niches it hopes to complete alongside three domains. The first one includes those anthropological works which cover aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the occupied Palestinian territories in the narrow sense. The second domain is that of important anthropological contributions to identity theory and the third one covers space, transnational connections and globalisation.

Two noteworthy anthropological works that give a better understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are the works of Lori A. Allen and Julie Peteet. Allen has mainly written about life under occupation and the socio-political problems emerging out of it (2002a, 2006),

and about various aspects of Palestinian resistance (2002b) for the Washington based “Middle East Report”. Even though she sees herself as being influenced by social anthropology, her articles are rather political analysis than work based on in depth anthropological fieldwork. Julie Peteet’s main focus lies on the political anthropology of the Middle East. Her book “Landscapes of Hope and Despair” on refugees and identity (2005) and another article on refugees, resistance and identity (2001) are both based on long-term fieldwork. Her work touches upon many aspects of locality and identity and her insightful writings contributed greatly to a better understanding of the relations between identity, place and resistance. Unfortunately, not much anthropological research has been done on grassroots resistance and activism in the occupied Palestinian territories. I hope that the outcome of my research about local Palestinian activism and international solidarity represents an adequate new attempt and an innovative contribution to the anthropology of Israel/Palestine.

Happily, I could resort to a solid and insightful inventory of literature on identity theory. The present work has been strongly influenced by the volume “Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach”, edited by Gingrich and Baumann (2004). The essays of this volume represent a great contemporary condensation of anthropology’s conceptual history on identity and its linkages to other disciplines as well as a useful theoretical approach and some inspiring case studies. The second most important inspiration for the way the concept of identity is applied throughout my research is “Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds” - written by Holland Dorothy and others (1998) – simply because it connects identities as social subjectivities with worlds of interpretation, or so called “figured worlds”, and with power, agency and privilege. They summarize their approach as one that is “at heart an anthropological and cultural studies adaption of sociogenic concepts of personhood” (ibid: 4).

While these two volumes represent the theoretical core foundations of the present thesis many others are highly relevant. Frederik Barth’s (1969, 1998, 2000) insights about boundaries and the social construction of difference (and belonging), Jenkins (1996) concept of “the internal-external dialectic of identification”, Anthony Cohen’s (2000) important volume called “Signifying Identities: Anthropological perspectives on boundaries and contested values” and many others who have provided valuable insights influenced me between the first field trips and the last write-ups.

Among those anthropological works that contributed to a well-guided analysis of the transnational interconnectedness of Bil’in’s resistance are Gupta and Ferguson (1997),

because their approach brings together space, power and identity, Appadurai (1996) mainly because his concept of “flows” and “scapes” provided a flexible enough and innovative concept, Hannerz (1992, 1996, 2003) and his insights about transnational connections and single-sited multi-level fieldwork, Eriksen (2003, 2006) who is writing about “globalisation” and the “cyberspace” and ultimately, Sally Engle Merry (2006), because her method of research on transnational human rights activists contributed much to my understanding of international activists’ roles as transnational actors and intermediary translators.

Although much more could be mentioned, such as the methodological foundations my research rests on (see chapter 2.1.2.) and those concepts which enabled the identification of symbolic and ritual dimensions in activism (see chapter 7.5.1.), a detailed and exhaustive discussion of the conceptual history and present (the state of the arts) of all aspects touched upon in this thesis would certainly fill too many pages. Most importantly the present work should be judged a) as a rather innovative contribution to a better understanding of the so-called Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its realities on the ground; b) as a contemporary condensation of some anthropological concepts on identity/alterity, power, space, ritual and transnational connections, and c) as a challenge to these concepts through testing them against the results of intensive fieldwork.

5 Palestinian Resistance and International Solidarity: A Short Introduction

Resistance is an ambiguous term in the humanities and social sciences as one side’s freedom fighter can be another side’s terrorist. I understand resistance as a legitimate defensive struggle aimed at generating change through challenging an opponent. Such an opponent is understood by the resisting side to be the source of a given situation which resistance should prevail so that an aspired collective goal can eventually be realized. The legitimacy of resistance cannot be universal but is subject to varying interpretations and narratives. By referring to resistance - non-violent resistance or resistance through activism - I intend to use the terminological landscape employed by the activists among whom I did research. Hence, writing about resistance and non-violent resistance does neither imply a judgment of what is just or unjust nor a political statement. Because identities may be understood as “cultural

products grounded in history” (Peteet 2001: 184), a short outline of the recent history of Palestinian resistance and the involvement of international and Israeli activists follows.

The Arabic word *sūmūd* means steadfastness, endurance, or resistance. In the context of Palestinian resistance it also implies the notion of resistance to Israeli occupation through day-to-day acts. While the struggle in Bil'in is a unique one, it is in line with similar movements in neighbouring villages and elsewhere in the occupied Palestinian territories. It also represents the most visible face of Palestinian resistance to the separation barrier and exemplifies the big picture of the conflict as a microcosm where the asymmetric elements between Palestinian civil society and Israeli military power become visible and the need for international support evident.

The first known dispute between Arab peasants and Jewish settlers took place in 1886 over land in Petah Tiqvah close to Tel Aviv (King 2007: 25). Throughout the late 19th and early 20th century and then during the British Mandate period, nonviolent forms of resistance and acts of noncooperation were carried out in response to growing Jewish immigration. The present emphasis on nonviolence in Bil'in's resistance, interlinked with international solidarity, builds on a long history of Palestinian nonviolent resistance most prominently practiced during the first Intifada. By being non-violent, the movement in Bil'in incorporates an oppressive Israeli other with a nonviolent and suppressed self. Power inequality is met with international and Israeli solidarity and transnational advocacy; the suppressed but resisting people of Bil'in provide the powerful picture that gives so much attention to this small village.

5.1 Bil'in: The Local Context

The village Bil'in is located on a hill about half an hour drive north of Ramallah and belongs to the Ramallah and Al-Bireh governorate. Like all of the West Bank it was occupied by Israel in the course of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War (also called Six-Day War by its victors) and eventually handed over to the Palestinian National Authority in 1995. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Bil'in had a population of 1.832 in 2010, compared to 1.678 in 2007 (PCBS Website, a). This indicates a steady growth, despite an increasingly difficult political situation. The average size of households in the rural areas of the Al-Bireh

and Ramallah governorate was 5.6 persons in 2007 (PCBS Website, b). Two schools in Bil'in provide close-by education for the youth of the village and one of the schools has a football court where games take place frequently.

Bil'in is a village exclusively inhabited by Muslims, a member of the village council said. There are two mosques, one of them is located in the centre of the town and serves as the starting point for the weekly Friday demonstrations. Even though prominent coordinators of the nonviolent resistance movement in the village represent a rather moderate voice and distance themselves from Hamas, the Hamas affiliate "Change and Reform" got 170 out of 534 votes in the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Elections and was second only behind Fatah, for which 184 eligible voters cast their ballots in Bil'in (Central Elections Commission Website).

The main economic factor in the village has been agriculture, especially the cultivation of olive trees for the production of olive oil. According to a member of the local popular committee olives provided the main source of agricultural income to the farmers of Bil'in. Alongside olives, other crops such as beans, peas, lentils, barley and wheat are cultivated. Bil'in comprises a total land area of 4.000 *dunams* (about 4km²), of which 1.500 have been taken for the construction of the Israeli Separation Barrier and about 1.900 *dunams* were annexed and made inaccessible by the so called "security fence" (B'Tselem 2005). Access to the annexed land behind the barrier would theoretically be possible through acquiring an entry permit. "Based on past experience, some Palestinians will be denied all access to their land. Those who obtain permits will only be able to gain access during the hours in which the agricultural gates that will be installed in the barrier are open" (ibid.).

Regular demonstrations in Bil'in began in February 2005 and have continued until the time of writing (fall 2010). The continuous expansion of the Modi'in Illit settlement (established in 1993) and the construction of the Israeli separation barrier on land belonging to Bil'in were the major reasons for these demonstrations to begin. The further expansion of Israeli settlements in 2004 and the routing of the separation wall around these newly built areas gave the impetus for the local Palestinian population to take action.

A survey conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2008) of the Palestinian Authority found 171 localities¹ in the West Bank being directly affected by the barrier. The

¹ Locality is defined as "a permanently inhabited place, with an independent municipal administration or other type of adopted administration" (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2008: 9). "The distribution of localities where the wall passes through 2008: 32 localities in Jenin governorate, 27 localities in Jerusalem governorate, 21

categories determining whether a locality is affected or not included the confiscation and isolation of land, displacement, closure of economic establishments, bypass roads and settlements on the localities land as well as the humanitarian needs resulting from these circumstances (ibid: 7, 8). Bil'in is one of the most severely affected villages, but most importantly, it represents one of the most visible faces of resistance.

In Bil'in, the separation barrier extends as far as four kilometres from the green line² (B'Tselem 2005). Like in many other places in the West Bank the construction of the separation barrier was used as an excuse to annex land for further settlement construction and justify these land-grabs as security measures. The local situation in Bil'in is best described with the words of the human rights organization B'Tselem:

“The separation barrier being built around the Modi'in Illit bloc runs adjacent to the houses of six Palestinian villages: al-Midya, Nil'in, Deir Qadis, Kharbata, Bil'in, and Saffa. These villages have a total of 16,000 residents. In the 1980s and early 1990s, thousands of dunams of these villages, some of which are privately owned, were declared state land and designated for the establishment and expansion of the Modi'in Illit bloc settlements. As a result of the barrier's route, thousands more dunams that are now [before the annexation] used for farming and grazing, or are intended for future development, will be separated from the rest of the villages' land” (B'Tselem 2005: 60).

What is referred to as the prospective impact of the then not yet completed barrier has already become reality and stays unchanged until today. In addition, several legal measures have been initiated in order to contest this situation. Although the Israeli High Court of Justice ordered the state to redraw, partially dismantle and rebuild parts of the 1.7 kilometre long separation barrier illegally built on land belonging to Bil'in in September 2007 (Haaretz 05/09/2007), the protests in the village continued and celebrated their three-years anniversary of nonviolent resistance (bilin-village.org) in February 2008. The High Court ruling was the response to a petition filed by Bil'in's committee together with the group “Peace Now”. The “Supreme Planning Council for Judea and Samaria” had legalized the illegal building of forty-two buildings on Bil'in's land. There have been continuous attempts by the villagers and their

localities in Hebron governorate, 22 localities in Qalqilia governorate, 20 localities in Ramallah and Al-Bireh governorate, 16 localities in Tulkarem governorate, 12 localities in Salfit, and 19 localities in Bethlehem governorate” (ibid: 7).

² Green Line is a common term referring to the 1949 armistice lines established between Israel and its neighbours after the Arab-Israeli war in 1948. The Green Line is the internationally recognized border between the occupied Palestinian territories and the state of Israel. As such, the line also provides the basis for possible future boundaries of a Palestinian state.

supporters to achieve a major rerouting of the barrier. However, despite several rulings by the Israeli courts and the International Court of Justice in favour of Bil'in, the barrier was still in place and Palestinians still had no access to their farmland at the time of writing.

5.1.1 The Weekly Demonstration

In order to make the events on the ground more comprehensible I would like to give a short introduction into the usual sequence of the weekly protests that take place in Bil'in. A more detailed discussion of these demonstrations as a "ritual of conflict" can be found in chapter 7.5.

Every Friday at around 1:00 p.m. Palestinians, Israelis and international activists come together in front of the main mosque in Bil'in and prepare for the march towards the Israeli separation barrier, which in the case of Bil'in is a fence that separates the local Palestinian population from a considerable amount of their farmland. Israeli activists usually enter the West Bank from Tel Aviv in private cars while most international activists either stay in the village throughout the whole week or travel occasionally to Bil'in from elsewhere in the West Bank. All of them come to support the Palestinians of Bil'in in their regular nonviolent demonstrations. Besides these main actors many observers attend the happening. Among them are tourists who might have heard from the local struggle and come to see (and photograph) it as it takes place, or journalists looking for a story, often wearing masks in order to resist the tear gas.

At the beginning of each demonstration coordinators of the local popular committee who are responsible for the demonstrations introduce newcomers into the usual process and potential dangers. For instance, the participants are told to watch out for tear gas canisters and advised to run towards and not with the direction of the wind when tear gas is around.

It usually takes some time until the crowd starts moving towards the fence which is located about 500 meters down a road from the main mosque. While marching Palestinians cry slogans like "no, no to the wall! No, no to the wall!" in Arabic, similar slogans are repeated by Israelis in Hebrew and internationals in English. The actual site where the demonstrators interact with the Israeli military is the space at the end of a road right before the fence. Usually a handful of Israeli soldiers wait about 50 meters behind the fence protected by army

barracks and camouflage nets; they stay and do not act until the first demonstrators try to tear away parts of the barbed wire that blocks the entrance to the other side. The sequence is very often the same: As soon as one demonstrator crosses the “border” Israeli soldiers start to shoot tear gas canisters either directly into the crowd or into the air. Once the gas spreads most people run back up the road towards the village while some – usually the more experienced – try to move further towards the fence. After the first few tear gas attacks the Israeli military often deploys a vehicle that sprays loads of malodorous liquid into the crowd. Needless to say, getting hit by this stinky chemical mixture can be very unpleasant. The fetor stays for a long time, even after a third extensive shower. After this humiliating attack most participants start to head back to the village or stay a bit further away. Some Palestinians who are well equipped with masks and/or rubber coats might stay a bit longer until another round of tear gas canisters hails down on them. This sequence is only a very rough description of those events to be found in almost all demonstrations. It has to be noted though, that strong variations occur.

Sometimes Israeli soldiers shoot rubber coated live-ammunition into the crowd or cross the fence by foot with the aim to detain demonstrators. Even though the coordinators try to avoid any use of violence, Palestinian teenagers often shoot stones with slingshots towards armed Israeli soldiers on the other side. This practice has been the main source of criticism from Israeli voices who doubt the nonviolent nature of the demonstrations, especially after an Israeli soldier had lost one of his eyes after being hit by a stone. But stone-throwing also serves as a justification for Israeli night raids into the village in the course of which Palestinian teenagers are often captured and detained. The degree of violence deployed by the Israeli military and the amount of people participating also vary and depend on many different factors. According to the head of the popular committee, between 100 and 3.000 people take part in the weekly demonstrations. Without international and Israeli solidarity the local Palestinian population would be far more vulnerable and most probably demonstrations in Bil'in would not be such a sustainable form of popular resistance without the support of outsiders.

5.2 International Involvement

The most visible face of international activism in Palestine is the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). It emerged from initiatives created “by concerned internationals to provide - via their own physical presence - protection and witness for an increasingly isolated and besieged Palestinian population” (Seitz 2003: 50). Bil’in is one of ISM’s most prominent grounds for challenging what Palestinians call *al-iḥtilāl*, meaning Israeli occupation. The ISM has tried to establish enduring relationships with Palestinian grass-roots organisations and local committees like in Bil’in through playing a supporting role, including cooperation with local village-councils and individuals (Stohlman/Aladin 2003: 182).

International activists predominantly come from Europe and the United States, whereby a minority attend training or preparatory courses before their arrival in Israel or the occupied territories. Once in the occupied territories, ISM activists are expected to attend a two-day training course consisting of a short historical overview of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an introduction into “cultural” matters such as how to dress modestly and how to behave when staying with a Palestinian family, playing role-games and discussing other specific issues relating to direct actions and legal problems.

Although most European and North American internationals get a three-month visa upon arrival, they have been confronted with increasing restrictions by the Israeli authorities. Many activists get photographed and videoed by the Israeli military or become registered when being detained so that they can eventually be denied entry to Israel upon their next arrival. The Israeli border control frequently interrogates those aiming at travelling to the West Bank for hours and recently so called “PA only” visas were issued, permitting travel only in areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority (righttoenter.ps). During my research I have met a few people who had changed their surnames in order to be allowed entry into Israel again. International solidarity to Palestinian grassroots resistance continues to be an important facet of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The situation in Bil’in is similar to Apartheid South Africa, one of local Palestinian coordinators told me: “Without international pressure we won’t achieve freedom and justice”. Besides so called internationals, another group of activists is very important for Bil’in’s struggle: the Israelis.

5.3 Israeli Civil Society Involvement: Crossing the Border

The term civil society is an ambiguous one if applied to Israel's population because its military has a very unique status in society, and the mandatory service – three years for men and two for women – has a huge effect on the lives and views of young Israelis. The decision of refusing mandatory military service has to be viewed against the background of the high prestige the “Israeli Defence Forces” have in Israeli society. Those who refuse military service do not only face imprisonment but also an overload of criticism from their fellow citizens. Refusing military service in Israeli is widely seen as anti-national within Israeli society. It follows that refusal also means that one has to break with parts of his or her national identity, or with what Anthony Cohen (2000b: 163) calls “personal nationalism.” Weiss (2001: 38) argues that the nationalist self in Israel is intrinsically inscribed into the body of every citizen:

“Nationalism in Israel, I argue, represents an embodied discourse. The contours of that discourse are highlighted in terrorist events. The national territory becomes equivalent to the personal body; the body politic and the citizen become one. The media are [...] agents of nationalism. Israeli nationalism is constructed upon the body, with the body as a literal and metaphoric vehicle for collective fears, hopes and commitments” (ibid).

Engaging and cooperating with the Palestinian enemy as an Israeli obviously does not fit into the general picture of Israeli personal nationalism. It is no surprise that only a small minority refuses the mandatory military service out of ethical concerns, despite the rise of organizations such as “Yesh Gvul” –meaning “there is a limit” – who call for refusal and “breaking the silence,” who collect testimonies from Israeli soldiers. The service is understood as an honourable duty by many; one could even say it is the initiation rite that prepares Israeli teenagers for “real life” and transforms them into mature agents of the nation state. By showing solidarity with the learned “enemy of the state” – the Palestinians – Israeli activists cross borders with their body and their mind. They become who they are not supposed to be and stop being who they do not want to be. Before examining activists' identities and alterities in more detail I would like to introduce some very significant theoretical concepts.

6 Identity/Alterity in Theory: A Preliminary Discussion

Throughout this chapter I intend to provide an introduction into the most important theoretical concepts relating to identity/alterity in terms of their significance towards my research objective. The various approaches to the study of identity/alterity might be best understood by outlining some of its often separately treated extremes.

Generally speaking, two main tracts can be identified whilst debating identity/alterity. The first tract describes identity in relation to difference and differentiation. The second criticizes any reference to alterity by denouncing it as a central aspect of identity, whilst putting a strong emphasis on belonging (Gingrich 2004: 4). The tendency to separate identity from difference has been described as part of a philosophical tradition, dating from Martin Heidegger and the influence he had on Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur³. In what could be called the postcolonial tradition⁴ - strongly influenced by Jacques Lacan - identity and alterity were eventually seen as somewhat mutually inclusive and dialectic, although this tradition tends to overemphasize the “sameness” in identity (ibid: 6-12). Whilst keeping in mind that anthropology has intentionally borrowed approaches to identity from other fields, I intend to discuss the specific anthropological understandings of identity/alterity.

The following definition provides the skeletal structure for this anthropological inquiry into the complex world of identity/alterity:

“Our working definition of identity designates social subjectivities as persons and groups of persons. These subjectivities are multidimensional and fluid; they include power related ascriptions by selves as well as by others; and they simultaneously combine sameness or belonging, with alterity, or otherness” (Baumann/Gingrich 2004: x).

The multidimensionality of identity/alterity can be underlined by the argument that persons are “composites of many, often contradictory, self-understandings and identities” (Holland et al. 1998: 8). The relation between identity/alterity and power/agency will be further examined later on.

³ Heidegger influenced parts of Derrida’s work on difference and Ricoeur’s hermeneutic approach. In a general sense, Heidegger’s criticism of enlightenment inspired the following generation to develop their own critique of modernity. Heidegger’s legacy “tends to stimulate an upgrading of essentialising notions of difference” (Gingrich 2004: 7).

⁴ Within this “postcolonial tradition”, Jacques Lacan’s legacy and the work of Gayatri C. Spivak (1985, 1996) are particularly noteworthy.

6.1 Boundaries

During the 1990s most anthropologists agreed on the simultaneous existence of sameness and difference in identity. Both are mutual constitutive parts of the same thing: identity/alterity. Sameness/difference and belonging/differing cannot exist without each other, since it is their dialogical interplay that constructs, maintains and contests boundaries. Boundaries are to be understood as a flexible line where the formation and negotiation process of identities takes place, because this is where the internal and the external meet (Jenkins 1996: 24, Barth 1969). Furthermore, a boundary is where the exchange with the environment happens, the place of outflows and inflows that through interactions mark differences and similarities (Barth 2000: 34). The boundary can be understood as the elastic band along which the dialogue between and mutual constitution of belonging and differing takes place. However, it must be noted that not every differentiation between “me” and “you”, or “us” and “them” maintains clear boundaries. I will later refer to cases whereby the processes of identity/alterity have crossed and redrawn boundaries instead of reinforcing them (although the latter is possible too).

6.2 The Self and Beyond

In social and cultural anthropology, the concept of identity was long used in the context of “ethnic identity” which points to the sameness of the self with others (Sökefeld 1999: 417). This indicates another dimension of general differentiation between approaches to studying identity/alterity, namely the relation of a single person’s aspects of identity/alterity to other individuals or members of a group. Therefore it might be necessary to distinguish between shared identities and a single subjective “self”. Richard Jenkins - who according to himself – spent his life at the borderlines between anthropology and sociology, writes that it is precisely this relationship between one’s individual identity and collective shared identity which is left relatively unexplored (Jenkins 1996: 19). What he proposes is an understanding of “the ‘self’ as an ongoing, and in practice simultaneous, synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others”. He further views “the internal-external dialectic of identification as the process whereby all identities – individual and collective –

are constituted”⁵ (ibid: 20). Rew and Campbell also write that identity is “a two-way process of categorization and ascription” (Campbell/Rew 1999: 16). What others think about oneself and one’s own views are likely to diverge. It follows by stating that there is almost certainly “a marked difference between A’s self-perception, and the perception of A by others” (Cohen 2000a: 5); hence the definition-offerings of oneself by others inform individual processes of belonging and differing, and may thereby cause conflicts between the internal and the external definitions of the self. An international activist who enters the world of activism in Israel/Palestine has to cope with these external and internal dimensions of identity/alterity throughout his or her stay. The external offerings as aspects of oneself, work under the umbrella of “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized” (Holland et al. 2001: 52). Such a socially and culturally constructed realm is a helpful categorical bridge between one’s intimate personal aspects of identity/alterity and the collective space of social relations.

This bridge also shows that the construction of community or similarity/difference goes beyond interpersonal contact. According to Anthony Cohen (1985), community also rests on the symbolic construction of belonging. This argument is based on the Durkheimian tradition of British social anthropology which emphasized the significance of symbolism for engendering solidarity. According to Jenkins (1996: 106f), Cohen advances three main arguments regarding the symbolic construction of community. First, “symbols generate a sense of shared belonging.” Second, “‘community’ is itself a symbolic construct,” and third, “community membership means sharing with other community members a similar ‘sense of things,’ participation in a common symbolic domain.” Thus, symbols play a significant role in the construction of meanings within the world of activism in Bil’in. Whatever people believe they have in common with others, be it a specific circumstance or a local community, there are both symbolic and non-symbolic dimensions. Beneath an umbrella of symbolism there is the suggestion that similarity may in fact be considerable diversity.

The final important aspect I would like to touch upon is the relation between identity and affect. According to Campbell and Rew, “there can be no social identity which does not possess an affective component” (Campbell/Rew 1999: 18f). Emotions certainly play a role because identities and alterities can be informed by affection for people one belongs to and antipathy for outsiders. Despite emotions being part of what connects and separates people, it

⁵ This distinction is “heuristic, drawn as an opposition for explanatory purposes” (Jenkins 1996: 142).

is relatively difficult to investigate emotions by analyzing verbal narrations or observations. In contrast to the difficult to grasp world of emotions and affect, the relation between identity and agency is probably easier to examine.

6.3 Identity/Alterity and Agency

The concept of agency has been subject to intensive debate within the fields of socio-cultural anthropology and the social sciences. Subsequently, agency should be defined and its relation to identity explained. In a general way, agency can be defined as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001: 112). In addition to that, the capacity to act must be realized in order to be utilized. During my research it soon became obvious that the capacity to act (or a lack of capacity) and the ability to have an impact (or the inability) play an important role in activists’ interpretations of belonging and differing.

The core category relating to agency (as employed throughout my research) is the individual realization of having (or not having) power and privilege and its significance towards personal aspects of identity/alterity. The significance of agency in identity is often summarized by the concept of positional identities. But “how one identifies one’s position relative to others” (Holland et al. 2001: 127) does not necessarily imply hierarchical interpretations of such relations. Consequently, an inequality in agency between two groups or individuals must not imply an emphasis on differing. The contrary may be the case when - for instance - the agency-deficit of a person or group A serves as the central motivation for person or group B, to join A in collective efforts to change a given situation. A realized inequality in the capacity to act - as I will show in more detail later on - can serve simultaneously as a source for belonging *and* differing.

6.4 Identity/Alterity and Activism

All the previously discussed dimensions of identity/alterity are important elements of the meanings ascribed to activism in Bil’in and beyond. Because these meanings are as diverse as the social, cultural and political backgrounds of the various activists, it seems reductionist to

categorize the actors into three distinct groups, namely Palestinian, Israeli and international activists. Nevertheless, such a distinction is justified for my research, as activists from each group experience resistance in Bil'in in different ways, and the relevant processes of identity/alterity among activists of the same group show very similar patterns. Hence, all Israeli activists have more or less similar backgrounds and also interpret their roles as activists in very similar ways. Even international activists who come from many different countries – although predominantly North American and European - emphasize their in-group similarities and understand themselves as having a common role in resistance, particularly with regard to a specific privileged agency. They develop an activist-identity as internationals despite their national and cultural differences. Therefore, being part of the struggle in Bil'in informs and contests aspects of activists' identities/alterities.

Israeli, Palestinian and international activists interpret their roles in different ways and assign distinctive meanings to their involvement in the struggle. These interpretations are understood as processes in a wider context; partly they designate what I understand as a specific world of interpretation or a figured world of activism

6.4.1 A Figured World of Activism

The figured world is the wider context within which the actors' identities/alterities relate to their roles as activists. An essential part of this context is a web of external offerings of aspects of oneself, or prototypes of roles and self/other. International activists particularly have to deal with specific role expectations throughout their involvement, and these external interpretations provide guidance in finding answers to questions like "what is my role?", "who is our enemy?" and "what is allowed and what is forbidden?" The world of activism we are dealing with in Bil'in is framed by specific interpretations over people's actions. Imagination and action are closely tied to each other. What I investigated as activists' role-understandings are "imaginings of self in worlds of action" (Holland et al. 1998: 5). Especially international activists are confronted with a clear picture of the enemy and supplied a framework of their role as nonviolent supporters in Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation. Throughout an interactional process of identity-formation as activists, "people tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are" (ibid: 3). While face-to-face interaction and collective

action are ways imaginations of self and other can be influenced, identity-shaping narratives, symbols and role-models also operate as transnational interaction and communication.

6.4.2 Transnational Connections

The village of Bil'in is a local junction of transnational inflows and outflows of people and meanings. Imagine the following situation. A student reads a story about Bil'in's struggle in a British newspaper or on the Internet. Shortly thereafter, she does some research about Palestinian resistance and watches a few videos on youtube.com, where she can see Israeli soldiers shooting on unarmed protesters with tear gas and rubber-coated bullets. Ultimately, she decides to join the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) after exchanging a few e-mails with one of its coordinators. In terms of transnational connections, the activist has encountered locally produced and transnationally communicated narratives of resistance in Bil'in. It follows that the outflows of meanings can engender inflows of people and these people very likely contribute to more in- and outflows of meanings and people.

The term "transnational" primarily refers to the movement of things and meaningful forms across borders and unlike "globalisation," transnational connections do not have to span globally (Hannerz 1996: 6). The relationship between transnational connections and identities becomes very evident if we look at Bil'in as a specific local, but transnationally connected, world of interpretation where the "interplay between technology, social organization, and particular meaningful forms" (ibid: 20) shapes and contests activist's identities. I will elaborate upon the significance of transnational connections for activists' identities in more detail later on.

7 Variations of Identity/Alterity within a Figured World of Activism

Throughout this chapter I will discuss identity/alterity among Palestinian, international and Israeli activists on the basis of my research material. I will start with an inquiry into variations of identity/alterity for each of the three activist groups separately. Therein special significance is given to activists' interpretations of their roles and the roles of others and the significance

of agency for these activist-identities/alterities. This inquiry will be followed by an analysis of various dynamic processes and grammars of identity/alterity observable across all three activist groups.

7.1 The Palestinians of the Village of Bil'in

“We hope to succeed with all our friends.

Here in Palestine you cannot succeed alone. We need help from outside, like South Africa” (Mahmud, Interview).

In the context of my research, Bil'in is understood as a local stage of human experience and human interaction where processes of identity/alterity take place simultaneously on various levels in various dimensions. It is a realm of interpretation where meanings are ascribed to one's own and the other person's roles. As I am an aspiring anthropologist one could expect that the present work has a focus on the “native” Palestinian population of the village where I carried out my research. Notwithstanding the fact that Palestinians represent the centre of gravity within the field I have studied, as it is “their” struggle internationals and Israelis come to support, the latter two groups are more intensely covered in my research. I have held a particular interest into how outsiders manifest themselves locally, the categories and roles they ascribe to others and themselves, and how processes of identity/alterity can be observed on the basis of their involvement in resistance in Bil'in. Research of Palestinian resistance during the first and the second Intifada certainly outnumber works which approach the topic from a more innovative and less “native”-centred approach. Hence, my research interest was shaped by the complex shifting tendrils of identity/alterity-processes, and this outweighed the often obvious focus on the “native” in anthropological tradition.

At the outset of this chapter I will provide a short introduction which will include relevant aspects of Palestinian identity and resistance in a more general sense. I will then briefly elaborate upon what meanings the local Palestinian activists ascribe to their resistance and to the involvement of international and Israeli activists.

7.1.1 On Palestinian Identity and Resistance

“The Palestinians resemble a few other peoples in the modern era who have reached a high level of national consciousness and have developed a clearly defined sense of national identity, but have long failed to achieve national independence” (Khalidi 1997: 11). Resistance represents a challenge to this failure and the continuation of a collective aspiration for self-determination and independence. One of the more general and widely shared aspects in Palestinian identity/alterity is the strong relation to agency (or the absence of power in their agency). Thus activism in Bil’in represents some kind of microcosm as people draw on outside assistance (“agency-upgrade”) to broaden local agency.

Bil’in is a microcosm of widely shared aspects in Palestinian identity/alterity under Israeli occupation and also a local space of transnational, transethnic and transcultural interaction between Palestinian, Israeli and international activists. It follows that any general de-contextualized categories in Palestinian identity are secondary for the understanding of the specific activist-identities/alterities within this space. However, there is one final general argument which is significant: “In a sense, each party to this conflict, and every other claimant, operates in a different dimension from the other, looking back to a different era of the past, and living in a different present, albeit in the very same place” (Khalidi 1997: 17). The same indication that Khalidi provides holds true for the figured world of activism in Bil’in. It is local *and* transnational, a home-town for Palestinians *and* an area of operation for activists and thus a multidimensional space pervaded by meanings and identities.

The national and historically grown identities of both Palestinians and Israelis are strongly related to land, the state (or as in the Palestinian case the denial of a state) and religion which are subject to continuous contestation. Besides this general argument it is notable that these identities are constituted by a very strong “other”. I would like to turn to some more specific issues relating to Palestinian identity/alterity within the figured world of resistance in Bil’in.

7.1.2 Suffering: “Our Land and our Children”

The beginning of the construction of the Israeli separation barrier on Bil’in’s land in 2004 and the confiscation of land for settlement construction gave the initial impetus for demonstrations

to begin. Land and the right to have access to it are among the reasons Palestinians most commonly referred to when explaining their motivations for the continuation of demonstrations. Although the local problem of Israeli land grab is easily explained by the routing of the separation barrier around Israeli settlements and its construction on Palestinian land, what Palestinians demonstrate against must be understood as more far-reaching.

It is the term “Israeli occupation” which is used to refer to the socio-political consequences of Israeli policy towards Palestinians. One Palestinian activist explained to me: “it is not just one wall; the occupation inside you, the suffering; the injustice kills your life in your head and mind” (Mahmud, Interview). When I asked him whether he could imagine leaving Bil’in if things didn’t become better in the near future, he replied that this was the last thing he would do because it wouldn’t feel good to lie in bed somewhere else knowing that his village was still suffering. Children were mentioned often when locals explained the effects of Israeli occupation.

“Like all the people, we want to be free and end the occupation. Why walls and settlements and more checkpoints? Why our children are suffering? (...) My life started in jail. No problem for me. We need to see the future freedom for our children. (...) If you cannot sit with your children and not talk about anything in the world. They look to the TV, they see soldiers killing people, how can you understand their mind? Why our children didn’t even see the sea?” (ibid).

This statement was made by one of the local Palestinian leaders of the resistance in Bil’in who has already been in jail as a child because of taking part in activities during the first Intifada. Throughout my research it became evident that for Palestinians who live and actively resist in Bil’in, “continuing the struggle” implies strong and durable aspects of identity/alterity. Self and other are mutually constitutive and bound to the specific context of local suffering. Life in Bil’in has been disrupted by the output of Israeli policies for so long that the violent other (as opposed to a nonviolent self and local resistance) forms the mutually constitutive core-opposition in aspects of local’s identities/alterities. The “suffering” includes frequent military incursions at night and the detainment of teenage boys. Despite international and Israeli support Palestinians are unable to influence the execution of such policies effectively, so that it is the *continuation* of the struggle which serves as an important objective in resistance and identity/alterity.

There is an insightful passage which states: “violence is a force that not only manifests itself in the destruction of boundaries but as well in their creation” (Nowmann 2001: 27). I argue

that the “Israeli Occupation Forces”⁶, as Palestinians call the Israeli army, as an “other” are perceived by the local Palestinians as violent and as such opposed to their own nonviolent resistance. The continuous conflict of violent vs. nonviolent interaction maintains the boundary which rests on the violent/nonviolent dialectic. This boundary is an elastic band along which the dialogue between and mutual constitution of belonging and differing takes place. The suffering of children and the denial of land-ownership also serve as categories that express this dialectic opposition.

7.1.3 “Homeless Activists Bring AIDS to Bil’in”

The influx of foreigners in Bil’in does not only contribute to improved agency in local resistance; it also provides the basis for a considerable amount of gossip and of negative stereotyping about this influence. This was highlighted to me after a conversation with a Palestinian student in a coffee-shop in Ramallah.

He and his friend were curious to hear my stories and research objectives and after I had finished they went on to tell me their views. In their eyes Israeli and internationals who were in Bil’in had to be homeless and without any perspective in their life since they stayed there for a long time. Furthermore, foreign activists in Bil’in - as one of them told me - would bring diseases with them and had continuously seduced the local youth to have sex with them. He referred to a “recent study conducted by students of Birzeit University” to back his argument. AIDS, according to him, was extremely widespread in the village because of foreigners.

I heard similar stories throughout the duration of my stay. Narratives pervaded by images of lustful Israeli and international girls coming to Bil’in with no aim but seducing locals. This represents one example of the many socio-cultural implications that the local manifestation of internationals and Israelis have. According to another student, Palestinian coordinators in Bil’in would earn a lot of money through the “activist-tourism” there. These views represent the difficulties those Palestinians who live outside Bil’in have in understanding the local meanings and implications of international activism.

⁶ “Israeli Occupation Forces” is a term employed by the people I researched. It is commonly used to describe the physically perceivable forms (mostly military) of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

There is an obvious gap between the Palestinian activists' interpretations on joint international resistance in Bil'in, and the views of Palestinian outsiders such as the two students mentioned. Beyond this gap, it has to be noted that opinions among those living in Bil'in also vary considerably. It follows that the figured world of activism in Bil'in contains three activist groups of which one is Palestinian. Although Bil'in is widely known and famous for its resistance, the specific patterns of identity/alterity between the three activist groups are not shared by persons outside this world, as the meanings produced by the "in practice simultaneous synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others" (Jenkins 1996: 19) are bound to a specific context.

7.1.4 Local Palestinians and Outside Involvement

The roles of Israeli and international activists (see chapters 7.2 and 7.3) are reflected in the views which Palestinian activists express. Outside assistance fills the agency-deficit of the local population and therefore brings about specific roles and functions. One Palestinian activist explained to me:

"We need all the people against the occupation. In the beginning Israelis [the military] started to shoot live bullets at Palestinian demonstrators. But if the Israelis see internationals and Israelis in the demonstrations and cameras, they change.

A second thing is that internationals are our messenger in the world. He is coming here and goes back and tells his friends and organizations; and the Israelis inside Israel. Now we have many people that refused to go to the Israeli army. These are small things, but important" (Mahmud, Interview).

International and Israeli activists in effect behave as "human shields" and make local resistance possible and sustainable. The objective of continuing the struggle rests upon what kind of agency outsiders bring along with them. As I will show later on, part of this agency is the capacity to translate local meanings into transnational advocacy.

The continuation of the struggle suggests that the actors will need steadfastness to keep on continuing. After more than five years of perpetual demonstrations and direct actions many Palestinians in Bil'in are exhausted. "But what exactly makes men stick together, especially in

perilous situations – in which betrayal and abandonment of a group – if that group is about to lose – may be by far the best strategy?” (Gellner 1995: 165).

For Palestinian activists in Bil'in every single demonstration forms part of the process that inscribes the meanings of resistance into their identity/alterity. One resists because he or she physically experiences resistance by attending actions together with other activists. The main reason for the local population to resist is the unbearable situation resulting out of the Israeli occupation. Various problems arise out of the separation barrier, the annexation of land for settlement construction and the violent suppression of the demonstrations which regularly take place in the village. Access to about 60 % of the available farmland formerly used by Palestinians is not accessible anymore. Nightly incursions into the village by the Israeli military create an atmosphere of fear and despair. Officially these incursions are aimed at finding certain individuals – often teenagers accused of having thrown stones during demonstrations – and persecuting them under military law, which often means month-long detainment without any kind of trial. The effects for those Palestinians who actively take part in the demonstrations are fatal. Abdallah Abu Rahme – who organized the weekly demonstrations in Bil'in – was forced to leave the village every night with his daughters to Ramallah because his house was searched and the interior severely damaged by Israeli soldiers attempting to take him with them one night. Abu Rahme, who also works as a school teacher, was convicted of incitement and organizing illegal demonstrations. He was put on an eight-month trial at an Israeli military court. The trial was still running at the time of writing.

This example shows how dangerous active participation in demonstrations can be for every Palestinian in Bil'in. The continuity of local resistance is only made possible by international and Israeli solidarity. This outside involvement becomes an intrinsic aspect of the local's struggle. International and Israeli activists are a source of power and of meaning; they help Palestinian activists to overcome the antagonistic Israeli "other" in their identity/alterity. This antagonism, which is "a presence which is believed radically to threaten the persistence of that quiddity which marks the being of an entity" (Nowman 2001: 42), threatens many aspects in the life-worlds of Bil'in's population. The presence of the other – in the shape of violence, suppression and restriction - prevents Palestinian activists from being totally "themselves" (ibid: 37). This antagonism is a threat to the subjectivity of the Palestinian activists, but because of the continuity of local resistance and its significance in activists' identities and alterities the antagonism also creates new subjectivities which are determined by the strong Israeli other. Once again we can see both a denial and an aspiration in the activists'

identities/alterities. The Israeli occupation and its local manifestations represent an “other” that is perceived as threatening Bil’in’s “self.” In order to protect the village, its people and, like one Palestinian said, the “future of our children”, the situation is “perceived as needing to be overcome if the subject is to endure” (ibid). International and Israeli activists are intrinsically connected to the meanings Palestinians ascribe to their struggle since it is them who make resistance more effective and sustainable.

7.2 The International Activists

Within the figured world of activism in Bil’in, an international is somebody who comes from abroad to support Palestinians in their resistance. Internationals who are active in Bil’in usually form part of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) which operates in many areas throughout the West Bank and in Jerusalem. In the early days of Bil’in’s resistance outsiders almost exclusively participated in the weekly demonstrations against the construction of the Israeli separation barrier and did not take any direct actions stretching beyond these protests. With the beginning of regular nightly incursions by the Israeli military into the village, internationals began to stay continuously in Bil’in. From then on their activities have entailed both public demonstrations and night-patrols, with the aim of warning locals about approaching army-jeeps and other Israeli army actions. This had the direction of improving Palestinian security and agency.

Although soon after their arrival international activists receive a two-day long training session, they have little time to accustom themselves to the new surroundings. No matter whether one is British, German, Norwegian or something else, non-Palestinian activists supporting Palestinian resistance will come under the umbrella of the etiquette “international”. Such categorizations imply certain role-expectations of oneself and others; alongside these expectations their activist-identities develop in a “two-way process of categorization and ascription” (Campbell/Rew 1999: 16). Before I elaborate upon specific agency-related roles, I would like to begin with general self-understandings of international activists, and their relation to Palestinian and Israeli activists in terms of identity/alterity.

It is interesting that foreign activists’ self-understandings merge into a single category of “international”. While the respective interpretations of this role certainly diverge from one

person to another, international activists referred to very similar aspects when talking about their aims, reasons to come and expected impact. The ISM's positions certainly influenced the similarities in the self-understandings of international activists; particularly because almost all internationals receive the same kind of training from ISM coordinators at the beginning of their stay, and thus are subjected with the same external interpretations of the role which they are supposed to follow.

In contrast to Israeli activists who are unable to stay continuously in Bil'in or elsewhere in West Bank areas classified as B and C⁷, internationals enjoy relative freedom of movement (within the valid period of their visas). Some of them, usually referred to as short-termers, stay for a few weeks and come to Bil'in for a few days during their stay. Others, called long-termers, may stay for several months or up to a year (depending on eligibility for visa extension). During their activities in Bil'in they are hosted in an apartment that is reserved for individuals who are active for ISM. Whilst short-termers merely have a small chance to build any strong relationships with the local Palestinian population, long-termers certainly have. Playing with local children, dinner-invitations to private homes and flirts with the local youth are few among many interactions. In contrast to the emotional connection to Palestinians many internationals develop over time, they often express their disgust when talking about Israeli politics and mainstream society. Travelling to Israel or engaging with the other side is relatively unaccepted among the activist community. A paper fixed on the international-house's refrigerator says in big letters "No Israeli Products". The one-sided views internationals presumably have towards Israelis are one of the main criticisms Israeli activists have for internationals.

The category "international" is based on a specific role-understanding, and in regard to that role all internationals are treated equally. At first sight it seems as if citizenship or ethnicity do not matter much in the external definitions of internationals by others. The opposite is true for the Jewish-American activist Michael who speaks out against Israel's politics especially because he is Jewish and American: "As a Jewish American I also see myself as breaking the idea that the Jews are doing it [the occupation] instead of the Zionist Israelis" (Michael, Interview). He further explained that as an American tax payer he indirectly supported Israeli

⁷ Area A, B, and C designate zones of control in the West Bank for the Palestinians and the Israelis. They were agreed upon in the so called "Oslo II" agreement on September 24, 1995. Zone A includes 3 percent of the West Bank. It is under Palestinian control. Zone B includes 24 percent of the West Bank. It is under joint Palestinian-Israeli control. Zone C includes 74 percent of the West Bank and is under Israeli control. It has to be noted that area C was subject to further permanent status negotiation and Arafat believed that these territories would be gradually transferred to Palestinian control. (Harms/ Ferry 2008: 155f).

occupation; showing solidarity with Palestinians thus counterbalances the guilt he credits to his home country.

As a Jew he feels misrepresented when Israel claims to speak for the Jewish people. One of the reasons for him to become active was to reclaim his Jewish identity as a humanist, and he thus felt a personal responsibility to see with his own eyes and speak out. By becoming an activist for Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation he does not only follow his goal to fight what he considers unjust politics, but he also offers resistance to the external definitions of his own Jewish identity. Although in this case citizenship and ethnic/religious affiliation does inform activist-identities/alterities to a considerable degree, it will be treated as an exception. My research showed that even though every once in a while national, religious and ethnic identities do play a role in identity-processes among internationals within the figured world of activism in Bil'in, such processes mainly draw from aspects relating to their specific agency as transnational, transethnic and transreligious internationals.

7.2.1 Differing and Belonging

The motivations and goals for joining the “struggle” predominantly vary among the three groups, yet are shared to a lesser degree between each group. While Palestinians, internationals and Israeli activists all emphasized that they more or less want similar achievements through their activism, variations exist and these are deployed in the construction of similarity and difference between and within the three groups.

7.2.1.1 Internationals among Themselves

Backgrounds and individual motivations to join in resistance vary, but most follow several socially mediated role expectations which are the product of a simultaneous dialectic process of self-interpretation and interpretations about oneself offered by others. The idea of the role model which internationals are confronted with upon their arrival can be understood as an external offer of self. As Anthony P. Cohen writes, there is always a difference between one person's self-perception, and the perception of that person by others (Cohen 2000a: 5). Such differences can cause serious conflict between the core aspects of one activist's self-

understandings and the external expectations he or she comes across. Let me provide an example.

The international activist John viewed himself as having the privilege to understand and interact with both sides of the conflict. Hence he decided to spend his free time during an assignment to get to know some Israeli settlers. He hitch-hiked to a near-by settlement and on his way back he had a conversation with Israeli soldiers which he described as “very fruitful”. After returning from his encounter with the “other” he told one of the ISM coordinators about it. The coordinator strongly condemned what John did because in his eyes it meant engaging with the enemy and betraying Palestinians.

Given that the boundaries delineating internationals’ roles within the figured world of activism are rather rigid, it proved incompatible with John’s activist-identity/alterity that he is with the Israeli “enemy” and with Palestinian resistance at the same time. For him, his agency implied the privilege of engaging with the “other” instead of demonizing them as a distant enemy. I will pull further reference to this example later on. For now I hope to have shown how the “internal-external dialectic of identification” (Jenkins 1996: 20) can implode when strong divergences exist.

Besides specific examples of individual dissent as the one above, internationals referred to their roles as activists in very similar ways and contrasted them to those both Israeli activists and Palestinians play. Similarity and difference in these cases are not primarily constructed on the basis of an individual’s national, ethnic, religious, regional or other affiliations, but with regard to the respective agency individuals and groups possess within the figured world of activism in Bil’in. “A” is an international and thus feels to have something in common with other internationals because A plays a specific role which is based upon a certain kind of agency.

7.2.1.2 *Internationals and Israeli Activists*

For many internationals, especially short-termers, Israeli activists and Israeli soldiers are all they get to know of the other side. Even those who did engage with mainstream Israeli society seemed to be very frustrated by their inability to share their experiences. One activist said: “if you talk to an average Israeli [...] grab the next guy walking in front of you and ask him.

Within three sentences he will be talking about the rockets that come in from Gaza” (John, Interview).

“The rockets that come from Gaza” refers to the damage Palestinians supposedly inflict on Israeli society. When being confronted with such kind of arguments, internationals often become emotional, yet usually they do not find any common ground because the interpretative world Israelis base their arguments on is entirely different from the figured world of activism internationals mediate their meanings in. In general, internationals acknowledge the difficulties Israeli activists face resulting from their dissent from dominant Zionist narratives. One activist acknowledged the following: “The Israeli activists were really cool and I really, really respect them [...]. They have it really rough because their whole society and the whole military security apparatus is designed to prevent dissent within their ranks” (Michael, Interview).

One way internationals interpreted the role of Israeli activists is by attributing specific agency-related functions to them. One of these is that internationals view Israelis as particularly effective in changing Israeli politics from within. In saying this, internationals also referred to language as an important factor in demonstrations, especially because Israeli activists talk to Israeli soldiers in Hebrew during demonstrations and other actions. In addition to this specific agency of influencing Israeli politics and society, internationals attribute an ambassador-role to Israeli activists because they consider the Israelis’ presence in Bil’in important for shaping the local Palestinians attitudes: “the presence of Israeli activists hopefully shows Palestinians that it is not about being Jewish, it is about being anti-Zionist” (Tristan, Interview).

Internationals therefore see Israeli activists’ functions as unique in two ways. Firstly, internationals attribute a specific kind of agency to Israeli activists which they themselves do not possess as outsiders, namely the capacity to influence Israel from within. Secondly, Israeli activists are seen as ambassadors who balance the concept of the Israeli enemy in Palestinian identity/alterity.

Besides these functions, it is interesting to note that internationals – when asked about their affiliations with Palestinian culture and society – often emphasized that they are culturally closer to Israel, but politically closer to Palestinians. One activist said to me: “I am still doing it because I believe in it, but my culture is on the Israeli side. You know I am going against my own lifestyle” (John, interview). In terms of lifestyle, the activist John felt especially

connected to Israeli society, and contrasted this affiliation with Palestinian society which caused cultural discomforts in him.

7.2.1.3 *Internationals and the Palestinians of Bil'in*

The ways internationals interpreted their belonging to and differing from the local Palestinians' resistance operated on various levels. The first aspect in internationals' identity/alterity towards Palestinians worth mentioning is that of belonging through emotional affection. Long-term participation in Bil'in's every-day struggles created an emotional proximity. It follows that internationals' activist-identities/alterities incorporate affective elements, which provide the motivation to take action and reduce Palestinian suffering. Rew and Campbell write that identity narratives can be deployed for the "mobilization of emotion through a selective drawing upon affective elements" (Rew/Campbell 1999: 13). While acknowledging the importance of this argument, I argue that also the opposite is true since international activists' emotional affiliations with Palestinian resistance can engender narratives that form part of their activist-identities/alterities; they thus lay the basis for the individual justification of political action. The following quote taken from one of my interviews should underline this argument:

"It is just the humanizing. You hang out with them [the Palestinians]. You stay with their families and play with their children; you just don't want that anything happens to them. It is like anything that they want, just give them a normal life is like the best possible thing. Obviously I have my own ideas about what has to be done. When you talk to the villagers they just don't want the army coming and stealing their children at night. They just don't want, they just don't want to be unable to go through checkpoints, not to be able to see Jerusalem, not to be able to go to the Dead Sea and do all this other stuff; just because the way politics are. They may not have larger goals than that. In that we can definitely agree. I come to Bil'in and I don't want to see anymore 15 and 16 year olds arrested at night and taken away for years" (Michael, interview).

Internationals certainly do not interpret Palestinians as belonging to them, but strong emotional empathy with their suffering bridges the internationals' activist-identity/alterity with the realities of the local Palestinian population. Hence aspects of their belonging to Palestinians are constructed by affect. This emotional belonging serves as the answer to the

big “why am I here?” in internationals’ self-understandings as activists. One relatively old Swiss activist identified so much with the local struggle that she couldn’t leave after staying in Bil’in continuously for months.

As this is one point of view it is important to note that emotional affection does not inform activist-identities/alterities in every case. Therefore the question as to why there is variation is partially answered by the degree to which internationals emotionally identify with the locals’ suffering.

Difference was largely more emphasized than similarity when discussions approached the topics of concrete political goals and nonviolent tactics in demonstrations. Internationals explained that they were mainly there to support Palestinians in their nonviolent struggle, despite a difference in their actual goals. Besides the political goals, some internationals attempted to distance themselves from what, in their eyes, were one-sided and problematic views Palestinians held towards Jews. One activist expressed his discomfort:

“For instance this Palestinian guy was joking around saying how great Hitler was. This is really, really dangerous, because it means that people like me or western Europeans lose sympathy or feel very uncomfortable at that point. And the presence of Israeli activists, hopefully, shows Palestinians that it is not about being Jewish; it is about being anti-Zionist” (Tristan, interview).

The degree to which internationals develop emotional ties with the local Palestinian population in Bil’in varies. As mentioned earlier, some activists who live in Bil’in over a longer period of time become affected emotionally and- relative to agency - identify with the local villagers. On the contrary, others maintain emotional distance and more strictly see themselves as a third party. One international said:

“I have to say I don’t feel particularly connected [to Palestinians]. I feel slightly above and don’t know, and I think that’s the right way to be [...]. It is certainly best not to become too emotionally involved because part of the role of Internationals is observing, an active participant. A large part of being in ISM is observation. There is a danger I feel to identify too closely” (Fergus, Interview).

By explaining his role as someone who is not particularly connected and is an observer, he addressed the problem of becoming too emotionally affected and one-sided. As identity/alterity is a product of human interaction which shapes the senses of self and other; the context provides interpretative frames where belonging and differing are constructed. By

staying “slightly above”, Fergus does not run the risk of becoming too embedded in the Palestinian perspective. He interprets his role as a distant observer and supporter.

7.2.2 Agency and Identity/Alterity in Roles and Functions

An example which activists use to evaluate their agency is the impact they expect to have. One activist explained the importance of activism in Bil'in for him as follows:

“It’s important, not necessarily because you see a visible difference between one demonstration or the next. You are not capturing land; you are not changing the necessary, like, parameters in that struggle. But because you are continuing the struggle and it’s visible and everyone knows that Bil'in is resisting every week at the same place, at the same time” (Michael, Interview).

During demonstrations, although the crowd walks towards the separation barrier and activists usually try to tear away parts of it in order to cross over to the other side, it appears that these actions are a symbolic expression of resistance, rather than having any immediate and direct impact. As another international explained, “no ISMer is going to stop the Israelis at some point bulldozing the house if they want to” (Tristan, Interview). However, as carriers of specific functions and roles, internationals already have an impact because they are physically present. The expected impact is reflected in the individual interpretations of the roles one thinks to play during resistance to Israeli occupation.

I would like to come back to the metaphor of a theatre play. A play contains actors with certain roles which in turn inform the actor’s played “self” on the stage. In a theatre, actors are agents of a role they are supposed to play and that role (here lies the difference to “reality”) usually does not have anything to do with their real life identities. The roles activists interpret within the figured world of activism in Bil'in certainly are reality in that these roles form part of their activist-selves which are defined, maintained and contested through interactional processes of identity/alterity. They are power-related ascriptions referring to agency.

The roles activists ascribe to themselves and to others within the figured world of activism in Bil'in relate to agency and power. The subjective evaluations of such roles form part of their identities as activists. I am aware of the limitations of an approach that isolates certain aspects of activists’ identities/alterities from other important aspects of their “selves”. This inquiry is not aimed at depicting a full-scale cartography of activists’ identities/alterities in relation to

ethnic, national, cultural and other relevant aspects and concepts. Instead it tries to identify those dimensions in identity/alterity that relate to the individual's involvement in activism instead; so to speak dimensions of identity/alterity that find their relevance only in a specific context or within a specific figured world. In the following the dimensions of activist-identities/alterities relating to agency will be discussed in terms of specific roles and functions; they are the product of the "ongoing, and in practice simultaneous, synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others" (Jenkins 1996: 19).

7.2.2.1 Roles and Functions

As one of the previous examples showed (see chapter 7.2.1.1.), divergences between one's own interpretation of self, and the interpretations of him/her offered by others can disturb aspects in identity/alterity and thereby cause role-conflicts. Internationals are outsiders and therefore a third party in contrast to Palestinians and Israeli activists who are direct elements in the conflict. As a third party, foreign internationals come to support. Their agency is one of specific abilities and privileges such as mobility, access to international media and little vulnerability to Israeli suppression and legal persecution. Above all, internationals are the personification of an agency-upgrade for local Palestinian resistance. They carry with them what Palestinians lack: security, media attention, transnational connections, etc. In sum, internationals bring power to the powerless; they support because their agency allows them to be effective in doing so and they help Palestinians to balance the power inequality in resisting the local manifestations of Israeli occupation.

Agency-Upgrade

For instance, the activist Michael is aware of the privileges he as a US-American citizen has within the world of activism in Bil'in:

"If I get arrested I go to jail for a day; on immigration detention maybe two weeks whereas they go to jail for six months up to years, years, years. I know that I have a personal privilege and I accept that. At the same time to not use that privilege to help them, you know, is a major problem. And I think that we should be using our privilege" (Michael, Interview).

The privilege to do what Palestinians are not able to do also serves as the individual answer to the “why am I here” question. Internationals’ activist-identities/alterities are to a large degree based on the realisation of the capacity to support Palestinian resistance through playing specific roles.

As carriers of privilege and agency, internationals are present in demonstrations and function as “human shields” because the Israeli military uses less violence. Internationals also use their language skills to translate local meanings into international media and they are able to move easily between Israel and the Palestinian territories and carry out advocacy work. They are transnational messengers for Palestinians in Bil’in as they have seen with their own eyes and tell people in their home countries what they have experienced. These functions form part of internationals’ interpretations of an activist “self,” with further respective interpretations of their role within resistance in Bil’in. As privileged and powerful supporters they also “invest something of themselves in the roles they aspire to perform” (Rew/Campbell 1999: 16). They try to be good activists and fulfil the roles they are expected to play.

Being a Third Party, or Not

Whether international activists evaluate their role as a third party trying to understand both sides of the conflict, or as part of Palestinian resistance opposing an Israeli other, is subjective. This is dependent upon the interactions through which the activist-identities/alterities are shaped and the context in which these processes take place.

It is no surprise that internationals are likely to adopt Palestinian views when the only Israelis they have contact with are soldiers and a small minority of Israeli activists. Those internationals who did not consider engaging with Israeli society as part of their activist-role were certainly more radical about boycotting Israel than those who adopted a more balanced attitude. The activist John, who wanted to talk with Israeli soldiers and settlers in order to gain better understanding and to influence their views, is an example of the latter kind. He described himself as a third party, a “westerner” who feels the obligation to use his privileges and his agency to understand both sides of the conflict. Contrary to his views, he was expected by others to be solely on the Palestinian side. He expressed the conflict arising from this dilemma as follows: “I don’t quite see it. I mean if I was French talking to a German it would be different. I am not a Bedouin, I am an international. I am a third party. I understand

their point. I am not a third party. I am with them. So what I do is the same if they do that” (John, Interview). The same activist once said thank you to an Israeli soldier for treating Palestinians with relative dignity. To him this was part of his role as a third party but to the other ISM activists it represented an act of betrayal. These examples show that the scope is wide when regarding the interpretations of internationals over their own position relative to Palestinian resistance and the “enemy” Israel.

What happens when a person’s interpretation of the role he or she plays within a specific context (such as activism in Bil’in) departs from the external role-expectations? By keeping in mind that identity is always something multidimensional and fluid (see Baumann/Gingrich 2004: x), there are at least two options for a person to mediate a conflict resulting from the internal-external dialectic of identification (see Jenkins 1996): the combination of both into something new or the rejection of the external. Both presuppose that a person possesses the agency to choose continuously from a set of identity/alterity offerings. Such a capacity to choose aspects in one’s identity/alterity should not be overemphasized. As Andre Gingrich and Gerd Baumann (2004: xi) write, we need to move beyond “the false opposition between an assumed primacy of structures or cognition on the one hand, and on the other, the helpless reduction of all social processes to agency and contextual contingency”.

Giving Hope and Showing Solidarity

Another role internationals commonly ascribed to themselves is that of showing solidarity and giving hope to Palestinians. They show solidarity by being among those who suffer and resist and in doing so, they give up and use some of their privileges at the same time. They refuse to live a quiet and comfortable life and join in uncomfortable and potentially dangerous resistance instead. This choice is nevertheless based on privileges such as mobility, wealth and advantageous European citizenship and power. In relation to this topic, one activist explained:

“You can see individuals and families that you have really helped. And who are really thankful for your presence here, and that feels good, you know. [...] When they see internationals and Israelis come to their villages and come to demonstrations and put their bodies in the way, catch up with tear gas, just like the Palestinians, and get arrested just like the Palestinians. Because it’s hard, hard living under the occupation and I am surprised that they have not given up already” (Michael, Interview).

In this case I would argue it is essentially the emphasis on difference in power and agency that results in the construction of belonging. Internationals' interpretations of their own roles in activism match those they ascribe to Palestinians like in a puzzle. Because Palestinians lack power internationals play an agency-related role; they show solidarity and give hope to Palestinians on the basis of a difference in agency (which is somewhat similar to class) and simultaneously become "just like Palestinians".

It follows that processes of belonging and differing work simultaneously but on different levels. This example contrasts the widely held belief that the realization of differences between one group and the other results in the construction of a rigid boundary delineating an exclusive "us" from "them". When difference is the precondition for interaction between group A and B and this interaction produces a sense of belonging between these two it can be argued (in the style of Barth (1998)) that distinctions are often "the very foundations on which embracing social systems are build". Also Israeli activists view themselves as distinct from international and Palestinian activists, although they belong to the same "struggle" as the others.

7.3 The Israeli Activists

Like international activists, Israeli ones also form part of networks through which they organize activities and communicate their political goals. At the time of research most Israelis active in demonstrations in Bil'in were affiliated with the group "Anarchists Against the Wall" (AATW), formed in 2003 as a response to the construction of the Israeli separation barrier. The AATW serves as a network of organization and communication and does not require any membership or formal commitment. Even though the name of the network suggests something else, members of AATW are by no means a homogenous group consisting of anarchists. The scope of political and social background is wide and opinions differ. What they have in common is their activism in joint actions with Palestinians and international activists and the aim to challenge Israeli occupation and the "Apartheid Wall", as they call it. In many terms, Israeli activists have to cross many borders on their way to become activists in Bil'in.

7.3.1 Crossing Borders

Most Israelis undertake a radical step when they choose to participate in a joint struggle with Palestinians and internationals against the politics of their own state, which involves a reorientation of some of their central aspects of identity/alterity. Non-activist Israelis rarely cross the border between what they interpret as their state (including settlements) and the Palestinian territories outside their military service. Being in the presence of and demonstrating with Palestinians consequently does not only represent the crossing of a political and physical border, but also the breaking with the learned and socialized boundaries of belonging and differing. The extent to which this break is experienced by Israeli activists varies because it depends on the individual's personal background, social environment and on other aspects.

My research has found that Israeli activists' backgrounds are very diverse, as is the intensity of their first experiences in demonstrations. The activist Ortal from Tel Aviv, who became active relatively late, writes about her first demonstration: "In one day my life changed. [...] I had tears in my eyes" (Ortal, interview). Vered, who became active at a very early age, has not experienced her first demonstration in such a way mostly because she grew up in a family where criticism has never been a taboo. Nevertheless, the variety of the individual backgrounds has to be understood against the background of some general elements of Israeli national identity/alterity.

We know that "national identities are [partly] constituted in relation to others" (Eriksen 2002: 110). In the dominant narrative of Israeli national identity, Palestinians (or Arabs) represent a very strong "other". This other is not to be understood at the collective level in this case, but as "the construction of nation in terms of self," which Anthony Cohen (2000b: 163) calls "personal nationalism." I argue that joining Palestinian resistance is primarily perceived as incompatible with Israeli national identity because the mutual constitution of belonging and differing – we Israelis as opposed to Palestinians – is built on a very rigid and impermeable boundary. It follows that being Israeli and resisting Israeli politics doesn't fit the dominant narratives of Israeli national identity in personal nationalism. Thus, activists need to rearrange the points of reference in their identity/alterity.

Another element in Israeli identity/alterity that appeared relevant throughout my research is the symbolism deriving from the social image of soldiers as defenders and heroes. For the

activist Ortal, crossing the border also meant escaping national “brainwash”. According to her, a specific imagination of the Israeli soldier as a hero was part of that brainwash. Facing the same hero as an opponent in demonstrations changed the image and elements of belonging in her identity.

For Israeli activists, being attacked by tear gas in a demonstration by their own country’s military, breaks the learned boundaries of belonging and differing. The former activist Tal from Tel Aviv participated in the first demonstrations against the Israeli separation barrier and describes his experiences as follows:

“For me, I got a whole lesson in politics. Because being held by the police, told by the police not to walk and walking, not physically fight them, but it broke something in me and I physically felt it in my consciousness. I had this understanding of culture, the law, the logos, whatever; the thing that I was belonging to and having broken from it. That is maybe something that is lacking. Nobody wants to break this because you are all alone” (Tal, Interview).

For Israeli activists, demonstrating together with Palestinians means opposing and confronting the national army of the state they are supposed to belong to. All Israeli activists interviewed throughout my research emphasized the influence these early experiences in demonstrations had on their opinions and self-understandings. They confront who they are supposed to belong to and join those in a political struggle who they have been raised to see as their political enemy.

7.3.2 Being Different

Being deviant is always difficult. It comes as no surprise then that Israeli activists who support Palestinian resistance have to cope with various problems as a consequence of their dissent. While the activists themselves do not see much contradiction in being Israeli and supporting Palestinian rights, the wider Israeli public certainly does. “Self-hating-Jews,” “traitors” or “lefties” are common descriptions expressing people’s contempt about activists’ cooperation with the national enemy. Activists’ interpretations of themselves stand in sharp contrast to external interpretations of their “selves” encountered in daily life. Bearing the consequences of being different implies various problems stretching from the level of personal and family relations to refusal of military service and imprisonment.

The activist Ortal writes about her mother's disapproval of her activities: "When I am in Europe sometimes, giving lectures for instance, my mother says after that: 'Why do you go abroad and talk bad about Israel?'" (Ortal, Interview). The activist Vered has not had any problems with her family but chose to refuse the army service and had to cope with resulting consequences:

"The only hard thing was, when I started, when I finished school and I started going to prison and the others were going to the army. It had nothing to do with what we believed; we could still be best friends. But we were in so different places in our life. I was in prison for two months. [...] When I got out of prison and started to have a job and an apartment and all that, I lived a different life then they did. I am living a very cosy life. I invited them to my housewarming party. They obviously lived still with their parents because they are in military. So through these situations we became totally different from our way of life. We don't have the same topics of conversation anymore." (Vered, interview).

She refused military service and faced imprisonment. Due to her difference in political opinion, her social life changed. This is just one example of the problems Israeli activists have to cope with because of their political dissent. While they are somewhat isolated and misunderstood by the Israeli majority, a strong alternative community and activist networks exist, and these have importance in maintaining confidence in what they are doing. More so, having a local community of activists, such as that exists in Tel Aviv, or being part of a network such as the "Anarchists Against the Wall", is essential in providing enough confidence for individuals who wish to depart radically from the dominant narratives.

Within Israeli national identity, the boundary that marks the space between belonging to Israel and differing from Palestinians is a dense, narrow and solid one. This boundary is where the dialogical relationship of belonging and differing constitutes an almost unmovable line between "us" and "them". To cross this line, Israeli activists must break from and redefine themselves because they are opposing what they are meant to be as Israelis. It is their simultaneous belonging to the "other" and the dissolution of this "other" as a constitutive opposition to their "self" that allows them to redraw the boundaries and rearrange aspects of their identity/alterity.

7.3.3 Differing and Belonging

In Israeli activists' identities, facets of belonging and differing relate to their own roles and those of other people involved in protests in Bil'in. Depending upon the context and matter, they simultaneously belong to and differ from Israel, Palestinians and international activists.

7.3.3.1 *Israeli Activists and the Palestinians of Bil'in*

Relations with Palestinians active in Bil'in were expressed as generally very good by Israelis interviewed throughout my research:

“We were in good relations, exchanging phone numbers and so on. There was also this young generation in Bil'in, almost the same age we were. We spoke Hebrew together, they speak pretty good. When I was 16, 17; in our final year in high school we became less active. We had exams and stuff like that and everyone followed his own thing in life” (Vered, interview).

Language seems to be important as a means to the construction of senses of identity/alterity. In another example a child provided an external offering of guilt in an Israeli activist's self when crying because of him speaking Hebrew. Speaking a specific language is a very obvious etiquette of belonging and differing. In the eyes of many Palestinian children, Hebrew is above all the language of the oppressor. The youth in Bil'in has learned over time that there are two kinds of Israelis: “good” and “bad” ones, or activists and soldiers.

In the case of Palestinians and Israeli activists speaking Hebrew with each other, a dialogue becomes possible and trust building more likely. During my stay in Bil'in it became evident that local youth had two categories of foreigners: Jews and internationals; or in their own words: *yahūd* and *ajānib*. It is no surprise then that language works as an etiquette in the construction of belonging and differing.

Even though the relations between Israeli activists and Palestinians were generally expressed as very good, it is needless to say that joint Israeli-Palestinian activities do not occur without difficulties. Stories are known about stones being thrown at Israeli activists' cars and in one case attacks occurred with Molotov cocktails. A Swiss activist who stayed in the village for more than four months expressed that “there are Palestinians in Bil'in who don't want to

engage with Israelis at all” (Julia, interview). One activist – as already mentioned in brief above - talks about how a Palestinian child reacted when hearing him speaking Hebrew: “I had the pleasure of being with a [Palestinian] child not more than four years old crying when he heard me speaking Hebrew, which is a terrible thing” (Tal, interview). While a small child is used to Hebrew speaking soldiers carrying guns, he is not always able to distinguish between “good” and “bad” Israelis, however the Palestinian activists in Bil’in certainly can. Palestinians have been used to the presence of foreigners and Israelis, since their involvement in the local struggle has been for more than five years.

The example of a Palestinian child crying upon hearing an Israeli activist speaking Hebrew represents the significance of “guilt” in Israeli activists’ identity/alterity. The activist Vered expresses similar feelings:

“It [activism] does give satisfaction and also guilt. I do pay taxes for this. My schoolmates are actually physically doing it. I live in a neighbourhood that wasn’t physically Arab before ‘48, but it was probably Arab owned land. I know all these things about myself. On the other hand what I am doing is trying to change” (Vered, Interview).

Through interaction with Palestinians, Israeli activists are confronted with those aspects of their “self” which they try to overcome through political activity. Hence “guilt” represents some uncomfortable aspects of belonging to Israel, and points at Israeli activists’ own interpretations of differing from Palestinians. Because one is an Israeli citizen, he or she cannot support Palestinians in an all-embracing manner, since being an Israeli citizen holds a range of obstacles to such full-scale support. Paying taxes to the occupation, living on “probably Arab owned land,” having done military service and enjoying all the benefits of Israeli wealth is an undeniable factor in Israeli activists’ identity/alterity. “Guilt” is both an aspect of Israeli activists’ “self” and an aspect of the external interpretations of this self offered by Palestinians. The Israeli activists’ capacity to act outside their structural entanglements with the Israeli state to overcome “guilt” is limited. We will see later on how being Israeli also implies a range of specific agency-related roles and functions, which constitute the essence of identity/alterity within a figured world of activism.

Beyond “guilt” there are other significant aspects in Israeli activists’ identities and alterities towards Palestinians. “Cultural difference” from Palestinians was often mentioned as a distinguishing feature by Israeli activists. Instead of feeling any connection to Palestinians in terms of society and culture, the connection to the struggle against Israeli occupation and the

separation barrier seems to be the main feature Israeli activists view as unifying. Beyond that, Israeli activists emphasized the unifying character of joint actions.

7.3.3.2 Israeli Activists and Internationals

While Israeli activists are outsiders in Bil'in, but insiders to the conflict, international activists can be understood as outsiders to both concepts, who manifest themselves within the figured world of activism voluntarily and usually without life-long connections to Israel/Palestine. Israeli and international activists co-operate more or less in the same ways as they do with Palestinians; all three join in the weekly demonstrations on Friday, but internationals are able to stay with Palestinians everywhere in the West Bank continuously while Israelis are not.

The fact that Israeli activists are insiders to the conflict is an important aspect in their identity/alterity as activists. Israelis who join a struggle for the rights of the Palestinian people against the politics of their own country clearly distance themselves from aspects in the dominant Israeli narratives. But, and this is the main source of the alterity in Israeli activists' views towards internationals, they still consider themselves part of Israel and object to radical anti-Israeli sentiments internationals often have. One Israeli activist says that "they [internationals] are kids with little understanding, with a lot of hatred towards Israel, with emotional views; it is what they do at that age" (Tal, Interview).

This argument has to be understood against the background of two circumstances. The first is that many international activists stay for less than a month, usually do not experience Israel from inside and therefore easily adopt several superficial aspects of Palestinian alterity towards Israel. The second is that Israeli activists tend to judge internationals' views on the conflict as one-sided and undifferentiated because of the first circumstance, and feel that they fight for Palestinians against Israel and not for peace. One Israeli activist says that sometimes "Palestinians are much more tolerant towards Israel than internationals" (Vered, Interview); she carries on with a description of a related situation in Jerusalem:

"We had a few ISMers and we were walking from Sheikh Jarrah back here. It was on Shabbat, and there is an orthodox Jewish neighbourhood between here and Sheikh Jarrah. We were a group of people, some of us not modestly dressed. And they were smoking, and there was a route that takes 2 minutes longer, but they said no, we need to take that. Listen, I wouldn't go

inside a Palestinian neighbourhood dressed like that smoking. I told them we can't go there like that. We were all walking around but these two guys there were walking through. I thought they respect one community, but they were not able to respect another" (Vered, interview).

Whatever the exact reasons for "not respecting" the orthodox Jewish community in that situation were, the story points at the circumstance that Israeli and international activists relate to Israel as an "other" in their identity/alterity as activists in different ways. Some international activists' generalisations of Israel as an enemy are certainly due to the absence of their contact with Israeli society outside their involvement as activists. It follows that another aspect of differing between international and Israeli activists is the duration of stay. Especially so called "international short-termers" are criticized by Israeli activists. The activist Vered said the following:

"It is more the short-termers than the long-termers, it is their prejudice against Israelis. They come very pro-Palestinian [...]. It does have two sides. [...]. I understand that they see soldiers as an enemy in that situation. But I don't think they should be automatically seen as evil. Especially the short-termers, because they don't have time to get into the whole thing, have a very one-sided mind" (Vered, interview).

Those aspects of Israeli activists' identity/alterity that relate to international activists seem to follow a twofold pattern. Internationals are seen as different from them in that they are outsiders who have one-sided anti-Israeli views, essentially because they are for and with Palestinians only. On the other hand, Israeli activist interpret the international activists role as something they lack as citizens of Israel who are not able to stay in the Palestinian territories continuously over a long period of time.

In sum Israeli activists' identities are strongly connected to their affiliation with Israel as a party in the conflict, even though the above described "guilt" in their identity indicates that this affiliation is afflicted with contradictions. According to them, as Israelis, they understand Israel while internationals don't. But as Israelis they are also unable to play the role internationals do in staying with Palestinians in Bil'in continuously. Here the dialectic relationship of identity and alterity becomes evident when one's own role is based on agency-related functions the other lacks while the other is ascribed agency-related functions oneself is not capable of enacting. The following chapter is aimed at outlining some of these specific roles and functions Israeli activists ascribed to themselves in relation to the roles of the other activist groups.

7.3.4 Agency and Identity/Alterity in Roles and Functions

Above all, the reasons for Israeli activists to join in Bil'in's demonstrations are to support Palestinians in their local resistance to the "Israeli occupation." Since the connection between resistance, agency and power is evident, it is not surprising that relative agency serves as the main category in the construction of belonging and differing among the people and groups of people politically active in Bil'in.

Israeli activists, for instance, described their roles in terms of their unique agency as Israelis, which is aimed at balancing the Palestinians' agency-deficit. For Israelis, activism is primarily directed towards influencing their own society. This ability was emphasized as very important and includes talking in Hebrew to Israeli soldiers during demonstrations and showing an alternative path to the Israeli public. An international activist said that "an Israeli is ten times more effective than Palestinians in making changes" and "if an Israeli talks to an Israeli soldier about the way they treat Palestinians, it's far more effective than if I do it" (John, interview). Despite their political dissent, Israeli activists are Israelis who speak Hebrew and live in the same country as the soldiers they oppose in demonstrations. "Being Israeli" implies an agency very different from Palestinians and internationals. The individual interpretations of this specific agency inform the processes of belonging and differing by which Israeli activists relate to themselves, to Palestinians and to internationals.

When the Israeli activist Ortal says that "another goal is to create awareness in Israel through demonstrations and direct actions," she underlines the argument that much of what Israeli activists aim at is directed at aspects of their identity as citizens of Israel. They became activists to change who they were; who they are *not* as Israelis is represented in those aspects in the Israeli national identity/alterity they depart from. Who they are not in relation to the other activist groups is mainly expressed through agency-related role understandings such as being able to change Israel from within or decreasing the danger for Palestinians in demonstrations. As a "human shield," Israeli and international activists are usually in the front line in demonstrations since they do not face as severe consequences as Palestinians when being detained. The role of supporters with certain privileges and a specific agency based on "being Israeli" is a central aspect of their activist-identity/alterity.

Israelis in Bil'in also see themselves as "ambassadors," because they want to show Palestinians that not all Israelis support what their state does and that they care about and fight

with them. In addition to that, they want to show the media, the world and Israel that there is a continuous struggle in Bil'in. I call this role "being a messenger," of which the activist Vered says: "If Palestinians are there alone and injured it is not a story. If an Israeli is injured, it is. By being there we make it a story" (Vered, interview). The non-Palestinian activists can be understood as carriers of specific agency-related functions, which manifest themselves in Bil'in through their presence. "Making it a story" is one of these amplifying functions. It implies the capacity to be heard and seen outside the village more easily than the local Palestinian population. This capacity seems to be more significant than the aim to move the Israeli separation barrier. None of the Israeli activists interviewed in my research believed that the demonstrations in Bil'in will have any significant effect on the situation on the ground. They rather want to "show that there is a struggle" (Vered, interview). They upgrade the Palestinians' agency with their presence because they generate media attention and political pressure and decrease the degree of violence used.

Another important aspect in Israeli activists roles is the capacity to "make it a joint struggle," as was expressed by one girl. By saying that "you need the Israelis to have a joint struggle" she indicates how important it is for her to "show" unity with the national "enemy" of Israel. The emphasis on having and showing a joint struggle represents both aspects of belonging to Palestine and of differing from Israel. After breaking with the learned boundaries of belonging and differing, Israeli activists show their affiliation with Palestinians through joint efforts, which at the same time marks their distance from dominant aspects in Israeli national identity/alterity.

In terms of agency, Israeli activists can chose to play a supportive role out of a privileged and powerful position. They are a human shield for Palestinians in demonstrations and are less vulnerable to legal persecution because of their nationality. They raise media attention and may increase the pressure on Israel and the military. Crossing the border from separation to having a joint struggle with Palestinians is a choice.

Israeli activists view their role as Israelis in local resistance in Bil'in as a privileged and powerful one, although "guilt" does play a role in this self-understanding as discussed above. Regarding alterity towards internationals, one Israeli activist evaluates her own agency as less powerful in supporting Palestinians in Bil'in:

"First of all, the internationals; I mean we go to demonstrations and we go home afterwards. The internationals first of all have the role of being there to help. They have the power. They

can stay there in the ISM-house. We can't do that. We slept there, a few nights here a few nights there. We can't really live there. We have jobs and school and so. The internationals can. They can leave it all behind them" (Vered, Interview).

While agency in Israeli activists' identity was interpreted as a powerful privilege in the other cases, "being Israeli" is evaluated as an obstacle in this context. The internationals' long-term commitment in the village, their ability to stay there continuously and legally gives them power in comparison to "us Israelis" who "can't really live there". A difference in agency is interpreted by the same Israeli activist on the issue of boycotting Israeli products: "we Israelis, we can't boycott Israeli products, while for everyone outside of Israel it is much easier" (ibid).

I hope to have shown that activism in identity/alterity matters in varying ways for Palestinian, International and Israeli activists. Who one is, or is not, as an activist within the world of activism in Bil'in is a socially constructed subjectivity which makes sense only in relation to the other involved activists. Most of them participate in the same actions and fight for the same cause, although this has very different implications for their identities and alterities. Let us take a closer look at the many processes whereby identities are defined, challenged and maintained in the course of social interaction.

7.4 Dynamic Grammars of Identity/Alterity

Before turning to some specific "grammars of identity/alterity" (Gingrich/Baumann 2004) and underlying dynamic processes, I would like to recapitulate the most important characteristics of identity/alterity briefly as they represent the cornerstones of the working definition used throughout my research.

First, identity/alterity refers to social subjectivities. These are multidimensional, and fluid and often relate to power and agency (ibid). And "because every individual possesses a number of identities not all of which are relevant in every context, a particular identity is situationally defined in the course of social interaction" (Rew/Campbell 1999: 10). The internal-external dialectic of identification (Jenkins 1996) is part of such contextual social interaction. Because a person is always defined and defines him or herself and others on the basis of a multitude of identities/alterities, it is possible to focus on specific parts such as the interpretation of roles within a figured world of activism.

Let us take a look at how activist-identities/alterities are shaped, challenged and contested. In order to make the seemingly invisible visible it will be necessary to find the right concepts for identifying change, fluidity and process.

In the interpretation and evaluation process of the empirical data I tried to make sense of dynamic processes of identity/alterity through the use of the concept of “grammars” as Andre Gingrich, Gerd Baumann and others (2004) developed it. They use the word grammar as “a simple shorthand for certain simple classificatory structures or classificatory schemata that we argue can be recognized in a vast variety of processes concerned with defining identity and alterity” (Gingrich/Baumann 2004: ix). Probably the most prominent of such grammars is “orientalization” as a “very shrewd mirrored reversal of: ‘what is good in you is [still] bad in them, but what god twisted in us [still] remains straight in them’” (Baumann 2004: 20).

Throughout the evaluation of the relevant data, I tried to maintain a dialogue between the grammars as Baumann and Gingrich defined them and other grammars and processes emerging out of my fieldwork material. In addition to “orientalization,” Gingrich and Baumann discussed “encompassment” and “segmentation” as grammars of identity/alterity.

“Encompassment means an act of selfing by appropriating, perhaps one should say adopting or co-opting, selected kinds of otherness.” It works on two levels: “The lower level of cognition recognizes difference, the higher level subsumes that which is different under that which is universal” (Baumann 2004: 25). As a co-option of one side by another, encompassment is always hierarchical.

The segmentary grammar means “a logic of fission or enmity at a lower level of segmentation, overcome by a logic of fusion or neutralization at a higher level of segmentation” (ibid: 22). Baumann gives the example of football fans. While the fans of a local team would be against those of the neighbouring village in one situation, they all cheer together for the national team against another on a higher level. But different from the football example, the segmentary grammar of identity works on various levels simultaneously. The great thing about this grammar lies in its contextual awareness since one might be an enemy in one context but a friend in another.

In regard to agency it has to be noted that I do not understand individuals and groups as capable of choosing freely between any of these grammars. Grammars of identity/alterity are the product of both individual agency and the socio-cultural context within which interaction

takes place. As in all processes of identity/alterity agency determines a) the individual capacity to mediate or manage aspects of identity/alterity and b) serves as a point of reference in the construction of belonging and differing between individuals and collectivities.

The concept of grammars turned out to be very fruitful for studying the field of activism in the village of Bil'in. In the following I would like to give some examples of dynamic processes concerned with defining identity/alterity among activists. I thereby aim at finding classifications in the style of the grammars introduced above.

7.4.1 The Shaping of Roles as Reciprocal Encompassment

As mentioned earlier, all foreign activists (most of them coming from North America and Europe) are categorised but also ascribe to themselves the etiquette “international” within the figured world of activism in Bil'in. Encompassment, as Gingrich and Baumann use it (2004), means that “the putatively subordinate category is adopted, subsumed or co-opted into the identity defined and, as it were, owned by those who do the encompassing” (Baumann 2004: 26). “You are different from me, but actually you are a part of me.” What if the encompassed and the one who does the encompassing do not form part of two different groups but are part of the same figured world within which encompassment works as a reciprocal process?

Let us say the British activist A already knows prior to his arrival in Palestine/Israel that he or she will play a supportive role in Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. Throughout his or her stay (and probably already before) a process defining his self-understanding as an activist begins. What I call his or her activist-identity/alterity is therein shaped by the “synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others” (Jenkins 1996: 20). A's dispositions and role-interpretations become encompassed by the label “international”; thus those aspects in his or her identity/alterity which relate to a specific individual role as an activist are continuously shaped and contested by the role an “international” is supposed to play and expects him or herself to play. I call this process “reciprocal encompassment” because instead of being the victims of external subsumption, the encompassed categorize themselves as “international” in the course of the internal-external dialectic of identification. It has to be noted that this etiquette as a marker of a certain

role starts to operate effectively only after such categorization is accepted and also recognized by others.

Since A's self-perception and the perception of A by others most likely differs, resistance to reciprocal encompassment is no surprise. This became evident in the earlier example of the activist John who wanted to engage with the Israeli enemy and saw his role as a third party to the conflict while the other ISM-activists judged his behaviour as a betrayal of the role internationals are supposed to play. John expressed his disapproval of the other's co-option of his individual role-interpretation as follows: "I don't quite see it. I mean if I was a French talking to a German that was different. I am not a Bedouin. I am an international. I am a third party" (John, Interview).

Another thing that became very evident through the time I spent with John was the multidimensionality of identity/alterity. It is clear that those aspects in activists' identity/alterity which relate to their activism represent only one cluster of their whole identity. Such a narrow scope does not just exclude many other possibly relevant aspects of identity; it also enlarges the details and makes the application of classificatory schemata possible. It helped me to see how political, cultural and personal aspects in individual narratives of belonging and differing make sense within the world of local activism. John feels politically connected to nonviolent resistance to Israeli occupation. He supports Palestinians even though he believes himself to be completely alienated by their "culture". Culturally he emphasized his belonging to Israel instead while he does not identify with their politics at all. Palestinians were just not his "tribe". He further said:

"I am doing social justice for an oppressed people. Even though a part of me really likes and loves these people. Another part says these people are so different from me. The cultural thing I mentioned. It has taken away my affinity for rescuing my brother; they are not quite my brother, they are another tribe" (John, interview).

It becomes evident that while John feels connected to Palestinians in one aspect, he puts emphasis on differing in terms of "culture". On a more personal level fission seems to prevail, but on the higher level of collectively resisting "Israeli injustice" John clearly views himself as belonging to the Palestinian side. This is part of a segmentary model and the different segments are what the individual world of identity/alterity consists of. They form the bricks out of which the multi-story building of identity is made of.

7.4.2 The Segmentary Grammar and its Contextual Dynamics

The segmentary grammar determines identities and alterities according to context. Who is my friend in one situation, place or figured world might be my enemy in another. I truly agree with Baumann when he writes that “the intellectual beauty of this segmentary grammar of identity/alterity lies in its contextual awareness” (2004: 23).

The context within which meanings of identities and alterities are formed through human interaction might also be determined by certain “topics” or categories. Meaning that “individuals in any society carry the potential for multiple and imbricated forms of identity comprised of gender, age, class, ethnicity, regional origins, kinship, religion, political affiliation, sexuality and so on” (Peteet 2001: 187f). If we apply this argument on the concept of the segmentary grammar of identity “segments” would look more like a shoal of hundreds of different fish, constantly moving and overlapping, depending on the respective context and perspective.

Some of the various topics relevant within activist-identities/alterities are politics, culture and emotional affection. Although activists’ identities consist of a multitude of dimensions/segments undiscovered by my research, it can be insightful to look at the ways the segmentary grammar works in some dimensions of activist-identities/alterities. If we take the construction of similarity and difference on the basis of cultural and political matters, we can see how on one level Israeli, international and Palestinian activists emphasize difference while on another level they emphasize similarity. Having a joint-struggle with internationals and Israelis is an essential part of the importance ascribed to resistance by local Palestinian activists. “We are together and because we belong to each other we are strong.” At the same time, the construction of cultural difference is evident in daily interaction in Bil’in. This is underlined by the many rules that exist. These form part of the role understandings Palestinians have about internationals and include the zero-tolerance of alcohol, sexual relations, public kissing and suggestions by ISM on how to dress and how to behave in the village.

Notwithstanding, all the relevant differences in activists’ identities/alterities, collective action, shared political goals and above all a shared enemy, flatten the unevenness on a higher segment. The following statement refers to how a common enemy or a common aim can unite people who might be strong “others” in another context:

“As long as there is a common enemy, our own differences don’t matter as much. If there is no common enemy when we just walk here around in town I notice the litter. If I am out there the litter is irrelevant. That’s human nature. I think that applies, will always apply. It applied in the Roman times, it applies now. It happens in families, families gather when there is an outside threat, but if there is no outside threat they are fighting” (John, interview).

For the activist John, “litter” served as a symbol for cultural difference in his activist-identity/alterity. In demonstrations, he said, these differences won’t matter, because they reinforced unity while confronting a common enemy. The segmentary grammar helps to explain how a person can belong to and differ from another person simultaneously and without contradiction.

One of the most stunning examples for the contextual awareness of the segmentary grammar is reflected in the following story an international activist told me:

“An interesting thing the other day in Sussyia...the soldiers have around four hour shifts, and the shepherds go out from four until seven. So you got a change of soldiers at six o’clock. So this was Tuesday afternoon. What was amazing was that there were quite young soldiers; the unit was just three months out of training. They came down the hill and they didn’t tell the Palestinians to dissolve. They came down, sat with us and had tea with them. There were two young soldiers, three shepherds, one ISMer and Marcus, this filmmaker, sitting on the hillside surrounded by sheep drinking tea. And the shepherds and the Israeli soldiers were chatting in Hebrew. At six the shift changed over. Two more guys came down and had tea. One of them went: ‘Hey, I have got ice tea and cold water’. He ran up to the camp and came down with ice tea and cold water. In this real situation I actually felt like a massive outsider because the shepherds and the soldiers were laughing and talking to each other in a mix of Hebrew and Arabic. I was sitting alone with Max, an English-speaker. They were laughing and we were constantly left out of the joke. Every now and then the Israeli soldier would translate into English and explain. How complicated this conflict is. That was it for me. It was really, really weird [...]. These two groups had far more together than I had with the Palestinians or the soldiers” (Tristan, interview).

While in other contexts the British activist Tristan would interpret his relation to the Bedouins in terms of belonging and his relation to the Israeli soldiers in terms of differing from an opposed “other”, identities and alterities seem to follow a different pattern here. The Bedouin he came to support against unjust treatment from the Israeli army suddenly seemed to have more in common with those who would otherwise represent an enemy that the internationals

and Bedouins had in common. Although positions in a conflict are often represented as absolute and the boundaries between “we” and “them” as rigid, it seems that such positions can easily shift according to a given context, even if the described context is rare. Whatever the conversation between Israeli soldiers and Bedouins was about and whatever it meant to both, the international Tristan felt like a “massive outsider” (not belonging to any of them) in this specific situation. The fact that the segmentary grammar of identity determines identities and alterities according to context (Baumann 2004: 21) suggests that the ways the actors relate to each other could be entirely different in another situation. The Israeli soldier, who uses tear gas against demonstrators and represents an enemy to Palestinian, international and Israeli activists in the situation of a demonstration in Bil’in, can be a companion in a relaxed tea-session in a different context.

What might be even more interesting than the fact that the international activist Tristan felt like a massive outsider in this unusual situation is, that Israeli soldiers and Bedouins spent time together in a very friendly and hospitable way. This example can be seen as an argument against the essentialising approaches to the relations between conflicting parties. Even though Israeli policies, including the extreme isolation of the Palestinian population from the state of Israel (and from Jewish Israeli citizens) and a practice of collectively demonizing them as “terrorists”, has contributed much to the maintenance of rigid boundaries, mutual understanding between Palestinians and Israelis is also a reality that cannot be denied. Wherever mutual contact in the absence of violence is made possible, the creativity of finding nonviolent ways to settle disputes seems to prevail over direct confrontation. In fact, a big portion of hostilities in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is maintained by irresponsible Israeli policies which make constructive interaction impossible.

The difference of how the segmentary grammar is applied by Baumann (ibid) lies in the absence of vertical segmentation such as lower and higher levels in a hierarchic order. The contextual awareness in the given example is rather based on horizontal variations; a different situation or context may result in a shift of identities and alterities. If we assume that every actor within the figured world of activism in Bil’in plays a specific role, we must also acknowledge that a person can step outside this role. Thus identities and alterities always have a relative component so that opponents in a conflict can easily belong to each other in another segment. The Israeli soldier in a demonstration in Bil’in forms part of the same group as the one drinking tea with Palestinians. The Palestinians, Israelis and internationals who demonstrate together towards the separation barrier in Bil’in share an enemy within the

figured world of activism and in a specific situation, but they might emphasize the differences separating them instead of their similarities once their common enemy is not present. The degree to which the “self” and “other” differ in individuals’ and groups’ identities/alterities can merge into a “we” on a different level is likely to depend upon the existence of a third party that can serve as a strong other.

7.4.3 Being a Jew but not an Israeli: Encompassment and De-Encompassment

There are many names that anti-Zionist Israelis are called by other Israelis who discredit them. “Self-hating Jews” or “anti-Semitic Jews” are two examples. These two etiquettes already suggest that Israeli activists are accused of denying parts of their self. Feeling misrepresented by Israel’s claims to speak for all Jews and feeling an obligation to speak out against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories motivated the Jewish-American activist Michael to come to Bil’in. His first visit to Israel took place in the course of a so called “Birthright Trip”, a 10-day free visit to Israel for young Jews between 18 and 26. He described his impressions as follows:

“It was very eye-opening in pushing me even further towards an anti-Zionist position. Everything seemed to be such propaganda. I mean it is propaganda. They brought us to military areas, to like hang out with paratroopers. All the stuff was such like a military culture. I was like even involved in anti-war protest in that time, before the war in Iraq and after it started. I was already very strongly anti-war. It didn’t connect with me in that manner” (Michael, interview).

He resisted against the encompassment done by “Israel”. “Israel” is understood as a symbolic point of reference in identity/alterity here and not as representation of a country’s people. According to his perception, Israel claims to represent the interest of all Jews and since he is Jewish he resists through anti-Zionist activism in the Palestinian territories. I call this resistance to the external co-option of parts of his identity/alterity “de-encompassment” because it challenges the encompassment done by “Israel.” The Birthright Trip only fortified his alterity towards Israel. The process of self-making done by Israel through a co-option of selected kinds of otherness imposes a connection between Michael’s Jewish identity and Israeli politics. Being left with the imposed choice between a) supporting Israel because he is Jewish, or b) being against Israeli politics and thereby against his own “Jewishness”, he

wanted to overcome the muting of his self by re-defining it through becoming an activist; by a process of de-encompassment.

7.4.4 Shifting Selves and Others: Israeli Activists Crossing the Border

As I have already discussed briefly in chapter 7.3, the boundary that marks the space between belonging to Israel and differing from Palestinians in Israeli national identity is a dense, narrow and solid one. This boundary is where the dialogical relationship of belonging and differing constitutes an almost unmovable line between “us” and “them”. To cross this line, Israeli activists have to break with and redefine themselves at the same time. It is their belonging to the “other” and the simultaneous dissolution of this “other” as a constitutive opposition to their “self” that makes a redrawing of boundaries possible and results in a rearrangement of aspects in their identity/alterity. How can we apply the concept of grammars on this process?

The grammars we have so far discussed on the basis of my research material are segmentation, encompassment and to a lesser extent orientalizing, because in several ways, this seems to be the dominant pattern among pro-Israeli forces that were not part of the present analysis. Since the subjectivities designating identity “simultaneously combine sameness or belonging, with alterity, or otherness” (Baumann/Gingrich 2004: x), it is obvious that grammars of identity/alterity describe relational patterns between two or more persons or groups. Identity, as ethnicity, has to be understood as an aspect of a relationship and not as a property; it is constituted through social contact and interaction (see Erikson 2002: 12, 18).

The process of reshaping aspects in Israeli activists’ identities/alterities that accompanies their breaking with parts of Israeli national identity and the simultaneous construction of individual belonging to the Palestinian resistance is also a product of social contact. When Israelis decide to engage politically with Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation they express both an aspiration and a denial in doing so. They deny the politics of their own country and aspire to challenge these politics through cooperation with the alleged “national enemy.” What happens in regard to classificatory schemata, or “grammars of identity/alterity,” is that aspects of their Israeli identity instead form alterity while they simultaneously see themselves as belonging to the resistance of the Palestinian “other.” I call such a process of simultaneous co-option of

senses of “other” into the “self” and redirection of senses of “self” into an “other” “alternative segmentation.” By choosing to cooperate with the Palestinian “enemy”, Anti-Zionist Jewish or Israeli activists take an alternative path and thereby underline that they are “equal but different.” One Israeli activist told me that to her, activism in Bil’in was about breaking the border Israel creates and challenging the occupation. Becoming part of the struggle, and belonging to it, parallels her departure from senses of belonging to Israeli society. Again identity and alterity prove to be something very flexible and contextual. Parts of the “other” and the “self” can shift and change throughout one’s life, even if this means that one has to reinvent and continuously redefine him or herself. One can break the rigid boundaries imposed from above by redefining them through social (inter-)action. This ability is a beautiful example of an individual’s power to contest collectively practised stereotypes and hegemonic views. While in mainstream Israeli opinion supporting Palestinian resistance and being Israeli would hardly be seen as compatible with each other, Israeli and Jewish pro-Palestinian activists define themselves as Israeli citizens (or as Jewish) and support Palestinian resistance concurrently. Furthermore, it is a matter of context which part of their identity/alterity is emphasized. They are equal with Israelis, but not the same. And essentially because they are not the same, they can be partners in Palestinian resistance.

Grammars of identity/alterity are patterns or concepts that help to describe the relations between people and certain dynamic processes influencing their identities. I have already described many of the roles activists ascribe to themselves and to others and have elaborated upon some specifications of each of the three groups. I will now turn to the wider frame of interpretation surrounding these individual senses of identity and alterity.

7.5 Worlds of Activism: How Identity/Alterity is Constructed, Reproduced and Maintained Figuratively

As I have indicated in other parts of the present work, activist-identities/alterities are to be understood as embedded in a specific interpretative context which I call the figured world of activism in Bil’in. It is a “socially or culturally constructed realm of interpretation, in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al. 1998: 52). Moreover, “identity is a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of

cultural forms and social relations” (ibid: 5). In simple words, a figured world is about the symbolic or imaginative construction of community within which activists come to view themselves and others as agents of specific roles. In this way, a virtual world is interwoven with other aspects of their identities/alterities which do not directly relate to activism in Bil'in.

I will touch upon three factors which, I would argue, play a significant role in shaping the figured world of activism in Bil'in. The first is the weekly demonstration in Bil'in which serves as a ritual that maintains and challenges aspects of activists' identities/alterities. Second, I will introduce the role of symbolism within the figured world of activism in Bil'in. Third, I will use fieldwork material from a two-day activist training conducted by the ISM in Ramallah in order to discuss its importance for shaping activists' role-understandings.

7.5.1 How Rituals and Symbols Inform Activist-Identities/Alterities

The role of symbols and rituals in the construction and contestation of a community has been widely discussed in anthropology (see for instance Firth 1973, Cohen, Abner: 1974, Cohen, Anthony P.: 1982) and beyond. In this chapter I will discuss whether the weekly demonstrations in Bil'in represent a ritual and how symbolism can contribute to the construction and contestation of boundaries in activists' identities/alterities.

Demonstrations in Bil'in take place every Friday after the locals return from their praying in the village-mosque. In the beginning, international and Israeli activists, Palestinians, tourists and journalists crowd in front of the local coordinators house. For newcomers, a short introduction into the matter is given, with information about how to deal with tear gas and how to act if being detained, while several other questions relating to the demonstration are discussed. After the preparations, the crowd marches towards the fence for about 15 minutes where the Israeli military already awaits them behind the barrier.

If we assume that activist-identities/alterities are embedded in a figured world that consists of symbolic and imaginative aspects which divide and relate participants and their actions according to roles, we consequently need to identify how figured worlds are shaped. Max Gluckman once wrote that “any ceremonial – indeed, any act of etiquette –marks the fact that a man is playing a particular role” (Gluckman 1975: 35). So how does the weekly “ritual of conflict” (Norbeck 1963) in Bil'in shape activists' roles as aspects of their identities/alterities?

The ritual in Bil'in has three main functions: communication, division and unification. It clearly separates the demonstrators on one side from the Israeli army on the other side of the fence and simultaneously unifies international, Israeli and Palestinian activists against the military "other." A heterogeneous demonstrating crowd faces an obvious enemy. Belonging and differing are marked by several oppositions such as powerful-powerless, violent-nonviolent, civilian-military, just-unjust and so forth. Beyond that, the weekly ritual of conflict in Bil'in is meant to communicate. It is essential to understand that "whatever its message, ritual is meant to communicate" (Dirks 1988: 863). International and local media and dozens of tourists with cameras transport images and meanings out of the village and thereby "show the struggle," as one Palestinian coordinator put it.

7.5.1.1 Ritual of Division and Unification

The insight that rituals can have both a unifying and a divisive effect is not new. Robert Dirks writes about Max Gluckman's work on kingship-rites in Southeast Africa:

"The cornerstone of Gluckman's (1954) thinking was his structural-functional insight: the kingship rites of Southeast Africa represent rebellion because rebellion is structured into the political systems embracing them. And yet these ceremonies do more than simply reenact the divisive side of politics. The rituals also serve to reassert fundamental unity" (Dirks 1988: 857).

What was then called a "structural-functional" insight is not so far from the understanding of identities and alterities as subjectivities embraced by an interpretative frame, such as the figured world of activism in Bil'in. The following statement of one international shows very clearly how important the weekly demonstrations are for shaping activists' identities/alterities:

"It is very easy to tell who is on your side and who is against you in that situation. You march to a wall very peacefully and they shoot at you with tear gas, and they throw percussion grenades and shoot at you with chemical weapons. And...it's very, I mean, it's weird, it's like a war. It's a war you know you are on the right side. It is very hard in a war situation to say, you know, someone is the good guy, someone is the bad guy. Because clearly in a lot of wars it's like you know, everyone loses. Even in these actions there is retaliation against the Palestinian communities. But the Palestinians are willing to accept those risks. You know like, when you march down there and you are just trying to cut open the walls so they can get to the 60 percent

of their farm land that's cut off from the other side, that what you are doing is completely right. [...] It is just a peaceful march, what kind of threat is that, they just cut a bunch of fences. It's about resources; it's about destroying the Palestinian community. There is a reason why they respond oppressively" (Michael, interview).

The ritual of conflict fortifies the nonviolent-violent opposition in his activist-identity/alterity. From Michaels point of view the demonstration is a peaceful march aimed at just means that is being attacked violently by an unjust opponent. The boundaries between "us" and "them" are clear cut. Besides the effect of marking the boundary between the two sides, the weekly ritual of conflict also helps to maintain solidarity and to reinforce unity among activists. It serves as an ongoing reassurance of the dialogical relation between the mutual constitutive identities and alterities which inform activists' senses of belonging to resistance in Bil'in. One activist interprets the demonstration's contribution to unity as follows:

"In a situation that has been going on for so long people get tired and they don't know why they are doing it. Having a focal point each week by these protests helps keep everyone together, it keeps them together being able to say: 'We are the people from Bil'in, the Palestinians, we are not going to lie down and let you do this'" (Tristan, interview).

In saying that the weekly demonstrations serve as a "focal point" for the local population suffering from considerate hardship, Tristan indicates that such a ritual of conflict does indeed contribute to the maintenance of unity within the resistance movement because it produces, challenges and maintains the foci of the actors' positions. As Gingrich and Baumann write, the social subjectivities constituting identity "simultaneously combine sameness or belonging, with alterity, or otherness" (Gingrich/Baumann 2004: x). The weekly demonstrations inscribe both senses of belonging and differing into the activists' identities and thereby shape the figured world of Bil'in which is a "socially or culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (Holland et al. 1998: 52).

7.5.1.2 *Ritual of Communication*

As a regular event the Friday demonstrations in Bil'in have attracted a considerable amount of media attention throughout the past five years. Even the photos taken for private means

already encompass an aggregate of images representing local meanings that have reached out to thousands of people. Many activists expressed “showing” the struggle as an important function in their support for Palestinian resistance. While just another peaceful Palestinian demonstration is less likely to attract attention by international media, the presence of hundreds of foreigners and Israelis certainly does provide the right “play” on the right “stage.” The regularity of the demonstrations, occurring at the same time and place almost every week, and the steadfastness of the movement helped to spread Bil’in as a symbol of Palestinian steadfastness and international solidarity.

As a “focal point” for reinforcing activists’ identities/alterities the weekly ritual of conflict connects resistance to identity and vice versa. It follows that identity is “not simply constructed vis-à-vis an other but through the process of resisting the power and dominance of this other” (Peteet 2001: 184). Resistance and the ritual that communicates it to oneself and to the outside world represent a strong point of reference in activist-identities/alterities. More than that, identities themselves can also be a means of resistance. These identities are expressed through collective action and interpreted worldwide through the reception of media coverage. Communicating “resistance” by physically resisting regularly also shapes the figured world through which activists interpret their own roles and positions relative to each other.

International, Israeli and Palestinian activists are on the same side in the demonstrations but also play different roles. Everyone does not go to the front line where tear gas canisters are often shot directly into the crowd. Likewise, only Palestinian coordinators and selected Israeli and international activists shout through the megaphone. In terms of the communication function of the ritual, it is interesting that there seemed to be a fluid but evident distinction between observers or “audience” and actors. This once again points to the metaphor of a theatre play which has a clear defined stage, actors playing specific roles and an audience observing the spectacle. This comparison should not be misunderstood as a qualitative value judgment that aims at limiting local resistance in Bil’in to its symbolic dimension. On the contrary, it underlines the effectiveness of “showing the struggle” and challenging the opponent simply because of the way the weekly ritual uniquely communicates the conflict.

7.5.1.3 *The Symbolic Dimension*

Figured worlds give landscapes a human tone (Holland et al. 1998: 41). The symbolic dimension is always part of the meanings people ascribe to their own actions and the world that surrounds them. Abner Cohen defined symbols as “objects, acts, relationships or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of meanings, evoke emotions, and impel men to action” (Cohen 1974: 23). Symbols and their role in political mobilisation have a long tradition and can be found in European Union campaigns, resistance movements all over the world and unsurprisingly also in Bil’in. The symbolic dimension of life is not something that is only to be found in specific forms. On the contrary, “through our dreams, illusions, spontaneous activities, moments of reflection and in the general flow of consciousness, we continually proliferate symbols and manipulate them” (ibid: 30).

The young Palestinian activist Bassem Ibrahim Abu Rahmeh died on the 17th of April 2009 after being hit by a tear gas canister in one of Bil’in’s demonstrations. Today, he continues to live on as a symbol within the figured world of activism. T-shirts printed with a Bassem art design, Bassem posters and banners, a movie about his life including a scene which shows his actual death and many verbal narratives represent the symbolic legacy of an activist’s death. The art design found everywhere in Bil’in and beyond says: “Good-bye Bassem. You were a friend to us all.” The narrations and documentations about his life, his role and his death figuratively connect the activist’s actions with a symbolic dimension. It is important to note however, that “symbols are abstract to a degree, imprecise to a degree, always multifaceted, and frequently implicit or taken-for-granted in their definition” (Jenkins 1996: 107).

Various aspects in activists’ identities/alterities, most of them constructed in binary ways, such as just-unjust, nonviolent-violent or victim-aggressor dichotomies are informed by the meanings ascribed to Bassem’s life and death. These symbolic expressions of meaning represent role-offerings for activists which also influence the way they make sense of their actions. In a similar way, symbols also contribute to the “objectification of relationships” (Cohen 1974: 31). As a symbol for an “innocent and just resistance movement” against a “guilty and unjust aggressor” narrations and images of Bassem underpin the legitimacy of resistance and ultimately create emotional affection. Bil’in itself also became a symbol for resistance and steadfastness, inspiring other villages to take similar actions:

“But because, you are continuing the struggle and it’s visible and everyone knows that Bil’in is resisting every week. The same place, the same time. Especially in an area where the second Intifada dissipated; so it is important to have places like Bil’in and Nil’in who do continuous every week nonviolent resisting at the wall. It’s symbolic in some ways, but that symbolism has inspired a lot of people to come to Palestine and inspired me to come to Palestine. Those people that have gone through their first demonstration there, that’s a visible interaction with the visible form of the occupation. The soldiers that are being there and actually repressing you; they come back and say, wow, that’s what Palestinians feel?” (Michael, interview).

The resistance taking place in Bil’in inspires people from abroad to join and show their solidarity. The fact that many of the international activists said that they had decided to support Palestinian resistance after reading about it or looking at video footage shows that symbols can be communicated and compel men to action through various channels. Personal story-telling accounts of an oppressed but steadfast Palestinian population in need of support, movies such as the one about Bassem, who became a symbol himself after being shot in a demonstration, or video-footage from demonstrations on the Internet, are all channels through which the symbolic dimension can inform people’s emotions and choices. One such choice is coming to Bil’in. Symbols of resistance ultimately help people to imagine their roles because they evoke emotions and give landscapes (of action) a human tone (Holland et al. 1998). Another influence on the specific imaginations of activists’ roles is the preparatory training all internationals attend before starting their first assignments in the “field”, i.e. in the actual demonstration grounds and areas of direct action.

7.5.2 How Roles are Influenced by the Activists’ Training

International activists are expected to attend a preparatory training at the onset of their stay in the occupied Palestinian territories. This two-day preparation is part of the figured world of activism within which activists interpret their roles. Such “figured worlds are socially organized and reproduced, [...] they divide and relate participants (almost as roles)” (Holland et al. 1998: 41). For most activists, the training is a first confrontation with the reality of Palestinian resistance; as participants, they develop specific role-understandings, expectations, hopes and fears. It follows that what they expect from themselves as activists is influenced by what they are expected to do and not to do. They develop a sense of their activist selves and

of the specific roles internationals are expected to play through the “internal-external dialectic of identification” (Jenkins 1996: 20), by which identities/alterities are shaped.

The activist training took place in the West Bank city of Ramallah in an ordinary looking seminar-room. Two trainers ran the session and about ten prospective activists sat around them in a semicircle, alternately looking at the flip chart, asking questions, discussing various topics and playing role games. The first session I would like to touch upon is called “hopes and fears.” Participants had to think of their hopes and fears in regard to their upcoming assignments as activists and discuss them in small groups. The members of the discussion group I was part of mentioned the following hopes: “making a difference,” “Palestinians will be free,” “achieving a better understanding of the things Palestinians have to get through,” “working against the forgetting of injustice” and “raising awareness back home.” Some of the fears mentioned were that of facing attacks by soldiers and weapons. Other comments included “I am scared of how fast Jerusalem gets cleansed,” “things are changing too fast” and “I am scared of getting blacklisted by the Israeli army.” What do these verbal expressions about hopes and fears tell us?

Most importantly, they are pieces of what I call activist-identities; they are representations of activist-selves; they include emotions such as fear and agency-related expectations such as hoping to make a difference or raising awareness back home. They are also “imaginings of self in worlds of action” (Holland et al. 1998: 5) and as such they designate the close connection between imagination and action. “People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are” (ibid: 3). Articulating and discussing hopes and fears in a group of prospective activists informs the imaginations of activist selves, and one’s own expectations are tested against what the trainers express as right or wrong.

Another issue where the trainers could judge what is right and what is wrong were so called “cultural matters.” According to one of the trainers, cultural problems resulting from internationals’ misbehaviours included many “indirect mistakes.” “We are very careful about our internationals. Three things are not allowed: alcohol, sex, and drugs,” he said. Furthermore, couples were to avoid kissing in public and girls should wear long sleeves if possible. Altogether, the so called cultural session was about the importance of avoiding problems with host families and Palestinian communities. Such rules and cultural taboos highlight the role of internationals as outside supporters, or guests. All this affects how the

participating individuals view and act in the world of activism. Rules and obligations are part of the process by which activists develop conscious conceptions of themselves as activists.

For a better understanding of how the activist training described above informs a specific world of interpretation within which activists develop specific identities and alterities, I would like to take a closer look at what Holland and others (1998) wrote about “Personal Stories in Alcoholics Anonymous:”

“Consider a group of men and women who are becoming alcoholics, not by drinking, but rather by learning not to drink. These individuals have decided to stop drinking because they have come to understand that ‘alcohol is controlling their lives.’ The Change they undergo is much more than a change in behaviour. It is a transformation of their identities, from drinking non-alcoholics to non-drinking alcoholics, and it affects how they view and act in the world. It requires not only a particular understanding of the world but a new understanding of their selves and their lives and a reinterpretation of their own pasts. They enter, or rather are recruited to, a new figured world, a new frame of understanding. [...] AA has constructed a particular interpretation of what it means to be an alcoholic, what typical alcoholics are like, and what kinds of incidents mark a typical alcoholic’s life” (Holland et al. 1998: 66).

Something very similar holds true for the world of international activism in Bil’in. The particular schemes of identification constructed by AA have something in common with the interpretations of how an activist is supposed to be and how he is supposed to act. A particular interpretation of the activist prototype is provided by the “International Solidarity Movement.” Their initial training, aimed at preparing activists for the field, is only one identity-shaping event of many within the figured world of activism. The symbolic and ritual components described above play as much a role in shaping the specific interpretations of how activists are as the training or the daily interaction with other activists and the “enemy”. Thus, how an activist interprets his or her role before or after being hit by tear gas while screaming “occupation no more!” in one of Bil’in’s demonstrations depends on a complex identity-shaping process, and this process usually starts long before the activist’s physical involvement in the conflict.

Ultimately, activists’ identities and alterities are a product of a “two-way process of categorization and ascription” (Campbell/Rew 1999: 16); these identities/alterities are shaped, challenged and maintained by specific social interactions such as activist trainings and rituals of conflict and they “figuratively combine the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations.” Interpretations of what a “good international

activist” is are meaningful only in a particular figured world of activism, which is a “realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al. 1998: 52).

8 Power and Spaces of Identity/Alterity

A look at a political world map makes one believe that borders do not just separate one political economy from another but also that these spaces incorporate distinct “cultures” and “people”. As we are (or should be) far away from the assumption that spaces have clear-cut boundaries and incorporate distinct “cultures” in contemporary academic thought, we can acknowledge the following:

“The ability of people to confound the established spatial orders, either through physical movement or through their own conceptual and political acts of *reimagination*, means that space and place can never be ‘given’ and that the process of their sociopolitical construction must always be considered” (Gupta/Ferguson 1997: 47).

If a person relates to space or to a specific place in his or her identity/alterity we can assume that this is because meaning is ascribed to it. By accepting that “place-making always involves a construction” (ibid: 13) we are forced to ask how place matters in identities/alterities of activists in Bil’in.

First of all, Bil’in serves as a symbol for the occupied population which suffers from a system of domination. The suffering of the oppressed is inscribed into the meanings ascribed to Bil’in as a place, and this place is shaped by the power of Israeli occupation. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) argue that the assumed natural differences between spaces such as nation-states are kept alive by a “field of power” and that “the enforced ‘difference’ of places becomes, in this perspective, part and parcel of a global system of domination” (ibid: 47). The space Bil’in is also shaped by such a system of domination called the Israeli occupation. It binds activists’ identities/alterities to its spatial dimension because the place Bil’in ultimately is where activists experience the essence of what they are doing; their picture of the Israeli enemy is shaped directly at the fence between Bil’in and the Israeli settlement on the other side. The

place where conflict takes place and where power inequality manifests itself in a physical way can be called a “political plastic”, or “a map of the relation between all the forces that shaped it” (Weizman 2007: 5). The characteristics of this plastic inform the meanings activists attribute to the experiences they make on it so that place becomes relevant in how they see their role in the Palestinian resistance.

If we try “to theorize how the space is being *reterritotialized* in the contemporary world” (Gupta/Ferguson 1997: 50), we should rethink the role the Internet and the electronic media play in influencing the imagination of roles and identities. As Appadurai writes, the electronic media “are resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of persons” (Appadurai 1996: 3). While one could argue that the Internet and the electronic media liberate people from place-bound identities, the opposite might also be true, because places are constructed and imagined in them. According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen, the Internet has proved to be a “reembedding technology,” as opposed to “disembedding” technology, because it can *strengthen* identities across vast distances (see Eriksen 2006: 4). Essentially because the Internet is an almost deterritorialized space, all places and identities can be made meaningful through it. Just as specific TV-channels around the world reshape a “distant local” in the imagination of Diaspora societies, the self-imagination of activists is influenced by role-model offerings provided on the internet or in videos about Bil’in’s struggle. They “provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project” (Appadurai 1996: 4). Another aspect besides space and power that is strongly connected to such resources of self-imagination is time. Space never exists detached from time and “in a lived world, spatial and temporal dimensions cannot be disentangled, and the two commingle in various ways” (Munn 1992: 94). In general we can distinguish two approaches to time: one views time as a stable and universal unit (like the atomic clock) and the other focuses more on motion and flux inherent in the social realities of time. Time as space is also something that is connected to human experience, i.e. the duration and steadfastness of resistance can become inscribed into activists identities/alterities just as the very space on which these protests take place is made meaningful through action and cognition.

8.1 Local/Transnational/Global: Making Sense of Space and Place

While research on globalisation and transnational processes is often understood as multi-sited fieldwork, “it may also involve multi-levelled single-site fieldwork” (Eriksen 2003: 15). Bil’in is such a site with many levels. But how can we grasp this complexity?

The “local,” the “global” and the “transnational” are all constructions which help us to make the complex interactions and the meanings they produce comprehensible in an interconnected world. Eric R. Wolf wrote in the introduction of his famous book “Europe and the People Without History” that “the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes,” and concepts such as nation, society and culture “name bits and threaten to turn names into things” (Wolf 1997: 3). Although “local” and “global” are as much imagined and constructed as “nation” and “community”, they are important analytical tools. “The term ‘globalisation’ has been common in anthropology and neighbouring disciplines only since around 1990” (Eriksen 2003: 1), but the existence of an interconnected world is much older. Locating the local in an interconnected world appears like a difficult task on first sight, but in fact globalisation produced many more localities and certainly more ways for imagining these localities:

“Hannerz turns the notion of multi-sited fieldwork inside out by showing that a single site in a complex society may be conceptualised as a multiple one. Since ‘spaces’ require agency and human interpretation in order to become ‘places’, it is clear that each ‘space’ may exist as various ‘places’ in so far as many agents invest it with different meanings” (Eriksen 2003: 12).

Globalisation is a less promising concept for locating these various places and identities than that of transnational connections and flows because “the term globalisation obfuscates the concrete and bounded nature of many of the flows of exchange and communication that turn the world simultaneously into a larger and a smaller place” (ibid: 4). Place-making and the shaping of identities often rests on local and global social processes.

Also Bil’in is a small stage of conflict which is connected to a large transnational space. It is a microcosm of the power inequalities dominating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and an example for the importance of international involvement. As a symbol for persistent resistance to Israeli occupation, Bil’in relates to activism like a castle to a knight. Bil’in is a space of human experience and the meanings emerging out of activists’ experiences are

inseparably connected to the stage or place of conflict. In contrast to the assumption that certain identities are bound to certain places, it seems more relevant to discover how places matter as a context of identities/alterities. What Julie Peteet wrote about refugee camps also holds true for Bil'in, which can be seen as "a particular local manifestation of a larger process of global politics" (Peteet 2001: 185). The local and the global overlap, interact and complement each other. According to Nustad (2003), both terms and the dichotomy they suggest need to be questioned. Also Eriksen writes that the local and the global were "counterproductive dichotomies" (Eriksen 2003:15). Although Nustad's suggestion that the focus should shift from "local/global interactions to how global actors are held together" (ibid: 135) does not really offer a solution for this problem, her criticism about the local/global dichotomy is important because she identifies the (global) actors as essential for understanding "globalization." Although far away from promoting anything like a "Global Ecumene" (Hannerz 1992) I would like to stress the transnational interconnectedness of Bil'in as a junction of inflows and outflows of such actors and meanings. For these actors, Bil'in as a site of conflict - as well as other places - can become relevant for identity-processes as a context. Let us recapitulate one example:

The activist Tristan felt excluded from the Bedouins he came to support because they and Israeli soldiers got along with each other well in a specific situation. While the Bedouins would have been pushed down a hill by Israeli soldiers in another context, they had a relaxed conversation while drinking tea in this specific situation. The same situation would never happen at the fence that separates Bil'in from its land simply because this place informs roles in a very different way. Every week demonstrations are held at this site. Demonstrators get attacked by tear gas and other weapons. It is a place of confrontation and conflict. The human experiences made there are inseparably inscribed into the meanings ascribed to the place. The roles activists and the Israeli army play in demonstrations are as bound to the place where they happen as the habits of a football team on a football pitch. It follows that place and identity stand in a dialogical relationship to each other because specific aspects of one's identity/alterity are expressed and experienced at specific places. In turn, places can fortify or challenge aspects of one's identity/alterity. The strong unity among all groups of activists and their alterity towards the Israeli army as an absolute "other" relate to the particularities of a specific place of confrontation. Moreover, the stage of Bil'in's weekly demonstrations as a space made meaningful through action is pervaded by the identities and alterities relevant within the figured world of activism.

Another interesting point is that it was essentially the absence of space and restricted access to it that initially impelled Bil'in to resist. It follows that the separation barrier and the space surrounding it mark the border to "stolen land." The Israeli army is the gatekeeper and every Israeli soldier represents an agent of the Israeli occupation, which - in the eyes of the Palestinian activists and their supporters - is the source of the absence of access to space. Thus, the separation barrier marks the line between one side's aspiration and the other side's denial of that aspiration.

8.2 Power and Space: The Village and the World

"Worldwide dynamics ultimately rest on a compendium of individual exchanges" (Nordstrom 2007: xvii). These exchanges can connect an activist in Bil'in in multiple meaningful ways with another person watching a video of the weekly demonstration somewhere else. Transnational connections transcend borders and serve as routes of transport for meanings and people. Besides that, they also change the meaning of time since communication and the flow of identities becomes increasingly fast. In regard to the many misconceptions about space in the social sciences and in public discourse, we can acknowledge the following:

"The discourse of transnationalism is based on a productive critique of the inherent imperfections of traditional representations of nations, states and cultures as geographically discrete and politically pacific. It suggests a radically different definition of space and occupancy" (Rabinowitz 1998: 142).

Transnational connections are deployed in the present work as a concept useful to explain the processes linking space with power and identity. Transnational interconnectedness implies not only interpersonal contact in terms of networks but also flows of meanings and imagination across vast distances in only very little time. Meanings can move while people stay put (Hannerz 1996: 8), and imagination as a "form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility" (Appadurai 1996: 31) is central to the understanding of transnational interconnectedness. Hannerz (1996: 20) writes about Benedict Anderson's (1983) discovery of "imagined communities" that "the way his argument exemplifies one variety of interplay between technology, social organization, and particular meaningful forms" is especially interesting. Similar to nationalism, this interplay is central to

the effectiveness of transnational activism in Bil'in. Technologies such as the Internet, increased mobility, the organization of international solidarity to Palestinian resistance and the meanings ascribed to activists' roles are equally important for the imagination of activist-identities/alterities as they are for the success of advocacy.

One of the most insightful discoveries in anthropological theory on globalisation is Appadurai's concept of "global cultural flows." In order to make the complexity of the global economy comprehensible and to explore the disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics he identifies five dimensions of global cultural flows: "a) *ethnoscapes*, b) *mediascapes*, c) *technoscapes*, d) *financescapes*, and e) *ideoscapes*" (Appadurai 1996: 33). According to Appadurai, these landscapes were irregular in shape and "perspectival constructs;" they "are the building blocks of [...] *imagined worlds*, that is, the multiple worlds that constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (ibid). Mediascapes, technoscapes and ideoscapes are especially relevant for the figured world of activism in Bil'in and its global interconnectedness.

Mediascapes refer both to the capacities of the media to produce and disseminate information and to the content created by them. They "provide [...] large and complex repertoires of images" and narratives (Appadurai 1996: 35). The dissemination of meaning and information through the internet is especially important for the images from Bil'in's resistance. Such mediascapes "constitute narratives of the other and protonarratives of possible lives" (ibid: 36). On the website of the International Solidarity Movement, one can read "thank you for your interest in joining [sic!] us in Palestine in the nonviolent resistance to end the Israeli occupation! This is a big decision and commitment and it is greatly appreciated" (ISM Website). This small piece of text is what prospective activists read when clicking on the "join us" button as part of a media landscape, it aims at encouraging people to imagine themselves as part of a nonviolent movement. Many more "protonarratives" form part of websites, video footage and media reports. Palestinian, international and Israeli activists have produced a huge amount of video footage, narratives and images which are aimed at communicating local experience into a supralocal and transnational space. Mediascapes are also a source of possible role-models for activists' identities/alterities. The figured world of activism in Bil'in is shaped by the narratives and images produced by mediascapes, and activist-identities/alterities are placed in the context of this interpretative world.

Ideoscapes are similar to Mediascapes in that they are also “concentrations of images, but they are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologies of movements” (ibid). The ideoscape of Bil’in’s resistance movement consequently communicates the “counterideology” of nonviolent resistance and justice while contrasting it against a “violent” and “unjust” Israeli occupation. This ideoscape provides another context within which activists’ identities and alterities are shaped and figured.

While Appadurai understands technoscapes as the high speed movement of technology “across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” (ibid: 34), a technological landscape might also refer to technology as the ground on which media and ideologies can operate and flow; most prominently the internet as a space of communication and interaction and the mobile phone as a means of communication.

The interplay of the local with the transnational takes place in the context of the discussed landscapes. In asking what kind of global interconnectedness Bil’in has, it appears most important to focus on the individual, or the activist, as a person both interconnected with local and transnational spaces. What role do activists play in the dialogue between the local and the transnational?

International and Israeli activists are carriers of transnational functions themselves and as such they are a human resource for bridging the gap between the local Palestinian resistance and the transnational space. When interpreting their roles internationals often relate to transnational agency. They are carriers of power because they are able to translate local meanings into transnational mediascapes and into different languages.

8.2.1 Translating the Local: International Activists as Intermediaries

Power and space are two closely connected concepts and both relate to identity in myriad ways. According to Eric R. Wolf, power has four different modes. The first depicts “power as the attribute of the person, as potency or capability.” The second mode draws attention to interactions because “power can be understood as the ability of an ego to impose its will on an *alter*.” The third mode refers to power as a determining factor constituting the environment of actors, which is called “organizational power,” and the fourth is “structural power” and designates powers that structure the political economy (Wolf 1994: 219).

Following these four modes, I see power as both an internal and external force. In the present discussion it refers mostly to individual capacities and agency. In terms of power, class or one's social position relative to others can inform identities and alterities. If person A is powerful and has access to resources and control over space, it is very likely that this will influence how A views himself relative to others who do not have such privileges. Although power inequality does not necessarily lead to the construction of difference between two individuals or groups, it can be a major distinguishing factor. When the "powerful" come to support the "powerless," power inequalities can be both a source of unification and differentiation.

It follows that international activists are an effective auxiliary force to the Palestinian resistance, and part of it because they have more power and because they represent some kind of "upper-class" in the world of transnational advocacy. They move easily between states and across borders, they translate local meanings into different languages and communicate these meanings through international media. This is made possible by the specific powerful agency international activists have in terms of doing advocacy. As shown in chapter 7.2 on international activists, the roles they ascribe to themselves and to others within the figured world of activism in Bil'in relate to agency and power, more precisely to specific functions that designate their role as powerful supporters of Palestinian resistance. The local Palestinians are not only imprisoned by the Israeli wall around their village or the Israeli "architecture of occupation" (see Weizman 2007), they are also excluded from channels that might reach out to the wider Israeli population and to the international community. Their "use" of the power and privilege of foreign and Israeli activists is an external agency-improving resource made possible through transnational connections. Activists, just as anthropologists, are intermediaries in the transnational flow of meanings. Engle Marry writes something very insightful about human rights activists, saying:

"Just as anthropologists translate local experiences into written texts or films in dominant global languages, so human rights translators take local grievances and translate them up into the more powerful language of transnational human rights. This usually means framing the stories differently than the victims do, but the target actors, such as states, may be more responsive to demands framed this way" (Engle Marry 2006: 42).

Hence, international activists, and to a lesser extent Israeli activists, transport messages from the local stage to a transnational audience. One Palestinian coordinator said to me: "Internationals are our messenger in the world. He is coming here and goes back and tells his

friends and organizations” (Mahmud, interview). As messengers, activists translate from the local village up to the transnational space.

It is certainly true that many Palestinians could just as well spread a message all around the world, but the way transnational power manifests itself in the shape of foreigners joining in local resistance in order to support its aims and to defend the local population is unique. Internationals upgrade the offensive and defensive capacities of the local Palestinian resistance. In many ways, they carry with them what Palestinians lack: security, media attention, access to multi-lingual media, transnational connections and much more. In sum, internationals bring power to an occupied Palestinian population; they support local resistance because their agency allows them to be effective in doing so and they help Palestinians to balance the power inequality in resisting the local manifestations of the Israeli occupation. International activists “remake transnational ideas in local terms. At the same time, they reinterpret local ideas and grievances in the language of national and international human rights” (Engle Marry 2006: 42). As I have shown in the detailed discussion of international and Israeli activists’ identities/alterities, local grievances impel them to action and the experience of conflict and injustice often answers the “why am I here?” question. As intermediaries, internationals are negotiators “between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility” (Appadurai 1996: 31). By writing stories about Bil’in’s demonstrations in English, French or German and by putting video-footage on youtube.com they communicate local problems up to transnational audiences. On the other hand, the Internet itself already is a powerful tool for the communication of local grievances. Palestinian activists regularly put video coverage on their website without the need for international supporters. A video of a man shot in a demonstration by Israeli security forces can be uploaded and sent around the world within minutes. But in terms of affecting public opinion in Europe or North America, international activists translate from a “less powerful” language into a “more powerful” one and transport meanings from a less powerful (local) into a more powerful (transnational) domain. In a world “where electronic media are transforming the relationships between information and mediation” (ibid: 189), almost everyone can advocate injustice and grievances, but as people suppressed by a powerful state occupying the land they live on, the Palestinians of Bil’in are hardly able to continue their protests without international support. The local’s struggle is needed to generate support and support is needed to maintain the local’s struggle. It is important to note once again that the distinction between local and transnational is a mere analytical one. Also the differentiation between space, power

and time has to be viewed with scepticism since time and space always form part of each other and are directly connected to power, i.e. the power to control space and time. The local, the regional, the national, the transnational and the global are all spatial constructions which interlink and overlap in myriad ways.

9 Conclusion

The present work was aimed at examining some connections between the *space* of activism in Bil'in, the *people* who experience activism in this space and the *meanings* evolving out of these actions. By discussing meanings as subjective interpretations of activists' selves/others – or roles – many relevant points of reference in the construction of belonging and differing within the world of activism can be identified. Such roles are relatively solid images of self and other within a specific world of interpretation.

Israeli, international and Palestinian activists all participate in the very same direct actions against the locally visible faces of the Israeli occupation; they join in the same demonstrations and night patrols and chant the same slogans. Although their identities/alterities relate to resistance in Bil'in and activism in very different ways, they manage to lead a continuous joint struggle against a common "enemy." Not their similarities, but their differences in agency, power and identity make this joint struggle sustainable and effective. These differences, unlike to common assumptions, provide the very basis on which interaction and collective action are made meaningful. The international activist protects Palestinians as a "human shield;" he or she communicates locally produced meanings into transnational spaces and functions as an intermediary. Although he or she felt emotionally connected to the local Palestinians, he or she would emphasize alterity towards, or differing from, Palestinians when talking about the importance of him or her being in Bil'in. International and Israeli activists are therefore viewed as an essential part of the resisting community *because* they are different; their role-understandings are social subjectivities which "simultaneously combine sameness or belonging, with alterity or otherness" (Baumann/Gingrich 2004: x). I have shown that in the case of activism in Bil'in, aspects of "otherness" – such as agency, culture, or language - can bring about senses of belonging. "I am very different from you, but because of that we can be together against injustice." Furthermore, it became evident that very often it is

a specific context that binds senses of belonging and differing. Aspects of identity/alterity can depend on the presence or the absence of a common enemy. In order to depict such dynamic processes I employed the concept of “grammars” in the style of Baumann and Gingrich (2004) and applied/tested it on the empirical data.

In the search of an answer to the question of how activists’ roles are shaped and challenged, some answers were found. First, these roles are part of what I call activist-identities, and they are shaped by the “internal-external dialectic of identification” (Jenkins 1996: 20). What others expect a fresh activist to do, and who they expect him to be in the world of activism, consequently influences his activist-self. Second, senses of activists’ identities/alterities are influenced by rituals of conflict, by narrations, by prototypes of activist-selves through various channels such as the media or the preparatory training conducted by the International Solidarity Movement. These “imaginings of self in worlds of action” (Holland et al. 1998: 5) are altogether what I call a figured world of activism; and this is where particular interpretations of what it means to be an activist are constructed.

In a way the arguments I tried to put forward point at some common misassumptions. The first of these is the view that differences between people lead to the construction of otherness and alienation. I have shown that quite the contrary can be the case when certain markers of difference - like between international and Palestinian activists – lead to interpretations of belonging rather than differing. The proposed argument that identities/alterities very much depend on context is also especially valuable as it suggests that who is a friend and who is an enemy always depends on contextual variations.

Another misassumption relates to the misrepresentation of the realities of the so called Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Bil’in’s mostly nonviolent resistance does not appear in the international media unless someone dies there. The movement with international and Israeli support forms part of a reality present in every conflict – that of the moderates. The many small every-day conflicts, the daily life under occupation and the acts of nonviolent resistance to it deserve much more attention than the seemingly never ending representations of the radical minorities in the conflict. Researching a single site of moderate Palestinian resistance is also aiming at accentuating the reality of every-day struggle in the West Bank. Besides the every-day actions in that struggle one needs to understand the meanings ascribed to it. By examining the identities and alterities of activists in Bil’in I hope to contribute to this understanding and to

provide one innovative perspective from which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be looked at.

When looking at activism in Bil'in from this perspective, the activists are the "actors", Bil'in with all its transnational connections is the "stage", the figured world of activism is the "screenplay" and whatever influences this specific interpretative world may be called "producer." The complex interplay between these four analytical dimensions is hard enough to define for a theatre play; it is much harder for the reality of Palestinian, Israeli and international resistance to Israeli occupation. I hope that I was able to introduce both the multidimensional world of identity *and* activism in a manner that answered and raised many questions.

10 References

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Michael, Bil'in, July 2009

Tristan, Bil'in, August 2009

Palestinian

Mahmud, Bil'in, September 2009

Israeli

Ortal, Tel Aviv, September 2009

Tal, Tel Aviv, September 2009

Vered, Jerusalem, September 2009

11 Appendix



Source: <http://www.bilin-village.org/english/maps> (accessed 09/2010).

11.1 Abstract

Palestinian resistance is frequently portrayed as something reactionary and violent by the media, the public, and often enough also by academics. While it is certainly true that Palestinians like Israelis have indeed deployed violent means in strive for political goals, the everyday nonviolent ways of coping with an increasingly difficult situation in the West Bank deserve special attention.

The present thesis represents an empirical research on the identities of Palestinian, Israeli and international activists who challenge the impacts of Israeli occupation-policies in a specific locality – the West Bank village of Bil'in – through sustained and regular demonstrations.

It also examines the many different dimensions of activists' identities/alterities and the relations between them by incorporating various concepts such as agency, transnational connections, space, power, ritual and symbolic aspects into one framework of analysis.

Moreover, by approaching individual aspects of identities from a multitude of conceptual grounds, the many processes that shape, maintain and contest these identities are made comprehensible and visible.

In short, the present work is aimed at examining some connections between the space of activism in Bil'in, the people who experience activism in this space and the meanings evolving out of these actions. These meanings can be called subjective interpretations of activists' selves and others; they represent the roles played by Palestinian, Israeli and international activists. These roles incorporate many relevant points of reference in the construction of belonging and differing and they are framed by interpretative worlds such as the world of activism in Bil'in.

The results of my research provide considerable evidence for the argument that identities and alterities, i.e. personal feelings of belonging and differing, are something very flexible and can change according to context. At the same time, aspects of belonging and differing that might seem to contradict each other can exist simultaneously but on different levels and in different contexts. The fact that Israeli activists can demonstrate every week in Bil'in together with Palestinians against the occupation-policies of their own country, while simultaneously being essentially Israeli, shows that the individual capacity to cope with many different and contradictory aspects of identity/alterity should not be underestimated. Finally, the present study should be read as reasoning against essentialist approaches to conflict and identity.

11.2 Abstract (German)

Palästinensischer Widerstand wird in den Medien, in der Öffentlichkeit und oft genug auch in akademischen Arbeiten leichtfertig als reaktionär und gewalttätig dargestellt. PalästinenserInnen sowie Israelis haben in der Vergangenheit zwar immer wieder Gewalt im Streben nach politischen Zielen angewendet, jedoch soll die vorliegende Arbeit vor allem die unterschiedlichen Formen gewaltfreien Widerstands und den alltäglichen Umgang mit der Situation im Westjordanland ins Licht rücken. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit wird dabei auf die unterschiedlichen Rollenbilder von AktivistInnen und auf jene Aspekte von Identität gelegt, die flexibel und je nach Kontext veränderlich sind.

Vorrangig werden in dieser empirischen Arbeit die Identitäten und Alteritäten von politischen AktivistInnen im Dorf Bil'in diskutiert. In diesem nordwestlich von Ramallah gelegenen Ort demonstrieren PalästinenserInnen, Israelis und internationale AktivistInnen wöchentlich gegen die lokalen Auswirkungen israelischer Besatzungspolitik.

Durch die Zusammenführung mehrerer Konzepte wie Agency, transnationale Beziehungen, Raum, Macht, Ritual und symbolische Kommunikation in einen analytischen Rahmen werden die vielen unterschiedlichen Aspekte von Identität/Alterität sowie deren wechselseitige Beziehungen aufgezeigt. Darüber hinaus wird es durch diesen vielseitigen Ansatz möglich, einige zentrale identitätsbildende Prozesse nachvollziehbar zu diskutieren.

Die vorliegende Arbeit will Beziehungen zwischen dem Interaktionsraum Bil'in, den AktivistInnen die darin agieren und den Bedeutungen, die sich daraus ergeben, herstellen. Diese Bedeutungen können als subjektive Interpretationen von individueller Zugehörigkeit zu bzw. Abgrenzung von Anderen verstanden werden. Sie sind Teil der Rollenbilder, denen in der Welt des Aktivismus in Bil'in Bedeutung beigemessen wird.

Die Forschungsergebnisse zeichnen ein umfangreiches Bild von flexiblen Identitäten und führen zu dem Schluss, dass die Zugehörigkeiten und Abgrenzungen zwischen Personen und Gruppen immer sozial konstruiert sind. Bis zu einem gewissen Grad und je nach Kontext sind diese veränderbar. Die Tatsache, dass israelische AktivistInnen gemeinsam mit PalästinenserInnen jede Woche in Bil'in demonstrieren und sich gleichzeitig als Israelis definieren können, unterstreicht, dass ein Individuum die Kapazitäten besitzt, sich mit unterschiedlichen und oft widersprüchlichen Identitäten und Alteritäten zu arrangieren.

Dieser Beitrag zu mehr Verständnis über die Realitäten des israelisch-palästinensischen Konflikts und zu sozialwissenschaftlichen Identitätsdebatten ist letztlich auch ein Argument gegen einen Essentialismus, der Identitäten als etwas Starres und Feindschaft zwischen Gruppen als etwas Absolutes versteht.

11.3 CV

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