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The voices of Israeli and Palestinian women.

Storytelling at the intersection between Peace and Conflict Studies and Feminist Theory

Master Thesis

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Acknowledgements

This work has a particular importance for me. My last-longing interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as my rooted belief in the Feminist cause, certainly contributed to render this thesis a valued and deeply felt contribution. Nonetheless, due to determined contingencies, the thread that links me to these topics became even stronger. During my travel to Palestine in the month of August 2019, I have experienced on my own skin the reality of occupation and the overall militarisation of the State of Israel: my entry in the country followed a rather troubled procedure, where I was interrogated, threatened and humiliated due to my willingness to collaborate with a Palestinian NGO for my Internship. These factors, and the following month that I had been able to spend travelling around Palestine and Israel, exacerbated my partisan vision of this conflict. When I was sent back to Italy, having been refused the extension of my visa, I had a heavy emotional baggage. Nevertheless, the writing of this thesis, served to me as a healing process: it enabled me to see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a more constructive eye. Thanks to this work, the research behind it, and the analysis conducted on the Political is Personal project, I managed to build my hopes again for a land that is as close to my heart as my own. And, especially, reading the stories of Palestinian and Israeli women, helped me to feel their struggle, their sufferance, and their strength. Coming from a more privileged situation, and knowing that my contribution will be contextualized in the academic world, my hopes are that my work would make the voiceless protagonists of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict heard and recognized.

Abstract

Much has been already written on one of the most peculiar conflicts of modern times, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Its "intractable" nature along with its high moral charge, make this conflict a very peculiar case in the tradition of Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS). Its complex and prolonged nature have triggered over the years the work of politicians, diplomats and scholars to unveil possible solutions in order to ease the livelihood of the populations involved. Nevertheless, strategies and plans have too often stemmed from the analysis of the situation through the lenses of statist intervention and institutional diplomacy, leaving more grassroots, bottom-up processes to be rather neglected. This concern, which has been tackled by scholars and practitioners of PCS, has been partly shared by Feminist scholars within the field. The input given by Feminist Theory to the field of PCS relates to the consideration of gender as an essential element to undertake in any analysis of conflict-affected societies. In this sense, the call for innovative methods to address intractable conflicts and their de-escalation and eventual resolution, operated by both PCS and Feminist scholars, finds an interesting, albeit often overlooked, element in the analysis of storytelling. The act of interpretation, that telling a story conveys, bears the multi-layered, complex and ambiguous nature of human experiencing. Therefore, a focus on storytelling as the production of meaning in a determined context, could unveil elements that would be lost in the background noise of hegemonic discourses. Acknowledging the militarized nature and the presence of hegemonic discourses on masculinity in both the Israeli and Palestinian societies, this works aims at focusing on women's storytelling. To do so, the database of the project Political is Personal, will be analysed through a two-phased narrative analysis. The analysis of storytelling in this peculiar context, represents an innovative compromise between the need to use gender lenses in the analysis of wars, addressed by Feminist tradition, and the call to focus on the "everyday" and the relational experience of a conflict, posed by the last generation of PCS scholars and practitioners. Therefore, the aim of this work is to question whether to switch the focus on the micro level of analysis, namely on the lives of the people affected by the conflict rather than its underlying political processes, could yield a deeper understanding and a more layered knowledge of a situation that has been often doomed as intractable. In doing so, the adoption of gender lenses will question the monolithic division between a hegemonic masculinity and a devalued womanhood, proving that putting women's voices out front, shows the presence of a more nuanced and less binary notion of femininity. Within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in a situation characterized by highly asymmetric power relations, dislodging the notion of femininity from its monolithic, stereotyped, and devalued depiction through a focus of storytelling shows the presence of common elements in the stories of Israeli and Palestinian women. Acknowledging the presence of a shared narrative and the value of narrative analysis in digging out hidden narrative

elements, represents the first step towards a more conscious and inclusive approach to gender and conflict resolution, that opens the doors for future research and initiatives on the topic.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The hopes for a new world order that the end of the Cold War had predicted, where negotiation and mediation were foreseen to embody the panacea to interstate and intrastate armed conflicts, are to this date far to be fulfilled. The multiplication and raise in complexity of today's armed conflicts poses an uneasy but necessary question: what have been missed? The traditional schemes of intervention of institutional diplomacy and statist cooperation seem to have been unable to tackle the complexity and multi-faceted nature of contemporary conflicts. In particular, the hegemonic presence of types of intervention that stem from the positivist assumptions of the Realist paradigm, have fostered the needs of other kinds of solution. New elements are arising from within the analysis of conflicts, that for too long have been neglected, such as the questions around gender, religion, ethnicity (Cox, 1981). In a world that is rapidly changing and that seems unable to pursue the elimination of armed violence around the globe, new solutions and approaches are needed to face these instances. Within the vast array of contemporary wars, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has embodied, for its prolonged nature, its high moral charge and its alleged intractability, the prototype of the contemporary conflict. Its features have caught the interest of politicians, scholars, and members of civil society, raising the salience of this conflict and heating the quarrel on possible solutions. Nevertheless, the complex nature of contemporary conflicts, of which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be considered a landmark, can no longer be tackled solely by statist and official diplomatic contributions (Putnam, 1994; Hallward, 2010). Whether some efforts to introduce innovative strategies that would include bottom-up, grassroots initiatives have been made, especially at the local level, generally the overarching presence of positivist and institutionalist agendas have tended to overshadow these contributions. Moreover, while the spirit of the Oslo negotiations has been buried during the Second Intifada and its aftermath, the controlling measures of Israel over Palestine have radicalized (Pressman, 2003). Besides the Gaza Strip, the conflict has acquired the features of a cold war, where the West Bank lives under heavy military occupation, and the everyday life of Palestinians is characterized by limitation of movement, dispossession, and political and economic oppression. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a touchstone for modern history under many different levels. It involves questions about history, culture, international relations, religion, and politics. Acknowledging the complexity and the multi-faceted nature of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis does not mean, on the other hand, to overlook its highly asymmetrical and oppressive nature. Scholars have argued that the high complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been too often used as the exemplification of an unsolvable and intractable situation, taking off the shoulders of politicians, representatives of international institutions and members of the civil society, the burden of not having been able to adopt

or trigger effective, long-lasting measures towards negotiation and conflict resolution. Ilan Pappé and Noam Chomsky, in this regard, claim that the Israeli-Palestinian crisis has suffered a series of paradoxes in its understanding by the international community as "*the tale of Palestine from the beginning until today is a simple story of colonialism and dispossession, yet the world treats it as a multifaceted and complex story- hard to understand and even harder to solve. […] Israel succeeded nonetheless, with the help of its allies everywhere, in building a multi-layered explanation that is so complex that only Israel can understand it*." (Chomsky, Pappé, 2015, p. 13).

Nevertheless, whether a focus on the intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could lead to depict the situation as unsolvable and to a trivialization of the current circumstances, there are several elements that needs to be taken into consideration for a conscious and nuanced approach to its de-escalation and eventual resolution. Indeed, the Israeli and Palestinian societies are characterized by strong ethno-nationalist claims, that within the national discourse, are connected to a deep notion of masculinity. The gender factor of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has usually been overlooked both by traditional academia and by peace and conflict resolution practitioners within the Israeli and Palestinian societies. In this context, the field of Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) has unfolded, introducing important elements in the analysis and mediation of contemporary conflicts. In this sense, this work places itself at the intersection between PCS and the Feminist academic tradition. In fact, whether PCS can contribute to a better understanding of conflict resolution, this does not *per se* embrace the gendered dynamics that underpin highly militarized societies. The importance of scrutinizing war through gender lenses, advocated by various traditions of Feminist scholars is, in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the *conditio sine qua non* the relation between gender and the perpetration of the conflict needs to be addressed. Whilst both these academic traditions have called for new, innovative methods to tackle the complexity and multi-layered nature of contemporary conflicts, highlighting the importance of a focus on the micro level of societies as complementary to any statist and diplomatic related initiatives, to this date there still lacks a systemic approach to storytelling. Storytelling, in fact, bears the multi-layered nature of language. The way a story is narrated reflects, and at the same time shapes, reality. In this sense, the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been and keeps being shaped by those voices that have enough power and legitimacy to be heard: hegemonic male voices that prevailed in the national, identitary discourse, suffocating and overshadowing the female narratives of the conflict.

For this reason, this work aims at analysing the female voices of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The reason of this choice is two-fold: on one hand storytelling represents a valuable source of data that, due to the interpretative nature that the action of telling a story entails, bears meanings and

information that could hardly be gathered through quantitative analysis. Secondly, the focus on Israeli and Palestinian women in an integrative way, might disclose patterns that have been often subjugated to works that promoted compartmentalized approaches over systemic ones. In a context where masculinity has permeated the narrations and the dynamics of the conflict, generating consequences at every level of society, innovative methods stemming from the field of Piece and Conflict Studies have been implemented to convey the knowledge stemming from the micro level of societies. Indeed, adopting the current standpoint of PCS, this work aims at connecting and contributing to the state of the art, with the insights that stem from a Feminist understanding of conflicts. The analysis of storytelling of Israeli and Palestinian women, responds both to the claims of Feminist Theory, around the necessity to include gender lenses in the analysis of a conflict, and to the requirements of grassroots, interpretative perspectives on conflicts, stemming from PCS. It is vital, then, for the aims of this work, to analyse whether a greater focus on female discourse in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, could unveil the complexities, asymmetries and differences among the experiences of these women and, at the same time, reveal through a deeper analysis, the presence of a common shared narrative.

The narrative angle

From August to September 2019 I had the chance to visit Palestine and Israel. The idea for this Master thesis started to grow on me during the time I spent in the West Bank and visiting some cities across Israel. The conflict is an inextricable phenomenon within the reality of those areas. At the same time, the ways Palestinian and Israeli peoples cope with and experience their everyday lives was an absolute surprise for me. The peculiar situation I found myself in, having been interrogated by the Israeli Border Police and having been judged as non-suitable to receive the common three-months visa, set me on particular emotional frequencies. Knowing the precarity of my situation, I decided to absorb as much as I could the three-weeks visa I was given. For this reason, I sought the contact with common people: telling them my story, I would spend hours listening to theirs. When, in the international news, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is dealt, it always comes with the burden of a political perspective that overshadows the experiences and the stories of the people involved. I talked to many people during my travel, Israeli activists, Palestinian fighters, common citizens, men and women who just wanted to share their stories. It was during one of this conversation that I realized the power that storytelling bears. I was talking to a vendor in the market of Hebron. He and his niece offered me some coffee and we stayed in his shop talking for almost two hours. At the end of our conversation he told me: “this is why us Palestinians are always happy to see tourists. Because we know that they will be able to carry our stories where they can be heard, places we will never be able to reach with our bare voices”. This man, Bader, was right on so many different levels: whereas a conflict gains

resonance for its political, economic and social implications, the faces of its protagonists are blurred and easier to overlook. Both the Palestinians and Israeli I met had a singular need to share their stories, as a way to have their experiences recognized, to see their narratives exist in a context outside the conflict. This spasmodic need to tell their stories made me wonder about all those unheard voices that are covered by the background sound of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Stories about normal people, dealing with an intractable political and cultural quarrel, victims of the national propaganda of their own faction but, deep down, brought together by the same human need to be heard and have their experience given recognition and be humanized in the eye of the international community and of the other side. In particular, for this work, I have decided to narrow the analysis to the stories of Palestinian and Israeli women for two reasons. Firstly, because within their respective contexts, these women are not only the victims of the overall conflict situation, but also of a widespread patriarchal vision of their roles. Secondly, due to the prevalence of a narrative of the conflict that emphasizes the idea of masculinity, the voices of women could be bearing common experiential traits, which is the key for the recognition and acceptation of the other side.

The whole idea and development of this project then, begins with a quite banal consideration about what we, as social beings, mean for communication. The archetypical ambiguity of this concept is clarified when we analyse its etymological meaning. The word, in fact, derives from the Latin "*communis*", which in its general understanding means something which is put common, shared. In this work I want to delve into this very core meaning of the term, considering the action of communicating as the human tendency to put something in common, to share one's experiences in order to generate an enriched meaning. The action to "put in common" which is implied by the act of communication, in fact, represents the tendency of human beings to narrativize their own experiences, in order to place human actions and community life into identifiable semantic categories (Bartes, 1975). The narrativization, the ability to transform the factual reality into stories, adding a communal meaning to facts, has always been a trait of mankind, since when myths and legends where the tools to explain reality and construct societies (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Nowadays, where the reality we live in is rather complex, and the "grand narratives" (Lyotard, 1984) are no longer sustaining the whole societal structure, we find again some enlightening in the power of storytelling. Narratives, today, have multiplicated and diversified for several reasons. Nevertheless, stories maintain their power to capture people's attention, to generate emotions, to humanize a distant experience.

Acknowledging these features of constructive storytelling (Senehi, 2002) and its capacity to foster empathy, to trigger the embodiment of "the other" and to avoid alienating othering dynamics, it is

paramount for the aims of this thesis to investigate, from a narrative perspective, how Israeli and Palestinian women perceive their roles and express their narration of the conflict. I was driven towards this project by two different considerations: the acknowledgement of the rich interpretative value of stories and the realization that unheard voices might be as loud as one with great resonance.

Structure and objectives

A research question that includes instances from different academic traditions and poses the inquiry at different levels of understanding, requires the deployment of different analytical angles. For this reason, this thesis will be structured in a way that provides a thorough framework of the academic and theoretical contributions that would be needed for a conscious understanding of the data reported in Chapter 5. Following this section, in fact, a brief introduction to the historical and cultural background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be provided. Certainly, the historical dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are widely known. Nevertheless, this work will delve into some of the categories that due to their historical foundations, still echoes in the current situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, the role of Palestinian and Israeli women will be contextualized through a brief account of their participation in both national struggles. Chapter 2, on the other hand, will provide an account of the methodological choices that were undertaken in the process of structure, construction and analysis of this work. Particularly, the epistemological features of narrative analysis will be scrutinized to present the bases for the configuration of the two-phased analysis through which the data of the project Political is Personal were organized. In Chapter 3, some of the most relevant scholarly contributions concerning the field in which this thesis is positioned will be outlined. The rationale for the literature review did not follow a principle of horizontality. The use of sources, followed a criterion of selection that focused firstly on the contributions around the topic of women and conflicts, highlighting the criticalities and insights of the field, to then be narrowed down to the specifics of the gendered construction of roles within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Eventually the third section reports accounts on the use of storytelling within the field of Peace and Conflict Studies and in particular for the aim of conflict resolution. Chapter 4 will then provide the theoretical framework that sustain the approach and development of this thesis. Starting from the more general contributions of Feminist Theory within the field of IR, the synergies between Feminist scholars and PCS practitioners and theorists will be developed. Finally, the analysis of storytelling will be introduced from a theoretical perspective, as the intersection between Feminists interests in hidden gendered narratives and PCS call for innovative methods for conflict resolution. The 5th Chapter represents the empirical core of the thesis. Here, the dataset for the analysis will be presented and the two-phased analysis of the data gathered through the Political is Personal project will be organized through the categories of the first phase, and the narrative synthesis of the second

phase. In Chapter 6, the findings will be embedded within an understanding that stems from Feminist Theory but that also adopts the insights of Peace and Conflict Studies. Finally, in the last chapter, some conclusive remarks will be drawn, in order to contextualize the findings and the work undertaken thus far within the framework of the contribution and the possible innovative insights that this thesis sheds on the academic world.

Historical and cultural background

The modernization of Palestine, according to Ilan Pappe (Pappe, 2004), can be traced back to the set of reforms led by the Ottoman rulers of the region between 1830s and 1876, which went by the name of Tazimut. The interest in the region by European elites and the following European economic integration, led to the emergence of a national and secular society in Palestine. The elitist nature of the establishment heading this Western-centred modernization process, along with a thrive for the spread of secularism, nationalism and liberal thought, generated some reactionist forces that tried to hinder this process and to preserve the "old ways". For this reason, in Palestine, as in many other regions of the Middle East at that time, from a Western modernizationist standpoint, the modernization process was frozen in this transitional period between tradition and modernity (Pappe, 2004). Furthermore, new waves of modernization and Westernization, such as Zionism from the early 1880s and later the British Mandate in 1918 (Bickerton, 2009), strengthened these various forms of reactionism, which not only refused the role of Western elites in the gradual occupation of the Palestinian soil, but also rejected the compliance by the secularized Palestinian elites. These reactionary forces, on the other hand, carried for many years the seeds of nationalism which was only subsequently triggered by the meddling of European forces and the establishment and rise of an organized and systemic Zionist ideology in the territory (de Jong, 2018). The events that led to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and later on to the Six Day War in 1967, represent the historical base of the current state of occupation under which Palestinians live in the West Bank and are secluded in Gaza (Bickerton, 2009). Occupation is a totalizing reality, for different reasons, both in Israel and Palestine. The magnitude and scope of the occupation is something that permeates the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians and that today represent the overt conformation of a conflict that turned from its explicit form to a "cold war". In his "Half Century of Occupation", Shafir Gershon identifies four facets of the historical notion of occupation: its being a legal category and an everyday experience, the reality of Palestinian resistance and the ongoing colonization of the OPT. These four elements, which are historically produced, still represent the prism through which the current situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be read (Gershon, 2017).

The first half of the 20th century had strongly been characterized by the rise of two nationalist movements: Zionism on one hand and a Palestinian national movement on the other. The exacerbation brought by the increasing circulation of Jewish in the Palestinian territory, the beginning of a slow and subtle process of colonization enforced by the Zionist movement, the unwanted relationship with the British Mandate, led to the UN Resolution 181 which contained the Partition Plan for Palestine (Boyle, 1990). The Partition Plan sought to address the highly conflictual situation arose from the clash between the two competing nationalist movements, by delineating clear and internationally acknowledged borders between the two states-to-be. The decision to part the Palestinian territories in order to be able to host the newly created State of Israel, led to the inevitable consequence of the First Arab-Israeli War (Bickerton, 2009). The war was nothing else than the protraction of the civil war that accompanied the end of the British Mandate but that, after the vote by the UN General Assembly, became structured in what is remembered by the Israelis as the War of Independence and for Palestinians as the Naqba (the Catastrophe). The 14th of May 1948 (Bickerton, 2009), David Ben-Gurion held a speech in front of the Jewish National Council where he declared the birth of Eretz Israel, the State of Israel. One day after, the 15th of May 1948, several Arab states sent their troops to back the Palestinian forces in their attempt to establish a "United State of Palestine" in place of the two-state UN plan. The war lasted until January 1949. By that time, the State of Israel, with the help of the newly established Israeli Defence Force (IDF), had driven out the Arab armies and secured its borders. The territorial situation saw Israel ending the war with nearly 78% of control over the lands west of the Jordan River (the original UN partition plan assigned Israel 55% of the land). The new borders came to be known as the "Green Line", which still shapes the partition of the land between Israel and the OPT today.

One of the most notable consequences of the First Arab-Israeli war was the displacement of nearly 750,000 Palestinian refugees (Morris, 2004). The land grabbed by Israeli soldiers implied the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages and the dispossession of Palestinian lands (Pappe, 2007). These events represent the core of what Gershon identify with the occupation as a legal category and an everyday life experience for Palestinians. As a consequence of these historical factors, which exacerbated after the second Arab-Israeli War in 1956 and eventually crystalized in the aftermath of the Six Day War of 1967, the experience of occupation determined the legal status of Palestinians: "*In the absence of citizenship, Palestinians in the OPT are a superfluous people, orphans of the international order, whose denial of political rights leaves them in legal limbo*". (Gershon, 2017, p.18). Under these circumstances, Gershon addresses the reality of the occupation by Israel as a form of "legal denialism".

Of the four facets of occupation mapped out by Gershon, the notion of Palestinian resistance becomes a relevant category in its overt presence in the Palestinian national discourse. Palestinian resistance, more than a means to an end, has long since become a permeating element in the lives of Palestinians. Moreover, the historical bases and the current continuation of Palestinian resistance, reinforced the binary contraposition between the Israeli and Palestinian national discourse, around the two leitmotiv of national liberation and national security. Despite the various conflicts that followed over the years, it was during the 1970s and 1980s that, as a result of the increase in power of the Israeli Labour faction (Gershon, 2017), and the increase in settlement activities in the Palestinian territories, active and sometimes violent resistance took shape in the West Bank. These forms of resistance led to the First Intifada, which lasted from 1987 to 1993. The Palestinian resistance of the First Intifada developed through the implementation of non-violent and civil society related actions such as strikes, boycotts and, at the same time, containment actions such as the creation of barricades in the streets, throwing stones, demonstrations (Alazzeh, 2015). Despite the low degree of violent resistance, the Israeli response was considered disproportionate and only exacerbated and triggered Palestinians anger. The end of the first Intifada coincides with the beginning of the negotiations in Oslo. The negotiation phase came out of the awareness that an organized and structured revolt like the First Intifada, which had lasted for about six years, would be untenable for both Palestinians and Israelis.

The best-known consequence of the Oslo negotiations was the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority and the division of the Palestinian territories into three administrative areas, A, B and C. Despite the collaborative spirit that derived from the Oslo Accords, the continuation of violence from extremist groups on both sides inevitably led to a new conflict. After the failure of the Camp David agreements in 2000, the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2002 came with the legacies of almost 60 years of conflict. The division of Palestine into administrative areas, the presence of jihadist extremist groups like Hamas, and disillusionment about the possibility of a peaceful compromise, made the Second Intifada much more intense and violent than the first (Pressman, 2003). The growing militarization of the State of Israel, combined with the use of suicide bombers by the most extremist phalanges of the Palestinian resistance, led to thousands of victims, especially civilians. The consequences of the Second Intifada were disastrous for the Palestinian population. For the first time, in fact, the Israeli population as a whole, had become the indiscriminate target of guerrilla actions by Palestinian extremists. These facts triggered an exponential increase in the Israeli ideology of militarization and in their feeling of being constantly under attack. The raising of the retaining walls in various areas of the West Bank, the introduction of checkpoints and the unprecedented restriction of Palestinian movements were justified as a need for protection of the Israeli population. In the same way, the aftermath of the second intifada has demolished the hopes of

those who still believed in the spirit of Oslo: the apartheid regime established with the raising of the dividing wall and the total militarization of the Palestinian territories has put an end to any collaborative instance.

Women's historical role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Besides the fact that women in Palestine have been active at least since 1917, during the demonstrations against the Balfour Declaration, many scholars agree that it was during the First Intifada that women's mobilization became visible in the context of the national struggle (Abdo, 1991; Kuttab, 1993; Sharoni, 1995). In the context of a historical reconstruction of Palestinian and Israeli national movements, it stands clear the lack of acknowledgment of women's contributions, due to male oriented and dominated historical accounts (Keddie, 1991). Besides this, women have always played a crucial, albeit not acknowledged, role throughout the development of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was in fact during the 1970s and early 1980s that women's committees were first founded, with the aim to involve ordinary women in the political struggle. The idea behind the committees was that to reach out to common women and to understand their everyday life struggles, in order to generate a bottom-up collaboration both for raising gender consciousness and for participating in the national liberation. The committees were divided according to different affiliations to political platforms but, notwithstanding these diversities, they managed to make conscious attempts to coordinate their work (Sharoni, 1995). This unity was the backbone of women's involvement during the First Intifada. The presence of the committees in fact, deeply influenced women's organization and mobilization during the first stages of the Intifada: the consciousness raised, and the literacy acquired led to a significant transformation in gender roles. Nevertheless, the magnitude of these transformations was circumscribed to the first months of the uprising, due to the social shifts related to the new reality. Indeed, it has often happened that "*social crisis draws women into community and political activity, thus challenging the rigidity of prevailing notions of femininity, masculinity, and gender relations. At the same time […] these challenges fail to yield long-term transformations […] as communities tend to fall back on preestablished gender hierarchies once they overcome the initial reaction to the crisis*." (Sharoni, 1995, p.72). The involvement of Palestinian women during the First Intifada was nonetheless paramount but it did not yield any significant change in the context of the national discourse, due to the prioritization of the national liberation struggle over the demands of women to be recognized as peer actors. This is a common trait that can be found both during the Oslo negotiations and the Second Intifada and that keep undermining the involvement and recognition of women in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In Israel, besides some overt cultural differences, the acknowledgement of women followed a similar path. When the national discourse shifted from profitability to national security and identity with the creation of the State of Israel in

1948, the rhetoric on Israeli women's participation to the national project began to be institutionalized around the ideal of motherhood (Sharoni, 1995a). Whether in fact on paper Israel had been proclaiming itself an egalitarian state concerning race and gender, the factual roles of women widely differ from these idealistic statements. The roles of Israeli women and men started crystalizing around the categories of mothers and protectors, where the national propaganda boosted this discourse by comparing "*any Jewish woman who, as far as it depends on her, does not bring into the world at least four healthy children*" to "*a soldier who evades military service*" (Ben Gurion, 1971, p. 8). Whether there had been some attempts to raise a feminist consciousness in Israel during the 1970s, it is not until the First Intifada that the stress of the feminist struggle is linked to the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The First Intifada in fact also signs a raise in Israeli women's consciousness about their Palestinian counterparts, especially regarding gender roles and discrimination. One of the most significant initiatives stemmed out from this political environment was the Women in Black movement, which aim was to raise awareness among Israeli society on the brutality of the Intifada and especially on the consequences on women. Nevertheless, also in Israel, the momentum of women's movements slowly faded after the first stages of the Intifada to be relegated to the background of the Oslo negotiations and as non-influential with the outbreak of the Second Intifada. The situation today, both in Israel and Palestine, still mirrors the presence of a prevailing national discourse based on a strong idea of manhood (Massad, 1995). This discourse, permeates every aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, leaving women's contributions in the shadow, dooming these grassroots, consciousness-driven and egalitarian initiatives to be lost in the narratives on masculinity in both contexts. "*Since the foundation of the State of Israel Zionist nationalism can be characterized as a state nationalism. Palestinian nationalism has been a liberation movement. Both types of nationalism have similar effects on the situation of women and there are striking similarities between the Israeli and Palestinian national discourse regarding sexual dichotomies.*" (Klein, 1997, p.341).

Beyond the main political and diplomatic consequences, the continuation and radicalisation of this form of occupation has also had cultural implications. On the one hand, the events of the Second Intifada have sanctioned the escalation of Israel's state of paranoia, regarding the feeling of being constantly under attack. This fear, and the awareness of having abandoned any possibility of reconciliation, has highly influenced the growing militarization of the state of Israel and the very perception of the conflict. The militarization process followed an exponential increase after the end of the Second Intifada, while justified with the constant war against Hamas in Gaza, on the ground found its greatest application in maintaining the oppressive and humiliating status quo for the Palestinians in the West Bank. Moreover, the segregation suffered by the Palestinians, combined with the constant humiliation due to the constant state of control in which they live, have greatly

exacerbated the anger and discontent of Palestinians. From an analytical point of view, the deprivation of liberty and the limitation of movement, characteristics of the occupation regime, have strongly influenced the sense of masculinity of this highly patriarchal society. The failure of the Second Intifada has only increased this sense of frustration that is often poured out on Palestinian women. The powerlessness to react, the frustration of the occupation, the continuous process of building new settlements in the Palestinian territories, have contributed to the crystallization and radicalization of gender differences. In both cases, in Palestine and Israel, the continuative protraction of the conflict, which sees on the one hand a militarization of society linked to a rhetoric of constant danger, on the other a reality of occupation that has stirred the gender categories, has exacerbated the nationalist rhetoric of both sides.

CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY

The field of Peace and Conflict Studies is undertaking major changes in order to provide new and more tailored responses to seemingly intractable situations. The partial failure, or non-effectiveness of Track I diplomatic efforts in highly complex conflicts, partly triggered the development of a higher interest in the dynamics that concern the micro level of societies, namely social interactions. In this sense, this work sets itself within this new generation of PCS, which seeks to frame the contributions of civil society's actors within a non-institutional framework to address intractable conflicts. Particularly this work will be enhanced by the contributions of Feminist scholars to the newly established generation of PCS that aims at achieving a "Post-Liberal peace". This theoretical framework will enable to tackle the gendered nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a perspective that values relationality over rationality and socially and culturally sited factors over mainstream solutions. Indeed, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, due to its alleged intractability and its last-longing rootedness, constitutes a representative case for this shift in conflict resolution. Moreover, from an academic standpoint and for the purpose of this work, one of the peculiarities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the gap between the symbolical and the effective roles of the women involved. In fact, following the respective hegemonic national discourses, from the Palestinian and the Israeli sides, women, despite their commitment to the national struggle, especially during phases of violent outbreaks, are depicted through diminishing and stereotyped roles. In this context, the female narratives of the conflict are overshadowed by the presence of a hegemonic masculine discourse and tied to highly gendered roles. The inclusion of women in the decision-making arenas in conflict situations has been addressed by the UN Resolution 1325 but, on the other hand, it has hardly been implemented within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Farr, 2011). On the contrary, women are relegated to private roles and are often excluded from official negotiation tables. The lack of women's voices from the tale of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will always hinder the diplomatic efforts, whether institutionalized or civil society driven, to start a de-escalation of the conflict and also, eventually, to set the basis for reconciliation.

For these reasons, connecting to the tradition of PCS and Feminist Theory, this work aims at focusing on the relational and experiential level of the conflict, specifically on the female narratives of the conflict that emerge from storytelling. The rationale behind this decision stems from the qualities and opportunities that the act of storytelling bears. Not only storytelling has been considered a transformative tool in the field of social research (Reimer, 2015), due to its capacity to foster personalization and empathy, but also, narrative accounts represent a vital source of data for

qualitative analysis. The multi-layered and interpretative nature of language are two of the fundamental elements that make storytelling a valuable tool for research. Telling a story implies an interpretative action of selection, which carry the storyteller's meaning and understanding of how reality is experienced. In this sense, analysing narrative accounts through a qualitative method of research can unveil the interpretations of the storyteller's reality which becomes an invaluable tool to understand the explicit and latent elements of one's story. Using a narrative methodology to analyse the accounts of women living under the circumstances of an armed conflict, not only bears the capability of discerning the nexus between gender and conflict, but also and more importantly, enables the researcher to catch the multi-layered experiences of Israeli and Palestinian women. Moreover, using storytelling as a base for the analysis, facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the deep asymmetries in power and status that affect the relation between Israeli and Palestinian women. Nevertheless, besides all the differences and asymmetries, understanding what it means to be a women in a conflict situation and in a patriarchal, highly militarized environment can lead to, firstly, a better depiction of the conflict's status quo and, secondly, to find shared narratives that can serve as the rationale for further research and grassroots initiatives.

The data

The empirical findings of this work are based on the analysis of secondary data. To meet the queries raised within the context of this thesis, the initial methodology consisted of a series of interviews to be conducted among Israeli and Palestinian women. Nevertheless, the contingencies of Winter/Spring 2020, hindered the possibility to reach a representative sample that would have constituted the dataset for the further step of analysis. In this context, the project Political is Personal represented a valuable alternative in providing a database of stories which were collected with the purpose to put female voices out front, within the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The affinity between the background and mission of the project and the issues presented in this work, rendered it a suitable option to provide the database on which I conducted my research. The stories that served as database for the analysis are reported in the website "Political is Personal: Israel + Palestine" and were collected between 2015 and 2018. Having to approach a set of secondary data in the form of storied accounts, I conducted an interview with the project manager of Political is Personal, Sarah Arnd Linder, on July 21st, 2020 (see Appendix 1). The interview was informal and structured around some open questions which were implemented with other inquiries throughout the conversation. The objective of the interview was firstly to gather information on how the project was structured and developed, namely a framework to understand the collection of data and the following editing of the stories. These information helped me posing the research work for this thesis within clear

epistemological boundaries, in order to highlight both the value and limitation of the approach adopted in the project.

Indeed, the stories were collected through free flow interviews that took place face-to-face and either via Skype or email. To this date, the project is composed of 74 stories where the storytellers are Jewish-Israeli, Arab-Israeli or Palestinian women both from the West Bank and Gaza. The selection of the interviewees followed a networking process where Sarah Arnd Linder personally knew the first interviewees, that helped her expanding the network to those women who were interested in taking part to the project. The editing process firstly privileged the fidelity to the text: whether the text of the interviews was edited to be more easily read, the content and structure were reported unchanged. One of the most notable methodological concerns is represented by the language in the collection of data and in the editing process, which is nonetheless contingent to the structure of the project. In fact, whilst Sarah Arnd Linder (who led most of the interviews) managed to conduct the interviews of Israeli-Jewish women in Hebrew, due to her lack of knowledge of Arabic (and the lack of an Arabic translator), the stories of the Palestinian women were collected in English. Subsequently, during the editing process, the accounts of Israeli-Jewish women had to be translated to English, while those of Palestinian women were only reported in a narrative form.

Epistemological boundaries of narrative analysis

A story is a particular kind of discourse production, which draws events, happenings and actions into an organized form, the plot, which structures the experience around determined factors. Moreover, the plot adds a new level of relational significance to apparently separated events, by the creation of a significance nexus which the storyteller employs to make sense of his/her experience. This particular feature of stories is what has rendered them interesting within the field of social research in the last three decades. A story, in fact, is not to be considered as a factual account of events, where the storyteller simply reports happenings in the form of a plot. On the contrary, the very process of emplotment implies the action of interpretation and reconstruction of reality, which adds new layers of meaning to the analysis of a story, something that allows researchers to catch the ambiguity and contradictions of the human experience. Furthermore, telling a story and thus engaging in a process of interpretation, plays a crucial role in establishing and remarking one's identity within a given social and cultural context. In fact, "*through stories, narrative becomes an instrument to construct and communicate meaning and impart knowledge. Stories told within their cultural contexts to promote certain values and beliefs can contribute to the construction of individual identity or concept of community*." (Mitchell and Egudo, 2003, p.2). In this sense, the action of emplotment implies the

selection of those events and actions that were more significant to the story itself, namely those factors which are direct contributors to the terminal situation of the story, its ending (Carr, 1986).

In the field of qualitative research, the analysis of stories gained momentum thanks to the capacity of narratives to carry and uncover complex and ambiguous human experiences and constructions. Indeed, the interest in narrative analysis follows a change in social sciences towards a more interpretative turn (Earthy and Cronin, 2008), which was triggered by a growing mistrust towards the empiricist standpoint of the realist paradigm. In fact, the narrative approach to data analysis deconstructs the beliefs that a story is merely the mirror of life events (Rosenweld and Ochberg, 1992) while, instead, focuses its primary attention on the processes of selective reconstruction of one's experience. The academic discourse on rationality stems from the Western scientific tradition on objectivity, a type of discourse "*that advanced hypotheses, reported evidence and systematically inferred conclusions*" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 9). From this empirical perspective, a set of data needs to respond and be analysed through a criterion of objectivity. This dichotomic view, where on one end there is the rational objectivity of the realist paradigm, and on the other the emotive subjectivity of the social constructivist paradigm has been challenged by Bruner, who argued that narrative knowledge is more that emotive expression, but rather it is a legitimate form of reasoned knowledge (Bruner, 1985). According to Bruner, paradigmatic cognition and narrative cognition are two modes of thought that represent two different and irreducible, yet complementary modes of cognitive functioning. Polkinghorne uses the distinction between these two modes of cognitive representation as the rationale to introduce two approaches to a narrative configuration of qualitative research. While paradigmatic cognition leads to an analysis of narratives, narrative cognition is the base for narrative analysis: "*in the first type, analysis of narratives, researchers collect stories as data and analyse them with paradigmatic processes. […] In the second type, narrative analysis, researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthetize or configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories. […] Thus, analysis of narratives moves from stories to common elements, and narrative analysis moves from elements to stories*." (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12). In fact, the primary feature of paradigmatic cognition is to classify a particular instance as belonging to a category or concept. In this sense, when analysing a narrative, the researcher would identify the elements in the story that can be lumped together under the same category of analysis. This process, that moves from the particular to the general, can be described as a process of separation: it ascribes different elements into general categories, according to a principle of commonality. Moreover, these categories, in social research, can be pre-determined during the phase of research design or be gathered through an inductive process while analysing the data. On the other hand, narrative analyses operates through a process of synthesis. From the standpoint of narrative cognition, the data set is structured through its

narrative elements into a unified whole which is the plot, where all the diverse elements of different stories concur to the developing of the storied narrative. In this sense, narrative analysis proposes a synthesis of the data rather than a separation of them into representative categories. Narrative cognition is based on an integrative principle: "*the analytic development of a story from the gathered data involves recursive movement from the data to an emerging plot*." (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.16).

Research design

In order to address the inquiries raised and the objectives of this work, the storied accounts that compose the database will be analysed through the means of a narrative analysis. The tendency to narrativize one's experience is inherently human (Kleres, 2010): in this sense narrative analysis is used to unveil the process of meaning-making and interpretative action that telling a story entail. The interpretative nature of narratives, poses some methodological unclarity, for which it is necessary to specify that:

"*It is equally correct to say "inquiry into narrative" as it is "narrative inquiry." By this we mean that narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. To preserve this distinction we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon "story" and the inquiry "narrative*" (Connelly and Clandining, 1990, p. 2).

For this reason, this paper will conceive and make use of the notion of narrative through more specific, yet still rather broad sense: the notion of narrative as story.

There are different intersecting elements that determine the outcome of a narrative analysis. When a researcher approaches a dataset composed by narrative accounts, the unit of analysis and the focus of analysis are the core elements to determine (Lieblich et al., 1998). The unit of analysis could either be categorical, namely a narrative analysis that "*compare all references to the selected phenomenon within one interview or across several interviews*", or holistic, that takes place when the researcher seeks "*to understand how a particular section of text is part of a life story narrated during the course of a single interview or several interviews with the same individual*" (Earthy and Cronin, 2008, p.). The focus of the narrative analysis on the other hand is structured around the dichotomy content/form. The content of a narrative account includes both the surface content and the latent content. In contrast, a narrative analysis that chose to focus on the form of the narrative, privileges aspects such as the plot, the sequence of events and the structure of the tale.

In this work the dataset of stories collected within the framework of the Political is Personal project will be analysed privileging a categorical unit of analysis and setting the focus on the content rather

than the form of the narratives. At the same time, the inquiry was structured through a model of analysis that unites pragmatic and narrative cognition (Bruner,1985). In fact, the inquiry of the narrative accounts followed a first analysis where the stories were analysed through the research of commonalities among the experiences of the women. The categories that stemmed out from this first phase of analysis were gathered through an inductive process that followed the first reading of the stories. The second phase of analysis consisted of a narrative synthesis of the commonalities found during the first phase through the means of a common plot. The rationale behind this choice resides in the aim of this work, namely that of digging into women's narratives in order to question the monolithic notion of femininity, shaped in relation to the presence of a hegemonic masculinity and scrutinizing the presence of an underlying discourse among the stories of Israeli and Palestinian women. Moreover, the idea of uniting a paradigmatic and narrative reasoning was justified by the complementary nature of these two forms of cognition. Privileging the fusion of the two modes of analysis made possible a deeper understanding of the narratives involved as well as a more detailed account of the common elements that concur to the synthesis of a shared story.

These stories, indeed, represent an invaluable source of data, having been collected through free flow interviews that allowed the participants to narrate their own accounts freely. The indication of freedom, namely the lack of an imposing role of the researchers, allowed to catch the overall narrative reconstruction that the women who participated made of their own lives' accounts. The interpretative action that underpins the process of telling a story, on one hand contributes to highlight the significance of determined factors for the storyteller while, on the other hand it remarks one's sense of belonging to a certain community. In the case of Israeli and Palestinian women, analysing their stories presents both positive and negative implications. The complex reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has often been studied privileging a sectarian perspective over an integrative one. The implications derived from considering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an "intractable conflict", also implies the notion of the conflict as a zero sum game (Bar-Tal, 2007), namely when "*each side focuses only on its own needs and adheres to all of its goals, perceiving them as essential for its survival and therefore neither side can consider compromise and/or concessions*." (Arnd-Linder et al., 2018). Nonetheless, focusing on women's everyday lives and experiences, through the collection of their stories, adds a different layer of understanding. In this sense, adopting a narrative configuration of qualitative analysis on the dataset, allowed to highlight the common elements in the stories and, at the same time, to synthetize the emplotment of a common experience that, eventually, could constitute the base to open a different dialogue between the two parties. The benefits of this approach are to be addressed to its capacity to catch not only the elements that can be ascribed to common categories, but also and more importantly to delineate those constructions that belong to a certain kind of

narration that, notwithstanding of the asymmetries and differences of these women's lives and perceptions, links the experiences of Israeli and Palestinian women under the umbrella of a shared emplotted narrative. On the other hand, as common in the field of narrative analysis, this research does not claim to expose an objective truth or to respond to traditional criteria of objectivity. The results of the analysis stem from a personal process of interpretation which does not imply the principle of reproducibility or objectivity of a realist empirical tradition. At the same time, the aim of what has been stated so far is to frame the findings in the context of a valid empirical tradition and to dismiss a criterion of validity based on an essential truth, but rather to endorse a principle of trustworthiness by stating the steps of the methodology followed to produce this narrative analysis.

Limitations

The limitations of the aforementioned approach are two-fold. On one hand they pertain the database, while on the other they involve the adoption of narrative analysis. Firstly, the sample on which the analysis was conducted is not representative. The methodology that carries the Political is Personal project was, as reported by Sarah Arnd Linder, not constructed to achieve a scientific validity. The women that took part to the project and whose stories constituted the database for this research, are well-educated and active in civil society. This portrayal of middle-class Israeli and Palestinian women, whether illuminating on certain aspects, is reductive with respect to the overall reality of Israeli and Palestinian women. Nevertheless, for the scope and objectives of this thesis, acknowledging the non-representativeness of the sample, does not invalidate the value of the findings. On the contrary, acknowledging this limitation opens the perspective for future research on the topic. Furthermore, a second limitation arises from the adoption of narrative analysis. A story does not constitute an objective truth. Narrative inquiries should always acknowledge that a story comes from an interpretative truth, which is essentially a subjective account of one's experience. In this sense, the findings of a narrative analysis conducted on a dataset composed of storied accounts, need to take into consideration the question on objectivity. A valuable contribution in this context comes from Riessman (Riessman, 1993) who argues that the starting point to evaluate the credibility of a narrative analysis should be addressed by the researcher in stating that a determined analysis is the outcome of a particular discourse or theoretical framework. This allows the researcher to firstly dismiss criteria for validity based on realist assumptions, where the analysis of data is seen to pursue objectivity in order to grasp the "truth", and secondly to contextualise the findings of a narrative analysis within the scope of one's research question. Thus, an analysis can not claim to be more truthful or objective than another one but the level of "trustworthiness" depends on the degree to which the researcher render transparent and clear the process by which the interpretation of the stories has been reached.

The categories

The establishment of these categories followed an inductive process, namely the categories were not drawn previous the first analysis of the narrative accounts. In fact, the process of choosing the categories was subsequent to the finding of commonalities among the stories. The categories are six and can be described as follows

Trauma. Trauma is a common element in most of the narrative accounts of Israeli and Palestinian women. These traumas are directly connected either to the everyday reality of the conflict or to certain specific moments (i.e. the Israeli-Gaza War/Operation Protective Edge in 2014). Moreover, the experience of the trauma by these women in perceived not as a circumscribed event, but as constant presence that influences their lives.

Home. Despite the hardships of living in a conflict zone, the idea of home is very rooted in the narrative accounts. The notion of home is described through contrasting feelings, such as pride, joy, sorrow, fear and shame. Nonetheless, the representation of "home" in the accounts is rendered through a deep sense of belonging and national identification.

Cognitive dissonance. The complexity of the situation, the power asymmetries and the radicalization of certain views among both the Israeli and Palestinian society, generated some form of cognitive dissonance between the hegemonic discourse on the other side (national propaganda, family affiliations, peer group's pressure) and the interviewee's personal beliefs. In certain case this dissonance is perceived with neutral feelings whilst in many accounts it is expressed through angst, sadness, or anger.

The "Other". The representation of the "other" in the accounts is characterized by a dichotomy between negative and positive feelings. Many of the interviewees point out their fear of the "other", the lack of knowledge of the other side and the general stereotyped image that the national discourse builds. At the same time, there is a willingness to meet the "other" and an underlying curiosity towards the other side.

Recognition. This category is different from the previous one, "the Other", since it adds a new layer of representation of the other side as well as an effort to humanize the "Other". In this sense, recognition stems from describing the sufferance of the Other as a shared feeling with oneself, trying to overcome the lack of knowledge or the fear of the other side and to feel empathy regardless the partisan belongings. This category is particularly important considering the shared description of the "Other" as something different from oneself because, at the same time, these differences do not matter in the recognition of humanity on the other side.

Gender discrimination. Both Israeli and Palestinian women report in their accounts several examples of discrimination based on gender differences and expectations. Regardless the connection to more or less religious backgrounds, many of these accounts provide a description of discomfort related to gender dynamics and roles.

Narrative synthesis

The narrative synthesis stems from a process of analysis that relies on narrative cognition. In this case in fact, the process of analysis served to synthetize the diverse elements presented in the accounts through the means of a unified whole, the plot, which represents the scaffolding of a shared narrative. In this sense, the diverse elements that constituted the stories of the Israeli and Palestinian women, were analysed through the lenses of their relevance to the emplotted narrative which stems out of this process of synthesis. In fact, notwithstanding the presence of highly diversified elements in the lives and accounts of these women, the narrative analysis enabled the emergence of a shared emplotted narrative which brings together the stories of Israeli and Palestinian women.

CHAPTER 3 – LITERATURE REVIEW

The presence of a multiplicity of different elements that concur in the conformation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, needs to be addressed firstly through the identification of the relevant academic contribution to the topic. Falling under the category of "intractable conflict" (Kriesberg, 2001), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is characterized by a high level of complexity and ambiguity. Having adopted the standpoint of Feminism from within PCS, this literature review will focus firstly on the contributions that address the criticalities arising from the study of women within conflictual contexts. Secondly, narrowing down the academic contributions of the field, the focus will be given to the construction of particular gendered role within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in order to present the effects of the dominant masculine hegemonic discourse on the conflict's representation. Finally, the last section will present the academic contributions on the nexus between storytelling and Peace and Conflict Studies, particularly how storytelling has been used both as a base for the analysis and as a performative tool in seemingly intractable situations.

Women and conflict resolution

The inclusion of gender in conflict studies is something that can directly be addressed to the raise and development of Feminist theories within International Relations (IR). Adopting a feminist perspective in the field of conflict resolution, has allowed scholars and conflict resolution practitioners to tackle the binary division between public and private spheres, agency and victimhood within conflict situations. The quarrel on women agency in armed conflict originates from a series of questions that were raised among Feminist scholars: what value does gender have in the dynamics of a conflict? Is the dichotomy between men-war/women-caregivers relevant to reality? Do women have a greater inclination towards peaceful conflict resolution? All these questions have helped to generate an extensive literature that analyses the role of women in conflict resolution. Nonetheless, introducing gender in the discourse on conflict resolution has raised several criticalities. Whether in fact, the development of Feminist contributions in the field of IR has generally mirrored an increase in women participation in public matters, the modes though which women's agency is treated often carries contentious consequences, concerning the relation between gender and other cultural factors. Many scholars have pointed out that dealing with female agency within the scope and for the resolution of conflicts, has often been characterized by a "gender-culture double bind". (Richter-Devroe, 2008, Aharoni, 2014). The notion of gender-culture double bind in particularly interesting because it provides a link between gender as a social constructed category and other societal and cultural factors, such as ethnicity, religion or political belonging. The presence of a gender-culture double bind when dealing with women involvement and agency in war, shows the tendency to a trivialization of

women's contributions through either approaches that isomorphically equate gender and sex (biological determinism), or through static and monolithic depictions of cultural Otherness. Regardless the academic standpoint, Western Feminist scholars have historically tended to represent third world's women through preconceptions that not only reiterated the Global North-South dichotomy, but also evicted women from developing countries of their subjectivity. Only in recent years, a thorough effort to decolonize the Western Feminist agenda has yield contributions that are respectful to both gender and cultural peculiarities when it comes to the role of women in conflict resolution. When we talk about gender-culture double bind in fact, we refer to the lack, in the past, of conflict resolution approaches that were both gender-based and culture-sensitive: " *To be gender-sensitive means "to bring women in" [while] to be "culture sensitive" means to accept local social and political traditions that very often imply exclusively inviting men as participants.*" (Reimann 2004, p.18)". The theorization of gender inclusion in conflicts has in fact, for many years, occurred indiscriminately with respect to culturally sensitive issues. Similarly, approaches that have made cultural sensitivity prevail over a specific context have fallen into the trap of highly discriminatory gender dichotomies. Sophia Richter-Devroe, in one of the most representative academic essays on this dilemma, approaches the issue questioning the belief of many scholars that an approach based on women's agency is consequently respectful of gender dynamics. "*[…]reports following an agency-based approach often fail to acknowledge that the inclusion of women in peace negotiations per se is no guarantee of gender equality and more gender-friendly agreements. Furthermore, this approach, by simply adding individual women as agents of change to existing programs and projects, fails to consider the underlying and often discriminatory gender structures upon which these very projects are often built*"(Richter-Devroe, 2008, p.34).

The double bind between gender and culture has also been addressed by placing gender within the context of Orientalism (Hajibashi, 1991). For example, in the growing body of literature on the topic, Minoo Moallem has introduced the concept of "gendered Orientalism" (Moallem, 2005), acknowledging the thread that links gendered roles to the reified depiction of non-Western women on which Orientalism relies. In this sense, it is of great interest what Meyda Yegenoglu suggests, namely that "*representations of cultural and sexual difference are constitutive of each other*" (Yagenoglu, 1998, p.1). The presence of dichotomies as man/woman, Western/Eastern, not only conceptually separated, but with specific characteristics that are assumed as totalizing realities, has only reinforced a representation of women in conflicts as victims of both gender dynamics and patriarchal cultural systems. In fact, focusing on a gender-based approach, chasing the idea of a global sisterhood, fails by proposing a static idea of gender that neglect other oppressive power structures that define social and individual gender identities, such as class, race, ethnicity. These criticalities are

reproduced in the same way when a culturally sensitive approach to gender roles is preferred. In this case, we look for culturally specific gender roles, i.e. the cultural characterization of gender roles in a specific context. The failure of this approach derives from the fact that it produces cultural dichotomies that see women relegated to stereotypical gender roles, linked to the apolitical and private dimension. This monolithic vision of culture in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has tackled the cultural dimension only from the point of view of the patriarchal systems on both sides. The cultural context in which gender dynamics are studied cannot be seen as a monolithic, homogeneous and timeless reality, but must be contextualized with respect to an intrinsic fluidity that reflects a variety of other factors. Moreover, the double-bind between gender and culture, should not be deemed as problematic. On the contrary, an analysis of women agency in conflict situation that includes both culture and gender as reciprocally constitutive can only be enriching for an understanding of Feminist consciousness and agency in non-Western contexts.

To address the role of women in conflict situations and their possible resolution, the institutional arenas of decision-making and policymaking cannot be neglected. Implementing gender equality in these institutional loci has become a non-negligible necessity, which has often been addressed in a rather acritical way. As regards the inclusion of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution practices, the most indicative document in this respect is UN Resolution 1325 which was adopted by the Security Council on 31 October 2000. The resolution aims to reaffirm the importance of the role of women "*in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security*." (UN/OSAGI). From this point of view, it is institutionally affirmed the importance of taking into account gender dynamics in the field of IR, especially in conflict situations. Although UN Resolution 1325 was a milestone in the field of gender mainstreaming, many academic voices criticized its cultural blindness and its long-term ineffectiveness in involving women in places of power. In the case of Palestine, Vanessa Farr analyses how in the case of three associations operating on Palestinian territory and using the principles of the Resolution, there has not actually been an increase in women's expendable power to be used in the institutional arenas. In Palestine, as in many other countries affected by prolonged conflicts, the organization of constitutive works preceding the dynamics of peace and state building, are strongly characterized by a principle of priority, which derives from a general cultural approach and especially from what is perceived by the people as paramount. In a reality like Palestine or Israel, the introduction of gender equality in institutional decision-making has always been labelled a secondary priority. In the first case, Palestine, the fundamental priority is self-determination, the end of the occupation and the pursuit of

national liberation; in the second case, Israel, the inclusion of women has always been subordinate to the resolution of the "security problem". In both cases, this is a vicious circle that only delays the inclusion of women in decision-making centres. UN Resolution 1325 was cited as being too technical, not suitable to be used as a weapon by ordinary women to claim their presence in institutional places and their importance in the dynamics of conflict resolution (Bell and O'Rourke, 2010; Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015). "*As such, the Resolution risks being yet another tool to underpin the neo-liberal peace-making approach characteristic of the Israel-Palestine conflict, which makes no effort to tackle the huge power differential between the two parties*." (Farr, p.542).

The lack of effectiveness in the implementation of the precepts of UN Resolution 1325 is especially evident in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, when considering the negotiation processes. The lack of women from the negotiation tables during the long diplomatic relationship between Palestine and Israel is an issue that has been addressed on different levels. It is relevant, in this sense, the analysis proposed by Aharoni. The scholar in fact, proposes a narrative analysis of Israeli and Palestinian women and men who in the course of their lives have taken part in negotiation tables between the two sides. The research question wants to clarify how female and male negotiators make sense of cultural and gender stereotyping within mixed cross-cultural strategic exchanges. What Aharoni shows is that the strategic discourse, typical of the negotiation processes, between Palestinians and Israelis, responds to the aforementioned gender-culture double bind hypothesis. In this case, the cultural component is often cited as the cause of the failure of negotiations. What Aharoni reports are extremely deep-rooted preconceptions, especially among Israeli representatives, not only towards their Palestinian counterparts, but also gender-discriminatory towards their female representatives. In this case, the negotiations were based on gendered construction of the cultural dimension. Honour and shame are concepts that were made to coincide with the image of the Palestinian men present at the negotiations: an idea that refers to a highly stereotyped masculinity and forced orientalism. *"[...] by ascribing these choices to traditional Arab societal values associated with tribal masculinity, patriarchy, and dominance rather than to rational choice or collective interests, this citation demonstrated an ethnocentric tendency and a simplistic, one-dimensional, and even Orientalist image.*" (Aharoni, 2014, p.377) Likewise, the preconceptions of the male representatives of the Israeli faction were used against female Israeli representatives. In fact, the study carried out by Aharoni showed that the strategic proposals put forward by Palestinian women representatives, were considered more beneficial to Israel than when the proposals that were ascribed to male negotiators; similarly, "the experiment also found that the gender of the Israeli negotiators had an opposite effect, as Jewish-Israeli respondents rated the proposal as more beneficial to Israelis

when it was offered by male Israeli negotiators than when it was ascribed to female Israeli negotiators". Aharoni defines this finding as gender devaluation effect.

Gendered identities in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Although their geopolitical and economic component is an essential element of analysis, when it comes to conflicts it is important not to neglect their socio-cultural consequences. A conflict represents a highly traumatic human event, which often tends to subvert the social and cultural order of the communities involved, leaving traces that are difficult to erase. In the specific case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the "hot" phase of the conflict can be circumscribed to certain historical events, the most recent of which are the First and Second Intifada, but among which can naturally be included all the outbreaks of war violence that have occurred since the creation of the State of Israel. In these historical moments, the socio-cultural coordinates of the communities involved have been challenged (Sharoni, 1995). In this session, in particular, the construction and perception of gender roles which, both in Palestine and Israel, has followed a spring movement, will be presented in relation to militarization.

There is an extensive literature that analyses the dynamics of conflict in relation to gender roles in certain contexts. One of the pioneers in this field is Cynthia Enloe who in her classic "Bananas, Beaches and Bases" proposes a reconstruction of the absence of a feminist sense in international politics (Enloe, 1989). The reasoning carried out by Enloe is part of a structuralist vision of international politics that conceives power relations as strongly linked to hegemonic assumptions where a determined concept of masculinity is the yardstick for decision and policy making. The author also questions the essentialist and naturalizing filter that is adopted to make an understanding of gender roles in international relations. "*Conventionally both masculinity and femininity have been treated as "natural, not created. Today, however there is mounting evidence that they are packages of expectations that have been created through specific decisions by specific people. We are also coming to realize that the traditional concept of masculinity and femininity have been surprisingly hard to perpetuate: it has required the daily exercise of power-domestic power, national power, and […] international power*." (Enloe, 1989, p.3). From this point of view, Enloe positions herself in an academic tradition that considers the formation and perception of gender roles not as a monolithic block of meanings, but rather as a social construct, resulting from the distribution of power within a given social context. In this sense, Cynthia Cockburn gets into the specifics of militarized societies, where power is distributed within the framework of widespread militarism (Cockburn, 2010). In these contexts, the author states that the militarization of everyday life is one of the prerequisites that make patriarchy survive and reproduce, cementing its foundations and giving space to a strongly

demarcated concept of masculinity. In highly militarized societies, in fact, there can be traced what Enloe defines as the ploy of the "dangerous world", which consists of the exacerbation of the complexity and danger of certain phenomena in order to project well-defined images of masculinity and femininity (Enloe, 1989). Indeed, in this context of constant threat, men and women assume opposite but complementary roles: the man becomes the protector, the woman the entity to be protected. Making women powerless victims, discursively and socially, is a common factor in many militarized societies. This vision is linked to a conception of gender roles as biological absolutes, which sees women more prone by nature to peace and men more belligerent. These gendered identities are the focal point of the contributions of scholars as Simona Sharoni, who referring to the peculiarities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, tries to make an understanding of how militarism and national struggles affect the construction of gender roles. She focuses in particular on the gap between the effective involvement of Palestinian and Israeli women in the reciprocal national struggles (and also in the hot phase of the First Intifada) and the symbolic and narrative appraisal of women's contributions. In fact, contradictions within gendered nationalism are bound up in the dynamic of symbolic and practical assertions of national identity, namely to the fact that there is a substantial difference between the symbolisation of the role of women in conflict and practice. "*Despite significant differences in context, women in both Palestinian and Israeli cases were encouraged to participate in nationalist projects but were publicly praised only when they participated as women*" (Sharoni, 1995, p. 35), namely when their roles where conform to a perceived and constructed notion of womanhood. In the context of militarized societies, the perception of womanhood, as early stated, is complementary and opposite to the depiction of manhood. This mechanism plays a central role in the narratives of masculinity and femininity both in Israel and Palestine. The development of gender roles follows the criteria of Palestine and Israel's respective national objectives and discourses: in the first case, it stems from the struggle of national liberation, in the latter of national security. In both cases nevertheless there is an overt idea of womanhood which sees women as the "mothers of the nation" and on the opposite dichotomic end, of manhood as the "protector of the nation". (Moore and Gobi, 1995)

In the case of Palestinian women, for example, during the First Intifada, a whole series of claims were concentrated and brought to light that revolved around the concept of self-determination and national liberation. In this arena Palestinian women played a fundamental role both from an organizational and logistical point of view. "*Over time it has become apparent however, that the Intifada was a contradictory moment in the development of a Palestinian feminist consciousness, as it constituted the entrenchment and revision of gendered norms, ideologies and practices at the very point at which women entered the public sphere. The mobilization of women corresponded with*

attempts (by both nationalist and religious forces) to restrict their participation to traditionally construed female roles (such as childbearing and social services)". (Jacoby, 1999, p. 513). In Israel on the other hand, the participation of women to the issue on national security passes through the filter of the army (Sasson-Levy et al., 2011; Harel-Shalev and Daphna-Tekoah, 2016). Israel can be considered one of the most militarized countries in the world, one of the few states that since the Defence Service Law of 1949 included women in the recruitment of the military service (Barak-Erez, 2007). Nevertheless, the inclusion of women in the army presents two criticalities: firstly, it stems from the necessity of national security and not from the need of gender equality; secondly, the roles of women in the Israeli military forces are strongly linked to the gendered construction of women's duties. Related to the last factor, several scholars point out that the roles covered by women in the IDF are mostly non-combatant roles and clerk related (almost 70% according to Sharoni). Women, both in Israel and Palestine, are called to action in the respective national struggles as long as they comply to the rules of the game and behave accordingly to the symbolical and narrative expectations that are bound to their roles.

Moreover, as Klein points out, this gap between symbolic consciousness and representation is embodied by the construction of gender roles around specific narratives (Klein, 1997). While other scholars as Yuval-Davis and Anthias focuses on the specific duties of women implicated in nationalist objectives (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989), Klein refers to the narratives underlying the roles of women in the specificity of the Israeli and Palestinian contexts. The first of these narratives is that of the "female soil" which connects to the notion of Parker of "eroticized nationalism" (Parker et al., 1992). "*The Zionist movement imagined the 'return' of the Jews to their 'motherland' as the return to the bride Zion. It called for the fertilization of the virgin land*" (Klein, 1997, p.342), a vision that implies the notion of land through a highly eroticized charge, and that has always been the bottom line of Israel's domestic political position. On the other hand, Palestine, as the occupied land, conceives the narrative of the female soil as the embodiment of the deterioration of the female body, the abuse of the "mother land": the redemption of the mother land, abused and humiliated by the occupier (which comes represented as coinciding with a toxic masculinity), assumes the traits of the redemption of sexual honour. The second prevailing narrative which shapes gender roles and identities in both Israel and Palestine is the depiction of women as "mothers of the nation", namely through their reproductive capacity in relation to the nationalist objectives. Within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, women are the mothers of the future generations of fighters: in the case of Israel, women are the emblems of the perpetuation of the Jews community, which links Israel to the land; in the case of Palestine, women are the mothers and the sisters of the martyrs, of those who fight against the occupation. Moreover, this narrative connects to what both Enloe, Cockburn and

Sharoni addresses as the militarization of the female body, namely the appropriation of the reproductive capacity of the female body by the masculine counterparts in conflict situations (Enloe, 1989, 2007; Sharoni, 1995; Cockburn, 2010).

Storytelling in the tradition of conflict resolution

"Moreover, in this infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative" (Barthes, 1975, p. 237)

As we shift the focus on the theme of narratives, we must first delineate the semantic field of this term. As Barthes writes, there is no human experience that has not produced, or is based on, a narrative principle. As for the purpose of this work, it is interesting to focus on the social dimension of narratives and how storytelling has gradually begun to be considered a fundamental element in the field of Peace and Conflict Studies. Within the field of PCS, in addressing contemporary conflicts, the quarrel around their intractability has involved several scholars. The notion of intractability has been addressed by a variety of scholars (Bar-Tal, 1998; Crighton and MacIver, 1991; Kriesberg, 1993). Kriesberg (quoted in Bar-Tal, 1998) identifies the four core features of intractable conflicts. According to the scholar, intractable conflicts are a) protracted, b) perceived as irreconcilable, c) the parties involved have an interest in the conflict's continuation, an, d) violent. To these features, Bar-Tal adds three elements of contemporary intractable conflicts, namely their zero-sum nature (any loss of the other party is perceived as the other part's own gain), their being total (the interests involved in the conflict are perceived by the parties as essential for the party's very survival), and their central nature (the members of society involved feel the conflict as a central preoccupation) (Bar-Tal, 1998). Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, its intractability has been pointed out by Kriesberg (Kriesberg, 2001), inter alia, but for example, on the other hand, Ilan Pappe refers to this semantics of intractability as a paradox (Chomsky and Pappe, 2015). The notion of intractability in fact, albeit being a useful analytical category for the study of conflicts, has been questioned by scholars and practitioners of Peace and Conflict Studies due to the monolithic and absolute nature of the term. Burgess and Burgess (Burgess, Burgess, 2006) for example, offer an overview of what is meant by intractable conflict and how the very term intractable is rather contentious: there are conflicts in the world that are more protracted than others, that are strongly rooted in the contexts of reference and whose exacerbation makes it difficult to see a way out, but this does not detract from the fact that such conflicts are manageable through alternative strategies. *"[…] the most important definition of intractability involves the distinction between the long-term, underlying (and generally intractable) conflicts and the innumerable (more tractable) dispute episodes that occur within the context of a*

larger conflict." (Burgess and Burgess, 2006, p. 178). One of the most remarkable steps forward in this respect has been the shift in conflict resolution from Track I to Track II diplomatic strategies (Montville, 2006).

Track II diplomacy refers to a shift of focus from the Macro level to the Micro level of mediation, namely the inclusion of private citizens not acting in official capacity in diplomatic efforts (Richter-Devroe, 2008). Track II diplomacy emerged during the 1990s "*as a complementary method to official state-based diplomacy, particularly when intractable identity-based conflicts have proven resistant to formal peace-making efforts*." (Çuhadar and Dayton, 2012, p. 157). In this sense, Track II diplomacy can be defined as *"a broader concept encompassing the many kinds of nonofficial interaction between members of adversary groups or nations which aim to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve conflict*." (Chataway, 1998, p.270). This change of direction took place mainly to deal with long-lasting and potentially intractable conflicts, which needed a change of diplomatic strategy and mediation. One of the main and foremost assumptions of Track II diplomacy is the need to involve into peace-making efforts common people since the bases of a protracted social conflict are directly related to the intersocietal dimension and to the identitary claims of the parties involved. The introduction of non-institutionalized diplomacy and conflict resolution has considerable advantages, such as bringing the mediation arena closer to ordinary people. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the failure of the Oslo negotiations process has been seen by conflict resolution scholars as the failure in the institutionalization of conflict management through Track I diplomacy. Nevertheless, as both Çuhadar and Dayton and Richter-Devroe argue (Richter-Devroe, 2008; Çuhadar and Dayton, 2012), in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the institutional failure of Track I diplomatic efforts has in most cases eclipsed the presence of bottom-up initiatives that functioned as mediator forces within Track II dynamics. Nonetheless, especially during the years after the First Intifada and preluding to the start of the Oslo negotiations, many of these initiatives stemmed both in Palestine and Israel with the purpose not only to mediate in inter-group dynamics but also, and more importantly, at the intra-group level within the conflict party.

Focusing on the Micro level implies the research in the field of Peace and Conflict Studies of new strategies and methodologies to carry on the management and transformation of conflicts. In particular, "*since the inception of the peace studies and conflict resolution fields, theorists and practitioners have recognized the significance of both imagination and an analysis of culture for understanding social conflicts and their resolution*" (Senehi, 2002, p. 42). In this sense, the analysis of storytelling as a form of cultural production in conflictual contexts, adds a whole new layer of

knowledge and dynamic insights in the field of conflict resolution. Whilst orality could seem to represent the most direct means of storytelling, it "*can […]be carried out through a plethora of other means, including written forms, gestures, paintings, theater, music, film, and drawings. Telling stories through oral or written forms is a key experience in the lives of people, particularly for those who have encountered traumatic events*" (Maiangwa and Byrne, 2015, p.90). In literature there are many examples of the use of storytelling as a performative and transformative tool to overcome traumatic experiences in seemingly intractable conflicts. The social representations of the "Other" in these dynamics stem from deeply interiorized cultural constructions. Mediation through storytelling and furtherly, methodologies such as narrative analysis, led in many studies to rather positive outcomes in the direction of reconciliation processes. One of the most striking examples in this regard, is the body of literature that includes researches about reconciliation through storytelling in Northern Ireland (Maiangwa and Byrne, 2015), between Ife and Modakeke in Nigeria (Folami and Olaiya, 2016), testimonial literature as a healing process in South America (Gugelberger and Kearney, 1991), or among women in Rwanda (Hamilton, 2000). In all these cases storytelling has been used as tool that set the basis for reconciliation. According to the authors, the power of storytelling resides in its capacity to foster the expression of personal feelings and in triggering empathy through dynamics of personalization. One of the prerequisites in most of the case studies is the creation of an empathetic environment, where the teller has the feeling that his/her story will be acknowledged. In fact, as Lederbach states "*Acknowledgment through hearing another's stories validates experience and feelings and represents the first step toward restoration of the person and the relationship*". In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, much research has been carried on with the focus on singular communities, for example the Bedouin minority in Palestine or women in the Palestinian refugee camps (Sayigh, 1998; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2005), there is overall a lack of academic contributions that highlight the power of storytelling in addressing the dynamics of the conflict. These contributions have of course enriched the state of the art on the possibilities to use storytelling as a tool, in contexts where reconciliation and empathy are generally a necessity. On the other hand, the academia has not produced to this date a systemic literature on a comparative and integral use of storytelling to analyse the insights that the stories of both Israeli and Palestinian women could convey. As previously stated, storytelling has proven to be a useful tool in addressing Track II diplomacy initiatives, for its accessible nature on one side, and for its evocative nature on the other. Moreover, the analysis of storytelling in armed conflicts contexts can unveil layers of meaning that are usually neglected by approaches based on realpolitik and statist diplomacy. Anyway, there needs to be more implementation of these practices and, with regard of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a greater focus

on the cultural production and construction of each side, in order to address the conflict from a grassroots perspective which would connect the experiential understandings of the people involved.

CHAPTER 4 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist Theory: entering the field of International Relations

Historically, the development of an organized Feminist tradition within the field of International Relations (IR) can be traced back to the 1980s, when scholars from different disciplines started putting the issue of gender at the centre of the academic debate. The development of a Feminist consciousness among scholars and practitioners of IR tends to coincide with the beginning of the so-called "postpositivist era" (Lapid, 1989), namely the beginning of several academic traditions that would challenge the dogmatic social scientific methodologies that had prevailed within the field of IR until that moment (Flax, 1987). Nevertheless, whether Feminist scholars identified themselves with this new wave of contributions (Tickner, 2006), entering the field of IR, did not follow a smooth and easy path, since it clashed from the beginning with a standpoint on IR that had neglected the importance of gender dynamics and relations in the configuration of the field for too many years. Some of the most eminent Feminist scholars of those years, such as Enloe, Tickner and Elshtain, raised the question around the problematic and impervious nature of International Relations for the development and establishment of a Feminist tradition (Elshtain, 1987; Enloe, 1989; Ticnker, 1992). The marginalization of women's contributions or the lack of interest in any gender-related issue whatsoever, were ascribed by this first generation of Feminists to the overarching male-dominated framework that shaped the field of IR. Another cause that was pointed out by these pioneers was the totalizing presence and influence of IR mainstream theories, which with its focus on realpolitik and interstate dynamics, deemed as, if not irrelevant, unrealistic, a shift of focus to the level of social interactions and to the creation of meaning among and within societies. Nevertheless, by proposing a focus on the relational causes of gender inequality, Feminist scholars by no means intend to diminish the role of the state and institutions in perpetuating social inequalities. On the contrary, while "*IR generally poses international relations in abstract and unitary terms […] feminists are mostly attuned to the social relations of the international. […] Feminists tend to see aspects of sociality – positive or negative in their outcomes for women and other groups in the international system – as the reality of international relations*." (Sylvester, 2009, p.10). The male-oriented nature of the field, as well as the prevalence of a mainstream academic discourse which valued rationality over relationality, let Feminist scholars to manifest the fact that "*There is a hidden gender to the field, and it affects how we think about empirical international relations and political economy*." (Sylvester, 2001, p. 161). In this sense, by making gender central in the academic discourse on IR, the idea of a crystalized and neutral differentiation between men and women is confuted, since gender implies the construction of masculinity and femininity as political categories (Whitehead, 2002). Acknowledging the political implications behind gender structures in IR, triggers an understanding of the dynamics that underpin

the field from a relational standpoint. In fact, the introduction of Feminist Theory into the field of IR served to dislocate the primary concern of the field from abstract, static and "peopleless" interstate relations to those elements that concur in the construction of ideas of femininity and masculinity associated with a determined societal or cultural framework. Gender, argues Sjoberg,

"*is complex and intersubjective. It is complex because gendering is not static or universal, but relational and changing. Gender can be constructed differently across time, place, and culture-interacting with other factors to produce social and political relations while being produced by them. […] It is intersubjective because genderings, while diverse, constitute a shared cognition and consensus essential in shaping our ideas and relationships, even when we are unaware of their role in our thoughts, behaviours, and actions*." (Sojberg, 2013, p.5)

Indeed, in this sense, the field of IR had always relied on a Manichean vision of masculinity and femininity, which would mirror the division between the public and the private spheres, where men belonged to the first, in the roles of breadwinners, and women were relegated to the latter due to a natural and biological equation between women and motherhood. Indeed, Feminist approaches in IR usually adopt the perspective of social constructivism (Sylvester, 2001). By confuting the essentialist biologic assumptions that see the notion of sex coinciding with that of gender, Feminist Theory in IR places gender at the centre of the academic discourse, identifying it as a force that shapes the balances and dynamics of international relations. Nevertheless, entering the field of International Relations from a Feminist standpoint have its difficulties, being IR a field where the rules of the game have always been dictated by men, and the status quo is so interiorized that "*most of the time we scarcely notice that governments look like men's clubs*" (Enloe, 1989, p. 6). Not questioning the lack of women from the decision-making arenas, has also been normalized by the development of a perverse mechanism that generated within the field. In the system enters who has learned how to comply with the rules of the game: namely, women are let in by the men that control the political elite when "*that woman has learned the lessons of masculinized political behaviour well enough not to threaten male political privilege*"(Enloe, 1989, p.7). This criticality directly concerns the issue of political representation. The representation of women in the current power system, passes through the filter of a highly male-dominated structure that sets the rules of the game where *"the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation. This becomes politically problematic if that system can be shown to produce gendered subjects along a differential axis of domination or to produce subjects who are presumed to be masculine*." (Butler, 1999, p.4-5). As Feminist theorists have pointed out, this generates the perpetration and recreation of masculinity both by the men that control the system and the women

who are let in. In this sense, Feminist scholars agree that the power system, which de facto relies on a male-oriented framework, needs to be tackled not from a standpoint that replicates the rules of the game, but from a perspective that aims at deconstructing the masculinized status quo.

Concerning the representation of gender, a group of Feminist scholars narrowed the focus on how war affects the construction of gender, namely how interstate or intrastate conflicts influence the notions of masculinity and femininity within specific societal and cultural coordinates (Elshtain, 1987; Goldstein, 2001; Barak-Erez, 2007; Cockburn, 2010). In particular, what these scholars were questioning was the gap between the political representation of women, namely their symbolic status, and the factual participation of women in war, where the dichotomic discourse upheld until that moment could no longer be accepted. In the classic "Women and War", Elshtain evokes this dichotomic and static division between men and women, through the figures of the Just Warriors and the Beautiful Souls. Nevertheless, Elshtain sustain the argument that the constitutive role of these prototypical symbols is not the reflection of power interests, but it became a question of identity which is replicated by men as well as women. The concern about representation is tackled by a vast literature that aims at investigating the symbolic roles of women in war contexts. A Feminist reading of conflicts stems from the belief that "*it would be limited, to say the least, to conceptualise war and conflict without analysing them as a subset of social relations of experiences, and exposing power relations within a militarist patriarchal structure*" (Harel-Shaleva and Daphna-Tekoah, 2016, p. 313). War, as a primary concern and object of study for the field of IR, entails many of the gendered dynamics that affect the issues of representation, decision-making and state-building. Militarization, as the foremost effect of war, associates with the notion of masculinity through the equation that links men to armed violence and protection. On the other hand, wars tend to subjugate the notion of femininity through the representation of women as powerless victims, mothers and caregivers. For this reason, Feminist scholars have had a long-standing interest in wars, as for the factors that concur in the exacerbation of conflicts and in the gendered dynamics that underpin conflictual environments. While some of these scholars have used a Feminist approach to understand the gendered dynamics that are created or exacerbated during conflicts, such as the implications of militarization on the everyday life (Herzog, 2004) or the nexus between state militarism and domestic gender equality (Caprioli, 2000), a branch of Feminist scholars have focused the attention of how Feminist Theory would generate an enriched perspective on conflict resolution.

Feminist Theory and Peace and Conflict Studies

The field of Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) can be rightfully considered a subfield of International Relations. Nonetheless, whether PCS was born within the lines of IR, it developed and got academic independency through the rejection of Realism to tackle conflict and peace. In this sense, Feminist Theory shares many common elements and core assumptions with the tradition of Peace and Conflict Studies (Sharoni, 2010; MacLeod and O' Reilly, 2019). For this reason, the merging, in some cases, of the two traditions has yield interesting academic contributions. One of the elements that brings together Feminist Theory and PCS from an academic perspective, is the belief that, contrary to what mainstream theories state within the field of IR, war is not inevitable and that the capacity to find nonviolent solutions to neutralize or solve conflicts is inherently human. John Paul Lederach, as one of the pioneers of PCS, argues that contemporary conflicts are inherently too complex to be tackled solely through statist diplomacy and realpolitik. In fact, the core idea on which PCS rely is that contemporary conflict "*demands innovation, the development of ideas and practices that go beyond the negotiation of substantive interests and issues*" (Lederach, 1997, p.25). The need for innovation, derives from the peculiar nature of contemporary conflicts. In fact, conflicts nowadays, are not sustained by the same ideological assets that characterized wars prior the end of the Cold War (Wallensteen, 2012). Today conflicts are articulated along diversified lines that make the idea of a sustaining ideological paradigm less salient for the understanding of conflicts' dynamics. Lederach identifies four peculiar features of contemporary conflicts. Firstly, contemporary conflicts are primarily supported by identitary lines that steps away from solely national citizenship, since "*in today's settings that unit of identity may be clan, ethnicity, religion or geographic/regional affiliation*" (Lederach, 1997, p.13). Secondly, in contemporary conflicts the arena is factionalized, and the power is diffuse, meaning that the conflict is no longer determined by statist hierarchies, but it is affected by a multiplicity of groups and alliances. The third feature identified by Lederach is that contemporary conflicts tend to be by nature lodged in long-standing relationships, namely they are identified as "protracted" or "intractable". This feature is linked to the dynamic of "reciprocal causation", namely a dynamic where the mechanisms of response within the cycle of violence become the premises for the perpetuation of the conflict. Lastly, due to the internal nature of most contemporary conflicts, the presence of international charters that specify limitations against the intervention in a member state's internal affairs, hinder solutions of the conflict that include the act of other state or international actors (Lederach, 1997).

Considering these features of contemporary conflicts, the academic field of Peace and Conflict Studies aims at approaching conflict situations from a different angle which departs from the mainstream theories of IR. Indeed, the core of PCS is the identification of the causes of armed

violence and the achievement of peace. The basic belief of PCS is that conflicts rely on a different array of interests, that are ascribed to a variety of factors: wars do not generate in a social vacuum, but rather are the outcome of conflicting social elements. States and rational interests can no longer be the ratio for the analysis of conflict, since "*To use the transitory phenomenon known as the national state as a sole criterion for defining a research discipline is both ethnocentric and strategically short-sighted*.". (Galtung, 1964, p. 2). In this respect, PCS relies on a particular definition of peace which was first introduced by Johan Galtung, widely considered the father of peace research. According to Galtung the current status quo, where conflict resolution is perceived to be reached with the end of violence, is rather too reductive to approach the complexities of contemporary conflicts and too simplistic to yield long-term solutions. For this reason, he developed the distinction between negative and positive peace. Negative peace "is the absence of violence, absence of war" while, on the other hand, positive peace "is the integration of human society" (Galtung, 1964, p.2). This distinction is also mirrored by the introduction of the notion of structural violence as the *sine qua non* for the analysis of contemporary conflicts. Structural violence, according to Galtung, is not related to personal agency, whether that comes from the domain of the state or the individuals, but it is inherent to the structure of society. In this sense, structural violence stems from societies and it is shaped around the presence of social inequalities, power asymmetries and exclusive dynamics. In order to achieve a long-term conflict resolution, indeed, initiatives need to be made in order to tackle the deeper layer of violence, structural violence, so that not only the explicit manifestations of war are neutralized but, more importantly, its foundations.

In this sense, this conceptualization of Peace and Conflict Studies has the potential to share several elements with Feminist theorizing and methodologies. By Feminist scholars in the field of Peace and Conflict Studies in fact, gender inequality is seen as one of the primary reasons for the continuation and perpetration of armed violence (Caprioli, 2000; Sharoni, 2010; McLeod and O'Reilly, 2019). Moreover, "Feminist discussions of gender, agency and political violence have contributed to international relations and security studies by problematizing the conventionally gendered nature of war, where women are either associated with peace or portrayed as victims of war rather than having agency or authority" (Åhäll, 2012, p. 289). These Feminist scholars address the problem from a two-fold perspective: on one hand, the marginalization of Feminist contributions within the field of PCS (as a reflection of the devaluation of Feminist contributions in IR), on the other, the lack of women involvement in conflict resolution initiatives. Indeed, firstly, Feminist scholars have pointed out that, despite the increasing number of Feminist contributions, and the common ground shared with PCS, the work of Feminist scholars is still marginalized within academia. This issue has also been posed by representatives of the mainstream IR, such as Robert Keohane, who addresses the various

dichotomies that arises from a confrontation between IR and Feminist Theory (Keohane, 1998). Notwithstanding, spanning through the "four generations" of PCS (Richmond, 2010), Feminist scholars have found in the fourth generation of "Post-liberal Peace" the approach with the highest level of affinity with Feminist Theory for PCS. The Post-Liberal Peace approach refuses the idea of liberal peace which is carried on by the development of strategies to tackle conflict through the intervention of international institutions. Mainly, the critique of the concept of liberal peace stems from its tendency to generate monolithic, almost caricatural, depictions of the Otherness involved in the conflict situation (Mac Ginty, 2014) and the subsequent idea of fostering peace through top-down approaches that would eventually recreate the existing inequalities that underpin the state of conflict. Contrarily to this conception of peace, the Post-Liberal approach values local agency and expertise in peacebuilding, merging bottom-up initiatives with a narrower understanding of the structural causes of the conflict situation. Moreover, the aim of social change is pursued through the acknowledgment of the importance of the "everyday" reality of the people involved in the conflict. The second perspective that Feminist scholars contributed with to the field of Peace and Conflict Studies, is the systematic lack of women from decision-making arenas regarding conflict management and resolution. A conflict situation is characterized by what Connell defines "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, Gender and Power), which is "*the celebration of male power, particularly the glorification of the male warrior*" that tends to be "*sustained through its opposition to various subordinated and devalued masculinities, such as homosexuality, and, more important, through its relation to various devalued femininities*" (Tickner, 1992, p.6). By reading a conflict through the lenses of gendered relations, Feminist Theory highlights the relational side of the conflict which is based on gendered dynamics and that unveils important elements for a deeper understanding of the structural causes of war. Gender, nevertheless, comes to be approached from two different standpoints that concurred to the creation of two schools of thought among Feminist scholars: on one hand, biological determinism, that ascribes inherent biological differences between men and women as the basis of social roles; on the other hand, social constructivism, that argues that gender roles are socially constructed from within societies and that men and women are socialized to stereotypical gender roles (Caprioli, 2000). Nowadays, the second of this traditions, social constructivism is widely acknowledged to be the most widespread among Feminist scholars, since biological determinism has been accused to be neglecting any social forces whatsoever in the development of the concepts of femininity and masculinity, tending to be culture-blind and to force a homogenization of gender categories that does not reflect the notion of difference, as in the literature reported on the issue of gender-culture double bind (Richter-Devroe, 2008; Aharoni, 2014).

The idea of difference, in fact, was developed by Feminist scholars in order to decolonize academia from contributions that tended to lump together women's experiences through approaches that, stemming from biological determinism, overlooked the importance of the social context. Western Feminism has for long sinned of reproducing an image of the women of non-Western countries through an Othering process that does not acknowledge the importance of social and cultural factors in the development of a feminist consciousness. "*This othering process in Western feminist theory has tended to reproduce difference via objectification, as women are constructed in ways that deny their subjectivity*." (Jacoby, 1999, p.512): a form of reification that generates monolithic images of non-Western women, as a crystalized Other that is understood through the prism of Western civilization. There is a vast literature especially about Feminism and women in the Middle East. In this context, Feminist Theory and PCS have concurred to the decolonization of Feminism, by fostering an understanding of Middle Eastern women's lives and experiences through the notions of agency, resistance, and difference since "*Arab/Muslim women continue to be presented as the imagined objects rather than the real subjects*" (Abdo, 1995, p.141). This change of perspective, the acknowledgement of difference and the stress on subjectivity, is reached through different theorizing and methodologies. In particular "*an important element of Middle Eastern feminist theory is an attempt to raise women's voices by historicizing their lives, contextualizing their agency and legitimizing their own perceptions of experience and struggle*." (Jacoby, 1999, p.513). Generally, this has implied the use of methodologies which would unveil the experiential side of women's experiences of conflict, as well as methodological tools that would stress the presence of structural inequalities related to gender in militarized societies. In this sense, Feminist methodologies have fostered that innovation that Lederbach mentioned. Such methodologies refer to a diverse array of traditions, but they share the aim to achieve social change through a less binary, more nuanced approach to PCS. "*They enable scholars to tap into their voices, culture and community that often remain hidden or unappreciated by existing approaches to PCS, and can introduce everyday experiences of conflict and peace that are not frequently captured*". (McLeod and O'Reilly, 2019, p. 139).

The role of storytelling at the intersection between PCS and Feminist Theory

"*People create order and construct texts within particular contexts. Narrative analysis then takes the story itself as the object of study*." (Mitchell and Egudo, 2003, p. 1)

Storytelling is a tool that goes beyond the political, economic, cultural structures of the society we belong. Storytelling is language and as such "*language encodes the culture of a particular community, including shared understandings of identity, power, history, values, and utopian visions*" (Senehi,

2002, p.43). Furthermore, storytelling serves as a rationale for action: "*narratives operate in the world and get results*", they are embedded with "*narrative potency*" (Senehi, 2002), namely the power that derives from the process f meaning-making that underpins storytelling. The notion of narrative potency, nevertheless, rises a series of criticalities which concern the distribution of power within a given social context. Whereas the tendency to transpose reality as experienced into storied narratives is a common trait of human beings (Bartes, 1975; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990), the legitimacy and power of a story is strongly affected by the power structures of societies. The dominant discourses of certain social groups tend to prevail over others according to cultural, social, and political variables. While the dominant narratives tend to be overt, the ones of subaltern communities often do not get enough salience to be heard in the public arena. Nonetheless, these narratives, obscured by the shadows of hegemonic discourses, often carry vital inputs when it comes to social research. These features of storytelling have widely been acknowledged both by PCS and Feminist scholars, due to their connection to the production of meaning stemming from relationality. Particularly, as previously mentioned, the nature of contemporary conflicts calls for innovative methodologies to tackle the multi-faceted elements that concur to the generation and perpetration of wars. The analysis of storytelling, in this sense, allows the researcher to pinpoint the structures of meaning, the interiorization of social norms and the diffusion of power within given social contexts. It is particularly important with reference to the gendered dynamics of wars, since the analysis of storytelling unveils those that are too often the silenced voices of conflicts. Focusing on the narratives of a conflict "*opens up space to engage with personal, lived, embodied experiences […] and how those experiences mutate across lines of gender, class, race and sexuality. […] Finally, it facilitates an understanding of the way the international acts at the level of individual lives and bodies- and vice versa.*" (Daigle, 2016, p.26).

Moreover, unveiling the power dynamics that underlie narratives serves as a tool to understand the systematic process of silencing those voices who do not gain enough potency to be heard. In conflict situations, the prevailing narratives are often those of men, due to the current status quo, where masculinity is associated with violence and militarization within war contexts. Nonetheless, assuming that women are more prone to peace than men could let scholars fall in the trap of biological determinism. Using storytelling to analyse women's silenced voices about conflict situations could lead to an understanding of the situation that entails and respects diversity among women and their claims. As Elshtain argues, whether the mainstream narrative on men and women in war is represented by the dichotomy of the Just Warrior and the Beautiful Soul where "*male and female bodies figure centrally in our shared reiterations of women and life giving, men and life taking*" (Elshtain, 1987, p. 165), history is studded with the deeds and choices of the "Ferocious Few", women

that dedicate their lives to armed conflicts. The stories of these Ferocious Few got lost in the redundancy of a hegemonic discourse that associates femininity and masculinity with the dichotomies peace and war, private and public. For this reason the analysis of storytelling becomes a vital tool to catch not only the voices and experiences of women in highly gendered contexts such as conflicts, but also to highlight the notion of difference, about the way the express their everyday life's struggles, moral beliefs, and systems of values. Stories collected in conflict situations are contingent elements, meaning that "*this story arises out of a context in which it makes sense, that it expresses a cultural slant and represents a particular historical set of circumstances*" (Winslade, 2001, p. 35). In this sense, the notion of storytelling relies on the theoretical tradition of social constructivism. Storytelling has been widely used in the field of PCS and Feminist Studies both for the reasons reported above, but also for its inherent constructive nature. Certainly, storytelling can assume the features of a destructive force when it is related to the hegemonic discourses within the conflict system (Senehi, 2002). On the other hand, storytelling, associated to bottom-up initiatives that focus on the micro level of societies, effectively show its constructive nature. For some scholars this is linked to a process of mediation, since the act of telling a story has been widely acknowledged to foster positive sentiments such as empathy and personalization (Winslade, 2001, Senehi, 2002, Reimer, 2015). For others, the focus on storytelling as the representation of structures of meaning through language, represents a constructive way to identify those elements in a conflict that pertain to the domain of structural violence (Galtung, 2013), in order to then propose tailored solutions. In both cases, the value of storytelling as an analytical and performative tool reside in its implicit transformative nature, namely in its capacity to hold secluded meanings and to generate social change.

CHAPTER 5 - ANALYSIS

This chapter will focus on the empirical dimension of this thesis project. Although initially, the empirical research side was intended as a collection of interviews of Israeli and Palestinian women, the contingencies of winter/spring 2020 made it impossible to draft a research project which would have provided a representative sample. Nevertheless, what will be presented in this chapter is by no means intended as a contingency plan. Researching possible valuable projects, I came across a project that immediately caught my academic attention and interest. The Political is Personal project, in fact, combines a methodological approach that allowed the researchers to collect the accounts of women living in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, at the same time, a rationale that deeply connects to the aims and acknowledgements of this thesis. The idea of collecting experiential accounts of women living the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without partisan biases and privileging the narratives of ordinary people, led to the creation of a dataset which is highly significant for works in the field of Trach II diplomacy and mediation.

This chapter aims, among other things, to present and analyse the Political is Personal project in depth, to expose its mission and objectives as well as the general content and nature of the stories that constitute the dataset. Moreover, my personal elaboration of the data will be presented, following the structure of the two-phase narrative analysis introduced in the Methodology, where the first phase is based on a principle of paradigmatic cognition, while the second inquires the presence of a shared narrative stemming from a synthesis based on narrative cognition.

Political is Personal

Political is Personal is a project started in 2015 by Sarah Arnd Linder, a Danish scholar with a background and experience in government, diplomacy, and conflict resolution with a particular focus on the Middle East. The project consists of a database of 74 stories of Israeli and Palestinian women, collected between 2015 and 2018. One of the main accomplishment of the project has been the creation of a platform where people from all over the world could get in contact with the experiences and lives of the storytellers, namely women that live the everyday life and consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The rationale behind the creation of a website (Political is Personal Israel+Palestine) resides in understanding storytelling as a powerful tool to convey feelings of empathy and personalization and in the idea that stories can bear multi-layered depictions of reality. This project nonetheless represented an invaluable source of data, since it conveys interpretative accounts of women's lives in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where these women are the storytellers. One of the core ideas behind the project, according to its project manager, is giving women a platform and a space where their voices could be heard. In fact, besides the academic

fruition, the main objective of the project is to create a forum for Palestinian and Israeli women's stories to be put out front. This factor stems from the acknowledgement that women's role and voices are yet to be recognized in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and respectively in both Israeli and Palestinian societies, even considering that, quoting Sarah Arnd Linder "we are the other 50%". In fact, the project stemmed from the recognition that even considering the pervasive presence of NGOs both in Palestine and Israel, women still don not have the full legitimation to be considered peer actors in the decision and policy making arenas. Sometimes, even within the context of NGOs that aim at empowering women and enforce gender equality, women do not get the same legitimation as men. Moreover, structuring the research project around women and their daily life experiences as the main category of analysis, aims at contributing to the academic literature in the field of human security that, until recently, has largely overlooked women's experiences "*due to the fact that, upon first sight, security issues are traditionally in the realm of men and masculinities*." (Arnd-Linder et al., 2018, p. 77). For this reason, giving women a platform to express their experiences of the conflict, but also, their being women living in a militarized society on one hand, and in an occupation context on the other, unveils narratives that are often neglected both domestically and internationally. Moreover, Political is Personal also aims at overcoming this partisan dichotomy between Israel and Palestine by highlighting the experiential accounts of women. Nonetheless, the project dissociates itself from the idea of lumping together women's contributions under the belief that due to biological factors women are more prone to peace than men. In this way, it absolutely does not want to account for women from an essentialist Feminist perspective. On the contrary, acknowledging the diversity in the experiences of Israeli and Palestinian women in their reciprocal contexts, the project aims at giving these women a space to tell their stories on the conflict, about their daily lives, their hopes, their fears. At the same time, putting women's voices to the fore, dispels the polarities between public and private, warriors and victims, allowing instead to build a framework where women's experiences are articulated through their complexities, contradictions, and criticalities. Focusing the research on the narratives of both Israeli and Palestinian women, allows the ambiguities that arise from the confrontation between Israel and Palestine, but also within one's own community to emerge. In this sense, it becomes vital to go and analyse what are the key elements that transpire from the stories of these women, to see if there are the prerequisites for a common narrative that goes beyond sectarian distinctions.

The dataset

The dataset is composed of 74 stories collected between 2015 and 2018. All these stories are reported on the website that has been created by the researchers of the project, "Political is Personal/Israel+Palestine", in the section "Stories". The website also provides the acknowledgments

of the project as well as its mission and a brief introduction to its aims. The stories are reported in a narrative form, namely they are the result of an editing process that privileged narrative fluency but that, nonetheless respected the content, style and the narrative order that stemmed from the interviews. The list of the stories follows a chronological order, where the first story "HER STORY #1 – Yael" was the first interview of the project. Moreover, the stories are reported with the caption "HER STORY" followed by the number and the name of the storyteller or by "Anonymous" in the case the woman had opted for the anonymous account. The women interviewed were given the choice to keep anonymity or to be reported by their names. Anyway, their origin or background is not reported voluntarily since the aim of the project is to give an unbiased account of women's experiences, beyond partisan belongings. Lastly, women were given the chance to choose pictures they perceive as significant for the story. In that instance, the pictures are attached to the narrative corpus of the story. During the editing process, the corpus of the story was divided in paragraphs according to a thematic principle. This decision was taken by the researcher in order to respect the narrative order of the interviews and the principle of significance given by the interviewees to determined topics as much as possible. Furthermore, every paragraph has been reported with a brief caption which is representative of its content.

The content of the stories is very varied. Certainly, the bottom line is the livelihood of a conflict situation but nonetheless, in every story this perception is framed through different significant elements. The storied form of the accounts meets the criteria of significance chosen by the storyteller. Some of the women introduce themselves whilst others start their story with a significant happening or issue. From the stories it appears that most of the women that took part to the project are averagely educated and active in the job market. While this on one hand affects the overall representativeness of the sample, on the other hand it is a direct consequence of the lack of a scientific framework that sustains the project. Moreover, the snowball effect through which the women were contacted, played a crucial role in this issue. Nonetheless, acknowledging the non-representativeness of the sample, these stories have the value to portray what can be defined as the average Israeli and Palestinian middle-class woman. Furthermore, it emerges that many of the women are active in the NGO sector and are committed to different degrees of activism for different causes: conflict resolution, women empowerment, children's activities and so on.

Categories: the "analysis of narratives"

The first phase of analysis consisted in the individuation of determined categories that could be representative of the commonalities that stemmed from the stories. As stated in the methodology, the operation of construction of these categories was inductive, namely it followed the first reading of

the accounts. While the operationalization of the categories is stated in the section “Methodology”, in this section the relevant elements gained through the first phase of analysis will be presented and organized according to the principle of pragmatic knowledge which sustains the “analysis of narratives”. The following data were chosen due to their high representativeness of the most dominant topics that emerge from this phase of analysis.

Trauma

More than the other categories, the traumatic elements that emerge from the stories mirror a deeply different reality between the lives of Israeli and Palestinian women. Indeed, this category depicts how the traumatic experiences of these women are related to different factors. The accounts for traumatic experiences from the Israeli interviewees in fact, are mostly related to determined contingent factors, such as the period of bus bombings or the Israeli-Gaza War of 2014. On the other hand, Palestinian women frame trauma more as a systemic element. In the first case, the traumatic experience is caused by contingent happenings, while in the latter it stems from the reality of occupation which is an everyday life experience for Palestinians. It is interesting to notice, however, how the perception of fear or the consequences of the trauma are similar in the stories of both Israeli and Palestinian women. In fact, both trauma as an everyday experience and as a contingent happening, caused hardship and distress and in many cases long-term consequences. This is the case for example of Anonymous #9 and Buthaina who, have respectively lived highly traumatic experiences. Anonymous #9 was one of the only five people who survived a bombing attack on a bus, while Buthaina was shot in the head with a rubber bullet by an Israeli police officer during a demonstration. Both of them changed their habits and attitudes after the traumatic experience.

Her Story #9 Anonymous

And when the suicide bombing attack happened during my time in the army, I was sleeping, something I always did on those long bus rides. That's not an option for my any longer; I don't sleep on buses.

Her Story #41 Buthaina

I was closer to the police than to the demonstrators. Then I started hearing gun shots of huge rubber bullets and tear gas cans. After having hear the first one [gunshot] I was out. I was out because one of the Israeli police/army men shot me in the head.

Other examples of traumatic accounts show several factors of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On one hand there is the story of Adele who, referring to the Operation Protective Edge (Israel-Gaza War) in

2014, remembers the event of a mortar hitting her garden, while retrospectively recalling the chance to have died that day. On the other hand, trauma is configurated by the account of Anonymous #12 and Maisoon, when they describe the continuous humiliations and the fear of the reality of the occupation.

Her Story #13 Adele

On the last day of the war [last summer], a mortar hit the ground three meters away from my bedroom. The walls, outside and in, were punctured by ensuing shrapnel. If I had been in the bedroom, I probably wouldn't be here today, but fortunately, I had been in the safe room.

Her Story #12 Anonymous

A female Israeli soldier asked me to take off all of my clothes, except for my underwear, and to walk around the room. I cried and said that I couldn't see, who was watching through the window. She began laughing and said, "No one is interested in seeing this!" I replied that it was my right not to get naked in front of her, to which she answered that even if I were to go back home, I would still have to do this. And so I took off all of my clothes, except my underwear, crying.

Her Story #59 Maisoon

Imagine that they put all of my family in one room every day, and that they tried to kill my father. Imagine that they shoot my brother in his back, and he still suffers until today, and another of my brothers was shot in his foot because he tried to extinguish the fire in the garden of my home, which was around the beginning of the Intifada or the uprising in 2000

They didn't allow us to get medical help for my grandmother, and the next morning she died. They ruined our greenhouse and our trees in the garden. Imagine all these things, and how a person would turn out.

Home

The idea of home is a recurrent element in the narratives of Israeli and Palestinian women. The concept of home, nonetheless, acquires different nuances and it is often related and exacerbated by the very nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Having this conflict an overt symbolic relation to the notions of land and space, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict plays a crucial role in these women's definition of home. At the same time in fact, it is evident the internal struggle of the interviewees between the hardships of living in a conflict area and the belonging to the land. Home is described through a variety of contrasting feelings. On one hand, these women recognize the hardships of living the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the precarity of the situation and the fear of raising their

children in this context. On the other hand, these women manage to highlight those factors for which the decision to stay prevail over the option to leave. In many cases these factors are related to the family, like in the stories of Anonymous #12, #44 and #49:

Her Story #12 Anonymous

What kept me from doing this, however, was the fear of splitting the family. At the time, my daughter was having a second child, which meant that if I left, I would have to leave her behind. I don't want to leave this place, because it's important to keep the family united, and my family and I agreed not to uproot ourselves from our home.

Her Story #44 Anonymous

Once I thought about moving, but I immediately understood that this is the easiest way. I can leave and be really happy, but this is my country, where my family is, where everything for me is, and I really feel connected to the land.

Her Story #49 Anonymous

But I don't think I'd be able to leave. It's really home – also because my friends and family are here. I feel like the foreignness abroad would be a big crisis for me. When I thought of studying abroad, I felt like there would be no home for me anywhere anymore. That's how I felt. I don't know if that is really how it would be, but it's difficult feeling at home somewhere.

In other cases, the decision to stay stems from a deep sense of belonging to the land, where feelings of pride and love for "home", intended as motherland, become stronger than the hardships of a life endangered by the conflict or under occupation.

Her Story #21 Lucy

After the war in 2014 I did start asking myself if I wanted to raise my children in a war zone. If I wanted to live my life in a war zone. The answer is no, but because of the way I feel about the place, I came to the conclusion that there is no choice in the matter. This is where I am supposed to be and seemingly there are more reasons for being here than were first revealed.

Her Story #47 Anonymous

I don't think that I would ever leave Gaza or go too far away. I think I will study something else and then come back. I really can't imagine myself not being here. In spite of everything, really, in spite of every shitty thing in this place, I really love this place.

Finally, in the story of Maisoon emerges another important element. The feeling of home is not only related to the presence of family, friends or to an ideal sense of belonging to the nation. The idea of home, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict not only emerge notwithstanding the hardships of the conflict, but it seems to be connected to these elements. The discomfort of living in a conflict situation triggers the sense of belonging and the attachment to home.

Her Story #59 Maisoon

That makes me love this place – because of how much I have suffered and lost. I love it a lot more.

I really have a special relation to this place, and it makes me proud.

Cognitive Dissonance

The category of cognitive dissonance is more subtle that the previous two categories. In fact, the operationalization of this category was trickier, since it circumscribe the discrepancy between the perception of a national super-structural discourse, which are, to different extents, interiorized by the interviewees, and the set of contrasting feelings that the storytellers have to deal with. More specifically, both in Palestine and Israel, the presence of national propagandistic discourses, often built through the discredit of the opposite faction, serves to maintain the status quo and to justify institutional positions on certain topics. Amon the interviewees, it is recurrent the feeling of dissonance between the ideological framework that they have interiorized or in which they conduct their lives, and their personal ideas on, for example, the other side. In many cases, this discrepancy causes contrasting feelings that vary from shame, to anger, to angst. These emotions stem from the acknowledgement that one's personal beliefs or feelings are not allowed nor accepted in the context of reference. Many Palestinian women pointed out that they have experienced refusals from friends or family members for their being "open" towards Israeli citizens. For example, the stories of Ana or Anonymous #51, clearly express this idea of feeling a minority among their society for questioning the status quo of the anti-Israeli discourse:

Her Story #17 Ana

Before she came to visit me, another friend of mine said to me, "How come you let this friend of yours come here when she sits with Israelis?" This friend viewed all Israelis only in the light of the occupation. However, I feel like a minority because I know that there are good Israelis.

Her Story #51 Anonymous

I haven't decided, and of course a lot of the people that I know that I have this side. I have profound discussions with them. They have started developing negative ideas about me, because they believe

I'm pro-Israel, and that I am normalizing, so a lot of them are rejecting what I'm doing and that I work [in Israel], but at the end of the day we live in the same country.

The same feeling of loneliness and rejection stems from many of the Israeli women's stories:

Her Story #49 Anonymous

Two years ago during the massacre in Gaza [Gaza War, 2014], I couldn't speak to my friends about it. Most of them are Zionist left, and in general I think that very few people during that summer were preoccupied with what was happening there. […] I think that there were people around me who weren't capable of hearing me talk about it – even some of my close friends disconnected from me. They couldn't hear me talk about it.

In other cases, this dissonance directly refers to the domain of values and morality. The feelings of the interviewees clash with the ideological structure and the interiorized values that their respective societies have built. This generates a discrepancy that causes distress, because it addresses not only the realm of values but the same sense of belonging that upholds the processes of identity-building. This clash deeply affects the experiences of these women, in creating a disconnection and a feeling of rejection between the woman as a citizen and the society and culture of belonging:

Her Story #38 Smadar

I really, *really* love Israel, and I really miss the days, when I was proud of being Israeli. I also think that the Palestinians are doing things that are wrong, but it's difficult for me to feel that my group, my main identity, is behaving like this, in a way that doesn't fit my values.

Her Story #39 Siwar

There is something that they say about occupation – that it corrupts [Israelis]. I think the same thing applies to the people living under occupation, and I *do* think that Palestinian society has changed a lot under Israeli rule, and that it has become more violent than it was before. When you discriminate against and marginalize people, something in them becomes selfish and they just want to survive no matter what, and therefore they don't think about the interests of the collective. There is a deterioration of morals. […] I feel like I'm losing my own society. I'm not saying that I'm not connected to that society, but it becomes more difficult to live with these changes.

Her Story #68 Mayan

I don't think that we [leftists] have a chance here. I see how much ignorance and being silent is blessed. To be an educated person is not something that is good. […]And everything that I believe in

and all the values that I live by, all of my morals and all of my ideology – all of those things contradict what happens here, but I need to live with this in my daily life. All these things that I don't believe in are forced upon me, and the gap between my perspectives and between that is difficult.

My ideology is not counted here. It doesn't have a space here. There is no space for my morals and my ideals.

The "Other"

From the perspective of the Israeli and Palestinian national discourses, the depiction of the "Other" is strictly linked to the dynamics of the conflict and the exacerbation of a discrediting rhetoric. The framework of the conflict is carried and justified by national discourses that lump together the other side in a whole that does not allow differentiation nor personalization. The conflict's intractability and its being considered a zero-sum game, enforce this separation and partisan division between Palestine and Israel. Nonetheless, the depiction of the Other that emerges from the stories is rather more complex and layered than the one provided by both national discourses. In the stories, the description of the Other is certainly affected by negative feelings. Israeli and Palestinian women refer to the other side often with fear, diffidence, or anger. At the same time, these feelings are not totalizing. The presence of negative feelings towards the Other is complementary to a widespread curiosity and willingness to know more about the other side. The high degree of reflexivity shown by the interviewees relates to the emotional capacity to partly overcome the presence of negative feelings and to reach out to the other side, in order to get a deeper understanding of the Other. This capacity is often represented by the willingness to understand the other side despite the presence of negative feelings. In the story of Anonymous #15 and #37 emerges a clear capacity to differentiate between the Israeli soldiers and Israeli citizens, which directly challenge the status quo of those national propagandistic discourses that foster the de-humanization and de-personalization of the other side:

Her Story #15 Anonymous

The day that I was supposed to meet Israelis for the first time, I still held anger towards them and I wasn't too happy about meeting them, because I thought that they would be against Palestine. After I met and talked to them, I found something different. They are not like the soldiers at the checkpoint. They are educated and believe in our rights.

Her Story #37 Anonymous

I share so many things with so many people around the world. Maybe I listen to some music that a Jew is listening to right now. I horseback ride, and maybe someone in Israel does that as well.

We always have something in common in spite of our differences. We always have something. Maybe so many people in Israel believe like I do, in peace and in a beautiful world, where there is no destruction and killing. I know these people exist, even in Israel, the place that killed us. There are hateful people and good people. There is always an opposite for everything.

The dichotomy negative/positive feelings is explicated by many of the interviewees. Along with a genuine interest towards the other side, in fact, the description of the Other sets the base for a further step towards recognition. The first phase, of differentiation, serves to counterattack the rhetoric built on the standardization of the Other. These women, have often lived traumatic and humiliating experiences to be addressed to the opposite faction, yet they have the curiosity to deepen their knowledge of the Other and to acknowledge its diversity, not only from the self, but also among the other side. The following accounts adequately mirror this dichotomic view of the Other. The fear, the anger and the interiorized cultural differences are overt but, at the same time the storytellers acknowledge that their understanding of the Other might be partial and biased, hence they challenge themselves to be more open.

Her Story #27 Anonymous

Sometimes I think about the families of those that died. I also think about the other side. Why do they kill themselves? Don't they want a brighter future? Do they think about how their mother feels? If I was going to kill myself or had these intentions, I would first think about my mother, or both my parents. What they do [suicide bombing], won't help in the end. It's the same on our side. If we bomb Gaza, it won't help. What they do, and what we do, doesn't help.

Her Story #28 Nitzan

Next month I'm going to a weekend dialogue seminar with Palestinian women. I want to meet them, to learn from them, and to look for solutions. I want to ask them about anti-Semitism, and so many other topics. We are all human beings, and we need to take advantage of opportunities to meet. I'm not scared of it, and I hope that it will add depth to my perspective. Some people don't like to have their minds changed, but I think that I always have something to learn.

Her Story #39 Siwar

I have anger against the Jewish population. I'm very angry, because of this superior attitude that they have – this attitude of the chosen people. This land is theirs, and they have been chosen by God. I don't want to do that, but I want to be human. I can't kick five million people out. Justice doesn't

mean that I need to get everything back. Justice means that I need recognition of what happened, and compensation, and to be treated as an equal citizen and an equal person

Her Story #42 Anonymous

On the other hand I always try to remember that they are human beings just like everyone, like us, but the situation and the complex reality make me feel differently sometimes. On the one hand we want to live together in peace, but on the other hand you are just scared.

Recognition

Recognition is one of the most important categories that stemmed from the analysis. The action of recognition implies a further step in the comprehension of the other side. In fact, whether the description of the other side was mostly related to finding out those elements that render the Other different from the self and to trying to go beyond the negative feelings associated to the Other to find out more, the act of recognition implies understanding the Other's existence and experience as worthy and dignified as one self's. In this sense, recognition comes with several associated feelings such as empathy, reconciliation and reciprocity. The capacity to recognize the suffering of the Other as one self's suffering and the existence of the Other as rightful as one's own, shows a great act of reciprocity. Notwithstanding the asymmetries and differences that characterize the lives on the two sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, these women manage to see the human side of the other faction and to go beyond the pain, the sufferance and the diffidence in order to recognize the experiences of the Other to be as worthy as one's own. Besides all the differences involved, it emerges from the stories a strong perceived connection on the human level between Palestinian and Israeli women. This can be seen when traumatic situations are addressed, like in the accounts of Anonymous #9 and Ronit, who uses the framework of the conflict and its atrocities to express a feeling of connection to the other side:

Her Story #9 Anonymous

When people suffer and feel at their worst, you see that they are just people. Everyone just wants to heal. There is no politics involved in this. During last summer's war round of sirens, we all ran to the stairs; it was something we did together.

Her Story #19 Ronit

When things heat up around us as now, it brings us all to depression, but because we are connected to the Palestinian cause, we also know that they suffer every day. When it "calms down," it's just calm on the surface. Palestinians suffer every day. They face awful violations. I don't justify any attacks

from both sides, but I can understand the Palestinian discourse, and I think that most women here also understand it.

At the same time, the process of recognition is built acknowledging the differences between the two situations involved. It would be naïve to expect Israeli and Palestinian women to overlook the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, several accounts present the willingness to humanize and recognize the experiences of the Other notwithstanding these differences, as it is expressed in the following extracts:

Her Story #10 Anonymous

I can't compare the occupier with the occupied. I don't hate them however. We are all humans, and we both love peace. If there was no occupation, and if a state for Israel existed not on Palestinians' lands, then I don't see why I couldn't be friends with Israelis.

Her Story #48 Hanan

I am very, very sad about this conflict between us and the Israelis. It's not that I smile at them when they kill us, but I know that it is the army that is responsible for killing us, not the citizens. This is the difference, and here it is not the Palestinians who kill Israelis – it's Hamas, the defense here. It's a shame to kill citizens and innocent people, like children, teachers etc. We are innocent people – us and the Israeli citizens.

Her Story #68 Mayan

I think it's a human characteristic in the whole world. It also gives a lot more order, and it's a lot easier. You feel a lot of comfort in a place, when you are part of something, but this "all" cancels the place of one. The moment I say "all the Arabs are killers," I'm putting my neighbor in the same category as the Hamas fighter, but they are two different people, and the moment I say this I stop seeing them as human beings. It then becomes easy to kill them, and it's easy to say "death to Arabs," when "all the Arabs are killers."

Finally, another important element in the act of recognition, is the willingness to set the bases for continuing the process of recognition. Many of the interviewees in fact, are mothers who want to set an example for their children and to teach them the human face of the Other. This decision is often expressed through the hope that the situation will change in the future. In this sense, teaching to feel the Other in terms of a human being, capable of suffering and feeling the same fears as the self, is perceived as an investment on the future driven by the hope for a possible reconciliation.

Her Story #74 Shoshi

So I went with him to the exhibition in order for him to experience and to feel what it means to be "other" in our country, and basically who is going to be considered his "enemies," in the hope that he would take this with him when entering the [Palestinian] territories. It was a way for me to remind him that people want to live, and they [Palestinians] have the same problems and the same dilemmas as us, and they love their children, as we love ours.

Her Story #12 Anonymous

You know, when you take away the most precious thing, which is life, you lose sight of what is important. That leaves people with nothing left to lose. At the time, my son didn't appreciate life. That is why I took him out to see the human side of the other part.

Gender Discrimination

The notion and awareness of gender discrimination was widely spread through the stories of both Jewish-Israeli, Arab-Israeli and Palestinian women. Some of these women address gender discrimination specifically for what it is, recognizing the power and rootedness of the hegemonic masculine national discourses, while other accounted for determined episodes in their life without ascribing it to a systemic dynamic. In both cases, nevertheless, they report the presence of highly discriminatory gender dynamics in their lives, both in Israel and Palestine. Whether the discriminatory behaviour is often related, according to the interviewees, to traditional religious backgrounds, at the same time, some of them account for the presence of an underlying tendency to strictly defined gender roles. From the stories of Lamah, Smadar and Buthaina, in sense, emerge a clear sense of oppression due to the presence of highly structured gender roles in the Israeli and Palestinian societies. Women are expected to live up to certain standards and to play according to determined roles. Women have to fight harder to be recognized as peer actors within the Israeli and Palestinian societies, mostly because of this pre-determined and deeply rooted separation of gender roles. In fact, there stems a clear dichotomy between men as the ones in charge of the public sphere, whilst women are relegated to their private roles of wives, mothers and caretakers.

Her Story #36 Lamah

I'm a woman, and I feel like men control women, and I think that if women got control, it would be much different. We wouldn't have to go through this conflict. [Jewish] men are similar to Arab religious men: "I'm the man, and do whatever I say. I'm the man. I'm the boss."

Her Story #38 Smadar

But then when I went out, people would say, “Why do you bite your nails? It’s not very ladylike!” Or, “Why don’t you have children already? Why do you have a doctorate? Get married and have kids. Why don’t you cook?” My husband cooks. I clean. Anyhow, I encounter those attitudes a lot, especially in Israeli society that is not politically correct. I’m fighting this a lot.

Her Story #41 Buthaina

Until two years ago, I was someone who took part in every national demonstration, even the un-authorized ones. This, in terms of being a woman, was always a conflict in the community, because our community is not perfect. Women are still oppressed and still are expected to be sweet, calm, and quiet – a woman is not expected to hold a flag and run in the streets shouting for freedom, nor face 500 police officers, nor write political posts on Facebook all the time. Even though I was born to a politically aware family, this has always been a struggle in my life.

On the other hand, also the religious background of certain areas plays a crucial role in determining the construction of gendered dynamics. The stories of Anonymous #47 and #50 show that the rootedness of certain traditional religious beliefs affect their lives on a daily base when it comes to everyday life events. At the same time, many interviewees pointed out the feeling of discomfort or unsafety stemming from being an independent woman in these kinds of contexts.

Her Story #47 Anonymous

When I walk in the streets I hear a lot of words, and I hear a lot of people trying to tell me things, but I don’t really care. I just walk and I raise my head high, and I walk as if nobody is talking or saying anything.

When a girl walks without a hijab in Gaza, it’s very weird. People will say, “Look, look, she’s walking without a hijab. She’s not wearing anything.” I kind of wasn’t used to that in the beginning, but now I’m very used to it, and I don’t really care what they say.

Her Story #50 Anonymous

I come from a conservative family, and I can say that I had a rough adolescence because of being a girl. My parents wouldn’t let me go to the movies with my friends. They wouldn’t let me go to birthday parties if boys were invited because it wasn’t accepted in my community, and they didn’t let me stay late with my friends in Haifa.

So I was oppressed as a woman in my adolescence, and I still am today.

Finally, Rawan, as many others raises the issue of gender discrimination connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many of the interviewees in fact, pointed out how life as a woman can be hard for the presence of a system based on highly structured gender roles as well as the everyday challenges of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Her Story #58 Rawan

It's not easy to be a Palestinian woman. You have issues inside of your community and also within the Jewish community.

Synthesis: the "narrative analysis"

The second phase of analysis stems from the kind of narrative cognition that Polkinghorne identifies as the framework for the process of narrative analysis. Whilst the act of analysing a narrative relies on a form of paradigmatic cognition that serves as the rationale to infer common elements from the stories, in the case of narrative analysis the process is reverse, namely the commonalities are organized by the means of a plot in a process of emplotment. The second phase of analysis of the database, followed this principle of synthesis, namely the commonalities found among the stories of Israeli and Palestinian women served as the elements to synthetize a shared narrative. This process serves to ascribe the elements that bring together the stories of Israeli and Palestinian women under the means of a common plot. This by no means imply that the stories of Israeli and Palestinian women are the same or equal. On the contrary, it shows that, despite the deep inequalities and overt differences, there is an underlying plot, namely a recurrent sequence of elements and similar interpretations that render these stories the epiphenomenal representation of the intertwined relation between gender and conflict.

The shared narrative of Palestinian and Israeli women is set in the context of a conflict that deeply affect the livelihood of who lives in those areas. The conflict is a permanent presence in the life of women since it permeates every aspect of their everyday lives, generating a feeling of precarity, fear and distress. The hardships and reality of the conflict emerge through several factors, such as the relationship with the family or a partner, the idea of motherhood, the sense of belonging. All these elements are characterized by an underlying sentiment of angst and fear: the insecurity of raising one's children in a war context, the fear of losing a family member, the exacerbation of negative feelings towards one's home. At the same time, the overarching presence of the conflict triggers the strengthening and consolidation of the sense of belonging associated to the concept of home. The hardships and the challenges of the conflict play a crucial role in the story, by making the protagonist appreciate simple things such as the warmth of the people, the beauty of certain places and typical

cultural habits. This idealization is complementary to the perception of the conflict as an intractable and precarious reality, which exacerbation could lead to the outbreak of another direct clash very suddenly. For this reason, the love for one's home, intended as motherland, is connected to a deep feeling of presentism, where the future is blurred by the lack foreseeability of the conflict. Another important element of the plot is played by the "antagonist". The presence of the Other triggers oppositional emotions which widen the gap between one's own account and the Other's. At the same time, the story is characterized by the willingness to understand and recognize the Other's experience and emotions as worthy and legitimate as one's own. This process of recognition stems from the acknowledgement of the similar elements and experiences in the antagonist's story and from the capacity of the protagonist to show empathy and to personalize the Other. The presence of these positive feelings, nevertheless, are tide to a capacity to see behind aprioristic and trivial partisan belongings that the conflict induces. Moreover, another factor plays a crucial part in this: experiencing gender discrimination, living the reality of highly patriarchal societies and militarized contexts, in a way soothes the process of recognition of the Other. The form of oppression related to gender that the protagonist faces every day, is the linking agent between the protagonist and the antagonist, because it gives the characters a common ground where to pose the battle. The awareness related to this link set the bases for the recognition of the other side and the partial neutralization of the diversities that characterize each side. The presence of an "oppressor" brings closer the experiences of the protagonist and the Other, through a process of recognition and humanization. This personalization is to be ascribed to the realization that there is a common story, that brings together the women of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a discovery on several nuances of femininity, in a context where the dominant narrative on the conflict is male-centred and the gender roles are highly structured and discriminatory. Moreover, the protagonist of the story lives a continuous challenge between the values and norms that she has interiorized from society and the rise of a contradictory conscience, that is willing to humanize the Other. This discrepancy often generates a sense of guilt and, in a few cases, of anger towards a system to which the protagonist does not feel she belongs. Not only the feeling of not belonging, but also the lack of acceptance from the majority of the society, creates a high level of loneliness and discomfort in the protagonist. Eventually, these factors serve to build what can be considered a shared story that brings together the experiences of Israeli and Palestinian women. A story set in what has been considered and intractable conflict, which long-lasting nature rendered it an everyday reality for the people involved. A story that contains element of antagonism and rejection, fear and shame but also curiosity and willingness to humanize the experience of the Other because, under determined circumstances, are similar and worthy to be legitimized as the one of the protagonist. And, finally, a shared narrative that might link the

experiences of Israeli and Palestinian women, in the intertwined relation between gender and conflict, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a way that shows understanding, respect and reciprocity.

CHAPTER 6 - DISCUSSION

Her Story#53 Anonymous

Some people can say that Palestinian needs to be free first, and then we can talk women's rights, and to this I say, *No, it doesn't work like this*. We will be free people when women are free. So it doesn't only have to do with being free from the Israeli Zionist occupation. It's also freeing ourselves mentally. I don't want to separate these two struggles. We would be a stronger society if we fought occupation with women up front and not in the back.

These words, represent a rather clear statement. What is currently conceived as the state of things, namely the prioritization of Israel and Palestine's national struggles over female emancipation and liberation, represents the axiomatic belief stemming from the predominance of masculinity within the discourse on the conflict. The criterion of prioritization behind putting the national struggle before the struggle for women liberation, summarizes the need to use gender lenses when approaching the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This section will delve deeper into the data collected in order to pinpoint the implications that emerged from the analysis in light of the theoretical contributions reported in Chapter 4. Indeed, this section will provide the framework for understanding the significance of the findings stemmed from the two-phased analysis conducted on the database of the project Political is Personal, in order to contextualize this research under the umbrella of Feminist Theory and PCS approaches.

As aforementioned, within war contexts, Feminist Theory aims at giving an explanation of armed violence that would overcome a dichotomic division between a hegemonic masculinity and a devalued femininity. The idea of the Machiavellian citizen-warrior is for Feminist scholars "*neither a unavoidable characterization of human nature, nor a desirable possibility; it is a revisable, gendered construction of personality and citizenship*" (Tickner, 1992, p.38). Using Feminist Theory as the conceptual framework to introduce the empirical analysis of this work, serves to highlight the importance of the involvement of female voices into the field of Peace and Conflict Studies. The contribution of Feminist Theory to the field of PCS in fact, is extremely notable in providing an integrate account for a reading of the data reported in Chapter 5 through a stress on gender as an essential element within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Female voices in fact, are usually tied to an interiorized notion of femininity which is contextual to the Israeli and Palestinian societies. In this sense, the notion of femininity in both Israel and Palestine, is deeply affected by the rootedness of an idea of manhood embedded in the conflict's dynamics: femininity and masculinity are understood as two fixed, timeless, complementary categories. Nevertheless as Sharoni argues, "*the role of gender*

in the context of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict extends beyond what it means to be a man or a woman; gender plays an important role, shaping individual and collective identities as well as dominant interpretations of the conflict and prospects for its resolution." (Sharoni, 1995, p.118). In this sense, a Feminist understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through gender lenses dislocates gender relations from the binary contraposition of masculinity and femininity, by making gender visible in its contextual and contingent nature. This binary depiction of gender which characterizes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict *inter alia*, arises in a context where militarization plays a crucial role in the establishment of gender roles and structures (Enloe, 2007; Riley, 2008; Asadi, 2010-12). As Enloe points out, there is a strict relationship between militarisation and masculinity. In fact, the military and the subsequent militarization of the Israeli and Palestinian societies have exacerbated a notion of masculinity which stems from the presence of inherent values related to manliness in militarized societies, such as toughness, courage, power, independence (Tickner, 1992; Sasson-Levy, 2002). Moreover, the Israeli-Palestinian case is very peculiar due to the presence of overt asymmetries between the two parties. Mitchell identifies different types of asymmetries within a conflict situation, legal, structural, moral, relational, behavioural (Mitchell 1991). Whether the presence of these asymmetries concur to shape the external conformation of the conflict, it also contributes in defining the nature of the causation between militarisation and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Militarisation in the case of Israel is de facto the result of a national discourse built around national security and around the "*development of a militaristic way of thinking that perceives war and the preparations for war as unavoidable societal processes*" (Daphna-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev, 2016); in the case of Palestine, militarisation needs to be diluted through the acknowledgment of the Israeli presence: the militarisation of society takes shape around the concept of resistance, which is built vis-à-vis the current state of occupation. The notion of femininity which arises in relation to the presence of a male-oriented frame of the conflict, is therefore built, in the national discourses, around features that discursively and structurally belong to the private realm of social life. The roles of women stem from this idea of femininity which generates in relation to an opposed strong masculinity. The two-phased analysis reported in Chapter 5 was conducted through the implementation of a narrative methodology on a sample of stories. The analysis of female storytelling within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in this sense, represents a valuable intersection between the need posed by Feminist Theory to put gender out front, in order to draw out a less binary and more nuanced portrayal of femininity (and femininities), and the urge pointed out by PCS scholars and practitioners to focus on the local, contingent and relational side of conflicts, in order to draft further insights for their resolution. Particularly, focusing on female storytelling in the context of a grassroots project as the Political is Personal, highlighted important elements that portray the

hardships and living experiences of Israeli and Palestinian women. The importance of these findings are two-fold: on one hand, they show that women within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, needs to fight on two different fronts, the one that directly relates to armed violence and the one vis-à-vis gender discrimination within their respective societies; on the other hand they show a more nuanced and less binary depiction of femininity, where complexities arise especially in the relation to the other part: a picture that mirrors the diversity of women's experiences and that shows the influence of a conflict embedded in ethno-nationalist claims on female consciousness.

The categories of Trauma and Gender Discrimination are respectively exemplificatory of the double-struggle that women within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are called to face: trauma, is an extensive phenomenon in Israeli and Palestinian women's lives, which is directly related to the conflict's dynamics and protraction; at the same time, the established masculine hegemony, exacerbated by the militarization of both societies, set the bases for highly patriarchal societal structures, where women have to fight against stereotypical gender roles and discrimination. Women, both on the Israeli and the Palestinian side, experience trauma in extensive and often permanent ways. The trauma can be related to the hot phases of the conflict or to everyday life experiences. Amongst the peculiarities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as part of its being lodged in the intractability paradigm, the sequence of outbreaks of armed violence followed by a return to the status quo of everyday hostilities and the reality of occupation, represent one of the most salient factors in shaping the lives of common citizens. Post-conflict phases, which is regarded by the international community as that moment when the parties involved cease the official war and the conflict enters a phase that goes beyond traditional hostilities, are as critical for women as the phases of active conflict (Handrahan, 2004). In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as aforementioned, the involvement of women in the public realm of the conflict reflected a spring movement, which followed the alternation between hot and cold phases of the conflict (Sharoni, 1995). The status and prestige that women gained during these moments in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, of which the First Intifada is the most exemplificatory, did not generate a long-term change concerning gender roles. Indeed, while the involvement of women has always been important from an organizational standpoint, with the presence of women's committees and grassroots women initiatives, the overarching presence of a hegemonic masculinity absorbed the revolutionary potential of women's participation to the conflict. In fact, "identities available to women are constructed within specific power relations which provide the framework of choice" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 21): in a context where militarisation radicalized the divide between men and women and fostered the establishment of a Manichean division of gender roles, even during phases where the armed violence is exacerbated, women are either relegated to the traditional roles associated with femininity or, in

the case they challenge stereotypical gender roles (as the example of female combatants), they are endowed with masculine connotations (Campbell, 1990; Asadi, 2010-12). In conflicts, the association between women agency with the values connected to motherhood (Skjelsbæk, 2001) is a consequence of the aprioristic equation between men and war. The notion of motherhood, as stated in Chapter 3, represents a pivotal element in the construction of gender roles within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: women are life-givers, mothers of the nation and symbols of the land. It is interesting to notice, however, how the perception of these discourses around motherhood and femininity emerges from the data of Chapter 5. These women in fact, are generally aware of the discriminatory nature of gender relations in Israel and Palestine. Most of them report episodes where they have felt discriminated or uncomfortable due to the presence of highly gendered structures. Nonetheless, there is a high level of consciousness among the women who took part at the Political is Personal project. Albeit the extent of their agency has been affected by the masculine hegemonic discourse within the conflict, some of them question these gender structures by claiming the power to change the situation as women: "I'm a woman, and I feel like men control women, and I think that if women got control, it would be much different" (Lamah, #36). Some of them express the clash between stereotypical gender roles associated with femininity and their political involvement: "Women are still oppressed and still are expected to be sweet, calm, and quiet – a woman is not expected to hold a flag and run in the streets shouting for freedom" (Buthaina, #41). This consciousness raises a series of observations. The standpoint of Peace and Conflict Studies which aims at a Post-Liberal peace, sheds some light on the necessity for bottom-up initiatives to change the current status quo. Dislodging women agency from the discourse of devalued femininity and the following associated values of womanhood, to a self-conscious, empowered and more nuanced narrative, could seem a very impervious process, especially in contexts, as the Israeli-Palestinian one, where notions of femininity and masculinity are so tied to the conflict's dynamics. Nevertheless, as emerges from the analysis, women's narratives might bear the seeds of a change that has not been institutionalized yet. In this context, the analysis of storytelling through a narrative methodology carries invaluable implications: on one hand in fact, narrative analysis on storied accounts unveils structures of meaning that would remain otherwise hidden; on the other hand, storytelling expresses the ambiguity and complexities of human experiences and it conveys inquiries that confute the over-exemplification of gender structures and ethno-nationalist claims. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, d'Estrée and Babbitt analyse the social psychological factors that pertain to women's participation in mediation and negotiation activities. The question posed by the two scholars tries to address the assumptions made on the role of women as peacemakers. De-escalation, as a

prerequisite for conflict resolution, relies according to d'Estrée and Babbitt on excellent interaction and communication skills. And, since their

"*approach sees interaction between parties as key in de-escalation and in generating new options, effective peacemaking will require the skills necessary for fostering quality dialogue* […] *Fostering quality dialogue also includes a willingness to speak about personal experience, in order to communicate relevant information but also to generate empathy, and the ability to constructively channel expressions of emotion by using such personal experiences. When this sort of emotion based in concrete experience is expressed, the experience cannot be denied, and it often elicits acknowledgment by the other side*." (d'Estrée and Babbitt, 1998, p. 188).

Whereas these prerequisites for an "effective peacemaking" are related to the field of mediation and interactive problem-solving (Kelman, 2008), they can as well be found in analysis proposed in Chapter 5. The stories of Israeli and Palestinian women provide an example of constructive communication that, through the accounts of personal experiences and emotions, is able to foster the base for a reciprocal understanding of the other side. The category "The Other", in fact, shows that notwithstanding the presence of negative feelings for the other side, such as anger, fear and suspicion, these women are willing to do a leap of faith, acknowledging their lack of knowledge about the Other and the presence of many representational biases, in order to acquire a deeper understanding of their counterparts. This is particularly impressive considering the high ethno-nationalist charge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which exacerbates the partisan distinction between "us" and "them", "protagonist" and "antagonist" (Heraclides, 1989). The biased and exemplified depiction of "Otherness" in identity-based conflicts with high ethno-nationalist claims, tends to constitute the base for the understanding and experience of the Other. As emerges from the category of "Cognitive Dissonance", Israeli and Palestinian women are embedded in cultural contexts that are prone to the acceptance of certain stereotyped, value-based, binary representation of the other side. Nevertheless, using Gramscian terms, a contradictory consciousness (Karabel, 1976) emerges from the storied accounts reported in Chapter 5. The clash between one's interiorized values, due to the socialization to each part's national narratives, and one's positioning in relation to the Other, generates among the women who took part at the Political is Personal project a feeling of dissonance, where the structure of values that they have been socialized to, is not capable of comprehending their openness to the other side. This attenuation in the binary predispositions towards the other side, set the base for a further understanding, that departs from dehumanizing and depersonalizing depictions of the Other: the category of Recognition, in fact, delves deeper into these dynamics of empathic acceptance. Anyway, as Senehi and Byrne points out:

It is important to note that "mutual recognition" does not refer to a universalizing view where one party embraces another party as essentially the same as itself, but rather it refers to a struggle to articulate and examine differences. While developing understanding across boundaries of cultural difference may never be complete or unproblematic, it seems that trusting relationships require a desire of all parties to recognize the dignity and experience of the other. (Senehy and Byrne, 2006, p. 240-41).

The participants to the Political is Personal project, indeed, within the framework of cross-cultural boundaries, communicate an understanding of the Other that is neither totalizing nor reductive. On the contrary, the process of recognition stems from the acknowledgement of the Other as different from the self and, *despite this*, the Other's experience is valued as important and worthy as one own. The step of recognition is particularly important because it sets the bases for a constructive transformation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Kornelsen, 2013). The everyday life in a war that is both destructive and that carries many asymmetries (in power, freedom, gender), is characterized by the hardships of partisan and opposing national narratives, that reinforce the paradigm of intractability, often crystalizing a situation where seemingly there is no space for reconciliation. In this sense, storytelling proves to be both a transformative (Reimer, 2015) and analytical tool since its use encourages "people to address and articulate a positive sense of identity in relationship to others but not in reaction to them" (Lederach, 2003, p.55) and, at the same time, its analysis proves to highlight processes of meaning-making that is much more articulated, conscious, and empathic than the one emerging from national discourses.

These findings prove that the analysis of storytelling can be rightfully placed at the intersection between the field of Peace and Conflict Studies and Feminist Theory. In fact, the need to overcome liberal peace-making, addressed by those scholars that abide to the "fourth generation of PCS" (Post-Liberal Peace), values the involvement in peace-making efforts of the local stakeholders, that are recognized to possess the agency and legitimacy to map out the everyday life situation in conflictual contexts better than external actors. Moreover, Feminist Theory pinpoints the need to use gender lenses in the analysis of conflicts, due to the reinforcement of gender inequalities that war-related phenomena, such as militarisation, boost in conflict-affected societies. In this sense, within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, focusing of female voices through a narrative analysis of storytelling, conveys a multi-layered understanding on how gender and war are related cross-culturally, and it unveils the presence of narrative categories that cross the boundaries of the partisan belongings of this identity-based conflict. Moreover, conducting a two-phased analysis leads to two different observations. Firstly, the use of paradigmatic cognition in conducting an "analysis of

narratives" enables the researcher to ascribe particular elements to general categories: more specifically, this action of analysis led to highlight the multi-layered reality of Israeli and Palestinian women, how the asymmetries in their respective situations produce different stories that, nonetheless, contain common narrative elements. This first phase of analysis produced an account based on paradigmatic cognition which respected the peculiarities of each woman's story, experience, and interpretation. On the other hand, the second phase of analysis, stemming from narrative cognition, allowed a synthesis, a reconstruction by the means of a plot: connecting to the general categories found in the first phase, the narrative analysis highlighted the presence of a shared narrative. The stories told by the participants at the Political is Personal project, carry the diversity, the complexity and ambiguity that are related to the process of interpretation of reality that storytelling conveys. Nevertheless, the synthesis of the commonalities yield the emergence of an emplotted structure, which showed the presence of a shared narrative arising from the texts, setting the base for a mutual understanding and a reciprocal recognition of what being a woman within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict means.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

Contemporary conflicts are complex human phenomena. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, due to its prolonged nature, its radicalization around identity-based claims and the presence of seemingly insurmountable asymmetries, can be rightfully considered the epitome of the "intractable" conflict. Nevertheless, despite these elements that contribute at outlining its epiphenomenal framework, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has sustained and keep reinforcing a highly structured gender divide. The militarisation of the Israeli society and the current state of occupation of the Palestinian Territories have exacerbated the binary opposition between a notion of masculinity that depicts men as protectors, breadwinners and warriors, and of femininity that portrays women as victims, caregivers and mothers. Despite the factual involvement of Israeli and Palestinian women in the conflict's dynamics, both during the violent outbreaks of the conflict and peaceful times, women's roles are still tied to highly stereotypical and reductive gender roles. The gendered nature of conflicts has been highlighted by Feminist scholars within the field of IR. In particular, one of the most notable contributions of these scholars have come from the collaboration with the field of Peace and Conflict Studies, due to the shared belief that conflicts are not unavoidable and that to better understand the causes of war, a focus on the micro level of societies can not be eluded. In particular, Feminist scholars within the field of Peace and Conflict Studies have highlighted how gender inequalities play a crucial role in the continuation and perpetration of armed violence, due to the predominance of an ideal-type of masculinity which is discursively associated with aggressiveness, violence and power. Within PCS, the fourth generation of scholars and practitioners, that aim at achieving Post-Liberal peace, concur in outlining formulas for the de-escalation of armed conflicts that stem from the non-institutional arena: bottom-up initiatives that value relationality and experientiality, and that would put local people's knowledge out front in the analysis of wars. In this sense, the fourth generation of PCS and Feminist Theory converge of the belief that structural violence, in the form of unequal gender structures, play a fundamental role in the radicalization of armed violence and, more importantly, these two traditions call for new, innovative methods to tackle contemporary conflicts and their de-escalation. Storytelling, for its ambiguous nature, plays a crucial role at the intersection between PCS and Feminist Theory. Narratives convey the human capacity to interpret reality and to transpose it into storied accounts. The analysis of storytelling in this sense, unveils the ambiguity and complexity of the human experience and it, therefore, constitutes a very interesting base for the interpretation of complex human phenomena. Having conducted a narrative analysis on women storytelling within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has led to the emergence of several insights. Firstly, the two-phase analysis highlighted the presence of commonalities within the stories

of these women: despite their different background, the asymmetries of their situations and the influence of representational biases of the other side, the particular elements stemming from the stories have been summed under six general categories. The presence of these common experiential elements, led to the second phase of analysis which, adopting the principle of narrative cognition, produced a synthesis of the commonalities through the means of a common plot, to highlight the presence of a shared narrative among Israeli and Palestinian women. The importance of these findings relates to the capacity of storytelling to unveil the multi-layered and multi-faceted nature of women's experiences in armed conflicts, which confutes the exemplification and trivialization of their roles through a process of victimization. Furthermore, this analysis, using the presence of a common elements as the scaffolding of a shared narrative, shows the ground for a mutual understanding which does not erase or flatten the differences between the situations and experiences of Israeli and Palestinian women, but embraces this diversity and provides a more nuanced, less binary depiction of femininity within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

To conclude, this work does not claim to have found the elixir for the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nevertheless, it indeed contributes to widen the literature of the field, proposing an innovative approach to approach the de-escalation of armed conflicts, through amore analytical, conscious, and nuanced standpoint. De-escalation and reconciliation can not prescind from a better understanding of a conflict's causes, triggers and structural dynamics. In this sense, this work has contributed to show the great value of narrative analysis on storied accounts to unveil hidden narratives, common experiences and mutual understandings. These elements could provide future research the prompt to value women's expertise and ability to foster personalization and humanization of the Other as an essential and invaluable contribution to conflict resolution. Legitimizing women's voices to be heard, embracing their difference and acknowledging the multi-layered nature of their roles in armed conflicts are factors that should no longer be neglected within the academic world, but, on the contrary, should constitute the beginning of a new, more gender-conscious, locally-placed, era of conflict resolution.

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- http://www.politicalispersonal.org/
- https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/

Appendix 1

Transcript of the interview with Sarah Arnd Linder conducted on July 21st, 2020

B. What were the core ideas behind this project, how did it start, who was involved and why did you start this whole project

S. So I started it, now it's 5 years, eeh, I have been asked this question before, and every time it is very difficult for me to answer, because I don't remember exactly the thing that was like "oh yeah!". So, I have lived in Israel for 14 years and I studied something similar to you background. I have studied Governance and Middle Eastern History and the I became interested in Feminism and gender very early on and… I have had different kinds of jobs, I have also worked a little bit in the peace NGO world but I was very disappointed, maybe very naively because I thought that, if you work in a field that is supposed to (pause) that is based on principles of justice, gender equality, dialogue and communication then people would apply that to their own behaviour and I noticed quit early on there is also, even for organizations that work with equality and justice, people don't always apply to how they work or how they make decisions. Many times when decisions need to be made it's men that do it and this is not specific for Israel and Palestine, it is a global thing, even in Denmark (pause) it's not black and white, but personally I didn't like it and then 5 years ago I just finished my Master degree, I was working somewhere, do you know Moroccan Oil? I was working there, I knew that eventually I didn't want to stay there, it wasn't mu thing but I had to make money and the when I finished my MA I was ok I am very passionate about politics and I live here so it is very relevant to my life and I am a woman and I am interested in gender and feminism and on a personal (pause) you know I don't say it officially, when I am out and, you know but I will say that I prefer to work with women only, and this was something for me, that I didn't want to work with men because I was scared of, I felt that as a women, especially as a foreign woman when you work in this field of peace and dialogue or human rights there is a (pause) it's maybe misunderstood, I have had some experiences where I felt that people weren't taking me seriously and professionally, they took it as an opportunity to flirt or to take me professionally in a serious way. But this is not something that I go out and scream because it can feel not so politically correct to say it but that's my experience. So there was the big war or attack, between Gaza and Israel in 2014, and it had happened before when I lived here but for me that was a very big, that was the first time really that the conflict hit me directly because it was one month and a half and I had lived and still live in the center of Tel Aviv and that the first time, well not the first time, that missiles, because there had been in 2012, but in 2014 for a month and half there were missiles daily and it felt like many things happened because of this war. There were many initiatives that started for this reason, like Women Wage Peace, that you probably know so they started after

that (pause), so I knew that there were several very important women peace and dialogue organizations that existed so I didn't want to do something that did this as well, it didn't make sense. Women Wage Peace is are already a platform where IJ women meet and Palestinians, though not many Palestinians, it's more an Israeli organization but there are already dialogue between women on both sides, but I wanted to contribute to that (pause) to what organization like WWP or Women within combatants for peace are doing and at the same time I was writing a blog about my own experience here in Israel and Palestine and I felt like I liked writing and I wanted to something that was as truthful as possible. I wanted not to do journalistic work but to go out to women, and it's maybe especially women who were not activists, who don't go out or on the I side I was and I am still interested in trying to reach like right wing women that don't feel that their voices are important, and I wanted to reach them and to through my writing let them speak (pause). And since then I mean at the beginning I didn't know what it would lead to, I quit my job and I was like let's take a chance and then with time I realized that it had different purposes so, one thing that I wanted to do was to reach people like you, because there some material already and people can use that to do research or what you are doing and myself also was part of a research paper, I did an academic paper with two other women from Israel, so there we used some of the material and we analysed some of the things that come up in the interviews. So, this is one way this can be used. Another way is that I wanted anyone in the world to be able to read this stories, so this is why it is available in the website and thirdly I don't think that this has so big of an impact on what is going on here whether it is raising the women voices or (pause) contributing to peace but there are a lot of themes and important things that come up in these interviews and women need to have more a say in general, especially in a conflict zone, since we are 50% (pause). So I am also trying and tried to reach the policy makers, anyone who can influence what goes on here. So that's more or less the three main reasons.

B. So this whole idea, since I really believe in the healing power of telling a story, how it developed? How did you reach these women, how did you find them?

S. It is very random. In the very beginning, the first one that I interviewed was Yael, who is my friend so then Rima who's the second story is also someone that I knew already and then I was member of different networks on Facebook, you know, there are many people here who are active in some ways so I asked people if they knew anyone who could be interested and (pause)it was easier obviously to reach Israelis because I live in Israel and I speak Hebrew and I am more Israeli than I am Palestinian so, that was easier there was not so much of a lack of trust. Reaching Palestinians was a little bit more difficult, especially from Gaza, where there is a lot more lack of trust, but I (pause) I think the first woman from Gaza I spoke to was some I wrote to on Facebook I found her and I wrote to her and the

second women was someone that someone knew and…it is easier to get through to women that know women that I have already interviewed because they say "Ok, Sarah is ok, you can trust her". Yes it depends on, I mean any woman who wants to be interviewed as long as she is 18 and has lived in Israel or the West Bank or Gaza… I wouldn't personally have a problem speaking to a Jewish woman living in a settlement but I don't think that I.. I won't go that far because of what I understood from Palestinian women from many, that would be problematic, so that it is something that I wouldn't do.

B. Would that be problematic from a religious standpoint or from a political standpoint?

S. From a political standpoint. I asked because I am very much, if I can, I try to ask the interviewees afterwards, like, sometimes if I make decisions about something then I ask them because I don't know, especially if it's Palestinian women, I don't know how it is like to be Palestinian so when I was thinking about this issue, about reaching Jewish women in settlements I asked around and my, most Palestinian women said, " well if you do this strategically it will not be clever" because then if Palestinian women find out they might not want to talk to you and the women who had already been interviewed might not be happy about suddenly be on the same platform but with Jewish settlers.

B. When you came out with the questions to ask these women, where the questions directly involving the conflict or were they more about their everyday lives?

S. This is also very random and that's why I am saying that is very not academic because only when I did the academic paper with these two other women, the interviews that I was doing at that time were streamlined because we had specific questions that we had decided on, but what I have done it's just when I asked the women if they wanted to be interviewed I explained them about the project and what was it about and that it has to do with their experiences, opinions in relation to the conflict or the occupation or the political situations, so they already knew that it's about this and they can talk about whatever they feel like talking about, so what I usually do it's start by saying "so tell me about yourself" and then they more or less give a background of what they do work and where they are from and then they begin talking about what it's like to live their life and what it is like to live under checkpoints if it is in the Wb or, if I know where the women are located then, for example if I am talking with a woman from Gaza I would ask her how it's like to live under closure and with time I have learned that there is a certain number of hours of electricity in Gaza everyday that affects people's lives and then I have asked about this. If it's Israeli women then I usually ask if they've served in the army, but that was like very random and some women talk a lot, as I don't need to ask them questions, others had shorter answers so then I tried to, but I don't really prepare much, I just write things down like the questions I come up with and then I ask them, so it's not very structured in that sense.

B. But maybe in this sense, without a structure, you can get through the flow of the narrative what a woman values more or the way she structured her own story.

S. I mean I want to say that I have tried as best as I can to let the women control their narrative but you it is not possible to be completely objective. So for example I don't speak Arabic fluently and I had to reach out to women who could speak English or Hebrew. It is only been recently that women from Gaza joined to interview women there and someone in the WB and that's already a limit. And I know that even if I try to be as gentle and friendly as possible, the fact that I look like this and that I am not completely Israeli or that I am not Palestinian it for sure means that certain things would be told to me while other women might not tell me.

B. So when you interviewed Jewish-Israeli women it was in Hebrew while with Palestinians from the WB and Gaza was in English?

S. I didn't for the interviews have any translator, just because I would love to have one, but I just (pause) I would have to spend the money myself. For some Israeli I did conduct the interviews in English if they felt comfortable with it because anyway I would have had to write them in English afterwards (pause) but they were free to speak to me in Hebrew while Palestinian women could not speak to me in Arabic.

B. Do you think that the way women were expressing their stories was following a chronological order or was it mor thematic?

S. That depends on the woman. I personally prefer (pause) I noticed that I asked questions according to themes. Many times, when I have asked the women to tell me about themselves, the question is more of a background and it leads to a chronological account like "I was born there, I am from this town, I worked here". I think that about the interviews it became more thematic, although there were some women, those who spoke a bit more, they didn't need the questions and they would develop the story by themselves.

B. Do you think the chance to stay anonymous affected the response of the women to the overall interview?

S. Those that were anonymous, they have their stories labelled as anonymous because they didn't want their name there and in those stories there were also no pictures of them and (pause) All the pictures by the way are chosen by the women, so (pause) and some of the women didn't want anything, signs, that would make people guess that it was them. I don't know really if they would speak more…I guess yeah, I haven't really though about it but I guess if they were anonymous the

would be more, there wouldn't be any consequences to what they said. But those who chose to have their first name and their pictures…maybe there was something subconsciously that made them be more careful. It was their choice to be anonymous.

B. So you told me before, that the project didn't follow an academic structure. How about the editing process? Did you follow any principle?

S. What I do is that before I recorded it. And then I would more or less do a transcription I would listen and then type everything down. And the I write the second draft which is where I put the titles and the I just find for every part, I try to create parts. But it's not like I have changed anything of the interview I just think that naturally we speak in a structured way, and this is probably where there is a bias because I chose the titles of each part and if it was someone else…if I found a sentence to be interesting then I would use that as the title of the paragraph.

B. Now I will ask you a personal question. When I read the stories, I was moved on a very deep level because you can feel that despite the hardships of their lives, these women are still hopeful for a better future. When you interviewed them, did you have the same feeling?

S. Yeah. I believed when they said this. I did believe that… I think something that was interesting to me was that even with women, especially Israeli women that had more possibilities to move out, because they have an American passport or European passport, there was still this sense of like "this is home". Also in Gaza, for me, I mean most young people in Gaza, including young women want to move out because there is not many possibilities but there is still this sense that it could get better and that is their home, which his surprising to me.

B. Do you think that is a particular trait of women?

S. (long pause). Ok so, I think one important thing is that the project was not meant to allow women to speak because women are known or famous to be peacemakers. It was just a fact that women are half of the population and when we look at decision that are being made, not only in conflict resolution, but all around the world, women are just put in the background, especially in conflict zones. So that was the intention not saying, as many organizations do, like "yes women are know to be peacemakers and they know how to be empathetic". I think that it's probably true that women are taught, I mean just by looking at my own life I feel that I am very (pause) equal, but I do notice that in myself I do take more household responsibilities than my partner, because I have this thing in my head that if the house doesn't look good then people look at me and not at him. So and this is not something that I was born with, it is something that you kind of learn through socialization. So maybe, women have been taught to be more happy and hopeful, but I don't think that it is something that

women genetically are prone to, or if it's something we are being taught because men they are the ones who are supposed to go and fight and be brave and women are supposed to be these, like, hopeful. So that I am not sure.

I think it's very like… I would say that the one thing that I have seen throughout the interviews more or less is the theme of security. Really like general personal security, not how many weapons there are, how big the army is, but really what does it mean to feel secure and being scared. But I think this is something that men also experience. The thing with men is, because of the patriarchal structures of society men don't get to express their emotions so much, for example talking about PTSD, and depression, anxiety which is something that many experience here.