Doing Research in Conflict Areas: Some Methodological Lessons From Palestine

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Abstract

Fieldwork in conflict-ridden settings presents many challenges for humanitarian actors and academic researchers alike. The Palestinian Territories is no exception, due to its spatial and administrative complexity, the anarchic geography, and the unpredictable events that develop. This article discusses, in a self-reflective manner, a set of decisions the researcher had to make during a Ph.D. fieldwork conducted in the West Bank in winter 2019/2020 to cope with the challenges. The research aimed to explore the political entanglement of humanitarian assistance in Palestine and employed the constant comparative method of the grounded theory. The key challenges include balancing between the practicalities of data collection and research ethics, and deciding on a research design that can obtain and validate why/how individuals choose to think, believe, act/react concerning politically sensitive issues.

Keywords: conflict, field research, Palestine, methodology

JEL codes: C18, F59, O19

Introduction

Doing research in conflict zones [Gasser, 2006] is at least as challenging as implementing humanitarian aid projects. The challenge is by no means limited to the physical safety of the researcher and that of the research participants. It includes a wide range of issues, starting from research ethics [Ford et al, 2009; Krause, 2021] through accountability for any 'activist' or 'peacemaker' role assigned to or undertaken by the researcher [Howard, 2018]. Keeping in mind the complexity of this subject, the pur-

pose of this article is modest: to reflect on certain methodological decisions I had to make during my Ph.D. fieldwork conducted in the West Bank in the winter of 2019/2020. While my research project explored how humanitarian actors navigated under adverse circumstances when they implemented aid projects, the very same circumstances affected the design and implementation of my research project too. These include the sudden emergence of incidents that require familiarity with the situation in Palestine and the calculation of risks. They also involve micro-level dynamics that need to be well understood before deciding on a particular research design. Finally, they relate to suspicion, fear, and sensitivity concerning political issues, which, if not properly dealt with, can create serious limitations in the field.

Acknowledging that research (project) and researcher are not independent of each other, this article proceeds as follows: Section 1 describes the political, administrative context framing any academic research in Palestine. Section 2 reflects on my positionality as a researcher, being an insider and outsider simultaneously. The main decisions concerning research design are explained in Sections 3 and 4, limiting the discussion to data collection, such as sampling, interview design, and observations, due to page limits. Research ethics is discussed in Section 5. The most important lessons drawn are summarized in the Conclusion.

1. The political and administrative context of any research project implemented in Palestine

Life in Palestine has been unpredictably and continuously refashioned since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip that commenced in 1967 [Weizman, 2007; Azouly & Ophir, 2013; Grassiani, 2015]. It has been troubled with the spatial and administrative complexity, fragmentation, and control of the Palestinian territory, which reflects not only an ordered process, but increasingly, a structured chaos [Weizman, 2007; Abu-Zahra & Kay, 2013]. As Latte Abdallah [2019] argues, the *modus operandi* of the endless borders within the Palestinian territory has created a prison web where many Palestinians feel somewhat detained. They also feel that they are subject to protracted violence, portrayed not only in the killings and incarceration, but also in the wall, concrete cubes, barbed wires, watchtowers, military checkpoints, travel permits, and so forth [Brockhill, 2020].

Reading into much of the well-established academic research that has been framing the political and administrative context in Palestine, various terms, such as belligerent occupation, illegal occupation colonization, settler-colonialism, and apartheid have been used [Davis, 1987;

Mbembe, 2003; Carter, 2006; Ben-Naftali, Gross, Michaeli, 2005; Tilley, 2012; Pappe, 2017]. Discussing the relationship, applicability, and hierarchy of such terms in an attempt to explain the logic of Israeli presence in the Palestinian territory goes beyond the scope of this article. However, doing any field research in the territory cannot circumvent interacting and dealing with the complexity and framing of the political situation and problems in Palestine. My Ph.D. fieldwork was no exception, which aimed to present an analysis of perceptions on and experiences with humanitarian assistance in the Palestinian context, and, by exploring forms of interactions between 'aid actors' and aspects of coordination with Israel, to further explain how humanitarian assistance is entangled with politics. The practical side of the context that influenced the research design in various ways will be described in Section 3. Before that, elaborating on details of the research design, the researcher's positionality should be acknowledged.

2. The researcher's positionality

Reflecting on her research interest and positionality – in light of her Jewish heritage and being the child of Holocaust survivors – Sara Roy, one of the leading scholars on Palestinian economy, argued that each individual involved with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to whatever extent, has a position:

> *"Any claim to neutrality, or, for that matter objectivity, is in my experience nothing more than calculated indifference. In any case, the concern should not be with the position but with how it was formed, how it evolved, and on what it is based."*
> [Roy, 2007: 58]

Keeping her reflections in mind and acknowledging that I am not an anthropologist, one of the most important steps during the formation of the research design was to acknowledge that the Palestinian context is not a research topic of purely professional interest in my case either. Being a Palestinian and having spent most of my life in the West Bank, the Palestinian question and struggle for self-determination has shaped my private life. In other words, being a native Arabic speaker and having grown up in the West Bank with memories and experiences about violence during the intifada years, I had the privilege of being an insider. However, I also have a second, Central European affiliation composed of a Serbian passport, early childhood memories, and my studies conducted in Hungary since 2015. These experiences also influenced the formation of my personality and way of thinking, and enabled me to develop an outsider view of the events. It should also be acknowledged that I spent most of my formative and adult years politically active, which made me familiar with the sequence and meaning of political events that occurred in Palestine, particularly after the

second intifada. Activism and my PhD-studies equally influenced my ways of questioning, framing of arguments, advocating for change, and connecting with the informants.

Furthermore, the research subject itself – humanitarian aid to Palestine – was familiar to me from practical perspectives too. Right before my PhD-studies, I worked as a practitioner in the field of fundraising and public relations for a local health organization in the Bethlehem area, from 2013 to 2015. These experiences provided me with unique and daily insights on interactions between the representatives of Palestinian NGOs and PA's institutions, on the one hand, and foreign donors and individuals – 'Good Samaritans' – on the other.

My familiarity with the political situation and the humanitarian field of practice in Palestine enabled me to take several calculated risks when conducting my fieldwork in the volatile and restrictive environment[1] of the West Bank. These risks are explained in the next section.

3. Doing fieldwork in a conflict setting: designing and redesigning

Before conducting my fieldwork in the West Bank, I tried to be thoughtful about the timing, that is, seeking to conduct the research in a politically calm period. This required the careful tracking of the news and contacting some key informants in Palestine before finalizing the timetable. Winter (2019/2020) was in many respects the optimal season, since people mostly stay indoors, and protests on the streets and the checkpoints against the Israeli soldiers are less frequent. What is more, Palestinians in remote/marginalized areas usually need more heating, a supply of warm water, healthcare, and proper shelter from cold and rain. Thus, humanitarian aid is usually provided at an increased volume during the winter. For practical reasons, Ramallah, a city in the centre area of the West Bank, where a large number of aid organizations have their physical offices [DeVoir & Tartir, 2009], was initially chosen as my temporary residence, as it ensured access both to informants working in Ramallah and target areas in the West Bank.

With regards to my first interactions with locals upon arrival, it was particularly striking to see the extent to which local people became less politically interested in the intra-Palestinian oppression and corruption since I had left the West Bank to study in Budapest in 2015. Two complementary phrases, *"it is due to the occupation"* and *"it is due to the consumerist*

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1 Restrictive environments refer to contexts where freedoms most relevant to academic research (e.g., freedoms of information, expression, and movement) are limited [Loyle, Smith, & Swedlund, 2019].

behaviours", casual expressions by Palestinians summing up what mainly contributes to their hardships, were repeatedly mentioned during the entire period of the fieldwork, echoing Nakhleh's old wisdom about the national sell-out of a homeland [Nakhleh, 2012].

I noticed the transformed landscape, with countless Israeli settlements sitting on top of Palestinian hills, when I travelled from one Palestinian enclave to another. My Palestinian ID was checked by Israeli soldiers at randomly erected and permanent checkpoints [on the latter experience see Grassiani, 2015; Griffith & Rep, 2018]. While all these settings have been and will remain there for a long time, the frequency of Israeli settlement building has measurably increased [Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, n.d.]. I found these settings intimidating, not being frequently exposed to them in recent years, and they reminded me of Muhanna's [2013] experience on how the researcher can noticeably become the subject of the field research when enduring similar hardships as the research participants.

The designed schedule of my fieldwork in the West Bank drastically changed with the sudden emergence of incidents, three of which are to be mentioned briefly here. First, one month after arriving to Palestine, a serious electricity crisis took place from 5 January 2020 to 26 February 2020, due to disputes between the Jerusalem District Electricity Company and the Israel Electric Corporation during sequential cold waves. Israel substantially reduced the electrical supply to the West Bank, causing frequent shutdowns of the electricity three days a week for three hours, in different areas. The crisis made data collection and analysis very challenging for everyone affected, forcing me to spend many days reading and writing on a battery-charged light.

Second, President Donald Trump announced the *"Peace to Prosperity"* plan on January 28, 2020 [The White House, 2020], and within a week, the situation quickly escalated: mass protests organized by Palestinians were held throughout the region, Palestinian youngsters were shot dead on the checkpoints, raids by Israeli soldiers were conducted in several areas, and a complete closure was imposed on the West Bank [OCHA, 2020]. Uncertainty, security concerns over the physical risk, and stress forced me to postpone field visits for ten full days before resuming the data collection.

Last, but not least, with the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in mid of March 2020 in the West Bank, several informants preferred to meet online over an in-person meeting, in order to avoid the risk of infection. In the meantime, Allenby Bridge, the only entry/exit point to the West Bank for Palestinians, was set for closure on March 10 [The Times of Israel, 2020], forcing me to decide on leaving the territory and resume the interviews online from abroad.

The repercussions of the outbreak of (COVID-19) and President Trump's announcement suggest how the distinction between global and local can quickly collapse, adding another dimension of challenges in the field research.

4. Methodological decisions concerning research design

While the purpose of my research was to explain how humanitarian assistance is entangled with politics, which primarily draws from the disciplines of political science and international relations, interpretive tools of anthropology (interviews and observation) were chosen to collect new empirical data. However, before embarking on the primary data collection, substantial desk research was conducted between 2016-2019 to understand the volume, significance, and paradoxes of humanitarian aid in human-made crises. It involved extensive readings about humanitarian aid in the literature, mainstream and critical alike, reviewed in the thesis itself [e.g., Anderson, 1999; Duffield et al., 2001; Terry, 2002; Rieff, 2002; Lepora & Goodin, 2013; Rubenstein, 2015; Paulmann, 2016]. Memoirs of personal accounts and diaries of daily realities, written by aid practitioners and journalists in human-made crises have been given special attention [e.g., Gourevitch, 1998; Alexander, 2013]. In addition, statistical data of official humanitarian aid trends by providers and recipients on the globe, and particularly in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, have been consistently observed [e.g., OECD DAC Statistics]. Collecting all these secondary data has been invaluable for developing a suitable and practical framework for primary data collection, and in processing and formulating interview questions that explore areas not covered by earlier research.

As the interpretive tools of anthropology served to reduce the dominantly state-centrist gaze in the academic research of international relations, they were particularly helpful in studying the role of non-state actors in international politics, such as that of aid actors in the Israeli-Palestinian relations [Vrasti, 2008: 298; Montsion, 2018: 2-8]. They also tended to bring up the maximalist view of politics when discussing ostensibly non-political topics, and to develop context-sensitive interpretations by providing insight into rich narrative descriptions [Aronoff & Kubik, 2013: 10].

Thus, in a way, the research tools of interviews and observation were indispensable for studying the often overlooked political dimensions of social phenomena, such as the surge of apolitical humanitarian aid in a politically contextualized crisis. As Aronoff and Kubik [2013] argue, culture, identity formation, beliefs, and rituals deeply matter, as politics is often incomprehensible when the meaning of political action is not decoded for the actors. These tools were also very useful for focusing up close on individual calculations and accounts that often originate in small settings,

within actual communities and localities. However, these calculations can reveal insights into the broader social and political conditions shaped at the macro-level [Weinstein, 2007: 351-365]. In similar logic, my Ph.D. research preferred the micro over the macro perspective in observing human subjects in real-life situations, in this instance the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and related specific features of their studied cases to the broader issue of Palestinians' macro-level rights concerning self-determination and independence.

Favouring interpretive tools of anthropology to navigate the micro-level dynamics in the Palestinian context was useful for the application of the 'constant comparative method'[2] of the 'grounded theory[3] in my Ph.D. research, which is impeccable within the inductive reasoning [Corbin & Strauss, 2015]. The grounded theory helped to develop a theoretical explanatory framework grounded in data on humanitarian assistance in Palestine. Subsequently, my research findings were discussed and compared with theories generated in other places of the world to find similarities and differences.

4.1. The practicalities of data collection in the West Bank

To facilitate conducting interviews and observation, a guide was prepared that has been set in accordance with the doctoral consultation process (see Annex A). It proposes the preferred criteria of the research participants, comprised of individuals with experience between 2002 and 2019 at the mid-senior and senior level with aid organizations that have physical offices in the oPt. Accordingly, the research participants were expected to be aware of what has been going on at the country's decision-making level, but who were also in contact with the field esp. in East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, and Area C, which covers 60 percent of the territory of the West Bank and is out of Palestinian jurisdiction, according to the 1995 Oslo Accord II [UN General Assembly, 1997].

The benefit of SSM (see next section) was that it enhanced my understanding of which target areas at the receiving end of humanitarian aid

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2   Constant comparative method refers to thinking strategies in analysing the data by questioning, examining one datum against the other for similarities and differences, thinking about various meanings, using flip-flop technique, making use of life experience, waving the red flag, looking at language, emotions, time, and metaphors, and looking for negative cases [Corbin & Strauss, 2015: 108-117].

3   Grounded Theory is a form of qualitative research developed by Glaser and Strauss [1967] for the purpose of constructing theory grounded in data. Its main features include constructing concepts derived from data, interrelating the analysis with data collection, grouping concepts in sub-categories and categories (conceptual ordering), and eventually integrating different categories around a core/abstract category (theory integration) to form the structure of the theory [Corbin & Strauss, 2015].

can be accessed, and which areas cannot. Although I spent most of my life in the West Bank, it was nevertheless shocking to experience increased restrictions on movement and the day-to-day reality of a society that lives in an anarchic geography with borders that are constantly shifting, ebbing and flowing with every political development or decision [Weizman, 2007: 7]. For example, during a conversation with the first informant, the subject was raised about the process of delivering primary health care by a mobile clinic to three villages in the north of the West Bank (*Barta'a* at the north-west of *Jenin* city, *Ramadin* at the north of *Qalqilya* city, and *Khirbet Jbara* at the south of *Tulkarm* city). I expressed my interest in visiting these villages, but it was brought to my attention that they are surrounded by a wall and the only way to enter is by getting a permit from the Israeli authorities. Due to the complex and unguaranteed procedure subject to delays and rejections by Israel, the idea of conducting a field visit to these areas was dropped.

Another example of the challenges in conducting field research, a visit to an emergency centre in *Haret Al Jaber* south of *Hebron* on 01 February 2020, an area surrounded by the Israeli settlements of *Kiryat Arba*, *Beit Romano*, and *Avraham Avinu* can be mentioned. I was advised to enter the area in a vehicle that belongs to one of the NGOs for my safety and security. The vehicle had to pass through highway 60, the north-south route that links Palestinian cities and some of the largest Israeli settlements, including *Kiryat Arba*. The vehicle took a narrow road, passing by a wine factory belonging to Israeli settlers, then by an Israeli military watchtower, before arriving at *Haret Al Jaber*. Without the protection provided by the informants, such a field visit could not have been realized.

Despite the SSM's advantages, I noticed that accessing new informants solely depended on the referrals of previous ones. This implies that many individuals who did not belong to the specific network of informants interviewed have been inadvertently excluded, which potentially increases the risk of selection bias. Furthermore, the research findings might have been biased to informants who were more cooperative and agreed to meet and talk. However, as Cohen and Arieli [2011] argue, despite the SSM's limitations, in a restrictive environment, this approach can make the difference between conducting research or not conducting it at all.

4.2. Selection of respondents and sampling

The fieldwork started on December 01, 2019, when I crossed the Allenby Bridge into the West Bank, and unexpectedly ended with the global outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) in mid-March 2020.

Snowball sampling (SSM) was used to find interviewees, which is especially useful when conducting research in marginalized societies [Cohen & Arieli, 2011]. Initially, a pool of three informants who met the criteria was selected through contacts made through relatives, friends, and acquaintances. The first three informants who agreed to talk gave me the names of contacts who meet the criteria, thus conveniently growing the sample group. The common, well-accepted principles of being systematic, reproducible, reliable, and credible were employed throughout the research process.

Overall, 26 informants were approached for unstructured interviews, of whom 16 informants agreed to talk (see Annex B). 15 of the informants had around two-decades of work experience with multiple aid organizations (INGOs, UN agencies, ICRC, Palestinian NGOs, all of which have been active in the oPt in one or more of the six clusters including food security, shelter, education, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, and protection [OCHA, n.d.]) and one informant had work experience with COGAT (see Annex C, D). The informants resided in eight different areas in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Israel at the time of the interview. 10 interviews were conducted in person, while the other six took place online.

The informants shared their stories with me about their work experiences and were encouraged to talk in their private capacities rather than as representatives of the organizations/authorities. The first reason for this approach was that individuals talking in their private capacities could be more critical and self-reflective than when representing an official occupation within an organization/authority. The second reason was that humanitarian practitioners, aid workers, military officers are not only units within their organizational structure, but they are also human subjects driven by values, beliefs, identities, cultural contexts, etc. Therefore, individuals are often better able to represent themselves than to represent their organizations' agenda, policy, and vision.

4.3. Conducting the interviews

15 interviews were conducted in the Arabic language, the native language of the informants, and one interview was conducted in English with the informant who had experience with COGAT. For conducting the interviews, a 2 – 3 hours long meeting was set with each informant. They were informal and in the type of unstructured interviews. The interviews

were capturing 'narratives'[4] depicting the biography of the informants, who revived a set of memories when describing their career path and personal life stories in the conflict environment. Thus, the informants were given more control over the course of the interview and were able to determine at what pace and depth they talk about the subjects they were asked to address. All questions were open-ended to gather as much information as possible and to let the informant bring up topics not in the formal set of questions.

The subsequent interviews were conducted in the form of open dialogue, adjusting the questions to concepts derived from the analysis of initial data. Some topics were emphasized, while others were de-emphasized based on information gained in previous interviews. After the informants talked about their experiences, laid out their perspectives, and made claims, similar or opposing perspectives by other informants were used to revise the dialogue questions. Such a strategy helped open up a discussion and let the informants make their case.

To facilitate the dialogue process, interviews were informal, avoiding titles when addressing the informants, and bringing in casual topics of daily life like the weather, traffic, the issue of the electricity crisis, etc. Informants were encouraged to go back in time and chronologically talk about their life, providing them with the opportunity to talk more about themselves, thereby helping them gain confidence and express a sense of pride. While the list of questions was at hand, in general, the first half of the interview focused on less sensitive subjects to build trust and show that I was not there to pass judgment. The second half delved into more sensitive issues, which are often considered off-limits.

The vocabulary used in the interviews had to be carefully selected. This was vitally important in an environment surrounded by fear and suspicion, and to not jeopardize the comfort level of the informants. This was also important because political terms have their distinct meanings in the Palestinian resistance culture. For example, while the terms 'cooperation' and 'cooperative' (Arabic translation: *taawun, mutaawin*) were important concepts in my Ph.D. research, they both have negative connotations that date back to the first and second intifadas. *'Taawun'* and *'mutaawin'* are terms describing cooperation, but they also can refer to working as a spy/collaborator with Israeli intelligence. Thus, the terms 'cooperation' and 'cooperative' had to be replaced with expressions such as 'getting permission',

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4   *"A narrative can be understood to organize a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole"* [Elliott, 2005: 3]. Narratives are chronological, they have a temporal dimension, they are inherently social, and they give a meaning of behaviour and experiences from perspective of the individuals involved [Elliott, 2005: 4–14].

'informing Israel', or 'applying for consent from Israel'. Another example of contested terms was the word 'security coordination' (*al-tanseeq al-amni*), which reflects a very polarizing topic in the Palestinian political discourse that is usually linked to the PA-Israeli security relations. Many Palestinians see it as the manifestation of PA acting as the subcontractor for the Israeli state and security apparatus, while others see it as a necessary act for the survival of the PA. An acceptable alternative for the word could not be found. So, the informants were encouraged to use the term at their convenience. By mentioning the words 'cooperation' and/or 'security coordination', the informant might be offended or ashamed, and could therefore abruptly end the interview.

4.4. Observations

Observations were initially planned for capturing the social and environmental context and my subjective experiences when visiting the remote/marginalized areas targeted by the organizations to which informants affiliate. But soon after the fieldwork commenced, it turned out that the entire Palestinian population living in the West Bank has been marginalized to some degree, meaning observations did not need to be limited to the remote/marginalized areas, since the entire society was being affected. To reflect critically on my identity, the role, the relationships created in the field, and the way these have influenced the fieldwork and the research process, a diary of field notes was kept during the entire period of fieldwork.

To capture various thoughts and feelings upon actions-interactions with the informants, Palestinian beneficiaries, and Israeli soldiers, I have also written down notes in a diary, which also describe the scenery and landscape of the field settings, whether in an office, a home, an emergency unit, or at the checkpoint. The diary helped validate the credibility of the data gathered in conversations with informants. It also helped to articulate the subtleties of actions-interactions and to acknowledge my involvement in the co-construction of the studied social phenomena.

5. Research ethics

Although much of the research participants were contacted informally, as explained in the previous sections, to make it possible to implement the field research, the ethical protocol of scientific research was taken seriously in line with EU norms [European Commission, 2018]. Thus, each potential informant received an email that briefly described the research project, title, and purpose, as well as an enclosed copy of the research summary and an official letter by the doctoral department.

The second step was a phone call for them to learn more about the purpose of the research and have as much time as possible to ask all questions in their mind before granting an initial consent. Should the informants request a list of questions before the interview session, it was sent to them. It happened four times, particularly. For the other informants, who did not request a list of questions, this was avoided, since having the questions in advance tended to cause the interview to be rigid and reduce the chance for the informants to go off-script. For obtaining the richest data in an interview, an atmosphere of mutual trust had to be developed. Accordingly, I did my best to be truthful and reliable during all interactions with the informants. I also aimed to present myself as an insider by mentioning my work experience in Bethlehem to the informants. Besides, repeating names of individuals and organizations among informants from a similar network was particularly helpful to facilitate the willingness of the informants to cooperate and refer further contacts. For several informants, it was essential to meet in advance of the interview session to establish credibility and be introduced in person.

Before starting the interview session, a casual conversation of at least half an hour was conducted to make informants more comfortable. The informants were offered to sign an informed consent form. It was not obligatory – I did not want to undermine trust – but most informants did not mind signing. Some of them were especially happy to receive such an offer, as they felt my research was well prepared. All informants were promised anonymity, particularly for their names and affiliations. It was made clear to all informants that their participation was voluntary, and they will not receive any financial reimbursement. They were also able to decline answering any question and withdraw from the interview at any time, for any reason. For the audio recording, permission was obtained. Most informants freely agreed. For the ones who refused to be recorded, detailed notes were written down during the interview. On several occasions, the informants asked the audio recording to be turned off in the middle of the interview, and it was done accordingly. As a result, these informants ended up providing sensitive information that might not have been revealed otherwise, thereby enhancing the richness of the findings.

Since objectivity cannot be applied in qualitative research, cultural and personal sensitivity has been pursued by respecting the 'language' used by the informants. Sensitivity particularly helped to better connect with the informants and see the world from their viewpoints. As an example, several informants spoke about their perspectives on the way the 'Jews' think and behave. In some cases, they meant to identify the entire Israeli Jewish community in a generalized manner; other times, the term 'Jews' was used only to refer to the operatives of the Israeli state such as IDF soldiers and

COGAT officers. Some informants were using terms such as the 'State of Israel', 'Israeli military command', or simply the 'Occupation', while a few informants were omitting 'Israel' from the sentence.

For protecting personal data, strict confidentiality was applied. Thus, I made sure the identity of the informants and their affiliations were taken off the transcripts and field notes. The identities were put in a separate document. I was also cautious not to reveal the identity of the source when discussing any topic with the informants.

Conclusion

Perhaps what can be noticed, more than anything else, is that doing any field research in the Palestinian territory cannot be conducted without being influenced by the complexity and framing of the political situation. Data collection also cannot be done without being influenced by the emergence of mostly unpredictable incidents, despite the researcher's careful planning. Acknowledging one's positionality can be crucial in the way of dealing with a certain research topic concerning Palestine. Deciding on a research design is not only indispensable for the ability to obtain and validate data in a conflict area, but also for linking overlooked dimensions in social phenomena. Last, but not least, giving special attention to the sensitivity of the research participants can rectify the richest data in a field work.

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