A spark of hope

The opinions of Palestine youth on their state and its future

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Berend Luesink, s4624572

Radboud University

Dr. O.T. Kramsch

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

One of the longest ongoing, protracted conflict in the world is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Because of the protracted nature of the conflict almost everything that is associated with the conflict is rather polarised. This becomes apparent when talking about the precise start of the conflict between the two groups. Arguing that the conflict started when Israel declared its independence will not work with some Palestinians, who will still argue that the state of Israel does not exist. On the other side, some more extremist groups within Israel will argue that the group of Palestinians does not exist and that those people are just Arabs living in the Middle East. This complicates any and all research concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This staggering complication does not deter many researchers from all sorts of different sciences. Enormous amounts of literature have been written covering many different facets of the conflict. Yet this does not mean that every aspect has been sufficiently covered by the extensive research. Since the world is constantly changing new research needs to be conducted in order to understand it. A great example of this is the amount of new research that should be done after the COVID-19 pandemic, to examine its impact on all sorts of aspects of the world. New research adds more information to the already existing literature, all aiming to increase the understanding of the changing world. This means that new research in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will add to the extensive work that has been done over the years.

Despite all the tremendous work that has been done, a proper solution still seems a long way away. The polarised nature of the conflict could be one of the reasons why both sides fail to find common ground to work from. This does not mean that the absence of a proper solution is because of a lack of trying to find one. In recent years, the former president of the United States, Donald Trump, presented a solution, which was quickly rejected by the Palestinian people (Crowley & Halbfinger 2020). The reasoning why the Palestinian people rejected the American proposal is that little to no attention was paid to them during the creation of this new peace deal. Several Israeli policymakers were asked to give their opinion on the proposal while it was being worked on, yet the Palestinians only saw the final product during its presentation. This only fed the pre-existing notion that the Americans only care about their Israeli allies, and are turning away from the needs and opinions of the Palestinians.

In this research the aim is to examine the opinions of Palestinians and try to present their ways of thinking. Since the scope of the conflict is far too great for this research alone, a clear research topic needs to be selected, which forms the research question of this research. The research question reads as follows:

*According to Palestine youth, how can political legitimacy contribute to the process of statebuilding in Palestine.*

Several aspects of the research question attract some attention. A very clear focus is placed on the opinions of the Palestinian youth, regarding the upcoming generations thoughts about their own state. These people have lived their entire lives in the ongoing conflict and are the future of the Palestinian state. It is therefore vital to try to understand their views on the political legitimacy of the Palestinian state and their opinions on the way the state has developed. Attention will be paid to the upcoming local elections of 2021, since these elections present themselves as a perfect way through which these young people are able to voice their concerns and solutions.

To be able to answer the research question, several topics need to be elaborated upon. Firstly, chapter 2 will elaborate the theoretic framework in which this research is placed. A part of this chapter will explain some of the context of the conflict, and the rest of the chapter will cover the literary debate on concepts such as statebuilding, political legitimacy and Orientalism. Secondly, the methods that were used to conduct this research will be presented in chapter 3. This chapter will contain which methods were used to gather the data for the research and what methods were used to analysis the gathered data. Thirdly, chapter 4 will present the gathered data. Throughout the research emphasis is placed on presenting the opinions and ideas of the Palestine youth who were interviewed, while trying to keep the ideas and opinions of the researcher to a bare minimum. In this empirical chapter the answers given during the interviews will be discussed. Lastly, chapter 5 will compare the results of the empirical chapter with the contemporary debates on the relevant concepts and will attempt to answer the central research question.

## **Societal Relevance**

The situation in the West Bank and Gaza is a complicated one. Many Palestinians are pessimistic about their future, since the situation concerning the ongoing conflict with Israel has stagnated. While the conflict was not as bloody as it has been, recent outbursts of violence show the unpredictable nature of the ongoing conflict. Even so, most Palestinians constantly notice the impact that the conflict has on their everyday lives. This pessimistic sentiment existed before the global COVID-19 pandemic broke out, which has not brightened the future for many Palestinians. The Israeli military law restricts most of the everyday life of Palestinians and seems ever present. The Israeli military occupation of the West Bank influences daily life to a large extent, because it restricts the movement of Palestinians, while also hampering most of the construction of new buildings in the West Bank. It appears that the different Israeli positions on the conflict are well known, they have been repeated over the last years because of the many elections that were held in Israel. Some Israelis strive towards peaceful coexistence while others proposed the exact opposite. The same clarity cannot be found on the Palestinian side since it has been more than a decade since the last elections and little to no political change has occurred since those elections.

This research will give insight into the ideas and aspirations of the Palestinians who struggle daily under Israeli military law. However, it is not likely that this research alone will clear up any misconceptions about the ideas and aspirations of all the Palestinians. The focus will be on the Palestinian youth, who grew up under Israeli military law and have never known anything else. It will be interesting to see their take on the current situation within the Palestinian state, especially since Palestinian politics seem to be dominated by older men. Additionally, it will be interesting to research the opinions and ideas that the younger Palestinians have about the ongoing statebuilding process that occurs at this moment. The Palestinian statebuilding process has been characterised by external interventions from the beginning (Esu 2016,264). Whether it be the UN international operations, the interference of Israel, or Western aid funds, all these outside interventions have had their influence on the statebuilding of Palestine.

The last point of societal relevance that this research has is that this research will shine a light on the precarious situation in which Palestinian politics are at this point in time. Many Palestinians do not feel represented by their only legitimate representative, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) (Barahmeh 2014,1). The Palestinian youth have never been able to vote on any of these positions within the PLO, which makes the question of legitimacy a pressing one, especially to them. It will be interesting to see if the Palestinian youth are critical of the current government and if they even want to change the situation or if they would rather seek their fortune in other areas of the world.

## **Scientific Relevance**

The debates surrounding the statebuilding process in Palestine are summed up into multiple scientific debates. Firstly, much of the literature written on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be related to the specific problem within the conflict that this research will address: the protracted nature of the conflict. Secondly, the literature within conflict studies written on the topic of statebuilding is also applicable to this research. This does pose a problem, since both these topics have been discussed in great detail over the years. Nevertheless, this research will add to both these discussions a the focus will be placed on the perspective of the younger Palestinians and their thoughts about statebuilding and state-formation. The current ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caused changes in the daily lives for many people, which in turn could bring about new insights for the ongoing literary debates. Lastly, questions about political legitimacy will be asked. Debates on political legitimacy can be linked to the discussion in the statebuilding literature. The discussion about political legitimacy will focus on political legitimacy in areas of limited statehood which forms a clear link to the statebuilding literature.

Much of the literature written on statebuilding use the definition of a state created by Max Weber (1947) as a starting point. The concept of statebuilding is created often around the ideas by Weber. Within the debate about statebuilding some focus more on economic security that a post-conflict setting needs to be able to rise from the devastation caused by a civil war (Collier 2011). Others focus more on the problematic idea that there should be a singular way through which countries are able to build their states (Hagmann & Peclard 2010) and adding to this are some who see problematic or contested statebuilding as the main blockades against successful statebuilding (Newman 2014). A different debate within the literature on statebuilding focuses on the terminology of ‘failed states’ and perceive this as anything but a neutral term (Nay 2014; Grimm, Lemay-Hébert & Nay 2014). The last main position within the debate on statebuilding aims to explain why the best statebuilding efforts or policies simply do not work everywhere (Sørensen 2001; Di John 2010). This can be caused by a lack of political legitimacy, which will be questioned in this research. The aim of this research is thus to combine the literature on statebuilding with the literature on political legitimacy to ultimately have a better understanding of the current situation of the conflict.

# Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter several concepts will be discussed. These concepts are related to the overarching question of this thesis, namely: How can political legitimacy contribute to the process of statebuilding in Palestine according to Palestine youth with regard to the upcoming elections of 2021. Several literary debates will be reviewed, to present the theoretical framework in which this research is embedded. Firstly, literature on statebuilding will be consulted to observe the current state of the academic debate. Statebuilding encompasses everything that has to do with the creation of a state, from setting up formal institutions to the implementation of new laws. Next the concept of Orientalism by Edward Said will be discussed, since this is an integral part of this thesis. The reason why Orientalism is so important is because it affects everything that is written about Palestine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by Western scholars. It is paramount that scholars are aware of these prejudices that are caused by Orientalism when they are discussing any topic concerning non-Western countries. Lastly, the discussion concerning the concept of political legitimacy will be presented. Additional concepts including state efficiency and the trust relation between the government and its citizens will be encompassed in the discussion on political legitimacy.

## **The literary debate on Statebuilding**

Statebuilding is inherently a complicated process. Often states arise after a tumultuous period. Every statebuilding process is different, because the context within which the country is created, is never the same. Sørensen (2001) focusses on the differences in statebuilding processes between European and contemporary Third World countries. This research aims to show that some European ideas and concepts simply do not achieve the same results in other places. One of the European concepts is the definition of the state: ‘all sovereign states consist of a defined territory containing a population, and with some form of government recognised as such by the international society of states’ (Sørensen 2001, 343). Combine this to the famous quote by Tilly (1985?) that “war makes states” and a clear way of statebuilding is made. Through a war of some kind a state is formed that will then be recognised by other sovereign states. According to Sørensen (2001), this way of European statebuilding does not function in the same way elsewhere for three reasons.

Firstly, the war that supposedly makes the state in Third World countries is unlike the ones in the European context. In the European context the wars fought were against external threats and the internal conflict that arose was a consequence of the external thread (Sørensen 2001, 346-347). In the cases of Third World or post-colonial countries the conflict was mostly internal, because these states were created by outside forces, which left the state often filled with domestic competitors for power. Secondly, the pursuit of political and economic interests by strong external powers complicate the statebuilding process (Sørensen 2001, 348). Clear examples of the complications caused by the pursuit of political and economic interests are suppling weapons to several African countries or even overthrowing a sitting government and replacing it with one more in their own favour (ibid.). Thirdly, the domestic preconditions in Third World countries are often a hinderance to the statebuilding process after decolonisation (Sørensen 2001,349-350). Especially in Africa many of the colonies were set up to be dependent on the coloniser as little was done to improve the economy aside of the products that were extracted from the colony. The economy of the colony was predominantly focused on exporting raw materials and agricultural goods, which did not change after decolonisation. These preconditions created a situation that was easily exploitable by the new people in power, who could continue these practises while they profited from it (ibid.). Agents of the state profit personally from their positions, and as long as this profit is greater than the possibly external aid, they will continue to exploit the situation and will go to war to maintain it (ibid.). Especially the second and third point made by Sørensen (2001) apply to the case of the state of Palestine. Since the conflict between Palestine and Israel is still not solved, the influence of external powers is present. The United States still have a strong connection with the Israeli state, while the Palestinian state is also tied to other Arab nations, albeit with less strong ties.

Di John (2010) also criticises the assumption that all statebuilding processes should follow the same trajectory and the notion that not following that trajectory creates failed states. A state consists of it being the highest political authority within a given territory (Di John 2010, 13). A ‘failed state’ does not meet this requirement, because it is not the highest political authority in its territory. Other problems within the state quickly arise as well, namely being incapable of sustaining itself, endangering its own citizens, and loosing its monopoly on violence within their territory (see Helman and Ratner 1993; Zartman 1995; Ignatieff 2002). There are multiple dimensions in which state failure can occur, such as security, economy, political representation et cetera (Di John 2010, 13-14). However, using these different dimensions and other indicators is problematic, because it is difficult to find the exact tipping point after which the state collapsed. It is hard to operationalise these different dimensions, and to then use them to pinpoint the exact tipping point of state collapse. Additionally, every situation is different causing differences in the importance of the specific dimensions. Focusing solely on finding this tipping point draws too much attention away from the escalating or de-escalating factors within the state. Another point of critique on blindly following the different dimensions of state failure is not acknowledging the pre-existing difficulties in state capacity that is often present in the countries that are labelled as failures (Di John 2010, 14-15). Lastly, a dimension such as political representation does not work on its own as a reason for escalating violence across a country. Multiple examples are present where the lack of political representation did not directly lead to the failure of the state for all its citizens. An oppressive dictator might fail a large portion of the population will still adequately care for a small part of the citizens. Another example might be the exclusion of a minority group during elections.These examples are from deeply problematic countries, such as Iraq under Saddam Hussein or South-Africa in the apartheid era, which would not be classified as failed states necessarily (ibid.). This does not mean that these dimensions cannot be useful while examining struggling countries. The dichotomy between successful and failed states should be left behind for an assessment of state effectiveness over time, in which conflict and violence are seen as a part of this statebuilding process.

Di John agrees with the ideas on the differences between European and non-European statebuilding presented in the article by Sørensen (2001). The statebuilding processes that have created the modern-day European states took centuries to complete and is filled with numerous wars and atrocities committed by various groups and countries (Di John 2010, 22-23). One of the differences between the historic statebuilding process of European countries and the contemporary struggles in statebuilding of non-European countries is the poor economy that many of these countries are left with after decolonisation. A result of the poor economies is decentralisation of the power of the government according to Leander (2004), which in turn can lead to further reduced state capacity. All these troubling aspects leave the door open to the far-reaching destabilising consequences of war, such as the criminalisation of administrative structures and the crumbling of the centralised government (Leander 2004; Di John 2010, 23).

The entire statebuilding process is becoming more complicated in the contemporary setting. Although statebuilding has never been perceived as a simple process, as made clear by the statement by Tilly (1985), it has been dramatically increased in potential problems. The article by Hagmann and Péclard (2010) present a few of these problems in the ever-growing list of actors involved in the statebuilding process in contemporary Africa. International institutions, foreign states, social or religious movements, multinational corporations and warlords are but a few of the numerous actors that have a stake in steering the statebuilding process of a developing country in a certain direction (Hagmann and Péclard 2010, 8-10). The reasons why these actors are involved in the first place differ greatly. Different repertoires are put up by many of these actors to present a reason why they are involved, such as promoting good governance, democracy and development (ibid.). Other actors are more focused on the material goods they can acquire from the statebuilding processes, such as the many important resources that are needed in the contemporary global economy. All these new aspects of statebuilding were of a lesser concern during the time of European statebuilding, presenting another reason why European statebuilding cannot be seen as the default method (Sørensen, 2001; Di John, 2010).

Other authors in the academic statebuilding debate focus on the need for a stable economic situation in order to help a country overcome the devastating consequences of a civil war (Collier 2011). Collier focusses upon the aid for the local population both in material goods tailored for utility and non-material solutions such as the promotion of grassroot businesses, security and development (Collier 2011, 29). Even though Collier mostly discusses the economic aspects of civil wars and their post-conflict settings, he does not shy away from the topics discussed by previously mentioned authors such as Di John (2010). State capacity is one example. Di John (2010) argued state capacity is often not taken into account when discussing the failures of non-European statebuilding attempts. Collier states that state capacity should be a long-term goal, but that it is often difficult to achieve because of the low-income societies that arise from a conflict (2011, 29). Local economic reform policies ought to be created, ensuring that a favourable environment for economic investment is established. Simultaneously, the ability to provide basic social services by the government should be boosted, for it to contribute to a secure and stable setting (ibid.). However, the solution proposed in the article by Collier (2011) is somewhat problematic because of a certain assumption. An example of a problematic assumption is the idea that the civil war or regional conflict has ended when statebuilding processes start. This very well might not be the case and means that the solution proposed by Collier might be too hastily. The goal of improving the overall quality of life for the people in a (post-)conflict situation is still strived for, yet the end of the ongoing conflict comes before restoring the power of a central government.

In his article, Newman (2014) emphasizes the problems in statebuilding before the situation has calmed down. The absence or failure of a centralised state can lead to more violent actors that strive for territorial or political power (Newman 2014, 179-180). Newman (2014) touches upon the idea of state failure as previously discussed by Di John (2010) but focuses on the importance of a unified state. He acknowledges that building a unified, centralised state is problematic and often boils down to a violent process with national or ethnic exclusion (Newman 2014, 179-180). After the violent struggle the state can be solidified. Newman associates many of the modern conflicts with unfinished statebuilding attempts (2014, 182). The ongoing instability and violence that lingers in some post-colonial countries can be seen as a result of very rapid and forceful statebuilding processes. Only a few similarities can be observed between this way of statebuilding and European statebuilding, with the most prominent similarity being the violence that occurred in both cases. Statebuilding will never be completely pacified, because it is an inherently coercive process that leads to friction (Newman 2014, 183).

In the contemporary discussion concerning states, statebuilding and related topics the term ‘failed states’ is highly discussed as presented by the articles by Di John (2010), Hagmann & Péclard (2010) and Newman (2014). However, this does not mean that this type of terms is no longer used in policy documents and international talks. Other lingo has crept into official policy doctrines and has been completely implemented as an internationally accepted policy term (Nay 2014, 211). The term ‘fragile states’ is often used by international organisations such as the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This term is not politically or ideologically neutral and it works to push a certain worldview of the most powerful actors (Nay 2014, 211-212). Since the World Bank and the OECD are leading actors in the production of widely accessible knowledge related to the idea of fragile states, they were able to normalise and define the term rather efficiently (Nay 2014, 219). The definition of fragile states seems closely related to the idea of failed states and focuses mostly on the domestic problems of these developing countries (ibid.). Not the global interdependencies, transnational dynamics or other externally driven factors are the focal point of the policies that utilise the ideas of fragile states. Moreover, the idea of fragile states closely follows the European model of statebuilding, and uses the European ideas associated with state building such as the monopoly of violence, a consolidated territory and a bureaucratic entity that leads the state (Nay 2014, 220).

Why would the term still be used if it is so problematic? According to Grimm, Lemay-Hebert & Nay (2014, 198) it is an attempt by Western state powers to describe reality in accordance with their own foreign policy priorities. By labelling certain countries as either fragile or failed, it gives the Western, often the main aid donors to developing countries, an incentive to act (ibid.). The creation of ‘principles of good international engagement in fragile states’ by the World Bank, the OECD and the European Union (EU) speaks volumes in showing who the main actors are that push the terminology of fragile or failed states (Grimm, Lemay-Hebert & Nay 2014,198-199). The fragile and failed states are perceived as a security thread to Western countries and once again highlighted the change in the discourse concerning contemporary wars. No longer are wars seen as a result of problematic relations between countries, rather wars are caused by problems within a state (ibid.).

## **The literary debate on Orientalism**

The second concept that ought to be discussed is Orientalism. The most influential academic concerning Orientalism is Edward Said, who started the academic debate in the 1970s. Said was born Mandatory Palestine and saw the changes that happened to the region during his lifetime. This greatly influenced Said, who began to look more critically at the manner in which Westerners viewed the situation in the Middle East, resulting in the writing of the book ‘Orientalism’ in 1973. It has been already been hinted at by several authors in the discussion on statebuilding when they stated their ideas on the way statebuilding is focused on the Western example and the overall Eurocentric worldview that is present in organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank (Sørensen 2001; Di John 2010; Grimm, Lemay-Hebert & Nay 2014). This is not a coincidence as it shows the clear power relation between Western countries and the rest of the countries of the world. The idea of an unknown, mystical and more exotic Oriental world was created by people from the West, because Europeans could submit other people to their idea of the Orient (Said 1978, 4-5). The ideas about the unknown Oriental world did not fade but remained present till this day within socio-economic and political institutions. The idea of the Oriental is a way for the West to differentiate themselves from others, by presenting the Orient is exotic, unknown and mystical while the West is logical and free of mysticism (Said 1978, 5-6). It is a very effective way of in- and exclusion and has created an idea of superiority within Western thinking about themselves and the rest of the world (ibid.). The idea of the Orient and its identity has been thoroughly incorporated in Western society that a consensus has been formed on what it encompasses (Said 1978, 202). The clear distinction between the East and West creates a dichotomous relation, especially when perceived from the dominant West (Said 1978, 201). Orientalism is thus fundamentally a political doctrine because it was put on a weaker Orient by a stronger West (Said 1978, 204).

The idea of the Orient has fully incorporated into Western society, making it impossible to avoid when observing others (Said, 1978). Orientalism influences the way anyone perceives the world, so acknowledging its impact is needed in order to not sweep it under the rug. The political nature of Orientalism is at the forefront when discussions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict start. Said argues that there is no neutrality possible when observing the situation in Palestine, because of explicit presence of ideologies on either side of the conflict (1986, 329-30). No room for indifferences, objectivity or neutrality can be found since everything is predetermined by both sides (ibid.). The term Israeli-Palestinian conflict is even a victim of this lack of space in the discussion, since it presents a clear dichotomy between the sides which only furthers the idea of a zero-sum game concerning the fate of either side of the conflict (ibid.). Even though the article by Said was written more than three decades ago, it is still applicable to the contemporary state of the situation. Said writes that the struggle between the Israelis and Palestinians would sometimes be presented as a symmetrically balanced conflict (1986, 31-32). According to Said the idea of a balanced conflict is false, because the Israeli side has always had the clear upper hand since its creation as a state. These attempts at presenting two equal parties fighting for the same space have never ceased and are visible by branding most Palestinian actions as terror acts while downplaying the oppression of Palestinians by the Israeli government and army (Said 1986, 32-33, see also Said 1989).

## **The literary debate on Political Legitimacy**

The best way to introduce the concept of political legitimacy is by using the words of Allen Buchanan (2002, 689): “The term ‘political legitimacy’ is unfortunately ambiguous.” One of the reasons for the ambiguous nature of the term is the usage of the word and how often it is used interchangeably with terms as political authority. Buchanan (ibid.) gives a clear definition of when an entity has political legitimacy. An entity has political legitimacy when it is morally justified in wielding political power, where to wield political power is to attempt to exercise a monopoly, within a jurisdiction, in the making, application, and enforcement of laws. Later, Buchanan argues that the need for democratic authorisation is necessary for political legitimacy, as long as the institutional resources are available for democratic selection (2002, 718). When the institutional resources are not available, then an entity can possess political legitimacy on the condition that it satisfies minimal standards for protecting individual’s rights. However, the individual does not have to consent for the entity to be political legitimate. When an entity has been selected through a democratic process, the consent of the individual citizens is cancelled out since the citizen alone does not give the political legitimacy for other citizens (Buchanan 2002, 702-703).

Rothstein (2009) agrees with Buchanan (2002) on the ambiguous nature of political legitimacy; however, he presents four distinct views on political legitimacy which he has observed in the literature. Rothstein (2009, 312-313) states: “People may accept the political authority of leaders in their country because of (a) tradition), (b) the personal appeal of the leaders (charisma), (c) the government’s production of goods and services, or (d) belief in the fairness of the procedural mechanisms responsible for selecting leaders.” However, Rothstein argues that the last part (d) is overrated, especially in limited statehood settings as he states that “… political legitimacy depends on the quality of government, not the quality of elections or political representation.” (2009, 313). It is often pointed out that if there is political equality for the citizens of a territory, electoral democracy brings forth the will of the people. However, even in shining examples of Western democracies such as Norway of Sweden, interest and lobby groups can play dubious roles while bureaucracies created by the democratically elected governments can derail policies (Rothstein 2009, 318). The failings of Western democracies directly question if political legitimacy is only given by the will of the people (ibid.). Another interesting point is the situation of minorities in electoral democracies, since they likely never will become the majority within a country. Remarkably, it appears that minorities have more trust in the political system they live in than people belonging to the majority group, as shown by Rothstein (2009, 318-319). The will of the people is clearly not the best source of political legitimacy, because the ones that might be heard less are sometimes more in favour of the political system than the ones that belong to the majority group. Lastly an important note is being made in the operationalisation and measurement of political legitimacy. Stating that someone has no confidence in the political system of that country does not equate to a lack of legitimacy. Low confidence in the political system can stem from many different origins, Rothstein argues (2009, 319-320). Clear examples of these origins are a sceptic attitude towards the authorities, a disliking in the current political majority or an aversion to contemporary policies (ibid.).

Schmelzle (2011, 9) agrees with the definition given by Buchanan (2002) and states that an entity has political legitimacy when it has the authority to create rules and decisions, while being able to enforce these rules and decisions. Furthermore, an important note is made by Schmelzle (2011, 6) on the significance of the quality of the government as mentioned by Rothstein (2009). Schmelzle (2011, 6-7) emphasises the difference between the quality of governance and the effectiveness of governance. Effectiveness cannot be evaluated in a vacuum, since it is always tied to the goals of the government (ibid.). However, effectiveness alone is not a solid reason for the legitimacy of an entity. Examples are given by Schmelzle (2011, 13-14). The benevolent dictator or an external actor might be as an effective leader as any other, yet they do not possess the political legitimacy since the dictator and the external actor are not democratically chosen and do not represent the will of the people. Even though the will of the people is a problematic indicator of political legitimacy, as argued by Rothstein (2009), the rule of a dictator is still illegitimate according to Schmelzle (2011, 13-14). The external actor has a slight chance of gaining political legitimacy in areas of limited statehood, if the local government cannot provide the governance services better than the external actor. Nevertheless, effectiveness of the state alone is not enough for an entity to gain political legitimacy (Schmelzle 2011, 16). It is rather apparent that in areas with limited statehood the questions surrounding political legitimacy are further complicated. According to Schmelzle, external actors should restrict themselves to the provision of public goods in areas of limited statehood because the affected citizens will perceive their activities as fundamentally defective (2011, 16-17). By restricting themselves to the provision of public goods, the external actors still help the citizens of a territory, while leaving the governance services to the elected government (ibid.). Lastly, the provision of public goods does not impair the legitimacy of the government, when it is done by external actors (ibid.).

Another complication that arises when discussing limited statehood is that this term is often viewed from a Western perspective, a problem earlier observed when discussing the literature on statebuilding (Sørensen 2001; Di John 2010; Grimm, Lemay-Hebert & Nay 2014) and further explored in the discussion on Orientalism (Said 1978). The article by Risse and Stollenwerk (2018) emphasizes this problem early on while discussing governance in areas of limited statehood (Risse and Stollenwerk 2018, 405-406). The international benchmark for a consolidated state is still the Western model, while most of the states that have to deal with problems in political legitimacy are neither consolidated nor fit easily within the Western model (ibid.). Risse and Stollenwerk (ibid.) define an area of limited statehood by stating that the central government lacks the ability to implement and enforce laws and lacks the monopoly over the means of violence. This means that most countries have areas of limited statehood, with only a select few, mostly Western, countries possessing the claim of a fully consolidated state. The idea that power and legitimacy is tied to established institutions does not hold up in areas of limited statehood, since power and legitimacy are based more on personal ties and subjective experiences by the people involved (von Billerbeck and Gippert 2017, 275-276). The legitimacy and power of a state are not consolidated during a conflict or in post-conflict areas, creating a patchwork of fragmented relations between different groups, institutions and individuals who possess some form of power or legitimacy (ibid.). This patchwork of different relations between people living in a conflict area and political actors does not imply that these areas are devoid of governance. The void in governance left when a government does not possess the legitimacy to rule over an area is often filled by non-state actors and external actors, furthering the complexity of the patchwork of relations in areas of limited statehood (Risse and Stollenwerk 2018, 406)

The article by Risse and Stollenwerk (2018, 407) continues the discussion on the effectiveness and legitimacy of external actors, which was earlier described by Schmelzle (2011). Citizens will view governance actors as legitimate when the governance actors handle within the boundaries of the citizens, even if the actors are external to the specific territory (Risse and Stollenwerk 2018, 407). This legitimacy is again restricted by regional differences in a country, meaning that an actor can be seen as legitimate in one part of the country, while regarded as anything but legitimate in other parts of the country (ibid.). Differences in legitimacy can be explained by the local differences in areas of a country, such as different ethnicities or religions. These differences play an even larger role in areas of limited statehood, where one of the unifying characteristics should have been the central government (Risse and Stollenwerk 2018, 410-411). The lack of trust in the central government is thus a large challenge in areas of limited statehood, which ought to be solved by increasing the trust relations between the citizens and the central government (ibid.). Trust relations need to be scaled up in order to create generalised trust in the government, instead of a patchwork of different trust relations based on group identities, ethnic ties or personal interactions. The article by Risse and Stollenwerk (2018, 411) give ample examples of problematic situations caused by less than ideal trust relation and conclude that trust relations are especially difficult to construct in ethnically or religiously heterogeneous groups because of the differences within the groups itself.

The problematic trust relations between the government and its citizens in areas of limited statehood present one source of legitimacy. Other sources or legitimacy can be found in legal recognition by international law or the perception of fair and transparent trails or institutions (Risse and Stollenwerk 2018, 410). Several more sources of legitimacy and examples of indicators are presented in the article by Risse and Stollenwerk, showing the great variety of situation in which legitimacy can be found or created in areas of limited statehood. Examples of sources of political legitimacy include participatory governance, social trust, traditional or religious authority, and ethnic belonging (ibid.). All these different sources of legitimacy could be troublesome as seen by the difficulties surrounding the trust relations between the government and its citizens. The relation between the government and its citizens is a vital part of gaining and holding onto political legitimacy, especially in areas of limited statehood. A lack of legitimacy is almost certainly a cause for ineffective governance and a lack of problem-solving capabilities, even if effectiveness is not the best a government can strive towards as argued by Schmelzle (2011).

The trust relation between a government and its citizens has been established as a very important one, especially in areas of limited statehood. A clear definition for trust is presented by Gambetta as a cooperative attitude towards other people based on the optimistic expectation that others are likely to respect one’s own interests (1988, 217-218). Some scholars argue that local state institutions create a trust relation with their citizens by displaying fair and impartial policies, to ensure their cooperation in the future (Rothstein & Stolle 2008). However, in areas of limited statehood the generalised trust in the government is often lower, while the personal ties with people within the local government or other institutions can be far greater (Draude, Hölck & Stolle 2018, 14). This helps to create an environment in which self-governance by local actors and personalised trust relations between different groups are able to thrive. According to Draude, Hölck & Stolle the best course of action for institutions is to build up from the existing trust relations and expand on these by designing systems that ensure fairness and impartiality on a local level, and steadily increase all these reforms to a national level (2018, 14-15). External actors could aid the local institutions by providing services that the national government cannot provide because of the dysfunctionality that arises during and after conflicts (ibid.).

# Chapter 3: Methodology

The research question – According to Palestine youth, how can political legitimacy contribute to the process of statebuilding in Palestine – can be researched in different ways. Both quantitative and qualitative research can give a proper insight into the way Palestine youth think about the Palestinian state, the political legitimacy of the state and the upcoming local elections. In this chapter the methodology of the research will be presented. Additionally, an explanation will be given as to why choices were made in light of the current situation. A large part of this chapter will be dedicated to the way in which conducting this research was complicated because of the ongoing global pandemic.

This research will be a qualitative one, since it focuses on the personal opinions and thoughts of a certain group of people. An extensive examination of a questionnaire filled in by a great amount of people could show the popular way of thinking about this subject. However, this research has neither the resources nor the time to reach most of the population of the West Bank, which means a more personal approach should be in place. This research focuses on the situation in the West Bank and not all the Palestinian Territories. It is very difficult for outsiders to gain access to the Gaza Strip, and contact has already been made with a Palestinian NGO, located in Ramallah in the West Bank. Again, this research has neither the resources nor the time to include the entirety of the Palestinian population.

Another reason as to why a quantitative research or a large-scale questionnaire would not work, is the main focus of the research which is presenting the ideas and thoughts of the Palestinian youth. Emersion into the group – which is the main focus of this research – is important, because only then will this research give a clear insight in their way of thinking. Judging from a distance has been done before, and has received critique from academic circles, such as the debate concerning Orientalism, spearheaded by Edward Said. If this research would observe the situation from a distance and then judge it according to the standards of the researcher’s own context, then it would be another Western study about the exotic Middle East. Since the goal of this research is to avoid writing another study from a predominant Western view, emphasis ought to be placed on the things that are said by the people that are being researched.

The main methods of acquiring data are through small talk and semi-structured interviews. Small talk is the method which is often used by cultural anthropologists to get a clear view of the situation, by talking in informal settings to people present in the setting where the research is being conducted. The answers to the simple questions give a first impression from the perspective of the people being researched, from which the researcher can continue asking more in depth and topical questions later on. Small talk is also meant to take away some of the preconceived ideas that the researcher has when entering the field, to make way for a better immersion into ideas and customs of research subjects. Observations of the situation are also of great importance to see the things the research subjects talk about first-hand. If a certain interviewee talks about a certain problem in a particular place, it would be beneficial for the researcher himself to see it as well. Not only to help further the immersion into the field, but also to help understand the problems that might impact the lives of the people in the field on a daily basis. This is especially useful in this research, since it might be assumed that the current situation creates many problems in their day-to-day life. Experiencing only a small bit of it might help further the understanding of the people in the research field by the researcher.

## **Analysis of the gathered data**

The analysis of this research will be based on the ethnographic research described in Cresswell (2013). Emersion into the group is important, because only then will this research give a clear insight in way of thinking of the Palestine youth. It is the intention of this research to resemble a realist ethnographer and try to keep the researcher’s biases and judgement out of the research. The setting of the research should be clear, and its description is the foundation upon which the research is built (Cresswell 2013, 162). This description of the setting should be done through a presentation of the daily life, and work from there towards a more in-depth situation, for example through the use of small talk and interviews. As mentioned before, the interviews will be semi-structured which means that a number of questions will be asked to every respondent. By using some of the same questions for every respondent, each different perspective on the matter can be observed and analysed. This analysis will use taxonomies and semantic tables as described in Cresswell (2013, 162-163). Before the taxonomies and semantic tables can be made, a transcript of the interviews has to be made. The taxonomies and semantic tables are useful to see whether respondents mention the same subjects, which of these subjects stand out the most and why the respondents mention these subjects.

## **Setbacks during the process of the research**

Even the best laid out plans sometimes fail. This is certainly the case for any ethnographic focused study that was planned to be done in 2020. In the beginning of 2020 news came out of Wuhan, China about a contagious flu virus string, named COVID-19 or the corona virus. After the news of the outbreak in China, many countries rightfully feared that it would come to them sooner rather than later. This was also the case for Israel, Palestine, and the Netherlands. This study was supposed to be conducted in Ramallah in the West-Bank. However during the preparation period of the study, news came out that the West-Bank was closed off for foreigners and people from the EU had to go into a fourteen-day quarantine when they landed in Tel Aviv, Israel. This meant that it was impossible for me to travel to the West-Bank to conduct this research.

Without being able to travel to the intended research site, the way of conducting this research was severely limited. The idea of the research was to immerse into the field as much as possible, which became impossible to do. Furthermore, the intention to use small talk to gather the first data and get to know the situation there was also hampered. Gaining the vital information to help build the rest of the research was the intended outcome of usage of small talk, especially in the earliest days of my stay in the West-Bank. The usage of semi-structured interviews was still possible through Skype or other similar programs, however without the insights gained through observations and small talk.

Nevertheless, communication with others around the globe has become easier and easier over the last decades. Because of the internet incredible ways of communication are possible, even during a global pandemic. As presented earlier, the absence of the possibility of travel to the intended research site was more than just inconvenient for the immersion into the field. It was rather impossible to fully immerse into the intended research site, which created an unfavourable situation in which this research was conducted. Yet there are some ways of conducting the research, through the usage of modern communication technology. While programs such as Skype might be most useful for conducting the interviews, other ways need to be used for making up on the lack of small talk. Using Skype quickly creates an image of a formal interview, without the option for small talk to get to know the situation from a first-hand source. In addition to the interviews, local new sites were used to stay updated with the current state of the Israel-Palestine conflict. It has become much easier to read the news in a foreign country, due to the far-reaching development of communication technology. Anybody can find credible news sources to read up on the current state of the Israel-Palestinian conflict and the situation in the West-Bank. However, it is important to keep in mind that different news outlets might have different opinions and agendas especially concerning the subject of this research. An extensive look through much of the local news sources might give some insight in the current situation, which could perhaps make up a little for the lack of small talk and observations that cannot be done at this current time.

## **A look at the participants of the interviews**

A quick introduction to the participants of the interviews is in order to properly present the answers given. During the interviews, 10 different people were interviewed, while nine interviews were initially planned. The extra interviewee participated in the last interview, when she acted as a translator. The first aspect about this group of people that should be known is that they all are wonderful, enthusiastic people with ideas about improving the situation in their homeland. Therefore, it is not strange to see them all work at the Palestinian Centre for Peace and Democracy, a local Palestinian NGO. Through this NGO I was able to get into contact with all the participants of the interviews. All the interviewees are able to vote, making them older than 18, while the eldest are just turning 30 years old. The first interview was done with R S on the 22nd of December 2020, who against all odds was able to find a job as a teaching assistant right after she finished her bachelor’s degree. During her interview she placed quite some emphasis on the difficult process that most schools and universities had to get through because of the complete lockdown of the West Bank in April 2020. The second interview was done with Ekram Zubaydi on the 23rd of December 2020, who might be the most activist out of all the participants. In her interview she talked in great lengths about the difficult status of women in Palestinian society, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has only complicated the matter more. On December 23, 2020, the third interview took place with Israa Daas. Immediately, it became apparent that she wanted to present the situation as best as she could. Israa first explained the situation in Palestine concerning the Oslo Accords, and later on she explained the current struggle between Fatah and Hamas to me. These first interviews helped in the continuous process of adjusting the interview guide, by showing which topics to talk about and, perhaps more importantly, which topics were not really as relevant as was thought beforehand.

The fourth interview was done with Nicole Zoughbi on the 24th of December 2020. Nicole explained the importance of the work of the PCPD, since she only got interested in politics and specifically local elections because of the PCPD. Many young Palestinians are not interested in politics, or even local politics because the changes that are needed are going at a glacial pace. Then came the interview with Nada on the 28th of December 2020. Nada explained during the interview that she would rather see a less central focused government and would like to see more responsibilities be placed by local authorities who can implement change faster. Tala Qudsi, on the 29th of December 2020, was next. Tala is another example of the work of the PCPD, since her interest in the local elections has increased tremendously by working with the PCPD. Next up was Hadeel Knafar on the 30th of December 2020. During this interview the position of women and young people in Palestinian politics was discussed. In order to improve the situation a breath of fresh air is needed and women and young people should be the ones to bring about changes according to Hadeel. Then, also on the 30th of December 2020, the first male participant of the interviews was interviewed. Hisham Fakhouri works as a lawyer, which has become increasingly more difficult because of the COVID-19 pandemic and is therefore not very optimistic about the situation quickly changing. The last interview was perhaps the most special one, since two people were interviewed at the same time. An interview with Mahmoud Jamal was scheduled on the 2nd of January 2021, but because of a horrible internet connection it was not possible to conduct the interview at that time. The next day, the 3rd of January 2021, the interview took place with Shahnaz Darwish joining in to translate the English questions to Arabic for Mahmoud, and then the Arabic answers back to English for the interview. After a short while of getting used to this system, the interview went swimmingly. By receiving two answers on the same questions, it was sometimes a little difficult to ask the proper follow-up questions to either Mahmoud or Shahnaz, yet in the end it was a successful interview. Mahmoud expressed during the interviews his displeasure about the current legislation that people under 25 years old are not electable, and his desire to enter Palestinian politics. Shahnaz on the other hand gave a vivid description about the difficulties that she faced when trying to travel to her work, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Chapter 4: Empirical Chapter

In this chapter the results of the interviews will be presented. Before elaborating on the results of the interviews, the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict needs to be explored in order to understand the situation in which the research takes place. This is split into two parts: the first part is focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the second part delves into Palestinian politics. The context of the ongoing conflict and the difficulties within Palestinian politics influence both the questions asked, and the answers given during the interviews. After the introduction into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Palestinian politics, the results of the interviews will be explored. In order to maintain a clear overview of all the gathered data, the rest of this chapter will be divided in four parts, linked to the four topics discussed in the interviews. These topics are the (1) opinions on the current government, (2) the upcoming elections, (3) contemporary problems within Palestinian society and lastly (4) changes that have occurred on an international scale. A bit of overlap in the topics is present since many contemporary problems will first be discussed during the conversation about the current government. However, it is apparent that the answers given concerning contemporary problems during the first topic are more of an introduction into these multiple problems. Several topics may thus be discussed further in later parts of the chapter, while other topics will be introduced in those later parts. This chapter will present the data gathered from the interview in order to give a clear overview of the thoughts and opinions of Palestinian youths on the different subject matters. The written literature concerning these topics will be closely examined in a later chapter, to preserve the aim of this chapter, namely focusing on the answers provided by the interviewees.

## **Context concerning the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is an extreme example of a protracted conflict. Protracted conflicts are often characterised by an extensive past, a turbulent present, and a murky future (Coleman 2000, 432). The conflict has become a continuous state for the people living in it, yet it is not in a static state as changes can and will happen (ibid.). The state of Israel has been contested by many of its neighbouring countries since its creation from the British Mandate Palestine in 1948 (Leuenberger & Schnell 2010, 803). Curiously, maps have been used as an important tool in the conflict, to consolidate national images and narratives while emphasizing the unity of the nation state for either side of the conflict (Leuenberger & Schnell 2010, 805). The usage of maps was instrumental for the creation of the national imagination of Israel, since many of the new Israelis were immigrants, mostly from Europe. A sense of place and connection to the land of Israel needed to be established, which was achieved through the extensive usage of maps and the geography-oriented education that was introduced in Israel (Leuenberger & Schnell 2010, 807-808). However, the usage of maps does not end by the educational and geographic attributes that they possess. Both sides of the conflict use maps to completely deny the others existence, for example by naming the Palestinian controlled West Bank simply by their Biblical names Judea and Samaria (Leuenberger & Schnell 2010, 819-820).

Afbeelding met kaart

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijvingFigure 1: A map of the state of Israel and some of the surrounding countries by the United Nations. Available at <https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/israel.pdf>

Afbeelding met kaart

Automatisch gegenereerde beschrijvingFigure 2: A map of Palestine by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/B89131CA78B4D385C12577980031886B-map.pdf>

This complete denial of the other side’s rights for existing creates a precarious situation where both sides claim the exact same territory as their own (Wallach 2011, 358). The appearance of Israel on political maps around the world signals that it is recognised as a country, a fact that is historically disputed by several countries in the wider area (Leuenberger & Schnell 2010; Wallach 2011). Many Israeli and Palestinian maps show either Israel or Palestine as one, homogenous country (Wallach 2011, 359). Yet, this is not the contemporary reality for either side. While Israel has effective control over the entire area, certain places are restricted such as the Gaza Strip. For Palestinians the reality is far bleaker, since their control over their Palestine is reduced to several cities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (ibid.). The map of Palestine has gained importance over the years for Palestinians as a symbol of their identity and nationhood. The idea of a strong and independent Palestinian state has become a dream to cling onto, and it shows clearly what the problem is in achieving this dream namely the Israelis (Wallach 2011, 360-361). Newly built Israeli cities are often not mentioned in Palestinian maps, while Israeli maps have a tendency to ‘Judaicizing’ the names of cities and towns since these were called by the Arabic and Christian names during the British Mandate (Wallach 2011, 361; Leuenberger & Schnell 2010, 810).

One of the most striking characteristics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the religion aspect of the conflict and even within the different sides. By no means are all the Israelis ultra-orthodox Jews or follow that particular way of thinking. The Palestinians are divided by religion and how moderate they are. Palestinian politics is a complicated affair to say the least, because it has been split into two separate bodies (Løvlie 2014, 100-101). Religion has become an increasingly important aspect of Palestinian politics (ibid.). The split in Palestinian politics happened in 2007 when Hamas won the elections in the Gaza Strip after the Israeli army left (Løvlie 2014, 113). Officially, Hamas is focused on creating an Islamic Palestinian state, however reality shows that they have been mostly occupied with the consolidation of power in Gaza Strip after they won the election (ibid.). Since Hamas has been actively in power in Gaza, they have had to adopt a more pragmatic stance towards their ideological approach. Hamas has gained more responsibilities by governing the Gaza Strip, and might appear less focused on the conflict. Yet, they cannot give up their religious-nationalistic roots without losing the approval of their most fanatical supporters (Løvlie 2014, 114).

## **Context concerning Political Legitimacy in Palestinian politics**

It is important to note that the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine is not the only impacting factor at play. To extensively present the context in which this research is conducted, problems within the Palestinian society need to be explored. Specifically, the current political field does not contribute to a more stable situation and causes problems with its own political legitimacy. While the ongoing conflict is often the root of many of these problems, it is nevertheless paramount to try and understand these problems even if they originate from other avenues than the ongoing conflict.

To say that the Palestinian political field is in complete disarray, is not a controversial statement (Hilal 2010, 24). One of the reasons of this fragmented political field is the physical separation between parts of the Palestinian population. One part of the Palestinian population lives under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank, while the other part of the Palestinian population lives in a de facto prison in Gaza (Hilal 2010, 24-25). To further complicate the matter, both territories are ruled by opposing political parties, the more secular Fatah in the West Bank, and the more Islamist focused Hamas in Gaza (ibid.). Both parties are dependent on foreign aid to sustain themselves, causing them to side with different regional powers. Since 2007 Hamas has had complete control in Gaza, however this does not mean the polarisation of the political field started in 2007. Rather, the complications within the Palestinian political field have been present from the start of the conflict with Israel.

One of the political organisations created with the goal to establish an independent Palestinian state is the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), which has become the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians on the global stage (Hilal 2010, 25; Barahmeh 2014, 1-2). Through a democratic process in the early years of the PLO the resistance group Fatah was able to take over the PLO, becoming the dominant Palestinian political power from the 1960s until the end of the 1980s (Hilal 2010, 25-26). However, the First Intifada in 1987 shook the political landscape, because of the prominence of more religious oriented organisations such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad (ibid.). A reaction to the First Intifada was signing the Oslo Accords in 1993, which led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), to work as a self-governing body for the Palestinians with as much political power as Israel allowed them (ibid.). The PA consisted almost exclusively out of the PLO leadership, because Hamas and other Islamic organisations rejected the Oslo Accords. After the presidential elections of 1996 Fatah established legislative legitimacy over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which were granted to them in the aforementioned Oslo Accords. These elections were boycotted by Hamas. Nevertheless, the hegemony of the Fatah dominated PA did not last. The Second Intifada took place in September of 2000. It was marked by inactivity by the PA, who had stagnated all political processes because of nepotism and clientelism, and extreme violence by Hamas. After the retreat from Israel out of Gaza, elections were held. This time Hamas participated in the elections and took advantage of the growing split in Palestinian politics, caused by an ineffective and inactive PA (Hilal 2010, 26-27). Hamas won the elections, causing problems within the organisation of the PA. Eventually, this caused so many problems within the PA that two separate governments were formed, one in the West Bank under the control of Fatah and one in Gaza under the control of Hamas (ibid.). Little to no progress has been made in restoring the damaged relationship between these two groups, since either side will not give in to the other (Hilal 2010, 37). The sides within Palestinian politics have polarised over the years, leaving a dichotomy within Palestinian society. Fatah still represents the side that seek to get rid of the occupation through negotiations and peaceful resistance, while Hamas has not changed it armed resistance ideas (ibid.). The polarisation of Palestinian politics has led to several crippling processes, most notably the stagnation of Palestinian institutions and the increase of foreign interference in politics. The split between the Palestinian camps has resulted in little to no new policies and legislation. Countries have indicated which side they support, reinforcing the image of conflicting region powers. Whereas Saudi-Arabia and Egypt clearly favour Fatah, Syria and Iran have spoken out in favour of Hamas (Hilal 2010, 38).

According to Kouttab and Toaldo, this split has only stimulated a further decline of the legitimacy of Palestinian institutions (2013, 1-2). A fitting example of this decline in trust in their own institutions are the protests that occurred in August and September of 2012. These protests were not organised against the Israeli occupation but rather against the PA. A pessimistic attitude towards both the Fatah government in the West Bank and the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip has grown, along with an increasing amount of people no longer believing in the two-state solution (Kouttab and Toaldo 2013, 2-3). The causes of these pessimistic views of the future stem from the absence of credible negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, the lack of a clear strategy formed by the PA, the political exclusion of Palestinians living abroad, and the ever-increasing Israeli influence in Palestinian territory (ibid.). One of the first things that Kouttab and Toaldo present to combat these debilitating processes is to ensure greater stability within the Palestinian territories, with the aim to prevent widespread violence akin to the Second Intifada (2013, 7). Another argument by Kouttab and Toaldo focuses on thinking about alternatives to the current PA and its structure. Many Palestinians perceive the PA as a corrupt institution with little to no actual bargaining power when dealing with the Israelis, whilst it also lacks in input from the Palestinian population (ibid.). The current Palestine National Council (PNC) ought to be the platform where Palestinians can make their voices heard, yet it currently is an extension of the PLO and the PA. According to Kouttab and Toaldo, a new constituent assembly should be formed, in which all Palestinian are to be heard. This means that Palestinians living in Gaza, Israel, and in other countries should have a voice alongside the Palestinians living in the West Bank (2013, 7-8). Discussions by this new constituent assembly should be transparent and easily accessible for the public. Any policy or legislative recommendations that this assembly makes should conform to international laws in order to preserve the moral dimensions of the Palestinian cause for an independent state according to Kouttab and Toaldo (2013, 8).

## **The Current Government**

The first interview set the tone especially concerning the opinions on the current government. “*I think that the current government is not serving well*.” (R S, personal communication, 21-12-2020) This was the first answer given during the interviews and it reflects the opinions of most of the other interviewees. A great number of difficulties in Palestinians society were mentioned as reasons why the government is not serving adequately. Problems ranging from the Israeli occupation to widespread unemployment and from a lingering clan system to a lack of communication between the government and its citizens. The government attempts to solve some of these problems, however as Ekram puts it *“… unfortunately, they don’t deal with these issues from the roots. They just give a small solution or immediate solution, but it’s not a solution to solve the problem from the roots*.” (personal communication, 22-12-2020). While many of these problems will be elaborated upon in later topics, it is important to discuss them early on, especially since the participants of the interviews expressed their concerns about these problems during the first topic. The opinions of Palestine youth on their current government served as an introduction into the later topics, as well as a way to get to know the interests of the participants. For example, Nicole in the fourth interview focused heavily on the gap between the government and its citizens and expressed her concern about not being able to voice their problems to the national government. Another example is Shahnaz in the tenth interview, who agreed with the first quote of R, but places the reasoning why the government is not serving well on the ongoing Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

The image of Palestine that was created by the participants of the interviews is a relatively bleak one. Unemployment has been a large problem, especially for the people who just finished their education. Nada explained in her interview that because of the difficulties surrounding job opportunities, she started her own business after two years of looking for suitable work. The situation is so dire that some of the participants, such as Nicole and R S, are considering moving out of the West Bank to find a better environment for job opportunities and a less oppressive system hanging over their country. For a solution for these problems of unemployment and a lack of job opportunities, many of the participants look towards the Palestinian government. Training programs offered by the government to help, especially women and young Palestinians, get better job opportunities should improve the situation. R S points out that the government has created some training programs, however these programs are not what she hoped they would be.

*They are focusing on just providing trainings, but not just special trainings that are needed for job vacancies. Like employers here, to be honest, they are not linked with the universities. They have no idea about the graduates that are graduating, or the programs that universities are teaching them. So that … when they face the real world and the working environment, they have many problems, and some of them just lose their jobs.*

R S, personal communication, 21-12-2020.

Throughout the interviews the role of the government came up when questions were asked about unemployment and the difficulties of finding job opportunities. “*… there’s nothing that is giving us hope to stay here and find what we want*” (Nicole Zoughbi, personal communication, 24-12-2020). This statement perfectly explains the attitude that some of participants of the interviews have towards the current situation in Palestine. They feel as if the government does not listen to them, has no place for them in any meaningful way and can or will not work towards improving the situation in Palestine.

The gap between the government and its citizens will be explored further in this next section, when primarily the complains about a lack of transparency and accountability from the government were mentioned by the interviewees. Ekram puts it best into words:

*They don’t give information … There is a huge gap between the government and the citizens. Because they didn't even ask the people about their opinion, if they want to change anything related to our life or our society. And they didn't give us an argument or a reason why they made these kinds of decisions.*

Ekram Zubaydi, personal communication, 22-12-2020.

Later during the interview, she added “*they don’t feel that they should give us these kind of information … they don’t feel that it’s their duty”* (personal communication, 22-12-2020). Ekram expressed that the terrible way of communication from the government leads to less trust in the national government. The feeling about the lacklustre communication by the government is shared by multiple people. For example, R S describes the difficulties of communicating problems with politicians, while only hearing about the decisions that were made by the same politicians. Another example is provided by Nicole, who states that she only sees the decisions, but not the reasoning why a certain decision was taken. Lastly, Hisham tried to see the positive aspects by mentioning that the government is doing what it can in difficult times, yet they should provide more information about the decisions that are taken. So, the government does not provide enough information to its citizens about the decisions that are taken, and they are not held accountable for a lack of information because it has been more than a decade since the last national election.

The lack of national elections has prolonged another problem that most of the participants of the interview emphasize heavily. Very few of the interviewees feel represented by the current government. Women and young Palestinians are excluded from positions, as mentioned by Hadeel: “*Officials say young people are unable to make appropriate decisions due to their lack of experience with political work”* (personal communication, 30-12-2020). About the lack of women in politics she mentioned that “*the government doesn’t support the rule of women in decision making*” (Hadeel Knafar, personal communication, 30-12-2020). Nada agrees that the position of women and young Palestinians need improving, and that they should be more empowered to be able to enter national politics and improve the situation of other women and young Palestinians. Entering national politics is already difficult for Palestine youth and especially for women in Palestine.

The lack of communication by the government with its citizens and universities create a situation in which it is difficult for people who have just finished their education to find jobs, according to several of the participants of the interviews. Many of the participants of the interview feel as if the government simply does not know what their everyday problems are, a feeling that is strengthened by the lacklustre communication between the government and its citizens. All these problems concerning the transparency, accountability and communication of the government eventually lead to a very serious problem, namely an absence of trust in the national government amongst the Palestinian youth who were interviewed.

The lack of trust in the national government thus stems from poor communication, no transparency concerning the decision-making process, a lack of accountability and exclusion of several important groups within Palestinian society. However, this lack of trust also originates from other areas. Some examples include the complains from Ekram, who focuses on the approach of the government towards several problems. In her words: “*They just give a small immediate solution, but it’s not a solution to solve the problems from the roots … It improves our lives for a short period, they we go back to the same problem”* (Ekram Zubaydi, personal communication, 22-12-2020). Later in the interview Ekram explained that the priorities of the national government and its citizens are not aligned.

*“I think the problem with the government that the people don't feel that the government know, their needs, know their issues … Think about poverty, unemployment, and there is no job opportunities, violence against women. And these kind of issues that the people want to find a solution for it. But for example, the government plan to renew the embassy, or the ambassador, the Palestinian embassy in, for example, France.”*

Ekram Zubaydi, personal communication, 22-12-2020.

Another reason for the lack of trust in the government ties back to accountability. Israa and Mahmoud agreed that there is little trust to be found in a government that was chosen more than a decade ago. No new national elections were held afterwards, and the majority of the same people are still in power. Several participants expressed the feeling that the current government either does not know or does not care about the problems that many of the Palestinian youth are facing, such as unemployment and difficulties surrounding job opportunities after graduation. This again ties back to a lack of communication, representation and participation of women and Palestinian youth in the decision-making processes.

Nevertheless, the situation is not completely lost according to the answers given in the interviews. A change in the Palestinian political landscape could bring about improvements according to Shahnaz, Tala and Hisham. Hisham specifically placed his trust in the spirit of optimism amongst other Palestinian youth to work towards a better situation in Palestine. Hadeel expressed that in order to increase the trust in the government more women and young Palestinians should be trusted by the government in participating in the decision-making processes, an idea that fits neatly with Hisham solution to the lack of trust in the government. The participants of the interviews are cautiously optimistic about the prospect of improvements after new elections. The new elections could prove to be just what many of the interviewees need, as well as a way to pull themselves out of the difficult period of the COVID-pandemic. More participation in politics by women and Palestine youth, who would focus on the needs and problems of women and Palestine youth, instead of a continuation of the idea that politics only belong to older men. Shahnaz expressed this idea perfectly by stating:

*“We need the young people, because they are the only who can understand us … They have experience and a lot of experience from the university. After the university when we graduate, we sit a lot of years doesn’t work, looking for the work, because we have no opportunity here in Palestine.”*

Shahnaz Darwish, personal communication, 3-1-2021.

Yet, with the inclusion of women and Palestinian youth not all the problems will be solved easily, with the first and foremost of these problems being the occupation of the West Bank by Israel. This quote by Shahnaz shows exactly the problem: *“… we have a lot of problems from the under the occupation and it's has no power as tell governments weak against Israel oppression*” (Shahnaz Darwish, personal communication, 3-1-2021). With new elections in Israel and possibly in Palestine, the future is uncertain, but hopefully some changes can be made by optimistic young Palestinians.

## **The Local Elections**

Several of the problems discussed in the question about the current government stretch out towards the topic of local elections. The previously mentioned lack of trust in anything government related extends to the local governments as well. While it has been a long time since the last national elections, the local elections have continued periodically. At first glance, this seems promising, however this might not directly lead to more trust in the local government. Israa explained that “*… each time we have these elections, like every four years, we don’t see a big difference between the new elected governance and the previous one”* (Israa Daas, personal communication, 23-12-2020). One of the reasons why the same people get elected is because of the existing clan system within Palestinian society. The feeling that the same people constantly get elected creates other problems, especially regarding the willingness to take part in the elections amongst Palestinians. Israa stated the following:

*“So many Palestinians, even in my age, or maybe older, they have the same belief. They're not doing their job; we have no trust in them. They are all the same. And this other stuff, they make them, like, they don't want to participate in the election, because it doesn't make any change.”*

Israa Daas, personal communication, 23-12-2020.

A change is needed in the possible candidates of these local elections, in order to improve the situation in their municipality. With this progress on the local level, the amount of people that put their trust in the (local) government could increase. However, problems previously discussed such as a lack of women and younger people still apply to the topic of local election, according to Ekram and Nada. Erkam agreed with Israa that people should look more carefully at the position of people in power, while Nada maked a case for an increase in women and young Palestinians in national and local politics. Ekram went further than only wanting more women and younger people in politics and argued for changes in the elections law that would cause the following:

*“more democratic, more transparent, and more helpful for people to choose the right people. And as usual, we first we started facing the same problem with enter the names of women to the election and try to change the society mind how they accept these women in decision making level, and they try to build the trust between the society and these women and convince them that there is no difference. The difference is the skills and the capacity. It's not the gender.”*

Ekram Zubaydi, personal communication, 22-12-2020.

More women ought to bew present amongst those who are voted in according to Ekram. There are quite a number of problems that exist because of the lack of a national constitution in Palestine. The Palestinian Basic Law should have been a temporary stand in for a constitution, according to Ekram and Israa. However, a constitution was never written, creating a lacklustre legal system, according to Israa and Ekram. The lack of a constitution coupled with the segregation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip caused an uneven legal field, creating a situation were “*Palestinians are not equal in front of law … and in front of a court. It’s like, we have different law from different backgrounds and this make the equality between Palestinians are hard is hard”* (Israa Daas, personal communication, 23-12-2020).

Another problem concerning the local elections is the influence that different tribes have within Palestinian society. A great example was mentioned during the interviews of Shahnaz and Mahmoud. They both discussed the situation in Hebron, where Mahmoud lives, and where the current mayor is part of the biggest family in Hebron. According to both Shahnaz and Mahmoud, the only reason why he is in office is because of his family. The problems that the tribes or clans cause were amongst the first things mentioned by R S. She mentioned that many Palestinians are not very motivated to vote because “*they all always know that the son of this family is going to win. So why should I elect or at the end, this family is going to be the winner. And their relatives are going to have privileges*” (personal communication, 21-12-2020). Hadeel agreed with R S on this subject, stating “*… there is no integrity because it is the parties and clans that control the election. And so unworthy people win. This made people lose confidence in the local elections”* (Hadeel Knafar, personal communication, 30-12-2020). Especially younger people have little faith in the local elections because they only see certain families win and are not optimistic that this can change.

The lack of enthusiasm about the local elections is also visible in other ways. While people hope that the results of local election are different than the previous ones, the actual result often disappoints. Ekram explained it as follows “*…the people deal with the election with a huge disappointment. … they don’t feel that it will solve anything of our problem”* (Ekram Zubaydi, personal communication, 22-12-2020). This disappointment in the local government is the reason why many Palestinians will not vote during the upcoming local elections in 2021 according to Israa.

*“I will vote in the coming elections, but I think other young Palestinians in my age would not do that. And the reason for that. Because each time when we have these elections, like every four years, we don't see a big difference between the new elected governance and the previous one. So it is all the same. … when people think like that, there is no difference between all of them, then they will not try to make a change or elect or participate in these elections.”*

Israa Daas, personal communication, 23-12-2020.

The participants of the interviews are outliers when it comes to the elections. All of the participants of the interviews have expressed their desire to vote during the upcoming elections, often mentioning that they will vote for someone with realistic and achievable goals. One of the reasons why some of the participants are actively thinking about the elections and even becoming electable is because of the work of NGOs such as the PCPD. Nicole praised the workshops of the PCPD that have helped her get more interested in the local elections, along with much practical information such as “*when the next elections are coming, and how they can participate in elections”* (Nicole Zoughbi, personal communication, 24-12-2020). Hadeel agreed with Nicole and added the importance of educating young Palestinians about the elections in order to express themselves politically, while also increasing the likelihood that women and younger people get elected to the local government. Shahnaz stated that she also did not know anything about elections and politics before she joined the PCPD. Now along with Mahmoud she expressed the interest to become electable in order to improve the situation in Palestine. The participants of the interviews made it clear that they are more of the exception than the rule when it comes to the interest in the local elections. However, the influence of local NGOs should not be downplayed and ought to be seen as a prime way of increasing the interest and participation of women and young people in local elections. While the clan system is still prevalent, most of the participants believe that it can change if other suitable candidates are electable in upcoming elections.

## **The Contemporary Problems in Palestinian Society**

The third topic that was discussed during the interviews concerned the contemporary problems within Palestinian society. Many of these problems have been discussed during the previous topics, such as a lack of trust in the government and unemployment especially amongst the younger people in Palestine. This topic will shortly list these problems in order to focus on additional insights on the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Palestinian society. The pandemic still plays a large role in everyday life, and thus the impact should be explored. It is important to understand the problems that have existed in Palestinian society, before discussing if these problems worsened during the pandemic and which new problems arose.

The state of the Palestinian economy before the COVID-19 pandemic was not stellar. Unemployment and a lack of job opportunities caused problems for many of the participants of the interviews. Other social and economic problems include poverty, increasing inequality and domestic violence, some of which have already been discussed in previous topics. The difficulties that come with the occupation of the West Bank were mentioned by Shahnaz. One of these difficulties is the lack of movement because of the checkpoints that are present in the West Bank, and no international travel to neighbouring countries such as Jordan. The answers given during the interviews paint a picture of a struggling economy along with problematic government trying to cope with the situation. On top of that, if there is one thing that all the participants of the interviews agree on, it is that the situation in Palestine got a lot worse because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the end of March 2020 all over the world measures were taken to slow down the spread of the COVID-19 virus. International travel came to a standstill and in many countries a lockdown was ordered to keep the number of infections as low as possible. The government of Palestine also ordered a complete lockdown at the end of March which eventually lasted till early June. The decision was made and almost immediately implemented according to R S. People were ordered to stay in their houses and schools and universities were closed. Because the lockdown lasted for three months, many people lost their jobs, and it became almost impossible to find a job. The people that were able to keep their jobs were sometimes paid less for the months of the lockdown or not paid at all according to Nicole. When asked the participants of the interviews gave their own examples of the economic difficulties that were caused by the lockdown. Hadeel mentioned that the project she was working on lost their funding, while Israa, Hisham and Shahnaz were not able to travel to their jobs. Nada was also not allowed to work in her own business, which she had started because of the lack of job opportunities in Palestine. The international travel ban caused the family of Nicole many problems as her father works in the tourism industry in Bethlehem.

*“… he has been sitting with no jobs since March, you know, and no salary also, because like they there's no money to give them. So this is another problem that Bethlehem faced, because it depends on tourists and tourism. And then no one is doing anything in these problems. No one has been helping. They were saying that they will give money to those people or they will help but we haven't seen anything since then.”*

Nicole Zoughbi, personal communication, 24-12-2020.

The situation as described by Nicole is a clear example of the consequences of a strict lockdown, which was implemented with little warning by the government. This can be related to the failing communication between the Palestinian government and its citizens as mentioned in the previous topics.

The lockdown caused a lot of problems, for example in the educational sector of Palestine. People were not allowed to move and schools everywhere were closed. Mahmoud explained during the interview that: “*I am sad because of the corona and I can't go to the university study. It's been online, and that's it's not good for me to get to the knowledge well, or to how to make the exams*” (Mahmoud Jamal, personal communication, 3-1-2021). Others also experienced problems with online education, such as Israa and R S. Israa mentioned that she “… *was thinking about studying abroad for a master's degree, and I get the acceptance from a Turkish University. And I couldn't travel because of, you know, everything. And they having they started teaching everything online but since I am not really interested in like, learning online*” (Israa Daas, personal communication, 23-12-2020). R S talked about the strain that was put on teachers, schools and universities for switching their education around completely. Another point she brought up, was the problems regarding online education caused by poverty, such as a lack of a computer or other inadequate supplies for both the students and the teachers.

The previously mentioned problems that were either caused by or worsened because of the COVID-19 pandemic all play a role in another pressing problem within Palestinian society: domestic violence. Domestic violence, in particular violence against women, has always been a problem but many of the participants of the interviews mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic as a reason why it has only gotten worse. Israa explained the following:

*“… there are so many local organizations who work for women to improve their, for violence, for maybe empower them. But, you know, the problem, even these institutions or organizations, they weren't open for women in the lockdown. They were locked. And this shouldn't be happening. And because, you know, I know, a woman who has suffered from violence during the COVID-19. And I tried to help her and connect her with an institution to work with them. But she called and they told her that there is a lockdown, and we were not in the institution. But once we were back again, we will help you. And this isn't the answer I wanted to hear, or she wanted to hear.”*

Israa Daas, personal communication, 23-12-2020.

A reason why violence against women has risen in the last year, was given by Israa and Hadeel. They explained that people were stuck together in their houses, with a lot of pressure on the entire family because of a lack of money and a general unsafe feeling. Ekram added that in Palestinian society it is the duty of the husband to go out and provide money for the household, while the wife takes care of everything within the household. The responsibilities of the women increased, since they needed to take care of the education for their children, along with all the other previous responsibilities.

“*The kids responsibility, the house responsibility, even though the poverty, there is no money, it's the woman duty. It's the good woman who can manage this financial issue. But if you couldn't manage it, you will not be a good woman. So it’s all the responsibilities on the woman's shoulder, I think it's a heavy responsibility*.”

Ekram Zubaydi, personal communication, 22-12-2020.

This created a very stressful environment which caused some men to act out against anyone in their surroundings. The participants were divided when asked about upcoming improvements concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. Some felt the vaccine against the COVID-19 virus could improve the situation quickly, while others pointed towards the many other problems that are to be solved after the pandemic. Israa explained the latter viewpoint:

*“If we work on a change in ourselves, if we work on a change in the way we look at young people, at women, at many things it will make change in the future. But once we were stuck in the same place when we will not get any other change or improvement. So it all depends on the way we think the way we deal with our internal problem. It is the way to make the change.”*

Israa Daas, personal communication, 23-12-2020.

## **The broader international scale**

Even though the focus of this research is firmly placed on the situation within Palestine, more specifically the West Bank, and the opinions of Palestinian youth on this situation, it is not impossible to view this outside of the greater context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Until recently the conflict seemed to have cooled down, especially in contrast to the First and Second Intifada. However, the outbursts of violence between Hamas and the Israeli military in May 2021 show the volatile state of the conflict. Little needs to be done to provoke either side of the conflict, often resulting in many civilian casualties. The situation will remain tense, and the conflict is far from solved. Multiple interviewees made it clear that the consequences of the ongoing conflict are the most pressing problems within Palestinian society. Yet not all interviewees agreed on this. For example, Ekram argued that while most Palestinian politicians see the occupation as the most pressing issue, smaller and more practical issues should not be overlooked. Many of these smaller issues stem from the occupation, creating a difficult situation to solve. A great example is movement through the West Bank, and the difficulties that Palestinians face in their everyday life. The Israeli checkpoints and roads that are scattered across the West Bank make it very difficult for Palestinians to travel from one Palestinian city to the next. Others argued that the end of the occupation would solve many of these problems and other difficulties could be looked at. “*… we are under the occupation and if we stay under the occupation, we doesn’t have the power in Palestine*” was the way that Shahnaz explained it during her interview (Shahnaz Darwish, personal communication, 3-1-2021).

The reasons for the differences in answers given during the interview could be many. R S explained that many Palestinians loath the occupation and the country of Israel, but she tried to examine the situation with more nuance.

*“I don't have any injuries from my family or people who were imprisoned because of the occupation, but others have. They have killed people. How you can imagine that this people who, who will have like before that killed is going to say hello to an Israeli, to an Israeli like, army every morning or stuff. It’s hard, it’s hard.”*

R S, personal communication, 21-12-2020.

As mentioned before the occupation is visible in everyday life for many Palestinians, in the form of Israeli checkpoints in the West Bank and the difficulties that many Palestinians face when crossing the border to, for example, Jordan for their work. Because of the far-reaching policies of the Israeli government Israa argued that Palestine is not yet an independent state.

*“We are now in two states, but one of them is independent, and the another one is not independent. So we need to make them two different states. Each one has its own supremacy and has its own independence and each one has the right to make their own decisions without any interaction or between both of them.”*

Israa Daas, personal communication, 23-12-2020.

The independence of both Israel and Palestine are mentioned in multiple different UN Resolutions and other international treaties, such as the Oslo Accords. These should be the legal basis for an independent Palestinian state according to Israa. However, the opinions of the participants of the interviews concerning the proposed two-state solution are quite different from each other. As previously stated, R S and Israa see the two-state solution as the best way to ensure peace in both Israel and Palestine. Several other interviewees agree with this sentiment, for example Ekram who stated “*I think we should, the international community should respect the international resolution, the UN resolution, which is talk about the two-state solution. And the only way to solve this conflict is the two-state solution.*” (Ekram Zubaydi, personal communication, 22-12-2020). Other interviewees took a standpoint more focused on the idea of just a Palestinian state, stating “*I want to see all Palestine. From river to sea. It’s my dream, all of Palestine*” (Hadeel Knafar, personal communication, 30-12-2020). Another example is the manner in which Shahnaz talks about traveling to different cities.

*“The occupation is the biggest problem in Palestine. I hope if there is not occupation in Palestine. And we can live how we have, like we do and travel to see all the cities in Palestine like Haifa, Akko and Jerusalem. For me, I am from Jerusalem, but I can’t visit Jerusalem if I don’t have the paper from the Israeli, to get inside Jerusalem.”*

Shahnaz Darwish, personal communication, 3-1-2021.

The statement by Shahnaz seems very much tied to her personal situation, a situation where traveling for whatever reason is difficult. This is by no means an isolated example, since many Palestinians face the same difficulties traveling through the West Bank, to Jordan or even visiting Jerusalem because of the restrictions that the Israeli occupation has places onto them.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not exist within a vacuum, which implies that other outside forces have some form of influence on either side of the conflict. Clear examples include the United States of America, who have been very supportive of Israel ever since the creation of their state, and other neighbouring Arab nations, who historically have had much closer ties to the Palestinian people. When asked about the recent American elections and the influence it could have on the situation within Palestine the answers were uniform and boiled down to “*I think it will stay the same … they may be changed, but I don’t think for the better”* (Nicole Zoughbi, personal communication, 24-12-2020). This was also the reaction on questions about the most recent Israeli elections, in late March of 2021. None of the participants think that the state of the conflict will change or improve because of a change in leadership in either Israel or the USA, if new leaders would take office. Lastly, a development in recent years is that more and more Arab countries have sought to normalise their ties with Israel. Examples of this are Morocco, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, who historically argued for an independent Palestinian state before the normalisation of ties with Israel. The reaction amongst the interviewees was divided on this topic. All participants agreed that the normalisation of ties is a negative development, however some were more surprised than others. “*It was hard for all Palestinians … it was a shock for Palestinians*” according to Nada (personal communication, 28-12-2020). Ekram seemed less surprised by the news about the increased normalisation of ties between Arab countries and Israel: “*I believe that the normalization was in between Arabs and Israel, it was before, but now it's become public. They start announcing it in media*.” (Ekram Zubaydi, personal communication, 22-12-2020). Whether or not the interviewees anticipated these announcements, they all agreed that the normalisation of ties will not improve the situation in Palestine and that this will more than likely lessen the interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in these countries.

# Chapter 5: Concluding Chapter

## **Comparison to the literature**

The Palestinian government faces many problems. Unemployment, a global pandemic, little trust from their citizens, a protracted conflict and its occupation by Israel are the first problems that were mentioned during the interviews. These types of problems are frequently discussed in the literary debate concerning statebuilding and the situation in Palestine is often indicated as an area of limited statehood (see Sørensen 2001; Rothstein & Stolle 2008; Di John 2010; Schmelzle 2011; Risse and Stollenwerk 2018). Palestine does not fit the idea of a consolidated state, because the Palestinian government does not possess a monopoly on violence due to the Israeli occupation (Risse and Stollenwerk 2018, 405-406). An area of limited statehood is more than often characterised by a lack of political legitimacy, which applies again to the situation in Palestine. Many of the participants of the interview expressed their displeasure with the current government. For example, Ekram explained that the gap between the government and its citizens runs deep, and communication between the government and citizens is impossible (Ekram Zubaydi, personal communication, 22-12-2020). There is no insight given by the government into the way they take their decisions, leaving many interviewees asking for more transparency from their government.

The relation between the government and its citizens is thus a cold one, with little to no communication between either side. This is problematic, as seen in the articles by Gambetta (1988) and Draude, Hölck & Stolle (2018). The trust between a government and its citizens is a very important one since it is one of the primary sources of political legitimacy (Risse and Stollenwerk 2018). This lack in trust in the government and communication between the government and its citizens has several consequences. According to the interviewees, the government is not interested in change, and they do not know what kind of problems Palestinians have to face every day. Many participants are optimistic that more women and young people in positions of power could improve their situation, for example by focusing on solving the currently unheard problems of younger Palestinians such as unemployment. Collier describes that a focus on a stable economy is paramount in helping the people in a post-conflict situation to ensure that the people are able to take care of themselves (2011).

Frustration amongst the participants of the interviews was almost visible when discussing the ongoing problems in Palestine. As previously mentioned, the government in the West Bank demonstrate many of the characteristics of a government with a lack of political legitimacy as described in the literature (see Sørensen 2001; Rothstein & Stolle 2008; Di John 2010; Schmelzle 2011; Risse and Stollenwerk 2018). The handling of the COVID-19 pandemic is a great example of the failing effectiveness of the Palestinian government. A lockdown was ordered with little to no warning beforehand, causing many problems for the Palestinian population, such as an increase in unemployment. Decisions made later on in the pandemic were referred to by the participants of the interviews as ‘orders’, since they only heard of them when they were implemented, and no external input had any influence on the decisions that were taken.

Yet, it is important to note that effectiveness of a government should not be placed in the limelight. Schmelzle argues in his article that effectiveness cannot be viewed in a vacuum, since it is always tied to the goals of the government (2011, 6-7). The picture of Palestine that was painted during the interviews is luckily not as black and white as the literature sometimes presents. While external influence in Palestine is noticed by the participants of the interviews, most prominently through the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the participants generally give no indications of significant actions by external actors. Sørensen argues that in contemporary statebuilding processes the interests of external powers is often present (2001, 348). The list of possible foreign actors ranges from states and international institutions to social movements and from multinationals to religious organisations (Hagmann and Péclard 2010, 8-10). Yet, throughout the interviews several participants argue that the interest in the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel is slowly declining in the countries surrounding Israel and Palestine. The consensus amongst the participants of the interviews is that the normalisation of ties between Israel and several Arab countries will have a negative influence. It is likely that not much will change because of these developments, because the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict will continue to be an issue in most of the surrounding Arab countries. However, many of the participants of the interviews expressed their frustration with the normalisation of ties between Israel and several Arab countries and perceive it as partially abandoning the Palestinian cause. Throughout the interviews it became apparent that the influence from outside actors is far more limited than Hagmann and Péclard argued in their article (2010).

The situation in Palestine resembles many of the examples given in the academic literature of countries struggling with a complicated statebuilding process. The unstable environment has created a difficult situation for the majority of the population and has been complicated even more by the COVID-19 pandemic along with the continuous pressure from the Israeli occupation. Many of the participants agreed that new, and more specifically younger, leadership is needed in order to restore the relation between the Palestinian government and its citizens. This new leadership would be better acquainted with the contemporary problems of Palestinians while ensuring that the trust that readily exists between the government and the population is improved, by expanding personal trust into more generalised trust relations on a national scale (see Risse and Stollenwerk 2018; Draude, Hölck & Stolle 2018). Interesting to note is that some of the participants of the interviews expressed that they have more trust in the local government than in the national government. Draude, Hölck & Stolle argue that generalised trust in the government can be kickstarted by supporting the local government and institutions because they often have a better, readily existing, trust with the people ((2018, 14). Institutions should work on this established trust from a local level upwards to the national level in order to create a sustainable generalised trust between the government and its citizens. This ought to go hand in hand with new elections, ensuring that a new and more inclusive government can start building its political legitimacy.

## **Answer to the research question**

The central question of this research is as follows: According to Palestine youth, how can political legitimacy contribute to the process of statebuilding in Palestine. To answer this question multiple semi-structured interviews were conducted. During these interviews, Palestine youth were asked about their opinions of the current government, upcoming local elections, contemporary problems in Palestinian society and the influence of external actors in Palestinian society. The questions were based on extensive literary research on topics such as statebuilding, political legitimacy, Orientalism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the list of questions was in no means complete and was open for small changes during the interviews, hence the semi-structured nature of the interviews.

The opinions of Palestinian youth on the current government of Palestine are negative and many expressed low expectations concerning their government. Many of the interviewees expressed the lack of transparency from the government in their decision-making processes and the little possibilities of communicating with the government. This became all the more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many of the decisions taken by the Palestinian government came out of the blue for many of the Palestinian youth. The lack of younger Palestinians and especially women in the positions of power were often pointed at as easy and achievable ways of improving the situation. The participants of the interviews expressed the feeling that the decisions makers in the government do not know their problems and believe that this can be solved if more women and younger Palestinians are in the positions of power. This directly ties to the next subject, namely the upcoming local elections of 2021. These elections have been postponed, because they should have taken place in the Spring of 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic threw a wrench in those plans. The same reason applies to the second time the local elections were postponed. Now the local elections are planned for the Autumn of 2021. While the differences in trust in the local and national government is not tremendous, some differences are significant. The local government is perceived as more accessible than the national government. Yet, there are some problems with the local elections in Palestine. Almost all the participants of the interviews have mentioned the influence of the clan system in Palestinian politics, specifically on the local level. While the extend to which the clans have influence on the local elections differs greatly, most agree that it is nevertheless of too much influence.

The many problems Palestine is facing can perhaps best be split into two different groups, namely the problems that were prevalent before the COVID-19 outbreak and the problems that are a direct consequence of the pandemic. The first and foremost problem in Palestinian society is the Israeli occupation. All the participants of the interviews notice the occupation in their day-to-day life, most prominently the difficulties regarding travelling through the West Bank. Most of the interviewees pointed to the occupation as one of the reasons why the current government is not functioning as it should, since it does not have complete control over its territory. Even so, the occupation is not the only ongoing problem within Palestinian society. Unemployment, a lack of job opportunities for people that just graduated, increasing inequality and poverty are some of the most impactful problems to many Palestinians. All these problems worsened because of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during the full lockdown of early 2020 in the West Bank. Many people lost their jobs, crippling the Palestinian economy further. These economic problems create a difficult and stressful environment within the domestic sphere, feeding into another pre-existing problem within Palestinian society. Violence against women has increased all over the world because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and Palestine is no different. The position of women has become increasingly more difficult since the start of the pandemic in Palestine, along with more stress for all people because of uncertainty. The added responsibility of teaching their children while schools were closed, along with most of their husbands being home all the time created complicated situations, resulting in more violence against women and children.

Throughout the interviews the participants expressed their ideas about the role of Israel. The occupation is mentioned as the first and most pressing problem when the participants were asked about problems in Palestine. Most of the interviewees were relatively pessimistic about the future role of Israel, since interest in other countries concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems to be decreasing. According to some of the interviewees the normalisation of ties between Israel and several Arab countries is a clear example of less interest in the Palestinian case. It has become apparent that the situation in Palestine is difficult and not approaching a quick conclusion.

According to the interviewed Palestinian youth, political legitimacy can certainly contribute to the statebuilding process of Palestine. In order to do so, new national elections need to be organised through which a better representation of the population can be elected. The Palestinian youth are certain that the statebuilding of Palestine can improve by new leadership. They wish to see a leader who is more in touch with the ordinary people of Palestine. The participants of the interviews are less optimistic about the ongoing conflict with Israel. While many of the internal problems in Palestine can be solved by new leadership, the Israeli occupation will continue to pose problems for the statebuilding process of Palestine.

## **Further research**

The recent violence in Jerusalem along with the skirmishes between Hamas and the Israeli army show that the conflict between Israel and Palestine is far from over. It also shows the inherent relevancy of further research into topics such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, statebuilding, and political legitimacy. Possible further research could focus on the situation within the Gaza Strip, since in this research it was omitted. Other possible avenues of research could explore the impact that the clan system has on local politics in Palestine. This topic came up during in the interviews, which is why it has not been further explored in this research. Lastly, an extensive research into the opinions of Israeli youth on the ongoing conflict with Palestine could shine a light on their unique perspective of the situation, in the same manner that this research attempted to focus on the opinions of Palestine youth.

## **Self-reflection and limitations of the research**

A critical review of this research is needed to conclude this entire endeavour. Many aspects of this research did not go as planned and the difficulties that followed are worth exploring. The most obvious problem that I, as a researcher, faced is the COVID-19 pandemic. I envisioned this research as an opportunity to dive into the life of several Palestinian youth and experience their day-to-day life in the West Bank. In the end, the travel plans were never finalised, because most countries closed their borders with the aim to keep the COVID-19 virus out. While I was frustrated at the time, it may have been for the better. In March of 2020 I was unprepared to start the research because I was not sure where it would go. I do not think that this research would have been successful if I had gone to Palestine in March 2020. Nevertheless, I needed to do the research to finish my study, so I slowly kept on working on all the different chapters from September 2020 onwards. It was difficult for me to find much motivation to continue because I was sitting alone behind a computer for most days. Nevertheless, slowly working on all the chapters began to resemble the beginning of a proper research and the more frequent talks with Dr. Kramsch helped to keep my motivation up. Everything started to speed up around the time that I started to think about conducting the interviews. I was shocked how willing everyone was regarding the interviews. Within a week all the interviews were planned, with a lot of help from the people at the PCPD. This gave me more and more motivation to keep on working on the research and progress was made. The motivation kept me going for a while, but while working on the last few parts, progress slowed down again. I began lacking motivation again, and when I worked, I never felt as if I had done enough that day. My struggle with maintaining motivation has been the main reason why it has taken so long to finish this research.

There have been several limiting factors for this research. The COVID-19 pandemic completely halted the original vision of this research because travelling to the intended field was no longer possible. I wanted to immerse myself into the environment of the research field and this idea had to be scrapped entirely. I think that the interviews could have been better if they had been done face-to-face, instead of through a video meeting. However, the limitations that the COVID-19 pandemic placed upon this research are far beyond anything that I have control over. Something that I do have control over and was limiting factor, was my motivation and discipline regarding finishing this research. I believe that this research could have been finished months earlier if I was able to keep myself focused on this research. In hindsight, I should have placed more deadlines for myself, to force me to continue working on the chapters of this research. This lack of motivation and discipline is something that I have control over and needs improvement moving forward.

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