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Not even a word

Politics of speech and silence in Palestinian memories

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Abstract: This article explores the memories of female Palestinian former political prisoners, via a rethinking of the interrogation moment as liminal space. This arena reveals and triggers productive processes of recognition of self and other, construction of meaning, and resistance strategies by reproducing a mode of remembering that can transcend the yoke of "victimisation" and defeat. I aim to acknowledge the terminology that prisoners use – or refuse – to describe themselves and their "being-in-the-world" and to explore the wide range of meanings involved. In this context silence, the act of not confessing during the interrogation, can be read as a microcosm of values that is not reducible to traumatic discourses, a categorisation that risks obscuring the social, cultural and political frame in which it is shaped.

Keywords: Female prisoners; Liminality; Silence; Recognition; Palestine.

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> Accounts by torture victims indicate the stage of breakdown at which their resistance intervenes. They "held up", they say, by maintaining (perhaps we should even say "enduring") the memory of comrades who, for their own part, were not "rotten"; by keeping in mind the struggle in which they were engaged, a struggle which survived their own "degradation" intact and did not unburden them of it any more than it depended on it; by discerning still, through the din of their tortures, the silence of human anger and the genealogy of suffering that lay behind their birth.
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> Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies,* 1986

A reflection on the specific Palestinian context of former political female prisoners who experienced interrogation and torture demands a rethinking of traumatic memories and their implications in Palestinian biographies[1]. The languages of trauma that have become hegemonic in the post-Oslo Agreement era often represent Palestinian prisoners as agentless and individualised, thereby hiding the subjectivity and the networks of struggle that are involved. In his analysis of humanitarian politics of testimony in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Fassin affirms: "Yesterday we denounced imperialist domination; today we reveal its psychic traces. Not so long ago we glorified the resistance of population; we henceforth scrutinise the resilience of individuals" (Fassin 2008: 532). In the last decades, while prisoners' struggle remains one of the cornerstones of Palestinian resistance, as Fassin says a new language is being used to frame the processes generated by the politics of occupation.

In recent years several ethnographers have applied an in-depth approach to explore the various implications that have emerged from the phenomenon of mass incarceration of Palestinians. They incorporate a measure of complexity in that these works consider the social, cultural and relational aspects. Among the others, Esmail Nashif (2008) has analysed the building of a community of Palestinian political prisoners through textual production; Nahla Abdo (2014) delineates an enquiry into the Palestinian women's struggle within the Israeli prison system from a historical and sociological

1. I wish to thank the anonymous *Anuac* referees for their stimulating comments, which helped me to improve this paper.

perspective. Julie Peteet (1994) has examined the policy and the practices of imprisoning young Palestinian men during the Intifada on one hand and male rituals of resistance on the other. Avram Bornstein (2001), in contrast, explores the problems of representation stemming from detention and Lena Meari (2011) focuses on the interrogation as a moment of constitution of subjectivity and politics. She claims that "the interrogation-encounter generates relationships that involve multiple layers and different configurations of power" (*ibidem*: 20).

Following the path opened up by these works, this article questions the meanings of the politics of speech (and silence) in the interrogation encounter with a focus on the way the agency that surfaces in the interrogation arena is positioned within a broader social system of values and effects. Pursuing the idea that a deep analysis of the language is needed, I discuss both the words used by the military to subjugate and dehumanise the prisoners, and the different strategies that the prisoners use to describe themselves and their "being-in-the-world"[2]. Thus, through a study of the words it is possible to reconsider the meanings through which subjects manifest their solidarity as individuals within a group, or as subjects within a community.

It is undoubtedly difficult to approach the individual and collective wounds generated by detention, torture and degrading treatment (Asad 1996; Scheper-Hughes, Bourgois 2004). As I will delineate throughout these pages, violence and torture enacted on the bodies and minds of female Palestinian prisoners are a definitive experience and a strategy that aims to shatter the social reality by penetrating into families and society. Torture is an attack, through the tortured body, on cultural and social bases (Scarry 1987). The purpose is thus to reconsider and to rethink the languages of suffering that are socially grounded by the subjects lived experience, collocating them into a broader constellation of meanings. Since we have to face these "unspeakable" (Scarry 1987) experiences, they should be analysed carefully in order to comprehend how they represent the self and the other, and to provide new strategies, agencies or intentions. Great attention has been rightly directed toward what violence can erase or destroy, however, this report wants to explore the question of what it can create … within prison cell walls.

2. Here "being-in-the-world" refers strictly to the concept of "presence" theorised by De Martino (1997) as a definite social-historical rootedness. In this case, the risk of losing presence when faced with military violence and torture could be thwarted by ritual, strategies or symbolisms that draw their efficacy from being culturally shared understandings and which are also subject to historical issues.

The observations I draw on were gathered during an ethnographic fieldwork I carried out in the West Bank between August and December 2016. The fieldwork entailed living together with a former political prisoner and her family in Nablus. I closely followed her work in a women's association, and I had the opportunity to talk with almost ten women – former political prisoners – arrested between 1967 and 2013, who shared their own detention experiences with me[3]. While staying in the West Bank and after the field-work, I attempted to find a positioning and a methodological rigour able to bring justice to these testimonies. "Recording" and reporting suffering memories is a rather difficult exercise: the swing between detachment and participation that characterises the ethnographic encounter acquires radical tones. Anaheed Al-Hardan invites us to reflect on the implications of knowledge production involved in research practices in Palestinian communities. She argues:

> The questioning of the researcher's "expertise" during the analysis process, as well as the extent of the researcher's ownership of a text that is produced through the writing of other people's lives, are essentially interpretative issues which are yet to seep the language [...] of researchers engaged in research on Palestinians (2014: 68).

The first urgent question that I faced concerns the ontological statement of witnessing and the testimonies that I listened to, that I translated and transcribed. Organising these interviews was an important methodological junction to understand the processes of construction of meanings. One issue has been highlighted by Berliner (2005) who warned that the "abuse of memory" in anthropological studies makes the bounding of the subject increasingly shaded and less effective. Following Cappelletto's (2003) approach I will consider memory as a social practice that gains meaning not just through testimony, but also in implicit and corporal expressions, in silences and the "not said", in places and through mythopoetic forms.

Linked to this topic, it is essential to mention that the women I reached were people who had chosen intentionally to share with me fragments of their story[4]; a painful and heavy experience that sometimes requires a long

3. The fieldwork was carried out for a Master's degree in Anthropology at the University of Turin. The aim of this ethnography was to delineate the multiple forms in which the colonial power expresses itself and to draw out gendered strategies of resistance produced by the domination of the prison system. Most of the collected materials used for this paper come from observations during both informal and institutional meetings organised by the women's organisations and from interviews that I recorded. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, to allow a greater fluidity of discourse.

4. In this framework it is important to set out what "remembering" means. The act of remembering generates the repetition of an experience that resists and transcends any delimitation. The circularity of a mnemonic traumatic practice fields a plurality of ties that concern both the claim of memory and the need for oblivion as a tension to domesticate time and the past. See Beneduce 2010.

process of metabolising. As it was for Aisha, whose autobiography of detention was released in 2004, thirty years after her incarceration. She wrote in her pages: "they keep bleeding; the wounds were still open after 35 years…" (Odeh 2004).

During our conversation, Khawla[5], a former political prisoner from Nablus, allowed me to find ways to handle these memories. Her evocative words provided me with the conducting wire, "le fil rouge", whereby I performed this analysis to understand the meanings and strategies of subjectivation that are articulated within the interrogation space.

> When they put the bag on my head I thought about resistance, about all the fighters in Lebanon, in Palestine and Syria, and I thought that this bag had been put to all resistance fighters. I had to carry on and continue my struggle (Nablus, 29 September 2016).

As she said, her experience was the same as that endured by thousands of other Palestinian female prisoners. It is important to underline that the Palestinian context is a field where violence and suffering have not ceased to be and exist. They continue to permeate Palestinian biographies and to constitute new shapes in which the process of remembering and forgetting involves both personal and collective narratives. Hence, in Palestine these processes cannot be considered as already digested products, as completely historicised, but they act, produce and reproduce themselves within a political landscape and a social past that "bites and re-bites" (De Certeau 1986).

For these reasons the discourses on traumatic events, such as detention, need to be rethought through an interpretative lens that permits us to capture the social, cultural and political filters, the strategies and codes in which violence is articulated. The transition of historical and external power into a subjective internal force needs to be strongly investigated in order to understand the overwhelming experience of the unexpected that trauma can describe.

> […] Power assumes this present character through a reversal of its direction, one that performs a break with what has come before and dissimulates as a self-inaugurating agency. The reiteration of power not only temporalizes the conditions of subordination but shows these conditions to be, not static structures, but temporalized — active and productive (Butler 1997: 16).

It is important to distinguish between a power "acted on" the subject, and the emerging of a power "acted by". Indeed, it acts in at least two ways: first, as what is for the subject always prior, outside itself, and second, the one here explored, as a subjection that the subject brings on itself, as a precondition of agency. Moreover, as Fassin and Rechtman affirm in a section of their work

5. The names of the interviewees have been changed, in order to respect the privacy of the women I met.

dedicated to Palestine, for Palestinians "the representation of the past and their expectations of the future are not fixed in the landscape of trauma" (Fassin, Rechtman 2009: 211). Thus, it is urgent and necessary to recognise the multiple meanings in action, thereby permitting a view of the historical implications of traumatic events which other readings may flatten out. While a common understanding of agency is associated with speech and then relegates silence to the realm of passivity and of trauma, this article reconsiders silence as a constructed practice, able to capture intentions, beliefs and communication shaped by the particularity of the context (Seljamaa, Siim 2016).

To delineate this context and the implication of its trajectories, I will firstly concentrate on the context of the West Bank (as a settler–colonialist territory) and the Israeli judicial system in order to understand the pervasive presence of the occupation in Palestinian lives. Particularly, I will focus on the arena of interrogation and on how it can explain the dynamics of construction of subjects in the colonial encounter.

Colonial encounters

Referring to the Palestinian context as a settler-colonial context I mean the configuration that this territory encountered starting in the late nineteenth century; I mean the project to establish a "Jewish nation" in Palestine. This project culminated in 1948 with the occupation of Palestinian lands and the expulsion of millions of Palestinians, destroying cities and villages. Palestinians refer to this event as Nakba[6], "the catastrophe", in Arabic. In 1967 the Zionist project was extended to occupy the remaining parts of Palestine, including the West Bank, the area I worked in. Since '67 this form of colonial domain has been characterised by the pivotal and aggressive intrusion of settlement, occupation and territorial conquest, along with the capture of resources[7].

In this scenario, the Israeli judicial system is a bureaucratic net in which it is easy to get trapped, even theoretically ensnared. "Palestinian" is a fluid identity, not uniformly recognised. Therefore, different legislation exists depending on whether the Palestinian comes from the West Bank or Gaza, from East Jerusalem or from the historic Palestine, currently Israel.

6. In 2007 Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad Sa'di published an impressive anthology of memories of Nakba. This ethnographic focus on Palestinian memory reflects the importance of a deep study of the implications of this issue in the Palestinian historical landscape. Memory is poignant because it struggles with a still contested present. And, as the authors claim, "making memories public affirms identity, tames trauma, and asserts Palestinian political and moral claims to justice, redress, and the right to return" (Sa'di, Abu-Lughod 2007: 3).

7. For an insight into the history of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and on the relationship between democracy and colonialism, see Gordon 2008, 2010. For an anthropological perspective on settler colonialism see Wolfe 1999. To focus on the limitations of a settler–colonialist approach in the context of Palestine, see Barakat 2018.

In his "displaced autobiography" Murid al-Barghouti (2003) describes his feeling toward the multiple definitions of his country:

> And now I pass from my exile to their… homeland? My homeland? The West Bank and Gaza? The Occupied Territories? The Areas? Judea and Samaria? The Autonomous Government? Israel? Palestine? Is there any other country in the world that so perplexes you with its names? Last time I was clear, and things were clear. Now I am ambiguous and vague. Everything is ambiguous and vague (2003: 22).

It is precisely for this reason that I have decided to focus on the Israeli military system as applied to former political prisoners who come from the West Bank.

The Israeli military court system was created in 1967, when Israel captured and occupied the West Bank and Gaza. It is a part of a broader system that was established to govern the Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories (OT). As Hajjar cogently explains in her book, the legal status of Palestinian residents in this area is strongly contested, mainly because "Israel is not their state, they have no sovereign state of their own, and their status vis-à-vis Israel is that of 'foreign civilians' residing in an area under Israeli control" (Hajjar 2005: 2). Despite the establishment of a Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994, Palestinians remain formally occupied and stateless. The 1995 Oslo Accord divided the West Bank into three types of area. Areas A and B were officially handed over to the Palestinian Authority's control: these form an archipelago of 165 disconnected "islands" throughout the West Bank (Lambert 2013; Solombrino 2017). The remaining part of West Bank was designated as Area C, where Israel retains full control over security and civil affairs, including planning, building, infrastructure and development. The impact of this Israeli policy extends beyond Area C, to affect the hundreds of Palestinian communities located entirely or partially in the other areas. Furthermore, this configuration ensures that military forces have a widespread presence and an all-pervading control over Palestinian lives.

In this geographic and colonial context, the primary purpose of the military court system is to persecute Palestinians who are arrested by the Israeli military and charged with security violations (as defined by Israel) and other crimes. As Hajjar explains:

> The military and emergency laws enforced through the military courts criminalise Palestinian violence, as well as a wide array of other types of activities, including certain forms of political and cultural expression, association, movement, and nonviolent protest – anything deemed to threaten Israeli security or to adversely affect the maintenance of order and control of territories. The scope of these laws is expansive, penetrating virtually all aspects of Palestinian life (2005: 3).

Since the Israeli occupation in 1967, over 800,000 Palestinians have been arrested by Israel and approximately 15,000 of them are women. Presently there are 4,500 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, almost 40 of whom are women. These statistics are indicative of the persistence of an Israeli policy of mass imprisonment that is extremely high by any standard.

According to Israeli military law, detainees may be interrogated for 180 days, and for the first 90 days lawyer visits are denied. This long and painful time implies the construction of strategies and models of relationships that enable us to understand moral worlds which are, however, locally situated.

In her work, Lena Meari (2011) pursues the idea that the interrogation-encounter can be read as a liminal stage. As she observes, the interrogation "signifies a colonial rite of passage that encompasses direct confrontation between ideologies, beliefs, value systems and modes of being of the Palestinian and the Israeli interrogators within non-symmetric conditions that resemble and transform the colonial conditions themselves" (Meari 2011: 22). In these terms, she explains how the interrogation-encounter represents the entire colonial occupation. Referring to the interrogation stage as a "liminal" stage means that it can be read as a colonial rite where the condition of the subject and its being in relation with society is reassembled and transformed[8]. Liminality resides in a middle phase where the absence of a structure makes the development of new social realities possible. Furthermore, it condenses the past, present and future of every Palestinian who has been arrested, subjugated and displaced. The interrogation practices constitute the experience of every prisoner, transcending spatiality and temporality and revealing the representation of occupation.

As Aisha evokes:

> I remember the pain. It seemed like it came out from the belly of the earth and would come through my body like a twister reaching up to the sky. As if all the injustices of human history perpetrated by humans against humans were gathering up that night inside them and they would pour them out on me (Khoury 2004).

Fanon's disruptive and dense first publication *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008) also helps us to discern the singular features of the colonial encounter. Although Fanon's reflection is strictly directed at questions of Blackness and Whiteness, it is also nevertheless crucial reading for understanding the multiple levels of colonial subjugation and the terms of its overcoming. The

8. As Thomassen (2015) argues, liminality "is a concept with which to think, and it points towards a certain kind of interpretative analysis of events and experiences". In liminality the distinction between structure and agency fails and a new structuration takes place. For the context see Peteet 1994.

pivotal issue of recognition is highly relevant to delineating the conflictual relationship between coloniser and colonised. Following these analyses, in the next pages I will consider the interrogation arena as a metaphor for the colonial encounter, where practices of subjugation and strategies of resistance are mutually constituted in a struggle for recognition.

The burden of words

As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, language is a field where the investigator deploys strategies to permeate and subjugate prisoners' sense of reality. Language is where the struggle for recognition unfolds and becomes urgent and imminent.

In his work *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, Michel de Certeau (1986) dedicates a section to the concept of "nomination of the other" that can be used to analyse the linguistic process that occur between jailer and prisoner in the context of interrogation. De Certeau analyses the Shreberian expletive *Luder*, "to be rotten", as a term that connects the individual wounds with the decay of the symbolic body. The offence – from which the author starts to propose his reflections on the torture experience – is a nomination process: it does not concern the content of the word, but the word itself. "The name performs", he says.

Following this approach, the main interest is not in analysing the interrogation discourse as the result of power relations: the meaning of a certain behaviour is hidden in the words pronounced inside the filthy cells of the investigation centres. In the interrogation encounter, the distance between jailers and prisoners, torturer and tortured, is not just a symbolic or an ideological distance; it is material and effective: one speaks Hebrew, the other Arabic. During the interrogations the military speak Arabic, and this enforces the will and the act of appropriation of meanings. Furthermore, their knowledge of Arabic is meticulous and profound enough to engage with the historical, social and cultural system of Palestinians.

> He said: "You are Fatima? *Ana ibn al hijja w talla' w thanāya mata hada al hamāma t'arfwni*" [I'm Hijja's son and I can discover everything, even little things. When I put on my turban you will recognise me]'. This is Al Hajjaj, an Iraqi poet[9]. The meaning of this expression is "I cut heads". This is the meaning (Nablus, 11 October 2016).

9. Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf (661–714) was an important General of the army in the service of the Caliphate in the first Omayyad period. He was sent by Omayyad to pacify Iraq where, after surviving an assassination attempt, he pronounced the above-mentioned phrase. He is remembered as a brilliant strategist and administrator, but at the same time he is sadly notorious for the brutality he was able to enact.

Poems and proverbs that are typical of the Arabic expressive tradition are used to undermine prisoners. Good evidence of this is that the investigators often demand to be called by fake Arabic names: "Abu Nihad", "Shawki" ... an inverted process of nomination that has the purpose of overturning the belief system of the interrogated.

Another frequent example that is reported in many interviews concerns a typical expression: "*alf ʿain tibki wala ʿain immi tibki*" (thousands of eyes are crying except my mother's eyes). The emotional involvement of detainees becomes a way into provoke and induce them to surrender in the name of the family affection. As Samia confessed, talking about the moment in which she was arrested with her brother: "We sent a message to each other. I'm not your sister and you're not my brother. Because emotions and family affections can weaken us while we're at the investigative centre" (Nablus, 16 December 2016).

These recollections show the intention of exposing the prisoner, who is confronted with the pervasiveness of his language held by the enemy. The power of reaching every aspect of prisoners' existence is clearly described in this passage from an interview with Samia:

> What I want to say is that the investigators who work with female prisoners are specialists. They are doctors, professors of psychology that know how to behave with women. "We're specialised with women... we're specialised with women of this or that party...". This is the pressure that they exert on us. From the point of view of our society (Nablus, 16 November 2016).

This is what specialists do: insinuating into taboos – norms, interdictions, customs – to induce women to embody the offence into their own social and cultural context. *Luder* does not mean just being a slut before the interrogators but applies to all those the woman will meet in her social circle after incarceration. The prisoners' gender unequivocally produces a system of a specific language that can threaten their individual integrity, as women. It is right in this space that the will of subjugating the other gives rise to a body "remade" for and by the name (De Certeau 1986). The power of language, embodied by nomination processes, also feeds on physical harassments that aim to provoke a sort of depersonalisation. All the women, as they thought over the interrogation moments, tried gradually to find the right words to describe them. It is not just the humiliation. It is the sleep deprivation, the isolation cell loneliness and so on:

> [The investigator] used impolite and offensive words. After asking some questions he left me shackled to the chair for five, six, eight hours. I spent two days and two nights there (Khawla, Nablus, 29 September 2019).

And:

> [T]he cell is dirty, and you can't change your clothes. You're supposed to wash yourself, to change your clothes like a normal human being even if you are in jail (Samia, Nablus, 16 November 2016).

Luder is supported by an image that makes the woman into an almost unrecognisable subject: dirty, uncombed, filthy. A rotten body.

It is significant here to think back to Beneduce's (2014) suggestion, when he affirmed the importance, for anthropology, of not dealing only with cultures and imaginaries, but rather, primarily with bodies, whose condition and destiny "are made" by cultures of violence that undermine their right to exist. In these cases of extreme pain and daily violence, the distinction between bodies and languages, between physical and psychic dispossession becomes gradually more nuanced and imperceptible.

The act of language

The interactions that arise during the interrogation have specific aims: to confess or not to confess.

De Certeau, linking this unwieldy law of language to the extreme process of torture, affirms that "the goal of torture, in effect, is to produce acceptance of a state discourse, through the 'confession' of putrescence. What the torturer in the end wants to extort from the victim he tortures is to reduce him to being no more than that, rottenness" (De Certeau 1986: 41).

The issue of "confession" needs a first analysis on its linguistic use. Indeed, in Arabic, the term *i'tiraf* has a double meaning: *i'tiraf ila,* "to confess to", and *i'tiraf bi*, "to recognise the other" (Meari 2011). The act of confessing, of admitting, does not just mean the surrender to the enemy. In a wider sense, it refers to the recognition of the other and of oneself in what s/he says, in other terms, to believe in her/his words. This belief, properly the trust in the interrogator's words, starts from an induced destruction of the self, from an unmade and unspeakable body, to achieve a new attribution of meaning, a body re-made by the name given by the other.

The relational process that could occur is *i'tiraf*: to confess and to recognise the other, since there is not an effective recognition of oneself. On the other side, not to confess becomes an embodiment of a socially constructed meaning that could be analysed as *sumud*, steadfastness.

In many interviews, the act of resistance to the interrogation, the strength to not succumb to the tortures, is described with this word, *sumud*. Khawla said:

> The strength emerges from inside, from here. This is the beginning of women's struggle. When they took me and carried me to the office, when they offended me, when they insulted me, when they kicked me like an animal. There, there was *sumud* (Nablus, 29 September 2016).

In these terms, in the contest of occupied Palestine, *sumud* "encompasses a broad range of tactics and actions directed at maintaining a Palestinian presence on the land" (Ryan 2015: 300). From a wider perspective, it signifies the strong determination to resist the occupation and the oppression and has been developed as a political strategy as a part of the anti-colonial struggle. It is not a definable practice and it has come to embody "a whole range of significations, sensibilities, affections, attachments and aspirations" (Meari 2014: 547). In the interrogation, it refers to the practice of not confessing and not recognising the other but recognising oneself as a part of a struggle. When Khawla says "I thought about [...] all the fighters in Lebanon, in Palestine and Syria, and I thought that this bag had been put over the heads of all resistance fighters", she recognises herself as a part of the Palestinian struggle. That point becomes the point of juncture between the past and the present taken in their contemporary time. It might be said that *sumud* "blasts the continuum of history" and re-signifies the interrogation space/time. Present is perceived in its articulation with the past and with other past experiences as they are: just a "now" of confrontation.

Silence as a moral practice

The pervasive strength of the torturer stands in contrast to a form of language that can be inscribed in *sumud*: silence. Indeed, silence can be read as the result of symbolic meanings transmitted in a "confrontation culture"[10].

"Wala qlmi" meaning "not even one word"; this was a frequently encountered phrase, repeated in almost all the interviews. It is a conscious and structured strategy, as Samia told me:

> When, the day after [my arrest], I'd been taken to the investigative centre they asked my name, and my brother's name. I didn't say anything, I didn't admit anything. [...] I paid no attention to them, and I entertained myself removing nail polish ... The interrogation period was miserable, but I took the decision not to talk, not to say anything. It's in my political culture and is very important for me. [...] This is me. This is what I believe in. So, I had to be strong (Nablus, 16 November 2016).

10. The later mentioned text: *The Philosophy of Confrontation Behind Bars* could be considered as part of this confrontation culture, i.e., ideologies, beliefs, value systems and modes of action that are produced in the interrogation stage.

For this reason, silence should not be analysed through hegemonic psychoanalytical categories as just the result of a traumatic experience, where words no longer hold any value. It is, rather, the intentional choice of answering to the theft of meanings conducted by investigators. Silence expresses the intention to destroy the recognition expected by the torturer through other semantic methods. The eventuality of the "end of the world" (De Martino 2002) the crushing of an individual story, triggers the process of construction of a collective history of incarceration. In the empty space of silence, we can recognise the echo of a moral strategy that lays down the basis for the building of community and identity. As Samia said "It is in my political culture", "it's what I believe in".

Silence, in this context, can be read as what Fassin (2011) considers "moral economy". According to his analysis, the main reason to promote the concept of moral economy is to reintroduce history and politics. In these terms, that "production and circulation of values, norms and affect" acquires sense through its historicization, characterising a specific historical context and the subjects that are involved (Fassin 2011: 486).

The relevance of Fassin's analysis is strictly linked with the universalisation of the discourses of trauma and of humanitarianism. Moreover, Nicola Perugini and Neve Gordon (2015) have cogently problematised the limitations of these narratives and politics, arguing that the limit of human rights lies with the lack of structural critique and complaint against the structural basis of domination and the abuses that it generates. So, the cultural translation of moral issues and reformulated values transforms the way in which they are produced and performed. It is important to focus on both the global and the micro-level of moral economic processes to reveal the dialectical implications. They are profoundly entangled within larger social, historical and political issues. Thus, the de-construction of this dynamic concept allows social values to emerge as structured and shared by a process of awareness and historicization. It could also reveal the implications of multiple interactions and tension between the subjects.

Remembering "the resistance, the fighters in Lebanon, Palestine and Syria", is a micro-local and contextualised reference that highlights the conclusive discourse of De Certeau, who affirms:

> Accounts by torture victims indicate the stage of breakdown at which their resistance intervenes. They "eld up", they say, by maintaining (perhaps we should even say "enduring") the memory of comrades who, for their own part, were not "rotten"; by keeping in mind the struggle in which they were engaged, a struggle which survived their own "degradation" intact [...] (De Certeau 1986: 43).

Resistance becomes a claim to existence, to recognition of the subject in an unmade body. To insert themselves into the interstices of the "institution of rot", means to recognise themselves, to see their own reflection in all prisoners' image. The inexpressibility of pain and humiliation becomes the stubborn statement of refusal to speak, to "not say even one word".

Politics of silence

Attempting to listen to the multiple implications of silence could reveal more about the society or the community. The voices and the testimonies I collected are part of a wider framework of displaced, dispossessed and occupied lives that have been, and still are, silenced. In order to have a deeper insight into the multiple implications of silence, it is quite pivotal to recognise that silence shifts; it can be a power "acted on" or can emerge as "acted by" the subjects. This swing of power discloses the strategies by which Palestinians strengthen identity and the sense of community.

On one hand, the first implication has been studied by many authors. Rosemary Sayigh (2015), for example, examines the multiple forms in which Palestinian suffering has been silenced. Ilan Pappe introduces the term "memoricide" to refer to the acts that have led to the proclamation of the State of Israel (2007). The Nakba is not recognised as a historical fact, as being an event that actually happened; more importantly it is not recognised as a crime that should be faced politically and morally.

> The tale Israeli historiography had concocted speaks of a massive "voluntary transfer" of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who had decided temporarily to leave their homes and villages so as to make way for the invading Arab armies bent on destroying the fledgling Jewish state (Pappe 2007: 5).

This ejection of historical trajectories gave rise to and drives the urgency of relating individual memories of Palestinians to the events that characterised the second part of the last century (Feldman 2008).

The history and memories of Palestinian prisoners' struggle has had a central role to play in shaping the process that leads to the constitution of autobiographical memory and its relationship to the wider class of a collective one: the attempt to tame the present by shaping the past. An important example is the text *Falsafat al Muwajahah Wara al Qudban* (The philosophy of confrontation behind bars), written in 1982 by some political prisoners, which deals with the question of what a Palestinian should do during the interrogation process, based on prisoners' own experience. Esmail Nashif (2008), who has analysed the social implications of this book, recognises its potential to create the basis for building both community and identity.

On the other hand the second implication, that of silence as a moral practice, as a producer of meaning not only breaks with a common reading of agency as linked to the verbal, but also encourages an increase in attention paid to the unspoken and the unspeakable as they emerge in fieldwork and in the research process too. What the anthropologist can access in terms of information is structurally delimited by the existing reality of colonial occupation[11].

Speech and silence should not be regarded as a dichotomic and static entities, but rather as the effort trough which both parties seek a position and recognition. In this case, the "recognising" of the interlocutor and the awareness of what can be spoken or what the recorder bulky ears' have to circumvent, was perceived as an *I'tiraf* exercise, a methodology of confession that recalls my previous analysis. Behind words there are acts and strategies, there are "hidden transcripts", that represent the "practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed" (Scott 1990: xii).

The memories I heard are thus inherently partial, constrained and incomplete, as are the ethnographic truths (Clifford, Marcus 1986).

For that reason, I consider them to be "fragments of memories", as shreds of life that come out. The challenge here arises with the identification of history where there is not a diachronic linearity, where contradictions and historical incongruities emerge. Salih's work on the affective and bodily narratives of Palestinian refugee women helped me to deal with these memories "[...] As women remember and talk they produce a performative effect that shifts the boundaries of the legitimate stories to tell" (Salih 2017: 757). In this sense, the crucial point is the meaning women gave birth to through and by their experience, as fragments of stories, in an attempt to connect them with each other.

Conclusion

In these pages I have reconsidered and focused on the codes and tactics that regulate relations – including the ethnographic ones – as well as on the multiple forms in which these relations are expressed or left unspoken. The interviews were conducted in Arabic. As a researcher, I "appropriated" their mother language as well. For this reason, I consider that translation needs a

11. For example, the question of confession I referred to in the previous section does not concern just those who keep silence, but also the ones that yield under torture. In this case it is the prisoner that confesses who is bound to silence. The implications of this tricky and presently unexplored question are not the main claim of this inquiry; however, I refer to Bornstein 2001 or Kelly 2010. I also recommend the immersive film *Omar* directed by Hany Abu-Assad (2013).

deeply attentive, cautious respect for that world of meanings that language transmits. I highlighted the way in which subjectivities shape themselves in the "liminality" of interrogation in an attempt to look at the relationship between suffering languages and their social configurations.

Referring to the colonial encounter condensed in the interrogation stage, I looked back to Fanon's analysis of decolonisation. He wrote: "Decolonization is the encounter between two congenitally antagonistic forces that in fact owe their singularity to the kind of reification secreted and nurtured by the colonial situation" (Fanon 1963: 2). From within the colonial constellation of power, and specifically the colonised struggle against it, Fanon portrays the mode of subjectivity, the agency that emerges throughout the anti-colonial struggle.

Khawla's words that opened this paper, allowed me to explore the way in which these women live, embody and narrate their struggle. Furthermore, they underline the intimate relationship that exists between an individual experience and a collective memory that can be historically and socially situated. The act of veiling, of hiding and covering the prisoner's head under the bag, is, conversely, where the De Martinian concept of cultural apocalypse could occur in his etymological meaning: "to reveal", "to show what is hidden". Cultural apocalypse is constituted as a crisis, as the end of a world that holds and at the same time it discloses a new beginning (Clemente 2005). In this sense, the apocalypse's image highlights all the historical, political and social factors in which violence acquires meaning through the idea of community. It creates an inextricable link between individual and collective experience, where the past and the present dialogue in a contemporary iteration. As I explained, the risk of an individual breakdown becomes concrete and imminent during the interrogation. The robbery of meanings implemented by the soldiers – who speak Arabic, the prisoners' mother tongue – the permeating use of language achieved through focused offences and the shaming conditions of isolation cells, contributes to construct offended, unrecognisable and "rotten" bodies. The crisis gets closer exactly at this juncture and the possibility of the end of the world triggers productive devices where the individual history links with other similar experiences. There recognition can take place, the reconsidering of oneself as a part of a group.

At the same time, it is reductive to read the memories of suffering and the stories of the dolorous interactions under traumatic categories only. According to Beneduce's (2010) remark, the more we speak about "trauma", the less visible history becomes and the victim is inevitably beaten back towards the pain of being unable to build history and shared memory.

Furthermore, the hegemonic languages of trauma run the risk of making people believe that this is the only, or at least the most effective way, to make their story heard in the international arena (Khalili 2007; Meari 2015).

As Rauda affirmed during a passionate dialogue, they were not "entered [in jail] to be victims or stuff like this... we were *munadelat* – fighters – not victims!" (Nablus, 29 October 2016)[12]. Not recognising themselves as victims is a product of the embodiment of cultural codes that pass along winding paths of violence. This expression also evoked Abourahme's work for me: *Nothing to Lose But our Tents* (2018). Quoting the words of a Palestinian refugee "We're not refugees. We're fugitives and nothing more", the author affirms that "the fugitive, here, is the figurative inversion of the refugee. Both figures start with a constitutive movement, but where the refugee ends in terminal limbo and the stasis of a camp, the fugitive keeps moving, and moving with consequence' (Abourahme 2018: 33). In that sense Rauda's words can be explained by a sense of action, of moving in a self (and socially) constructed direction, rejecting a static definition and identification.

Understanding the suffering languages and strategies that arise from unbalanced power relations means capturing the deep sense of the words and of the silences, rebuilding the winding paths of meaning, both individual and collective, that are involved.

In conclusion, I recollected De Martino's lesson. He identified a powerful antidote to the conceit of psychological categorisation through paying attention to the historicity and the languages of suffering. I recognise in his works the hard and precious effort to transcend pain with value, and to reintegrate subjects into history. It is necessary to capture the way in which those who live and suffer a "not decided" history can think of themselves and the surrounding world. Therefore, the aim of this paper has been to delineate figures of crisis and redemption, subjects in which I discerned a thrust to "get out of the night" and to think beyond the category of victims, offended by and removed by history.

12. This argument is interesting for the reversal relation that could emerge looking at works that analyse the processes of the controversial term "victim", both as a status produced by domination and as an identification – or not – with the term acted by their own "victims". See Taliani 2011.

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