Negotiating gender under occupation
– A study of womanhood in Dheisheh refugee camp, Bethlehem.

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Summery
Patriarchal power structures and oppression from the occupation are two major influences in how women in Dheisheh refugee camp can live their lives. Gender roles are strict and traditional and women are homebound and generally marginalized in the community. Daily life is made difficult by the occupation making violence, fear and loss a plainness.

However, the occupation has caused traditional gender roles to sway, in terms of women having to work outside the home in order to support the family, because husbands and fathers either being killed or imprisoned by the Israeli Occupation Forces, IOF. Women are also given higher education in a larger scale than before because education has become both a form of resistance but also a way and a hope for the younger generation to build a better future for themselves and the community. Making work and education tools and strategies for women to gain more independence. Strength is the outcome of living under dual oppression. Women are forced to be strong by the harshness of living under occupation and are made strong by constantly negotiating their roles as women within the stern framework of a patriarchal society under a violent occupation.

Key words
Palestine, refugee, gender, womanhood, occupation.
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Introduction

Imagine that you are fast asleep in your comfortable bed, it’s in the middle of the night and you are having a sweet dream about that special someone, suddenly you are woken by a loud noise. It’s three o’clock. You swiftly sit up in bed, you can smell the teargas, your heart starts racing. You know exactly what is happening. You get up and close the windows, seeing the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) on the street below and the camp’s youth with hidden faces retaliating by throwing rocks and homemade pipe bombs. You wonder who the IOF is here to retain this time. You join the rest of the family in the living room, it’s easier to ride the raids out together, as you look your brother in the eyes an another bomb goes off close by and suddenly there is a sharp knock on your front door. Angry voices yelling in Hebrew, you don’t understand what they are saying but the next second they break down the door and you are suddenly staring into the barrel of several fire arms, they are here to take your father away.

Violent, scary nightly raids by the IOF is a normal occurrence in Dheisheh refugee camp. Because the camp is seen as a focal point for the resistance against the occupation, the IOF has a bigger focus on the camp’s inhabitants.¹ It is not hard to imagine that the women in the camp feel that they are subject to a much harsher form of oppression than people not living in refugee camps. Then also imagine that you are a woman living in a culture that is dominated by patriarchal power structures that further limit your freedom of movement, speech and choice all based solely on your gender. Can you imagine building a life in the same situation as these women? As you will see in this study, the women have adopted strategies for negotiating their gender roles in the Dheisheh refugee camp community, strategies that are based on the context and clever in the way they navigate the intricate borderlands between the dual oppression they are faced with.

This study started with a four-week internship at the youth organisation Laylac in Dheisheh refugee camp.² During those four weeks I not only conducted the interviews with the women for this study but I got a first-hand glimpse into what it is like to live their reality. The women spoke freely and shared many stories and experiences, it was clear that they wanted to communicate how life really was for them in the camp, what kind of hardships they face in their daily lives and how they keep living in the tough situation that life is for a Palestinian woman with refugee status. Therefore, the study came to be about how different power structures effect womanhood and how women negotiate their positions in society on a daily basis.

¹ Nina Gren, Occupied lives, 2015, p. 7 f
² Laylac homepage, http://eng.laylacdo.org/, 160511
Purpose and subject of inquiry

The gendered nature of war and conflict is male coded and builds on stereotypical gender roles as the violent masculine and the victimized feminine. General research about conflict tends to uphold a male dominated perspective thereby hiding women’s perspective in the general discourse about conflict.

It is possible to assume that women are affected by and experience conflict differently than men. By focusing on women’s narratives the study aims to challenge the “Big Story” discourse about Palestinian refugees that portrays refugees in big numbers and statistics which causes a dehumanised perception and reproduces stereotypical notions of women in conflict as passive victims of their circumstances.

The study also aims to add a female perspective to the general discourse in order to challenge the male dominance of the field, doing this by highlighting the multi-faceted ways women daily face and cope with the harsh situation that it is to live as a woman and a refugee in a Palestinian refugee camp.

The questions this study aims to answer are:

- How does oppression from both culture and occupation effect women in the camp?
- In what way does women in the camp negotiate culture and oppression?
- In what way has the Israeli occupation had an effect on the female gender role in the camp?

Theoretical views and key concepts

According to Foucault, the individual, the subject, is not autonomous. The subject is constructed and governed by a various number of power structures in society, especially by dominance and subordination. Therefore, the subject is also the arena on which power is acted through and upon. Relations of power are everywhere; the subject does not exist

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4 Maria Stern, Malin Nystrand, Gender and armed conflict, SIDA, 2006, p. 31
5 Nefissa Naguib, Women, water and memory: recasting lives in Palestine, (Women and gender, the Middle East and the Islamic world, v.6), Brill Academic Publishers, 2009, p. 4
6 Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the holocaust, Cambridge, 1989, p. 150f
7 Nana-Korantema A. Koranteng, Women in the machinery of war, Pomona College, 2016, p. 25
outside of them but they are rather the basis of identity and forms the conditions for the making of identities and therefore power relations are even incorporated within the subject as a creative force of the self. Power is therefore always both suppressive and productive, a negative and positive constituting force at the same time.\(^9\)

I will focus on two theories concerning power structures; first, Foucault’s theory about surveillance and control, as explained through the theoretical framework of the *Disciplinary strategy* and *Panopticon*. Second; the *heteronormative matrix*, gender roles and the gender contract as described by Yvonne Hirdman, Fanny Ambjörnsson and Judith Butler.

**Surveillance and control**

The disciplinary strategy is one strategy to assert power where the focus lies on constant surveillance, registration and restriction of movement of the subject. It assigns each subject with its place, its property, its death, its body; in other words, the authority in power has the power to sort subjects into categories of, for example citizen or noncitizen, life or death, in order to keep control over the subjects. The disciplinary strategy creates a never ending surveillance and every aspect of the subject’s life is saturated by the authority in power.

The strategy was, according to Foucault, a way of containing an outbreak of the plague in a small town during the sixteen-hundreds. However, the plague outbreak can also be seen as a representation of confusion and chaos. For a situation where the law has ceased to exist and individuals show their true selves. A situation where there would be a need to put order back into place by redistributing “the right body”, “the right name”, “the right place”, to each subject to restore order. Thus, the leper, is made into a danger for the society that needs to be eliminated and/or excluded in order to keep others safe. By the creation of an inexhaustible, ever watching machinery of power to constantly monitor the society and keep its subjects under never ceasing surveillance.\(^10\)

The leper and the danger she/he causes can take many contemporary forms, like terrorist, suicide bomber, extremist, modern woman etc. Without forgetting that the right to define such labels and the danger they pose, lies with the authority in power.

In addition to the disciplinary strategy is, the British philosopher, active in the late 1700s, Jeremy Bentham’s more physical manifestation of the ever present, ever watching authority in the shape of a guard tower called the Panopticon, which Foucault used in a more metaphorical way to describe how surveillance could be internalized into self-

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\(^9\) Fanny Ambjörnsson, *Vad är queer*, Stockholm, 2006, p. 47 f

policing. The Panopticon is a guard tower in the middle of a circular prison, through which the guards stationed there can see everything going on in the cells. The prisoners cannot see the guards in the tower and therefore never know when they are being watched. The prisoner is always aware of the surveillance and due to the constant awareness the exercise of power becomes automatic and definite. The structure of the Panopticon serves as a perpetual visual reminder for the prisoner of the policing and the asymmetrical power structure. Even though the exercise of power is discontinuous, as in not always in action, the prisoners never know the difference and so the effect is permanent. In a sense, the Panopticon creates an internalized surveillance where the prisoners police themselves as much as the authority in the Panopticon does, making the prisoner a co-creator of the surveillance and in effect maintains the asymmetrical power structure.11

Because power is acted on and through the subject, resistance will be most effective through the subject. To re-define labels, standards and norms that have been put down by others and re-invent oneself as a defiance to the power, to take back the definitions is to take back power.12

**The gender contract**

There is no one uniform attitude towards women in the Arabic-Muslim world, however, they share a similar expression of culture13 which is predominantly patriarchal with conservative gender structures.14 A patriarchal society is denoted by a male dominated societal structure that gives men a predominant status in the family as well as society as a whole. Women are always subordinate to men, to which level, varies due to spatial aspects.15 Leaving the father as the head of the family to maintain the rules and laws of the gender structures, these gender structures between male and female is what Judith Butler calls the *heterosexual matrix*.

The heterosexual matrix is a cultural construct based on two easily identified genders; feminine/female and masculine/male, they are each other’s opposites and hierarchically defined through a mandatory heteronormativity.16 Which means that male and female are

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11 Foucault, p. 201 ff  
12 Mansfield, p. 63  
14 Gjermund Granlund, *Violence against women among the Palestinian refugees in Jordan*, Olso University, 2014, p. 15  
15 Dictionary, searchword: patriarchat, http://www.ne.se.e.bibl.liu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/l%C3%A5ng/patriarkat, 160504  
sexually attracted to each other and are expected to reproduce.\textsuperscript{17} How women and men are supposed to act within the heterosexual matrix is called \textit{gender roles},\textsuperscript{18} and the list of requirements for each gender is what Yvonne Hirdman calls \textit{the gender contract}. Which is a package of thoughts, practices and terms in relation to gender and the relation between sexes, the package that defines the stereotypical feminine and the stereotypical masculine and their relations to each other, a structural restraint for both genders. Including a hierarchical division between the genders making the male superior to the female.\textsuperscript{19} Heterosexuality and the gender categories are forced and socially binding, and have through history been maintained through exertion of power. Because the obligatory heteronormativity contains an assumption that everybody is heterosexual other arrangements become abnormal.

The heterosexual matrix is problematic in the sense that it does not allow for any variations, it is rigid in its forms it cements heteronormativity through punishment of deviants. Society is its gatekeeper,\textsuperscript{20} not only policing sexuality but also gendered behaviour,\textsuperscript{21} like for example if a woman wants children or not, if she wants to work outside the home or not, if she wants to wear a vail or not. The requirements for each gender are to be followed if one wants to remain within the normative mould accepted by society. To step out of them would consequently mean that one does not fit into society. Society playing the role of the categorizer of bodies, deciding through norms which is right and which is wrong, and also being the surveyor that you never know when is watching. Therefore, a fear of violence or exclusion is created and rules of the norm are internalised and self-policed.\textsuperscript{22}

However, to challenge normative structures can be seen as to challenge an oppressive power structure, and therefore, the power exerted has also created a reaction; resistance.

\textbf{Key concepts}

The term community will only be used when describing the community inside the camp, because it differs from the community outside the camp. The women interviewed often referred to the camp as “one hand” when talking about the community and social networks inside the camp. By making use of a practice called ‘neighbouring’ they ensure the strength

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ambjörnsson, p. 112 f
\item \textsuperscript{18} Nationalencyklopedin, search word: könsroll, \url{http://www.ne.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/könsroll}, 160502
\item \textsuperscript{19} Yvonne Hirdman, \textit{Genus- om det stabilas föränderliga form}, 2., [rev.] uppl., Liber, Malmö, 2003, p. 77-84
\item \textsuperscript{20} Rosenberg, p. 11
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ambjörnsson, p. 61
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ambjörnsson, p. 46 f
\end{itemize}
of the networks by nurturing social relations between neighbours and thereby connect the whole camp in a network where help is given freely and selflessly, creating their own social security.\(^{23}\) There is a high sense of community in the camp and they rely on the collective for protection by acting together, hence the term one hand.

Resilience and/or steadfastness, \textit{sumud} in Arabic, is a term often used to describe Palestinian women. It is to not only be alive but to live one’s life in spite of the occupation and everything that it brings. It is to build a house and a home that is meant to remain there for a long time to come. It is to build a family and enjoy it but also, it is to hold on to the identity as a Palestinian and that Palestine exists and will keep existing, because they are still there.\(^{24}\) Therefore it is also an aspect of resistance, Gren writes that “showing steadfastness has long been a political strategy for Palestinians” \(^{25}\)

\section*{Previous research}

\textit{Women, Water and Memory: Recasting Lives in Palestine- Nefissa Naguib}

Nefissa Naguib has in the book \textit{Women, Water and Memory: Recasting Lives in Palestine}, made several interviews with women in the small village of Musharafah in Palestine about the importance of and the changes that came when piped water came to the village. By focusing on water and meaning of fetching water from the well before pipes were drawn she taps into important subjects of womanhood in an Arabic culture and society. In her own words;

“This book is not only about changes that come about when spring water is replaced by piped water; it is also an allegory for the impress of significant historic moments on women’s lives, about people’s lives as lived. Water, and the way it is organised thus opens up a world of interrelated activities, of systems of meanings and of social and cultural identities.” \(^{26}\)

The women’s narratives of life, family, past, present, marriage, the younger generation, the changing times and the occupation, to name a few, are all connected to the stories of the water and are all interwoven. By combining historical, cultural and gender perspectives she gives an in-depth view of the life and situation of the older Palestinian woman and by

\(^{23}\) Campus in camps, \textit{Common}, Al Quds University, 2013, p.10 ff

\(^{24}\) Alexandra Rijke, Toine Van Teeffelen, “To exist is to resist: Sumud, Heroism and the Everyday”, \textit{Journal of Palestine Studies}, 2014, 59. about \textit{Sumud}, \url{http://www.palestine-studies.org/jq/fulltext/165375}, 160504

\(^{25}\) Gren, p. 92

\(^{26}\) Naguib, p. 3 f
this she aims to contest archetypical views of Palestine and its people by making ‘native’ stories heard.  

**Campus in camps**

“Campus in camps” is a project that started in Dheisheh refugee camp in 2012 in collaboration with, inter alia, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA), Camp improvement programme and the Al Quds University. The aim with the project is decolonizing knowledge in and about the camps to overcome decades of social exclusion, political subjugation and apathy.

By employing critical learning, the project aims to change conventional notions about life in the camp by involving teachers from university and students with and without refugee status. By first unlearning what they call; alienating knowledge, they can relearn knowledge that is based on real life in the camp and, furthermore, produce their own knowledge from within the camp to decolonize knowledge about Palestinian refugees and the camps. Campus in camps has since the start become an educational platform that keep creating generational leadership able to introduce new ideas and initiatives in camps that can challenge stereotypes and dominant power relations.

It has also made a number of research studies in the camp, for example *The Collective Dictionary* which is exclusively based on the refugees own words and expressions about the contemporary situation in the camp and of being a refugee.

Another study, *The Garden, making place*, looks into the meaning of the camp as a space in transformation. From a mostly humanitarian space into an active political space. The study delves into the meanings of the space in the camp through individual’s narratives about living and sharing the narrow spaces in the camp with thousands of others. To give an understanding about how living in very confined space effects identity creation of refugees.

**Occupied lives, Maintaining Integrity in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in the West Bank- Nina Gren**

In this extensive study, Nina Gren gives several perspectives of life and living in Dheisheh refugee camp. She means that;

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27 Naguib, p. 21
28 Campus in camps homepage, about. [http://www.campusincamps.ps/about/](http://www.campusincamps.ps/about/) , 160419
29 Campus in camps, Vision, Al Quds University, 2013, p. 9
30 Campus in camps, *The Garden, making space*, Al Quds University, 2013, p. 2
“By investigating everyday life, I try to provide a better understanding of both the dynamics of political conflicts and of the concerns of people living amid conflict, as well as their reasons for taking action or not.”

Through a twelve-month long fieldwork, living in the camp, Gren covers important topics such as living with ongoing violence and the normalization of such a situation, politics, resistance in daily life, hope and despair, culture, traditions and much more. With a focus on tactics of how the inhabitants of the camp overcome and recover from hardships caused by the occupation and how they find meaning in life through utilizing the concept of resistance through *sumud*. Her fieldwork took place during the second intifada which also gave her a rare glimpse into how the community in the camp functions as one to ensure safety but also to re-establish normalcy and social continuity.

The study *Woman, water and memory* highlights the important role that women play in the Palestinian generally highly patriarchal society and how that role has changed through time, however, it does not focus on women with a refugee status. The study made by *Campus in Camps*, which only focuses on the situation inside the camp gains its relevance through just that, giving an inside perspective from the camp. However, as mentioned before, general research is more than often male oriented and according to the traditional gender roles that follow with a strict patriarchal society; public spaces are for men, the home is for the women. It is obvious that the female perspective about public spaces in the camp are wanted in the studies. Although, still giving an invaluable inside-out perspective from the camp. *Occupied lives* is by far the best and the most well-rounded study I have come across during the work for my own study. Gren captures so many perspectives of life in the camp and ties them all together on a comprehensible level, which is an overwhelming task. Though the book is very general, she draws the reader in on a slightly more personal level by for example by depicting a funeral from her own perspective. To have a chance to challenge the 'Big Story' about refugees, generalization is a foe to be reckoned with. Moreover, what these studies have in common is the focus on individual narratives about the situation in Palestine, all of them either have a certain gender perspective or a refugee perspective but none of them have both.

Research on female refugees in refugee camps in Palestine is scarce and as one of the women I interviewed stated;

> We [women] are half of the population here, where is our place?

It can be assumed that in a situation of conflict and life in a refugee camp affect women and men differently. However, general research often tends to focus on the male perspective and leave out women’s specific perspectives and experiences. Thus by exclusion of a certain gender perspective, creating a risk of recreating taken for granted assumptions about women, especially when the study subject is part of a different culture.

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31 Gren, p. 11
and/or religion.\textsuperscript{32} It is only by looking critically at research and identifying what is being excluded from the general narrative about a subject and looking directly at the exclusion that one can challenge presumed assumptions about it.

Thereby, a study that focuses on refugee women’s experiences of living in a refugee camp from their own perspectives and narratives is the only way to challenge taken for granted assumptions about them. It is important to do so for the sake of a chance to effect the general discourse about refugee women to broaden it and to make it more inclusive.

**Method**

**Description of the field**

Dheisheh refugee camp & Laylac

Israel declared independence in 1948 and engages in war with the Arab states. Israel wins and displaces 700,000- 800,000 Palestinians.\textsuperscript{33} Dheisheh refugee camp was created on a hillside outside of Bethlehem in 1949 as ca 3000 people, from 45 villages around Jerusalem and Hebron, fled their homes. The same year, The United Nations Relief and Works Agency of Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established and assumes responsibility for Dheisheh refugee camp and 18 other camps in the West Bank, still to this day providing school and healthcare to the camp. Currently the Dheisheh refugee camp is less than 1 square kilometre in size and has a population of ca 15,000.\textsuperscript{34} Palestinian refugee camps are in general seen as localities of resistance and Dheisheh refugee camp is particularly linked to resistance and struggle. Therefore, the camps become an important target for the Israeli army to intermit unrest.\textsuperscript{35}

The camp is also the home of The Palestinian Centre of Youth Action for Community Development, Laylac which was founded in 2005 with the purpose of mobilizing the younger generation in the camp to make the youth in the camp a bigger part of Palestinian community development. By creating projects in co-operation with the youth they have created a strong collaboration and bond with the youth in the camp and also established Laylac as an association for the people by the people. Through a comprehensive co-operation with national and international organizations, spreading of information through


\textsuperscript{33} Dictionary, Nakba, [http://www.ne.se.e.bibl.liu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/\%C3\%A5ng/nakba](http://www.ne.se.e.bibl.liu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/\%C3\%A5ng/nakba), 160426

\textsuperscript{34} UNRWA, Dheisheh Camp profile, [http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/dheisheh_refugee_camp.pdf](http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/dheisheh_refugee_camp.pdf), 160426

\textsuperscript{35} Gren, p. 7 f
various campaigns and projects about the camp, refugee status and the occupation is a large part of Laylac’s work.\textsuperscript{36}

**Demarcation**

For this study I chose to demarcate the informants to only women from the age of 20 and up, born and raised inside Dheisheh refugee camp. This demarcation was made as refugee women’s situations differ from women without refugee status in Palestine, and although it would have made for an interesting study to compare women’s narratives with and without refugee status that was not the aim of the study this time. The gender perspective is chosen due to the lack of research from women’s point of views in the fields of ethnicity, migration and conflict, therefore the study will only focus on the women’s perspectives.

When society, culture and community are referred to in the analysis it is meant as the society, culture and community within the camp because definitions of society, culture and community is very dependent on geographical location in Palestine, therefore; society, culture and community are not used as a general understanding in this study.

Furthermore, I have, in my analysis, focused on power structures based on the women’s narratives. Since they did not mention religion at all it is not part of the analysis. The discussion if the vail is religious or not is not for me to say, the women discussed it as belonging to the community rules and therefore that is how I have chosen to analyse it.

Also, again, since the focus of this study is the women’s narratives about womanhood in the camp and how the occupation effects life, I will not delve further into the history of the occupation, why and how it came to be.

It is the women themselves who have identified themselves as being oppressed as women in a patriarchal society and it is their own definitions of how the oppression takes form that have been used in the analysis. It is not something that I have interpreted for them.

In terms of taking a stance in the conflict, I sympathize with Palestine. It is clear that human rights and international law are violated by Israel as the occupying force, and that Palestine has an international right to resist. But, I do not agree with any violent actions from either side of the conflict.

The use of the term Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) is based on the informants and their use of the term. It was the only term they used to describe the soldiers. I am aware that there is another common term, namely; the Israeli Defence Forces. However, it was not used by the informants and therefore, IOF is used.

**Qualitative Interview as a method**

I choose qualitative interviews as my main method of collecting material for this study due to the method’s flexibility, giving the person interviewed the space and the interviewer the

\[36\] Laylac homepage; projects, [http://eng.laylacdo.org/?cat=39](http://eng.laylacdo.org/?cat=39), 160427
possibility to focus on the interviewee’s interests and viewpoints.\textsuperscript{37} Especially with the setup of the semi-structured interview, which gives the interviewed the possibility to answer questions more freely and express their own viewpoints and what they think are important aspects in a more multifaceted way. Also, it gives the interviewer the freedom to pose follow-up questions, asking for more explanations on things mentioned in answers that were not in the original questions manuscript and to seize the opportunity to let the interviewees colour and shape the material.\textsuperscript{38}

As Kvale & Brinkmann writes, however, the more unstructured an interview is the more likely it is that the interviewees will give unexpected and spontaneous answers that may not coincide with the interviewer’s original thought.\textsuperscript{39} This did happen during the interviews and I was forced to revise my questions when I started to identify what the women thought important to talk about concerning womanhood in the camp. I do not see this as a disadvantage; rather, it made the material more vibrant and interesting and more in tune with their perceived reality.

\textit{The interviews}

Nine in total, were meant to be single, semi-structured interviews with only a translator and myself present in order to capture the individuals dictum of experiences and view of their situation. However, the situation came to be different from what I had first imagined and in retrospect reflected the women’s statements about life in the camp; how life in camp lacked privacy, being crowded and the close social bonds. Meaning that, at the majority of the interviews four to seven other individuals were present, ranging from family to friends to neighbours who sometimes wanted to help with answers and tell stories of their own. I did ask if they would feel more comfortable talking with me in a more private setting but they did not mind the audience so it became of utmost importance for me to remain flexible and go with the flow. Some of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the women and became a great learning opportunity of social life between the woman and her family, friends and neighbours. The interviews were mostly a casual and light meetings, although some of them became emotional and tears were shed when telling stories of family members being killed or when reflecting on the future.

\textit{Informants}

The nine women interviewed ranged between the ages of 21 and 55. All of them had lived their entire lives in Dheisheh refugee camp. Three of them were students at the university, one was a stay at home mother and five of them were working women. My requirements

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\item\textsuperscript{37} Alan Bryman, \textit{Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder}, 2., [rev.] uppl., Liber, Malmö, 2011, p. 412
\item\textsuperscript{38} Bryman, p. 415
\item\textsuperscript{39} Steinar Kvale, Svend Brinkmann, \textit{Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun}, 2. uppl., Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2009, p. 147
\end{enumerate}
\end{flushleft}
for the informants were that they identified as women, had lived in the camp their entire lives and that three of them were in the age group 20-25, three in the age group 25-35, and three in the age group 35 and older. The age groups were chosen with the hypothesis that women from different age groups depending on their situation in life had different views on womanhood and life in the camp. There was a slight difference but it became irrelevant for the study.

The selection of informants was made jointly with my translator. I gave her my requirements; as stated above. She asked women if they wanted to participate and then presented them to me and if I agreed she set up the meeting. A method easily called a comfort selection, as Bryman calls it. Because I was reliant on my translator to establish contacts with the informants.\textsuperscript{40}

Translation

Because I am an outsider looking in, and not a normal occurrence in the social life of the camp and also with the language barrier, I do not speak Arabic, my translator became a gate keeper to the society.\textsuperscript{41}

As mentioned above, the majority of the interviews were translated by my translator. She is born and raised in Dheisheh Camp, as the interviewed women. Which means she has invaluable thorough knowledge and combined with her excellent skills in the English language she made for a perfect translator. We had a good collaboration; I stated the question she listened carefully to both my questions and the answers and tried hard to translate accurately from English to Arabic and vice versa. All which are important skills for a translator during interviews to have.\textsuperscript{42}

Even though she did an excellent job at translating from Arabic to English, there is always a risk that expressions and explanations get lost in translation. And sometimes she helped out with asking questions that she thought that I would be interested in hearing the answer from, but always asked before she did. This was also a risk for the study, because after a while she understood where my interests were and she could steer the informant’s answers in the direction that she knew I was interested in. \textsuperscript{43}

\textit{Transcription of the interviews}

As Kvale \& Brinkmann states, there is no general form or way to transcribe an interview; it is up to the transcriber to decide what kind of and how much information that is necessary

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Bryman} Bryman, p. 433
\bibitem{Bryman} Bryman, p. 387 f
\bibitem{Kvale} Kvale, Brinkmann, p. 160
\bibitem{Bryman} Bryman, p. 387
\end{thebibliography}
in the transcription.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, I started transcribing in quite some detail but in the process of transcribing I soon noticed what I needed to include in the transcriptions. Because I will use a combination of critical discourse and narrative analysis, with a greater emphasis on the latter, I did not feel the need to, for example, mark pauses or ‘thinking sounds’ in the transcription. However, I did feel the need to mark emotional changes like crying, laughing or when they were being ironic. The notes I took during the interview, about for example how many people were in the room, if the interview went smoothly or not and so on, were helpful to fill in the gaps that could not be heard in the recordings.

Coding the material

Early on in the process of this thesis I had a pretty good idea where the study was leading and what themes were important for the women. After the transcription three clear themes crystalized: \textit{education, work, strength}, and these became the central key words for the study.

I continued to code the material by highlighting sections in a different colour for every theme and proceeded to go through the material several times one theme at a time, taking notes and figuring out the common denominators for each theme. To get a clearer view of the complex connections between the themes I drew a mind map with each theme in a bubble and all the key words for each theme around the bubble and drew lines between them to make the connections visual and more clear, that has been a great help in keeping connections and relations untangled.

\textbf{Narrative and critical discourse analysis}

As mentioned before, I make use of both critical discourse and narrative analysis in this study, because when I had finished transcribing the interviews I realised that the women adopted a storytelling fashion to talk about their situation, memories and lives in the camp. In those stories were clues to why different strategies were utilized to which only a narrative analysis was not enough to explain, therefore I added discourse analysis.

When analysing narratives one focuses on how individuals position themselves in a context comparing descriptions about the past, present and future. How the context influences the individual in terms of positioning can also be analysed through a narrative perspective.\textsuperscript{45} Because the context and its influence is a focus for this study, adopting a critical discourse analytical view is fruitful in analysing the effect of power structures on experiences and stories disclosed in the narratives\textsuperscript{46}, giving the study a deeper understanding of the dual oppression women are subject to and how it effects their lives in Dheisheh refugee camp

\textsuperscript{44} Kvale, Brinkmann, p. 197

\textsuperscript{45} Bryman, p. 527

\textsuperscript{46} Bryman, p. 484
and where they position themselves in the context as women and individuals. Taking the stance that speech and action are either working for or against power exertion/structures, the question of power will always be relevant to how and why subjects act and react in different situations.47

**Research ethic requirements**

At the beginning of all the interviews I read them the letter of information for the study which included the ethics of research. The letter of information is enclosed at the end of this document.

**The requirement of information:** telling them what the study was about and that they could choose to answer or not answer any question they liked without further explanation. 

**Risks:** that the interview could cause strong emotions and that they had full right to stop the interview whenever they wanted without further explanation. Likewise, the risk of safety which is further discussed below.

**Confidentiality:** The requirement of confidentiality was the biggest concern, given that they are under occupation by the Israeli government and for their safety I did not ask for any personal information other than their age and if they had lived in the camp their entire lives. For the same reason, their consent was given orally to avoid having their signatures on paper to keep their identities safe from the Israeli authorities in case there would be questions about the papers at the airport security check.

The interviews were recorded on a smartphone and the files, after being uploaded to Linköping University’s cloud storage, erased from both smartphone and computer for safe keeping during travel.

In the analysis the women’s dictums will be, as far as it is possible, made anonymous, by for example not using names of individuals or families mentioned in the interviews. Although, I cannot ensure full anonymity from individuals living in the camp, it is a small geographic area where recognition from the text will always be a risk. Quotes will be changed into a more grammatically correct English which can help to further anonymize the dictums.

**Consent:** stating that they understood the information and gave their consent to participate. 48

**Ethical reflections**

You are so lucky; you have no idea how lucky you are

47 Kvale, Brinkmann, p. 248

Were words often expressed after the interviews, and yes I was. I could, unlike them, travel unhindered to places, I could move. I, as a Swedish citizen could freely move about in a way that they could not. Suddenly a few letters, forming a word in my passport, the right word, ‘Sweden’ as opposed to ‘Palestine’, gave me more worth as a human being than the women I interviewed. This made me uncomfortable because I have never been so bluntly faced to this extent, with inequality and oppression. It was something I had to relate to in many situations, not only the interviews, and being constantly reminded of in interactions with individuals I met during the four-week period the internship lasted. I could never avoid it and again, had to constantly relate to it and be as humble to the situation as possible.

Qualitative interviews have from start a built-in power imbalance, caused by the structural set-up of the interview situation. In connection with my privileges as a Swede, as described above, it caused further power imbalance and it worried me that it would affect the interviews in a negative way, that I would be met with suspicion. However, the fact that the purpose of the interviews was for a thesis and that I stayed with Laylac, which is a well-known organisation in the camp, appeared to legitimize my presence. Also the fact that my translator was one of them, a women born and raised in the camp, who knew the social and cultural customs seemed to make them more at ease with me and more likely to share and talk freely. For me, in a sense my translator became what Kvale & Brinkmann calls a Trojan horse.

Interviews are a knowledge creating conversation and all participants are involved in the creation of the knowledge documented, regardless if they are conducted with or without a translator. One can argue that even the recording device is an interfering aspect in the interview situation. Personally, I put extra thought into which clothes I wore to the interviews, to not risk being disrespectful. During the interviews I actively thought about my stance, tone of voice, nodding, being encouraging and sensitive to the situation, especially in moments emotions ran high. All to make the interviewee comfortable, feel safe, in control, heard and understood.

To maintain a high ethical standard during the whole research process the interviewer has a responsibility in the analysis process to make an as accurate representation as possible. I have been highly aware of my ‘western glasses’ and my preconceived ideas about the culture and the situation that the women live in. In order to minimize the risk of reproducing defective conceptions of refugee women, that they for example are victims of

49 Kvale, Brinkmann, p. 48 ff
50 Kvale, Brinkmann, p. 92
51 Kvale, Brinkmann, p. 34
52 Kvale, Brinkmann, p. 91
their circumstances, lethargic and dominated. Being conscious of one’s own preconceived notions about another culture is a good start, however, one must remain reflective throughout the entire analysis process.

**Analysis**

Life in the camp is hard. There is no rest from the occupation, it is an ever present force. Making its presence known by a constant fear of nightly raids, bullet holes in walls serve as a permanent reminders of places individuals have been killed in clashes. Everyday life is marked by worry and fear;

> It effects the woman outside and inside, the daily fear, day by day from the occupation. When they come in the night and what they do against our children, and also the woman she should care and she thinks about her family all the time, what she will cook for them, where are my children? All our conversations, even when we sit together we will talk about the occupation, like even we speak me and the girls and we went to sit and we talk about the occupation, everything, occupation is inside everything in our life.

Sharing the women’s situation for four short weeks it was striking how much frustration and anger was caused by the different ways the occupation effects life. Roadblocks, checkpoints, “settler-only” roads, watchtowers, gates, night raids, barriers, and curfews are just a few of the ways the occupation controls movement and daily life. Making freedom of movement severely impaired, checkpoints are everywhere to hinder travel between cities, when traveling to that city could mean a job to support one’s family, education for a better future or crucial medical care. Making every aspect of life hard and strenuous.

The constant waiting and anticipating the next time the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) raids the camp in the middle of the night, and the fear when they come. The raids are violent; rubber coated bullets, gas bombs and sound bombs are used every time and injuries are common. It is a strenuous and scary experience and it takes its toll on one’s mind. I lasted two weeks before I cracked under the pressure from the constant presence of fear and violence but also suddenly being forced as a woman to be hyper aware of my body and the rules that were applied to it in in terms of how much skin was showing, how women conducted themselves in public and also struggling with how women are spoken to and treated by men in general. However, I knew all the time that my stay was limited and that I was leaving for a safer, calmer place but for the women in the camp there is no other choice than to keep going because they are trapped living this situation.

> You are like living in a jail, but a big one, there’s no rooms but it's a big jail.

For women, who are thought of as a responsibility of men, they also constantly have to face the community and their questions about why, where, how and who. It was clear, when walking in the camp with my translator and her friends, men asked them questions every few meters. On top of that, the camp is very crowded, the houses are tightly built, and
privacy does virtually not exist. A lot of the women described living in the camp as “hard to breath”, “choking”, “closed” and “tight”,

Because it’s a small place, everyone knows everyone.

The woman inside the camp, all her life is about the camp, it’s like closed.

When I asked the women which three qualities a woman needed to have in the camp, they all gave similar answers, she needs to be educated, strong and work.

So therefore the analysis is divided into those three categories; **Education**, focuses on the importance and the meaning of education other than perhaps, making a career. **Work**, and how it effects women’s situation and identity. And **Strength** deals with the women’s notion and definition of strength, how to be strong and what strength constitutes for a woman in the camp.

It is not possible to separate the three concepts completely from each other, they are tightly intertwined and sometimes preconditions for each other.

**Education – the key to awareness**

Education gives younger generations hope for the future, it is resistance against the occupation and it empowers women. The higher the education the better and abroad if possible. There was a clear divide between the younger and the older women regarding education; for the younger women the focus was to gain an education and to use it for resistance and to change society. For older women, who most of them had children, their focus was to work and earn money to pay for education for their children to make it possible for them to make a better future.

If she educates herself, study hard and finishes her studies, I think she will be stronger and have more confidence to face society and any troubles or problems that can come.

Facing the society is a large part of the women’s daily lives. They are subject to a great deal of patriarchal power structures that limit their choices.\(^{53}\) The power structures, which partially also can be called female gender norms, can also be seen as used as a tactic through Foucault’s Disciplinary strategy. In place to keep order by categorizing and policing subjects, women. Education and awareness gives confidence and strength to face society, question norms and stand up for one’s choices.

If she is educated, she can say no. She will be strong enough, if she doesn’t believe in the veil and her father or the family wants her to wear it, she will be smart enough

and have the methods to convince them why she should not wear the vail if she doesn’t want to.

It is a balancing-act for women to negotiate their roles in society but to do so within the framework of their culture and their society in order to respect it and avoid being looked at as ‘bad’. One can say that the women both police themselves according to the internalised societal power structures but at the same time constantly negotiate their roles as well. Education plays a vital role in navigating in this intricate negotiation of position for the women, but also for the rest of the camp because their perception is that education also creates a general open-mindedness and that is a necessity with the other part for the negotiations to have an effect. The occupation plays a big role in the negotiation of gender roles. Seeing as how exertion of power, in this case in form of oppression based on ethnicity, always is a creative force too it creates a ripple-on-the-water effect and affects another oppressive power structure namely the patriarchy. According to my informants, more women are sent to University now than before, partly because education is also seen a form of resistance. For example, women are allowed by the community to participate in demonstrations against the occupation, which, according to my informants, they were not allowed to do before and accredit education for producing more open-mindedness among the men in the camp. However, there would not be any demonstrations without the occupation, and one can wonder if educated women were not seen as a form of resistance if the changes would come about without it?

I live in an open-minded family, I have open-minded people around me and even though my mother would allow me to wear shorts I wouldn’t wear them because I know that the community wouldn’t allow it. I respect my community and I respect how people in the community think. Not just to go out with shorts and they will say she’s a bad girl, here it’s not good to say at the girl that she’s bad, she needs to show respect.

By operating within the frameworks of their society they also make their own definitions of what being a woman in Dheisheh refugee camp means. They also define the possibilities to change the definitions and at the same time stay true to their own culture and respect the community and the people in it. Suleiman describes how Western feminism does not understand nor fit the struggle of feminism in the Middle East, especially concerning equality for women. Therefore, it was vital for feminists in Muslim communities to find their own way of working within the frameworks given by culture, society and religion.54 These women were not outspoken feminists. However, all of them questioned the norms and acted against them daily.

It is a balancing-act but education will make it slightly easier. According to my informants, society will “look at you in a different way”, in a better way as an educated woman, because;

54 Suleiman, p. 137 f
higher education is expensive in Palestine, only families with money send their daughters to study at university. It becomes a question of class, even though the women ensured me that everybody is socioeconomically equal in the camp, there is a clear hierarchy structure where education grants a higher status for women and a higher status for the family that can afford to send their daughter to school. Therefore, it is hard to say which factor has the largest impact on the effects for women from education, if it is the perception of money tenure or the empowerment of the individual brought from the education in itself or the collective effect on a society with a high number of educated individuals.

For women in the camp, the struggle is dual, however not completely divided. They face oppression as women from the patriarchal community and as Palestinians from the occupational forces. As women the struggle is against oppressive gender norms and societal structures, as Palestinians the oppression and the violence from the occupation. However, as Palestinian women, they are seen as the bearers of their culture, a culture the occupation is trying to mitigate, therefore the act of self-definition becomes highly important but requires education and awareness to do so.

The community controls through disciplinary strategies and the occupation is the ever watching panopticon. They are always aware of it, although, never knowing exactly when they are under surveillance, they negotiate terms for both at the same time with the only tool they have, education. It is hard and exhausting work and help comes from an unexpected direction, namely, the occupation. Because education is the only non-violent weapon Palestinians have against the occupation. It can be assumed that education does create open-mindedness making it easier to accept change in for example normative gender roles. Education becomes a weapon for women to fight gendered oppression and for Palestinians to resist the occupation and therefore becomes a pre-condition for societal change. A positive effect from a negative force.

Education is the weapon to resist, it is the tool for improvement and change and therefore, it gives hope for the future, a better future.

Education also creates more opportunities for women to work, earn their own money and independence. Which will be discussed in the following chapter.

**Work – the key to independence**

In conformity with education and the impact it has on women’s position in society, working outside the home is a part of women’s lives that has been affected greatly by the occupation.

55 Stern, Nystrand, p. 9

56 Lois Griffiths, Martin Griffiths, “The Palestine story: to exist is to resist”, *New Zealand International Review*, vol. 37, No. 5, 2012
As men are the head of the family, it is their role to support the family by working and earning money. The problem is that it is harder for men to find work and with ca 10,000 husbands, brothers and fathers imprisoned in Israel and many dead, often responsibility to support the family financially falls on the woman, despite also having responsibility for the home. Making loss of a close relative a typical women’s issue, as Per Gahrton puts it.\textsuperscript{57} However, it is an issue created by the occupation. Traditionally women do not work outside the home. The occupation has by creating a situation, for the camps inhabitants, where desperate times calls for desperate measures, budge the gender roles and created a slight change in the female gender role and allowed for the wiggle room to let women work outside the home without shaming them or the family. Which has now made working outside the home a given for the younger generation of women. And again one can see the effects of the occupation on the female gender roles, one can wonder if this change for women concerning work outside the house would have come about were it not for the occupation and the creative forces such an oppressive power brings with it. Therefore, it is possible to assume again that the oppressive powers of the occupation have loosened up the gender contract further and made it necessary to negotiate both gender contract and disciplinary strategies.

When she doesn’t work, she has to ask her husband or family for money so she will live by their rules and limitations. But if she earns her own money she is more independent and doesn’t have to ask others for money or permission to do something. If you don’t have money you can’t move.

Earning money as a woman does not only mean that the family will be taken care of, it also brings freedom and independence, not only in a financial aspect but in the way of freedom to move, to act and to be a bigger part of the community.

For a woman in the camp, to have a job, means that she can take care of her family and be a decision maker, make her own decisions.

She will be in more control of her own situation, she is earning the money and therefore she is part of the decision making concerning how the money should be spent. Since it is the woman’s role to take care of the home, cooking, cleaning, raising children, taking care of elders and so on, she will have further fulfilled her duties to the home and family by making sure they are fully taken care of. Even though the financial support of the family is the man’s role; if he earns the money, he supports the family, if she earns the money she takes care of the family. Earning money will still be coded as male or female according to the assigned gender roles, allowing work outside the home for the woman but at the same time cleverly staying within the traditional framework of both society and gender.

One could also say that by earning her own money and being the provider of the family, she takes on certain male coded properties. Such as independence, control, freedom and

\textsuperscript{57} Gahrton, p. 576
power to make decisions, which could be an aspect of her gaining a more influential position in both family and society. However, it does not take away from her duties as a woman or other rules within the cultural/societal/gender framework that applies to her as a woman. Nonetheless, a woman earning her own money will be empowered and looked at differently by society, just the same as with education. The interviewees meant that the empowerment worked through increased confidence. However, a woman can have all the confidence in the world but if she is not allowed by community to act with it then she will remain in her place. One can yet again wonder if it is the tenure of money that influences women’s position in society more than anything else?

Education is, for women, nearly a precondition for employment but money is always a precondition for education, making it a question of the chicken or the egg. Even if it involves danger for their lives, women will go to work;

I am afraid but I must go, my children they go to school and my husband has no job, even if I see Israeli soldiers I have to be strong because we need the money. One morning, I go at six in the morning, there were Israeli soldiers in the camp and they put a gun to my head and I tried to tell him I was only going to work so I can support my children but he told me to shut up or he will shoot me.

There is an aspect of resistance in going to work every morning and sending the children to school, it is part of creating a normal life in an un-normal situation. And with the money earned creating a more tolerable context, investing in the children’s future and hoping that it will get easier for the next generation. Resistance in form of everyday actions is a way of defining their everyday life as their own and not something that is created or affected by the occupation. Even though it very much is.

**Strength – the outcome**

She needs to be strong

Was the first answer all the women gave when I asked which characteristics a woman needs to survive in the camp. What is their definition of being a strong woman in Dheisheh refugee camp? For sure it is not muscular strength? Even though strength is part of everything, I will divide it into two parts for simplicity. First, strength that can be seen as acquired through education and work, second, strength that evolves from living under oppression from both community and occupation.

The community is not fair, there is a lot of discrimination, and if she’s not strong she will be lost in this community because she will not be aware of anything that’s happening around her, maybe her family will force her to choose something or do something and she don’t know but she will do it, because she doesn’t know anything, she’s not aware of the conditions.

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58 Gren, p. 80
Education, awareness and work generate societal strength for women which means that she will be granted access to be a larger part of the community, making it possible for women to further negotiate and strengthen their status and individuality in society.

In this sense strength is something that can be acquired through education and employment.

Weak, uneducated, unemployed women should then not be a part of the community in the camp because without challenging the female gender roles, they stay at home where they ‘belong’ because they are not aware or educated enough to know how or why to do it. Education brings awareness which is key for challenging the norms but the problem remains; without money no education. It is then possible to assume that only better-off families can afford sending their daughters to higher education. Does that automatically mean that those less well-off are less aware or just that they cannot afford higher education for their children? And also, does it mean that the struggle against gender based oppression is an issue for the individual and not the collective?

There is a kind of strength that cannot be taught or learned. It is the kind of strength that comes from constantly living with fear, worry and struggle. It is the kind of strength one can only build by having been brought up in a place where violence, loss and hardships are everyday occurrences.

We don’t have children with small minds here, they have very big minds. Because living in a camp where the Israeli soldiers break in every night, taking our cousins, fathers, you would see that is effects the way we think, the way we do things, it’s made our personalities stronger in a way.

It is an effect that is impossible for them to avoid. Another woman put it like this;

The woman, she has big responsibility and really, she is strong but she is a woman, she has feelings, she’s delicate, she is a woman like any woman in the world, but the situation built her character to be strong. I want to be as any woman, say Hi, but you know my situation doesn’t give me a chance to be a light woman or even a sensitive woman, I feel, I cry, I’m a mom, I’m a lover, but we are strong because the situation doesn’t give us chance to be another woman...

The harshness of the situation forces women to be strong, even if they would like to be ‘lighter’ women, they do not have that opportunity. So they cope, they keep smiling and laughing but inside they are uneasy, worried what will happen next, if their children are safe or not.

I swear, I swear that we are suffering. Maybe we are smiling on the outside but on the inside we are uncomfortable. We welcome other people in our house and doing everything all the time but on the inside we are distressed.

The extraordinary inner strength that women in the camp have is ambiguous. It is sorely needed to cope and a pre-condition for resilience, sumud. At the same time, they are aware that it is created by the situation that they live in and they do not see it as if they have
another choice than to be strong and face everyday life in the camp with everything that it entails. Although, they want nothing else than change, calm, security and to be lighter women. Once again, the oppressive power of the occupation is working like a creative force; inner strength and the act of resilience can be seen as a reaction to the oppressive powers.

If strength in relation to resilience is seen as resistance against the occupation, then one can wonder if one can exist without the other? If so, then strength and resilience are a reaction to the oppression and should therefore not be able to belong to a certain gender.

However, as postulated earlier; women experience conflict differently than men, the interviewees agree that women in their culture bear more of the grief and worry than the men do, due to prevailing gender norms and societal structures, therefore the women are strong in a different way than men, according to them. And since women face oppression as both women and Palestinians, one could assume that they have a point. One big difference in female and male strength (in relation to the occupation) can be found within the normative gender roles. As stated by the interviewees, women need stronger inner strength than men because they have the responsibility for the entire family and the responsibility also entails keeping them safe, fed and under a roof and therefore suffer more when something happens and struggle more to take care of the family than men. Therefore, since men do not have this responsibility they do not need to be as strong as women on the inside. All according to the gender contract, with the slight difference that they feel that women have the upper hand in inner and emotional strength. However, also due to the gender hierarchy within patriarchal power structures, male strength will always be more credited.

One can say that the mix of inner and acquired strength is the concept of the ‘strong personality’.

The biggest thing that living in the camp has affected me, is that it built my strong personality, it is the most important thing for me. I am strong, polite, respect my community with how I wear my clothes, it helped me a lot, so the most important thing for me is my strong personality.

The strong personality can be seen as the fruit of their labour, living their whole lives with dual oppression and constantly contesting and negotiating their positions in community and society. And it is sorely needed, danger and fear are common ingredients in daily life in the camp. Whether they are going to work, school or to visit neighbours, there is a constant present fear and anticipation for danger and it takes a strong personality to be brave enough to despite the fear go outside and continue life as usual.

Continuing life as usual is the core of resilience as resistance, sumud.

To live despite uncertainty, requires unimagined strength.
The Palestinian woman here in the camp, she keeps smiling, you will see all the women smiling whatever happened. She will be smiling but her family is broken and there’s a disaster inside of her but she is smiling.

*Sumud* can be seen as giving the hardships of living as a Palestinian refugee a meaning and a way of coping with the oppression. It is most definitely a form of resistance, showing that they are just as resilient as the occupation and staying in Palestine despite the hardships, even if it means living in a refugee camp, showing that they belong to the land.

And what can be a greater resistance than building a home, raising children, foster them to keep resisting and keeping a life for your family? Or if the IOF breaks into your house in the middle of the night and destroys your home, but you clean it up and turn it into a home again? It is possible to imagine that the female gender role and its capacity of homebuilding is fundamental to the whole concept of *Sumud*, and therefore the question of its survival, if one assumes that the female gender role will keep evolving and change further, is legitimized.

Inner strength, strong personality, *sumud* cannot be thought or learned. It can only be acquired through living an entire life with the multifaceted hardships that it is to be a Palestinian woman in Dheisheh refugee camp.

If a woman decides, if she decides that that colour is not green, it is not green, it’s blue, then she will say that it’s blue and it’s blue, if she wants, but if she don’t care she will not do anything.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to answer three questions about womanhood in Dheisheh refugee camp through the narratives given by nine women living in the camp. The purpose of the study is to examine the female gender role within the frameworks of both occupation and a stern patriarchal society to challenge stereotypical notions about women in conflict. Answers to these questions have been attained by applying theories about gender, such as Judith Butler’s *heterosexual matrix* including notions about the *gender contract* as described by Yvonne Hirdman and theories of power like Foucault’s thoughts about surveillance and control.

Throughout the analysis process it has become clear that the occupation poses a highly negative intrusion in the women’s lives but also that it is cause to great changes in the patriarchal community. The female gender role has been effected and changed by the

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60 Gren, p. 92
power exercised by the occupation. Oppression of women comes in two variations but act as one because both are intertwined in community and daily lives to the degree that they cannot be separated.

To simplify; oppression from the occupation is based on their ethnicity and oppression from community is based on societal power structures, heteronormative matrix and gender norms based on their gender. To reconnect with Foucault and the non-autonomous subject, womanhood in Dheisheh refugee camp is highly affected by the different kinds of oppression. Effecting women through limitations in choice, whether it be based on gender and what kinds of life choices are available to them, or based on ethnicity and for example the physical limitations posed by the occupation through check points and living with loss. Making limitation the most prominent effect of oppression on the women’s lives from both occupation and patriarchal power structures. However; their reaction against the oppressions, again showing that power is always both negative and positive in the way that it creates reactions and action with those who are subjected to it, is the basis of the negotiation process.

Because womanhood in the camp greatly consists of negotiation. Constantly relating to community and what is expected of them as women and negotiating their own path that may or may not coincide with the family’s or the community’s expectations. However, they need to conform to the existing framework that they want to change to avoid being rejected from the community; thereby the importance of negotiation. Achieving their own definitions of womanhood in the camp in the process. By making use of education and work as instruments for negotiating their places in the community and what is important to remember is the how the occupation has created positive changes in the normative gender roles, allowing a wider berth of movement and choice in favour of women. That said, it does not take away from the grief, pain and suffering it first and foremost is guilty of. However, education and work are problematic in relation to each other; since education is expensive only richer families can afford sending their daughters to higher education and work is hard to find for un-educated women.

Strength is both the outcome of and the prerequisite of life for women in the camp. So strongly connected with the occupation that it is perceived by the informants as forced on them, they do not have a choice but to be strong.

Inner strength is created in relation to the occupation, individual strength is acquired through education and work. Both of them working together to create the invaluable concept of a ‘strong personality’ which extends to the concept of sumud, which cannot exist without strength and is also intertwined with women’s education and work. Sumud becomes an even more interesting concept regarding its dependence on the normative female gender role if one considers gender role’s inconstant form.

So, how has this study helped to change the discourse about women in refugee camps?
First, this study has shown that women in Dheisheh refugee camp are not helpless victims of oppressive power structures whether they be societal or from the occupation, they are actively disputing and contesting them daily. Second, strategies have been formed and are used both individually and collectively in uniform with their current situation to influence change in their community.

Third, women and resistance in terms of sumud, are inseparable, showing that women have great informal power in the community in regards to resisting the occupation.

The keyword being active, they are not sitting idly by watching the men throw rocks at the IOF and letting them make all the decisions. Through strategies like making their own money they assure a larger place for themselves in the community. They want to be involved and they are fighting to be involved. Through education striving for a better future, both for the individual woman in terms of personal development with awareness, strength and independence through work, and for the community by increasing open-mindedness to further the development of gender roles to effect change in the community. In the process strengthen the resistance against the occupation.

In conclusion; women in Dheisheh refugee camp mainly suffer from two kinds of oppression. The oppression and the power exerted by the occupation has effected the patriarchal power structures. Women, by making use of tools like work and education, work to further effect change in society and on normative gender roles. As a consequence of constant exposure to oppressive power structures from both community and the occupation, women feel like they have been forced to be strong and that the strength is a requirement to survive living their situation. At the same time, it is a prerequisite for the form of resistance called sumud. A form of strength which can only be acquired by constant negotiating a situation like the women face in daily life in Dheisheh refugee camp, Bethlehem.

For further research I would suggest an in-depth study of the concept of sumud, as a form of resistance, through a gender perspective focusing on the younger generation women in the camp and their perception of the concept. Maybe asking the question if the evolving female gender role pose a threat against sumud as a form of resistance against the occupation? The same material as this study is based upon could also be analysed through theories of social capital in terms of Dheisheh refugee camps special network between the camp inhabitants and the concept of the camp being ‘one hand’, creating their own security both social and against the IOF. Also a comparative study between Palestinian women from the camp with a refugee status and women living in a city without refugee status, to compare their views of gender roles and if the occupation has influenced them differently.
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Appendix

Interview participant information

(This information was given orally, therefore the layout is not designed)

Before you decide to participate in this interview there are a few important things that you need to know before giving your consent to participate.

The focus of this study is women and their stories about life in the Dheisheh camp. The stories will be a part of my Bachelors thesis written at Linköping University. The stories are planned to be collected through a series of individual interviews with 6-8 women. Participation in the study entails an interview that will be carried out individually with me and will last between 30-40 minutes. During the interview you have the right to answer any question you like and you also have the right to decline to answer any question. After the interview you also have the right to delete sections of the interview or to withdraw the interview in its entirety from the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose to end it at any time you want without any further motivation.

The interview carries with it risks since it may bring up difficult and sensitive memories which may trigger strong emotions on your part. If that is the case, you have the right to choose not to answer the question or end the interview without further motivation.

The only information about yourself that I will ask you to provide and which I will mention in my results is that you are a woman who has lived her entire life in the camp. Apart from this you will not be required or asked to give any other information about yourself or your identity during the interview. This is done to establish a high level of anonymity. The recorded interviews will only be handled by myself and will be encrypted and stored in a cloud during travel.

Do I have your verbal agreement to participate in this study?