

Neighborhood in Nablus City: The Formation of a Social Safety Network during the Siege

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In 2002, Nablus City in Palestine had to face more than one siege. The first siege affected all Palestinian cities; the Israeli army invaded the Palestinian territories and imposed a curfew for around a month in April. Later the same year between June and October, the city of Nablus witnessed a siege that was characterized by immobility and destruction. No one was allowed to leave their home; to do so put their lives under threat. This paper will reflect upon the role of the neighborhood in the construction of a social safety network. This network supported the inhabitants in their struggle to confront the occu-

pational apparatus and to practice their daily activities despite the three-month siege that was imposed by the Israeli army. This paper focuses on neighborhood relations: describing their distinctive influence on peoples' lives and reflecting on the meaning of being a neighbor, the obligations of neighbors within the same district, and how these relations manifested during the siege in 2002 and afterwards.

Keywords: Palestine, Nablus, Neighborhood, Siege, Occupation.

Introduction

What does it mean to be a neighbor in Nablus city? What impact do social relations have on coping with the Israeli curfew that was imposed on the families living in the city in 2002 and in the years that followed? During my fieldwork in 2012 and 2013 in Nablus, a city in Palestine, I had the chance to meet families and individuals from differing backgrounds. It was striking to me that despite their different backgrounds they had the same reaction to the mention of the word *siege*, which was *allah lā y'īdha min ayyām* (Hope that God will never let those days return). Their conversations made it clear that their memories still have a major influence on their actions and daily behavior.

At that time and in the years after, I kept communicating with people and families in Nablus. I used different approaches to be able to gather adequate data that reflects the reality from within. Participant observation and narrative interviews were my main tools to gain in-depth information about the daily life of the inhabitants. Meeting individuals, families, men, and women from different backgrounds and places in the city allowed me to delve deeply into the quotidian life of the people. In time, I was able to develop a strong relationship with them and gain their trust, which I cherish deeply until today. Not

only did they welcome me in their homes and share their experiences during and after the siege, they also included me in their daily life by telling me stories that can hardly be found in the literature. People's narratives and their stories can provide us with vital knowledge about human relations.

Everyone's story reflects his or her individual ways of dealing with the past. On the one hand, its consequences can still be detected easily in the present by looking at the continuing Israeli occupation and the deteriorating economic situation. On the other hand, empty spaces where buildings once stood or demolished houses and many other damaged buildings can be seen in the different areas of the old city which are: Al-Yasmīneh, Al-Gharb, Al-Qaryūn, Al-'Aqaba, Al-Qīsariyyeh, and al-Ḥabaleh and are a further reminder to people of the suffering they experienced.

The first siege was when the Israeli army invaded all Palestinian cities in April 2002 for around a month. Later, also in 2002, Nablus was invaded again for three months. During those days, no one was allowed to leave their home without putting lives under threat. Daily activities were forbidden due to the restrictions on mobility. People were allowed to leave their houses only every now and then for a few

hours. It was impossible to practice simple activities, such as going to work or buying from shops, since everything was closed. What is fascinating is that the city seemed like a ghost town, but in reality, people were able to continue practicing their lives under the surface. Even though no one was allowed to move, people were still able to sneak to their shops with each other's help without being seen by the soldiers. Even schools continued to run in each neighborhood, where all students were gathered and the teachers took on the responsibility to teach them. They were able to contact each other by calling at home and exchanging information about the location of the soldiers. Knowing the exact places allowed the inhabitants to move from home to home or to their workshops without the soldiers seeing them. The inhabitants of Nablus were able to continue this pattern until the long siege came to an end.

The uniqueness of the city of Nablus is manifested in the social relations that exist among its inhabitants. This paper reflects on how the inhabitants were able to survive such a long curfew by relying mainly on their social network. Doumani illustrates that it is challenging to comprehend how the inhabitants of Nablus managed to stand together during the hard times: "The short explanation is that historical

forms of solidarity and social networks, especially on the family and neighborhood levels, have combined with well-organized popular committees on the grassroots level to provide the minimum necessary degree of social cohesion" (Doumani, "Scenes from Daily Life" 1).

These social relations were the main factor promoting survival during the siege. Kinship ties were also important, but this paper will shed light on neighborhood relations, which became part of what I call the "pillars of resilience" (Kamal 38). According to Hastrup (106), resilience is "an emergent quality of all responsible social action; it is the rule and not the exception of social life, given that all societies must demonstrate a degree of flexibility to operate and ultimately to survive". The pillars of resilience are tradition, religion, kinship, and neighborhood, the combination of which helped individuals survive in the wider context, through support and inner relief. Altogether, the pillars led to the formation of a wide social safety network that individuals were able to rely on during the siege. Each one of the pillars is explained in different papers I will publish separately.¹

One of these articles (Kamal, "Nablus Under Siege") analyzes religiosity, kinship, and the creation of resilience. It provides a deep insight into the concept of resil-

ience and its origins (Leslie and McCabe 116; Hastrup 28; Berkes and Turner 487; Holling 14; Alexander 2708). In addition, it highlights the specificity of the term in the Palestinian context and how it has evolved over the course of the 20th and 21st century. Furthermore, resilience's inherent link to the Palestinian concept of *sumud* (steadfastness) must not be underestimated (Thoburn 378; Rijke and Teeffelen 86; Meari 549; Schiocchet 3).

This paper focuses on the fourth pillar: neighborhood in Nablus. This article reflects upon neighborhood relations in Nablus and their role in the formation of the social safety network during the siege. It does so by describing their distinctive influence on peoples' lives, the meaning of being a neighbor, and the obligations of neighbors within the same district. This aspect links to Bourdieu's reflection on social practices, which he sees as "a set of dispositions that generate practices and perceptions. The habitus is the result of a long process of inculcation, beginning in early childhood, which becomes a 'second sense or a second nature'" (5). In Nablus City, daily practices are embedded within the perception of how duties and obligations towards family and neighbors should be manifested through rituals and occasional practices. These regular practices in Nablus can be considered distinct

social processes that contribute to the formation of neighborhood ties. From this perspective, this paper will delve with an ethnographic lens into what neighborhood means in the context of Nablus City during times of crisis and insecurity.

A reflection upon Nablus City

The city of Nablus is located between two mountains, Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal, and lies to the north of Jerusalem/al-Quds. Nablus is situated within area "A" following the Oslo agreement.² It played an important role in history (Al-Zarū 36-37) and witnessed various different rulers (e.g. Roman, Turkish, British, and Israeli occupation). Due to its continuous active resistance to Israeli occupation,³ it was separated from other Palestinian cities by several occupation methods, mainly military checkpoints.⁴ Historically, Nablus City is considered a hub of resistance, as Beshara Doumani explains: "Nabulsis are proud of their city's epithet, the 'Mountain of Fire', an appellation deriving from a local legend that Napoleon, upon approaching Nablus, met his defeat when the inhabitants set forests and olive groves ablaze, burning the French soldiers. The legend speaks about one of the traditions for which the Nablus region is famous: it is a center of resistance to outside control" ("Scenes from Daily Life" 46).

Since *An-Naksa* (the setback)⁵ and during the Israeli occupation, the inhabitants of the city lost their land and their basic rights. While I was sitting with an old man in his 70s in his family house, he remarked: "I was outside of Palestine when it fell under the Israeli occupation in June 1967. When I entered Palestine and saw the Israeli flag I started to cry." This man was not crying merely for a lost plot of land. His deep sorrow was caused by the loss of the rest of Palestine in the 20 years since *An-Nakba*⁶ (disaster, catastrophe). As Taraki explains:

The consequences of the Nakba in 1948 and the military occupation in 1967 have been far-reaching and must be brought into the analysis of family and household dynamics. Statelessness, economic dependency on Israel, water and land confiscation, the marginalization of agriculture, migration to oil states and beyond, and arrested urbanization are only some of the more salient aspects of this condition (...). The lives of individuals as well as households and the families they belong to have been affected in myriad ways by this overpowering reality. (Living Palestine, xiii-xiv)

The Palestinians' struggle continued over the years, whether by direct resistance to

the occupation (the First Intifada⁷ in 1987-1993) or by official negotiations.

Since the Oslo agreement in 1993, the economic and political situation has not improved people's living conditions, as Dag Lonning explains based on his fieldwork in Palestine from 1994 to 1995 and further prolonged fieldwork in 1996:

The reality I faced was a people trying to survive in the midst of economic deprivation, closures and humiliation, as well as desperation and political frustration, all in the name of something their political negotiating partner, to some extent even their own leaders, as well as large parts of the international community called peace. (162-163)

Authors such as Dag Lonning (162-163) and Edward Said (13) confirm that the Palestinian Authority (PA) has not been able to fulfill its people's needs over the past two decades. Additionally, many people confirmed this during my fieldwork, emphasizing that the economic situation before the establishment of the PA was better.

The creation of the Palestinian Authority misled observers into thinking that the occupation had come to an end, but in fact, occupational practices became even more severe and destructive for Palestinian

lives. When the Israeli siege started in April 2002, the inhabitants of Nablus faced brutal, new, previously unaccustomed techniques. Amal⁸, who lives in the old city, told me about her experiences while we were walking through its alleys: "I did not expect the invasion to be like that. I remember during the First Intifada that, although Israeli soldiers were everywhere, we confronted them and lived our lives and went to work, but this time was so scary and death was everywhere."

Despite the continuous social, economic, and political resistance to the Israeli occupation, the invasion in 2002 was the peak of the violence. There were no longer normal means to vent the frustration the people felt as a result of the three-month-long siege. The social situation in the old city was heavily influenced by Israeli violence. Over the years since the First Intifada, many families left and moved to new houses outside of the old city. Many of those who stayed in the old city are poor. The social system in the city stimulated the rise of a social space under the siege by recreating strong ties among the community. The harsh living conditions due to the absence of a stable economic situation as a result of a continuous blockade of the city's border by the Israeli army for many years after the siege meant that it was difficult to maintain close relations in

the same way as before. However, people managed to maintain their social relations, mainly their neighborhood ties, because they know that without their neighbors and relatives they will lose their social safety net. At the back of their minds, people believe that the Palestinian Authority is weak and unable to protect its own people.

Despite the obstacles they faced and face, the support they found from each other gave the people a somewhat positive outlook on life. Lisa Taraki explains that families in Palestine are characterized by being able to cope with the apparently unbearable situations imposed on them by the practices of the Israeli army ("Enclave Micropolis" 6). The city's customs and social relations were and still are a powerful tool in constructing its uniqueness. People care about their families and their informal social networks, which have become a main way of overcoming the difficulties they are facing. Even the Jewish Samaritan community (Schreiber 1)⁹ that Nablus is famous for lives in harmony with the Christians and Muslims, reflecting the unity among the city's residents regardless of their affiliation. The norms and traditions were and still are stronger than the negative influence of the political situation. Such harmony reflects the particularity of Nablus City, in contrast to other Arab

countries where sectarian disputes have become a destructive force (for example Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon).

Experiencing the city may be described best in the words of one inhabitant: "We love to walk inside the old city, especially in the morning when everyone is starting to open their shops and lay out their products to attract buyers." These are the words of one of the residents who lives outside the old city, but I heard the same opinion from others I met during my fieldwork. After spending time with them, it became clear that, despite what they had gone through, they were still attached to their city. As one of the residents put it:

"We love to live and we will live even if the situation is bad. This is our way of struggling and fighting the occupation: by living our life, going to work and school, and having fun."

Siham, who once lived inside the old city and moved out to live in the surrounding area, commented:

"I came to the library today through the old city alleys; the roads are the soul - the smell of food was everywhere, the bread, the sweets, *hummus*, and *falafel*. All the smells are amazing."

Her colleague replied:

I love the feeling when I walk in the morning in the alleys of the old city. I hear the owners of the shops pray for

God to provide them with livelihood, and I said to myself, "Amen." Such a beautiful feeling. Seeing them put their products in front of their shops and each of them cleaning his shop, others bringing water to clean the space near their work, each of them having a good start and saying some prayers to comfort the soul. (Ayshe)

The dialogue between the two colleagues speaking with passion about their city and their feelings while watching the morning rituals of the people reveals the people's rootedness in their city. Not only this conversation, however, showed this deep-rootedness. I hardly met anyone who did not express the warmth they felt toward each other - the inhabitants - during their daily interaction, whether formal or not.

The absence of a welfare system in Palestine can be considered an influential variable for the strong informal relations among the inhabitants. As Safadi and Easton explain in their study of the evolution of the social welfare system in Palestine: "The inherited welfare programs focused on providing basic services for specific groups rather than enhancing the citizens' welfare" (58). In Nablus, cohesion and social ties played the important role of keeping people together during the siege. According to James Moody and

Douglas White (5), cohesion creates connectedness. From this perspective, cohesion in Nablus is reflected in neighborhood relations, religious beliefs, and, most importantly, local kinship relations, which are manifested over many years through different kinds of social, economic, and religious practices, such as *A'sha' būnīye*,¹⁰ *Al-'īdīye*,¹¹ and *Al-nu'ūṭ*.¹² These practices are not temporary; on the contrary, they lead to the establishment of strong, well-founded relations. This links to Appadurai's explanation of neighborhood as a multiplex interpretive site. His view is that "neighbourhood is a context, or a set of contexts, within which meaningful social action can be both generated and interpreted" (184). Neighborhood relations can be strengthened through daily relations among the inhabitants and the rituals they exercise during the year. This point of view brings us to Bourdieu and his explanation of the harmonization of experiences among individuals and the support they obtain through their participation in individual and collective activities:

One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a common sense world endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus on the meaning (*sens*) of practices and the world, in the other

words the harmonization of agents' experiences and the continuous reinforcement that each of them receives from the expression, individual or collective (in festivals, for example), improvised or programmed (commonplaces, sayings), of similar or identical experiences. The homogeneity of habitus is what within the limits of the group of agents possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation) implied in their production - causes practices and works to be immediately ineligible and foreseeable. (80)

Such an important reflection on both neighborhood and cohesion provides us with an understanding that connectedness, the harmonization of agents' experiences, and meaningful social action all contribute to the formation of strong neighborhood ties. The following section will reflect upon this point by providing an ethnographic example from the field.

Neighborhood: the compassionate community

"Your nearby neighbor rather than your far brother." (Palestinian proverb)

"The neighbor before the house."
(Palestinian proverb emphasizing the

importance of inquiring about future neighbors before buying a house)

During a visit to an employee of the Palestinian Medical Relief Committee (PMRS), Lana, a doctor in the PMRS in her fifties, recalled the days of the siege by focusing on social relations. When she was informed about the scope of this research, she explained with a smile that people could not enjoy eating any meal knowing that one of their neighbors needed something. She said:

It was the time when the siege gathered us in a good way (...) We used to cook together; there was a lot of food we used to store in our refrigerator that started to rot due to the lack of electricity. Days were without electricity and we had to manage our life. So, in order not to throw food away we gathered all the neighbors, so that nothing would be thrown away. (Lana)

Relations within the neighborhood (*ḥāra* or *ḥayy*) are considered a duty for better or worse. The notion of neighborhood is connected to the concept of "closeness", which "carries contextual meanings that range imperceptibly from asserted and recognized ties of kinship to participation in factional alliances, ties of patronage and

clientship, and common bonds developed through neighborliness" (Eickelman 146). This connection to closeness highlights the duties that rest upon people within the same *ḥāra*. Neighbors are obliged to share joyful moments and to be supportive of each other in hard times. For example, at weddings, the families of the bride and groom are expected to invite not only relatives and friends, but also their neighbors. The number of invitees is large, so the wedding costs a lot of money. The invited guests are expected to give money to the bride and the groom as a present, in addition to being an indirect support to cover some of the couple's expenses. In this sense, kinship and neighborhood relations to some extent intersect, which connects with what Linda Stone says: "that it is part of human ideology relationship" (6). Kinship and neighborhood cannot really be separated from each other. This is in line with the theoretical position developed by Eickelman (140), who insists that in Middle Eastern societies the analytical separation of kinship from other social spheres does not make sense. Rather, kin ties are culturally linked with other forms of social proximity in the notion of *qaraba* (closeness). Even if social relations can be costly, it makes sense for the inhabitants to make an effort for others and show care, as this

keeps the tradition alive within their daily interactions. This aspect can be understood through Pierre Bourdieu's illustration of reproduction theory. Cultural capital refers to the cultural codes and practices that parents transmit, which become like a long-term investment. These practices are usually transmitted to children through the process of family socialization, or in Bourdieu's term, *habitus* (qtd. in Tzanakis 77).

The structure which has produced it governs practice, not by the processes of a mechanical determinism, but through the mediation of the orientations and limits it assigns to the habitus's operations in invention. As an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions, and no others. (Bourdieu 95)

Bourdieu's main focus is on the relations between education, family, and social class and how education plays a vital role in the reproduction of social inequality. His perspective can also help explain how rituals and daily practices among the Nabulsi were essential in reproducing

social ties in the same pattern among family members and their offspring to some extent. Peoples' pasts tell us that showing care and support for neighbors reflects the manners they uphold, and these behaviors are passed on from generation to generation and reproduce themselves throughout the years. Such behaviors are always challenged by political and economic circumstances. A woman reported that, before the First Intifada in 1987, any new neighbor used to be invited for dinner as a welcome to the neighborhood and to get to know each other. "They are neighbors and we should know our neighbors," she said.

Taking a short tour of the old city helps us understand what *neighborhood* means to people and how their relationship continuously recreates the same space over the years. On one field trip I took around the old city with Ibtisam,¹³ she knocked on a door and called out the name of the woman who lived behind it. The woman did not reply, so Ibtisam simply opened the door and called the name of the woman again until she came and welcomed us, although we had come without an appointment. This incident reflects how people in the neighborhood are aware of each other's daily habits and can act upon them.

Another example: when the Israeli army invaded the city, the soldiers destroyed the shop doors, leaving them open to robbery. Neighbors looked after the shops and protected them - as Salim, a Nabulsi citizen, did when he took hundreds of dollars from a moneychanger's shop and kept them until he met the owner after the first siege was over. The owner lived in a village near Nablus and had not been able to take the money with him.

Why should Salim have been concerned about his neighbor's shop during an unpredictable situation when it was hard to move around? He could have taken the money for himself or even have left it and focused on his own business. Is it an ethical commitment to look out for others whenever they need assistance? Or is it a beneficial relation of giving and taking? Or is it the power of religious beliefs that remind people that they are "one body", as the Prophet Muhammad said (Al-Bukhārī 1279).

Whether it is an ethical commitment or a religious influence, it definitely reshapes peoples' behavior as part of the extended group in their daily lives that arises from the obligation towards each other. If someone is in need of medicine or food from his or her neighbor's pharmacy or shop, the neighbor is ethically obliged to give it to him for free, until he is able to pay

it back. This also links to *Ḥaqq al-šaf'a* (preemption), an obligation (under Sharia law) towards the neighbors that dictates that nobody can sell their house or land to a stranger without first asking their neighbors if they want to buy it. Such an obligation outlines neighbors' ties towards one another and is still a practice today.

In terms of religion, since their childhood at school, the inhabitants of Nablus have learned certain verses of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's sayings (Hadīth) by heart, which they mostly follow and circulate among their families and neighbors. They often tell each other that the Prophet commanded them to take care of their neighbors, and they repeat what is mentioned in the Quran (Abdel Haleem 54) when asked why they should be concerned about their neighbors:

Worship God; join nothing with Him. Be good to your parents, to relatives, to orphans, to the needy, to neighbours near and far, to travellers in need, and to your slaves. God does not like arrogant, boastful people. (An-Nisā' 36)

These verses were translated by the families into traditional practices that defined their way of reshaping their space, which brings us back to Bourdieu's comment regarding practices and their discourse:

It would thus be possible to move on the ground where talk of rules seems least misplaced, that of custom or "pre-law", and show that the "customary rules" preserved by the group memory are themselves the product of a small batch of schemes enabling agents to generate an infinity of practices adapted to endlessly changing situations, without those schemes ever being constituted as explicit principles. (16)

Bourdieu's analysis exemplifies that daily habits have the ability to construct a coherent relationship through the interactions among families, individuals, and neighbors. For example, if a neighbor cooks a meal that is not easy to prepare, the woman sends a dish of it to her nearby neighbor. Or if someone has lost a member of their family, neighbors become their main support during the period of mourning. They are expected to cook for them, take good care of them and to welcome people who come to show their respect and condolences to the family during the days of mourning. On the whole, neighbors are expected to stay in contact all the time.

These kinds of strong ties manifested themselves during the siege through the establishment of popular committees (Kamal 50). During the siege in 2002, the

families in Nablus City formed a wide social network to take care of each neighborhood in Nablus. Each neighborhood came under the responsibility of a well-known and respected person to keep in contact with all the families in case they needed any supplies. In addition to that, the popular committees¹⁴ also embodied the social spirit, which could be seen in the initiatives of individuals to contribute to the wider network. For example, Siham, a woman in her forties who lives outside the old city, reported that even though her family did not have close relations with their neighbors, they still offered them their assistance. Siham's parents' house was one of the few houses in Nablus where the electricity was not cut off during the siege. They linked a power cable to their neighbors' houses, despite the increased charges they would have to pay. Additionally, some of her family members from a nearby village sneaked in during the opening hours of the siege and provided the family with vegetables, bread, and other essentials, which they shared with their neighbors.

Of course, there are certain variables that have an influence on the neighbors' relationship. Personal interests and achieving social and political status are also motives behind the concern for social relations. The better someone's reputation and

relations with their neighbors, the more they can achieve in public life. For example, people who belong to a political party or want to be elected to the municipality communicate with their neighbors regularly, making positive gestures and showing good intentions to others. I was introduced to one local member of a political party who is very active on the social level: he constantly follows up on the living conditions of his neighbors and contacts donors who are willing to cover the needs of the poor, especially during Ramadan. Many people who live outside the old city contact him because of his reputation for trustworthiness, which he has established over the past thirty years. Staying in touch with his neighbors and people from other areas in the old city, especially by informing outsiders about who is in need, gives him social status and helps make him an influential member of his party. Being part of the community means creating powerful relations that can be used during elections. Nablus is a place where nothing can be hidden, and because of this, people are aware of how they behave and interact with others. They care very much about their reputations, so even if there are families who are reluctant to help their neighbors, most likely they will. Not offering assistance to people around them is unac-

ceptable behavior among the people of Nablus. A woman told a story about a family who was forced to stay at their neighbor's house after Israeli soldiers took their home and turned it into a military checkpoint. The neighbors did not show proper hospitality and lacked Arab hospitality manners (*Husn al-Ḍiyāfa*), as the woman reported. This family became stigmatized for this. Although a long time has passed since the siege, this story and other stories about those who did not show a good attitude during the hard times became well known among the residents and have had an enduring effect on reputations. This means that social, commercial, and marriage relations will be affected in negative ways. People who do not follow the customary law of hospitality and do not behave in a communal way will be considered untrustworthy. Their neighbors will not keep close social and commercial connections with them.

Of course, not everyone is a good neighbor. Disputes can be found everywhere, but living in such a community means behaving in a certain way, because neighbors share one place that belongs to all of them. In addition, during the siege, the inhabitants activated their social life and kinship relations in positive ways, which marginalized their usual disputes. Regardless of the disputes that may arise

from time to time among neighbors, the existence of relations became an important means of overcoming emotional and material difficulties. It is impressive how they moved around during the siege and maintained social ties despite the threat. The same behavior was practiced by people during the siege: cooking together, visiting each other without the soldiers seeing them, staying together for hours, and calling their friends and neighbors regularly. People tried to keep socializing despite the mobility restrictions and moving whenever the chance allowed them. When I asked families how they could not only survive physically, but also to take good care of their mental and emotional well-being during and after the siege, they told me that their relations with neighbors became even closer. They became closer to one another by sharing their fears and sorrows and talking about them whenever they met.

Neighborhood as a distinctive space

In comparison with other cases in Palestine, Asia, and much of the rest of the world, in Nablus the neighborhood can be considered a significant feature. For example, Patricia Lawrence visited a house in a village in Sri Lanka and reported a housewife's words:

The lines between who is friend and

who is enemy have become impossible to draw. She had lived long enough to remember the period before the war with deep nostalgia. She lamented, "Now the people have a stone heart." When there is crying and shouting next door in the night, people in this village can't go over and ask, "Why are you crying?" because we don't know if the LTTE or the army is there. (176)

Several studies of Sri Lanka that deal with suffering and violence have not gone on to take a deeper look into neighborhood relations, which might be interesting to study in various political contexts (Spencer, "On not Becoming a 'Terrorist'" 120; Perera, "Spirit Possessions and Avenging Ghosts" 157). However, the example shows that the complicated relations in Sri Lankan society can hardly be considered a social safety net as they are in Nablus city.

Another case studied by Mamphela Ramphele in South Africa deals with the development of young people's identity as gendered individuals and their belonging to their families and communities. She mentions: "Violence against children is a serious problem in South Africa. (...) during 1993-94 officially reported child rape cases increased by 63 percent from 1993 (...) an estimated 85 percent of the survivors of child rape know their attackers well - family members, friends, neighbors

and baby-sitters" ("Teach Me How to Be a Man" 103). This study describes the fragile relations within the community and how they affected the younger generations.

Of course, there are different reasons behind the suffering in these two cases. Sri Lanka went through a long civil war, which was not the case in Nablus. The violence against children in South Africa highlights how neighbors can hardly be trusted, which is also the opposite in Nablus. However, the comparison illustrates how relations of trust among families in the city can in turn create strong social cohesion. This brings me to Doumani (*Rediscovering Palestine 66*), with his emphasis on the importance of cultural capital as the element that maintains relations of trust among people. One of the reasons for the existence of these relations and their distinctive influence on peoples' lives is that most of the people are either closely or distantly related. During fieldwork, many people confirmed to me that inhabitants are relatives, which is called *Nasāyeb* - marrying not only within the same family (cousins' marriage), which is a big trend in Palestine (Taraki, "Living Palestine" xxv). In addition, the sons of the family usually live near or in the same neighborhood as their natal families. The inhabitants know each other by name; they know the family back-

ground and all the personal details of those who live in the neighborhood.

In spite of disputes in the city (which mainly encompass inheritance issues that I will not deal with in this article), during hard times families overcome their disputes and unite against the external violence imposed on them. In this regard, I often recall the words of one of the residents: "Having one destiny leads to unity." Maintaining their social relations with families and neighbors was a strong element in facing the siege, which is related to what Appadurai says about production: "It involves the assertion of socially (often ritually) organized power over places and settings that are viewed as potentially chaotic or rebellious" (183-184). One of the residents told me that he and his brother had not had any contact due to a family dispute. But during the siege, forced to stay in his home like a prisoner for an extended time, he became worried about his brother. He had heard about another family, the Al-Sho'bi¹⁵ family, that was buried alive. The first thing he did when the citizens were allowed to leave their homes to get food was to look for his brother to be sure he was still alive.

In Nablus City, neighborhood also has its particularity as a major socio-economic network. To an extent, traditional practices

are a strong influence on such relations. According to Beshara Doumani:

The internal dynamics of these networks changed over time. But, in form if not in substance, their continuity provided Nabulsi with a shared sense of social norms. Although changing and not always followed, these norms served as a set of common reference points that helped define what it meant to be a Nabulsi. It is precisely the constant reproduction of these networks over time and space that imparted to Nablus its unique character as a conservative interior trade and manufacturing town in which family dynamics have long dominated social and political relations and in which merchants played, and continue to play, a leading role in economic and cultural life. Indeed, it can be argued that the remarkable continuity in habits and forms of social organization in Nablus was rooted in the daily rituals and practices which knit the participants of each network into a tightly woven and resilient social fabric. (*Rediscovering Palestine* 56)

The concept of neighborhood in Nablus is characterized by the pattern of social relations that transcend generations. These relations are preserved through

rituals and traditional customs that are practiced over the years, as mentioned earlier. The neighborhood can be considered a public space, which according to Jürgen Habermas is where public thoughts, values, ideas, and opinions can be formulated and integrated with each other (Habermas et al. 50).

To conclude, the peculiarity of neighborhood in Nablus is manifested through the shaping of the inhabitants' relations in which individuals, families, and their memories are all integrated. Regularly taking part in rituals and practices leads to the establishment of a social public space within each neighborhood.

Conclusion

Neighborhood relations in Nablus City had a vital influence on the way people survived the siege in 2002. Through ethnographic analysis and social and political contextualization, this article outlined the importance and role of neighborhood relations in the construction of a social safety network. Several ethnographic examples and how they link to the wider social and political framework are presented. These ethnographic examples not only deal with the situations that people had to confront, but also echo an everyday life pattern of neighborhood relations. To understand the distinctive concept of the neighborhood in the construction of

social safety networks, the article analyzes its origins and the meaning of the concept for the inhabitants.

The kinship and neighborhood relations have reproduced themselves over generations; they have an immense influence on social relations as a whole and still play a major role in individuals' behavior and practices. They became a source for creating survival strategies during and after the siege. Traditional practices were used to keep people together, and this enabled people to interact on a daily basis until the siege was over. They meanwhile supported one another through shared activities. Their mutual obligations predetermined the way they protected and helped each other, regardless of whether they were in a dispute or not. These practices and beliefs based on what they had learned and experienced from their own culture became the main toolkit of survival.

The way people cope with the suffering imposed on them shows how they situate themselves in different roles among their family, neighbors, and friends. People's behavior and activity as individuals was an important variable in society. This had an impact on the social network, in terms of being part of both the private and public spheres. This highlights the fact that "the notion of agency thus implies that the

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people know that they act, even if they do not necessarily know the consequences of their act" (Eriksen 52). It is important to remember that the notion of agency is a result of internal and external influences on people's lives.

In the end, the article gives an overview of the city of Nablus and its historical background in order to highlight the reasons that led to the creation of strong social ties in general and neighborhood relations in particular. In addition, the paper illustrates how such patterns of relations were reflected in daily practices among the inhabitants of the city and during the siege in 2002. The meanings and the distinctive influence of neighborhood relations on peoples' lives are important in order to understand resilience in political and social upheavals. The obligations and duties among neighbors reflect that society can play the role of official institutions as a survival strategy, especially when the Palestinian Authority is not able function properly under the continuous occupation.

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Notes

¹ *Anthropos*, in print: "Nablus Under Siege: in print Religiosity and the creation of resilience." Article under review: *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*: "A Palestinian City under Siege: Women's involvement in reconciliation with the past experience."

² On September 13, 1993, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Israeli state signed the Oslo Agreement, which was supposed to end the Israeli occupation, but in fact divided the West Bank into various "areas", A, B, and C. The PA has full control in area A, whereas area B is jointly controlled, and area C in the West Bank is 70% under Israeli control. For more information, please see the map of the Oslo Accord division of West Bank and Gaza (Chomsky 281).

³ All Palestinian territories were under occupation since 1967.

⁴ Nablus had experienced closure for nine years (2000-2009), when no one could normally enter or leave the city. This meant walking through the rough hills and mountains to enter or leave the city; the main route was across Mount Gerizim in Nablus.

⁵ The term designates the Six-Day War in 1967, when the West Bank of Palestine fell under Israeli occupation.

⁶ *An-Nakba* is a Palestinian term meaning catastrophe and referring to the 1948 expulsion of Palestinians, when 750,000-800,000 were forced out of their homes.

⁷ According to Lori Allen, "The first intifada (Arabic, 'shaking off') against the occupation began in 1987. Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip had begun in 1967, and for Palestinians it meant military rule and a lack of civil, political, and human rights. Home demolitions, detention of political prisoners without trial, torture, and extensive land confiscations all characterized Israel's occupation. Israel built hundreds of settlements throughout the Occupied Territories, erected on land confiscated from Palestinians" (Allen 454).

⁸ Amal is not her real name. All the interviewees' names in this project were changed for reasons of ethnographic anonymity and safety. The method of communication was personal meetings. I met each one of my interviewees on regular bases and had long conversations in addition to observing them during their daily lives. All the interviews were conducted in the period of June to December 2012 and July to September 2013.

⁹ The Samaritan community lives on Mount Gerizim or Jirzim. "This is one of the smallest minorities in the world. Most of them live in the City of Nablus in Palestine. As a small minority with a main interest to survive, and to reserve its identity and heritage, the Samaritans do their best to keep their neutrality and good relations with all powers and factions in the region. (...) The Samaritans in Nablus are in harmony with the Palestinian society..." (Yousef, Barghouti 34).

¹⁰ *A'sha' būniye* is an invitation among family members in *Sha'ban* (a month in Islamic calendar) before Ramadan. It is a way to show closeness and to celebrate the coming of Ramadan together. This tradition is linked to the people in Nablus.

¹¹ *Al-'idīye* is a sum of money that uncles and aunts give to their nieces and nephews and that brothers give to their sisters on the first day of the *Eid* (Muslim festival).

¹² *Al-nu' ūṭ* is a sum of money that relatives, neighbors, and friends give to a newly married couple.

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→ ¹³ During this research, I made several tours of the old city of Nablus with Amal in particular, who lives there, in addition to others such as Ibtisam, whom I mentioned earlier, and Om Salman.

¹⁴ Popular communities were established in 2000 when the second Intifada was broken. During the siege, they played a vital role in supporting the people in Nablus. The popular communities comprise an informal network in which each individual belongs to a different geographic area, in order to connect with people in the same area to find out about their needs and provide them with medical and food supplies when necessary. In addition, informal institutions also took part in such communities (Kamal 48-49).

¹⁵ When I was starting my desk research in the Nablus municipal library archives, an employee there told me: "There is a horrific story: the whole Al-Sho'bi family was buried alive(...)" This story actually reveals the extent of fear and violence the inhabitants were facing.

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