AN UNJUST SETTLEMENT
The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) brings internationals to the West Bank to experience life under occupation. Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) provide protective presence to vulnerable communities, monitor and report human rights abuses and support Palestinians and Israelis working together for peace. When they return home, EAs campaign for a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict through an end to the occupation, respect for international law and implementation of UN resolutions.
AN UNJUST SETTLEMENT

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)
From “living with them” to dispossession: a tale of Israeli settlements

The image of settlers - at least in some parts of the world - has been greatly magnified by Hollywood films. In Hollywood's characteristic Manichean perspective of villains and heroes, settlers were the good guys who brought civilization to the backward, dark-skinned savage natives. Real history shows a very different picture. European powers assumed that the supreme goal of advancing civilization justified any means; consequently, aboriginal peoples in many regions were the targets of systematic cultural genocides. Everywhere in Africa, Asia, Australia and America, indigenous populations weredecimated or totally annihilated. Subjugated by military and cultural means, their languages, traditions and religions were destroyed to make space for the settlers and their "civilizatory" endeavor. The history of colonization is full of acts of barbarity committed by the "civilized" settlers against the "barbarian" natives. Besides methodical killings and massacres, settlers did their best to undermine or wreck natives’ economy and lower their self-esteem and dignity.

Western colonialism meant suffering and dehumanization for aboriginal peoples, whose very humanity was at times unashamedly denied. During the conquest and colonization of the so-called New World, reputed theologians discussed whether Amerindians were animals or have a human soul. The controversy went on until Pope Paul III issued the bull Sublimus Dei in 1537 stating that "the Indians were human beings and they were not to be robbed of their freedom or possessions".[1] Only a few heeded the Pope's call, and Indians continued being treated as animals and deprived of their livelihood for a long time. Resistance to colonial oppression and exploitation was met with harsh and exemplary repression: in Chile, the leader of the Mapuche people, Caupolican, was impaled; in India, sepoys were tied to the muzzles of cannon and then blown from guns.

In 1934, facing Gandhi's criticism to the idea of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine, Martin Buber acknowledged the fundamental obstacle that represented the antagonistic and vital claims of two peoples to the same land. But he did not see the solution in prevailing the will of one on the other. “We considered and still consider it our duty to understand and to honor the claim which is opposed to ours and to endeavor to reconcile both claims. We have been and still are convinced that it must be possible to find some form of agreement between this claim and the other… We have no desire to dispossess them: we want to live with them. We do not want to dominate them: we want to serve with them…”[2]

Regrettably, Buber's vision never materialized and other Zionist leaders saw the establishing of a Jewish State as "the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism."[3] Their teachings contributed to establishment of an Israel that would have a settler-colonial society driven by the needs of territorial acquisition, an impulse that brought about a forced occupation of territories that had historically been inhabited by Palestinians.
- an occupation and subsequent colonization ideologically and religiously legitimized by Israel's foundational myth of the Promised Land. Thereafter, successive Israeli governments have systematically worked to create a de facto situation whereby the appropriated land will remain under Israeli control after an agreement is reached by enticing settlers through such incentives as low-cost, quality housing, free education, lower taxes and a variety of subsidies and grants.

This report, whose main core is a collection of perceptive analysis produced by Ecumenical Accompaniers in situ, eloquently describes what colonization has meant for the Palestinians: confiscation of land and water resources, home demolitions and evictions, harassment and violence, vandalism and incitement, restriction of movement and access. Israel’s settlement policy continues strangling the Palestinian economy and making the Palestinian people more dependent on foreign aid.

With this booklet, the WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) contributes to give a human face to the plight of the Palestinian people by telling the individual stories of Mahmoud, Salem, Hamza, Eid, Salim and other strong-willed people. But let us not forget that their stories are the stories of millions who live under occupation in the West Bank.

“Israeli settlements are in direct contradiction of the two-state solution, which makes a peaceful end to the occupation unachievable,” concludes the report. An inescapable connection between settlements and peace that has been captured in World Council of Churches’ position on this issue: Settlements are illegal, as is their expansion; they are prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention and incompatible with peace.

The need to end the occupation and the settlement policy was recently recognized in an editorial by Israeli newspaper Haaretz: “the need to disengage from the stigma of the ‘occupation state’ is already seen by many, even within the ranks of the realistic right, not as a luxury but as an emergency lifesaving operation. We can only hope that it’s not too late to wish that Israel, dynamic and vibrant, will once again extend its wings fully within the family of nations.”[4]

[1] Nonetheless, theologian and philosopher Juan Gines de Sepulveda still argued that Indians were barbarians and idolaters and slaves by nature in his Democrats alter. De justis belli causis apud indios (1547).
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After the Six Day War in June 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) in addition to other Arab territories. A debate immediately ensued about what Israel should do with the newly conquered territories. Two main wings developed: those who wanted to return the occupied territories to their rightful owners as soon as possible and those who wished to maintain control of the areas for either religious or strategic military reasons.

The initial government stance was to hold the territories as bargaining chips for further negotiations. Israel opposed plans to establish civilian settlements in the West Bank. However, due to pressure from within the government and various interest groups, the first settlement, Kfar Etzion, was established in September 1967. Yigal Allon, the head of the Ministerial Committee on Settlements, emphasized that this was necessary for security reasons. He stressed the need of a “Jewish presence” in the West Bank, and advocated for the establishment of Israeli settlements. In the period 1967-1977, 30 settlements (inhabited by about 4,500 settlers) were established in areas of the West Bank that were to be annexed by Israel according to the Allon Plan.

The Likud party came into power in 1977. Their settlement policy was based on the Sharon Plan and Drobless Plan. Then Minister of Agriculture, Ariel Sharon, called for settling the West Bank in an effort to annex Palestinian populated areas, which he thought were of strategic importance and are on Biblical, Judea and Samaria.” These plans, added a Jewish-nationalistic and religious ideology to the settlement movement. The government’s goal was to settle 80,000 Israelis in the West Bank before 1986; yet, from 1988-1992, this number increased by 60% - mainly due to the expansion of already existing settlements.

According to the Oslo Accords, “Neither side shall initiate or take any steps that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations”. The Rabin Government promised not to establish new settlements, and to halt the expansion of existing settlements, with the exception of construction for “natural growth” – a vague term, used by all Israeli governments since 1993, which has proven to include migration to settlements in addition to the growth of existing populations. Thus, settlement population growth continued even after the Oslo Agreement.

After the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, it seemed that former peace initiatives had failed, and Israel claimed that there was no longer a Palestinian partner for peace. As a result, a unilateral approach was taken. In late 2003, then Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon announced the withdrawal from all 21 settlements in Gaza, and from 4 settlements in the northern West Bank. This strategic retreat was known as the Disengagement Plan. It was implemented in August-September 2005. The move was meant to allow Israel to save resources that were being used on settlements that were not of strategic importance and to re-channel them towards more important ones, while reducing friction with the Palestinians, and avoiding I.

**I. Introduction**
international pressure to negotiate a settlement on unfavourable terms.

In 2006, the new Kadima Party, lead by Ehud Olmert was elected due to their Convergence Plan, which sought to create a secure, democratic, and Jewish state. The latter two characteristics have historically been parallels, which Zionists have been unable to mend due to a large Palestinian population in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Thus, the plan sought to relinquish areas in the West Bank that have large concentrations of Palestinians, while annexing large settlement blocs such as: Ariel, Ma’ale Adumim, Gush Etzion and Modi’in Illit to Israel. In all, the Convergence Plan claimed to annex about 10% of the West Bank’s land, which was west of the Separation Barrier, and to dismantle all settlements east of it. The Convergence Plan was shelved after the kidnapping of Corporal Gilad Shalit, and the inconclusive outcome of the July 2006 battle with Hezbollah. Wide public opinion that the unilateral withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000, and the Gaza Strip in 2005 had proven to be security failures, coupled with outrage from the settler communities at risk of eviction under the plan, weekend Olmert’s ability to execute the plan.

A new government was formed on 31 March 2009. The failure of Olmert’s pragmatic government shifted the Israeli vote to the right. The current government consists of a wide coalition of centre-right to extreme-right parties, and does not include Kadima, which chose to be an opposition party. Many of the coalition parties’ constituents are settlers, as are some of the government’s ministers – most notably Minister of Foreign Affairs/Deputy Prime Minister, Avigdor Lieberman. Thus, it is unlikely that the current government will dismantle settlements. The government has however implemented a temporary ‘freeze’ on settlement construction, pending the outcome of negotiations with the Palestinians. This move is meant to coerce the Palestinians into negotiations even though they do not believe that the right-wing Israeli government is a genuine partner for peace. Some interpret the current Israeli government’s desire to engage in negotiations as a way to annex large settlement blocs into Israel by redrawing the border – essentially a non-unilateral execution of Sharon’s Convergence Plan, which seems to have become the settlers’ best hope due to mounting international pressure to dismantle all settlements.

This report highlights the issue of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs), present in six locations throughout the West Bank – Bethlehem, Hebron, Jayyous, Jerusalem, Tulkarem and Yanoun, have produced a number of case studies on the effects of Israel’s settlements and settlers on the Palestinian people. Although there are many different ways in which settlements systematically infringe upon Palestinians’ human rights, the EAs have identified five overarching themes that are apparent: Confiscation of Land and Water Resources; Home Demolitions and Evictions; Harassment and Violence; Vandalism and Incitement; and movement and access. In this report they provide specific examples of each of these themes as well as Israeli and Palestinian perspectives on the greater issue.
II. Conceptualization of Israeli Settlements and Settlers

Currently, about 500,000 Israeli settlers reside in the West Bank. Of these, more than 300,000 live in 121 settlements (70 of which are located east of the planned route of the barrier) and approximately 100 outposts that control 42 percent of the land upon which Palestinians hope to develop a state. The remaining 200,000 settlers reside in 12 settlements that Israel built on land illegally annexed to the Municipality of Jerusalem.

The majority of the settlements in the West Bank have the status of “National Priority Area A”. Israel has been waging a demographic war to settle these areas with as many Israelis as possible, to change the facts on the ground and ensure that the land will remain under Israeli control after a final-status agreement is reached. To persuade Israelis to relocate to these settlements, Israel established a system of incentives for settlers, such as: low-cost, quality housing with subsidized mortgages; free education and transportation to and from schools; higher salaries for government employees; grants for factory owners; subsidies for farmers; and lower taxes than communities inside Israel.

Yet, Settlements are purposely built to prevent urban development of Palestinian communities and control of water resources, which has crippled the Palestinian agricultural sector. Moreover, the security that the government provides for settlements - by means of checkpoints, road blocks, trenches, earth mounds, Israeli-exclusive by-pass roads and other barriers - have significantly reduced the Palestinians’ freedom of movement. For these reasons, Israel’s settlement policies are widely interpreted as undermining the peace process and reduce its status among the international community.

Israel has ignored these laws, and has consistently opted instead to adopt its own interpretations of international humanitarian law in an effort to legitimize its actions. The settlement movement has historically been described as a strategic mockery of international law, local legislation, Israeli military orders, and Israeli law, to facilitate the ongoing mass-theft of Palestinian land. The best example of this was when Israel made a series of declarations of “state land” from 1979-1992, which were an instrumental component in confiscating 900,000 dunams of land (16 percent of the West Bank) for settlement use. Moreover, since the first settlements were created, the legal system has turned a blind-eye towards settlers who have continuously, forcibly taken control of private Palestinian land and water resources that surround these areas.
Al-Ma’sara is a Palestinian village belonging to the Bethlehem area. Al-Ma’sara citizens, like the citizens of the villages Jurat ash-Shama, Um Salamona and Wadi Nis, have a large part of their land just beside the Israeli settlement Efrat (east of the Hebron road/Road 60). The settlement El’azar is close to a western outpost from Efrat. As settlements in occupied territory they are illegal according to the Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 49. Efrat and El’azar are a part of the large Gush Etzion block, and, as such, they are included in a future Israeli plan for a large chain of settlements which will link, with Gilo and Har Homa to the North and East, to encircle Bethlehem and connect the settlements more firmly to Jerusalem. Efrat has a population comprised primarily of “economic” settlers, that is to say they have moved there because it is economically advantageous for them, in part because of State subsidies for living costs. The settlement today consists of nearly 9,000 citizens. On the west side of Road 60, an outpost, or branch, of Efrat has been built. Close to Herodion (the summer palace of Herod the Great, the Roman governor of the area at the time of the birth of Jesus) there is a settlement called Noqedim with its outpost, El David, as a branch of the settlement. 

Al-Ma’sara today has about 800 citizens; the nine Palestinian villages, which are close to each other in this area bordering on Efrat, have a combined population of about 9,000 citizens. Mahmoud is about 35 years old and a farmer in a long family line of farmers. He owns 65 dunums, five to six of them bordering on Efrat. Mahmoud tells me that he tries to get to his land about every fourth day, but often the settlers prevent access. Not only do they prevent him from reaching his land, they also have uprooted many of his olive trees and grape vines. In early spring 2010, he was on his land to plant new trees; he was only there five minutes before the soldiers came, turning him out. The settlers had complained about him being there. Though he was forced off his land, he planted 20 new trees which remain.
Mahmoud has, as do many other farmers in this village, a part of his land – 78 dunums - east of the village, near the hill of Herodion. A small settlement called El David, an outpost of the settlement Noqedim, is there. Mahmoud tells me that there have been occasions when he has been on his land to plant trees that some settlers have let their dog loose and set it on him. He sees the settlers being helped by Israeli soldiers, who accompany them.

One time a soldier forced him to dig the plants up. That soldier used to monitor the demonstrations on Fridays in the village and he recognized Mahmoud. When he had been forced to pull the plants up the soldier asked him if he had papers which showed that he was the owner of the land. “Yes, I have”, Mahmoud answered and then he was told to visit the Israeli military civil administration office at Gush Etzion. He went there and showed his paper and he got the permission to plant on four dunums, which he now has done. But in return they wanted him to promise not to make more problems. So he, as the owner of the land, is the problem according to the Israeli’s point of view, not the settlers, who are penetrating his land illegally.

Mahmoud takes us to the neighbouring village Jurat ash-Shama where we meet with Salem, an older farmer with great integrity. Salem owns land of 60 dunums on the west side of Road 60. He has a small cottage and a well, five meters deep, 6x6 meters in circumference. He’s planted olive trees on this land that has been owned by his family for 100 years and he used to graze his sheep there. Yet, Salem reports that settlers from the Efrat outpost have been making problems for him over the past four years. They prevent him from grazing his sheep there. They have also made a new road through his fields from the settlement to his well and have used this access to water for their bathing and swimming. Or, they used to when they first
began to use his well, but now they have thrown so much rubbish in the well that it has become polluted and useless.

Like Mahmoud, Salem attempts to work his land, plowing, planting and caring for trees, and grazing livestock on the land. This year, Salem has plowed half of his fields to plant trees. One day, 20 minutes after he began working, the settlers came to his field, turning him out. Women from the settlement removed the nets he had put around the trees to protect them from sheep and goats. They continued to vandalize Salem's farm by uprooting all the trees he'd planted and cared for.

Salem and his family used to live in the house on their land eight months of the year to have easier access to the land in the busy planning, growing and harvesting seasons. Four years ago they did not dare to do this anymore because the settlers had begun to throw stones at them and to shoot at the sheep. Salem showed me a report from a veterinary surgeon documenting that three of his 50 sheep were killed by the settlers on April 23, 2007. About a year ago, Salem found a mine 20 meters from his well. Soldiers came to disarm it. Salem went to the court, but the settlers asserted that the mine was left from the Jordanian occupation that ended 41 years before. Salem has another opinion.

When faced with harassment and destruction of his property, Salem is ambivalent about reporting the problems. When he has reported incidents such as settlers illegally planting trees on his land, there is no response. When he has asked soldiers for help, they just say, “The settlers are crazy; we can’t do anything.” Salem dares not go directly to the settlers to complain; they are all armed with weapons and he fears for his safety.

When the Wall between Efrat and Wadi Nis/Um Salamona is completed, as is projected, Salem like many others in the villages will lose all his land, because their land will be unreachable, and according to an old Ottoman law, if you do not work your land for three years, it will become government property.
Isolated, vulnerable, and difficult to get to, Jubbet adh Dhib is a Palestinian village on the fringes of the populated area of the Bethlehem Governorate, right on the edge of the desert. Getting to Jubbet adh Dhib is not easy. Travel from Bethlehem through Beit Sahour to reach a new Israeli-built Jerusalem to Hebron road, a new bypass road. Go south for two kilometres before turning off east again under the shadow of the distinctive flat-topped Herodion hill, where Herod the Great built his magnificent palace around the time of Jesus’ life, a hill recently named by Netanyahu as one of Israel’s Religious Heritage Sites. On the approach to the village of Al’ Asakira, take the single track road leading off to the right between houses. About 400 meters up this narrow road, a rough track leads off to the left. Without a four wheel drive vehicle, it is wise to walk from here. This final kilometre of muddy, stony path leads to

Suffocating Jubbet adh Dhib

by Phil Lucas
Jubbet adh Dhib, though the village remains hidden until you reach the brow of the hill about half way along the track.

The village is quite small; there are 27 houses and 160 people, half of whom are children. It is in an attractive, pastoral setting. On a clear day, you can just see the salty water of the Dead Sea 15 kilometres away. You will often see flocks of sheep or goats as you approach the village, usually herded by one of the women, and on the left is the outdoor oven where the bread is baked in traditional rural style.

This small village is, according to the monitoring agencies United Nations – Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) and the Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem (ARIJ), one of the most vulnerable communities in the Bethlehem area. A significant part of the problem of Jubbet adh Dhib is that the families here are regarded as refugees. After the Nakba of 1948, the village was deserted. The occupants fled to Kuwait, where most of the middle aged family members were born. Families returned about 20 years ago to re-occupy their ancestral homes and land, but their paperwork shows only that the village has not been continuously occupied. This meant that when the nearby settlement of Teqoa started to expand its outposts a few years later, an action considered illegal under the Fourth Geneva Convention, the villagers were powerless to prevent it. They could not afford the expensive lawyers who might have made a case to support the villagers in the Israeli courts, thus allowing for unjust laws and illegal expansions onto expropriated lands to continue without contest.

The village consists of untidy, flat-topped houses, many of them with rusty reinforcement bars sticking from the top or sides indicating the intention of the builders to add on to the buildings. There is no chance of such development now. We are in Area C under total Israeli control, an Area in which all building work, including the extension of existing houses, is banned. For example, work which had started some years ago to extend one of the houses to accommodate a growing family ended when the IDF arrived to oversee the demolition of the extension. The community has, however, converted one of the houses into a kindergarten, which was officially opened by an Ecumenical Accompianier in November 2009 and where the children now proudly chant their English alphabet in unison.

At the far edge of the little village, about 250 metres away, you see one of the Teqoa outposts which arrived 12 years ago. This outpost is a sheep farm, operated and occupied by eight Sephardic Jews from Ethiopia. When they came, they took possession of the land to the south-east of Jubbet Adh Dhib, right up to the edge of the village. They keep themselves to themselves and, apart from taking the land, have not interfered directly with the village. While they do not swagger about with guns or set dogs

Phil, an EA from the UK eating home-baked bread and drinking tea while visiting families at Jubbet adh Dhib.
onto their neighbours’ animals, as other outpost settlers do, they are there, on land belonging to Palestinian families.

Jubbet adh Dhib has no electricity. As night falls, darkness descends upon the village, relieved only by oil lamps. They have a small generator, which is started from time to time and provides sufficient power for recharging mobile phones and running the one computer in the village. The lights of the nearby settlement shine brightly. The Israelis refuse to connect Jubbet adh Dhib to the grid. Hamza, the village mayor and his brother Ammar are electricians. Denied connection to the electrical grid, they worked for two years to bring solar energy to the village. With the support of the UN and a German company they had designed and then started to build the first photo-voltaic panel. The IDF arrived and told them it was not allowed and must be dismantled. It seems that the intention is to make life so uncomfortable for the villagers that they will give up and leave the land for the settlers.

In February 2010, with the help of the local Palestinian authority, there was an olive-planting programme on village land. The IDF, presumably prompted by settlers, arrived and called a halt until ownership was proved of the land where the trees were being planted. The ownership has now been proved to their satisfaction so the tree planting can continue. A few days later, the water supply to Jubbet was cut off. The problem is blamed on archaeological digging near the Herodion, though curiously it has not affected the supply to the nearby settlement outpost. The water now has to be imported in a wheeled trailer, bumped over the rough ground. Both the people and the sheep and goats depend on this imported water, as the water in the village cisterns is contaminated by bacteria, which affects humans and animals alike.

“We have managed for two thousand years without a road, we have managed for two thousand years without electricity,” said Hamza. “We cannot manage without water. Please help us.”
A Selective Drought in Um Al Khair

Gearóid Fitzgibbon

Rows of houses stand sentry on the parched, barren hill. A water tower rises from their midst, irrigating lush greenery. But beyond this West Bank settlement’s perimeter fence is a tiny Bedouin campsite where people are desperate for water.

Here at Um Al Khair in the South Hebron Hills, there has been no rainfall for many months. Grey rock and dry, rugged earth spread off in every direction and the shepherds struggle to find pasture for their flocks. But the recent drought is exacerbating a human-made water crisis. Amnesty International recently completed an investigation into Israel’s water policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It revealed a host of measures that prevent Palestinians throughout the West Bank and Gaza from obtaining adequate water. Demolitions of storage facilities and denial of access to aquifers, along with bans on digging wells, mean that up to 200,000 Palestinians in rural communities have no access to running water at all.

Israeli settlers, meanwhile, face no such challenges. With their intensive irrigation farms, lush gardens and swimming pools, they consume on average around 300 litres each per day. Average Palestinian consumption is around a quarter of that, and well short of the 100 litres minimum recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). In some cases Palestinians survive on as little as 20 litres a day, usually brought in by tanker. For communities that rely on agriculture for a living, the lack of water is critical.

The Israeli government responded to the report by saying it had fulfilled and indeed surpassed all its obligations to supply water to the Palestinians. It also accused them of violating their commitments under water agreements, particularly as regards illegal drilling of wells and building of sewage plants.

But Um Al Khair is not connected to any water network and the Israeli army will not issue permits to dig wells. The community is forced to buy tanked water from Mekorot, the Israeli national water company, which charges 5 shekels (around $1.30) per cubic meter. That cost prohibits the shepherds of Um Al Khair from irrigating crops. Um Al Khair’s only other water supply is a pipe no bigger than a garden hose that trails across from the pump in the settlement.

“Sometimes they turn the water off for days at a time,” one resident of Um Al Khair told EAPPI. “We have enough water for drinking and washing but no water for agriculture.”

All this exacerbates the impact of an ongoing drought. Bedouins coping with dry spells in the past would have moved around in search of better pastures, but increasingly this is hampered by Israeli-occupied lands. The displacement of Palestinian shepherds from their historical grazing areas is well documented, yet little is being done to address the issue.

A Selective Drought in Um Al Khair

A young girl looking at EAs thru the door of her family's make-shift home in Um Al Khair.
of good pasture. But these days, much of the best grazing land is off limits, confiscated by the Israeli settlements that are spreading inexorably across the landscape.

Palestinian shepherds are also tied down by movement restrictions imposed by the Israeli army and the threat of violence from Israeli settlers which bars them from grazing in certain areas. Armed youths from the settlement regularly threaten the village itself. Recently, they broke through the barrier fence to steal the Bedouin’s few scrawny chickens. There is also frequent abuse and stone throwing.

Salim, a shepherd from Um Al Khair, says that complaining about water problems ignores the root cause. In order to improve the water situation, Um Al Khair needs to build pipes, but the village is in an area where the Israeli authorities refuse to grant building permits to Palestinians.

As recently as October, the Israeli authorities told international development NGOs that they are breaking the law if they build in the village. The Oslo Accords of 1994 placed the village in “Area C,” meaning it is under full Israeli military and civilian control. The Israeli authorities do not grant permits to Palestinians in “Area C,” so although the residents have papers proving they own the land, they cannot build on it.

Every structure built here since 1967 has a demolition order hanging over it, including the tents. Several buildings have already been destroyed - including a toilet block.

Eid, the son of a village elder, was defiant. “Every time they destroy our buildings, we will build them again. This is our land,” he said.

His determination does not hide the fact that Um Al Khair is a precarious spot. Winter rains may make these hills green pastures for a few months. But the long-term future of Bedouin communities like Um Al Khair hangs in the balance.
Newly constructed homes are ready to absorb more settlers, while families in Um Al Kheir are prohibited from building and are forced to live in tents and shacks.
Local women baking bread for their families together in Um Al Kheir.
Reaching the settlement of Zufin along the well paved road 505 is easy. The road skirts the town of Qalqilia which is totally surrounded - bottled in - by the Separation Barrier. The road which leads to the entrance to Zufin is on the right just before what used to be an Israeli checkpoint. This was the neck of the bottle, the only way in and out for Qalqilia’s 50,000 Palestinian residents. Zufin is protected at its entrance by an army post. It has a population of 1,000 or so settlers, and is a smart, well-appointed tree-lined community.

Some years ago an Israeli peace activist posing as a prospective house buyer was told that for the price of a two bedroom apartment in Tel Aviv you could buy a family home with multiple bedrooms in Zufin: a place where “the air is clean, you have space, and the children can play in safety. It’s so peaceful here.” The further attraction of Zufin is that it’s only a 45 minute drive from the centre of Tel Aviv. When asked what the neighbouring Palestinian village was called the estate agent claimed not to know, but told the undercover reporter that they never had any problems with it.

The Palestinians who live in the nearby village of Jayyous know all about the settlement of Zufin. Its creation and threatened expansion have dominated and adversely affected many of their lives. Ali lost 200 dunams (about 50 acres) of land in 1989 when it was confiscated in order to build the settlement. His family had farmed the land for at least six generations and made a comfortable living through the sale of olive oil harvested each autumn from his trees. Now in contrast to his prosperous neighbours in Zufin, he struggles to make ends meet.

Unusually Jayyous is built on a hill, originally as a Roman garrison town, and looks down on Zufin, reversing the common situation in the West Bank were settlements dominate the landscape from the hilltops and looking more like fortifications and military outposts than places to live. This, of course, is the case, as part of the settlement strategy has been to ensure military control of the occupied territory. As Ariel Sharon famously said: “Everyone has to move, run and grab as many hilltops as they can to enlarge the settlements, because everything we take now will stay as ours. Everything we don’t grab will go to them.” From the hilltop on which Jayyous is built it’s possible to see part of Zufin, the land confiscated for its planned expansion, and a quarry scarring the landscape from which stone was taken in order to build it and some of its neighbouring settlements.

Looking east you can also see a strangely square shaped hill which is an unregulated dump once used for all manner of settlement waste and which local Palestinians suspect has led to the pollution of underground water supplies.
EAs sitting with Palestinian farmers under an olive tree in Jayyous as they share stories about the difficulties they face when trying to reach their land each day.
From Jayyous village on the hill, you can see quite clearly the route of the Separation Barrier winding like a snake around the settlement and the surrounding land, and separating Jayyous both from Zufin and from 75% of its land in the “seam zone” between it and the Green Line that marks Israel’s border established by the 1948 armistice. The Separation Barrier is a potent symbol of the separate development being pursued by Israel: across the West Bank, settlers living geographically next door to Palestinians never encounter their neighbours. The “Stop the Wall” campaign has described it as an “apartheid wall” as it seems to represent similar ideological thinking to that pursued by the Nationalist Party of South Africa in the 20th century.

Jayyous farmers who still own land in the seam zone on the Israeli side of the Separation Barrier have to obtain permits from the Israeli Army to work their land, and can then access it at certain times of the day through agricultural gates manned by soldiers. Such permits are not easy to obtain, and are often withdrawn with no reason given.

The difficulty of accessing their land because of the wall has further compounded the sense of loss felt by those who have lost land to the settlement of Zufin. Tawfiq Salim, who has seven sons, lost 24 dunams of land and 500 olive trees, with an average age of 32 years in 2004 as ground was prepared for an expansion of Zufin that has not yet happened. He had to stand and watch as huge earthmoving Caterpillar vehicles uprooted his trees. This was the only land he possessed, so at a stroke he lost his income and financial security for his family, but also much more.

He said, “There is no cost for what I have lost. I lost my life growing those trees.”

Abdul who is now 62 also lost land and 53 olive trees, many 500 years old, in the first development of Zufin in 1989. Twenty years later he is still angered and saddened by what he described as the theft of his land and the loss of trees that were part of his family history and wealth.

Some of the oldest uprooted trees from the building of settlements are sold in Israeli garden centres as “trophy” trees. On one of the main roads into the settlement of Ma’ale Adumim it is possible to see such transplants.

Talking to Ali who lost his land in 1989, it’s as though it was only yesterday and his anger and grief at its loss has not reduced with the passage of time. John Edwards, the Deputy British Consul in Jerusalem, put it well: when talking about the occupation he said, “settlements are the root cause of most of the problems on the West Bank” and he talked of the need to frame the struggle against the occupation as a civil rights movement. He also said that the international community should speak in clear and unambiguous terms: “Regarding settlements we should clearly say that stealing peoples’ land is wrong, because that is what it is.”
We were on the “Arab Bus”, as it is commonly referred to; the one with blue stripes going east of the city in the direction of Al ‘Eizariya and Abu Dis. We were standing in the back of the bus as all the seats were taken. We were both wearing our vests, which the passengers recognize and welcome. However, on this morning we were taking a slightly different trip; we were going to visit the Ma’ale Adumim settlement to meet with Gidon Ariel, a member of its city council and its mayor’s advisor on International Affairs. The round-about at the entrance of the settlement was coming up; we know this route well as we have many contacts in the surrounding Palestinian communities whose lands were confiscated to build this settlement. We asked the bus driver to stop at the round-about, but...
he did not seem to hear us and drove through the intersection. We had to call out and ask to be let off the bus - it felt strange to leave the bus there; at this point the passengers were staring at us and wondering where we were going. The bus went on to Al'Eizariya and Abu Dis, but we walked to the checkpoint at the entrance of Ma'ale Adumim. Gidon was there waiting for us and greeted us warmly. The weather was nice, so the three of us walked together to a café in the settlement.

Ma'ale Adumim is big; almost 35,000 people live there. Its name comes from the Book of Joshua (15:7), which mentions the “Pass of Adumim” as the border separating the territory of the tribe of Judah from the one of the tribe of Benjamin. The Book of Joshua tells us the story of the conquest of the Land of Israel and the division of this land between the 12 tribes. Another conquest happened in 1967 when Israel took over this territory from Jordan and occupied it. Ma'ale Adumim was first established as an outpost in 1975, a settlement the following year, and in 1991 the Government of Israel recognized it as a city. Ma'ale Adumim may be called a city, a town or a suburb of Jerusalem, but no matter what, it is first and foremost a settlement.

Walking down the streets of Ma'ale Adumim is strange; it looks surreal. In the middle of the desert, everything is green, lush and clean. According to Gidon, the mayor calls it the “shining pearl of Israel.” This is because the development and location of settlements is tightly linked to water supplies. The population of the West Bank is 90% Palestinians and 10% Israeli settlers; however, Palestinians use a mere 17% of the water available from West Bank aquifers, whereas Israel uses the remaining 73%. Israeli water consumption (333 cubic meters per Israeli per year) is approximately four times higher than Palestinian water consumption (83 cubic meters per Palestinian per year), partially due to the fact that the Israeli water company, Mekorot pumps most of the water from the occupied Palestinian territory and sells it back to Palestinians at a very high price.

Our conversation with Gidon was friendly throughout our visit; yet, he avoided questions that dealt with oppression, human rights, land confiscation, etc. Instead he chose to use our meeting as an opportunity to spread his ideology, which is purely on Joshua's narrative, making it difficult to grasp his logic. In any case, we thanked him for the coffee and the tour before we left.

Bedouin homes in contrast to Israeli settlements, which are located only about 1km away.
A few days later, we were back on the same “Arab Bus” heading east of Jerusalem. This time we got off at another round about in the middle of Al ‘Eizariya. The streets are in bad shape, there is a lot of dust and noise all around us. We took a side road to go visit the Jahalin Bedouin community. In 1975 they were forcibly evicted from their land in order to make room for the expansion of Ma’ale Adumim. Now they live next to one of Jerusalem’s municipal garbage dumps; we walked through piles of burning garbage trying not to breath in the terrible stench. When we reached the village, Mariam was waiting for us and invited us into her house for tea and bread. From her terrace, you can see Ma’ale Adumim in the distance, spreading its numerous tentacles over a beautiful hill. Mariam pointed at a few structures, caravans and tents, standing in the shadow of Ma’ale Adumim. She told us that these are Bedouin families who have been displaced once already and are now going to be forced to move again in order to vacate the valley and make room for the settlement to grow. The alternative for these Bedouin families is to move to the dump of toxic waste where she lives.

Mariam also told us about the men of the Jahalin community who work in Ma’ale Adumim; a twist of fate: their occupied land is now the only place where they can get a job, cleaning the streets and houses of settlers. One could argue that this represents a great opportunity for them; however, there is no job security and the wages are very low. In this specific instance, Israel chooses to apply Jordanian labor laws instead of Israeli ones, which deprives workers of their fundamental basic rights.

The streets of Ma’ale Adumim are lined with majestic olive trees that were uprooted from Palestinian fields and brought there, giving the un-informed the perception that the settlement is as old as the ancient trees that are incorporated into its landscape. Sadness overwhelms me when I look at these trees – I see them with their arms wide open screaming for help; they have become displaced just like their owners. One of them stands at the entrance of Ma’ale Adumim, where the road then continues to Al ‘Eizariya, marking the crossroads between the occupiers and the occupied. Living in captivity, this tree has deep roots that will one day tell the story of conquest.
Home Demolitions and Evictions
Erasing Al Walaja

by Susan Palmai

The setting of the village of Al-Walaja, a community of 2,500 residents on the western edge of the Bethlehem area, is the beautiful rolling and terraced hillsides sloping down into a deep valley. The beauty of the area as well as its proximity to Bethlehem makes it attractive to settlers wanting to extend the Israeli settlements of Gilo and Har Gilo. Thirty houses in al-Walaja have pending demolitions orders as they stand in the way of further development: new houses in the settlement and the Separation Barrier's route, which is planned to completely encircle the village.

While visiting the village, we were graciously shown around by Mahmoud and Issam, two young men in their late 20s. When asked what they would like to see in the future for their village, one replied, “Leave us alone!”, referring to the Separation Barrier and the building of settlements that encroach on their village.

In al-Walaja, Mahmoud works at the Ansar Centre, a community centre providing support for children, teenagers and women of the village. There they can gather, participate in programmes and find solace in sharing their discomfort with each other as settlement construction approaches less than 100 meters from the door of the Ansar centre.

During our tour of the area, the threat to the village was palpable. We passed the demolished ruins of Issam’s house, a home that was bulldozed by the Israeli army and rebuilt by the family, only to be demolished again. They do not have the money to build a third time. A road, which only Israelis can use, separates Mahmoud and his family from a lonely little house belonging to his grandmother situated on the side of a steep, picturesque hill. Further up the hill sits Har Gilo, a very large, not-so-picturesque settlement built within the extended borders of the city of Jerusalem. The little house had to be abandoned by Mahmoud’s family several years ago. Those who had lived there must now live with other family members closer to the centre of the village.

The next stop on our tour was to visit with Abed, a local farmer who lives in a small but cozy cave complete with a bed, a few chairs, and a kitchen chiseled into its stone surface. While his family lives in a refugee camp in Bethlehem, he chose to remain in his village living in a cave and working his family’s land. He explained that by building underground rather than above-ground the army cannot demolish his home; by working the land, the army cannot claim the land as abandoned and then expropriate it as State land.

As we returned up the hill from Abed’s cave, Mahmoud and Issam explained that although they were on their own land, they should not be in the area because they risk being harassed and/
or arrested by Israeli soldiers. Yet, they felt that this would be unlikely while in the presence of internationals, adding “We only wish to be left alone to live in peace and with dignity”.

While on a second visit to the village, we heard another story of the loss of a village family’s home. Seham Salim and her immediate family had moved from country to country before eventually settling in the village of al-Walaja – her mother’s family’s hometown. In 2003, they built a family home but did not have the proper paperwork (e.g. title to the land), so not only did the Israeli government order the house to be demolished, they ordered the family to pay a fine of 70,000 NIS (about 18,000 USD). Additionally, the family was to bear the cost of the demolition, a not uncommon requirement of the families whose homes are demolished. On 31 January 2006, the IDF arrived at the house with bulldozers, ordered the family out, giving them just enough time to collect their identification cards and money before the bulldozers went to work.

With their house gone, some of the family went to live with other relatives in al-Walaja, and Seham’s two oldest sons began to live in a tent. The community responded by rallying behind them to help them build another house, albeit smaller than the first.

In November 2006, the bulldozers and the IDF arrived again, unannounced and flattened house number two. This time the Holy Land Trust intervened and assisted with financing a third house, with help from international and Israeli organizations.

As we sat in the small but cozy house enjoying Seham’s Palestinian hospitality, the view from the window includes piles of rubble from the demolitions of her previous houses. Close at hand, we can see the ever-approaching settlement of Gilo. She said, “The first two houses were bigger” and it “hurts her heart to think about it”. Now Seham and many other al-Walaja residents are holding their collective breath waiting for the next time. The demolition order is still in place; the Separation Barrier may be built and the settlements will likely continue to expand into the lands and area of this beautiful village.
At the bottom of the hill, we get out of the car where our driver will wait for us. The road is blocked with huge boulders. On foot, we walk through the road block and up to the Tent of Nations. The dirt road now leads us to a wire fence. We have already seen too many fences and ugly walls, and I’m disheartened to face yet another fence. We stop at a tall metal gate, fitted with a strong lock, which seems to have been repaired several times. We wait here to meet Daher, one of the brothers in the Nassar family. Meanwhile, I look around us at the scenery. We are in the midst of a beautiful hilly land with ancient terraces that could be hundreds or thousands of years old and hand-made dry-stack stone walls. I know the toil of making these walls; I’ve done it myself back in Switzerland. This work means squashed fingers of misplaced rocks, much patience to make everything fit just so, and the skill that comes only after generations of practice and inherited knowledge. Gnarled olive trees and delicately...
blooming almond trees are all around us on the hillside. Our eyes rise to the hilltops under the light blue sky. We see the scraped hillsides that look like stone quarries on the nearby hilltops. Yet, we are told by the previous EAPPI team, these scarred areas are the marks of the places where the foundations will be for new housing units in Newe Daniel, Rosh Zurim, Gavo’at and Eleazar, the growing Israeli settlements that are all around.

We hear Daher running down the hill with his key. He opens the gate for us with a big smile and the Arabic greeting: “Salaam Aleikum”, or “God be with you”. We answer with “Aleikum Asalaam” meaning “and God be with you also”. Daher explains to us the reason for the gate’s locks: three times in the last six months, settlers from the surrounding area, specifically those from Newe Daniel, have tried to enter the farm by force, breaking the gate and once, when they could not get the gate open, jumped the fence from the other side of the hill. They entered the property with rifles, scaring kids at a summer camp which Daher, his brother Daoud and the family offer each year. Making our way further up the hill, we see colorfully painted stones lining the path decorated by the very same kids getting a break from life in the city filled with bad air, no playground, and no one to offer activities and games. I pick up a little red stone and follow the path our group has taken onto the farm.

The group and Daher have disappeared into an old cave. My feet find the steps down to find Daher explaining to us his family’s history. Daher and Daoud’s grandfather lived in this cave, dug by him. We see levels for sleeping mattresses, a niche for cooking and, in the middle of the cave, an interestingly painted pillar: three faces above each other. Daher proudly points out that they depict his grandfather, his father and himself. The pillar also reminds the painter and the viewer of the gift of the three religions prominent in this area of the world: Islam, Judaism and Christianity.
As Daher shares the story of the family's relationship with the land, the most important fact is shared: the land of their family is, without a doubt, theirs. Daher's grandfather kept the purchase papers and deed to the land from 1916, proving ownership from the Ottoman Empire times, through British and Jordanian occupations and on to today. This is a great advantage over many Palestinian landowners, who obtained their properties by a verbal contract and a handshake. Nevertheless, the family is constantly harassed by settlers and the army; they have ended up defending the ownership of their land and buildings in court on many occasions.

Yet, the brothers, one of whom stays on the farm each night in rotation year round, is not allowed to hook into the electricity or water supply that goes to the nearby settlement. Neither are they legally allowed to install photo-voltaic panels for solar
power, nor build a cistern to collect rainwater for
human, animal and plant use. They would need a
building permit for those improvements, a permit
that the Israeli authorities refuse to give.

They are not allowed to build anything on their
land, not even to put up poles for the tents
that shelter the many international students
and volunteers that come every summer to
help with projects and to learn about the
increasingly difficult conditions of Palestinian
life under Israeli occupation. A helicopter
checks and monitors any building attempts or
improvements they make. Improvements (even
the lavatories built for family and volunteer
use) are reported and end up with a demolition
order on them.

The settlers and the army soldiers use threats
and force to frighten the family. Daoud tells us
about one such experience:
“One late evening, after a happy day on the hill,
I started to drive home - my small daughter and
son asleep on the back seat. A soldier guarding
the road to the farm stopped me, asking what
I was doing here. I told him that I was driving
back home from my property. The soldier
ordered me to empty my car. I did. “The kids
too!” the order came. I looked into his face:
He meant it. I gently woke up the little ones,
telling them that the soldier was a good man
and was not going to hurt them.”

The hilltop farm stands in peace despite the
legal assaults, and the harassment from the
neighbouring settlers and the soldiers. The
project on the hill is a success. Goats, chickens,
vegetables and fruit trees are thriving; volunteers
from many countries around the world come
and help. Children come for summer camp:
young people learning about peace and living
it. The family invites their neighbours to visit,
provided they leave their weapons at the fence,
right by the sign that shapes and defines this
“Tent of Nations”: We refuse to be enemies. As
we walk down the “humane hill”, we leave with
new hope in our hearts, hope for the nations
and for humanity.
South of the Old City there is an ongoing fight for history and square meters. Palestinians are being forced out of the Arab neighbourhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem and their homes have pending demolition orders to make space for the “The City of David”, an Israeli settlement that is a vital part of the Israeli government’s plan to solidify its illegal annexation of East Jerusalem. The Israeli government claims that Silwan, a major archaeological site, is where King David built his palace and established his capital. Although these claims have never been proven,
they are told to the 500,000 tourists who visit
the site every year; visitors are increasingly being
targeted by the Israeli government in the battle
for public opinion.

“It was here where everything started” says
the 3D movie shown at the beginning of the
three hour “official” tour. The young, Israeli-
licensed guide started the tour by saying, “This
is where it all started. This is the only place on
earth where the Bible is the only guidebook you
need.” Her words were heard without any doubt
of how archaeology, history and religion can be
distorted and used for political propaganda. The
historical diversity was wiped out in her story,
because she unfortunately provided only one
version of the area’s history. The 4,000 years
before David were ignored, and no mention was
made of the 55,000 Palestinians (about 90% of
the population) who have lived in Silwan for
countless generations. In fact, the tourists were
surrounded by high walls and walked thru pre-
selected paths, so as not to see the Palestinian
homes that decorate the neighbourhood.

Rather than telling the truth, a new history
was created – one that is meant to lobby the
international community and legitimize the
forced-displacement of the local Palestinian
population from their homes.

Ever since the private Israeli organization
Elad received permission to dig at the site in
1997, the aim seems to be to remove as many
Palestinians as possible from the area under the
guise of archaeological excavations. Although
Palestinians in Jerusalem pay taxes just as
Israelis do, they get little in return. In Silwan
there is no park, no playground, no library, no
shopping centre, no cinema, no sports facilities
nor a health clinic. They are not even allowed
to build homes or add extensions to existing
ones. In fact, many families expect that their
homes will be demolished by the Municipality
of Jerusalem or taken over by Israeli settlers.

There are currently 88 pending demolition
orders in Silwan, and the lack of stability due to
the imminent threat of displacement has had a
paralyzing effect on its residents.

There is a widespread dispute in Jerusalem
about Elad’s archaeological excavations and
interpretations of its findings. Thus, Israeli and
Palestinian led “alternative-tourism” groups
frequently take interested visitors to the area
to tell the untold history, to question the
discoveries, and to inform tourists about the
conflict and the deep-roots that Palestinian
families have in the area. They also explain how
the housing policies in the neighbourhood are
part of a plan to demographically Judaize East
Jerusalem so that the “facts on the ground” will
never allow the occupied East Jerusalem to be
part of a future Palestinian state.

When we met Jawad Siyam, he told us that his
family had built their house in Silwan in 1952.
Settlers tried taking over the house in 1994 and
though they were unsuccessful, they managed
to occupy his grandfather’s home. Jawad is
the Director of the Wadi Hilwah Information
Centre, where he and his volunteer staff of local
youth are committed to building awareness
about what is happening in the area. He told
us that more than 50% of Silwan’s residents
are under the age of 18 years old and said he
can only ensure a brighter future for Silwan’s
youth by spreading awareness. Before bidding
us farewell, he said, “Please tell your family
and friends about our struggle for freedom and
peace.”
Farisa, a mother of 11 grown up children has lived most of her lifetime in Khirbet Tana, a small agricultural village, south east of Nablus. She has seen her home demolished twice and has been threatened by the inhabitants of the neighbouring settlement several times. In 2001 her son was shot by a settler during the olive harvest. She has lost her son and two houses but her strength, humour and tenacity remain.

Early in the morning of 10 January 2010, five bulldozers and several soldiers came to destroy most of the houses and the school in Khirbet
Farisa and her neighbours were given five minutes to pack their personal belongings, which was not nearly enough to save everything. Sadly, this situation was not new to the villagers, who had lost their original houses in 2005, when following demolition orders all the buildings except for the old mosque were destroyed. The legitimisation for the Demolition Orders is officially "security reasons", as the area is designated as a military training ground and as such is unsafe for residential dwellings. The nearby, and far more recent, settlement of Makhora apparently does not suffer the same risk, as in spite of claims that there is a freeze on settlement building it has been recently expanding. The “security risk” in Khirbet Tana is highly questionable. It seems more likely that there are plans to displace the whole village in order to expand the settlement. Settlers are coming into the village frequently, threatening people or trying to swim in the well.

In addition, the Israeli Army has been challenging other aspects of the people’s life in Khirbet Tana. A month before the demolitions of January 2010, four tractors had been “confiscated” by the army. An impossibly high fine was requested of the farmers in order to reclaim their tractors, on which they depend for their livelihoods. EAs spoke at that time to Arik Asherman of Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR) about the tractors, and about the difficulties the farmers were facing in getting them back. He informed us that although RHR were actively investigating, his main concern was that this signalled a potential activation of the demolition orders that had been issued on the houses. RHR had been very actively involved in the rebuilding of Khirbet Tana in 2005 and had at the same time attempted to get permits for the dwellings, on the basis of what seemed to be robust land rights. These attempts were eventually quashed in the Israeli courts and new demolition orders were issued. Arik, speaking in December 2009 about his concerns that the tractor confiscation could in fact signal the imminent demolition of the rebuilt houses, was sadly to be proved correct.

Despite having experienced two comprehensive demolitions, the villagers remain on their land and brave this difficult situation. After the first demolition they rebuilt their houses at once. Knowing what may come, they had more recently told EAs “If they demolish our homes again, we will rebuild them again!” - and they did. Farisa tells with a keen smile on her face that in the very minute the army was destroying the houses, the villagers began to rebuild them again. She offered sweets to the soldiers and kept on making cheese just as she would on a normal day. She laughs out loud several times while she is telling the story. Everyone around her is infected by her humour and starts to laugh, sitting in between the broken bricks and destroyed roofs of a whole village.

The image of the village is indeed chaotic - the school lies in pieces, some former roofs cover the grass. But even though their houses have broken for the second time, their will has not. In fact, the village is even livelier than before. More people have come back to Khirbet Tana because the farming season has now started. Fences and tents can be seen everywhere, many through donations by national and international NGOs as their representatives are frequently visiting.
the village. Medical treatment, the water supply and sheep shelters are improved or guaranteed by various organizations. A new school will be financed soon and Khirbet Tana has even promised its first paved street! Since the days have become warmer and nature around the village is showing its best spring face, even people from the neighbouring towns are coming in buses to have picnics. Farisa welcomes everyone with her warm smile.

Khirbet Tana is challenged by settlers and soldiers. They seem to be doing everything they can to erase the tiny village from the map. “When we came to take your tractors, we broke one of your legs. Now we are breaking the other one!” a soldier said when they came to demolish the houses. But Khirbet Tana is still standing, again. Its story is impressive; on the one hand because of the pressure and oppression it faces from the Israeli Army and on the other hand because the people have never lost their resilience. This inherently positive resilience casts a more lasting impression on the visitor than the threat ever could. Farisa’s laughter could warm the heart of everyone who is confronted by the frustration of living under occupation. If only she could be more widely heard.
HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE
Provoking Tuq’ua

by Sabine Blum

We come to the large Palestinian village of Tuq’ua in the Bethlehem mountains, a village surrounded by settlements and bound by roads intended for settlers to use. One of these roads skirts the edge of town and cuts through a path that many children use to get to school: one of the secondary boys’ schools in town is east of the road; the secondary girls’ schools and the primary school are on the west side of the road. Children have to cross the road in order to get to classes.

We’ve come early in the morning to watch and monitor as the children go to school. We see the school kids as they are stream down from all sides of the village, hundreds of them, some on small paths but most on the narrow paved road without sidewalks the settlers’ road through Tuq’ua. The children go down the hill to their school building. They walk, run, and skip into the little valley in ever increasing groups.

There are 400 small girls, ages six to ten,300
older girls grades four to ten; and 400 boys grades six through twelve, youngsters, eager to be men soon: total 1100 school children. Some pupils with special vests, assisted by a young teacher, try guiding their classmates across the rather busy street with no speed bumps or pedestrian markings. Settlers drive their cars at high speed down the road full of children, frightening those who are walking and those who are watching.

Every day, at least one military vehicle shows up on this dangerous road to stand guard. The vehicles park just off the road, either in the shadow of the girls’ school or on the road leading to the boys’ school. The soldiers do not come, however, to offer protection for the children along this dangerous road. Rather, they show up to give protection to the settlers and their cars along the road. Ostensibly, the reason for protection is stones that are thrown at the cars and the military vehicles by the children, especially the boys. Yet, the danger is greatest for the children. Not only do they have to watch for the cars, but they experience harassment and bullying from the soldiers in their jeeps. At times, the children and their school bags are searched by the soldiers. Other times, the search includes angry and provocative words. In the past months, after experiencing this treatment, a few of the boys have thrown stones at the army jeeps. Those soldiers have responded with canisters of tear gas and “sound grenades” thrown into the courtyard of the boys’ school. The boys all ran up the hillside away from the school and towards fresh, clean air. School was cancelled for the rest of the day.

More distressing, however, are the incidents in past years of the harassment, bullying, and aggression of the soldiers turning to violence and killing: recently a physically handicapped student was badly beaten by two soldiers in front of one of the teachers. Two students have been killed on the road in front of the school, and on the path to school, by gunfire from the soldiers.

The Ecumenical Accompaniment team can only go to the village once a week to observe
and monitor the morning school in-gathering. Yet, we attempt to work with, encourage and promote the efforts of the local leadership to strengthen their community, particularly in the face of such difficulties and realities of nearby settlements and the military occupation. When visiting the mayor of the village of Tuq’ua, this is what he told us:

“Yes, I know, this is a very dangerous road through our village that our children have to use. I have applied to the Civil Administration several times for sidewalks, speed bumps and warning signs, but without any result so far. Seventy meters of the land to the right and to the left of a road that is used by Israelis also is declared Area C, which means the Israeli government has the say. Also, not only have we already lost 6000 dunums to Israeli settlements, but a new agricultural road that the village has built was closed down again just 5 months ago by the Israeli government. They say it’s for security reasons. And look here! [He points to a big area of rubbles inside the school yard] Does this look like a recreation area which would be in your country? I’m sorry for the kids, but I simply cannot find the money.”

Hemmed in by a road, with Israeli settlements and settlement outposts all around, the pressures and tensions in the homes and farms of the village can be high. Yet, the school-children, those who are still learning about their neighbour and their humanity, are being shaped by the inequality and environment of fear that comes with having residents of settlements, who speed by on the road, as their nearest neighbours.
Spring has come to Susiya, a small village in South Hebron Hills. The stone covered hills have turned blossoming green and the newborn lambs have plenty to eat. Life for the shepherding people should be easy this time of year, but something obscures the magnificent view.

On the other side of the valley, past the neat rows of olive trees there is a black watch tower, guarded 24 hours by soldiers. Just behind, a large settlement block overshadows the small Palestinian village.

Sana’ moved to Susiya when she married to Jamal ten years ago, now they have five children together, the youngest only six-month old. They live in tents like all the other neighbours, because no Palestinians get building permits here. But living in tents doesn’t mean that the problem is solved: the small family have demolition orders on all their tents, the small toilet and the even tiny chicken house. Their tents have already been demolished four times even though they are the owners of the land.

Tent life is not easy, too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer. Sana tries to keep it clean and tidy but still the flies are everywhere. They are not allowed to bring running water or electricity to the tents. The Israeli-Palestinian NGO, The Villages Group, has tried to help them with some solar panels so that they at least can keep a lamp turned on at night.

“It is not good for the children to stay here”, she says. “They get ill and they are afraid. A few years ago the soldiers used to come almost every week to search the tents.” They would force them to take out all their belongings even the...
smallest coffee cup; they would scream at the children and sometimes throw sound grenades – all in the name of “security”.

Sana admits that she would like to move, life is just so difficult here. But how could they give up now, when they have struggled for so many years and besides, where would they go? Their land is here and they need somewhere to keep all their animals. Jamal’s grandparents used to live where the settlement is situated, but in 1982 they were chased away to make room for the settlement. First to an area a few hundred meters away and then again in 1986 to where they live now.

“And still we are not left alone”, Jamal complains, “what do they want from us?” Jamal points out the remains of his aunt’s house, just by the black watchtower. Some settler kids are gathering there now, its Saturday today, Shabbat for the Jewish people. It is always on Shabbat that they cause the Palestinians the most trouble. That is their day off.

Herding is the main source of income for the people of Susiya, but the “closed military zone” surrounding the settlement prohibits them from using the best grazing area for their animals and the richest land for agriculture. Jamal’s family owns 1500 dunums but they can only reach one third of it. Jamal explains how they sometimes try to go to the area at night, only 30 minutes at a time, to plant or harvest their land. But it is dangerous.

One week ago Jamal’s brother got arrested because he was herding the sheep to close to the watch-tower; the olive grove is the invisible border even though they possess land far beyond that point. The settlers on the other hand can take their sheep to the Palestinian land without risk of any problem. Sana explains how they came two weeks ago and let their sheep walk around and eat the crops of the Palestinians. She screamed at them to go away but the settlers didn’t leave until the police came after nearly one hour. Two weeks before a settler killed two sheep with his car as he was passing by the village. Since the settlement was built, the Palestinians have not been allowed to use that road. What used to be a ten minute ride to the closest town Yatta, now takes more than an hour.

The expression “A dog is a man’s best friend” has a significant meaning in Susiya. All the families have guard dogs to alert them if settlers or soldiers are coming to the village. In June 2008, Jamal’s aunt got severely injured when she was attacked by four masked settler men with wooden sticks. She was herding with her sheep on her land not even close to the settlement when they came. The incident was videotaped by a neighbour and broadcasted all over the world. But despite the strong evidence no one was convicted for the crime.

Jamal does not get surprised anymore: “The Israeli soldiers and police always protect the settlers, even when they commit crimes. We are not allowed to protect ourselves.”

Over the years four people have been killed by settlers. Nowadays there are often internationals in Susiya such as EAPPI and B’Tselem provide the families with video cameras for documenting attacks and harassment. This is their only protection. According to the Fourth Geneva Convention Israeli settlements on the Occupied Palestinian Territories are illegal under International Humanitarian Law, and “they ( Civilians) shall be treated humanely and never be discriminated against.”

The rules are there, but justice is far from the people of Susiya.
Wadi Al Hussein is a valley in the outskirts of Hebron city. It is located between two settlements: on one side is Kiryat Arba, the first Israeli settlement in Hebron since the occupation. Work on it started already in 1968; on the other side is the Givat Ha'avot settlement. These two settlements are considered one unit and have a joint local council. Together they have about 7,000 citizens. The street running from Hebron city centre out through Wadi Al Hussein has been closed to Palestinian vehicles for the last seven years, for security reasons. Since a few weeks, a Palestinian public bus has been allowed run. This is a recent positive development, but the only one to mention. The Israeli settlers are free to use their cars on this street whenever they like.

The people who live in this area have many stories to tell. Like the family that has a tent on their field built by the settlers as a synagogue. Several times, it has been demolished by the
IDF, but is quickly rebuilt. Families in the area can only do the olive harvest accompanied of internationals.

The local Shoemaker has five sons. They can’t find wives because nobody wants their daughter to live in such an area. The families in the area know that if they leave their houses, the valley will go to the settlers. But if the shoemaker can’t find a woman for his oldest son, he will move. Another family tells of the five horses they once had: three of them got poisoned by settlers; they gave away the other two. In their living room they have a large cabinet with many cups and trophies won at racing competitions. In the fathers eyes one can clearly see what his horses meant to him. In the same house they showed us a pile of old photographs. We see a lot of pictures with sheep and horses or people standing in front of this house. In the background, we see the settlement of Kyriat Arba rising up from a few houses on a hill to the massive complex it is today with the security fence around it.

In the pictures, we also see many of the women without headscarves and wearing short skirts. This was quite normal in the 80’s here in Hebron. Then there were the pictures of the family on holidays at the Red Sea. The picture of their father in swimming trunks on a motor boat was reminiscent of much happier times. Holidays at the Red Sea are impossible today for Palestinians in this area, or anywhere in the West Bank for that matter. Today the family relies on support from local and international NGOs just to assure their existence.

Another house close to the street has a high fence around it, financed by TIPH (Temporary International Presence in Hebron) to protect the people from the stones thrown by passing settlers. Fawsia lives here with her mother, her
husband and their eight children, and one
grandchild, her eldest daughter’s child. The
grandchild lives there because her husband is
in jail. She is only 18 years old and would like
to study, but left school after she got married.
Her husband has another year left in jail, and
doesn’t want her to work. So she takes care of
her siblings and her own child. This is no easy
job. If the parents are both out, she has to keep
the kids inside. Sened, her 11 year old brother,
is very naughty and always tries to escape. She
told us that he is not very clever. Two years
ago, settlers passing by hit him with a wooden
stick on the head. He was unconscious for days
and spent a long period in hospital. Before he
was excellent at school; today he can’t follow
anymore. There is an Israeli demolition order
on the house, even though it has been here a
long time. The new part of the house was built
with international help.

These are some examples of what the people of
the Wadi al Hussein valley have to cope with in
their daily lives. In a climate of powerlessness,
they struggle to maintain day-to-day life.

Israeli Military vehicles often
patrol Wadi Al Hussein and
setup checkpoints.
In February 2009, 69 year old farmer Hussein and his 19 year old nephew were attacked by a group of nearby settlers from the settlement town of Havat Gilad on his land near the village of Tel not far from Nablus. He had been ploughing with his tractor that morning in preparation for planting a hay crop. At 3pm after completing afternoon prayer, he stood up and suddenly found himself surrounded by a large group of settlers. The settlers carried sticks and had several large dogs with them. They beat him with the sticks and threw stones at him. As he fell to the ground he said he decided not to fight back but rather to entrust his protection to God. “Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar” he cried as they continued to attack him on the ground. His 19 year old nephew was also beaten with sticks. The settlers then slashed the tyres of his tractor, stole a large bag of seed and one of his two donkeys. He managed to travel the 1km to the nearest road on the back of the remaining donkey where his nephew was able to call a taxi to take him to Qalqilia hospital. Here he was treated for shock and severe bruising, and had twelve stitches in deep and dirty wounds to the front and back of his head.

After treatment, though bloody and covered in muddy clay, he was happy to be interviewed by B’tselem, an Israeli human rights organization, and two Ecumenical Accompaniers. He said he was not prepared to go to the Israeli police as he knew from the experiences of others that they were ineffective in following up such cases and he did not trust them. His view is echoed by in B’tselem’s 2008 Annual Report which said: “The policy of leniency and turning a blind eye to harm to Palestinians, which is implemented by the Israeli authorities charged with law enforcement on Israeli citizens in the Occupied Territories, reflects a shameful disregard for the law and property of Palestinians, which Israel has a duty to respect.”

This statement contrasts with the words of Bob Lang spokesman for the settlement of Efrat near Bethlehem, who made a presentation to a group of Ecumenical Accompaniers and said:
as themselves victims of the violent culture of the occupation. He said, “These settlers are primitive and poorly educated people with closed minds”

For the last 2 years B’tselem has been running a campaign called “shooting back” which trains Palestinians vulnerable to attack by settlers in the use of video cameras. There have been several cases where the film they have gathered has been used to convict violent settlers and many more cases where the presence of cameras has reduced the possibility of violence. As a B’tselem trainer said, “the Israeli army may have guns, but in the end a camera is a more powerful weapon.” One of the nurses who treated Hussein also agreed to have a video camera in order to document injuries to Palestinians caused by settlers which he said was a growing and worrying trend at the casualty department.

Hussein, though obviously shocked by the attack was fully intending to go back to his land and continue working on it as he said he knew no other life. He said that he could only trust in God for his protection and thanked those who had listened to his story. He said he thought it important that the wider world should know of the suffering of the Palestinian people. When asked how he felt towards his attackers his answer was, “I don’t hate these people, I just wish God’s peace upon them that one day we may have peace in this land, and may Allah bring peace upon you all.”

“The settlers are the bridge to peace in this land, as they live amongst the Palestinian people. Peace means living together side by side; walls and fences don’t bring it”

Facts on the ground however show daily reports of settler violence against Palestinians, often intended to encourage farmers to leave their land. Abdul Karim Saidi works for B’tselem and sees a lot of settler violence. He described the settlers who attack an old men such as Hussein,
We had been invited by farmer Abu Riyad from the village of Immatin to his land in the valley just below the Havat Gilad settlement outpost. As we walked along the road a beautiful valley lay before us. By the side of the road yellow flowers were growing high and the olive trees were green. The sky was grey with a small threat of rain. It would have been a gorgeous walk had it not been for the three Israeli soldiers fast approaching behind us.

Immatin is a village in the Qalqiliya Governorate in the northern West Bank of Palestine. It has around 3000 citizens. [The village itself is in Area B but the land surrounding it is Area C.] Immatin’s recent history is, like that of so many other villages in the area, stained by stories of uprooted olive trees, confiscated lands, and the approach of the Separation Barrier or Wall. If the planned route of the wall is finished, some 10,000 of the 27,000 dunums of village land will be isolated from the village. “No one knows when the second stage of the construction of the wall will start, but when it does it will cripple the village” the Secretary of the Municipality said when I met him in his office.

The village has had problems with settlers for many years. The closest settlement is the Qedumim Settlement, built in 1977 and with a population in 2007 of 3,382. But the biggest problems are not with the settlers from Qedumim but with those from an outpost named Havat Gilad, or Gilad Farm, established by Moshe Zar in 2002. “Outposts” are how settlements start and are generally situated on hilltops. At first they have a few temporary structures such as caravans or cabins and are totally separated from the closest permanent settlement. They are usually established by a few Jews - the population of Havat Gilad is about 20 - who are very strongly ideologically and religiously motivated to, as they see it, recover the Jewish homeland. Outposts are considered illegal not just in international law but by Israeli law as well. Immatin farmers have had problems with

Problems in Immatin

by Sofie Eriksson
settlers from this outpost since it was first set up. They as well as farmers from neighbouring villages have been harassed on their own land. Settlers throw stones from the hillside, and many dunums of crops and olive trees have been burnt by them over the years. Settlers sometimes beat the farmers, and have on occasion even come into the village to burn cars and cause other problems. Israeli Army soldiers patrol the area and are frequently present but do not protect the Palestinian villagers. Abu Riyad tells us that during clashes between farmers and settlers the soldiers are usually on the side of the settlers. Sometimes they even take part in the abuse.

On the morning of 11 January 2010 Abu Riyad was on his land with other family members when some 20 settlers from Havat Gilad came down and approached them. Abu Riyad and his family members attempted unsuccessfully to negotiate with the settlers, but the altercations continued during the day and the situation escalated. The settlers called in the Army. The farmers for their part invited in the media, and members of the press documented the events that followed. In the clash between the settlers and the farmers, the soldiers protected the settlers, restrained Abu Riyad, pushed him to the ground and beat him using, he said, guns and rocks. He still suffers from the injuries he received from this beating. This is not the first time he or members of his family had been beaten by soldiers or settlers, he told us. A few years ago his son, a Palestinian policeman, was brutally beaten after Abu Riyad, family members and friends tried to prevent the building of a water pipe across their land connecting Havat Gilad to Qedumim settlement by cutting the pipe in several places. The soldiers beat his son almost unconscious, and he almost died.

Abu Riyad had invited us to his land to see the problems for ourselves. As we were walking towards his land, a military jeep parked on the road and three soldiers came up fast behind us. They claimed we did not have the right to pass and that they would call the border police. Abu Riyad became very upset and managed to push through and reach his land as the soldiers watched. After a rather heated discussion between one of our Palestinian contacts and the soldiers we withdrew and eventually returned to Immatin—one of the soldiers said that they were protecting us from the settlers as they have attacked people from international organizations before. That may be true, but the repeated stories from people in this area who have been beaten by soldiers made us feel less then safe, not just because of the settlers but also because of the presence of soldiers, too.

“The settlers are the worst problem of the occupation, but it is not the settlers that we fear. We know their minds. It is the soldiers that are the real danger.” (Abu Riyad, 24 February 2010, Immatin)
Mohammed, a quiet and sensitive-looking 22 year old, was subjected to a violent and threatening attack as he visited his father’s land in Kafr Qaddum to tend the family’s olive trees.

The village of Kafr Qaddum is overlooked by the settlement of Qedumim and its two settlement outposts, Qedumim Zefon and Givat HaMerkaziz, which have spread over four hills above the ancient village. The old Palestinian road to Nablus which goes through the new settlement has now been closed to Palestinians so a journey that used to take 20 minutes and cost 6 shekels now takes 1½ hours and costs 20 shekels.
For hundreds of years the people of the village have been dependent on the olive harvest, but with the coming of the settlement the majority of its trees are now in Area C, under full Israeli control, so permission to look after the trees and harvest the olives has to be given by the Israeli District Coordination Office and the Israeli army. This is to ensure there are no clashes between settlers and the villagers when they go to work their land.

On 20 February 2010 Mohammed went with two friends to work on his father's land which borders onto the settlement. Negotiations between the Deputy Mayor of the village, Abu Musab, the District Coordinating Office and the army meant he felt safe and officially permitted to go to his land. The three young men went to spray the spring grass under their olive trees to ensure maximum fertility for the roots of the trees. When Mohammed arrived he was surprised to see that a new fence had annexed half of his father's land, but because he had limited time, he and his friends went to work under the trees. At 11am he was confronted by a settler in army fatigues and armed with an M16 rifle shouting at him to "get off my land!" The settler was shaking with rage. He then fired a shot in the air and, pointing his gun at Mohammed, tied his hands with a plastic tie. Mohammed and his friends were terrified as they felt the trembling man might shoot them either by mistake or deliberately. The soldiers responsible under international law for protecting the Palestinian farmers were alerted by the noise of the gunshot but simply watched from a distance. The Israeli police were called and Mohammed was taken to the Settlement Police Station at Qedumim. He was released on bail at 11pm, after an announcement from the mosque that the villagers had collected the required 1,700 shekels (approximately $550).

Earlier in the week his family had celebrated the release of his elder brother from an Israeli jail. He had been held without charge for 26 months. The mood of celebration had quickly turned to one of anxiety and despair with the arrest of Mohammed two days later. When asked what his plans for the future were Mohammed's answer was "Please can you help me to go to Sweden I don't want to live here anymore."

Reflecting on this story, Abu Musab, the Deputy Mayor of the village, said, "This small story is really the big story, a microcosm of life in Palestine. Somebody steals your land, then accuses you of trespassing on their land and violates your human rights using a gun and the full force of military law. It's the occupation in a nutshell."

Asked how he continued to find the strength to work on behalf of the village under such constant threat he said: "I have to, this is my home. As a Palestinian I'm rooted in this land just like those 1,000 year old olive trees. I also get huge encouragement from working with Israeli peace activists and internationals like you."

Mohamad sits under an olive tree as he shares his story with EAs.
The stories about Asterix and his tiny village which refused to be occupied by the Roman Empire are famous. As Hani Amir opens a small gate in the separation barrier and lets you into his garden, you almost expect the smell of grilled wild pork and the sound of a cacophonic unbearable voice.

Hani’s house is surrounded. Looking out from his front door you see an eight meter tall concrete wall which separates him and his family from the village of Mas-ha to which they belong. The road along outside leads on the right to a military base a few hundred metres away, and on the left through gates and tall fences topped with barbed wire to the houses of the Elkana settlement. If it weren’t for the tall fences topped with barbed wire between the houses, this could have been an ordinary neighbourhood. But Hani’s neighbours want him to move. “They climb the fences and enter my garden. Sometimes they fire their guns, other times they throw stones. Once a stone hit my youngest son in his forehead; he was ten years old at the time. They are trying to scare us away.”

Hani bought his land when he got married in the early 1970s. He built his house and worked the fields. The family ran a small restaurant. When the Separation Barrier was built in 2003, most of his land was confiscated.

Elkana is built in the West Bank, and more than half of it is built on private Palestinian land. The settlement was founded in 1977 and it now has about 3,000 residents. Most of them are religious Zionist settlers who settled in the West Bank because they believe that God gave them the land. Therefore, they believe Hani is the one who is breaking the rules. This was demonstrated when a German journalist asked a settler representative why they were harassing Hani’s family. He said: “We are not the ones who are causing trouble. Hani is causing his own problems by staying in that house. If he agrees to move there will be no problems.”

By losing much of their land, Hani’s family also lost half their income. Now the Separation Barrier and the settlement make it difficult to travel to the remaining part of their fields. “If I could drive through the settlement it would take me two minutes to go to my land. Now I have to travel around it and pass two Israeli checkpoints, which takes about an hour. I do it every day. It’s my land, and I will not give up.” Today Hani has a key to the gate in the Separation Barrier which allows him to pass to Mas-ha. It has not always been like that. “For more than a year I didn’t have a key to the gate. The soldiers opened it for 15 minutes every day. It was impossible for my children to go to school; we were living in a prison. We held demonstrations which internationals from all over the world attended. Sometimes I destroyed the gate. In the end they decided to give the key back to me. Later they told me I wasn’t allowed to have visitors. I told them it’s my house, and that I can have as many visitors as I like. Then they told me I could have visitors, but that they weren’t allowed to take pictures. I told them everyone who wants to can take as many pictures as they like, because the land is mine. Now they have stopped hassling me about this.”

Hani and his family have become a thorn in the flesh of Israel. He receives a great deal of attention and publicity from the international community which makes it difficult for the Israeli authorities to remove the family by force. Therefore they started trying other tactics. “They offered to build us a new house in another village, with free electricity and water. If we agreed, they would also find a job for me and my oldest son. I rejected their offer. Now I’m stuck here without anything, but I’m stuck on my own land.”

Hani does not have any strength-enhancing potion, but right now one more person knows him and his story. In our world that may be just as important.
To See or Not To See…

by Ingrid Edfast

A group of pilgrims were walking through the Old City of Jerusalem. In the distance were many praying voices. The group is led by a man carrying a large wooden cross. They were walking along the ‘Via Dolorosa’, following Jesus’ path to his crucifixion. Overwhelmed by the seriousness of the moment and reflection on Jesus’ suffering - they did not look at anything other than the street blocks that they were walking upon. If only the thousands of pilgrims who visit Jerusalem each year would lift their heads and take a good look around – they would see a completely different suffering; a suffering not so many speak about, but one that exists only a few metres from the Via Dolorosa.

On a roof terrace overlooking the crowd is a woman looking out at an incredible view; the golden Dome of the Rock reflecting the afternoon sun with the Mount of Olives in the background. However, the terrace is not nearly as beautiful as its view; parts of it have been demolished by Israeli authorities – toys, flower pots and all sorts of broken things are scattered on what remains of the terrace floor. Yet, the woman on the terrace is not alone with her problems; wherever we go, we can see traces of the slow takeover of Palestinian homes in the occupied Old City by Israeli settlers.

In another house, not far away, lives Abed with his wife and their seven children. They live on the top floor of one of the tallest buildings in the Old City. The view is fantastic and strategic; thus, the Israelis want it so as to install surveillance cameras. Abed was given an ultimatum, either...
to tear down his apartment himself, or have it forcefully demolished for a fee of 80,000 NIS (approximately $20,000 USD). The house is in dire need of repairs, but authorities have not allowed him to fix them. Abed is not even allowed to fix a hole in his roof so that it would stop leaking rain into his 6-month old baby's crib. Abed says, “The Israeli Government is trying to force us to leave our home, by letting it decay until they can demolish or take it, but I will never give in. I will never leave my home and they have no right to make me do so, it has been built by my grandfather and my family has lived in it for more than 70 years, before Israel even existed. Where should we go? I have seven children and no work.”

As we left, Ahmad, our local contact and translator told us that “there are approximately 150 houses and apartments in the Old City that are threatened by demolition orders.” He knows the area very well as he is creating a video documentary of the stories of the families that are living under the threat of demolition and eviction. He pointed out a window on our way down the stairs of Abed’s home and said, “Look… All those houses decorated with Israeli flags were originally Palestinian homes that were taken over by Jewish settlers.” Once we were on the street he said, “Hurry… I have many families I want you to meet.” He took us up another steep staircase at the top of which were two armed guards in front of a thick door with a heavy lock. He told us “One year ago, a family of nine Palestinians were thrown out of this apartment and it was turned over to a group of five settlers who brought these guards with them. The settlers moved on to occupy other homes, but they left behind the security to make sure the original owners do not return to their apartment and to ensure it stays in the hands of the Israel.”

As we continue to the next floor up, he knocks on the door of another apartment in the same building and introduces us to an elderly woman who lives there with her pregnant daughter’s family. She says, “I am afraid every day. They have beaten me and threatened to install an electronic lock on the door that leads into our staircase. If they do, they will then be able to determine when we may - or may not be allowed to enter our own home. What shall we do? They have no right to take over our apartments – but they still do. Nobody listens to us and nobody cares!”

Although the outcome of illegal Israeli settlements and settlers will be ultimately debated and realized between politicians, we believe that ordinary people bear the responsibility to at least lift their heads when walking the streets of this ancient city so as to bear witness to suffering that still haunts Via Dolorosa and the surrounding neighbourhoods. We hope that people will open their eyes to the reality on the ground and push their representatives and governments to bring an end to evictions, demolitions, settlements and occupation.
While Mohammed and his family are shepherds, he is also a school-teacher. One day in the beginning of February, settlers came from the nearby settlement of Mevo Dotan and frightened his son who was herding their sheep that day. I met him the next day to hear the story. Mohammed said the settlers chased away the sheep and were generally hostile towards his son. As we sipped coffee in the sunshine outside Mohammed’s house, he pointed towards a bundle of plastic arches. “Two months ago the settlers came and demanded that I take down my sheep pen because I was not allowed to build here. They did not show any kind of court order, but just told me that if I did not take it down myself – they would”. Mohammed hopelessly said that instead of letting them come and do it, he did it himself to appease them. “Some days the soldiers are here to protect students from Tel Aviv who come hiking here. One day they stopped me and my students from going to school because some students from Tel Aviv wanted to visit the historic ruins up the hill.”

Mohammed lives in the small village of Khirbet al Hamam which is in the far northwest of the West Bank, situated right between the settlements of Mevo Dotan and Hermesh. The nearest Palestinian village is An Nazla ash Sharqiya to the West. In order to get to this village we had to travel in a four-wheel-drive Jeep for about 45 minutes, through water and mud on a deteriorated road. The village
A scenic view of Khirbet Al Hamam, a Palestinian village where locals are often victims of harassment and violence from Israeli Settlers.
itself is home to about 70 people from seven families, living in shacks and small houses. The community lacks the most basic infrastructure, such as roads, electricity and water, which led to isolation and poverty. The villagers are refugees who were chased out of Caesarea in 1948 by Jewish militants. Instead of settling down in a refugee camp, they rented the land of Khirbet al Hamam from a nearby villager and have lived there ever since.

The settlement of Mevo Dotan was founded in 1981. It is located on top of a hill that overlooks Khirbet al Hamam. The name comes from the ancient biblical city of Tel Dothan that was supposedly positioned in this area. Mevo Dotan means the road to Dotan. According to Mohammed, groups of Israeli settlers and university students often come to the ruins above his village. They claim that they are Roman ruins and are keen to link them to Tel Dothan, which according to the settlers, would make the area “historically theirs”, as he puts it. Mohammed, on the other hand, claims that the ruins might be Byzantine. Using history as an argument for the ownership of land is common in the whole of the West bank. It is,
however, difficult to reach a conclusion based on facts regarding ruins because of the political ramifications of the arguments. It is especially difficult when it comes to any kind of legal argument about ownership based on historical records.

The area where Khirbet al Hamam and these two settlements are situated is relatively far away from any of the larger cities. People here do not get much attention in the media, which makes the villagers vulnerable to settler harassment and violence.

Before I left the valley where the village is situated, I saw the settlement of Hermesh about two kilometres away, situated on a hilltop. Hermesh and Mevo Doran house no more than 500 people, but are surrounded by numerous military installations. In 2005 the two settlements were to be evacuated and dismantled by the Israeli government in the initial draft of its unilateral disengagement plan, but in the end they managed to remain. The future of both the settlements and Khirbet al Hamam are threatened for different reasons. In the future history will tell us who were able to stay.
The Soufan Family lives in Burin, south of Nablus. Their house lies on a hill in the middle of an olive grove encircled by beautiful wild flowers in the spring. It is a peaceful place at the first sight. But on top of the surrounding hills, there are buildings of the Yitzhar settlement looking down upon the Palestinian village.

Um Ahmad, mother of nine children, is preparing food with some of her daughters in the house, while the boys are sitting outside and looking after the sheep. “Mustawtanin!” (settlers), someone suddenly shouted. Everyone knows what is happening; it has happened many times before. Although the hills are wide and sparkled with colour, it is not hard to see the crowds of people moving down towards the house.

Inside the house, 22-year-old Iman’s hands are shaking while she is adjusting the video camera to film the attack for B’Tselem, an Israeli peace group. She has experienced these visits and witnessed their horrific consequences before. Before the year 2000 the relationship with the neighbouring settlers was good. The illegal settlement of Yitzhar was built on Palestinian land in 1984, only a few hundred metres away from the house we now stand in, where Iman was born. Even though the anger about land loss was deep, there was a peaceful coexistence. The fragility of that situation was brought into sharp relief with the onset of the second

A Place Called Home

by Christina Beil

The Soufan Family lives in Burin, south of Nablus. Their house lies on a hill in the middle of an olive grove encircled by beautiful wild flowers in the spring. It is a peaceful place at the first sight. But on top of the surrounding hills, there are buildings of the Yitzhar settlement looking down upon the Palestinian village.

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Um Ahmad tells EAs about life in Burin - a village in constant conflict with the surrounding settlers.
intifada, and everything changed. In February 2002 settlers invaded the family’s property and partially burned the house. Iman was 15 when she saw her home in flames. When her father saw what was happening he had a heart attack and died in front of her eyes. When Iman is talking about her life before this day, her eyes shine. Every time you ask about settlers her eyes show how she is suffering, along with her whole family. "It’s difficult, very difficult", they always say. Their sheep get stolen, animals slaughtered, and olive trees cut.

The settlers are moving towards the house. As they get closer, we can see 20 men, some with covered faces, armed with slings and sticks. The family is on alert. It is not only Iman whose has got a special task in these emergency situations, everyone seems to fit into a well developed system. The boys are making phone calls and taking sheep inside while the mother is observing the situation. Her daughters are taking care of the children. Soon, villagers from other parts of Burin arrive to support the family.

After a few minutes some soldiers arrive. In time, there are five military cars around the house. Burin is located in Areas B and C, which means that the Israeli army is officially responsible for the security of all the people who live there. However, when it comes to settler harassment the Israeli Army frequently appear biased. Even when they are coming to protect families, they often will not challenge settlers. One soldier has told the family: “What can we do? We can’t do anything. Just lock yourselves in if you see them coming!”

Today though, the army presence seems to ease the situation for the Soufans. The settlers who are already half way down the hill turn around and move slowly back to the hilltops. There is no need for more protection. The settlers do not come closer to the house and the village, probably due to the amount of military cars and people.

It takes a while for the family to return to relative normality after the settlers disappeared towards the hill tops. The men sit in front of the house observing the hills. The mayor of the village comes to show his support.

Inside the house the women continue cooking, but are still affected by the incident. Um Ahmad feels faint and has to sit down on the kitchen floor, leaning towards the furniture. She is tired, wearied from the immediate stress and the constant underlying threat. Even if no one gets physically hurt, which is thankfully usually the case, and nothing is destroyed, the situation still seems unbearable. Anything can happen anytime. The ongoing threat traumatizes the whole family. They are living in constant fear, without knowing what comes next. “The only thing left is that they kill us”, the mother worries.

Burin is their town and the house is their home and they do not leave. Where would they go? However, living there is very difficult. No-one who has not experienced their situation can imagine the effects that the on-going pressure of vandalism, harassment and violence has on this family. The family still hopes for change. But this hope is further eroded each time they experience these threatening settler approaches.
“How are you doing?” I ask. The boy looks up at me, confused. With eyes still foggy with anesthesia, he searches the crowded hospital room. He spots his mother and others from the village at the other end of the room and nods at them. He probably does not recognise the reporters and politicians in attendance because he has never been the centre of such attention before. He certainly has never met me, but I try again: ‘kief halak?’, ‘how are you?’ He considers me for a few seconds then pulls himself together and sits up. “I’m good, thanks to Allah.” The room is filled with cheers.

The boy is Amid (18) and he is from Iraq Burin, a picturesque hilltop town southwest of Nablus. Amid was shot by a settler following clashes between Palestinians and residents from the nearby Bracha settlement. He was lucky; the bullet went straight through his thigh.
Such confrontations have become weekly rituals in Iraq Burin. Initially, a group of settlers came down and planted trees on Palestinian land. The young men of Iraq Burin mobilised, chasing the intruders away with sticks and stones. The following week settlers came back with a bigger crowd and threw stones back. Since then they have been clashing weekly near the olive grove in the valley facing the settlement, every Sabbath after midday. Abu Hitham, the town’s Mayor, says “It can last an hour, maybe five. Sometimes the Israeli soldiers stop them with tear-gas and [shock] grenades. But they always stop before dark”, the Mayor laughs. The violent routine is, perhaps, amusingly predictable. However, in the beginning they threw stones, then the settlers brought guns, and that is how I ended up at Amid’s bedside.

Amid’s tough talk from the hospital bed is typical of people in Iraq Burin. The older men I meet there talk about the town’s stone-throwers with pride; a group of males in their late teens recount their own involvement, how they have injured this or that person with well placed stones. They don’t seem to care if they fight settlers or soldiers. They are angry young men who have grown up in the long shadow of occupation. Their frustrations are fuelled by settlers who constantly chip away at the borders of their homeland. Their stories of the Saturday clashes are backed up by footage from shaky mobile phones. “It is just like watching movies”, the mayor later tells me.

Understanding why grown men talk seriously about stone throwing is not as difficult as it first seems. Consider Iraq Burin’s turbulent history; the town is close to Nablus which has seen some of the fiercest fighting in the West Bank in recent times. Violence and oppression are everyday realities here. All the people I meet are suffering from some violent trauma or loss; stories about beatings in jail, killing of family members and the stealing and mutilating of sheep are common. My search for individuals who are against the stone throwing, or unaffected by the harassment of soldiers and settlers, was not fruitful. I speak to officials, children, women and the elderly but there is unanimous support. We asked one mother if she worried about her boys when they went out on a Saturday to show the settlers their presence with stones; she shrugged, and said “the army comes at night sometimes and take boys away. They are no safer even in here; we cannot make it safe for them anywhere. I worry all the time, it makes no difference. They might as well resist.”

The heavy Israeli army presence in the area and the proximity of the illegal Bracha settlement means young men are always watched carefully in Iraq Burin, sometimes quite literally by soldiers in a watchtower on top of the mountain.
their resistance to the occupation. In the face of such adversity it might be argued that stone throwing is one of the few relatively safe ways to vent anger at the occupying force. Armed resistance with guns is suicide.

When asked about how he handles the clashes, the mayor gets serious. “We always tell them peace first. But these settlers, they come from America, they come from Europe and Russia and live on our grandfathers’ land. When they burn down our trees, bulldoze our fields and plant new trees, we fight!”

The mayor asks if I want to come and see the clashes for myself the following Saturday. When I ask when, he laughs “Come around 13:30. You can have tea at my house. They usually start fighting around 14:00”.

We get there late. It’s 14:15 and the Israeli Army has already begun to fire tear gas at the Palestinian boys. The settlers are walking back up the hill. One Palestinian boy was hit by a rock and is being treated in the waiting ambulance. When the settlers gone, the young boys turn on the soldiers. The mayor and I join some 100 onlookers from town at a safe distance on the other side of the valley. The adult men and young children cheer the stone throwers on. The women stay at home but we can see them in the windows and on the rooftops of the houses. Al Jazeera is there along with the local media. It looks very well organised.

Eventually, the soldiers have had enough. They charge towards the boys, who run away. I am advised to leave. As I do, I heard the distinct sound of gunfire. Two new ambulances rush in. Six boys are taken to Nablus hospital as the sun goes down behind the hills of Iraq Burin.

“It is like a game”, one of the boys told me; I can’t help but agree. It seems sad that these boys are playing their youth away in a game they never will win.

Representatives from Bracha Settlement did not answer my requests for interviews.

Travel restrictions and regular curfews limit the choice of recreational activities available. The occupation also damages the frail rural economy leading to unemployment and boredom.

The military grip on the area is suffocating. “There is no freedom here” one man explains. “It’s like a jail, we cannot go anywhere without a permit, I cannot go to my land. They took my land and say it is theirs!” another man shouts. Frustration, hopelessness and a sense of disempowerment is felt everywhere. The vastly superior military power of the Israeli Army leaves little room for people to demonstrate
From the bumpy road winding up to the hilltop, you would never notice that people are living there. All you see is the magnificent view over the mountains, over the wall, over Israel and all the way to Jordan. Nothing seems to be standing in your way. To find their tents you have to leave the road, put on your hiking shoes and climb down the hillside. The first thing you notice are the colourful clothes hanging to dry in the wind. Then you see the several beige tents of Bir Al-lid, perfectly melting into the colour of the stone.

Nine families live here in Bir Al-lid, in the south Hebron hills in the West Bank. They just recently moved back to their lands. They were expelled 20 years ago during the first Intifada, and fled to Jinba, a Palestinian village just down the mountain by the Israeli border. During their years away, the settlement of Mitzpe Yair and an offshoot outpost sprung up just a couple of hundred metres away from their lands.

Four months ago, they won a case in the Israeli Supreme Court, saying they have the right to return to the land they own. They are among the few that were lucky to still have the legal papers from the Ottoman era, confirming their ownership. Despite the verdict, they are only allowed to use a fraction of the large lands they owned. The rest of the land is classed by the Israeli Government as a “closed military zone” strictly forbidden for Palestinians, for “security reasons”.

A wide open area surrounds the tent village, yet it seems like they are living in a cage. They recently won the right to use the road to their home, but the residents of the nearby Israeli settlement do not seem to care about...
high court decisions. Atah explains how they destroyed their water pipe just two days ago. They disconnected it and then threw garbage in the well so the Palestinians couldn’t use it. Atah made a complaint to the Israeli police who promised to come the following day. They never did. Water access is one of their main problems. The majority of their land is inside the "closed military zone," around the new Israeli settlement, so they can’t reach most of their wells. They have to buy water in tanks and bring it all the way out to the village. Atah calculates that they have some kind of problem from the settlers nearly every fourth day. Sometimes it is damage to property, sometimes stone throwing and even physical attacks.
The Israeli settlers of Mitzpe Yair are sheep farmers just like the Palestinians in Bir Al-lid. They often take their sheep to graze on the Palestinian land, exhausting the already poor grazing areas. Because of this the Palestinian farmers often need to borrow heavily to buy feed for their sheep.
The Palestinians here live in caves and tents because they don’t get any building permits from the Israeli authority, and they are not allowed to bring electricity to their village. They have even received demolition orders on their tents, saying they are illegal buildings. A month previous, heavy rain made the tents muddy and flooded some of the caves.
I ask them how they manage in these harsh conditions, and if their children will continue their struggle. Atah tells me about a song called The Land Speaks Arabic.
“The land is everything for us”, he says, “and we need to live here not to lose it. We will never give up our land.”
Atah is building his life on hope, hope that one day the Palestinians will have a country. “From what I see at the moment”, Atah adds, “it is only getting worse.”

Atah explains the struggle of Bir Al-lid’s people to remain on the land of their forefathers.
Why would a man build his home with only one window and one door in it? Why does he, and his wife Zbaideh, live inside their home feeling scared and vulnerable?

“The Israeli military demolished our home in 1990 and blocked our water wells”, said Abdel Karim. The Israelis have occupied our land, our life and our work. They have raped our land. The Israeli settlers who have now moved to live here throw stones at us, they attack our house, and they have destroyed our electricity connection many times. They have killed our sheep and goats.”

The area in which Abdel Karim and Zbaideh live has a beautiful landscape with hills and valleys and it contains the most fertile land used to produce the best olives, grapes, apples, cauliflowers and carrots. But this was before the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and before the building of the Kharseena Settlement for Israelis in Al-Buwarieh.

International Humanitarian Law prohibits the transfer of the occupying power’s civilians into occupied territory and so this settlement is illegal, but, despite its illegality, the residents of the settlement are protected by the Israeli military. Boulders, barbed wire and fences are used to control the movement and access of the Palestinian farmers who live there. The Israelis say that this is needed for security purposes. A new road has been built for the sole use of the settlers and the Israeli military, while the old Palestinian road has been blocked. This curtails the movement and access of the Palestinians severely. Abdel Karim told us that it is not considered good if a Muslim woman has a baby on the road and that this has happened because of the movement restrictions. Neighbours have died because they have not been able to go to hospital. Ambulances are not able to come through the road blocks.

We are sitting in Abdel Karim and Zbaideh’s reconstructed house: It was built with only one window and one door to make them less vulnerable if they are attacked. The walls are not plastered. We sit in the room with the concrete floor and the unfinished block wall as Zbaideh brings us peeled carrots to eat.

There is a very warm fire in the centre of the floor, with a funnel to the ceiling that allows the smoke out. There is one electricity socket. With a 6-adaptor appliance, all the electricity in the house comes from that source. There is a television and two couches. A further demolition order has been issued on their property. Any time they think the military are coming to demolish their house, they remove all their belongings. Since the Israeli occupation, life has changed completely for this couple.

“My health has been affected”, she said as she rummaged for her tablets. “A month ago I opened the door one night and there were four settlers outside holding guns. They were aged between 10 and 18 years of age. They looked hard and hard and hard and watched me and then walked away. I knew what the message was.”

Abdel Karim can no longer bring the farm produce to the Jerusalem market where he
traditionally traded with a buyer. This buyer cannot come to Hebron to do his purchasing either. Abdel Karim now sells in the local Hebron market for a much lower price. He has to transport his produce by mule instead of by car because of the Israeli road block. Roadblocks are not the only obstacles for Palestinian farmers. Their water wells are continuously destroyed by the Israeli military. They say that the Palestinians have no permission from the Israeli government to build wells. The Palestinians only have access to 20% of the water resources in the West Bank. The settlers have access to 80% of this water. Farmers are not permitted to dig their land to a depth of more than 30 centimetres.

Zbaideh’s sister and her sister’s four children, ranging in age from 1 to 6, can no longer come to visit. If they do, they are attacked by the settlers who use stones and sticks. They have told Zbaideh that they are too afraid to visit her anymore.

But Zbaideh did smile as she brought us a plate of delicious mandarin oranges and told us about the day that she and nine other women with their small children worked until nine o’clock at night clearing part of a road block so that they could have pedestrian and animal access. Abdel Karim told us that he is convinced that their continuous intimidation is a deliberate Israeli policy in order that Palestinians will leave their land and more Israelis can take their place. He wonders what else could be the reason for the fact that the Israeli military only protect the settlers and do not protect them. He cannot understand why Jews and Muslims cannot live peacefully together as they did in the past. “We are peaceful people. We are religious brothers. This is the land of Jesus, Moses and the prophet Mohammed. The Israelis are monsters. They have not come here to live with us, but to remove us from our land. The occupation is the problem, as are the Zionists that have come to live in the settlements.”

When I asked what message Abdel Karim would like us to bring to our homelands, he replied, “Ask those with a conscience to try to help us live and work safely because we want to live and not to make war.”

Abdel and Zbaideh Karim built their home like a prison and remain indoors as much as possible to avoid being attacked by Israeli settlers.
As I approached the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, I noticed that there was a lemon war going on in the street. I saw several squashed lemons - dirty, after being pelted at walls and falling to the ground. People were upset.. so who threw the first lemon?

I saw a few police cars, with heavily armed officers, who were being told about children spitting and lemons being thrown. A blue tent with white walls was being erected on the sidewalk. Some 20 people were putting up the tent, and a similar amount of police officers were watching. Photo-journalists from international news agencies such as the New York Times and Associated Press were running around with huge cameras to document the situation. I was wondering why there was so much international attention over a tent and some lemons.

The story began back in 1956 - when the United Nations built houses for Palestinian refugees who had fled from their homes and villages in what has become Israel. In return for housing in Sheikh Jarrah, they had to give up their refugee status. The Ghawi family moved into one of these houses over 50-years ago. Yet, today Mr. Al Ghawi is 87 years old and spends his days sitting on a chair on the street, watching settlers freely go in and out of his home, which is now draped with Israeli flags. This is because in the autumn of 2009. Israeli settlers accompanied by police broke into his home in the early morning and threw out the family and their
furniture. In protest, the family settled in a tent directly across the street from their home. The police have repeatedly torn down the Al Ghawi’s tent, but the family re-erected it every time. Many Palestinians, Israelis and internationals stop by the tent for a chat or a free cup of hot coffee. On this day I had the pleasure of meeting Joseph, an Israeli university professor, who often visits the tent carrying a box of cookies for the family’s children. He said, ‘This has been going on for far too long. We must put pressure on our politicians and on the Mayor of Jerusalem to solve the conflict.’ Joseph is a member of the Israeli peace movement, which organizes a weekly demonstration in support of the families.

During this week’s demonstration, the settlers picked the Ghawis’ lemon tree and began pelting them at the family and their supporters, who were not slow to throw back the fruit. The settlers immediately retreated and called the police to report that they had been attacked. As a result, the Friday demonstrations are no longer permitted in front of the Ghawis’ home. Thus, the Israeli peace activists together with Palestinians and international observers now gather every week at a park at the entrance of the neighbourhood.

The following week I went to the park in solidarity with the demonstrators; the settlers (with the protection of the police) tried to interrupt the demonstration as usual by inciting the crowd. They performed victory dances and ran in the street laughing and holding up their pointer and middle fingers to resemble the letter ‘V’, similar to how football fans celebrate a victory. An elderly woman next to me looked at me and said, ‘I am Jewish, but I am ashamed at how the settlers are behaving. They are embarrassing the entire Jewish community.” The crowd then began to cheer, ‘Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies’.

I just hope that the Ghawi family will one day be able to pick their lemon tree themselves.
A Town Like Awarta

by Joakim Sharp-Bergersen & Christina Beil

Awarta is a typical West Bank town. The roughly 6,000 inhabitants typically work in either small business or agriculture. Like many Palestinian towns Awarta is rich in history. Three historical sites dating back millennia draw visitors from far and near. People living there are proud of the town’s heritage, but so are the Israelis.

We meet Mahmoud (65), a retired teacher who returned to Awarta in the late 1980s after 20 years of working in Jordan. “I saved money for my family and when I moved back I wanted to make a good life here, because here is my land,” Mahmoud smiles. Like many Palestinians he sought work abroad in 1968 when it became clear that the occupation would not go away overnight. When he came back, he found the hills of the West Bank inhabited by hundreds of thousands of Israeli settlers. When he left the country there were none.

Mahmoud invites us in to meet his family. They live in the tallest building on the highest hilltop overlooking Awarta. It is a modern five story

Mahmoud stands next to a broken tomb-stone, one of many graves in the Awarta cemetery that are frequently damaged by Israeli settlers.
building decorated with colourful paintings of palms and patterns. Construction began 10 years ago and finished only days before we got there. The whole family lives in the building, each son on a different floor. Mahmoud is proud of his home and shows us the view from the rooftop.

“You can see the whole of Awarta, and the settlements of Yitzhar and [the outpost of] Itamar” he says. On the western side of the house there is a Muslim cemetery. Inside the cemetery are the tombs of Phineas, Abishua and Ezra—important names in the Torah and the Qur’an. It is a holy site for Jews and Muslims alike. Many Jews however maintain a long held mystic tradition of ritual praying near holy men’s graves. For Jews practicing this tradition, the West Bank is home to some of the most important places of prayer in the world.

Mahmoud explains how twice a year the building is taken over by Israeli soldiers who use it as a strategic lookout to protect Jewish worshipers visiting Awarta’s holy sites. “First soldiers come in a jeep and shut down the town with a curfew. We dare not look out, but sneak behind the curtains”. He goes on to tell of how soldiers then usually enter the house and force all family members at gunpoint into one small room. Once there they are not allowed to speak to each other or even to leave for the bathroom. “They plant hatred in our children’s hearts” Mahmoud says.

According to Mahmoud the visits follow a similar pattern every year. After taking up strategic positions around town at around 10pm, busloads of Jewish worshippers roll into Awarta guarded by 15 armed jeeps, roughly 70 soldiers. “The settlers pray and sing and eat there for many hours, last time they left at four in the morning”, he says. I ask if the Israeli army warns people prior to their incursions but Mahmoud answers with a question. “Why, do you think they want to make life easier for us?” I feel a bit naïve but I comfort myself by thinking that perhaps many Palestinians are biased in their observations of the occupiers.

Mahmoud seems to know little about the Jewish faith and is sceptical about these activities. “Why do they sing and drink in a holy place?” he says. “I think their leaders have told them to do this here just to make it difficult for us.” I ask him why he believes the busloads are filled with settlers, but this confuses him. He has always just assumed that they came from the settlements, or perhaps he does not care whether they live here or not. “They always make trouble,” he says. He explains that settlers from Itamar sometimes sneak down to the tomb of Ithamar located in the middle of town. “They do it without the soldiers knowing it, like a secret”. However they usually do something to let the people in town know they have been there. We are showed pictures of graffiti with the Star of David or the words “Death to Arabs” sprayed on holy sites.

I visited the cemetery two days after an organised busload have left. The visitors smashed Palestinian gravestones and threw garbage around. How an organised religious tour under Israeli army protection can do something like that frightens me. I’m beginning to learn that Mahmoud’s apparently paranoid view of the “visitors” might have more substance than bias.

A few weeks later, tensions flared up in Palestine following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s announcement about making two West Bank tombs heritage sites. The move drew criticism from both the Israeli left and right, and was widely condemned by Hamas and Fateh, as well as the UN and the EU. In an attempt to curb tensions, Netanyahu stated the Israeli-funded $107 million restoration plan was “not political”. Can holy sites be anything but political in a place like the West Bank? I know that the residents of the tallest building on the highest hill in a small West Bank town called Awarta would have a thing or two to say about this.
Like a limpet on a rock at the seaside, the village of an Nu’man clings to its foundations despite the forces that wish to delete it from the map. The village lies in a luminal place resulting in a precarious state of existence: it is in Jerusalem, but it is not in Jerusalem; it is in Palestine but it is not in Palestine. It is a village almost no one can visit, a village in real danger of being excised, of being swept aside by the inexorable Israeli expansion through the Palestinian territories of the Bethlehem area.

About two hundred people live in an Nu’man. Its houses are built of indigenous grey-white limestone, one of them recently converted into a little mosque. It is set on a gentle hillside, in view of neighbouring villages, including al Khas, one kilometre away across a valley to the south-east. It is fifteen minutes by car from Bethlehem, five minutes from Beit Sahour, but the only people who can drive there are the people who live there and, of course, the Israeli Defense Force and Border Police.

Since the 1967 war, when Israel defeated its Arab neighbours and began to tighten its grip on the land, both that which was theirs and that which was not, it has steadily and illegally advanced the boundaries of Jerusalem. By the

MOVEMENT AND ACCESS

Nothing New for An Nu’man

by Phil Lucas
acquisition of extensive Palestinian land, the metro area south of the city has built huge and still expanding settlements, reaching to the very fringes of neighbouring Bethlehem, a Palestinian urban area.

One of these settlements is Har Homa, a glistening white castle that dominates the landscape immediately to the north of Bethlehem. Construction on this settlement began in 1997 on the pine-covered hill of Jabal Abu Ghneim. What had been a nature reserve and one-time favourite picnic spot for Bethlehemites was slated to become a housing development. A vigorous campaign to prevent the perceived vandalism and in an effort to save the hill and prevent its inclusion in Israeli Jerusalem went as far as a draft resolution to the UN. The fortress-like settlement built in tiers up the hillside is encircled to the south by a military road and the Separation Barrier. Inside this barrier, to the east of Har Homa and on a neighbouring hill, lies the little village of an Nu’man.

Har Homa now regarded by Israel as a suburb of Jerusalem, is like many other West Bank settlements in providing lower-cost housing with preferential mortgage rates to encourage people to move in. Most Israelis here are economic rather than religious settlers, meaning that the residents choose to move to this illegally built up area in the West Bank for economic rather than ideological reasons. Many of the properties appear to be empty, the well-equipped children’s playgrounds unused, but building construction continues apace. When Har Homa 1 is nearing completion, the settlement building programme will progress to Har Homa 2. The planned site for Har Homa 2 is none other than the hill of the village of an Nu’man.

Though there is a threat of expanding the settlement in the future; there are more
immediate concerns facing the villagers – their health and well-being, and their human rights. Although an Nu’man is inside “Jerusalem”, that is on the Jerusalem side of the Separation Barrier, only a handful of its residents have been allowed Jerusalem IDs. As a consequence, they are not allowed to go to Jerusalem and need a special permit to go to their own homes.

A new road from Jerusalem to Hebron passes through the valley between an Nu’man and al Khas. Where the access road leads from this new road to an Nu’man is a checkpoint, which controls not only traffic on the main road but also vehicular and pedestrian access to the village. Visitors not allowed to pass. No relatives can visit; tradesmen cannot deliver goods; the doctor can’t enter; the ambulance cannot respond to emergencies.

What a contrast these two places provide, Har Homa and an Nu’man! The former is bleak and inhospitable, lacking any sense of community feel and with very few shops; it is a dormitory suburb where people drive in and out of their homes and few people walk in the streets. The latter is a tight-knit community where almost everyone belongs to one of two extended families and everyone knows and cares about everyone else. An Nu’man fits the landscape as though it has been part of it for centuries, which indeed it has. Har Homa is a fortress. It is a modernist intrusion made uglier by the fact that it is cut off from Bethlehem behind its wall and electrified fence, an ugliness further exacerbated by the intent to sweep over the bucolic and tenacious village of an Nu’man in the ever expanding growth of the settlement.
When driving on the road from the village of Shufa to the city of Tularem, you may notice people walking or riding donkeys down the hill from the village to the main road. You may see private cars, buses, or military jeeps, but you will certainly not see a car with a Palestinian license plate. Palestinians are not allowed to drive on this road – it is exclusively for Israelis (mainly settlers); instead they must walk about four kilometres along the side of the road passed the Avnei Hefetz settlement down to the village of ‘Izbat Shufa where they can then take a taxi to Tularem. On their way back home they have to walk the same distance, but up-hill as quick as possible so as to avoid being attacked by settlers or harassed by soldiers. A villager tells us that this is not fair because, “the road is ours, it was built before 1948, we built it on our land, and we maintained it; yet, they prevent us from using it.”

When returning from Tularem up the road, you can see the entrance to Shufa from the main road, which was once closed only by an earth mound.
and concrete roadblocks, but in December of 2009 a fence and barbed-wire were added. You will also notice a sign pointing towards the entrance of the Avnei Hefetz settlement that was founded by Ultra-Orthodox Jews in 1990 and is now home to 200 families/1,300 people. The settlement is also surrounded by a fence and a system of surveillance cameras that make protecting the community from infiltrators, or more commonly, olive-picking farmers easy for the Israeli military. However, if someone from Shufa does not want to take the risk of imprisonment, injury, death, or simply is not healthy enough to make the hike to ‘Izbat Shufa, he/she can alternatively reach Tulkarem via a network of small, deteriorated back-roads, which makes the trip 25-kilometres longer, and the time to reach Tulkarem depends on how long it takes to pass the Enav Military Checkpoint.

If you do manage to reach Shufa in the morning, you may be surprised to see clothes-lines full of washed clothes outside of every home. If so, you arrived on a special day - the doctor is in town and therefore the village is briefly given electricity during the day (only from 10:00am-12:00pm); thus, women take advantage of the situation by doing their laundry, and students get to have computer class. The village is not connected to the electrical grid so the municipality acquired a generator. Yet, they can only afford to operate it from 5:00pm-11:00pm. If anyone wants to have electricity during the day, he/she would have to pay about $12.00 USD per hour, a price nobody in Shufa can afford. However, in Avnei Hefetz there is electricity around the clock, which is provided at a very affordable price.

In addition to the beauty of the landscape of
Shufa, there is a 500-year old Ottoman castle on the top of a hill. It was renovated three years ago, and from the roof one can see the modern sky-scrappers of Netanya and the Mediterranean Sea. Although both Netanya and the beach are only about a 30-minute car ride away from Shufa, the villagers like all Palestinians are not around to enter Israel without a permit, which is very difficult to obtain – many people have not been to the shore in years and others never have. A woman of the village said, “30-years ago, life in Shufa was different: People felt safe. At night, we often slept outside in the fields or on the roofs of our houses. We often went to Tulkarem to sell cheese and buy sweets for the children – everybody was happy.” Today, Shufa is a suffocated village; about 20 families left in the recent years, and only about 1,200 inhabitants remain.
“Only God helps now. Nobody else can.”
Nasser serves in a mosque in Madama. Madama is one of several small villages situated in the valleys of the beautiful landscape of the northern West Bank.
Five times a day Nasser goes to his mosque to serve; he is the one who gives the call to prayer. He is also a landowner; his land lies north up the hill towards the settlement of Bracha. In 1990 he built a house there for his family, which now consists of 11 people, a dog, a cat and rabbits. He also has small chicken farm.
However, in 1991, things changed. The Israelis started to build Route 60, a so-called “bypass road”. These roads enable easy, swift access for Jewish Israelis between West Bank settlements (and also between settlements and Israel). Palestinians need special permission to drive on them.
Route 60 passes through Madama in such a way that Nasser’s home and fields have ended up on the other side of the road from the rest of the village. He told us: “Before, it was easy to come down to the village. Now our home is completely separated from the community.”
To get to school or work, previously a five minute journey, the family now has to take a circuitous route around the new road, which they are not allowed to cross.
The only direct link between the village and his house is a rough tunnel track passing under Route 60, which is often closed by the military with big cement blocks.
It became impossible for Nasser and his family to remain in their home. They now live in his brothers’ house in the centre of the village. It is very crowded in the two rooms they occupy.
Nasser’s chicken farm has been attacked and destroyed twice – initially, he tells us, by the army and the second time by settlers. He has rebuilt it both times, but this feels temporary; he is naturally concerned that it could be destroyed again. He tries to get to his house daily to take care of the chickens and rabbits.
We asked Nasser how he and the Imam in the Mosque support the young people here who have always lived in the shadow of the occupation. He replied: “We urge them not to use violence. But we ask them as well to stay in their land and to plant their trees.”
Nasser has, like so many Palestinians, lost something of fundamental importance by not being able to live in his home, to remain on his land. Nasser says, “We live like in a big prison”, and his friendly eyes become sad: “To live here in the village is a big disadvantage for my children”. “What do you think about the future?” I ask. Nasser looks despondent: “I am born into this. My children are born into this. Only God helps now. Nobody else can. I dream that the occupation is over and we are living in freedom!”
A couple of hours later we are hearing from Khitam, one of many Palestinian women who face extraordinary daily challenges due to the occupation, and live with constant concern for
their families, their children, their sheep, their economy, their water supply and their bills.

Khitam is clearly proud to be the mother of 12 children and also clearly proud of her sheep; she tells us “Six years ago I got three sheep from ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) and today I have 17!” She cuts grass by hand every day to feed the sheep. Her hands are beautiful, though torn by hard work. She gestures gently as she tells us her stories. Her husband is ill and only one of her sons has paid work. The economic situation in the West Bank and the difficulties of obtaining permits to work in Israel lead to very bleak employment prospects here. Her sons try to work on their land, but the settlers often drive them away from the fields. Khitam tells us that during the olive harvest, when the farmers are on their way home with the crops, settlers came down in the evening to the fields to steal the crops.

A year ago one of Khitam’s sons and her nephew had been arrested because they prevented some settlers from stealing their sheep. The soldiers blindfolded and handcuffed them and they were held for a night in the watchtower of Bracha settlement.

The water supply in the household is very limited. They have to buy water transported in a tank wagon. The water, previously free, now costs the family 450 shekels every month, “and the youngsters wash themselves both before work and after!” she says with a resigned smile. A washing machine would be prohibitively costly with water and electricity; she has not been able to pay the electricity bill for six months, so all the washing for her large family is done by hand.

On our way to Khitam’s home we had seen an Israeli registered lorry with a trailer full of garbage. It stopped outside the girls’ school to deposit the waste there. Our guide jumped out of our car and had a short discussion with the lorry driver. The vehicle then left the same way it came – up to the bypass road, Route 60. Khitam told us that settlers and Israelis often come down and dump their waste around the village.

Three months ago the whole family had had a particularly harrowing experience. A military jeep came into the village, apparently on an “ordinary” security round. Some local youngsters started to throw stones towards the military vehicle. Khitam and her family happened to be walking along the road nearby and the soldiers ordered them – adults and small children alike – to walk in front of the military jeep, effectively providing the Israeli army vehicle and the soldiers in it with a “human shield”. Before the stone throwing stopped one stray stone hit Khitam’s daughter’s head. She was not seriously wounded but naturally very frightened.

I ask Khitam: “What is your dream for the future?” Without hesitation, she answers “I dream that the occupation is over and we are living in freedom.”
Know Your Boundaries

by Jan Sutch Pickard

The tiny village of Yanoun is only mentioned in the Bible once. In the book of Joshua there’s a very long account of how territory was divided up among the tribes of Israel. Chapter 16 (5,6) describes “...the boundary of the Ephraimites family by family...going round by the east of Taanath-shiloh and passing by it on the east of Janoah.” Janoah/Yanoun then was just a marker in the making of boundaries. Yanoun today is a small farming community, where boundaries have positive and negative meanings. I talked to Rashed, the mayor and one of the farmers who work the valley that runs between Upper Yanoun, at its head, and Lower Yanoun, where the land opens out. As well as a flock of sheep and goats, he has olive groves and fields under plough. We were looking out over the valley bottom, a patchwork of green – with hay, chick-peas, broad beans and wheat. “You do not build walls or put up fences”, I said, “Then how do you know where your land begins and ends?” He laughed, “It is my land – I plough it and plant it. Kemal’s land is right next door. If he wants, he can put a stone at each corner. But if he does not put a stone, I know. Each year I plough the land. I know where the rocks are, underneath the soil.”

Yanoun’s boundaries are increasingly shrinking as near-by settlements continue to expand.
He knows the land well. This is where his father and grandfather farmed before him. But the landscape has changed. The tops of the limestone hills, which were once open grazing land stretching all the way down to the Jordan Valley, now bustle with watch-towers, telecommunication towers, water-towers, caravans, poly-tunnels and big chicken barns. These are the illegal outposts of the settlement of Itamar.

Rashed says that the traditional lands of Upper and Lower Yanoun amounted to 16,500 dunums. But now only at most 500 dunums are actually accessible to Upper Yanoun. “Lower Yanoun is better. Here, we are in the middle of settlements.” He gestured round the hilltops, wearily.

There is limited access to another 400 dunums. The previous week he was able to get a one-day permit from the DCO to plough some of his own land, which is high on the hill near the settlement. But the next day, when he went back to graze his goats nearby, he was chased away by masked men. Soldiers or settlers? It wasn’t clear. What was clear was that he had overstepped the mark.

Who sets the mark? “Who decides where the boundaries will be?” I asked.

“The soldiers and settlers together decide. When the settlers want to change it, the soldiers agree.”

How are the boundaries marked? “On this side (to the west of the village) they make a fence.” It is visible on the skyline – not a huge structure like the Separation Barrier – just the way anyone might define their property. Of course these outposts are illegal in Israeli as well as international law. The young men who have come out from Itamar to stake a claim here are squatters on the land of Rashed and his neighbours. But now that this settlement expansion is becoming a “fact on the ground”, maybe it’s good to have the ground marked out – do not “good fences make good neighbours”? It’s not as simple as that: “There they made a fence – we can see the fence. But we cannot go near it. If we even go so far (he indicates several hundred metres) they will come out and give us trouble.”

I was struggling to understand what was going on, when I read this “idiot’s guide” from the organisation that brings together former Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters, Combatants for Peace:

“So this is how it works: The settlers arrive at a certain hill and construct an outpost, which is actually a caravan or a wooden shelter. This hill is usually privately owned Palestinian land. The army and the state give legitimacy to these actions by the fact that when these outposts are constructed the soldiers arrive straight away and guard it, of course, protecting the settlers. The owners of the land cannot harvest it any more. The party isn’t over yet: around a settlement a special security zone is announced; the Palestinians aren’t allowed to enter. Its size and area, no one really knows. The Palestinians find this out through trial and error: if they get caught and beaten they know they reached this zone. Of course there isn’t any official decision, and when the units of soldiers change, so do their ground rules. And so the game starts over.”

(Combatants for Peace Newsletter, July 2009)

The invisible boundaries encroach on the village. And they are constantly being redefined. For instance, barns for battery chickens or other huge agricultural buildings, such as those above Yanoun, not only attract subsidy from the Israeli government, but also carry with their large footprint the need for a bigger “security zone” – which effectively enlarges the settlement area. As we talk, we watch several Palestinian shepherds grazing their flocks along the roadside or in the olive groves – while the hillsides lay inviting and empty – but no-go areas for the farmers. Meanwhile the settlers sometimes choose to stroll through this landscape with impunity – almost as though they are “beating the bounds” – defining their territory.

Rashed told me about a recent incident – an attack not with weapons but with humiliating words: “I was herding my sheep. Then a settler approached me with an M-16 rifle. I saw two more settlers on the hill behind him. He asked me what I was doing there. I replied ‘grazing my
sheep”. He said, “No, this land is mine now. Go back home.” I said, “Where shall I go? When I go to another place another person tells me to leave. So where shall I go?” The man then yelled “Go to your home!” So I left – I did not want him to shoot me or my sheep.”

All the time we are talking, a bulldozer is working on the hilltop to the east, breaking new ground. Rashed points out that it’s not a contractor, but an army bulldozer. Whatever military structure they are planning, this activity identifies the army of occupation more closely with the planning of settlements. The appropriate boundaries were crossed and abandoned some time ago.

Rashed makes this connection, remembering a time before 1993, when Itamar was founded. He was 15 years old and was with his father and their flocks up on the hill where the chicken barns now stand. “Soldiers came and started shooting over our heads. That was before the settlers. We went back to our house.” It was as though that was an early sign of the boundaries being redefined by force. Since then, when first the settlement and then the outposts came, Yanoun has suffered, but survived the crisis in 2002, when its people fled escalating violence. It’s now the eighth year of international presence here – embodied most of the time by EAPPI – which seems to limit the aggression of the settlers and the military. But there’s little we can do to hold back the invisible boundaries which are tightening like a noose on this valley.

“You know the settlers, the Israelis, want to take over all the land and force us Palestinians out, but even if they want to shoot me and my family, I will not go anywhere.”

Rashid, the Mayor of Yanoun tells EAs about his experiences with Israeli settlers.
How to Stay Alive in Hebron

by Gerry O’Sullivan

“The only way I survived the torture at the hands of the Israeli military was because I heard inside my head the words - “Don’t Talk – Stay Alive” said Hani Abu Heikel. He said that these words continued and continued and continued in his head through day after day of torture. It was how he survived.

I spent an evening with Hani Abu Heikel and his family. Hani lives in Tel Rumeida, Hebron, and his home is surrounded by large buildings accommodating Israeli settlers. The Israeli military have a base on the flat roof of their single-story home. The soldiers are there 24 hours a day. Hani’s young son, Jamil, told me that sometimes the soldiers play football on the roof during the night. When the family had sports channels on their TV the soldiers would evict the family from their home so they could come in and watch major football matches. Jamil told me that his family have now removed the sports channels to prevent this happening. The family’s grape trees lie in the garden, black and cindered from the time the settlers set fire to them. Their garden is littered with rubbish thrown by their neighbouring settlers. Armed settlers walk through their garden by the side wall of their home every day. The settlers have entered their home and attacked the family, under the watch of the Israeli military. The military are there to protect the settlers but not the Palestinians. There is no one to whom the family can make a complaint.
The first changes that the Abu Heikel family noticed were in 1984, at 3 o’clock in the afternoon, soldiers came in jeeps and announced that there was a curfew and that everybody in the neighbourhood needed to stay inside their homes. The fields in which they used to play, hiding in the wheat, were bulldozed by the military. The zucchini was flattened. The old man who owned the field and who had planted the crops in it was told to stay in his home. This man was alone and could do nothing. Then a large winch arrived, followed by three trucks, each with a caravan.

“The caravans were furnished already. We could even see a line of washing in one of them! An Israeli soldier told us that we were going to have new neighbours and that the Palestinian tradition was to invite new neighbours to their home and to feed them. I could see that he was being sarcastic! Then a man we came to know as a settler, Baruch Marzel, came puffing up the hill, he was very fat and was wearing a high Kippah on his head. He had a long beard. Within a half hour there were three settler families and there was a settlement in the fields behind us. I did not even know what the word “settler” meant at that time!”

When Hani ran in to tell his father, the response was – “We hope God will help us. You just live and you will see what I mean.” Hani said his father was a very tough and strong guy, and that this was the first time he saw him looking scared.

Hani went to school the next day and met Baruch Marzel on the way.

“I saw his eyes and I was scared. I could feel he hated me and was going to attack me. That was the start of everything for me. My father kept saying to me that I should run away and not react. He knew I was the angry son. He knew I would fight for anyone.”

Hani said that these three settler families were
guarded by six soldiers at all times. When a five-year-old child decided to wander somewhere, he was followed behind by soldiers to protect him, around and around. Meantime the soldiers kept stopping Hani as he would pass asking him where he was going and what he was doing.

“The settlers had not started to attack us yet, but we would wake in the morning to find our garden chairs stolen and our plants cut at the roots. We complained to the Israeli police and they just told us that settlers don’t do anything wrong. I became more and more angry and three years later when I was in University I joined Fatah in the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). From this time I was detained many times, I was beaten by the Israeli military. They attacked our home. I became even more hating and was becoming angrier.”

Hani joined the PLO about the start of the first Intifada in 1987. This intifada was the expression of frustration and revolt by a whole generation of Palestinian youth, who had been born into the Israeli occupation. Hani said he found soul mates in the PLO, people who felt like he did. They all talked about revenge. His parents did not know that he had joined this organisation.

Hani’s first arrest was in 1988. “By this time, I was in control of the Intifada strikes in Hebron. We asked traders to stop selling Israeli goods. If they refused, we first gave them a warning then, if they did not cooperate, we burned their materials and produce right there in the street. We Palestinians had good yogurt, we did not need Israeli yogurt. We in the PLO were well supported by our community, we demonstrated, we had power! Yasser Arafat had been deported and was based in Tunis and we had channels through which we received our orders. I was 18 and 19 years old then and I felt I was a hero, I was useful!”

Hani was finally arrested. One of the Palestinians in his group had turned spy. Hani was detained for 87 days and was not allowed to see a lawyer. His family did not know where he was until 40 days later when a released prisoner told them he had seen Hani Abu Heikel in prison.

“The Israeli military locked me in a cell on my own for three days. I was kept in silence and darkness, except for the few times a day when the seven cm peep hole in the door was opened by a soldier. I shouted and cursed at him to get him to talk to me, but there was only silence.”

Then the interrogation started. Hani said that they put a bag that stank of blood over his head and handcuffed his hands behind his back as they beat him towards the interrogation room. This is where he met what was to be the “good cop”. He was shown a file with his photo on it and asked – “Are you Hani Abu Heikel? He replied “Yes, I am.”

I noticed Hani’s older children listening intently at this stage, so I asked him if they had already heard this story or would he like me to stop. He replied that they had not heard but motioned me to continue.

Hani continued to say that the real torture started for him at this stage. He was told that his friends had also been arrested and that they had confessed about Hani’s role in Fatah and the PLO. Hani did not talk. For nights they would not let Hani sleep. They continued to torture him. They would open his cell door every 10 minutes and throw a bucket of water over him. They asked how he slept and he always told
them he slept very well. I asked him how he managed to not break under this torture. He said he heard the words in his head - “Don't Talk – Stay Alive” – over and over and over again. His only goal was to survive each of the nights. This continued for 30 days. His training in the PLO had prepared him to not trust anyone, not even his own mother if she was in jail beside him.

After this test of Hani, his hands were tied to a ceiling for two days. And still he heard in his head - “Don't Talk – Stay Alive” – over and over and over again. Then he was tied to a chair with no back for three days. “If I needed to go to the bathroom I had to do it on myself.” And still he heard in his head - “Don't Talk – Stay Alive” – over and over and over again.

The Israeli military then tried leaving Hani out in the cold all night in the rain with no clothes, but they did not break Hani. He knew that if he broke he would be in prison for years. He knew that if a Palestinian threw just one stone that the jail sentence was one year. Hani says that he was the only one who did not talk. All his comrades received between 7 and 11 years in jail. But the military continued to move Hani around to other jails and to torture him to try and get him to talk. When he finally arrived at the last jail he knew he was with his own people as they did not ask him what crime he had committed. They were men from Hezbollah, from Lebanon, from Libya, from Jordan. He spent 20 months with them. This was a place where two prisoners stayed awake each night to ensure that others did not talk in their sleep. After two months Hani took his turn.

“At this time, I was now proud and happy. I did not think I had done any wrong. This was good time for me. Most of the prisoners were academics and intellectuals. My university professors where also there. I continued with my studies in prison - Business Administration, Political Science, History, Hebrew, and English. I was proud; I met my heroes in jail.”

After 20 months, Hani was finally released and returned to his family home where he spent a half an hour with his mother before being arrested again. He was told that he was “a
danger to security”. After this, he was constantly detained and released and spent four more long periods in jail.

“Then I was home watching TV with my father and cousins one night. We were watching a peace activist wearing a sign that said – “No occupation.” My cousins laughed and said how stupid he was and how a sit down protest would achieve nothing. But I did not laugh. I had spent much of my life thinking and thinking in my cell in silence and what I saw this man doing on TV made sense to me. He was surrounded by cameras and the photos would probably go to at least 15 other countries. Yet, every time I was arrested and jailed I returned home to see more and more of our land covered with settlements. I was achieving nothing!” My father asked me why I did not laugh with my cousins. I told him why and he said – “That is what I have been trying to tell you all this time, but I did not have the words.”

This subject of non-violent activism started to occupy Hani’s thinking. Hani became very friendly with Cliff Kennedy from the newly-arrived Christian Peacemakers Team (CPT).
“We became friends, we talked a lot, and I felt peace in my heart. I started to think of non-violent ways of effecting change.”

His first opportunity came when the water supply of his area, Tel Rumeida, had been damaged by the settlers. The Palestinian Municipality was not allowed by the IDF to bring trucks of water to the neighbourhood, nor to mend the pipes.

So Hani decided to have a sit-down picnic and to invite mothers and children to join in. He contacted the media and nine TV stations arrived. The military commander was called by the soldiers on duty who did not know what to do. Hani said that this commander found it difficult to hide his fury – he could not smile at the cameras, even though he tried hard to do so. Hani was told by him that there were not enough troops to carry the water to the houses and Hani asked what would happen if he, Hani, shot a settler? The military governor replied that there would be 1,000 soldiers there immediately! And Hani replied – “Then you can afford to send 20 soldiers to carry the water from the Municipality trucks!” The IDF then called a curfew for the settlers and carried the water to the houses. The following day the Municipality trucks were allowed in. Hani said that this was the first time these Palestinians had seen non-violence achieve a goal. It was to be the start of many more non-violent activities as well as projects in Hebron.

Initially, Hani’s comrades in the PLO were not convinced. Hani raised the topic of non-violence at a meeting that had been called to organise a second Intifada, this time a military one. Hani called for a vote. His own hand was the only one supporting non-violent methods. But many years later Hani has finally got their support. “They come to our non-violent demonstrations, they give us equipment and they assure us that no-one will stop us.”

Finally, in full circle, Hani has met the peace activist that he had seen on TV. The settlements continue to loom above Hani’s home; his children have very different memories of their childhood. The violence and the attacks continue, but Hani is no longer an angry and violent man. He is a courageous man. He is a thinker; an effective strategist.
ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN PERSPECTIVES

The Divided Movement

by Ida Jorgensen Thinn

The construction by Israel of the Separation Barrier has attracted massive criticism from both Palestinian and international human rights groups, and the international community. In an advisory judgement in 2004, the International Court of Justice ruled the barrier illegal because it is not built on the “Green Line”, the internationally recognized border between Israel and the putative Palestinian state, but is built in such a way that as many Israeli settlements as possible - but not all - are incorporated on its west, Israeli, side. Israel has therefore been accused of drawing its future borders unilaterally, and without negotiation with the Palestinians. However, one aspect of the building of the Separation Wall that has received little attention so far is the settlers’ own responses both to the Wall and the concomitant Kadima Party strategy of withdrawing from the smaller settlements to the east of the Separation Barrier.

These responses vary greatly depending on the religious/political views of the settlers themselves. There are three main settler groups: religious Zionists comprising about 40% of the settlers; secular settlers comprising 30%; and ultra-orthodox comprising the final 30% with views as follows.

Religious Zionists saw the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem as a sign of the early coming of Messiah. For the first time in 2000 years, Jews could pray at the Western Wall and travel freely to the Biblical land of Judea and Samaria. The Jewish people was therefore obliged to prepare the ground for His coming. Settling the whole of Biblical Israel was one of the main means of doing this. For these settlers the Separation Barrier is a dividing of the Holy Land which obstructs the coming of Messiah. The very idea of the Jewish state withdrawing Jews from the eastern part of the land given to them by God is therefore seen as blasphemous. So more than 90% of these settlers were opposed to the withdrawal, and against the building of a barrier in the West Bank.

The secular settlers who live in the West Bank mainly for financial reasons, generally welcome the Separation Barrier. According to a survey conducted in 2006, more than 50% of the secular settlers were not opposed to a withdrawal of the settlements east of the barrier. However, it should be said that the majority of these settlers live west of the Separation Barrier, and are barely affected by it in their daily life.

Ultra-orthodox settlers are generally non-political, quality-of-life settlers. They do not share the religious Zionist ideology of settling the Holy Land to help the coming of Messiah because they believe that the only way human beings can affect this is by living according to the Laws of God. Traditionally, therefore, they do not engage much in political affairs.
However, in recent decades there have been signs of a polarisation of this group. For example, the numbers of ultra-orthodox settlers identifying themselves with religious Zionism is growing, as is the proportion of extremist elements. This is potentially politically important because the majority of ultra-orthodox settlers live in the smaller settlements east of the Separation Barrier.

How did the settler movement respond to the withdrawal from Gaza and West Bank settlements east of the Separation Barrier? In 2005 the Israeli Army evacuated all the Israeli settlements in Gaza and four in the West Bank. The settler movement organised large demonstrations and massive lobbying campaigns against these withdrawals.

How has the dispute about the Barrier and withdrawal from settlements affected the settler movement?

Firstly a division appeared in the settler movement about which methods it is legitimate to use when protesting against the Israeli government. For some, keeping the whole land of Israel was more important than the Jewish nation remaining united. They were therefore willing to use violence in order to stop the withdrawals. The majority however opposed this. A resident of the Tekoa settlement said: “How can I fight against my sons in the army and my brothers in the government? You can only beat the IDF by violence, and this would destroy Israeli society.”

Secondly, the Yesha Council, which is the settler’s central representative organ, lost much of its support among the settlers. More extreme groups, like Women in Green, started calling for a change in the settler leadership: “If we continue with this leadership, we may as well begin packing in Efrat, Betar, Ma’aleh Adumim,
Ariel and in Jerusalem’s Gilo neighbourhood, that is, the large settlements. We simply must provide an alternative leadership to the Yesha Council – because even if they all resign and new people take their place, the struggle cannot be waged by people receiving their salaries from the government.”

Thirdly, the construction of the Barrier and withdrawal from the settlements left the settlers with the impression that their strong ties to the right-wing parties in Israeli politics were broken. A central member of the Yesha Council elaborated: “In the past, people in the government knew what we were talking about. They had felt the earth under their feet, and smelled the trees in the wind. Now most of the members of Knesset are lawyers and businessmen. We used to be the most influential lobby organisation in Israel. Now we are defeated.”

However, the plan of withdrawing from the settlements east of the barrier was shelved after the 2006 war against Hezbollah in Lebanon and the 2008/9 offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and since then the Kadima party has lost much of its influence. The new Israeli government is a right-wing coalition, and the new cabinet is more sympathetic to religious Zionist ideology. Although the settler movement is in principal still against the Separation Barrier, there have been few attempts to work against it in recent years.
IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Israeli settlements are in direct contradiction of the two-state solution, which makes a peaceful end to the occupation unachievable. Their very existence infringes upon the Palestinian peoples most basic human rights, such as the right to own property, the right to equality, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to freedom of movement, the right to self-determination, and the right to live free of harassment and violence.

EAPPI recommends that international humanitarian law be implemented according to the following conventions, resolutions and rulings:

- **Article 46 of the Hague Convention** prohibits confiscation of private property in occupied territory. Article 55 of the same Hague Convention stipulates “the occupying state shall be regarded only as administrator and usufructuary of public buildings, real estate, forests, and agricultural estates belonging to the hostile State, and situated in the occupied country. It must safeguard the capital of these properties, and administer them in accordance with the rules of usufruct.”

- **Article 49, paragraph 6 of the Fourth Geneva Convention** explicitly states that “the occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”

- **UN Security Council Resolution 465** (1980-unanimously adopted) clearly declared that “Israel's policy and practices of settling parts of its population and new immigrants” in the occupied territories constitutes “a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East”. The Security Council called upon Israel to “dismantle the existing settlements and in particular to cease, on an urgent basis, the establishment, construction or planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem.”

- **The 9 July 2004 ruling of the International Court of Justice in The Hague** declared that “Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, are illegal and an obstacle to peace and to economic and social development.”