

Notes from the West Bank and Gaza



DON BETZ

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I arrived at Ben-Gurion airport near Tel Aviv, Israel, within an hour of the first announcement of the PLO-claimed attack on a bus near Dimona in the Negev. In the sherout (shared taxi) on the way up to Jerusalem sat an elderly couple from Long Island. They were visiting their orthodox son and his family who had immigrated some time before. They always stay at the Jerusalem Hilton and confessed that they would not want to live in Jerusalem, but could consider Tel Aviv since it was «more like home». My immediate companion was a cantor at a Jerusalem synagogue, a man in his mid-thirties transplanted from Brooklyn about four years ago. As we moved along the modern divided highway through the hills leading to the pass toward Jerusalem, he took it upon himself to inform me of the heroic actions of his fellow Israelis during the 1948 War of Independence. He spoke as if he had fought in the trenches himself.

Then the news of the attack silenced the car. Our Arab driver said nothing. The cantor, however, filled the air with his opinions. «This is no place for these people. If they do not want to live in peace, then they must get out!» The only reference made to the Occupied Territories provoked him to respond curtly, «The only occupied territories are those currently lived on by Arabs... thy are occupying our land».

At Charles de Gaulle Airport a few hours earlier, I had already witnessed a manifestation of the Israeli attitude toward «its» Arabs. As we waited to board the continuation of the TWA flight from New York to Tel Aviv, a 75 year old Palestinian woman in traditional village dress exited a connecting flight and entered the waiting room for the flight to Tel Aviv. A paunchy, demonstrative, Israeli man made it clear both by his body language and his words that he was VERY suspicious of this potential threat. He immediately contacted TWA personnel, the Israeli security agent in the lounge and others demanding that she be searched and passed through the electronic detector. One TWA official attempted to quiet him with the reassurance that the Palestinian woman had just stepped off a flight that had passed through security in the airport of her departure and walked directly from that plane to this secured lounge. He was not to be assuaged. «I have to fly on this plane, not you,» he bellowed in an obnoxious tone loud enough for all in the lounge to hear. The old woman was soon asked to come with the security agents and pass through the metal detectors and open her only hand luggage, a well-worn paper bag. She was cleared. We proceeded to his AND her homeland.

JERUSALEM

Our first discussion was with TIKVA PARNASS, associated with the Alternative Information Center in Jerusalem. I had met Tikva over five years before during the early days of my tenure with the United

Nations. As a college student, she had served in the Palmach, the élite strike force of the Haganah and predecessor of the Israeli Defense Force. She recalled sending a letter to her parents at the end of October 1948 criticizing American Zionist philanthropists for demanding that the new Israelis care for the Arab refugees. Her concern, and the concern of her fellow Israelis, was for the creation of their new state, she confided, and for the thousands who had been displaced.

Tikva, now on the nursing faculty of the University of Tel Aviv, is a peace activist in Israel associated with several other organizations that have mushroomed since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

She saw signs of the uprising becoming more violent and a commensurate loss of self-control on the part of the IDF and the settlers. From her perspective, the army appeared disoriented and confused (this dimension was evident to us on more than one occasion in the streets of the West Bank and Gaza). It has startled many Israelis to find their press using the same terminology to describe the surprise of these events to the Israeli public in the same way they reported the outset of the 1973 Yom Kippur-Ramadan War. At that, time the Egyptian army successfully crossed the Suez Canal and seized Israeli fortified positions in the early days of the war.

Significantly she sees the consensus in Israeli society as fragmenting and the mass street demonstrations increasing. Professors who are normally apolitical have signed petitions and psychologists are attesting to the negative impact on Israeli society of the brutal occupation. (It should be noted, however, that opinion among academics in Israel remains both demonstrative and divided. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, 16 March 1988, some 600 professors have published a statement supporting government action one month after another 600 faculty members at Israeli academic institutions vigorously protested against the oppressive tactics employed by the IDF against protestors). Yesh Gv'ul, the organization of some 600 soldiers initially formed to protest the Lebanon invasion, have also refused to serve in the West Bank and Gaza.

Tikva believes that opposition to these policies among the military will increase as the regular army rotates with the reserves who are generally older and perhaps less violent. The IDF has increased active duty for reservists from 30 to 62 days per year. Now there are six times as many soldiers in Gaza as it took to occupy it during the 1967 War. Tikva also quoted analysts who contend that economic costs have been high, with \$500 million lost to the Israeli economy since the uprising began on 9 December 1987.

Tikva further commented that Peace Now has NOT been a major mechanism in putting large numbers into the streets. Some support the

«Jordanian option», which is not considered an option to Palestinians. For the people of the Occupied Territories, the PLO is the only legitimate leadership. Children in the streets wail «We are the PLO!», she exclaimed.

Tikva and others see a prime struggle abroad in the diplomatic, political and media-public opinion arenas. She believes the central message of the uprising is that the *people in the Occupied Territories have changed the balance of power by their actions*. Ezer Weizmann, Yehashefat Harkabi and other prominent Israelis contend that the only meaningful negotiations will be with the PLO. It is clear, however, for all their previous confrontation with Likud Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir that Shimon Peres and Labour will not accept a Palestinian state now.

She spoke at length of the spirit of the people of Palestine. She quoted one Palestinian woman saying «We are not sad... we go with open eyes to the end... each one of us knows the costs of proceeding and of not proceeding.» Tikva argued that the center in Israel is already on the right side of the political spectrum when the issue is the territories.

She quoted Israeli political scientist Professor Sternhalt, who argues that while Israel experienced a national revolution, it never underwent a liberal, democratic revolution, and that democracy in its comprehensive and tolerant dimensions are not necessarily part of the Israeli political legacy.

She spoke of the Palestinian solidarity cutting across all the previous, formidable barriers to unite them. Shops are open for two or three hours per day in each city or village. Full color stickers of the Palestinian Flag, a terrorist and outlawed symbol in the area, are affixed to public surfaces all over the West Bank and Gaza and in East Jerusalem as well. (We were to observe them throughout our visit). She said that Gaza workers are returning to work on a rotating basis so as to share the burden. (Press reports speculate that 25% of the Palestinian «guest workers» were returning to their jobs in Israel by March. Economic necessity has more Palestine workers returning now).

She found the Israeli press coverage of the uprising to be good, but that there was little or no reporting of the considerable cooperation between the army and the Israeli settlers in the territories. Many are playing a dual role, that is, the settlers are also serving in the army. She commented that the army has been guilty on more than one occasion of preventing ambulances from helping the injured. There has been no treatment for the injured in prison, according to her testimony.

A later meeting with RITA GIACAMAN of Bir Zeit University took place over dinner at the Notre Dame Center in Jerusalem. She spoke at length about the political and social structure and the women's

movements in the occupied areas. The first women's committee was formed in 1978. The four main women's committees include :

1. The Women's Work Committee which attempts women to rally women in the villages. It was formed to assist women in mobilization, a circumstance that has changed dramatically. Their prime interest is in improving the status of women.
2. Working Women's Committee (Rakah);
3. Political Women's Committee (PFLP);
4. Women's Committee for Social Work (Fateh). Political factional differences spawned these divisions and also penetrate and impact issues of women and health. Their struggles over national political issues are not healthy for women. Ninety percent (90%) of all Palestinian women function outside the scope of these committees.

Rita spoke of the empowerment of women and all Palestinians. *Their united action is re-enforcing them that they can change the world.* She reiterated that the uprising involved all classes, both sexes, peasants and shopkeepers. All schools and universities in the Occupied Territories had been closed since January 1988 by order of the military occupation authority. She contended that such action is illegal since only the Minister of Education, and not the military, has the right to close the schools. She said that in the West Bank and Gaza, the Islamic fundamentalist movement «has a nationalist banner». This assessment represents a change in orientation and tactics by the fundamentalists since early 1987. The Muslim Brotherhood has NOT joined the uprising since their historic interest has been the establishment of an Islamic state in any part of the Arab World. Rita sees the uprising being perpetuated by the youthful nature of the Palestinian population. She noted that 3/4 of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza is under 30.

After we discussed the effects of certain forms of tear gas being deployed by the IDF, she asked us to request an official, international inquiry into the short term/long term effects of the types of tear gas being used against the people in the territories. She had noted an association between abortion and tear gas exposure and openly speculates if such action qualifies as prenatal genocide. (Such protests by the ICCP, PHRC, ADC, UN and others have resulted in investigation of CS gas and a statement by the US manufacturer that it has ceased shipment to Israel. Many American newspapers and TV networks have reported on this situation).

That evening the BBC reported that the Palestine Revolutionary Forces General Command took responsibility for the attack on the Israeli bus near Beersheba. Everyone here seems to be news junkies. They listen to Israeli, Syrian, Jordanian and the new Voice of Jerusalem,

of the PFLP-General Command (A. Jabril), not to mention the authoritative BBC. The BBC asserts that the attack gives Shamir more justification to resist any peace process involving the PLO. The land for peace option offered in variations on UN Security Council Res. 242 remains outside Shamir's field of vision. The *Jerusalem Post* offered detailed and insightful analysis of Shamir's position on the issue. M. Gur, Labour Member of the Knesset, reflected the tough reaction in the Israeli Knesset. «Here you see what is the real PLO. Here you see their real intentions». Gur said that the Likud would be favored in elections if they were held now. «The results depend on the PLO and the people in the Occupied Territories... if they continue their extreme position, then any progress among Israelis will be very difficult.» The Palestinian position is extreme only if the occupation is accepted as the norm and the costs of occupation to be minimal. For the OCCUPIED, the occupation is a daily reality, not a passing experience to be sampled and then discarded.

In the United States some traditional Israeli friends have been willing to speak out (see letter to Shamir from 30 Senators) but NO ONE in the Senate is calling for a suspension of aid. The *Jewish Chronicle* in London finds the Shultz diplomatic initiative ill-timed and says that Israeli public opinion is hardening as it looks to elections.

AL-MAKASSED

Al-Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem houses victims of Israeli military occupation policies. It is a 200-bed private, full-service institution with specializations, making it the largest in the Occupied Territories. It is an Islamic Charitable Hospital which means that 70% of the patients do not pay.

We were well received and informed by several members of the staff including British-trained Dr. Rustom Nammari, Hospital Director and Orthopedic Surgeon.

Al-Makassed is reserved for severe cases requiring specialized attention and extended care. The facility has received as many as 53 injured in a single day since the beginning of the uprising. Nammari started by mentioning that the hospital has treated over 150 cases of severe bullet injuries impacting from the head to the legs. These are live ammunition wounds inflicted by high-velocity (2 km per sec) NATO rounds that shatter bones on impact and make treatment and recuperation difficult. The rounds are fired at close range, not the range for which they were designed, inflicting «colossal damage». Patients are seriously injured by the holes made by the rounds and by the bacteria that breeds in such massive wounds.

By early March the staff of this one hospital had treated 500-550

victims of beatings, including fractures of virtually every bone as well as severe head wounds.

Rubber bullets also cause extensive injuries. Originally designed as a crowd-control device, they are weighted plugs of hard rubber with metal inside. (A new, smaller but heavier, rubber projectile has been introduced since mid-March.) When fired at close range and at the head, the injuries are very serious. At best they leave a large bruise, like a beating. We saw two men whose jaws were shattered by the rubber bullets fired at close range. Dr. Nammari said that they have treated 8 persons who have lost eyes due to these «crowd control» measures. Due to the existing web of laws, the medical authorities *must* report all cases hit by bullets. But this regulation does not apply to the victims of beatings. Many avoid going to receive institutional medical treatment for beatings for fear the report will lead them to prison. Often the police follow the released patients home for interrogation.

Therefore, many are treated at home. Several of the grass-roots societies prepare first-aid kits and train women and girls on the applications of first-aid techniques. Dr. Nammari speculated that the hospitals do not see one-half of the injured.

The doctors spoke of the gasses being used in the West Bank and Gaza. They see a change with some affecting the central nervous system. They have observed long-term symptoms of nervousness, chest infections and severe headaches. Others speak of haemorrhaging, massive skin irritation and spontaneous abortion.

The life-threatening nature of this gassing policy is starkly evident in the reports of casualties generated during the *intifadeh* (uprising). According to the Database Project on Palestinian Human Rights, 53 persons had perished due to gassing over the last five months through June 15, 1988. The victims range in age from one week to 90 years and include two pregnant women. They are not included in the oft quoted Israeli military «body count» consistently used by the Western media.

Beatings have been unprecedented in their ferocity. Some have been pummeled so severely and mercilessly that internal bleeding is common as is bleeding into the brain. The medical personnel have chronicled extensive muscle and bone damage, and now face a very serious rehabilitation problem among the young. «Some of the limbs of these young people will NEVER work properly», one doctor commented.

The difficulties in caring for these victims are compounded by the occupying authorities. Many times the injured are not allowed to be picked up by hospital ambulances until «quiet» has been restored in an area. Time may be crucial in saving these lives. «I know that we could have saved some lives, but it took more than two hours to get some of these patients to the hospital», Dr. Nammari confided.

Dr. Nammari was particularly concerned with the paralyzed and those who need rehabilitation. He introduced us to 25 long-term patients in Makassad at the time. Six were paralyzed, either from the neck down or the waist down. Most were under 18. He testified knowing at least 30 cases of paralysis in the West Bank and Gaza since the onset of the *intifadeh*. He also displayed difficult cases of multiple femur fractures that do not heal easily. There is no rehabilitation center, staff, equipment or facilities. The expertise to meet such a crisis is not available. It was clear that there will be a continuing demand and escalating need for such a facility and the people to run it and to train local staff in the proper rehabilitative procedures.

No patient feels safe from the grip of the occupying army, even in the hospital. Soldiers were stationed right outside the entrance. They have entered the building and taken patients on several occasions. Often they are taken as they are leaving the hospital. This tactic was corroborated by medical personnel met throughout the Occupied Territories.

At Ramallah hospital, soldiers attacked the students on numerous occasions firing rubber bullets into the entrance and tear gas all around the building. The attack was justified by the students placing the Palestinian flag on the roof of the hospital. Flying the flag, displaying the colors of the flag in any way, or giving the «V» for victory sign with your fingers are all considered terrorist acts and cause for harassment, beating, arrest and administrative detention.

Many individual cases of serious injury could be chronicled here. A few examples include a 23-year old man from Khan Younis in Gaza who lost his leg below the knee. Another man, age 20, had his leg shattered by a high velocity bullet. It can only be repaired by using an external metal skeleton literally holding the remains of his leg together with clamps. He was hit by a bullet as he entered Gaza City's Shifa Hospital. On that day one was killed and 15 injured INSIDE that hospital. A third case was a 29-year old man with a bullet in the neck which has rendered him totally paralyzed from the neck down due to a severely damaged spinal cord. Next to him was a 24 year old double amputee. Perhaps the most difficult case to confront was FIRAS, a 12-year old fifth grader who is paralyzed and will never walk again. Ghassan is a 15 year old paralyzed from the waist down. We were told he was shot in the back as he ran from the Israeli soldiers. Both his spleen and one kidney had to be removed. His wish, he related in Arabic from his wheelchair, was to be healthy and to be free. Two 16-year old boys were shot, one through the center of both hands, the other through the center of his «writing and throwing» hand. These are some of the results of the humane crowd control measures utilized «with utmost restraint» by the occupation authorities. (A phrase used by the Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations in March 1988).

As we dragged ourselves out of the facility, the doctors drew my attention to the words of former United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger quoted in the *Jerusalem Post* the previous day. He counselled the Israeli authorities to crush the insurrection «overwhelmingly, brutally and rapidly». I could offer my Palestinian inquisitors no credible insight into the motivation for such counsel. I could only think of FIRAS and his future.

RAMALLAH

We visited Ramallah and spoke with many people including JAMAL NASSAR and ROGER HEACOCK, professors at Bir Zeit University. I know Jamal from Model United Nations simulations in the United States. He was a professor at Illinois State University, who went to Bir Zeit in August 1987 on a Senior Fulbright Fellowship. He taught three days before it was closed. In 1987, Bir Zeit was closed 4 months, and remains closed at this writing.

Jamal says the uprising has been going on for 20 years, but since December 1987 the revolt has crossed all sectors of society and all strata are involved.

He sees the formula for peace as self-determination leading to a Palestinian state; and such a successful process necessitates talking with the PLO. He finds the same analysis prevalent throughout his society. The Jordanian option is non viable. At this time the PLO is willing to accept a Palestinian state alongside Israel. For Jamal the JUST solution is a democratic, secular state in Palestine, but he realizes that it is not practical today. He does see a democratic, secular state in the future, won «either by force of demography». The West Bank and Gaza comprise less than 20% of old Palestine.

«Why should they accept less than full rights? Self determination? They will NOT accept Jordan, will accept autonomy ONLY if there is genuine self-rule at the end of the process, he stated. He characterized the uprising as spontaneous, but within a week there was national leadership. The uprising has placed some limits on the outside leadership they cannot accept compromises unacceptable to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

The degree of unity and discipline is unusual. «The Israelis tried to manufacture their own brochures, but we all know which are authentic and which are not. The people talk about the uprising in every kitchen.

There are countless examples of solidarity, of the «Iron Will» resisting the «Iron Fist». One is the story of a man being beaten in the street by an Israeli patrol. A woman arrived carrying an infant and waded into the center of the confrontation. She chastised the victim for being such a poor excuse for a husband and a father, and exclaimed that she wanted to have

little to do with him. With that scolding she dropped the baby into his arms and stormed off around the corner. The beating ceased and the man staggered away clutching the child. Nearby was the woman waiting to retrieve her infant. She was not his wife; he was not the husband or father. He was a man at risk.

The Bir Zeit professors commented that the Islamic fundamentalists were important at the outset of the *intifadeh* in Gaza. Many members of the former Palestine Liberation Army were there and they turned to Islamic Jihad. Their importance has diminished as they have subsumed their parochial agenda to that of Palestinian nationalism. Friday, all seem to go to mosque. The event has evolved into a social/political gathering. Even Christians are going to the mosque and Muslims to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The national uprising has crossed confessional lines. «This is a war of national liberation», Jamal offered, and noted that five groups are coordinating their resistance efforts. Islamic Jihad comprises about twenty percent of the total and is accepting the independence of the Palestinian state under the leadership of the PLO. It sees the utopian prescription in the Jihad, and that they «may diverge from the PLO in the future, but not now».

Jamal talked of the strike inside the Green Line (pre-1967 Israel) and the relief the Arabs inside Israel have dispatched to refugee camps under siege. «The Green Line is NOT a barrier for Palestinians». They are countering Israeli attempts to geographically divide the Palestinians. The unity of all Palestinians scared Israelis. Israelis, to be really peaceful and free, must become Middle Eastern. Neither man saw an end to the uprising. «Palestinians are just emerging from a traditional society and can survive with little». They visualize a protracted struggle assuming many forms and shapes as the circumstances dictate.

Jamal, and everyone else we engaged on this subject, found nothing new in the Shultz Plan. «It still leaves a bantustan in the West Bank and Gaza». They concluded that world sympathy will not secure the future. Palestinians must achieve independence for themselves. However, those in support of this historic process can assist. One practical suggestion was a «support a farmer» program whereby approximately \$150 per month could be raised to keep a farmer on his land and not seeking work inside the Israeli economy. More violence is expected from the IDF and the settlers. They fully expect Israel to try and maintain an apartheid state. But they did not characterize the settlements as major obstacles to peace.

«All the work done on behalf of the Palestinians for the past 20 years was exceeded by what has happened in the Occupied Territories of Palestine in the past three months», Jamal concluded.

It was with these men and other residents of Ramallah that we observed one of the confrontations between the «children of the stones» and the

IDF. At 11 AM, the students placed the Palestinian flag atop Ramallah hospital. Displaying the green, black, red and white banner is but one of an endless list of «terrorist acts» designated by the occupation authorities. The IDF engaged the 13-18 year old, kuffiya-wrapped students in the rock-strewn streets adjacent to the hospital. Rocks and then rubber bullets, rocks and then tear gas, rocks and then live ammunition, followed each other in an escalating and deadly rhythm.

One eighteen year-old soldier became enraged when a single stone thrower refused to retreat an expected distance when threatened. The soldier suddenly rushed to the student. He failed to lower his protective visor and when the soldier closed the distance between them to the distance from a pitcher's mound to home plate, the rock thrower unleashed the projectile and it found its mark square on the bridge of the nose of the lunging soldier. As the soldier fell he fired his rubber bullets at the retreating boy and slumped to the ground. His comrades withdrew him from the center of the action and ministered his shattered nose. These soldiers urged us to take pictures. A Reuters photographer standing next to me muttered, «Now all hell is going to break loose». Some of the students went to the roof of the hospital and shouted, «Stones are more powerful than guns. We no longer fear the gun or the stick. Beat me today... fine. I am going back to the village again and pick up stones. Lay down your guns. I would rather be dead bones under the soil of my country than controlled by others».

The IDF eventually withdrew from that confrontation, just one of several incidents occurring in the city. The frustration was evident on the faces of these boy-soldiers. As they passed us they grabbed a Palestinian student standing nearby who was in no way involved in the confrontation. People with us began to shout at them to leave her alone. We were urged to stay close to them and to have our cameras ready. Adverse publicity might save her a beating or worse.

She was pulled and shoved by these teenage Israeli soldiers for a few minutes as they lumbered up the debris-filled street. Eventually they pulled her face back by her hair and sprayed her twice in the eyes with a mace-like substance. She screamed and fell down. As the soldiers proceeded down an alley, residents in a nearby house took this university woman in to wash and rest.

The patrol proceeded down a narrow lane between rows of substandard houses and apartments. When they had passed, a woman came down from one apartment and asked if we were journalists. After we identified ourselves, she told us the day before the IDF fired tear gas into her baby's room for no apparent reason. She was holding a year-old child whose facial complexion was severely irritated. The canister she produced was one of four we would see so many times during our days there. It was the MK II 560 CS gas can clearly labelled not to be utilized indoors as DEATH

or serious injury may result. The lettering also proclaimed that in was made in the USA, complete with company and zip code. For the Palestinians we encountered it symbolized the role of the US as co-oppressor in the Occupied Territories.

At that time I was reminded of an open letter to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in the *New York Times Review of Books* from American Jewish intellectuals from across the political spectrum «It (the policy of holding the West Bank and Gaza) makes peace negotiations impossible. It casts the Jews in Israel, and those who are about them all over the world, in the impossible position that the Jewish state can live *only* by forever repressing the Palestinians», the letter concluded. The repression is a daily fact of life for these people.

NABLUS

We followed the twisting road to Nablus and the north of the West Bank negotiating the steep hills and passes that wind between them. There were villages all along our route where the *intifadeh* continues far out of the reach of the Western media.

Nablus is the largest of the towns on the West Bank. It is set dramatically against the sheer face of the surrounding hills with the main commercial area at its base. The entire area was uncustomarily quiet. The shops were closed. Few people were on the street. Our guide, a well known physician from the area, took us high on one of the hills to a neighbourhood where a few children played in the street. They found us objects of curiosity, and began to offer personal testimony on the effects of the occupation once they learned that we were from the West and we were friendly.

We were ushered into an «upper room» where 30 people gathered to comment at length about the uprising. The central, organizational role of the neighbourhood committees and the women's committees was stressed. They seem to elicit the participation of most of the people, and are organizing life since 9 December in a disciplined way previously unknown in this community. We heard this saga of unity and cooperation repeated throughout the West Bank and Gaza. These neighbourhood or popular committees as well as the women's committees were becoming the social, economic and political institutions in the daily life of the people.

The work of the neighborhood committees commenced with the collection of food for the most needy. It then evolved to include cooperation with the medical relief committee in order to establish a clinic in the area to treat the injured who could not or would not go to the hospital. «They organize everything... from food supplies to throwing stones and all in between», one of the local leaders proclaimed. Other responsibilities include home visits to the injured, visits to hospitals, to those arrested who can

be visited and the holding of symbolic funerals for fallen friends whom they could not bury.

Curfews, the functional closing of an entire community or camp, are no strangers to his city of 120,000 inhabitants. For example, during February, Nablus was under curfew for 13 days, yet this new popular institutional arrangement was able to provide food to the neighbourhoods. There is consistent support for those Palestinian workers who usually make their living in Israel. There is a campaign among the people to support these families. «We are steadfast with one another», a youthful leader commented.

The horror stories of the occupation were plentiful. «A fourteen-year old boy was killed in front of this house last week», the occupants stated. They recounted multiple instances where the IDF burst into houses and proceeded to break arms of those who could throw stones. «With which hand do you write?», inquired one soldier before he and his associates broke both. A man recounted the humiliation of being beaten in front of his wife and children in their home. The acrimony stretched to stories of Israeli soldiers urinating in the rooftop water reservoirs as demonstrative example of the state of the occupation.

The role of the municipality has been eclipsed by the grassroots organization of the neighborhood committees. The municipalities were characterized as being cooperative with the occupying authorities in the past. Power is being reorganized.

Characteristically, the road narrowed to passages not wide enough for a small car. We were the only persons on the street, save an eight-man IDF patrol that noted our entry and surrounded the car in the alleyway. They bumped the side of the vintage VW beetle with their M-16 rifle butts demanding we all exit immediately. They wanted to see all our passports and our driver's identity papers. The self-declared leader of this military contingent began screaming in Arabic how he was crazy and that we should not say a word or he would kill all of us. He demanded that we remove a 4x6 inch color sticker of the Palestinian flag that had been affixed to the swinging sign above a shuttered shop. When we did not immediately comply he took the driver's identity card and told him he would not see it again. It was retrieved later.

We were extricated from this tense situation by the very women we had come to meet. Several of them arrived and began to speak quickly to the soldiers, all the while slowly moving us away from the car and toward the meeting house. We walked for fifty yards up a passageway to the entrance of a small home. One Israeli soldier affixed a tear gas canister to his weapon and levelled it at the entrance. When we shouted at him not to fire, he looked up and just laughed as he walked away. Throughout our meeting in this house the soldiers walked under the windows periodically striking

their rifle butts on the outside walls. The tension of realizing that they could burst in at any time or fire tear gas into this private home was palpable for all of us.

But the spirit in the room starkly contrasted with the ugly scene on the street. The room was overflowing with women, about 30 of them, ranging in age from 13 to almost 80. By their dress they represented the full spectrum of the society, from Islamic sisters to those dressed very modern and western, Muslims and Christians. Each was anxious to offer their perspective of life in Nablus and the important transformation taking place for women at this seminal historic moment.

Women are empowering themselves under these emergency conditions. They find themselves in the abnormal position of protecting men who are always subject to IDF arrest. They have been able to retrieve the sick and injured and, occasionally, to leave an area during the curfew and search for food and supplies. They are all involved in learning first aid. As each one has learned the basics, she is in charged to passing the techniques on to others. Other organizations are preparing first aid kits to be distributed throughout the region. The women undertake visitation to prisoner's families. Many prisoners are being held outside in tents or unheated building, so the women had already made over 200 wool shirts for them and would be making more.

There are constant threats to women from insults to assaults. Yet their spirit was indomitable. They were fully prepared to meet the challenge to protect their children and to gather the food. They were attacked with tear gas during the silent demonstrations on International Women's Day on March 10, 1988. At least one woman was severely injured; another was unconscious for 2 days.

They do not feel safe and secure ANYWHERE, not in their homes, not with friends, not in the mosque or church. Houses are broken into at will and without reason or provocation. It is part of the reality of occupation. There were several memorable personal testimonies. One involved the 68-year old woman who sat next to me. She spoke rapidly of being beaten for not opening the door. She told the IDF that there were no men in the house. They entered through the house next door and broke through her ceiling to get to her. She was cursed and beaten. When she tried to respond to their false allegations of shielding men in the house, they yelled, «Uscut!» «Shut up!» Other soldiers threw stones through her windows. «To whom do you complain?», she queried. «If the enemy is your judge, to whom do you turn?» Another incident told of a woman's son who was hit by an IDF jeep, then he was beaten and left in the street. The women talked of the many persons they would minister to secretly so that the injured would not enter the hospital where many have been seized by the IDF.

These women were animated and spoke excitedly of their determination to continue this protest and demonstrations as coordinated by the Unified National Command. They agreed that the proposed UN-sponsored international peace conference is the way out of this intolerable situation. They would not accept a return to life before the *intifadeh*.

We paid a call on Bassam Shaka, the former mayor of Nablus who lost both legs one morning when he started his car in 1977 and a planted bomb exploded. He has become a symbol of resistance to the 20-year old occupation for many in Palestine.

Bassam Shaka conceptualized the *intifadeh* as an «explosion releasing the energy, pain and suffering of the occupation». The West Bank and Gaza were Arab areas and were not going to change because of the oppression. He found the determination of the population to be inspiring. He claimed no responsibility for leadership, but praised those who had assumed direction. He characterized the phenomenon as immensely popular, but warned that the IDF would undertake more stringent methods to break the rebellion.

ORIENTAL JEWS

That evening we returned to Jerusalem and an enlightening interaction with two Sephardim, Oriental Jews, representing a small, peace-oriented Oriental Front. One was YOSSE SHILOA, a well-known Israeli actor and the other MEIR AMOR, a writer who spent 21 days in jail for refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories.

The Oriental Front has profound claims against the social order in Israel. For the last 100 years, the negative Jewish attitude toward Arabs has been nurtured in Middle and East Europe. These men maintained that the European Ashkenazim brought their fears, philosophies and ideas to the state of Israel they created in Palestine.

The experiences of Jews in Europe and those in Arab countries were NOT parallel. Before, during and after WW II, many Jewish people in Europe were killed. But Jews in Arab countries did not suffer the same fate. The two men contended that Zionism encourages Oriental Jewish antagonism toward Arabs. But now the majority of the Jewish population in Israel is Oriental. They are also the lowest socio-economic class. «It is like a bus with the driver an Ashkenazim and most of the passengers Sephardim», one of them commented. They (the European Jews) are in control... now».

Both maintained that Jews and Arabs *can* live together peacefully. Orientals have done it before in Arab countries, so there is ample precedent. «As Oriental Jews, we have a *material* interest in peace. The huge amounts of money used for war now are desperately needed in Israeli society. «We

live in a culture of war... we must develop a culture of peace, an attitude of peace. We cannot exist forever as a fortress, a crusader castle of sorts in the Middle East», one stated. They see that Palestinians and all Israelis should have the same rights, not more, not less. The historical process over the last 100 years has created both the Israeli and Palestinian drives for nationhood.

According to these articulate spokesmen, Oriental Jews in Israel are trapped in a second class status. «Ninety-five per cent of the Jewish people in army prisons are Oriental Jews, and the same is true in civilian prisons». Many of them are there because they are not enthusiastic about serving in the army. A major social question in Israel is why are the Oriental Jews serving. Israeli society is dominated by Ashkhenazim. The upper classes are filled with Ashkhenazim military or former military personnel. They have maintained an economic, political and cultural interest in war. BUT peace with the Palestinians is an integral part of the conception of a promising future for these two Oriental Jews and their movement.

They were disappointed with what Israeli society meant to Oriental Jews. «Israeli policy promised Oriental Jews much, but has delivered little».

Palestinians have changed the labor market in Israel. Israel does not allow the Palestinians to form unions, thereby creating a windfall for industry owners. But this policy undermines the Oriental Jewish factory as well. *There are connections between Palestinians and Oriental Jewish interests. We see common interests in peace...* We know our parents lived with Arabs and we also have social, economic and political interests in changing the current situation.»

Both men believe that Oriental Jews will have an ever-increasing impact on Israeli society. Seventy per cent of those 18-30 years old in Israel are Oriental. Three hundred thousand (300,000) children, 30% of all the children in Israel, are considered underprivileged. Of that number ninety-eight percent are Oriental. These children are the ones who will not be finishing high school. Many of the soldiers are from this educationally deficient group. The funds needed to provide enhanced educational opportunities for these people are diverted to military budgets.

«We are creating our history now. We should try to change the direction of that history now. We must change the balance of power in Jewish society in Israel», they said. The distinction of Ashkenazim and Sephardim that connotes the chasms in the socio-politico-economic reality of Israel, developed ONLY in Israel. «We are ready to change from being objects to subjects in history». They see their quest as a social and not a political movement. They are looking for «a third way», another approach.

In response to a query about Oriental Jewish support for the right-wing Likud coalition, they counselled that the Sephardim pro-Likud vote was actually an anti-Labour vote. It is the Oriental Jews who come with

Palestinians for the lowest paying jobs. The animosity is due to Palestinian willingness to work for less, the hatred spawned from economic competition, from fighting over crumbs.

«You can make peace, real peace, with people only when you know them, know their spirit, their culture. It is the process of humanizing the adversary», Yossi Shiloah commented. He tries to enhance this level of understanding by presenting «The Journey - An Evening with Palestinian Poets» to Israeli Jewish audiences. «We are opening a window to a new mind... we are learning again what it means to be a refugee... we must act not just to make peace, but to discover a culture». He reminded us that Israeli society is not homogeneous. «So we must dream of the next 100 years. We do not have any place to go, any of us. We must share the future together - it is a hope we must realize. Can we conceptualize what it will be like to live together? What will that society be like? A day AFTER the peace... how will Palestinians see us, Oriental Jews. For we have a cultural connection with one another that we must rediscover». For these men the collaboration of Oriental Jews and Palestinians is part of an optimistic future.

That evening at a dinner for 20 from relief agencies and faculty staff from Bir Zeit, I met a heroine. This bright, attractive 22-year old student was interrogated for 17 days and eventually placed in administrative detention for 60 more days. She refused to incriminate herself. «I won the grudging respect of my interrogators». One finally told her that «If all Palestinian women are like you, I will be out of a job». She spoke of becoming a friend of the rat and the cockroach. «We learned to divide the two-by-three meter living space», she quietly commented. She was never formally charged with any crime, never had the benefit of counsel. That night we also heard of a US women's tour that visited during the uprising. Most were Catholic nuns and they were strip-searched when leaving the country. The official paranoia that someone might be able to leave with information that may incriminate the official policy is more extreme than usual. This is not an attribute of a democratic society. We learned each that democracy has no relevance to the life of a Palestinian in the West Bank and Gaza.

GALILEE

The next day was National Strike Day called by the Unified National Command. No commercial activity took place throughout the West Bank and Gaza. Discipline was evident everywhere.

We went by Israeli taxi to near Tel Aviv then north to Galilee. In Nazareth, the largest Arab city in Israel, we visited friends, one a well-known lawyer. We wanted to discover the degree of support for the

intifadeh among these Muslim and Christian Palestinians who are Israeli citizens and live inside the Green Line.

We were told that the support had been widespread, particularly in the form of collecting supplies to be distributed in the Occupied Territories by UNRWA. But this UN-sponsored assistance only goes to the camps maintained by UNRWA.

There was no unity among Israeli Arabs on a three day work strike inside Israel. The more nationalistic Abna al Balad (sons of the village) was in favor, but the larger, more mainstream Communist RAKAH said no. There had been some violence in Nazareth and a few slogans appeared on walls.

«Right wing Jews in the government would like us to throw rocks and molotov cocktails», our host explained. «Then they will be able to justify their actions. They will contend that they cannot relinquish control either in the Occupied Territories or Galilee». Up to our meeting that day in Nazareth, there had not been a single Jewish fatality of the uprising. In the sixth month of the Intifadeh, the Israeli toll stands at two.

«In Israel we must proceed legally», the advocate insisted. «We will fight legally in the knesset... we are not Algeria.»

What if a separate Palestinian state were to be created in the West Bank and Gaza? What would be the Israeli Arab response? We raised this question throughout our visit. «We will NOT leave Galilee... we will stay here as Israeli citizens and work to strengthen Palestinian status in Israel. We will develop a pattern of cooperation with the new state. We do not want to lose our attachment to this land».

What about confiscation of Arab land in Israel? « They have confiscated land every day since 1948... we hardly have a graveyard. Ninety per cent of the land in Israel is controlled by the state. The prime culprit was identified as the ISRAELI LAND ADMINISTRATION. They are buying land even in South Lebanon!».

The majority of the land is controlled by this administration which cannot sell it. A person can own a building, but not the land. The laws for Israelis and Arabs appear equal, but the applications differ. Arabs cannot rent this land. There is no law justifying the confiscation of Arab land. «The land is declared to be needed for the public interest. The next year it becomes the site of a Jewish settlement». The Minister of the Treasury has the power to declare ANY land as needed for the public interest. It is the government adjutor who sets the price of the land. Currently, the prevailing price is NIS 20-80 per dunum (100 sq. meters) which makes the land grossly undervalued. What is referred to as «compensation» is labelled «sanctioned stealing» by the lawyer. «Israel steals from you and also Israel decides the amount of compensation». A resident can only receive electricity to his home if he has been granted a licence

for his home. Only cities can have planning committees which regulate these licences and most cities are governed by Jewish committees. The Arab citizens of Israel wield little political clout in these decision-making forums.

Since the uprising there have been administrative detainees in Galilee for the first time. Twenty well-known activists from the nationalist Sons of the Village were so treated. Nazareth itself had been under military law until 1965. This emergency power inside Israel proper gives the detaining authority to military commanders in the North, Central and Southern Commands. Under these regulations, there is no requirement to prove guilt. It is a harsh tool to curb activism. We heard stories of those taken to the police stations being beaten.

The sentences for activism are harsh. Some ninth graders received 2 year sentences for disobedience. Slogans, posters, Palestinian flags are all considered terrorist symbols. The uprising's Unified National Command have urged these children and adults not to pay the stiff fines, but to go to prison. The Israeli attempts to create local of support for their administration of the Occupied Territories through the village Leagues program failed. «The leagues are finished», our host concluded.

American relief worker Karen White spoke about her investigation, *The Children of the Stones*. She documents mistreatment of Palestinian children in the Occupied Territories by the occupying forces and settlers. She spoke at length of bone and muscle damage from beating which will affect the future growth of the victims. Her studies reveal that sixty per cent of the injuries sustained by the children are never seen in the hospitals. Many children hide from the visits of the Red Cross and some with broken bones do not want to be seen for fear of reprisals from the military occupiers. We found her comments corroborated by other interviews and by medical personnel.

There is great fear of the curfews by the residents of the West Bank and Gaza. During these periods there is little opportunity to receive medical aid and food. Under curfew the people are «invisible» with no media presence to protect from the house-to house ransackings and beatings. Without the media, these people become faceless once again. Witnesses spoke of mail to US Congressmen being intercepted. Some now send it out via diplomatic pouches of sympathetic countries.

SHEFARAM

We drove from Nazareth through the Galilee hills to the smaller village of Shefaram and met with advocate Ramze Abu Rahmeh.

He commented that the unresolved situation in the Occupied Territories was dangerous for those Palestinians inside the Green Line. Reactions could compound and the situation could end up frighteningly parallel to the

Ireland/Northern Ireland powder keg.

The Shultz program was depicted as «OK», but six months later. «Those in the Occupied Territories can't agree to a solution that is less than land, home, country and government for the Palestinians». They are not interested in the Jordanian option. The people of Palestine reject Jordan for it divided Palestine with Israel. Many see Hussein as partner with Israel and condemn him for the carnage of Black September, 1970.

Abu Rahmeh said that there was new hope among many that the Palestinian state was in sight. Most of the Arabs in Israel would stay in place and not move to a new Palestine. He speculated about the possibility of dual nationality.

He has a 16-year old son. He will not send his son to national service under the current circumstances.

He was sure that if Palestinians secured their national rights, there would be no need for terrorism. He was strongly opposed to the recent Palestinian terrorist attack on a bus in the Negev as an unacceptable tactic. Sur rash behavior counters Palestinian interests and benefits the right wing in Israel. It provided more impetus for Shamir's resistance to accommodation as he prepared to go to Washington and his meetings with Shultz and Reagan.

Our host contended that Israeli Arab assistance to those in the Occupied Territories is the *minimum* they can do. Israel fears an Israeli Arab strike and its potential impact. Therefore Israel must allow expressions of support of the Occupied Territories Palestinians by their compatriots inside Israel, for to suppress it would only exacerbate the situation. He confirmed our assessment that we were witnessing a social revolution with solidarity cutting across all intermediary loyalties.

TIBERIUS

Our search for our contacts took us from Nazareth to the Scotch Hospice, a lovely retreat location in the town of Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee, about 45 minutes from Nazareth. By good fortune, we were able to meet with two Episcopal priests, Fr. S. Shehade and Fr. O. Rentisi, both residents of the West Bank.

Fr. Rentisi commented that the uprising was «like a fever that has touched everybody». The spirit of cooperation is evident in the way people treat each other. They have discovered a new sense of themselves as they cooperate in innovative ways. «Before, they fought for food in the camps. Now, they share what they have», Rentisi explained.

FR. Rentisi judged the Shultz Plan as fatally flawed. The US is seen as allied with one of the parties. The US does not acknowledge the rights OR the representatives of the Palestinian people, does not recognize the

PLO, and wants to cooperate with Israel to create another representative for Palestine in the Occupied Territories. «They will *not* find such a representative from now until eternity», Fr. Rentisi declared.

Israel must also be saved from this demoralizing situation. The futures of the Palestinians and the Israelis are interdependent. The peace of Israel depends on the peace of Palestine. They called for a two state solution. «There is a need for realistic, honest people at this critical point in our common history».

Fr. S. Shehadeh found a new tone in the Shultz Plan, an implicit recognition that Palestinians have rights. He contended that Palestinians should be taken into consideration by the US when forming Palestinian policy. He reaffirmed the central leadership role of the PLO. «Who among Palestinians is not the PLO?» *No one* can tell the Palestinians who should represent them», Shehadeh declared. He sees the path to peace through mutual recognition of Israel and the PLO... and then peace talks. Under these circumstances, perhaps the US will encourage Israel toward accommodation.

The issue of terrorism implicated Israel as well as Palestinian liberation groups. Shehadeh said Yassir Arafat has supported United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242/338 and other UN resolutions as bases for peace. They both spoke of repercussions in Galilee if the Occupied Territories situation is not resolved. They admitted that such a demonstrative response by Israeli Arabs could trigger right-wing reaction in Israel.

What if there were a Palestinian state? Both men concurred that Galilee Arabs would stay in Israel as citizens there with full political, economic and cultural rights. At this time they do not feel part of Israel even though they live under its laws and are called citizens. «We are not allowed to feel it. We are discriminated against in dozens of ways including work, agriculture, education and living conditions. Even the Druze are affected, they responded.

They are hopeful for real peace and what could follow from open borders including trade, exchange, etc. They both commented that aid from Galilee has been funneled through UNRWA, but aid to the towns is more difficult. These goods sent by truck were stopped by the IDF in Gaza.

«People are determined to keep on. If we give up now, Israel will crush us. We do not want to be occupied any longer!! This is not a rebellion. Rather the people are seeking their own entity, identity, integrity, state, passport and flag on their own soil. The people will NEVER go back! The people of the Occupied Territories want their own state established by their own leadership, the PLO. «When we tell you who our leadership is, it is NOT for you or anyone on the face of the earth to tell us who should lead us. And don't be deluded into accepting the Israeli argument that this is an Islamic revolution... I am a Christian and go to the mosque on Friday;

Muslims come to church with us on Sunday», Rentisi explained. The bonding is transcending confessionnal barriers in occupied Palestine.

The National Committee for the Protection of Arab Land in Israel called for a national strike on 30 March. This is a continual reaction to the loss of Arab land at the hands of the Israeli authorities inside the Green Line and in the Occupied Territories. Israeli development plans for areas with large Arab populations are undertaken without any consideration for the Arab people living there.

YMCA-EAST JERUSALEM

Our two and one-half hour drive back to Jerusalem was followed by dinner at the East Jerusalem YWCA. The energetic and resourceful Doris Salah was our hostess. The evening was an outpouring of emotion and entreaties for help, help to end the occupation, to devise campaigns to change governmental attitudes, to speak out and to assist in practical ways.

My dinner partner was the legendary Sameeha Khalil. Many Palestinians decided long ago that the preservation of the dignity of their families and their people was possible even under the burden of occupation. Their spirit and their achievements have served as role models for others. Many can be mentioned. One certainly is Um Khalil.

Her story is a microcosm of the saga of the Palestinian people. As a young wife and mother she and her family were dispossessed in 1948 and ended up in Gaza. With her last piece of jewelry she and her husband rented a small truck to return to their home and pick up some belongings and articles for her children. They were turned back, and not allowed to go to their home. From that moment her life, her concerns, her orientation changed. She has been jailed 8 times. She has organized effective women's societies, including the current *Inash al Usra* (Family Breeding) in El Bireh after watching her people stand in UNRWA lines for bread. She wanted to help Palestinian people help themselves and, thereby, retain a sense of their identity and integrity. Her cottage industry emphasizing traditional embroidery for export represents economic independence for thousands of rural West Bank families. The society also runs a kindergarten, a residence for orphan girls, a bakery and a small clothing manufacturing business. She successfully channelled her defiance for the occupation and her concern for her people into a series of enterprises where Palestinian people exercise some control over their own lives.

Such independence and self-determination cannot be tolerated by the occupying authorities. On 18 June 1988, IDF forces raided the *Inash al Usra* Centre and closed it for «an indefinite period» on the grounds of instructing youth to demonstrate. The closure will adversely impact 4200 women directly and over 20,000 other people in their families. By this action

the military authorities on the West Bank are attempting to undermine a successful self-help enterprise conceived by Palestinian women for the welfare of the entire population.

We were encouraged by our dinner partners to urge a study of the psychological impact of the occupation. We were reminded that no one seems to be monitoring the important relationship between the settlers and the army. They believe that time will NOT solve these problems, and that they do not want the situation to degenerate into predicament that duplicate Northern Ireland.

«The USA and Israel must be reconciled to the fact that it is not possible to still human beings striving for freedom by burning, stealing and killing» counselled one physician.

We were told the car of a women's work committee in Ramallah was fire-bombed that day and 11 more persons placed in administrative detention. «The occupation is killing the love in the hearts of our children». a leading female administrator warned. Shamir and company were described by two priests there as «ex-gang fighters and bone breakers, die-hard pioneers of Zionism with no conception of the future».

We repeatedly were encouraged to keep the human bridge to Palestine open, to send more people to the region. «Send us those who need to learn, women's groups, main line churches. They need to become stronger advocates for the balance they urge». Our hosts that evening conceptualized the crisis as a human issue. «These people are important and are suffering. Help us open our schools again, for our children are now being denied an education... Stop preventing us from forming an independent state, raising our own flag, issuing our own passport».

Their prescription was mutual recognition of Israel and Palestinians and, then, sitting down around the table.

That day the BBC announced that the European Parliament had blocked an EEC agreement with Israel that would have increased the amount of duty-free goods to the Community. The products affected were juice, flowers and fruit. Our Jerusalem friends conceptualized the adoption of limited trade sanction against Israel as a rejection of Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories. This action negates the decision taken by the EEC ministers and the agreement must now be re-negotiated. This decision will force a public debate in the Strasbourg chamber on the underlying reasons for this abrupt change in policy. Our dinner hosts embraced this small victory as tangible support from the West. The next day commentary in Israeli press dismissed this action as of marginal economic importance.

GAZA

We went to Gaza the next day. Gaza is 30 miles long and 10 miles wide

with almost 700,000 inhabitants living in four towns and 8 camps. About 2500 Israeli settlers also live there. The contrasts in living standards between West Bank and Gaza are stark. The road from Jerusalem that cuts southwest toward Ashkelon and onto Gaza is used principally by Arabs going to and from Gaza. It is in a decrepit state of disrepair. The Norwegian ambassador to Israel has said of Gaza «This is worse than what the Germans did in Norway during the war». By the close of the day, I began to appreciate his comment.

All the way we heard tales of Gaza, the conditions there and a litany of personal experiences. We were told that Gaza would probably be under curfew (The entire area was isolated by this administrative tactic the very next day). We were told not to go in a car with yellow Israeli plates lest we be the target of continual rock-throwing. We were supposed to change cars when we arrived at the Gaza border, but it never happened. The Israeli administration contend that the people in Gaza are «better off» than they were under Egyptian administration. This argument is spurious because the demand is for independence, not Egyptian administration. What barometers are used to measure this relative «prosperity»? Television and refrigerators or mortality rates, hospitals, and a quality of life index? In «normal» times, 60,000 Gazans trek each day into Israel. Many of them work as day laborers on land their families owned before 1948.

Urban guerilla warfare is a way of life now in this 320 sq.mile patch of Palestine along the Mediterranean. As soon as we reached the checkpoint to enter Gaza, the road surface and the mood changed. Immediately, our cars and their yellow Israeli licence plates were spotted by the local population. Both cars were hit with rocks during our stay. Heavily-armed Israeli military patrols are everywhere. The wire mesh over all windows and lights of Israeli military vehicles attest to the grudging respect the «children of the stones» have earned in this blighted area.

But as soon as the kuffiyah-wrapped *shabab* (boys-children) noted that our escort was well known to them, these street-fighters quickly transformed from our adversaries into our allies. Several of them diverted the attention of a fast-approaching Israeli jeep patrol with rocks while our cars were huddled first in an orchard and later into an enclosed courtyard.

As we scampered out of the cars, I sensed a shadow falling across me. I turned to confront a teenage boy standing on a two foot mound of earth, staring at me through his scarf and rolling two rocks in his right hand. «Are you an Israeli?», he questioned in Arabic. I clumsily responded that I was a friend of his people. A gunshot distracted me for a moment. When I turned around, he was gone.

We dashed across a field and another orchard into the front yard of a dilapidated dwelling. Within moments we were drinking tea, eating oranges from the adjacent trees and hearing testimony from men, women

and children of Gaza City. We were now under the protection of «the people». While we talked, a battle continued in the street about 150 yards away. Two lookouts, perched on a crumbling retaining wall, surveyed the situation beyond our vision.

The stories of abuse and oppression abounded. We saw evidence of rubber bullets and live ammunition being fired into many houses. Every family we visited produced more than one tear gas canister made in the USA that had been fired INTO their homes. In meeting after meeting in the houses of Gaza City and Jabaliya camp, the residents recited tales of life under occupation. «Settlers stopped the other day and shot a girl playing in a shooyard», one middle-aged man commented. «The settler was interrogated and released. Yet so many of us, including children, are sentenced to prison for throwing rocks! We will not stop our resistance to this unjust and humiliating occupation until it ends».

The conditions in Gaza make the West Bank look like a developed country. The measures that have been used to subdue the *intifadeh* in Gaza there have been extreme. Full curfews have been proclaimed. For days Gazans were not supposed to leave their houses. Water has been cut to Jabaliya and Nusseirat camps more than once. On the evening of 9 March the American-born Rabbi Meir Kahane and Gaza settlers attacked one of the camps. The articulated aim of Kach movements is to «drive the Arabs into the Jordan desert».

As we walked the dirt y back-streets of the city escorted by recognized leaders of the resistance, ever-expanding groups of children tracked us at a minimal distance. People came out of their shanties and makeshift dwellings to eye these Westerners. Along the dusty, deserted main streets were countless strands of steel wire, coiled remnants of torched steel-belted tires that had served for a time as makeshift roadblocks and a flaming, noxious manifestation of popular defiance of the superior MILITARY power under which they live.

At Shifa hospital, Gaza City, we witnessed the consequences of the occupation's brutality. I hesitate to label Shifa as a hospital. There were no sanitation standards. The toilets were filthy with debris scattered everywhere. What food I did see was repulsive. Shifa is administered by the military occupation authorities and Gazans pay taxes to support it. More than once we were reminded that Gazans are taxed 20 percent of their income and 15% VAT on goods they buy in order to support the military government that provides just services as Shifa. Many injured persons refuse to be taken to Shifa. Most spoke of family members or friends being arrested from their beds while convalescing in the squalid hospitals of Gaza. This was not the well-scrubbed Makassed Hospitals in East Jerusalem, only a short distance away.

Three days before our arrival, Israeli soldiers entered Shifa and arrested persons from their beds. The doctors and nurses openly protested the

action, but now would not speak with us. «They have ben warned,» commented a man from Gaza that now accompanied us. We were reminded several times that the people avoid admittance to the hospital. Many simply forego medical care for their injuries.

What was sickening is not only the number of injuries, but the type of punishment that these victims have sustained. They reflect a sadistic philosophy of crowd control. Two fourteen-year old boys had broken arms, multiple breaks. Their limbs have been so badly pummeled and pulverized they may not be able to use them again. Elbows and wrists had been repeatedly smashed with rifle butts and truncheons. Ankles and knees had also been prime targets. The bone and muscle damage to the boys we saw was extreme. There were three men who had been so severely beaten that their arms and legs were at least three times normal size a full three days after they had sustained the onslaught. One man kept his head covered. I asked him if he was afraid we would take his picture. No, he responded, it was that a soldier had poked his scalp repeatedly with a long needle and the cloth was soothing his wounds. Two days earlier I heard a report from a Western relief worker on the West Bank who had evidence that a soldier used a long needle repeatedly to prick the chest of two children. Patients told us that their families are often beaten just outside the hospital but also inside when they visit.

Jabaliya Camp is one square kilometer of dust and corrugated shanties that is the «temporary» home to 60,000 Palestinians. It has an open sewer winding through it. What looked like a pond was a cesspool. Children are everywhere. In the center is a barb-wired Israeli military compound complete with a watchtower. This sprawling warren of hovels called a camp has been partially bulldozed by the Israeli army under the recommendation of General Ariel Sharon in order to allow easier access to the camp's center for military vehicles. This is the same Sharon who has moved, under IDF guard, into the Muslim quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. Many of the spaces between these tin, wood and plastic shelters that open onto the road have been sealed by mammoth concrete slabs and mounds of earth piled against them in order to cut off avenues of exit and to prevent these spaces being used as hiding places for the rock-throwing children. These slabs were pushed into place by the omnipresent BULLDOZER, the destructive symbol of the Israeli military occupation of this region and its people.

Of the people we met during our stay, none was more memorable than 101-year old Ibrahim Awad. We met him lying on a mat in the courtyard of his small, modest dwelling. He and his family told us of their confrontation with the occupying military authorities. Apparently the Israeli military (IDF) was chasing a tire-burning demonstrator and thought he might have climbed over the wall into the Awad's yard. When Awad's

65-year old wife would not open the door, it was kicked in. Everyone in the family was beaten. The doors to all the rooms were kicked in. (We saw the recent reframing of all the door facings). This centenarian was struck repeatedly on the back with a club. «If I had been 20 years younger, they never could have entered», he cried from his prone position. A burning tire from the protest in the camp was drug into his courtyard. His wife talked of being struck all over her body, one of her daughters being knocked unconscious and dragged by her hair. She spend threee days at Shifa.

The soldiers returned to his house the next day and found him laying flat on the mat. «Are you still alive?», one soldier said whimsically, and then kicked him. More rounds were fired through the plastic roof in the bedrooms. «I have seen the Turks, the British, the Jordanians and, for the last twenty years, the Israelis. It is time for us to have our own land. We have waited and suffered long enough», the ancient man demanded.

We continued to walk through the camp under the watchful eye of the military lookouts in the tower. We were confronted at a distance by a horde of children, ranging from 4 to 16 years old. They seemed fearless. Hatred filled their young eyes. «Inta Yahud??» «Are you Jewish?», I was quizzed more than once. Even the protestations by camp leaders serving as our guides did not convince some of them. When a few of the youngest children threw rocks at us, they were admonished by their older compatriots. As one man explained, «If you look European, they assume you are an Israeli. Even if you are a journalist, they are suspicious. The Israeli authorities have sent persons into the area looking like journalists. The next day people would be questioned and arrested on the basis of pictures taken by the «journalists» the day before. They have little reason to trust you».

We met an eleven-year old boy who was picked up by a patrol and driven far from his village. He was bludgeoned and left in the rural area. He was found by a Bedouin woman who nursed him for three days and finally helped him find his way home. All this time his family had non way of knowing where he was, if he was alive.

Harassment never ends. After we left a meeting at a «safe house» the Army arrived on that narrow dirt street and fired rubber bullets. One of our hosts was struck in the face with one of the projectiles and had to be taken to the hospital.

At night there is little rest. Al are tense at jeeps and truck careen through the streets. The residents know that the soldiers could smash through their door at any moment. There are stories of settlers disguised as soldiers or police entering homes and smashing the contents.

We were told many times that it has become very risky for foreigners in Gaza. They are subject to attack both by IDF and Gazans. Nevertheless, some journalists and human rights workers brave these dangers. One Japanese female photographer remained in Gaza for a week to cover the

story lest the outside world have no independent information about the situation.

As we pulled out of Gaza City in a cloud of dust, a cluster of small children, now convinced that we were friends, waved the «V» for victory sign to us. We returned to Jerusalem. They turned back to Gaza and their daily confrontation with the occupation, the only mode of life known to most of this youthful population. In the next days we learned that foreigners were not being allowed into Gaza. Radio reports listed casualties in Jabaliya, Gaza City and other areas.

For me, those statistics will never be impersonal abstractions again. Each one has a face, a family, a story and a hope for the future. Their spirit is unmistakable and unforgettable. In the wasteland of Gaza streets, we were witnessing a renaissance, the rebirth of Palestine. It fills the eyes of those determined children and their parents.

I do not expect GAZA to ever fade from my consciousness.

RAMALLAH REPRISE

The next day was consumed with additional meetings in Ramallah. We met with young professors at Bir Zeit University. They confirmed many of our earlier conversations and offered new insights. They concurred that the settlements policy's ultimate objective was to force the Palestinians to leave. The people of the West Bank and Gaza are countering this thrust for the first time in a disciplined, coordinated manner through the neighbourhood and camp committees. These organizations represent a countermeasure, a method to aggregate their energies and remain united during this trying situation. They agreed with our conclusion that success has bred success of the resistance and has attracted traditional and moderate elements to the uprising. They related that the camps and the villages are most affected by the curfews and other forms of collective punishment.

This grassroots, non-governmental networking did not spring forth from a vacuum. Since 1967, there have been a variety of existing committees and unions aggregating persons, (at least in theory), persons in the region by occupation, sex, avocation and religion. They played a vital constructive role in this institutional development. They were the initial instruments of mobilization. But in the past their effectiveness has been diminished by interfactional rivalries. It is the COORDINATION of the committees work that must be identified as the new and significant variable in this INTIFADEH. The post December 8 Israeli threat was perceived as universal. Their struggle is based on more than anger over the occupation. It is, at its roots, a struggle for RIGHTS, including the opportunity to establish an infrastructure for a country, a state. They reminded me that Americans do not, and cannot, know the daily realities of occupation. The

details of such a life are never noticed.

There is also a seminal *economic* aspect of the occupation. The people on the West Bank and Gaza are beginning to establish their own economy rather than remaining a subservient economic entity. The current boycott is affecting the Israeli economy. An example given was that the one day strike inside the Green Line cost the Israeli economy \$13 million. «You must see the Occupied Territories from the economic perspective», they offered. These controlled areas mean money to Israeli treasury, the income tax is about 20 per cent of income and the bridge to Jordan tax raised \$50 million over the past 20 years for Israel. Deductions from Palestinian workers salaries who work in Israel, money that will not be recovered by these «guest workers», is estimated at over \$2 billion since 1967. The Occupied Territories have become a *consumption* market for Israel, a captive market. The West Bank and Gaza are the second most important economic partner for Israel after the U.S. More importantly the occupation and its exploitative economic policies have denied the West Bank and Gaza the opportunity of developing economic, social and political infrastructures. These are policies designed to undermine the creation of a nation-state.

Our hosts asserted that it is important that an international investigation be undertaken to evaluate the short-term and long term effects of the several types of tear gas being used by the military in the Occupied Territories. At least one type that is often used is US made. It is a five inch aluminum cylinder that is fired from a weapon. It reads «Long range projectiles 150 Yards» (I never saw it used further away from the intended victims than 50 yards) «MKII 560 CS Federal Laboratories, Inc Saltsburg, PA 15681 USA» Also printed on the canister was the ominous warning: «For outdoor use only. Must NOT be fired directly at persons or indoors as death or injury may result.» We heard numerous testimonies from individuals detailing tear gas use at close range, fired directly at persons, and fired into closed rooms and homes. My brief interview with the mother in Ramallah clutching her 18-month old girl with the severely irritated skin, my meetings with Nablus, Ramallah, Gaza and Jerusalem confirmed that these weapons are being utilized in ways unintended by the manufacturer. By May the parent company of the gas manufacturer publicly stated that it was not sending any more of the gas to Israel since the storm of protest has contended that it was being used in deadly ways. There is no way to ascertain if such action will be taken or how much gas is already on order and «in the pipeline». The Palestine Human Rights Information Center in Jerusalem confirms numerous deaths of infants and the elderly as a result of exposure to gas in both closed and open space. These victims are NEVER included in casualty lists sanctioned by the Israeli Defence Force.

A contemporary Palestinian poster boldly declares that «Darkness Never Lasts». In the midst of this protracted story of the darkness of occupation,

the Palestinian people have decided to seek light. They have stood up. That indomitable spirit is evident in the children of stones, in the merchants, the intellectual élite, the clergy form both faiths. It is alive in the field workers and the unskilled urban laborers. It lives amid the squalor of the camps and in the dreams and actions of 100-year old men and phalanx of Palestinian grandmothers. It is embodied in the students whose schools and universities have been closed by the occupying power for over three months and who daily challenge the occupying army with rocks and their red, green black and white national banner. It is defiantly exhibited in the pride and economic efficacy of viable, self-help projects like Sameeha Khalil's *Inash al Usra* (now closed indefinitely by the IDF), the medical relief committees and the alternative educational systems being developed. These people are creating alternatives, new ways of approaching old problems. They are, in the tradition of the occupiers, «creating new facts»

Power is essentially a relational phenomenon in which A influences or controls the behavior of B for a multiplicity of reasons. Its root is psychological. The people of the West Bank and Gaza have severed the power relationship that has governed their existence since the spectacular Israeli military victory in June 1967. For twenty years they essentially have proceeded on the seemingly incontestable premise that the occupier was invincible. After all, Israel has demolished and humiliated three Arab armies in six days. The Israeli occupying authority set the terms for their relationship. Israel acted, Palestinians reacted. Israeli confiscated much of the Occupied Territories for «security interests», and the Palestinians lamented the injustice and hopped for divine intervention to reverse this protracted travesty. Some bravely resisted. They filled the jails and prisons, were exiled or killed. The embers of hope for Palestinian self-determination were preserved among the people and through the formation and activities of their leadership in exile, the Palestine Liberation Organization. But factionalism sapped the energy and power of the people and the PLO. These internecine conflicts confirmed and preserved the «gospel of the Middle East according to Israel». In many ways the Arab states and Palestinian disarray were allies of Israel, co-conspirators in preserving the Israeli-controlled power relationship.

In April 1987 the Palestine National Council, the Palestinian parliament, met in Algiers. Despite Western analyses that this gathering of Palestinian representatives from around the globe ended on a harsh and irreconcilable note, the reality of Algiers was dramatically different and helped set the stage for the INTIFADEH. The factions aggregated under the umbrella of the PLO, carved out common grounds for understanding and cooperation. While the Western Press relentlessly pursued Abu Abbas (of Achille Lauro fame) for countless interviews, the leadership and the

Council members were forging new links. This sense of unity among Fateh, PFLP and PDFLP and others provided impetus for factional cooperation on the ground in occupied Palestine.

When the uprising was ignited by the death of four Gazans in early December and the shabab took to the streets, the factional dissonance, so central to Israel's mode of effective occupation, was overcome. Even the Islamic movement, which is strong in Gaza, has accepted the proposition of Palestinian nationalism.

Since then the Palestinian people have stood up. They have, for the first time in 20 years in the areas of occupation, seized the initiative. They are responding to the challenge and humiliation by empowering themselves. This spirit is vibrant and growing stronger with each passing day, with each new casualty, with each expression of unity and determination NOT to return to the *status quo ante*. After almost seven months and countless Israeli pronouncements that the uprising has peaked, that it is finished, the psychological break with the past, with the mechanics of the occupation, made by the Palestinian people of the West Bank and Gaza, remains unended. A new power relationship is developing. Palestine is being molded each day by Palestinians.

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منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية
الإعلام الموحد

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