

# **THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI DILEMMA**

## **A Report on the FFIPP Winter 2005-06 Delegation to Palestine/Israel**

**By Katharine Gratwick Baker<sup>1</sup>**

As our plane banked for its landing at Ben-Gurion international airport early on the morning of December 27th, after a twelve hour direct flight from Newark, I found myself thinking again about why I'd come on this trip. Petro-politics, the threat of Iranian nuclear weapons, the grinding Iraq war, Al Qaeda, Syrian intrigue in Lebanon, Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, and the rise of Hamas all swirled together in a Byzantine mix that made the plot line of "Syriana" look linear by comparison. As a reasonably informed reader of the American press, I'd been concerned about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for a long time, but it had been at a considerable personal distance. On this trip I had an opportunity to learn more about what was really going on there, and it has shaped my understanding of the Hamas landslide in the Palestinian elections last week. It gave me a sense of the social-political context for the Hamas movement, its attraction for voters, and the long-term determination of Palestinians to create an independent state, regardless of the huge obstacles in their path.

My husband, Peter Titelman, heard about the Faculty for an Israeli/Palestinian Peace (FFIPP) through friends who traveled with one of their previous delegations, and so we signed on to join their eleven-day winter trip leaving right after Christmas. About thirty people participated; half of them were U.S. university academics and half were undergrad and graduate students from the U.S. and Western Europe.

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FFIPP was the brain child of a number of Palestinian, Israeli and American academics who established the organization in 2002, during the second *intifada*, feeling that official Israeli policies and positions were well covered in the media, but that there was less general knowledge of conditions “on the ground”. On its website<sup>2</sup> FFIPP defines itself as “a network of Palestinian, Israeli, and international faculty, with an affiliated international student network, working in solidarity for a complete end of the occupation and a just peace”. It has sent seven delegations to the region over the past three years. The purpose of these trips is to educate academics and others about the situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories of Palestine, and encourage participants to spread the word to their academic colleagues and other opinion makers in the United States and internationally. FFIPP is very clear that it is not anti-Israeli or pro-Palestinian, but is deeply concerned about social justice issues in the region. Its organizers have created an intensely immediate experience for their delegates, who learn in a direct, personal sense about the roots and current realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Participants fly into Ben-Gurion, and then spend a night in Tel Aviv, recovering from jet lag, changing dollars into shekels, and meeting other members of the delegation. The next morning we watch a video, *Arna's Children*<sup>3</sup>, as a preliminary orientation to the program, we talk with the director of the film, Juliano Mer Khamis, and we meet Hanna Knaz, a sprightly unflappable sixty-year-old American-born Israeli peace worker who has been the on-the-road guide for all the delegations. The group then piles onto a large,

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<sup>2</sup> [www.ffipp.org](http://www.ffipp.org)

<sup>3</sup> *Arna's Children* is a prize-winning documentary film produced by Trabelsi Productions in 2003. It tells the story of the lives and deaths of a group of Palestinian children growing up in Jenin before the second *intifada*.

comfortable blue bus and heads for Jenin, which is both a region and a city in the West Bank, about fifty miles north.

Gazing out the windows of our bus, Peter and I see the dry rolling rock-strewn hills of Israel for the first time. It's late December and we don't expect the fertile biblical land of "milk and honey," but the landscape seems harsh, in spite of its valleys of olives trees and grape vines, as well as the non-indigenous pines, cypress, and eucalyptus trees planted by the British during the years of their Palestinian Protectorate between the two world wars. Clusters of square block stone and cement houses, some old and some new, stand like fortresses on the hillsides.

We know we will have to go through an Israeli checkpoint<sup>4</sup> before entering the West Bank and that our bus with its Israeli license plates will not be permitted to come with us. On the bus, Knaz instructs us in how to act at the checkpoints. She tells us that the Israeli soldiers guarding the checkpoints are very young, very tense, and will suspect everyone. She will be the only person to speak with them, and none of us is to make any comments whatsoever. She tells us that taking pictures of the soldiers or the checkpoints is illegal. We can try to take pictures anyway, but should not let the soldiers see us doing so, because they may confiscate our cameras. The delegation will leave no one behind in crossing the checkpoint, and there will be a Jenin bus with a Palestinian driver waiting for us on the other side. Once we are through the checkpoint, out of respect for the Palestinians we should speak only English or Arabic, but not Hebrew which is considered "the language of the occupier". If we wish to take pictures of Muslim women, we should first ask their permission.

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<sup>4</sup> There are currently 605 Israeli checkpoints in the West Bank, of which only 20 are actually on the so-called Green Line border established between Israel and Palestine after their 1949 Armistice Agreement.

Knaz tells us that the Oslo Accords (1993)<sup>5</sup> divided the Palestinian Territories into three areas: Area A includes Palestinian governed cities, Area C (by far the largest region) is run by the Israelis, and Area B is just outside the cities and was designed to have joint Israeli-Palestinian governance, but long ago it came under Israeli control and now is no different from Area C. Israeli citizens are officially forbidden in Area A, and may receive a fine of 3000 shekels or prison if they are found there. Knaz herself has been going into all three areas of the Occupied Territories at least once a week since the beginning of the first *intifada* (December 1987), as part of her volunteer work as a nurse for Physicians for Human Rights, and she has not been arrested, probably because she carries an American passport. On this trip into Jenin, Knaz not only will guide the FFIPP delegation, but she also plans to deliver bags of food in memory of a Palestinian friend of hers, Samira, who has recently died of cancer.

Our bus drives up to a Jenin checkpoint, we climb off, and look around. The place looks like a wide unfinished construction site with debris littering the sandy soil. We walk down a long cement path with fencing and rolls of barbed wire along both sides. At the end of the path is a kind of terminal with several young Israeli soldiers guarding the entrance with machine guns, and a group of Palestinian men standing against a wall, apparently waiting for permission to pass. Knaz engages the soldiers in an English-language conversation, describing our group and our need to cross into Jenin. The soldiers refuse, saying that groups are not allowed through this gate. She tries to persuade them, and the soldiers ultimately use cell phones to call another checkpoint where they assure us we will be permitted to enter. We straggle back to our bus, and

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<sup>5</sup> Signed by Israel and Arafat for the PLO

drive to the other side of Jenin where Knaz persuades a different group of nervous young soldiers to let us pass quickly through the heavily guarded turnstiles and enter the city.

Our first meeting of the day is at a rehabilitation center for disabled children, founded in 1991 (after the first *intifada*), in the Jenin Refugee Camp. We climb to a third floor meeting room filled with children's paints, books, glue pots, crayons, and paper flowers. Sitting around a long table, we introduce ourselves and then listen to presentations by three dark-suited Palestinian officials, who apologize for our difficulties in entering Jenin, and then describe to us "how it is to live here." We learn that this is the only center for disabled children in the Jenin region, which has a population of 240,000. We learn of their many needs for resources and services that have been disrupted over the past five years of the second *intifada*. Although they have received small grants from UNWRA, Save The Children Foundation, and USAID, these are generally short-term, and there is little sustainable operational support. We learn about the repression Jenin has experienced since 2002<sup>6</sup>, when they were under siege for two weeks, 485 houses were demolished, and 62 women and children were killed. Leaving their homes felt to them like a second *Naqba* (the Palestinian term meaning "catastrophe," that defines for them the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948). There have been severe psychological after effects from the siege especially for children. They ask us to put pressure on the United States government to change the policies that support Israel.

After our conversation (and an informal lunch of pita bread, hummus, and fresh vegetables), we walk through the Camp<sup>7</sup> which has been extensively rebuilt since the

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<sup>6</sup> This Israeli attack on the Jenin Refugee Camp was a "collective punishment" in response to a suicide bombing on the night of Passover in March 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Refugee camps throughout the West Bank are no longer tent cities, but resemble overcrowded concrete urban ghettos.

Israeli “incursion” of 2002, with money donated by the United Arab Emirates. A small white car drives up, a young man in fatigues, carrying a Kalashnikov semi-automatic rifle, steps out, and is introduced to us. We learn that this is thirty-two-year-old Zakaria, the military leader of the Al Aqsa (Martyrs) Brigades in Jenin, a tall young man with an easy carriage whose face was burned by a bomb in 2002. We have seen him as a younger adolescent in the film, *Arna’s Children*, and we know he and his friends were involved in the Jenin Refugee Camp’s children’s theater project. Now we learn that his mother was shot and killed while standing in the window of her house during the “incursion”, and five of his six siblings are either dead or in prison. Zakaria is wanted by the Israelis, but he tells us that he feels safe in Jenin Camp which takes care of him. He shows us three kindergarten classrooms he has built in memory of his mother, and then talks to us in a basement room while sweet coffee is served and it grows dark outside.

Through a translator, Zakaria tells us that “our arms are nothing compared to the Israelis, but political, social, education and cultural aspects are far more important than arms. We are forced to take up arms because we have been attacked. The suicide bombers are very problematic for us, but sometimes for them this is the only way to get out of this living hell. Everyone around the world focuses on this issue, but we are not genetically suicidal. Many of these young people feel they are already dead as they think ahead to their lives under the Occupation. In some ways this is all they have left. If you compare a suicide bomber with a tank, a suicide lasts a minute, and a tank’s damage lasts for years. But we have no other means to fight the Occupation... You can be non-violent if you have the right enemy, but here the army greets non-violence with bullets. We are not in love with weapons – I could give up my weapon easily. It is only five kilos

of weight on my back. But how can you convince Palestinians that the Israelis want peace, when you look around? What you see on the ground is where the reality is. We are in the middle of a conflict about land, human rights, and religion. These are much more essential than suicide bombers and tanks.”

After several questions, Zakaria slips away into the night. Stunned by the impact of meeting him and hearing the calmness with which suicide bombing is discussed as one among many legitimate tactics of war, we walk quietly back to our bus through the dark cold streets, and Arabic music streams out of an open window above us.

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The next morning back in Tel Aviv, we open the curtains of our hotel room window and look across western-style city rooftops to the Mediterranean, shining and blue in the distance. The Jenin Camp experience seems far away, and yet increasingly present.

After breakfast we drive to the modern campus of Tel Aviv University. There we meet with Judah Shaul, a burly 23 year old with a bushy pony tail and beard, who is a founding member of the Israeli ex-combatant group called “Breaking the Silence”. Judah tells us he was born in Jerusalem, raised in an ultra-Orthodox family, and at age eighteen joined the Israeli army (the Israeli Defense Forces or IDF) as a combat soldier, eager to defend his country. He served in an infantry brigade from 2001 to 2004, first as a soldier and then as a commander in of the ancient biblical city of Hebron, now a divided city south of Jerusalem. He describes himself as a young man who knew the difference between good and evil, but his values were shaken up as a soldier, almost as if they were “put in a blender”. He was trained to shoot grenades at a range of two kilometers from

the converted school that served as an IDF barrack in Hebron. This was called “reaction fire.” He and his fellow soldiers would send grenades into a crowded residential district every night in “reaction” to something that might be happening in the Palestinian section of the city. He tells us that it became like a “computer game” for them: “When you shoot grenades in the dark toward civilian targets the Palestinians no longer look like human beings.” He also tells they would draw Palestinians into a “no man’s zone and then shoot them.” And they regularly invaded Palestinian neighborhoods in armored personnel carriers, shooting at street lights, houses, cars, and shops. The mission was “to frighten the Palestinians” in the name of “deterrence”. Some of the soldiers put an X mark on their rifles for every Palestinian they killed.

Judah tells us that for soldiers a “wall of silence comes down between yourself and the situation, because you don’t want to understand what is happening to you... It is something you don’t talk about in normal society, admitting that it is exciting to smash up a Mercedes.” He says, “we were silent when we realized what we had done. You realize that you are a monster, and you ask yourself what have I been doing for these three years. It is terrifying. Something inside me is dead. I have enjoyed the feeling of power. I ‘need’ it, it’s addictive. No one is immune to this. Every soldier goes through the same process of corruption. What disturbs me is the lack of value of human life. We are taught that Palestinian lives have no value, and we must shoot to kill anyone walking in the streets at night.” Judah tells us that when he was discharged he gave back his “uniform and rifle, but could not give back the monster” within him.

The hundreds of young Israeli soldiers who have joined “Breaking the Silence” see themselves as an alternative to the press in reporting on how the IDF functions. They

say they want to face society openly in order to “deal with what is happening”. In telling the story, they are “paying” for what they have done. Judah tells us that many discharged soldiers drown themselves in drugs in order to forget the military experience, but he and his group have chosen a different path.

In the afternoon we participate in a “mini-conference” at Tel Aviv University (TAU) on “The Impact of the Disengagement and the Role of Academia.” Two of the originally scheduled participants are not able to attend, because they haven’t been able to get through the checkpoints from the West Bank in time. But a number of distinguished Israeli and Palestinian professors from TAU and Birzeit University in Ramallah do arrive and discuss the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, as well as their thoughts on prospects for peace through a two-state solution<sup>8</sup>, and the up-coming elections in Palestine<sup>9</sup>. There is general agreement that 80% of Israelis and Palestinians want to sign a peace treaty, but that each side’s vision of peace is very different. The younger generation wants to participate in a political process that will move toward peace, but the press tends to report the positions of extremists on both sides, and this affects the nature of the dialogue. How will a common meeting ground be found? Many of the speakers are deeply pessimistic about the near-term prospects for peace. FFIPP academics are encouraged to bring the Occupation into academic discourse, to talk, write and teach about it, to share information and remain critical and analytical about it within every discipline. They agree that the most important part of the FFIPP experience is the Israeli-Palestinian student dialogue. A member of the FFIPP Board of Directors, Dr. Eyad Saraj, does not attend this conference

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<sup>8</sup> An acceptable “two state solution” for many Palestinians means a dividing border along the Green Line established in 1967, Jerusalem as the capital city for both states, and the removal of the Jewish settlements, the Wall, and the Israeli checkpoints in the West Bank.

<sup>9</sup> Currently scheduled for January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

because he lives in Gaza, spent three hours waiting at a checkpoint to enter Israel, and finally gave up and went home. We are beginning to get a sense of the enormous complexity of the issues on both sides and our increasing personal responsibility as FFIPP participants to try to understand.

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The next morning we again drive north for an hour or so, stopping briefly at Knaz's kibbutz to drop off a package for her grandchildren, and then going on to a nearby Palestinian-Israeli town, called Kfar Kara<sup>10</sup>, where we notice that the street signs are in both Arabic and Hebrew, as they are in all Israeli cities with substantial Palestinian-Israeli populations.

In Kfar Kara we meet with parents and teachers in a small library where they tell us about an association they founded in October 2000, called "Bridge Across the Wadi". At the beginning of the second *intifada*, groups within the Palestinian-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli communities<sup>11</sup> in the Wadi region wanted to bring people together after a severe police repression during which thirteen Palestinian-Israelis were killed. Local Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli parents decided that the most effective way to heal the conflict in their communities was to build a bi-lingual school in which children and teachers would communicate in both Hebrew and Arabic. They tell us they were viewed as "Don Quixotes" in the town, but they were determined to be successful. They know Jews and Palestinians will continue to live together forever, even when there are two countries, and they want to normalize their relationships. One hundred and six families

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<sup>10</sup> This town is not in the West Bank, but in Israel.

<sup>11</sup> After 1948, about 160,000 Palestinians did not leave the country, and became Palestinian citizens of Israel. These people and their descendants are referred to as Palestinian-Israelis. There are a number of towns in Israel, including Kfar Kara, that have both Palestinian-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli citizens.

(53 Palestinian and 53 Jewish) send their children to the school which receives support from the Israeli government. They expect this number to double next year, since there is so much local interest in the project. All classes are taught by two teachers in both languages, the school has two principals (Jewish and Palestinian), and it has a special calendar, celebrating both Muslim and Jewish holidays. When asked how they will measure success in the long term, the bi-lingual consultant to the school says that if Palestinian and Israeli children grow up to marry each other and “grow a new identity”, she will consider the experiment successful. This long term view is certainly inspiring, although it doesn’t seem as though she really expects these results in her lifetime.

After leaving Kfar Kara, we turn off the coastal road and head east for half hour into the hills of Israel to the nearby “unrecognized village” of Ein Hud. This was historically a Palestinian village, but the inhabitants ran up into the mountains to escape the Israeli army in 1948. Since then the original Ein Hud has been rebuilt and is now an Israeli artists’ colony called Ein Hod. The Palestinian village of Ein Hud, although unrecognized by the Israeli government, re-established itself higher up in the mountains, accessible only by a very steep narrow dirt road that our bus driver navigates gingerly.

At the top of the road we absorb a breathtaking view down into the valley that is reminiscent of Tuscany. We meet Mohammed, whose grandfather escaped from the lower village in 1948, and hid in the hills with his family, hoping to return to his original home when things settled down. In 1951, the Israeli government told Mohammed’s grandfather that because he had been absent from his property in the lower village for three years, he no longer owned it. The government declared it to be State

Land<sup>12</sup>. The little cluster of stone houses the family fled to in the mountains constituted an “unrecognized village” and therefore received no services, including no road repair, electricity, water, schools, health care or libraries after 1948. Mohammed formed an Association of Forty Unrecognized Villages in 1986, with the goal of receiving services through recognition. With the support of many Israeli organizations of good-will, they appealed to a local planning council and to the regional authorities. They also published their struggle, writing letters to the Israeli Knesset, U.S. Congressmen, the UN, and appearing on television. In 1992, the Israeli government declared that recognition might be possible if they made a master plan for the village. In October 2005, they finally finished a master plan that was accepted, and the village has recently begun to receive services. Mohammed tells us that “after 28 years of struggle there is hope.” He has opened a restaurant in his grandfather’s house and serves Palestinian food to both Arab and Israeli guests who come from as far away as Jerusalem. The food and the view are spectacular.

That night we drive down through the dark hills to Jerusalem where we settle into a hotel in the Arab section of the city. After dinner Peter and I find a cab driver who will show us the beautiful old city at night. For 200 shekels we are tourists and drive to the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Church of Mary Magdalene, al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, the Wailing Wall, and the Jaffa Gate. These are the holiest places for Christians, Jews, and Muslims, and I wouldn’t have wanted to miss them even though they are not on the trip’s schedule. But I am moved by their resonant biblical beauty. The ancient walls and narrow streets are chilly

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<sup>12</sup> This frequently referenced ruling is based on a 1858 regulation from the Ottoman Empire, the Declaration on Estates Lands, stating that if a landowner abandons his property for three years, ownership reverts to the state.

in late December, though bright with lamplight and busy people. From the high point of the Mount of Olives, we gaze out beyond the city to a string of lighted settlements stretching across the valley to the River Jordan.

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The next morning we board the bus and head forty kilometers south toward Hebron. Once again we will be entering the Occupied Territories, and Knaz reminds us of the rules: no Hebrew, no pictures, no talking at checkpoints. In addition, she tells us to use very little water for hand-washing, showers, and toilets, since water is so scarce. She also tells us not to point the soles of our feet toward others, since that is considered impolite in Arabic society.

Judah Shaul, of “Breaking the Silence,” rejoins us along the road and uses the travel time to fill us in on the historical legal situation in Hebron. Jews and Arabs have lived there for thousands of years, and in the eighteenth century it was one of the four holiest Jewish cities in the world. In the twentieth century, there have been a number of massacres of both Jews and Palestinians in the city, and in 1997, it was divided into two sections: H1 for 150,000 Palestinians, and H2 for 30,000 Palestinians and five to six hundred Jewish settlers, with 400 Israeli soldiers to protect them. Palestinians are not allowed to enter H2 by car and there has been considerable violence there, so many of them have moved out. It is often described as a “ghost town.” Hebron is unusual because the Jewish settlers live right in the city, although there are also numerous settlements just outside the city limits. We drive past the settlement of Kiryat Arba (population 6500) where rows of identical square stone block houses bite into the rocky hillsides like barnacles on granite.

We arrive in the H2 section of Hebron, and Judah decides to take us for a walk through the now deserted formerly Palestinian marketplace, where the doors of market stalls are now welded shut. Young heavily armed IDF soldiers hang out on the street corners and in camouflaged look-outs on rooftops. A middle-aged settler films Judah on a video camera as he guides us through the old Palestinian market (Judah is relaxed and says this happens every time he comes to H2). When we walk into a large open square of demolished buildings, we suddenly realize that we are being pelted with stones thrown at us by teenagers in yarmulkes, children of the ultra Orthodox settlers at the far side of the square. Judah would like to stay and stand them down, but most of the delegation prefers to move out of range. As we head back to the street, a small car speeds through a mud puddle near us, splashing a muddy spray on our group. Judah calls the local police on his cell phone and asks them to provide protection for his international visitors. About ten minutes later they show up in a blue jeep, and we are accompanied by police and IDF soldiers for the next stretch of our walk. A member of the delegation who speaks Hebrew tells us that the soldiers talk about Judah, saying he kills Jewish babies. Apparently he is well-known for bringing tour groups to H2.

We walk up a side street, and climb some cracked stone steps leading into what may once have been a garden or an orchard. Now it is overgrown and filled with trash and rocks. On the far side a break in a stone wall leads us up to a higher level, where we thread through backyards of rubble, finally ending on the balcony of a Palestinian named Hashem, who invites us into his whitewashed stone house. We sit in his living room sipping sweet tea while he describes what his life is like in H2. He says, “We are willing to live in peace with the settlers, if they will live in peace with us.” On

the walls of the living room are children's drawings of cheerful trees and flowers. After we are seated, his very solemn four year old son walks around the room carefully shaking hands with each member of the delegation. Later Hashem shows us a videotape he took last year when settlers raided his and other Palestinian houses in the neighborhood, stomping through them, breaking furniture and windows. The end of the video films an encounter between a group of young Palestinian girls on their way to school, and a group of pre-teen Jewish settlement girls, who kick and punch them, knocking them down in a field near the school. In these episodes the IDF soldiers are present and protect the settlers. Hashem also tells us that the IDF is building a road through a large Palestinian cemetery in the middle of H2, and the Israeli Supreme Court has turned down a Palestinian appeal to divert the road around the cemetery.

The ominous conflict between settlers and Palestinians feels intensely present and explosive in Hebron because these people are living side by side within the confines of the city. We drive north twenty kilometers to Bethlehem where the settlers live outside the city, and there are three Palestinian refugee camps in town. We visit the Daheisheh Camp, probably the largest of the three. It has a well-organized grass-roots cultural center funded by UNDP and UNWRA, and called IBDAА ("creativity" in Arabic). Among their programs is a children's folklore dance troop, whose spirited performances we have seen in Amherst. IBDAА has a kindergarten, a library, a sports club, a health committee, an internet café, computer classes, cultural exchanges, children's radio programs, and a women's factory for crafts and sewing. Because it was founded shortly after the 1967 war, it is well established, and has been able to take

leadership in setting up a network of ten refugee camp cultural centers around the West Bank called “Let’s Connect”.

The young directors tell us there are 11,000 people in the Daheisheh Camp, of whom 6,000 are children. When asked about a picture of Che Guevara on the wall of their meeting room, they say that he is a symbol of the struggle for freedom, and that their politics are all about the Right of Return<sup>13</sup> for Palestinians. They tell us that Ben-Gurion once remarked, “The catastrophe generation will die, and the next generation will forget.” Their effort is to prove Ben-Gurion wrong. One of the directors tells us that he still has the key to his grandfather’s house in Israel, as do many of the Palestinian refugees we meet.

In the afternoon we attend a mini-conference in a large auditorium at the Bethlehem University Peace Center. The topic is “Prospects and Obstacles for Peace in Light of the Disengagement, the Wall<sup>14</sup>, and the Occupation: the Role of Academicians.” It is attended by a large group of Italian peace workers, as well as our delegation, and professors from Bethlehem University which was founded in 1973, with the support of the Vatican.

The first speaker is Dr. Ghasaan Andoni, the founder of the International Solidarity Movement and a professor at the Palestinian Rapprochement Center of Birzeit University in Ramallah. One of his deepest concerns is that the concept of “collective rights” is disappearing, and “individual rights are increasingly taking precedence over the

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<sup>13</sup> This concept is part of the peace negotiations and would give Palestinian refugees the right to return to their 1948 homes in Israel or equivalent compensation for the loss of their lands.

<sup>14</sup> Many of us have read about the Wall (referred to as the “fence” by Israelis) in the western press. Although we have seen it only fleetingly from the bus, we know it is a barrier the Israeli government is building between Israel and the West Bank as a security measure. We learn much more about it in this meeting.

rights of larger social systems”. This is the basic Israeli argument for denying Palestinian sovereignty. But he also believes that the major challenge for Palestinians is an internal one. He exhorts Palestinians not to allow chaos and violence to become legitimate, but to have the courage to stand and speak out about their beliefs. He says that every nation has reverted to terrorism and violence at some time in its history, but he does not want this to become an accepted culture in Palestine. It is the duty of academics to emphasize this point in our teaching. We must present the “real” Palestine to the world in a way that will be accepted and embraced. He does not believe that the majority of Palestinians support violence, and in addition violence “plays to Sharon’s hand.” The choice of “attacking back is an individual choice, but not a collective choice.”

The second speaker, Dr. Jad Isaac, a sociologist and Director of the Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem<sup>15</sup>, leads us through a power point presentation full of maps and statistics about the current geopolitical map of Palestine. Some new facts for us are that:

- 7% of the West Bank is now under Palestinian control, and the rest is occupied by Israel;
- The Wall that the Israeli government is building to divide Palestine and Israel will be 683 kilometers long, but is less than half finished. 23% of the projected Wall follows the Green Line, and the rest follows its own course inside the West Bank. So called “buffer zones” on the Palestinian side of the Wall claim another 16% of West Bank land;
- Jerusalem has ten new checkpoints around its perimeter since 2000;
- Bethlehem has lost 1/3 of its Palestinian land to the Wall;

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<sup>15</sup> [www.arij.com](http://www.arij.com)

- Israel has recently built 734 kilometers of highways in the West Bank on which Palestinians may not drive. These are the so-called “sterile” roads.

Dr Isaac describes Gaza as a “black hole”, a virtual prison in which residents have no jobs and no resources. Separated from the West Bank, it cannot be a viable unit, and this lack of viability leads inevitably to violence. He says there is an “absence of symmetry” between Israel and Palestine, and that the U.S. is “an accomplice” in this imbalance. He states that the instability in the region will continue until there is a strong third party intervention that will require a well-defined implementation process as part of a final peace agreement<sup>16</sup>.

The third speaker is Dr. Luisa Morgantini<sup>17</sup>, an Italian member of the EU parliament, who is in Bethlehem with the delegation of Italian peace workers in the audience with us. She comments on the paradox of the flowers and peace symbols that Israelis have painted on their side of the Wall. She then says “the international community must bear the responsibility for what has happened here. It is all about the acquisition of land and the quiet deportation of Palestinians... The EU meanwhile is just waiting to see the results of the Palestinian and Israeli elections in January and March,” but she finds it very difficult to maintain any hope about the situation. She says “the Palestinians are doing their best to survive and they are a miracle.” She wonders “why there is so little violence, given their situation.” She concludes that “the Wall is a shame to the whole world.”

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<sup>16</sup> An implementation plan and a time frame were missing from the Oslo Accords in 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Morgantini and her group are on their way to Gaza after they leave Bethlehem. Several days later we learn that two members of their group have been briefly kidnapped by members of Hamas in Gaza.

After this intense, informative, mind-expanding mini-conference, Peter and I allow ourselves to realize that we are actually in “O Little Town of Bethlehem” and again take a short tourist diversion. We stroll across the square to see the Church of the Nativity which is ancient, dark, and filled with devout visitors. But it’s hard to keep the nativity in mind after all we’ve seen and heard. On the “deep and dreamless streets” of Bethlehem we walk past several fat trunks of aged olive trees slumped against a whitewashed wall. They have been uprooted, stripped bare, and have a sign on them that says, “Crimes Against Nature”. These tree trunks are among the victims of wide scale systematic destruction of Palestinian olive groves<sup>18</sup> and look like the corpses of stout old men.

That evening we have dinner with the Italian delegation at a Palestinian restaurant next to a portion of the Wall constructed through the heart of Bethlehem. This is the closest we have come to these forty foot high slabs of concrete. They cast strange shadows on the dreamless streets of what is increasingly another ghost town.

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The next morning is New Year’s Eve, a cool clear sunny day, and we drive back to Hebron, again through a harsh rocky landscape encircled by uniform clusters of colorless block settlements that creep across the hilltops. This time we visit H1, the Palestinian side of the city. The busy street life of H1 is strikingly different from H2. Crowded fruit and vegetable markets are filled with fresh produce; children play on the sidewalks; donkeys, cars, and adults in colorful dress throng the streets. We are greeted by the Governor of the Hebron region, Areef Al-Jabari, an impeccably dressed balding gentleman who sits at his desk under portraits of Abu Maazen and Arafat, and radiates a

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<sup>18</sup> 400,000 Palestinian olive trees have been uprooted since the beginning of the second *intifada* in 2000.

quiet calm, as he speaks to us through his interpreter. We sip sweet tea out of tiny glasses, as the Governor, who is also the chief security officer of the region, tells us that Hebron is the capital of Palestinian industry. He also says that Palestinians respect all religions, but that Islam is a religion of peace: “We are against all forms of terrorism and against killing. In Islam you go to hell if you kill innocent people.” The Governor expresses frustration that his security force cannot assure the security of Israeli and Palestinian citizens in Hebron, because the Palestinian police are not permitted to wear uniforms or carry a weapon in Israeli areas. He represents Abu Maazen, the president of the Palestinian Authority, but cannot consult with the president in person in Ramallah, because he needs so many permits to get there through the checkpoints, and he may not drive through Jerusalem. He asks us to transmit what we see in Hebron to decision-makers in the United States, in the interests of making peace.

In the evening we drive to Ramallah, capital city of the Palestinian National Authority about fifteen kilometers north of Jerusalem. This time we ride in several large vans as far as the Qalandia checkpoint just south of Ramallah. Knaz has told us to pack small overnight bags that we can carry through the checkpoint. It is dark when the vans drop us at the barrier. Cold and somewhat anxious, we walk for a half mile up a dark road with the Wall and its watch towers looming over us on the right and search lights circling out over us. The dark low checkpoint terminal with its crowded turnstiles spreads out at the top of the hill. Small boys sell hot snacks to the crowd and beg for shekels. Men, women, and children huddle around little fires built in cans. There is an atmosphere of confusion, of bright slashing search lights above, and cold darkness below. Knaz has organized us to stay together and, with our American and western European

passports, she smoothly shepherds us through the checkpoint turnstiles, but as we look back in the darkness we see a crowd of Palestinians pushing to get through, mostly men, but a few women with small children, and we feel anguish at the ease our passports confer upon us.

We are met by vans on the other side of Qalandia that sweep us off to our comfortable hotel in Ramallah and then out to a New Year's Eve dinner where we celebrate with pita bread, hummus, lamb stew and red wine. At one point we hear gunfire in the street, but are reassured that this is how New Year's Eve is celebrated in Ramallah.

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On New Year's morning, a beautiful bright sunny day, we climb into vans and drive off to the east on a two hour long drive through the desert to Jericho. This is our first view of the beautiful pinkish-brown desert hills that roll down to the Jordan River, and we stop at the top to breathe it in. Some of us walk down a slope to a small ramshackle Bedouin encampment to visit with a couple of small boys herding their goats. The land is parched dry and stony, and it's hard to see how humans can survive here.

Far in the distance we see a glimmer of the river, and soon we are in the green oasis of Jericho, with its lush banana plants, tropical white buildings, and wide quiet streets. We leave the vans in the parking lot of the Palestinian Negotiations Affairs Department and are ushered into a large meeting room where we are again offered small cups of sweet coffee. After several minutes Dr. Saeb Erakat, the Chief Negotiator for the Palestinian Authority over the past twenty years, joins us, wishes us a happy New Year, asks each of us where we are from, and reminisces briefly about his years of study in

California. An urbane, sophisticated diplomat, Erakat talks expansively for more than an hour about “big picture” issues in the peace process. He tells us that the Israelis have three options: 1) a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, with reciprocal exchanges based on the Oslo Accords of 1993, which gave recognition to the Palestinians as a people, but did not finalize a peace agreement. He tells us this solution is all in place, and he would need only three months to produce a permanent status agreement and implementation time table with his Israeli counterpart. Israel would retain 78% of historic Palestine and the international recognition of its right to exist; Palestine would receive the remaining 22% of the land; 2) a single secular democratic state called Israel in which Palestinians and Israelis would be equal citizens with equal rights (this would be acceptable to the Palestinians); and 3) continuation of what Israel is doing on the ground today, which he calls a “stupid system” with no benefits for either side. He consistently supports the two-state solution as the best outcome for the region, and he believes that democracy for all the countries in the Middle East is the only way to defeat Bin Laden and other religious extremists. The biggest difficulty in a two-state solution will be moving the settlements out of the West Bank, but he wishes to protect them against violence, and has personally condemned every suicide bomber since the beginning of the *intifada* (he even helped rebuild a synagogue in Jericho that had been burned by angry Palestinians). Erakat believes that Jews, Muslims, and Christians can live peacefully side by side, but they must work together for peace and justice for all peoples under the rule of law.

Erakat is generous with his time and is willing to continue answering our questions, but we must return to an afternoon meeting in Ramallah with Dr. Azmi

Shuaibi, Director of AMAN (the Coalition for Accountability and Integrity), and a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Shuaibi is also a leader of Transparency International and the Commission to Combat Palestinian Corruption. He was a participant in the peace negotiations in the early 1990s, that culminated in Oslo, and was Chairman of the Budget Committee in the Legislative Council for three years, although he resigned under Arafat's Presidency.

In quiet accented English, Dr. Shuaibi talks with us about current Palestinian politics. He believes that the number one issue in the up-coming elections, scheduled for January 25<sup>th</sup>, will be corruption, and the number two issue will be peace. He has always believed that combating corruption is crucial for building a viable state, but under Arafat "this was extremely difficult, since Arafat thought he was above the law", undermined the parliament and was not accountable to it. Arafat "of course was not an ordinary leader". In fact "he was the only leader of the Palestinians for forty years, and established a system of favoritism and nepotism at the highest levels, although at lower levels of public transaction the Palestinians are not corrupt". According to Shuaibi, "the new post-Arafat leadership has not yet been able to take hold effectively", although the current president, Abu Maazen, wants to finish the peace process and transfer power to the younger generation. There is currently a struggle within Fatah (Arafat's party) between the old guard which is seen as corrupt, and the second generation. In addition, there is the issue of al-Aqsa, the Martyrs Brigade, and the fighting arm of the PLO. Al Aqsa, whose military leader Zakaria we met in Jenin, was supported by Arafat and has become a symbol of the second *intifada*. Marwan Barghouti, now in an Israeli jail, is apparently the only member of Fatah who can control

al-Aqsa, and he is running for parliament from prison. Shuaibi believes he should be freed, and can play a positive role in the PA government.

Shuaibi also gives us his views on Hamas, a Muslim brotherhood (similar to those in Jordan and Egypt) that is listed as a terrorist organization by both the Israeli and the United States governments. Hamas is unwilling to accept the existence of Israel, but wants to establish its legitimacy through the Palestinian electoral process. Many Palestinians agree that, in spite of their history of violence, Hamas should come to the table because “they are not tarred with the brush of corruption, as Fatah is”. The basic political power of Hamas is in the cities and not in the villages, where family relationships dominate electoral choices. Shuaibi predicts that Abu Maazen will probably stay on as president because he accepts the younger generation of Fatah, he is very honest, and he is accepted by Hamas. He predicts that Hamas will enter the parliament, but will not join a coalition government, wishing to stay in the opposition until there is a final peace settlement.

We next meet with a large well-dressed young man called Yassir who works in the public relations department of Birzeit University. He describes his experience as a student at Birzeit, which he entered in 1987, after growing up in a refugee camp. Shortly after he enrolled, the first *intifada* began, and the university was closed for four and a half years. During those years, many students left the country and others were taught in churches and mosques through a kind of underground educational system. He tells us that students were detained and arrested for studying. The university finally reopened in 1992, and he finished his BA in 1995. Now he is enrolled in an MA program in international relations, but finds it very difficult to attend classes because of the

checkpoints between Ramallah and Birzeit (five kilometers away). In addition to checkpoints, students and faculty must often walk one to two miles and are subject to daily harassment. The IDF soldiers are the same age as the students and frequently humiliate them by telling them to “take off their clothes and imitate a donkey”. Currently more than a hundred students are in Israeli prisons, some under “administrative arrest” with no legal representation and no reasons given for their detention. Birzeit has about 7,000 students, and five years ago they came from all over Palestine. Now they are primarily from Ramallah and Jerusalem, since it is too difficult for students from Gaza and other more distant locations to get to the university.

Yassir introduces us to Salah Habub, a small quiet man probably in his mid-thirties, who spent seven years in Israeli prisons. While in prison Salah learned Hebrew and finished a BA in political science. He now works in the Palestinian Ministry for Detainees. Salah describes how he was taken in the night and his family could not find him for three months. He was blindfolded, tied, kept in a refrigerator for eighteen days, physically tortured, and then interrogated for 103 days, although ultimately no charges were brought against him. When asked how the experience in prison had changed his life, Salah tells us that before prison he thought all Israelis were bad. After learning Hebrew and studying, he realized that “there are many strong Israelis who are trying to help the Palestinians”. He is angry at the U.S. and the U.N. which he feels are “doing nothing to help us”. He says, “We are waiting fifty-five years for them to help us get rid of the Occupation.” Now Salah works to release illegally detained Palestinians from Israeli prisons.

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On January 2<sup>nd</sup>, we drive sixteen kilometers northwest of Ramallah to the village of Bila'in, where a non-violent protest movement has been organized against local encroachments of the Wall and the confiscation of village lands for settlements<sup>19</sup>. After a welcome from Muhammad Hatib, a local leader of the movement, we walk down an uncultivated rock-strewn hillside to a small hut that flies a large Palestinian flag. Hatib explains that the Israeli authorities have repeatedly told them they need permits for their protests. After they discovered that the builders of settlements do not need permits, they decided to build a little tin house right on the edge of the construction road about a hundred yards from Modi'in Illit, the nearest settlement. They put it up over night the week before our visit, and two members of the movement sleep in it every night, although there have been a number of IDF attacks on it. Non-violent Israeli peace activists come out to Bila'in from Jerusalem every Friday to join their protest activities at the Wall construction site.

In the past few days settlers have been coming over to the little house to talk with the movement leaders and find out what they are doing. The settlers are religious and have no idea that they are living on land that has been confiscated from the village. We are told that they don't work or read newspapers, but just study the Torah. Most of them live in poverty and are supported by the Israeli government. They express sympathy for the non-violent activists and begin a dialogue with them.

On the far side of the settlement construction site, several IDF soldiers in an army truck watch us through binoculars. Meanwhile a group of Palestinian pre-school children and their teacher climb a nearby pile of gravel and slide down on their backsides

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<sup>19</sup> There are currently about 3,000 settlers living in new settlement houses in Modi'in Illit, on Bila'in land, with a plan to build homes for 30,000 by the end of 2006, and for 300,000 in the coming years.

with squeals of joy. We are told they are from a school near Bila'in and have come to see the village land for the first time, "so that they will never forget it".

Back in Ramallah we meet with Dr. Salim Tamari, a soft-spoken professor of sociology and director of the Institute of Jerusalem Studies at Birzeit University. Dr. Tamari is also on the Board of FFIPP. Tamari comments that American business interests, neo-cons, and the Christian right are currently colluding with each other to support Sharon, and this undermines any possibility for peace at present. The Israelis see the situation "only in terms of security", and their Wall and checkpoints have become "a systematic process for segmenting the country and sabotaging the Palestinian economy", making it impossible for farmers to access their land or for workers to get to work. In addition, all universities have become local, since students can't commute from any distance. The Palestinians are gaining worldwide support for a two-state solution "which would provide security for all, and would solve the refugee problem". A single state solution has no resonance for either group, since the Israelis don't want to dissolve their Jewish state, and the Palestinians want independence. Tamari believes a peace negotiation process will have to start again in the near future since the international community "can no longer sanction a modern state that gives no rights to a large segment of its population". Israel will "have to face its demographic reality" before many more years go by.

Professor Nabil Casis, the current president of Birzeit University, then speaks with us. He is a "nuclear physicist by training and a political activist by choice", was involved in the peace negotiations leading up to Oslo, helped to form the Palestinian National Authority in the mid-1990s, ran the Bethlehem 2000 reconstruction and

renovation project, and has been Minister of Planning for the PNA. His present “charge” is academic freedom for Birzeit, and the other ten universities in Palestine. Under the Occupation there can be no academic freedom, but he anticipates a “protracted struggle against an adversary that has a determined goal (of denying academic freedom to Palestinians)”, and he tells us that international support is extremely important to their survival.

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Early the next morning Peter and I again leave the group, this time to visit our friend, Dr. Mohammed Sawalha, in Nablus, which was originally on the FFIPP itinerary. Knaz changed the group’s plans when she was told by Palestinian friends that Nablus was being shelled at night and would not be completely safe for the delegation. But two people can sometimes do what thirty cannot. Sawalha, whom we had met last year in Massachusetts, encouraged us to come. So we join five Palestinian passengers in a public taxi in downtown Ramallah, zoom through busy city streets, and then along the public road to Nablus, some forty kilometers north. It’s another bright clear sunny day, the stony terraced hills give way to stony valleys with flat cultivated fields filled with rows of young olive trees, and further hills encrusted with pale cement-block houses that may be settlements or may be Palestinian villages (if they have a minaret). A Palestinian policeman pulls us over in a remote valley, and it’s unclear for what purpose. He examines the driver’s papers, points to a crack in the windshield and a defective windshield wiper, the driver gets out, they chat in friendly tones, we sit in the closed taxi, the motor loudly idling, and then we drive on.

Shortly before Nablus we come to the Hawara checkpoint, which is similar to Qalandia, with turnstiles managed by anxious young IDF soldiers, and crowds of Palestinians pushing to get through. Sawalha meets us in his little Fiat on the other side, and we drive into Nablus, a vibrant city of 120,000 people stretch ten miles through the valley with checkpoints at either end, and Israeli military installations on the tops of the surrounding hills. Nablus is alive with people walking, shopping, and talking. It's the first day of the election campaign, and cars stream through the streets waving banners for their candidates.

We stroll through fruit and vegetable markets to meet an old friend of Sawalha's at a small café where we drink sweet tea and eat pita bread with hummus. Later Sawalha takes us to the Palestinian House of Friendship, which he founded several years ago in order to create programs for the children of Nablus that will counteract the violent environment they live in. The House was destroyed by an Israeli "incursion" in 2002, but they have rebuilt it, and continue to offer art, dance, and English language classes to children. This fall they distributed 500 school bags to needy children, and last summer they held a marathon through the valley that drew 1200 children to participate. Sawalha's current project is to launch a radio station with programming that will offer games, music and stories to children and young people in the valley. We learn as much as we can about this project in hopes of being able to help fundraise for it in the United States.

In addition to his work with the Palestinian House of Friendship, Sawalha is a professor of linguistics at An Najah University, and he takes us there to meet his wife, Samar, who is head of the journalism department. It is exam week and the halls are

filled with high energy students getting ready for vacation. The Sawalhas invite us to come back to their apartment in a new building on a western hillside with a broad view of the city. We learn that a group of university faculty bought the land and built the apartment building after they heard the land was about to be confiscated by Israelis in order to build a settlement. We drink coffee, eat fruit, meet their three children, and talk about life today in Nablus under the shadow of the Wall and the checkpoints. Sawalha was involved in the peace negotiations in Washington in the early 1990s, and has many friends and colleagues in Ramallah and Jerusalem, but he doesn't visit them because travel restrictions are so onerous and dehumanizing. He is bringing all his energy and creativity to his work with the children of Nablus, instead of returning to politics at this time.

He drives us back to the Hawara checkpoint at four in the afternoon, we say good-bye, not knowing when we will meet again, and catch a public van for Jerusalem, where we reconnect with the FFIPP group.

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The next morning our bus heads two hours south to Be'er-Sheva and the Negev desert of southern Israel. Our first stop is Ben Gurion University where we meet with Professor Oren Yiftachel, an Israeli member of FFIPP's executive board and a political geographer and planner. He presents a paper to us entitled, "Negev Bedouins and the Israeli Settling State: Time, Space, and Politics of Creeping Apartheid." He calls Israel an "ethnocratic society, a dynamic settling society" and describes Israeli attempts to make room for more settlers in the Negev by spraying Bedouin fields with toxic chemicals and moving them off their farm and pasture lands into the cities. The

Bedouins are Arab Israeli citizens, constituting 25% of Negev residents but holding 2% of its land. In 2005 the Israeli Supreme Court ruled against the legality of spraying, so now Bedouin crops are being plowed under. Yiftachel also describes the “stratified citizenship” of Israel today in which there are ten different sets of rights, ranging from those of “mainstream Jews” to those of Bedouins”.

We drive further down into the dusty desert of the Negev, with Yiftachel’s Arab Palestinian colleague, Professor Thabit Abu Rass, giving us more demographic details on the Bedouins (30% unemployment, 60% under the poverty line, 17/1000 infant mortality rate, 35% of marriages are polygamous, 24% finish high school). Our bus briefly picks up the mayor of the region, who tells us that 80,000 Bedouins Israeli citizens live in “unrecognized villages”, with no electricity, water supply, sewage system, health clinics, or social services. As we pass a particularly ramshackle group of Bedouin huts, the mayor points out a large modern building in the background that is apparently the prison where Fatah leader Marwan Barghoutti is serving his sentence. The mayor tells us that “Marwan is living in better conditions in prison than I am at home.”

In a fierce dust-swirling desert wind, we leave the bus and enter a Bedouin house where we sit on brightly decorated foam pads around the floor of a large meeting room with a cheerful straw mat in the middle. The host serves us tiny cups of sweet coffee from a large golden swan-necked pot, and we learn more about life in the “unrecognized villages”, the tremendous efforts the Bedouins are making to resist being urbanized by the Israeli government, and the difficulties getting an education (80-85% of girls drop out of school at age 13). We are told that one of the reasons for the high polygamy rate is a desire to match or outnumber the “imported Jews”, i.e., the settlers,

and many Bedouin men apparently have more than twenty children with several wives in hopes that they will ultimately win the demographic struggle with Jewish Israelis. As we leave the house, we notice a brand new American SUV parked under a shelter, and Professor Abu Rass tells us that many Bedouins are involved in corruption schemes.

We drive on to a Bedouin Women's Center in a Bedouin town, Likia, in the Negev. This Center is supported by Oxfam and teaches Bedouin women to dye wool from the Awasi sheep of Negev, to spin it into yarn, and then with home looms to weave it into beautiful rugs, wall hangings, pillow covers and bags. The women receive money for their work usually for the first time in their lives, they become literate, teach their children, and begin to look to the future with hope. Their greatest challenge is persuading their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons that this work is legitimate, but with male unemployment so high, the money makes a big difference to these families.

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The next morning we are scheduled to visit the Alternative Information Center in Jerusalem, a center for the Israeli left-wing's grassroots movement against the Occupation. On the way we pick up a copy of the International Tribune and read in giant headlines that "Ariel Sharon has suffered a massive stroke and is fighting for his life". This fact profoundly affects our final two days in Israel-Palestine, as we realize what a central figure Sharon has been for the past and future of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The Israeli director of the Center, Michael Warschawski (nicknamed Mikado) is planning to give us a tour of the settlements and Wall around Jerusalem, explaining the "Sharon strategy" to us, although now that "he is dying", will the strategy

continue? Warschawski tells us that “every prospect for the future of Israel has been built around Sharon. Who will replace him? Right now we don’t know what they intend.” He considers Sharon a “major war criminal”, but says he is the first Israeli leader with any long term vision. He quotes Sharon as saying, “the war of 1948 is not finished. We must establish the State of Israel.” Sharon opposed Oslo in 1993, because it fixed the borders, and he wanted no final agreement with the Palestinians “for another fifty years, until his plans had been completed”. Sharon originally claimed that Jordan was the real Palestinian state and wanted “voluntary transfers” of all Palestinians to Jordan. When he realized this was unrealistic, he made Palestinians “absent – present” citizens (no land, but they could vote in the West Bank). According to Warschawski, Sharon hoped to complete the “cantonization” of Palestine, closing off Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Jericho, and Gaza with the Wall and the checkpoints, so that they would become “islands in a Jewish state”.

Warschawski predicts that Sharon’s new Kadima party will disappear without Sharon, and that the Wall and the settlements will continue until there is a change in the current public mood. He says Netanyahu uses “ultra-right rhetoric” but won’t take action, and Peretz is committed to return to a negotiation process in a break with Sharon’s unilateralism, but there is no mass peace movement yet in Israel, so little progress will be made.

Warschawski takes us on a bus tour around the periphery of Jerusalem so that we can get a sense of the “colonizing” or the “Israelization” of the West Bank in this region. We see huge stone satellite settlement cities that apparently have no cultural or administrative life. They have schools, but no public buildings, and the Wall around

these settlements is decorated with pretty landscapes of trees and flowers. The settlements are populated by “economic settlers” in search of less expensive housing near Jerusalem, who become more ideological after moving there. As we get closer to Jerusalem, Warschawski points out Bedouin shacks on top of the city garbage dump where whole Bedouin communities have been moved after they have had their land confiscated in the Negev.

We have lunch with a friendly group of students and faculty at Al-Quds<sup>20</sup> University in East Jerusalem, and then drive to Hebrew University in West Jerusalem where an Israeli professor, Menachem Klein, one of the negotiators of the Geneva Agreement (2001-2003), talks with us about Israeli politics in the wake of Sharon’s stroke. He says, “Sharon was a great unifier,” and he too wonders what will happen next: “The questions are bigger than the answers.” He tells us that more Israelis than ever support the idea of a divided Jerusalem and have no interest in ruling the Arab section of the city, but asks if “the next Prime Minister will have enough civil courage to open up a new dialogue with the Palestinians.” This will take someone with great strength and experience, since “evacuating the West Bank and East Jerusalem will be very different from evacuating Gaza.” He says, “Israelis will learn the lesson (of making peace) when all other options have collapsed.”

It is growing dark outside, but another Hebrew University professor, Dr. David Shulman, speaks to us briefly about his experiences as an Israeli peace activist working with Ta’ayush<sup>21</sup>, a peace group focused on concrete actions “on the ground” aimed at alleviating distress in Palestine. He goes to the Territories every week and takes

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<sup>20</sup> Al-Quds means “Holy of Holies” in Arabic, and refers to Jerusalem, in this case the location of the university.

<sup>21</sup> Ta’ayush means “living together” in Hebrew. Its website is [www.taayush.org](http://www.taayush.org).

significant personal risks confronting Israeli border police. Ta'ayush is a mixed group of Israeli Jews and Palestinians within the tradition of the non-violent resistance movements of Ghandi and Martin Luther King, junior, in which they provoke conflict with their adversaries in a non-violent way. Often they get beaten up by the police and settlers, but they try to make sure the press are witnesses to these events so they will be publicized. He encourages us to work at educating public opinion in the United States about what we have seen.

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On the final day of the trip we are back in Tel Aviv again, in a large auditorium still gaining new information from new speakers, but also trying to organize our thoughts and make sense of all we have experienced in Israel-Palestine. In the morning we hear from two young Israeli army “refusers”, Elik and Dan, who are part of a new organization of Israelis and Palestinians called “Combatants for Peace”. Elik, age 28, tells us he enlisted in a paratrooper brigade at age 18, and came to realize that Israel would have to stop its Occupation before it would be able to negotiate peace. He said, “promising peace is more than refusing violence; curfews are not preventive, but they are a collective punishment; the Wall is not a measure of security, but a cause of insecurity... A crime against humanity is taking place, and we need to stop the carnage. This is a human problem.” Dan joined the infantry on the Lebanese border, but decided he could not stay “in that cycle of crime and shooting.” He refused to serve in the reserves after he left the army, was put on trial, and jailed for a month for his pacifism. Dan and Elik decided to start their movement to show that even “normal people” (not leftists) oppose the Occupation. But they tell us “it’s not easy to convince people that refusing is good.”

In Israeli law there is no place for conscientious objection unless you are extremely religious. In the 1990s, however, the culture began to change, and young people increasingly began to refuse conscription. At first the army dealt with them by ignoring them, but now “refusers” can spend a year and a half in civilian prison.

Our next speaker is Dr. Daniel Rabinowitz, a professor of anthropology and sociology at Tel Aviv University, who talks to us about the Palestinian citizens of Israel. He tells us that in 1948, 750,000 Palestinians, primarily the urban and rural elite, were driven out of the country. They were the leaders of institutions, schools, and civil society before 1948. Approximately 160,000 “residual” Palestinians remained in Israel in 1948, lost their property, joined neighboring villages and towns, and became “internal refugees”. There are now three generations of these survivors in Israel, who have worked for change through the political process (there are currently eight Palestinians in the Knesset) and through founding a large number of NGOs – in what Rabinowitz calls “a frenzy of civil society activity.” But he describes the middle generation as “the worn out generation” because even though Palestinians make up 18% of the population of Israel, they are never included in political coalitions and are still second class citizens in terms of rights. The younger generation of Palestinian Israelis shares their parents’ despair because mainstream Jewish Israelis still will not work with them politically.

Knaz next introduces Shulamit Aloni, the “mother of the Israeli civil rights and feminist movements,” founder of the human rights party, Meretz, and a member of the Knesset for 27 years. Aloni tells us that Israel has three basic problems: 1) it is not yet a nation because it has no constitution; 2) it is not a real democracy because human rights are the basis of democracy, and it has no Bill of Rights, and denies equal rights to a

large segment of its population; and 3) the army is a serious problem because, “as the first army of the Jewish people in 2000 years,” it is a “sacred cow.” Its leaders become heroes, politicians, statesmen and educators, and its military culture permeates the society. She tells us that the Israelis are “the victims of the world” because of the Holocaust, but it is well-known that “parents who beat their children are those who were beaten themselves as children.” The Israelis are trying to destroy the Palestinians, but this won’t work. Beating them “does not make Palestinians afraid – it makes them angry. They are oppressed, but they are not victims.”

Our final speaker, Dr. Ilan Pappé, is a professor of history at Haifa University. He describes his “conventional Zionist upbringing” in a town near Haifa, his military service on the Golan Heights, and his bachelor’s degree in history at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, all of which did not affect the “Zionist scaffolding” of his mind. Then “by a stroke of luck” he went to England to do his doctorate in history at Oxford in 1978, just at the time when the 1948 Israeli military archives were opened. It was a shock for him to discover military records showing that the Israeli military had systematically expelled the Palestinians from their land and destroyed more than 500 Palestinian villages in 1948. He says he has been “reconstructing the past and reprogramming” himself ever since. The “deeper historic explanation for Palestinian retaliation in every immediate moment is rooted in this displacement,” which he only discovered in 1978. The Israeli narrative of 1948 is a “false narrative, and an amazing number of people, especially in the United States, have accepted it.”

Pappé proposes three factors from his study of the archives that must be addressed in order to have a real peace process:

1. Give the Palestinians a stage on which to be heard. Don't tell them they are lying about what happened in 1948.
2. Deal head on with the consequences of the ethnic cleansing of 1948. This has a human face in the almost 6,000,000 Palestinian refugees in the world today. Americans have ignored the refugee problem in the peace process, but it must be put at the center of any future negotiations.
3. We must listen to what the refugees want. For 57 years nobody has asked them what they want. And their position must be given a weight similar to the weight of the Israeli position.

Pappe concludes by telling us that “problems between Israelis and Palestinians will not end with the end of the Occupation. That is only part of the problem. The refugees must be dealt with in order to have a real peace.”

Pappe has clearly raised a huge unaddressed problem, never directly discussed by any other speakers we have met with on the trip. It is overwhelming to imagine the viability of six million Palestinians returning to the Jewish state of Israel, but compensation as a viable alternative to actual return was also not discussed.

Coming out of our final day on the FFIPP trip we are emotionally and intellectually drained. How can we make sense of everything we have learned? We have met soldiers who have given up violence, torture victims, non-violent peace activists, and parents at a bi-lingual school who hope their children will grow up to “marry each other and create a new identity”.

We have been given extraordinary access to the highest levels of political and academic leadership, both Palestinian and Israeli. We know that the vast majority of people living in the region want some sort of resolution to their terribly costly struggle, but we have learned that neither side speaks with one voice. Israel is deeply divided between secular and religious Jews in terms of its future as a state, and Palestine is deeply divided over the means that are acceptable in striving for the outcomes it seeks, as we have seen in the outcome of their January 25<sup>th</sup> elections. In journeying briefly through political time and space one can only carve a narrow swath in a landscape, and we have no idea how widely the political ideas we encountered resonate through the two societies.

The intensity of what seems to be an intransigent human struggle over a small region of dry stony infertile land with barely adequate resources overwhelms us. Its sacred history, its fiercely divergent narratives of ownership and collective rights, and its dramatic imbalance of power challenge an anxious wider world that started the problem but somehow has not been able to step in and make things right.

A little more than a year ago Yassir Arafat, the historic leader of the Palestinian drive to statehood, died in Paris. In early January 2006, Ariel Sharon, the most powerful military and political leader of the Israelis in modern times, was felled by a massive stroke. This month the Palestinians held elections for their legislature, with the Hamas victory leading to a huge shift in the Palestinian National Authority's philosophy and focus for the predictable future. In March the Israelis will also go to the polls and elect a new post-Sharon leadership. Perhaps this new Palestinian and Israeli leadership will bring new energy to the peace process. But perhaps they will continue their bristling stand-off for another decade. Or maybe the wider world will not tolerate this tragic waste

of human lives and resources, and will force them to resolve the conflict. We will watch and wait, telling the story of what we have seen.

*January 30, 2006*