

by Abigail

## Seeds from Palestine

Please contact me if you have any comments or questions or criticisms or praises about this lil' pamphlet.

Especially if you are doing  
or are interested

in doing Palestine solidarity  
work here in

**F-I-L-O-R-I-D-A:  
Palestine Will Be Free**



[animelafefon@moose-mail.com](mailto:animelafefon@moose-mail.com)



For my entire life, the political situation in Palestine/Israel has deeply affected my family, probably more than would be expected for a middle class family living in the suburbia of North Central Florida. There has always been a divide between my parents over the Palestinian question - my Jewish mother's side of the family having strong ties to Israel - her Czech father a Holocaust survivor, some of his family who survived the concentration camps having immigrated to Israel, and my father having lived in Lebanon for almost a decade of his life (1969-1977), where his best friend in medical school was a Palestinian refugee, and where he learned first-hand the damage done by Israel's policies in the Arab World. I remember my maternal grandfather ("Andaddy") and my dad shouting over the issue, enough to make the walls in our home shake. I remember arguments between my parents about the "Jews and Arabs", leading to their divorce.

I remember seeing the grief on my father's face as he read about the latest news from Palestine in the Sunday paper, I would try to divert him to the comics to keep him from getting upset. My parents avoided speaking about politics around my sisters and I and so when my father died when I was sixteen, I still knew very little about his political beliefs and about the "conflict" at all.

My mother would sometimes mention that my dad had been a "pro-Palestinian activist" when he was younger, and as I became more and more politicized and active against the U.S. "War on Terror" - the bombing of Afghanistan and then the War in Iraq, I began feeling cheated that I never had political conversations with him, that I never knew this whole part of his life, never knew how he stood on issues that he was really passionate about. I really craved to know, would spend hours digging through the boxes of his stuff we had put in storage, wrapping myself in his keffiyas and pouring over his books about Lebanon and Palestine, hungry to find out more - beyond what my mother told me when we would talk about Middle East politics, which wouldn't go beyond "Israel is doing God's work... She has to protect herself, the Arabs want to push the Jews into the sea... Don't the Jews deserve to live?" She would then be backed up by her pro-Israel husband, and our conversations with her would always end up with me being told that I didn't understand history, that I was naive and that criticism of Israel was equal to being anti-Jewish.

Later that night, after the party, after laughing and dancing, sweet treats and bittersweet goodbyes, when everyone had gone to sleep and I was up packing, I heard gunshots and went back to the window. The street was empty, the wind cool, the only sounds were gunshots echoing throughout the streets. For the past few nights - the army has been coming into the city, speeding their jeeps up and down the empty streets, interrupting everyone's dreams with screeching breaks and gunfire.

The moon was waxing, almost full. I thought about how insane it is that by the time the moon was full, I would be on the other side of the world, probably sitting in my mother's green lawn in the "safety" of her suburban middle class white neighborhood in Florida. Another round of gunshots shatters the calm moonlit silence and a man in the apartment across the street from ours gets up to close his windows. A wave of guilt comes over me, that I can just get on a plane as easily as I got on a plane to come here, I can just fly away from it all. I think about what the family across the street from us would give for just a taste of the safety my mother lives in. What he would give for his children not to be woken to the sound of gunshots, to the sound of tanks, to the sound of explosions in the night. On the empty streets below, there is an old man walking. He's smoking a cigarette and taking a stroll under the moon, he's so calm, walking so slowly, like old men do. It's so strange to see him going for a walk, as if the army wasn't shooting a few blocks away, as if the jeeps couldn't come around the corner at any moment.



## Last Taste of Palestine

The night before I left Tulkarm we had a going away party, just with internationals, some of our local Palestinian coordinators and my friend Jallal. The party was complete with a talent show, and lots of baklava-sweet nutty flaky pastries dripping with honey. Earlier that day we were in Baka Sharkia and I had gone searching for a pomegranate tree to collect a few for the party, I only had to go around the corner from where we were having a meeting to run into pomegranate branches spilling over a wall, above the street. I stepped up on a ledge of the wall, and as I reached up to grab a few heavenly globes, I heard a man yelling "Stop!" Embarrassed, expecting to be scolded for trying to steal fruit like I have been so many times picking oranges or starfruits in South Florida, I stepped down and apologized "Asif, asif" (sorry), feeling a little guilty. It was a man from the meeting, who had been to the demonstration earlier that day, but instead of being angry, the man laughed and said "Why are you climbing? Why didn't you just ask?" in a way that showed he was worried that I would hurt myself (exerting all the energy it takes to pick fruit). It annoyed me that he was implying I wasn't strong enough or that picking fruit is a "man's task". In a second he had climbed the tree and was passing fruits down to me, and then the mayor came with a plastic bag and soon I was being handed a bag of fifteen or so huge gorgeous almost ripe pomegranates. Everyday I am amazed by their generosity, that such an exquisite gift would be given to a thief. "This is a thank you for your work here to share with your group. Please don't forget us"

Back in the apartment in Tulkarm I sat by a window peeling pomegranates and listening to the street below, bustling around as the sun melted away. Cars screeching around, vendors yelling the price of their produce. I sat there peeling, enjoying separating every seed from it's bitter skin, appreciating the last rays of light kissing my skin goodbye before sinking below the window sill. As the sun set, the call to prayer from the mosque quieted the sounds of the city, and the sky took a shade similar to the dark pink glistening jewels that were piling up beneath my fingers. The best way to eat pomegranate seeds is not one by one, but by the spoonful, or even better, the handful- when all the little capsules of juice burst open at once so that clusters of flavor explode onto your tongue, flooding your tastebuds with liquid euphoria. After an hour, I had peeled all the fruits which resulted in the biggest amount of seeds I have ever seen in one bowl at one time. Raking my hands through the delicate rose beads, feeling them between my fingers and feeling the power that each of them hold- the incredible strength each seed possesses to become a tree- I thought about all the seeds that I have gathered from being, working and living in Palestine- everything I've learned, seen, heard, and all the ideas that are beginning to sprout in my mind. Now I think about the responsibility I have with these seeds, to pass them on, to plant them, to turn my experiences into something productive.

My father's sister Madeline was the first to tell me about the International Solidarity Movement's work in Palestine, and I really felt myself called to go. I was hungry to see things for myself, I felt like it would be the only way for me to really know.

Then when I was visiting my friend Jamie in California, I went to hear Starhawk speak after returning from working with the ISM in Palestine, I was completely convinced that I needed to go. To stand in solidarity with the indigenous people of Palestine, but also for personal reasons- to uncover the mystery of why this conflict caused such pain in my family, (resulting in Andaddy and my dad to stop speaking to each other, contributing to the divorce of my parents), and also to do something I thought my father would be proud of, to honor him, to go in his memory.

My first few weeks of being in Palestine, I would get e-mails from my mother that truly pained me to read. Accusing me of working with "an Anti-zionist, anti-Jewish organization" (ISM), telling me that she was embarrassed to be my mother, embarrassed that she raised me. At the ISM training I broke down crying during the "hopes and fears" part of it, because I really felt that my mother was ready to disown me.

At first I stopped e-mailing her, because it was too painful for me to read the responses- which would basically be criticisms of everything I had said in my last e-mail. To not feel support from my only living parent just devastated me. But she wound up reading the updates from my sister forwarding them to her, and so I started sending them to her again. To my surprise, as the weeks went on, and as my mother got my reports of all the atrocities and injustices I was witnessing, the more the more she expressed sympathy with the Palestinians and even outrage at the state of Israel, and by the time I was arrested she actually said she was proud of me for the work I was doing.

Being back in the states now, it is amazing to me how much she now respects that I went, and how to everyone we've run into this weekend she says "Did you know my daughter just got back from Palestine-slash-Israel?" Just knowing that I had this affect on my mother and my relationship makes me feel like even if I just accomplished this by going to Palestine, it is so worth it.



When I got home my mother handed me a file that I had never seen before, filled with memos and fliers and letters to the editor that my father had written during his activist days. I went to his old house, that my mom is now the landlord of, and sat on what used to be his bed, and read his writing. I realized that I had never read anything that my father had written, besides a birthday card or a drug prescription!

I found out that the year that I was born was the peak of his activism. The year that I was born, 1982 when Israel invaded southern Lebanon, my father's parents and his younger sister were still living in Beirut and my dad became very active with a group at the University of Florida called the Supporters of the Right of the Palestinian People, organizing demonstrations, dialogues between Jews and Palestinians on public television and getting a Lebanese journalist to speak about the current events in Lebanon and the role of the U.S. there.

It felt so good to read my father's writing, like I had a window into the part of his life that I had been so curious about. I feel that he is proud of me, and I feel proud that he was my father, that I have his passion in my blood. I feel also so proud of my mother, that she has come around to understanding where I'm coming from and respecting my views. She reminds me everyday to question and to see things as not "just black and white".

So this zine is dedicated especially to my parents, and to my entire family.

Here is my attempt to explain what I experienced while I was in Palestine.

These days, too, with the wall completed in this region of the West Bank, the rules have changed again. Now much of the farm land sits west of the fence, reachable only through gates in the wall, controlled by soldiers. Even those who have demeaned themselves in order to request permits to cross, permits that acknowledge the land on the other side is no longer theirs, are not allowed through at the whim of the soldiers. One day, only men over thirty-five are allowed through, the next only those without vehicles, the regulations changing minute by minute. At one gate, farmers were told only newly married men were allowed through, at another, soldiers demanded identification for the donkeys.

For weeks, the gates were closed altogether, no one being allowed through. The reason given by the soldiers? Sukkot, the Jewish holiday of harvest. Again, the ability to forget becomes lost when presented alongside the reality. This time that should bring an acknowledgement of commonality, as both sides celebrate their harvests, stands, as so much else does in this land, only to drive the sides further apart.

I do not pretend to claim that either side of the line is perfect, innocent or pure. That there are not faults even on this side that I sit. I do claim, though, in a voice that will not cease, that the reality on this ground is not so easily disassembled as the broadcasters and analysts will have you think. It is not as easy as the scared innocents verses the big bad terrorists. From the inside looking out, things become so much clearer to me. Daily encounters with the soldiers, most these days that admit to having been awake and on duty for 48 hours straight, have a way of clarifying the reality for me. A way of allowing me to understand what is going on, in a manner that the newspapers lack. It is impossible for me to accept that anyone with an open heart and mind, who witnesses this situation on the ground or at least from an alternative source, could come to any less of a conclusion.



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For every morning that the children lose another day of education because the soldiers won't open the gate in the wall, for every man that is blindfolded and handcuffed at a checkpoint for looking "suspicious", for every child who cannot sleep the night through for the never ending shooting and tanks in the streets, a fighter is born. One who wants to resist, through stone, gun or body. All of those moments of life

controlled by another, until the need to scream and fight back come manifest. And then you fit the bill. The one they neatly created for you to fall into, or be pushed into as the case may be. Although in all of the news casts, political analysis, lists of the dead that will never be admitted. All you will ever be in their eyes, upon their lips, is a terrorist, motivated by hate, religion and fanaticism. Never will the other side admit their own doing, their own faults in all of this. For me though, I can see the reality. From the ground up, I can feel it.

And now, the olive harvest has begun. Days upon days of wandering amongst the olive trees surrounded only by the sound of stick hitting tree, olives hitting ground. Many moments pass that allow me to forget the occupation even exists. If that be the case though, my presence here would be none, or drastically different at least. My presence, in case soldier or settler should choose to attack these farmers, would not be necessary. Those moments of forgetting become few and far between though. The forgetfulness shattered every time I look up and see a settlement looming yards away, every time the soldiers set up a checkpoint between the olive groves and the farmers' homes. Every time an F-16 fighter jet flies over head, every time we get a call that tanks are in the city streets, the ability to forget slips away.

## International Solidarity Movement (ISM) Tulkarem Region

We are international and Palestinian volunteers working in solidarity with the Palestinian people to confront non-violently the illegal Israeli occupation. The Palestinian people are suffering a grave injustice that cannot be ignored by the international community. Please do not hesitate to contact us in cases of human rights violations or to support non-violent community resistance.

055/474066 059/836783 052/854586 052/320481

English 067/361708 or 064/309753

Website [www.palsolidarity.org](http://www.palsolidarity.org)











# Palestinian

## Rights

EDITOR, Sun: Palestinians are human beings and have a right to exist too.

The Sun should be commended for having the courage to deplore the atrocities committed by the Israel Defense League in Lebanon in its editorial, "Merchandising Destruction." If one scans the major newspapers of our nation, few editors have the courage to criticize Israel, even when it goes too far. Our political leaders as well seem reluctant to hold Israel accountable for its actions. Even our President appears unmoved by Israel's misuse of U.S. weapons in violation of U.S. law (the

Arms Export Control Act). Our democratic hopefuls do not have the guts to address criticism towards the present administration's "carte blanche" policy. No one wants to be caught whispering any disparaging remarks about any of Israel's present and past actions. This would be risking being called "anti-Jew" and "anti-Zionist" which is tantamount to committing political suicide.

Mr. Rosenblatt writes well and convincingly, but unfortunately he misses the important point. It is not the right of Israel to exist that is in question. The United States has an unshakable commitment to that right and has proved it. Dachau, Auschwitz, and Terzin should and will never be forgotten. But the specter of the horrors of the Holocaust cannot be waved around as a smoke screen or as a justification for Israel's present inhumanity.

What is the question, Mr. Rosenblatt, is Israel's right to exist to the exclusion and detriment of the local Arab population in Israel. What is in question is the right that Israel had to expel three-quarters of a million Palestinians from their homes and property back in 1948. It was not the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem who expelled these Palestinians; it is not he who continues to annex and appropriate to this day.

What I am questioning is Israel's right to deny the Palestinians' right to return to their home. And what gives Israel the right to murder civilians both on the West Bank and in Lebanon under the pretext of national security? Is it because Arab governments have done the same thing on their soil? And why does Israel have

## Birmingham Sun

### THE SUN'S POLICY

1. Report the news fully and impartially in the news columns.
2. Express the opinions of The Sun in — but only in — editorials or the editorial/opinion pages.
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Towards the end of the meal Larry, Philip's brother, starts to talk. "So I heard they started putting dogs in the airports to keep the terrorists away... yeah, the terrorists see the dogs, and they are afraid the dogs are going to bite them, so they go away... yeah, they think if the dogs bite them, their blood won't be clean anymore and they won't get those 75 virgins they're promised in heaven." Everyone is trying to ignore him, Donna-Philip's cousin says quietly under her breath "I'm really offended by everything he just said." I start giggling and pour myself another glass of Menochovitz sweet wine, not caring to get into it. "Oh, you think it's funny that the terrorists want to blow up Jewish people and Americans? Oh, yeah, that's real funny."

"I just don't really believe that if someone's going to blow themselves up that they're really afraid of a dog." I say, which aren't my real thoughts at all, which are more along the lines of "why the hell are you talking about this?" and "can we refrain from being racist at the dinner table?" but for the desire to have a conflict-free meal I refrained.

"It's the truth, it's because of the virgins. It's because of the virgins." He mumbles.

I focus on my glass of wine and try to detach. My mind wanders and I wonder how friends in Palestine are spending this night.



"Are you afraid of Arabs?" I asked her.  
She was quiet again and then said "Yes."  
"You're American?" she asked.  
"Yes"

"So, do you love Israel?" Just as much as I love any other fascist colonialist nation state.

"Of course" I said in a sarcastic tone. I don't think she picked up on my sarcasm because she smiled for the rest of the ride.

### My III' Anti-Vegan Rant

Something that really annoys me these days is veganism. I never thought it would be something that annoyed me, maybe because I was a vegan for several years, and by default I still eat a "vegan"/freegan diet... but veganism REALLY annoys me. I just have to get that out there!

The other day an activist acquaintance was telling me about his favorite restaurant- a "Vegan Middle Eastern restaurant" in Seattle... what? So, I have very limited experience in the Arab world, but no one I met in Palestine even understood the word we were taught to mean "vegetarian".

"La, shoukran. Ana Nabat!" I would say when offered meat, "No thankyou, I'm vegetarian", and the meat would be piled high on my plate anyway.

Of course this acquaintance later said that there weren't actually any Arab people working there or eating there, and this is a prime example of why vegans annoy me sooo much.

Here's this restaurant that is a bunch of white hippies co-opting Arab culture, taking business away from the Arab owned restaurants, and then coming down with this whole vegan superiority thing, but still calling themselves a "Middle Eastern" restaurant- when eating meat is a huge part of Arab culture. Why can't vegan folks just go to an actual Arab-owned restaurant and eat all the vegan options they have- falafel, hummus, foul..? Why don't we thank them for sharing their traditional food with us, instead of supporting a restaurant that is stealing it, changing it, and making money off of it. You know a

Sat, 2 Aug 2003  
hello, family!

it's been such an incredible week, i will try to give you an idea of what's been going on. the camp against the occupation has been established for three weeks and it is basically just a meeting place for farmers to meet with ISM folks to plan actions, and to establish a presence right by the "security" fence that has separated farmers from even more of their land.....

while keeping a presence at the camp, we've also gone out to other areas to help with actions there. the day after my first night at camp some of us took a trip to Jayyous where we participated in helping to bring food, water and medicine to a Bedouin family of eight whose house has been isolated from the town, caught between the fence and the green line- they have been cut off from their clean water supply and their food supply, also the mother has diabetes and has not had access to getting medical care.

the action was really beautiful, but really heartbreaking- the mother came up to their side of the fence and one man climbed over the razor wire so he could get right up to the fence. and started to throw plastic bags of cauliflowers and cucumbers and tomatoes over the tall fence, over the barbed wire, into the woman's outstretched arms. then the father came with the donkey and they began to load up the donkey with all the supplies to carry back to their home. in a matter of weeks the fence is going to be electrified- and so i don't know how long this exchange is going to be safe to sustain.

on the way walking back to town along the fence, we came across some construction happening on a gate, that was going to be a gate leading to a military base- and i was really surprised to see that they were palestinians working on it! the children that were with us started yelling at them and later it the exchange was translated to me- "why do you build our prison?" ... and the workers responded "we have to feed our children!" the workers were not from jayyous, someone said they were probably arab israelis- "48 palestinians" because no one in the area would agree to work on the fence.



Tue, 5 Aug 2003

greetings everyone!  
after a long 20 or so hours of being detained by israeli police and military, i am back in jerusalem- now forbidden to enter the occupied territories for the rest of my stay in israel. at 7:00 yesterday morning, there was an action to prevent a portion of a palestinian home from being demolished in order to make way for building the 2nd phase of the separation wall, which the state of israel has said it would not be built for another 6 months....

the group i was with arrived late to the action and could not get to the house because we were stopped by military, so we stood at the road block and were taking pictures of soldiers violently moving peaceful protesters to buses- and when we tried to get closer to take better footage we were charged and taken away with violent force onto buses that transported us to the ariel police station in the illegal settlement of ariel in the occupied west bank, where we've been until just two hours ago.

we were basically forced to make a choice between being deported and being released under the condition that we would not enter the occupied territories, which of course we were very unhappy to accept but we accepted it ...

i am really angry that our lawyers faced us with no choice but to take the conditions, because now i realize that there are other things we could've done. i'm feeling like i've betrayed all the promises i made to work on projects with farmers in tulkaem... and i miss all of my palestinian friends so much already. it breaks my heart that i cannot be with them right now.

i love you all  
more later,  
abigail

But also, things that usually I'm really strict about seemed less and less relevant in the situation I was living. When there's human beings being denied basic rights, it bothered me less and less that there's no way to recycle and there's no where to compost and that I'm eating what I'm offered to eat.

The dinner was delicious, except that Swad kept piling more and more chicken on my plate. It was strange eating meat, but it also felt right to respect her hospitality. After dinner we turned up the music and had a dance party, and I learned a few more Arabic dance moves. We said goodbye and talked about when I would return. "Maybe when you come back Thair will be married, living in his own house. Or maybe he will be dead."

On my way back to Jerusalem I caught a ride with two Palestinian men who said they could drive me to the bus station. At the checkpoint, a soldier came and collected our IDs. He then came back a few moments later and told me to get out of the car. "Why?" "Just get out" I got out, and he took me aside. "What's your name?" he said, looking at my passport. "It's written on my passport" I said. "Avigail? It's a Jewish name. Your Jewish?" "My mom is" "So you are Jewish" I shrugged.

"Are these men hurting you?" he asked me in a low voice. "Of course not, they are my friends, they are giving me a ride"

"So you are sure these men are not forcing you... they aren't hurting you?" "NO!"

"You are not afraid to ride with the Arabs?" "No, of course not" "What are you doing here, anyway?" "I was just visiting friends and now I'm trying to

go home" "So do you love Israel?" "Excuse me?" "DO YOU LOVE ISRAEL OR DO YOU LOVE THE WEST BANK?" I stood there, and a million reasons why I fucking hate Israel flashed through my brain and rushed to the tip of my tongue, which I promptly swallowed. "Am I free to go now?" He gave me back my passport. "Are my friends free to go?" "No, we have to check them." "How long will that take?" "I don't know, half an hour..." "Shit, if I didn't get to the bus station in time for the next bus to Tel Aviv I would have no way to get there by 6 in the morning to catch my flight. Feeling shitty I went back to the folks who had offered me a ride and apologized that I really had to go. At that moment an Israeli woman was driving through the checkpoint and not wanting to miss my opportunity to get a ride from a woman I flagged her down and asked her for a ride. As I was getting in her car I felt like pure shit for leaving my other ride, knowing it looked like the fucking soldier saved me from the "scary Arab men". "So where are you coming from?" the woman asked me. "I was visiting friends in Beit Sahour" She was quiet for a moment and then asked "You're not afraid of the Arabs?" "No, I'm more afraid of the soldiers than I ever will be of a Palestinian. They're the ones with the guns." "Oh that's silly, there's no reason to be afraid of soldiers."



The day after the bombing I got on a Palestinian bus in East Jerusalem that was going to Bethlehem, so I could say goodbye to friends in Beit Sahour, and half way there we were pulled over by the army, who had set up a temporary checkpoint since last night's attack.

Some soldiers came on the bus and began checking everyone's IDs, kicking all these elderly Palestinian women off the bus who didn't have papers to be in Israel. The women would argue or plead with the soldier a little bit, but then gather their stuff and get off. This one woman pretended to be asleep when the soldier came to her and when he yelled loud enough she finally rolled her eyes and got up. It reminded me of sneaking on trains in Europe and pretending to be asleep when the train conductor came by, and it made me smile that we shared this tactic.

"Why are you making these old women leave the bus?" I asked.  
"Because they don't have papers to be in Israel."  
"But now they are on their way back to Bethlehem, they are going home"

"How do you know they won't get off somewhere before the bus gets to Bethlehem, and blow something up in Israel?"  
"Well, if you don't let them stay on the bus they will definitely be stuck in Israel, won't they?"

I argued with him a bit more, but there was no way he was going to let the women stay on the bus.  
He just kept saying to me, "Don't worry, you can stay on the bus"  
He went outside with all of the Palestinians' IDs to check them, and after about five minutes I went out and encouraged him to hurry up, since we all had places we needed to go. He assured me five more minutes and he would return them, which he did in exactly five minutes. As the bus pulled away I felt really frustrated, that I couldn't do anything to help the women stay on the bus. I wondered what they were going to do and if they were going to be able to get home tonight.

The bus turned a corner, and there on the side of the road were all the women that had been kicked off, waiting for the bus to pick them up! The bus driver pulled over and the elderly women got back on the bus, chuckling and smiling. I started laughing too, excited that they had so easily outsmarted the soldiers, and laughing at myself for thinking that I needed to "help" these women, who can obviously take care of themselves.

It was really good to visit Thair's family one last time. They were upset that I couldn't spend the night because I had to get to the airport by 6 the next morning, so I was going to catch the bus to Tel Aviv tonight. I was told that since I wasn't going to spend the night, I must stay for dinner, which I agreed and Swad sent Thair off to buy a chicken. Being vegan in Palestine is close to impossible, without being disrespectful and rude. Everytime a family cooked a meal for us I would say "Ana Nabati" which means "I'm vegetarian", but everytime no one would understand that word! My entire time in Palestine I've been able to avoid eating actual flesh, just eating the sauce or stew around the meat, but it seemed like tonight it was going to be unavoidable.

Mon, 11 Aug 2003

hey beautiful dear ones,

here's what I've been up to lately...  
The past two nights i have been sleeping in a house in Beit Hanina- which is in East Jerusalem- (not passed the green line- so i haven't broken ball yet!)...which has been under high risk of being demolished these past few days, for being built without a permit, because it is nearly impossible for palestinians to get building permits- and so we are there to hopefully stop the demolition. around 10 people live in the house.. but it is hard to really count because next door is what i believe is the father of the house's sister and all of her kids, and so there's just a lot of kids everywhere!

it's so strange to be in a home that you know could be bulldozed to the ground at any moment. i can tell that the family is nervous, but they continue on with their daily activities... washing the floor, baking bread, serving tea... knowing that any of these activities could be interrupted mid-way, but doing them anyway. the grandmother has fallen in love with me, she is the dearest old womyn, and so wise. she doesn't understand my hair, or the holes in my clothes- which she has now patched all of them, despite my protest! and we can't communicate with each other, but i know she is so happy that we are there. this morning she put her hands on my head and started praying, later i think she tried to tell me it was a passage from the Koran.

Fri, 22 Aug 2003

Hey everyone!  
It's me, your friend/daughter/cousin/granddaughter/sister/niece in Palestine!

Due to my current location/legal situation/security reasons I will now send messages from this e-mail account, if you write me with any details about where I am, please write to this address and refer to me as anyone except the name you know and love me as.



My last night in East Jerusalem, August 18, I was sitting with three girls from my little sister's school (which was such a wonderful surprise to just run into the familiar fun faces of Ingrid, Eden and Jessica) when there was a very close sounding explosion outside, followed almost instantly by ambulance and army sirens racing by our hostel. We turned on the news but it was still flooded with pictures of the bombing of the UN building in Iraq earlier that day, and so photographers and journalists in our hostel headed out to find out what was happening and Ingrid, Eden and I followed.

About a kilometer from our hostel, a suicide bomber ripped apart a bus, killing somewhere between 18 and 20 people (I've seen both numbers in the newspapers here), including what I heard was seven children. By the time we got there, the whole area was blocked off, and so we stood at the police line and looked onto a sea of red flashing lights and watched the concerned faces of all the Orthodox Jewish men who were gathering. My friends with press passes were able to get in, and later told me about the bodies they saw being taken away, and a zaka picking up body parts and scraping bones and flesh off the walls of the nearby buildings to bury.

Back at my hostel in East Jerusalem, the army rolled in and started pulling Palestinian men off the street, out of their stores, beating those who would not cooperate. They rounded up 30 men and started marching them down the street, some of my friends who saw this happen followed to witness. Ten men were arrested, the rest were released.

We decided it would be best to leave for Tulkarm, back to the West Bank, as early as possible the next morning because the army's response to this attack was sure to be severe, and we would be needed. Also the longer we waited, the harder it would be to get in, with checkpoints tightening up and gates closing.

So now I am back in Tulkarm, we got through the checkpoint without a problem, but it's insane here. As soon as arriving, we went to visit the Tulkarm Refugee camp, where there are 18,000 refugees living in a camp originally established for 2,000. Before the occupation, the economy was agriculturally based, but Israel started bringing in workers from Palestine to do manual labor and so most left farming-- 90% of the refugees there is have jobs in Israel, but because of the siege there is no work, and so many Palestinians are suffering from unemployment.

asked me how it was living in Tulkarm, and I began to tell them. I told them about how the army had been coming in at night, and I gave them an example of when the Special Forces came in and shot a bunch of children playing cards and pool. They became very defensive and condescending, telling me that the army knows what it's doing, even though it doesn't seem like it from the outside. That often times "wanted men hide where children are". I told them there were no wanted men in the billiards hall, that it's a place where only kids hang out. I was immediately discounted with "Oh, how do you know? The Arabs lie, you know". Ori continued to tell me how almost every Palestinian family has dangerous weapons inside their home. Yeah, maybe kitchen knives. A girl's face that I've seen on a martyr's poster comes to mind, when her brother was shot she ran at a soldier with a kitchen knife and was shot dead.

I told them I didn't see any Palestinians with weapons. "Well of course they're not going to come out and show them to you!" Tommy scoffs. This argument was absolutely pointless, nothing I could say would change their minds. And also I think the Palestinians have the right to defend themselves, to resist the occupation, which I didn't think would be a good idea to express to these relatives. It's true that I never saw a Palestinian with a gun, however, when I was in Jerusalem I saw Israelis carrying rifles around as if it was just another limb on their bodies. I've even been to a party where these two Israeli dudes brought their guns with them to dance. "So why is it that Palestinians throw stones at the tanks, if they do have all of these weapons?" I ask.

"Let's not talk about politics anymore." Tommy suggests.

Journal entry

Tonight there was a suicide bombing about 1 1/2 kilometers from where I was sitting with Israeli friends in a pub in West Jerusalem, watching them drink beer. We walked outside and stopped to get cigarettes and the cashier told us what had just happened-- the street was soon filled with flashing lights and sirens, ambulances rushing to the scene. Last I heard 11 people were killed. And earlier today I heard 7 IDF soldiers were killed. I wonder how many of the 11 in the cafe were soldiers, or had been soldiers, or would be soldiers. There aren't that many "civilians" in Israel-- most people have been or are in or will be in the army-- most have carried a gun, with it's purpose being to shoot Palestinians. I have a cousin who is carrying a gun to shoot Palestinians.



He pulled over to drop me off, as I stuffed all my dirty clothes and bloody underwear back in my bag. Damn it, it's not too often that I get sexually harassed and my rights violated by the pigs in a matter of a few minutes. He was making some racist comment about "the Arabs" as I stepped out and slammed his car door mid-sentence. Asshole. Maybe I should just walk the rest of the way, so I don't have to deal with any more Israelis.

I started walking and a truck pulled over. I opened the passenger door and stepped up to see the driver- "Netanya?" I asked, and he nodded. "Shou-I mean thank you" catching myself. "Shoukran?! Arabi?!", and I realized he was Arab. "Naam, shwiye" -yes, a little bit.

I got in and he pulled back on the road, I felt myself relax, and felt safe again as he turned up his Arabic music and we were able to communicate a bit.

### Journal entry

**I am sitting on the porch of my great cousin's hotel room in Zikron Yakov- gulping down the last of the romaan seeds and plums I brought from Tulkarm just trying to hang on to the sweetness- I am not hungry- I just want the taste of Palestine in my mouth. My view from here is lighted highways and a lighten up swimming pool surrounded by nauseatingly green grass. I feel like screaming and crying and vomiting all over it.**

Meeting my Israeli relatives was intense- to talk with people who I am linked to by blood, who are tools of the state of Israel, spilling the blood of the indigenous people whose stolen land they live on, stolen water they drink. Not only does my government fund this racist occupation, but my family enforces it! It made me feel so much more responsible to fight the occupation, just to counteract the damage that my own family does. My three distant cousins are all in the army- one in active duty and two in the reserves. I met my distant cousin Ori who has a new 4 month old baby, and serves one month every year. He seemed very kind, he was excited to meet a distant relative and listened to what I had to say. But speaking to him and his stepfather Tommy about the occupation was just impossible. They

We met with a woman at the camp who works with prisoners- she says that in the West Bank and Gaza Strip there are 8,000 political prisoners today. She estimated that 80% of Palestinian men have been or are imprisoned. Out of the five Palestinians who were in the room during our meeting, all had spent time in jail including the women.

Lately there has been a lot of resistance organized in the jails, protesting their subhuman conditions- and they have been met with punishment of no electricity, prisoners' property being taken away, prisoners' tents being burned down, and the other day in Majoodu prison, tear gas was used- sending 25 prisoners to the hospital, and one man is now permanently blind. On the 25th of August, all of the prisoners in Palestine will be starting an open hunger strike.

She talked about how in the papers it is always written that Israel is releasing prisoners, but often the same day they release 100 prisoners, they arrest 200. Or they release civilian prisoners- drug addicts, thieves, and criminals- they don't release the freedom fighters/ political prisoners.

We walked around the refugee camp and I felt like we were a parade. Tons of kids swarmed around us everywhere we walked, bringing us flowers and yelling the only things they know in English "HOW ARE YOU? WHAT'S YOUR NAME?" over and over and over... the camp is sooo crowded, not only with people, but the alleyways in between the homes are so narrow, I felt really claustrophobic and really uncomfortable- like we were tourists just coming to stare at people living their lives.

Later that evening, I was sitting drinking tea and eating these amazing homemade pastries with my friend Jallal, when we heard tanks rolling into town. We hurried back to the ISM office/apartment and on the way home, kids were in the street putting up barricades, throwing things in the road to make it hard for the soldiers to get through.

Later that night, we got a call that the Special Forces and the Army entered the Tulkarm Refugee camp, walked into a billiards hall and shot indiscriminately at those inside who were playing cards- none of who were wanted men. Eight were arrested, seven were injured and a 15 year old boy named Ziad died as the army denied him ambulance access until it was too late. 5 months ago Ziad's brother was also killed by the Israeli Army.



The next morning I was supposed to go to Farhoun village for my friend Ghalee's brother's wedding. But it's really hard to travel these days, and there were no buses going, and just as we were deciding whether or not to take a private taxi, we got a call that there were demolitions happening in a village nearby and we were needed there. Here's the report I wrote about what happened:

August 21, 2003

Early this morning, 15 heavy-duty earth moving machines rolled into Nazlat'Isa accompanied by an uncountable numbers of soldiers, border police and unmarked Israeli workers. By afternoon, they had proceeded to demolish 4 houses and 120 stores which were mostly building/industrial supply stores and supermarkets. Although these buildings are in the path of another fence that will be built just inside the green line, the soldiers claimed they were slated for demolition because they were built illegally without permits. This fence, along with the main separation wall that is being built in the West Bank, will create an isolating pocket around three villages: Nazlat'Isa, Baga Ash Shardi, and Nazlat Abu Nar. Eleven ISM activists from the Tulkarm region, 7 Catalonians, 1 Pamplonian, and 3 Americans, documented the demolitions. They also helped store owners, who were not given adequate warning, to empty out their stores of merchandise and to load the goods onto trucks to salvage them from the demolition. Due to the vast number of stores and homes in the area, it is highly likely that the demolitions will continue tomorrow. However, several home and store owners have gone to court to get a junction and it is possible the demolitions may be delayed.

When we arrived in Nazlat'Isa, one house was being destroyed and everyone was gathered around, kept back by soldiers keeping us from getting too close. Eventually we got a man to take us through an orange orchard over a wall and through someone's yard so we were on the other side of the soldier line. Store keepers were frantically pulling everything out of their shops, and piling all of their merchandise on to trucks and out of the area as fast as possible.

He stopped the car and opened his car door, and i automatically opened my car door.

He stood right in the open car door and facing me, pulled his dick out of his pants, as if he was going to piss right there.

"What the FUCK are you doing?" I yelled and bolted from his car, speed walking back up the side road he had pulled onto, to the highway. He immediately put his dick back in his pants without peeing, jumped in his car, and followed me, yelling at me (suddenly in English) in a really aggressive, angry tone to "Come Back! Come back here!" I ran across the road to the oncoming traffic and flagged down the first car that was driving past. I opened the car door and saw that he was a soldier, maybe even a commander, but I looked up to see the asshole dude waiting for me on the other side of the street in case I didn't take the ride. So I got into his car and we sped away. For some fucked up reason, I was almost comforted that it was a soldier, my thoughts being that I was less likely to be sexually assaulted by someone "in uniform". My thoughts were racing and I was trying to gather myself, while trying at the same time to make small talk with the soldier. After becoming accustomed to a culture where I never felt threatened of being assaulted, and everything sexual is either forbidden or very private, and so much skin is covered, it was really shocking to be confronted with this fucked up shit again.

"Where are you coming from?" the soldier asked, but I don't really here him, because my head is racing.

What the hell was he doing anyway? Did he just want me to look at his penis? Did he think by looking at his fucking penis that I would want him or something?

"Where are you coming from?" he asked again, a little bit more demanding.

"Oh, I'm just coming from Tulkarm-" I don't know how I could have been so shaken up not to remember to lie, but the second the word left my mouth I knew I was fucked.

"**TULKARM??! YOU'RE COMING FROM THE WEST BANK??!**" He barked, in a voice filled with panic- as he immediately began tearing through my bag with one hand, and swerving to stay on the road with the other hand. "Calm down! Calm down!" I said, trying to steady my voice

"This is really unnecessary, you have no right to search my bag"

"**GIVE ME YOUR PASSPORT??!**" he ordered, still rummaging in my bag.

"You should really calm down. What are you looking for?"

"You are coming from the West Bank, so you might have a bomb!"



When I first entered Israel, one of the main things that helped me get through airport security was that I am "Jewish", and that I have an Israeli distant relative (cousin of my mother's father) who lives in Netanya. My entire time being in Palestine I had it in the back of my mind that I wanted to visit him, but it wasn't until the very end of my trip, after getting an e-mail from my mother that his partner had died and he would really like to see me, did I finally look at a map to realize that Netanya was only fifteen kilometers away from Tulkarm! Our local coordinator Abdul Kareem told me that before the intifada, people from Tulkarm went there all the time to go to the sea. People used to even walk there, it's that close. So I decided to leave Tulkarm a few days before my flight, and make a visit to see my relatives.

When I was saying goodbye and a Palestinian friend asked me where I was going- "Oh, I'm going to Netanya for a few days before going to the airport". His eyes changed and feelings of guilt pierced my heart, how can it be so easy for me, a foreigner in his homeland to go wherever I want, while his every move is controlled?

At sunrise, I kissed everyone goodbye in their beds and went out into the street to catch a ride to Tiebay checkpoint. Walking in the early morning on the street, I got many friendly waves and was offered to join some folks for coffee, "La, shoukran" No thank you, I said- wanting to get an early start so I wouldn't have to hitch in the heat. Several taxi drivers were on the sidewalk next to their cars, finishing their morning prayers. I negotiated a price with a driver, and as we drove out of Tulkarm I felt a little sick, knowing that I may never be back here.

I got through the checkpoint and began walking towards the highway that goes to Netanya, excited to be hitching again after not having hitched at all since I was in Spain.

I stuck my hand out in an awkward sort of way, being advised by a friend of mine that hitch hikers in Israel don't use the thumb. I got picked up real quickly, a young Israeli guy blasting techno music. He didn't speak any English, and I accidentally almost started speaking to him in Arabic but caught myself. I understood that he would drive me pretty close to Netanya. I got in and he introduced his name and reached out to shake my hand, which I accepted but his grip gave me an instant sick feeling in my stomach and he held my hand for a few seconds too long before I was able to get my hand back. I found myself being very suspicious of him and was very alert in seeing where he was driving, making sure he was following the signs to Netanya. After about five minutes, he started saying something in Hebrew that had the tone of "Oh, I just have to get something" or "Oh, I'm just going to pull over for a second", as he suddenly pulled off the road and started taking off his seat belt. "Why are we pulling over?" I asked, even though I knew he didn't understand me. I unbuckled my seatbelt and put my hand on the door handle.

Boxes of new shoes, carpets, bags of chickpeas/tobacco/spices, bags of plastic jars/straws/cups, furniture, candies and juices were all flying through the air onto big mountainous piles on the trucks. I helped load the trucks for awhile, trying to be careful not to stomp all over the beautiful vegetable gardens that were planted in between the stores, but others weren't being that careful probably because the plants would all be under rubble in a matter of hours.

Everyone who could speak English came up to me to tell me that the man whose house they were demolishing right now was supposed to have his wedding tonight. I thought about the wedding that I was supposed to be at that night, and what a devastating way to start a marriage this would be.

There was a factory in between the two houses being destroyed and everyone was going crazy trying to get all of their supplies out. We felt really helpless, like there was nothing we could do to stop the demolitions- what could 11 people do to stop 15 huge bulldozer/tanks?!

We thought at least we could negotiate to make sure all the houses/stores/factories would be able to get their supplies out. When we raised our concerns to the commanding officer of the demolitions, he said to us "Yes of course we will give them time to get everything out- don't worry" Don't worry?! Houses are coming down, people's shelter and workplaces are getting ripped down, but there's nothing to worry about at all.

At that point, two of us saw another home getting demolished on the hill, so we went up to document and try to find out more information. The man whose house was being demolished at that moment was named Iahd, and he was building on his family's property, who have owned the property for his entire life.

Their yard is absolutely beautiful, filled with olive, fig, citrus and pomegranate trees, vegetables, herbs and flowers- the tanks rolled over them without a second thought- uprooting at least three orange trees that I saw.



Danielle who is a Jewish ISM activist from Philadelphia said to the man that although Israel claims to be a Jewish state, they are breaking Jewish law -because it is illegal to cut down a tree that bears fruit. I would hope it would be breaking Jewish law to destroy a family's home, too.

Iahd showed us the maps of where the new fence was going to be built, right through his parent's orange orchard and through his newly built house that was now just a pile of rubble. It took 5 years to plan, get enough money to build and to construct the home, and in just 30 minutes it was destroyed.

Iahd said they are doing this because "they want to move us, but transfer is dead" he said- "I am going to rebuild my house in exactly the same spot" to show that he's not accepting this, he does not accept their authority and he's not leaving.

Another man I spoke to told me he cries when he hears of a suicide bombing in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, he worries because he also has family in Jerusalem, and he cries for the young children who are killed. But then he pointed to a pile of rubble that was once a home, and he said "But when everything you have worked for and everything that is yours is taken from you, what can you do?"

## xxvi Arab Women

system at least once served to protect the individual, espec women. But popular stereotypes of Arab women only serve to establish the positional superiority of Western women, hardly a true exsion of sisterhood.

This book is the work of a group of women writers who set out to write their articles because, like myself, they feel that it is their duty to reveal the misconceptions regarding the role of Arab women. Arab women have led serious struggles to develop their world and it cannot be dismissed either as "charrel" or as "cattle." At the same time, I never intended this book to be an apology for the denial of women's rights in certain areas of the Arab world. Mine is a more critical position: while I disagree with the images propagated in the West of Arab women as docile and male dominated entities, I disagree with the notion that women have achieved their rights in the Arab world. Not a single country has given women full equality in every domain, and the Arab world lags far behind in this respect. Nevertheless, to use Arab women as a stick with which to beat the Arab world is dehumanizing first and foremost to the women of the Arab world. Such an attitude cannot be mistaken for feminism; rather it is a degradation of this term.



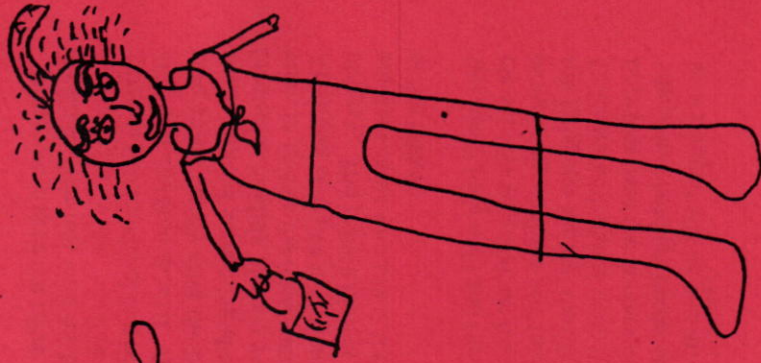
version at a time when the West is seen by them to be a dominating force. For example, although Eastern women are donning the *hijab* in greater numbers, some believe that unlike their predecessors they are fighting to maintain their place in the workforce and to maintain leadership roles in their segregated communities.

Arab women are also challenging the Western feminist paradigm from a secular nationalist point of view. In a recent annual conference of the National Organization of Women (NOW), Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi was honored for her work as a spokeswoman of the Palestinian people at the Middle East peace negotiations; there she was heckled by a listener from the audience saying, "We came here to hear Arab women talk about their oppression by Arab men." Ashrawi was being asked, from this perspective, to address only her oppression as a female in Arab culture while blindfolding herself to the world of work. Such a view is a capitulation to the patriarchal traditionalist paradigm which requires that women stay away from the political sphere. Feminist theory can bring about retrogressive results if it is applied without consideration to the wide range of conditions of women in the Third World.

I argue that in many countries of the Arab world the fate of the women's movement and the nationalist movement are often intertwined. This was the case in the Egyptian struggle for national independence; in the Algerian struggle for independence this was also true, although there were many disappointments for women after the new state was formed. Currently, it is Palestinian women who are making strong strides in the process of rebuilding their country and it is to be hoped that the coming five years will not bring about the same fate faced by their Algerian counterparts.

### THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS BOOK

I have lived in the United States much longer than I have lived in the Arab world and I consider the U.S. to be my home. But neither I nor any of my female Arab-American friends recognize ourselves in the images of Arab women propagated in the media blitz targeting Islam and Arabs, which have their roots in the Islamo-phobia of some early Orientalist writings. For a long period of my life I have fought for the rights of Arab women to lead full and emancipated lives. But I have come to the realization that the stereotypical views of Arab women perpetrated in this country constitute a worse injustice against Arab women than the patriarchal oppression that they must face in their own countries. The extended Arab family based on the patriarchal





## Reports from Tulkarm

We have been visiting martyrs and prisoners' homes.

We spoke to a man named Ahmad whose 23 year old son Hani was murdered by Israeli Special Forces this past June along with his friend Adan, who was 26 years old. Both of the men were killed because they are fighters.

Members of the Jihad party. His father says that out of all of his thirteen children, Hani was the kindest son, the most polite. He had finished school and was doing construction work. He was engaged to be married to a woman in Jordan. The family is living in agony because the soldiers took his remains, and so he has yet to be buried. In Muslim society, it is crucial to bury the body as soon as possible after the death, and it has been months. Until the body comes, it is as if their son is killed everyday, they can have no peace until he is buried. "We are living the death every moment, until the body comes". The only part of their son that was left behind was his arm, which they have buried. Same with Adan, only his arm was left to be buried. The men were trapped in an animal shed and the special forces were on the roof, throwing grenades in from the skylight. So people think that both of the men grabbed a grenade to throw it away from them, and their arms were blown off. The family members were forced to carry the body parts out into the street, that was soon transformed into a river of blood, and then the bodies were taken away.

When we visited the other martyr Adan's family, they are also waiting for the body. We met with his brothers and his friend who played on the same soccer team as him, because both of their parents are dead. It is a very difficult life for the oldest brother, he has to care for his four sisters and his wife and children as well. Adan was unemployed and struggling to take care of his family after the death of his parents- they described him as very vocal, always screaming about the conditions they were living in. The brother is holding his two year old son, "There is no stability, no life, we want to live as the other nations live. This is a hopeless, miserable life." Attention is drawn to the two year old as he approaches Danielle's video camera. The baby's mother comes out of the kitchen and tells us that when soldiers come into town, the baby follows the older boys and throws stones at the tanks.

We visited the wife and the mother of a 27 year old prisoner name Meheraj. He was on vacation, on his way to Farhon to go swimming when he was stopped by soldiers and told to get out of the car. The soldiers shot him in the lung, the leg and the chest and left him bleeding on the road. A Red Crescent ambulance from Tulkarm picked him up but because it was such a hopeless case the doctors decided to bring him to a hospital in Nabulus, where he could get better care. On the way to the hospital, the ambulance was stopped and he was arrested.

Listening to the "Other" is essential when speaking across cultures, even if that voice speaks from beneath a veil. Arab women's reasons for donning the *hijab* (head-dress) are as numerous as the different forms that it takes. In some cases the *hijab* has become a symbol of defiance against Western policies in the region, and cannot be considered outside this context. To see the *hijab*, in such cases, only as a sign of conformity to Islamic principles, and therefore a form of oppression of women, is to miss the point. If the relation between an ideological struggle and control over women's bodies is reminiscent of the plight of women in other cultures, this is because control over women's bodies often reflects an ideological battlefield. While Arab and Western women's agendas may differ, yet methods of control over women's bodies are often similar. All societies become sensitized to the oppressive measures within, and only a self-conscious and critical consciousness is capable of distancing itself in order to see oppression of women in global terms.

### DIFFERENT SYSTEMS IMPACT ON WOMEN IN DIFFERENT WAYS

In the West most view discrimination against women as the product of a culture of male domination. In the Third World, women say their struggle cannot be considered outside the regional political and developmental issues. Women are doubly oppressed during periods of colonization: they are oppressed by the system as a whole, and each woman is also the first victim of her husband when the latter is under excessive stress due to political factors. Periods of decolonization are also the moment when Arab women emerge into the political sphere and assume leadership roles outside the home. All these factors must be taken into consideration in order not to impose a myopic view of the role and the oppression of women in the Arab world. To use the same yardstick by which we measure the role of Western women on Arab women will produce a myopic view of the latter; we will be measuring some aspects of male domination but not the essential ones, and such an analysis risks reducing the drama of women's emancipation to the domestic sphere.

Western feminism, of course, is grounded in Western thought, ideology, and values. Arab women's struggle is equally grounded in the religious, cultural, and political norms of the Arab world. According to some Arab women, it is a difficult if not impossible task to write about Islamic feminism in a climate that assumes the universal supremacy of Western feminism. They believe that Western feminism is rejected by Muslim women because it calls for a form of cultural con-



role of women in Muslim-Arab culture or, more often, following strident objections to a lecture fraught with Orientalist misconceptions. For this dialectical opposition dominates all that can be publicly said on this subject. So forceful are these currents that any speaker on Arab women fears that her comments will be misinterpreted either as belonging to the Arab-bashing camp (when stating critical views on the role of Arab women) or, more often, as being complacent about the conditions for Arab women, presenting them as totally satisfied with their status. Arab women's reality, their daily battle against occupation, war, an entrenched and stringent patriarchal system, their fight to control their bodies and their destiny, their small victories, and their empowerment, all fall outside the parameters of this dialectical opposition. Furthermore, the current debate risks becoming a contest in positioning the greater victimization of Arab women, which, once established, automatically translates into a victory of the West over a regressive and violent Arab East. Cultural biases toward Arab women have forced Arab-American women like myself, who hold feminist views, into a defensive position. Those of us who were vocal in our critique of traditions that hamper the development of women find it difficult to voice that same criticism in an atmosphere that is charged with negative misconceptions about Arab women in the context of the Islamic traditions. And, as most Arab-Americans know, the negative images of Arabs have some serious repercussions: they condone aggressive behavior toward Arabs both in this country and in the Arab world.

Can one actually begin a serious debate on Arab women in this climate? Unless current conditions change, such a debate distorts the experience of Arab women and risks becoming an oppressive rather than a liberating tool. Before we can address women's liberation in the Arab world we must liberate this culture's views about the Arab "other," especially women.

Leading feminists have often noted the need to both acknowledge and overcome the differences facing women across the globe. Underlying those statements is the assumption that despite the differences, that female oppression takes in different cultures, despite the fact that the current historical reality has imposed on some women a double burden of fighting both a war of liberation and a struggle against patriarchy, despite all the different experiences of women across cultures, women are still very much the same. Some American Arab feminists can, if they so choose, transcend the relations of domination and subordination that characterize the relations between the two worlds.

He was brought to an Israeli hospital where he underwent three operations, and blood transfusions. After five days in the hospital, he was sent to investigation for 2 months and 13 days, where he was tortured. He has been in jail for 2 and a half years now, his four year old son doesn't recognize his father's picture anymore.

August 23, 2003

Yesterday morning at 4 in the morning in Rameen village, about a half hour drive from Tulkarem, a house was destroyed with demolition explosives by Israeli Forces. Three of us from ISM went to visit the family, and document what had happened. The house was totally torn apart, and even the neighbors houses were damaged- broken windows and ceiling damage from the explosion. The family's son has been away from home for four years- he was "wanted" because Israel claims he was linked to some sort of bombing a few years ago, and so he went into hiding for a few years, and then 2 years ago his family heard he had been arrested. They think their home was targeted as revenge for the suicide attack in Jerusalem last week. The family is now without a home.

I walked around the remains of the house, there was a bit of flat foundation left, the family had put all their blankets and pillows on this bit of unbroken earth remaining to sleep on. Their security/shelter/normalcy has been completely turned upside down- they were only given ten minutes warning to get out of their house, not enough time to take their possessions out, and so belongings are scattered among the rubble... broken coffee mugs, children's homework papers... What looks like it once was a beautiful garden is crushed by chunks of concrete- tomato vines have been smashed- leaving unripe tomatoes covered in dust on the ground- never to be eaten... I managed to pull a baby citrus tree out from under a piece of wall- the crushed leaves putting out the sweetest smell into the dusty, dead air.

After listening to the family's story, we walked a bit down the road to drink Arabic coffee with the mayor of the town and some of the neighbors. From this house we could see the lights from the Israeli settlement on the next hillside. Land from 4 villages was stolen for the construction of this settlement, a lot of this land being agricultural. Because of the military protection of the settlement, the farmers are not able to go to their land to harvest their olives and almonds from trees that have belonged to their families for generations. Every year they watch their crops rot, while they struggle to make enough for their families to eat. Sometimes they can see settlers burning their trees to make room to build more settler houses.



Last night four of us went to the Tulkarem Refugee camp to speak with the families whose children were shot the other day. We first went to be with the mother of the 15 year old child Ziad who was killed. She and maybe twenty other women relatives and friends were sitting in their neighbor's house having what seemed like a mourning time together, the men were in a room upstairs. The mother and sister barely spoke to us at all. Just five months ago, her other son Mohammad who was twenty years old was shot by an IDF soldier on the way to pick up Ziad from a friend's house. So now all she sees of her sons is the pictures on their martyr posters.

The picture on Ziad's poster is the face of a young boy- round with chubby cheeks, not smiling. How could someone shoot a boy in the middle of playing cards? In the corner of the poster is a smaller picture of him holding a gun. In a lot of the posters around town, the martyrs are holding guns, but few of them are fighters or own guns- the guns are symbols of resistance. The guns are either superimposed on the computer, or when the Palestinian authority comes into town, all the kids borrow a gun and run to the photo booth- all the boys want a picture of themselves with a gun.

The women in the room begin to speak to us "The world does not see that we are the victims, but we are the victims... They always talk about security for their children- what about our children? No one cares if our children die.... Just last week he was asking for new school clothes... We want our children to have fun, but if they go out they get shot.... He used to make us laugh, we miss laughing now.... They don't want peace, they want to wipe us out.... Why the only nation that is still not free is the Palestinian nation?"

It is hard to see the women crying, none of us have words, we don't know what to say. A woman brings us coffee to drink, the small cups are only half full, I take a sip but it is so bitter. The first coffee I've been offered without sugar in it. There is no sweetness in this room. A fifteen year old boy is dead, and the women are in mourning.

The next house we went to was the home of a man named Iyas, whose 15 year old son was injured in the shooting.

The sitting room is small, but very snazzy. With what looks like new tiles, cheap plasterwork- like frosting on a birthday cake, and pink, yellow and green light bulbs on the ceiling. There is a painting hanging above the window of a Western blonde woman lounging by the sea. Iyas tells us that sometimes he just likes to close all the doors and windows, turn on the television, and pretend he is in Europe, and not in the refugee camp.

ing of Thalidomide Children (New York: Cornell University)

*Two Short Stories by a Palestinian Feminist*

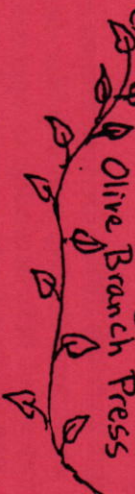
fingers his beads and murmurs, "Ya illaha illa Allah." I am the *waledah*; having once given birth, I claim my right over life and death. The pain of the latter, I swear, is greater and more unforgivable.

The soldiers appear and the snake coiled around my wrist glitters wickedly, like an obscene signal. With my free hand I pull at it, twist it back and forth, but it refuses to let go. I pick up a stone; resting my wrist on a rock, I strike at the snake with an almost insane strength. My wrist is bloody but I feel no pain. The snake breaks off. With my mangled hand I grasp the stone damp with blood and with all my strength hurl it at the pointing guns.

Introduction from Arab Women: Between Defiance

and Restraint

edited by Suha Sabbagh © 1996



HOW SHOULD WESTERN WOMEN CONCERNED WITH WOMEN'S ISSUES RELATE TO ARAB WOMEN?

This question is raised time and again by Arab-American women, following their polite objections to an unduly rosy presentation of the



## HANAN MIKHAIL ASHRAWI

in that year of drought, when the olive harvest failed and our grapevines withered in early summer. Next the *lozeh* went to pay for the schooling of Walid—my only born, the joy of my life, the hope of my future—while he lived. But the snake remained. I wore it on my wrist all those nineteen years until it wore me—winding itself around my thickening flesh, its tail meeting its head in a tightening double circle that refused to slacken. Not all the soap or oil greasing my hand could make it slip off my wrist, until I stopped noticing its existence. We became one.

The same ruby eyes stared coldly at me on my wedding night, as I clutched the bedpost frantically praying for the pain to stop, for that monster heaving on my innocent body to disappear, for the comforting embrace of my absent mother to reclaim me. I bit my lips with a fierce determination not to scream, and the sheets turned ruby red with blood of my twice torn body. It was my duty, my fate and pride as a virgin bride, I was told. But no one warned me or armed me against the pain. On that same bed Walid was born. At fifteen I watched my body being taken away from me again as the *dayeh* poked and prodded between my thighs and kneaded my swollen stomach like leavened dough with a calculated impersonality that was even more terrifying than my pain. For a whole day and night my body refused to give up its inhabitant, while I prayed and prayed for a boy in order to spare this unknown child a woman's fate. I cursed my husband then for his unbidden forays inside my body and my mother for the forbidden secrets that she never divulged. "You'll forget," she had said. "All women do, or the race would end." I never forgot. And as the screams welled up from the depths of my stomach through my parched throat, I froze at the dispassionate stare of the ruby eyes and in silence and blood gave birth to Walid. At fifteen I became Im Walid, and Abu Walid strutted about with pride of fatherhood, having sired a son, while I silently cursed my fertility and worshipped its fruit. That was eighteen years ago.

Walid's eyes were open when I got to him. Staring blindly into an empty sky, they did not recognize me. With all my pent-up pain and the million silent screams I could not release, I pressed my palm to the open gash that the bullet had made in its passage through his head. Blood and brains mingled as I cradled his head in my lap and drenched my *thoub* with the warm thick liquid that seeped through to my breasts and thighs. I knew the bracelet was uncomfortable in its cold hardness and I tried to remove it from beneath his head. But he felt nothing. I wrapped his tortured head with the *hatta* he had worn around his neck ("It's our national symbol, Yamma") and cried searing hot tears, silently, gently, singing a broken lullaby, "Nam ya habibi nam."

Abu Walid, the *waled*, now stares into space; no longer a father, he

Just outside his door, the stairs are crumbling, and parts of the walls are blown-out from where a helicopter shot at them 6 months ago. Iyas tells us about how his wife is suffering, because she doesn't know if her son is alive or dead. At least if he was dead he would be with Allah. They can't get any information about how or where there son is. Sometimes they hear he is in Tel Aviv hospital, other times in Haifa... Once they heard he was dead, the next time they heard he was in critical condition.

We went to the billiards hall where the operation took place. There are children playing pool, just as they were the other night when the Special Forces came. We are shown the bullet holes in the walls, and the blood stains on the floor and on the chairs.

We are told that the Special Forces rolled in to town in a civilian car, dressed as Arabs—wearing kefiyas. They first fired the light bulb in the billiards hall, to make it dark. They immediately proceeded to fire at the children inside playing pool and cards. 7 boys were shot, and for 15 minutes were left bleeding, with the army denying the Red Crescent ambulances access. One child was screaming at the soldiers to let the ambulances pick up the bodies, and he was shot. The bodies of the injured were stacked on top of each other, with the dying boy on the bottom of the pile, and then they were all thrown into an army jeep.

We went to the home that is right next to the billiards hall where a ten year old boy named Jiad lives. He was trying to run away but when he saw the shooter aiming at him he said, thinking the men were Arab because of their dress, "For God's sake, don't shoot!"—according to him, the shooter lowered his aim from his head and shot him twice in his leg. Jiad didn't know at first that he had been shot and continued to run. When he realized, he didn't tell his mother because he didn't want to worry her, and so it was a little while longer until someone noticed he was bleeding and his father carried him to the hospital.

I just can't stop looking at this sweet child and how on earth a human could want to fire a bullet into such a beautiful, harmless child. He is missing a front tooth, he has a long face with awkwardly sticking out ears, and the mildest, sweetest expression. He says he is not afraid of going to the billiards club or playing outside, because there is no where else to play. But his younger brother and sister who are standing in the doorway say they are afraid and will not go out.



We went to speak to a woman named Salama, who has just been released from prison. She was kept in administrative detention for three months, told that she was being kept for "secret military reasons", but that's the only reason she was given for being detained. Her husband is in jail, accused with being a member of Jihad, and financing the Jihad movement. So for three months her children had no parents, they stayed with Salama's sister. The night she was arrested the soldiers came at midnight and instructed for all of the men to go outside, when they came to her house she told them that there were no men in her household, since her husband was in jail. "We soldiers asked her name and she told them her name, and they said "We have come to arrest you."

For the first three days Salama was blindfolded and given nothing to eat. They offered her water, but she refused to drink. The first two months she was in prison where there was no room for women prisoners, and so she was kept in a room alone with one other woman. For the last month, she was moved to a women's prison in Jerusalem - where there were 70 Palestinian women political prisoners.

The conditions in the jail were very bad - with a lot of women suffering from diseases without any medical treatment. The women were given three hours a day to go out of their rooms. Once when all the women got out of their rooms, they refused to go back, in protest of the bad conditions in the jail. The jail keepers used tear gas, high pressure water hoses and sticks to beat the women back into their rooms. A woman named Mewartarah gave birth to a boy named Wael while she was in prison, he is now 5 months old. She will be allowed to stay with her son until he is two years old, then he will be taken away from her. She has a four year sentence.

Salama is back at home now, and her children seem very happy. I asked her how having both of their parents in jail has affected her children, and she said that they became very violent and aggressive towards each other and other children while she was away. This is what Palestinian children are learning from being under occupation.

The next woman we visited has a daughter named Doa in jail. She started crying the moment we were in the door, or maybe she was already crying, or maybe she hasn't stopped crying in a long time. She had just recently come back from visiting her daughter, which was very traumatic for her. She could only see her on the other side of a glass and a fence. She didn't recognize her daughter, because she is so pale and thin. She is anemic and is not being given enough food, and is not receiving any medical care.

that has birthed 6 children. She says she daydreams about saving enough money for a coming to live in the u.s. - marrying an american him. few years to become a citizen and then divorcing him. she wants to make a living teaching dance and arabic classes - she said it would probably take her 3 years to have enough money to come, and i don't give any false hope that "life is great in america", but for her she says anything is better than living under occupation. on the way to the wedding, the road we were going to take was closed, because their were dead bodies in the road so we had to take a different road-- this year there have been atleast 30 assassinations by the israeli secret services in their town.

A short story by Palestinian feminist  
Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi  
taken from Palestinian Women of Gaza & the West Bank  
edited by Suha Sabbagh @ 1998  
The Gold Snake

I pick up a stone. Clutching it tightly in my fist I raise my arm. The impulse to hurl it with all my strength rises in my body, through my veins, like a viscous substance—cold and deliberate—starting with my cracked feet and up through my womb, beginning to wither with prolonged childlessness, and my breasts, dry of milk, to my veined arm, for once raised in a clenched fist. The mid-morning sun reflects off the bracelet on my wrist, and the blinding glare freezes all motion. A gold snake, its scales worn by years of scrubbing and cleaning, of embracing and releasing, of dressing and undressing, stares at me blindly with two ruby eyes. I was only fourteen when the snake, with new scratchy scales, was wound around my wrist as part of my dowry—the *mahr*—in partial payment of the bride's price. Along with it came a heavy gold *halabi* chain from which dangled an intricate *iczel*, a filigreed almond that was even bigger than the one my mother wore hanging from her neck in between her dry and wrinkled breasts. Both almonds were empty. On my other wrist, a thick coin bracelet with genuine 'Osmalli and *Ingiliz* coins completed my engagement wear. I felt rich and cherished then, entering the mysterious cult of womanhood fully adorned in the tradition of my sex and race. The coin bracelet was the first to go



party-relatives of my friend Tha'er, which was sooooo fun. for the night before the wedding party, the men and the women dance in separate rooms, and it was sooo rad to be around such amazing dancers. i was the only foreigner there, and so i got a lot of stares, but people i think were amused to see me dance:) I got to meet Tha'er's mom, who is such a strong womyn- and all about smashing patriarchy.

Her name is Swad, which means happiness in arabic, but she says just because she laughs and smiles, this doesn't mean she is happy. she says she is thinking all the time, and so at night she takes an aspirin so she can go to sleep, otherwise she would stay up all night thinking.

She is the first muslim palestinian womyn i have seen with short hair who smokes cigarettes. i think they are small forms of rebellion, since they are both forbidden. (the brand name of the cigarette her husband smokes is PATRIARCH brand- but she won't smoke his cigarettes:)

She was engaged at fifteen years old, married at sixteen, to a man who was 28 years old. She got home from school one day and her father told her "You are engaged to Hassan".

in islamic-arab culture, someone is always in control of wimmin, whether it's their husbands, fathers or brothers.

She is an English teacher, but all of her salary goes to her husband- she struggles really hard to gain control of some of her wages.

she was able to save enough to buy an apartment in the center of town, with a view of the mountains from the windows. her husband fought with her to put the apartment in his name, even though it was her money. but she went to court and got it changed to her name. if she divorces her husband, her two youngest children will be allowed to live with her until they are ten years old, and then legally they have to go live with their father. the other children cannot live with their mother, and so the father will remarry and his new wife will take care of her children.

this breaks her heart, which is why she has stayed with her husband for so long, but she can't take it anymore. she needs to be free.

She said she used to do political work and social work but "First i have to fight for freedom from my husband, then i can fight for freedom from the occupation". she is really depressed, she wants to live alone with her children... they separated for 2 months, but her children were really unhappy so she came back. she's been in the hospital 5 times for her depression. it breaks my heart to hear her sadness, because she has such a joyful spirit.

Doa is a social science major at a University in Nablus and is in her 4th year of school, 22 years old. She holds up a picture of her daughter, a girl my age, wearing red lipstick and a white hijab. She kisses the picture and tears roll down her cheeks. Doa was arrested June 7, 2002 and was sentenced to 3 lifetimes plus 30 years. She is charged with being in a car with a suicide bomber before an attack in Netanya. In this operation, 3 were killed and thirty injured- so the sentence is a lifetime for each person killed and a year for those injured after that.

The mother leaves the room to get us grapefruit drinks, and the father says he doesn't know if she was involved in the suicide bombing, he does know that she was a very good student and used to volunteer in the hospital, where she saw a lot of blood and a lot of martyrs. Doa is the parents' only daughter, and they have one son, Jameel, who was shot by special forces 4 and a half months ago and was badly injured. The mother kisses her daughter's picture and begins wailing "What's the point of talking to you? I want my daughter. Can you bring me my daughter? Bring my daughter to me! If she did it, she only went in a car and came back... She is my only daughter... what can you do for me? They say this is a democracy, but she is my only daughter! When she went away to the university, I missed her too much THEN. She is not only my daughter, but my sister, my friend. We need practical things, not talking. Tell Bush we want peace. They kill our sons, we want to live! What have I done to deserve this life?"

August 26

This morning we were called to come to Jabarah checkpoint, it has been closed for a week now, since the attack in Jerusalem. Since the village on the other side of the checkpoint is very small (about 50 families), villagers usually come to Tulkarm to work and buy food, and they all have been denied. One man has two children who are in need of medicine, and although he has a note from his doctor stating that he needs to get the medicine in Tulkarm, he has been denied. School is starting on September 1, and if the checkpoint is closed, no children will be able to go to school. When the checkpoint was established, the village was promised they would always be allowed to move freely into Tulkarm, since all of the villagers' lives are dependent on going to and from the city. This morning, the soldiers said that people could go through, but everyone is scared if they go they may not be allowed to come back. The men of the village all gathered to protest that the checkpoint should be open at all times, as was promised to them. The demonstrators were threatened with tear gas and the crowd dispersed, which is when we were called to come. We negotiated for the gate to be open for the rest of the day, but tomorrow is still unknown.

It is hard to see the women crying.



## The Attack on Palestinian Agriculture

One of my major focuses while in Palestine was to understand the struggle of Palestinian farmers in the occupied territories- I interviewed farmers in the villages of Deir el-Ghussou and Atil, members of the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee in TulKarm and East Jerusalem, and the Ma'an Permaculture Center in Ramallah. The more I learned about the farmers' situation, the more it became clear to me that the destruction of Palestinian agriculture (through land confiscation, control of trade, and imposing unsustainable Western farming practices) is a colonialist method of the state of Israel to annihilate Palestinian self sufficiency, making the Palestinian people physically dependant on Israel for survival.

While volunteering with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) for "Freedom Summer" in the TulKarm region, I stayed at a camp located on Palestinian land- an olive grove next to a portion of the razor-wire fence that was cutting off farmers in the area from their land. This camp was a meeting ground for farmers and ISM activists to organize their demonstrations against the wall, where farmers succeeded in cutting/shaking/pulling down portions of the fences. Farmers that I met were not only struggling with the devastating loss of their land and crops because of the Wall's construction, but also with severe financial hardship of with extreme restrictions and expenses on much needed water/fertilizer/pesticide inputs, and roadblocks and checkpoints limiting their access to markets- therefore causing many yields to go unsold and spoil.

Tulkarm ISM spent quite a bit of time in Baka Sharkia, a town where a second wall is in the process of being built- destroying all homes, shops and farmland in its way, which will result in putting three villages in a cage. One morning, we took a walk down a dirt road to see some of the farmland and greenhouses that were being destroyed, but before we even reached the bulldozers we came across a field of eggplants being ripped up- not by soldiers, but by a herd of sheep. Upset that the sheep somehow had gotten into this field, I asked the Palestinian man who was showing us around if we should get these sheep out of there, so the farmer's crop would not be lost. The man told us that the sheep were brought into the field to eat, because these eggplants were all going to be destroyed by the bulldozers before the eggplants were ready to harvest, and so instead of having them go to waste, at least the sheep could eat them. This reminded me of our friend Jallal, a farmer in Deir el-Ghussou, who is also having his neighbor's goats eat a lot of his crops- not because a bulldozer is going to rip them up, but because he hasn't found a market for his yield in two months because of closures- as most of the farmers in the TulKarm region, and it is better for the animals to eat them than no one. It is heartbreaking to see this food go to waste not only because of the loss for the farmer and his family, but also knowing that more than a fifth of Palestinian children are malnourished, partially because of how impossible the occupation has made it for farmers to transport their yields.

My entire time in Palestine, although I did feel very restricted and frustrated by dress codes and other limitations on women, I felt respected and never threatened of anything close to sexual harassment. On the contrary, a half an hour into returning into the Western state of Israel where "women are free", I was threatened with sexual assault and had to run. The women of Palestine are oppressed- oppressed as women living in an extremely patriarchal culture and as Palestinians living under a severely brutal occupation. Women of the Arab World are often portrayed in the West as quiet, velle servants to males that need "our help" to liberate them.

This stereotype is insulting to the strong women of Palestine who are in constant struggle for theirs and their children's survival, and who just by living their daily lives are bravely resisting their oppressors.

While I was in TulKarm, I participated in a demonstration that was planned to be a Women's Protest Against the Wall, Palestinian and Israeli women meeting at both sides of the wall and then the Israelis coming through the gate to stand with Palestinian women on their land. The Israeli women arrived at an open gate, but were instructed by soldiers not to go through and obediently stood there until the gate was closed. The Palestinian side of the gate was closed from the beginning, and when the group of Palestinian women and children chanting passionately approached the gate, the soldiers showered them with teargas. But they were not deterred and did not disperse, and stood their ground. The supposedly "empowered" Western women listened to the voices of 18 year old boys with guns who would never tear gas Israeli women- their mothers/sisters/friends, when they could have ignored the soldiers demands and marched through the gate, standing with the Palestinian women, and probably preventing them from being gassed.

A way for us to stand with our sisters in Palestine is not imposing our Western feminism, but standing up against the occupation with them, and respecting how they choose to fight for women's liberation within that struggle.



## Wimmin in Palestine

We are constantly fed propaganda about how "the Arabs oppress women", and this is often used to not only demonize Islam and Arabs but also to legitimize our military aggression on Arab nations, such as dropping bombs on Afghanistan to "liberate" the women of that country.

When arguing with countless passer-bys who I would engage in conversation with while participating in a vigil in front of the White House the months leading up to and during the War in Iraq, I would encounter this argument quite frequently. "We have to plow them up because Saddam is a criminal. Do you know what he would do to you if you were over there? As a woman, if you went over there, you'd be nothing! They hate that you have freedom."

Freedom? Freedom to always be seen as a sexual object? Freedom to be mentally assaulted with images of what my body should look like and pressured to fit into those standards? Freedom to make less money than men doing the same job? Freedom to be harassed, violated, abused, and raped on the streets by strangers and at home by family and people I know?

Almost every womyn on the planet I believe lives in a patriarchal, misogynist culture. The oppression of wimmin in the Arab world may look extreme to us, but it is not up to us to define what a liberated womyn is. For example, many Palestinian women do not see wearing hijabs as repressing themselves, but as an attempt to hold on to their culture and resist Westernization.

It comes up often that at protests where Israelis and Palestinians are present, there are always some Israeli women participating dressed in tank tops and short skirts, which is extremely disrespectful to Palestinian culture. An Israeli friend of mine actually wears a mini skirt and a shirt that exposes a lot of cleavage when she goes to demonstrations in the occupied territories, because she won't let anyone "sexually repress" her. I question if being "allowed" or even encouraged to wear as little clothing as possible by Western society is really a sign that women in the West are "sexually liberated"- or if it is more of a sign of how exploited we are.

In Baka Sharkia, we met with an eighty year old farmer and his sixty year old daughter who had 6 dunums of farmland that were in the path of the wall and were going to be destroyed that day. They were loading a cart on their donkey with supplies they were trying to save. In their greenhouses they were growing peppers, tomatoes, and cucumbers, but ten days beforehand the bulldozers had cut the irrigation and now all of the plants in their greenhouses were dead from thirst- and soon would be buried by the huge yellow grave diggers. The old woman invited us for tea into her little shack made of rusty sheet metal- while we were waiting for the rainwater to boil we could hear the sound of bulldozers right outside. It was probably the last kettle of tea she was able to make in her little hut before it was knocked down. Something that I noticed while drinking sweet tea, was a shocking vibrant green grapevine- unaffected by the water shortage, right outside her greenhouses (now brown houses) of withered dry tomato plant skeletons. This strong perennial used to growing in this dry climate was the only plant living in eyesight, it seemed as though it was growing in defiance- having no need for the Israeli controlled water. Before the occupation and the introduction of western agricultural practices and greenhouses, crops were only irrigated by rainfall, but now Palestinian agriculture is dependant on irrigation, therefore controlled by Israel.

According to Jallal, many farming practices have changed drastically since the occupation- he pointed out the differences by comparing his techniques with his grandfather's. With the occupation, Palestinian traditional crops and agricultural practices were lost- tilling with donkeys was replaced by tilling with petroleum machinery, relying on rainfall was replaced with irrigation systems, farmers stopped saving their own seed and started buying "treated" and "improved" seeds from Israel. Palestinian staple crops (wheat, barley, lentils, sesame seeds, chickpeas) were replaced with the demands of the Israeli market (tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, cauliflower, cucumbers- crops that are "heavy feeders" - or need much more nutrients and water than the crops Palestinian farmers were used to growing), animal manures were replaced with chemical fertilizers, and many farmers invested in greenhouses instead of farming in the outdoors. Traditional Palestinian agriculture which was diversified crops and self-reliant food production is now monoculture-dependant on pesticides, chemical fertilizers, hybrid seeds, and irrigation- all supplied from Israel (Kurzom 10)



## How agricultural practices were lost

The loss of traditional and sustainable agricultural practices began with the transition to using hybrid, or what Israeli companies call "improved", seeds. Being fed propaganda from the Israeli seed companies, the farmers stopped saving their own seed and began buying seed from Israel, convinced these would create "bigger, tastier" vegetables. They were not told that along with having more visually appealing vegetables, these new vegetables were also less resistant to pests and diseases than local traditional varieties, so therefore farmers began needing chemical pesticides to make up for this. The distributors and representatives of Israeli hybrid seed and chemical companies, being the only source of information available to Palestinian farmers (Kurzum 24), convinced farmers to abandon diversified, self-reliant food production and turn to modern/export-based monoculture, dependant on their products (Kurzum 22). In fact, Israeli-Palestinian "free trade" agreements prohibit Palestinians from purchasing these products from non-Israeli sources.

My friend Abu Bassal, a farmer in Deir el-Ghussou started farming in 1967, and at that point he saved all of his own seeds. About ten years later he started buying seeds from Israel because the vegetables that come from Israeli seed were bigger and more visually appealing/easier to market, and he has been buying seeds every season since then. Soon after switching to Israeli seed, he started having many problems with pests and by 1979, was buying chemical pesticides from Israel.

Every year after beginning to use chemicals, the insects build resistance and the soil loses fertility; therefore, the amounts of chemicals farmers need increase- more and more pesticides and chemical fertilizers are necessary for the same effect. (Kurzum 22) Having become dependent on purchasing these agricultural inputs pushed many farmers into debt, forcing a substantial number of farmers to abandon their land and turn to the job opportunities available inside of '48/ Israel. Leaving the land unused made it easier for Israel to confiscate more land (Kurzum 11)- under Israeli law, lands that are "uncultivated" for three years are subject to seizure by the state of Israel. (Pengen 17)

With the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> intifada in 2000 and borders between Israel and the occupied territories closing, work in Israel has become unavailable and some are trying to return to agricultural work; however, Israel's military actions and "free trade" policies have driven farmers, the environment, and the food security of all Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip into a dangerous, hopeless situation.

And now here I am standing at Baka el Sharqia bulwabi (gate), and this same star is on the soldier's helmet who is kicking a farmer's donkey and refusing to let the farmer go to his land. The yellow Jude stars have changed to yellow license plates that pass through the checkpoint easily while cars with green and white Palestinian license plates have been lined up for hours.

And the Star of David on the Israeli flag is flapping in the breeze above the checkpoint, watching and accepting the soldiers keep women from visiting family members, men from going to their jobs... Encouraging the soldiers to control and humiliate, to enforce the imprisonment of Palestinians.

It infuriates me that this star that I used to admire and feel even a little proud of my connection to it, now makes me nauseous and enraged at the sight of it.

Palestinians see this star hanging from the tanks that shoot at their children and hanging from the bulldozers that destroy their homes. The state of Israel is terrorizing Palestinians while hiding behind the star, - "We have to protect the Jews".

The apartheid system that the army enforces is breeding hate. The only Palestinians that Israeli Jews see come are freedom fighters/suicide bombers, the only Israeli Jews that Palestinians see are soldiers/terrorists.

When I first got here it bothered me a lot when Palestinians would tell me "The Jews don't want peace" or "The Jews want to kill us all" and I would suggest "You mean the state of Israel doesn't want peace?" But what conclusions can be drawn when the symbol of Judaism is being used as your oppressor's flag, other than that those who follow that religion support the actions of the army that uses it?



I think the Palestinian people are much like their trees. They are deeply rooted in their land, gripping the earth with all of their strength. They continue to grow, enduring all hardships- their water is stolen, their conditions are made unlivable- but they are steadfast, even though they know they may be cut down at any moment. They continue to produce fruit (continue building, continue having children, continue planting) even though they know none of it may ripen.

In these past weeks, I have been near so much violence. I have seen the blood of a Palestinian boy shot dead while playing cards. I have met the family of a man who the only piece they have left of his body is his arm. I have also been a block away from a suicide bombing, where my friend saw a man picking up fingers from off the street. So when I see the massacre of these trees, I see bloody limbs and dead children who will never grow up. As the machines are tearing into the wood and leaves, I feel them tearing through my heart, because I know as long as olive branches are falling, there will never be peace.

### **Every time I see an Israeli flag I want to scream.**

It's that blue star of David, a star I always thought was beautiful, that often sparkled hanging around my mother's neck, a symbol of liberation for her, a symbol she embraced after divorcing my father and she was free to convert back to her roots, re-connecting to the spirituality of her ancestors. Seeing the star brings me back to my mother's dining room- where I've seen the star emblazoned on candlesticks, wine glasses, Hanukah wrapping paper, and artwork on the walls. It brings me back to the smell of latkes sizzling in the frying pan, to the heat of a weekly sip of sweet wine sliding down my throat and warming my chest, to the feel of ripping apart fresh challah bread after the prayer, to keeping-kosher-arguments about how long we had to wait after a chicken dinner before eating ice cream, to the sound of my mother's voice practicing the next day's Torah reading after dinner. Seeing the star makes me think of the strength of my relatives who survived the Holocaust- all the pictures in my high school history books come to mind- the piles of dead bodies, the ghettos, the concentration camps, the yellow "Jude" Stars of David on everyone's clothes.

### **WTO in Palestine**

Although international economic and financial institutions pushing "free trade" claim to have goals of creating a more "prosperous, peaceful and accountable economic world", their actual effect on Third World nations is devastating. The World Trade Organization (WTO)'s way of "helping" Palestinian agriculture, is encouraging farmers to grow luxury products to correlate with the requirements of the Israeli economy, filling in the gaps of Israeli exports- meant to keep Palestinian farmers from competing with Israeli farmers (Kurzom 13). Instead of supporting farmers to grow strategic crops, such as wheat (which traditionally was grown by Palestinian farmers, but is now all imported from the United States), the WTO has been pushing Palestinian farmers to enter the European market by growing flowers for export. (Kurzom 12) The WTO is pressuring the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture to increase the land grown with flowers from 900 dunums to 125,000 dunums- therefore asking for 58% of the total irrigated land.

For farmers who have been long suffering from debts, closures affecting marketing and an extreme shortage of water, the WTO provides loans, technical assistance, pure water, and assurance of a market to those who abandon growing food to grow flowers. (Kurzom 14) These incentives only last until the farmers are trapped into owing exorbitant amounts of money and losing their infrastructure to grow other crops, and then the benefits are cut back.

Loans are also given to farmers who are willing to grow monoculture products such as strawberries and seedless grapes, to feed an external market -increasing their dependence on water, fertilizers, and chemicals, creating a debt trap. (Kurzom 15) The more land being used to grow luxury products, the less there is for the actual needs of Palestinian communities, forcing them to be less and less self-reliant, depending more and more on Israeli and other Western countries' products.



## Environmental destruction & chemicals

"Chemical pesticides are made from the same components used by Western countries during World Wars I and II to produce explosives and poisonous gases, using derivatives of ammonia, bromide, mustard gas, sulfates and others. As it seems, substituting the use of these chemical substances for warfare purposes that kill people directly, they are now used in the form of "agricultural pesticides" to gradually kill people and destroy the environment." ~George Kurzom, *Chemical Company Control Over Our Food*

Palestinian farmers now have one of the highest pesticide usage in the world- with 35% of their agriculture production costs going to purchasing pesticides. (Kurzom 23) Israeli suppliers provide Palestinian farmers with pesticides that are so toxic, they are illegal to use in Israel. Israeli agricultural hand guides provided for farmers actually recommend using pesticides that have been banned internationally because of their extreme damage to health and environment. (Kurzom 24) About 24 chemical pesticides that have been prohibited or restricted worldwide are still being used in Palestine, including Lindane, Dorspan, DDT, and Tamaron (Qare 1).

When speaking with farmers from Deir el-Ghassou, they've said that since the intifada, chemical fertilizers and pesticides have become very expensive and the amounts they are able to use has become very restricted. My friend Jallal told me that soon after the intifada started, the army raided the farmers' supply store and confiscated the pesticides and herbicides, to keep them from "making explosives". Now with restricted amounts of chemicals that their crops are now dependent on, many crops are being lost to pests.

In Aritil, a village neighboring Dier el-Ghassou, two of the groundwater wells have had to close because they are poisoned with farming chemicals. Farmers in this area have also noticed animals' health declining, and the rate of cancer in their children increasing. This is also due to the chemical fertilizer factory that was built on the border of Tulkarm - it was originally a factory inside of Israel but was moved because of it's toxicity. People say the factory only operates on days when the wind is blowing into Tulkarm. One farmer I spoke to who works with the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee, said that 18% of the people in the Tulkarm region are suffering health problems from exposure to chemicals the factory releases.

## The Olive Branches Are Falling

In Nazlat'Isa machines are destroying homes and killing olive trees to build a fence, to put the entire village in prison. For the safety of the Jewish children, for peace and security, the olive branches are falling. In this moment a screaming yellow monster with a metallic scream and razor sharp teeth is tearing into a grandmother tree, ripping her from her roots, scattering her little green grandbabies all over the ground. They will never be ripe, they will never reach the mouth of the farmer's hungry grandbaby. I met a man with twelve children who has fifty dunums of olive trees that our being devored by the monsters. He has also received an order that his shop that sells farha and bousa (little chickens and ice cream) will also be destroyed to make way for this wall. "What will my children do? What choice do they have but to become thieves?"

The other day I saw a little boy at Jabarh checkpoint, he was covered in dirt and crying because the soldiers wouldn't let him through. An elderly Palestinian man told me "don't take pity on him, don't help him pass, he is a thief from the refugee camp. He wants to go to Israel to steal." But what choice does he have when everything has been taken from him? Knowing he is a thief makes me want to help him to get through more, so he can take some back.

In Nazlat'Isa there is a man whose house was destroyed the same day he was to be married. He was woken up at sunrise to bullets, tear gas and soldiers beating his parents, brother, sister and him, forcing them to leave their home. The second floor was being prepared for him and his bride, but there was no time to rescue any of the new furniture they had just bought. That night, after watching their home crumble, the family still had the pre-wedding henna party and the next day, in his brother's home, he was married.

I met a man the other day who when he found out there was a demolition order on the house he was building, he and his family moved in, although it was not ready to live in, and started planting fruit trees- clementines, cherries, bananas.... I told him I hope the trees will still be standing at harvest time. "Enshella" God willing, he says.

Here in Tulkarm, it is almost pomegranate season, but not quite- the outsides are pinkish- yellow and the insides are the color of pink lemonade- but everyone is picking and eating the fruits- the markets are full of unripe "romaan". I have never eaten a pomegranate that wasn't extremely ripe- what's a pomegranate if it's not blood ruby red- bursting open with sweetness- exploding out of it's skin with flavor? Maybe we don't wait here because no one knows tomorrow... Maybe tomorrow the pomegranate trees will be cut, or we will all be dead. Better to eat a pink pomegranate today than never eat one at all. But why must the Palestinians live in such fear and uncertainty- in the name of security?



While I was in the West Bank, I met with two Palestinian organizations that are working to improve farmers' situation. The Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (P.A.R.C) is fighting destructive free trade policies and the uprooting of traditional agricultural practices with colonialist Western agriculture by setting up a "fair trade" with Europe to export organic olive oil, dates and grapes, and providing training for organic farming methods and saving local seed so farmers can have another option to the Israeli hybrid seed companies.

I also met with the Ma'an Development/Permaculture Center which started as a project in self-reliance, training women how to make their own processed foods - jams, canned vegetables, etc. instead of buying Israeli goods. Now they are working on training farmers to return to traditional Palestinian agricultural practices before chemicals were used, and to adopt permaculture techniques- including mulching, composting, and alternative pest control- countering the propaganda farmers get from the Ministry of Agriculture, which is funded by chemical companies to promote pesticides.

Ma'an finds that of the farmers who take their trainings, 5% become completely organic, 25% adopt some of the techniques they learn, but for rest it is too expensive and time consuming and they cannot afford to change- which is the case of all of the farmers I spoke to in Tulkarm- that if someone could guarantee that using organic methods would be successful, and financially support the losses, they would all gladly abandon pesticides, but they are afraid because they cannot afford to potentially lose an entire crop to pests. Ma'an does find that farmers who take their trainings and learn about the dangers of pesticides, in all of their home gardens (where they are growing food for their own families) they completely adopt organic methods.

It was very inspiring to meet with these groups who are fighting the occupation by using permaculture as a method of resistance. Reaching self sufficiency and independence from Western agriculture and Israeli inputs will surely strengthen Palestinian economy and loosen the powerful grip and control Israel has over Palestinian people. However, because of the strength of Israel's brutal military force, it is difficult to imagine the reality of this happening- won't bulldozers and tanks always be stronger than fruit trees?

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This factory in Tulkarm is one example of many Israeli factories causing destruction to the Palestinian environment; in fact, it is very common for factories that are denied licenses to operate in Israel to be moved to the border, or to Israeli settlements inside of the occupied territories. The most dangerous industries are chemical industries- (plastics, batteries, spark plugs, aluminum, leather, dyes, etc.) which produce poisonous elements such as cadmium, chromium, and arsenic that contaminate the soil, air, and underground water. (Kurzorn 19) In Tubas, a main agricultural region, six Israeli settlements are dumping industrial wastes into the spring water that is used to irrigate farmland. In addition, sewage from Palestinian villages where Israel has denied permits for building wastewater treatment plants is also contaminating this area's water, but because of Israel's control of the groundwater, this is the only water available for the farmers to use. The increase in pollutants in the soil have increased the diseases and pests attacking the crops; therefore, farmers multiply the amount of internationally illegal chemicals they use to compensate. Due to all of these factors, cancer rates are increasing drastically in Tubas village. (PARC interview)

#### WATER

Since the beginning of the occupation, Israel has been profiting from stealing Palestinian water resources and selling it back to them, while maintaining complete control over the water they permit them to use.

"The second day after occupying the West Bank in 1967, the Israeli military issued military order No. 92, which would prohibit all water development, drilling and infrastructure building in the West Bank, unless a permit was obtained from the military "water officer". To this date, not a single permit has been issued, for agriculture or domestic use, in any of the areas which benefit from the Western Aquifer, demonstrating Israel's iron grip over Palestinian water resources."

- (Palestinian Hydrology Group 53)

Today, the building of the Wall is having a huge affect on water sources, the first phase has already grabbed 50 wells- either isolating them west of the wall or in the "buffer zone" east of the Wall, and 25 wells and cisterns have been destroyed (PENGON 25)

So in addition to contaminating the few water sources Palestinians have left, the state of Israel has complete control over the water they do have access to and continues their legacy of confiscating more and more Palestinian water sources, redirecting the water to Israeli settlements inside of the occupied territories and Israelis within the "green line".



Israel uses 57.1% of the total available resources in the Occupied territories, and makes available only 8.2% of water to Palestinians. On a daily basis each Israeli uses an average of 270 liters per day, while the Palestinian average daily use in urban areas is 50 liters per day, which is half of what the World Health Organization deems necessary to meet basic needs. (Palestinian Hydrology Group 54) Much of the water stolen for use in settlements is used for swimming pools, decorative gardens, and grass fields, while Palestinians suffer from a shortage of drinking water and farmers can barely pay to have their crops watered. For Israelis, water is subsidized by the government, and so Israeli farmers pay only a fraction of what Palestinian farmers pay: in 2001, Palestinians were paying \$.07 per cubic meter, while Israelis only paid \$.014 per cubic meter of water. (Kurzum 17)

According to farmers I spoke to in the Tulkarm region, water prices have gone up drastically since the second intifada- while they used to have to pay \$8 for an hour of irrigation, it now costs \$20, or about 90 shekels. Farmers are infuriated that they are now being forced to pay for their own stolen water, and cannot afford to irrigate as much as they need to.

The World Bank's suggested solution to the farmer's crisis in their 1996 Report on Water in the Middle East was for Palestinians to "give up agriculture" because it requires too much water (Kurzum 18). This statement is not only in complete disregard of the fact that there is enough water for everyone to have enough if water wasn't being stolen to water lawns on stolen land, but advising Palestinians to "give up agriculture" in a society where agriculture is the backbone of that society, is to tell them to give up living!

### Challenges of Marketing Produce

The shift of planting a diversity of food crops that are ready to harvest at different times spread throughout the year, to the Western practice of all farmers planting the same monocrop has resulted in a large surplus of a few foods at the same time, making it economically impossible to market the yield, and so it is sold for either very low prices, or the crops are left unpicked. In Toubas, farmers have to sell a truckload of vegetables for 400 shekels (\$100), which comes to 1 shekel per box (20 cents).  
Not having the funds for massive food processing infrastructure, a lot of vegetables are grown in excess and wasted, and then when they are out of season they are bought back from Israel at a very expensive price. (Kurzum 20)

In addition, the attack on Palestinian freedom of movement with the building of the Wall, and increasing checkpoints and closures, has made it extremely difficult for farmers to transport and sell their products. Produce on its way to sell in Israel and other parts of Palestine can be held "for security reasons" until it spoils.

In Abu Bassal's 40 years of farming, he has never had such losses as this year (2003), by September he had already lost 20,000 shekels this year because of closures. The suicide attack on August 18 that killed 20 people on a bus in Jerusalem, resulted in a closure that devastated the farmers in the Tulkarm region. I talked to a group of farmers a week after the closure began and after watching their crops at the peak of harvest time rot, they expressed to me that 99% of farmers in their village were ready to leave farming.

### The Wall

In June 2002 Israel began building the first phase of a Wall that would cut off and cage the West Bank with a "security fence" as some Israelis call it, or "Apartheid Wall" as some Palestinians call it. This Wall is not being built on the "green line"/1967 border but is being built up to 6 km inside of Palestine causing immense land confiscation, de facto annexation, and destruction of cultivated lands. The Wall is going to be built on 14,680 dunums of confiscated land of 51 villages and towns, while the Wall separates farmers on each side of the Wall from 100,615 dunums of land. (Pengen 16) Over half of the land between the wall and the green line is cultivated with vegetable crops, greenhouses, citrus and olive trees, or used for grazing fields. (Pengen 25) So far, the building of the Wall has razed 510 dunums of cropland, 29 agricultural shelters, 14 km of roads, and 300 dunums of greenhouses, and everyday the bulldozers destroy more. (Pengen 27)

Israel has stated that farmers' access to the lands on the other side of the Wall will be permitted under certain restrictions; however, of the 51 communities on the Wall's path, 25 have already reported that residents have no access to land. The inability to access lands will surely lead to land confiscation- the Israeli High Court has ruled that land which remains "uncultivated" for three years is subject to seizure. The lands west of the Wall will forcibly become "uncultivated" as farmers are unable to tend to them, thus will be expropriated to the state of Israel. For those that will have access to their lands but are isolated in the zone between the Wall and the Green Line, they are isolated from their markets-meaning a total loss in revenue. Farmers in this zone are already unable to continue cultivating lands because of their existing debts, and so the fate of these farmer's lands are similar to those that cannot access them. (Pengen 17) In addition, communities in the zone between the wall and the green line now "get in the way" of building new settlements and Israeli infrastructure; thus, the Israeli military has begun forcing communities out of this zone.