

A TALK WITH MY JAILER

di ELEONORA GATTO

PREFACE

The narrative line of this short story was inspired by a real encounter which took place between an arrested Palestinian and a soldier.

The day I went to greet M. back home after his release, he told me about a weird encounter he had experienced during his arrest. When I first heard the story, I was baffled. While he was awaiting to be interrogated, a soldier in civilian clothes approached him and asked explanations about the occupation. Once the initial distrust overcome, M. engaged in a political discourse which tackled different aspects of the Israeli occupation. I found it a paradox that such discourse had to happen in a detention structure. Although the soldier presented himself in civil clothes, probably searching for a common ground, M. was under arrest in a military area with his hand cuffed. Therefore the oppressive colonial-militaristic based hierarchy was preserved not allowing a real human exchange.

Nevertheless I found the episode of a certain significance as on one side it highlights the ignorance and lies which reign in the military environment, on the other side the will of an individual to search beyond the lies he is told.

My aim in this short story is to touch sensitive issues related to the ongoing Israeli occupation by following a narrative line in which appear also personal thoughts and considerations developed during my five months stay in Palestine. As I was shaping the dialogue I tried to remind myself what my objectives were in order to guide the narration towards that direction.

Firstly, I tried to highlight the fact that what the Palestinians have to endure isn't a conflict as it's often referred to, but blatant colonialism carried out by a racist-based Zionist regime.

The Israeli State is advancing ethnic cleansing and genocide against the indigenous Palestinian population by confiscating their land, stealing their resources, demolishing their houses, killing civilians and covering these criminal acts by fostering its people's fears and brainwashing them playing the security card.

Secondly, I tried to give space to the nonviolent popular struggle focusing in particular on Nabi Saleh's case that's becoming a leading example within the movement. The importance in tracing the historical events that brought the village to embrace the nonviolent popular struggle is fundamental also to clarify a widespread misunderstanding

about Nabi Saleh's struggle. Often, also on news channels, it's reported that Nabi Saleh's struggle is against the Apartheid Wall. A serious mistake that stresses the lack of research and knowledge of the context. Nabi Saleh's struggle is in particular against the expansion of the Halamish settlement; and in general against the occupation in all its elements.

However, Nabi Saleh goes even further, elaborating a global analysis of the occupation. The local analysis of the context is integrated with a more global perspective resulting in the awareness that it's the capitalistic system which fosters the protraction of the colonialism and the supremacy of the colonial system. Finally, the soldier's voice personifies the usual contradictor proposed by the Israeli society or by the white privileged classes

which tend to repeat old colonial approaches. I've been quite faithful in reporting the content of the dialogue told to me by M. I believe it's important to give him voice considering his active role in the Palestinian popular struggle. However, inevitably, the answers given to the soldier's questions have been also contaminated by my own understanding and vision of the occupation.

It must be said that, after the first draft, I was very doubtful about publishing the story. I was worried I could send out a distorted message to the readers. In particular, I didn't want to spread the idea that usually the IDF soldiers are so softhearted. On the contrary, their passive acceptance in taking orders without questioning the hierarchy and the system they're serving makes them

partners in crime of the ongoing occupation.

Ignorance, servility, brainwashing, camaraderie and a strong gender-based hierarchy where brutal strength is recognized as an added value are some of the elements that annihilate the soldiers' humanity.

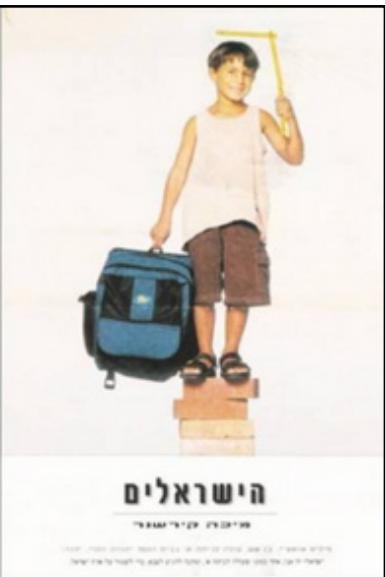
Growing up in Israel's militarized society means developing a distorted vision of peace and violence. The latter insinuated so much in daily life that it underwent to a normalization process. This partially explains the excessive brutality used by the IDF in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Nevertheless, there are Israeli citizens that have been able to reject this violent logic choosing to follow their conscious by refusing to





serve the army. The refuseniks right now represent a minority, but can potentially be a changing force within the Israeli society. The major challenge they will have to face, in my opinion, is the ability to give themselves a more organized and united structure in order to actually influence the policy makers.

I overcome my doubts by decided to add two short chapters that could give a broader perspective on the issue.



In the first chapter I focus on the Refuseniks contextualizing them in the militaristic Israeli society and tracing a brief history of the Israeli peace movement. I believe it's fundamental to give credit to the stands that these young Israelis have taken as they do represent a strong alternative and an example for other Israelis. In particular the last generations of Shministim have developed a more universal view of struggle for liberation claiming their position against any kind of oppression and asking for a more inclusive society based on equal rights and justice. Many of these refuseniks joined the Palestinian popular struggle against the Zionist occupation by participating to the weekly demonstration in resistant villages such as: Nabi Saleh, Bi'ilin, Ni'ilin and so on.



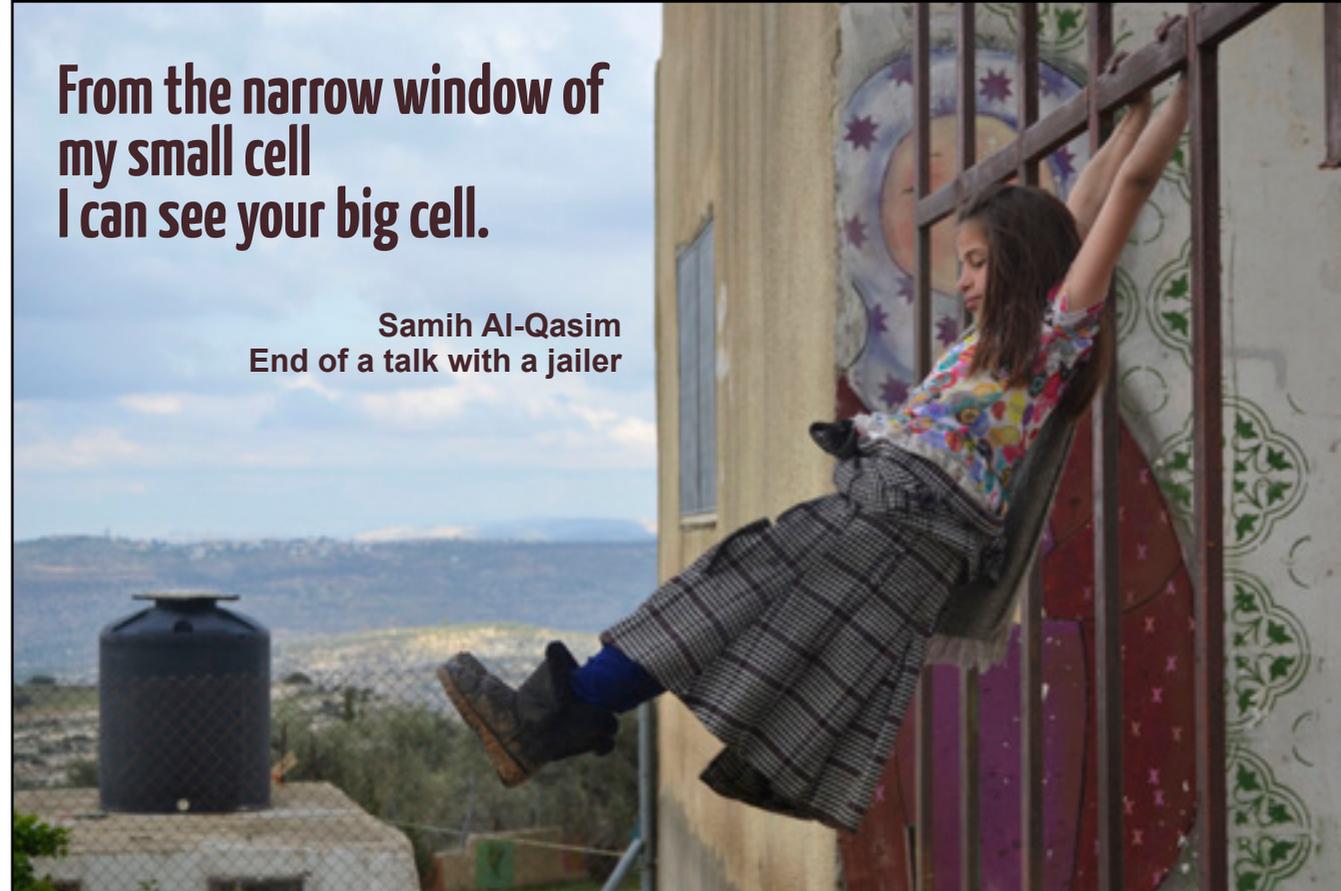
The second chapter, instead, focuses more on the specific context of Nabi Saleh. It's hard to summarize 65 years of sufferings, abuses and injustices, but I'll try to trace its history and give some data and inputs on the ongoing human rights violations that the residents must daily endure. Finally, what I'd like to stress about Nabi Saleh is that their resistance doesn't start in 2009 with the confiscation of the water spring, as many may think. Their political involvement can be dated back to the British mandate and has continued constantly assuming different forms according to the historical periods and on the needs. They have a glorious past of resistance which is seen as a heritage from which take inspiration. Their recent change of strategy towards a nonviolent popular struggle, in fact, takes impulse from the first intifada which had the force to include every aspect of the Palestinian society regardless the affiliations, the gender or the social class.



This grassroots movement which seeks a national impact, in my opinion, is a valid alternative to the so-called negotiations and corrupted governmental policies. It will be interesting to observe in the next months how Hamas and Al-Fatah, following the reconciliation, will decide to relate with the movement.

From the narrow window of my small cell I can see your big cell.

Samih Al-Qasim
End of a talk with a jailer



I

At that point I had completely lost the count of the hours passing by. The darkness I was trapped in since I was kidnapped from my house was thrusting on my eyelids. Blindfolded, the shadows were swallowing me, and all I could hear were random words in Hebrew. I don't know where they were taking me nor what I had done to get arrested. They wouldn't say.

Waiting in a cold room, seated on a bench, the wintery draughts were creeping in my bones. I was forcing myself not to shake. I didn't want to give them the satisfaction of thinking that their uniform, their rough manners and arrogant smirk could break me. I've been exposed to their oppression since the day I was born and their hatred just made me more determined to fight for my right to exist and resist. The plastic band tied around my hands was sinking in my skin, I could feel every muscle in my arms, coerced behind my back, burning in pain. No food, no water, no toilet was permitted. International law: just words to be used at their own convenience. But still, we are the terrorists.

II

The landscape from my rooftop is breathtaking. You can see the whole valley and in the clear days you even manage to see the sea off Jaffa. Sinuous contours chase and overlap each other originating the hill on which my village leans on.

The clinging roots of the strong olive trees keep us steadfast, the blossoming almond trees gives us hope as winter isn't everlasting, the red spring flowers in the fields provide shade to our martyrs and every stone reminds us that we have the right to chase away the oppressors from our land.

This is Nabi Saleh.

Nabi Saleh, that night, was immersed in a peaceful atmosphere. At least until 2:00 a.m., when the blasting banging on the doors broke the charm and the menacing shouts snatched us from our sleep. 300 full armed Israeli forces were deployed against a village of 500 unarmed civilians. They stormed the village when the only witnesses could be the stars guarding over us, they broke into our houses, they threatened us, forced us to wake up all the family members, also the newborns, because they were searching for 'wanted' people of whom they had photos. Here you are born a potential terrorist.

Five of us were arrested. Amongst us a 15 years old kid, already his second time.



III

I can hear the screeching of the opening door and footsteps getting closer.

I was expecting to be brought in front of the interrogator, but instead I feel the blindfold slide down. I naturally open my eyes and a beam of light makes me go blind again. When I finally manage to put into focus, I notice a man standing in the middle of the room, staring at me. He smiles, hands me some juice and seats next to me.

"I took off my soldier uniform so you'd see me as an equal; I'd like to talk to you."

I couldn't help being suspicious. One of my first memories related to the military green outfit dates back to when I was about seven years old. The soldiers, during an incursion, lined us up in the main square of the village keeping us under the blazing summer sun. The clockwise movement of our shadows stressed the hours fading one after the other. I don't remember what aroused my hilarity, but I dared to laugh in front of them causing the rage of a soldier who grabbed my head and smashed it several times on the nearby wall.

Now, a soldier in civil clothes is approaching me asking for a confrontation to be addressed with the use of words and not with the live ammunitions of his M16. I realize that without his green armor, my perception of him has changed: before being a threat, he's a human being. I tell him so.

He smiles again and without hesitating he immediately asks:

"Why do you throw stones at us?"

The most inflated question I receive. As if the whole occupation issue could be minimized to that act. I sigh and answer:

"Isma31, I won't talk about myself, but I'll tell you why Nabi Saleh throws stones at you. Actually, you already should know, since you are rendering service there."

"I don't or I wouldn't ask. You just come to the checkpoint and throw stones at us."

"I see, so paraphrasing... what you're telling me is that you are working in some random village of the West Bank of which you don't know nothing about, nor its history or its demands, and even so, just because you receive orders, in your ignorance you feel perfectly fine in controlling our mobility, in humiliating us, in expropriating our land, in carrying actions of intimidation against us, in torturing us, in shooting us and in killing us! You are making our life miserable just because we are Palestinians, yet we shouldn't have the right to react to your inhumanity? We are still mourning our ancestors' sufferings added to the ones we endure daily, and even if we believe that any mean is justifiable against

the colonizer, we choose to respond to your oppression with nonviolence. You should be the ones carrying this painful burden, you should be the ones considered accountable for it and be ashamed! Instead you carry weapons. Sumud, inner resistance, is what keeps us steadfast. It's not a choice but a must for us. It's a daily tension against a systematic ethnic cleansing supported by the institutional powers. Be it the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli Zionist government or the International Community. The stone is the symbol of our resistance and its launch a clear statement towards the occupier: "You're not welcome. Go away from our land."

It's not thrown to harm, but to protect oneself, it's an instinctive reaction."

I pause a bit before proceeding with settled voice: "You repress us thinking you'll eventually be able to tame our spirit, but until we don't receive justice and freedom, it won't happen. The occupation must end."

He bursts into laughter "I doubt that will ever happen!" and continues: "And in Nabi Saleh, what is the original issue?"

"Nabi Saleh has a glorious past of resistance. If you mean what has triggered our outrage, it's been the confiscation of our land. You allowed the Halamish settlement to be established and eventually to expand. You didn't intervene when they illegally annexed agriculture land belonging to us from generations, you were accomplices. International law forbids the occupier from transferring its own civilians into the territory it occupies, nevertheless your government offered financial

benefits and incentives encouraging Jews from all over the world to move in cozy gleaming apartments erected on stolen land."

"Then file a complaint and go to court." he said with an annoyed tone.

"Well, thanks for the advise. We already did. Twice." I answered, catching him off guard. "In 1978, the Israeli High Court ruled that the confiscation was illegal and that the lands had to be returned to their rightful owners. However, as it often happens here, the decision was never enforced and we continued to witness to the continuous grabbing of our lands. In 2008, we went to court again and once again it was recognized Palestinian land, Your court sent bulldozers to destroy the fence that was preventing us the access. When we finally managed to set foot on our propriety, we were attacked by the settlers with gun shots and stones. At the time, you stood there with no intention to stop them and you still don't, when they enter the village with the intent to vandalize it. A year later, settlers, feeling strong of their untouchable aura, expropriated

more private land including the natural spring 'Ayn al-Qaws, renaming it Mi'yan Maeer. That was our only natural water resource."

I pause to take my breathe, before asking: "Now I have a question for you: as a soldier you're a slave to how many masters?"

I smile provocatively at him and continue: "You're submissive also to the settlers' will? Is this part of the servility training you received as a soldier? You protect them although they are violent, while you brutally repress us despite being nonviolent. You killed with no mercy two of our bravest men: Mustafa and Rushdie Tamimi. No one ever responded of their deaths, their murders were judged innocent."

"We are soldiers, we must obey to the orders."



Silence fell, saturating the air of unuttered words. Being a soldier is not a good enough justification. Refusenik, are those Israeli citizens that refuse to enter the army rejecting to dominate another nation, to carry out deeds of destruction and dispossession and to become a partner in crime of a State policy based on ethnic cleansing, apartheid, murder of civilians, massacre operations and daily violation of human rights towards Palestinians. I stare at him judgmental, I know my thoughts are piercing through his consciousness. He just lowers his eyes.

“It’s our politicians’ role to find a resolution and that’s why there are negotiations going on with John Kerry’s mediation.”

This time I was the one that burst into laughter: “The peace talks will surely fail.

The US role in these so called ‘peace process’ is to essentially act as Israel’s advocate. Palestinians’ are not even considered as a parti in this negotiation.

Not even from our own authorities, who overwhelmed by corruption, they silence its people’s clear demands. We will not surrender our rights, as the U.S.

And Israel have long insisted. Even if our leadership might consider it, the people won’t tolerate such outcome. Consider these peace talks as bogus, they’re just a petty coverage which allows your government to persist with its expansionist policy fragmentizing even further the territory. The subtle aim is to sabotage the remote possibility to establish a Palestinian State. Since the talks have started the number of settlers has increased radically, the settlements have expanded becoming actual towns or cities, proof that Israel isn’t willing to withdrawal from the West Bank. We are tired of living as prisoners in our own country, we want peace, but not an imposed peace dictated by Israel.”

“Than what’s the solution?”

“People are the solution. We all must get rid of the occupation ruling our minds, we must be able to dare, visualize and fight for an alternative future. The institutional suggested one hides only interests and profits.

Many will call it utopia at first, but that’s only because it expects more audacity, engagement and passion. We need more visionaries.

Nabi Saleh, since five years, has chosen to embrace the nonviolent popular struggle. It inherited the spirit from the first Intifada and learnt from the previous experiences of nonviolent struggles, such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mandela, in order to forge a Palestinian model to follow. Next to us, Internationals and Israeli activists support and share our fight for liberation. We don’t



deny our past of armed resistance, but we realized that this strategy change is functional to the time being and will guide us to the end of the occupation, in its whole. The strength of this movement resides in its horizontal participative base which allows anyone to contribute to the struggle regardless the religion, nationality and social class. The only condition is to feel ready to engage in a battle for freedom. Our approach is, de facto, already laying the foundations for a one state solution.”

“The Two States solution would give you a State of your own, why don’t you support this possibility?”

“Simply because it’s not a feasible possibility. It’s a lie that has been going on for too long, feeding the resignation of many. Have you ever seen a map of what’s left of the West Bank? The absence of territorial continuity, due to the settlements, the wall and the checkpoints, makes it impossible for a State to be established. The settlements would have to be dismantled, fueling the vicious circle of hatred and never-ending claims of sovereignty and ethnicity over the land. The bloodshed would be endless. Above all, our struggle is firstly for freedom, not for independence. The two aren’t synonymous, our right to self-determination must lead to the right of return, equality and justice for all citizens and that’s possible only with the deconstruction of the zionist ideology with guides Israel’s policy. We want to be able to live in a State where humanity, equality, justice, mobility and cultural self-determination is guaranteed to all its citizens. Only this choice will ensure a lifetime peace.”

The soldier was speechless, his head bowed, starring into nothingness. I could tell that I had been able to shake his awareness, to raise questions kept bound in his deeper meanders.

“I’ll tell you one more thing before I get interrogated and I get to know about my destiny. Don’t fool yourself, you’re not here to protect your beloved State, you are here to preserve the interests of a minority in power. They are playing with your fears, brainwashing you, raising you in the suspicion towards the Other, caging you within false beliefs to better control your mind.

Maybe one day you’ll get killed, maybe one day you’ll kill me. Do you think they’ll care? They won’t, as long as they continue benefiting from the status quo: the occupation. You should give your life a more meaningful purpose instead of perpetuating crimes.”

Just before they took me away, he raised his head and I managed to glimpse in his eyes the emotional turmoil that was taking over the confident military posture that he showed off all through the confrontation.

IV

I don't know what happened to him after our encounter. He probably went back taking orders pushing his guilt back in the dark meanders of his conscience. Or maybe not. As for me, I was released after a pitiful attempt of incrimination with made up charges. I had to pay 1000 shekels for the expenses the army had to bear for my arrest.

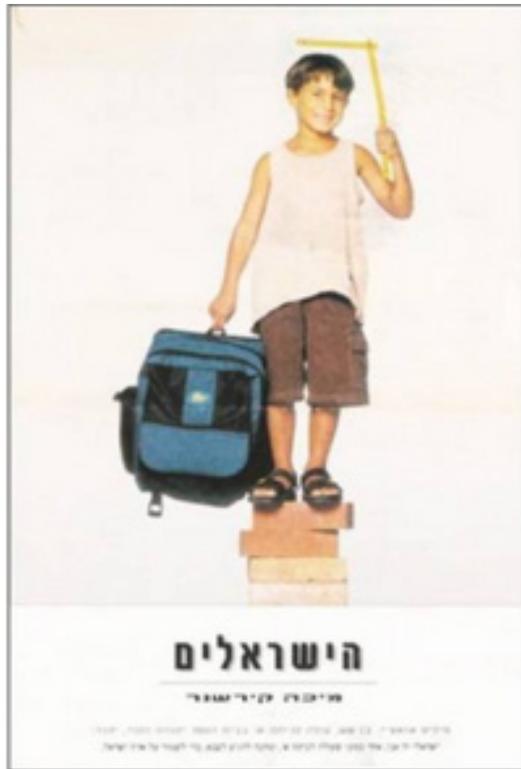


ISRAEL: A MILITARIZED SOCIETY

Militarization in Israel is fundamental to keep in power the powerful and to repress the voiceless.

Militarization is present in all spheres of the Israeli society: economic, political, judicial and educational. Armed young soldiers roam the cities, streets are named after wars, military units and generals and even integration in the Israeli society is based on the military service which is conceived as an unquestionable duty. Its omnipresence infuses a sense of proximity and familiarity which inevitably leads to a process of normalization towards war and violence and to a distorted concept of peace and justice. This indoctrination, combined to a constant induced fear in the citizens, magnifies the veneration of Jewish nationalism and of the Israeli army.

“The problem with the army does not begin or end with the damage it inflicts on Palestinian society. It infiltrates everyday life in Israeli society too: it shapes the educational system, our workforce opportunities, while fostering racism, violence and ethnic, national and gender-based discrimination”.



**“AN ISRAELI IS LIKE ME,
SOMEONE WHO STARTS
1ST GRADE, AND WAITS
TO GO TO THE ARMY IN
ORDER TO PROTECT THE
LAND OF ISRAEL”**

Political sphere

Militarization in the political sphere is evident from the pivotal role that the security mantra assumes in the decision making processes. False threats are used by the government to give priority to the security issue, often used to justify the violations of human rights. Furthermore, the military experience is kept in high consideration in the political career. In the last years all the Prime Ministers and cabinet ministers were ex generals.

Economic sphere

Security is prioritized in the national budget. It is mainly allocated to military needs, weaponry and salaries. The Israeli security-industrial complex is one of the most profitable in the world.

Educational sphere

The education system in Israel tends to normalize war and military service.

Since young age, children are taught to see service as a natural stage and a duty.

The perpetuation of the military ethos, myths and narrative through memorials, rituals and ceremonies are all aimed to prepare the youth for the military service.

Therefore, the Israeli educational system is somehow cooperating with the military one by proposing, for example, initiatives in which elementary students go on field trips with military guides which focus on the past wars or cases in which kindergarten children collect gift packages accompanied by thankful letters to be sent to soldiers.

HISTORY OF THE PEACE MOVEMENT AND OF THE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

The peace movement in Israel can be dated back in the 70's. The victory of the Likud party in the '77 elections (determining a drastic shift to the right wing) combined to the on-going occupation of the Palestinian territories led to the creation of Israel's first widespread peace movement: **Peace Now**. The demands were mainly to end the building of the Israeli settlements focusing on the relation between peace and the security of Israel "as the state of the Jewish people", therefore keeping a Zionist perspective of the conflict.



Photo:
Yesh Gvul demonstration
[archive photo]

When the Lebanon war in 1982 broke out, it seemed logic for 58 high school students to question the government's commitment in ensuring peace. They wrote a letter to Golda Meir expressing their dissent and giving space to another form of protest towards the occupation: the refusal to serve the army. **Yesh Gvul** (Hebrew for There's a limit), became the ambassador of such tactic causing a fracture within the peace movement. In fact Peace Now condemned the decision to refuse military service.

Following the Oslo Accords in 1992, the peace movement was pretty much lethargic believing that the negotiations would have brought to an effective peace.

An important organization that was founded in those years is **New Profile**, a group of feminist women and men who ask for a demilitarized Israeli society. Their work consist in dismantling the militarized structure which is contaminating all sectors of the Israeli society and culture as well as in promoting a support network for the growing national movement of young Israeli refusers.

However, it was the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000 that prompted many Israelis to object to the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories by refusing to serve in the army or by resisting their draft. Between September 2000 and the end of 2004 over 1,391 Israelis refused to serve in the IDF,

reenforcing the refuser movement. Of particular significance was the letter published on Ha'aretz and signed by 53 reserve combat officers and soldiers which stated: *"We shall not continue to fight beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people."* These signers later funded **Courage to Refuse**.

Concomitantly, a group of high school students called **Shministim** (Hebrew for high school) expressed their dissent in joining the army once they turned 18 years old.

Inspired by the previous letters, many others expressed their refusal in the following years. In each round students signed these letters sending out a radical message: the unwillingness to take part to the Occupation of the Palestinian Territories, to carry out human rights violations and to contribute to a militarized society.

Photo:
Shministim refusers



IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

These major movements present different patterns of refusal which can be explained by the socio-economic, political and cultural changes that have affected the Israeli society in these years.

The first significant distinction is in the ideological structure. Yesh Gvul and Courage to Refusal consider Israel's security a serious issue that must be kept in consideration, but not through the occupation of the Palestinian Territories. It's no coincidence that the components are reserve combat soldiers and officers who support selective refusal.

Their discourse, therefore, remain strongly bond to nationalist and military codes.

On the contrary, New Profile and Shministim are far more radical. They involve female and male activists who fight for an inclusive society based on anti-militarist, pacifist and feminist stances which lead to absolute refusal.

They openly attack the Israeli government accusing it to be a terrorist State:

"we will obey our conscience and refuse to take part in acts of oppression against the Palestinian people, acts that should properly be called terrorist actions."

Shministim letter 2001

to commit crimes, violate human rights and to carry out racist policies:

"Palestinians in the occupied territories live under Israeli rule though they did not choose to do so, and have no legal recourse to influence this regime or its decision-making processes. This is neither egalitarian nor just. In these territories, human rights are violated, and acts defined under international law as war-crimes are perpetuated on a daily basis."

Shministim letter 2014

Even the security issue is challenged stating that actions such as Land expropriation, house demolition, torture, executions etc...

"are not only illegitimate, they don't even achieve their stated goal of increasing the citizens' personal safety. This safety will be achieved only through a just peace agreement between Israeli government and Palestinian people."

Shministim letter 2010

Furthermore, they point out how militarization impose a gender-based chauvinist structure that perpetrates a model of male dominance which is bound to be replicated also in the Israeli society:

"In our opinion, the army encourages a violent and militaristic masculine ideal whereby 'might is right'. This ideal is detrimental to everyone, especially those who do not fit it. Furthermore, we oppose the oppressive, discriminator, and heavily gendered power structures within the army itself."

Shministim 2014

Ultimately, these activists denounce the discriminatory nature of the Israeli State proposing instead an inclusive approach which challenges the definition itself of Jewish State. They aim to deconstruct the collective memories and myths which allows the militarization to be perceived as part of the society, war as unavoidable and security priority as necessary to survival.

Photo: *Two of the high school students who refused to serve the army this year*



Websites

New Profile:

<http://www.newprofile.org>

Shministim:

<http://www.whywerefuse.org/>

Courage to Refuse:

<http://www.couragetorefuse.org>

Peace Now:

<http://peacenow.org.il/>



HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN NABI SALEH

Nabi Saleh is a village of about 500 inhabitants located at 21 km from Ramallah. The area is mainly agricultural land and covers approximately 4,800 dunas. The illegal Israeli settlement of Halamish, which lies in the southern part of Nabi Saleh, hosts about 1,054 settlers and was funded in 1977. Since then it has been expanding, stealing 250 dunums of private Palestinian owned land.

In 1978, the inhabitants of Nabi Saleh presented a complaint to the High Israeli Court against the confiscation of their land. It was sentenced that the lands should have been returned to the original owners, but as it often happens in cases of illegal appropriation of OPTs land, the decision was never enforced.

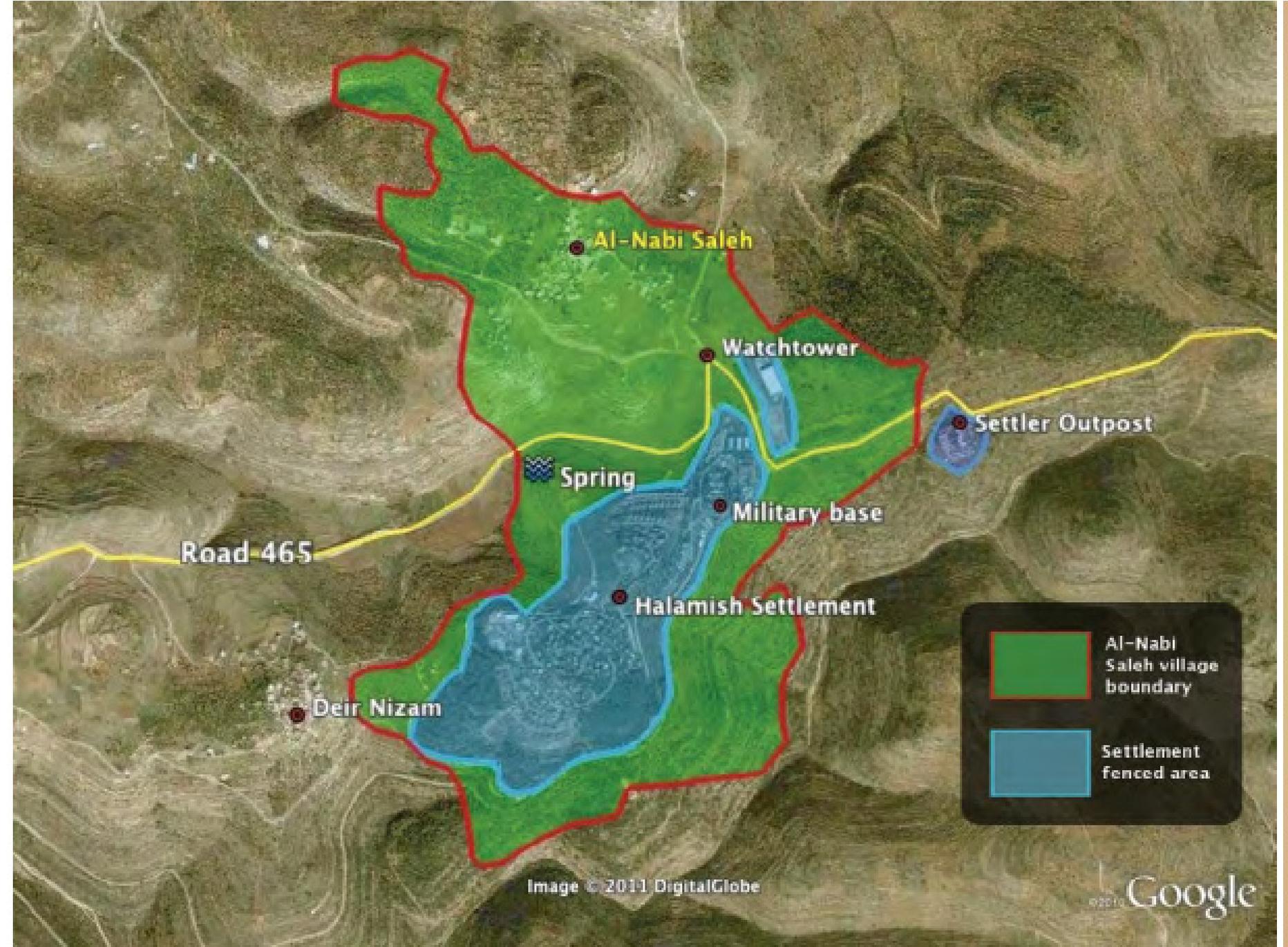
In 2009, the settlers feeling confident by the gained impunity, they expropriated the land around the natural spring of 'Ain al-Qaws. The Israeli Occupation Forces forbid the access to the water source to Palestinians, allowing the entrance to settlers.

The on going land grabbing, the lack of legal protection and endured violence pushed the inhabitants of Nabi Saleh to react. Since 2009, every Friday, they stage a nonviolent demonstration against the expansion of the illegal Halamish settlement, the confiscation of their land and of the oppressive occupation system in its whole. Taking inspiration from the first intifada, which was a popular uprising, Nabi Saleh aims to forge its own model of resistance which doesn't necessary fit in the western definition of nonviolence or peaceful. The strength of this movement resides in the fact that's popular therefore inclusive, anyone can participate contributing according to theirs skills and will.

USE OF VIOLENCE

Every Friday, just after the prayer, the village marches towards the expropriated lands, but never manages to reach them as they are stopped by the Israeli Occupation Forces who shoot tear gas, rubber coated bullets, live ammunition and sound grenades. The use of violence from the IOF has been increasing in the last years as Amnesty International's report Happy Trigger states: *"Israeli forces have repeatedly isolated their obligations under international Human Rights Law by using excessive force to stifle dissent and freedom of expression, resulting in a pattern of unlawful killings and injuries to civilians. They do so with virtual impunity due to the authorities's failure to conduct thorough investigations."* Excessive brutality against the protesters, reckless use of violence and collective punishments are all tactics used not only on Fridays, but throughout the week on daily basis. Their aim is to intimidate and humiliate the movement which represents a real alternative to the polarization of the conflict.

There have already been two martyrs



in the village due to the excessive brutality of the IOF.

On December 10th 2011, Mustafa Tamimi died after being hit by a tear gas canister shot at close range during the demonstration. The investigation for his assassination was closed two years after. The Israeli Military Advocate General

(MAG) claimed that the canister that killed Mustafa was fired "according to the relevant rules and regulations and did not involve any illegality." Therefore, it accepted the soldiers version, who stated that he didn't see Mustafa when shooting from the military jeep. The question that rises spontaneous is: how can it be regular for a soldier to shoot although it doesn't have a

clear perspective of what's going on? Especially during a nonviolent demonstration.

Just one year after, on 17th November 2012, Rushdie Tamimi was shot directly with live ammunition. The IOF shot 80 bullets with no justifications to the residents and the family who tried to assist him. He succumbed two days

after at the hospital of Ramallah.

In both cases there was no legal justice and the murders are still free. Furthermore, the IOF tend to target key components of the resistance, such as the photographer of Nabi Saleh, Bilal Tamimi. Although he always wears a distinguishable vest and is carrying a camera, he is often attacked. The IOF use stun grenades as well as tear gas, rubber-coated bullets against him.

NIGHT RAIDS

Night raids happen very often in Nabi Saleh. Usually, the Israeli Occupation Forces enter the village in the middle of the night storming into the residents' houses.

They carry out destruction and property confiscation as well as harassment and arrest of family members. They wake up the whole family, frightening children and often conduct 'mapping exercises'. These practice consist in taking photos of all the youth and identifying them in order to map them and eventually arrest them.

These raids involve an excessive use of force and intimidation causing harm to unarmed civilians. Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits reprisals against protected persons and their property. Such arrests and violence against entire families and their property constitute forms of collective punishment and aim to break the resistance.

MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

Palestinians are subjected to mobility restrictions and controls due to the policy of territorial fragmentation carried out by the

Israeli State in order to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian State. Such limitations manifest themselves through a system of checkpoints, settler-only apartheid roads and the infamous Apartheid Wall. Freedom of movement is recognized under International Law in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Right.

At the entrance of Nabi Saleh there is a checkpoint which controls the mobility of residents. The Israeli Occupation Forces can close the gate at any time and at their own discretion.

In fact, the Israeli Occupation Forces regularly enforce closed military zones in particular on Fridays when the demonstrations take place. This means that any resident can be arrested even if they're not a threat.

For example, on the 12th of April, the IOF imposed a blockade on the village. All the main entrances were closed and anyone who attempted to enter or leave the village was attacked regardless the threat they represented. Just before the siege, Sarak, the military unit now in service and known for its ruthlessness, announced its will to "impose law and order by suppressing any for of terrorism".

A senseless statement considering that Nabi Saleh is carrying out nonviolent actions against the Israeli occupation. It appears clear that such siege was forced on the village as a collective punishment in the attempt to break the firmness of the popular struggle. After three days of siege, the residents marched to protest against the blockade. Uncontrolled violence was used, but the demonstrators managed to open the main road gate and end the siege.

HOUSE DEMOLITION

The so-called Area C, under the direct Israeli control, covers 60% of the Occupied Palestinian Territories where an estimated number of 180,000 – 300,000 Palestinians live. These areas are conceived by the Israeli State as to serve its own needs, therefore resources are exploited, military trainings take place, and they settlement development is encouraged.

Instead, Palestinians are banned to develop, build or cultivate their own land. De facto, this fosters the ethic cleansing of the Palestinians many of which, pressured by the restrictions, decide to abandon the area.

In Nabi Saleh there are about 13 demolishing orders. At anytime the bulldozers could come and reduce into rubbles a families' habitation.

ARRESTS

First of all, it must be mentioned that the legal framework in which Israel operates is not only discriminatory but in blatant violation to the international law. In fact, while Israeli citizens are subjected to Israeli civil law, Palestinians, both adults and juveniles, are subjected to Israeli military law.

In Nabi Saleh's case, women and children are the most targeted for various reasons. Women are strongly engaged in the popular struggle: they actively participate to the political life and are often on the front lines of the demonstrations. This represents an element of success in the struggle for liberation which the Israelis feel they must repress.

Of about 168 people arrested In Nabi Saleh, 33 are less than 18 years old, and 9 under 15 years old. They were

all brought to Israel to be detained and interrogated. By doing so Israel violated Article 76 of the IV Geneva Convention which forbids transfer of detainees outside the occupied territory.

The Article also specifies that "proper regard shall be paid to the special treatment due to minors". Israel continuously ignores also this last right.

Usually, the most common charge used against children is the stone-throwing, even though most of the time there is little or no evidence at all. The purpose is threefold. First, targeting the most vulnerable exerts pressure on their family and on the entire community in the attempt to weaken the resistance and end the mobilization. Secondly, they are asked to become informants and provide information on figures involved in the demonstrations or on other children. Lastly, it's a way to scare and deter them from participating again in demonstrations. As Defence for Children International Palestine reports, during the arrest children are subjected to tough interrogation techniques which most of the time exceed in torture and ill-treatment. They are both prohibited under international law, including the UN Convention against Torture ratified by Israel in which it's stated that there are no exceptional circumstances whatsoever to permit torture. Furthermore, they are often forced to sign confessions incriminating human rights defenders or other participants.

During the interrogation they are not informed of their rights to remain silent, to seek for a lawyer. They are prevented from seeing a family member and often the interrogations are not recorded.

STUDY CASE IN NABI SALEH

Islam Dar Ayyoub was arrested in the early hours of 23 January 2011, when the IOF stormed his house at 2 a.m. They didn't give any explanation for his arrest. When his family intervened, they were beaten up. At first, he was brought to the Halamish settlement where he was thrown to the ground and left there for several hours. In the morning, he was brought to the police station at Ma'ale Adumim settlement to be interrogated. He was threatened with electric shock treatment or attacks by dogs. During his interrogation Islam wasn't informed of his right to remain silent or of his right to have a lawyer. In fact, his lawyer was prevented from assisting his client. He managed to talk with him only after five hours when Islam, affected by the psychological pressure, had already signed a statement in Hebrew on the understanding that if he did so his family would come and take him home. Instead, the statement incriminated Bassem and Naji Tamimi, two prominent figures of the popular struggle in Nabi Saleh. He then appeared in front of the Military Judge and charged for stone-throwing. He was detained for three months before being released and placed under house arrest, therefore he was not allowed to go to school or leave his habitation.

DESCRIZIONE PROGETTO

Il Servizio Civile Internazionale opera sin dal 2000 in Israele-Palestina a sostegno della popolazione nelle lotte per la fine dell'occupazione militare israeliana, per lo smantellamento del Muro/Barriera di Separazione, per la riappropriazione delle terre e dell'identità negata, attraverso una visione della questione che porti a una trasformazione del conflitto. Lontano da sterili semplificazioni o pregiudizi dominanti, si tende al superamento della logica della separazione, incoraggiando la cittadinanza attiva, mantenendo un approccio orizzontale e sostenendo modalità nonviolente.

Tra i diversi progetti operanti, i progetti di volontariato di lungo termine mirano a sostenere la resistenza popolare palestinese in modo strutturato e continuativo, lavorando insieme quotidianamente verso un comune obiettivo, allargando e rafforzando la relazione di fiducia con i partner, ed incentivando meccanismi di scambio e reciprocità. I volontari sono impegnati in azioni di resistenza civile, campagne e attività di advocacy, realizzazione di laboratori e trainings.

PHOTO REPORTAGE

Le immagini raccolte raccontano la vita di due volontari italiani nel villaggio palestinese di Nabi Saleh, situato poco distante da Ramallah. Nabi Saleh è sede da cinque anni di proteste contro l'occupazione israeliana e la confisca, ad opera dell'esercito israeliano, di terre per la costruzione di insediamenti coloniali, considerati illegali dall'unione Europea e della comunità internazionale. Le proteste si concentrano su una manifestazione popolare e non violenta che gli abitanti lanciano ogni venerdì dal centro del villaggio per dirigersi verso le terre confiscate. In risposta, durante questi anni di proteste, i 400 abitanti tutti, e quindi anche donne e bambini, hanno dovuto subire una repressione militare brutale, fatta di centinaia di arresti, centinaia di feriti e dall'uccisione di due ragazzi - a sangue freddo e mentre erano disarmati - dai soldati israeliani.

La mostra vuole restituire quell'intimità di relazioni che, attraverso il lavoro nella quotidianità, si è instaurata tra due ragazzi italiani durante il loro progetto di Servizio Volontario Europeo e il piccolo villaggio palestinese. La totale condivisione degli obiettivi con il movimento di resistenza popolare, ha fatto sì che tra i volontari e gli abitanti di Nabi Saleh venissero a cadere immediatamente barriere culturali, linguistiche e stereotipi e si instaurasse al contrario un rapporto di fiducia profondo che ha creato legami profondi che forse solo la

potenza delle immagini riesce a restituire.

I volontari ed i ragazzi del villaggio hanno lavorato insieme sulle campagne di sensibilizzazione alla causa della promozione dei diritti umani. Hanno costituito un Youth media team, composto non da fotografi professionisti, ma da attivisti capaci di raccontare attraverso l'occhio privilegiato dei protagonisti una realtà dura, spesso drammatica, ma densa d'umanità e di sogni difficili da realizzare se non attraverso la resistenza all'occupazione.

Attraverso laboratori sull'utilizzo dei diversi media, si è accresciuta non solo la padronanza nei media, fondamentale per costruire canali d'informazione dal basso, sul modello dei movimenti che hanno attraversato negli scorsi anni tutto il mondo arabo, la Turchia e gran parte dell'Europa e del Mondo, ma soprattutto la coscienza di sé come parte di un movimento più grande che valica i confini del villaggio palestinese, dell'occupazione israeliana e lo colloca in linea con aspirazioni e movimenti di resistenza globali.

“And still I rise” è il primo progetto di un collettivo formatosi nel villaggio palestinese di Nabi Saleh dall'incontro tra due volontari italiani di lungo termine del Servizio Civile Internazionale ed i giovani palestinesi del villaggio.

Le immagini raccontano la tenace opposizione di un piccolo villaggio sotto occupazione militare israeliana, che ha deciso di resistere perché nel vissuto quotidiano dei propri figli non vi siano più giochi di guerra, ma possibilità di costruire un futuro degno.



النبي صالح

AN NABI SALIH









































