

Palestinians say “You Are Welcome” – Life Behind the Wall of Colonial Occupation

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Some walls are made of stone
Some of words and whispers
Some walls are never known
Some are buried deep inside us

(Taken from the last four lines of the first verse of “Breaking Down the Walls” on the album Come Into the Light by Susan Grace; Black Dog Productions 2009)

Walls often appear as opinion. Like air they are ubiquitous, their source rarely questioned. Some are cultural, mythological, carried generation to next like genetic inheritance. Some are the product of conditioning by church, state, or advertising. Consider the self-erected wall materialized in a waving flag, a prophylactic, allowing a parent to blindly see his child off to war or the specimen of American free will “obeying his thirst” drinking a can of carbonated sugar water. Perhaps nowhere is this metaphor more demonstrative than when conversation turns to the “Israeli / Palestinian Conflict”. Having seen its many manifestations erected as barriers to peace and justice I was not surprised by opinions volunteered me a year ago after announcing my plan to travel to Occupied Palestine.

Some of these are paraphrased as follows:

‘Why bother? They (the Israelis and Palestinians) have been fighting for thousands of years. Let them kill each other off’ – a local businessman.

‘I can give you vaccinations for typhoid and hepatitis but you’ll have to purchase your own Kevlar Armor. They hate Americans’ - a Physician Assistant at the clinic where I received my travel vaccinations.

‘They do not respect Israel’s right to exist. Israel has the right to use any measures that they deem necessary to protect themselves from these Islamic extremists who want to kill them because they are Jews’ - an electrician.

‘They are violent, hateful and ignorant and don’t hold American values like freedom, respect for others, or education’ – a truck driver.

‘There are Christian and Jewish peace advocates but where are the peace Mullahs?’ -a University employee and local peace activist.

“Taking a walk in another’s shoes” is more than mere adage. Walking alongside another, abandoning afore mentioned barriers and listening is vital to understanding. I thus hoped to gain an understanding of a people generally misunderstood and often vilified in the United States. I found an opportunity to do this by joining a delegation of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World aka the Wobblies) on a mission of solidarity to Palestine. It is not the intent of this article to elaborate that worthy mission. Other Fellow Workers have already done and will do this skillfully (e.g. Industrial Worker February / March 2010 #1723 Vol. 107 No. 2 or www.iww.org). It is my intention however to shatter unfair myth by putting faces on mysterious personages heretofore unrecognized who suffer the cruelest ironies, standing accused of being the victimizers of their oppressors. On the other side of those walls of concrete, fear, hate and mistrust I met some of the kindest, most considerate folk that I have ever come to know. They are my friends. I would like you to get to know them also.

AHLAN WA SAHLAN!

YOU ARE WELCOME!

A walk through the suq (Arabic for market) on my first night in Ramallah was a delight. It seemed that every other person that I met greeted me the same “you are welcome”. Then “where are you from?” “You are welcome” is a gift, a genuine offering given freely to the stranger and an expression of unqualified respect. It is the core and the essence of Arab / Palestinian culture. Throughout that evening and indeed my entire stay in Palestine I was blessed with this respect, generosity, and kindness. When I returned later that night to my room at the Merryland Hotel I had the occasion to reflect. I imagined a Palestinian walking down a street somewhere in the United States wearing a kiffiyya (traditional head scarf). Would Americans say “you are welcome”? The various scenarios that came to mind saddened me. Walls as opinion considered, it is quite possible that this admirable trait is elemental to their sad situation. We Americans with our walls of arrogance have much to gain if we accept their inherent values maybe even emulate their honorable ways.

Mohammed Aruri,

Mohammed Aruri, the delegation’s initial and main contact in the West Bank is a man of heroic stature. Like the giants of labor from US history such as Big Bill Haywood and Mother Jones whom we celebrate for fighting for and defending our rights he has devoted most of his life to the cause of the working class. A man of the most dignified, generous, and unassuming character he has suffered the indignity of prison at the hands of the Israeli government for the crime of union organizing. When the Union of which he had been past president, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), proved to be top down in its management and unresponsive to the needs of the rank and file he organized a new union federation

the Independent Federation of Unions in Palestine (IFUP). The IFUP is structurally democratic and like the IWW politically independent. He is the International and Projects Manager for the Society of North Ramallah Villages For Social and Health Development, which can count among other achievements the construction of a modern health clinic accessible to communities that previously had no access to health care. A champion of human rights he has been a tireless advocate for the Palestinian people and their right to live as human beings free of military and colonial occupation. He has visited the United States in an effort to get “main stream” AFL-CIO labor support but mostly his message has fallen on deaf ears. It is my hope and that of my Fellow Workers to get his message heard.

Marium wa Abu-Marium, Mohammed (Mary and Mary’s Father Mohammed)

Late night on the 24th of November I was not tired. Having not yet made adjustment to circadian disruption I decided to sit in the small lobby of the Merryland at the chance of meeting new friend. A young man sat next to me. We tried to converse: “Salam alaykum”; “Wa alaykum ahsalam”; “Ismii Rob”; “Ismii Hammed”; “Tasharafna Hammed”; “Tasharafna” or rather something less efficient and a bit more awkward. In any case we did get some pleasantries and greetings exchanged and learned each other’s name, his being Hammed (nickname for Mohammed). His English was not much better than my nearly nonexistent Arabic but with patience, perseverance, perspicacity, and a phone call or two to an English speaking friend of his we managed a friendly if somewhat strained conversation.

After having suffered the brutal December 2008 Israeli military attack, Operation Cast Lead, on their home in the Gaza Strip Mohammed and his three-year-old daughter Marium managed to escape and were staying in Ramallah. Destitute, Hammed was trying to find work for himself, as well as medical help for Marium who has Leukemia. They were having little to no luck.

Israel tightly controls the borders of both Gaza and the West Bank strangulating their economies. Although Gaza is far worse off, the West Bank suffers a poverty rate of near 45 percent. Jobs that pay a livable wage are preciously few. There is excellent medical care in Jerusalem but their Israeli issued ID cards prohibit them from going there.

Marium – her dad had happily explained to me that she was named after the mother of Issa (Jesus) - is a lovely and delightful child and like her father intelligent and gregarious. She, like many a child her age is inquisitive and found adventure, getting into anything within reach. One evening while her father was trying to teach me Arabic and I was trying to help him with English, I heard from down the hall a plunk, pling, twang, twang, twang. Marium had found my open hotel room door an invitation and the banjo laying on the bed a temptation. Noisemakers are a delight for most children and this one had her totally immersed. Shiny noisy distractions aside this little person was attentive and bright. The following day she climbed up on my lap and started pointing at things in the lobby. She pointed at the door and

said “bab” (door in Arabic). She then waited for me to reply. When I replied with “bab” she smiled. She then pointed to a cup of water saying “miyah” then again smiled when I replied in kind. When I mispronounced a word she would shake her head and say “la”. Many have experienced similar exchanges with their own or a friend’s child. Role reversal was obvious to me this time though. A three-year-old was teaching me her language.

I’ve lost contact with little Marium and her dad. I don’t know if she ever did get to see a doctor. Hammed tried to get her to a hospital in Jordan at least three times while I was there but their ID cards and the Israeli Check Points kept getting in the way. Israeli security evidently sees threat manifested in a terminally ill little girl. I got to see Mohammed my last morning at the Merryland. He appeared distraught, on his face an expression familiar to me from having seen it in my own mirror, like a man who knows his baby girl is dying and he has little power to save her. At least my Valerie’s humanity was not discounted by a colonial military occupation. I told him that I was honored to have met him and that I would pray for his daughter. He smiled and said “shukran”.

Rawda, Issa, Ragad, and Hannah Khouriya

The first Sunday after the IWW delegation had finished its mission and most of the members had returned to the US I was feeling the need for silent reflective thought. I took an opportunity to attend the Ramallah Friends (Quaker) meeting. After worship, as is the custom, folks introduce themselves. If they have anything of a spiritual or social concern to share they do so. When it was my turn I explained that I had come to Palestine as part of a delegation. Now that that mission was through I was seeking the opportunity to meet families, farmers, and ordinary working class people and hear their stories. Synchronicity was at play because it was there where I met Rawda and Issa Khouriya.

Rawda introduced herself to me and said that she wanted to help. She owned and operated a Bed and Breakfast in the village of Jifna. There I could stay for a very reasonable (“special”) price and she and Issa her husband would take me anywhere I needed to go, introduce me to their many contacts and friends and act as my interpreters. I could not pass this up.

Life under military occupation had already been hard. The Second Intifada (the “throwing off” in Arabic is the name given to the armed rebellion against the Israeli occupation starting in 2001) saw an accompanying increase in draconian security measures and collective punishments dealt out via military violence against civilians.

One evening while sitting in the dining room and enjoying a cup of tea with Rawda she told me of a sleepless night when she and their son Hannah witnessed Israeli gunships raining fire down on Ramallah. Hannah at one point asked her “am I going to die mom”.

Hannah had been attending the first grade at a public school in Ramallah. The process of going into town and back became unbearable. The family was forced to park their car at a checkpoint. Not being permitted to drive further they were forced to take taxicabs. This made taking Hanna to school and picking him up afterwards, going shopping, or visiting friends and family horribly humiliating and difficult.

The economy sank deeper. Work vanished in the West Bank. Work that was formerly in Israel was no longer legally available. Most of the work that was available in Issa's trade – he is a self educated residential / commercial construction contractor - was largely in the illegal (under Article 4 of the Geneva Conventions) Jews only settlements. Once when Issa was building a home for a settler, a doctor who was from the United States, told Issa that he did not belong in the country and that someday he would have to leave. It became increasingly impossible for Issa to continue working in his trade.

Believing that their children come first the Khouriyas decided that it was best to keep the family close and together so they took Hanna out of the public school in Ramallah. They enrolled him and his sister Raggad the following year in the catholic school in Jifna. Issa stopped working out of town and in the settlements so the family is now struggling to make a living by offering their comfortable beautiful home as well as their warm hospitality to those who care to visit.

Upbeat and a joy to be around they took time to show me the positive and good things that are happening in their community as well as struggles that they face. They show a love for each other that many a cynical American family, engrossed in individual agendas and consumed by possessions, would do well to emulate. All they want is to live unmolested, and to have a decent chance with opportunities for their children to lead fulfilling lives. Like most of the people I met in Palestine They do not hate or blame the Jewish or the American people for their troubles. They only ask for fairness and to have their story heard. They dream of the day when more people from the United States come to visit, see that they are not terrorists, and become their friends. They have asked me to be their Ambassador.

Salleh Hammad's Humiliation

Humiliation is a mechanism of oppression used to keep people in their place - at the bottom of the social economic hierarchy. Demonstrated in the form of the sewn on six-pointed star in the ghettos of Poland, a lunch counter in Mississippi, and a bus seat in Alabama, it is a fact of life every day in Palestine.

There are 59 Palestinian Refugee camps with names like Qalandia, Ayda, Ad Duheisha, Jenin and Al Jalazun. They are repositories for the hundreds of thousands who were violently driven out of over four hundred villages and towns by the Israeli military / paramilitary organizations the Irgun, Hagana, and the Stern Gang. Many of these former Palestinian places have been razed and their names removed from

maps. Some of them now have parks or Israeli communities built over them. Although international law and many United Nations Resolutions (e.g. UN Res. 192) say otherwise, the residents of the “camps” are told by Israel that they have no right to return to their homes. Ironically many of the people now living in the Palestinians’ homelands are from the United States. Many believe that they have a right to return to a homeland that they can prove no ancestral connection to save for biblical mythology. This is not only humiliating to Palestinians who can remember or have parents who knew their former homes it is a vulgar contradiction. It should be an embarrassment to thinking Jews in Israel and the Diaspora.

Salleh Hammad, his wife Messar, and their daughter Niveen live in a small home in the Qalandia refugee camp south of Ramallah. On the night that I met them Salleh had just returned from a thwarted attempt to go to work. He had left his home headed for a job in Jerusalem at 4:30 A.M. Jerusalem is 10 km (6.2 mi) “as the crow flies” from Qalandia.

Travel for the Palestinian is never as direct or as convenient as it is for avian or Israelis. He is not permitted to travel the many “Jews Only” roads and thus is forced to navigate convoluted routes that are usually many miles out of the way. In the process he is expected to negotiate a myriad of military checkpoints.

On this day Salleh’s experience was particularly painful. As frequently happens Salleh was held up at the Qalandia checkpoint. This checkpoint with its angry cold steel bars and turnstiles has five dark and unfriendly gates. Although there were almost 200 people at the checkpoint trying to get to work in Jerusalem, the Israelis only had one gate open. Only a few were allowed to pass every half hour. People started to get restless. Knowing that they were going to miss an opportunity to work and thereby have some means to take care of their families many of them got angry. This caused friction within the group and was exacerbated by teasing from the Israeli guards. After being held up for hours at this checkpoint then a subsequent one nearer to Jerusalem Salleh arrived at the job too late to work and was let go. His return trip was similarly convoluted causing him to not get home until after 6:00 P.M.

This is not an isolated or infrequent occurrence. I have talked with farmers in the Jordan valley who have had their produce spoil and paramedics who have had to deliver babies or had to care for the injured, sick and dying after being denied crossing a checkpoint for days. Being denied access to the means of a living or medical care is a violation of basic human rights as well as International Humanitarian Law and the Universal Covenant of Human Rights.

Non-Judicial Punishment

Many who have served in the Armed Forces know the phrase non-judicial punishment. It is a form of “corrective” punishment meted out by the military that bypasses the judicial (in military terms, courts martial) process. In the US military

this is supposed to be an alternative that the service person can opt for instead of a process that may or may not have a potential for harsher punishment.

Extrajudicial punishment however is an every day threat to Palestinians. Since the Oslo Accords Palestine has been divided into three categories. "A" areas are said to be zones where the Palestinian Authority has both civil authority and security responsibility. Area "B" is designated as having Palestinian civil authority and shared Palestinian / Israeli security responsibility. Area "C" is designated as being totally controlled by Israel. In regions designated as Area C the Palestinians are under military civil administrative rule and have no rights under law. The distinction between area designations is more theory than fact because in reality Israel exercises the same administrative powers whenever it wants inside Areas B and A as well. Palestinians can be, have been, and are subjected daily to warrantless arrest and imprisonment without charges.

On Friday December 4th 2009 in the village of Bi'Lin I had the honor of joining a small group of internationals, residents of the village, and Abdallah Abu Rahmah a leader of the nonviolent resistance movement, in a nonviolent protest of the Israeli barrier that cut the village off from the majority of its farmland. A week later on December 10, 2009 Abdallah was at home asleep in the "Area A" city of Ramallah when Israeli soldiers broke into his home, arrested and blindfolded him in front of his wife and children then hauled him off to prison where he sits to this day (March 28, 2010) without charges.

Collective Punishment - Ahmad & Heba

Israel has often utilized collective punishment as an instrument of extrajudicial control. Targets vary in size. For example the December 2008 Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip called "Operation Cast Lead" can be seen as regional and the massacre and razing of the Jenin Camp in 2002 as community. Collective punishment however sometimes reaches down to the family level.

Ahmad, Heba and their two children call the Ad Duheisha Camp home. Families in this camp are like those in others that I visited, limited by the small footprint of their community. When families inevitably grow generationally they either have to find residence outside the community or build vertically onto the existing family home in the camp. This makes for small square foot per floor multi floor residences with sons, daughters, granddaughters etc. living above and below each other.

In 2004 Ahmad's brother got in trouble with the Israeli authorities. I don't know the particulars but his infraction was cause for his arrest and imprisonment. His imprisonment was insufficient to satisfy the Israeli authorities so they evacuated the family and their neighbors one night, set charges in the home, and demolished it.

Like most of the other Palestinians that I met Ahmad is aware and sensitive to the special relationship that the United States government has with the Israeli

government at the expense of them and other Arab or Muslim peoples. As he was sharing the photos of his demolished home with me he became quite critical of US aid, financing Israel and consequently the funding of the destruction of Palestine. Heba kept telling me “please understand, he’s not angry at you”. I told the two of them that I was not offended and that I would try as best as I could to work for a remedy. As I was leaving he thanked me by pinning a Palestinian flag lapel pin to my jacket. I’ve been wearing it to this day.

Trapped Between a Wall and a Hard Place

I received a phone call late one morning from my friend Mohammed Aruri. He said “Rob you wanted to meet Palestinian families, we have a member of the pharmaceutical union whose family is trapped between the wall and a settlement. They suffer very much. Can you be at the hall by 4:00? She can take you to meet her family”.

Having agreed, I met Zanah later that afternoon. Immediately we discovered that neither one of us understood much of the other’s language. However both of us understood that her family’s story needed telling outside the wall. Minutes later the two of us were in a service taxi (vans used as taxis that usually wait until full of customers before getting underway) and headed out of town.

Almost two hours later after negotiating the circuitous route afforded Palestinians bottlenecked by checkpoints our taxi left us in the village of Hizma. From there we walked through the opening in the separation wall where we were screened by soldiers securing the entrance to the Israeli Settlement Pisgat Ze’ev.

We continued another 200 meters above the checkpoint when Zanah stopped and indicated that I should take a photograph of it. Pointing to a car parked nearby she attempted to explain something to me in Arabic. I understood laa (no) and sayaara (car) but little else. At first I thought, “Maybe she wants me to get in and drive her somewhere” then after realizing that the soldiers were still observing us “no that doesn’t make sense”. She then produced a cell phone and called her friend Salleh whose command of English was to become indispensable in the following few hours. He explained that Zanah and her family were forbidden from traveling in automobiles inside the settlement.

After walking a few hundred meters more and entering a break in a chain link fence I was invited into the home of the Al Khatib family. There I met Zanah’s mother Kifaya , her sisters Om Kolthom, and Abdalghafor, her brothers Yusef and Khilam, and Khilam’s son Abdullah. With the indispensable help of my cell phone interpreter I learned that a few years ago a section of the separation wall was erected on their property cutting them off from their village.

Last year the Municipality of Jerusalem who now claims jurisdiction forced them under threat of fines to get rid of their chickens, sheep, and goats. These for many years had been a mainstay of the family economy. The family is now largely dependent on Zannah's meager income of 2000 shekels (around \$500 USD) a month. Family members have been threatened with arrest if they are found outside their property line. Friends and family members living in the village are often not permitted entry and sometimes endure hours of harassment and delay at the checkpoint when they try. To make things much worse two of Zannah's sisters suffer from a genetic neurological disease. One's condition has advanced to the point of confining her to a wheelchair. These young girls have no way to access the medical care they need if they are not permitted to travel in a motor vehicle.

Pisgat Ze'ev, like all Israeli settlements inside the West Bank is illegal under international law as per Article Four of the Geneva Conventions. I've been asked if the restrictions placed on the Al Khatib family were done for security, to protect the Israelis from terrorists. The best answer to this is a statement made by a friend of mine named Mitri who lives in Jerusalem; "It is the nature of the thief to obsess with security".

...but where are the peace Mullahs?

Roads to nonviolent resistance At-Tuwani and the South Hebron Hills.

I received an email one afternoon from an activist list in the West Bank inviting me to take part in a direct action (protest) in the village of At-Tuwani in the South Hebron Hills.

At-Tuwani is an ancient village about ten miles southeast of the city of Hebron on the northern edge of the Negev Desert. It is a mixture of caves, ancient stone, concrete form, and block buildings. Since biblical times it has been populated by Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans. Villagers still find Jewish, Roman and Greek coins in the area. Residents of the area like many Palestinians are not, strictly speaking, Arabs but are likely the descendents of Canaanite tribes, Philistines, Egyptians, Jews, Greeks, European Crusaders, Bedouins, as well as Arabs. They are a rugged, simple farming and shepherding people.

The action was a march covering around 5 km starting from the school in At-Tuwani to the Al-Massafir Basic School in the village of Al-Fakheit. Palestinian residents of this area known as Al-Massafir Yatta have suffered violent attacks from settlers for years. Children and teachers traveling to and from school have been and continue to be victims of these attacks. Because Al-Massafir is situated in a declared "Area C" the Palestinians are under military (Administrative) law and do not have the civil right to recourse. The settlers who are under civil jurisdiction are usually unrestrained and often aided by the military in their attacks. As a ruse at mitigation and at the behest of the settlers the military often declares village property and travel routes "closed military areas". Out of fear of attack by settlers or of harassment and / or arrest by the military the children frequently walk a route to

school that takes in excess of two hours where otherwise it should only take fifteen minutes. Added to all of this is the disturbing fact that the Palestinian schools in the area, as well as most of the other buildings in the village have demolition orders issued against them by the Israeli government. It was the intent of this direct action to bring these persecutions to light and seek international solidarity for a just redress.

When we reached the Al-Fakheit school there was a prayer from a local cleric and speeches from community leaders. After the speeches and lunch the children were seated in rows of chairs outside of the tents that made up the school. The teachers started handing out books, pencils, and crayons. The children were jumping up and down excitedly, raising their hands, and saying "ana, ana" (direct translation I, I) but quietly sat down when asked to. One at a time when called by name a child happily got up to claim her or his prize then return to their seat carrying both the prize and the hugest of smiles.

There was entertainment. Two of the teachers, a man and a woman, performed a skit that had the children laughing. I laughed too although i didn't understand what they were saying. Then there was music and boys and young men danced traditional folk dances. Finally there were presents wrapped in what looked like Christmas (this is a traditional Muslim community) wrapping paper for the kids. Once again there were excited calls of "ana, ana" but the children got in an orderly line and each received one. They all seemed to be delighted with their cheap plastic presents. One little boy received what looked like a toy beauty parlor set, complete with what appeared to be a pink hair dryer. He stared at it for a minute or so a little puzzled but then that smile was there and he was off comparing his prize to the other children's. Gracious humility and generosity are cross-generational traits in this community.

To this community, like many others that I visited in Palestine, nonviolence is not an obscure philosophy professed and practiced generations ago by Mahatma Gandhi in India. They and their leaders – one being my host Hafez Hreini – are schooled in and are practitioners of satchigraha, the art of nonviolent non-compliance. They have made Nonviolent Resistance a part of every day life. Threatened daily by home demolition, land confiscation, settler violence, and military complicity they simply refuse to be pushed out and refuse to resort to violence.

The community has garnered international support via Christian Peace Teams and Operation Dove (of the EU). Teams of two activists often walk with villagers when they travel between villages to “get in the way of” and or record settler, military, and police violence. I was privileged to accompany them a few times.

One afternoon we accompanied a shepherd, Omar Abu Jundiyye and some of his children to their village Tuba. There we were treated to a tasty traditional Palestinian meal complete with khubs taboon, a delicious flatbread baked in a stone

hearth after which we spent a delightful night with the family in their home, a cave on a desert hillside overlooking a vast and beautiful landscape.

One of the walls that we westerners - especially Americans - construct conceals intrinsic value of other peoples and if those people have been classified by the ruling class as the enemy this is especially true. One of the realities concealed by this wall is other's relative intelligence or cultural development. That night in the Abu Jundiyye home I was treated to conversations ranging from art to solar energy. These conversations took place in the languages of the three nationalities represented; Italian, Arabic, and English. Having a command of only one of these I felt a bit in awe of the children who could speak all three. Later that night before turning to bed I stepped outside for a few minutes. There before me softly illuminated in the peaceful glow of the moon was a beautiful desert landscape violated by mean, hateful and powerful spotlights emanating from the Mo'an Settlement, a metaphor of life in Palestine.

The next day we walked with one of the shepherd's younger sons while he grazed his sheep on village land within sight of an illegal settlement outpost. One day earlier I had accompanied, along with two members of Operation Dove, one of this young shepherd's older brothers named Khalil. Accompanying us was an Abu Jundiyye family donkey. I was informed that settlers had shot this and another family donkey in the previous year. This one had survived but the other one died. Khalil had a little trouble pronouncing my name. Rita, one of the two Operation Dove workers, said that I should tell him another name that I was known as. I told him "ismii Abu Michael". Translated this means I am father of Michael. It is traditional here for a man to take his son's name for his own. In this way Mahmud Abass, the president of Palestine is also known as Abu Mazzen. Small things like this can breach cultural and language divides. Khalil liked this and the resultant bonding felt good. Hours later he hollered and waved to me saying "Abu Michael".

I have learned recently that Khalil and his younger brother were herding their sheep close to the settlement. On the request of the settlers they were attacked by the Israeli army and chased back to their home. When Kahlil questioned the soldiers for this violation of his rights to herd his sheep on family property he was arrested, blindfolded, and forced to walk a kilometer across rocky hilly ground to be hauled off to prison. When the younger brother questioned the soldiers as to why they were arresting his big brother one of the soldiers then head butted him. I sadly do not know Khalil's situation now. I pray that he is free. Having met Palestinians who have served years in prison for such offenses is disturbing.

One very heartening thing gives me hope. I learned that night in the Abu Jundiyye family home that the Israeli Peace organization known as B'Tselem provided this and other families with video cameras and have trained them in their use for filming settlers and soldiers when they threaten or attack them. The program is called "Shooting Back". This is truly not a Israeli / Palestinian conflict but a human rights

issue in which many Israeli Jews and members of the Diaspora have taken part on the side of justice.

Breaking Down the Walls and Tearing Down the Fences

Words are vital. Trigger words are weighted to arouse emotion. When used indiscriminately, as they often are, they erect walls blocking open discourse and critical thought. They can appear ubiquitously when such discourse threatens national mythology or systemic contradictions. As much as humanly possible words should be understood in defining context across all linguistic and cultural variations. Language carrying accusatorial or condemnatory weight should be applicable equally to all whether they be nations, social groups or individuals.

Perhaps the trigger word most prevalent today and accepted by many across the political spectrum in the United States is terrorist. A terrorist is one who threatens or uses violence to effect intense fear in a populace as a means of achieving social, economic, or political agenda. If we apply this definition to all, shouldn't it carry equal condemnation to: "Shock and Awe" the U.S. bombing attack on Bagdad; the continuing wars on and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan; drone aircraft bombing attacks on Pakistani villages, and the act of making war in general.

My last visit in the Palestine was in the Jenin Refugee Camp with the family of Muhammad Alhisha who died fighting the Israeli occupation. Many in the United States would call this man a terrorist for having joined, trained with, and led a unit of Jihad Islamiia. What I found was a loving family who welcomed me into their home sharing with me a drink of Zam Zam, holy water from the well in Meca. I learned of the terror that their family felt and witnessed in 2002 when the Israeli military attacked their community with tanks and aircraft killing many of their neighbors. I learned of the immediate aftermath when soldiers occupied the Alhisha home beating and threatening to execute the then fourteen year old Mohammed. I learned of the bulldozers driven by Israelis pushing down the homes in the camp, some with people still inside. One of those was their neighbor, a paraplegic. Mohammed was not permitted to complete his last year in school because he was taken to an Israeli prison where he served a couple of years. The Alhisha family home is decorated in a manner similar to that of many an American home as a shrine with photos of their son, a fallen soldier with his unit.

When I was still with the IWW delegation the last of our official visits was with the Workers Advice Center in Nazareth, Israel. Our host there Michal Schwartz, WAC's Women's coordinator, was asked by a member of the delegation if WAC supported boycotting Israeli products as an attempt to change the policies that were violations of human rights. She replied that Americans were hypocrites, pointing out our country's record in the Middle East and elsewhere. Feeling insulted at first I now later have to agree.

It is my firm belief that what is needed for justice and therefore peace to prevail today is truth and reconciliation. Neither can be achieved in an atmosphere of intransigence. Until we as a people pull down those walls erected by nationalist mythology, hate and fear we can expect nothing but the same or worse. Until we listen to the cries of those we are led to vilify or those we are told are our enemies or the enemies of our "friends" we can expect to go on sacrificing our young to more rich man's wars.

As for the quintessential conflict in the Middle East I have one last thing to say. It is the request most often made of me there by those that I now have the pleasure of calling my friends. Visit Palestine.