

Our Neighborhood Sheep

There are a lot of sheep in our neighborhood. Usually their bleats of 'baa' are not very loud and fluctuate between a normal 'baa', and then a slightly louder 'baa'. A few days ago, the rhythm changed and the normal low bleating was overtaken by the louder bleats.

Explanation: It seems as if the sheep are aware that they are about to be slaughtered, although I do not understand how they could know! Perhaps it is the atmosphere of Eid Al-Adha.

Bottom line: If the sheep in our neighborhood are clever enough to recognize life and death, how come our neighbor, who always uses a government-owned vehicle, cannot differentiate between 'halal' and 'haram'- lawful and unlawful acts? How come our gossiping neighbor cannot distinguish between tittle-tattle and conversation? And most importantly, why don't all of us in the neighborhood pay attention to what is going on around us? Danger is so close all the time and we do not cry 'Baa'!

While our sheep, with all due respect, know when to bleat ... we do not want to be slaughtered.

Happy Eid and many happy returns for us and for our sheep.

Editor in Chief

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The Second Prawer Plan in the Jordan Valley: Bedouins under Assault

By Ritta Abu Ghosh

Bedouin and tents spread over large areas of land awaiting forcible evacuation to enable the building of thousands of settlement units in their place. What does this picture remind us of?

Historically, the Israeli occupation government has employed a variety of aggressive and "legal" means to achieve one of its primary objectives: to consolidate the Israeli demographic presence at the expense of that of Palestinians. The means used include the demolition of houses in Jerusalem, attacks against farmers, the desecration of mosques, uprooting of trees, and the forcible rounding up of Bedouin in a newly constructed town close to Nueima in Jericho.

Al-Hal has learned that the so-called Israeli Civil Administration, which is a part of the Israeli occupation government, intensified the demolition of Bedouin dwellings to the east of Jerusalem over the past eight months, leaving 668 Palestinians homeless to date. To expand the Maaleh Adomim settlement in the E1 area and establish a strip adjacent to the settlements around Jerusalem, the Civil Administration now wants to round up three Bedouin tribes, Al-Jahalin, Ka'abneh and Rashidyeh, living to the east of Jerusalem and numbering between 3800 and 6000 people, in the vicinity of Nueima village to the south of Jericho.

Attalah Mazaraa, a Bedouin from Abu Dis, said: "This scheme aims to put an end to our traditional lifestyle, considered as primitive by the Israeli government, and to resettle the Bedouin close to tribes and families in a way that is not consistent with their way of life and traditions." He added: "We will not leave the place where we have lived for decades until the Negev is liberated, and then we will return. We will oppose this scheme with all our strength."

Abu Yusuf, a Bedouin from the Al-Jahalin tribe, said: "We will stay on our land with our livestock and will not leave. We filed a case in their [Israeli] courts and are waiting, but we will not leave, not even by force."

This issue sparked controversy domestically when some Arabic and Hebrew language newspapers published reports that Palestinian companies are involved in implementing the structural plans of the Israeli Civil Administration in that area in preparation for the forcible displacement to which the thousands of Bedouin would be exposed. This raised questions about the scheme and about the role of the Palestinian government in disciplining these companies in the event that the Israeli settlement plan

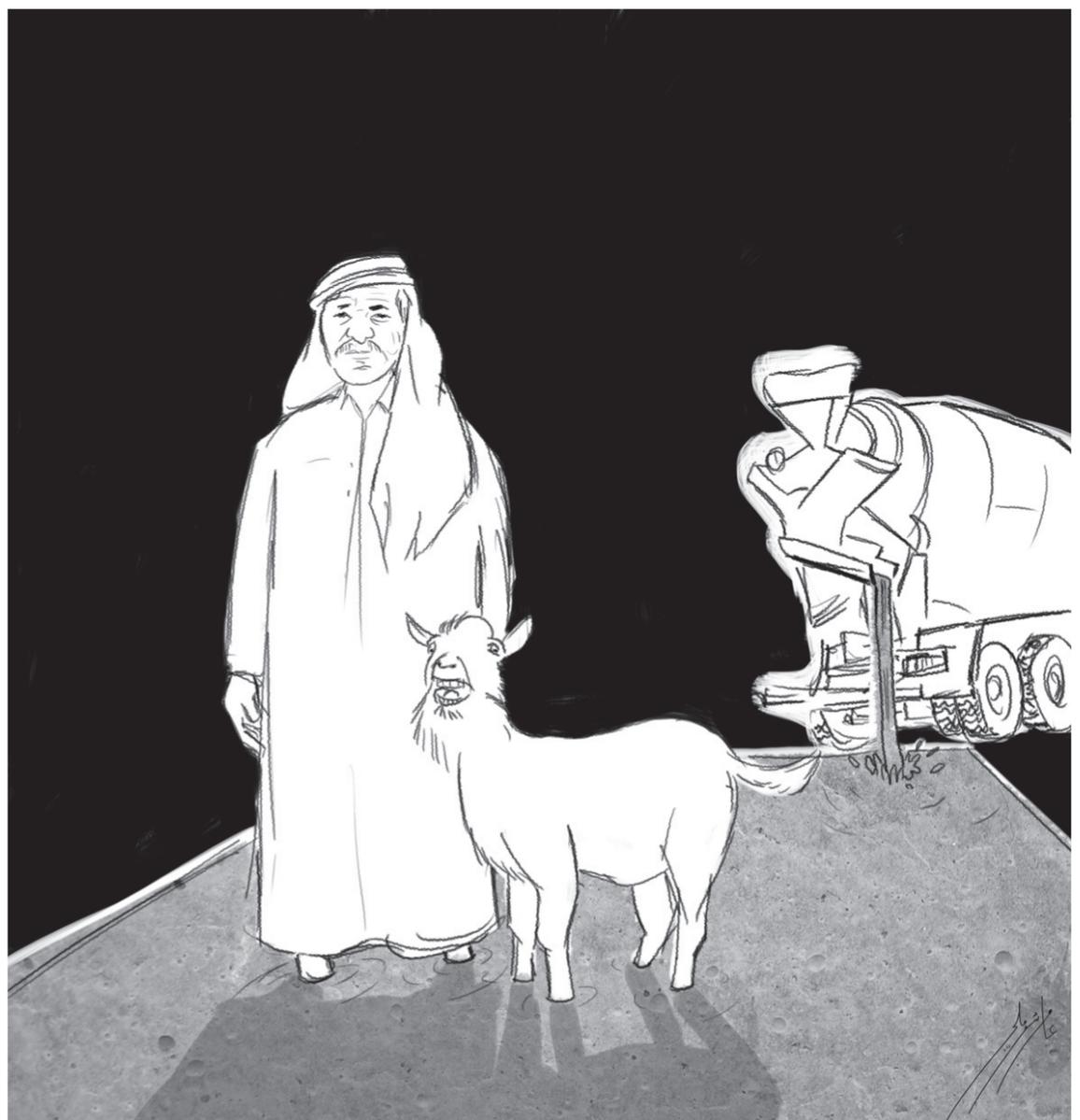
cannot be stopped.

The PA official responsible for the Separation Wall and settlements, Ziad Abu Ain, condemned Palestinian companies cooperating with the Israeli Civil Administration and warned that the PA would not shut their eyes to this issue. He said that he had told these companies to cease their cooperation in the implementation of these schemes immediately.

Jamal Jumaa, coordinator of the Popular Committee against the Wall and Settlements, said that there is an initiative to launch a campaign against the evictions similar to that launched against the Prawer Plan in the occupied Negev. "Displacement and ethnic cleansing is not a new policy by the Israeli occupation and the objective is to alter the entire infrastructure at the expense of the Bedouin community, but we will not stand back and ignore it," he said.

Lawyer Bassam Bahar, Chairman of the Committee for the Defense of Land in Abu Dis, said: "It is not possible to file a petition at the moment and wait for a response by the complaints committee at Beit El. Nevertheless, meetings are underway between the Palestinian government and international institutions to discuss a firm response of resistance that will ensure that the Bedouin stay on their land, and also protect the rights of landowners in the area of Jericho where it is planned to transfer the Bedouin."

Internationally, the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA) circulated statistics collected by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicating that demolitions and coercive displacement have been five times higher in the past eight months than in previous years: the occupation destroyed 156 Bedouin dwellings in the period from March and August. The UNRWA Commissioner-General,



Pierre Krahenbuhl, declared in a statement that this forced transfer violates international law and opens the way for the construction and expansion of settlements at the expense of the Bedouin social fabric and in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. He urged the Palestinian government to act rapidly.

The plans for forcible displacement are part of the expansionist settlement project in the Palestinian occupied territories. The Negev Bedouin were the victims of the Prawer Plan, which has only been frozen, but not discarded. Today, it is the Bedouin of eastern Jerusalem; tomorrow Bedouin in other locations. It is no longer merely

a humanitarian or a human rights issue, but an attempt to halt the growth of the Palestinian population and end their resilience on their land, represented in the desert, which the Bedouin consider to be public land. This is a new Prawer Plan at the door, in a different form and flavor, but it will be greeted with resistance.

Oslo after 21 years... How can we escape the cycle? Politicians: International legitimacy is more important than all bilateral negotiations

Dania Desouki

On the 13th of September 1993, the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were concluded. After 21 years, the agreement is still an issue of debate between supporters and opponents and the dilemma may be summed up in the question whether the Oslo Agreement was the right track for the PLO to take or not.

Al-Hal discussed this subject with a number of politicians and took note of their views at this period when answers regarding the destiny of Palestinians are blurred.



Kayed Alghoul

Saleh Zeidan

Issa Qaraqe'

Ayman Daragmeh

Bassam Alsalihi

Qaraqe': Oslo was an ambush

The Head of Prisoners and Released Prisoners Affairs, Issa Qaraqe', believes that the Oslo Accords was an ambush for Palestinians. Israel failed to abide by any of the international conventions or international law. The Oslo Accords were based on phases, divided into other further phases, that trapped the Palestinian leadership in agreements that could not be achieved, most importantly an independent Palestinian state. Qaraqe' stated that the main violations and breaches of the Accords committed by the occupation comprise the proliferation of settlements, the plunder of West Bank land, and the high toll paid by detainees under Israeli manipulation and bargaining.

Qaraqe' indicated that any future agreement must ensure the end of the occupation of the territories occupied by Israel on the 5th of June [1967] and a commitment to international legitimacy, as well as identifying all the

crucial details and procedures prior to signing any agreement.

Addressing the Israelis, Qaraqe' said: "Do not dream of any fragmented, separated or interim agreements as an achievement of peace with the Palestinian people as this must be based on commitment to United Nations resolutions. In the event of continued settlement, the only response will be the continuation of conflict and a state of war."

Daragmeh: Palestinian discord over the Oslo Accords

Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) member Dr. Ayman Daragmeh views Oslo as a mistake in the history of Palestinian resistance, particularly with the lack of a fair balance of power internationally and the bias in support of Israel. He believes that the Oslo Accords eliminated the most influential card in the hands of the Palestinian people, i.e., the Palestinian

armed resistance. The Palestinian leadership was eager to return to the occupied territories and negotiating from abroad weakened them, putting them at the mercy and control of the Israeli occupation. Daragmeh noted that lack of Palestinian consensus over the agreement is a crucial factor in its weakness and failure. The Palestinian negotiators were not fully aware of the required information, data, maps and international law, and had to make use of Israeli maps during the negotiating process.

Daragmeh believes that the Oslo Accords were practically over by the time of the 2000 Aqsa Intifada, but officially they still stand. Reaching a future agreement with the Israelis is impossible in view of the American bias in favor of Israel and the preoccupations of the Arab world.

Alghoul: International agreement required, not only with the Israelis

Member of the political bureau of the

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Kayed Alghoul, said that the Oslo Accords trapped Palestinian national goals in the hands of American and Israeli forces. It also weakened the position of the Palestinian cause in the Arab world. Alghoul noted that the Oslo Accords restrained the outcome of the first Intifada and tamed the Palestinians and Arabs. It was also the start of the never-ending negotiations with the Israeli occupation, giving Zionist schemes the opportunity to take root in the Palestinian territories and to link the Palestinian economy to that of Israel, rendering it completely dependent on the Israeli economy.

According to Alghoul, any future agreement concluded by the Palestinian leadership must lead to a unified strategic agreement and no longer rely on negotiations with the Israeli occupation, which have proved useless. Instead, the search must take place for a political process based on international legitimacy and law and revert to the United Nations.

Zeidan: International legitimacy is more important than negotiations

Saleh Zeidan, member of the political bureau of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), stated that the Oslo Accords did not reach any solution, simply a dead end. It did not achieve the Palestinian goal of

establishing an independent state. On the contrary, Israeli repression and aggression mounted and settlements multiplied. Zeidan believes that the struggle of the Palestinian people must move away from the framework of the Oslo Accords through continuous uprisings and appeals to the United Nations to escape from Israeli oppression and tyranny and become free of the economic obligations imposed on Palestinians.

He added that the Palestinian people must conclude a unified national agreement and work to enhance recognition of Palestinian national rights by joining international organizations and holding Israel accountable. Any future agreement must be signed under the framework of international legitimacy and within a specific time frame, and be based on fundamental rather than interim solutions. The power of the Palestinian resistance must be reinstated; conflict and war must be the result of breaching the principles of the signed agreements. National Palestinian unity is the most important issue to be achieved and guaranteed.

Bassam Alsalihi, member of the political bureau of the Palestinian People's Party, sees significant discrepancies in the Oslo Accords that enhanced sovereignty over the population without sovereignty over the land. He believes that any future agreement must be based on international law and fulfill the terms of reference of the United Nations.

Due to lack of coordination and a unified leadership, Gaza is flooded by humanitarian assistance...but it is still not sufficient

Haifa Bayoumi

In spite of multiple campaigns launched during and following the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip, and the flood of humanitarian aid that engulfed the area, the absence of coordination and a unified leadership to distribute assistance as needed by the residents has resulted in this aid proving inadequate and being concentrated in some areas and not in others.

Mona Alfarrar, Deputy Director of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society in the Gaza Strip, stated: "We need a united Palestinian political stance. Aid should have been associated with a national position in support of the Palestinian cause."

She added: "The Gaza Strip received a lot of assistance as we suffered from a shortage of medicines and medical supplies during the assault due to its ferocity. Also, the attack came at a time of severe hardship when many medicines and medical supplies were in short supply in Ministry of Health hospitals and health facilities in the Gaza Strip."

Alfarrar clarified: "The lack of coordination regarding the distribution of aid led to inequitable delivery. If it had been taken place by organized coordination, it would have reached all those affected,

displaced persons, and those in need. The media concentrated on aid distributed in shelters, while assistance did not reach evacuees living in the homes of their relatives."

Alfarrar continued: "There is supposed to be a sort of internal system based on the role of young people and the provision of support to displaced families. The Palestinian situation requires an emergency action plan prepared in advance, but what really happened was a big media performance."

Alfarrar also noted that the absence of a unified command on the ground, combined with the absence of an active role by young people with the necessary drive, has caused an imbalance in the aid delivery process.

Mahmoud Alzeq from the National Task Force said: "A Presidential decree will establish a commission comprised of ministers from the unity government, governors, political figures and relief organizations, to act as an official body and the official focal point internally and externally to avoid chaos and combat abuse of the situation for personal interests."

Alzeq also pointed out that the distribution of aid faced problems due to political groups distributing aid to their

own members and supporters, while ignoring their own people who have different political affiliations.

He said that the war had affected everyone, primarily the poor and those living in border areas. Although a crisis had existed even prior to the recent assault, it had been aggravated and had spread to encompass everyone. He added: "We have not reached a stage where there is one body responsible for the distribution of aid that includes ministries of the unity government, political authorities, and the conservatives. There is huge chaos due to the interference of different political authorities in the distribution of aid and relief operations, with each institution working on its own."

On the topic of partisan involvement in aid, Faisal Abu Shahla, a member of the Fatah leadership, said: "Political parties and authorities have nothing to do with the distribution of aid as this is the responsibility of the unity government, which is entitled to direct relief operations and coordinate the work of relief institutions." He was critical of the accusations launched at political authorities about partisan distribution and stated that [political] parties have nothing to do with aid.



Samer Halabi from Insan Youth Center commented on the role of young people and said: "During the assault, efforts were confined to the distribution of humanitarian assistance to displaced persons as a volunteer activity independently of any national institution."

Halabi added: "Aid was delivered to displaced people living in the homes of their relatives, those living in the church, and often in commercial shops. Aid distribution conducted by our team was not concentrated on shelters."

Halabi said that aid distribution faced

interference by partisan groups who wanted to get their hands on it. However, extreme poverty requires a more substantial input and a larger volume of assistance to meet people's basic needs, which was their main concern. Everybody requires assistance in any form and by any means.

Halabi indicated that aid was inadequate and donor institutions had ignored the Center, which is not affiliated to any party or organization and works independently. This had given rise to fears focused on nepotism in the distribution of aid.

Male participation in the labor market is four times higher than that of females: the law is unable to impose equal wages

Dalia Fataftah

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) revealed that 10% of Palestinian households are headed by women. The labor force participation rate in Palestine was 43.6%: 69.1% male and 17.4% female. Male participation remains four times higher than that of females and there is a gap in average daily wages with females receiving only 84% of the average daily wage paid to males, despite women constituting half of Palestinian society. The estimated population at the end of 2012 was around 4.35 million, divided into 2.21 million men representing 50.8% of the population compared with 2.14 million women accounting for 49.2%.

Some women work long hours that exceed those permitted by the Labor Law and earn much lower wages than men, although productivity is the same. For instance, Asmaa Zayed works ten hours a day in a shop in Ramallah for a monthly wage of NIS 1000, while a man working in a shop next door earns double her wage.

Examples of wage disparity are plentiful. Laila works in sewing for below the minimum wage; a man in the same profession gets paid double her wages, on the basis that women are unable to operate some machines.

Khatib: Exploitation by Employers

Al-Hal learned of a woman who was obliged to work for 12 hours a day

for monthly pay of NIS 500 because nobody would employ her for a better wage as a result of facial deformation.

To investigate who is responsible for the protection of women's rights, we interviewed Khatib Khatib, Chairman of the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC). She stated: "There is a trade union committee that monitors working women and employees. The Labor Law provides for equal pay at work. Although the text is clear, there is a problem applying the law and employers take advantage of this and put pressure on women to accept low wages." She added: "Regulation of minimum wages is the task of the Ministry of Labor and various trade unions, but the Ministry complains about a lack of inspectors that renders it unable to monitor all enterprises. In addition, it is the role of trade unions to act on complaints from women, but most [women] refrain from submitting complaints to the Ministry or to trade unions because of threats of dismissal by their employers."

Non-specialized Courts:

Khatib clarified: "Labor courts are regular civil courts that do not specialize in female workers. There should be a special judicial authority to defend the rights of workers." She pointed out that there are no accurate statistics on female workers. The official labor market records show a female participation rate of 17%, although this number may be doubled by women who are not registered such as women working in agriculture

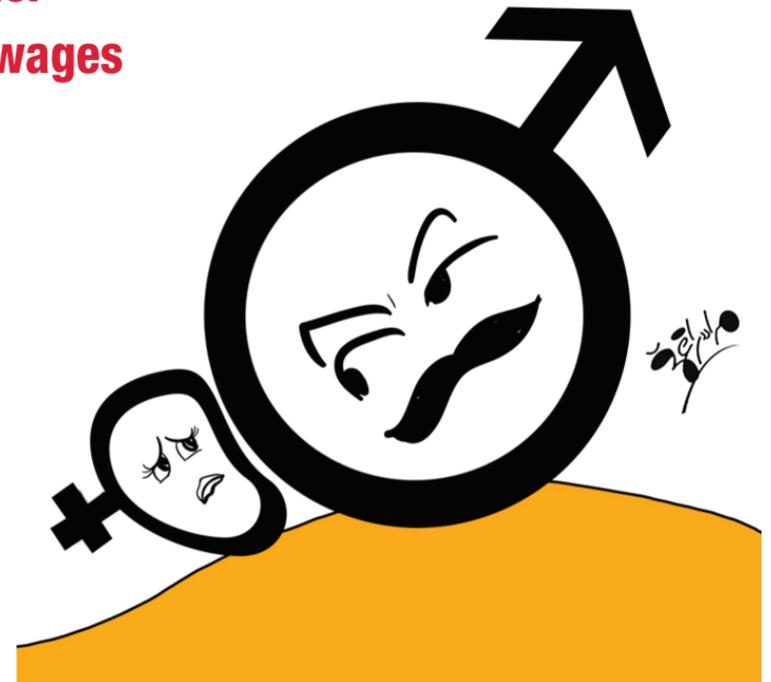
and kindergartens. Female workers encounter many problems, including a lack of sanitary facilities, long working hours, absence of health insurance, verbal abuse and low wages.

Assaf: Discrepancies in Benefits and Incentives

Eman Assaf, Rapporteur of the National Committee for the Recruitment of Women and Chairperson of the Gender Unit at the Ministry of Labor, stressed that, besides the obvious discrepancies in wages between men and women, there are hidden privileges granted to male workers, primarily concentrated in higher level positions that are monopolized by men and where women are not a significant presence.

Although the Civil Service Law regulating employment in the public sector stipulates the same salary for the same job, whether performed by a woman or a man, there is an invisible line in the implicit privilege by which men are promoted to high level positions, but women are stuck at the same level of employment for a long period of time.

Assaf highlighted the problem of specialization for women. Although women are a significant presence in Palestinian universities today and exceed the number of males thanks to the emergence of a trend supporting female education in Palestinian society, and also because males tend to study abroad more than females, women incline to specializations that



are incompatible with the labor market due to family and social factors that direct women to the services sector where pay is low. Assaf added: "Statistics show that there are over 80 professions that have no women and that offer high quality and high paying employment."

The National Committee will launch a project entitled Al-Marsad to monitor violations faced by women in the labor market that limit the presence of women. The role of institutions in supporting women is not to create jobs in the labor market as much as to direct women to specific fields of work.

In this same context, Dr. Nidaa Abu Awwad, lecturer at the Institute for Women's Studies at Birzeit University said: "Globally, there are differences in wages between men and women, but the wage gap varies from one country to another according to the economic, political and social conditions. In Palestine, the wage gap is very large, the least in the public sector. However, there is a gap in social benefits for men, such as spouse and children allowances. The gap is larger in the private sector and may mean that a woman earns only 60% of the wages earned by a man."

"We own no more than 13% of Jerusalem"

Tafakji: The concept of one million settlers within the 1967 borders is quietly being carried out

Dina Daa'na

"In 1991, there were about 105 thousand Israeli settlers in the West Bank compared with 380 thousand today, quite apart from another 200 thousand in Jerusalem." This was confirmed by Khalil Tafakji, Director of the Mapping Department at Orient House, Bait Al Sharq, in Jerusalem in an interview with Al-Hal newspaper about the volume of Israeli settlement in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Tafakji highlighted the issue of Bedouin displacement, the objective of which is to transfer the Bedouin from their communities for Israel to build new settlements and expand others. Over 32 thousand settlement units were recently built in the West Bank.

Droble: The project for one million settlers

Discussing developments in Israeli settlements over past years, Tafakji stated: "Settlement activities have never stopped, even during times of peace. In 1977, the extremist Israeli government headed by former Prime Minister Menachem Begin initiated the settlement process everywhere. In 1979, a comprehensive settlement plan was devised when Matityahu Droble, head of the World Zionist Organization, talked of one million settlers in the West Bank. Ariel Sharon started the so-called Seven Stars project in 1990, which provided for the construction of settlements over the Green Line [dividing Israel and the occupied West Bank]. Sharon pursued this project until 2004."

Tafakji added: "From 1991 to the present day, over 32 thousand settlement units have been constructed within the West Bank, in addition to the confiscation of about 12 thousand dunums classified as public parks. Also, one third of the

West Bank, or over one million, 200 thousand (1,200,000) dunums, are closed military zones."

Tafakji explained that besides the land settlements, there is another type of expropriation exemplified in the control of water resources and the riches of the Dead Sea, where 830 square km of land were taken over by the Israelis and Palestinians are not permitted to drill any well without Israeli permission.

Bedouin Resettlement

Referring to the resettlement of the Bedouin, Tafakji pointed out that there was a Palestinian-Israeli agreement in 1995 to transfer the Al Jahalin Bedouin tribe from the area of Maaleh Adumim settlement to the Abu Dis area. The Israelis are now planning Bedouin resettlement around their demarcation of the future borders of the Jewish State. These borders led to the construction of the Separation Wall to the west. To the east, there are Bedouin dwellings covering vast areas of land in the Jordan Valley that the Israelis seek to control. Thus, the past ten years have constituted a process of the destruction of Bedouin communities in the Jordan Valley by classifying large areas of land as closed military zones, starting from areas surrounding Jerusalem, in the Hebron area or in the Jordan Valley, with the aim of presenting resettlement as a solution for the Bedouin.

Tafakji confirmed that the Israelis are attempting to redraw the border in these areas and absorb one third of the West Bank to enforce security and economic control. He pointed out that Bedouin communities within the Jordan Valley are not recognized by the Palestinian authorities and the Israelis have taken advantage of this to demolish Bedouin communities and halt further construction. Israel also imposes restrictions on Palestinian communities in the Jordan Valley, the largest of which is the city of Jericho.

The Bedouin population constitutes only 60 thousand Palestinians, who are surrounded by the Israelis who seek to redraw the borders on the grounds of security.

Another Plan for the City of Jerusalem

In 1994 a master plan was drafted entitled "Jerusalem 2030". Tafakji described how this plan provides for the construction of 58 thousand settlement units, the expansion of existing settlements, the construction of a new road network, and the reduction of the Arab population to just 22%. He noted that Palestinians used to own 100% of Jerusalem, but now own only 13% following the confiscation of 87% of the land.

Tafakji pointed out that the Israelis are now focusing on so-called Jordanian Jerusalem; an area of no more than 6.5 square km in the Old City with a Palestinian majority. Based on accounts in the Old Testament, Israel is laying claim to this area on four fronts, confiscating houses in old Jerusalem on the grounds of "absentee property", or on the pretext that it was Jewish property prior to 1948, or for 'security purposes' such as the killing of a settler. The recent pretext for the confiscation of houses is the claim that it is an unused space and is "vacant".

According to Tafakji, the Israelis combine three major issues: religion, history and sovereignty. From a historical point of view, they emphasize that they are rooted in Jerusalem starting from the city of David three thousand years ago. The religious aspect is linked to the Temple and the Wailing Wall.

Creating a Jewish Landscape

Tafakji noted that: "The ongoing changes to Jerusalem are altering and destroying the Arab Islamic nature and replacing it with a Jewish-Israeli landscape and background, so when a



Khalil Tafakji

visitor enters the city, he will see it as Israeli."

"There is a change in the Arab landscape that is unseen by the eye and takes the form of Judaization of the language and the changing of names. For instance, Jerusalem became known as Yerushalaim. These Hebrew words are now part of our daily conversation and I expect that in 20 years, we will all talk in Hebrew intermingled with some Arabic words."

Negotiations under the New State of Affairs

On the possibilities of negotiating within the new realities on the ground, Tafakji concluded: "There can be no negotiations under these circumstances since the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke definitively about peace and negotiations as if the Arab initiatives were completely finished. The Arab-Islamic front is collapsing and Israel is becoming more powerful, particularly the extremist right-wing who believe that historic Palestine from sea to river is an inalienable Jewish Waqf. Hence, any negotiations under the current constraints and conditions are bound to be unsuccessful."

Shatha Badawi... the First Engineering Captain in Civil Defense

Shatha Dajani

She is a role model, not only for Palestinians, but for the entire Arab world as the first female engineer with the rank of captain [in civil defense]. Al-Hal interviewed Shatha Badawi, holder of a Master's degree in Regional and Urban Planning and Engineering from An-Najah University to discuss her record as a feminist and a professional.

Badawi explains: "At the beginning, I thought, like everyone else, that civil defense was related to municipalities and was simply to put out fires. I had some fears about how the community would perceive me, but I found myself capable of taking on the challenge and proving the role women can play in society. I also realized that the nature of the job matched my specialization."

"After joining the civil defense in 2009, I discovered that it has a broader and more comprehensive purpose than extinguishing fires and carrying out rescues. Civil defense seeks to provide civil protection in the stages of a disaster: in the handling and treatment of fires, earthquakes and natural disasters. Initially I was appointed to

the Department of Public Safety and Prevention and was responsible for the implementation of safety procedures in buildings. I started with external activities such as holding meetings and [signing] protocols with ministries and institutions, in addition to participation in projects conducted by the civil defense."

From running regular tasks in civil defense, Shatha moved to work in the development and planning of missions for this important body. She says: "I was appointed as head of engineering projects in the civil defense, which is a part of the Planning and Development Department, from where I started the path towards becoming the head of the department. Of the projects that I carried out, some were related to gender as a new concept that focuses on the integration of women and men in society, and in all sectors of work since they complement each other."

In 2012, the gender unit was established with the objective of providing the highest quality services to members of the community. The civil defense excelled in this role, especially following the formation of teams of

approximately 300 volunteers from all governorates. This work targeted all social groups, with a focus on the integration of females and males.

On the sensitive issue of women working in security agencies, Badawi said: "This was not the only problem I encountered during my service. I found a considerable gap between the laws enacted by the state and the performance of some of its institutions. Thus, sustainable planning needs to be integrated to reduce the potential for disasters - it is not temporary and can be transferred from one generation to another."

In her journey of self-development, Shatha's Master's thesis entitled The legislative and institutional basis for sustainable planning for the reduction of disasters in the Palestinian Territories was the first project [in this field] in the Arab world. It highlights the importance of the presence of national forums and bodies, and coordination between them and the gender unit at the Planning and Development Department to reduce potential disasters.

As for the difficulties that she encountered as a female, and as a

woman working in civil defense in particular, Shatha Badawi said: "The main difficulties were caused by the conflict between myself and the social customs and traditions: who I am and what I want. Also, being one of the first group of women who joined the civil defense was hard because it was not equipped for women. There were no dormitories, washrooms or changing rooms at the beginning, plus the uniform was designed for men only. But the civil defense is now building new facilities that are gender-sensitive and prepared to receive women."

According to Shatha, women make up six percent of civil defense staff, the highest percentage of all military institutions and agencies in the state. They made some changes to protocols and to specific policies and procedures, such as inspection and monitoring, and created new strategies with special regulations. Everyone acknowledged the changes that occurred in the civil defense after [women] joined, as well as the importance of the presence of women in this sector.

Talking of her future ambitions, Badawi confirmed: "I will keep struggling for



justice for women and men and will do my best to achieve complementarity at work and to reconcile our jobs with our families. I will also seek to develop the concept of "civil defense" as "civil protection" and to integrate it into the culture of all members of society so we may impose conditions for safety and security and make Palestine a secure and stable country suitable for living and investment.

Other young people, like Sameh Abdel Haq, hope that the Al Hamouz café will witness the end of the Israeli occupation, just as it witnessed the end of the British Mandate which ruled over the area for years.

Mutaharikeen... Young people who overcome the distance between Ramallah, Haifa and Gaza

Sofia Deibes

Mutaharikeen for Palestine is an independent group of young people who defy the concrete barriers and the oppressive policies that violate the freedom of movement of the Palestinian people by promoting the collective Palestinian identity.

The group was created by 60 young men and women aged between 20 and 28 years of age from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Palestinians [of 1948], united in belief in the kinship between one people and the importance of their role as young people in raising awareness and alleviating physical distances that fragment the Palestinian identity, wherever it may be.

The group originated from within the Youths for Change program in 2014 in

partnership with a number of institutions, including Palestinian Vision, the Association for Arab Youth - Baladna, the American Society of Friends - Quakers, and the Palestinian Policy Network- Al-Shabaka.

According to Ahmad Yasin, a participant from Ramallah, in the absence of a body for young people to promote a united Palestinian identity, the Youth and Policies program and Mutaharikeen work to build friendships between participants and counter stereotypes that people form about each other based on their place of residence.

Ahmad describes his participation in the project "as the realization of the Palestinian dream, even if virtually, where I can express myself and explain the harassment and abuse I am exposed to in the place where I live. I also listen

to the daily problems faced by other young Palestinians who are united by Palestinian concerns and segregated by barricades and the Wall, in addition to different social and political realities."

Maisan Hamdan, another participant from the town of Karmel, with a Druze community in the Haifa district, described her feelings about the project: "Some see the project as a means to revive the intense Palestinian discourse, particularly because the project runs locally and internationally. Others think that it is just a dream that is too difficult to come true." Hamdan adds: "Participation in Mutaharikeen means there is no submission; it is defiance of the reality imposed upon us by the Israeli authorities who exploit Palestinian society along geographical and sectarian divisions."

Those in charge of Mutahareekeen organized three meetings in Ramallah with the participation of a group of young people from the West Bank and Palestinians [of 1948], and via Skype with participants from the Gaza Strip.

The participants drafted political papers addressed locally and internationally. In the last meeting, the group was divided along these lines to lobby and advocate for freedom of movement for Palestinians.

Hamdan found that lack of direct contact between the group did not affect the flow of positive energy and determination, even without a picture and with interruptions to the sound.

A member of the group, Asrar Kayal from Kufr Yasif village in Palestine [1948], said: "These meetings resulted in many events as part of a media campaign entitled 'No limitations to our identity'."

The first activity launched was by members of Mutahareekeen in a



Mutaharikeen...young people divided by geography but united by Palestinian concerns and dreams

return march to Loubieh village. Kayal adds: "The second activity was Tour Palestine, which comprised meetings held simultaneously in Nablus, Gaza and Haifa to host dialogue between the three groups and the filming of a video called Tour Palestine that offers a virtual tour of the whole Palestinian territory." Kayal stated: "The meetings reshaped the concept of identity that has been fragmented through the segregation of the Palestinian people by geographical space, and also as a result of their preoccupation with sub-identities linked to party affiliations, sectarianism, and even family."

The recent Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip had a significant impact on the group. Naji Aljamil from Jabalia refugee camp said: "In spite of the difficult situation, I did not feel alone this time. Calls from Mai in Acre, Maryam in Tarshiha, Yazan in Bethlehem, and Dunia in Hebron gave me the feeling

that all of Palestine bleeds with Gaza. The project achieved real Palestinian intercommunication."

Triggered by the sense of national responsibility imposed on the entire Palestinian people by the recent Israeli assault on Gaza, participants from Mutahareekeen took the idea of enhancing a united identity further by working together in all areas in solidarity with families in the Gaza Strip. This included the publication of stories and photos of martyrs on their website, in particular that of Abdulla Amara, one of their friends in the group who was killed during the assault. His photo and name were posted next to the logo of Mutaharikeen with a caption saying: "Abdullah's dream was to become a lawyer of international humanitarian law and to hold the Israeli occupation accountable for war crimes against Palestinians; Let us achieve his dream."



Al Hal is a monthly newspaper that has been issued since 2005, it's a critical daring newspaper that discuss controversial delicate issues that varies between political, economic, social and cultural themes, with the participation of a group of professional outstanding journalists in West Bank and Gaza, in addition to Media students at Birzeit University, Al Hal has contributed to uncovering lots of cases that are not being publicized in daily newspapers or being banned for censorship; subjects of Al Hal are handled through reporting ,investigative reporting, articles and interviews along with criticizing caricatures in every edition, The newspaper has in parallel to the paper edition a digital version that showcases best articles in multimedia, check our newspaper website following this link:

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Issued by: Media Development Center



Tel: 2982000 Email: alhal@birzeit.edu