

Dear everybody,

There are many disturbances in Jerusalem this week: clashes between police and Palestinian youth, beatings, teargassing, settler harassment, and many arrests. It all revolves around the week of the Jewish festival of Sukkoth and renewed Palestinians fears over the fate of Haram al Sharif where the Al Aqsa mosque is. As usual there are many versions of what is happening, accusations, and counter accusations, but concern is heightened by the knowledge that the last Intifada started in Jerusalem in a similar fashion. Tension mounts whenever the mosque is involved, and either side could exploit it.

However, I'm not actually in Jerusalem to witness it so you'll probably know as much as me from your own newspapers.

I've come to pick olives in Yanoun, a small farming community in the north east of the



West Bank overlooking the Jordan Valley. It is hard to describe how beautiful it is. It has that timeless quality, you can imagine it having been like this for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years. Even in the West Bank, there are not many places like it still left. Yet its beauty is not the only thing it is famous for. In October 2002, it became the first Palestinian village since 1948 to be completely emptied of its inhabitants, by violence from the fundamentalist settlers of Itamar

about 10 km away. Established in 1986, Itamar began spreading its outposts over the hills encircling the Yanoun valley in the mid 1990s. Water tower, electricity pylons, vineyards, chicken farms, mushroomed. Settlers encroached on Yanouni land, terrifying its inhabitants. A decade of violence culminated in the October attack and the villagers finally fled. Israeli human rights activists eventually persuaded them to return if an international presence was established, and that was the genesis of EAPPI in the village.

Seven years later, the village is still there, but it does not thrive. Villagers are not allowed to build or repair existing houses, install telephone lines or create infrastructure to benefit the community; with 60% of the community under 16 this does not bode well. They say they would share the land if they could graze their sheep and pick their olives, but they know they have no chance of altering the minds of the settlers who want them gone.

Unlike Jerusalem, our Yanouni team have a pretty idyllic time of it. They walk the couple of miles between Upper and Lower Yanoun twice a day, chat with their



neighbours, hang out with the shepherds, and eat well on local produce. But they can never relax: they are constantly on the alert for army incursions and scan the horizon with binoculars for settlers. Extreme settler violence has decreased but the potential for harassment is always there. Teenagers with rifles, specimens of the broadly nicknamed Hilltop Youth, walk through the village arrogantly asking men old enough to be their

grandfathers to show their IDs. Villagers have never s so much as touched a settler, yet in this upside down world any incident results in Yanounis being arrested. And the outposts are still encroaching while the fields the Yanounis abandon move further down the hillsides.

The trickiest time of the year is the olive harvest. Many trees are up near the outposts where Yanounis dare not go. The army is supposed to protect Palestinians for three to four days in these areas and Israeli and international activists help get their harvest in before the permit runs out. (This scenario is repeated all over the West Bank.) But this year, the IDF put out a statement saying: “Israeli civilians will not be permitted to enter particular olive fields so as to prevent friction between different populations. Representatives of Israeli Police and IDF will be present.” ‘Friction between different populations’ is a euphemism for settler violence. But Israeli activists provide both manpower and protection, whereas the IDF doesn’t pick any olives and only spuriously protects because the settlers call the tune. Last week, Israeli activists were turned back before they reached Yanoun and our team picked for only half a day before a settler objected. The police ordered us to leave. Unbelievable. This year the harvest was poor because of the drought so in the end the three days were enough to harvest the upper grove. Olive picking in spectacular surroundings surely has to be one of the most harmonious way to spend a day.

I left Yanoun after three days and took a bus westwards across country, first to Nablus, then on to Tulkarem for a three day visit. The first thing to say about travelling on the West Bank now is that it is much quicker. When I lived in Tulkarem four years ago, it took 6-7 hours to Jerusalem, a distance of 100 miles. Now it doesn’t take more than three. The checkpoints are still there but are mostly unmanned. This is huge for the

inhabitants of Nablus, which in my day was a completely closed city with Huwara the most odious checkpoint on the West Bank at its entrance. Tulkarem too used to be ringed with checkpoints but this time when I arrived I sailed through the once dreaded Anapta. It doesn't mean Palestinians are any more free, rather that the Occupation is more structured. The high-tech matrix of control is now in place and can be activated at the first signs of trouble. It seems to be more a question of pressing buttons now that deploying soldiers on a fulltime basis.

What has changed in Tulkarem? The town itself looks a tiny bit more prosperous. The huge piles of rubble of the bombed former PA buildings in the city centre are being cleared after lying there for five years and a smart new PA headquarters has gone up,



all part of the plan to improve the Palestinian economy while keeping human rights to a minimum. The goods terminal through the Wall at Ephraim where we used to see off the prisoners' families' buses into Israel, now also serves as a conduit for workers going into Israel. The whole thing has been privatised, which makes the guards manning it even less accountable. The idea is to have as few employees as possible, especially not young

conscripts. Serving in the Occupation for long periods is bound to affect teenage soldiers in one way or another, so privatisation possibly with foreign workers is one way out of the problem it creates for Israeli society.

The agricultural gates are more sophisticated too. At Deir al Ghusun, a structure has been built with metal detector and biometric fingerprinting. Gone are the days when farmers lifted their shirts and did a little twirl in the middle of the buffer zone. They always found that humiliating, but this new system is worse because it stops them staying overnight with their extended families in Israel to give themselves more time in the fields.



The first person I see when I arrive is my friend Abdul Karim Sa'adi. My team met him in 2005 and he proved a fantastic contact. As the regional field worker for the Israeli human rights ngo B'tselem, he was a fund of knowledge, prepared to share his experience with us, as well as being a gentle humorous man. Over the past three years he has made many friends among EAPPI volunteers and a group of Brits organised a speaking tour for him in the UK in November. Knowing how meticulous you have to be with visa applications, they trod with extreme caution, careful to cover every possible loophole. So I was astonished when he told me he had been refused. He had all the credentials: letters of invitation, the tour schedule, expenses covered, his own bank account details, proof of steady work, married man with four children, no reason to overstay, etc. etc.



For Palestinians it's not just missing an important opportunity to tell what's happening or not being able to enjoy your friends' hospitality. It's also another humiliation. Says AK, "I fight for human rights every day of my life, yet I am denied such a simple right. I have never committed a violent act, yet Israeli war criminals are welcome in the UK, and I am not." I am so sad. Apart from all the wasted hard work setting up the tour, I feel so awful for AK. I know he will never come now, out of pride. "If your prime minister crawled on his knees to invite me, I would not go," he says. I feel embarrassed by my own freedoms, never refused anything, anywhere, yet half the valuable person AK is.

Another of our Tulkarem contacts, Samar, has been luckier. When I saw her last week she was ecstatic at having got a visa to go on holiday to Switzerland invited by another former EA. On an earlier occasion I had invited her to the UK, but she too was denied a visa. How come the Swiss don't think she's desperate to stay in their country like we do? Why shouldn't Palestinians go on holiday? My third rejectee from Tulkarem a couple of years ago was a farmer. He has a brother in London and I supported his application to accompany his elderly mother for the birth of his brother's second child. But no, we didn't want him either. I'm beginning to think I'm the jinx.

The Tulkarem team's work has changed slightly now that the checkpoints out of town are manned only intermittently. The focus has shifted to the agricultural gates where the problem of getting enough gate permits has worsened. Getting the olive harvest in from land on the Israeli side is proving harder and harder. I heard that last year the village of Qaffin to the north (which lost a lot of land beyond the Barrier and closed three of its four olive presses when I was there) had been helped with the harvest by Kibbutz Metzger on the Israeli side. It sounded unique, I wanted to visit these unusual kibbutzim but there was no time. I don't know if it happened this year, it would be an amazing act of solidarity.

There was good news from the village of Jbarah south of Tulkarem. It is one of the many Palestinian villages stuck in no man's land between the Barrier and the Green Line. Villagers need permits to cross a manned checkpoint into the West Bank, yet will be arrested if found in Israel even though no barrier prevents them. They can get to Tulkarem but no one can visit them. Our team goes to a little school there, and as foreigners do not usually have a problem. I went to say hello to the teacher, and all was well on the way in. But the soldiers had changed shift by the time we walked back. This ridiculous red-haired American boy barred the way and told us to do the hour's journey round by the vehicle checkpoint. Luckily his commander saw the absurdity of us having been let in but not out. The good news is that Jbarah has finally won a battle in the Israeli High Court to re-route the Barrier behind the village so that it becomes Palestinian again. However, many High Court re-routing decisions are still pending after three or four years, so it may be time before Jbarah residents can return to normal.

I so enjoyed being back in Tulkarem. Making friends and contacts is much easier in the countryside than in Jerusalem. And from a personal point of view, walking through olive groves to monitor the agricultural gate as the sun comes up and joking with the farmers, beats standing in the dreary concrete and razor wire of Qalandya at five in the morning watching workers fight to get through the cages.



On my first day back, I finished an early morning stint at Qalandya when we got a house demolition alert from the Displacement Working Group. While I was away, my colleague Jenny had been several times to Beit Hanina, a quite posh suburb of East Jerusalem where police had advised a young couple with three small children that the house demolition order they had received a year ago would be carried

out on the Sunday. It did not happen and they hoped against hope it never would. But at 8.00 on Monday morning, the bulldozer arrived with a dozen soldiers in jeeps, ten border police, a team of removal men, mounted police, and dog handlers. For a one-bedroom house! The husband Amjad Triaque and his three-year old daughter were forced out, the furniture dumped in the street, and the house crushed, all in a matter of minutes. Amjad's wife returned from taking the two older kids to school to find a pile of rubble. She fainted.



I have visited many houses with demolition orders and seen many houses after they'd been demolished. But I had never actually watched it happen before. The sheer senselessness and waste of it fills you with rage and despair. And such use of force: as if treating it like a military operation justifies the brutality. There had been a demolition hiatus during the summer, but we heard Jerusalem City Council still has a budget of a million shekels for demolition this year, enough for 15 more houses. There were three demolitions in Beit Hanina that Monday, mercifully only the Triaque's was inhabited.



The second was a working bakery; the ovens were left on the street. The third was only house foundations. The fourth a block of flats with only one storey built, belonging to the Abu Aisha family. They had received a stop work order several years before but had no idea demolition was on the cards that day. Luckily for them, the Caterpillar broke down after the first blow and in the time it took to fetch another one (a Volvo much to the chagrin of Jenny who fired off a photo to some Swedish BDS organisation) the owner arrived. To stop proceedings, he had to pay 40,000 shekels (8,000 euros) to the court, and another 40,000 to the municipality, within the hour. He won that race against time, but it is only a stay of execution. Fees, fines, lawyers, pauperise Palestinians facing what, as I have previously explained, is discriminatory housing policy.

Only 140 building permits were given to Palestinians last year when there is a shortfall of thousands of housing units for them in East Jerusalem. Hundreds of illegal structures get built every year, and hundreds get demolition orders. 80% don't actually get demolished, but they could at any time. So why Amjad's house? It was a converted stable, on private land, overlooking nothing, disturbing nothing. When we came to see the family next day, the ICRC had come round with a big tent, mattresses, blankets and emergency supplies. It was erected beside the former home, the family moved some bits and bobs of furniture in, and by nightfall a new dwelling was taking shape. When we visited later in the week, Amjad was still shaken but already planning to build again. What option does he have? Move to the West Bank and lose his Jerusalem ID?

What else has happened? Ah yes, a bizarre incident. Apart from Qalandya and Wadi Nar, we monitor the pedestrian checkpoint of Zaytoun just ten minutes from our hostel down the back (east) side of the Mount of Olives. It is for the people of the former Jerusalem suburbs of Al Azariya (Bethany) and Abu Dis now shut out by the Wall. Workers come in the early morning, followed by professionals, and then lots of schoolchildren. Many of them are just tots, some unaccompanied because parents might

not have a permit. It's important that the Humanitarian Gate be open because they can't fight grown ups to get in the turnstiles. And if the workers let them all in first, then they are late for work. So we've been checking on that, with some success.

But last week, we found six men sitting outside the checkpoint. It transpired they had got into the city to look for work through one of the places where the Wall is porous (heaven knows where they are, it looks so monolithic). They'd been caught, had their documents, mobiles and money confiscated and put out through the checkpoint. It's illegal to confiscate documents, even from Palestinians. Anyway, after a couple of hours on the phone with Machsom Watch trying to trace the documents, we had to leave the matter in MW hands as we had a meeting elsewhere. On the way back through the checkpoint, the metal detector beeped as I passed. I was surprised since my phone, etc. was in my jacket on the conveyer belt. "Go back," shouts the girl soldier. I went back, beep, again, beep. To cut a long story short, I went back and forth taking off earrings, necklace, watch, shoes, etc. It was a complete farce. When I had only trousers and t-shirt on, she ordered me into the strip search room where I got down to my knickers. Through the window, I could see the soldier and her female colleague smirking. It was funny, really. I laughed too although I wasn't supposed to. "Like at the airport," said the soldier. I complied only because I didn't want to hold up the line of Palestinians. When I finally got outside the checkpoint, the men we had been helping ran to the fence to say the police chief had come out and returned their documents. I phoned the woman at Machsom Watch to tell her about the search. "Punishment," she said. "Oh well, I suppose it was worth it," said I.

That would have been the end of it, except that it happened again. A couple of days later, we were again doing some phoning on behalf of two schoolgirls who had been denied entry. They said this new shift of soldiers was making life difficult. When we finished and I went through the metal detector, the rigmarole started again, it peeping and me removing things. The soldier was the colleague of the one who'd given me a hard time before. When she pointed to the little room, this time I refused. "Once, OK, but not twice." If I hadn't had my EAPPI jacket on I'd have made a big fuss, but on the phone to my coordinator she said she didn't want to up our project's profile, so I went back out and round by another checkpoint. But these experiences are good for us because it underlines the sheer arbitrariness that Palestinians face every day, and that makes their lives so intolerable.

In fact, the more we go to this small checkpoint the more we discover that people using it (or not using) have very sad stories. They are typical of what is known as 'divided families' whereby husbands and wives have different IDs and cannot live together. Khulood, for instance, used to run a women's centre in Jerusalem and lived with her husband and four children on the Mount of Olives. When the Wall was built, unlike her husband she was denied a Jerusalem ID because she was born in Jenin although she had studied and worked in Jerusalem since 1989. She now has to live in the West Bank alone. Their children have Jerusalem IDs so go back and forth between their parents. None of it makes any sense, it just destroys lives, and for how long? Saladin, a taxi

driver we know is in the same situation. He is on the West Bank, his wife and children in East Jerusalem. He can only spend one day a week with them. Ibrahim Salame is one of 300 people who live on the east side of the Mount of Olives inside the Wall (his family for sixty years) who cannot go more than a street away from their houses without being arrested if caught since they can't get Jerusalem IDs.



To finish, I'll bring you up to date with the Hannoun and Ghawi families saga. We've known for some time that a speaking tour of the US was being arranged for them by the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. They would be going with others from Silwan and Bethlehem. Nobody dared breathe until their visas were confirmed. As soon they were in the bag, the departure date was set. Nasser Ghawi was going, but not Maher Hannoun since he has a criminal record after spending three months in jail last year for refusing to hand over the keys to his house. Going in

his place was his twenty-year old niece Sharihan.

However, the night before departure, the settlers opposite attacked the Ghawi's tent and six of them were hospitalised, including children. Another five were arrested. "Lucky you weren't there," I said to Nasser later, referring to his imminent departure. "Lucky for them", he told me. He left the next morning, but he must be so worried about his family. The settlers sit in chairs outside the house, their weapons provocatively on display in a street where children play. No one arrests them. Although we visit almost every day, we also receive emergency calls: one came late last Friday night when fifty settler supporters came to dance and sing in the street between the tent and the house. Five police cars turned up too, it was very tense but no violence. Next day, the police came by with a demolition order for the tent to



be carried out on the Sunday. It did not happen. On the Monday, though, there was trouble between the settlers and a group of French visitors. Some were arrested and so was an employee of the Greek embassy. It is so surreal.

The Sheikh Jarrah US tour is going well. The group has been invited to the White House and to speak in Congress, and Sharihan has 42 interviews. Nasser looks a bit fierce with his bushy beard (I hope he will not scare the Americans) but he is a gentle man and a fine speaker in Arabic, Hebrew and English. Despite his family's eviction, he calls for "justice and reconciliation between the two communities in Jerusalem, which will not be a place of tension and violence but a meeting place between neighbours living in unity."

Today was the second court hearing for Mohammed Sabbagh whose house is the next in the Sheikh Jarrah firing line. No decision was taken; next hearing January 18. He has plenty of support from the consulates, aid agencies, Israeli ngos but more than solidarity is needed if the settler takeover of East Jerusalem is to be halted before Palestinians physically disappear together with the idea of Palestine...

That's it for this time. I'm coming to the end of my three months. Hopefully next journal I'll tell you not only about the awful things that are going on but about some of the extraordinary people resisting them against all the odds, and others who act in solidarity with them.

See you all very soon. Can't wait to see Rafa and the girls, I think of them a lot when playing football with the Triaqe toddlers in front of their pile of rubble.  
Lots of love, Ann

#### Disclaimer

I have been sent by Quaker Peace and Social Witness to participate in the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). The views contained here personal and do not necessarily reflect that of QPSW or the WCC. If you wish to public the information contained her or disseminate it further, please first contact the EAPPI national coordinator. [teresap@quaker.org.uk](mailto:teresap@quaker.org.uk)