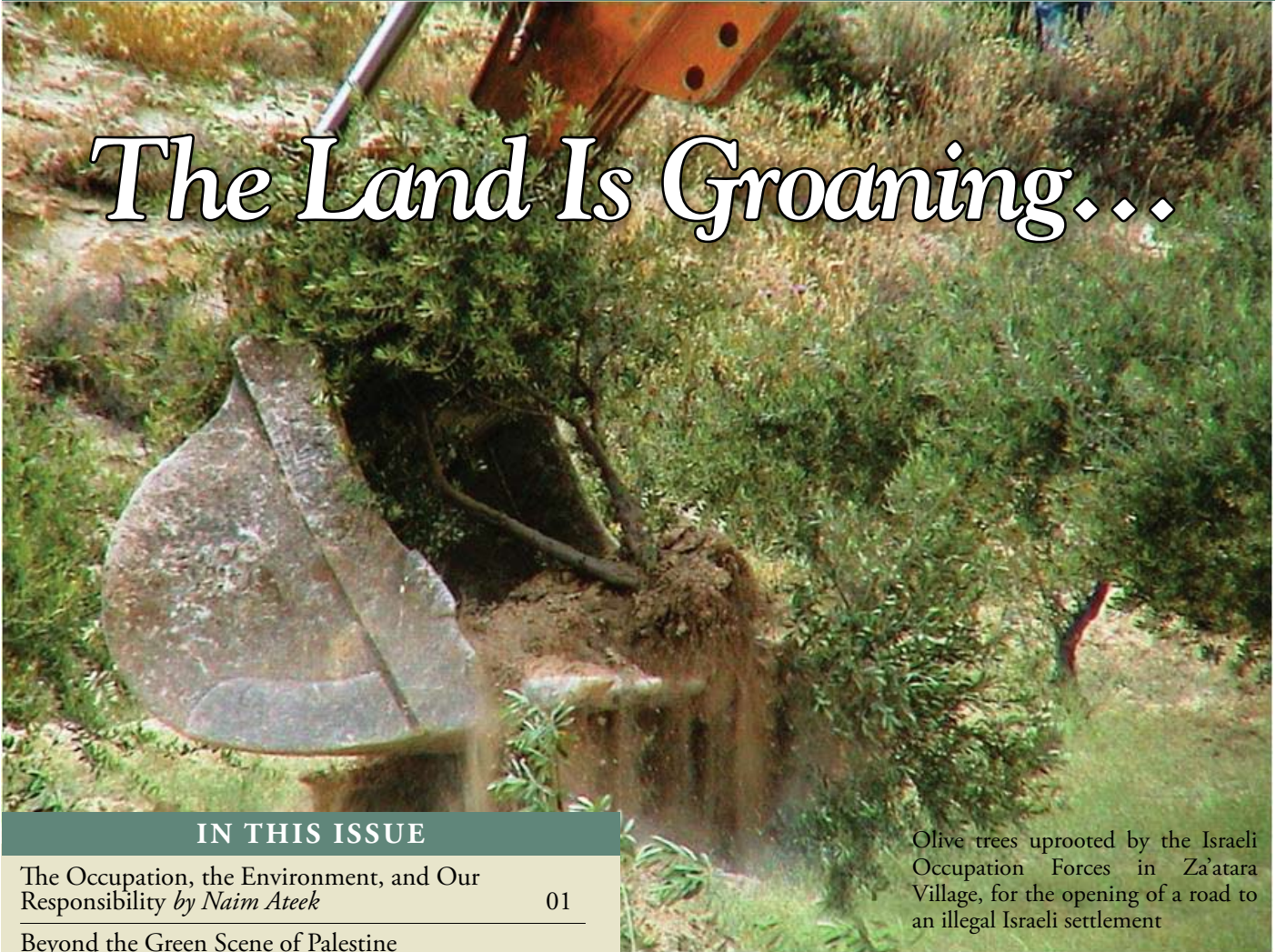


CORNERSTONE

A PUBLICATION BY SABEEL ECUMENICAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY CENTER



ARJ Photo Courtesy

The Land Is Groaning...

Olive trees uprooted by the Israeli Occupation Forces in Za'atara Village, for the opening of a road to an illegal Israeli settlement

IN THIS ISSUE

The Occupation, the Environment, and Our Responsibility <i>by Naim Ateek</i>	01
Beyond the Green Scene of Palestine <i>by Hiyam Hazineh and Roubina Bassous-Ghattas</i>	04
The Landscape of Palestine: Paradise or Hell? <i>by Peggy Wilhide Nasir</i>	06
The Gaza Strip: Lack of Water and Power During the Last Two Wars and the Daily Plight of the Inhabitants <i>by Giorgio P. Nembrini</i>	09
Bearing Witness to a Land <i>by Omar Loren</i>	11
Palestinian Environment and the Occupation <i>by Jane Sami Hilal</i>	14
Take off Your Shoes <i>Poem by Jim Manley</i>	14
Environmental Occupation	19

The Occupation, the Environment, and Our Responsibility

by Naim Ateek

The question of ecology is a very important and relevant matter when one considers the environmental changes that have taken place in our country. The starting point for me is a consciousness that as Palestinians we are also guilty vis-à-



vis the environment. Whether through negligence or ignorance or both, we have shared in causing damage to our environment. Therefore, before pointing a finger at the sin and evil of the occupation, I would like to point to our Palestinian responsibility for the disregard we have shown to our environment. In the words of one prayer of confession, "... we confess that we have sinned... by what we have done, and by what we have left undone..." We have sinned not only against God and neighbor we have equally sinned against our mother earth.

As people of faith, we believe that God created the whole world. God's creation includes humans as well as all the natural order with its vegetation, animal and sea life. Our world is beautiful and good (Genesis 1:31).

Jesus looked with admiration and amazement at the natural beauty around him and said, "Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these."



"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it." -Psalm 24:1

(Matthew 6:26-29). The psalmist recognized and praised God's creative power, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it." (Psalm 24:1). Therefore, we begin with a sense of repentance and we acknowledge our irresponsibility and failure to properly care for the beautiful earth and environment around us that God has given us.

Some people have argued that the Bible reflects very little theological or spiritual relevance to nature and environment. This has been attributed to a human-centric theology where humans are asked to subdue the earth "and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1:28; see Psalm 8). As a result, humans have exploited the earth and its natural resources as well as the sea and animal life. Subsequently, some have suggested

that the theological focus must shift from human-centric to creation-centric. This will help us view Christ's Incarnation as an event that confirms the significance of the whole created natural order. This can also help us to work for environmental protection and against any exploitation of nature. To emphasize a creation-centric approach is to emphasize human responsibility to care for the earth. It is a stewardship that has been entrusted to us. When we pause to reflect on the blessings that mother earth gives us, we should be humbled and responsible in taking care of it and sustain its loveliness and beauty.

In this issue, we take a good look at the Palestinian Territories that have been occupied by Israel since 1967 and the environmental damage that the occupation has caused. The enclosed articles are only a sample that shows the extent of the damage that is taking place.



It is important to be aware that the damage and harm which the occupation has inflicted on the Palestinian environment has threatened not only the natural and beautiful environment, it has affected the health of Palestinians including many young children. Due to the illegal Israeli occupation, the water aquifers in Gaza have been damaged, soil has been degraded, and the natural ecosystems cannot be maintained, and the separation wall is further separating people from their environment. The Israeli army and settlers have polluted the Palestinian areas. Israel has been accused of dumping poisonous waste in West Bank areas. Fruit trees and especially olive trees have been uprooted, more land continues to be confiscated by Israel and the land continues to suffer. We call attention to the dangers that occur. Some Palestinians believe that nothing can be done while the occupation remains in place. Others believe that it is important to expose this terrible injustice that is affecting both humans and environment; and it is important to continue to challenge the Israeli government with all possible nonviolent actions that are available.

One of the reasons for our neglect and disregard of the environment is due to the priority we give to the political struggle against the occupation. For Palestinians, the occupation is the major issue which needs to end and only then will we be able and ready to attend to other things. This has caused many of us to become complacent and negligent about important matters that should not wait. The danger with complacency and postponement, however, is that negligence can become a culture that people become used to, and old habits die hard.

As we continue to resist the evil of occupation through nonviolent means, it is of utmost importance not to neglect what is within our powers to do in the present in making the environment around us attractive, healthy, safe and beautiful.

We must realize that to protect the environment and to work against exploitation is a matter of justice and we must encourage it as we resist the occupation. It is not only Palestinian human beings that are under siege and in agony, it is the environment itself that is also suffering and is awaiting liberation. As we continue to resist through nonviolence, we need to

remember that ours is a comprehensive understanding of liberation. Humans and our whole environment need to be free from exploitation. This is a task that all of us must engage in for the sake of peace and harmony.

In addition, our emphasis on doing justice and working for peace on earth, our tiny portion of earth, is also part of the harmony and peace that is needed to keep a healthy and sustainable community, while greed, militarization, selfish national interest can damage people and the environment. Israeli injustice, domination, and oppression of others have environmental ramifications that not only ruin the social fabric of our human society; it has negative and adverse effects on the environment. Palestinians and Israelis, indeed all human beings, need to realize our interconnectedness with one another and with the environment in which we live. We are bound together in order to maintain and sustain a healthy human/nature ecosystem that can give us peace, harmony, and well-being.

The Reverend Naim Ateek is the Director of Sabeel, Jerusalem.





Photo by Kristen L. Brown/Sabeel

The beautiful Judean Hills

Beyond the Green Scene of Palestine

by Hiyam Hazineh and Roubina Bassous-Ghattas

The Palestinian Territory is a unique element of the Mediterranean ecoregion. It is a crossroad of several civilizations, interacting with the unique naturalness of the region. Land management focused on the optimum use of the natural environment within the context of ecosystems. These ecosystems provide a full array of goods and services upon which people depend for their livelihood and well-being. Main services include food, medicine, fuel, water purification, pest control, and climate regulation, in addition to intangible services such as

aesthetic, cultural heritage, recreation and most importantly the Palestinian identity.

Palestinian life has developed in close relationship with natural ecosystems, such as forests, shrub lands and grasslands. Forests cover an area of 78 km² of the West Bank. Natural, planted, and bare forests are the types of forests. The natural forests are mainly evergreen Oak Maquis: trees of carob, pistachio, oak, Christ-thorn, etc. Shrub lands are very dynamic and host a distinctive wildlife covering an area of 280 km². They mainly constitute

of salvia, thymus, tulips, cyclamen, iris and daisies. As for the grasslands, the most familiar in the West Bank are rangelands, with an area of 749 km². Main range plant species include legume species and grass species such as barley, medick, melilot, trigonella, and goat grass (ARIJ-GIS 2011).

Another vital ecosystem, though not a natural one, is the agricultural ecosystem, which is a result of the transformation of natural ecosystems to promote ecosystem services (MEA 2005). Agricultural lands occupy the largest proportion of the Palestinian landscape; it covers around 2150 km² of the total area of the West Bank (ARIJ-GIS 2011).

Ecosystems, however, change naturally with time, but in Palestine, changes have been a result of continuous abrupt

pressures, breaking their structure and thus their related physical, chemical and biological functions.

Impact of occupation on Palestinian Ecosystems

Ecosystems are under threat from a variety of pressures, which are further worsened by the ongoing conflict resulting from the Israeli occupation, which has created geographical discontinuity in Palestinian lands and resulted in a major physical impediment towards achieving sound ecosystem management in Palestine. Palestinians now have limited access to a large portion of their natural resources. In addition to the confiscation of land, deforestation and destruction of habitats are causing high land fragmentation.

Concerns are also expressed over the potential impact of the ongoing construction of the Segregation Wall and the Segregation Zones along the western and eastern parts of the West Bank. The Segregation Wall will span 774km and will isolate 13.6% of the West Bank total area upon completion (ARIJ-UM 2011). About 85% of the Wall is built inside the Palestinian land, redefining the 1967 borders and dispossessing Palestinians of their land and natural resources (OCHA 2009). The Eastern Segregation Zone, on the other hand, is an area of 1664 km² located along the eastern terrain of the West Bank that stretches 200 km from south to north, most of which has been declared as a closed military area, and is off limits to Palestinians. Both the Wall and its zones are causing major



According to a survey conducted by ARIJ

–Urbanization Monitoring Department in the year 2011, the total number of uprooted trees in the West Bank as a result of Israeli practices over the period between 2001 and June 2011 is 667,032 of all types of fruit trees but mainly olive trees.

challenges in conserving representative ecosystems, landscapes and habitat linkages between ecosystems. Furthermore, 60% (3394 km²) of the West Bank territory falls under complete control of the Israeli army, known as area “C,” is accessible for Palestinian use -- except in areas declared as Israeli military bases, Israeli closed military areas, mine areas, Israeli settlements, and nature reserves -- but not accessible for management by the Palestinian Authority (ARIJ-GIS 2011). Ecosystems in Area “C” are not only unmanaged by any authority, but are used improperly by the Israeli occupation for settlement expansion, bypass roads and outpost establishments, segregation wall construction, military bases and

military practices. Such actions are causing the degradation of the natural component of each ecosystem leading to the alteration of its functions resulting in poor, deserted and unfertile lands.

As a result of the previously mentioned Israeli practices only 20% of the Palestinian grassland ecosystem is accessible to Palestinians. Such conditions result in reducing the size of accessible grazing areas and exposing the remaining rangeland to an overgrazing phenomena, accelerating land degradation, reducing the green cover biomass and grazing capacity, and enhancing the desertification of that area. In addition, the natural Palestinian forest area has diminished by 59% since the year 1970 (Adel 2007). It is worth mentioning that almost 21%, 31%, and 13.1% of the grasslands, forests, and shrub lands respectively, will be annexed behind the Segregation Wall upon its completion (ARIJ-GIS 2011).

The agricultural lands, on the other hand, decreased by 9%, between the years 2006 and 2010 (ARIJ 2011). Around 16% of the agricultural areas were degraded and transformed into open spaces. Furthermore, nearly one-fifth of the West Bank agricultural land is inaccessible (UFAD 2010) to the Palestinians and almost 8.6% of the agricultural land (including arable lands) will be lost behind the Segregation Walls upon its



Roubina Bassous-Ghattas is a graduate of Birmingham University, UK, with a MSc degree in the “Utilization and Conservation of Plant Genetic Resources.” She is the Head of the Biodiversity and Food Security Department at ARIJ.

Hiyam Hazineh is a graduate of the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Zaragoza – CIHEAM, Spain, with a MSc degree in “Integrated Planning for Rural Development and Environmental Management” She is a landscape ecology researcher at ARIJ.

completion (ARIJ-GIS 2011).

Sovereignty over natural resources is one of the key elements for any nation to achieve sustainable development and sound ecosystem management (ARIJ 2007). Israeli occupation practices will increase the probability of Palestinian natural heritage loss and the alteration of ecosystem types and functions by impacting the existence of a large number of natural resources causing the loss of valuable and irreversible resources.

References:

- Abu A'yash, Adel, (Adel 2007). Inventory of Palestinian Forest trees in Palestine. Ministry of agriculture. Department of Forestry. West Bank.
- Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ 2007). Status of the Environment in the occupied Palestinian Territory.
- Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem – Geographic Information System Department (ARIJ-GIS 2011) Land Use – Land Cover Analysis for the year 2010.
- Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ 2011) – Sustainable Agriculture Program. 2011. Landscape analysis between the years 2008-2010. Bethlehem, West Bank.
- Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem – Urbanization Monitoring Department (ARIJ-UM 2011). Analysis of Satellite Images, “Monitoring Israeli activities in the occupied Palestinian Territory”. Project funded by the European Union.
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD 2010). “Rural poverty in the West Bank and Gaza,” Rural Poverty Portal. Available at: <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/gaza%20and%20the%20west%20bank>
- Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA 2005). Island Press, Washington, DC.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA 2009). Special Focus. Several issues.
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD 2011). Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the occupied Palestinian territory. Trade and Development board - Fifty-eighth session. September 2011. Geneva

Photo by Peggy Wilhide Nasir



The Landscape of Palestine: Paradise or Hell?

by Peggy Wilhide Nasir

For centuries, travel writers from all over the world have offered the widest possible spectrum of opinion on the beauty (or lack thereof) of the Palestinian landscape. Ranging from English poet George Sandys – who found Palestine “adorned with beautiful mountains and luxurious valleys” -- to Mark Twain’s famous dis, the subject of Palestine’s natural surroundings generates a lot of

discussion among those of us seeing this country for the very first time.

My first reaction is very different from my fellow American, Twain. Although I cannot begin to compete with his writing skills, I can and will challenge his vision. Far from being “destitute and unlovely,” I find Palestine to be the most intense and interesting landscape I have come across. Is it the most beautiful? No. Is it the most



Country side of Sabastiya near Nablus in the spring

interesting? Yes. It reminds me of a woman whose features are imperfect and not classically beautiful, yet there is something so mesmerizing about her face you cannot stop looking.

Coming from America, where a change of scenery often involves a long car or airplane ride, I am thrilled by the compact diversity of the Palestinian landscape. In a couple of hours (unless, of course, you are a West Banker) one can easily travel from the city of Jerusalem to the Negev desert; from the Dead Sea to the Sea of Galilee; from

the hills of Ramallah to the beaches of the Mediterranean, or from the valley of Jericho to the tip of Mount Hermon. (In solidarity with my Palestinian friends and relatives, my assessment of the landscape is based on pre 1948 borders).

And most of my fellow expats agree, Palestine offers one heck of a view.

“It’s comprehensively interesting,” says Stefan Szepesi, who has worked in Palestine since 2006 and has hiked extensively not only in Palestine but in Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Spain.

“Switzerland, for example, by far beats Palestine for natural beauty,” said Szepesi. “But it’s so much more interesting here in Palestine.”

Szepesi’s interest in the Palestinian environment runs deep. He is the author of a new book, to be published at the end of 2011, called “Walking Palestine: 25 journeys into the West Bank.” Szepesi has spent the better part of four years walking through the West Bank, and researching the themes and attitudes of generations of travel writers.

“The majority of people make this mistake: it’s either paradise or hell,” said Szepesi. “But the truth is somewhere in the middle.”

One thing I have learned from Szepesi is that in order to fully appreciate the Palestinian environment you have to get out of the car and off the bus. As he points out, olive groves that give the landscape a grayish, mottled cover from afar come alive with vibrant green up close. Almond trees may have a nuanced hue from a distance, but display the most amazing colors

on approach. And the Palestinian wildflowers, which you hardly ever see from the car, shimmer in the sunshine in the fields and on the hillsides of the West Bank.

Szepesi’s West Bank hikes have, for me, opened the window to the beauty of Palestine; he literally puts us on the beaten, ancient paths that have been used for centuries, if not millenniums, to travel from village to village. Many of these paths are so old you cannot see them on maps or find them on *Google Earth*. But they take us to places that seem positively magical to this American; places where I stumble across a group of shepherds tending their flocks, marvel at the vastness and sameness of the landscape from Wadi Kelt to Jericho, meet a boy with a donkey traveling between villages, and clamor on ancient ruins atop a hill.

My surprise passion for the Palestinian landscape seems to be shared by a whole host of expats lucky enough to live here for a while. Almost all experience a deep reaction to the land.

Gloria, a friend from Iowa, has a spiritual relationship with the Palestinian landscape that makes the Bible “come alive.”

“In the Bible it talks about how the desert blooms,” she said. “And when you get here you see the desert really does bloom and blossom. The beauty of nature here is spiritual. The desert that blooms, the fig trees, the olive trees, and all the different kind of herbs used today are referenced in the Bible.”

Even the topography takes Gloria on a spiritual journey, reminding her of how Jesus and his followers walked up the hills to Jerusalem.

“It is indeed a bit of a magical place,” said my friend Helen, a British expat who has been living and working in Jerusalem for more than two years. “There is quite an emotional connection with this land, a connection with history, a connection with home.”

A self-described “country girl” who grew up walking the southwestern British countryside, Helen feels at home on her Palestinian hikes and is also an advocate of off-road journeys to see the true beauty of Palestine.

Otherwise, she said, you will miss the many varieties of wildflowers that blanket the Palestinian landscape.

“They are the kind of flowers that are small and sweet, they hide,” she said. “You have to get right up to them to fully appreciate their beauty.”

As hard as I try to ignore it while I commune with my Palestinian surroundings, the ugly nature of the occupation cannot be avoided. The shepherds I came across approached our group with trepidation for fear we might be violent settlers; the ticky-tack houses of the settlements mar the Palestinian landscape; and urban congestion increases as more and more Palestinians are confined to smaller and smaller areas.

Helen described it best.

“When you are looking at a beautiful view, and it is interrupted by the unmistakable Lego-like uniformity of the settlements, it is almost like a dagger going through your heart,” she said. “They just look wrong; they so obviously don’t belong. The view is so much more powerful than words.”

“It really takes you back to the basics” of what the conflict is about, she said,



“When you are looking at a beautiful view, and it is interrupted by the unmistakable Lego-like uniformity of the settlements, it is almost like a dagger going through your heart,” she said.

leading us both to the conclusion that anyone involved in negotiating the peace process should be required to take a few hikes through the countryside.

So it is often with a heavy heart that my compatriots and I return from my outdoor adventures in the West Bank. But it is also with a deeper appreciation for the splendor of the land, and its importance to the Palestinian people. It gives us all a better understanding of why Palestinians have such an unshakable connection to the land, and why they fight so hard for the right to continue living peacefully among its hills and valleys, olive trees and citrus groves, wadis and deserts.

In our reflections on the Palestinian landscape, everyone I have talked to comes back to the same point: Not only is the beauty of Palestine a great natural resource, so are its people.

“When you go on hikes, it teaches you what the real Palestine is about,” said Helen. “You see how people really live. Palestinian village life is so simple and family-oriented. And the people are always so welcoming. But what I love most is their sincerity. It is everything you hear about the hospitality of the

Arab people. It is really humbling.”

Gloria believes Palestinian hospitality is reflected in the Bible verse “you may be entertaining angels, unaware.”

“They live that,” she said. “I truly love the hospitality. I love the sincerity of the shopkeeper standing in the doorway that, if he sees you are injured or sick, gives you God’s blessing that you will be well.”

Gloria contrasts Palestinian sincerity with the robotic, empty ring of “Have a nice day,” or “Can I help you?” often heard in America.

Stefan Szepesi hopes his book will provide hikers the opportunity to experience Palestinian hospitality firsthand. In fact, he delayed publication to line up local guides for each hike.

“I wanted to be able to give people one, two or even three guides to contact. I am starting a website where new guides can sign up and be booked,” he said. “I want readers to be able to truly experience the local flavor, to stay in local guesthouses and eat in local restaurants.”

So, while the great travel writers of past and present debate over how to characterize the Palestinian landscape, those of us fortunate enough to live here for a while are unanimous.

Just the other day, a friend was sitting in my garden, talking to his mother on his cell phone.

“Where are you?” she asked, hearing the birds chirping in the background. “It sounds like you are in paradise.”

“I am,” answered my friend.

Peggy Wilhide Nasir is a former journalist and is currently a freelance writer and communications consultant in Jerusalem.

The Gaza Strip

Lack of Water and Power During the Last Two Wars and the Daily Plight of the Inhabitants

by Giorgio P. Nembrini

In recent years two major wars have been conducted by the Israeli Army against the Palestinians living in the Gaza strip. The first war, “Summer Rains” (June 2006), did not bring any rain, but rather shells, destruction and despair. More than 1500 people were killed and over 5000 injured and many properties destroyed. The daily life for the majority of the people not directly wounded or badly affected by the strikes or the shelling and lucky enough to escape unhurt, was extremely difficult, as water and electricity were cut. The majority of the deep wells (boreholes) distributing water to the population via the network were made non-operational as most of the pumping stations were not equipped with an independent electrical supply. Lessons were learned and during the recent years, with the help of the UN (United Nations), INGO (International Non Governmental Organizations), and CMWU (Coastal Municipalities Water Utility), we managed to equip all the boreholes with electrical generators and with a minimum diesel storage capacity. This allowed us to maintain the water pumping during any kind of problems linked to the particular situation in the Gaza Strip, where basic goods, like diesel, may not be allowed to enter due to the restrictions imposed by the Israeli Government.

During the next war named “Cast Lead” (December 2008) which lasted more than one month, diesel was in



Sewage Lake – Khan Yunis in Gaza



The seashore in Gaza



As one challenge was addressed,
another one was looming.

short supply and only after days of negotiations the INGO's and the UN were authorized to import fuel for the specific purpose to run the pumping stations. Only a few of them were damaged by the relatively indiscriminate shelling, but if the water could be pumped into the network, damage to the pipelines, to the distribution system and to the elevated storage tanks has been serious.

More than 2600 buildings were totally destroyed and about 20,000 severely or partially damaged.¹ More than 5000 elevated storage tanks were lost and more than 2300 were in need of repair, leaving most of the people still living within the targeted areas without water and electricity.² Water had to be brought into Gaza at high risks during the temporary interruptions of the shelling. Many civilians were caught in the streets, looking for a minimum of water to be used for drinking and cooking and, if enough, for all the other hygiene practices. Popular filtering devices used to prepare drinking water by removing the relatively high concentrations of salt (chloride and nitrate) by reverse osmosis could not be operated due to the lack of power, and underground water had to be consumed as it was. With the exception of the damaged boreholes (8 in the northern areas) CMWU was able to operate the remaining ones (about 135) close to

their normal schedule, as shown from their data. This means that water was pumped into the network, but many pipelines and minor pipes were broken and normal production data did not necessarily represent the reality of the availability of water for many families. Repairs to the main transmission lines were done quickly, often during the ongoing hostilities, but the secondary and tertiary networks (distribution to areas and connection to the buildings) could not be repaired immediately, thus obliging the people to collect water far from their homes and to carry it up into their apartments. The situation gradually improved but the burden of acquiring enough water for the daily needs could not be solved immediately, even when the repair teams were allowed to move without taking too many risks.

As one challenge was addressed, another one was looming. In addition to the municipal wells, which were extracting between 200,000 to 250,000 m³/day, there were more than 4000 agricultural wells, tapped into the same aquifer, extracting the same amounts of water. Over-pumping would lead to an increased depletion of the water table, which would trigger an increase of the controlled salt intrusion from the ocean and would increase the flow of water of poor quality from the Israeli eastern side due to the increased hydraulic gradient. According to international standards, the quality of the water flowing from the Hebron escarpment has never been

good, containing too much chloride. As most of the water used was from the underground - and was reinjected into it - contained high levels of chloride and nitrate, their concentration in the underground water increased. Only some of the waste water treatment plants are discharging directly into the sea, creating other contamination problems along the seashore. The increase of the concentrations of chloride and nitrate has been relatively controlled by the recent implementation of different measures, like limited outputs for the new boreholes and for the existing ones and limited hours of pumping. The new Northern Waste Water Treatment Plant (NWWTP) needed for the treatment of the wastewater in North Gaza and intended to infiltrate the water into the ground, in order to partially replenish the aquifer and control the depletion of the water table, will not solve the problems and the concentration levels of chloride and nitrate may increase again.

There are technical solutions (reverse osmosis) but they require huge amounts of energy, presently not available within the Gaza Strip. Importing the totality of the domestic water from Israel, which is a better quality and cheaper, requires painful and courageous political decisions and it is doubtful that both parties are presently ready for such an option, which will preserve and improve the state of the aquifers and the lives of an increasingly demanding population.

1 UNEP, environmental assessment of the Gaza strip following the escalation of the hostilities in December 2008 January 2009, September 2009, www.unep.org

2 CMWU, Damage Assessment Report, Water and wastewater infrastructure and facilities, Gaza, 27 Dec 2008-19 January 2009, personal communication.

Dr. Giorgio P. Nembrini is a graduate of the University of Geneva, Switzerland in chemical engineering with a PhD in analytical chemistry, and water related problems. During the last four years he has conducted research on the water supply of cities affected by conflicts, as an independent consultant, with a grant from the Geneva Foundation.



Photo by Peggy Wilbide Nasir

An Olive Grove in Palestine

Bearing Witness to a Land

by Omar Loren

In autumn the searing summer sun softens to a warm glow against the rugged Palestinian hills. There you will find the stone terraces littered with families working, tree by tree, through the olive groves. They comment on the fruit comparing it to the previous tree, to the rest of the grove, and finally, to previous years. On weekends when many come back to their home villages from the cities, you will find three generations together, some perched

on ladders and branches and others sitting below picking through the piles of olives. They are fueled by rounds of tea and coffee made by open fire and sprawling meals of cheese, *labaneh*, eggs, pickles, olives, and *hommus*; on special occasions a pot of *mahshi* or *makloubeh*, (traditional Palestinian dishes), is carried in. They tease those softened by years of *madany* (urban) office work for lagging or give the juicy details of the latest family land dispute.

Each hillside has a name and in turn, each grove has a name. Some even recall the beautiful fruit of an individual tree. This living topography is invoked by older members of the crew, making sure that kids are within earshot. With flashes of bitterness in their voices, grandmothers tell the children about the hills beyond the new Israeli barrier where they used to collect *zatar*, *'akkoub*, *maramiyyeh* (thyme, wild thorny greens, sage) and other wild plants that are required provisions in Palestinian households. Scenes like this are repeated day after day, on hill after

hill across the West Bank until the trees are picked, the olives pressed, and the precious golden-green nectar of the Palestinian autumn is stored or sold.

This is not a portrait of an idyllic past. Rather, in everyday life, both rural and urban, Palestinians bear witness to a land that sustained them for generations. The olive's sacred status in society is affirmed with each *bismillah* (in the name of God), or *biissmasaleeb* (in the name of the cross), quietly uttered when pouring the new oil, with each prayer of thanksgiving for a plentiful harvest, or with the care given in pruning a tree for next year. In recognition of this status, the machinery of olive presses in each village is adorned either with verses from the *Qur'an* or with icons of the Virgin Mary and *Al-Khader*, as Saint George is known in Palestine. A faith in creation draws people to the land despite a deeply uncertain future. With each year, more trees are planted but also more trees are bulldozed or burned. The hills, springs, trees, soil, and people suffer from the plunder of land, extensive use of noxious farm chemicals, and the decline of crop diversity. In this context, bearing witness to a land means creating space for the future.

This space is not possible without the help of certain plants. One particular plant, *fakkous*, is a light green, cucumber-like member of the melon family. It is a summer fruit prized for its juicy crunch. There are many varieties in Palestine and people have strong preferences by region. Some are known by color, whereas others are named for places such as the *Sahouri*, from the town of Beit Sahour. Its



A faith in creation draws people to the land despite a deeply uncertain future. It is in everyday life that we are invited to bear witness to this land.

distant relative the cucumber is grown in plastic houses with heavy use of pesticides and artificial fertilizers, where the plastic, chemicals, seeds, and sometimes water for irrigation all come from Israeli companies. In this conventional scenario, farmers only sometimes overcome the cost of these costly inputs. Whereas most farmers used to grow a wide variety of crops including wheat, barely, sesame, lentil, vetch, apples, apricots, pomegranates, olives, figs, plums, and an array of vegetables, in many Palestinian towns these have given way to just a few. These few cash crops like tomatoes and cucumbers are grown intensively under irrigation. This has transformed the Palestinian countryside, drastically reducing the plant diversity on the land, stretching water reserves, and in some places like the plain of Jenin, exhausting the soil to the point where some crops will no longer grow.

However, *fakkous* does not abide by such conventions. As a matter of fact, throughout the West Bank, *fakkous* seeds are only available from other farmers and farm shops in rural areas. Moreover, *fakkous* cannot be grown successfully with pesticides, artificial fertilizers, and perhaps most interestingly, irrigation. The varieties of *fakkous* grown in Palestine are so



adapted to rain-fed cultivation that the plant will not bear fruit if irrigated. It will have impressive growth, but for reasons that confound agronomists, the plant will not give fruit. Farmers, however, shrug their shoulders and say that this is the way things are: the humble *fakkous* is not suited for chemicals or irrigation.

Across the West Bank from Jenin to Hebron, there is renewed interest in *baladi* or native seeds. About ten years ago, Palestinian environmental groups began to take more interest in conserving native and local varieties of cultivated crops. These included cereals as well as vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers,



and eggplants. Special attention was paid to landraces (a local variety of domesticated plants) that are native to the region such as wheat, barley, lentil, and *fakkous*. Many of these crops do not survive under irrigation. They had been developed for generations under *ba'ali* or 'rain-fed' agriculture. *Ba'ali*, an ancient word used today comes from the major Canaanite god *Baal* who was associated with Hadad, the god of rain and storms. Today thousands of years later the word remains in the local Arabic vernacular. These varieties were not planted widely any longer, but all over the West Bank concerned farmers preserved them and renewed their personal stock. Modern production

systems encouraged intensive and irrigated production. Palestinian farmers had adapted the crops for many generations to particular microclimates where soil types, elevation, rainfall, disease pressures, pest pressures, and temperature play important roles. When divorced from a particular space, these local seeds did not survive. Coupled with the disregard paid by agricultural scientists, many seeds had all but disappeared. Only now do we realize that these seeds are important for our common environmental future.

It is in everyday life that we are invited to bear witness to this land. Yet often we do not realize that it is the seemingly most insignificant things, a cup of tea

during the olive harvest or the mighty *fakkous* seeds that give us the most beautiful invitations.

Omar Loren is writing a history of Palestinian environmental thought for his PhD dissertation.

Palestinian Environment and the Israeli Occupation

by Jane Sami Hilal

World attention has focused on the political conflict between Israelis and Palestinians with less attention to the environment of the area. While environmental problems do not recognize political, racial or religious boundaries, there is an organic relationship between environmental degradation in the occupied Palestinian Territories (oPT) and the political conflict. The oPT differs from other countries as it is characterized by the presence of two contradictory planning schemes that aim at exploiting its natural resources to serve two peoples: the indigenous Palestinian population and the Israeli settlers and army, who have controlled the area since 1967.

The fragile Palestinian environment has been the first casualty of this reality. It has been exposed to pressures ensuing from the activities of the Palestinian population on the one hand, and from the practices of the Israeli occupation on the other hand, which have systematically impeded Palestinian economic development and significantly contributed to changing the environmental landscape of the oPT. Lack of sovereignty over land and natural resources has denied the Palestinian people their rights to regulate land-use and to manage their own resources, without exceeding the carrying capacity of the land. Without the ability to regulate land-use over a contiguous area, natural ecosystems cannot be maintained, the status of the environment cannot be monitored, and environmental protection cannot

be implemented and enforced. On the other hand, the plans of the Israeli occupation in the oPT have been geared by political factors, aiming at grabbing as much of the Palestinian land as possible to implement the Israeli colonizing strategy and to change the demographic status.

The Israeli occupying Authorities have focused on exploiting the Palestinian natural resources to ensure a good standard of living for the Israeli settlers. They have used the Palestinian water resources far beyond any rational and equitable system of allocation. They have imposed restrictions on the Palestinians' water use in all sectors of life. In addition they have hindered the economic development of the Palestinian people and damaged their physical environment. Furthermore, the Israeli occupying Authorities have badly neglected the management of waste in the oPT. The geographical discontinuity, created in the lands under Palestinian control through the implementation of the Israeli Segregation Plans and the construction of the Segregation Wall, has hindered the implementation of several centralized projects related to waste management.

The practices of the Israeli occupation and control used by the Israeli Authorities have systematically hindered the development of the Palestinians, helped to increase poverty among

them, damaged the environment in the process and resulted in major physical impediments towards accomplishing sustainable development in the oPT. Environmental problems, such as land degradation, deterioration of biodiversity, depletion of water resources, deterioration of water quality, air pollution, etc. have dramatically accelerated during the Israeli Military Occupation since 1967.

In spite of the availability of fresh water resources in the oPT, the Palestinian water rights have been violated by Israel and consequently Palestinians have not had adequate access to potable water or water for agricultural and industrial purposes. Regarding the Palestinian water rights in the Jordan River, the Palestinians who are riparians have been deprived of their right in the Jordan River since the year 1967 when Israel began its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.¹ Concerning groundwater, the Israelis are currently using about 82% of the annual safe yield of the groundwater basins to meet 25% of their water needs, whereas the Palestinians in the West Bank consume about 18% of the annual safe yield.

As a result of the Israeli water policy and practices in the OPT, the total amount of water available for about 2.4 million Palestinian inhabitants in

¹ Isaac, J. and Safar, A., 2005, *Roots of Water Conflict in the Eastern*

Jane Hilal is a graduate of Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAICH) Chania, Greece, with a Masters degree of Science in Environmental Management. Currently, she works as the Head of the Water and Environment Research Department with the Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ).

Take Off Your Shoes

by Jim Manley

the West Bank is 105.9 million cubic meters (MCM) for their domestic, industrial and agricultural needs. For comparison, the total amount of water available for about 7.1 million Israelis is 1408.6 MCM in addition to 727 MCM from other sources² (i.e. storm and brackish water). On a per-capita basis, water consumption by Palestinians is approximately 73 litres per capita per day (l/c/d) compared to about 300 l/c/d for Israelis. Therefore, the per-capita consumption in Israel is 4 to 5 times higher than the Palestinian per-capita consumption in the oPT. This per-capita figure represents only about a quarter of what is recommended by the World Health Organization. Another example that illustrates the depletion of Palestinian water by the Israelis is that the 580,000 colonists residing in the West Bank including East Jerusalem consume on average 369 l/c/d. Furthermore, the Israeli colonies are regularly provided with water while more than 203 Palestinian localities are not served by the water network. Even those connected to the network suffer from frequent water shortages resulting in worse health conditions.³ In fact, the Palestinians in the rural communities of the West Bank survive on far less than even the average 70 litres; in some cases the per capita water-use may not exceed 20 litres per day.⁴

² World Bank, 2009, Assessment of Restrictions on Palestinian Water Sector Development, West Bank and Gaza.

³ PWA, Palestinian Water Authority, (2009), Water Supply in the West Bank Report, Ramallah, Palestine.

⁴ Amnesty International, 2009, Troubled Waters—Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water- Israel -Occupied Palestinian.

Refrain: Take, Take off your shoes
You're standing on my holy ground
Take, take, take off your shoes
You're standing on my holy ground
Well, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof
From the waters beneath to the heavens above, so...
Take, Take off your shoes
You're standing on my holy ground
You're standing on my holy ground

On the eighth day of Creation, well, the Lord looked around
At the power plants and freeways and the trash on the ground
Plantations growing rubber where the grain should be high
You couldn't see the sun for all the smog in the sky
Well, kids, you really filled the earth and then you subdued it
But there's nothing in my book that says you've got to pollute it! So...

Refrain

You're heating up the planet with your green-house effect,
You're killing off the oceans, 'cause you've got no respect
For what your fluorocarbons do to air and sea and land
What part of global warming do you not understand?
If oil is the commodity we're fighting for
It's time to learn the sanity that less is more...

Refrain

"Take Off Your Shoes" was written in 1974 at the Claremont School of Theology for a mid-term project in Dean Freudenberger's prophetic class, "Christian Responsibility in a Hungry World." The first verse reflects eco-issues of that time, most still current. The second verse was penned in 2011 as we experience global climate change.

Jim Manley is a song writer from California. The song is used by his permission. Copyright 1977, 2011. All rights reserved. jimmanley@earthlink.net www.manleymusic.com

Glimpses of Our Activities

Photos by Sabeel staff



Local Clergy leading the Sabeel Worship Service for Peace in Jerusalem.



A Sabeel Worship Service for Peace, the local clergy working together in an ecumenical spirit.



Thirteen clergy spouses met in Taybe for a retreat.



Sixteen clergy from the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Galilee area met in Taybe for an Ecumenical Clergy retreat.



Cedar Duaybis sharing at a book review of Mark Braverman's book, "Fatal Embrace" at the Jerusalem Sabeel office.



Jerusalem Sabeel's Young Adults seeking wisdom from Father (Abuna) Meletios Bassal.



Jerusalem Women's program reaching out to a younger group of women on a hike to Lifta, a 1948 Palestinian depopulated village.



Young Adults picking olives during the harvest.



The Nazareth Sabeel Children at their meeting of St. Francis of Assisi.



Pictures by the children who are involved in the Nazareth Sabeel Children's program, they made holiday crosses.



A gathering of young adults in the Nazareth Sabeel program.



Women around an olive tree in Bir Zeit for a joint Nazareth and Jerusalem Sabeel program.

Challenging
Oppression,
on a Donkey:

Christ,
Resistance,
and Creative
Discipleship

July 4 – 15, 2012

Jesus often taught about God's love and justice by doing something unexpected that challenged and convicted his audience. Christ continues to invite his disciples today to follow him in resistance to oppression, creatively witnessing to liberation for all, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sabeel's 7th International Young Adult Conference

Challenging Oppression, on a Donkey: Christ, Resistance, and Creative Discipleship

Our vision is to provide young adults with an alternative pilgrimage experience that challenges faith perceptions and actively engages with the people living in these lands.

11 days in Palestine and Israel

Cost: \$1200 includes all land costs but not airfare or transportation to/from the airport

Apply Now! www.sabeel.org and read Luke 19:35-42

Visits to Palestinian and Israeli Communities – Cultural Activities – Contextual Tours of Holy Sites – Volunteering and Activism – Worship and Bible Study – Panel Discussions and Advocacy Workshops

Application Deadline: June 1, 2012

Learn about Sabeel and Liberation Theology at
www.sabeel.org
Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center
Email: youth@sabeel.org or call +972 2 532 7136



Environmental Occupation

As olive trees are uprooted, so are Palestinians' lives

A million and a quarter trees and thousands of acres of farmland have been destroyed in Palestinian territories by Israelis since 1967. Nearly 456,000 olive trees were uprooted between 2000 and 2005, and the destructive practices continue to the present time.

Destruction of agricultural tracts is perpetrated in two forms: Israeli military action in support of state land expropriation and destructive vandalism by Jewish settlers.

Palestinians face draconian restrictions on the movement of people and goods in the territories. Many Palestinian farmers cannot reach their agricultural lands to tend and harvest their crops because of road closures. The separation barrier has deepened the agricultural crisis, permanently separating Palestinian families from their farmlands, except for locked, unmanned gates that allow unpredictable access.

Under a law from the Ottoman era, Israel claims as state property land that has been "abandoned" and left uncultivated for four years. This land is then usually declared Israeli state land and often later allocated to Israeli settlements for expansion. By making it almost impossible for some farmers to get to their land, Israel can claim that Palestinian land has been "abandoned." Often, land expropriation is effected without resort to even such bureaucratic chicanery as this.

Olive trees are a major source of livelihood for many Palestinian families. By targeting olive trees, the Israeli government is sabotaging the Palestinian economy.

World Bank reports have condemned the uprooting of olive trees as violating the trade policies of the Paris protocols of 1994 which call for "free access for Palestinian goods to the Israeli market and vice versa." Property destruction also violates Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits collective punishment.

Israel's control of water supply leaves Palestinians thirsty

Since the Beginning of the occupation in 1967, Israel's strict control of the water sector in the occupied territories has prevented development to meet Palestinian water needs, and caused shortages and a water-quality crisis.

Water in the occupied Palestinian territories has been fully incorporated into the Israeli water-management system to the general benefit of Israel and detriment of Palestinians. About 70% of groundwater on which Israel is dependent and 40% of its annual fresh water supply originate in the occupied territories. Of the water available from West Bank aquifers, Israel uses 73%, West Bank Palestinians use 17%, and illegal Jewish settlements use 10%. As a result, West Bank Palestinian water consumption is 40 liters per day less than the minimum global standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Israel is in control of all water development in the West Bank. Israel can veto any Palestinian requests to drill wells or collect surface water. It is difficult if not impossible for Palestinians in occupied territories to get permission to drill a new water well or even repair one. Because of the water shortage, many Palestinians have to buy water from tankers; poor families spend up to one-fifth of their income on water.

Israel has neglected construction of infrastructure to connect the Palestinian rural population to a running-water network as well as proper maintenance of existing networks. In 2008, 227,500 Palestinians in 220 towns and villages were not connected to a water network. Another 190,000 Palestinians are only partially served.

In the West Bank, about 50 groundwater wells and more than 200 cisterns have been destroyed or isolated from their owners by construction of the separation barrier, affecting the domestic and agricultural needs of more than 122,000 people.

PURPOSE STATEMENT *f* SABEL

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. Sabeel strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

For more information on Friends of Sabeel groups in your area please contact our international representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.