

A diary from the West Bank - Palestine



Lars Tore Bjermeland

Påsken 2013

The following are notes from a trip at the West Bank, Palestine, Easter 2013. Sixteen individuals from all over Norway went to experience the difficulties the Palestinian people are suffering due to the Israeli occupation. We visited cities, organizations, refugee camps and people who all could tell about the hardships of being under siege. Witnessing the rise of an Israeli apartheid state, with all its humiliation and violent cruelty - hurts.

The reader have to appologize my insufficient English, in addition to possible factual errors in the text, regarding persons, geographical places, years, etc.

Lars Tore

23.03.2013

Ramallah, West Bank.

I drank a bottle of red. The Bethlehem Star. They said it was local. Meaning Palestinian. My suspicion is on the other hand; Israeli. The label made me suspicious. I might be wrong, of course. Happens often. But it was good. It was actually lovely. Then, alongside, I smoked. We're 15. And most of us are patting on the magic wand of the pipe, to the bubbling sound of the water as we inhale - like a group of fish in an aquarium at the surface to be fed. In unknown waters. We are having a nice time, in shades of grey - in Ramallah.



Let's just start with the following, and make it very clear: Israel is an apartheid-state; which runs a ruthless, reckless and inhuman practice and policy toward the Palestinian state and its citizens. Israel is probably the only country in the world, which has a population where 67% of it - tell they are proud to be racists. They are proud to say they wish all the Arabs to be demolished, and that their land shall and will be free from anything else but Jews. 67%. Israel is a state which is fully aware that the rest of the world has given them countless of warnings related to expansion of settlements on Palestinian land, the violation of human rights through humiliating check points, deprivation of Palestinian homes, the never ending imprisonments of innocent Palestinians, and the never ending terror on the Gazans, the extreme restrictions on their freedom of mobility, work or demonstrations - but don't give a shit. Because nothing will happen. The warnings have absolutely no substance. They are allowed to do whatever they want. Israel is a child who is told it is not allowed to be naughty, but when it is - there are given no consequences. The child will be a bastard. For those of you who heard the proclamations of the UN, that the number of civil wars in the world has never been lower than now; that democracy and peace among nations is in blossom; that segregation, humiliation, arrests, terror and overt terror between ethnic groups belong to another era - you're deeply mistaken. The abominable takes place all around the world. One example, which probably most of the world has insight into - is Israel. The sick part; we all embrace the evil - by being silent.

Onboard the Air Baltic from Riga to Tel Aviv, somewhere above Europe, takes place a small theatre. The main actor is me. I'm naive, interested, and amazed. By my side, are two Finnish people. A man and a woman. It all started when I offered them the two last Latvian chocolates I had. In fact, I regret bitterly I did, afterwards. I was sure the guy was a Jew. He sat with an oversized bible on his lap, and he had the exact same beard as the fundamental ultraorthodox ones. Turned out he wasn't, though. He was just a Christian. She, was his colleague, and translator. Thought I'd work on my growing and involuntary prejudices I've personally experienced the last years. Therefore - the chocolate. Sometimes it's easy when something grabs you too hard, to forget that only peace can build bridges - not hatred.

About eighteen years ago, the guy, who then was a businessman traveling around in Europe - got a vision at an airport in Germany. As he was staring at the flights coming in from the runway, and the passengers that got off, he suddenly saw what was in front of him, unclear and in purple colors. The funny part, was that he did not only see the people who went off the plane, but also people getting onboard - at the same time. From that moment on he understood. God had spoken to him. This once ignorant businessman. God had given him a mission. And the mission, was to establish an organization in order to help Jews from all over the world to emigrate back to Israel, the Holy Land. The passengers he saw in front of him, were Jews. In thousands. The two of them run today an organization called The Ravens, which has exactly that purpose; to return Jews to Israel. As their organization is located close to the border of Russia, they have specialized in organizing the return of Russian Jews. According what they said, they've had great success. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991, thousands of Russian Jews have wanted to emigrate. The Ravens has assisted them in everything from transport, settling in their new home, establishment of the contact with Israelean authorities, and in general all practical matters. The Ravens was indeed a truly successful and devoted organization. My deep curiosity and immense admiration was of such a character, that I had to ask if there really was space enough for all the Jews who wanted to return. After all, there are actually more Jews living outside Israel, than inside. To my astonishment, I got to know there would be enough space. Very soon. A chill in my back. I asked them if they were thinking about the "Palestinian problem", and how this land at any

point would fall into Israel`s hands. A queer smile without any words dismissed that as a problem at all. The promised and expected had already started; the final expansion of Israel; Syria. Damascus was now falling, the Muslims were killing each other, just like God had predicted to man - through the Holy Bible. It seemed like they enjoyed to hear themselves preach this pervert fulfillment. They looked at each other, she was stroking his thigh, while tapping lightly his nose tip wit her finger. So happy for the present but fair cruelty taking place just north of Israel. Finally. The enforcement of the prophecy. No need to worry; they had the settlers.

It was cold and dark as we arrived at Ben Gurion International Airport, Tel Aviv. I can honestly say there wasn`t much difference in temperature from Molde, where I came from. And first; passport control. Not nice. Two of us were taken aside and questioned more thoroughly. One of them even twice. I was only questioned where I was going, why I came, and who I traveled with. I told them we were visiting Jerusalem, the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, the Dead Sea, and other Christian sites. Barely approved. With a grim look. I guess they have decades of training in recognizing who`s not there only to stroll the Via Dolorosa. Even I will also do that, of course. It took us about an hour to get from Ben Gurion to our Royal Court Hotel in Ramallah - where we will reside all the time we`re here. Happy for that, actually. Then I will get the possibility to get to know Ramallah well. As we enter the municipality of Ramallah, a huge red sign sat up by Israel tells us - that Israelis are not allowed to enter the area, as it is associated with mortal danger. Is this a joke?

About Ramallah: the city lies about ten kilometers north of Jerusalem. Distances between everything are short, and from roof tops, one can even see the Jordanian mountains in the east. Ramallah houses a population of around 300 000, though no one can say for sure any exact number. Even though many Palestinian see Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, Ramallah is recognized as the per facto capital, in addition to being a cultural, political, and administrative center of the Palestinian authority. It is growing fast, alongside a rapid growth in the population, and it`s beautiful. And it even has a beer brewn here! Ramallah was historically a Christian town, but today Muslims form the majority of the population, with Christians still making up a significant minority. The city is recognized to have a dry summer, but mild and rainy winter with occasional snowfall. Three days ago, the city and Abu Mazen was honored by a short visit, by maybe the person with the most power in the world; Barack Husain Obama. Obama stayed like a couple of hours, handed out a few million dollars - which actually makes the Palestinians more dependent than free, before he went back to Jerusalem to dine with Netanyahu.



That is Ramallah, and here I am. I've put down the magic wand, the fog is replaced by late hours, and the coal has turned into ashes. Nighty folks. We'll see about tomorrow. Sleep tight.

24.03.2013

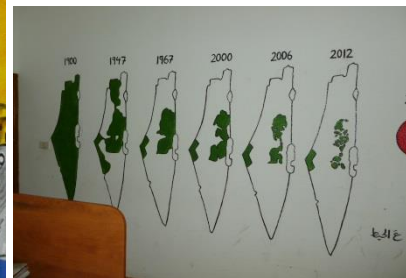
Ramallah, Jerusalem

7 o'clock. I wake up. No need for any alarm. Sometimes I wonder if these West Bankers are placing their elbow continuous on the horn as they squeeze their way through the traffic jam. Just one, big, and coherent noise from six to nine, accompanied by massive yelling. Brick walls will not keep it out. I for sure need no alarm.

In the dining room, at a quarter past seven, I find myself and another of my travel companions. I feel rested. And the breakfast - is wonderful. I eat some scrambled eggs, a little mushroom stew, tomato and cucumber, and zitr. I finish with an Arabic coffee, but soon discover it's too early for me to drink tar with sugar at 7:40 a.m. I will learn from my mistakes. And they aren't few. Today's schedule is not sat until 9 o'clock, so we're way done when the others start showing up. Then, I wait. Guess I might as well be used to it. I believe waiting is geographically correct now. A bit past nine though, we all meet outside the entrance of our hotel, for our first walk in Palestine. We head for a meeting with a grass root organization, which has actually accomplished quite a lot. The organization has its headquarters in Ramallah, a 30 minutes walk from our breakfast table. And it's freezing.

Stop the Wall is an organization, consisting of politically independent people - ranging in everything from students to unemployed, and farmers to businessmen, which all have a common aim; to fight against all violations afflicted them by Israel, and a resistance against the wall which segregates, separates and destroys families, homes and land. Their aim is to embody the will of the Palestinian people, by getting an accept for life - through freedom. Their office was newly refurbished, and looked really nice. On the walls were paintings of resistance, martyrs and national symbols.

The guy who welcomed us, had devoted most parts of his life for the cause of freedom. He was the founder of the organization, and was working actively with the Palestinian authorities - especially in their dialogue with international partners. He had for instance only an hour available for us, as he was going for a meeting with the PLO and an ambassador for the Austrian embassy in Tel Aviv. He was though no longer in charge of the organization, as he was sought after by the Israeli government - and could therefore not stay for a long time at one place. He had to be constantly on the move, both from home and family. His crime is to work against the expansion of the Israeli society on Palestinian land, and the building of the wall. All in all, he had stayed nine years of his life in Israeli prisons. The man in charge of Stop the Wall today, was arrested by the Israeli police in that particular office, the 8th of March 2013. He's still in custody. The soldiers wrecked and raided at the same time the offices completely, stealing laptops, hard drives and memory cards related to the organization's human rights advocacy work. Our old man held an informative speech and a slide show about the present situation; a situation which hardly gives hope at all. It was a good meeting - even though "good" is hardly the right word to be used in this matter.



Outside, the temperature was gradually creeping upwards. I pass a busy road with a prayer to live for tomorrow, enter a small shop, buy a chocolate and some sunflower seed. We all await our driver who shall take us to Jerusalem, and from there on start today's "Political Tour." The sense of resignation could be found in the terror of waiting in a rapidly increasing heat, or the lack of food or drink, or a combination of both.

In Jerusalem we meet Abu Hassan, which will be our guide the next three days. I didn't know Jimmy Page was still among us. Jimmy, or Hassan, had spent the last sixteen years of his life informing and enlightening people about the political situation in Palestine and Israel. Before he had this role, he was an activist. That is also why he had spent 12 years of his life in different Israeli prisons. After he got children though, he didn't have the conscience to carry on like before - and chose another way to fight the occupation. Through spreading the knowledge of what has happened, and is happening.

We all drive out of Jerusalem city, to get an overview from a distance. The landscape which reveals itself before us, is indeed beautiful and biblical. The rocky and hilly landscape, shepherds, early morning sun, terraces of olive gardens, white almond trees, donkeys. Nothing much different from the two thousand year old picture which has been created in my mind - of how this land would look like. That is - if we look to the east. When we turned to the west, we saw white clusters of villages or settlements, all as outskirts of Jerusalem. These settlements were though not surrounded by the land I've above described. They were surrounded by a massive concrete wall, taller and more solid than the Berlin Wall ever was. And most likely; it's a wall which will become older than the German became. But there were not only one wall. There were several, and they seemed to go in all directions, and it was very difficult to understand much of it, what its purpose was, or where it ended. It was all a chaos. I've heard about the wall in singular, not in plural. This political tour turned out to be a revelation to me, concerning Israeli policy. The tour turned out to be a tough test whether we understood the tactical planning behind the design of land, or not. If we understood the clever minds of the architects which feed their families from the purpose of making life as unbearable and humiliating as possible for others. I passed. But only barely. The racism is too overwhelming. The sickness is too tough to keep focus. As we drive west and head for one of these settlements, we pass through the second checkpoint of the day. We're pointed at by the Israeli soldiers, with huge automatic weapons. The driver is checked. Abu Hassan is checked. We're allowed to pass. One is not allowed to enter Jerusalem from the West Bank, unless one has valid documentation that one resides there. Abu Hassan has that.



The Whole of Palestine is divided into, A-zones, B-zones and C-zones. This is according to the Oslo Agreement from 1993 - which most Palestinians consider as probably one of the most devastating treaties which has been signed for Palestine. In general terms, the Oslo Agreement's main aim was to make Palestine having full autonomy over the areas which had been occupied by Israel in the Six Day War in 1967, through a transitional period not exceeding more than five years. In rough terms. A final deadline for complete autonomy, would then be set to 1998. Today it is 2013, and the autonomy dream has maybe never been more dim than now. A-zones are those areas where the Palestinians are fully in control. They have the authority, and have their own police force. Of the Palestinian areas, the A-zone covers approx. 18% of the territories. In reality, Israel has also full control over these territories, as the army can enter and do arrests whenever they might want to. Only civil Israelis won't enter the zone. A-zones consist of Gaza, and the towns of Jericho, Qalqilya, Ramallah, Bulkarem, Nablus and Bethlehem at the West Bank. Then they have the B-zones. These are other areas at the West Bank, where Palestinians are meant to take care of the security, but while they are under full Israeli authority. This zone covers about 22% of the Israeli territories. Finally, they have the C-zones. The C-zones include Israeli settlements on the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. This zone covers about 60% of the Palestinian area. Israel was obliged through the treaty of the Oslo agreement, to within a period of 5 years - having transferred full autonomy of the land back to the Palestine. If all parties had acted according the purpose of the agreement's designers, it would maybe have worked. But whether it was the designer or the rest of the world who was naive, or both, one party was indeed not; Israel. By dividing the Palestinian land into patches, or islands, on the map - the agreement allowed Israel to temporary rule areas they previously never had full control over. Now they could, with an international accept to lean on. The problem was; the transfer of authority never actually started. Instead, they consolidated even more power in the areas, through doing whatever they wanted, without the world responding. Even in the A-zones, the Palestinian authorities have minimal real power today, and is 100% subjected to the Israeli government and its soldiers' actions. Meaning, what once was Palestinian land, is all under Israeli control.

Was this rough description really necessary? Maybe it is boring for some, but I think it's important to know, to understand the horror of apartheid we experienced today.

As above mentioned, we were driving in the outskirts of Jerusalem, and more specifically - East Jerusalem. When it comes to facts about Jerusalem, history and demography, I won't do more than mentioning that it is a city of more than 700 000 people (it has a rapid growth), and that it is reckoned as to many, the most holy place for both Christians, Muslims and Jews. Of

our concern, it is maybe more important to mention that West Jerusalem is under Israeli control, while East Jerusalem is under Palestinian control. Legally, but not in practice. The recipe: outside the borders of East Jerusalem municipality, are growing clusters of Israeli settlements. The diaspora from all over the world return back to the holy land, and settle down. Remember; this land is a B-zone, meaning Israel is exercising the authority over it - even if it belongs to Palestine. This is happening today, but has also been done for decades. The settlements are numerous; some are in the beginning of their lifetime and thereby still small, and some are older and consist of thousands of settlers.

Then the wall. Israel then surrounds the settlements with a wall; a wall which goes straight into East Jerusalem. Simsalabim; East Jerusalem has got a new settlement - which again adds a certain number of new Israeli Jews to the population of East Jerusalem. But the wall is not only including, it's expelling as well. At the same time as a new wall is including a settlement into Jerusalem, it may at the same time divide a village from Jerusalem. Over the night, a wall might have been sat up, and suddenly a Palestinian village is separated from the city they once belonged to, work and family. As we watched the enforcement of the horrific plan from above, on the many hills and ridges surrounding the otherwise so beautiful and unique city, it was too obvious to see. The wall, which Israel claims to put up as a security measure (the reason which all of their humiliating measures are grounded on), is nothing but a snake in the landscape - with one purpose; to expel and include. Please, compare the map of the 1970 - border of Jerusalem municipality, with one from today. Why do you think the size of the municipality has doubled?

A few facts about the apartheid we experienced today: we saw the standard of the infrastructure today, and did comparisons. The infrastructure in the Palestinian areas are poor, while it is well developed in the Israeli. No wonder, as the Palestinian are themselves not in charge of the major economy. Israel is. According the Geneva Convention, Palestine is under occupation, and the ones occupied shall restrain from any economical expenses toward the occupier. All Palestinians in B- and C-zones must pay taxes to Israel. If not, they are breaking the law. Then, Israel has built something they call Bypass roads. These roads, which have high standard, are built between the settlements and West Jerusalem. Meaning; only Israelis can use it. Last year was also the dawn of separate buses in parts of Jerusalem municipality; one for Israeli Jews, and one for the others. The plate of the cars, has also great importance. If the plate is yellow, you are either a resident of Palestine, or have residency in East Jerusalem. If your plate is white, you belong to the Palestinian area (outside East Jerusalem). Cars with white plates cannot enter Israel or Jerusalem. Cars with yellow plates on the other hand, have the possibility to enter Palestinian areas. If you have a girl- or boyfriend outside East Jerusalem, and yourself have a residence permit in East Jerusalem, you cannot live together. If someone finds out your girlfriend lives with you in East Jerusalem, without her having residence permit, you will lose your own permit. You will also lose it, if you stay with your partner temporarily outside East Jerusalem. And about the humiliating checkpoints, which actually has no other purpose than being humiliating and oppressive; I will tell you more about them tomorrow, as I know we're going to experience them like the Palestinians themselves do, tomorrow. The examples of overt, extensive and planned racism were so many, that my mind at some point couldn't take it anymore.

The old city of Jerusalem, is of the most holy and sacred places in the world. The greatest events, in the biggest religions took place here. Tonight I strolled the old town, and up the Via Dolorosa. I passed the church where Maria, the mother of Jesus, is supposed to have been born. And if I went on further, I might had come to the Cavalry; where Jesus was hung on the

cross. To me, it is extremely special to be present at these places. There are so many things I want to see in Jerusalem. And I felt it tonight, the atmosphere. It was special, and something I don't think I've experienced before. But I couldn't focus tonight. My mind was somewhere else. I decided to return to Jerusalem another day, and headed for number 18 back to Ramallah. At the check point between Jerusalem and Ramallah, the bus was stopped. Soldiers came in. Heavy loaded with guns. Checking the documents of all the terrorists on board the bus. The kids, the men, the women, old people, couples.. We, were of no interest. Then, the bus began moving again. On my way back to the hotel, I started to think about what I saw inside East Jerusalem today. I will end my letter of today, with these memories.



Some of the Palestinian refugees, after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, was provided with land by the Jordanian government (who at the time was in charge of East Jerusalem) in a neighborhood called Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem. These were several families. At the Six Day War in 1967, Israel once more gained control over the land, and soon after Israeli settlers came and occupied the homes of these families. This occupation was a violation on the rights of refugees, according international law. Israel had no other choice but returning the homes to the rightful owners. During the decades up until today though, there have been continuous claims by settlers for the ownership of the houses in Sheikh Jarrah. In 2008 the first families were to be evicted. The Israeli court had accepted the settlers' claim for ownership. Up until last year, one of the families slept outside the house, on the street, refusing to leave. For four years the proud family stayed on the street. Watching strange faces through the windows of their home, which was lost forever. The rest of the families in Sheikh Jarrah also await this to happen. None of them dare today to leave the house at any point, as settlers may move into them immediately no one is at home.

As we came to Sheikh Jarrah today, we stood outside the house of the mentioned family. In front of the house and us, was a settler. This guy had come in from Brooklyn, New York, with his family, and moved in the same day as the Israeli court had ordered the eviction. This was four years ago, but "his" house was in a miserable condition. He hadn't done anything with it. When he saw us, he went inside. At the roof top, were countless of surveillance cameras. Soon the Israeli police would be here. We went further on to another house in the neighborhood. The same destiny. Inside that house, lived a group of young settlers. For years,

young settlers had moved in and out, was in general sleeping at daytime, and making noise at night, had dogs which bit the neighboring Palestinian children, urinated in plastic bags and threw at the neighbors, and all kinds of inhuman behavior. As we stood and looked at the place, a small Palestinian girl came over and gave each of us a flyer. About Sheikh Jarrah. One of us gave her a shekel for tip. Soon she returned. She wasn't allowed to receive it by her mother.

It has been a long letter today. I don't think any of the rest ones, will have this length. But i had to tell. Good night.

25.03.2013

Hebron, Bethlehem

The temperature's rising, and we're on our way to Hebron, the largest city on the West Bank. It houses more than 500 000 Palestinians, and is situated 35 kilometers south of Jerusalem. Historically, Hebron has been a center for trade in the whole region, but has for a long time now suffered due to the illegal occupation. It is also one of Palestine's oldest cities, and is considered as holy by both Jews and Muslims. It houses several buildings, remnants and relics from the past, covering eras of different rulers. Hebron is unique in the way that it is the only Palestinian city with Israeli settlers living inside the city itself, in addition to the surroundings. These settlers number about 400, and are guarded by an Israeli force of around 10 000 soldiers. This has led to a tense situation between the Israelis and the Palestinians; Jews and Muslims. After the transition of power through the Oslo agreement should have taken place, the contrary has happened in Hebron. Since the year of 2000, the city has periodically been closed, extensive curfews, houses have been torn down, land confiscated, businesses have had to shut down, due to increased military Israeli presence, including actions taken by the Jewish settlers.

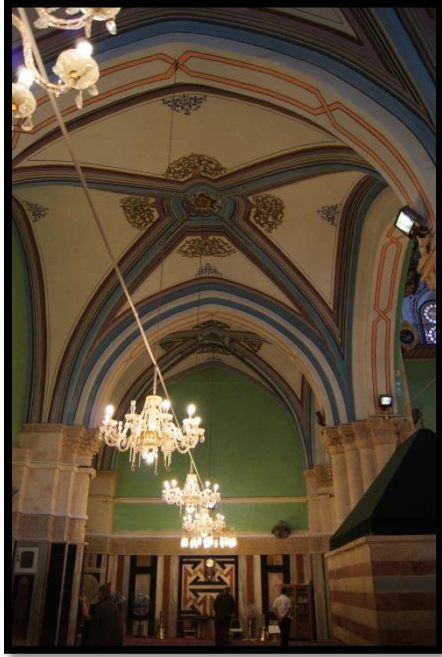
We arrived just outside Hebron's old city. Some kind of procession was being organized, with music, happy children waving, shouting and asking the usual "what's your name". Turned out the city's mayor at any time would arrive, to visit the Ibrahim Mosque. Before the narrow streets and alleys got filled with people, we hurried our way into the old town. Archways of age old stones led in all directions, humans everywhere, spices and vegetables in baskets and barrels, clothes, carpets and other crafts, hens in cages to be sold, scarfs, t-shirts and flags with pro - Palestinian messages, and the list goes on. In the end at one of the archways, the Israelis had put up some security measures. We all had to go through a checkpoint, before we could enter the square outside, in front of the Ibrahim Mosque. But the soldier who was in charge of opening and closing the entrance whenever he might found it convenient, let us wait. Abu Hassan said this was the typical routine. Just not letting people through, let them wait in frustration, especially at the time of prayers in the mosque – so they wouldn't make it. When the soldiers wanted, they would open the gate again. I asked Abu Hassan, if he thought the soldiers enjoyed the harassment, or if they just had to obey the policy made in treating the Palestinians. He told me that he had no problem answering this question from

an objective point of view, as he had been thinking about it for countless of times during his whole life as a resister of the occupation. He said that in general, most soldiers really enjoy what they were doing. It's not only the sense of power they hold that makes their cruel behavior, but there are several other factors as well. He had also an opinion, that female soldiers were worse than men. But one such factor is, that they are brought up with the prejudices and hate against Muslims. They inherit the beliefs about "the others". Then, it is really not easy to be a soldier in the Israeli army, if you're a little pro – Palestinian. Even if you have a little sympathy, you will soon resign on this. Your attitude will in general not survive there. And in the end - the harassment has a purpose, and it's called humiliation. To make them know who's superior. But personally, I cannot understand how this will work in the long run. As I've mentioned in another letter; I think man can only achieve peace, by doing good. This, is nothing but an evil plan.



The Ibrahim Mosque was very beautiful. It seemed very small inside, but it had its reason. In 1994 a man called Baruch Goldstein entered the mosque with the help of Israeli soldiers outside, first shot the imam in the head, and then performed a massacre on the praying Muslims inside. Eventually he was stopped, and got strangled. After this incident, the Mosques became closed by Israel. Inside the mosque one will find the grave of Amber. When the mosque finally was reopened, they had divided the mosque into two, and made the other part of it a synagogue. With no access between the two

areas. The tomb of Amber could be seen from the side of the synagogue, while it could be seen in another angle from the mosque. The silence, the beauty, the sacred atmosphere, and the feeling of being welcomed inside the mosque was so satisfying. When I stepped outside again, and saw the Israelis soldiers, with their automatics to secure themselves against these evil terrorists surrounding them, and the ultraorthodox settlers gaze at us with hate – I just felt like crying.



We continued down and into a part of the city, now named the H2-area. Hebron is divided into two areas; H1 and H2. H2 has traditionally been the richest and most busy part of Hebron. This was hard to believe, as it looked like the city was dead, where we were. There were no shops, practically no people, just dust, sun, Israeli flags all over, and checkpoints with soldiers. The street where we walked had a new layer of asphalt. It was new. The reason; the Israeli foreign minister; Lieberman, had just been visiting. There was a strip of gravel to the right of the asphalt. This strip was for Palestinians, while the asphalt was for Jews. That was his demand. Lieberman, as we speak about him, also visited the Ibrahim mosque that day. When he's in a mosque, he refuses like the custom says, to take off his shoes when entering a mosque. He didn't do it this day either. He was kindly asked to do, but denied. Abu Hassan tells us that hardly anyone dare to confront him. The consequences may be fatal. It's like a bad movie.



It was hard to believe this city had a population of more than 500 000 residents. The H2-area is totally controlled by Israel, and is a C-zone, which never ceased to exist. Abu Hassan wanted us to stop at the corner of a street. To the left, was a check point. Behind that check point, was a population of tens of thousand. But each and every one of those people living behind that check point, had to pass it to, for instance buy a bread. Behind that check point there were no shops, nothing. It was illegal. To have full control over the people inside, everyone had to be checked, going in and out. In front of us was a small mosque. It was run by an imam, who lived in a house just behind the mosque. It used to take approx. two minutes for the imam to walk from his house to the mosque. Now, it took about twenty-five minutes. As a “security measure”, Israel had put up a concrete wall in front of his house. This led him to take another way to the mosque, and through several check points.



As we stood there, several cars of settlers, with yellow plates, passed us. Watching us suspiciously. One raised his fist at us. Abu Hassan revealed for the first time a little about his own life. Like I've told you before, he had been spending a large part of his life in Israeli prisons. I asked him where the Israelis usually took the prisoners. He said it was different places, but the usual tactic was to transfer them between several prisons, during the arrest. I continued by asking him about the prison conditions. He said he could talk for hours. Of course he couldn't now. He could only try to make me understand, by asking if I knew about what was happening in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. Of course, I knew some. He said that regularly, prison staff- or wards arrive in Israel to be trained in interrogation methods. In other words; torture. One doesn't have to be Einstein to then figure out the prison conditions in Israel. On our way back to the old town, we passed a street called Martha-street. This street was once the most busy and prosperous one in the whole of Hebron. Now, it was dead. Again, just sun, Israeli flags and check points.

The old town was great. Like a cliché; it was like from the stories of Allahaddin. People were polite, smiling, wanted to talk, and at least happy we wanted to come and see the situation, their town and their culture. And it was so full of life. Now we had entered the H1-area; the Palestinian controlled area. Palestinian controlled, with strong modifications. One thing Hebron by many is best known for today, is a protection which is put up above the peoples' heads, in the narrow alleys where all the trade and life takes place. Why? Because above this protection, are apartments belonging to the 400 settlers of Hebron. Systematically, they throw garbage and all kinds of stuff out of the window and down onto the people underneath. The latest "idea", is throwing down plastic bags of urine or stool, or paint, which will ruin the clothes, fabrics or other handcraft. It is quite unbelievable.



At one corner, Abu Hassan asks us if we want to go on top of one of the Palestinian-belonging apartments – to have an overview of the city. Not just to see the city, but also to see the apartment whose roof we stood at. It was now occupied by Israeli soldiers, and the family who lived there had to stay with friends. The Israeli soldiers, deployed in Hebron, were occupying the house. They returned usually late at night to sleep. At the roof top of the apartment, we could get a good overview of the city. The H2-area, which once was prosperous and rich, was now all deadly silent. The H1, was now probably what H2 once was.

At every roof there is a water tank. They are all black or grey. To be more specific, the black or grey water tanks belong to Palestinians. White water tanks belong to Israelis – and are about five times as big. Water shortage is a huge problem in Palestine, as Israel controls 82% of the water resources on Palestinian soil. And it's no secret. The water tank at this roof top, had five bullet holes in it.



The further we got into the H1-area, the more busy it got. More people, more noise, more trade, more life. As we went out of the old quarters, our car waited for us. To the left of our car, was a new check point. Behind it, another city area with thousands of people. With no shops, no mosque, no nothing. Some of us passed the check point and its disgusting soldiers to look behind. Streets with apartments and houses, but no people outside. The sound of a baby was crying from somewhere inside one of these, but was replaced by the roaring motor of a huge monster of an armored vehicle slowly advancing toward us. It passed, and right behind it was a Palestinian boy, laughing, as he was covered with like a twenty-five balloons. Maybe he wished they could lift him up, and take him far away. We left Hebron. It is the first time I had ever experienced such racial discrimination, segregation, and evil, as I had done there.

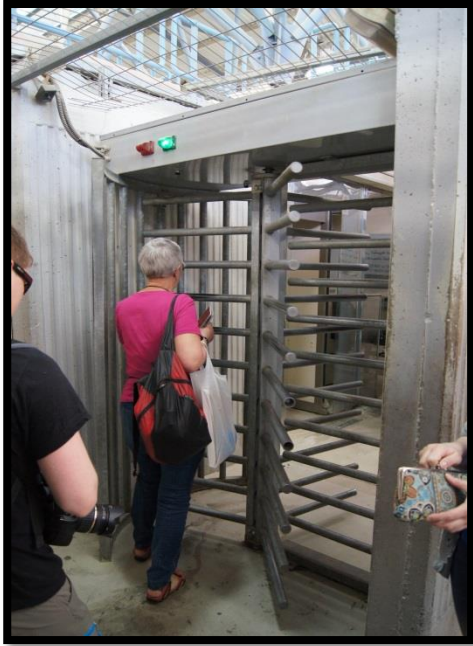


After about 30 minutes, we arrived in another holy site; Bethlehem. Our schedule didn't allow us to stay there for too long. It is a city of approx. 25 000 inhabitants. And as we all know; it is the birth city of Jesus from Nazareth. Which again, is what it is best known for. And related to that – the Nativity Church is undoubtedly what's most visited in the city. The church was built in the 4th century, and is seen as a holy place for both Muslims and Christians. We went there, and I saw the cave where Jesus is supposed to have been born. More than 2000 years ago, the place was a cave, and then the church had been built around it at a later stage. I have always thought, and according to the New Testament, that Jesus was born in a stable. People claim otherwise, as well. It was a nice experience to be there. The church in itself was magnificent, and I've never seen anything like it. There were like countless of lamps hanging everywhere, and it all had a sense of age, age, age old atmosphere. I truly enjoyed being there.



It was nice to be in Bethlehem, even if it was for a short stop. Between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, there is a huge check point, where thousands by thousands of people enter each day. They call the checkpoint, "300". I don't know if they call it the same down here. We could pass the checkpoint being inside the bus, but we wanted to have at least a small sense of how it was, going through the check point. At this time of day, there were almost none. Usually, at a certain hour in the morning, and in the afternoon, the place is packed with people. People going between home and work. Why such security measures; God knows, I guess. Because of the wall (which I previously have said is put up everywhere on the West Bank), some people have to get to this checkpoint, as it is the only way between Jerusalem and Betlehem. For people living far away from "300", it might take them what before was 20 minutes in getting to work, 4 hours instead. As an example. And there are certain hours for when it's possible to get through the checkpoint. If you're too late, you might not get through to work at all that day. Or if you're late back home from work, you will in many cases get through, but usually not be allowed to get out again the following day. Because you were late. There are so many examples of unnecessary and meaningless policy and regulations, I have kind of resigned. Again. But worse than the restrictions in themselves, is what once more the Palestinians have to suffer from every day; the humiliation by the meaningless. To be treated like criminals. To be treated as in a concentration camp. We went through the checkpoint, and I can promise you - that I felt as a criminal when getting out of there. Metal barriers everywhere, detectors, long hallways for thousands of people to wait, while someone is being harassed, interrogated, denied letting through. Not on Israeli soil. On Palestinian land. Internationally recognized Palestinian land.





I go home. I smoke shisha. I go to sleep. The world is not fair. My mood switches between anger and sadness. The checkpoint made me angry. Good night.

26.03.2013

Nablus, and Balata Refugee Camp

For each day now, the temperature's rising. It's only March, and I can't really imagine how it will be here in July. We're heading northwards, and the second biggest city in Palestine; Nablus. Nablus is approx. 2000 years old, and has maybe the most beautiful old town, in all of Palestine. It has throughout the centuries (and millenniums) had several rulers, but when the UN declared Palestine as an approved national state in 1948, it became officially a part of Palestine. Only a year after, during the Arab-Israeli War, the city came under Jordanian rule. This lasted until the Six Day War in 1967, when Israel took full control over the city, until the Bloody Oslo Agreement – as many Palestinian calls it. Since then, it has been a so-called A-area; meaning The Palestinian authority has full control. As before mentioned, is this as far from the truth as it's possible to get. Israel is still in large controlling the economy, the freedom of movement in and out of the city, and has it continuously and totally under surveillance. Apart from that, the city houses a large majority of Muslims, but also two minorities of Christians and Samaritans.



Along the road, we get to see the same old story of apartheid and racism, as we so often have been witnessing these days. As our bus has yellow plates (Israeli), we face no problems. At the checkpoints on our way, there are two lanes in each direction. One where Israeli cars are let through, and one for Palestinians. At each checkpoint, Israeli cars are passing without even slowing down. Each and every car with white signs (Palestinian) are being stopped and checked for documents or other. We pass small Palestinian villages which is located close to the road we're on, and the small dusty gravel road which leads down to the main road, are blocked by huge cement blocks, or tons of sand and stones – to prevent the residents the access to the road. The road, designed for yellow plates, which leads them to the nearest city in a short time. Instead they have to take old and impassable roads, where it will take the Palestinians ages to get to the same destinations. And we see abandoned houses, once belonged to Palestinians. Close to many of these houses, are put up new Jewish settlements. The Palestinians who own the abandoned house, often doesn't dare to come back. The settlers are worse than the Israeli soldiers, and are extremely aggressive. Most settlers carry machine guns, and do whatever they can to let everybody else know who's in charge. They are also known for having fearsome dogs, which Palestinians in general are afraid. Regularly, Palestinians are scared to harvest their own land, due to the settlers nearby.



At about an hour of driving, we arrive in Nablus, and Balata Refugee Camp. When the state of Israel declared its independence in 1948, and was given the land by the United Nations, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees, and fled the villages and cities they until then had settled in. Refugee camps started growing like weed all over Palestine. The ones that came to these refugee camps, were people from nearby occupied territories. One such territory, was what today is the Israeli city of Jaffa. And these fled to the nearest non-occupied city, which was Nablus.

The UN therefore established Balata refugee camp. The whole idea about a refugee camp, is that it is supposed to be strictly temporary. An occupier is according the Geneva convention, responsible for the refugees who suffer due to the conflict, and must do what it can to resolve the problem and situation for the refugees, as soon as possible. As we know; the Israelis never really went, and never really cared for the displaced anywhere in Palestine, and will never do. Result; the refugee camp they became responsible for in 1948, is still there. And the situation has never been worse. Balata refugee camp is the largest refugee camp in Palestine (apart from Gaza), where there are 27 000 refugees living in an area of 1 square kilometer. Everything in this camp, have bi-effects. It is naturally struggling with an extreme unemployment rate, and poverty. The results of that, are children who are struggling with emotional problems, at school and home. Anger. Depression. Fear of the daily and nightly raids from the Israeli soldiers, who always arrest teenagers during the night, and put them into detention for unknown periods. Suicide. The quite new phenomena of drugs, which the refugees buy from soldiers who want to earn a little cash. Including the fear of the soldiers who can kick in the door at any house in the middle of the night, to get some food, or to stay there until the morning and the sun rises. The extreme anger and frustration among young boys, which mainly results in one of two evils; either joining extreme fundamentalist groupings, primarily related to al-Quaida, or seek the settlers. If they choose the last option, they will either get shot, or their dogs will take them. In other words; they commit suicide.

A refugee camp is meant to be temporarily, as previously mentioned. And it is originally meant to consist of tents – as it is temporarily. All over Palestine you will see refugee camps, but which is not consisting of tents. They look like huge clusters of houses; like extremely poor villages. Where did the tents go? Naturally, when a camp is no longer temporarily, the residents in the camps do as best they can, by improving the living conditions some. They get some cement, and build some walls. Get some wood, and lay a roof. Then the roof will after a while become cement. And then the roof will become a home for somebody new. And they will build. And so it goes on. In all directions. And children are being produced. Into poverty. And children grow up, to give birth to even more children. And then they eventually die. And it grows, and expands, and it is assigned not more than 1 square kilometer. Even if Nablus is an A-zone. Israel says so.



So we visited Balata. We saw the children. So beautiful ones. We saw the angry, exploding young men. We saw the houses which were so close, one could barely go between them. We saw the sadness in the eyes of the old people. The resignation. We were also at a meeting with the manager of the camp. It was very interesting. He was a very sympathetic man. He told us about the history of the camp, the situation today, the future whom nobody knows. He told about UNRWA, a branch of the UN, who's running schools in the camp. Despite it was the UN, the condition of the school were poor.

He told about the European volunteers who stayed at the camp, for periods of three months. Measures were taken, by the international community. Unfortunately, they're just a drop in an ocean of tears. He himself was born into a refugee status, and had for decades lived in Balata himself. His mother had fled the Israelis in 1948. She refused though, to live in a refugee camp. Therefore she gave birth to this guy, in a cave. For the two first years of his life, he lived in a cave. That experience hadn't done any harm to him, but to his mother. Today, she still lives, but is very sick. She lives in the camp. Our tour guide had met this man several times before. But he said that now, he seemed more resigned, frustrated and desperate than ever before. And he tried to be calm. The meeting ended in tears. For everyone. I'm even close to tears now, as I'm recalling this. We left Balata. In silence.

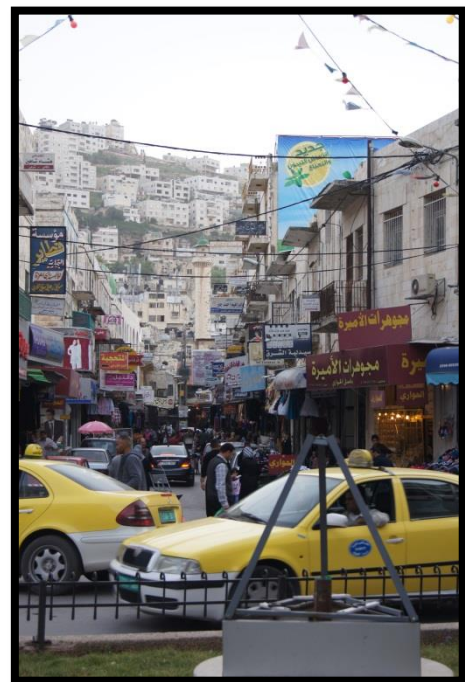


The next part of our program that day, was to meet the mayor of Nablus, as a delegation of the Palestine Committee in Norway. I have to mention that three persons outside of our group, joined the meeting. One journalist from Helsinki, which worked as a volunteer in Hebron, and two doctors from Nottingham, England. The meeting was ok. We were welcomed, and met with the highest respect, which of course was vice versa. The mayor spoke about a relationship the municipality of Nablus just recently had established with the city of Stavanger , Norway – and how happy they were about this. They had even recently visited Stavanger. For which purpose, was not told. And since they just had established this contact with Stavanger, he assumed we were from Stavanger as well...and spoke to us, about the great appreciation of meeting us, and the blessings we all had to bring back to Stavanger. Anyways, the mayor had been newly elected. He was re-elected, as he had been a mayor ten years ago. He was a fat, little, funny guy. And it was in general a pleasant meeting. He spoke about his mission, about the city of Nablus itself, and of its challenges and possibilities. We were welcomed to come up with questions. Personally, I brought up the subject about the relationship or differences between Hamas and Fatah, and how this affected the international attitude toward the Palestinian issue. He thought it was an important question. Nice. The Palestinian solution though, by the mayor, was two states. And that`s all I want to say about that.

In the end, he invited us for lunch at a restaurant. Everything paid by the municipality, naturally. Nablus is surrounded by mountains (it actually has the highest mountains in all of Palestine), and up in the hillside on one of these mountains, were the restaurant located. It was very nice, and undoubtly where the politicians usually took their guests. It was indeed not a place for the ordinary citizen. We felt really honored. The food was great, the service the same, and we had a good time. In the end we had to leave. And I think we all wanted to leave, as well. The experience with the mayor was interesting, but the rest of it.....so meaningless compared to our experiences at Balata a few hours before.



Up in that hillside, we had a beautiful view of Nablus in the sunset. A huge city, squeezed between those beautiful mountains, was really nice. We ended the day with a walk in Nablus's old town. The old town originates from the early days of the city's history, and is considered by many as the most beautiful old town in the whole of Palestine. I really enjoyed the old town of Hebron a few days before, but this was maybe even more fascinating. An age old labyrinth of spices, vegetables, handcrafts, people, animals in cages to be sold, laughter, flavors, food, candy... you name it. It had been an extremely good day. Good is maybe not the correct word, but meaningful. We should have sat down inside one of those hundreds of alleys to drink Arabic coffee and smoke argil, and reflect over today's impressions as the dark red sun went down behind the mountains. Unfortunately, we didn't..



Jerusalem.

I took a day off from the group. Some of us now and then do that. Being together, all the time, for 10 days, can be a little tiresome. So I slept long, sat for a while on my balcony, looking at the traffic, and wrote my diary. Not until 2 o'clock I got out. Wanted to check out Jerusalem today. Was there our first day here, but was in a group, which is not the ideal situation when you want to walk around, looking at this or that. Therefore, Jerusalem today.

I went up into centrum of Ramallah, from the hotel. The temperature was about 20 degrees celcius. But felt it was going to boil in the afternoon. Grabbed a taxi with white plates. Meaning; he could not enter Jerusalem municipality. I therefore took it to Qalandia checkpoint, and went off there. Qalandia checkpoint, is the checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem. At that time of day, there wasn't much people at the checkpoint. As the taxi could not pass Qalandia, like I had been used to with the group (as our taxi has yellow plates), I had to enter the control inside the checkpoint by foot. Only four people were in front of me. Inside each checkpoint there is this iron gate, which you must push to go further. The soldiers can prevent it from opening at any time he or she pleases to. Usually, they let people wait all the time, by not opening up for the Palestinians – even if there isn't anyone in front of the person in the queue. Just for humiliation. I was number four in a group of five. What could have taken them 3-4 minutes, became like half an hour. The soldiers were laughing a little, sending some sms'es, at the same time as they now and then peeked over at the Palestinian waiting. The woman in front of me, she had a little son. She put her bag on a metal detector, and went through this security check. The soldier told her to go back, to put her earrings on the detector, and send it through, for scanning. I was thinking, what can be inside the ear-ring... Then, they sent her back once more, to put her wedding ring onto the belt. Then they sent her back for the third time, while yelling at her, because she had to put a small pin which tightens her hijab, onto the belt. It was easy to see how the soldiers were amused by this. The fourth time, it was ok. But they still yelled at her. My turn. I put my belt and my watch onto the belt. Walk over to show my passport. They check my name, smile, and wish me a good day. With embarrassment I step onboard the bus. It is not a pleasant feeling at all, to be treated like a prince, while everyone else around you – your equals, are treated like garbage, like criminals. It seems that I will never be used to this everyday racism. If there was any positive in this, it has to be the experience, and that I've felt the reality in practice. That's at least worth something.



The bus into the holy city takes like ages. The reason is that the traffic gets busier. Sweat is boiling inside the bus, and after more than an hour I arrive at the main bus station in Jerusalem. I have a few main missions today, and they will all be in the old town. I could say a lot about Jerusalem. I have a lot to say about the segregation, racism, displacement and eviction which is taking place, but it would be just another dive into hopelessness. Today, I needed a rest, and let occupation be occupation. I content myself with saying that Jerusalem is of the holiest places in the world for both Muslims, Christians and Jews; the Muslims have their Al – Aqsa mosque, the Jews have the Western Wall, and the Christians have the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – among other main attractions of significant importance; it has a population of more than 800 000 people; it is divided into West – Jerusalem, which is governed and under the rule of Israel, and East – Jerusalem, which is governed and ruled by the state of Palestine (the grim facts about the latter, is explained more thorough in my letter nr. 2); and the city is finally estimated to be around 3400 years old. Enough for now.



Like the first time I was there, I enter the Old Town through the Damascus gate. The gate is an extraordinary construction, and from a distance it looks like a beautiful backdrop of a theatre. Once entered, one feels like the time has stood still, and one is quite sure that this is exactly how it has been for hundreds of years. Sounds like a cliché-kind of description, but I do as a matter of fact think most people will feel that way. I discover this feeling here in the Old Town of Jerusalem, as I've also done when I've visited the other cities of Palestine; especially Nablus and Hebron. That is, if you manage to ignore the hordes of tourists and the Justin Bieber artifacts. And I do actually believe so; that it has been like this for ages. Just like this. A busy trade, shouting, yelling, laughing, discussing. flavors. Items to be bargained and sold at every corner, in every small street. Sometimes one can feel the presence of history in the air, in the atmosphere. One can in Jerusalem's Old Town. It's a good feeling. To understand and feel you are part of a present which is just floating by, in a historical site which remains unchanged. Shortly after one has passed the Damascus gate, there are two ways to choose – if you want to go deeper into the Old Town for exploration; either a main alley to the left, or a main alley to the right. A week ago, I chose the one to the right. Didn't take me to any historical sites. Today I was aiming at these sites, and headed on the left alley.

At the very end of this, I found the great Western Wall. The Western Wall is a remain after a great Jewish temple, built by King Herod. The rest of the temple was once torn down by the Romans. The Jews believe that this temple was once built on top of king Solomon`s temple, which again was built on top of the mountain where Abron was sacrificing Isak. The area in front of the wall is functioning like a synagogue for the Jews, as they go here for praying.



It gave me little, being there. I didn`t find it particularly special. As so many other famous historical sites, paintings or remnants from the past isn`t as expected. There might be a logical reason to this, though; the crowds. The crowds of ultraorthodox Jews, in their silly outfits, with their silly haircuts, and their silly behavior towards everything and anyone which is different from themselves. I am sorry; I can`t help it. I am sure that if I had met the Amish, or some other kind of extremists, I would have felt it the same way. But I haven`t met the Amish. But I have met the ultraorthodox ones. And it makes me almost sick, just to think and write about this magnificent, divine and devout people. Actually; when I look at them – I think they look a bit retarded, the whole bunch of them. And of course; I get a little sad when I see their beautiful and playing children; already got their *kippa* and the first braids. On their way to fundamentalism. Unknowingly aware of a way of life, not in compliance with any societal development – and the rest of the world in general.

But I am not blind to which stupidity it was by me, going down here at 4 - 5 p.m., in the middle of Easter. I am sure I couldn`t find a worse time to go down there. Ultraorthodox ones from all over the world were squeezed together on the relatively small area, and it was difficult to find my way through the crowd at all. And I am sure most of them were Americans. If I closed my eyes, it could sound like I was in the States. I went up the alleys again. And I had no urge to return at a later point, either.

It was getting late. The sun turned into deep red, and colored the age old, paved alleys. I had to find the Via Dolorosa, the street Jesus went a two thousand years ago. I wanted to see the place where he was supposed to have been laid into the tomb, and where he was hung on the cross; the Cavalry. I had to ask, to find the way. It wasn`t that easy without a map. The Via Dolorosa was actually a street partly under an archway, in a labyrinth of small streets and alleys, full of people, food and merchandises. It wasn`t easy, but it was amusing. Finally, I got there. I had actually no idea what to

find. I have to add, though, that I hadn't read up on anything, so if I had bothered to read a little, I would have known more. Anyways; the sites I was looking for, was inside the Church of The Holy Sepulchre. It was now getting quite dark outside. Wouldn't matter anyway; the only light inside the church, was like a million of burning candles. I have to say; it really has to be a great loss for any traveler, regardless of religious conviction, if he or she misses out on this attraction. Inside, it was by far the most beautiful church I have ever seen. There was quite a lot of people there, but not compared to the Western Wall, naturally. And most of the people were gathered in queues in front of Jesus's tomb, as it was possible to enter it. A lot of people were also gathered in front of the Cavalry, and the cliff where the original cross once had been. I'd really wish to tell everyone I meet; go and see this church. Forget the religious conviction. Just go there, suck in the atmosphere of something great, and become humble. It is a really fantastic feeling. These two things; the Cavalry and the tomb, was a great experience. At the same time, was the rest of the church also unbelievable. It was so beautiful, that I really have no words.



As I left the church, it had become very cold outside. I put my vest on. At the square in front of the church was a minaret, belonging to a mosque. It was praying time for the Muslims. I looked up at the minaret, listened to the sound of the imam reaching out to each and every man and woman and in Jerusalem, alongside my deepest humility and admiration for what I recently saw in the Church of The Holy Sepulchre. And I felt how beautiful everything was. Sincerely, I know I now sound a little on the edge, but really – I think I became religious for a moment or two. I think I thought, as I was going back down the Via Dolorosa, and into the labyrinths, how beautiful it is that Christianity and Islam can live alongside like they do here, with respect and in co-existence. I think we're like brothers and sisters, and that embracement of one another as humans must be valued far more than the minor differences there are. I think this is wisdom people could benefit from.



The sky above was completely dark. The alleys underneath were not. It never got completely dark down there. Some places, people even lit small bonfires, as the the crowds had disappeared. I went out of the Old Town, through the Damascus gate, and found myself a balcony at a café. It had been a very nice day. I think I love Jerusalem.

28.03

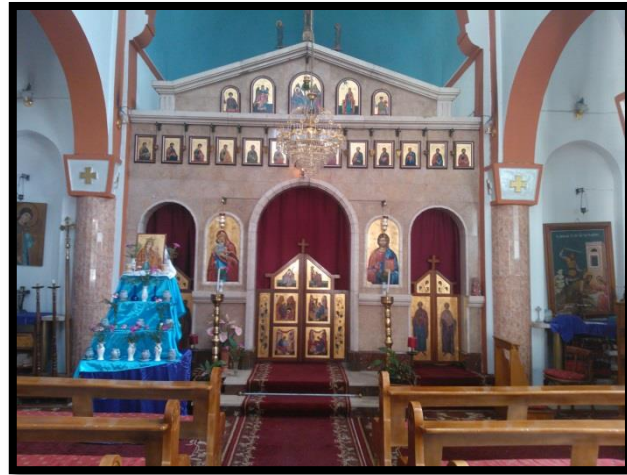
Nablus

It's like what some people say; Palestinians are crazy. They have to. If one is not crazy, one can't cope with the injustice and cruelty brought upon one. There's no other option. It is about time to return to the grim facts of an occupation.

On our way to Nablus, once more, our bus drives into a C-area; an Israeli controlled zone. The road is of high standard. Less than a year ago, a school-bus, full of children who had been visiting Jericho and the Dead Sea, happened to be the victims of a horrible car accident here. They were students at a school in Ramallah, Palestine, an A-zone. There had been a heavy rainfall, the road was slippery, and the bus crashed into some rocks. Several of the children died instantaneous, but most of them were hurt and alive when they called for an ambulance. The bus was up-side-down, and they were all trapped. As this was a C-zone, the Palestinian emergency units had to ask for permission to enter the C-zone. Firstly, they were denied, as there were Israeli ambulance personnel located in a small settlement just 5 minutes from the scene of the accident. As nothing seemed to happen, Israel was asked again – for the permission to enter. On Palestinian land. They gave no reply. In the meantime, the bus caught on fire. A number of four ambulances could be seen in the village, from where the accident had taken place. All children were burnt alive. A Tel Aviv – located newspaper, one of the biggest newspapers in Israel, mentioned the incident the following day. Saying it was horrible that such could happen, and that if there could be found any positive in this – it would be that the world didn't have to see another generation of terrorists grow up. The reactions all over Palestine were furious. But as everything else, international attention is strangled with silence. And it all passes away, except in the minds of the close ones, left behind.

In Nablus today, we had a meeting with a priest at a Christian church, Father Joseph. It was interesting. He told us about his own life, how he had contributed to the establishment of the church, and how he looked at the future for the church in Nablus. It turned out that also this man, like the manager of the camp in Balata, had been living in a cave in the mountain, the three first years of his life. When he was young, he didn't care too much about religion, even though he was born into a Christian family. When he got a little older, and attended at the University, he became more interested. After some years, he established the first Christian church in Nablus, for the Christian minority there. The Christian minority in Nablus, is indeed a minority. 98% of the city's population are Muslims, and the rest are mainly Christians. There's also another small, but extremely interesting minority there, which I will write about in a while; the Samaritans. The church in Nablus had been very popular for a long time, both for Muslims and Christians. The church had established services for health care, including dental care – and was therefore highly appreciated. But the uprising came in September 2000; the 2nd Intifada. Israel closed all exits and entries to the city, and it became strangled. The economy broke completely down, and Father Joseph didn't have any money to pay the salaries with. So, all the public services they until then could offer, had to be closed. Now, the city is experiencing an economic growth – despite the heavy control by Israel. Father Joseph have though not re-opened the church's services, like before. The priest is furthermore largely critical to how church leaders throughout Europe in many ways have abandoned Christian values. In this, he is pointing at being a leader and a pioneer of a cause, only preaching is not sufficient. One has to show the true Christian values through action and practice, as well. He thinks that even the most developed country has need for strong engagement at practical levels of social welfare in a society. Father Joseph, had always tried to live up to this ideal. In addition, he was running the church, naturally. He brought us to see it. It was very nice. Naturally, not anything like I saw in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, but in fact – kind of alike a Norwegian church. Including Father Joseph, three other priests were employed in that church. The whole thing was a nice and informative experience, and gave us a deeper understanding about the situation of the Christians in a highly Muslim – dominated city. As Father Joseph said; they didn't have any problems by being such a minority, and there were

no problems between people due to that. The only problem was the small number of Christians, including the restrictions given them by the Israeli authorities in a wide range of matters.



Father Joseph joined us for our next program. Together with him, we went for a visit and a meeting at the An-Najah University in Nablus. The University is ranked as number one in Palestine, as number five in the whole Middle-East region, and as number 1020 worldwide –out of a number of 25 000 universities. The University was huge, and it was divided into two campuses. One campus for humanities, and one for science. We got to see them both. The University covered most fields of education, with lecturers both from Palestine and abroad. It also had its own tv- and radio channel, which both were without comparison – the most popular ones in Palestine. They also broadcasted to other countries in the region. The University was very nice, modern and equipped in all ways - in line with international standards. In the meeting with the principal of the University, they showed us a video they had made about the different faculties, subjects, projects and students. It was impressive. The University was also deep into a new project; a hospital which was under construction in Nablus. But there were challenges, naturally. Such a standard of University was not in compliance with the economy of Palestine. Most resources had come from abroad, and then mostly from other Arab nations. Some were also given by the UN. The resources they received were in general sufficient to build, buy and develop. The problem was on the other hand, an economy to run it in the long run. Like salaries, electricity, maintenance, and so forth. Subsidies are given for investment, but not to run it. A classical and short – sighted plan in donation. Another problem, was the restrictions made by the Israeli authorities, on foreign staff and students. As no foreign student is allowed to have anything else than a tourist visa, he or she can't stay for more than three months. Then the person has to leave the country, and then once more apply for a visa. Not everyone gets it, and therefore many students can't take the risk of attending a full-time bachelor degree, for instance. Despite the University's respected reputation. This applies for both students and staff from abroad. The University welcomed any foreign guest lecturer- or student, but could unfortunately not give any

assurance whether they were given visa by Israel or not. In Palestine. We left the University with admiration for what they had managed to build.



Then lunch. In Nablus centre. Busy, chaos and overwhelming. We found a small oasis of a restaurant in a backyard, and had the most delicious lunch ever.

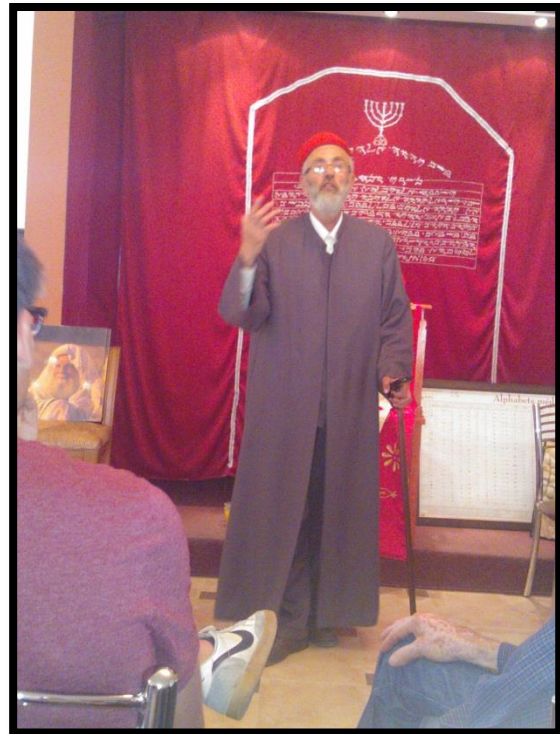
Our next, and last stop today, was going up in the hillside of Nablus. To visit the oldest known surviving people of our planet; the Samaritans. Personally, I can just vaguely remember the people from somewhere in my childhood, and I knew it was related to some biblical. Apart from that, I knew little. The Samaritans are spoken of in the Old Testament. Once upon a time, the Samaritans numbered more than 3 million people. In 1970, they numbered 117. Today, they count a bit more than 700. The Samaritans' greatest challenge, is the lack of women. They just don't have enough women to reproduce themselves. A measure which has been taken, and which is also the reason behind the increase of the population the last decades, has been to attract women from abroad. It's though not as easy as that; the woman also has to convert into their religion. And it is not an easy religion to be a woman in. The woman is subject to severe restrictions in a wide range of areas in daily life. I don't think there exist any studies of it, but it would be really interesting if there was some kind of research on for instance, how these women experienced the life they had chosen – after a certain number of years. I look upon such an anthropological subject as extremely difficult to carry through.

The village we visited in the hillside of Nablus, was not just any place. It was the main residence of the Samaritans since the dawn of time. The Samaritans have historically lived all over the Middle East region, but their main village was where we were now. The reason behind that, were the two mountains close to the village. One of these mountains; Gerisim, has been the holy place for all Samaritans. The story behind it, was as follows (briefly, and for sure inaccurately).

Once, the Israeli came to the land of the Samaritans. The Israeli came into a valley between two mountains, one - whose name was Gerisim, and the other one - I can't remember. On each of the two mountains, stood six Samaritans. At the mountain of Gerisim, the Samaritans welcomed the Israelis, and blessed them. Unfortunately for the Samaritans, the Israeli didn't like the land, and decided to move on without settling down. On the way out, they were cursed by the six Samaritans on the other mountain, for leaving. Since then, Mt. Gerisim has been covered in green, in blossom, and have been a fertile land all year round. The other mountain has been barren, desolate and infertile. This has been a sign of the Samaritans as the people of God. This is at least the way we were told today, of how the history came to be.



The Samaritans had obviously been through tougher times, than what they experienced today. The extreme decline of their population throughout the history, witnessed of nearly total extermination. Today, their village seemed highly prosperous. Nice villages, luxurious cars, and magnificent gardens. No wonder, as they have two nationalities; both Palestinian and Israeli passports. Free access wherever they want. In addition each and every one of them (the men), work in the state apparatus, either in Palestine or Israel. Bastards. Actually, they seemed very anxious to point out, that the Muslims on many areas were more like brothers and sisters, than what the Jews were. This is in fact a bit surprising. Because the Jews consider the Samaritans to be Jews. But the Samaritans do not consider themselves to be so. All these things or historical "facts" about their history, the specific year of every birth or death of kings, the many proofs of their divinity, was told us by the high priest of the community. He had been sacrificing years of his life to make a Samaritan museum in the village, and it was here he lectured us about the history of the Samaritans. I think he was an extremist, and so did the others – I believe. But nevertheless, true or not, he was a representative and a descendant of an age old people, which has surely existed for thousands of years. And that, is indeed something special.



Then, the program was over. Heading back home, we drove down the hillside, with Gerisim to the right of us. Sunset. The age old landscape of Judea and Samaria, was right here. I asked if there was any possibility to stop the car, too shoot some photos. They would be marvelous. But the driver didn't want to. We were driving on a settlers' road. If we stopped the car, it would make them suspicious. Even if we had yellow plates, there had to be some kind of reason what we were doing on that road. And they would call for the soldiers. Bloody settlers. That's a very appropriate nickname, actually.

That was day 5.

29.03

Bi'lin, and Friday Demonstration

Bi'lin is a small village, located not far from Tel Aviv, Israel, and the green line. The green line is the outer, and for once legitimate border, between Israel and Palestine. The village is located on a hill, and from its narrow, dusty streets one can look down upon Tel Aviv with its millions of inhabitants. It is a huge city with stretches far out. Dozens of skyscrapers contribute to the image of a metropolis. Bi'lin on the other hand, is not a metropolis. It is a poor, tormented Palestinian village with a population of around 3000, and which every year loses young citizens into Israeli jails. Some are seen again, some are not.



We are in Bi`lin today, because it is Friday. And Friday demonstration. Bi`lin got world famed quite a few years ago, as it was one of the many Palestinian villages Israel wanted to revoke through its expansion. The very day Israel claimed their ownership to the land and the village, they announced the forces would come at five o` clock the next morning to revoke all Palestinian id – documents, including removing the olive trees of the village. The residents hastily held a meeting during the night. With the help of pro-Palestinian Israeli media, they managed to attract international media both abroad and present in Israel or Palestine, for what was about to happen. The Israeli forces showed up as promised, at 5 a.m., and found residents chained to all olive trees there were to be found. They refused to surrender their village, their homes, their identity. Israeli occupation policy has for decades been to incorporate Palestinian land into Israeli land, and thereby demanding documentation of the residents` ownership to Israeli land, which they of course can`t come up with. They have only documentation of ownership to their Palestinian land. So the soldiers came, and the bulldozers came, but the residents refused to unchain or in any way let themselves be threatened. With the presence of international media, Israel had nothing else to do, but to withdraw. The occupant knew very well they had no right to trespass onto Palestinian soil. Since then, both international, Israeli and Palestinian media has had an eye on Bi`lin.

Unfortunately, no matter the graveness of atrocities or human rights violation – history tells us too often that everything will be forgot in the end.

That would have happened to Bi`lin as well, if it hadn`t been for the Friday demonstrations they have held, each day since. Each Friday Bi`lin is a symbol of the Palestinian resistance to the occupant, and that righteousness will be achieved one day, through devotion for its land and people. Palestinians, alongside international and Israeli activists show up in Bi`lin to demonstrate. Usually it turns out violent, to some degree.



Before today's demonstration, we gathered in the house of a professor at Bir Zeit University, Ramallah. He had lived in Bi'lin all his life, and he had throughout the years been organizing the demonstrations. He told us about the above mentioned incident - which was the starting point for the Friday Demonstrations, in addition to a general discussion about the Israeli - Palestinian issue. He seemed like a very wise man, and when I sometimes meet such men or women, who combine academic knowledge and professionalism with specific action through activism; I admire such. After the meeting we drove half a kilometer, close to the wall. The demonstrators numbered about 50. Then the show began.



We were located on a grassy slope, covered with olive trees. Grenades of tear gas was everywhere to be found on the ground. Like fallen apples. The wall was in front of us. Huge, grey and ugly. Along the wall, on the backside of it, we saw small groups of soldiers. Most places, we only saw their shiny helmets and plastic shields to cover themselves from the stones. At another place, there were several army vehicles, and dozens of armed soldiers. At first our friend, the professor, walked in front of the demonstrations with a Palestinian flag, shouting slogans. We all accompanied him in his song for freedom. It is indeed weird how one, voluntarily or not, so easily join the masses or majority when there are gatherings of this kind.



Then the soldiers started to spurt some kind of stinky water across the wall (which I don't know the name of), in order to afflict it onto the demonstrators. I'm sure it's made for many purposes, but one is for sure to apply it on their clothes, as these then will smell so horrible, they will be impossible to wear. None of us were afflicted by this. The demonstrators started getting closer to the wall, and a group of 5 – 6 young men started to hit the soldiers with the military vehicles at the top of the hill with stones, by using stone slings. Like we have only seen on news back home. They were incredible accurate, and hit the band of soldiers several times. They didn't harm them though, as there wasn't much power left in the stone as it reached where they stood, and when it did – they covered themselves with plastic shields.



As the stone slinging became too intense, the soldiers started shooting the grenades with the gas. They were terrible. It is possible to predict where the grenade will land, so if one is observant, one can easily escape it. The problem is that the grenade consists of an acid gas, which stays where the grenade has landed for a long time. So one might enter an area, without knowing a grenade previously has landed there. Pain. And make sure to be on the right side of where the grenade hits the ground, considering where the wind blows. The demonstrators were tough, and had presumably long practice. They were all thoroughly covered with scarfs to protect themselves from the smoke. And if they were quick; when a grenade landed, they picked it up and back into their sling, and slung

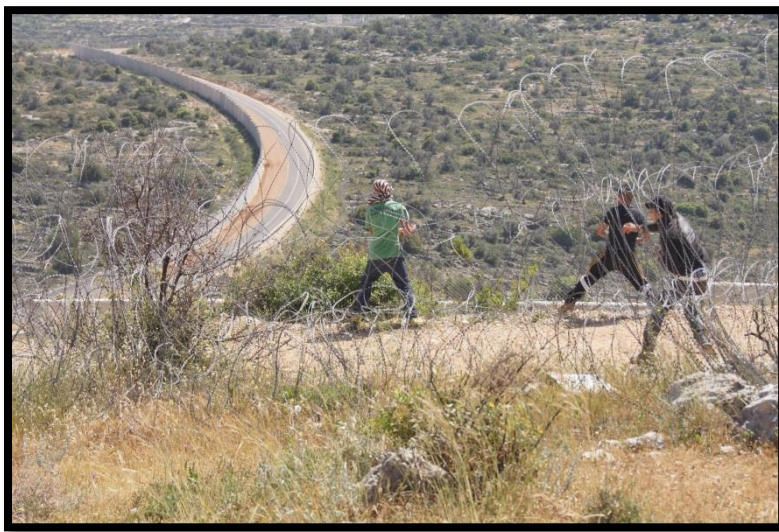
it in return. They rarely hit the soldiers, though. During this, I accompanied these guys. Fighting a hopeless battle, doomed in a withdrawal. But I shot some really nice pictures, and got a pretty good impression of the hatred that prevails.



Actually, I think the soldiers were not the most disturbing element of the scene this day. On another small hill of sand and gravel on the Israeli side of the wall, just high enough to have a proper view of what was going on, gathered a number of approx. 30 settlers. Both children and men. All dressed in black trousers, white shirts, and braided hair. After a few years, there are no difference in the look of a small boy and a grown-up man. They were watching the clash intensely, and we didn't hear them, but we could see them cheer and applaud as the soldiers' grenades were shot. I am so happy they were amused. Their observing presence was at least to me, disgusting and revolting. They are after all, in large parts, one of the main sources of this conflict. Including being the very embodiment of racism, in all its ignorant cruelty.



The wall continued from the scene of the most intensive demonstration, as far as the eye could see. To the left of where most of the demonstration had taken place, the wall changed its direction and turned westwards, pointing straightly at Tel Aviv. Just where it changed its direction, was another spot of huge and beautiful olive trees. I saw something was going on in there, and went down. Three young men were throwing stones at soldiers on the other side of the wall, which were firing smoke grenades at them. I felt stupid just being there, not contributing. So I joined them. I felt very right. Though it doesn't help, of course. Not at all. I was pretty accurate myself, as a matter of fact. But a grenade came pretty close, and I was caught by the gas. The consequences made me withdraw. The same grenade hit one of the trees, which caught on fire. To me, it was over.



I went back to the majority of the demonstrators. They had all withdrawn some. Then we realized the Israeli soldiers had passed the wall, and now entered Palestinian soil with their vehicles. We found out later, that they hadn't done that for a year. It had been a special day. The throwing of stones and stone slinging, had ceased. Most of the demonstrators now only demonstrated peacefully. Anything else was too dangerous. The slightest act of violence, would lead to arrest and detention. At this point, several of the demonstrators went almost all the way up to the Israeli forces, with the Palestinian flag in their hand. They didn't seem too afraid when demonstrating like that. I guess they should have known better, after years of practice and unpredictability, because suddenly the soldiers shot grenades at a very short distance, and started chasing the demonstrators by foot and by cars. As we all fled, the soldiers stopped as well, and returned to the other side of the wall. The demonstrators celebrated the incident as a victory, and the young men were driving away, shouting, singing, and celebrating with loud music. The Friday demonstration was over. One week until the next one.



At the spot, there is no time for reflection. And the moment catches you, taking you in one or another direction. It is like factors outside your own consciousness, which is in charge. I surely didn't regret I participated actively in the demonstration. I felt it seemed very correct, and in accordance with my patriotism with the Palestinian people. When I have a chance to escape from the masses who's just looking at the persecution and racism afflicted the Palestinians, I'll gladly pick up a stone to at least show my support by doing something. Even though it's really nothing.

Anyway; the reflections which has come down upon me in the aftermath of today's incident, are to me very clear. It is all a theatre. And one can indeed ask why the parties continue a theatre which has no ending. A theatre with no purpose. Actually, it's nothing but a sad comedy. I ask myself such questions as, what if the soldiers don't show up on a Friday, what will then happen? Nothing, most likely. What if the demonstrators don't show up? The same; nothing. Who benefits from these clashes? Certainly not the Palestinians. Now and then a youngster is taken by the Israelis, and no one knows when he will return to Bi`lin. Now and then someone is hurt badly by the grenades. Was a few stones worth it? Actually, the way I see it, it is Israel who may benefit from these clashes. The continuation and maintenance of the conflict, is of high value for a continuation of their security measures. Maybe it even serves as a training ground for new recruits in the army. Because, for the Palestinians, what does it really help? Maybe they even know it has no purpose, because who we saw today, was a 10-12 angry and young ones, including just a couple of older and more established activists. That's it. I think several of us expected like hundreds. But it wasn't. It was just a few. There are no grounds for thinking the anger and the violence was nothing but an excuse for a bunch of youngster who wanted to measure strength with the Israeli soldiers. There is no doubt that blood was boiling today, of hate, frustration and desperation. In a village where each family in general had someone who is or once has been arrested by the Israeli soldiers, it is no wonder the hate is coming to the surface. But the number of demonstrators, their age, and the overwhelming imbalance in power relations, gave me a feeling of a resigned theatre. It's really a sad show.

After the demonstration we were invited for lunch, to a womens` charity organization in a nearby village. International activists often had this program, to visit the organization after the demo. The organization had restored an old house, with the help of Norwegian funds. Inside they sold handcrafts which were made by the women of the village. And it was all related to Bi`lin. Several of the women had lost their men to the Israeli forces. And several of the men had never been seen again. People die in jail. Because of various reasons. Some of age, some of hunger, or some by torture. What happens with the body of a deceased one in prison? Will it be returned to its relatives and the place where he came from? I dared to ask the women of this. They looked at me and answered that they had lost many men in Israeli prisons. In one way or another, they had heard that they had passed away. What is being done to the body, nobody knows.



On our way home to Ramallah, exhausted, dusty and full of adrenalin – mixed with tear gas, we pass what once were Palestinian houses, which were now occupied by settlers. Our guide told us that he had several times witnessed how the settlers act as if they were some kind of cowboys, or local police. Fully armed, with horses, this hat the fundamental Jews daily use, and with a self-appointed legitimacy to secure their neighborhood from the terrorists around them. Therefore, so many Palestinian leave their homes. Because they don`t dare anymore. I asked our guide a final question about this divine people we are so fortunate to be bothered with; to which degree do the Jews sustain the agriculture on the land they steal from Palestinians? Our guide says that the settlers don`t know, and don`t even want to, preserve this land. The olive tree is a good example of their lack of will, interest or wish to have anything to do with farming. The olive tree is a farmer`s gold in Palestine. It is the only thing a farmer can be sure of bear fruit, every year. The olive tree is also down here called “the tree for the lazy farmer” – as it requires absolutely no maintenance of its owner. It will naturally be an advantage if the farmer takes care of it, but it is not a necessity and a condition in

making the olive tree bear fruit. The settlers are not even interested. When the tree bear ripe fruit, and it is all set to be harvested, it is usually hung until it falls down by itself – and rots on the ground. The desire to earn quick money, will be at the expenses of any preservation of the land. Let's hope they at any point not will be dependent of it, for survival.



30.03

Ramallah

I got a friend. He's in Jenin – which is of the cities located in the very north of the West-Bank. Actually, he has got a residence permit in Norway. The last time I heard of him though, he was in Jenin. How come people who flee from persecution, imprisonment and a continuously threat choose a return back to that condition, instead of living in peace and predictability? Through both personal friendship and work, I have for a long time dealt with immigrants in Norway. And I've seen the obstacles so many of them face in coping with our society, through depression, social dissatisfaction, xenophobia, difficulties finding work, the eternity of family reunions, and the list goes on. Whatever we might say, regarding how well we're organizing the practical conditions for immigrants through the right of introduction courses, housing or social benefits alike Norwegians – we can't change the nature of our society. And to many immigrants, that nature is in the long run – pure winter. And our beautiful but cold and silent and winter is something way else than what many immigrants keep in their blood. In the end, most of them will usually adapt. But not all. There might be a chance that my friend from Jenin didn't. I never asked him specifically. But it was my plan today.

Around twelve o'clock I went to the bus station in Ramallah, to find a bus to Jenin. I soon found out that the bus stations were to be found at any corner, and that they also were as chaotic as Ramallah itself. In the end, I finally found my bus. The driver told me he would go in about 45 minutes, as he wanted to wait until there were more passengers. That's how it works around here, apparently. I came back after 45 minutes, and then I got to know he wouldn't go until three o'clock. A little mathematics, and I found out that if I went to Jenin at three o'clock, and the trip took about two hours, there wouldn't be much time left until I had to return. Then I asked him when the latest bus was back from Jenin to Ramallah that night. There were none. Unfortunately, the mathematics became easy; I couldn't go. I wouldn't get back tonight, and I had to, as we were heading for the Dead Sea and Jericho the following morning. I didn't want to miss that. And I didn't want to spend a fortune on taxi either. Jenin, is quite a distance from Ramallah. It was sad. I had planned to go see my friend already before I left Norway. Now, I knew it wouldn't happen. Not this time.



But I had spent lots of time travelling around at the West Bank, without exploring the city which I stayed in; Ramallah. I guessed this would be the day. Actually, for the one who doesn't know where, how, who and when in this city, like myself, it is just one big chaos. That's at least my experience of it. Streets criss-cross everywhere, a jungle, people swarm, the traffic are stuck because pedestrians regard the road as natural to walk on as the pavement, loud music, busy people, people with donkeys, Europeans, Palestinians, Africans, Asians, shawarma, falafel, argil and coca cola, horns, nice clothes, minarets, and horns again....whatever you may think of; it was there. And it was all mixed as a huge salad bowl. And you can easily eat it! I love Ramallah. If you're the type who doesn't care about losing your way back to the hotel, or a type who can easily do without predictability or a schedule; go to Ramallah. Let yourself submit to the city, and it will grant you with life itself.



Here the other day, when I was taking a taxi to the check point between Ramallah and Jerusalem, I asked the taxi driver which place he would recommend visiting the most, in Palestine. To watch a beautiful landscape, I should go see the Jericho region, he told me. But, if I wanted to really have a taste of life; nothing would be compared to Ramallah. Good to know!

Ramallah, as mentioned before, is located about 10 kilometres north of Jerusalem. It also houses the national authorities of Palestine. Of the most populous Palestinian cities, Ramallah is maybe the most liberal of them all. It has a mixed population of Christians and Muslims. The city was under Jordanian rule from the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, until the Six Day War in 1967. From then on, the city was occupied by Israel for 27 years, and under full Israeli siege. The city became in 1994 though transferred back to Palestine, according the Bloody Oslo Agreement. It was then declared as an A-zone; meaning almost under complete Palestinian control. In addition, also as mentioned before, it houses the Palestinian national authorities, as both Palestine and Israel was denied to establish their capital in Jerusalem – even though the city is holy for both people. The political tensions are, have been, and will probably be for a long time, too fragile for such a solution.

Anyway; how can one talk about politics, when there is no politics to talk about? In an apartheid society where millions of people are suppressed, harassed, murdered, segregated and persecuted – how can one even suggest a political dialogue? It will be extremely tough. That's why this is not a subject of discussion at all; Israel has not shown any signs of will to improve the relationship between them and Palestine, they have continuously strengthened their measures and restrictions on Palestinian land, and they have quite overt not given a damn shit about the Bloody Oslo Agreement, and the conditions it set. Anyways, Ramallah is not functioning normally today as the headquarters for the Palestinian authorities, due to regularly Israeli interventions in daily matters of governance and security. In the A-zone. But there is life. And it is accelerating. And you can feel it. And above all – you feel happiness by being present.



They day passed by, by roaming the streets, enjoying cafes and writing at the hotel room. In the evening, I met an exiting person. A good friend of mine in Norway, who originally comes from Gaza, had a brother here in Ramallah. I had never met him before, but tonight I did. It was funny; he had the look of his brother (just a bit more slim), and the same voice (just a bit more mature).. We spoke for about half an hour at a café, downtown Ramallah. I was fascinated by his work, and the commitment he showed towards it. I envied him. One part of his job, was to work with traumatized children. He was often in Balata refugee camp, where we had been a few days ago, and worked with children there. I listened to him, and wanted to listen more. I wished he would never stop talking. I hoped he didn't ask too much about my life, and what I did. Not because I didn't want to talk, but because my words would seem meaningless, at the moment. I went home that night, with thoughts I had questioned myself so many times before. What did I do with my life? For sure; not what my heart desires.

This was a day in Ramallah. A few notes about nothing, as nothing really happened. Some days are like that. Two days to go; tomorrow to Jericho and the Dead Sea, and the day after tomorrow – back home. Unfortunately.

Kalandyia refugee camp, Jericho, Dead Sea

We had a refugee camp for breakfast. Kalandyia. Also established in the aftermath of the Nak'ba in 1948. This was where our devoted, very nice and knowledgeable guide was both born and grown up. We saw the house where he had spent his first years. It had fallen apart. And the camp, was the same story; thousands of people squeezed into a limited area, poverty, extreme unemployment, littered streets, dusty, dead, social problems, random and groundless atrocities by soldiers passing by. Electric cables as in a spider's web. As at a Norwegian reception centre. Daily the Israeli electrical company cuts the power, as bills are not paid. But who to pay the bill? And with what? The residents are also given huge critics, due to the continuous construction of new apartments on top of others, and the risk of everything falling apart. But what's the solution? What's the answer to an increasing population in a seemingly forever restricted area? Maybe Israel knows, as they are responsible for the camps and the diaspora within it.



We hadn't come to see the misery today. We had come to see a privately owned and run combined primary school and kindergarden in the camp. A few women of the camp had taken the initiative to start the establishment, and it had become a success – largely due to the quality of the teaching. Contrary to my expectations, the UNRWA (UN) schools run in the camp, had a pretty bad reputation among the people we spoke to. In general, it seemed as the quality of the teaching was low,

equipment was sparse, and days were short. Briefly, we saw a UNRWA-school in Balata refugee camp when we were there. Compared to what we saw there, and the picture told us about the standard of the UNRWA – school, it very well might be some truth in this. Without me having any more specific grounds to believe such. All employees at today's school and kindergarden had pedagogic education from either Bir Zeit University in Ramallah, or the An – Najah University in Nablus. Basically, it was aimed at children of the refugee camp – but as soon as the rumor spread, parents living outside the camp also wanted their children to be enrolled. Still, there were mostly children from the camp. As it was a private enterprise, the costs of running it were in large part paid for by school fees. The price per year for a child at school, was 300 shekel (450 NKR), and 200 shekel (300 NKR) for kindergarden. The principal, whom we spoke to, were very pleased with what they had managed to establish. But like any other enterprise, the economic conditions made it difficult. In contrary to the University we had visited, they had the resources to pay their employees, but lacked the money to buy equipment. Of course every one of us became extremely involved at that very moment, and suggested to establish some kind of fund raising organization or gather equipment from here or there and go to Palestine with it, when we got back home. Let's hope some of us will take the first step for such an initiative. The only fear is that, involvement grabs you very hard at one moment and decreases as time pass by. For once, again; let's hope not this time.



The children in the school and kindergarden were so cute. They were all so excited as we stood outside the gate at the school. Fifty, sixty screaming pupils clinging to the gate, stretching out their hands to give five. They were all fluent in English – in one sentence; “what’s your name”? It is likely that they knew we were coming. We visited the pupils in their classrooms, heard them sing for us, saw them dance, melted by their smiles and happiness in performing, and naturally captured these through immortalizing photographs.



As we drove out of the camp, we passed by another wall, surrounding one of the new settlements which was incorporated into the West Bank. More than 20 children from the camp, had been shot and killed along the wall by settlers in 2012. Some of them had been too curious about the settlements, and got too close to the wall. Some of them had been throwing stones. I guess the stones which the kids threw over the giant wall, hit the settlers' houses 200 meters behind the wall, with extreme and deadly power. There is no wonder the armed settlers have to defend themselves against such a mortal enemy. After all; the Israeli Supreme Court has decided that throwing stones may be lethal, and that such actions must be considered as possible attempts of murder. It would furthermore in many cases be natural for settlers in such circumstances to defend themselves, by any means.

An hour later we were driving down the Jordan Valley. The landscape had a dramatic change from what we had seen at the West Bank so far. And it was indeed dramatic. The mountains became larger, and the road passed great canyons and streams. On the large plains and valleys we saw scattered settlements of Beduins. Their housing seemed rather poor, and it looked more like some kind of childish construction of wood, brick, rusty scrap and ropes. It was indeed a clear evidence of poverty. The Beduins are in addition today considered as often in conflict with both the Israeli and the Palestinians. The Israeli, because of their nomadic way of living, which is not in accordance with their idea of ownership and control of land. The Palestinians, because many Beduins have signed into the Israeli army. And it was so hot. The temperature rose very fast, as we kept on going down the Jordan Valley. It was purely uncomfortable.



After a short while, we arrived in Jericho. More specifically – we arrived at some kind of tourist information, with five hundred giggling teenage school girls, seven camels which could bring you on an adventurous ride on the parking lot for 15 shekels, including 5 cable cars which would take you up to a restaurant just underneath the summit of Mount Temptation. I saw no centrum, and not for the rest of the day either. Anyways, we got onboard one of those five cable cars and headed for a lunch up at the mentioned restaurant. That was a good idea. As we hung far above the ground and considered the possibilities for surviving if the cable car fell down and approached the restaurant in the hillside, we got a fantastic view of the surrounding land. It was extremely beautiful.



We're finally seated in the beautiful restaurant up in the hill-side. Jericho underneath us is described in the Old Testament as the "City of Palm Trees". It is known in the Jewish-Christian tradition as the place of the Israelis' return from slavery in Egypt, led by Joshua, the successor of Moses, and there are found remains of settlements dating back to approx. 9000 BC. Today, it is believed to be one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world. Like so many other Palestinian villages, also Jericho was under Jordanian rule from the establishment of Israel in 1948 - until the Six Day War in 1967, and under Israeli occupation until the Bloody Oslo Agreement in 1994. One of Jericho's primary sources of income, is tourism, and especially due to Christian pilgrims. Because of the already mentioned Mount Temptation, with a Greek monastery almost at the top of it, thousands of pilgrims go here every year. It's naturally also benefitting from its close location to the Dead Sea.



After eating our lunch while looking up at the top of the mountain, where the Devil – for a certain number of days which I don't know, tried to persuade and tempt Jesus a couple of millennia ago, some of us took a stroll up to the Greek monastery. The monastery is carved into the mountain, and is extremely beautiful. Six grumpy Greek monks reside there, and none of them were interested in speaking to the visitors. There was a local guy inside the monastery who guided us around, in Arabic, naturally. We could only guess. We were also shown the balcony of the monastery, to experience the panoramic view it offered. I advise none with a fragile heart to do the same. The height underneath are dizzying and pulls you towards it. A creepy magnetic power. The hillside of Mount Temptation, to the right of us, looked like a Swiss cheese. It was covered and perforated by caves, inhabited by humans in ancient times. We didn't get too see Jericho town. But we got up into Mount Temptation with its monastery, its breathtaking view, and its escape from the strangling heat down there.



After fifteen minutes, we finally arrived at the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is a lake, which covers parts of both Palestine, Israel and Jordan. Apart from the Jordanian part of it, the lake and its surroundings is governed by Israel, despite the large part of these surroundings belong to Palestine. This is a so-called C-area; meaning it is Palestinian land, but is under total rule by Israel. This is a border-area, and it is therefore understandable why Israel here reluctantly transfer any power to Palestine. The lake is known for its high percentage of salt, nearly 30%. As a result of this percentage, almost no organism can live here. It has always been hard for me to believe one can actually just lie still on the water, and float. I was looking forward to experience this by myself. The salty water, combined with a high level of humidity, the temperature and the special affect the sun has, 400 meters beneath sea level, creates special preconditions for treatment of different skin diseases, especially psoriasis. The surface of the Dead Sea is located 410 meters beneath sea level. Historically it has been about 395 meters beneath sea level, but a rapid decrease of water during the last decades, is witnessing an environmental disaster. The main reason for this disaster, are farmers higher up in the Jordan Valley, who irrigates water away from the Jordan River, into their plantations, first and foremost banana plantations. In this way, the needed amount of freshwater doesn't reach the Dead Sea. The result

may be total desiccation and evaporation of the salty lake. Both Israel and Jordan have requested international support for funding a pipeline from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, in preventing the latter for total disappearance.



What amazed me about the Dead Sea, was its size. I thought of it like huge, but it wasn't. Even though the air was dim and hazy, I could easily see the other side of the lake – which was Jordan. It is though stretching far out, but its width was nothing much to brag about. Here at the northern end of the lake, it had a depth of up until 400 meters. Parts of the southern end, is said to show only 4 meters of depth. We undressed, Jumped into the lake, and felt like some kind of objects which is impossible to sink. I laid on my back, on my stomach, I even stood in the water, without having the slightest possibility to sink. One guy was even on his back, reading a newspaper. Demonstrating, I guess. It was really fun. One is also advised to rub oneself in with the mud which is to be found on the bottom. It is supposed to be very healthy and add important vitamins to the skin. I didn't do that. After just 20 minutes, my skin started to itch and burn here and there. This happened to several of our group. It was the salt. Sensitive skin is not only sensitive for the sun, but also to salt. And here, we practically bathed in salt. I went up at the beach, and showered off the salty layers and mud on my feet. As I stood there, enjoying the clean, cool water running down my body, in company with other hedonists, it struck me that during just a few minutes – we probably spent more fresh water than any Palestinian could afford in a week. I sat down with the others in the beach bar. It was not too crowded on the beach today. Sunset was closing up. Israeli beer – Goldstar. Chilly music. Relaxed. It was so sad, that life could be so beautiful as in that very moment – but only with a hint of disgust.



We left the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, and headed back to Ramallah. I really think I could enjoy staying down here for a while – the easy atmosphere, and the magnificent landscape. Still, I would be living in nothing else but a veiled reality, not revealing anything about the true suffering this land and its people are experiencing. I'd better go to Ramallah, and the true Palestinian reality. It was my last day.

31.03

Ben Gurion, Tel Aviv

We're at Ben Gurion. We were told to be at the airport approx. 4 hours before flight departure. I figured out why.

We make no secret of where we've been, what our purpose with the visit has been, or that the trip is organized through the Norwegian Palestine Committee. Because of our openness, everything in our luggage, from clothes to toothpaste, is x-rayed. Torn out of our suitcases by security personnel, and told to repack it on our own. We're questioned who we've visited, what our political views are, which political parties we vote for, if this is our first trip to Palestine and/or Israel, if we have any relatives or acquaintances here, and so forth. Each of us are assigned a personal security staff, and taken to an interrogation room. The questioning continues. Our bodies are checked from top to toe. I ask the one who's dealing with me, whether these procedures are done to all travelers, or if it only concerns Norwegians. He assures me, that it is 100% random who's exposed for such thorough security measures. It was a true coincidence, that each single individual of our group was interrogated today. A true random incident!

I leave Palestine. Dissatisfied. I have not become particularly wiser or more knowledgeable. In general; I knew what was happening down here, before I left. But it has physically hurt me now. In a way it would never have done at home. I've seen the violence, the humiliation, the racism, right before me. I could touch it, if I wanted. I've seen the appreciation of smiles and happiness in a life which can be, and is, turned into hardship and sorrow each and every day. Through the faces of children we've met, through the wrinkled, toothless but beautiful faces of old people. I leave dissatisfied, for not being able to in any way help a nation whose people are continuously fighting, bleeding, surviving, begging and screaming out to the rest of the world for justice – but ain't heard. Apparently also ignored. It is hard to watch a child who's been beaten to blood, and there is nothing you can do about it.



Everyone knows what is happening in Palestine. Governments all around the world have declared the Israeli occupation for illegal. People from all over the globe can daily watch the thousands of atrocities and violations of human rights afflicted the Palestinian people by Israel – if they want to. There is not anymore a question of what is happening. It is all proved. Through major world organizations like the UN, NATO, Red Cross or Doctors without borders, through the witnesses of refugees or Israeli deserted soldiers, through an overwhelming published documentation, through the media – who brings the grim and not mistakenly fact into our comfortable lives, and not the least; through the cold, cynical and overt admission from Israeli politicians – that Israel will expand as far as needed. For the chosen ones. The question is, why. Why do we accept the injustice and brutality that we otherwise so steadfastly oppose to as inhuman?

For those of you who have bothered to read my writings, decide for yourself. I hope it has stirred something.

