



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE  
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## In Praise of the Occupation

by Amira Hass

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The occupations brought about by the 1967 war accomplished one great thing: They reunited the majority of the Palestinian people within the boundaries of their homeland. For the first time in 19 years it was once again possible for Palestinians to live and experience together, as a group, the expanse between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.

Up until the start of the 1990s this was a basic experience that was taken for granted, and it played a part in empowering and reconstructing the Palestinian people after the catastrophe and the disintegration that was brought upon it by the establishment of the State of Israel. Only today, as this expanse is being butchered into dozens of separated and distanced enclaves in a process that is causing Palestinian society to crumble, is it possible to understand the importance of space during about a quarter of a century. In 1967 Israel learned from the "mistake" it made in 1948. It took care not to grant citizenship to the inhabitants of the occupied territories, not even the

inhabitants of the 70 square kilometers it annexed to Jerusalem. But it made a new "mistake": It opened one expanse to both Jews and Palestinians. Of course the Jews had the hegemonic privilege to settle in the entire expanse, to take over Palestinian lands and precious water sources to build expansive settlements for themselves. This right is denied not only to the Palestinians in Hebron or to the Jaffa refugees, now living in the Jabalya refugee camp, but also to the inhabitants of Nazareth and Sakhnin, who are Israeli citizens.

But the right to movement within the expanse and the basic rights that derive from it - the right to earn a living, to study and to develop cultural ties - opened up possibilities of development and progress for people, both as individuals and as a national community. The experience of the expanse compensated for the many vacuums that the Israeli policy of discrimination had created.

For about a quarter century of occupation, relatives and natives of the same villages came together again. People from the Galilee and from the Gaza Strip studied together in educational institutions in the West Bank and in Jerusalem, developed cultural and political ties and met in mosques and churches; people who had been separated until then by signs saying "Danger: Border Ahead," found themselves working at the same hospitals, the same factories, the same markets, the same construction sites and afterward at the companies they established together; couples were formed and children were born, who were familiar with the changing landscapes of their homeland not from songs of longing but rather from visits to relatives.

Indeed, the right to live together in the home expanse was denied not only to the 1948 refugees, but also to the new refugees of 1967: About 240,000 people, inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip who were expelled and fled fearing the battles, and another approximately 60,000 who were abroad when the war broke out. The young state, only 19 years old at the time, acted as though it were mature and experienced: It hastened to deny the vast majority of them the status of residency in their land. By means of various tricks it also denied residency to another 100,000 individuals who went abroad to work or study after 1967, with a skillfulness that created another link in the chain of dispossession that began in 1948 and to which we have not put an end to this day.

But it was only in the 24th year of the occupation that Israel began to "correct" the empowering "mistake" of 1967: If until then the occupation had been characterized by the theft of land (and water), it

was now also characterized by the robbery of the Palestinian expanse. Starting in 1991, Israel has been creating two kinds of expanses between the Mediterranean and the Jordan: a superior, open, developed and improved space for the Jews, and a shattered space tainted by intentional de-development for the Palestinians.

This radical change began in January 1991, when Israel revoked the right of all Palestinians to freedom of movement in the whole country and established a regime of permits for limited amounts of time, doled out only to a minority. First the inhabitants of Gaza were cut off from the entire expanse. Then came the turn of the inhabitants of the West Bank. Later the accelerated construction of the Jewish settlements and the building of the bypass roads in the West Bank (all under the cover of "the peace process") cut the northern part of the West Bank off from its southern part and increasingly distanced villages from their lands and their provincial towns. Gradually, Israel also restricted the movement of the state's non-Jewish citizens in the expanse and denied their entrance into the Gaza Strip (from 1994 onward) and afterward into the West Bank as well (from 2000 onward). And this is how we arrived at the present: an archipelago of dozens of small and shrunk enclaves, cut off from one another, with the distance between them increasing.

No wonder there is nostalgia for the occupation that existed before 1991!

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