

The Ghosts of Ghettos Past: Israelis Fight for Their Nation's Soul

by M. Woodward

Consider these two images:

Children begged everywhere, in the ghetto as well as on the “Aryan” side. Six-year-old boys crawled through the barbed wire under the very eyes of the gendarmes in order to obtain food “on the other side.” They supported entire families in this manner. Often a lone shot in the vicinity of the barbed wire told the casual passers-by that another little smuggler had died in this fight with omnipotent hunger.¹

The soldiers turned the spotlight on the car, from their watchtower. The couple managed to walk only a few steps, Lamis supported by Raad, until the voice of the soldier was heard from the tower: “Stop or I shoot. Stop or I shoot.” They froze in place. Raad says that he tried to explain to the soldiers that Lamis was about to give birth, but they only shouted, “Stand, stand.”²

The first description is by one of the few survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto, Marek Edelman; the second by Israeli journalist Gideon Levy. Approximately 63 years have passed between the two.

In September 1939, three hundred and seventy-five thousand Jews lived in Warsaw, Poland. When the Nazi beastmen invaded, all non-Jews were forced to move out of the city's Jewish Quarter, and an additional 125,000 Jews were forced to move in, cramming them into an area which was only 2.4% of the city. The Nazis built 11 miles of ten-foot-high wall to brick them in, using expropriated Jewish assets to finance this deadly project. The Warsaw Ghetto shrank, as its inhabitants were exterminated by starvation, typhus, or deportation to the death camps.

Edelman writes that the Nazis dominated the Jewish population by “breaking their spirit through persecutions and by evoking a state of passive submission in their midst. The experienced and devilishly refined German propaganda agencies worked ceaselessly to achieve these aims, spreading—

1. Marek Edelman, “The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising” (Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, N.D.).

2. Gideon Levy, “And the Twins Died,” *Ha'aretz*, Aug. 1, 2003.

for those days—incredible rumors which further increased the panic and derangement in Jewish life. Then . . . the maltreatment of Jews passed the stage of an occasional punch on the nose, sadistic extractions of Jews from their homes. . . .” Collective responsibility was the Nazi standard: “Thus, in the first days of November 1939, 53 male inhabitants of the 9 Nalewki Street apartment house were summarily shot for the beating of a Polish policeman by one of the tenants.”

Levy tells the plight of the Palestinian couple Lamis and Raad. Lamis, carrying twins, went into labor, at seven months, on Dec. 21, 2003. From 1:00 until 5:00 a.m., referral slips were acquired, and fruitless attempts were made to pass through various checkpoints, so the babies could be born in the hospital and receive the medical care that premies need. A courageous ambulance driver crawled under barbed-wire fence at one of the checkpoints, and got Lamis through by dragging her on a stretcher, under the barbed-wire. The twins were born in the ambulance: One died shortly after birth; the other, a few hours later. Lamis told Levy: “I should have given birth at home, and even died, rather than going to the checkpoint and begging the soldiers for hours to let us pass. I hope the Israelis will never taste what I tasted, and will not experience what I went through. And that they will explain to their sons who serve in the territories that they should be a little bit human. That they should be human beings.”

The Fourth Year of ‘Sharon’s War’

It seems as though Israel has been fighting for its life since its inception. But now, it is fighting for its soul.

During the Six-Day War, Israel took possession of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, separate areas of land which could have become the Palestinian State in 1948. These areas are called “Greater Israel” by the right-wing secular Israeli realtors and the beast-man majority among the pseudo-religious *haredi* settlers who suffer from pornographic fantasies about the “holy” soil of Israel.

The *haredi* claim that God gave them the land of Israel, from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates River, but they neglect to mention that the “deal” included the adherence to 613 Mosaic laws, including “Thou shalt not oppress the stranger, for thou were strangers in the land of Egypt” (*Exodus* 23:9, *Hatorah*).

Many in Israel, and the rest of the world, calling Gaza and

the West Bank the “occupied territories,” have stated that maintaining them is destroying the moral fiber of the nation. Alex Maor, jailed for refusal to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in 1973, and whose son is the jailed Refuser, Adam, posed the question recently, while touring the United States: “How far can we go? How bad can we act? . . . [It] won’t be Israeli when it is irreversible. Let’s not make it irreversible.”

In June 2002, the Israeli government, under the control of the Likud and National Religious Parties, took advantage of the legitimate fear of terrorist attacks by the Israeli population, and began building what they call “a security fence,” ostensibly to prevent the uncontrolled entry of Palestinians into Israel. The barrier is a combination of electronic fences with dirt paths, barbed-wire fences, trenches on both sides, and concrete wall.

In December 2003, the UN General Assembly asked the International Court of Justice at The Hague to give its advisory, non-binding opinion on the wall, after listening to “pro” and “con” arguments (see previous article). The right-wing Jewish media is making much of the fact that two Arabs are among its 15 justices, and, as Jerusalem Newswire reported on Dec. 9, that “Israel will also claim the right of an occupying power under international law, to erect structures like the fence.” When questioned on the religious make-up of the Court, its Information Officer Laurence Blairon responded: “It is difficult for me to comment on this since one’s religion is a private matter. However, I can tell you that there is no need to quarrel about the balance.” As to the rights of an occupying power—such as the Nazis putting a wall around the Jewish section of the city of Warsaw—he said, “Your last question is unfortunately too case-related to receive an answer from me.”³

The Almagor, Victims of Arab Terror Association, will be represented at The Hague by attorney Yaakov Rubin. Almagor leader Meir Indor—who was the number-three man of the Action Headquarters umbrella group which funded and led the incitement campaign against Prime Minister Rabin and his Oslo peace initiative—commented, “It’s not that we’re thrilled about a fence that cheapens the blood of those of our brothers who remain on the other side, and even provides a temporary excuse for not totally liquidating the terrorist threat [isn’t this the euphemism for ‘genocide’ used by the Nazis?—MRW]—but we will not allow hypocrisy to reign in The Hague.”⁴ Indor was the first person in Israel to brandish a poster denouncing Rabin as a “traitor.”

The Israeli government’s claim that the barrier for purposes of security does not explain why the partition does not adhere to the Green Line, the pre-1967 borders. Instead, this partition goes deep into Palestinian territory and wraps hun-



The black line shows Israel’s wall, as completed or under construction in December 2003. The outermost gray line to the north, west, and south is the post-1948 armistice line, the so-called Green Line, recognized internationally as the legal border. The additional territories were seized by Israel during the June 1967 war. Other gray lines show plans to extend the wall—either approved by the government, or recommended by the Army. Dashed lines show extensions demanded by settler organizations. The dark gray areas and triangles are Israeli settlements. The Jordan River is on the far right. Source: www.nad-plo.org. See the color map on the website for a more differentiated view of the Israeli plans and their effects.

3. Personal correspondence.
4. Arutz 7 website.

dreds of Palestinian villages in enclaves, or imprisons them in the “seams” between the partition and the Green Line, where residents will neither become Israeli citizens nor have free access to their farms and families who may be on the other side. According to an interview in *Yediot Aharonot* on May 23, 2003 with Ron Naham, the Mayor of the illegal settlement of Ariel and a supporter of U.S. Christian fundamentalists, Sharon’s “security” barrier has been in the works for years. “I haven’t sat with the Prime Minister recently, but the map of the fence, the sketch of which you see here, is the same map I saw during every visit Arik [Sharon’s nickname] made here since 1978. He told me he has been thinking about it since 1973”—twenty-seven years before the current Intifada began.

Opposition in Israel

The list of anti-occupation/anti-wall forces in Israel is huge, and their goal is the education of the Israeli population. Among them are B’Tselem, Yesh Gvul, Gush Shalom, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Citizens of Israel Against the Fence, Women in Black, Women Against the Fence, and Ta’ayush (Arabic for “life in common”—an Arab/Jewish partnership founded in response to the Intifada which began in September 2000).

These groups all support Israel’s right to self-defense.

The signs that these groups hold while they are demonstrating, are either similar or identical in outlook: “Peace does not grow behind walls,” “Terror spawns terror—the bloody cycle must be broken,” and “Occupation is a crime.” Many people also carry beautiful circles upon which are painted Israeli and Palestinian flags, meeting in the middle, and signs calling for the boycott of Caterpillar bulldozers: “CaTER-RORpillar: Demolishing Homes, Demolishing Palestine, Demolishing Peace.”

According to **Citizens of Israel Against the Fence**, “The fence torpedoes any chance for peace, . . . leaves the Palestinians strangled in a pressure cooker, . . . leaves us with no way out of the bloody conflict. The solution is found in negotiations and not a unilateral step of annexation.”

B’Tselem—literally, “in the image of,” as in B’Tselem Elohim, “in the image of God”—also means “human dignity.” This human rights organization deals exclusively with human rights violations within the Occupied Territories. According to its website, their many reports have dealt with “torture, fatal shootings by security forces, restriction on movement, expropriation of land, and discrimination in planning and building in East Jerusalem, administrative detention, and settler violence. . . . As an Israeli organization, the majority of its efforts is directed at violations committed by our government on behalf of all of us.”

According to B’Tselem, the total length of the main and secondary barriers will be 659 kilometers upon completion, affecting 237,000 acres of land—7,000 of which has been expropriated—and disrupting the lives of 875,000 Palestin-

ians in 206 communities. This is 38% of the Palestinian West Bank population.

B’Tselem’s Checkpoint Monitoring Team has begun distributing pocket-guides to IDF soldiers at checkpoints. This may be the result of the particularly brutal week of severe abuse at the Sarra checkpoint near Nablus, which began the day after the Dec. 26 shooting of Jewish Israeli Gil Na’amati by the IDF during a non-violent protest by Israelis, “Internationals,” and Palestinians, as he tried to cut through the gate of the Mas’ha camp near Jerusalem. The rules in the pocket-guides, in accordance with IDF orders, include allowing passage of ambulances and ill people seeking medical care; not beating, degrading, or punishing Palestinians; not damaging Palestinian property: “We are all human beings.”

Yesh Gvul (“There Is a Limit”; *gvul* also means “line” or “border”) is a peace group that, according to its website, supports soldiers who “refuse the duties of a repressive or aggressive nature.” It was born in response to the 1982 invasion of Lebanon; 168 servicemen were jailed during that time, some of them repeatedly. The numbers of Refusers were larger than those incarcerated, but the IDF opted not to imprison most of them, for fear of the uproar this would generate. They continue to foster the Refusal movement: “We counsel soldiers wrestling with the painful choice between serving policies they find abhorrent, or defying military discipline. Those who decide to refuse [repressive duties] get our full moral and material backing, ranging from financial support for families of jailed refuseniks, to vigils at the military prisons where they were [sic] held. Whenever a refusenik is jailed, we bring his protest to the public notice, as a model for the broader peace movement, and for other soldiers in a similar dilemma.” Some Israelis have suggested that were it not for Yesh Gvul, Lebanon would also now be part of “greater” Israel.

Gush Shalom—“Block of Peace”—was formed in 1993, in response to a perception that the existing Israeli peace movement was getting too comfortable with the newly elected Labor government. Uri Avnery, one of its founders, was born in Beckum, Westphalia. He and his family moved to Palestine when Hitler came to power. He was among a large group of Israelis and Internationals who became a “human shield” around Yassir Arafat, immediately after the suicide bombing in Haifa last October. This group lived in Arafat’s compound for several days—including Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year—concerned that Sharon would try to bomb Arafat in retribution for the Haifa terror.

Gush Shalom is called “radical ultra-left-wing” by both right-wing and mainstream politicians. Their statements are forceful and to the point: “The question remains: Does Israel have the right to sentence an entire people to a life of imprisonment, demanding security for itself, while holding the Palestinian people in the iron grip of occupation? . . . Three years ago, it was known as ‘Barak’s generous offers.’ Today its name is ‘The Separation Wall.’ The plan remains the same:



A section of Sharon's 25-foot-high separation wall, the subject of the World Court case, in Qalqiliya City, Israel. "According to B'Tselem, the total length of the main and secondary barriers will be 659 kilometers upon completion, affecting 237,000 acres of land—7,000 of which has been expropriated—and disrupting the lives of 875,000 Palestinians in 206 communities. This is 38% of the Palestinian West Bank population."

grabbing maximum land, while driving the Palestinians out. The same people who swallowed whole-heartedly the lie: 'Barak offered the Palestinians everything, but they preferred war' are now eating the second serving: 'The fence is not political. It is a security measure.'

Their calculations of the ultimate size of the "fence" are slightly higher than those of B'Tselem, claiming that the security partition will be 950 km, plus another 100 km to "protect" the illegal settlement of Ariel. Sharon's plan to turn Jericho into an enclave has been temporarily halted; perhaps he and the pseudo-religious groups are mindful of the previous wall there, which was brought down by Joshua and his troops, and Joshua's subsequent pronouncement: "Cursed of the Lord be the man who shall undertake to fortify this city of Jericho: He shall lay its foundations at the cost of his first born, and set up its gates at the cost of its youngest" (*Joshua 6:26, Tanakh*).

However, all groups agree that more than 115,000 Palestinian olive trees have been uprooted, and that more than 37 wells providing more than 4 million cubic meters of water have either been destroyed by the partition or expropriated. In a semi-arid geography, the results can only be catastrophic.

Using the former "success" story of Gaza—until October, no terrorist activity came from Gaza, which was completely fenced in—as a model of why the West Bank barrier will not function as a security mechanism, they lay out some important truths: Gaza, an area of the world with the greatest population density of 1.2 million, has a partition 50 km. long. If 5,000 soldiers are needed to guard the 6,000 settlers who live there, if the IDF makes daily incursions, if 2,000 Palestinian homes have been demolished in the last three years, if helicopter

assassinations continue, what will be needed to protect the settlers of the West Bank?

Sharon claims that the barrier is a temporary security measure, which will be removed when peace comes to the Middle East. Gush Shalom asks why a depressed Israeli economy would spend between \$2-3 million per km of barrier—\$1.5-2 billion upon completion—on something that is not permanent. They also remind us that the approximately 180 settlements were originally built as "temporary" archeological sites and army camps.

Gush Shalom's IDF pocket-guide reminds soldiers that war crimes will haunt them forever, and that there is no statute of limitations on them.

During the research for this article, I stumbled upon an eerie note from a Gush Shalom member, writing from the Mas'ha camp, one month prior to Gil Na'amati's shooting there: Nov. 29, 2003:

Dear Friends,

As of Tuesday, Mas'ha is almost closed. The gates open three times a day, for 20 minutes each time:

6:50-7:10

12:50-13:10

16:50-17:10

The intention is to gradually cut off all Palestinian villages from their lands and contacts on the other side of the fence.

Eventually the gates will be permanently closed.

I attempted to reach both Mas'ha, and the writer. The

writer said the camp is completely closed. There has been no word from those still living there.

Recently, Israel has begun handing out Welcome/Restriction letters to new arrivals to Israel, explaining that entry into territories of the Palestinian Authority—"Area A of Gaza, Judea, and Samaria"—is forbidden without prior written authorization. Legal measures will be taken against anyone caught attempting to enter these areas, which may include deportation and refusal of re-entry into the State of Israel. This "restriction" completely disregards the Palestinian Authority and prevents any human rights groups and/or Internationals from entering these areas. It is not clear whether the new restrictions will also prohibit the entry of Israeli citizens who are not settlers into these areas.

'Refusers' Bear Witness

The most poignant documentation of the ongoing cycle of terror in Israel and the Occupied Territories is the 14-page testimony of Israeli Youth Refuser Haggai Matar, sentenced with four others to one year in jail for refusing to serve "in the army of Occupation." He passionately details his pen-pal relationship with a Palestinian who spent six years in an Israeli jail without a trial; his work with Gush Shalom in rebuilding demolished Palestinian homes; his joining with Ta'ayush to bring food to the besieged village of Yassuf—in which soldiers stomped on the food and arrested several activists, and which ended in settlers from Tapuach storming the village, burning cars, and shooting at houses, with no arrests made; the lack of medical care for Palestinians, and their lack of access to such care because they can't get through the checkpoints; attempts to rebuild water depositories in Palestinian areas destroyed by settlers⁵ in Hebron; his witnessing of soldier violence; the IDF's operation "Pressure Cooker"; the destruction of Palestinian groves of olives, tomatoes, and zucchini⁶; the Palestinian curfew times, which change with the whim of the soldier in charge.

Matar concludes: "We're really dealing with evil, an evil we must resist. . . . [I] made a choice of referring only to the evil of IDF racism and brutality as it is reflected in the occupied territories. But I also know the Israeli way of life puts death and 'the home-land' as our holiest values, . . . helps maintain a small elite's rule over millions of Arabs and Jews, women and men, all in the name of 'Security'—a security

5. Hebrew is a mathematical language, using ten roots from which virtually all words are born. The root for "bless" is *bet-reish-kaf*. This root is found in the word "blessed," but is also the root for the words "knee," "pool," and "pond." What is the relationship? Water is the greatest blessing. We bend at the knee to take it out of the pond. The philology itself makes any destruction of a water depository a sacrilege.

6. "When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city?" *Deuteronomy* 20:19.

none of us really holds any shares in. I have no choice but to refuse and to use my refusal as a tool to the benefit of the society in which I live. . . ."

When the Refusers toured the United States last Fall, they asked for American help in stopping the Occupation. "Whatever I say is not as important because I'm Israeli. Americans must push the pressure," was Noa Levy's request to those of us in "the cradle of liberty."

Marek Edelman lamented that the pathological clinging to denial of the majority of the Jewish population in the Warsaw Ghetto, led to its extermination. By the time the uprising got on its feet, there were too few soldiers left.

Gil Na'amati remains hospitalized, struggling to recover from the gunshot wound he received while cutting into the gate imprisoning the human beings of the Mas'ha camp; the gate that is now permanently closed.

Rabbi Asherman, on trial for standing in front of bulldozers about to demolish homes, says that we have a "moral inheritance" to continue the mission begun by those courageous souls who have gone before us.

We, in the United States, cannot continue to wallow in denial; we cannot say "we didn't know," because we were too busy watching the football playoffs. Lyndon LaRouche and his youth movement have opened the doors to reality, and have welcomed us in. Let us also become golden souls, *b'tselem Elohim*.

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