



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE  
MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA

## The über-wardens

by Amira Hass

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Two weeks ago, on Election Day, at 8 A.M., drivers wishing to leave Tul Karm from the eastern exit (toward Anabta) discovered that their permits were invalid. A soldier at the checkpoint, who prevented the passage of the drivers, apologized: Today, leaving the city by car is permitted only to residents of the three neighboring villages - Shufa, Safrin and Beit Lid, he explained to Machsom Watch activists. "And in general, this is not a checkpoint (through which the permits are meant to allow passage - A.H.), but a barricade. And here there are no permits; here there are procedures."

Palestinians living under the Israeli occupation are imprisoned in a thicket of physical, corporeal barriers of all types and sizes (checkpoints, roadblocks, blockades, fences, walls, steel gates, roads prohibited to traffic, dirt embankments, concrete cubes) and by a

frequently updated assortment of bans and limitations. There are permanent bans, to which various periodic bans are supplemented, such as the aforementioned ban on travel to Anabta. Even without recurrent nighttime raids by the army to arrest wanted men, even without the shelling that fails to stop the firing of Qassam rockets, life is completely disrupted.

The disruption of life and the bans are not reported as "news," because they are the routine. And this routine erodes any hope for a humane future.

Gazan natives are not permitted to be in the West Bank. Palestinians, including residents of Jericho, are not permitted to be in the Jordan Valley (except for those with official addresses there). It is prohibited to drive in a private car through the Abu Dis checkpoint (which divides the northern and southern parts of the West Bank). It is forbidden to enter Nablus by car. It is forbidden for Palestinians residing in East Jerusalem to enter West Bank cities (except for Ramallah). Citizens of Arab states married to Palestinians are prohibited from entering the West Bank.

The soldier at the checkpoint or behind the Civil Administration counter is the last, least important, link in the thicket of restrictions and limitations. The soldiers do not question the orders and bans, but they didn't invent them. They are low-ranking jailors, and behind them is a faceless battery of bureaucrats who enact regulations, constantly tweaking methods of imprisonment and proscription.

The Israeli uber-wardens seem to have special fondness for meddling in Palestinian family life, and not only when one of the spouses is an Israeli citizen. Their agents in the Civil Administration prevented, for instance, entry into the West Bank (not Israel) to the Turkish wife of a Palestinian resident; to an individual whose relative died ("because the relative was not a first-degree relative"); to a woman whose father-in-law died (a relation that is not considered first-degree); to a father whose son had taken ill (with the excuse that other family members had entered the West Bank on tourist visas, and, according to records, had not left the West Bank when their visas expired).

Natives of Gaza who live in the West Bank are 70 kilometers away

from their parents and siblings in Gaza; some have not seen each other for five-to-eight years, since they have not received transit permits through Israel. Jordan Valley residents may have relatives living 10 kilometers away who are not allowed to visit them.

Planners of the separation fence have shown not only a weakness for the available lands of the Palestinians, but also a weakness for separating families. If the fence route now being proposed is approved, approximately 570,000 dunams (140,000 acres) of Palestinian land (approximately 10 percent of the area of the West Bank) are expected to be wedged between the separation fence and the Green Line. In other words, they would be essentially annexed to Israel. Residents of the villages imprisoned behind the separation fence have relatives in nearby villages.

One father in Azoun Atma, for instance, relates that his daughter in Saniria, a neighboring village that's a few-minute walk away, is not receiving a permit to visit him. Youths whose families own orchards on the other side of the separation fence are not receiving permits to enter via the gates of the fence and help their elderly grandfathers work the land. Weddings, funerals, olive harvests and mass family events are celebrated - thanks to the initiatives of the Israeli uberwardens - via telephone, e-mail or videocam, for those who have it.

One can only wonder what the planners of these separations are hoping to achieve by forbidding a grandson to help his grandparents to work their land or a woman to live with her husband, and decreeing that entire villages lose their lands, that is, their futures. They are backed up by almost across-the-board support for any measure they take, ostensibly in the name of security.

They continue to invent prohibitions because there is no one raising a voice against it. And they are responsible for not only seriously disrupting the lives of Palestinians, but also implanting the jailor mentality in thousands of Israeli young people, soldiers, clerks and policemen - an intoxicating mentality of those who treat those weaker than they with impunity.

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