

Dear friends and comrades. This is my last update from Palestine. A very big thank you to all those who have read what i have to say, shared it and helped get the [fundraiser](#) over the £10k mark. (not too late to share more!) I especially want to thank as well the people helping distribute the updates. Hils, Jawad and Jo. Magnificent support. Without them this would not be available. And there others too - my family and friends - without whose support I wouldn't have got here. I am very lucky to have you.

I have now left Massafa Yatta and am sad to leave. And confused about how best to spend my time. I think I would like to have stayed longer, but I have a schedule and people to meet in Bethlehem which is also about solidarity.

I was given a lift to the service bus which would take me to Al Khalil/Hebron. We are accompanied by E who wants to make sure I'm not overcharged. She's fierce, and the driver looks at me wondering how I have managed to deserve the defences of this strong woman. And it's possible the situation is highly unconventional. I don't know.



I want to say something fitting as a goodbye and especially to thank her for allowing me to make bread for her family, but Google Translate is too unreliable. So I simply put my hand to my heart and said shukran [thank you]. It was easier with K, E's husband, as we embraced before I left.

In Al Khalil, I find my place of stay and meet more comrades who have been working there coordinating between various resistance and civil groups. I get a clear sense, which has been hovering for a while, that the occupation is a multi dimensional presence. It has many intensities - from place to place, from day to day - and this is as exhausting as anything else. It is hard to keep up and understand.



As an example of this multi located 'frontline' they (my new companions) had just been to a demonstration following following a public call:

"to attend Friday prayers on land threatened by confiscation in Dura and surrounding villages. The prayer is a show of solidarity with the landowners against the unjust decision to confiscate the land by the settlers. Today, citizens gathering in the area were violently suppressed, and demonstrators were attacked with live ammunition and stun grenades."

When they joined this local prayer protest, they learned settlers had been trying to steal the land of ten Palestinian families in this neighborhood. This is the first time settlers have come to that specific area in the Anab area of Dhahiriya, southwest of Al Khalil/Hebron. A settler claimed he was sold the land, and set up a tent on the land - the first step towards the development of a future settlement - despite the Palestinian owners having never met the man.

Once again, as with the arrest of the shot farmer's son in Al Rakiz three nights before, the victims were the ones to be arrested. Three Palestinians were put in zip-tie handcuffs by Israeli Occupation Forces and taken away, only to be released hours later. Ma, who was recounting this story, said:

"as one of them was taken away, he was smiling. A few comrades and I were also briefly detained by the soldiers, who photographed our passports. When they released us, the son of one of the Palestinians who was still detained came running

to me to talk, smiling and laughing, even though his father was still being held by the IOF. They are used to this, as this is daily life under the occupation."

The occupation works on so many fronts, and has many guises requiring different strategies and mechanisms to combat it.

There is a surreal feeling as I travel from Al Khalil to Bethlehem. The sudden removal from the intensity of Masafer Yatta is a relief but equally other modes of life feel unimportant. As we motor up the road to Bethlehem, I can see the occupation parading itself in different ways : a flag hoisted here, barrier stopping traffic there, a random checkpoint holding up the traffic. The war is not in every place but the occupation and it's impact most certainly is.

Before I left Masafer Yatta, at my last time at M's where I had spent a few eventful nights ([as I wrote last week](#)), we met some older Israeli activists. They were gentle and striking looking, and were welcomed with great affection by M and his family. They all spoke good Arabic. I found they had been visiting for over 20 years, and that they were there as a part of a project of a woman who was unable to be there that day. There is a lot of trust Yair told me. Their work is documented on film here - <https://ukjewishfilm.org/film/the-human-turbine/>



They contrast strongly with the younger Israeli activists I've met. Angry and determined, they spend as much time as possible in Masafer Yatta. They are urgent. When speaking with N, who is calm but very serious, I asked how her family viewed her activities. They don't speak about it. This is not simply an humanitarian endeavour to bring much needed utilities,

laudable as this work has been, to Masafer Yatta communities, but a political struggle for fundamental change, she says.

And they both contrast with an encounter with the army (Jaysh). I cannot pretend to be minding my own business, except of course combatting the injustice is my business. Settler boy shepherds were encroaching close to a farm. Our job was to observe, document and report - and by being there hope they took a more cautious approach.

Surprisingly the army turned up. Maybe the boys had radioed back to the settlement outpost or maybe the soldiers were simply cruising around. The army were also boys, and strode over quickly, their guns still shouldered, cameras at the ready. They took our photos. Inspected and photographed our IDs.

One of them asks what are you doing here. I ask - because I cannot resist - "What are **you** doing here?" The cameraman looks at me with contempt. "Have you not heard of October 7th? It is Jewish versus Arab." This is wrong on so many levels. It is hard to respond with a reasonable quip. This man's aggression has been justified by a complete misrepresentation of being Jewish and denying Palestinians their identity. I had no words and that is probably just as well, but I am so pleased, looking back, to have found Israelis who would deny this view and who fight against it strongly.

Even so, not all Palestinians welcome Israeli activists. One told me that if you want to change things, go to the points of occupation - the settlements, or the places of power in Israel - and change things there. Then come here and help. I find this a challenging view - not least because it has implications for the time I spent in Masafer Yatta - but one I respect.

In Bethlehem at Easter I am struck by how empty Manger Square, the birthplace of Jesus, is. Just as in Masafer Yatta where the Palestinian economy should be thriving fuelled by walkers, cheese lovers and even climbers, the squeeze in Bethlehem on the Palestinian economy is palpable. There are no tourists and this is Easter. This is another stranglehold of the occupation.

I am meeting D, who is a student with Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund. We have been hoping she would be coming to a Sheffield event [small park Big Run](#) this year. So I was delighted to hear she has her visa, has booked her flight and will be happy to speak both about her experience in education (an aspect of our theme this year) and to perform some rap in the evening!

D is a very impressive young woman with a clear purpose. She works with children who have been arrested by the Israeli forces, helping them to overcome their trauma. She tells me many have nightmares after release, but counselling helps to relieve their pain. In spite of this, it's clear many young men have trouble rekindling their lives after release. She told me of one person who had been unable to complete his final school year due to his arrest. He tried to catch up - but couldn't not pass his exams. His anger, she said, is a 'burning fire'. Israeli soldiers had told him he would not succeed - and this has burrowed a deep impression onto his mind.

She then told me about a young man, in prison for two weeks, who had been in a cell [with another child who tragically died](#). The news had not been clear about who had died. The mother of the boy who was released was distraught, she had thought it was her child who had died. Her feelings of relief on discovering his survival were of course terribly marred by the fact another mother was now grieving for her own son, Walid. Yet another dimension of the occupation - creating division and inequality even in grief.

I meet up with some comrades who are taking a break and we drive over to Beit Jala passed the Israeli Occupation army base and down a small country lane. We are in a beautiful valley, terraced hills festooned with olives, apricots and apples. A patch of poppies are a splash of red in the distance. Winding dirt roads across the hills give access to remote land.

We stop at a place that should be teeming with Easter Monday holiday makers, Jayla Jungle. It is an organic farm and cafe. A battered piano, a huge stove, cloth draped from the ceiling, dark wooden bar and a cool shady garden. We look across the valley and see, where another Palestinian restaurant of great repute used to be, a drooping Israeli flag. The land is now stolen and settlers overlook the valley.



Two days after I arrive in Bethlehem I go south again - just a small way - to meet Mahmoud, who I am proud to consider a friend as well as a comrade. I love listening to him because he is a poet of the land. His incantation for Palestine is infused with images and metaphors connected with his life. And also the politics is clear.

Israel is trying to fragment us, so we must build community. Israel is trying to take our land and crowd us into cities; so we must cultivate it, work it, live on it, refuse to sell it.



He tells me of a plan to create a cooperative and, with international support, cultivate 132 dunums (30 acres approx). This currently rests at the bottom of a steep valley overlooked by Efrat to the South and Zayot to the North. Leaving this uncultivated would leave it open for settlers to claim and have a contiguous illegal slab of land. This is grassroots action and building of sumud, strengthening ties across families, deepening their attachment to the land.



As Mahmoud finishes ploughing he turns to me and says 'smell the richness in that soil'. I can see it powers his heart and feeds his mind. What he tells me, and other Palestinians have told me, and what the Israelis don't get, is they will never leave.

Furrows for liberation

(for Mahmoud)

You are ploughing on a precipice
Walking towards the sun, private words only your mule knows.
Chains rattle, the share cracks against stone.
Carefull, you round the olive trees and let them caress your legs.

The valley yawns steep and wide, gulping the last sun.
The barley bends easily to the wind; the sheep take their time.
There is passionate Rizaq's land. Each neat furrow
A prayer, a promise, a cup of sweat.

Up on the hill, Efrat invades the view , crowbars neighbours
Off the edge, to the city, by cash or gun.
Not you. A red kefiyeh bandages your head,
Your feet are rocks sunk deep, drawing strength, demanding justice.

Following my [last update](#) there is little news on the farmer who was shot by a settler resulting in the amputation of his leg. But I have heard that he has now been released from hospital - where he had been under arrest.

He had been involved in Massafer Yatta resistance for a long time helping to erect buildings. A solid community minded person steadfastly remaining on his land.

The settlers are after his land because he has access to a spring.