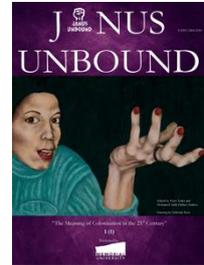

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Everyday Evil in Palestine: The View from Lucifer's Hill

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Introduction

The incremental colonization, ethnic cleansing, and oppression occurring daily in historical Palestine is usually ignored by the world media. These daily occurrences stand very little chance of being properly reported on and, therefore, fail to make it onto any politician's agenda. This is not surprising; even dramatic manifestations of Israel's brutal policies do not receive their due attention and reaction, but at least they are noted. The Palestinian tragedy is not made only of relatively known landmarks of this brutality, such as the 1948 catastrophe, the 1956 Kafr Qassim massacre, the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon, the 1999 Kafr Qana massacre, the 2002 Jenin massacre, or the assaults on Gaza. Everyday oppression becomes a significant landmark in this callous genealogical territory.

The Palestinian experience should be highlighted not because it differs from other locations of brutality in the world, but because it is one of the few cases that is still widely denied.

This article offers a glimpse into the daily evil of Israeli settler-colonialism through the window of one hour on a hill in the West Bank. I use the term "evil" advisedly and in connection to the daily experiences of Palestinians. "Everyday history of evil" is used in psychohistories of the Holocaust and other genocides as part of a quest to understand how "ordinary" people could commit evil (Ludtke 1995). More recently, such a quest has also focused on the Islamic State (Covington 2016). Hannah Arendt argued that evil seems to be intrinsic to humanity (Whitefield 1981), while the psychoanalyst Coline Covington (2016) and the anthropologist Monique Layton (2021), each in their own way, explain how everyday evil is justified and enhanced by indoctrination and ideology and can therefore be controlled by such forces.

Although the term "evil" might sound metaphysical or imaginary, Freud, Girard, and Arendt among others give it a psychological and clinical definition (Aragno 2014; Dadosky 2010; Whitefield 1981). As Coline Covington (2016, 1) argues, it is "an action that is intended to dehumanize another and to use the other as means to an end." Covington shows how organized political systems and group psychology perpetuate the cycle of evil and destruction. Covington's examples, like all works on the subject, exclude Israeli brutality in Palestine, even

while scholars who depict Israel as a settler-colonial project insist that at the heart of such a project is the need to dehumanize the native, the other, the Palestinian.¹ In genocide studies, it seems there is still a taboo on discussing Palestinians.

Recently, the research on everyday evil has moved outside the Western world and includes the horrors experienced by indigenous people. This approach introduced the concept of “historical oppression” without excluding contemporary oppression, as well as expanding the boundaries of resilience theory to contain the indigenous struggle. These developments open the way for a better understanding of the Palestine case (Brunette and Figley 2017; Salter, Adams et al. 2018).

The purpose of almost all these general inquiries is to understand the essence and meaning of evil. In this piece, I would like to offer a glimpse into the everyday evil under Israeli settler-colonialism, less as a way to better understand evil, than to provide a concrete description of its existence and machinations. This is less an exercise in understanding than an effort to disseminate information and alert readers to an ongoing catastrophe. While the mechanism and matrix of callousness is more obvious in dramatic events such as the assault on Gaza, choosing a largely random time and a place can also make this clear. In my case, this was a hill—the Lucifer Hill, overlooking an area south of Mount Hebron called Masafer Yatta. From that vantage point, both the oppression and the resistance to it are visible. This is but one of the places in the West Bank that constitute what Ariel Handel (2009) called “a map of disaster.”

Though several locations in occupied Palestine gain brief international attention, the span of this attention is both very short and often lacks the necessary historical and moral context. The body of research currently available gives the impression that one must digest a mountain of information to grasp the full horror of Israeli settler-colonization. I will show that all anyone needs to grasp the realities of this ongoing oppression is one hill, and one hour.

Lucifer’s Hill

It is mid-August, the hottest month in Palestine, and it is noontime, which should be unbearable. But where I am standing, on top of Lucifer’s Hill, on the southern tip of the occupied West Bank, the climate is exceptionally pleasant. The cool breeze from the sea on the west and the dry air from the Judean Desert are particularly pleasant for someone like me who usually spends his summers in the humidity of Haifa, on the Mediterranean. On this particular day, I am also thinking about my friends back home in London melting in the sweltering temperatures of the recent heatwave.

The hill had no particular name for a long while. It was an important outpost for whoever ruled the border between Palestine and (Trans)Jordan. Local people told me it was named in Arabic *Tel al-‘Asafir* (the Birds’ Hill), which makes sense as it was and still is an ideal spot for watching birds of prey migrating in the summer to Europe and returning in the winter to Africa. The British had built a police station there but did not give the hill a name. The Israeli army distorted the Arabic name and turned it into the more ominous one: Lucifer’s Hill.

The original British police station is still there, nicknamed at the time “the Mickey Mouse building” as its two annexes on the side resembled Mickey’s ears. It was built to guard Mandatory Palestine first against smugglers, and later against young volunteers from the Arab world who crossed the river Jordan to join the Palestinian guerrillas in their struggle for independence during the years 1918-1948. The Jordanians also used it as a police station. After the Israeli occupation in 1967, it was deserted for a time. In 1991, the Israeli army opened a pre-military boarding school in the main building of the police station to house young settlers and turn them into fanatic religious nationalists. In 2016, some in the international community became aware that this cadre was now running the Israeli army and security services (Lubell, 2016).

In 1981, 4,000 dunams (988 acres) around the post, which included the hill and its surroundings, were given by Israel to the World Zionist Organization (WZO); the state itself illegally acquired this space by expropriating private Palestinian land. The WZO is an anachronist body from the pre-state days. During the period of British rule (1918-1948) it recruited funds and political support for the colonization of Palestine. After the establishment of Israel, it was redefined as a Zionist non-governmental organization (NGO), as was the other colonialist arm of the movement in the mandatory time, the Jewish National Fund (JNF).

These two bodies proved useful in pushing for further colonization after 1948. Since its inception, the state of Israel was aware that taking over the land of Palestinians, be they the refugees of 1948 or the residents of the 1967 occupied territories, was an illegal act according to international law. So they devised an internal legal process by which these lands were nationalized not by the state (which would be a stark violation of international law) but by the JNF and WZO as external non-governmental “Jewish” bodies, committed to obtaining land exclusively for the Jewish nation.

Moreover, the funding for this elaborate act of theft did not come directly from the state, at least at first. The money came from Jewish communities around the world, which had been asked to donate to ecological NGOs that would keep Israel green and sustainable. After the right-wing Likud party came to power in 1977, the funding began to arrive directly from the state as well, and some of the NGOs’ departments were incorporated in new ministries sometimes named “the ministry of infrastructure” or in the recent government’s “the ministry for settlement.”

The lands I was watching from Lucifer’s Hill were expropriated by the WZO and defined at first as grazing grounds, namely lands forbidden for human settlement. The dozen Palestinian villages on this land were thereby declared illegal. This by itself, however, was not enough to intimidate the Palestinians into leaving this land which they had cultivated for centuries. The next move was to change the category of the land and encourage Jewish settlers to build large farms on the land.

One person who heeded the call for building a big farm on this land was Yaacov Yohannes. He was a South African Jew and an ideal choice for one of the first of many to become a farm owner in the area surrounding the hill. He detested post-Apartheid South Africa and thought the West Bank to be a place where time had frozen and racialization was still legitimate and even welcomed (Shulman 2013, 22-37).

He had already settled in the area without permit. The WZO had to plead with him to settle on the hill, which he found unattractive, but he was finally persuaded. He received more than 3,600 dunams (889 acres) of land. In the process, he Hebrewized his family name to Talia and named the land expropriated by the Israeli army from a Palestinian family the Talia Farm. The original Palestinian owners proved in court that the land was theirs, but he was never evicted. His family still owns the farm today. I will come back to them later.

Masafer Yatta: In the Shadow of Area C

The hill lies in the midst of an area called Masafer Yatta. This is an old name, and it seems that it means the distance it took to travel from the town of Yatta (south of Hebron) to this hilly area, where for centuries farmers built hamlets to keep an eye over their cultivated plots and herds. The hamlets became villages and nowadays there are 19 in this area.

The scenery of the Masafer Yatta area from the hill is breath-taking even today. It is a beautiful panorama that reminds one of the magical views one can revel in when visiting the lands bordering on the desert-like and arid areas of southern Palestine. To the east, one can see the southern Jordan valley well into the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan through yellow hills. To the north, the view is open all the way to Hebron, a space dotted with small picturesque Palestinian villages but marred by the dozen or so fortress-like Jewish settlements. Much closer to the west, you can see the Tarkumiyya checkpoint, a privatized and notorious crossing between Israel and Area C.

In 1995, Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo II agreement which divided the occupied West Bank into three areas. Area A under direct control of the Palestinian Authority, the new body established by the Oslo Accords, would later be declared the state of Palestine. Area A is 18% of the West Bank, which itself is 20% of historical Palestine. The State of Palestine is therefore 3.6% of historical Palestine, and even this tiny land is dependent on Israel's goodwill and say-so.

Area B (roughly 22% of the West Bank) is under joint control in theory, but is totally governed by the Israeli army and security forces. Area C consists of nearly 60% of the West Bank and is under direct Israeli rule. Tarkumiyya is one of the connecting points between Area C and Israel proper (Israel before the June 1967 war). It is run by a private security company which granted this prison gate the appearance of an international terminal, part of the disguise Israel employs to cover up this project of inhumanity it has maintained now for more than 50 years. The lucky few who are allowed to work in Israel, and who are therefore vulnerable to demands by the secret service to serve as informers and collaborators—must arrive there at 0345 in the morning and return before dusk—a routine reminiscent of the permit of stay for Africans in apartheid South Africa. Palestinians are not allowed to cross by cars, and they have to walk and be picked up on both sides. Settlers and other Israeli citizens have a normal crossing through a barrier, while Palestinians are pushed into covered tunnels, guided by robotic voices that direct them on their way in or out of Area C.

The whole area from the barrier to the border with Jordan and the very southern tip of the West Bank is then part of Area C. This should have satisfied the Israelis, but they want more. Israel has coveted this tip of the West Bank from

the first day of the occupation in June 1967. In their vision it should have been part of the West Bank as a whole since it was devoid of any Palestinians and thus ideal for an uninterrupted Jewish colonization and de-jure annexation to Israel. Since 1967, successive Israeli governments experimented and perfected the vision of having the land without the people living on it. The first step was to decide that Palestinians had no need to live in spacious areas and should cling to densely populated spaces—open and green spaces were to be only occupied by Jewish settlers.

The first step in this direction was to partition the West Bank between Jewish and Palestinian spaces. This new partition was authored and supervised by Yigal Alon, one of the leaders of the Labour Party that dominated Israeli politics since its inception until 1977. He devised a detailed plan, the Alon Plan, and although successive Israeli governments never adopted it officially as a governmental plan, it served as a blueprint for the policies of the Judaization of the West Bank since 1967. Masafer Yatta was located within the Jewish West Bank in the Alon plan.

The “Jewish West Bank” became Area C under the Oslo II agreement. Naph-tali Benet, who became Israel’s Prime Minister in June 2021 after 11 years of Benjamin Netanyahu’s rule, led since the beginning of this century the informal lobby calling upon Israel to annex Area C to the Jewish State. In his various ministerial positions under Netanyahu, Benet talked about the annexation of the area to Israel, but in essence did very little. Like others he was content, and maybe will still be content in the future, with figuring out how to Judaize or ethnically cleanse it fully, before annexing it.

The current Israeli methods in Masafer Yatta are the admixture that would be used in the future to cleanse Area C. When standing on Lucifer’s Hill, you can vividly see this brutal methodology in action. Let’s view some of them beginning with the weaponization of archaeology as a pretext for the ethnic cleansing of local people.

Susya: Archaeology in the Service of the Colonizer

If you look towards the West, you see a bizarre sight: an archaeological site with settlers’ huts and small Palestinian homes in its midst. This is Susya. In 1986, Israeli archaeologists declared it a biblical site and it was doomed. The archaeologists who made this declaration were employed by an outfit called The Civil Administration. This was the new guise Israel gave to the previous Military governance. So in 1981 the organization changed its name but not its methods or purpose.

The designation of the village as an archaeological site led to the expulsion of all its inhabitants. For a moment this generated an international outcry. The insidious official response of Israel was that since there was no original village there in the more distant but undefined past, it was legal to move it for the sake of archaeological excavations. Susya is an old village, known in the past as Khirbet Susya, meaning the “Ruins of the Liquorice Plant,” an herbal vegetation Palestinian farmers can still find nearby. Built in the early 19th century by farmers and shepherds from the nearby towns of Yatta and Dura, Susya was used at first as a satellite village to the towns where modernization had limited the cultivated land available and what land that was available was too dear to be purchased.

The farmers first built in caves, making them the base for their homes (a method quite well known all over the Mediterranean); it was a permanent abode for some and an additional one to others. No one had the right to destroy and expel them. Susya was expanded in 1948 and absorbed the Palestinians expelled by Israel's 1948 ethnic cleansing of the southern parts of the country (which also included tens of thousands of Bedouins and until 1950 the Negev from the Naqab. From Lucifer's Hill you are also reminded of the Nakba, on top of everything else.

Plia Albeck, the mistress of land expropriation in the West Bank and right-wing civil servant, even recognized that the people of Khirbet Susya were the rightful owners of the land. She wrote to the government:

The [ancient] synagogue is located in an area that is known as the lands of Khirbet Susya, and around an Arab village between the ancient ruins. There is a formal registration on the land of Khirbet Susya with the Land Registry, according to which this land, amounting to approximately 3,000 dunam [approximately 741 acres], is privately held by many Arab owners. Therefore, the area proximal to the [ancient] synagogue is in all regards privately owned.²

And yet, apart from one family, they were all expelled. This unique family's steadfastness and courage are visible on a clear day from Lucifer's Hill. The family is totally isolated because of the checkpoint, nobody can visit them, so they are deprived of any social life, and their children have to walk a long way to school. This journey depends on the goodwill, which is hardly in abundance, of the Israeli army that opens the checkpoint for them and escorts them as they are daily harassed and even assaulted by the settlers.

The use of archaeology for dispossession in Palestine is not new as is evident from the seminal research done by Nadia Abu El-Haj (2001) and others. It began in 1948, when a group of archaeologists were appointed by the Israeli government as members of an outfit called the "Naming Committee," which was assigned the task of finding archaeological justification for taking over destroyed or occupied Palestinian villages and giving them biblical names. The purpose was to portray an act of destruction as a redemption of ancient, indeed biblical, Jewish villages. Similar practices were enacted in the occupied West Bank. But archaeology was not the only means to depopulate Masafer Yatta. No less important was allowing the settlers to continue harassing the locals.

Vandalism and Thuggery in the Service of the Jewish State

The settlers' farms and small colonies are usually located on top of hills, such as Lucifer's Hill. The settlers in these areas are effectively vigilantes and vandals enjoying the full protection of the army. The burning of fields, houses, and orchards, and the physical assault of Palestinian farmers and even their children, was intended to show the Palestinians who was the boss in Masafer Yatta. The Association of Civil Rights in Israel (2020) estimated that the inhabitants of two villages in Masafer Yatta had to leave in the midst of 2000 because of such harassment. By 2005, the Israeli human rights organization, Btselem, estimated that within two years, 88% of the Palestinians living in Masafer Yatta had experienced attacks by settlers. The attacks also included blocking roads to Palestinian villages and fields (Ashkar 2005).

On almost every day of the year you can find a report with forensic description of such harassment. One such day, 23 October 2012, began with the settlers identifying a plot of land they desired, this time within the village of Susya. They then stuck up a pole with a sign on it—claiming it as theirs. On the note they declared the new name for the plot that they had chosen: “The Hill of God’s Grace” together with a quote from the Bible.

And here begins a charade. The Palestinian owners are encouraged by Israeli human rights organizations to complain to the Civil Administration. But this body had already closed the “disputed” area for two weeks and designated it as a closed military zone. In the meantime, the settlers remained on the land, brought caravans, and planted vine stems to show the cultivation that is required in court as a proof of their right to stay on the land. I will explain this particular charade in more detail shortly. These stems are visible from the hill, dotting the Palestinian land coveted by the settlers like evil spots. Such a presence is visible from the hill at the midst of the Hazar family’s plot of land in the village of Susya.

Two years later, this method—of planting a vine grove as the first step in the takeover—was used on other lands belonging to Palestinians in the Susya area. With the help of NGOs and lawyers, the Palestinians grouped together and went to the Israeli Supreme Court, inadvertently playing a part in a process that would repeat itself. The Court almost always legalizes such takeovers and only interferes when it is called to do so by the appeal of Palestinians. Would it be better to not appeal? A similar question is raised by Nadine El-Enany (2021) in her brilliant book, *(B)Ordering Britain*, where she engages critically with the human rights lawyers working on behalf of immigrants and refugees in Britain who might, if successful, elevate them one rung up the racist ladder of Britain without challenging its very existence.

Dehydrating the Palestinians out of Masafer Yatta

Another method of driving Palestinians out is to dehydrate them. Water is scarce in this part of Palestine, but for centuries the Palestinians knew how to gather the winter rain for irrigation. Now the army and the settlers systematically sabotage Palestinian wells, divert water to cattle farms that are an ecological disaster in this part of the world, and force Palestinians to buy the water at a much higher price than it is sold to the settlers. As one Palestinian pointed out:

Water is life; without water we can’t live; not us, not the animals, or the plants. Before we had some water, but after the army destroyed everything we have to bring water from far away; it’s very difficult and expensive. They make our life very difficult, to make us leave. The soldiers first destroyed our homes and the shelters with our flocks, uprooted all our trees, and then they wrecked our water cisterns. These were old water cisterns, from the time of our ancestors. Isn’t this a crime? Water is precious. We struggle every day because we don’t have water. (Amnesty International 2017, para. 11)

These words are Fatima al-Nawajah’s, a resident of Susya who gave her testimony to Amnesty International in April 2008. This report focused on the way the denial of access to water and the damage to wells and reservoirs play an

important role in chasing out the people of Susya and other villages in the Masafer Yatta area. It began with the army destroying water facilities for the villagers in the Masafer area. The army claimed that the wells and the water systems built around them had no permit. The real reason can be established clearly from Lucifer's Hill. The settlers needed the water for their swimming pools and vineyards.

The report noted that in 2008, some 180,000 to 200,000 Palestinians already lived in rural communities without any access to running water or in towns and villages which are connected to the water network but whose taps often run dry. Water rationing was common, especially but not exclusively in the summer months, with residents of different neighbourhoods and villages receiving piped water only one day every week or every few weeks. Consequently, many Palestinians have no choice but to purchase additional supplies from mobile water tankers, which deliver water at a much higher price and of often dubious quality (Amnesty International 2017).

Today in 2021, the situation is worse. Unemployment and poverty have increased in recent years and disposable income has fallen; Palestinian families in Masafer Yatta and in Area C in general must spend an increasingly high percentage of their income—as much as a quarter or more in some cases—on water.

When you look to the West from Lucifer's Hill, you see the effect of water theft on the Palestinians; when you look to the east, you see the impact of another method used to ethnically cleanse the people of Masafer Yatta: firing zones.

Militarizing the Living Space

Declaring the area a military firing zone is another method affecting more than a dozen Palestinian villages in this region. During military training exercises, the army's heavy vehicles knock down huts, run over cultivated fields, and demolish water wells. According to the military law one cannot reside inside a firing zone area, hence all the villages are living with an expulsion order hanging over their heads. Some orders are executed, but in most cases they are used as means of coercing Palestinians to become informers and collaborators.

Already by 1977, much of Masafer Yatta had been declared a firing zone, codenamed Firing Zone 918. It meant that at any given moment the army could demolish your house, burn your crops, block access to your fields, and stopper wells, as you would be deemed henceforth an illegal resident. This method has been used more extensively since 1999 (Btselem 2013).

In contrast, in the very same firing zone stands Avigayil, an illegal outpost founded in 2001 on more than 1,000 dunams (250 acres) of land near Susya and visible from Lucifer's Hill. 11 years later, Palestinians, who owned part of the land on which the outpost was erected, appealed to the Supreme Court, asking it to require the state to implement demolition orders standing against the outpost. The response was cynical and cruel. There was no point in returning the lands on which Avigayil was founded as it would return the Palestinians to a firing zone. At the same time, the government legalized the outpost which lies inside the firing zone. Jewish settlements were allowed to stay in a firing zone while the real owners of the land are barred from it.

From Lucifer's Hill you can see the land belonging to Abu Jundaya. In 2000, his land was targeted by the Israeli army. The army issued a demolition order to his two houses and an animal shelter. Since then, he has lived in a tent.

In 2013, Ali Awad owned a herd of over 1,000 sheep. Despite being wealthy, he has lived since then in a cave within the firing zone, and every morning crosses it with his animals. When the army exercises, almost every day, it closes the road, forcing him to make a 15 kilometre detour, instead of his preferred two kilometre route. He complains of helicopters practicing emergency landings near his wheat fields: "The wind generated from a single landing destroys an entire field" (Awad 2021, para. 10). Since the area is ruled by the Israel Defense Forces, there is no point in complaining to the authorities. But he still epitomizes the Palestinian resistance in this impossible reality. Trapped between Lucifer's Hill and Firing Zone 918, Ali Awad impressed a visitor who described him as a good shepherd, "daily refusing to give Lucifer, who turned out being Zionist, the violent victory it so desires" (Tov 2013, para. 14).

In 2013, the Israeli daily *Haaretz* looked more forensically at this particular firing zone at the heart of Masafer Yatta. The 28 September headline read: "The Government won't vomit [in disgust, an idiom meaning that they will commit any crime] at any dirty bureaucratic trick aimed at keeping Bedouin and Palestinian shepherds away from their homes." Declaring their homes and fields firing zones and training grounds became the main methods.

On 12 May 2019, Amira Hass revealed in *Haaretz*, on the basis of a classified document she managed to lay her hands on, that the army admitted to using training grounds in places such as Masafer Yatta in order to force the population to leave. The army officers refer to the villages as "weeds" that will return unless the army persists with its military exercises to "pesticide" them (Hass 2019).

All is Legal in the Eyes of the Colonizer

One might rightly ask, could not the occupying army just do what it wants and expel the people at will and confiscate their lands? Well, until 1974 it did, but then the more conscientious sections of Jewish society began to take the army to the Supreme Court, where the Judges demanded that the government have a good explanation for such acts of displacement and replacement.

In a famous 1974 court case, known as the Elon Moreh ruling, the Supreme Court asserted that the army could not confiscate private Palestinian land (and thus expel its owners and transfer the land to the settlers) on the basis of security considerations. This was welcomed by the newly founded settler movement, *Gush Emunim*, which wished the government to de-Arabize the West Bank in the name of Zionism and not under the disguise of security needs.

In 1981, Ariel Sharon found a way of legalizing this theft. He used an ancient Ottoman category of land, called *Mawat*, or "squatter's rights" or "adverse possession," whereby land that has not been cultivated for three years reverts to the state to expropriate further land for Jewish settlement. The climatic and topographical conditions in Masafer Yatta are such that cultivation can be partial because the fields are also used for grazing, but the ownership is complete. This did not help the people of the area and their land was reclassified as *Mawat*. The

state took their land and gave it to the settlers. The Occupation likes to legalize its crimes.

When you look closely from the Hill to the land confiscated in such a manner, you observe a bizarre scene: barrels spread over the land and in them twigs and very young trees. This is the second part of the charade previously mentioned: according to that same Ottoman Law, if you cultivate a deserted land for ten years, it is yours. The state and the settlers, knowing that you cannot cultivate these lands properly, regard the barrel vegetation as proof of cultivation.

Sumud (Steadfastness) on a Daily Basis

From Lucifer's Hill this colonization and oppression is quite visible, but the unique steadfastness of the Palestinians is also evident. Here and there a small Palestinian flag on a location coveted by the occupiers can be seen flying from indefinable Palestinian homes in the midst of a Jewish colony, and one can see young men and women accompanying schoolchildren on their long journey to school to protect them from the settlers' harassment.

The mix of Palestinian and Jewish buildings within what is now called Susya tells you the struggle is not over. The people of Susya kept returning from the places into which the army threw them. At first, they even succeeded in attracting international interest and support, including that of the British government, whose Department for International Aid was deeply involved in building cess-pools and cisterns for the Palestinian deportees all over Masafer Yatta, many of which were subsequently destroyed by the Israeli army.³

However, in recent years, international attention waned and Israel has exploited this lack of interest to justify another expulsion when an ancient synagogue was allegedly discovered. But the villagers fight back and more importantly as elsewhere in Area C their biggest achievement is steadfastness, that they are still there. From the air, Masafer Yatta looks full of hamlets, though in Zionist eyes it is terra nullius. On the ground you can see that it is full of life that comes from centuries of sedentary and semi-nomadic communities living in the Hebron and Yatta regions. The Bedouins, who were expelled from Israel during the Nakba, increased the number of villages but they face a policy of ethnic cleansing on both sides of the Green Line: the demolition of unrecognized Palestinian villages in the Naqab (the Negev) and the destruction of life in Masafer Yatta.

After my visit to Lucifer's Hill, I joined those who daily carryout one of the least reported anti-colonialist struggles in the world. We were accompanied by a youth group called *Youth Sumud*, "the steadfast young people," who are struggling against the expulsion of Palestinian villagers.⁴ They are rebuilding deserted villages such as Zarura, where the villagers used to live in renovated caves that had been connected to electricity and water by these amazing youngsters who come from surrounding villages. Most of them are academics with excellent English, and believe that non-violence is the best way of defending their future.

They are still active in 2021. One of their main activities this summer is to try to defend the village of al-Tuwani in Masafer Yatta, which is clearly visible from Lucifer's Hill. The group stays the night with this particular community; though

exposed to endless harassment by the army and the settlers, they remain steadfast.

The village of al-Tuwani is this year's focus of the struggle between the brave young people of Masafer Yatta and the colonization. It is led by Sami Hourani who was arrested several times for his nonviolent protests in this village and the nearby village of al-Rakez. His friend, 24-year-old Harun Abu Aram, was less fortunate. He was shot by the army in the neck while trying to prevent the soldiers from confiscating his neighbour's generator.⁵

Sami was arrested because of that particular incident, but he has long been targeted by the occupation since he is a leading organiser and activist in the area, a founding member of the *Youth of Sumud*, and a board member of the overall organization coordinating the popular resistance in the West Bank, the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee.⁶

In May 2021, Hourani was brought west of Jerusalem to the notorious military court Camp Offer. The session was held in Hebrew so that the cynical Israeli concession to allow international observers to sit in would be futile, as on-the-spot translation was not allowed by the court.

After visiting the brave young people in Zarura and returning to the car, I noticed a flock of birds of prey watching us with interest. Palestinians are barred from birdwatching from Tel-Asafir, now Lucifer's Hill. But with our help they might be able to do it one day, when the West is less obsessed with a non-existent anti-Semitic scare and remembers its original responsibility for the ongoing catastrophe of the Palestinians.

Conclusion

In 2015, Yaacov Talia died in an accident, but his ilk continues to terrorize the Palestinians in outposts with benign names such as Maon (home) and Avigayil (Abigail). His siblings are now approaching me and my friends on the hill. They do not utter a word but cast unfriendly gazes at us and leave a cloud of dust that covers us as they drive on their way to Lucifer's farm.

The Palestinians refer to their current situation quite often as *al-Nakba al-Mustamera*, the ongoing Nakba. The original Nakba or catastrophe occurred in 1948, when Israel ethnically cleansed half of the Palestinian population and demolished half of their villages and most of their towns. The world ignored that crime and absolved Israel from any responsibility. Since then, the settler-colonial state of Israel has attempted to complete the ethnic cleansing of 1948. From Lucifer's Hill one can see both the past and present of this project, as well as one of the principal reasons for its incompleteness, the Palestinian resistance.

Biography

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Notes

1. Depicting Israel as a settler-colonial state is now accepted by many scholars as can be seen from the large number of articles on it in the *Journal of Settler Colonial Studies*. See <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rset20>.
2. This report by Albeck was sent to the government in 1982 and is quoted in full in Btselem's website (in Hebrew). See https://www.btselem.org/hebrew/southhebron_hills/201507_facts_on_susiya
3. On the British role read Medical Aid for Palestine's (MAP) report: "Britain and Palestine: A Parliamentary Focus, 2010-2015" <https://www.map.org.uk/downloads/map--caabu-parliamentary-report.pdf>.
4. See their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/youthofsumud/>.
5. This was chillingly captured by Btselem see: https://www.btselem.org/video/20210215_israeli_soldier_shoots_harun_abu_aram_during_attempt_to_confiscate_generator_khirbet_a_rakeez_1_jan_2021.
6. See their website: <https://www.facebook.com/PopularStruggle>.

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