

*Crying in the Wilderness*

# Voices from Behind the Entombment Wall

by WILLIAM A. COOK

"Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing. Do you begin to see, then, what kind of world we are creating? A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world which will grow not less but more merciless as it refines itself." (1984, George Orwell)

Orwell wrote 1984 immediately following World War II and published it in 1949. He had the model for its reality readily at hand, indeed, the above wording paraphrases the words of Hitler as he calculated how to make the "Party" the controlling force in his fascist world. He implemented his world with walls, identity cards, tattoos, laws, internment, torture, and forced pain, humiliation, fear, and torment wrought by treachery.

I stood with a group of colleagues surveying this strange, surreal scene — the narrow stone and gravel road butted against the chain-linked fence topped with rolls of barbed wire, sixty yards of bulldozed land, stripped now of its trees and plants, turned into a virtual private highway for IDF forces, enclosing electrified fencing, blocking access to farm land and groves, a wall of fencing that carved miles upon miles of land out of this small town north west of Jerusalem encircling settlements recently constructed in this Palestinian land haunted by the realization that this wall, this entombment wall, had been condemned as illegal by the International Court of Justice, that the United Nations had upheld that ruling with a resolution condemning the wall, and understanding that it violated the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, only to see it flare out in both directions as it snaked over and around the hills and valleys as far as the eye could see. I stood marveling at the minds of humans who could design such an instrument of torture that confiscates in its steel and cement reality 58% of the West Bank

([www.pchrgaza.org/files/Reports/English/sharon.htm](http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/Reports/English/sharon.htm), 5/11/05).

I stood there and realized, that despite the action of the ICJ and the UN, the wall existed, a defiant and colossal villainy perpetrated against the world communities, done with a blandness of arrogance that Donald Rumsfeld could appreciate, even as the state of Israel seeks a seat on the United Nations Security Council (Daily Times, Pakistan, 5/6/05), a body that it obviously rejects with aloof contempt and finds irrelevant.

At that moment, a group of children appeared, some on bikes, others running beside them, coming down that beat-up road toward the fence. An engineer, our interpreter for

this visit, spoke to them. They immediately fanned out over the road in front of the fence looking intently for something that thing was a rock on which blood stains were still visible, blood stains from a brother of one of the kids who had been shot at that place not long before. He still lived, recovering as we spoke. But they wanted to show us one of their homes back up the road and to the left, a home that sat on land that now bordered the fence, much of their land annexed for the fence. The family had just received a notice that they must pull down their sheds and out buildings because they were too close to the fence, buildings that had housed chickens, turkeys, goats, sheep, and cows since the '50s, buildings that were constructed of bits and pieces of tin and boards, weathered, scarred remnants scavenged from the debris that lay everywhere in sight. But if they moved the buildings, where do they house the animals; whose land do they annex?

And so we gathered there on that rise that looked out over the fence that abutted a shanty that came too close to a fence recently completed by the IDF that had 60 yards of stripped roadway and fence to protect from the chickens and donkeys. The absurdity of the situation could not cloak the sense of desperation on the face of the owner or hide the anger that swelled in the chest of his worker and friend as they sat under a tree, the only protection from the blistering sun, talking to us, asking in wonderment why they were responsible for the closeness of the fence; why those with such power should want to destroy a family with 11 children; why, when they had taken so much of their land already, would they force them to tear down the only protection they had and lose the only land they had to shelter their animals and feed their family? Why? What had they done to the Israelis?

They pointed to a distant hill where smoke rose in the heat shimmering sky spreading over the hills, a garbage dump for the "settlers" placed on Palestinian land, a gesture of disdain and mockery of those already entombed behind their wall. The attitude, the visible expression of the racist behavior that glares out at the world, the world refuses to see. An old man joined the two, pointing his finger at his own chest, slowly saying in hesitant English, "I too am a Semite, why do they hate me? Why?"

So we talked, talked about the oppression, the physical presence of troops that turn children, like the youngsters that brought us to this place, into defiant kids that open their shirts to the soldiers daring them to shoot, the last resort of those without hope for a future. Constantly under the boot of Israeli occupation: seen at checkpoints when they wish to leave town, seen at the one gate through the fence for the farmers to access their trees and fields, but only at the convenience of the IDF that stand guard and demand ID cards, seen in the harrowing changes that have turned life here into a slow suffocation that destroys self-esteem, erodes income or destroys it entirely, and eliminates any semblance of meaning in a land forced to succumb to the dictates of an occupying force.

Why do we Americans allow this to happen, they ask? It's not Israel alone; their bullets, their missiles, their tanks, their caterpillars are all "Made in America." Indeed, their military is "Made in America." Why?

So we left this town only to drive to an even more surreal place, one the mind of man has difficulty comprehending could ever exist since it seems to defy the very essence of a human soul, yet it exists, created by the IDF, a horrifying reality paid for with our tax dollars. We drove to the outskirts of a small town, down a road bordered by dilapidated buildings of wood and tin linked together with broken fencing. Across the street the land fell off spreading out into distant hills. But the road ended abruptly at a chain link fence garnished with rolled barbed wire. Behind it was yet another. Both these 10 foot high fences ran to the right joining another fence running parallel to the road for approximately 30 yards where they met another set of fences that turned left and ran behind a donkey shed and small outbuildings, past the rear of a small house, until they joined yet another set of fences, visible to the left of the house as they ran into the Wall, the 25 foot high cement blocks that form the Entombment Wall, a wall here that faces the front of the house not 20 yards from the front door. In this enclosure sits a house occupied by a family with six children. The IDF walled in this family! Security comes to mind. A husband, wife and six children must be completely entombed to safeguard the Israeli squatters who reside in suburban town homes on land illegally stolen from the Palestinians that borders the back side of the house and from the extended "settlement" that occupies the hillside further to the right beyond the chain link fence that runs parallel to the road we drove up on.

The expense alone boggles the mind, but when the IDF gets angry because the owner refused to sell his house and little land, collective punishment must be exerted to teach a lesson to this family. The lesson blares out at the world if the Israelis would let the world see it, let the TV cameras in to film the depravity of mind that would erect such a monstrous insult to humanity. And the lesson is not lost on the children who must look out at this tomb wall every day of their lives and realize that humans erected it, humans who identify with collective punishment since it is an essential ingredient in their Bible where destruction of people at the behest of a G-D (sic) every man, woman and child, every beast of the field, every ox, every sheep, every ass — whose command they must obey or suffer His wrath has become a way of life in this new century of human progress up the evolutionary ladder from savage to advanced savage.

Let the family tell you how they can explain this treatment. What do you say to your 4 year old or your 10 year old? What rational explanation can one conjure up to give voice to this demented and prejudicial abuse? What words convey to a young child the deplorableness of this act: mischievousness would be too kind and hardly true, dreadful seems lame, horrid, foul, rotten, that's closer to the truth but fails to capture the

baseness, hatefulness, damnableness, yea, the amoral diabolicalness of this insanity. So we drank some tea, listened as the mother and the father tried to convey how they managed to live in this "rat's cage" of wire and cement. And we tried to grapple with life lived in this microcosm of Israeli occupied oppression that is the reality of the West Bank. What irony their creation represents, that they should wall in one family so those with only a short time to spend in Palestine could see in miniature what Sharon's IDF has done for all Israelis as they imprison all their brothers and sisters.

Perhaps we should hear from one last voice crying in the wilderness to complete this journey of hidden souls that have none to speak for them, none to see the plight that suffocates them day after day. There is a voice, a guardian that tells the story here; but there are many voices here, voices of children that have been given a place to run and play in the old city, the Muslim quarter of the old city, just inside the ancient walls, a place large enough to have a basketball court and a small soccer field. This little oasis exists because the residents camped out peacefully for more than a month to halt the creation of a "settlement" in this quarter of the Muslim district of the old city, a settlement that was to be erected within a couple of days, no notice having been given to the residents until a friendly Israeli took it upon himself to tell them. The residents proposed a social center for the children, a place to play, a small library for reading, and a stage area for them to see plays and hear music. Now a kindergarten provides kids with a start at learning, and parents a safe place to leave their kids for 150 shekels a month when they go to work.

But as safe as it is, as pleasant as the surroundings are, the children come each day depressed, anxious, even sullen. Dyala, the guardian, talks of the need to have a ready smile to displace the anticipated behavior caused by the conditions that surround them on every side, the wall, the hideous, offensive wall, the countless checkpoints that the children must endure, the harassment of their parents, the deplorable conditions that exist at home, poverty the reality of day to day existence, the fathers psychologically torn by constant unemployment and its subsequent humiliation and hopelessness. Dyala talks of hope of the future that can bring a better life, but the children ask, where is the hope, what future? The choices are few: a man can leave to get work in another country or sometimes in a distant place in the West Bank, but if he does, he loses his residency status. Dyala's own children cannot return as residents. The state takes the home or the land; indeed, the state encourages Palestinians to leave even paying a sum of money with a guaranteed job somewhere out of state. If they leave with their Jordanian Passport, they cannot return as residents. They are entombed inside the wall, physically and psychologically. The squatters can move freely on roads built specifically for them, an interlacing network of roads that create a web of free movement. The indigenous people must travel broken down roads cutoff by checkpoints where they wait hours on

end so that trips of a few minutes take hours and passage to Jerusalem or other cities can be curtailed at the whim of the IDF.

So we watch the children play knowing that internally they see their world as a prisoner does, a life lived under constant surveillance where their opportunities for learning, for travel, for the small joys a child's life should possess have been sucked out of their reality by the occupying forces that show no mercy, but rather an inhuman indifference to the suffering that greets them each day.

These are the voices from behind the entombment wall, Sharon's Wall of Fear that cuts off the lifeblood of the Palestinians tearing apart the human mind leaving them a legacy of pain, humiliation, fear, and torment made real by a treachery of an insidious and malignant kind.

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