

**“If the Germans had to live this way a single day!”**

**29 October, 11 o'clock at night, in the airplane to Tel Aviv**

Luisa has organised a fact-finding mission to Palestine and Israel. 14 deputies from all fractions will participate in it. The programme promises much information and many impressions. We well may have had the first and only “yellow” (non-session) week this year, but when Luisa asked me, it was clear that I would travel with them. Luisa Morgantini is simply the Palestine deputy of the EP, and there possibly may not in all the national parliaments in Europe be any politician, woman or man, with so many contacts in Israel and Palestine as she has. Moreover, not simply contacts, but heart-felt and intensive human relationships. I already travelled twice with her in the Middle East, and was able to witness that at every second street corner a person suddenly embraced her. It will be stressful; the schedule of the visit points to it, and Luisa is exciting anyway. Her sincerity may be strenuous, and she certainly does not like to be contradicted, but she is this way, this is how I like her.

Arafat, whom we were supposed to meet on Tuesday in Ramallah, was ill and had been flown to France.<sup>1</sup> But that was not a problem: I had visited him 15 months ago in the Muqataa, where the Israeli government had isolated the sick old man for three years. My curiosity is satisfied. New things will no longer be heard from him. He is, despite all propoganda from Israel, the USA or the BILD paper, not the problem, but impulses for a solution and for a democratic development in Palestine will no longer emanate from him either. I look forward to Israel and Palestine, yet I already know now about the feeling of a sad helplessness which will reign it all. Of course, the Palestinian suicide attempts and the Israeli military actions and the almost daily dead are being reported, but the international community has forgotten this conflict and its victims.

**October 30, 8:30 o'clock in the morning, UN Office for Coordinating Humanitarian Aid (OCHA) in Jerusalem**

At 5 o'clock I was in the Hotel Ambassador in East Jerusalem. I would have to get through this day with two hours of sleep. The “night” will nonetheless cost a proud \$ 100. Mike, a very reliable and generous fellow, whom I know from earlier visits, met me and two other deputies at the airport in Tel Aviv.

Vegard Pettersen, the head of the OCHA office, informs us in a detailed way about the humanitarian, economic and social problems, which the wall and the numerous street blockades and checkpoints in the occupied territories are causing. He speaks of a humanitarian crisis. Overall, there are in the meantime 703 different roadblocks, which choke the opportunities for movement of the Palestinians in their own country and economic traffic: 60 checkpoints, for example, of whom often enough it is not known, when and whether they are open at all, six “partial checkpoints”, 45 “road gates”, ninety concrete blockades, which make the passage through certain streets impossible, 350 earth walls and trenches, which block the passage for cars. Cabs, which have gotten expensive, transport the people up to these obstacles; behind them, others are waiting to lift them further. Many streets, however, are completely forbidden for Palestinians, the same goes for the use of motorcycles and mopeds. 210 of the 622 planned kilometres of wall (Pettersen, in a neutralising way, talks of a “barrier”) have been completed in the meantime, partly as a high and electronically

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<sup>1</sup> He died there, mourned by the world community, in mid-November. (A.B.)

secured fence, partly also as a huge nine metre high concrete wall as in close-by Abou-Dis, supplemented by a 50 to 300 metre wide buffer zone, where there run further barricades – and for the whole way not on Israeli, but on Palestinian soil and ground, which is being ruthlessly expropriated for this purpose. In many places, the wall reaches far into the Palestinian territories, separates peasants from their fields and markets, divides one Palestinian community from the next. Eleven Palestinian towns and villages are circled all around by the wall, 76,900 people are factually shut up there, a further 16,300 are imprisoned in twelve “closed areas” between the border to Israel and the territories occupied in 1967. The plans of the Israeli government for the annexation of further parts of the West Jordan country and for the “Bantustanisation” of Palestine can already clearly be seen from the course of the wall: the whole Jordan valley is supposed to be attached to Israel and be connected to Israel at the altitude of Jerusalem by the settlement plans E1: To the Palestinians, there will remain four territories separated from one another: Gaza (however, without the border strip to Egypt), an area around Yenin in the North, one from Ramallah to Jericho and one around Bethlehem and Hebron in the South. The dividing up and the new annexations are already long in progress: by way of the fast-growing Jewish settlements, the roads connecting them (called bypass roads, they are also located on Palestinian territory), the wall, the prohibitions, the checkpoints and obstacles. The newly built Highway 442 alone shuts up an additional 40,000 people. The Palestinian economy has practically collapsed. Vegard Pettersen counts up that the Palestinian population at present receives one billion Dollars in aid; the highest per capita in the world. If one were to double it, poverty would be reduced by 8%, if on the other hand, Israel were to remove the obstacles in Palestine, it would be reduced by 15 percent. Pettersen is UN representative, committed to neutrality, but one notices, how deeply he is concerned by the situation of millions of Palestinian women and men.

Unemployment has risen by 10 to 40% in the last four years, in some regions to 80%, the number of people living under the poverty line has increased from 22 to 50%. Food aid had to be quintupled. Whoever lives in the enclaves or “closed areas” needs a permission to leave it, for instance, to get to his or her own fields beyond the wall. This permission is only valid for six months, for men only, if they are older than 35 years, and only for one checkpoint, opened twice daily, in the morning and the evening. Tractors are prohibited, spending the night on the fields as well. Who is no longer capable, under these conditions, of living of his or her fields, will be expropriated.

The situation is especially bad in the Gaza strip, where 1.3 million Palestinians live. Here, 68% live below the poverty line, and not accidentally Hamas (originally protected by Israel against the PLO) can count on a third of the votes in the meantime. Israel has divided the Gaza strip into three parts by Jewish settlements and streets, often inhabitants are not able for whole days to get from Southern Rafah to Gaza City or into Northern Yabalya, which is only 20 kms away. Sharon’s withdrawal plan will not improve this situation by much. 1497 buildings, the home of more than 15,000 people, have been destroyed by the Israeli army in the last couple of weeks, and further de-peopling on the borders to Israel and Egypt is already planned.

### **Half past Nine, Abou Dis**

Aaa, here I was in summer 2003. Now the wall is completed. What I remembered as a provisional situation and had just seen on maps and heard about in briefings, stands there: a shocking nine metres high, grey, oppressive, incredibly cold. Terry Boullata, a Palestinian women teacher, who was long imprisoned during the first

Intifada, welcomes us: "Welcome to our Ghetto." I would avoid this expression, but the wall certainly has another goal than just to protect Israel against the horrible suicide attempts and to "separate" Israelis and Palestinians. If it really brought security for Israel, I would accept it, even if, in the long term, security can of course only be guaranteed by togetherness. Then, however, the wall would have to run along the "green line", the border of 1967. Instead, the wall is above all else an instrument for expropriating the Palestinians and for the final occupation of large parts of the West Bank. Moreover, it destroys the economic and political existential conditions for a Palestinian state, low in any event. It does not separate Israelis and Palestinians, but the Palestinians from each other. It also does not constitute security for Israel but insecurity for the Palestinians: social and economic insecurity, degradation, the criminalisation of a whole people not only ideologically, but in real life, by way of the countless prohibitions and obstacles, by way of the arbitrariness of the Israeli army, the police, other bodies, the defencelessness and complete insecurity about legality of the Palestinians.

Demonstrators have pasted posters of Arafat on the wall, have painted slogans ("Stop this wall!", "Stop the occupation!"). Terry Boutalla's house lies beyond the wall, in East Jerusalem, which Israel has separated from the other occupied territories, and there still is a narrow gap where, passing by an earth wall, through rubbish and concrete rubble, one can get to it. Terry's husband, on the other hand, who has no permission for East Jerusalem, is not allowed to legally spend the night in his own house. A small hotel, directly opposite and the land, which has belonged to his family for 700 years, is "incorporated" into Jerusalem and thus expropriated. In it, there is now a police station. The confiscation of Palestinian property happens in a thoroughly non-bureaucratic fashion. The owners are not informed personally or by letter; one simply posts a notice to a tree on the street. Who accidentally reads them, and understands the military topographic maps, maybe still has a chance to use the legal right to appeal. All others are, after a week, robbed of any legal opportunity. Terry's husband says: "For them, we do not exist as people and not as legal subjects." The discrimination is daily. Two hundred metres away, a new Jewish settlement is being built. This is where the refuse containers stand. Terry and the other Palestinians settlers have no right to use them – allegedly for security reasons. Illegal Jewish settlers have water every day, the Palestinians only on two or three days a week in the summer.

Abou Dis used to be a suburb of Jerusalem. The city in the meantime of course has moved no millimetre further away from Jerusalem, yet it is no longer a suburb. The occupation laws and the wall have separated both cities more than 100 kms could do it. Abou Dis' inhabitants, women, men and children, have used schools, hospitals and many other installations in East Jerusalem together. Now, for many, it is forbidden territory, or they have neither time nor money to manage the hour-long drive to East Jerusalem, which in reality is only 50 metres away. Terry Boullata and others, with whom we speak this morning, speak of a double Apartheid policy: an Apartheid against the Palestinians overall and an Apartheid wall between the Palestinians. At midday, we drive to the Khakandiya checkpoint in the North of Jerusalem. The road goes past large, quickly expanding Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, mostly strategically located on mountain summits, past Palestinian cities, which are circled by forbidden streets, barbed wire fences and the wall, and past miserable Bedouin villages in the valleys. Taxis and other cars from Ramallah carry people up to the checkpoint, which they have to pass on foot. A very old, decrepit woman, who is supported by a man, maybe her son, attracts my attention. It may well be 200 or 300 metres through an entangled barbed wire mess, barriers, air-raid shelters,

controls and a few dozen of very self-assured soldiers. I do not know what they think. They seem very proud, convinced of themselves and superior. Are they really this way? I do not know. When asked, they respond that they are doing their duty, that Israel needs security. Whether they cannot imagine, how humiliating all of this is for the Palestinians – in their own country? No, we keep our rules. Four young Palestinians, three men around 18 years of age and one girl tell us that their valid documents have been taken from them 20 minutes ago. They do not know why and not how long they will have to wait. The soldier, whom we ask for that information, again only answers: We have our rules. Who manages to pass the checkpoint, can take a taxicab or a minibus again on the other side. Earlier one needed a good quarter of an hour from Ramallah or Bethlehem to Jerusalem, for Palestinians it is today almost a full day's travel. Jesus today would barely be able to get to Jerusalem. The direct connection is closed to them, and the wall is just being built on it, and before they get to Jerusalem, a further checkpoint is waiting for them. I have beaten off myself a little piece of the wall. My Swedish colleague Karl says: "Even if it is still much higher than the Berlin wall, at one point in the future, it will doubtlessly have the same fate." Historically, it will without any doubt be this way. This does not make the reality any better.

## **2 o'clock in the afternoon, at Albert Agazarian's in the Swedish Christian Mission in Old Jerusalem**

Albert Agarzian is born in Old Jerusalem. From the roof of the Swedish mission, he shows us his birth house in the ocean of roofs of the old city. With full temperament, he woos for the rights of the Palestinians and lists the discriminations. Since the occupation, 200,000 Palestinians have lost the right to live in Jerusalem. Israel has extended its city limits far into occupied territory. Agazarian describes the concept for the city's development as "the maximum of land and the minimum of non-Jews." One of his many anecdotes could be the slogan for our travel. A man walks into the hospital and asks for a doctor for his eyes and ears. No, he is told, in that case you have to go to an eye doctor or a throat, nose and ear doctor, there is no doctor for eye and ear. Yes, says the man, but I need a single one for both, because I see what I do not hear, and hear what I do not see. One should send all European politicians for one week through Palestine. May be they will see and hear after all, what is really the matter there.

In the afternoon, I let myself drift through the narrow streets of the old city. Families of orthodox Jews in their holiday dresses are on the way to the Wailing Wall (it is Sabbath), Palestinians are shopping for the evening meal after the Ramadan Fast, tourists, of whom there however have not been so many for years, are looking for the Path to Crucifixion or let themselves be drawn into his shop by the torrent of words of one of the numerous traders. Today, I only want to let the colourful and loud bazaar atmosphere between Yaffa and Damask gate act upon me. I must only pay attention nowhere to betray too much interest, so as to get past the salesmen.

## **6 o'clock in the evening, Meeting with Israeli Conscientious Objectors (Refusniki) in the hotel**

Haggai Matar and Shimri Zamret are both 20 years old. They have spent two years in prison because they have refused to do their service in the Israeli army, which to them is an occupying power. Before court, Haggai has pleaded his right to an independent opinion and the fact that the army did not defend Israel but was suppressing another people. Haggai and Shimri talk without bitterness. They had

made their decision very consciously. “What I told the military court two years ago”, says Haggai, “has appeared as a book. I do not take a word of it back, but today everything is even worse – the way the Israeli army proceeds in the Gaza strip, the daily life of the Palestinians, their economic situation, their suppression and degradation, also the life in Israel. I do not believe in the USA, not in that Bush will seriously ask Israel to end its occupation policy, therefore, please understand my action and my words as demand to the Europeans to finally become active and exercise pressure upon Israel.”

Next to the two young men, there sits Yonathan Shapra, about thirty years old, strong, with a well-trained body, sun-burnt, his hands are long and lank, the characteristic head shaven short, the blue eyes look very attentively, one feels sure to be facing a soldier. Already when we entered the room and I did not even know, who he was, I was impressed by him. He is a major, has been with the army for more than ten years, a helicopter pilot. Yonathan talks calmly, thoughtfully: “I have taken a much longer time to break away from my education, to draw consequences from what I experienced in the army in the occupied territories. These young objectors are the best soldiers Israel has. I have only recognised very late that it was not a matter of defending my country, but of an occupation and of the interests of the illegal Jewish settlers. 27 pilots in the meantime have refused to serve in the occupied territories. Yonathan talks about many rocket attacks meanwhile being started from unmanned aircraft. Officers pull the trigger at a computer in far away command rooms. They no longer have the sensation that they are killing at the moment: “The Israeli society does not take into account what we are doing in the occupied territories. I have acted much too late. I want to prevent further killing.”

Ofem, who also belongs to the *refusnikim*, is twenty-three. When an education officer of the air forces told him that Israel could defeat Syria in a one day war, he asked himself, whether the officer was conscious at all that he was talking about war, about dead bodies, injured, destruction. Ofem thinks: “We need a change in the full depth of our society, in child-raising, education, the media, culture, because the occupation of Palestine is only a phenomenon for the comprehensive wrong-headed development and the militarisation of the whole society: “We are proud to be the only democracy in the Near East. Yet, if this is at all true, this only holds for the Israelis themselves, to the Palestinians we do not accord any rights at all and oppress them.”

Haffai, Shimri, Ofem and Yonathan continue to speak. Yet, our time is actually over. Other conversation partners are already waiting – from the Israeli committee against the destruction of Palestinian houses (a frequent practice of the Israeli army and justice), from Bat Shalom (Peace now!), an alternative information centre, from the Jerusalem Centre for Women, where Palestinian women engage for reconciliation and from the Tayish Movement (the Arabic word for partnership that women and men Jews use who want to work together with women and men Palestinians against the occupation policies). That there are these and other organisations who oppose mutual hatred is encouraging, even if I know from visits in the 90s that the peace forces on both sides back then were much stronger and more influential. What we got to hear, however, is troubling. Again there is question of the militarisation of society. Yonathan says that the propaganda presented Israel as the victim, “but we are perpetrators and victims at the same time. We have an ideology like old Sparta. And the nation does not know the facts of occupation or ignores them.” He reports that mostly young, unmarried soldiers are sent to checkpoints such as that in Khalandiya.

They neither have the consciousness of how much they are humiliating the Palestinians, nor scruples. Many soldiers, however, develop psychological problems later on, and there also existed a growing number of “grey” objectors, which by way of health certificates and other means, sometimes also with the tacit approval by superiors, avoid the service in the West Banks and in the Gaza strip. One of his friends, also commander of an Apache helicopter, had had to kill two innocents with a rocket. He had demanded and received the agreement from his commander never to be placed into such a situation again. I asked Yonathan, how his family reacted to his refusal. His father, who works in the military industry, has no comprehension for him, but his mother in the meantime has joined a Jewish group that controls the behaviour of soldiers at the checkpoints.

At a quarter to nine, we still meet with European diplomats. Appraisals that would have made me somewhat more hopeful, are also not heard from their side. Yet, when I think of Yonathan and his mother, of Haggai, Shimri, Ofem, Terry – I know about a human warmth and responsibility, which cannot be destroyed neither by the terror from both sides nor by the merciless occupation policy.

### **October 31, 9 o'clock in the morning**

We are on the road to Khalkhilya, a Palestinian city in the North East of Tel Aviv. Close to our hotel, we drive past a bus stop guarded by police or military, which control the access, just like many restaurants, hotels, super-markets and public buildings may only be visited after a control of the bags or by metal detector. It was here, during my stay last year, that one of the bloody suicide attempts took place. We had laid down a reef only a few hours after the event. The terror against civilians, for most Israelis is a trauma, even if daily life is not marked by these multiple horrors. Tel Aviv, Haifa or Jerusalem have the colourful and open street life of most Southern countries.

It is not easy to write sufficiently legibly in a bus. I have often already, when copying my notes, sat puzzled over my hieroglyphs, without being able to decipher them again. Again I have gotten into the Ramadan for my travelling to the Islamic world. No eating, drinking, smoking until the evening. Even if in Palestine, a lot is not being handled as strictly as in Afghanistan, I keep to the law. I think it is simply a question of respect before another culture, religion, the customs of people. One of my colleagues, who lit up a cigarette yesterday on the street, was also made aware of the Ramadan quite aggressively by an elderly gentleman, at least I understood the word and the tone of voice was also quite unmistakable.

The well-kept highway leads through expropriated Palestinian territory. Mike, who accompanies us, tells that this street not only separates the close-by Palestinian cities and villages from one another (on both sides it is partly also protected by barbed wire; there is after all not only the wall), but that the inhabitants of the West Banks may also not use it, not even cross it. Mike has a “residence permit” for East Jerusalem – a certain privilege, but at the same time also an instrument in order to split off East Jerusalem from the occupied territories. I see that over several kilometres all access roads and paths to the highway are blocked with barriers or by fighting tanks of the Israeli army. We come to a checkpoint, still far within the West Bank – we are allowed to pass it quickly, however. And finally we turn off into Road No. 6, which parallel to the Mediterranean coast leads to the North through a fertile and intensively agriculturally cultivated county. Toward 10 o'clock we reach

Khalkhilya, that means, we first drive past a city surrounded by a wall, then through a massively guarded and militarily upgraded street control, in between watch towers. Then only are we in the town.

### **Khalkhilya**

The city and its 45,000 women and men inhabitants are completely encircled by the wall, similarly also the 50,000 people in 32 neighbouring villages. So as to be able to get to some of them at least, Israel has “generously” built a tunnel between Khalkhilya and a few neighbouring villages, which passes under the highway. Its entry and exit points, however, can be barred by large steel gates. The city once lay at the main road, which from the North leads into Tel Aviv, which is only a few kilometres away. Peasants, gardeners, craftsmen and traders lived well thanks to their customers from Israel. Now, the street is closed. The Northern checkpoint is closed; only the one in the South, through which we came, is passable at least on an hourly basis. The wall here in the North of the town is only four metres high, but an electronic fence, two barbed wire tangles, a watch tower and a purposefully built military road give those, who live in Khalkhilya, the feeling to be prison inmates. We talk with the about fifty-year-old owner of a market garden, barely 100 metres away from the wall. His land on the other side of the wall he is no longer able to cultivate. There, once ten employees had their work-place, now the hothouses are destroyed. Only his two 80-year-old parents still live there. What he produces in Khalkhilya himself, hardly finds any takers. His lemon and orange woods, roses, palms or the indoor plants, he is ready to give away for as low a price as is offered to him. Four years ago in the summer, he had once sent a truck to Nablus (30 km away), it was held up by the Israeli soldiers for a whole two days. All plants had dried out. The Israeli military has asked him several times to give up his remaining hothouses next to the wall. The transparent planes, by which the plants are kept against the glaring summer sun, are hole-riddled at numerous places by shots. He had to get delivered the gardening earth from Israel; 200 Dollar per truck, but he was no longer allowed to sell there. “How do you survive?” I ask him. “There is only one reason: Because death has not caught me yet.” He has no hope. “Nobody in the world”, he says, “has the courage to stop Israel, and nobody wants it, not the USA, not Europe, not the Arab countries. There is no hope for us. There remains only Allah for us.” While we were talking to him, a jeep comes, two men from the municipal agricultural agency get out. They want to cash the annual fee of 800 Shekel. But he does not have the money. The electricity bill as well he has not paid over a longer period. Electricity is also supposed to be cut off to him. Smilingly, but very bitterly, he says: “Instead of helping us, they want money.”

We drive into the centre of the city, to the mayor into the town hall. I am trying to find out what is offered by the shops. In Germany I would see very little of that by just passing. Here, however, the shops do not start behind the shop windows, but with their displays on the sidewalks. Everything cheap can be had. I see toys, almost exclusively made of plastic, the same goes for kitchen utensils.

Marouf Zahran, the mayor of Khalkhilya, belongs to those Palestinian pacifists, who want a peaceful resistance against Israeli politics and the de-militarisation of the Intifada. He heads a group of 20 Palestinian mayors, who want to carry out a common conference together with 20 Israeli mayors. He tells that Israel already had built a fence along the border in 1956, back then still on Israeli territory (Khalkhilya lies directly at the “Green Line”). There had often been attacks on the city back then,

and during the 6-Day-War 1967, all inhabitants had been evacuated for forty days; almost half of the town had been demolished by bull-dozers back then; 17,000 people were living in Jordan as refugees until today. Most people here, he says, also speak Hebrew. Until 1995, there had been many personal and economic connections, also common enterprises with Israelis. But then the road was interrupted, a circular connection around Khalkhilya was built, and finally, the 14 km long wall was constructed, exclusively on Palestinian territory, an additional 24 km of wall surround the neighbouring Palestinian villages. In this region, 23 Jewish settlements were built on Palestinian land. All land, not needed for the walls or the roads themselves, but only used during the construction, is supposed to be given back to the owners. He shows us a document, in which the Israeli administration certifies to that. But it has not happened so far. The wall strip with its various security systems is at many points 100 metres broad, an additional 45 metres on each side are not supposed to be tread on and not cultivated. Much soil has gotten lost to the peasants in this tightly settled and agriculturally intensively utilised region for that reason alone. 105 trees were cut down for building the wall. The Israeli army has offered 50 Dollars as compensation for every olive tree. Yet, not a single peasant has accepted this offer, because it would have meant an acquiescence into the robbery. 33 houses, especially restaurants and shops at the Southern exit of the city, which up to then had profited from the through-passage, were blown up by the army (we shall see the debris later), two people were shut during the protests against the expropriations and the construction of the wall. The peasants are separated from their land. One needs a permission to get onto one's own land. Although the people in the city consider the application for the pass permit as an acquiescence into the wall, they agreed after all to file them. Yet, of 1,000 applications only 300 were approved, only for men, who are older than 35 years old and married, have at least one child and only for a two months period. An appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court had remained fruitless. Diplomats from all European countries and members of the Congress of the USA had come during the last years into the closed city and had been shocked by the situation. Nothing helped. If and how long the only control point was open, nobody knew, and it was a completely arbitrary things; at times, it was closed for three days in a row. Often Palestinians were also harassed without any obvious reason. Israeli citizens, also those of Arabic descent, were not allowed to enter Khalkhilya, 130 families had been torn apart for that reason. The city, which in the North of the city owned the largest existing Palestinian water reservoirs, now has to buy water from Israeli companies, while its own water, as the mayor calls it rightfully, was being stolen. 540 shops, almost every second, and 45% of the workshops have gone broke since the construction of the wall and had to be closed, 8,000 women and men inhabitants had to live off the food aid of the UN, the Arabic Red half-moon or from Arab countries, unemployment was at 65%. The mayor guesses that the town with its exposed geographically strategic position at the city line of Tel Aviv is supposed to be "strangulated", the Palestinians should be forced to moved. 4,000 have already done so these last couple of years. Ever again, just again this Thursday, the Israeli army entered Khalkhilya and arrested people. Neither the municipal administration, nor their families had been informed about the reason. In the end, he demands: "Europe should exercise more forceful pressure and appear more united, in order to impose law and the Road Map to Peace over Sharon. How often have I heard this during these last two days. Maybe it is even good that most people here do not know, how much "Europe" has forgotten them. Because even if the garden owner may no longer have any hope left, without it, it is impossible to live and survive, least of all in this battered country.

### **12 o'clock, still Khalkhilya**

We have travelled to the West of the city. Especially in the side streets, most shops are really emptied out. Here, one-hundred metres in front of the border, recognised internationally and in the meantime also by the Palestinians, between Israel and the occupied territories (the “green line” of 1967), the wall is nine metres high, approximately as high as a three-storey house. “Welcome to the Jewish shame”, someone has sprayed on it with paint. In Spanish, another one has expressed his or her solidarity with Palestine. Despite all anger about this lousy wall, it worries me that the criticism also manifests itself as a star of David, interlinked with a swastika. Behind the wall, there lie still another 30 to 60 metres of Palestinian land, gardens and fields, which no one is allowed to work any longer.

We drive on to the Northern gate. Here there stand those restaurants and shops, about which the mayor had told us. Now, there is grey desert here. The gate has been closed for a long time. The hothouses behind it, the plants – dried up. A water channel, on Palestinian soil, is now accessible from the “Israeli” side only. On the way back into the city, we see two houses, which the army has recently blown up (they are 80 in all in Khalkhilya). In one of them, there had apparently lived relatives of a Hamas activist. That was grounds enough for destroying it. The neighbouring house belonged to people not involved at all. It was in the way.

### **A quarter to 2 o'clock in the afternoon**

Surprisingly, Luisa has granted us half an hour of leisure. I took a walk through the shopping streets in the centre. The City and its women and men inhabitants are poor. My impression from driving past there I found confirmed. The Town and its inhabitants are poor. The goods on offer are cheap, but everything important is there, and the coloured display on the tables of sun-ripened tomatoes, paprika, cucumbers, leech, onions, garlic, raisins, apples, sourly pickled vegetables, many vegetables, flat bread, dough pockets or oriental sweets fascinates me ever again. More is not to be seen in these sad roads either, yet I do not need more. The people will not be able to afford much, however. Nevertheless, in the fast month Ramadan, there takes place a feast in the evening in many families, and everywhere women, men, children are shopping for it already. At a bread store, a young man asks me, where I am from. America? Germany. Ah. How I liked Khalkhilya? Beautiful? So brazenly I cannot lie even to be polite. Interesting, I reply evasively, but the wall is terrible. Yes, there he agrees immediately.

It is warm in the Southern Mediterranean time. Yet, drinking is not allowed. When I buy myself a coke for later, the cashier says suspiciously: Ramadan. I assure him, it is for later. Half another later, we are in Israel. I drink it. I have a bad conscience.

### **5:30 o'clock in the afternoon, Tel Aviv**

We are at Yossi Belin's, the Israeli initiator of the Geneva agreement and chairman of the left Yahad party (the successor party of Meretz). The office of the Geneva initiative in a high rise is small and modest, but the work, which is done here and by the Palestinian partners, has attracted world-wide attention. A year ago, prominent Israeli and Palestinian women and men politicians and intellectuals presented, after two-year-long secret negotiations, a complete draft treaty for the solution of even the most complicated problems of the Palestinian-Arab conflict. Both sides would have to make difficult concessions, approval therefore also did not come easily to many, but without real readiness for compromise, results are unthinkable. The confrontations

over the treaty draft are fierce in Israel and Palestine, most positions adopted in Israel are negative, but at peace demonstrations, it is the central topic, and in the population, there exist a large minority and in the Knesset, in the meantime, 19 deputies, who would support a solution on that basis. In Palestine as well, the discussion is controversial, but large parts of the leadership have pronounced themselves in favour of it.

Yossi Belin, who also has been Israeli minister of justice once, views the envisioned unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza strip very critically; it could not be part of a peace solution: "Gaza should not be left by way of a unilateral Israeli withdrawal, but in the course of negotiations with the Palestinians and in the framework of the Road Map of the Near East quartet (USA, EU, Russia, UN; A.B.). The Geneva accord could be the final result." Like almost all our women and men conversation partners, Belin also wishes for a more active European policy: "Sharon boycotts the quartet, and the USA declare solidarity with him. The EU must steer against that and lead especially the dialogue with the Palestinians and support them, if the USA do not do it. If the EU were to exercise pressure upon Israel, however, or even imposed sanctions, it would lose all its possibilities. This would be considered an anti-Semitic policy in Israel."

Yossi Belin links great hopes apparently with Abu Mazen: "Abu Mazen is the friendly face of the Palestinian revolution." I had met him together with other deputies about two years ago, when he had just become Palestinian prime minister. Back then, he had only limited backing and with many Palestinians has the reputation of being corrupt. Although he had been viewed internationally and also in Israel as a partner ready for talk, Sharon had given him no chance to profile himself. The exchange of prisoners was negotiated exclusively with the Hisbollah, the checkpoints on the West Bank not opened, the Palestinian tax incomes held back by the Israelis not transferred, so that Abu Mazen had had no chance to prove himself and soon had to resign. Now, he is being handled as successor to Arafat, but if Israel continues the repressive policy in the Palestinian territories, Yossi Belin thinks so as well, only the Hamas will be strengthened.

## **7 o'clock in the evening**

Yossi Belin still stays on, but now we talk with Daniel Levy, who has conducted the detailed negotiations on the Geneva accords. Sharon's sharp attack on the initiative had turned it into a major topic. Levy considers Geneva to be an important signal to both societies and the international community, because it includes a common, collective and detailed solution and the partners on both sides had been of high calibre and serious. For the first time in Palestine, it had come to a really concrete, realistic and pragmatic discussion. The agreement would mean that 50% of the Jewish settlers (especially close to Jerusalem) could remain, in the countermove, Palestine would receive Israeli land especially close to the Gaza strip. A complete right to return of all the Palestinian families who had fled or were exiled in 1947/48 or 1967 to Israel would not be given. I know from many conversations with Palestinians that it is very hard for them to accept such stipulations, moreover, since they have numerous decisions of the Security Council on their side. This evening as well, it immediately flares up. Our Palestinian friend and travel companion Mike spontaneously breaks out: "Why? My family lost its land in 1948. I have the documents. And now, we are supposed to give up further territories and not be able to return?" But this terrible, bloody, decade-long and internationally so threatening conflict will remain unsolvable, if not both sides cut the Gordian knots by which they

are tied and continue to tie themselves ever again. Nelson Mandela in 1990/91 did not let himself guide by the feeling that the Apartheid regime had robbed him the best years of his life and that he only regained his freedom as an old man, that his people had been tortured for decades by a despicable white racism, but that a common future was more important. It will not work any other way in the Near East either.

### **8 o'clock in the evening**

We go down into a cellar, on the walls there hang photos of demonstrations and young men. I recognise Yonathan Shapira, whom we had met yesterday evening in Jerusalem. Here, an organisation is headquartered, who organises and supports Israeli refusniks ("Encourage to refuse"). From most of those we had met the day before, it distinguishes itself by its Zionist orientation. And different from Haggai and Shimri, they refuse only the service in the occupied territories. Arik Diamant, their director, is thirty years old, he speaks with temperament and can hardly be stopped. He is a software engineer, for four years he served as a paratrooper. He was stationed in many parts of the occupied territories, for a long time in Nablus, and has often experienced the repressions and humiliations of the Palestinians: "We define ourselves as a Zionist movement, for our country, and therefore against the occupation. We want to defend our country, not the occupation and suppression of Palestine. We want to stay in the army, but not in the occupied territories." The movement had begun with 50 objectors, now they are 630. Thousands, thus believes Arik, sympathised with them, however, shunned the consequences.

Arik has reached his present state of mind with the help of David Zonshein. David, 31, is company commander, major, for 12 years in the Israeli Defence Forces. He seems pensive while he speaks: "I have done many things, which sometimes do not let me sleep at night. Three years ago, I picked the courage to refuse service in the occupied territories. My family, we belonged to the settlers, has broken off the contact with me. It was hard for me personally, as major, as commander over almost 200 soldiers. But I participated in the occupation of South Lebanon, I witnessed massacres and attacks against completely innocent people. What we are doing in the occupied territories is also destroying Israel and its security. Therefore, we have taken the initiative back then to declare our objection openly, including name and army rank. We want to appeal to the personal feeling of responsibility of the soldiers, because without soldiers, there will be no occupation." According to David's conviction, the refusnik movement has already affected the possibilities of the Israeli army. Indeed, a high-ranking advisor of Sharon has declared recently in public that the plan to withdraw from Gaza was also a reaction to this initiative. David Zonshein was arrested for 35 days. He smiles: "That is no so terrible for a soldier, who has been fighting for 12 years. And I even continued to get my salary. Later on, I was even promoted from lieutenant to major. Others have had to go to prison. The personal price was higher, the break with my family, with my friends. As an officer, one enjoys very high social recognition in Israel. But I have also encountered a lot of approval." I ask him, how his own soldiers had reacted. "Many young soldiers in my company told me, how much they had already respected me even before, and now even more. Some in the meantime, followed my example." David has not been dismissed from the army. On the one hand, the army leadership tries to kill the refusnik movement with its silence. On the other hand, it fears that many more may get the idea to escape the undesired service with a partial refusal. David's division commander even told him: "Zonshein, you are one of my best officers. You have

done wonderful work in Lebanon and elsewhere.” But David once again adds: “No, I am no longer proud of Lebanon.”

Even if 630 refusnikim among 35.000 soldiers in the occupied territories do not seem like much, conscientious objection has become a constant topic in the Israeli media and also in the army. After the brutal invasion of the Palestinian refugee camp Yenin (I was there immediately afterwards, and reported on it in my diary of May 2002) 120 soldiers had joined the movement. “We want to carry conscientious objection into the centre of Israeli society”, says Arik. “We refusnikim also demonstrate at the checkpoints themselves against arbitrariness, targeted murder and collective punishment. In this way, we sensitise additional soldiers, but this is not easy, because many Israeli soldiers feel they are in a war, and they are also told this every day. The suicide terrorism of the extremists confirms them in that. But we want them to learn to distinguish between the self-defence of Israel and the occupation.”

Recently, an officer has refused to serve at a control point between two Palestinian villages. He was thrown into prison. I have to think of Dan Halutz, who as commander of the air force (in the meantime he is deputy general chief of staff of the Israeli army) was responsible for the targeted killing of the Hamas leader Salah Sh’hadeh with a 1-metric ton bomb. Fourteen innocent people, half of them children, were killed along with him. Halutz afterwards claimed in an interview with the newspaper Haaretz that he had slept well after the attack.

I am not only impressed by the refusnikim, but also again a little less devoid of hope (what a treacherous formulation to have to put “without hope” into the relative), but any additional confidence in the future has left me during the last years in Israel and Palestine. I do not see a Nelson Mandela in the Near East, also not his counterpart Frederik Willem de Klerk, who had least had been capable to acquiesce in the inescapable radical change and in the end of Apartheid. But Ari, Yonathan, Shimri, Haggai, David might also need women and men partners on the Palestinian side in order to break out of the spiral of violence and of action and reaction, of which no one can say with certainty, whether they are reactions or actions.

I want to recommend the homepage of the organisation “Encourage to refuse”:

[www.seruv.org.il](http://www.seruv.org.il).

### **No, the day has not ended yet: 9:20 o’clock in the evening in Yaffa**

I have to admit: before the meeting with Yossi Belin, Luisa, for the second time today, must have had a planning “misfortune”. Again, we had another three-quarters of an hour spare time and were in Yaffa. I have always liked to be in this city marked by its Palestinian history and architecture, of whose Mediterranean beach one also has a gorgeous view of the close-by skyline of Tel Aviv – even if the old town of Yaffa in the meantime has been donned up all and out for tourists. After all these conversations and the oppressive experiences in Khalkhilya, I simply wanted to have a coffee today and relax. Two, three others apparently felt the same way, and we sat in the sun, looked somewhat longingly at the sea and talked about rather more irrelevant things.

Now, in the late evening, we are again in Yaffa, in one of the few restaurants that still belong to a Palestinian family. Now Luisa has the programme in her grip again, and there is not only a marvellous Palestinian meal, there is mainly another meeting, this time with the Israeli “Women in Black”, who ever since the first Intifada protest every Friday in black against the war (in the meantime, an international movement of women has become of it). Opposite me there sits a young lawyer with a very decided opinion, which she also defends with an attitude, which barely permits of any

arguments: "I do not have a vision of peace. I only want an end to the terrible occupation. Whether we will live in two states or in one, I do not care, but please not any more Palestinian dead, please no longer the silence of the Israeli society on these murders." She does not think very highly of the Palestinian initiative, and of Yossi Belin she suspects that he above all wants to become minister again. Such differences of opinion are natural, and among the Left everywhere even more frequent than in other political circles. In this region with its infinitely painful conflicts, however, I long for more commonalities among those who want to conclude peace with one another.

### **November 1, 7 o'clock, on the road to Gaza**

The night was short. We were only back in Jerusalem after 1 o'clock in the morning, but now we are already underway again to Yabalya in the Northern part of the Gaza strip and Gaza city. On Saturday, they had told us that the Israeli authorities would not allow our visit. Yet, together with the Representation of the European Commission, we had pushed it through. Israeli and Palestinian companions, Mike included, are not allowed to join us, and the bus is only allowed to bring us up to the frontier. On the other side, a Palestinian bus will await us.

After 1992, I have been in all Palestinian territories, however, not yet in the Gaza strip. During the early breakfast, I had met a German diplomat who advises the Palestinian Foreign Ministry. When I told him about the trip planned for today, he said: "It will be important for you to get there, but it won't be pretty. Immediately behind the border, you shall see the ruin of a building that the German developmental service has financed. It was almost ready, when it was destroyed a few days ago by the Israeli army. In Gaza, you will experience the focal point of the political and social problems of the Palestinians in their most concentrated and sharpest form." Experience, I ask myself. I certainly use this word very often myself. But what do we visitors get to see after all. "Experience", that after all would require one to live in this situation day-in and day-out, as concerned man or woman!

I am writing down my observations, my impressions, my fleeting experiences (there the word is again). I have to be careful with my judgement. On the Israeli side, for instance, we meet this time only critics, men and women who are against the official policy. The picture that comes up as a result is one-sided of course. The great majority of the Israelis is indifferent to the fate of the Palestinians, or they place them under a general suspicion of extremism. Sharon's repressive policy finds broad approval. Yet, also our impressions of Palestine are incomplete. We hear again and again about readiness for negotiation and compromise, yet, anti-Jewish sentiments are, as is well known, very widespread and the suicide assassins are celebrated by quite a few as heroes.

### **9 o'clock Erez Crossing Point**

After an one-hour discussion and control, we are allowed to pass. The Israeli border installations are several hundred metres in width. The Palestinian bus was even allowed to come to meet us for a stretch of the way. The main road to Gaza is barred. The road runs over a sandy, miserable asphalt road. Between the border and the first houses, an enormous chaotic surface can be seen. Everything that stood here once, was blown up and pushed together by the Israeli bull-doers. The building, about which the German diplomat told me, lies in ruins. It is the only place, at which at least concrete rubble reminds one of the fact that people once used to live and work here.

In this house, Palestinian-Israeli were supposed to be developed. A beautiful and important ideas. The army claimed, however, that Israeli security made its blow-up necessary.

After the field of ruins, there at first comes only sand. And then again a strip of rubble, the result of the most recent Israeli military action. Destructions everywhere, also parts of a school were bombed. Between the debris, the homeless have build themselves primitive metal sheet huts. Then suddenly the new construction area Sheik Zhakhid, appearing very comfortable und luxurious. Most apartments in the houses lying in the direction of Israel are empty, however. Too dangerous, they tell us. As a matter of fact, almost all houses in this area show numerous shot holes. Then again ruins, ruins, ruins. We are in the refugee camp of Yabalya, a city in the Northern part of the Gaza strip, in which 120,000 women and men Palestinians live, packed very closely. Here the Israeli army after the entry on August 20, has provided for "security". All trees and plants, under which militant Palestinians might allegedly hide, are destroyed, cut down. Among the rubbish and dust, two dishevelled goats are looking for a few blades of grass. In the middle of a mountain of blasted concrete, steel, splintered wood, remains of rugs and laundry, there sit five women in colourful Palestinian dresses and an old men. Three weeks ago, this was still their home and that of fifty additional people. Israeli soldiers had ordered them to leave the house immediatly. Then it was blown up. They are now staying at neighbours'. They were not allowed to take anything, also money and jewellery must still be hidden under the rubble.

Further around, many additional ruins, and the houses that are still standing are mutilated by shots, One hundred metre away, there stood an apartment building, for instance, in which 120 people lived. Nothing can be seen of the house any longer but a tangle of reinforcing steel, debris and the remainders of a dozen households: dress hangers, parts of furniture and one bra; that it is lying around so visibly in this Moslem world to me seems to document the extent of the destruction most clearly. A few of the bombed out families live in five tents out of rugs and tarpaulins, which stand in this war desert. In one of them, I see five women, a saved sofa, two rampaged armchairs; in the sand in front of it, there is a small rug, on which two children are squatting. Bizarrely erected iron poles form the support for a laundry line, where they hang six, seven pieces of the saved clothing. I walk along the path, which once used to be a street until it can no longer be passed, because the rubble from houses left and right of the street has collapsed here. An excavator is in the process of clearing it. I mount the concrete mountain and have the sight of a landscape of ruin encompassing two or four soccer fields. Only the steel skeletons and the loudspeaker of the mosque that was also shot down, rise up from it. The owner of one of the destroyed houses tells that he built his house 2 ½ years ago. The IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) have blasted it, so as to obtain freedom of movement for their tanks. He and all others as well were not allowed to take anything of their property. The attacks must have been intensive. In all houses, also in one school, there are numerous holes from shots, frequently also by grenades. The lane of destruction (the army will certainly call it a security lane) here reaches 500 to 600 metres into the residential area. There have been 140 dead in the last couple of weeks. "Precision strikes" in completely over-populated streets.

In the centre of Yabalya, no fighting has taken place. Yet, I have already seen more miserable towns, hardly any uglier ones. 10,000s of people live in small huts out of

unfurnished concrete bricks. There is hardly any distance between the houses, very seldom a tree. The water supply and the sewage disposal are catastrophic. Only the oriental bazaar atmosphere in the main business roads immediately attracts me again, where the poverty is often more apparent than in Khalkhilya. Cars, trucks and our bus try to clear themselves a path between the many donkey carts, children in school uniforms cram at the toy stands, where shockingly many cheap military toys are on display, plumbers hammer on the sidewalks on large metal panels, car mechanics on dented car bodies. Right next to it, there hang legs of mutton and cages with chicken stand around. The streets are dirty and full of rubbish. Proudly our translator points to a macabre “monument” at a street-crossing – built out of the remainders of the Israeli tank, which drove over a mine here a couple of months ago.

### **Gaza City**

Without noticing it, we have left Yabalya and are already driving through Gaza City. 1.3 million Palestinians live in the Gaza Strip, which is only very few kilometres broad. Apart from the areas blasted by the Israeli army, there is hardly any stretch of un-built on territory. Gaza City is not quite as unfriendly as Yabalya, but here as well, there are again and again blown-up buildings. The Yallah Street, through which we drive, has four lanes, and it is the place, where the Israeli air force carries out the most targeted killings. At the end of a side road we drive past, I can see the Mediterranean, but sea and beach appear infinitely far to me here.

There were four dead as a result of a new suicide attempt in Tel Aviv, we just hear. One of the Palestinian women in our bus calls it a “military operation”. I ask her what is military about it? She: “We have no other possibilities.” With many on both sides a discussion is impossible, and even if one wants to find explanations, I can understand neither the ones nor the others.

Gaza Beach and the fishery haven can be seen. I cannot quite avoid feeling pleasure, but I immediately have to think that the fishers can only throw out their nets on a small surface of several hundred metres in breadth and certainly hardly any of them is still able to live off his work.

### **12 o'clock, Palestinian Council on Foreign Affairs**

Now our meetings with Palestinian officials, associations and organisations. At first with members or former members of the Political Committee of the PLO, who if I understand Luisa correctly, are in opposition to the present leadership. Marwan Konafani, Chairman of the political committee of the Palestinian legislative (the Parliament), Dr. Ziad Abu Amr, also a member of Parliament and former Minister of Culture and Dr. Kamal El-Shafri, the former health minister, are really critical: Arafat was the symbol of Palestinian emancipation, but also an obstacle to the needed changes. Arafat and Abu Alla at this point only wanted to allow local elections in some towns, in order to secure their power. The military confrontations between various Palestinian fractions were illegitimate and dangerous. New elections (the last ones took place 8 years ago) were needed immediately. All three, however, also point to the fact that it was Israel that had destroyed the possibilities of a Palestinian self-administration and by way of its occupation policy hindered free and fair elections, Marwan Konafani adds that however also essential parts of the Palestinian leadership declined immediate new elections: “But we want them. Elections would change our whole situation, they are the only way to improve the political system.” About the Sharon plan for a withdrawal from the Gaza strip, he judges gloomily: “We

would support any step which could lead to a new dynamics. But this plan is simply aimed at preventing a viable Palestinian state and to leave the Palestinians with all their problems and without any rights alone in the Gaza strip. On both sides of the wall”, he adds, “the fence, extremism is growing. At the moment, there only profit the adherents of Sharon’s way of force and the violence of Palestinian extremism.” Even to him as Chairman, it was almost impossible to call together the Political Council of the Palestinian Parliament. Sessions were possible neither in Gaza nor in Ramallah, because Israel did not allow the deputies to travel. To him personally, it had been forbidden to travel abroad for meetings in the European Parliament and in the NATO organs.

### **1:30 p.m., Gaza Municipal Health Centre**

From the windows, I see the sea, I hear how the waves beat regularly against the shore. We sit together with lawyers, doctors, journalists, human rights activists, scientists, writers. Yamal Zakhout, director of the Health Centre, leads the discussion. He engages himself for the Palestinian coalition for freedom and democracy and the Geneva initiative. Yamal argues calmly, thoughtfully, his criticism is sharp in both directions. The Sharon plan and the building of the wall he considers a racist policy, which is supposed to make a two-state solution impossible. Yet, he also says: “The Palestinians have offered Sharon occasions in the last four years to motivate his aggressive policy. There does not rule any law and any order in the Palestinian territories. Palestinian arms are not employed against the Zionists, but against Palestinians and for criminal goals. The Palestinian police is demoralised and is being misused for the private interest of individual leaders.”

Yamal obtains approval as well as rejection. The discussion is open and differentiated. Whether this is the case more often, I have to doubt and must hope for it at the same time. A writer thinks Yamal had to take into account that it was the Israeli policy that had destroyed the Palestinian security forces in the Gaza strip. Another says bitterly: “It is the Hamas which supplies the people with food, not the PLO. Not the democratic forces. They would not even be capable of doing it. The Israeli policy destroys the social, economic and political conditions for a Palestinian democracy. Yamal Zakhout immediately responds to that. I am pleased by how carefully he argues. He reports on a survey among 13 to 15 year-old youth in Gaza. 36% of them to a question concerning their expectations of the future answered: “When I am 18, it would be the best to die as a martyr.” Whoever wants to change that, has to give these boys legal rights and a social perspective. A few organisations, teachers, journalists, local leaders and communal politicians tried to act in the Gaza strip for restraint and tolerance and to bring the silent majority to speak. At present, however, the Hamas and the other extremists were winning people. Once again, he complains about the situation in the Palestinian police forces and the other security forces. A week ago, an innocent 13-year-old boy had been killed on the open street by a dozen shots during private, criminal confrontations. The police weren’t doing anything. And last night, he tells us, there had been fired in Gaza shots of joy from thousands of guns, when the news came that Arafat was doing better: “The guns come from everywhere: from Israel and Egypt, and they are mostly directed against Palestinians.”

Similarly diverse are the opinions concerning the Geneva initiative. Yamal welcomes it and openly argues in favour of it, but he names two objections: First, Israel had to recognise its guilt, this would also be better for the democratic culture in Israel itself.

Second, the right to return for the refugees was regulated inadequately, even if he of course knew that not all four million Palestinian refugees could return. A natural scientist objects that it was necessary to look ahead on both sides, Geneva was a realistic give and take and an acceptable, concrete goal. Everything else was secondary. An about forty-year-old man, whom I do not remember introducing himself, contradicts him vehemently. There was more than enough initiative. Geneva moreover was an initiative from above. International law and the Security Council resolutions were sufficient. Now there had to be elections and negotiations, so that the people could exercise influence from below.

### **8 o'clock in the evening, again at the Erez Crossing Point**

It had gotten dark fast, and with the end of the daily fast time, the streets were empty, and the people, if they could afford it, at their feast at home or in a restaurant. We as well. In the "Beach Hotel", a make-belief world in the Gaza, or a world for a handful of Palestinians, who had money. The discussions with Yamal Zakhout and the others also continued during dinner.

We are again at the checkpoint. Since more than an hour we are being controlled individually, thoroughly and several times over. "Welcome to Erez crossing" stands on a sign post, but nobody is likely to feel welcome here. For some obscure reason, I was, as the only one in our group, allowed to get through after one control only. I did not even have to pass the metal detector. Should a German diplomatic passport have worked this miracle? I get myself a coke out of the vending machine, am writing and waiting for my female and male colleagues. They are standing 30 metres away at the metal control and are being asked by loudspeaker to put their bags on a band, to throw in their passports somewhere (probably one guards the soldiers against suicide attempts this way) and to finally pass through the first control point. Three further ones, less fussy but just as long ones, are still waiting for them. Invisible against the nightly sky, a battle airplane chases over Gaza. One can only think the worst.

### **Half Past Eight**

We are through and stand at a close-by resting area. Our bus driver strikes. Yesterday he had been back with us to Jerusalem only at one in the morning. At five o'clock he had gotten up again, and now Luisa demands of him (and of us) to still drive into the Negev desert. I know the problems of this and other villages from my visit in 2003. Their inhabitants are Israeli citizens, but their villages are not recognised by the government. The driver quarrels loudly with Luisa, calculates for her that we will be back only far past midnight. He is pooped out. European laws would at this point already no longer allow him to drive, I think. We are all tired, exhausted from the long day, especially from the multitude of impressions. But nobody objects to Luisa. She calls up Mike, asks him to send another driver. The more tired(?) half of the delegates now decides after all to return directly to Jerusalem. We others wait with coffee or beer for the new bus. I calculate that travelling back and forth and the conversation there will take five hours, much too much after this day, but now I have to get through there. From the border, oppressively close, we can hear a machine gun salvo. Palestinian and Israeli daily life. We are startled.

### **9: 20 o'clock in the evening, somewhere behind Dimona**

We have driven forty minutes with the new bus to the South, into the Negev desert. However, now we have to change the bus again. That will be a kind of a night! Who

knows what Mike has organised, has had to organise so that we might arrive at that village at all tonight. A few minutes ago, we passed Dimona, the Israeli nuclear research centre. The city lights shine far into the desert.

### **9:45 o'clock at night, Abudlul. We are there**

During the further ride, not much more was to be seen. In the moonlight, tree silhouettes became ever scarcer. The Negev is barren and rocky. It is cool in the desert air. During the last 1,000 metres, we drove over the fields. For the non-recognised settlements, there are no streets and no money. Our driver says: "If the Bedouins were Jews, their often decade-old settlement would have long been recognised." But for the Bedouins, who hold Israeli citizenship, this does not apply. Their village does also not appear on a single Israeli map, apart certainly the military ones, in no state statistic, in no official report, the cultivation is not acknowledged, the land property of the Bedouins is not recognised, even though the inhabitants of course have to pay taxes and even vote for the Knesset. Their villages officially do not exist. At least this village still stands, three houses, however, which had stood a little further apart close to the Israeli road were cleared out and destroyed two months ago, 150 overall in the Negev desert. They actually no longer exist.

We are welcomed in a barrack with walls out of metal sheets and tarpaulin. Present are also two young women from a human rights organisation, but otherwise they are – I have to say naturally – all men. They display a touching warmth, shaking our hands, many put their hand following Arab custom for gratefulness and thankfulness also on their breast. We sit down in a quadrangle on cushions and rugs on the concrete floor. Against one wall, there stands an age-old TV set. This village gets no electricity, however, it has a generator. In a mould in the concrete, there burns a charcoal fire, over which the tea pot hangs. An old man brings us tea and water glasses and fills our cups. He is happy about the Arabic : "Shukran!" (Thanks!).

At first there talk members of Israeli and international organisations, which commit themselves on behalf of the Bedouins and the "unrecognised" villages. "Together" one of them is called. 33 international and national NGOs (also Jewish ones) support the Bedouins in the meantime. Also the Canadian and US American governments have become active. The inhabitants of many non-recognised villages in the Negev desert have also elected their own representations. There are 45 such villages in the region, 34 of them have joined in an interest representation and elected a regional committee. Their chairman, at least I think that is what he is, like some others wears European clothing, the others, however, have appeared in their Bedouin garments. He reports that there exist only 16 elementary schools and only one secondary school for their children. Water and energy supply and health care for the 17,000 people in these villages all over the whole Negev are lacking almost completely. The government was trying to drive them from their land, it also paid only a very small compensation (2000 to 4500 Shekel) for this. Actually, that even amounted to an acknowledgement of the legality of the settlement and of the land claim by the Bedouins. Yet, the way through the courts had been useless up to now, the government and the Knesset make the laws, and the settlement of the Bedouins had also not been registered under the Ottoman empire, when many property claims were founded. Usually, the authorities argue with military requirements when asking them to move out, but a short time later, the land would then be used by Israeli farmers. Sharon himself had a large farm on confiscated Bedouin country. There were Bedouins, who had gone to the cities and were living there in miserable

townships. Unemployment there was the highest, however, the education and social system catastrophic. Above all, however, to them it was a matter of the legal title to the land that they had been settling on for centuries and were using agriculturally and of their traditional village way of life. The village elder adds: "We Bedouins are not apt to make compromises on our way of life. We can no longer accept further restrictions. We will not let ourselves forced by their refusal to supply water, electricity, to provide health care, roads and schools to give up our land."

The people in these villages live off sheep and goat raising, some also cultivate vegetables and grain, some are working in the cities. Through the tent entrance, the light ocean of Dimona could be seen in roughly 10 kilometres. Somewhere there, Sharon's farm is located as well. The fate of the Palestinian women and men in the occupied territories is outrageous. The Bedouins are Israeli citizens, taxpayers, voters. They are humiliated and deprived of their rights. What else but state racism can I call both of this? The "Jerusalem Post" has recently written about a "threat by the Bedouins". "Israeli citizens are being propagated as a danger", one of the NGO representatives declares himself shocked, "the origins lying in the discriminatory Israeli policy are kept silent, however." In the villages, people tell us, the anger was mounting in the meantime, and fundamentalist sentiment was increasing here as well, where up to recently it had been unknown; moreover, many had relatives in the Gaza strip.

The government wanted to offer the Jewish settlers, who would not leave the Gaza strip, land in the Negev. A 2,600 additional people in the unrecognised villages have recently been asked to quit heir land. In any event, only two percent of the Negev had remained to them. The village elder says: "We don't want to become the victims of the necessary peace!" For this reason, they were refusing the deal, that is why they were asking to make their plight and situation internationally well-known and to help pierce the indifferent silence in Israel and in Europe. In the North of Israel, the Bedouin rights had been acknowledged a few yeas ago after long fights by the concerned and by international organisations. When we were parting, the village elder said: "Thank you for coming. Knesset deputies come here at most, when there are elections. Please be our ambassadors in the European Union and in the public and do come back!"

One could also leave the tent through the side, where our bus stands. Yet, it is the custom that one leaves their tents, as open as they may be, only through the door. Through them, one also returns to them.

### **Shortly before Midnight**

We drive back through the starless night. There are so many beautiful things in Israel and also if, after every visit, I first have the non-suppressible feeling not to want to come back for a while, my heart is long attached to Israel and Palestine. Since I have been here the first time in 1992, a deep, contradictory, very often helpless relationship has developed. The history, with so many facets and so very topical, does not let me go; I enjoy the colourful daily life in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Yaffa, Haifa, Ramallah, Jericho, have gotten to know wonderful people closely tied with their countries (their countries), an usually rich culture and so much more. Yet, my work and my political convictions make me experience especially the oppressive sides of these societies, their politics, conflicts, degradations, racism, terror from both sides

and not infrequently elementary misery. However, I would also not be able to return here as a tourist.

### **November 2, 2004, 9 o'clock in the morning, Bir Zeit University**

The Palestinian city Bir Zeit lies a car drive North of Jerusalem in the Mountains. The campus of the university makes such a normal impression; one might think one is in Boston, Bochum or Padua. Hundreds of girls and boys run up and down between the modern university buildings, sit on the stair walks in the sun, smoke, laugh loudly and talk with each other equally loudly. There are especially many young women, a majority, not so few of them, with a head cloth, but with open, happy faces. Different political slogans hang from the façades. The university has been founded in 1924 as Palestinian school, became academy, college and finally, in 1972, university. It has five faculties for art, economy, engineering sciences, social sciences and law. The training, the dean Nabit Kassis assures us is market-oriented, but the labour market for Palestinian university graduates has broken all but completely. 6,500 students currently study at Bir Zeit, actually more than 50% women, most of them from Palestine, but also for example from the USA, Switzerland, Australia, Holland and Germany (for them, there is a special programme: Palestine and Arabic Studies). We also get acquainted with a British professor, who has been teaching at the university for 20 years and despite all difficulties quite obviously is still excited about his work.

The second Intifada and the Israeli blockades, however, have made access to the university considerably more difficult and have also discouraged foreign students from coming to Bir Zeit. Nabit Kassis thinks that the Israeli army especially in the more recent period has tried to consciously prevent the access there. For many months, the university was also cut off from its hinterland around Ramallah, especially the students from Gaza, however, have extreme difficulties to get to Bir Zeit and back. Nabit Kassis has been Minister in the Palestinian Authority and belonged to the negotiation team with Israel. He appears competent, realistic, and problem conscious (last but not least with respect to the problems on the Palestinian side). I believe him when he talks about the open political and cultural atmosphere at the university and calls it unique in Palestine.

We meet with students from Europe, the USA and Australia. A Swiss boy asks us, why Europe did not criticise Israel more consequentially and practised double standards with respect to human rights, international law, and the keeping of the UN Security Council resolutions: war against Iraq, close collaboration with Israel. Helga, a German, who before studied at the Free University of Berlin and has been here for 13 months, tells about the daily harassments she experiences when driving through the West Bank and how much worse these were for her Palestinian fellow students, worst of all for those from Gaza, who were no longer able to get "legally" to the university. When she had decided to study Arab regional studies and political science at Bir Zeit, she had had the impression that both the German and the Israeli authorities had only been able to imagine sympathies for terrorism as a motive.

Afterwards, we look at an art project on the Israeli wall, which had been exposed at the Biennale in Venice. Politically it is impressive, artistically much less so. Yet, in any event, I am using the time to talk with Helga. I quickly begin to feel, how happy she is to be able to talk. She begins stammering: "Oh my God, I haven't talked German in such a long time!" But then she talks without stopping. She wants to get rid of as much as possible, especially also her helplessness on how to explain people

in Germany the situation, given that solidarity with the Palestinians is being pulled into the neighbourhood of Anti-Semitism.

I am trying to write down her words as precisely as possible. "Here I do not even realise fully anymore, how deeply we are humiliated, because it is daily life, and the newspapers nowhere in the world of course write about daily life. They inform about suicide attempts and so-called punishment actions by the IDF. In Nablus, I have heard shots daily and never read about it in the news. The soldiers in the meantime even throw Palestinians on the ground, when Europeans are looking. If the international media do not write about the daily killing in Palestine, the soldiers know that about that, there will most certainly not be written anything. In the beginning of the semester, I wanted to travel with Palestinian friends to Nablus. At the checkpoint, only I was left through. My friends did not even get an explanation, why they were not left into the city. They then tried to get by foot over the mountains to Nablus and were of course discovered and arrested. It did not help them anything that they could prove to have tried it quite normally at the checkpoint and that they did not want to get out of Nablus, but into the self-administered Palestinian city. They asked the Israeli soldiers: 'Why did you not arrest us at the checkpoint?' They were accused as terrorists."

When I had to leave, Helga says: "If the Germans only had to experience only the most harmless part of these practices by their police, they would all rebel. Here this has been daily life for decades and decades, and even worse. Only very few Palestinians become militant. Most of them get used to the worst themselves."

Between Bir Zeit and Ramallah, the Jewish settlement strategy, by which Palestine is being destroyed, can well be seen. The Jewish settlements are almost always constructed on hill-tops, which command the land around them. Sharon claims that no new settlements will be allowed, but first of all, those, which two or three years ago were made up only of a couple of dozen of provisional houses, today are already small towns with thousands of inhabitants, stretching deep into the valleys. Second, we pass ourselves by a completely new Jewish settlement, which only has only existed for a couple of weeks now. At the mountain slope, there still only stand two, three containers and caravans, over which there tower two Israeli flags. Actually, according to Sharon's declarations, the army should long have evacuated the settlement, but on the contrary, in a couple of weeks there will be a connection to the central electricity and water supply, then the building of firm houses and walls against the Arab neighbours will begin; at the latest then, also the army will be here: With a basis and watch-towers, and again a piece of land will have been broken out and no longer be accessible to Palestinian men and women.

### **11 o'clock in the morning, Ramallah, Meeting with Yaser Abed**

Yaser Abed is the Palestinian initiator, or one of them, for the Geneva agreement and President of the Palestinian Peace Coalition. We hear nothing new of him, put in brief: wall, fence, the infamous bypass roads to the Jewish settlements, these themselves and the countless barricades are instruments of the Bantustanisation of Palestine by Israel. The retreat from Gaza will change nothing to that, only isolate the population even further, while Israel will deny all responsibility. Yaser Abed, however, also demands a democratisation of the Palestinian autonomy authority, a new organisation of the political order and a division of power and quick elections in

Palestine. The Israeli approach in the past few years had all but destroyed the Palestinian institutions.

### **1 o'clock in the afternoon, Riwaq: Art Institute for the Care of the Palestinian Cultural Heritage**

My colleagues at mid-day absolutely wanted to see Arafat's headquarter, the Muqataa. I had visited it shortly after its almost complete destruction, had also met with Arafat, who had to spend almost 3 years on this building, or rather the remaining annex in factual arrest. Now Arafat is in Paris, and even if many Palestinians are hoping for his recovery, it could be felt in the last few days that people were intensively preparing for the time after him. Parts of the Muqataa, among them the large conference room, have again been built up, but the cars that the army has mowed down during its storm on the headquarters are still lying around, stapled one over the other – maybe also as a barrier against the Israeli army, in case it should try it again. Also concrete and steel obstacles against helicopter landings have been built up everywhere, because they fear that Sharon wants to deport Arafat out of the country.

However, now we are sitting in the sunny garden of the non-state culture institute Riwaq, which occupies itself especially with the maintenance of old Palestinian architecture. Riwaq functions as non-profit non-state organisation. The very different projects are financed by Palestinian communities, Arab states and Sweden.

I am happy! We have met many impressive, warm-hearted people during these days, and I have felt well among them. But there is still something else here. I think that I am happy right now (and I do not deal in an inflationary way with this term), because we have to do not only with wonderful people and in such a beautiful atmosphere, but because this time it is not only about resistance, but about a real, already occurring social construction. Here I see a present and a future, which the refusniki, the Israeli and Palestinian human rights organisations and the peace activists on both sides, only want to make possible in the first place. I feel, no: I experience in this garden a rich, independent capacity for life of Palestinian society, which I had so often doubted in the light of the ruins in the Gaza strip, the economic and social trouble, the corruption in the administrations, the Israeli repressions and the splintering up of the Palestinian territory. But they are also wonderful people, who tell us about their projects and exploits, architects, historians, engineers. Their attitude towards each other, their generosity toward one another and toward us, the sense of humour, the respect between the elders and the very many quite young ones, the happiness and the open pride, with which they report on their achievements – seldom, very seldom have I witnessed something similar. Palestinian architecture has been neglected even more than other cultural areas, because for more than half a century, the Palestinians have mostly been refugees. Riwaq registers the architectonic results of Palestinian culture and history, makes them more famous and restores some of them for the social and cultural communal life in the cities and villages. 50,000 architectural monuments have in the meantime been seized by them and at present are being put together in a comprehensive digitalised library. They are not only concerned with the aesthetic, cultural, historical heritage, they reconstruct old houses together with village inhabitants, women's initiatives, women and men teachers, children, so that modern social life may take place in the historical walls: art education, exhibitions, musical performances, political discussions. One of the young architects calls their common goal "social development through restoration" of old Palestinian buildings.

They show us photos of refurbished houses and their current uses. In a painting competition, Palestinian girls and boys paint the traditional ornaments and the architectonic embroideries and maybe also receive a feeling of how much would get lost to them and their country, if these old buildings were to fall apart further, because here as well everybody dreams of a modern new building.

And as in all poorer societies, new construction in Palestine certainly means somewhat more in comfort and almost always a loss in design, history and beauty.

### **2:15 o'clock in the afternoon**

It is hard for me to distinguish our conversation with Mustafa Barghouti, the Director of the Health Development, Information and Policy Institute and with a number of other women and men representatives of Palestinian organisations from what we have already heard elsewhere. Barghouti is also the leader of the oppositional Palestinian National Initiative. Their assessment of Israeli policies is apparently the same, but the criticism of the Palestinian authorities is very sharp. Palestine needed comprehensive political, especially democratic reforms and quick new elections under European control, otherwise the current nomenclature would falsify them. The PNI, he says, was a political and social movement for independence, democracy and social justice and wanted a true political alternative to PLO and Hamas "for the silent majority". I am not capable to assess the character and the perspectives of this movement.

### **An hour later**

We are again fully in the Luisa Morgantini rhythm and still somewhere in Ramallah. The room is decorated with posters by Marwan Barghouti and slogans for his liberation. Barghouti's wife and members of the Palestinian Parliament report on the conditions of his arrest and the situation of the 7,500 other Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons. One and a half thousand people at this point are in "administrative arrest", without any investigation, without accusation or trial. Israel is one of the very few countries, where torture is legally permitted. 166 Palestinians have died from torture. 750,000 Palestinians, they tell us, have been locked up since 1967, every second Palestinian man has sat at one point or another for a shorter or longer period in Israeli prisons.

Marwan Barghouti, the most popular Palestinian leader since Arafat and one of the very few, who does not have the reputation of being corrupt, sits in the strictest isolation arrest. Not even his wife is allowed to visit him, and recently also his son was arrested. Israel reproaches Marwan Barghouti, who is deputy of the Palestinian parliament, with being responsible for terror attempts. The November 2004 edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique* writes about him: "In the West Jordan country, Barghouti is by far the most popular figure. He can appear as a populist like Arafat but is capable of acting much more skilfully and flexibly. The Israelis accuse him to have organised terror attempts, but after all he formerly used to be an advocate of the two-state-solution. And his proud appearance before the Israeli judges has brought him even more stature (that I was able to witness myself two years ago; A.B.)... A new call for peace with Israel could turn him into second Nelson Mandela, whose liberation the whole world demanded. Should Israel not have an interest in Barghouti's realising his historic role?"

### **Jerusalem, 7 o'clock in the evening**

For me, it is the last scheduled meeting. Shortly after five a.m., I will fly back from Tel Aviv. I will have to leave the hotel at two o'clock at night. The others will still have a meeting in the Knesset and in the Israeli foreign ministry.

The "Parents Circle – the Families Forum" (Parents Circle – Family Forum), this is the name of the organisation we have invited for this evening into our hotel. Actually, I had thought not to be able to learn anything new. Yet, the hours this evening turned into the most moving, not only during this trip, but maybe of all my encounters in Israel and Palestine since 1992.

I know that we will meet with people who have lost relatives in the terror by the Israeli army or by the Palestinian extremists and who nevertheless do not want revenge, but reconciliation. In 2001, we have honoured two of them in the European parliament with the Sakharov price. Nurit Peled, a Jewess, back then in the plenary hall in Strasbourg gave a speech, whose moral and emotional insistence even hard-boiled, conservative deputies could not withstand, while I am remain convinced that I have never heard something better or more human, and even my aversion against the inflation of superlative does not protect me against this statement. For months on end, it stood on the start side of my homepage ( even today, she can be found under my address, because this attitude and its expression in thought and speech are so infinitely important to me.)

The first to speak this evening is Adel Misk, a Palestinian. Oh, if only I had kept it on a tape recorder or recorded with a camera. I was only able to take notes; I cannot describe the changes in his face that reflects contradictory emotions, only mention the inextinguishable sadness and warmth of his eyes: "All of us have lost relatives. It was a long road from hatred to the engagement for reconciliation. I am a doctor. My father died in my arms. After three days of mourning visits, I was alone. At first, I did not want to ever forgive. I had had many Israeli friends before. I helped the police to find the killer of my father. He is a settler. He only got two years in prison. Children had thrown stones, he had felt threatened and had fired. A fourteen-year-old stone thrower was also found and arrested. He was sentenced to 6 months. Later on, however, I met an Israeli who had lost his son in an attack by the Hisbollah and nevertheless was working for a reconciliation with the Palestinians. We talked with each other, and I noticed that he was in the same situation I was in, but had drawn a completely different conclusion. We then decided to work together for a peace between our people and to find other families of victims. That helped us and continues to help us to come to terms with our fate. That is the first thing. The second: We want others not to have to go through things like that. We won't have any peace, as long as there is the occupation. We tell other people that we need peace with each other, so that no one has to lose his children, parents or sisters any more, not in Palestine and not in Israel.

The man, whom Adel Misk had met, sat next to him, the grey-haired, maybe sixty-year-old Chradi. His story: "I come from a classical Israeli family of Zionists, socialist, trade unionists. I had always seen myself as a person fighting for peace, my whole family. My youngest child, my son Noah therefore also thought that he was serving in a democratic army and for peace and security. According to his orders, he also went into South Lebanon, even though all of us, he included, thought the occupation was wrong. His mother was in a women's initiative against the occupation: 'Lebanon in Peace'. Five days before his dismissal, he was killed by a bomb on his way. Pinned

to his uniform, he was wearing the sign of this women's organisation: 'Lebanon in Peace'. It was the evening of Holocaust memorial day, when there was a knock at the door. Everybody knows the picture: two military, one civilian. Nobody had to tell me anything. I screamed and cried immediately. Why should we continue to live?! He had been our youngest, our happiest. We only had to continue to live because of our other children. Two days later, we received his clothes and his uniform with the pin against the occupation of South Lebanon. An officer told us that he had insisted on wearing it. For us, this was like a sign. We have paid the most horrible price. We have the right to tell you and everybody that one can be a Zionist and a humanist at the same time. We use the moral authority that we have because of our fate to set an example to both Palestinians and Israelis that there are human partners on both sides, against the distorted image in the Israeli and Arabic media, against the wall and the prohibitions that stand between us. We have installed and financed a telephone hotline: "Hello Shalom, hello Salam!", we had half a million conversations to establish contacts between Palestinians and Israelis. We need your help, even financial support, to continue that. The conflict has to be solved. It can be solved. Politically and by way of the people who work together for a common future and not for a hateful past."

The third is Chadit Aberman from Hebron (I don't know, whether I understood his name correctly, even less, whether I have written it correctly): "I simply want for people and their children to be able to live. I was active in the first Intifada and therefore lost my work as a teacher. I then found something else, and was able to financially support my family until on November 16 2000, my brother in the village Bet Omar was shot by Israeli soldiers. With a put-on shot in the head. Shortly afterwards, my second, fourteen-year-old brother was killed in front of the house of our mother by a shot from a large distance. He had sat there to drink tea. If one is hit oneself it is a completely different feeling than just hearing about it. I had Jewish friends. I no longer wanted to see any Jew anymore, no longer hear any Hebrew spoken. When I was told that an Israeli peace group wanted to talk to me, I refused. They are enemies. But then I let myself be convinced. The first time around, I thought they were crazy. Yet it is Arabic custom to honour your guest, so we met a second time. 45 Israelis and 50 Palestinians from my region met at my place. But I was thinking the whole time: they are to blame, the Israelis are to blame. Two mothers, a Jewess and a woman from my village, told how they had lost their children. They were both crying. And then I suddenly felt our common fate. I did not want it, but it turned out this way. We cannot change the past, only the future."

Ramin Charan is a drawer, a Jew, an Israeli, a "Zionist", he says. "Above all, however, a human being. In 1973, I was a soldier in the Yom-Kippur-War. I returned embittered. I has lost two good friends. I have family, four children. Our daughter Smadou was 14 years old, when two suicide bombs, 500 metres from this hotel, tore her and others into death. Her grandfather was a very prominent Israeli general, one of our heroes of 1947/48 and general chief of staff in the 6-day-war of 1967. However, he was also one of the first, who wanted a reconciliation with the Palestinians. When he died in 1995, all great military and political figures of the country were present at the funeral. When seven years later, his granddaughter, my daughter, was killed, again all were present. And afterwards, you are alone. You think, what are you going to do now, what can you still do now? The first was. Revenge! The second: I wanted to understand, how something like this can happen and do something against it personally. I needed a whole year to reach that

conclusion. Hans Frankenthal invited me to do something together against the hatred and for peace. I shouted at him: How can you?! But he proposed, come along, have a look at it. What happened to me there, there Jews and Arabs were together, I cannot explain. I am not very religious, but everything changed for me. We are human beings together. We organised actions, set up display dolls to show the number of victims on both sides, 300 in the year 2000, now over 4,000, with Israeli and Palestinian flags. I say thanks to you that you are not standing on the side. We need you.”

Omar is a physician, Palestinian, he studied in Rumania. His father and his brother were killed, he himself was during the first Intifada for six months in “administrative seclusion”, without any accusation, without judgement, later on again for four months and then again six months: “They did with me what they wanted. I have never received a written accusation. I wanted to leave the country. I managed to do it and passed the second and third degree of my medical training there. But I came back. There was no other way. I have to be here. In our forum, we talk about our suffering in Palestine and in Israel. After all, we have only one possibility: peace. And peace we will only get together. Or not at all.”

We have been only listening for a whole two hours. Now we are also not in a position to ask questions; it would be wrong as well. Evans, my women colleague from Wales, has her eyes red from crying. I stroke her gently. She smiles helplessly. I think we all feel the same way.

Although I have only very few hours left for sleeping, I still sit together with Claudia and Françoise. We talk about this and that and are agreed that we cannot and do not need to speak about this evening, at least not now.

### **3 November, six o'clock in the morning**

I fly back. It seems that Arafat is dying. What will that mean for the Near East? It will show itself very quickly that neither Arafat nor anyone else decide about peace, but Israel's honest readiness to withdraw from Palestine, also from East Jerusalem and the ability, on both sides, to consequently condemn and scorn any kind of violence, any terror, that means precisely also one's own. The BILD paper demands in its issue of today: The Palestinians have to understand that they have to make peace with Israel. “The” Palestinians. Apart from the unilateralism I consider this generalisation against a whole people as despicable racism.

It is by accident that I took Arthur Miller's “Focus” with me on this trip. When I put the little Reclam volume into my bag, I did not know, what the subject of this novel was. But I could hardly have found something more apt to the circumstance than this story of an upright American Christian, who himself thinks and feels Anti-Semitic, yet in summer 1943 or 1944 becomes victim of the aggressive Anti-Semitism getting virulent in the American society back then, by way of a banal coincidence, because his new glasses make him look Jewish in the eyes of his neighbours and the members of the “Christian Front”. Arthur Miller in this book also tells the story of a pogrom and the story of the Jew Itzig from old Galicia, which a Jew had again and again told to his son. He, on a much later day, precisely in this summer of war, stands at the grave of his father, “but he did not see the tomb stone, but the face of his father that floated before his mental eyes. And in his memory there formed itself the old question, which he had always asked, when his father had finished with his

story. 'And what is the meaning of it?' 'What the meaning is?' his father used to answer. 'There is no meaning to it. What could this Itzig have done? He had to do, what was expected of him, and it had to end, as he knew that it had to end, and there was no other possibility. That is the meaning.'" Miller's story, however, finishes differently from this one, the non-Jew Newmann resists together with his Jewish neighbour, not at all of his own free will, but because the anti-Semitic violence makes no difference between the two, but when he is then asked for the Jews on his street, he says: "There are the Finkelsteins at the corner..." 'Only they and you yourself?', the policeman interrupted. "Yes. The Finkelsteins and I", says Newmann. I have met Israelis and Palestinians and the German student Helga, who would have answered the question for the Jews and the Arabs in the same way. After all, I decide, I want to come back here soon.

*Translated by Carla Krüger, 5/12/04*