

Part II: Palestine and Israel Talitha Kumi - a place to meet

As the political situation is as it is, we had to organize the meeting with many obstacles. Israelis are not allowed to enter A-Area, Palestinians cannot go to Israel without a visa. So we met in Talitha Kumi, which can be entered by both sides and which is a German-Palestinian school run by the Berliner Missionswerk. It is open for Muslims and Christians, offers a boarding school and the Palestinian (Tawjihi) and German International Abitur (DIAP). Besides it has a college for future hotel staff. The Israelis checked the security before and came without a security guard. That was already a good symbolic gesture. The Palestinians could sleep in the guesthouse of Talitha Kumi or in their own cosy beds, as most of the Palestinians participants live just some hundred meters away. The school is surrounded by a fence, where the participants sometimes met and were shown the homes of their Beit Jala group members. The Germans were invited to a traditional Palestinian wedding ceremony, could stay overnight in families, if they wanted, and could experience Palestinian family life. So they got a direct impression of equality in Arab households. The Israelis were not allowed to leave the school premises.

So we had to improvise a lot in order to stay together as long as possible.

As there was an important Jewish holiday (Sukkoth) in-between, the Germans and Israelis went to the Negev or different parts of Israel for one day (Kfar Saba, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv) to celebrate this day with Jewish families, then came back and took up their work at Talitha Kumi again. The last days they travelled by hired cars to the Negev and stayed with Israeli families, before they made a bit of sightseeing the last days alone in Jerusalem, the holy city, but at the same time the focus point for many troubles. The other participants had to go to school or university again. Everything was very complicated, but that's the strange reality in that part of the world.



Tamer (2nd from left): "I live down there, 200 metres from here". Tamar (left): "We are not allowed to go there".

Friday Sept. 28

- 3:00 Arrival from Airport
- 11:00 Introduction: Beit Jala information, Visiting town and families
- 12:00 Where Christianity started: Bethlehem
- 18:00 Evening Meal at Beit Al Liqa

Saturday Sept. 29

- 9:00 Transfer to Talitha Kumi
- 10:00 Information, Round trip school and surrounding area - Tent of Nations
- 13:00 Arrival of Israelis
- 15:00 Organization of next days
- 16:00 The Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Facts, opinions and narratives
- 18:00 Dinner alltogether
- 19:00 Lecture and discussion: Mrs Shereen Hlal, The role of women and men in Palestinian society

Sunday Sept. 30

- 10:00 Reflexion within groups.
Writing articles, preparing interviews for our newspaper
- 13:00 Israelis and Germans leave for Sukkoth

Monday Oct. 1

- 18:00 Dinner alltogether
- 19:00 Lecture and discussion: Mr. AbuDayyeh (Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung): The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict from the Palestinian point of view.



Before the takeoff in Frankfurt - here at the latest you can see and feel that the trip is not a normal one.



Beit Al Liqa - a Christian meeting place in the centre of Beit Jala, founded in 1996, new building 2001, consisting out of a park, hotel, kiosk, conference room, "Peace Arch" (Indoor playground), activities for young and old (women's club, sports, playground, kindergarten...).



Johnny Shahwan - born in Beit Jala, founder of the centre together with his German wife Marlene: cook, waiter, preacher, hotel manager, psychologist, father, husband.. everything in the same person.
A Christian centre in the middle of Muslim culture.



Christian Church towers, Muslim minarets, radio transmitters over Bethlehem and Jerusalem - symbolizing some different aspects of the Middle-East conflict.



Outside and inside the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, different Christian religions are fighting for their part of the church. Long queues everywhere show the importance of this place. St. Hieronymus translated the bible into Latin, Kamal Mukarker showed us round in Bethlehem. We interviewed his mother, author of "Living between borders". Tourist shops all along Milk Grotto Street. George's shop and The Olive Wood Factory are well-known for their hospitality and the breathtaking panoramic view over the region.

"Palestine needs people with belief and hope" (Axel Awad, Bethlehem Bible College)



Living in a difficult surrounding: Children of Beit Al Liqua nursery - the hope is education. Settlements around Jerusalem and Bethlehem are growing, limiting Palestinian life.

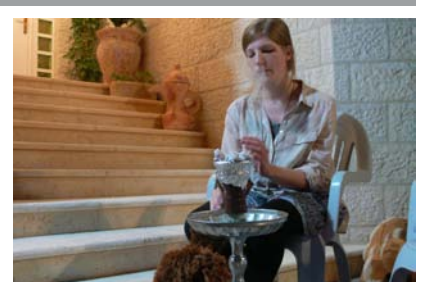


The first information about Beit Jala was given by Johnny Shahwan, the founder and leader of Beit Al Liqua, a centre that wants to give hope for people in a seemingly hopeless situation.

The town in the district of Bethlehem has about 17.000 inhabitants, 65% are Christians. In the whole district the Moslems count 87% and the Christians 13%. In whole Palestine the Christians form a minority of less than 2%. Johnny says, that they are part of the Arab culture, but don't feel like Arabs, as they had been here from the beginning of Christianity, before the Arabs came in the 7th century. So Christians have lived here for nearly 2.000 years. There are Greek and Russian Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Protestants and Free Evangelical Churches in this district. Many Christian organizations (schools, kindergartens, hospitals, colleges, universities) are supported from all over the world. Many families live on tourism. There is no important industry, some building companies, some olive wood factories, not much agriculture: textiles are produced now by China. In former times Beit Jala was the town of grapes and apricots. Before Intifada II many had jobs in Jerusalem, now you must get an electronic chip to find work in Israel. So people mainly live on services, some figures say, that more than 50% are unemployed.

Christians are more influenced by European culture. Due to the political situation, the segregation wall or security fence or apartheid wall (it is a matter of perspective), families have lost hope and emigration has increased in the last decade. The so-called peace process has come to a standstill, there is no progress in sight, so alone in Chile 50.000 Christian Palestinians have settled. You must have a strong belief together with hope for the future in order to resist this surrounding. Christians feel discriminated by Muslims in many aspects. It is not common, that Muslim and Christian children play together or that there are inter-religious friendships or even marriages. Head scarves are worn by nearly all Muslim women, liberal Christians are blamed for their behaviour, e.g. dancing, casual dresses, drinking alcohol, other role models of men and women. Christians feel neglected by the world public, not many want to realize the bad situation of Christians, politicians don't tell the truth about that. The pressure between Muslim majority, Israeli occupation and limited chances make life very hard. This is especially the case for Christian women, who are expected to follow Muslim traditions.

The clash of role models in Palestine? Arab-Muslim traditions - Christian European assimilation



Building bridges? The Tent of Nations

We are in the Westbank and pass a former checkpoint on the road 60 to Hebron, turn right into a narrow road full of holes and stones, until we reach an impassable rock barrier. After a 500-metre-walk along fences, wild garbage dumps and fields, we come to the gate of the Nassar Farm. Now we can see the problem: All around on top of other hills there are Jewish settlements. Mr Nassar welcomes us and leads us to the piece of land, provided for the international project "Tent of Nations". His son, Daoud Nassar, born 1970 in Bad Kissingen, Germany, became the project leader in 2000. The aim of this institution is "to build bridges of understanding, reconciliation, and peace on a broad basis". Volunteers from all over the world help the family on the fields with grapes, wheat and olives. Water is stored in cisterns and electricity is produced with solar panels, as both are not accessible for them.

The Arab Christian Nassar family came from the Lebanon and bought the 100 acres in 1916. They can prove that it is their land with Ottoman, British, Jordanian and Israeli documents. Despite these documents, they have been fighting for their land for more than two decades now. Volunteers show us round, we use the compost toilet, test the homemade honey and jam, see the cisterns and get a feeling of the hard life. Mrs Nassar tells us of some signs of hope. A woman from the nearby settlement visited them and was surprised to find people living under these conditions. Unfortunately the contact was stopped by fellow settlers.



Tent of Nations - A camp of hope or frustration? A commentary by Jakob Nehls



Imagine: Your home is on top of a hill, the area around you is very beautiful, you can see far, there are green valleys and behind the horizon it is possible to discover the golden color of some mountains. One day, people bring rocks and put them on the street to your hill, it is impossible to come by car or any other vehicle: the road is blocked. New villages are founded around you, on the land, that actually does not belong to them: the Jewish settlements.

Or does it belong to them?

Welcome in „Tent of Nations“, an island of hope in the Westbank, around only unknown neighbors, called „settlements“. In UN law they are illegal, but

the settlers claim the land for themselves: You are in the centre of a conflict of land, space, water, religion and more.

The Palestinian family has lived there for around 100 years, they've got documents which prove that they are the owners. However the family has to go to an Israeli court: people want to occupy their hill and want them to disappear. It's a great project: between Bethlehem and Hebron there is this little oasis of hope and peace: Tent of Nations. People from all over the world support the family, they are dependent on the international community. One motto of the Tent of Nations: „Peace, Justice and Conservation of the Creation.“ To reach this, they want to educate people for these aims.

In addition to that there are volunteers helping them on the farm, feeding animals, doing workshops etc., they can stay between 3 weeks or one year and they are really important for the surviving of the farm.

Another option to help the family is to donate money for cultivating olive trees. "For each tree which is cut we plant three new ones", Mrs Nassar tells us. The German group owns now five trees, to support this great project for peace and freedom in Israel and Palestine. Maybe the trees will have fruits within the next years.

They want to break the circle of violence and act in a positive way to change the atmosphere. One tool for that are the meetings about peace and freedom and to get into a dialogue, another principle is: "Peace comes through dialogue". They educate e.g. women in the towns to use computers.

The first motto we saw at the entrance gate: „With heart and hand, we change the land.“ May it become reality!



The Middle East Conflict
 Different narratives about the same facts
 Chr. Pies, Talitha Kumi, Sept. 29, 2012, 16-18:00

Work in groups with Israelis/Germans/Palestinians

- a. Try to find out what happened in the years mentioned or what will happen in 2020
- b. Write down the meanings/definitions for the words/terms under No 2
- c. Present the results to the group

1. Years

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|----------------------|
| a. ca. 1000 BC | b. 70 CE/AD | c. 7th century CE/AD |
| d. 1897 CE/AD | e. 1917 CE/AD | f. 1933-1945 CE/AD |
| g. 1947 CE/AD | h. 1948 CE/AD | i. 1949 CE/AD |
| j. 1967 CE/AD | k. 1987/2000 | l. 2020 CE/AD |

2. Important Terms and Facts – different interpretations

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| a. Diaspora | b. Ottoman Rule/Empire | c. Imperialism |
| d. Zionism | e. Balfour Declaration | f. British Mandate |
| g. Palestine/Palestinians | h. Arabs | i. David's Star |
| j. Muslim, Christian, Jew | k. Independence War (1948/49) | l. Nakba |
| m. Orthodox | n. Refugee Camp | o. UNRWA |
| p. Holocaust/Shoah | q. United Nations (UNO) | r. Human Rights |
| s. Security Fence | t. Segregation Wall | u. Die Mauer |
| v. Intifada | w. Oslo Process | x. Road Map |

Shereen Abdullah Awad Hlal

Lecture and discussion: Women in Palestinian society



Mrs. Hlal is a young woman who teaches at Bethlehem Bible College. She studied in the USA and Tel Aviv, has achieved a BA in English literature, an MA in Education Administration in Texas and an MBA degree at Tel Aviv. She is married and has got two children.

She spoke about the abilities and possibilities of Palestine women being dependent on three different things: Religion, family and community. The traditional expectations are to be a mother, to care for the children, to do the household and to educate the children. The main role of a man is to work and to provide enough money for his family.

"Women in Palestine are on a good way towards equal rights, but it is a very long way", Shereen starts her lecture. They are getting involved in politics and better professions, in Ramallah there was the first female mayor, in the Bethlehem area there were the first women candidates for local elections. More and more women become interested in politics; 60% of the population are female. The fact that women become more aware of their position has also an economic reason: normally one money earner is not enough, prices have gone up and many jobs need more educated and qualified workers.

There are two different streams in society: Many women, especially Christian ones, adopt the Western lifestyle, on the other hand the extreme Muslim attitude is against equal rights for women and men. Moreover the traditional law is against women, e.g. a husband can "discipline" his wife. And there are great differences between Christian and Muslim Palestinians. For example the real fundamental Muslims don't accept women as equal human beings. The men are allowed to have more than one wife.

Usually Palestinian women get married very young, but more and more are going to get married later. They like to go to university and to get a good profession. The Palestinian women are much closer related to their families. The family is the most important value in Palestinian society. More often than in Europe they cannot choose to study what they want or to marry who they want. The family (the parents) will decide the profession and also the marriage. A good example for this is Muslima R., who was our first partner in the project: She wanted to study in Germany, but her greater family didn't allow that. But at least she convinced her family to move from home and study engineering in Hebron. Mrs. Hlal tells that it is not usual and not allowed to stay closely together for Palestinian men and women before being married. You are not allowed to touch each other in public. Before you get married you have to be engaged and the family has to agree with your partner.

Mrs Hlal thinks that it is a very long way to equal rights between men and women. The change must happen in the minds of men and women, it is a question of mentality and awareness. The best method to reach this aim is education, as it influences male and female lives. The difficulty is to preserve at the same time the culture, which still is dominated by man's attitude that women cannot do the same like men. Many questions from our group followed and could be answered: Abortion is not allowed; if a couple is divorced, the former husband is the owner of all the property, but has to pay for his wife and children; the new generation is giving up arranged marriage; cheating the husband is severely punished, family law is regulating this case; any kind of body contact between the sexes is not allowed, intimacy messes up with cultural traditions, but many see it as a kind of respect towards women; love is O.K., but there are strict borders; mixed marriages (Christian - Muslim - Jew) are opposed by most of the population.

The dark shadow of limited possibilities under the political conditions is hovering above everything. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict together with inner-Palestinian ones make everything difficult. On one hand women want to move towards Western civilization together with the awareness of human rights. They start to talk about them and demand equal rights. On the other hand they have never talked and been aware of equal rights, because the strong Arab traditions can be real obstacles. Both trends have to be combined. Asked why she came back to Palestine after her many degrees from abroad, she said, "I felt like in a cage, when I was back here, but I also returned because I wanted to fight for human rights and especially the rights for women".



Clothes often can tell you a lot about the situation of equal rights. In Mea Shearim some of us tried to change identity, it was a strange experience. Men also wear special clothes according to their religious belief.

Clothes - religious pressure or a matter of identity?

It is very difficult to give an overall statement about women's rights in Israel and Palestine. In both civilizations there is a wide range of attitudes. Religious groups try to influence daily life and want to restrict women's right to be individuals. It is striking to watch that in the streets in Mea Shearim, the ultra-orthodox quarter in Jerusalem, or even in the Souks in Bethlehem. Israel was supposed to be a country where women have the same rights, but meanwhile much has changed.

(<http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendung/en/weltzeit/1684077/>). In Jerusalem you can see miniskirts all over Yehuda Street, just 500 metres away you would be attacked, if you crossed the streets like that in Mea Shearim. 50 busses alone in Jerusalem run as "extra kosher", where women sit in the back wearing head scarves, wigs and long dresses and where they are ordered to leave the seat when they are sitting at the wrong place. The trend in Palestine for Muslim women is to wear black dresses, which - according to many women - is like losing one's own identity. The traditional Palestinian dress (Malak) is very colorful and worn at different occasions during lifetime. It was a symbol of individualism, it has nearly disappeared

(<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/mode-islamismus-in-palaestina-frauen-warum-so-trist-a-817378.html>)



Lecture and discussion: Suleiman Abu-Dayyeh The Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the Palestinian point of view

What is a foundation?

In Germany many political parties, industrial companies and private persons have established foundations. They give money into it and sponsor various activities according to their political attitude, belief or interest. Many foundations are very active in Israel and Palestine, some have branches in both countries, some prefer only one. Only a few try to bring people from both regions together.

Mr Suleiman Abu-Dayyeh is the Palestinian representative of the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung for Freedom, founded in 1958. It is named after Friedrich Naumann, a liberal politician (1860-1919). It is dedicated to the liberal ideas of the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP) in Germany, to the spreading of freedom for the individual together with responsibility for the community or state. They support political education in many countries of the world. Mr Abu-Dayyeh was born in Beit Jala, studied social studies in Germany and also works as a lecturer for sociology at Bethlehem University.



Mr Suleimann gives an overview of the history of Palestine until 1948. He emphasizes that for him Palestine is the whole area, as it was already called 2000 years ago. He points out that both sides always refer to the past to legitimize the own political attitude and actions, although the landscape Palestine has never been a country for Jews, Christians or Muslims alone. The establishment of the Jewish state Israel in 1948 changed everything. Under the international feeling of guilt after the Shoah, Western countries and the UN thought to solve the problem by founding a new Jewish state on Arab land and separate the land into an Arab and Jewish state without asking the people living there. Not really knowing what had happened in Europe under Nazi rule, many Arabs opposed the existence of the new state, a war started, misunderstandings and ignorance grew very fast on both sides, the Middle-East-Conflict began.



The following discussion shows how difficult a real dialogue is: Israelis point out that there were systematical persecutions of Jews before and after World War II in Arab states, Mr Suleimann denies that. Misunderstandings reach the climax, when Israeli youths understand that Israel doesn't have the right of existence. From that point onwards there is a fierce exchange of well-known arguments, the voices get louder, Noam angrily leaves the room, Germans are in a kind of shock, Palestinian youths are silent. It is a typical example how all the discussions end, if you are not willing to listen to the narratives of others, if you don't accept other arguments, if you don't even think about that the other might also be right, if history and the past play the dominant role, if rational thinking stops and rules for a discussion are not followed.



Cooling down: Each group met after Mr Abu-Dayyeh's lecture and his disputed theses. It turned out to be the most critical point in the project. Everyone could realize how difficult any solution is and how much the problem affects everybody. But should it remain like this?



What is the role of Germany in the whole conflict? Carolin Manns tries to calm down the emotions after a lecture and discussion about the Palestinian point of view.

Mr Abu-Dayyeh's opinion is, that only a few still think that there will be two separate states. A small Westbank and Gaza state would be like a "Mickey-Mouse-State". His idea is that the chances for two states are decreasing, the best would be if Jews and Arabs could live in a confederate state without any separation, yet different perspectives for a peaceful solution are too far apart. Mr Abu-Dayyeh has a very pessimistic look into the future: Many Palestinians are

losing hope, emigrate, suffer from occupation, corruption in the PNA territories, mismanagement, water shortage, lack of freedom etc. etc. There are so many obstacles for a peaceful solution, that there is no chance for a compromise. Both sides are not ready and not able to get out of all the internal and international troubles by themselves. Fundamentalists on both sides "will lead us into another war and the moderate and willing people will lose the battle". His only hope is that there will be support from abroad, e.g. the European Union, United Nations or the USA. They all together must put pressure on both sides to find an agreement.

It is a very sad evening, as the young participants could realize how adults see everything from a different perspective and how their experiences and socialization have influenced their political points of view. The young project members were willing to meet, they have learned from each other, have talked about indivisible human rights, are more optimistic than adults and want to live in a more peaceful region.

After a short break to relax and Carolin's endeavour to settle down the emotions and the dispute, we play, dance and sing again together, the end of the evening is a big party!

Commentary

....Suleiman's prospects for the future are very negative.

He speaks of a great war that will come. This setting frightens us. But not only in this respect, this lecture was something special.

For the first time we Germans were able to see in an impressive, but above all frightening form how emotionally deep this conflict actually goes. During the lecture, it was hard for some people from Israel to remain seated in their chairs because their opinion does not coincide with the Palestinian one.

Some left the room temporarily, it was a strange atmosphere. In the discussion neither side really listened, the different views got stuck on both sides. Many talked at cross-purposes, so this conflict can not be solved. It has become clear that only a productive discussion is helpful, that is, that the other opinion must be respected and honored! What is most important at that point - and that has taught us this week - is the simple but quite clever wisdom:

The one and only truth does not exist!

Jakob