

Palestinian
children and
adolescents speak
about the Israeli
Separation Wall



Facing the Wall

By Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian



Front cover: Near Rachel's Tomb, nine-year-old Sharleen plays next to the towering wall in front of her home.

Photo: David Ward/World Vision

Front cover drawings are by Rawan Dandees, 16 years old. The drawings portray Rawan's home being demolished to make way for the Wall.

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Facing the Wall: Palestinian children and adolescents speak about the Israeli Separation Wall

Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian

World Vision publishes this report to encourage awareness and discussion about the impacts of prolonged violent and political conflict on the lives of children and adolescents. We consider it important that children and young people everywhere be able to express their views on the issues and participate in the decisions that profoundly affect their lives. In the context of this report, opinions and comments expressed by children and young people are their own, and views expressed by the author are the author's own, not the opinions of the World Vision organisation. World Vision urges an end to all violence against children and young people – whoever the perpetrator, whatever the cause.

The names of all participants have been changed, not only to protect their confidentiality, but also to protect them from any security threat to which they might be exposed by such a disclosure.

Photos within the text were taken by research participants and therefore are anonymously attributed.

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A new environment for working in relief and development in the Palestinian territories emerged in early 2006 with the election of new governments in the Palestinian Authority and in Israel. While the impacts of these changes continue to ripple across the political landscape, the humanitarian conditions in Palestinian areas continue to deteriorate. One of the greatest humanitarian concerns remains the impact of the Israeli Government's construction of the Separation Wall in the West Bank. *Facing the Wall*, commissioned well before the results of elections were known, has ongoing relevance to the quest for peace and security of all by addressing the Wall's immediate and long-term impacts on Palestinian children and adolescents.

At the outset of the Wall's construction, in 2002, World Vision and other international humanitarian agencies feared the grave economic and social consequences. In the first six months of building, we witnessed Palestinian residents of the West Bank being cut off from schools, universities and health care services. Clearly, the Wall was not only separating Palestinians from Israelis; it was fragmenting Palestinian communities and isolating them from support networks and facilities in neighbouring towns.

In October 2003, World Vision Jerusalem–West Bank–Gaza (WVJ) released our analysis¹ on the impact of the Wall. Our primary conclusion was that Israel's unilateral construction of a dividing wall – mostly on Palestinian land – would result in the confiscation and destruction of land, thus compromising the integrity of peace processes such as the Road Map, and posing a grave obstacle to peace. While we acknowledged then, as now, the right of Israelis to live in security – which is the primary rationale the Israeli government articulated for the Wall – we anticipated that the construction of the Wall on Palestinian land would pose a multitude of economic and humanitarian risks to Palestinian communities and to the efforts of humanitarian agencies

working in Palestinian communities. This has proved to be accurate².

We affirm that a fair and even-handed peace process must be pursued. Any lasting peace in the Middle East must recognise the fundamental human right of Israelis and Palestinians to be secure within their borders. Both have the same rights to life, liberty, and security of person. The Wall does not strike the right balance in respecting those sets of rights for both Palestinians and Israelis³.

In the initial flood of data and editorials about the Wall carried by newspapers and television broadcasts nationally and throughout the world, most focused on economic, political, security and social ramifications on the larger Israeli and Palestinian communities. There was still a gap in analysis of the Wall's impact on marginalised and vulnerable members of Palestinian society, particularly adolescents. As the concept for the research was developed, Dr Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and World Vision were keen to focus on the impact of the Wall on Palestinian adolescents, and in particular, the differential impact on girls. Aligning with World Vision Jerusalem–West Bank–Gaza's organisational vision of "A Generation Transformed", this research would be a response to the deep brokenness that is being experienced by all people, on both sides of this conflict. The voices of the adolescents communicate profoundly the true human impact of the conflict, and give us the opportunity to collectively advocate for change on many levels.

Dr Shalhoub-Kevorkian is a professor in the Institute of Criminology, Faculty of Law and School of Social Work at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and Visiting Scholar at the University of California (Los Angeles) School of Law and Centre for the Study of Women. Dr Shalhoub-Kevorkian has been a senior lecturer at Hebrew University since 1995, and is the only tenured Palestinian woman lecturing within the Israeli university system. She has published extensively in the fields of

domestic violence and women's studies, and her main research interest has focused on the victimisation of vulnerable groups in society, especially women and girls. Her most recent study paid special attention to the crime of femicide, and other grave abuses of women, as well as the invisibility of such abuses inflicted on women in conflict areas.

With extensive experience in this field of research, Dr Shalhoub-Kevorkian understood that adolescent, especially female, voices in conflict areas are often hidden and ignored. Indeed, women and girls have paid a very high price for speaking up and challenging both Israeli and Palestinian systems of oppression and patriarchy; they are often punished for their self-expression. Thus, she proposed a project that would amplify those voices by facilitating an opportunity for adolescents to safely and voluntarily voice their perceptions, reactions and analyses about the Wall and its impacts on their day-to-day lives.

The study reiterated the dire circumstances facing Palestinian young people, especially vis-à-vis the Wall, which are not widely recognised in other reports. For example, the young participants describe home and farmland demolitions, sharp increases in unemployment for adult family members, and their inhibited access to schools and hospitals. However, Dr Shalhoub-Kevorkian takes the research a step further to reveal the methods and strategies of female and male adolescents for surviving, coping with and adapting to the military occupation. *Facing the Wall* greatly increases our understanding of the intricate and varied ways adolescents see, know, perceive, feel and apply meanings to what they experience. Their thoughts, words and images are counter-discourses through which they resist oppression. Palestinian adolescents, therefore, are not only victims of the Wall and its impacts, but they are also survivors – who cope with, and resist, the Wall and its impacts.

The participation of young people in rights-based development research during a period of political instability such as this one has some inherent risks. One of the primary concerns throughout this project has been the protection of these adolescents from any harm that could result from their participation. The research team worked extensively with parents and

teachers surveying potential physical settings for the participants' photography, taking extra care that their safety near military-surveyed walls and checkpoints would not be jeopardised. Unfortunately, all Palestinian adolescents are at high risk of violence regardless of where they are or how quietly or loudly they voice their views. Therefore, the research team was committed to not exacerbating the situation, by having clear expectations for participants and taking all protective means possible, such as using pseudonyms for all direct quotes, and protecting participants' identities in all their photographs, and offering psychological help when needed.

As is evident from the participants' quotations throughout the report, the young people in this study spoke and wrote freely. As Dr Shalhoub-Kevorkian notes, the multiplicity of their voices suggests the way they navigate "between hope and hopelessness, power and powerlessness". Their choice of words and illustrations is a reflection of their own psychopolitical perspectives. They challenge the role of Israelis, Americans, "the so-called civilised world", the Arab world, and Palestinian leadership as complicit in the oppression and injustice that they have experienced. Their candid comments demonstrate their power to question and analyse political and social issues, particularly those that directly impact their lives. This is a coping mechanism, both positive and necessary for their survival.

The research does reveal a variety of negative coping mechanisms, however, such as power plays and violence against others and themselves. On several occasions, participants expressed that the daily frustrations of facing the Wall directed their thoughts more and more towards suicide bombing as a possible response to that frustration. Sadly, some of them indicated that they saw this as a legitimate method for both ending their suffering and resisting oppression. These references to potential violence targeted against oneself and Israelis have severe implications and cause grave concern for World Vision and the research team. World Vision believes that every action must be taken to avoid the endangering of human lives through the use of force in conflict situations. We abhor all violence and in no way condone the use of

¹ "World Vision Jerusalem–West Bank–Gaza's Position on the Wall" released 27 October 2003 (see Appendix).

² Norwegian Refugee Council (2004); International Court of Justice (2004).

³ We acknowledge that the construction of the Wall may have had some positive impact on the psychological and physical well-being of some Israeli children and adolescents, who may feel more secure as a result of its construction. This is a question worthy of research as well. While World Vision is concerned with the impact of the conflict on all children and adolescents in the region, our primary mandate and expertise as an international, child-focused, humanitarian agency is with communities in the West Bank and Gaza where humanitarian need and the impact of conflict on children are highest.

Foreword

suicide bombing for any reason; we take this especially seriously when children are involved. Through our programmes, World Vision offers hope and promotes peaceful forms of action.

In publishing this report, we also recognise the suffering caused by Palestinian suicide bombers to Israeli citizens including children, as indeed we have helped to document the loss of life among both Israeli and Palestinian children in our 2003 report *Who will wipe away their tears? A call to end violence against children in Israel and Palestine*.

This report shows that more attention is urgently needed to ensure that psycho-social well-being, education, peace-building and social reintegration of children and adolescents are priority components of humanitarian assistance. In response, World Vision Jerusalem–West Bank–Gaza (WVJ) is committed to improving our interventions geared towards practical, community-based responses to conflict.

World Vision already works in eight Palestinian governorates in the West Bank and Gaza with a focus on relief, sustainable community development, education, health and agricultural development. We have supported initiatives for community members to advocate for their rights, and have co-founded programmes to support the resilience of children, such as psycho-social interventions. Developing responses to conflict also enables WVJ to support and strengthen Palestinian and Israeli civil societies. This aligns with our vision, and our twin focus on building resilient communities and developing new generations of leaders. A key will be to provide communities with the tools to strengthen their capacity to deal with conflict, without succumbing to hopelessness, or violent retaliation. Initiatives will concentrate on psycho-social programmes; building the capacity of communities to respond non-violently; providing support to local democratic structures; supporting local educational institutions on strengthening these areas in school curricula; and grassroots mobilising and training.

At the same time, we will continue to advocate in national capitals and at the United Nations

for a negotiated end to the conflict, which has done so much harm to Israeli and Palestinian children. World Vision remains committed to seeing a lasting peace in the Middle East that recognises the fundamental human rights of Israelis and Palestinians to be secure within their respective borders. Amid shifting political realities it is our earnest hope that a peace settlement based on international laws and UN resolutions guaranteeing mutual security with dignity, justice, and equal opportunity can be reached⁴. The recurrent themes that emerged from the research such as poverty, home demolition, impediments to education, destruction of farmland, and inability to access hospitals and places of worship are, and will continue to be, issues of concern for World Vision and subjects for our advocacy.

World Vision thanks Dr Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and the young Palestinian participants for this powerful documentation of the voices of Palestinian adolescents for the insights they together contribute.

As you read this report, the expressions of the adolescents may sometimes shock you, sometimes anger you, and sometimes break your heart. We urge you, when reading their words and Dr Shalhoub-Kevorkian's findings and recommendations, to join us in thinking about ways to intervene and to bring such voices to the attention of policymakers. The burden is now on us – governments, multilateral institutions, international development and relief agencies, human rights organisations, and local social service organisations, along with religious institutions, communities and families – to hear these young people's voices and to act, so that future generations can have a life free of violence and genuinely rooted in hope.

Charles Clayton

National Director

World Vision Jerusalem–West Bank–Gaza
2007

This study looked closely at Palestinian adolescents' perceptions during military occupation. It examined their lives, their concerns, and the meanings attached to those concerns, during the construction of the Israeli Separation Wall – a defined period in Palestinian history.

Sketching portraits of the teenagers' perceptions, the study examined the ways in which those perceptions mobilised their power – power to cope and power to survive. Despite the multiplicity of adolescents' voices, their perceptions reflected a legacy of historical injustice, constant displacement, deprivation of education, economic hardships, military occupation, loss of social stability and a new, racialised spatial policy expressed in the construction of the Wall.

Their voices, writings and photos taught me that the power of the powerless could create hope as well as hopelessness. Their shared insights created hope when – through the power of living, singing, writing, questioning, being playful or crying – they were able to liberate their occupied spaces. They created hope when they preserved their love for and sense of belonging to those around them. And yet, their perspectives embodied hopelessness and despair when their young lives were bombarded by loss – the loss of loved ones, lands, schools, teachers, friends, family.

Palestinian adolescents' voices also challenge the "global hegemony of scholarship – the production, publication, distribution, and consumption of information and ideas about Palestinian adolescents". By asserting their right to live in a dignified manner, they raised their own oppositional discourses. But, as this study showed, the price they pay – both for being Palestinians and for living in the shadow of the Wall – is very heavy. All I hope is that, by presenting such contestatory narratives and voices, this study will speak truth to power, create alternative spaces, and help to lessen the price that these young people are still paying.

NADERA

⁴ Open Letter to President of the Security Council on 6 December 2001. World Vision International. http://www.wvi.org/wvi/president/president_speeches.htm.

⁵ Mohanty (1991, 55).

⁶ UNOCHA (March 2005); EMHRM (July 2004 – July 2005); Erturk (2005).

This project aimed to give voice to the Palestinian conflict's hidden social actors, particularly adolescents, allowing them to voice their perceptions, reactions and analyses through action-oriented research. The research director, Dr Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, a Palestinian professor of criminology and social work based in Jerusalem, examined the effects of political oppression and political violence, as illustrated in the case of the Israeli Separation Wall, on the lives of 13 - to 18 - year-old Palestinian schoolgirls and boys⁷. The sample for this study comprised 99 girls and 73 boys.

Dr Shalhoub-Kevorkian and her research team used an expressive therapy method to engage the young people in communicating the effects of the Wall on their daily lives. Participants were encouraged to write compositions, contribute oral and written narratives, and take photographs. The adolescents also took an active role in groups, analysing the meanings and implications of their creative and emotional expressions.

This documentation of the research includes seven primary sections:

- 1. The Israeli Separation Wall** – A presentation of facts and figures describing the effects of the Wall on Palestinian adolescents.
- 2. Theoretical and conceptual underpinnings: The study of silent voices** – An exploration of different approaches to the analysis of adolescents' responses to political violence.
- 3. Research methods** – An explanation of the action-oriented research method used in this work. The method is applied to examine the effects of political violence on young people and to bring their voices to the table.
- 4. General analyses of the data** – A breakdown of the data gathered from the 110 compositions and 19 personal narratives of the 172 young people who participated in focus groups and discussions concerning the Wall. The following recurring themes emerged: impediments to education, poverty, home demolition, destruction of

farmland, and inability to access places of worship and hospitals.

- 5. Noticing the absent: The Wall and adolescent girls' ordeal in Palestine** – A discussion of the effects of the historical and political struggle in Palestine on girls' coping and survival methods. The collected narratives and voices suggest that, in the studied area, political occupation and violence collude with patriarchal protection and violence.
- 6. In their words** – A look at how adolescents communicate and cope with their vulnerability in political conflict through singing, crying, getting upset, questioning, being playful and searching for threads of hope.
- 7. Findings and recommendations** – Suggestions for policy and humanitarian interventions to protect adolescents affected by the Wall.

This study revealed the intricacy of adolescents' ways of looking at, knowing, perceiving, feeling, and experiencing oppression, and exposes the complex meanings that Palestinian young people attach to their experiences. Throughout the study, they exhibited a power to peel away the layers of the conflict by questioning and investigating. This power is an essential prerequisite for wider socio-cultural change and political transformation.

The gender effect of the Wall was also apparent. Palestinian girls showed how they can refuse and be critical of leadership, masculinity, oppressive patriarchy and occupation, by challenging the "perpetual walls" in these areas. They face the powerful hand of the Israeli military and stand opposite the three-storey-high Wall in the full knowledge that they cannot overcome these obstacles alone, and only with patient hope for change.

Young people's narratives are counter-discourses that should add fresh insight to local and international discussion on the conflict. These alternative discourses clearly reveal a critical need to look at interventions and solutions which remove obstacles, such as those created by the Wall, to adolescents'

well-being, education and development.

In terms of practical humanitarian interventions, the researcher concludes that the best way to support adolescents' physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration is by ensuring that health and nutrition, psycho-social well-being and education – all of which should draw on local culture and an understanding of child development, are priority components of assistance.

Specific recommendations drawn from the preliminary findings of the study are divided into the following intervention areas:

Psycho-social aspects

- Expand and supervise systems of social and psychological support to improve adolescents' coping and adaptation strategies for the Wall and other forms of political violence.
- (Trusted adults) Discuss with adolescents any issues of political violence and unrest that are causing uncertainty for them, thus helping to prevent the development of negative psychological ramifications.

Social aspects

- Develop leadership by creating programmes that help girls and boys channel their feelings and deal constructively with polarised emotional reactions.
- (NGOs) Work hand-in-hand with parents, educators, various care-givers and social organisations to develop specific interventions that address the causes and effects of political oppression on girls.
- Raise awareness of the gendered effects of political violence and the Wall. Promote girls' participation in social activities while building new methods for protecting them. Work with policy makers and women's organisations on these issues to prevent further gender discrimination.

Gender-related aspects

(Although included in all the other aspects, this element needs specific elaboration.)

- Support educational institutions, human rights groups and women's organisations to play their crucial roles in prevention, intervention and protection initiatives.
- Build creative ways to maintain young women's ability to construct a better future. Participating in gender-awareness programmes could promote girls' psycho-social and physical well-being, as well as their personal sense of efficacy.
- Train teachers, parents, male counterparts and women's organisations in gender-awareness to recognise signs of disempowerment and stress, and to impart vital survival information about gender-related violations.
- (Women's organisations, parents and educators) Discuss and devise safe and better options to tackle the challenges of personal safety for girls and women.
- (NGOs) Work hand-in-hand with parents, educators, various care-givers and social organisations to develop specific interventions that address the causes and effects of political oppression on girls.
- Raise awareness of the gendered effects of political violence and the Wall. Promote girls' participation in social activities while building new methods for protecting them. Work with policy makers and women's organisations on these issues to prevent further gender discrimination.

Educational aspects

- (International organisations) invest more in safeguarding children's and adolescents' educational milieu.
- (National efforts) specifically invest in and promote educator's efforts to safeguard children and adolescents in educational institutions.

⁷ We have targeted this small age group because in the current context parent and school consent was only possible with older students.

Executive summary

- Assist educational institutions in building creative ways to maintain education; participating in a special educational programme could promote children's and adolescents' psycho-social and physical well-being.
- Train teachers to recognise signs of stress and impart vital survival information on such issues as personal safety when crossing the Wall or the checkpoints. Teachers should also promote tolerance and respect for others. Such virtues are particularly important in dealing with daily frustrations and violent measures by the occupying forces.
- deal with children's and adolescents' needs when facing the Wall or politically violent activities.
- Help create a larger, more effective support system for children and adolescents in times of crisis.
- Undertake special research to examine the roles of children and adolescents in preventing, responding to, and protecting themselves and their communities from political violence.

Research and documentation aspects

- Construct a research programme to serve as both an intervention and an investigation. The programme should be structured to intervene and search for new methods of helping children and adolescents.
- Work with children and adolescents to create child/youth-centred programmes that look at how the Wall and other related political violence affects them.
- Within social and educational activities that provide a safe haven and a source of empowerment for children and adolescents, build documentation and research projects that involve young people – showing them that despair is not an answer to the political situation, and that they have the power to document their experiences, making their agency visible and their voices heard loudly.
- Survey local and international organisations in order to study problems associated with the effects of political violence on children and adolescents.
- Conduct broader action-oriented research to thoroughly analyse girls' perceptions regarding the development of methods to decrease and intervene in political violence.
- Create a training module for international and local service providers to help them

This project searched for the absent voices in the political discourse concerning the Wall, and hopes to help in making these voices heard.

The idea for this action-oriented study grew out the daily resistance of Palestinian children and adolescents living near the Israeli Separation Wall, and their refusal to accept political/military occupation as a non-negotiable fact⁸. In many years of working with victims of trauma and survivors of political occupation, I have observed over and over again that although Palestinian young people do not always have words to describe their traumatic experiences, they always find innovative methods to confront their oppressors. In interviews and compositions for this study, adolescents frequently used the Arabic terms *muqawama* and *nidal* to describe their active responses to the daily experiences of oppression. While *muqawama* in the Palestinian context usually refers to resistance, and *nidal* (literally meaning “struggle”) indicates standing up to oppression, both meanings vary from context to context. In either case, the meaning can refer to actions, such as reaching school or getting beyond a checkpoint, which they see as liberating in small ways.

Resistance, for these adolescents, is non-acceptance of what they call “a dreadful occupation”. For example, some of these

young people repeatedly endure the often degrading process of obtaining the occupiers' approval to reach school, visit a physician, check on a relative, or participate in a family wedding. In some instances, as this and other studies show, children and adolescents may lack the vocabulary necessary to discuss such experiences, and they feel helpless to communicate what they are experiencing.

Set in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian West Bank, where the Wall is being constructed in and between Palestinian villages and towns, this project searched for the voices that are absent from the political discourse on the Wall, hoping to support these hidden voices in their efforts to talk back to those oppressing them. Borrowing insights from young Palestinians to construct a humane, individual and gender-sensitive discourse on the Wall could help not only in conceptualising victim/survivor narratives, but also in searching for new intervention strategies to mitigate the humanitarian consequences of prolonged conflict. Moreover, constructing such a discourse would illustrate how closely young Palestinians' private social spheres (such as home, and school) are linked to public ones.

This project attempted to help the hidden frontline⁹ actors to voice their perceptions of, thoughts on, and reactions to what is going on around them. Using this method of action-oriented research, I hoped to examine the effects of political oppression on the lives of 13- to 18-year-old Palestinian adolescents. The terminology for this age group is problematic. Adolescents in Palestine as young as 15 or 16 years old are sometimes thought of as adults, capable of marrying and having children. Yet under the *Convention for the Rights of the Child* they are considered children until they reach 18 years of age. For the purposes of this study I refer to the participants primarily as adolescents, to indicate that they are older than most children and approaching adulthood, yet we must remember their protected status under international human rights law.

This action-oriented research concept is

⁸ The Wall is called the “Security Fence” by the Israeli Government, the “Apartheid Wall” by some Palestinians, and “Separation Barrier” by others. For the purposes of this study, we refer to it simply as the Wall.

⁹ The terms “frontline” or “frontliners” refers to the adolescents' position at the forefront of a non-traditional battle line. It is redefined not as a military term for combatants, but as a term for those civilians who are exposed to a hostile and an often violent environment on a daily basis, as they go about their mundane activities such as shopping, going to school, and visiting the doctor.

based on the theoretical underpinnings of expressive therapy, which in turn emerged out of the ancient healing rituals of shamans. In these rituals, expressions of creativity were viewed as part of the healing process. Similarly, the utilisation of verbal and non-verbal communication methods forms a flexible therapeutic approach that tunes in to the needs and voices of clients. Use of expressive therapy in other settings gave me the idea of accessing and utilising different forms of communication (for example, writing, photography, sharing and story-telling).

I realised the importance of such an approach for the first time on a late-October day in 2003, shortly after returning from a sabbatical abroad. My daughter and I went to see the Wall for the first time. I stopped my car in the village of Abu Dis, where children were coming home from school. I noticed their ability to manoeuvre between the Israeli soldiers, sneak through holes in the Wall, or simply line up to pass through the checkpoint.

I was watching a group of five girls when one of them looked at me and commented: “We go through this every day.”

Then one of them said: “It is very hard and frustrating to go through body searches, interrogations and humiliation each and every day, but this is the only way we can go ahead with our lives.”

Another girl shouted loudly: “It is very scary to stand in front of the weapons and rifles, but we must confront them (*nuwajeh*).” She asked, “Do you have a better way?”

I told them that I came to learn from them. One of the girls, Mervat, came over to tell me a “secret”. She explained that when she and her female friends and relatives get frustrated with lining up and being searched, they study the area to determine which soldiers are present. If they conclude that they can tease, bother or disturb the soldiers, for example, by ululating, they start singing and crying out all at once. Mervat stated: “We have done this three times. Each time, the soldiers became

nervous and could do nothing but work faster and allow us to pass. Now we need to make sure that the soldiers are not the same ones we’ve met before.”

Mervat’s secret is that ululating is one of her methods of tackling the daily hassle.

In spite of the fear of being shot or arrested, these adolescents create their own strategy, plan the execution, and examine the field (as Mervat described it) before implementing it. This made me stop and think. Someone needed to document, learn from, and listen to the voices of these adolescents, especially their ability to express their helplessness in ways that made them sing, feel happy, and discover hope.

In this way, the project could find, document, and learn from new methods of creating hope in such a hopeless situation. This study also stressed the need to consider the adolescent’s situation in the socio-cultural and political context, and to take into account the hierarchy of her or his society. This is because the adolescent’s status in his or her society affects how that society protects her or him, or how it responds when she or he is abused. The fact that the adolescent’s society is occupied by military forces, and is daily violated, affects its ability to offer help when needed, apply its laws and rules, and protect when called upon. Thus, not only do societies in war zones and conflict areas have limited resources to protect their constituencies, but also, vulnerable groups within such societies are further weakened. I searched for an innovative method to research and interact with adolescents enduring political and armed conflict taking into consideration the individual Palestinian adolescent’s and

society’s vulnerability under occupation and behind the Wall.

Setting the scene

The political violence and unrest in the occupied Palestinian territories have had an inevitable effect on children and adolescents. While a limited number of young people suffer directly from trauma, arrest, casualty, death and the destruction of their homes and communities, none is spared the effects of the militarisation of the society as a whole¹². In fact, political conflict leads to an increase in children’s and young people’s suffering, child abuse, domestic violence and abuses inflicted upon women¹³. In such situations, the integrity of the family and the local community are also endangered¹⁴.

Children are the majority in Palestinian society. A 2004 fact sheet published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs stated that 53 percent of the 1.8 million Palestinian children living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are children under the age of 18; 1.2 million are schoolchildren¹⁵. It reported that since September 2000 (the onset of the second *Intifada*), 669 children had been killed, 4,170 Palestinian homes had been destroyed, and 6,000 children had been affected by those demolitions. Moreover, 2,000 Palestinian children had been arrested, and over 300 were still in Israeli prisons. The political violence restricted children’s access to schools; delays at checkpoints forced them to take lengthy detours to reach schools. Because of such restrictions, the fact sheet reported, the quality of education had deteriorated and school dropout rates had increased¹⁶.

Approximately 1,200,000 children are affected by the crisis, but their voices and their personal experiences are rarely heard. The Palestinian child or adolescent’s ordeal, victimisation,

resilience, agency and capacity to act positively are usually obscured by superficial and biased media coverage. Such coverage often depicts the “young suicide bomber”, the “child stone-thrower”, and in some cases the “traumatised child”, but it rarely shows the child or adolescent as a survivor of his or her people’s historical legacy of occupation, displacement and ostracism¹⁷.

Blaming and stigmatising Palestinian young people for their activism in the political struggle should be challenged. This stigmatisation should be replaced by such questions as, “How can we learn from the child or adolescent’s agency to further our understanding of his or her ordeals in conflict zones?” and, “How can one utilise his or her agency to promote interventions that emphasise justice and fairness for Palestinian children and adolescents?”

This report looks at the adolescent as a stakeholder who shapes, is shaped by, and is mobilised by his or her context. What makes the young person a stakeholder is not necessarily his or her identification with a political faction. The Palestinian child

¹⁰ The names of all participants have been changed, not only to protect their confidentiality, but also to protect them from any security threat to which they might be exposed by such a disclosure.

¹¹ Ululating [*zagharit* in Arabic] is a traditional way for women to express their feelings of love, happiness and even pain and loss. It is a long, wavering, high-pitched vocal sound.

¹² Baker and Shalhoub-Kevorkian (1999); Thabet, Abed, and Vostanis (2004). In a study of 669 Palestinian school-age children, Miller and associates (1999) revealed that children and adolescents have high prevalence of conduct disorders, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They also found that high rates of lifetime trauma exposure are linked with higher prevalence of mental health problems. A 2003 study conducted by Qouta, Punamäki, and El-Sarraj reported that children’s PTSD level was affected by age, gender, and mother’s education. Qouta and associates (2003) discussed the importance of the proactive function of internal family support.

¹³ Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2003, 2004).

¹⁴ Cohen and Hendlar (1997); Chamley (2000); Derib (2002).

¹⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2004).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2003).

Introduction

or adolescent's participation in resisting occupation is reflected in the daily activities of getting an education, reaching his or her loved ones, and finding opportunities for a more dignified life. Hence, the child or adolescent's agency could be connected to hunger, poverty, insecurity, deprivation of schooling, protection of family members and loved ones, and the desire to belong. Blaming and stigmatising Palestinian young people for their activism in the political struggle should be challenged. This stigmatisation should be replaced by such questions as, "How can we learn from the child or adolescent's agency to further our understanding of his or her ordeals in conflict zones?" and, "How can one utilise his or her agency to promote interventions that emphasise justice and fairness for Palestinian children and adolescents?"

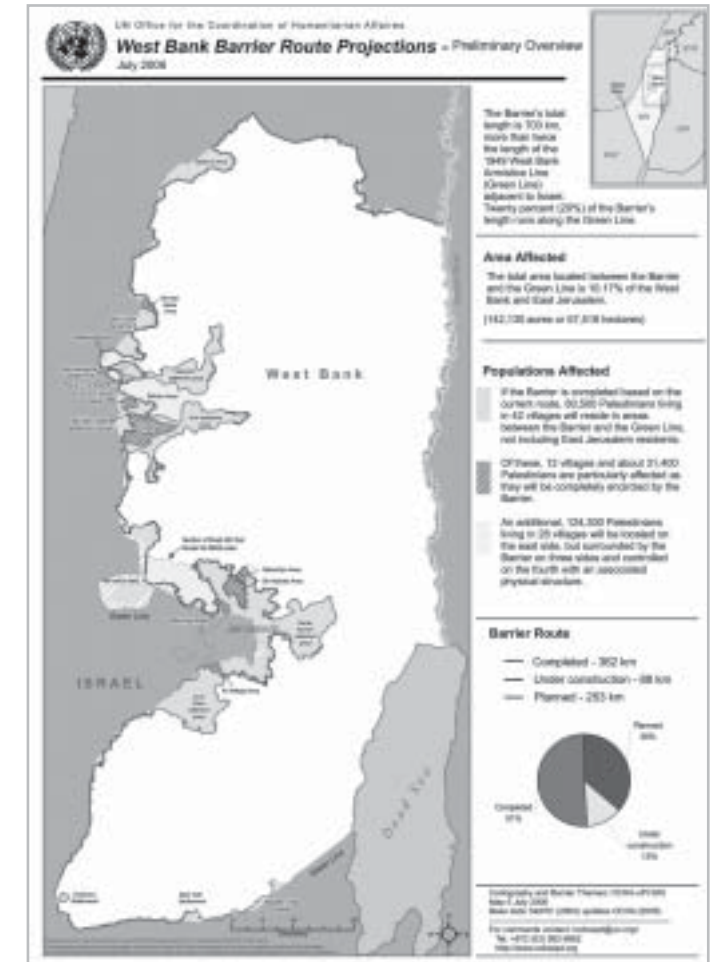
Section 1

The Israeli Separation Wall

The Israeli Separation Wall is three times as long and twice as high as the Berlin Wall¹⁸. The total length of the existing and projected route is 703 kilometres¹⁹. As of April 2006, 51 percent of the total had been completed and 13 percent was currently under construction²⁰. There are 73 gates along the route of the Wall.

As early as 2003, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that close to 680,000 people – about 30 percent of the Palestinian population in the West Bank – would be directly affected by the Wall²¹. As a Norwegian Refugee Council report emphasised, the Wall was leading to additional displacement of tens of thousands of Palestinians, raising concerns among the international community about further internal displacement²². The continued construction of the Wall violates 2004 rulings by both the International Court of Justice and the Israeli Supreme Court²³.

The Wall is the most visible form of control over Palestinian movement. Since invasions into the West Bank in the spring of 2002, the Israeli military has been implementing a system of control that includes hundreds of checkpoints and a bureaucratic permit system. Depending on the circumstances, Israel is able to halt all movement and activity in some areas by closing checkpoints and gates in the Wall, cancelling permits and imposing curfew.



Map courtesy of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

In Qalqilya in the northern West Bank, over 40,000 residents are imprisoned within the Wall in what the Israeli High Court found to be a suffocating ring²⁴. Many residents have lost access to the outside world – cut off from schools, jobs, health care, family. The Israeli military controls all access to the area by funnelling all traffic through 11 gates. These gates are guarded by soldiers, are subject to arbitrary hours of closure, and are not staffed around the clock in case of emergency²⁵.

¹⁸ Palestine Media Center (2004).

¹⁹ UNOCHA http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/OCHABarrierProj_6jul06_web.pdf

²⁰ www.btselem.org/english/Separation_Barrier/statistics.asp

²¹ UNOCHA (2003).

²² Norwegian Refugee Council (2004).

²³ International Court of Justice (2004); *Beit Sourik* Village Council v. The Government of Israel (HCJ 2056/04 [2004]); BTselem (n.d.).

²⁴ Beit Sourik Village Council v. The Government of Israel (HCJ 2056/04 [2004]). See also: http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/OCHABarrierProj_6jul06_web.pdf.

²⁵ For more details, see text of Dr Mustafa Barghouti's press conference (Palestine Media Center, 2004).

Section 1 The Israeli Separation Wall

Although Israel started issuing permits for some Palestinians to cross the Wall, human rights organisations revealed the humiliating process required to obtain a permit. B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, reports on the racism inherent in the permit system, stating, "Absurdly, only Palestinians require permits. According to Civil Administration directives, Jews can freely enter the Seam Area²⁶ even if they are not residents of Israel. By contrast, Palestinians wanting to obtain a permit face a bureaucratic nightmare."²⁷

When looking at the effects of the Wall on young people, one learns that its present and future effects are detrimental. A report by Defence for Children International/Palestine (DCI/PS) showed a sharp increase in violations of children's rights following the beginning of the second Palestinian uprising in September 2000²⁸. Increases have been observed in both the frequency and severity of these violations against children. The report stated: "In the West Bank, continued construction of the Segregation Wall in 2004 has led to further land confiscation and home demolition and the imposition of ever-harsher restrictions of movement for significant swathes of the Palestinian population²⁹." It also found: "Whereas an average of 11 Palestinian children were killed each month in 2003, escalating violence and Israeli military attacks...brought the figure to an average of 13.5 child fatalities per month",³⁰ and noted that in the first four months of 2004, some 350 children were taken into Israeli custody... During arrest and interrogation, children are subjected to physical and psychological abuse, often amounting to torture."³¹ Another 2004 report by Save the Children shows how the stagnation of the peace process, military occupation and economic collapse in the occupied Palestinian territories constitute a serious humanitarian crisis for Palestinians and Israelis living there.³²

The report described how the construction of this long, high Wall was preventing Palestinian children and their families from accessing basic services, such as health care and education.

²⁶ The "Seam Area" refers to the land between the Wall and the border separating pre-1967 Israel from the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

²⁷ Suissa (2004).

²⁸ Defence for Children International/Palestine Section (2004).

²⁹ Ibid., 2.

³⁰ Ibid., 4.

³¹ Ibid., 6.

³² Save the Children (2004).

Section 2

Theoretical and conceptual underpinnings: The study of silent voices

Most work on the effects of political violence and oppression focuses on the economic, political, health and social ramifications of such violence. The voices of children and adolescents on the frontline – particularly girls – remain hidden behind closed doors, and the neglect can intensify their suffering.³³ The combination of this disregard, violence and oppression sometimes results in the double victimisation of the young, and particularly, of girls.³⁴ Yet ironically, as recent research shows, these experiences might also strengthen young people's agency and power while turning their frontline position into a site of liberation and resistance.³⁵

While many researchers continue to be concerned with the implications of political conflicts for young people, there is no consensus in the way that scholars frame questions, problems and solutions. Hence, a serious tension has emerged between scholars who adopt a strictly medical model and those who examine political conflicts from broader socio-historical and child-context perspectives. Those who espouse the medical model attempt to understand the victimological and traumatological effects of exposure to violence. They assume that the affected ones' mental health is at great risk. Such literature has therefore explored the psycho-emotional consequences of conflicts, displacements and refugee life on children and adolescents.

By contrast, those who advocate a broader approach started questioning the notion of

trauma, as well as the methods used to identify traumatised young people.³⁶ These researchers started exploring the resilience of the young and their methods of coping with the ramifications of conflicts. Thus, in the process of developing a more contextualised approach, these studies have tended to generate knowledge from field-based research, examining young people's lives in a holistic manner that takes into account local understandings of sickness, coping, adaptation and well-being.³⁷ Critics of this approach point to the danger in losing sight of the often immense suffering inflicted on individuals by exposure to armed conflict.³⁸

Political conflict raises many concerns about the ways in which children and adolescents react to such reality. Thus, scholars have used multiple, and in some cases conflicting, modes of analysis. Some completely pathologise the reactions; others criminalise them; still others completely normalise them. So too, some see the young people as passive victims who are deeply traumatised by war and political conflict; others perceive them as actors in the resistance movement, as child soldiers, or as criminals. It is important to note that the researcher's position affects their approaches, methods of data collection, and mode of analyses. For example, in a case study of Northern Ireland, Tony Gallagher shows how the bias of American researchers in the 1970s affected their interpretation of data on the effects of violence in Northern Ireland.³⁹ American research on the subject stressed the psychological pressure of living in a violent

³⁹ Gallagher (2004).

³³ Qouta et al. (2001).

³⁴ Miller et al. (1999); Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2003).

³⁵ Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2005).

³⁶ Swartz and Levett (1989); Boyden (1994); Tolfree (1996); Boyden and Gibbs (1997); Summerfield (2001).

³⁷ McCallin (2001); Eyber and Ager (2004).

³⁸ Dawes, Tredoux and Feinstein (1989); Bracken (1998).

Section 2 Theoretical and conceptual underpinnings: The study of silent voices

society. Alongside this, Gallagher raised the claim of some scholars who perceived such pressure to be deliberately induced by the British state, which was engaging at the time in a psychological genocide.⁴⁰ Rona Fields observed that, by exerting this pressure, the British could impede and even eliminate the ability of Northern Ireland's people to take political actions.⁴¹ By contrast, psychologists based in Northern Ireland produced a body of work that seemed determined to refute Fields' claims by overstating the normality and ordinariness of everyday life there.

These disagreements led to multiple interpretations and confusion concerning the ways in which young people were reacting to the violence. Some believed that the young people were coping with abnormal situations; others asserted that they were simply habituating to the difficult circumstances. Still others felt that the young people of Northern Ireland had rejected the mores of the unpleasant world and, whether at the psychological level or the physical one, had opted to disengage by trying to turn a blind eye to the harsh reality surrounding them; the researchers identified psychosomatic reactions, depressions, anxiety, sleeplessness, hopelessness and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as results of this disengagement. Clearly these fundamentally different perspectives reflect different orientations to the subject at hand – orientations found in scholarship on other violent contexts elsewhere in the world.

Differences among research orientations can be more clearly defined and even politicised when examining abuses inflicted upon children and adolescents by government forces in times of conflict. It is common knowledge that the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), the various Geneva conventions, and the laws of many countries establish clear guidelines concerning the treatment of children in conflict situations.⁴² Yet governments frequently enact emergency legislation, such as acts intended to prevent terrorism, that allows them to

side-step or suspend measures intended to safeguard the young.⁴³ Child harassment, arrest, imprisonment, torture, and deprivation of schooling – actions in clear contravention of articles 2, 37, and 38 of the CRC – are all measures taken by governments under such circumstances.⁴⁴ Israel, for example, has allegedly arrested Palestinian children and held them without charges.⁴⁵ Amnesty International and other human rights organisations publicise cases of unlawful arrest and detention of minors around the world. However, it is likely that the majority of such abuses rarely come to light; children, adolescents and their families are intimidated into silence and are threatened by politically violent measures that might jeopardise their survival. Such barriers and risks further silence children when they are detained, arrested, or tortured.

Moreover, conducting research into such matters may endanger the participants, their families, and even the researcher. In one of my previous clinical interventions with Palestinian youth during the first *Intifada*, young participants shared with me emotions (such as anger, fear, frustration and despair), behaviours (such as vandalism, violence and attempted suicide) and future plans that, if exposed, would have jeopardised the participants. Their comments sometimes conflicted with my own values and professional code of ethics. As a therapist, I needed always to find a way to prevent them from hurting themselves or others by searching for constructive methods of resistance and political participation. One such method was to involve them in helping younger children to reach their schools, do their homework, document human rights violations, and report those incidents to trusted non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In researching the traumatic effects of war and occupation, studies could easily focus on the psycho-medical or legal aspects. Research has commonly overlooked young people's resilience and strategies for survival in the context of political violence. It can also fail to

⁴⁰ See, for example, Fields (1973, 1977); Gallagher (2004).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² United Nations (1990); for Geneva Convention protections, see, e.g., Protocol I to the Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 77, sec. 1).

⁴³ World Organization Against Torture (2000).

⁴⁴ United Nations (1990).

⁴⁵ Stein (2001).

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acknowledge their need to talk back, participate in a positive manner, express their needs and share their feelings. Moreover, there is also the risk that research will misinterpret their ordeals or use them as a political tool for further oppression. If researchers use young people's experiences in this way, they participate in the political violence, offer politicised knowledge to power holders, increase suffering, and jeopardise professional ethics. Such a use of the so-called professionalised analyses turns professional knowledge into an additional tool of oppression.

This danger is reflected in the case of child labour in conflict areas.⁴⁶ Conflicts impoverish civilians and drain the resources of governments. In many countries that have experienced political conflicts, rates of child labour are increasing. Is such labour detrimental to the child's mental health, or is it a possible opportunity to bring some income, stability and self-esteem in the midst of uncertainty? Using the legal or medical and traumatological models in such situations to analyse the effects of child labour and to promote the application of international laws might prevent children from working but fail to address why they are working. Without looking closely at the political context, such actions could put children at additional risk of further hardship and abuse.

On the other hand, analyses of the studied topic become complicated when the research, because it is too narrowly focused, excludes issues that are important to young people – ignoring their need to address those specific matters, and effectively silencing them. For example, in cases of child sexual abuse during war and political conflict, the voices of abuse victims can be silenced if a narrow, politicised research focus on the conflict prevents the children from raising and addressing their abuse. The effects of such politicisation are particularly exacerbated in cases of sexual violence inflicted upon females.⁴⁷ In some places, girls' vulnerability increases during

war and political conflict, incidence of sexual harassment and sexual violence rises, and there is a greater likelihood that girls will be targeted.⁴⁸ Studies on Kosovo, for example, show that those who suffered sexual violence live not only with the psycho-emotional effects but also with social alienation and stigma.⁴⁹ Additionally, my clinical observation and research in Palestine shows that fear of physical and sexual abuse threatens girls' well-being.⁵⁰

In a sense, however, the politicisation of professional knowledge and the lack of consensus concerning victims' methods of coping with political violence could be explained in multiple ways. For example, a researcher's position and worldview may affect the way that he or she analyses the data. At the same time, a researcher might be correct in asserting that abnormal situations become normalised as life continues, or that the direct impact of violence is experienced in varying ways by different communities. These could also be explained by the way in which hegemonic power holders, including the media, represent children and adolescents – whether as passive victims or as "terrorists".

In addition, the politicisation of knowledge and absence of consensus on coping strategies can be explained by the effects that social constructions of masculinity and femininity have on young men and women. Such constructions (on both the oppressed and the oppressor's side) in conflict areas also affect their reactions to political violence, or the existence of social support system, a belief system or a politically supporting system and its role in promoting, controlling or protecting young people from the effects of violence.⁵¹ The variety of analytical options opens up numerous possibilities for researchers and activists examining, studying, or intervening in such contexts.

In the interest of openness and clarity, I would like to state at the beginning of this report that

⁴⁶ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (1999).

⁴⁷ Jok (1999); Machel (2001); Nordstrom (2001).

⁴⁸ Some have noted that boys also are vulnerable to similar abuses, but part of the risk of sexual violence is the social aftermath. I believe that the stigma associated with and social reaction to female abuses, particularly in highly patriarchal societies, is greater than reactions to similar abuses of boys.

⁴⁹ McKay (1998).

⁵⁰ Shalhoub-Kevorkian (1993, 1998, 2004).

⁵¹ Baker and Kevorkian (1995).

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my perception and mode of analysis view the young people in the study sample as neither fully “traumatised” nor fully “normal”. In fact, I refuse the use of totalising theorisation, and prefer to give the child the right to define his or her status. I also suggest looking at adolescents not as simply passive vessels into which political, cultural, economic, religious or other ideas are poured; rather, I assert that they actively seek to understand their world in light of their own personal, gender, social and national experiences. Thus, by analysing the effects of political violence as they are reflected in this case study on the Wall, borrowing meanings from the participants themselves, I should be able to draw on the multiplicity of young people’s epistemologies and reactions that are based on the combination of their victimisation as well as their resistance. In doing so, I will examine young people’s attitudes toward political violence, taking into account the effects of the abuses inflicted upon them as well as their agency in facing such atrocities and challenges.

Section 3 Research methods

How does one study the effects of a segregating wall? How is this accomplished in an environment that routinely exposes one to overt violence? Finally, how does one enable vulnerable voices to face those antagonistic to their general discourse? The task of building a methodology is extremely difficult. It is all the more so when the methodology is to enable one to examine the effects of political violence and, more precisely, the effects of the Israeli Separation Wall, on Palestinian adolescents. In light of these factors, the study employed adolescents’ own writings, spoken narratives and photographs as media for identifying, exploring and contextualising their experiences, while also allowing for the triangulation of data. I describe this exploration and process of contextualisation as “the un-mapping methodology”.

Mapping, unmapping

The Israeli occupation’s primary rationale for the Wall is that Palestinians, including children and adolescents, are “security threats” that should be separated by “a security fence”.⁵² The Israeli government portrays the “fence” as one that offers freedom and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. Yet Palestinian young people who face the Wall on a daily basis readily counter that claim when they talk about the impact of the Wall on their lives. It was the purpose of this study to reveal those unheard and often misunderstood voices of Palestinian adolescents that are lost in the dominant discourse on the Wall. This will challenge the hegemonic story to include the voices of those young people who personally suffered and whose families have suffered and continue to suffer, not freedom or security, but rather separation and other impairing effects, from the Wall.⁵³

Just as mapping enabled the occupying forces to construct a security claim, unmapping intends to uncover the effects that such ideology, and the resulting domination, continue to have on the occupied: Palestinian adolescents facing the Wall. By “unmapping”, we refer to the process defined by Richard Phillips and described in Sherene Razack’s work, “To unmap is not only to denaturalise geography by asking how spaces come to be, but also to determine world views that rest upon it.”⁵⁴ In other words, the process of unmapping entails thoroughly examining a geography (whether physical, political, or social) to understand how that geography was created and grew into its present form. The process also involves working to understand how that geography influences (sometimes even determines) the world views of the people who live within it. Thus, in this report, unmapping aims at understanding the role of Israeli dominance in the political and social geography of young people in Palestine. Specifically, the report uses adolescents’ comments and narratives to understand how that geography of dominance is expressed in and determines our young subjects’ world views.

The methodology has two parts: drawing a new child/adolescent-oriented map and rethinking the map. In drawing a child/adolescent-oriented map, I describe results of the initial survey of participants concerning the effects of the Wall’s construction. Particular attention is devoted to socio-economic, political and gender contexts as they are perceived by Palestinian adolescents. The positions of the subjects and the delineations of power are reflected in spatial control and its relationship with the production of knowledge during the process of constructing the Wall. Drawing a child/adolescent-oriented map displays standard contextual elements that can be

⁵² “Security fence” is the description favoured by Israeli and U.S. media.

⁵³ International Court of Justice (2004).

⁵⁴ Razack (2002, 5).

Section 3 Research methods

evaluated scientifically. However, this part of the process also considered how relationships, both political and social, are affected by such contextual maps.

The process also investigated what happens when young people create maps. The second part of the research method – rethinking the map – explored their methods of resisting the many spatial and contextual changes that the Wall imposes upon them. This part devoted particular attention to non-traditional methods of resistance (in this case, their own writings, focus group discussions and photographs). All of these methods of resistance constitute the media with which the adolescents map the geographies around them. Using these sorts of mapping media could help us to detect new avenues for resisting oppression. In doing so, rethinking the map could help to redefine and negotiate space previously occupied by the patriarchal hegemonic adult, including

space once occupied by the Israeli military. Therefore, the study allowed us to examine such relevant issues as the role of adolescents, and particularly girls, in this newly confined space between the Wall.

As we examine the discourse, the way knowledge is produced, we can begin to redefine meanings and meaningful practices constructed within that discourse. After all, it is the discourse that is historicised.⁵⁵ To examine the production of knowledge, we first conducted participant observations documenting changes in perceptions and behaviours over a specified period of time. During these observations, we noted the political and social events that preceded and followed any perceptual or behavioural changes. This process allowed us to conduct conversations with female and male adolescents over a period of weeks and months. It helped us to become aware of shifts in participants' perspectives and the meanings that they ascribe to the word around them.⁵⁶

Composition, photography and focus group themes

Participants were asked the following questions to prompt responses during the data-gathering process of composition-writing, photographing and focus group discussions:

1. What does the Wall mean to you?
2. How does the Wall affect you and your family?
3. What are the effects of the Wall on Palestinian adolescents in general?
4. What are you doing to cope with the effects of the Wall?

Sources and modes of data

1. Number of written compositions: 110 (80 by girls and 30 by boys)
2. Number of written personal narratives: 19 by girls
3. Number of girls participating in focus groups: 58 in 3 groups
4. Number of boys participating in focus groups: 47 in 3 groups
5. Visual data: 63 photos by girls, with captions
6. Participatory observations* with adolescents: 67 (41 girls and 26 boys)
 - observations collected from girls and boys passing near, through or around the Wall, who engaged in discussions about the Wall with the author and her assistants during the period from February to August 2004

⁵⁵ Hall (1997).

⁵⁶ Becker and Geer (2004).

Section 4 General analyses of data

The richness of the data gathered and the power of the adolescents' language greatly complicated analysis of the socio-linguistic, semiotic and ontological aspects of their words. Yet this same richness and power compel one to share the adolescents' ideas, concerns, and agencies, as well as their calls for help.

Data were gathered from the 110 compositions and 19 personal narratives of the 172 girls and boys who participated in focus groups and discussions concerning the Wall. Out of these discussions, the following recurring themes were recorded, and responses were arranged according to these themes. In addition, photographs were taken and captioned by girls, as they themselves proposed. (Due to security concerns, we feared asking boys to do the same.)



"Dozens of people walk through an opening several inches wide.
الناس بالعشرات والفتحة بالسنتيمترات

Impediments to education

Fear of the inability to reach school was mentioned more by girls than boys.

Adolescents were worried about the future of their education and the fate of their teachers and educators. For example, in his composition, a young man named Hassan wrote:

هنالك معلم او هنالك معلمون لا يستطيعون ان يصلوا الى مدارسهم بسبب صعوبة التنقل بين المدن وانا لدى اقرباء لم ارهم منذ سنوات عديدة في الكثير من المدن حتى من قبل وجود هذا الجدار بسبب كثرة الحواجز وصعوبة تنقل الفرد. انا اتمنى ان تعود الحياة كما كانت وان تعود الاوضاع لان هذه الحياة لا تطاق ابدا

"Teachers will lose their jobs and we will lose our ability to reach schools – and this big huge Wall will cause a campaign [hamlat tajheel] to increase ignorance and uneducation."

In addition to their comments about the restrictions imposed on movement due to the Wall or checkpoints, the adolescents constantly discussed their deep sense of loss: loss of good teachers, loss of ability to keep on seeing childhood friends in schools, loss of ability to proceed with their education in the schools they enjoy, and loss of a sense of belonging.

Another youth shared that his teacher wouldn't be able to reach the school the next year, once the Wall was erected. He said:

Section 4 General analyses of data

“She is the best math teacher I ever had. I will never study or love math any more. I can’t comprehend how the school will function without her.”

Fear of the inability to reach school was mentioned more by girls than boys. Girls, in particular, feared that this might happen because of their families’ economic situation, because of the Wall, or because of measures imposed by the Israeli military. The following quotations present specific examples of their concerns:

“If I won’t be able to go to the same school, then I won’t go to school. This school is my favourite, and it will always be my only option.”

“My father said that if the soldiers keep harassing us when we pass through the gate, he won’t send us to school.”

“I am not going to school next year because the construction of the Wall has made it difficult to reach Jerusalem. I need to walk so far every day, and then find a taxi to take me to school. I had better stay home.”

“I am afraid that if I need to walk this far to reach school, my brother will not allow me to go back to school next year. He saw me yesterday crying and screaming at the soldier. He vowed that if that happens regularly, and I begin to run and hide between the hills and barriers to get away from soldiers in order to reach school, he’d see to it that I stay home for good.”

Yet even as they reported these hardships, adolescents also insisted that they would go to school, meet friends, challenge parents, and encourage teachers, imploring them not to give up. The following are specific examples of their resolve:

“I will do all it takes to reach my school. My school is all I have.”

“I called my grandmother and asked her to help me pay for the transportation expenses, and she will give me the money. I will go to my same school.”

“They could build a million walls, but they can never prevent the Palestinian

child from getting an education.”



“They delayed us from going to work, and with this they destroyed our hopes.”
عوقنا عن عملنا ومع هذا دمروا أملنا

Poverty

The greatest cause for concern was the impact that unemployment would have on their male family members’ self-image.

The issues of poverty, hunger and unemployment were mentioned repeatedly by female respondents. The greatest concern was the impact that poverty would have on their male head of household’s self-image. Suhad, a 16-year-old girl, commented: “My father will feel he is a lesser man if he ends up sitting at home all day long.”

Mervat, an 18-year-old (female), echoed:

“My brother got married four years ago, and since that time, he has barely worked, since his boss’ shop in Jerusalem was closed. He feels that his manhood was affected by his unemployment. It is true that he is not responsible for the political and economic situation, but he still needs to be a good husband, father and son. He doesn’t feel he is a good brother to me. I feel so worried about him. He lost so much weight, and I am worried that one day we will lose him. You know, he tried so many ways to

better his status at home and in front of his in-laws. He went back to school and studied economics at the Open University, but he still can’t find a job to feed his family, and my dad is barely feeding us.”

Home demolition

The young people mentioned the thousands of houses and shops demolished to build the Wall. They discussed how quickly bulldozers destroyed buildings. One girl remarked, “They turned the house and the shop of my uncle into ruins in seconds [*Qalbathum bithawani la anqad*].”

Another 17-year-old boy stated:

“All we build or plan is able to be demolished at any given moment. Can you comprehend the pain of seeing all you built, the place where you and your family were raised, the place where your children were born, being demolished in seconds? It is a scene that burns the heart [*Manthar beh’req il qaleb*].”

Destruction of farmland

The adolescents discussed the effects of the Wall on the villagers, farmers, and the market place. One young girl, who was waiting for a soldier to allow her to pass, stated in a loud voice,

“Yesterday, I heard that over 100,000 olive trees have been uprooted. Do you know how long it takes to reap the fruits from an olive tree? It is possible those olive trees were planted centuries ago.”

Another girl replied, “Yes, we heard the same news and my grandfather cried so much that his eyes became blinded with tears [*hatta ina’amat e’eyunu*].”

Two boys observed that the Wall also separates many farmers from their land. They told me a story of a farmer who rode a donkey to the agricultural gates where farmers are allowed to pass. The farmer would be allowed to pass only if he did so without his donkey. He was

Section 4 General analyses of data



“I wouldn’t be afraid if they destroyed my house... and if they blocked my way I wouldn’t crawl.”
لو هدوا البيت مش خايفة ولو سدوا طريقي مش زاحفة



“They have uprooted the trees and planted spitefulness in our eyes.”
خلعوا الأشجار من جذورها وزرعوا الحقد في عيوننا

told that donkeys and other animals have special gates that require special permission. Usama, the 16-year-old boy sharing the story, commented: “Maybe donkeys can pass through gates without standing in line, or being searched and harassed. These days, it seems better to be born an animal than to be turned into an animal by the Israeli soldiers.”

Another 15-year-old girl wrote in her composition about the deep pain she felt when she learned that water cisterns and wells were seized during construction of the Wall:

“Isn’t water a basic need for human beings? Why are they separating us from our wells and depriving us from water? Why are they destroying our wells? Isn’t it our water? Isn’t it our source of living?

Section 4 General analyses of data

So, the aim of the Wall is to steal our water, destroy our limited resources to live, our land, our fruits, and our olive oil. Even the thyme [*za'atar*] that grows with very little water was destroyed to build the Wall.”

Inability to access places of worship



“A heaven without people is no place to be.”
الجنة من غير ناس ما بتداس

The Wall will cut congregations from their mosques. Many young girls told of older people who believe that the main aim of the Wall is to prevent them from seeing the holy Muslim shrine, the Dome of the Rock, from their houses. Girls often reiterated their desire to assist their grandparents and older people by doing something about it. This attitude is reflected in such comments as “I must find a way”, “I need to do something”, and “I promised my grandfather that I will find a way to solve this problem, and that he will go back to his same habit of opening the window each morning to look at the Al Aqsa Mosque.”

The Wall has cut villages and communities in half. The Wall’s division of communities was

raised again and again by the young people. Wisam shared with us her grandmother’s fear that she will die without being able to be buried beside her husband. The village, as she explained, “is now cut in a way that the cemetery is in one part, and most of the village’s houses are in the other part.”

The participants also shared with us the anxiety they felt at being prevented from walking to their friends’ houses and visiting the places, such as the park, where they used to spend time. Before the Wall, most girls and women would routinely meet, walk and converse in the park. The inability to reach hospitals, schools, universities, shops, workplaces, and relatives was also a constant topic of discussion.

Section 5

Noticing the absent: The Wall and adolescent girls’ ordeal in Palestine

This section presents the attempt to understand the effects of occupation on Palestinian adolescent girls.⁵⁷ It seeks to both reveal the girls’ methods and strategies for surviving, coping with, and adapting to the occupation, and to identify the main hardships girls face under occupation. This makes it possible to formulate intervention strategies to ease the pain and, if possible, heal the wounded memories.

This section is grounded in girls’/women’s traumatic experiences of being victimised by political violence and oppression, of the pain, anguish, despair, and sadness over the continued struggle for liberation (of the self and the land), and of that struggle’s effects on individual Palestinians. Studies examining women’s reactions to trauma that emanates from political oppression and occupation reveal that women’s depression, anxiety and stress-related symptoms were higher than those of their male partners.⁵⁸ Historically, however, studies have not examined women’s remapping, and women’s own narratives in terms of how they react to traumas resulting from political conflicts and resistance movements. Moreover, few, if any, have studied how the victimisation of women in war zones – a context of continuous oppression, occupation and injustice – affects their coping abilities. Although it is known that gender plays a role in individual responses to trauma, there is a paucity of research in this area.

Confronting patriarchy

The narratives and voices collected for this report suggest that, in the studied area, political occupation and military violence collude with the over-protection and domestic violence

that these girls experience from patriarchal and social structures.

For example, Siham, a 17-year-old schoolgirl, remarked:



“We are not walking on our usual streets, but we can still go on towards freedom.”
مش عمالنا بنمشي بشوارعنا العادية لكن قادرين نواصل الحرية

“As a young woman, I face so many problems with my family. My father is always worried about me being abused on my way back and forth from school. Yesterday, I was climbing the Wall – I mean jumping from the hole that we all pass through – and one neighbour said that this is not something girls should do. He said that it is more honourable for girls to stay home than to jump, climb, argue or fight with soldiers. So many friends of mine left school or were unable to continue their education due to the political situation.”

Some girls stressed their inability to tell parents or significant others of any hardship. This inability to call for help increased during the heightened violence and the

⁵⁷ See also previous studies by the author: Shalhoub-Kevorkian (1994; 1998).

⁵⁸ Punamäki (1990); Baker and Kevorkian (1995); Qouta et al. (1997).

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construction of the Wall. Girls shared many incidents with which they needed the help of an adult but failed to find one. This lack of available support or feedback in times of crisis jeopardises adolescents' mental, social and, in some cases, physical health. It also particularly increases girls' vulnerability, which can take many forms, including physical and emotional vulnerability. In some cases, it can also result in sexual abuse, such as in what the girls defined as "the Ford van phenomenon" [*thaherat ll Fordat*]. Girls shared with us the way Palestinian male drivers of Ford mini-buses⁵⁹ were abusing their power and harassing and sexually abusing girls. (By contrast, boys mentioned that gangs physically abuse and steal from them.)

In addition, the girls explained that their friends comprise their best support systems. They gave numerous examples of assistance provided by classmates and close friends.

Women's reactions to political conflicts and war-related situations are found to differ from those of men.⁶⁰ Specifically, women's reactions and coping strategies are deeply affected by both the political context and the nature of gender relations between men and women.⁶¹



"People pass through checkpoints normally, but in them one can see the effects of humiliation and degradation."
الناس بتمر عادي والذل والإهانة عليهم بادي

⁵⁹ Ford mini-buses are used as a form of public transportation between Palestinian cities and villages, and are largely unregulated by the Palestinian Authority.

⁶⁰ Accad (1990); Shehahdeh (1999).

⁶¹ Accad (1990).

⁶² Girls, for example, have been asked to take off their veil in public, or were bodily checked and humiliated in front of male relatives and friends.

Coping with extremes

Despite the external and internal hardships, girls search for methods of resisting oppression. But their resistance is costly, both in their life in public spaces and within their families.

Female adolescents pay a high price when they challenge systems of oppression. Young girls participating in this research shared numerous incidents in which they fought and talked back against oppression, but were punished for doing so. Girls who raised their voices against Israeli soldiers who attempted to humiliate them were subsequently beaten and arrested. Their gender raised their vulnerability to harassments, abuse and violence.⁶²

But this high price extends even to their families. Kawthar explained to the others in the group:

"I want to say something, but do not get upset with me. I must say that the construction of the Wall and its effect, the existence of the checkpoints, the hardships in our mobility and freedom, and other things, make us less open with our parents. I personally started hiding things from my parents, because I am afraid that if I tell them they will prevent me from coming to school. The fact that I am not free to share my daily ordeals with my close family members makes me feel that I am hiding things."

Hiding harsh and abusive experiences from relatives was only one of the reported methods of coping. In their compositions and focus groups, girls shared various ways of coping, some risking safety more than others. For example:

- writing poetry
- throwing stones
- cursing at or lying to soldiers
- helping to sneak family members past the checkpoints
- causing trouble to distract soldiers'

attention so that they do not notice a friend who lacks a permit to pass the checkpoint

- wearing the veil because they know it makes Israeli soldiers nervous, or to feel safer and more protected religiously
- going to school each and every day in an attempt to show the soldiers that they will not frighten, intimidate or deter schoolgirls
- participating in weddings, funerals or other social activities to stress that rising oppression provokes more determination and persistence.

Despite all the acts of daily resistance, some of the girls stressed that their great frustration and despair was sometimes, or might potentially be, expressed in violence to self and others.

Mervat said:

"Sometimes I feel so angry and frustrated by my life. To see those dirty soldiers who perceive me as very young and less than an animal. (Remember, I started wearing the veil so as to tease them and let them know that I am a proud Muslim.) To hear the daily instructions from my family and teachers, and then to listen to the hardships of my friends. It is hard. I deserve a better life. Some days I think of bombing myself and stopping this torture and humiliation. Do you know of a place where I could add my name to those that are willing to commit martyrdom [*yestashhedo*]?"

Palestinians have faced a long and painful political situation.⁶³ Religiosity and politicisation have been found to help individuals cope with non-stop traumas. The study by Baker and Kevorkian showed that religiosity and political convictions are associated with the absence of helplessness, pessimism and despair.⁶⁴ In that study, religiosity was identified in such activities as praying regularly; political engagement was identified in such behaviours as participating in demonstrations.

⁶³ See for example Baker (1991; 1992); Punamäki (1990).

⁶⁴ Baker and Kevorkian (1995).

⁶⁵ *Nakba* ["catastrophe" in Arabic] is the name given to the Palestinian displacement and uprooting of 1948.

⁶⁶ Kanafani (2000).

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Connected to history

The voices and writings of Palestinian girls who are affected by the Israeli Separation Wall are connected to the historical oppression of displacement and the continuous *Nakba*. The decision to examine the *Nakba*⁶⁵ in this context developed from a participant's reaction to the present study.

Nuhad is 17 years old and is studying physiotherapy. When I discussed the project's aim, and the need to help the voiceless to speak, she recalled Ghassan Kanafani's story, "Returning to Haifa".⁶⁶

She related to me and the group of adolescents I was interviewing that if she and her family don't fight the effects of the Wall, they will end up facing the same tragic fate as the couple in Kanafani's story. Kanafani's story is of a frightened couple who fled Haifa during the *Nakba* in 1948, leaving behind them a 5-month-old child. After the second dispersal in 1967, they returned to Haifa and discovered that their son had grown up to become an Israeli soldier. The son refused to recognise his parents and was fighting his brother, a *fida'i* (revolutionary fighter and hero), who was on the other side of the border in Lebanon.

Nuhad's comments took the entire group back in history, bringing to the surface the stories told by their parents and grandparents. The girls' discussions swung like a pendulum between their determination never to forget the past, the displacement and the refugee



"An 8-metre-high Wall can come tumbling down, but you will never ever break our hearts."

سور ٨ أمتار ممكن ينهار ولكن ولا عمركم بتولعوا بقلوبنا النار.

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state of their predecessors, on the one hand, and the present, in which a new reality, a new loss, a new impossible present is being constructed, on the other.

As Siham, a 19-year-old student, stated:

“This Wall will always remind me of our resistance, of our screwed-up reality [*kheibitna*], of our past, of their fear. Every time they build it [the Wall] higher, my grandmother laughs and tells the soldiers who are sitting all day long beside our house that the more they do things, walls, curfews, closures, violence the more we know that they are scared of us. Do you know why they are scared? Because they know that we have justice on our side [*as’hab haq*]. I sit, listen to my grandmother and laugh with her, but I also know that my present, my ability to move, visit friends or go to university will be negatively affected by the Wall. So yes, I laugh at the Wall, but I also cry so much. It scares me so much. It will block my future.”

A girl named Nawal asked her, “So why do you laugh?” And Siham replied, “What else can I do except laugh at them and laugh at myself?” Nadia added, “Are we going crazy? *Jannanuna* [They drove us crazy], *nakabuna* [they caused us the loss of the *Nakba* or War of 1948]!”

The words of these young frontliners reflect a growing awareness both of the power of resilience and the weakness of life in such a dark reality. The girls’ words and stories drew a very painful picture of the daily misery of the Palestinians. The interaction showed these girls facing perpetual walls, in more ways than one.

Nawal (18 years old) said:

“It is not that we face a Wall, but *walls*. Just think of the fact that the Wall is built by Palestinian workers who need to live and bring food to their children. Think about the fact that [a prominent Palestinian politician] is the one who is selling them the cement for the Wall. Think about the Americans that are

supporting Israel financially and morally in the world.

They give them guns, and help them kill us. Do you think that it is only this one Wall? So many walls.”

Conclusion

Most of all, the results of this study challenge the binary stereotype of active males and passive females in political conflicts and war zones.

Most of all, the results of this study challenge the binary stereotype of active males and passive females in political conflicts and war zones. The study also illustrates the way the current situation in Palestine has challenged the conventional separations between women and men, girls and boys, young and old.

Despite the continuous victimisation and struggles for survival faced by Palestinian girls and women, they have often been denied acknowledgment of their pain, losses and frontline efforts.⁶⁷ There is an urgent need to document and listen to girls’ and women’s narratives of war crimes, but it is also important to search for the gender-specific agencies and voices that girls and women employ when coping with atrocities in such a masculine and hegemonic patriarchal context of military occupation.

The effects of the historical and political struggle on Palestinian girls’ coping and survival methods are clear. In their narratives, girls have used the polarities of silence and screaming, obedience and resistance, learning from and criticising history/politics/society, and tears and laughter – all in attempts to face, cope with and actively respond to the continuous and unpredictable oppression. Further analysis of their response appears in the Findings section.

Section 6

In their words

The Wall has come to hold many different meanings. In an attempt to recover some of those meanings, I will allow the adolescents’ own words to explore the Wall’s hidden significance and reveal the commonly unknown perspectives and concerns of the young participants, grouped here into broad themes.

Physical separation



“This street used to be crowded and filled with people, but today it has no shape or character.”

كان هذا الشارع يصبح العالم أما الآن فقد أصبح بلا معالم

Focus group discussions identified many issues that adolescents face when dealing with the Wall. Most related to the physical separation from something important in their lives. For example, one young person stated: “I have been isolated from my friends. I have no-one to play with or spend my leisure time with since they closed the Wall around us. I feel like I’m in prison.”

Yousef, a 14-year-old boy from a village, said:

ان الجدار الفاصل قد احدث فجوة كبيرة على اهالي قرية النعمان وقد منعت قوات الاحتلال الإسرائيلي الطلاب من الوصول الى مدارسهم في بيت ساحور وام طوبا وقد اغلقت الطرق التي تفصل قرية الخاص عن النعمان التي كنا نحن أصحاب وابناء وجيران وأصدقاء وقد عانينا كثيرا من الاعتقالات والتهديد ومنع السكان من الوصول الى بيوتهم وقد كانوا يجبرونهم على التوقيع على أوراق لا إنسانية بمنع الوصول الى البيوت وعدم السكن في هذه القرية التي تعبرونها (مزموريا). انهم كانوا يهددونهم عند اعتقالهم على السجن وكانوا يضربونهم ويعذبونهم في البرد في وسط الليل وهذا لا يجوز. لا للاحتلال لا.

⁶⁷ Shalhoub-Kevorkian (1997a, 1997b, 2003).

“The residents of the village of A Kheibitna Al-Nouman (Mazmouria) were evicted by force. The Separation Wall has created a grave problem for them. The occupation authorities have prevented students from reaching their schools in Beit Sahour and Im Touba. They closed the roads that separated Al-Khas village from Al-Nouman. They used to be friends, and neighbours, but they suffered a great deal from the arrests, threats and being denied access to their homes. They forced them to sign papers that prevent them from reaching their homes and living in the village. They were threatened, beaten, arrested and tortured in the cold night. This can't be right. I say, 'No to the occupation!' ”

Salwa, a 17-year-old girl, explained:

“The students of the school can't enter in the morning until the soldiers open the gate, and they can't get out in the afternoon until the soldiers open the gate. This situation has affected the Palestinian people economically, intellectually and culturally, because it prevents exchange and contact between people. This Wall disrupted the Palestinian situation and destroyed it completely.”

A girl named Samiha wrote:

“The building of the Wall began, Palestine began to cry and its people began to mourn. Neighbours said goodbye to each other because the Wall had separated them. Farmers could no longer reach their land and students could no longer reach their school. Neighbours will no longer visit each other because a Wall prevents them from seeing each other. In some Palestinian districts, the building of the Wall has ended and the hardships of the Wall have begun.”

Young participants shared many stories in which they or their loved ones suffered separation from the construction of the Wall. Nada shared with us her family's ordeal:

وقبل أربعة أيام اخذ أبي جدي إلى مستشفى المطلع في القدس حتى أرجعوه، وطلبوا من جدي المريض ان يحضر معه تصريحاً، فعاد واخرج تصريح ثم عادوا الى الحاجز ولم يدخلوا، حتى ذهبوا من طريق "واد النار" ثم وصلوا الى المستشفى. وصل جدي الى المستشفى وحالته خطيرة.

“Four days ago, my father took my grandfather to the Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem. (At the checkpoint,) they sent him back and asked him to get a permit. He went back and got a permit, then returned to the checkpoint, but they didn't let them in, so they went through Wadi Al-Nar in order to reach the hospital. My grandfather reached there in serious condition.”

The Wall's power to dominate

The process of unmapping the Wall, of assessing its meaning in their lives and identifying ways to counter its influence, started with adolescents' reflections on its power to dominate their and their people's lives. Their words, writings and photos undermined the claim that the Wall is a tool for achieving security. Their powerful words uncovered the ideology and practices of conquest and domination, and revealed how the Wall, while representing security for Israelis, actually undermines the personal security and sense of safety of these adolescents and their families.



“You look like a serpent; we should seek your ruin.”

شكلك زي الأفعى ولتدميرك منسعى

The comments of a young man named Samaher are emblematic of the unmapping process. He observed:

فقد أصبح مشهد الجدار يظهر في حلم كل فلسطيني، يعترض طريق أماله و أحلامه يصدها و يمنع الحلم من الوصول، فان حياتي و حياة كل فلسطيني أصبحت يوميات الجدار الفاصل فلا بد لكل واحد منا أن يمر عنه سواء بالحلم أو في الحقيقة

“The scene of the Wall started appearing in the dreams of every Palestinian, cutting its way through his hopes and dreams, blocking the dream from materialising. My life and the life of each and every Palestinian became a diary of the Separation Wall – for we must all pass by it either in our dreams or in reality.”

Samaher's comment reveals that the Wall meant the destruction of happy dreams. The same young man said: “The Wall is a nightmare, a nightmare, but when will we wake up and realise that it is gone [kabus, kabus, emta mnish'a minuu]?”

Participants explained that despite their willingness in most cases to abide by the rules that the occupiers are imposing, they were still unable to ease their hardships.

Marwan (male) said:

“While I was standing with my father, one of the soldiers came and told my father to go back and that he couldn't pass [through the checkpoint], in spite of the fact that he had a permit. People waited just in case the soldiers let them through. Even students, and ambulances transporting patients and injured people, were prevented from passing the gate. I hope that the world will see what acts the occupation soldiers commit at these gates, in order to demolish this Wall that causes daily suffering to thousands of Palestinians.”

Militarisation of food and aid was another recurring theme in discussions among the participants of the focus groups. As one teenager stated:

“Our food, our water, and our ability to meet and see each other are in the Israelis' hands. Only if they open the

gates can we get food and water. Most of the time they cut off the water to prevent us from resisting them and my mum always begs us to stay home and not resist them, so as to have water, food. She always says, 'At least we could take some food to your grandmother.' ”

As a young girl observed, militarisation of food or aid threatens women and adolescents the most:

“The problem is that Israelis control the access to food, and men in society are the ones who distribute food and even water. I could tell you what happened during the three-day curfew. Men used all their power against women, and my uncle was trying to control my mum (my father is imprisoned). He agreed to give us water only if my mum signs the paper allowing him to get the money from the bank, when it is our money – this is the only source of income to us.”



“You have defaced our environment and darkened our lives; when will you get out of our sight?”

شوهتوا بيئتنا وسودتوا عيشتنا فمتا نتزاحوا عن خلفتنا

History of Palestinian resistance

In their comments and writings, it becomes clear that the Wall has multiple meanings for these young people. For some, it symbolises the history of the Palestinian people's resistance to occupation and displacement. As they discussed this, the adolescents shared their understanding of the Palestinian history and political legacy.

Imad (male) stated:

Section 6 In their words

“After the Zionists violated part of Palestine in 1948 and established their state on it, they then “violated” the remaining land of Palestine. They decided to build the Separation Wall under the pretext of protecting themselves against Palestinian rebels. They stole large areas of our land, and prevented those living behind the Wall from visiting their relatives, going to their schools, towns and mosques. The Wall has prevented landowners from farming their land and workers from going to work. This has led to the uprooting of thousands of trees from Palestinian land and the destruction of the environment. We will resist the construction of this Wall with all our strength.”

Mustafa, a 17-year-old boy from a refugee camp, wrote:

“History repeats itself and events are repeated, such as the demolition, killing, arresting, discriminatory separation and forced migration away from family, home and friends. How many martyrs should fall, how many injured should bleed, how many houses should be demolished, how many should be separated from their families? History repeats itself.”



“In the West, people drive on ‘highways’; we walk on ‘no-ways’.”

الغرب يتمشى بشوارع “Highway” وإحنا نتمشى بطرق “Noway”

Political significance

The adolescents in some instances sounded like young political analysts, stressing that the effects of the Wall are not fully represented in

the human tragedy, the economic hardships, the deprivation of education, and the restriction of freedom of movement. They stressed the local and international (Palestinian and Arab) ramifications. One female adolescent, Maha, noted:

“The United States supports the building of the Wall and Israel’s policy towards the Palestinian people. All the Arab countries should know that if the building of this Wall affects Palestinian activity. It will also affect all the Arab countries, because the defeat of Palestine is the defeat of all the Arab people.”

Ameera, a female adolescent, wrote:

“The Wall is being built by Arab workers, in Arab factories, for the financial benefit of certain Palestinian ministers. Everyone is remaining silent to please the donor countries and obtain the satisfaction of Bush, the father, and Sharon, the son, so as not to deprive Egypt from flour, or Kuwait and certain Arab countries from alcohol that Arab rulers drink in night clubs.”

Hiba (female) wrote:

“When the building of the Wall began, cement was imported from Egypt to Palestinian factories whose owners claim to be fighters and ministers in the Palestinian cause. In my opinion, they are collaborators but they are worse enemies to Palestine than a collaborator, because they act openly while everyone else remains silent.”

In discussing the construction of the Wall and the Wall’s place in their history, they offered their own political analyses regarding the ideological factors affecting political decisions about the Wall. A 16-year-old girl who wishes to remain anonymous explained her view:

جدار الفصل العنصري

ان هذا الجدار يهدف الى تفكيك وحدة الشعب

الفلسطيني من خلال وضع الحواجز لمنع الوحدة بينهم وذلك من خلال إبعاد الأهل والأبناء والعائلات عن بعضهم البعض ضمن إطار ما يسمى (الجدار الفاصل) أو جدار الفصل العنصري.

ان هذا الجدار في الأراضي الفلسطينية تماما مثل: السرطان في جسم الإنسان فكلاهما يهدفان الى القضاء على الأماكن والأجزاء التي يمران بها سواء كان في جسم الإنسان أو في الأراضي الفلسطينية. فهذا هو مرض خطير مثل هذا المرض فيكون دائما الهدف هو الفصل والتخريب.

“The purpose of this Wall, which is referred to as the Separation or Apartheid Wall, is to destroy the unity of the Palestinian people by using checkpoints that separate families from each other. This Wall on Palestinian land is like cancer; it destroys everything it touches. It’s a dangerous disease. Its goal is to divide and destroy.”

Halah, a girl from a refugee camp, wrote:

“This Separation Wall is like a separation monster that they built to divide Palestine into different sections. Large areas of land were confiscated to build the Separation Wall, which has become a burden on Palestinians’ everyday life.”

By writing, talking and sharing newspaper clippings about the Wall, the young people educated us about its length, height, locations, and effects.

Samar, a 16-year-old girl wrote:

“The Apartheid Separation Wall is Israel’s failed response to its geographic defeat, since the number of Palestinians is equal to the number of Israeli Jews in Palestine, despite the campaigns of repression, exile and forced migration. [The Israeli] government thinks that it can destroy the creation of a viable Palestinian state by building a Wall that confines Palestinians in enclaves and prisons. It committed its crime, the ‘dancing snake’, in Jenin, Tulkarm and Qalqilya, where this snake’s

length grew and stretched over vast areas of land through Salfeet, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron, threatening to confiscate 350 square km, isolating 42 villages and 100,000 people west of the Wall in [central West Bank], in addition to confiscating 250 square km, isolating 37 villages and over 450,000 people in the south.”

Manal (female) wrote:

“Israel has surpassed the international limits in oppression and terrorism. The United States doesn’t care any more because it is Israel’s number one supporter. It lets it do whatever it wants. Israel is not afraid of any European State because it’s protected by America. What kind of a state makes decisions without



“They have oppressed nature and have planted separation and sin.”

قمعوا الطبيعة وزرعوا القطيعة والخطيئة

caring about the consequences? It kills, arrests and displaces.”

Some discussed the “right of return”.⁶⁸ Passing one of the few gates through the Wall, one young participant remarked:

“This is what the criminal Sharon and his followers want: to destroy us. But the first and the last issue that is scaring Sharon and his supporters is the right of

⁶⁸ The “right of return” refers to the right of Palestinians who were forced to leave their houses and lands during 1948, to return to their land and/or to be compensated for their losses. It is based on United Nations Resolution 194 (United Nations, General Assembly, 1948) and has been affirmed annually since 1948. For more details see Naseer Aruri (2001).

return. They know very well that we will always ask for our right of return; it is our right by international law.”

Intra-communal conflict



“To Be Continued”

Discussions revealed yet another troubling result. Some Palestinians have been fighting with each other, trying to prevent the construction of the Wall on their own lands. The Wall is then constructed on the land of a neighbour or a relative. One young girl offered:

“I witness the racism of this Wall that has caused multiple problems between the Palestinians themselves. Bloodshed has occurred between Palestinian families and brothers in Zaatara and eastern Al Taamra.”

Symbol of suffering

As these youngsters reflected on the symbolic meaning of the Wall, the anguish and sorrow in their words was very perceptible. They used such words as “cancer”, “snake”, “dangerous

disease”, “apartheid”, “divider”, “criminal”, “imprisoner” and “violin of laws”. They also described specific effects, such as uprooted trees, separation from loved ones, displacement and forced migration of Palestinian people and more.

The adolescents’ anguish increased each time they moved from general perceptions to discuss more specific contexts, such as talking about their house and the Wall, or about their village and the Wall. This could be seen in Rana’s words when she said:

“The horrible sight of the city of Jerusalem astonished me; I pictured it like a sad city because of what had happened to it. Nobody visits it anymore after it was imprisoned by large cement Walls that prevent us from seeing or dreaming of the vision of liberty. The

scene that surprised me the most was seeing a pregnant woman carrying her infant in her arms and begging the Israeli soldier to let her go through to the clinic to treat him. I found out afterwards that the infant had cancer but the soldier paid no attention, because Palestinians with green identity cards are not allowed into Jerusalem.”

When the young people shared family concerns, it became clear that the Wall has adversely affected some in very personal ways.



“I will grind you into tiny stones to extinguish the fire in my heart.”
سأفتك إلى حجاره لأطفئ ما يقيني من ناره

For example, Firyal said:

“Personally, my family has begun to collapse time after time. We have begun saving food for the next day in order to continue this difficult life that all Palestinians face everywhere...” (She stopped talking and was about to cry.)

Another girl said: “I’m very sad, and my sadness is even greater when I see my grandmother bitterly crying as she watches the bulldozers destroying the land and uprooting the trees. I feel this Wall is suffocating me.”

Psychological pressure

On the psychological level, one particularly tragic effect of the Wall was repeatedly mentioned. On several occasions, the young people expressed the wish to die and end

the process of humiliation that Palestinians experience. Adolescents’ reactions to the construction of the Wall showed that the more vulnerable they feel, the easier it is for them to want to participate in resisting oppression.

Asad, a 17-year-old boy stated:

“If we are living death and insecurity each and every day on our way to school, in our houses and even when we open the window and see this huge Wall, we feel that our struggle is to reach a dignified life, to be able to put food on the table, find decent jobs for our people. (My father has been unemployed for the last year since they started this Wall.) And if it takes that we die to achieve dignity for our people, nothing will stop us. I personally do not think that anyone could stop me. My mother might cry; my friends might feel sad, but only by such actions can we show Israel that we do not and will not surrender.”

One young girl (14 years old) explained that the Wall caused a serious economic hazard. She supported her assertion by quoting a local saying, ‘I’d rather

slit my throat than lose my livelihood’ [*Qa’tea’ li’ inaq walla qa’tea’ lirzaq*].”

These are some excerpts of the written stories, comments and experiences:

“A father and son were going to a hospital in Jerusalem to visit the mother. The child was about 13 years old. The Israeli occupation soldiers stopped them at the gate at the Wall. A soldier asked the father where he was going. He told him he was going to visit his wife, who was in a Jerusalem hospital. The soldier asked him if he had a permit. He replied that he didn’t, so the soldier ordered him to go and stand in the corner. The father told the soldier that he had to go to the hospital and pay the bill because his wife needed an operation. The soldier just shouted at him. Half an hour later, the father went up to the soldier and asked him if he could go home because his son couldn’t stand under the sun. The soldier

laughed, grabbed him, started insulting him and beat him in front of his child. The child started to cry. The soldier went towards the child and started intimidating him by saying that they were going to kill his father. After a short time, they let the father go home after those cowards had ridiculed him.”

“In the Bethany area, settlers have taken over an apartment building. They claimed that it belonged to them since 1927, but the building was only built this year, so tell me, how can one fight such logic? Isn’t martyrdom the best solution?”

In a female focus group, Samaher commented:

“Thousands of eyes wander over the Wall daily, humiliated, suppressed but patient in this humiliation and contempt, in order to reach Jerusalem, the flower of all cities. This Wall has divided beloved Palestine, but it does not only concern Jerusalem.”

And Rawia explained:

“The Wall has had a significant effect on a student’s psychological well-being from an educational perspective. If his or her house was demolished, he or she will keep thinking about this house and why it was demolished. Was it demolished for the security of Israel? Yes, for the security of the State of Israel.”

Marta’s words echoed Rawia’s frustration:

“It is hard to forget about this shitty Wall... It is so big, so high, so hard to see and to absorb. It gets in your bones, for it has affected us economically, politically and even morally. I personally am not sure if there is a God in this world. And if he exists... where is he?”

Such feelings of anger and frustration were communicated in various ways. Some participants felt, as Marta wrote: “Life is not worth living.” Other comments paralleled what Maher wrote: “Do you think that there is a reason to live?”

Amer, a 16-year-old boy from one of the refugee camps, wrote us the following story:

Salem and the Apartheid Wall

There was a young man called Salem who lived in Bethany. He was 20 years old. His father was ill and his mother had died while giving birth to his younger brother. He had three brothers aged 14, 7 and 3 years, as well as a sister aged 5 years. He worked inside Israel. He had very moderate financial means. He used to come home on the weekend and give his brothers money to spend on themselves and at school – as well as pocket money. He bought the medication for his father and the milk for his young brother. One day, while Salem was at work, the occupation army was on its way with trucks and cement blocks to build the Wall near Salem’s house. His family was in great danger.

When the occupation forces reached Salem’s house, they evicted his ill father and family. Salem’s father had a long and serious discussion with the army, but to no avail. He was too ill to resist and he knew nothing would come of it. He cursed the soldiers and they hit him. They claimed that the land that the house was built on belonged to them. Of course they were lying; they want to kill and displace the oppressed Palestinian people who can’t retrieve their homes or land, their pure homeland Palestine...

When Salem returned home, he found his family had become homeless. The neighbours had taken them in because his house had been demolished in order to build the Wall in its place. He returned to work and resigned, so his boss told him that, in that case, he wouldn’t pay him the rest of his salary. Salem was forced to agree [to give up his pay]. He returned home with great difficulty due to the security closure. He decided to join the resistance against Israel. He told Hamas he wanted to carry out a suicide bombing. He took an explosive belt and went to Tel Aviv, but there were heavy security restrictions, so he was caught and put in prison.

This is all due to the psychological state. He was distressed and now his family is left homeless because the neighbours are poor and can’t bear the extra expense. Salem’s story ends in this humiliating way – with



“Our destiny is controlled by cement blocks and a soldier.”

مصيرنا تتحكم به قطع إسمنتية وجندي.

homeless brothers and sister, an ill father, a deceased mother, and an imprisoned brother.

Inhibiting education

Mahmoud, a 16-year-old boy from a refugee camp, insisted:

“The main reason why some Palestinian children don’t complete their education is because the Separation Wall has isolated them from their schools. They don’t want to create a future generation that is educated and will fight for the rights of people whose land was occupied. They want to suppress our ambitions of having a state in which we will live in freedom. This Wall has separated me from my family, friends, relatives, and neighbours. They want to create an uneducated generation by using forced eviction and repression against them in order to get them to give up their rights.”

Samaher, a 14-year-old girl, began by explaining why she leaves so early for school:

“The thing that has probably surprised you is the fact that I left for school so early, but it is not surprising! Because my school is situated in Jerusalem, a huge Wall with a gate separates me from my school. How many families had their homes demolished and how much land was confiscated in order to build this Wall? Our families were dispersed and separated. I challenge this oppressive monster that has destroyed my dreams.

I can no longer easily reach my school, and my father can no longer get to work, so our only source of income has disappeared.”

As Qaisar explained, the main hardships revolved around efforts to reach schools. He said: “I study at the secondary school of the village of Im Touba. When I go to school in the morning, I walk nearly 4 kilometres and I encounter the soldiers who are there on a daily basis.”

Sixteen-year-old Omar (male), said:

“I study in Beit Sahour and I have to walk a long distance [to get to school] since they dug up the main road, which is the only road to the town. They have sent me back more than once because I live behind the Wall and it is forbidden for me to pass unless I go through Al-Quba checkpoint.”

Tareq, a 13-year-old boy, said:

انا كنت اذهب بدراجتي الهوائية الى المدرسة في دار صلاح ولكن الآن بعد ان تم حفر الشارع بعمق ثمانية امتار وعرض سبعونه مترا لم اعد قادرا على ذلك واقوم بالمشي عبر التلال والصخور والوديان. ابني اقباسي جدا من المشوار واحزن على زملائي من اطفال الروضة والصفوف الابتدائية وهم يعاونوا من الطريق وهذه النتيجة من الجدار المقيت.

“I used to go to my school in Dar Salah on my bicycle. After they dug up the road, I can no longer do that. I walk over the hills, rocks and valleys. I suffer tremendously from the journey and I feel sad for the other kindergarten and elementary school students who suffer as a result of this dreadful Wall.”

Nuhad, a 16-year-old girl, raised her concerns, stating:

“Our village is facing a crisis; the roads are closed, or dug up. In addition to that, the villagers who have green identity cards without permits can’t get into Jerusalem. My school is located in Beit Sahour; if the Wall is completed, I will have to move to another school. This requires a lot of work.”

Ahmad explained his situation:

كنا قبل الجدار فرحون و نتمتع بالحرية الكاملة، كنا نذهب في الصباح الى المدرسة، لا احد يعيق طريقنا أو شيء وكنا نصل المدرسة قبل رن الجرس بوقت طويل. كانت الطريق معبدة وجديدة نصل الى المدرسة ونحن نظيفون مرتبون، كنا نصل ونحن مرتاحون الجسم.

اما بعد الجدار أصبحنا نستيقظ قبل الوقت الذي كنا نستيقظ فيه، قبل بناء الجدار أو قطع الطريق التي نمر بها الى المدرسة بساعة أو أكثر، حتى نأمن اننا نصل المدرسة في الوقت المناسب بسبب:

لان الطريق أصبحت ترابية بسبب ما فعلت بها القوات الإسرائيلية من حفر وتخريب لكي تقوم ببناء الجدار، لكي يقطع الطريق الواصلة بيننا وبين المدرسة حتى يقضوا على التعليم الفلسطيني.

أصبحنا نصل المدرسة متأخرون عن الوقت المناسب أو المقرر، ان نصل في نفس الوقت الذي كنا نصله قبل بناء الجدار بسبب الإعاقات التي تقوم بها إسرائيل فمثلا نقوم بحجزنا نحن الاطفال لعدة ساعات أو يقوموا بإرجاعنا الى البيوت.

"Before the Wall was built, we were happy; we had total freedom. We went to school in the morning, no one or nothing got in our way, and we reached school before the bell rang. The road was paved and new, and we reached school clean and tidy, physically relaxed.

After the Wall was built, we had to wake up earlier than before and spend an hour or more on the road to school, in order to reach [it] on time. The road is now a dusty path because of the digging and the destruction the Israeli occupation forces have done in order to build the Wall. They cut off the road to the school in order to destroy Palestinian education.

We began arriving at school later than usual. We are supposed to reach school at the same time we used to before the Wall was built but we don't because of the Israeli practices. For example, they detain us for hours or send us back home."

Site of resistance

Some participants looked at the Wall as a challenge that mobilised them to keep on walking the walk, going to school, helping each other, getting good grades. Through these activities, participants turned their reactions to the Wall into new sites of resistance. These forms of resistance also strengthened participants' determination to proceed in their efforts for their nation's liberation from occupation.

Through proverbs, religious anecdotes, and poetry, the adolescents stressed their ability to transform the oppression the Wall caused into power and a search of hope. For example, one remarked, "We are as small as mice and as strong as lions."

Quoting poetry, one adolescent wrote: "If the people want to live, then destiny will surely respond [to their needs]." Another youngster expressed the same thought in a different way, writing, "One day, if the people want to live, then destiny will surely respond [to them], the night will surely fade and the chain will surely break." And another: "As a poet once said, 'The one who doesn't like to climb up the mountains lives forever between the holes in the ground.' "

Some adolescents quoted the Quran. Sixteen-year-old Mahmoud (male) recited, "The prophet said in the holy Quran: 'They will not fight you in a body except in fortified towns or from behind walls. Their fighting amongst themselves is severe.' "

Participants clearly expressed the determination to fight back against the occupation. One participant wrote:

"Last but not least, despite all the measures used by the occupation to oppress us, the Palestinian people will remain resistant. We will confront this [enemy] until every grain of earth of the holy land is liberated."

A boy named Nabil wrote:

"One shouldn't surrender [acceptance of the challenge], for this is how it was portrayed in the Quran: 'They will not fight you in a body except in fortified towns or from behind walls.' This verse

illustrates that this Wall is beneficial to the Palestinians; it was built and it will end, but the people will remain standing."

Such an attitude is clearly reflected in the words of Walid (a male):

"Today they are building a Wall, convinced that it will prevent suicide bombings, but they are wrong. It will not affect a young man, woman or child whose goal is to liberate his/her country, even if a hundred Walls were built around them."

Mohammad, a 15-year-old boy, said:

"Yet I say to the Israeli occupation forces: 'We will not leave; we will resist the theft and pillage with all our strength and determination.' By remaining in our villages, towns and cities, the purpose of the Wall will be defeated. I can see the coffin in which the Wall will be buried soon."

A female participant named Marwa stated:

"We will not defeat this Wall by sitting in our houses, or watching television or reading newspapers and magazines. We must remain informed about the Wall, but not through the television or the papers or the news, rather from our windows that look out onto the Wall that no one can approach.

If all the Palestinians, old or young, adults or adolescents, had objected from the beginning, no one could have or would



"No comment. The picture says it all, and the breaches are flagrant."
بدون تعليق. الصورة واضحة والإنتهاكات فاضحة

have dared to build this Wall. It is said that marches were organised against the Wall."

Adolescents also proposed political solutions, and resilience can be seen in their proposals. For example, Tareq, a 16-year-old boy from one refugee camp, said:

"I agree on the two-state solution, Israel and Palestine, but there are conditions, such as the demolition of the Separation Wall, returning Jerusalem to its rightful owners, the Palestinians, and withdrawing from the occupied Palestinian territories."

Role of law in political conflicts

The International Court of Justice's review of the Separation Wall motivated adolescents, despite the hardships, to keep on going to school, pass checkpoints, visit relatives, and plan for their continuing education.

A female participant named Zuheir explained: "The entire world objected to the idea, demonstrations took place all over Palestine and the International Court of Justice in The Hague has decided to debate the issue of the Wall."

Suraida (female) stated:

"The Wall is such a serious danger to Palestinians, so we took it to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. [The Israeli Government] was so afraid of this act that they ended up shipping [the remains of a] bus that was exploded by one of our martyrs to affect the court's decision, but we won the case."

Suraida's words were so powerful that they prompted Nihaya, another girl who was listening, to say that she plans to study law so that she can help the lawyers in future cases against Israel.

Some adolescents said that they need to work more with humanitarian and international organisations to help stop the Wall, while Fadya, a 14-year-old girl, stated:

“Where is the so-called civilised world that claims that the whole world is independent, free and safe and that every individual lives in dignity? Let them come to Palestine and see the killing, destruction, house demolition, the uprooting of trees and the devastation of the Palestinian environment.”

The call for help was not restricted to foreign international agencies. It also included Arab ones. This is clear in the conclusion of the composition by Mahmood (male):

“I call upon all the Arab countries to stand with the Palestinian people and to remind them that Jerusalem isn’t only Palestinian but also Arab. Therefore, it’s their duty to protect it.”

Legal intervention has also helped in individual cases. Mahasen, a 16-year-old female resident of a refugee camp, reported:



“I used to walk here happily. The day we part from you, Occupier, will be a feast day.”

كنت أمشي هون وأنا سعيد. يوم فراقك يا محتل عيد.

فسي يوم من الايام قال ابن عمتي لي، ان الجيش الاسرائيلي سيشق طريق الجدار الفاصل من وسط منزلهم، وقال انهم يريدوا ان يهدموا البيت.

وبعد عدة ايام استولى الجيش على بيت عمتي لكي يخططوا الى هدمه فتدخل محامي اسرائيلي كبير في هذه المسألة، وانفقوا على ان لا يهدموا البيت، وتوصلوا الى ان يمر الطريق من امام منزلهم.

“One day I was told by my cousin that the Israeli army intended to build the Separation Wall in the middle of their house and that they were going to demolish it. A few days later, the army occupied my aunt’s house in order to demolish it. A famous Israeli lawyer intervened and they agreed not to demolish the house; instead the Wall will pass in front of their house.”

Although adolescents do participate in resisting oppression and occupation, they are typically forgotten when leaders start peace negotiations. Young people are rarely involved in peace negotiation, and this issue was raised by the participants.

In group discussions, participants commented that they heard frequent reports concerning crimes committed against the Palestinians and viewed such crimes, including the daily humiliation and the militarisation of aid, as “Sharonian” attacks. To these adolescents, all aspects of the Palestinian individual’s life are occupied by the Israeli military presence and by suffering from such attacks, or crimes, as they called them.

Resilient hope

Despite all the foregoing words, sayings and narratives, adolescents evidently kept on believing that things will change one day. “Time won’t be always on their side,” said Manar, a 17-year-old girl from the Arab village Al-Sawah’reh in East Jerusalem.

These adolescents displayed two sets of values: resistance and hope.

In searching for the best way to face such harsh political realities, a participant named Fatmeh told me:

“Do you know what it means to a 15-year-old girl like me, who experiences daily humiliation on my way to school so that they could build the Wall? But when they try to put me down, I feel I am resisting occupation. I am declaring that my dignity can’t be stepped on.”

Conclusion

This study reminds us that the agency of adolescents in conflicted areas, and particularly of girls, should not be forgotten or allowed to go unacknowledged. Palestinian adolescents’ voices expressed pain and power, called for help, created innovative methods of self-help, and most of all, called for access to a dignified life.

Adolescents explained how the highly politicised context has militarised their private and public spaces, including their schools and homes. Basing our data on adolescents’ voices, writings, words and photos, we learned how adolescents’ perceptions towards political spatial violence transformed their roles in society as adolescents and affected gender differences. Political violence – when violence is the most obvious of military values – creates militarised societies, wherein masculinity is closely linked to militarism. Militarism has intensified masculinities and increased the subordination of adolescents and, especially, female adolescents. But, as this study showed, militarised oppression also mobilised their willingness to be actively involved, and to passively or actively support resistance as a mode of survival.

This study showed the multiplicity of adolescents’ voices. Such multiplicity reflected the way they live their lives between hope and hopelessness, power and powerlessness. At times they felt hurt and humiliated by the occupation and expressed it in spiteful hate of the “enemy”. In other instances, they denied the humiliation and asserted that the oppression increased their determination to keep on living. Adolescents described education and schooling as spaces of belonging, love, and support. Those spaces served as sites of resistance, and so too, adolescents perceived the support they gave to their parents and grandparents as a site of liberation. But at other times, the

feelings of despair and sadness prompted them to perceive their own death and martyrdom as liberating.

The question remains: how can one prevent adolescents from finding in their death and martyrdom the best way of living? How can we react responsibly? What can we do with their calls for help, and how can we respond to their dire need for a safe and secure life?

The adolescents’ ways of unmapping Israeli dominance, and questioning the construction of the Wall, clarify the relationship between identity and physical space. The actual physical construction of the Wall is projected to their world, family, and future dreams. They show how place becomes race. Their words emphasise the ways that Palestinians are collectively kept in place as the “Other”.

With a variety of examples, participants frequently stressed the differential treatment of Palestinians by Israeli Jews. They spoke often of how the Israeli-built Wall segregated Palestinians and confined them in closed enclaves. Some mentioned their views of the soldiers’ attitudes – “those dirty soldiers who perceive me as very young and less than an animal.” Others expressed their opinions on the political purpose of the Wall as one of ultimate destruction of the Palestinian identity; for example, “...to destroy the unity of the Palestinian people...”, “...to destroy the creation of a viable Palestinian state...” and “...to destroy us...”.

In the process of unmapping, the adolescents also create their own “maps” – including strategies to cope with the effects of racialised policies. Their well-calculated coping strategies have them carefully planning their acts of refusal. They fear being noticed, shot or arrested, and so they examine the ramifications or their resistance before taking any steps. They also express helplessness in a way that makes them sing, feel happy, cry, get upset, search for threads of hope or seek out hope, for in their powerless lies their power to resist and face racism.

Section 7

Findings and recommendations

Palestinian young women and men seek to escape official hegemonic Western discourse that presents Palestinian young people as uniform and homogenous.

Summary of findings

- This study clearly portrays the multifaceted images presented to the researcher by young Palestinians. To a large degree, adolescents' ways of looking, knowing, perceiving, feeling, witnessing, and experiencing, and the meanings that adolescents attach to what they go through, are intricate and varied.
- There is a multiplicity of voices within the individual adolescent, be it a girl or a boy. Young people view themselves in many roles – from freedom fighters and frontliners to agents of socio-cultural change and mobilisers of political transformation to recipients of oppressive measures.
- Palestinian young women and men seek to escape official Western discourse that presents Palestinian young people as uniform and homogenous. Their refusal to accept the Western hegemonic way of representing Palestinians increases their motivation to act, react and pro-act against this negative and stigmatising representation.
- Adolescents stressed how the construction of the Wall caused internal displacement and, in turn, increased their social, economic, and personal losses, as well as those of their families.
- The girls' and boys' words, writings and photos are counter-discourses, through which they seek to escape imitation of the oppressor's mind and power. They refuse

oppressive authority by both Israeli and Palestinian patriarchal forces. The many forms of rejecting the social and political hierarchies are more apparent among young women than among young men.

- The physical, economic and political hardships created by the Wall have given birth to new methods of patriarchal control. When the harsh economic reality is examined in combination with a spatial politics that increases insecurity at checkpoints and gates along the Wall, we learn that, for example, some families have preferred to send only their sons to schools. A clear product of the Wall is that adolescents, particularly girls, are deprived of education. Such hardships increased gender violence as reflected in early marriage and fear of sexual abuse.
- Female adolescents stated that they pay a high price when they challenge systems of oppression. Young girls participating in this research shared numerous incidents in which they fought and talked back against oppression but were punished for doing so. Girls raised their voices against Israeli soldiers who attempted to humiliate them and were beaten and arrested for doing so. Their gender raised their vulnerability to harassments, abuse and violence.
- The research revealed a variety of negative coping mechanisms, such as power plays, illusions, taboo-breaking, and glossing over the harshest reality with denial. Yet, adolescents' power to peel away all issues through questioning and investigation is an observed coping mechanism that is both positive and necessary for their survival.
- Adolescents raised many concerns regarding their inability to achieve their future goals. As they explained, this caused many fears, increasing their sleeplessness, hopelessness, depressive moods, and despair.
- Physical spaces, whether the streets in

which adolescents lined up to pass a checkpoint, the schools, or even the farms, became symbols of belonging, solidarity and unity. The symbolic physical spaces also became political spaces in which new sites for liberation and resistance were created. For example, reaching school was not about earning an education only. It became a silent but apparent declaration of the intention not to surrender to any militaristic form of political domination. Passing the checkpoint day after day turned the physical space of the checkpoint into a hidden national statement of resistance against the occupation.

- In all of the young people's reactions, the historical pain and the current experiences are always connected to their hope for a better tomorrow. Reactions showed the power to survive and keep on fighting oppression, in spite of the hardships on all sides. The social construction of their reality is oppressive and static, but young Palestinians manage to free themselves from such constructions.
- The girls and boys explained how, in each space (school, home, at checkpoints) they search for a different perception and for new venues to act. There is also symbolic meaning to be found in the checkpoint beside the Wall. It is a place where they are scrutinised, but also where they scrutinise the other: the power holders. It seems that the checkpoint is one of the uniquely powerful places where they can challenge authority; they can allow themselves to scream, shout, cry, lie, call names and voice anger. At the checkpoint, they challenge not only the Israeli soldier, but all oppressive systems.
- The Wall is found to create a racialised and oppressive space. Both boys and girls explained how the Wall hampers their life opportunities, how the policy motivating construction of the Wall creates additional racism and oppression, against Palestinians in general and against Palestinian adolescents in particular.
- The policy that resulted in the construction of the Wall has always, according to the

Section 7 Findings and recommendations

adolescents' analyses, been connected to economic deprivations and an increase in the unemployment of their family members and acquaintances.

Recommendations

This report focuses on the ways adolescents perceive the effects of the Wall on their physical, mental and emotional apparatuses. It also considers how the Wall challenges and jeopardises the welfare of Palestinian children and young people, particularly girls. Such challenges include physical injury, gender-based violence, and the effects of psycho-social distress on child development. The consequences of these challenges interact with and then compound and accentuate one another. For example, the disruption of food supplies, the destruction of crops and agricultural infrastructures, the disintegration of families and communities, the displacement of populations, the destruction of educational and health services, and the devastation of water and sanitation systems, all take a heavy toll on the adolescents. To be effective, assistance must take account not only of each specific challenge, but also of their effects when compounded with each other.

Article 39 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.⁶⁹

The best way to support adolescents' physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration is by ensuring that health and nutrition, psycho-social well-being and education – all of which should draw on local culture and an understanding of child development – are priority components of humanitarian assistance.

⁶⁹ United Nations (1990).

The need to consider the effects of the Israeli Separation Wall on girls and boys from a youth-actor viewpoint arises from three important facts:

Demographics: Children and adolescents comprise a majority of Palestinian society. Policy should be appropriately accountable to them, while also allowing them to participate in policy formulation and implementation.

Children and adolescents are targets: They are often targets for militaristic power holders.

Youth-initiated advocacy: Such advocacy is limited due to the very restricted political and physical space. These limited spaces result mainly from the harsh economic situation and restrictions in mobility caused primarily by the construction of the Wall.

Recommendations drawn from the preliminary findings of this study are divided into the following intervention aspects: psycho-social, social, gender-related, educational, and research and documentation. It should be mentioned that although the gender element is included in all aspects, we felt the need to expand specifically upon it.

Psycho-social aspects

The girls and boys in this study explained that parents, teachers and other care-givers do not discuss with them the political, social and economic hardships that their family and close community are facing. This lack of communication or, as Sahar (female) described it, “the fear of discussing hard issues with kids”, raised adolescents’ worries and increased their feelings of marginalisation. These feelings were exacerbated by the construction of the Israeli Separation Wall; its construction brought many uncertainties for adolescents and especially for girls. Adolescents noticed when family members, friends and neighbours were forced to permanently leave their homes and their schools and be separated from their families.

Political violence and unrest raise additional worries and challenges. Adults’ failure to discuss such issues with adolescents can compound the uncertainty and its negative psychological ramifications.

Specific recommendations:

- Expand and supervise systems of social and psychological support to improve

adolescents’ coping and adaptation strategies for the Wall and other forms of political violence.

- (Trusted adults) Discuss with adolescents any issues of political violence and unrest that are causing uncertainty for them, thus helping to prevent the development of negative psychological ramifications.

Organisations need to work with care-givers (parents, educators, physicians, clergy, and others) to train them to dialogue with children and adolescents. Uncertainty, fear, and feelings of unimportance and rejection could lead to unwanted and, in some cases, harmful behaviour. Care-givers need to remember that the young person is *part* of the political conflict. She or he lives it, sees it and feels it. Allowing young people to share, write, discuss, talk loudly and cry could help them to feel that their voices count, reinforcing their role and status as respected, active members of the society.

Children who have been continually exposed to violence almost always experience a significant change in beliefs and attitudes. This can include a fundamental loss of trust in others. Adolescents in this study identified a number of activities that support coping by fostering a sense of purpose, self-esteem and identity. These include establishing daily routines, such as going to school, preparing food, intellectual and emotional stimulation through structured group activities (including play, sports, drawing, drama, and story-telling), and opportunities for expression, attachment and trust that come from stable, caring and nurturing relationships with adults.

Service providers should seek to develop

and expand crisis counselling services for young people, particularly young women. Such services should include crisis hotlines, “Big Sister” or “Big Brother” mentoring programmes, youth-to-youth support and counselling services. A recommendation for youth-to-youth programmes comes mainly from an examination of the experiences reported by girls in the study. Girls frequently discussed the importance of their peers in coping with crisis. However, youth-to-youth assistance without professional and adult supervision may lead to dangerous results – as was also learned from the girls’ own stories.

Helping young people build on their own strengths and resilience in collaboration with trusted care-givers is an important strategy in the coping process. Integrating modern knowledge of child development and child rights with local concepts and practices will result in more effective and sustainable ways to meet their needs. Although many symptoms of distress have universal characteristics, the ways in which people express, embody and give meaning to their distress are largely dependent on social, cultural and political contexts. They are also based on different belief systems.

Exploring a child’s or adolescent’s experience with violence, and the meaning it holds in her or his life, is important to the process of healing and recovery. While many forms of external assistance can help to promote psycho-social recovery, such explorations should take place in a stable, supportive environment. They should be conducted by care-givers who have solid and continuing relationships with the young person. Ethical issues and confidentiality must be carefully considered. When journalists or researchers encourage a young person to relate personal horror stories, the interview can open old wounds and tear down defences; if they are photographed and identified by name they can become vulnerable to additional harassment.

Social aspects

The study showed clearly that adolescents are fully aware of the power, heroism, strength,

loss, violence, humiliation and oppression that their people and loved ones are experiencing. Participants shared with us that some of their teachers are feisty fighters while others are abused and beaten. They related that their parents are frustrated and fearful, yet stronger each and every day they get through without losing a family member. They told us that their grandparents are upset, angry and sad, but strong. They gave us many examples of times when their relatives and parents hid their tears, bit their tongues and accepted humiliation. Conversely, they told us about times when those adults fought with and screamed at soldiers for permission to cross a checkpoint or to take a relative to a hospital. The daily ordeals that sound schizophrenic and illogical – but truly reflect their realities – should not be left unacknowledged.

Specific recommendations:

- Develop leadership by creating programmes that help girls and boys channel their feelings and deal constructively with polarised emotional reactions.

Social programmes and civil society initiatives that, using progression⁷⁰ planning and oversight, gather children or adolescents of the same age, hear their voices and organise them as a group would promote the feeling of togetherness and mobilise those who are interested to pursue their activism in a more supportive and productive manner. Young people should not be left alone to plan their own methods for reducing the pain and suffering of their people, friends and family; such isolation may backfire, bringing negative, unintended consequences for both the young person and the community.

- (NGOs) Work hand-in-hand with parents, educators, various care-givers and social organisations to develop specific interventions that address the causes and effects of political oppression on girls.
- Raise awareness of the gendered effects of political violence and the Wall. Promote girls’ participation in social activities while building new methods for protecting them.

⁷⁰ Of or pertaining to progression; tending to, or capable of, progress (*Webster’s Online Dictionary*).

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Work with policy makers and women's organisations on these issues to prevent further gender discrimination.

Gender-related aspects

"Everything that will happen to my people will happen to me"⁷¹

This quote from Julie Peteet parallels the feelings of pain expressed by girls in this study when they discussed the story by Kanafani.⁷² They juxtaposed their gender roles with their nation's pain and displacement. This leads them into a complicated situation. If they dig into their roots and history, they feel the history and legacy of both political and gender oppression. Girls discussed gender-related hardships that increased their sufferings. For example, they explained how the socio-economic situation forced them to accept early marriage as a means of helping their families financially. They gave many examples of how they were prevented by their families or communities from pursuing their education, reaching a medical doctor or even participating in a relative's funeral, out of fear and because it was unacceptable for girls to endure the hardships of conducting these activities. They exemplified how girls are the first and last to be affected by political violence.

The question (and challenge) remains: How can a young woman learn about her history, connecting both the gender and political aspects, while continuing to look for ways to survive the internal and external gender oppression? How can we intervene in gender crimes without divorcing them from the general context of political oppression?

Even when social support and family closeness are present, family members may be reluctant to take chances. Some stop encouraging their daughters to continue their education or prohibit them from going alone to the library. Families fear that the girls will not be safe on their way to and from places. Mothers and fathers may, in the name of protection, end up preventing their daughters from building a better future. Discussing this observation

⁷¹ Peteet (1991).

⁷² Kanafani (2000).

not only among women's organisations, but also with parents and educators, would spark searches for safe and better options to tackle such challenges.

The pressure on boys to behave according to masculine and patriarchal social expectations, from one side, and endure a humiliation by occupation forces, from the other side, increased their frustration. Some of them shared with us that they became violent and aggressive towards their own family members. Some others felt the need to participate in the violent resistance movement in order to deal with their frustration and despair. Still others invested themselves in education, getting good grades, supporting and caring for their family and community members. Some did all of these things.

Specific recommendations:

- Support educational institutions, human rights groups and women's organisations to play their crucial roles in violence prevention, intervention and protection initiatives.
Joint efforts among these organisations could serve the broader function of empowering young women. These organisations give meaning, power, and hope to girls' lives. They instil gender-sensitive and supportive values, promote justice and respect for human rights and enhance peace, stability and interdependence.
- Build creative ways to maintain young women's ability to construct a better future. Participating in gender-awareness programmes could promote girls' psycho-social and physical well-being, as well as their personal sense of efficacy.
- Train teachers, parents, male counterparts and women's organisations in gender-awareness to recognise signs of disempowerment and stress, and to impart vital survival information about gender-related violations.
- (Women's organisations, parents and

Section 7 Findings and recommendations

educators) Discuss and devise safe and better options to tackle the challenges of personal safety for girls and women.

- (NGOs) Work hand-in-hand with parents, educators, various care-givers and social organisations to develop specific interventions that address the causes and effects of political oppression on girls.
- Raise awareness of the gendered effects of political violence and the Wall. Promote girls' participation in social activities while building new methods for protecting them. Work with policy makers and women's organisations on these issues to prevent further gender discrimination.

Educational aspects

Educational institutions and teachers were found to have crucial preventive and protective roles in helping young people affected by the Wall. Literature shows that education also serves a much broader function. It gives shape and structure to young lives. It can also instil community values, promote justice and respect for human rights, and enhance peace, stability and interdependence. Participants often mentioned the reality that schools were not safe from attacks, invasions, and abuse during the *Intifada*. The destruction of education networks represents one of the greatest developmental setbacks for countries affected by political violence. Lost education and vocational skills take years to recover, complicating the overall task of post-conflict recovery.

Fear and disruption make it difficult to create an atmosphere conducive to learning. The construction of the Wall was found to disrupt not only schooling itself, but young people's perceptions of schooling – that is, as linked with the conflict and with prevailing political, economic and social conditions. Loss of schools, teachers, educational routine, educational materials, friends and more made educational institutions dangerous places for children. Nonetheless, the loss of schools also turned the same educational system and those identified with it into significant players in young people's lives. The importance of educational opportunities in the stated

perceptions of these adolescents demonstrates the importance of preserving and safeguarding the educational system.

As noted above, sometimes, even when educational opportunities exist, parents may be reluctant to send their children (especially girls) to school because they fear for their children's safety on the way to and from school or during classes. Parents may also need their older children to work in the fields, in shops or at home, caring for the youngest children. Such obstacles to education should also be addressed by educators and policy makers.

Specific recommendations:

- (International organisations) Invest more in safeguarding children's and adolescents' educational milieux.
- (National efforts) Specifically invest in and promote educators' efforts to safeguard children and adolescents in educational institutions.
- Assist educational institutions in building creative ways to maintain education. Participating in a special educational programme could promote children's and adolescents' psycho-social and physical well-being.
- Train teachers to recognise signs of stress and impart vital survival information on such issues as personal safety when crossing the Wall or the checkpoints. Teachers should also promote tolerance and respect for others. Such virtues are particularly important in dealing with daily frustrations and violent measures by the occupying forces.

Research and documentation aspects

Apart from the great need to document and understand the experiences and perceptions of children and adolescents in conflict zones, their voices will not be heard if there are no spaces in which their concerns can be raised.

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Specific recommendations:

- Construct a research programme to serve as both an intervention and an investigation. The programme should be structured to intervene and search for new methods of helping children and adolescents.
- Work with children and adolescents to create child/youth-centred programmes that look at how the Wall and related political violence affects them.
- Promote social and educational activities to create what could be considered a safe haven and a source of empowerment for children and adolescents, and use such initiatives to build documentation and research projects that involve young people. Such projects should show them that despair is not an answer to the political situation, and that they, as young people, have the power to document their experiences in their own writings, paintings and photos, thereby making their agency visible and voices heard loudly.
- Survey local and international organisations in order to study problems associated with the effects of political violence on children and adolescents.
- Conduct broader action-oriented research to thoroughly analyse girls' perceptions regarding the development of methods to decrease and intervene in political violence.
- Create a training module for international and local service providers to help them deal with children's and adolescents' needs when facing the Wall or politically violent activities.
- Help create a larger, more effective support system for children and adolescents in times of crisis.
- Undertake special research to examine the roles of children and adolescents in preventing, responding to, and protecting themselves and their communities from political violence.

Specific research activities

Document communities' perceptions concerning the problems facing both boys and girls.

Explore local and indigenous coping mechanisms for helping children and adolescents facing the effects of the Wall, the checkpoints and other challenges.

Focus on understanding and addressing girls' ordeals.

Research the attitudes of local and international organisations toward conflict and gender.

Research the attitudes of military personnel towards the impact of the excessive use of force on children and adolescents in conflict zones.

Use photography as a basis for documentation.

Challenges

- Learning to approach children and adolescents as agents of change rather than as passive victims.
- Learning from children's and adolescents' success stories to support other children and adolescents.
- Making the effects of war on girls, and gender-related issues, more relevant to human rights, social and psychological analysts, rather than simply to the traditional children's rights advocates.
- Eliminating the duplication of work as much as possible.
- Being sensitive to media exploitation. For example, focusing only on abuses inflicted upon girls might, in turn, put them in jeopardy.

The adolescents' writings, words, stories, photos, discussions and shared experiences confirm the need to invest much more in hearing young people's voices. They also confirm the importance of tuning policies and interventions to their needs, not to what we as adults think their needs are.

The adolescents' input allows us to question the current models of assisting and addressing the needs of young Palestinian females. Their discussion about the *Nakba* and the *Awdah*⁷³ requires us to consider whether, by exploring their own history and engaging politically, the girls intend to restore themselves to more active roles in society. Or, are they instead searching for a place that could contain the burden they carry, an accumulation of the memories and experiences that have taken them in numerous contradictory directions? What are the various voices telling us?

These young women have told us that they, too, with all their fears and anger, are frontliners. They have conveyed that they are present with all the grief and suffering; they are coping with a harsh reality. Palestinian girls are showing how they can refuse and be critical of leadership, masculinity, oppressive patriarchy, and occupation by challenging the "perpetual walls". Their *sumud*, or steadfastness in the face of racism, dispossession and deprivation, is the one and only way to survive. Being a *samedá* [one who is steadfast] means facing the powerful hand of the Israeli military and standing opposite the three-storey-high Wall, knowing that they cannot overcome these obstacles alone. However, they also continuously showed the researchers how they create their own private, safe and loving world inside the viciously real one.

The adolescents' private spheres, including their homes, villages, schools, camps and city neighbourhoods, were not safe from attacks, invasions and abuse during the *Intifada*. Restrictions in mobility have damaged and in some cases destroyed family ties and networks. Moreover, invasions into the private, familial and community spheres, as well as the fear and disruption they cause, make it impossible to foster a safe and secure milieu. This kind of destruction leads to enormous developmental

setbacks for countries affected by political violence. It takes years to restore lost social support and gender-sensitive familial and educational atmospheres, and this complicates overall post-conflict recovery.

The construction of the Wall did not simply disrupt personal relations and family ties. It connected perceived loss of the extended family with the historical legacy of *Nakba*. Hearing these young people historicise their continuous trauma, the *Nakba*, the constant *nakbas*, the *shahat* [displacement], the need for constant *nidal* [resistance], I saw how this affected their perceptions concerning their past, present and future. I learned from them the ways they turned the spatial violence, expressed in the construction of the Wall, into a new site of resistance while creating a new space from which to challenge militaristic patriarchal structures.

They made me realise the power of their agency and resilience, but I also learned how they ended up paying a very high price for being young, especially if they commit acts of resistance. That high price is evident when young people are deprived of education and their safety nets. It is felt when harsh socio-economic conditions compel them to accept early marriage, or when they are forced to stop their schooling in order to support their families. It is not yet clear how we can decrease the price children and adolescents pay for their freedom, equality and dignity (with which all human beings are endowed at birth!).

Let me end, then, with the words of Sumaya (a 17-year-old girl) who tried to convey the message that she would continue hoping, and waiting for better times to come. In the caption for her photograph of the Wall, she expectantly wrote: "Night must be followed by daylight."



"Night must be followed by daylight."

كل ليل حتماً له نهار

⁷³ *Awdah* is an Arabic term for the right of return for refugees.

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Appendix 1

Open Letter from World Vision International to the President of the Security Council (11 December 2001)

His Excellency Moctar Ouane
President of the Security Council

Permanent Representative of the Republic of Mali to the United Nations

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the World Vision Partnership, I write to urge the UN Security Council to take immediate action to halt the unprecedented violence and bloodshed in Israel and Palestine. World Vision is a child-focused development agency with programmes assisting poor and disadvantaged Palestinian children and families.

We condemn the suicide bombings. We condemn the excessive use of military force to expand an occupation of Palestinian land that continues to be in violation of UN Resolutions.

We urge the Security Council to help establish an immediate ceasefire. We urge the creation and deployment of an international observer mission in Israel and Palestine to protect civilians.

Further, we note that Secretary General Kofi Annan has been recognised widely within the Security Council and by the parties in conflict as having an indispensable mediating role. The authority and impartiality he holds must be used to bring the parties to the peace table, leading to final status negotiations. We urge the Council to provide the Secretary General with this mandate.

World Vision, a Christian relief and development organisation working in nearly 100 countries, including Palestinian areas of the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza, stands by the following five points as requirements to achieve justice and peace in Palestine and Israel.

- Human rights must be affirmed. World Vision affirms the basic human rights of Palestinians and Israelis to live with dignity, respect, and security. We support these rights as established by the UN *Declaration on Human Rights*, the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the Geneva Conventions on the legal obligations governing occupying forces, and others.
- Disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force must be condemned. World Vision supports the Geneva Conventions that oblige combatants to take all possible actions to protect civilians. The use of helicopter gunships, rockets and live ammunition against stone-throwing young peoples is disproportionate and indiscriminate. Armed individuals and groups who target civilians must be held accountable for violating international law.
- The occupation of Palestinian lands must end. The UN has repeatedly condemned Israeli seizure of Palestinian lands. Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem provoke conflict.
- The social and economic injustice that feeds violence must be addressed. Property, wealth, water and political power are disproportionately concentrated in Israeli hands. Closing off Palestinian towns which depend on travel for jobs, education and health care further aggravates the suffering of the poor.
- A fair, even-handed peace process must be pursued. Any lasting peace in the Middle East must recognise the fundamental human rights of Israelis and Palestinians to be secure within their respective borders. A peace settlement based on international laws and UN resolutions must guarantee mutual security with dignity, justice, and equal opportunity.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dean R. Hirsch
President
World Vision International

Appendix 2

World Vision Jerusalem statements on the Israeli Separation Wall

World Vision Jerusalem welcomes International Court of Justice ruling that the Wall that Israel is building contravenes international law (July 2004)

World Vision Jerusalem welcomes the International Court's ruling that "the construction of the wall being built by Israel, the occupying Power, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, and its associated regime, are contrary to international law..." World Vision Jerusalem also welcomes the finding that the wall infringes on Palestinians' freedom of movement, freedom to seek employment, education and health. This is in line with what World Vision Jerusalem's position has been on the building of the wall in the West Bank, as stated in the position released 27 October 2003 and which is reiterated below.

World Vision Jerusalem's position on the Wall (27 October 2003)

World Vision Jerusalem is extremely alarmed by the Government of Israel's unilateral construction of a dividing wall which proponents are calling a Security Fence. While acknowledging Israel's right to live in security, the current construction is *not* defensive in nature. In fact, the wall is being built not on the official 1967 border of Israel, but has encroached heavily into Palestinian areas in the West Bank. According to the Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network (PENGON), at the end of construction the wall will effectively annex some 50% of the West Bank, isolating communities into cantons, enclaves and "military zones".

The wall's construction prejudices any future land for peace agreement and is contrary to the spirit of the Middle East Road Map sponsored by the Quartet and calling for the creation of a viable Palestinian State next to a secure Israel by 2005. The wall is preventing Palestinian farmers from accessing their land. Students are being cut off from their schools and the sick, elderly and expecting mothers are being cut off from essential health services. Without extensions, the wall is estimated to be at least three times as long and twice as high as the Berlin Wall. As a development organisation in the region, we recognise the profound humanitarian implications of the wall:

If completed without the expansions: 120,000 Palestinians will be isolated, or some 6% of the West Bank population. In addition, 200,000 Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem will be totally isolated from the rest of the West Bank.¹

Nine of the Palestinian communities in the enclaves west of the Wall will not have direct access to any medical facilities. Additional Palestinian localities that rely on the three main cities (Jenin, Tulkarm and Qalqiliya) for emergency care and specialised treatments such as regular kidney dialysis and chemotherapy will be blocked from access to these services.²

Given the humanitarian consequences the wall is having on the Palestinian population, World Vision Jerusalem recalls a previous World Vision International letter sent to the Security Council on 11 December 2001 pleading for the Security Council to act swiftly to end violence in the Middle East. We reaffirm the following points President Dean Hirsch made in that letter:

Appendix 2

“Human rights must be affirmed.”

“Disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force must be condemned.”

“The occupation of Palestinian lands must end.”

“The social and economic injustice that feeds violence must be addressed.”

“A fair, even-handed peace process must be pursued.”

In light of these points, the wall constitutes a grave obstacle to peace and inhibits the work of transformational development in Palestinian communities. World Vision Jerusalem strongly supports advocacy efforts focused on ending the construction of the wall as well as on its dismantling. A just and secure peace can only be achieved through well-intentioned, good-faith negotiations, and real change which will bring about true security and national integrity for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

¹ <http://www.pengon.org/wall/fact-may-2003.pdf>

² http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/report1/ocha_wall1_page4.pdf

Back cover: Adolescent girls from Ras Atys wait at the gate to Habla village, which is open only three times a day. Their school is located on the other side of the wall erected between these two villages.
Photo: World Vision



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