

Kahn Yunis cemetry: bodies of 110 victims of Israeli attacks massgrave, 22 November 2023. Credit: Mohammed Talatene DPA via ZUMA Press

Palästina-News Nr. 32, December 2023

What you don't learn in Switzerland

The aim of this newsletter is to improve information about events in Palestine and Israel, with a focus - but not only - on the German-speaking part of Switzerland. For this purpose, articles from English-language online newspapers, online portals, publications, etc., are quoted in abbreviated form.

References provide a link to the original article and / or publication medium. The edited articles have been shortened and may not fully reflect the opinions of the authors. Martin Luzi Büechi (MLB)

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Moral failure by remaining silent

The shameless exploitation of the victims of the Hamas massacre of 7 October through a "fake news" war on social media, especially by Israeli propaganda with the help of European and North American media, is hard to bear. The use of dehumanising language in these media is one of the first signs that they may be justifying the genocide in Gaza, or not perceiving it as such.

Equally unacceptable is the silence of some in the pro-Palestinian community on the massacre, and in particular on the humiliation and violence perpetrated by Hamas against Jewish and Muslim girls and women, or the cheering on of these war crimes and crimes against humanity. While there is still no evidence of mass rape, and it is unclear how many people were killed by "friendly fire" in southern Israel, e.g. under the **Hannibal Directive**, there are enough images of sexual humiliation and degradation, and of murdered and abducted children and civilians. Women in particular were abandoned by the IDF: spotters who tried to warn were silenced. The spotters were young women, and young women are so painfully easy for men to ignore.

War crimes and crimes against humanity must be condemned without reservation and without contextualisation with the massive Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza (such as the **Dahiya Doctrine**) and the West Bank. This silence and delayed condemnation, e.g. by UN Women, was immediately exploited by Hasbara for propaganda purposes, and any criticism of the brutal actions of the Israeli army is labelled as anti-Semitic and prejudiced. Not helpful either is the Israeli refusal to cooperate with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which has reportedly requested access to Israel and the Palestinian territories to gather information on the Hamas attacks. Israel accuses the office of being biased against Israel.

This moral failure by remaining silent about the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Hamas makes it difficult for Israeli Palestinians in particular to take a stand and risk being arrested. As the well-known Palestinian rapper,***Tamer Nafar***, writes in an article in Haaretz: *"I have no problem expressing my sympathy to someone who has been hurt; the problem lies in the political expressions, because to accept this terrible pain you have to stand behind the Western leaders and the global media who embrace Israel emotionally and politically and sponsor its army. These are the same entities that ignore our pain and have always funded its eradication.* In an interview with CNN, ***Tamer Nafar*** then gives the only ***posssible answer*** to the provocative question about his opinion on Hamas. MLB

Palestinian Rapper Tamer Nafar: how to fix this mess

Haaretz

With No Shortage of Enemies, Only Palestinian-Israeli Friendships Can Fix This Mess; Tamer Nafar, December 5, 2023

I've been writing this article for a month. I first decided not to publish it because we, Palestinian citizens of Israel (as well as Jews who have not "sobered up"), are in danger. People have been arrested for online posts, for shares and likes. But the pain is too heavy to be carried alone.

Israeli police arrested actress Abd Elhadi over online post allegedly endorsing Hamas attack:



Maisa Abd Elhadi. Credit: Elad Debi

When I face Israeli or Western media, it always feels more like an interrogation than an inter-view. *"Do you condemn Hamas?"* I'm asked. There is no right answer to a wrong question. I condemn any violence against innocent people, period. All my life I've been fighting against the discrimination of living people, why should I start discriminating between dead ones?

I try to understand what message Israeli or Western media are trying to convey to Palestinians. Right now, in front of you, there is an entire generation of bleeding children in Gaza; what is your message to them, beyond telling them to *"condemn Hamas?"* or asking *"why did the preceding generation vote for Hamas?"* or "*you're being used as human shields."*

Ich habe einen Monat lang an diesem Artikel geschrieben. Zuerst habe ich beschlossen, ihn nicht zu veröffentlichen, weil wir, die palästinensischen Bürger und Bürgerinnen Israels (auch Juden, die noch nicht "aufgewacht" sind), in Gefahr sind. Menschen wurden wegen Online-Postings, wegen Shares und Likes verhaftet. Aber der Schmerz ist zu gross, um ihn allein zu tragen.

Wenn ich israelischen oder westlichen Medien gegenüberstehe, fühlt sich das immer eher wie ein Verhör als ein Interview an. *"Verurteilen Sie die Hamas?"* werde ich gefragt. Es gibt keine richtige Antwort auf eine falsche Frage. Ich verurteile jede Gewalt gegen unschuldige Menschen, Punkt. Mein ganzes Leben lang habe ich gegen die Diskriminierung von lebenden Menschen gekämpft, warum sollte ich jetzt auch noch Tote diskriminieren?

Ich versuche zu verstehen, welche Botschaft die israelischen oder westlichen Medien der palästinensischen Bevölkerung vermitteln wollen. In diesem Moment steht eine ganze Generation blutender Kinder in Gaza vor Ihnen. Was ist Ihre Botschaft an sie, abgesehen davon, dass Sie ihnen sagen, sie sollen *"die Hamas verurteilen",* oder sie fragen*, "warum hat die vorherige Generation für die Hamas gestimmt"* oder *"ihr werdet als menschliche Schutzschilde benutzt"?*

Schauen Sie einfach in die Augen eines Kindes in Gaza und beschreiben Sie ihm seinen Platz in der Welt. *"Wenn du Waffen benutzt, bist du ein Terrorist, und wir werden Boote, Flugzeuge und Panzer aus den USA nehmen und laut UNO legale und illegale Waffen einsetzen und die Armee bewaffnen, die Gaza auslöschen wird! Wenn ihr euch an den Gerichtshof in Den Haag wendet und ihn bittet, zu untersuchen, was wir getan haben, dann wisst, dass wir Verbündete haben, die ein Veto einlegen werden; wenn ihr euch entscheidet, gewaltlos Widerstand zu leisten und zum Boykott unserer Produkte aufruft, werden wir dafür sorgen, dass die Welt ein neues Gesetz verabschiedet, das zu eurer Verhaftung als Antisemiten führt!"*

"Wenn Sie mit uns kooperieren, wie es die Palästinensische Autonomiebehörde tut, werden wir trotzdem

Just look into the eyes of a child in Gaza and describe for him his place in the world. *“If you use weapons, you’re a terrorist, and we’ll take boats, planes and tanks from the U.S. and use legal and illegal weapons, according to the UN, and arm the army that will erase Gaza! If you turn to the court in The Hague and ask it to investigate what we have done, know that we have allies that will veto you; if you decide to resist in a non-violent manner and ask for the boycott of our products, we’ll see to it that the world passes a new law that will lead to your arrest as an antisemite!”*

“If you cooperate with us like the Palestinian Authority does, we will still expropriate your land and throw you in jail without any indictment. Your businesses and olive trees will be torched by settlers who are backed by the army and state; your journalists will be murdered in front of cameras. Let’s say it wasn’t us who fired the shots; after a year we’ll admit it was, and guess what? We won’t find the guilty party because we won’t look for one!”

Ihr Land enteignen und Sie ins Gefängnis werfen, ohne dass es zu einer Anklage kommt. Ihre Geschäfte und Olivenbäume werden von Siedlern, die von der Armee und dem Staat unterstützt werden, in Brand gesteckt; Ihre Journalisten werden vor laufenden Kameras ermordet. Nehmen wir an, wir waren es nicht, die geschossen haben; nach einem Jahr werden wir zugeben, dass wir es waren, und raten Sie mal? Wir werden den Schuldigen nicht finden, weil wir nicht nach ihm suchen werden!"

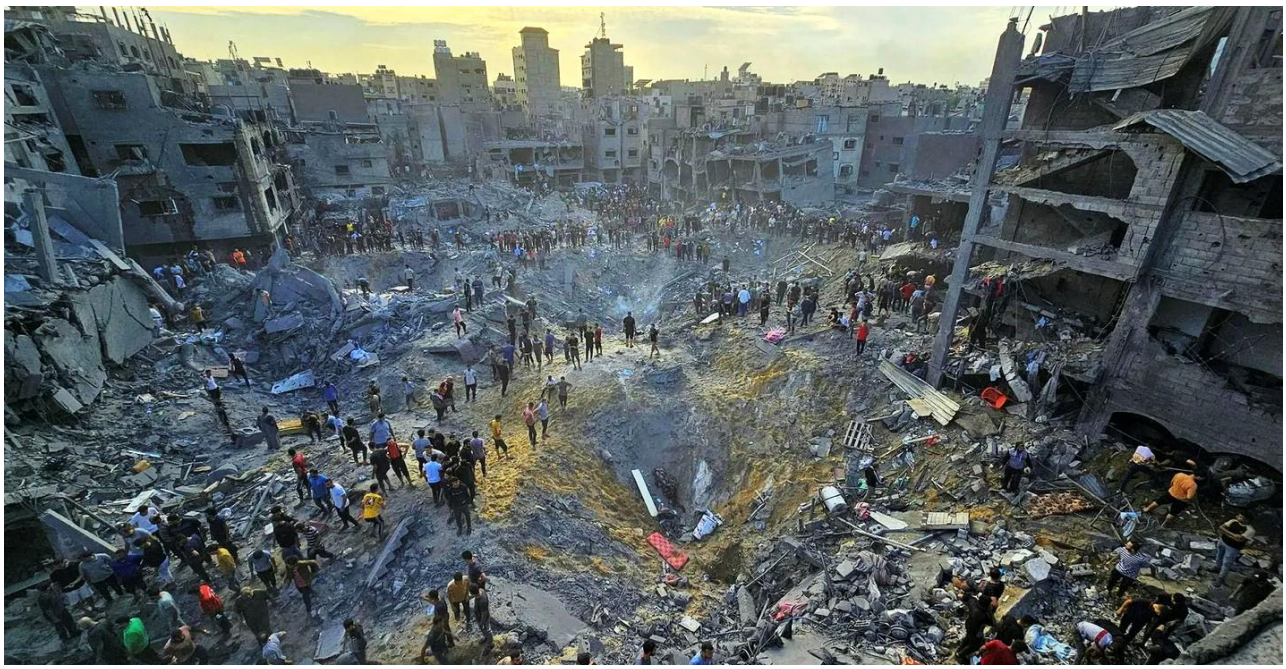


Jewish and Arab citizens protest in Tel Aviv. Credit: Tomer Appelbaum

Bombing Gaza into the “stone age”

Mondoweiss

Why has Israel overwhelmingly targeted Palestinian civilians in its attack on Gaza? Israeli leaders have told us repeatedly collective punishment is Israel's official policy, the current attack has just taken it to the next level. Jonathan Ofir, December 1, 2023



Gaza Palestinians search for casualties at the site of Israeli strikes on houses in Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. Credit STRINGER REUTERS

Yagil Levy, December 9, 2023 in Haaretz: ***The Israeli army has dropped the restraint in Gaza, and the data shows unprecedented killing. The IDF chief of staff recently boasted of the army's precise munitions and its ability to reduce harm to noncombatants. But the data shows that in the war on Hamas that principle has been abandoned.***

Israel's recent conduct in Gaza has remained consistent with the Dahiya doctrine but is also taking it to the next level. The Dahiya Doctrine was coined by current Minister Gadi Eisenkot when he was Chief of Northern Command in 2008. The military doctrine, named after the Dahiya quarter of Beirut that Israel targeted and leveled during the 2006 war, outlines "what will happen" to any enemy that dares attack Israel:



A child at a hospital following an Israeli strike in Deir al-Balah central Gaza 14 November Omar Ashtawy APA images

"What happened in the Dahiya quarter of Beirut in 2006 will happen in every village from which Israel is fired on," Eisenkot declared in Israeli newspaper Yediot Aharonot in March 2008. "We will apply disproportionate force on [the village] and cause great damage and destruc-tion there. From our standpoint, these are not civilian villages, they are military bases."

After Israel's 2008-9 Gaza onslaught, Operation *Cast Lead*, Israel's Foreign Minister at the time, Tzipi Livni, stated that *"our troops in the Gaza strip behaved like hooligans, which I demanded of them."* She also stated that Israel *"is a country that when you fire on its citizens it responds by going wild - and this is a good thing."*

Olmert, who presided over Cast Lead as PM, said: *"We've said that if there is rocket fire against the south of the country, there will be a severe and disproportionate Israeli response."* And, of course, Olmert's "master of the house" mantra was more widely echoed last year as the election slogan of the far-right Itamar Ben-Gvir, who is now the Minister of National Security in Netanyahu's government.

It would appear that the Dahiya Doctrine's idea of regarding civilians as military targets has come to its most explicit genocidal fruition. The

Israels jüngstes Verhalten im Gazastreifen steht im Einklang mit der Dahiya doctrine, allerdings auf eine nächst höhere Stufe gehoben. Die Dahiya-Doktrin wurde vom derzeitigen Minister Gadi Eisenkot geprägt, als er 2008 Chef des israelischen Nordkommandos war. Die Militärdoktrin, die nach dem Dahiya-Viertel in Beirut benannt ist, das Israel während des Krieges 2006 angriff und dem Erdboden gleichmacht hatte, beschreibt, was mit jedem Feind geschehen wird, der es wagt, Israel anzugreifen:

"Was 2006 im Dahiya-Viertel von Beirut geschah, wird in jedem Dorf geschehen, aus dem Israel beschossen wird", erklärte Eisenkot im März 2008 in der israelischen Zeitung Yediot Aharonot. "Wir werden unverhältnismässige Gewalt auf [das Dorf] anwenden und dort grossen Schaden und Zerstörung anrichten. Aus unserer Sicht handelt es sich nicht um zivile Dörfer, sondern um Militärbasen."

Nach dem israelischen Angriff auf den Gazastreifen im Jahre 2008 und 2009, mit der Operation "*Gegossenes Blei (cast lead)"*, erklärte die damalige israelische Aussenministerin Tzipi Livni, dass sich "*unsere Truppen im Gazastreifen wie Hooligans verhalten haben, was ich von ihnen verlangt habe".* Sie erklärte auch, dass Israel *"ein Land ist, das, wenn man auf seine Bürger und Bürgerinnen schisst, mit einem Ausraster reagiert - und das ist auch gut so."*

Olmert, der als Premierminister den Vorsitz über *«Gegossenes Blei»* innehatte, sagte: *"Wir haben gesagt, dass, wenn der Süden des Landes mit Raketen beschossen wird, es eine strenge und unverhältnismässige israelische Antwort geben wird."* Und natürlich wurde Olmerts Mantra "Herr im Haus" im vergangenen Jahr als Wahlslogan des rechtsextremen Itamar Ben-Gvir, weiter verbreitet, der jetzt Minister für nationale Sicherheit in Netanjahus Regierung ist.



Palestinians check the damages after an Israeli strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on December 3, 2023.Credit: SAID KHATIB – AFP

Es hat den Anschein, dass die Idee der Dahiya-Doktrin, Zivilisten als militärische Ziele zu betrachten, zu ihrer eindeutigsten und völkermörderischen Verwirklichung gekommen ist. Die Dahiya-Doktrin ist keine neue Erfin-

Dahiya Doctrine is not a recent invention from the 2006 Lebanon War, it evolved from Israeli settler-colonial dehumanization of Palestinians. The doctrine formularized the indiscriminate and disproportionate attack on a civilian population and civilian institutions such as hospitals, and it became a standard. What we see is now the next stage of this murderous policy in practice.

dung aus dem Libanonkrieg von 2006 - sie hat sich aus der israelischen siedlerkolonialen Entmenschlichung der Palästinenser und Palästinenserinnen entwickelt. Die Doktrin formulierte den wahllosen und unverhältnismässigen Angriff auf die Zivilbevölkerung und zivile Einrichtungen wie Krankenhäuser und wurde zur Norm. Was wir jetzt sehen, ist die nächste Stufe dieser mörderischen Politik in der Praxis.

Hilltop Youth: the terrorist arm of the Israeli government

Haaretz, The Guardian and the **BBC**

Since the start of the war in Gaza, Israel has intensified its attacks on Palestinian pastoral communities in an attempt to drive them from their homes and land in the southern Hebron Hills. The communities face almost daily threats from violent settlers, backed by the government, military and police, until they leave their land. Armed settlers appear day and night, entering residents' homes, assaulting them and destroying their belongings. The settlers also steal mobile phones to prevent documentation of their violence. They destroy solar panels and water tanks, steal livestock and in some communities, such as Khirbet Susiya, have even threatened to kill residents if they do not leave their land as soon as possible.

More than 260 Palestinians were killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank, according to a Palestinian government tally, since Hamas's attack on October 7 sparked a new war with Israel. But no hope of justice: A study of settler violence cases between 2005 and 2021 showed 92 percent were dismissed by the Israeli authorities. MLB

Haaretz: ***Cigarette Burns, Beatings, Attempted Sexual Assault: Settlers and Soldiers Abused Palestinians*****:** Hagar Shezaf, October 21, 2023



A week after being assaulted in Wadi as-Seeq, Palestinians and Israeli activists struggle to recover – and accuse an army unit of 'hilltop youth' and settlers. The army has removed the commanding officer of the unit and opened an investigation.

From left: Majd, Mohammad Khaled and Abu Hassan, cuffed and blind-folded, Wadi as-Seeq, October 2023. The image was disseminated on social media. Credit: Courtesy

The abuse lasted almost a whole day. Soldiers and settlers detained and handcuffed three Palestinians from the West Bank village Wadi as-Seeq, and for hours, according to the Palestinians, they were severely beaten, stripped to their underwear, and photographed handcuffed, in their underwear. Their captors urinated on two of them and extinguished burning cigarettes on

Die Misshandlungen dauerten fast einen ganzen Tag. Soldaten und Siedler nahmen drei Palästinenser aus dem Dorf Wadi as-Seeq im Westjordanland fest und legten ihnen Handschellen an. Nach Angaben der Palästinenser wurden sie stundenlang schwer geschlagen, bis auf die Unterwäsche entkleidet und in Handschellen gefesselt in ihrer Unterwäsche fotografiert. Ihre Entführer urinierten auf zwei von ihnen und drückten brennende Zigaretten auf ihnen aus. Es wurde so-

them. There was even an attempt to penetrate one of them with an object.

At the same time, soldiers and settlers arrested leftist Israeli activists who were present, including a minor, cuffed them, threatened to kill them, and detained them for hours. Some of the activists were beaten. The activists say that in addition to the presence of people in uniform, at some point a young settler in civilian clothes was put in charge of guarding them.

The Israelis were released after three hours. The Palestinians were only released in the evening by Civil Administration officers, and were taken to a hospital in Ramallah. Both groups were extensively robbed, including cash and a car.

gar versucht, einen von ihnen mit einem Gegenstand zu penetrieren.

Zur gleichen Zeit nahmen Soldaten und Siedler anwesende linke israelische Aktivisten, darunter einen Minderjährigen, fest, legten ihnen Handschellen an, drohten, sie zu töten, und hielten sie stundenlang fest. Einige der Aktivisten wurden verprügelt. Die Aktivisten sagen, dass zusätzlich zur Anwesenheit von Uniformierten irgendwann ein junger Siedler in Zivil mit der Bewachung beauftragt wurde.

Die Israelis wurden nach drei Stunden freigelassen. Die Palästinenser wurden erst am Abend von Beamten der Zivilverwaltung befreit und in ein Krankenhaus in Ramallah gebracht. Beide Gruppen wurden in großem Umfang ausgeraubt, darunter Bargeld und ein Auto.

The Guardian: *West Bank settler violence – a photo essay*



A recent Human Rights Watch report says settler violence in the occupied West Bank has doubled since the 7 October attacks. Photographer *David Lombeida* stayed with Palestinian families facing threats and abuse from settlers encroaching on their land. December 7, 2023

A house burned by settlers in the West Bank town of Turmus Ayya, last week. Credit Moti Milrod

Violence in the occupied West Bank was already at a more than 15-year high in 2023, with 200 Palestinians and 26 Israelis killed, but since Hamas unleashed the deadliest day in Israel's history on 7 October it has surged in parallel with the war in Gaza.

Since that date 260 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank, including in raids by the Israeli military against suspected militants, and by extremist settlers – whose daily attacks against Palestinians have more than doubled in the last two months, UN data shows. The international community has issued strong statements to the Israeli government that it must protect Palestinians from attacks by extremist settlers

For these photographs, I stayed with Palestinians families facing threats and abuse from settlers encroaching on their land and met Israeli activists attempting to help Palestinian families undergoing these rising threats. The following images show this rise

Die Gewalt im besetzten Westjordanland hatte bereits im Jahr 2023 mit 200 getöteten Palästinensern und 26 Israelis einen 15-Jahres-Höchststand erreicht, doch seit die Hamas am 7. Oktober den tödlichsten Tag in der Geschichte Israels auslöste, hat sie parallel zum Krieg im Gazastreifen stark zugenommen.

Seit diesem Tag wurden über 260 Palästinenser im Westjordanland getötet, unter anderem bei Razzien des israelischen Militärs gegen mutmassliche Kämpfer und durch extremistische Siedler, deren tägliche Angriffe auf Palästinenser sich in den letzten zwei Monaten mehr als verdoppelt haben, wie aus UN-Daten hervorgeht. Die internationale Gemeinschaft hat die israelische Regierung nachdrücklich darauf hingewiesen, dass sie die palästinensische Bevölkerung vor Angriffen extremistischer Siedler schützen muss

Für diese Fotos habe ich mich bei palästinensischen Familien aufgehalten, die von Siedlern, die in ihr Land eindringen, bedroht und misshandelt werden, und ich habe israelische Aktivisten getroffen, die versuchen, palästinensischen Familien zu helfen, die diesen zunehmenden Bedrohungen ausgesetzt sind. Die fol-

of violence since 7 October and life for Palestinians in the West Bank amid expanding settlements.

genden Bilder zeigen den Anstieg der Gewalt seit dem 7. Oktober und das Leben der Palästinenser im Westjordanland inmitten expandierender Siedlungen.

BBC: *West Bank settler violence – a Video*

Allies of Israel have condemned a sharp rise in attacks by armed Jewish settlers on Palestinian civilians in the West Bank. Religious jews in illegal settlements on territory that is occupied by Israel claim the land was given to them by God. The war in Gaza has led to an intensification of violence in the West Bank, with the heavily-armed settlers attacking Palestinian communities. Palestinians say the settlers have been armed by Israel and are protected by Israeli soldiers. The settler's leaders claim they are protecting themselves. BBC News reporting by Jeremy Bowen, December 4, 2023

The Face of White Female Jewish Supremacy: Daniella Weiss

The New Yorker; The Guardian; Middle East Eye

The New Yorker: A leader of the settlement movement on expanding into Gaza, and her vision for the Jewish state. Interview by Isaac Chotiner; November 11, 2023

The Guardian: 62, mayor of the Jewish settlement of Kedumim, near Nablus, in the West Bank; June 5, 2007

Middle East Eye Video: Settler leader *Daniella Weiss* calls for burning Palestinian towns: March 03, 2023

The Guardian

Weiss believes that the land of Israel should be the Biblical "Promised Land", stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates, which today would take in a large chunk of Egypt, Israel and the occupied territories, the whole of Jordan, and a broad slice of western Iraq. Weiss does not talk of an "occupation", but uses the word *"liberation"* for the territory captured by Israel in the six-day war. She talks not of *"settlements"* but "*communities,"* not of "*building anew"* but of *"resettling*" on the land. To her the Jews have a historic right to the land stretching back thousands of years, while the Palestinians are a "*new formation."*

The New Yorker

Q: How would you describe the settler movement?

A: I see the settler movement today as a direct continuation of the settler movement of a hundred and twenty, thirty, forty years ago. I see it as a chapter in the history of Zionism, and we are in one of those chapters of modern Zionism. Settlement is the way to return to Zion.

Q: You said, *"Settlement is the way to return to Zion"?*



Daniella Weiss, 2019. Credit: Eliran Aharon

The Guardian

Weiss ist der Ansicht, dass das Land Israel das biblische "*Gelobte Land"* sein sollte, das sich vom Nil bis zum Euphrat erstreckt, was heute einen grossen Teil Ägyptens, Israels und der besetzten Gebiete, ganz Jordanien und einen grossen Teil des westlichen Irak umfassen würde. Weiss spricht nicht von *"Besatzung",* sondern verwendet das Wort *"Befreiung"* für die von Israel im Sechstagekrieg eroberten Gebiete. Sie spricht nicht von *"Siedlungen",* sondern von *"Gemeinden",* nicht von *"Wiederaufbau",* sondern von *"Wiederbesiedlung"* des Landes. Für sie haben die Juden ein historisches Recht auf das Land,

A: Yes. It's the end of the dispersion and the beginning of the revival of the Jewish nation in this homeland.

Q: What are the borders of that Jewish nation?
A: The borders of the homeland of the Jews are the Euphrates in the east and the Nile in the southwest.

Q: We saw some horrible images on October 7th of what happened to Israeli children, and now we see some horrible images in Gaza of what is happening to Palestinian children. When you see Palestinian children dying, what's your emotional reaction as a human being?

A: I go by a very basic human law of nature. My children are prior to the children of the enemy, period. They are first. My children are first.

Q: We are talking about children. I don't know if the law of nature is what we need to be looking at here.



Palestinian medics prepare premature babies, evacuated from Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital, for transfer from a hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip to Egypt on Nov. 20, 2023. Photo: Said Khatib/AFP via Getty Images

A: Yeah. I say my children are first.

das Tausende von Jahren zurückreicht, während die Palästinenser eine *"neue Formation"* sind.

Der New Yorker

F: Wie würden Sie die Siedlerbewegung beschreiben?

A: Ich sehe die heutige Siedlerbewegung als eine direkte Fortsetzung der Siedlerbewegung von vor hundertzwanzig, dreissig, vierzig Jahren. Ich sehe sie als ein Kapitel in der Geschichte des Zionismus, und wir befinden uns in einem dieser Kapitel des modernen Zionismus. Die Besiedlung ist der Weg, um nach Zion zurückzukehren.

F: Sie sagten: *"Die Besiedlung ist der Weg zurück nach Zion"?*

A: Ja. Es ist das Ende der Zerstreuung und der Beginn der Wiederbelebung der jüdischen Nation in diesem Heimatland.

F: Was sind die Grenzen dieser jüdischen Nation?

A: Die Grenzen des Heimatlandes der Juden sind der Euphrat im Osten und der Nil im Südwesten.

F: Wir haben am 7. Oktober schreckliche Bilder von israelischen Kindern gesehen, und jetzt sehen wir in Gaza schreckliche Bilder von palästinensischen Kindern. Wenn Sie palästinensische Kinder sterben sehen, wie reagieren Sie als Mensch?

A: Ich halte mich an ein sehr grundlegendes menschliches Naturgesetz. Meine Kinder haben Vorrang vor den Kindern des Feindes, Punkt. Sie stehen an erster Stelle. Meine Kinder stehen an erster Stelle.

F: Wir sprechen hier von Kindern. Ich weiss nicht, ob das Naturgesetz das ist, was wir hier betrachten müssen.

A: Ja. Ich sage, meine Kinder stehen an erster Stelle.

Palestine talk with Hanna Tams: dance as a form of resistance

I first met Hanna Tams at a dance event at the Tojo in the Reitschule in Bern. He was performing with other Palestinians in a performance called *Last Things Remaining,* by the Swiss choreographer Mirjam Barakar. Mirjam tells the story of how Western and Middle Eastern perspectives meet and merge into a new form of artistic language. Hanna himself is the well-known artistic director, choreographer and founder of Douban Professional Dance Company from Beit Hanina, East-Jerusalem. Hanna believes that dance is a powerful way to express one's identity and find healing, a journey he had experienced first in his own life. MLB



Tojo Theater, Reitschule Bern: ***last things remaining; 18. November 2023***

Hanna Tams was born in 1994 into a well-known "historic" Palestinian Christian family in the heart of the Old City of East Jerusalem. He has two siblings, Eithar and Lour. Both his parents were in the PLO. About his grandfather he said: *"He was assassinated in 1974 on his way to deliver medicine to a pharmacy in Ramallah. The bullet "hit" the whole family and broke them emotionally, leaving the mother with 7 children. She was pregnant with another but had a miscarriage due to the grief and fear that affected the whole family."* But that was not enough. The Israeli occupiers continued to try to break the morale of the family members by taking away their most valuable possession: their house in the Old City of Jerusalem where more than 14 Palestinian Muslim and Christian families lived under one roof.

Access to the house has been made difficult by the occupier through various forms of harassment, like setting up of a checkpoint in the building's playground and anyone entering the house has to undergo a full body search. Also the intercom system in all the flats has been switched off so that no visitors can enter the house without prior notification. For Hanna's grandmother, who is 70 years old, life in her flat, alone and without the possibility of receiving spontaneous guests and visitors, has become very difficult.

But he had his own activities, and by the age of 10 he was an excellent swimmer. When he won first place ("Best Swimmer of Palestine") in the East Jerusalem YMCA competition, he joined the West Jerusalem International YMCA. But in order to compete internationally in swimming, he would have had to obtain Israeli citizenship. He and his family refused.

Hanna was fascinated by dance as a child. *"I used to watch my sister take ballet classes, which she did not like as much as I did. She preferred hip-hop classes."* At first Hanna's parents didn't think dancing was for a boy, but eventually they enrolled him in dabkeh classes. But he was not accepted into the dance class because. *"I was considered 'too feminine',"* he said.



Hanna in der Altstadt Bern, 19. November 2023; Phot: MLB

At 13 he took up ballet as well as modern dance and dabkeh. Because his parents wanted him to study something "practical" to earn money, he went to study biology and nutrition at Bir Zeit University, but then switch to business and marketing and graduated with honors in 2017. After several artistic stops in San Paolo, Brazil, Austin USA, Barcelona and London he obtained his Master of Arts in Dance from the Liverpool John Moores University.



Tojo Theater Reitschule Bern, November 18, 2023. Phot MLB

It was hard work to get his Master Hanna recalls: *"I rehearsed for 10 hours or so almost every day and didn't have time for anything else"*

In 2012, at 17 only, he founded Douban Professional Dance in East Jerusalem with his alma mater, the Collège des Frères in Beit Hanina, as a key partner. A year later, the Douban dance troupe had grown to include more than 40 young dancers aged between 14 and 22, and performed for the first time in various Palestinian cities. The show was a success, but some audiences found it shocking. Most of the criticism was about the *skirts worn by the young dancers. Laughing, he said: "even though they were wearing tights under their skirts!"* It is the first and almost the only contemporary dance company in East Jerusalem. As an integral part of the social, cultural and artistic mosaic of Jerusalem, the group seeks to address social issues by communicating positive messages through the production of integrated theatrical dance performances.

In the Old City of Jerusalem, many families struggle with alienation; others are burdened by the suffocating conditions and turn to drugs. They are in direct confrontation with Israeli police, soldiers and Jewish settlers. "They have no space to release their energy because they are confined in overcrowded places," says Hanna, *"There is a visible sense of despair and loss among young Palestinians in Jerusalem"*. He choreographed dance performances and taught dabkeh to children, mostly in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. While working with Jerusalem children, Hanna noticed a gap in the educational curriculum in East Jerusalem, as the Israeli government began to manipulate the Palestinian curriculum, resulting in the erosion of community identity. In order to combat this erosion of Palestinian identity, Hanna began researching Palestinian folklore and was able to find a new method that allowed him to uncover and develop a history and folklore curriculum that enhanced the understanding of Palestinian identity and history through dance

For Hanna Art is another peaceful form of resisting the occupation: *"Dance is known to boost one's self-confidence,"* Tams explains. *"It increases strength, flexibility, balance, and rhythm, yet perhaps more important, it helps individuals discover and express their identity. In this respect, dance has the capacity to bring joy and the potential to heal".* But dance is also an important tool to connect Palestinian with a positive connotation with the whole world. But even then, Palestinians don't exist as a country. In 2017, at age 22, Hanna received the ***Emerging Young Leader Award*** bestowed by the US Department of State. This prestigious award is granted to 10 young leaders aged 18 to 24 from around the globe. Then there was a "problem" what country would he list as his own? Like most Palestinians in Jerusalem, he has no citizenship, only permanent residency. Eventually, he was listed under "East Jerusalem," an entity without a flag.

Besides the political constraints, there are also social, mental, emotional, and physical types of abuse and intimidation that the youth, including young women and girls, face. All of this makes it difficult for them to feel comfortable and confident in their bodies. As a dancer Hanna has instructed hundreds of children between the ages of 12 and 18 over the past 10 years in Jerusalem Most of the kids struggle to make sense of their identity under the Israeli occupation, which considers them inferior beings while imposing itself on their education and livelihood. Even though he could have a career as a dancer elsewhere, he talks about the "scent" of Jerusalem, which he yearns for when he travels. *"I would feel irrelevant abroad. I cannot live outside of Jerusalem."*



Tojo Theater Reitschule Bern, November 18, 2023. Photo MLB

World Music for Change: a message for 2024

Freddom and Justice, Playing for change: **www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIrWYUHAMH8**

War/No More Trouble: Playing for Change: **www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgWFxFg7-GU**

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