

Village Visit: Iraq Burin

2011-2012

During the 2nd Intifada, the hilltop village of Iraq Burin close to Nablus was cut off by road for five years from 2000 to 2005. Villagers young and old made their way across the rocky paths down in the valley across a steep hill to Nablus, a ten minute ride turned into a two hour trek. For the sick, it was a donkey ride to the hospital and if you were even unluckier, like one woman who gave birth to her first child at the checkpoint under the heartless eyes of strangers, you were at the mercy of the heartless Israeli soldiers

After the steep climb to the topmost point of the village nothing can prepare you for the breathtaking view across the valley and beyond the folding hills towards Tel Aviv and the sea. As we stood on this point called Al Hefa, the knifepoint in Arabic, for its sheer drop down to the road and the lush green valley beyond, the 85 year old dowager of the village tends her pomegranate and olive trees every day, 'what else can I do, it's my land!'

On the knife edge in every way the village of Iraq Burin is a short walk through the valley from Burin itself. Iraq means a small mountain. Newer houses ribbon down the other side of the village from the abandoned ruins teetering on the edge of Al Hefa, and in the distance on the hills the watchtowers of the IOF rise above the settlement of Bracha.



Bracha from which increasing incursions of men with weapons prevents the farmers from going onto their land. This land has been designated as agricultural land by the Palestinian authorities. However, it is cut off from the village by the watchful eyes of the army and the settlers who are established in the woods alongside. Faraj, our guide believes this area is undoubtedly earmarked for settlement development. A well was destroyed by settlers last year; it is now guarded by the villagers, especially the youth, who number about 40% of the village, many of whom work in Nablus.

Last year a solitary farmer tending his crops was shot in the leg by a settler and managed to clamber onto his donkey and reach the safety of the village, past the two houses now earmarked for demolition, one of which is unfinished, the other inhabited by Palestinians. During a 2010 demonstration, two village teenagers walked around the corner towards these houses; one was shot clean through the forehead and as his friend bent down to pick him up, he too was shot, clean through the heart. The martyrs graves still grip the Palestinian flag, their faces adorn every wall and home of the village.



Photo: Iraq Burin.



Photo: Illegal colony Bracha.



Photo: Graves of the young martyrs.

Faraj, local resident and journalist, is hoping for better things; his grandfather came to the village from Haifa in 1948, driven out with his entire family to walk to Iraq Burin; this is where Faraj was born and this is where he has known only the occupation. As he stands on Al Hefa and surveys the land he calls home he wants change. Perhaps the agreement between Hamas and Fatah will move things on to a two state solution. And the settlements? Well, they may have to go, it's the only way for it to work.'

Faraj sits on the large flat stones at Al Hefa, stones worn smooth as marble by generations of men coming after work to smoke their hookah and watch the setting sun, and talk, as they have done for centuries, and still do. The checkpoints may come and go but the valley below is theirs, it is in their hearts. The future rests with the young children stumbling among the debris of a house under construction; its owner used to own the oldest house on Al Hefa. 'Oh, why did you move from that lovely view?' Well, I can now see the beautiful view of the entire village from below' he laughs. 'And. I am making a new garden below the house, it is going to be called The Rachel Corrie Garden. You know, the American who was killed by those animals.'