

Kifl Hares

June 17, 2012

A few days ago, on Thursday June 14, the IWPS team received a request for our presence overnight in the village of Kifl Haris in Salfit. The military shuts down the village twenty-six (somewhat sporadic) nights a year at 10pm, forcing every person into their homes to make way for Israeli Settlers who come to pray and make their presence known at Joshua's tomb, which is located in the centre of the village.

The Colonizers/Settlers believe Joshua is a figure who conquered the ancient Cannonites and brought the Jews from thousands of years ago into this land. These gatherings supposedly occur for pious reasons, yet often result in thousands of Settlers wreaking havoc in the village, through means of vandalism, trash, defecation, and obnoxious noise sent echoing through the quiet, small village into the wee hours of the morning. Palestinians watch silently from their darkened homes, unable to sleep, watching as their town is taken over.



Photo: The mob.

Our presence was requested so that we could not only take pictures and document this frequent display of violence and colonization, but to hopefully keep the vandalism to a minimum, with our international outsider status.



Photo: Settlers break the branch of a fig tree and throw it in the street.



Photo: Praying at the tomb with his machine gun.

Our evening began with us quietly leaving our Palestinian host's home, where we had laughed and ate much, and making our way to the centre of the square. We joined the over half-dozen military trucks and security vans while getting a sense for things. We made sure the soldiers understood our persona as innocent Christian pilgrims who were there at Joshua's tomb to pray, having heard about the celebration in Jerusalem.

One soldier escorted us to the tomb to pray before the settlers began their evening and then invited us to get him if any soldiers caused us problems. After spending some time huddled around a prayer book of one of our teammates, while soldiers popped their heads in and out of the underground concrete tomb, our persona was secured. We made our way to a patch of ground in the centre/edge of the square, in clear view of the night's activity, as dozens of settlers began to arrive and set up tables for food, mingle about the town, and sometimes pray.

One of our teammates, who had observed such an event before, noticed a significant difference on this night from her last time seeing it; there was a major lack of religiosity in the majority of settlers' behaviour, which is supposedly why they take over the village.

What became apparent (and was even confirmed by one of the more orthodox Settlers) was that there was a lack of spiritual fervor among the young people, which comprised most of the numbers of the mobs. A need to pray at Joshua's tomb was trumped by the lure of a chance to be obnoxious and make their colonizing presence known to the Palestinians who were forced to silently watch and/or and listen from their darkened windows.

Over the course of a few hours, the mingling about consisted of a number of Settler boys barking at us; asking where we are from, condemning us for our Christian beliefs, and making it clear that we were not welcome there – that we were inferior in their eyes. We witnessed young boys attempting to size up the observing and disenchanted soldiers. They tried tampering with Palestinian property (which was thankfully under control of the soldiers because the numbers on this particular night were significantly less than other times), and aggressively ripped fig branches off Palestinian trees and threw them on the ground.

In waves, the crowds mobbed a road trying to reach Jonah's tomb off to the side of Joshua's, pushing against the line of soldiers blocking them. The boisterous yelling, pushing mob was clearly not seeking somber time in prayer, but loud and obnoxious trouble making. As the evening played out, our presence as internationals with further intentions than prayers and innocent piety, was made more clear as we took pictures and stood more obviously and knowingly within the action.

At one point a soldier right in front of us began to pick up garbage, and as we followed suit, a gang of young male Settlers made it loudly clear that they thought we should leave the trash on the ground for the Palestinians, cursing Palestine and the town that we were in. It was difficult to stand there and not be able to fully argue back the way that I would have without such circumstances surrounding us. Somewhat refreshingly, one soldier who was clearly disgusted by the Settlers, told us to "Never listen to what they say, ever."



Photo: Large military Vehicles invade the narrow street of the village.

At about 2:30/3am we began to make our way out of the village, down the only road we could walk on, lined with soldiers. At the base of the village, we curved in the opposite direction of the settlers, past the soldiers, and along a smaller road within the olive groves, headed for Haris. We walked home for two hours through to morning, with Army trucks whizzing past us along the main road.

The Settlers take-over and presence in Kifl Haris proved to be a demonstration of their self-proclaimed power and ideological arrogance. Both those who came to pray at the tomb of Joshua (the figure they believe brought the Jews from the Torah into this land) and those who came to declare their status as settlers, did so through colonial acts of imposing on, controlling, and taking over a Palestinian village. God wonders what they were praying for.