

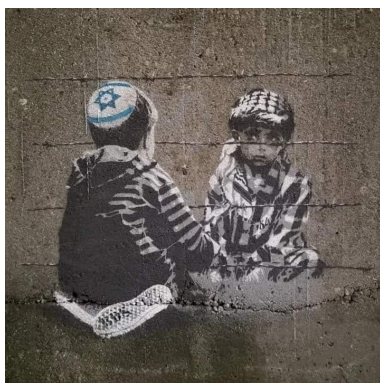
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Eileen Fleming

# Palestine. The Walls Of Berlin And Bil'in

- Aujourd'hui - Israël/Palestine ou l'inverse -



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[Bil'in, West Bank] Twenty years ago on Nov. 9, the Berlin Wall came crashing down due to the build up of pressures exerted by the Solidarity movement demanding freedom at the time of the demise of Communism. The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolically portrayed the end of the Cold War and proved that walls cannot keep people apart. The Berlin Wall was twenty-seven miles of rolls of barbed wire augmented with a high concrete barrier and watchtowers, floodlights, and a no man's land. A few scaled over, some tunneled below and 136 East Germans died trying to cross it.

<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH266/188BilinSoldiersline1W-1-6f287.jpg>

A wall twice as high and five times as long as the one that fell in Berlin, is close to completion in the West Bank. One of the chants I learned during one of my four visits to the agricultural village of Bilin, was "The wall will fall in Bilin ; the wall will fall like in Berlin".

In Bilin, the Green Line is five miles from the separation barrier and for the last five years every Friday afternoon after prayers at the mosque, Palestinians and growing numbers of Israelis and Internationals have been waging a nonviolent solidarity march in resistance to the route of the construction of Israel's Wall-which in Bilin is twenty feet high of wire fencing that denies the farmers access to their olive groves.

For the last five years of Friday's, locals, internationals and Israelis of conscience endure tear gas, rubber bullets, sound bombs and other means of 'crowd dispersal' inflicted upon them by Israeli forces in ever escalating force.

[http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L397xH273/199BilinShootingTeargas\\_W-59b51.jpg](http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L397xH273/199BilinShootingTeargas_W-59b51.jpg)

During my initial visit in 2006, the Israeli forces targeted only the activists who ran down the hill along side of the fence, but in June 2009, just as the front of the crowd neared the area of descent, another gate and more barbed wire had been erected in front of it and the Israeli forces assaulted us immediately with tear gas as we approached.

On Nov. 4, 2009, Richard Boudreaux, correspondent for the LA Times, reported from Bilin :

"Every Friday Mohammed Khatib's forces assemble for battle with the Israeli army and gather their weapons : a bullhorn, banners " and a fierce belief that peaceful protest can bring about a Palestinian state.

"His message is a hard sell : Khatib, 35, is a modern-day Gandhi...And the risks of his activism are enormous...The Israeli army has targeted him. He was arrested, severely beaten and threatened with death during a series of midnight raids on the village this summer. He was freed on condition that he report to an Israeli police station each Friday at the hour of the weekly protest." [1]

[http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L369xH324/194BilinTearGas5\\_W-24b50.jpg](http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L369xH324/194BilinTearGas5_W-24b50.jpg)

Bilin's Israeli attorney, Michael Sfard, credits Khatib with the inspired idea to erect under cover of dark a clandestine 10X10 brick edifice just yards from where 700 upscale Jewish only apartments were being built on Palestinian land and which I photographed in January 2006 :

I learned then from Iyad Bornat, Head of the Popular Committee, "A few weeks ago we brought in a caravan [house trailer] on our land close to where the settler's apartments are being built. While we were inside the Israeli Forces sawed the door open and pulled us out and roughed us up. So, we brought in another caravan and during the night we built a concrete brick building within four hours to resist the wall and occupation. People come and go ; they are from all over the world. They support our nonviolently resisting the wall that is clearly stealing our land. This wall and the Israeli forces are not allowing us onto our land to care for our olive trees. They confiscated our land and impose

military law upon us and claim we are trespassing on our legally owned land."

Abdullah, the Coordinator of Against The Wall in Billin informed me that as of January 2006, 1,600 residents of Billin who legally own 4,000 dunums of property had 2,003 dunums of it confiscated by Israel to build the Jewish only apartments upon which Palestinians are not even allowed to approach.

During my visit I spoke with a few of the two dozen Israelis and Internationals who were maintaining a presence for days or weeks at a stretch, such as a twenty year old from Indiana who was studying Middle East Foreign Policy in Jerusalem and had spent her weekends at the outpost in Bilin since it was constructed. A twenty year old from New York told me, "We are fighting an important struggle. If America would only learn the truth about what is happening here, they would stop their blind support of the Israeli government that denies people basic human rights."

An Israeli activist said, "This cause is very important to me because this is the only way to struggle. This is our only chance to bring back the popular Intifada : a chance for women and children to nonviolently resist the wall and occupation."

A member of the Popular Committee in Bilin who taught Social Work and Psychology at El Quds Open University, told me that he was shot and jailed for two weeks because of his nonviolent resistant activities, "The Judge said he would investigate the soldier who shot me, but the soldier lied and denied he shot and the matter was quickly forgotten by the Israelis.

"Three weeks ago we could not come in here, but when the court admitted the settlement buildings were illegal we put the caravan on the property and when the IDF destroyed that, we built this room. Ever since, more and more Israelis, Lawyers, Sheiks, women and children come and stand with us in solidarity for human rights. Rachel Corrie's family has been here too."

The outpost was demolished long ago and the village has now worked their case through Municipal to the Israeli Supreme Court and both ordered Israel to stop the building, to move the fence and restore about half of the 575 acres of olive groves back to the Bilin's farmers ; but construction has not ceased.

On November 6, 2009, Iyad Burnat, wrote :

Bil'in Remembers Berlin

On the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, two hundred internationals traveled from the US, UK, Ireland, Italy, Spain and Belgium to join the weekly peaceful demonstration in Bil'in.

Each Friday, Palestinians from the village of Bil'in are joined by hundreds of internationals and Israelis protesting the apartheid wall which annexes Palestinian land.

Iyad Bornat, said "the twelve metre polystyrene wall", which was made and carried by the residents of Bil'in, "was carried from the mosque in the centre of the village and placed on the other side of the fence, with the hope that the Israeli soldiers would remove it."

As demonstrators chanted 'We want peace, without occupation, without settlements, without the wall', four soldiers entered the no mans land between the double fence and dismantled the polystyrene wall which displayed the

message "Berlin 1989, Palestine ?".

Victorious cheers from protestors were met by a bombardment of tear gas and sound bombs fired by Israeli soldiers from a military vehicle.

Local boys known as 'shabab' got close to the fence and flying the Palestinian flag were able to remove an equal amount of fence with a set of bolt cutters.

A choir of twelve traveled from Belgium to act in support of the Palestinians in this region. Undeterred by the tear gas and holding an EU flag their songs echoed through the olive tree landscape...'Tear down the wall', 'We want peace', 'Ich bin Bil'iner' were amongst the many slogans and chants...Thank you for your continued support, Iyad Burnat, Head of the Popular Committee in Bilin and a co-founder of Friends of Freedom and Justice in Bilin  
[www.bilin-ffj.org](http://www.bilin-ffj.org)

"Just as a simple man named Gandhi led the successful non-violent struggle in India and simple people such as Rosa Parks and Nelson Mandela led the struggle for civil rights in the United States, simple people here in Bil'in are leading a non-violent struggle that will bring them their freedom. The South Africa experience proves that injustice can be dismantled." - Archbishop Desmond Tutu, after visiting Bil'in, August, 2009.

"The wall will fall in Bilin ; the wall will fall like in Berlin."

Eileen Fleming,  
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*Post-scriptum :*

*Photos Gary Fields.*