

## The Al-Haq School: re-learning the “Nakba” experiencing the forms of the occupation

Almost one year after the incursion of the Israeli forces in the *Al-Haq*'s offices of Ramallah, the ninth edition of the Palestinian NGO's “*Applied International Law Summer School*” in the West Bank has concluded.

Never, since its designation by Israel as a terrorist organization- a charge refused by many European countries such as Italy for insufficient proof- in the October 2021, *Al-Haq* has missed its annual appointment started in 2015. Every summer, in June, dozens of students from all over the world, human rights activists and people involved in sustaining in different forms the Palestinian cause have the opportunity of experiencing on the field the important work conducted by this and by the other NGOs that they meet during the program.

A scrupulous work, made of both documentation and advocacy, which helps the reconnection of the many fragmented experiences of resistance among the Palestinian people and that digs deep into the cracks of a system reproducing, since the 1948, a “continuous”, structural Nakba.

Go up-cracks, until the core of the break: to understand the very sense of *Al-Haq*'s work, and its environment, we want to retrace the most relevant steps of this years' Summer School program.



*Farmers of the Bedouin community in the Jordan Valley area where it was built the Mishor Adumim quarry. Ph. Collective Zenobia*

### Exploiting nature and life: the Jordan Valley

Anyone crossing this sun-burned wide extension of land would be struck by the sight of the manifested architecture of the occupation, documented by the NGO: winding pipelines, gigantic

factories surrounded by the dust and settlements such as Kalya, known for its beaches overlooking the Dead Sea and for its dates plantings.

There's no better area of the West Bank in which the Israeli companies expropriation of Palestinian natural resources is more evident: starting from the water- extracted and distributed by the Israeli company *Mekorot*, detaining since the 1982 the monopoly on the region's water supply and their allocation, largely unequal both in the amount and in the costs, between the colonies and the Palestinian communities; going through the mineral reserves- whose extraction produces polluting dust clouds all along the Bedouin populated lands; ending with the labour force.

In 2022 the *Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics* reports that the Israeli labour market- both within the official borders and in the settlements- represents for the West Bank Palestinians the second source of employment. This data helps to understand the blackmail condition of exploitation and cheap labour to which the Kalya dates plantings' workers, mainly women and children- according to the 2015 *Human Rights Watch* report- are subjected.

The other aspect of the blackmail condition of the Israeli labour market is the competitive price of the Israeli goods, often resold to the same Palestinian population, granted by the exploitation of the same Palestinian cheap labour forces (and by the lowest Israeli customs tariffs, compared to the Palestinian ones).

By preventing the local population's access to the natural resources, by the exploitation of its labour force and the blockade on its growth, the Zionist colonization project moves along the dual track of the systematic expulsion and the socio-economic control that allows the State of Israel to flourish and expand thanks to the Palestinian water and sweat.



*The Geshuri Industrial factories seen from the Hakoritna farm, in Tulkarem. Ph. Collective Zenobia*

### **Self-organization against pollution: the Geshuri Industrial zone, Tulkarem**

The history of the Geshuri factory and the Hakoritna family farm is useful to understand a second crack that *Al-Haq* works to climb. During the whole visit to this area, the chemical factory facilities' toxic breath never leaves us. These facilities were originally collocated on the Israeli side of the 1948 borders; then, in 1987, following the continuous protests of the residents, indignant by the polluting

conditions provoked by the factory, the Geshuri plant was moved on the West Bank side of the border: in a few years, as it was documented by *Lancet* in 2013, the number of cancer and respiratory disorders cases within the local families' members has significantly increased.

Just a few meters away from the chimneys, under the greenhouses of the Hakoritna farm, cucumbers, tomatoes and other vegetables are grown according to the biological farming techniques, whose benefits are the topic of many initiatives in which the local community is involved by the peasants. Water is obtained thanks to rain filter devices and collected into storage tanks at the angles of the field; electricity is produced through some solar panels on the rooftop. Only a minor part of the material and financial aid comes from the Ramallah government.

According to the last poll published by the *Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research*, more than the 80% of the Palestinian population regards the Palestinian Authority, whose representatives were elected back in 2006, as a corrupted élite far away from the actual people's needs, and colluded with Tel Aviv in security matters as well as economically subject to it. In light of the reality and the perception of this situation, the various forms of self-organization of production become essential pillars for the sustenance and the social development (even if limited by the prevention of the access to the natural reserves imposed by the Occupier) of Palestinian communities, aiming in this way to free themselves from an almost totally Israeli dependent labour market's grip.

The *Al-Haq* work of documentation and legal advocacy in the International Courts of subjects such as the Hakoritna family or the Jordan Valley Palestinian farms is an help for the unification of these experiences- not only geographically fragmented, by the apartheid infrastructures, but also on the plan of narrative- into the same framework.

### **Ghettoization and gentrification: East Jerusalem**

But what is this framework? To answer the question we must retrace one last step of the Summer School program: the one taking us in East Jerusalem, where we noticed how the systematic apartheid of Palestinians takes shape following three main routes.

The first route is the ghettoization, as the reclusion of the families expelled from the 1948 occupied territories in refugee camps such as Shu'fat (North-East Jerusalem) - where there is also a huge population of couples otherwise divided by the Law on Family Unification and Palestinians who cannot afford the increasing prices of houses within the city- or in suburbs such as Kufr Aqab- officially part of the Holy City municipality, but cut off by the Qalandyia checkpoint, one of the biggest and most tragically famous for the high number of victims of the Israeli forces. In both of these cases, most of the residents choose to live in suffocating densely constructed, unhealthy and insecure abandoned and marginalized areas, because this is the only way to maintain the Jerusalemite citizenship: the result of this process, as stated in *JLAC's* 2022 report, is the concentration of more than the 33% of East Jerusalem Palestinian population in almost the 4% of the total surface of this part of the city.

Moreover, there are the expulsion and expropriation operations reproducing on an urban scale what is in place in the rest of the West Bank: this is what happens, for example, in Sheikh Jarrah and in Silwan, or in the "*El Plan*" case designed to connect East Jerusalem to the Ma'aleh Adumim settlement's area through bypass roads, shopping centres and tourist services infrastructures. Similar interventions mix the violence of forced eviction with the invention of urban masterplans, thus helping the gentrification, and so the unwilling departure of the former Palestinian inhabitants who cannot afford the higher prices in the area.

In this way, we come through a third route which is the combination of the former two: the pursuit of the "demographic balance" aiming at taking the Palestinian population, whose growth rate is higher than the Jewish population's one, into numerically controlled and controllable levels, being easily

economically exploitable without menacing of becoming demographically and thus politically a threaten. Ghettoization and expulsion are, though, the two sides of the same coin: the Zionist colonization of Palestine, reached through the contrived creation of a Jewish-Israeli majority and a cheap labour force captive market, to whom re-sell the products of its same exploitation.



*Shu'fat refugee camp, in East Jerusalem. Ph. Collective Zenobia*

This is the context and the object of *Al-Haq* documental and legal fight, that the Summer School successfully teaches. A fight for the truth, to recognize the various shapes reproducing the occupation and the colonization as a way to rebuild, piece by piece, the mosaic of a system which, far from being circumscribed either to the foundation act- the 1948- or to the more notoriously expansionistic period- the 1967- of the State of Israel, re-describes the Nakba as a process starting 75 years ago and continuing, in different forms, without interruption.

*Collective Zenobia*