

# VOICES FROM THE SOUTH

E-Newsletter - May 2015

## Acknowledging the Nakba and Struggling for Justice: Jewish South Africans travel to Luby

In June 2013, the documentary film “The Village Under the Forest” had its world premiere in Cape Town, South Africa. The film, by Jewish South Africans Mark J. Kaplan and Heidi Grunebaum, presents an example of how a Jewish diaspora has been implicated in the erasure of the memory of the mass depopulation of Palestinians.

Nearly two years later to the date, in May 2015, a group of Jewish South Africans (many of whom had been anti-apartheid activists) traveled to Palestine and Israel, in particular to the destroyed Palestinian village of Luby in the Galilee. The aim of their trip was to visit this village under the forest that the documentary described, to stand in solidarity with the village’s Palestinian descendants who are still displaced, and to take responsibility for the actions being done in their name.

This month’s “Voice from the South” features a reflection from Heidi Grunebaum on the South Africans’ visit to Luby. Their visit was covered by several international media outlets, including CNN International (the link is below).

By Heidi Grunebaum  
University of the Western Cape

On the 1st of May 2015 a group of thirteen South Africans of mainly Jewish background participated in a ceremony at the ruins of the Palestinian village, Luby in the Galilee, together with about 150 Palestinians and Jewish Israelis. Under the trees at “South Africa Forest,” the ceremony offered us the opportunity to express a symbolic gesture of solidarity on behalf of 200 other Jewish South Africans.

What is the connection between Jewish South Africans and Palestinians from Luby? Luby, along with some 500 other Palestinian towns and villages, was depopulated and destroyed in the 1948 War for Palestine – the *Nakba*, catastrophe.

Some Palestinians were displaced inside the new state’s boundaries but the majority made into refugees, a condition that

persists for many. Israel passed laws to prevent the return of the refugees whilst the Jewish National Fund planted swathes of pine forests across the depopulated land in the name of all Jewish people.

The JNF forest on the ruins of Luby is called the “South Africa Forest”, a name that invokes our citizenship and South Africa’s legacy of mass forced removals. It is one of hundreds of forests which Jews in the diaspora have helped to cultivate, 86 of which are on the ruins of Nakba villages.

Our trip to the region was organised and hosted by Naif Hajjo from Luby, a member of ADRID (Association for the Rights of the Internally Displaced) together with Zochrot, an Israeli organisation committed to raising awareness of the Nakba. Our activities before the ceremony included cleaning Luby’s burial ground. The cleansing of its desecrated graves

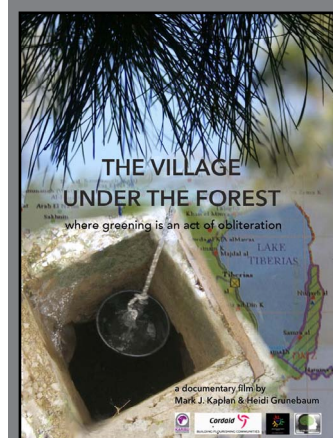


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Learn more about the “Village Under the Forest” documentary film at:

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as an act of showing care to the dead was profoundly meaningful, a point made by delegation member, Shereen Usdin.

The ceremony comprised two parts. The first was a walking pilgrimage through the forest to different stops at ruins of what had been Lubyá's public buildings and communal sites. At each station yellow signposts in Arabic, Hebrew and English were erected. The act of marking and naming the places at which the buildings had stood is one that connected people from Lubyá, their scattered descendants, our group and Jewish Israelis to the materiality of history and place which are the ruins themselves.

After the walk of place-marking, we handed over our pledges signed by two hundred other Jewish South Africans to representatives from Lubyá.

The pledge affirms signatories' acknowledgement of the Nakba, recognition of the irreparability and extent of Palestinian loss, and an unconditional commitment to the struggle

for Palestinian freedom premised on the actual return of refugees and displaced.

The possibilities for moral indignation to translate into a politics supporting the actual return became clearer as we examined the timing of the ceremony. It took place during the continuing Nakba, in the midst of deepening state repression and oppression inside the boundaries of Israel and in the West Bank and Gaza.

The structural context for the joint action at Lubyá became visible over the days before we travelled to Nazareth to meet our hosts and descendants from Lubyá.

In Jerusalem and the West Bank we met with Palestinian and Jewish Israeli activists, daily experiencing the sheer "tangibility of the apartheid Wall" as the delegation's youngest member observed, and the everyday impact of Israel's form of settler colonialism on Palestinian lives (and on Israeli lives in different ways) through its current forms of military-industrial, economic, infrastructural,

spatial and bureaucratically engineered segregation.

Face to face with the current scale of catastrophe, we witnessed the reverberations of the human disaster of the 1948 Nakba that continue to be felt across the region.

In the Jewish diaspora, it is urgently necessary that the Nakba and its effects on lives and land are made known; that its ethical, moral and political consequences as an ongoing process are engaged; that "the sounds of the system cracking from within" be more widely heard, as delegation member, Stiaan van der Merwe wrote.

We commit to developing a longer term relationship with ADRID and engaging with Jewish activists from the diaspora for Palestinian and Israeli freedom are indivisible. In supporting the indivisibility of this freedom struggle, the time for Jewish people to be present as partners in it has become abidingly urgent. ■

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**Learn more** about the South African visit to Lubyá, and the history of the JNF's involvement in covering the remains of the village, from **CNN International's** video coverage of the visit (May 15, 2015):

<http://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2015/05/15/pkg-lee-israel-trees-of-regret.cnn>

