

# The Face of a Boy

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**T**HE MISDEEDS OF Napoleon's occupation army in Spain were not photographed. Photography had not yet been invented. The valiant fighters against the occupation had to rely on Francisco Goya for the immortal painting of the resistance.

The partisans and underground fighters against the German occupation of their countries in World War II had no time to take pictures. Even the heroic uprising of the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw was not filmed by the participants. The Germans themselves filmed their atrocities, and, being Germans, they catalogued and filed them in an orderly way.

In the meantime, photography has become common commonplace. The Israeli occupation in the Palestinian occupied territories is being filmed all the time. Everybody now has cellular phones that take pictures. Also, Israeli peace organizations have distributed cameras to many Arab inhabitants.

Soldiers shoot with guns. The Palestinians shoot pictures.

It is not yet clear which are more effective in the long run: the bullets or the photos.

A TEST case is a short clip taken recently in a remote West Bank village called al-Nabi Saleh.

Every Israeli has seen this footage many times by now. It has been shown again and again by all Israeli TV stations. Many millions around the world have seen it on their local TV. It is making the rounds in the social media.

The clip shows an incident that occurred near the village on Friday, two weeks ago. Nothing very special. Nothing terrible. Just a routine event. But the pictures are unforgettable.

The village al-Nabi Saleh is located not far from Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. It is named in honor of a prophet (Nabi means prophet in both Arabic and Hebrew) who lived before the time of Muhammad and is said to be buried there. His extensive tomb is the pride of the 550 inhabitants.

Al-Nabi Saleh is built on the remains of a crusader outpost, which in its turn was built on the remains of a Byzantine village. Its history probably goes back to ancient Canaanite times. I believe that the population of these villages has never changed—they just changed

their religion and culture according to the powers that be. They were in turn Canaanites, Judaeans, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines and finally Arabs.

The latest occupation (until now) is the Israeli. These new occupiers have no interest in converting the locals. They just want to take their land, and, if possible, induce them to go away. On part of the lands of Nabi Saleh an Israeli settlement called Halamish (“flint”) was set up.

The conflict between the village and its new “neighbors” started immediately. Between them is an ancient well, which the settlers have renovated and claim as their own. The village is not ready to give it up.

Like in many other villages in the area, such as Bil'in, on every Friday, right after the prayers in the mosque, a demonstration against the occupation and the settlers takes place. A few Israeli peace activists and international volunteers take part in them. The demonstrators are generally non-violent, but on the fringes teen-agers and children often throw stones. The soldiers shoot rubber-covered steel bullets, tear gas and stun grenades, and sometime live bullets.

As in many small Arab villages, most inhabitants belong to one extended family, in this case the Tamimis. One Tamimi boy was shot dead in one of the demonstrations, a girl was shot in the foot. It is a Tamimi boy who features in the recent event.

THE CLIP that rocked the world starts with one lone soldier, who was obviously sent to arrest a boy who had (or had not) thrown a stone.

The soldier jumps across the rocky terrain, looks for the boy who is hiding behind a rock and catches him. It is 12 year old Muhammad Tamimi, with one arm in a plaster cast.

The soldier puts his arm around the neck of the boy, who cries in terror. Soon his 14 year old sister appears, and soon after that his mother and other women. They all tear at the soldier, who tries to push them away with his other arm. During the wild struggle, the sister bites the arm of the soldier, the one which holds his gun.

The soldier is masked. This is a new thing. Why are they masked? What are they hiding? After all, they are not Russian policemen who fear the revenge of the gangsters. When I was a soldier, long ago, masks were unknown.

During the melee, one of the women succeeds in ripping the soldier's mask off. We see his face—just an ordinary young man, recently out of high school, who is obviously at a loss of what to do. There seem to be photographers all around. One sees their feet.

Would the soldier have used his gun if the photographers had not been there? Hard to say. Recently a brigade commander shot and killed a boy who had thrown a stone at his car. The army condones and even lauds such acts of “self defense”.

For some minutes the scene goes on—the boy crying and pleading, the women pushing and hitting, the soldier pushing back, everybody shouting. Then another soldier approaches and tells the first soldier to release the child, who is seen running away.

WE DON'T know who the soldier is. It is hard to guess his background. Just a soldier, one of many who enforce the occupation, who face the demonstrations every week.

Another angle to the event is provided by one of the protesters off camera, so to speak, who was caught for a fleeting moment. He was recognized.

He is a teacher who bears the names of two illustrious persons—the Zionist founder Theodor Herzl and the composer Franz Schubert. Herzl Schubert is a veteran left-wing peace activist. I have met him in many demonstrations.

On the morrow of the showing of the footage on all Israeli television stations, the cry went up to dismiss him. What, a leftist peace demonstrator in the schoolroom?

Schubert was not accused of preaching his opinions in class. His peace activities did not take place during working hours. The very fact that he took part in a demonstration in his own free time was enough. His case is now “being considered” by the education ministry.

This, by the way, is no exceptional case. A respected female educator who was chosen as headmistress of an art school was blocked by the discovery that many years ago she had signed a petition calling on the army to al-

low soldiers to refuse service in the occupied territories. The petition did not call for refusal but only respect for the moral decision of the refusers. That is enough. The ministry, now led by a nationalist-religious demagogue, promised “to consider the matter”.

These cases of a new McCarthyism concern, of course, only leftists. No one demands the dismissal of the rabbi who prohibits the selling or renting of apartments to Arabs. Or the rabbi who wrote that under certain conditions it is permissible to kill non-Jews, including children. Their salaries are paid by the state.

MANY MILLIONS around the world must by now have seen the Nabi Saleh footage. It is impossible to assess the extent of the damage.

It is not that this clip is especially revolting. Nothing terrible happens. It is the face of the occupation, the present face of Israel, that imprints itself on the minds of the viewers.

For many years now, almost all news footage coming out of Israel has concerned the deeds and misdeeds of the occupation. Gone and forgotten is the face of Israel as the progressive state created by the victims of the most hideous mass crime in modern history. The state of pioneers who “made the desert bloom”. The bastion of freedom and democracy in a turbulent region.

That picture has long been wiped out. The Israel that presents itself to the world now is a state of occupiers, of oppressors, of brutal colonizers, of soldiers armed to the teeth who arrest people in the middle of the night and persecute them during the day.

This face changes the perception of Israel throughout the world. Every TV clip and news item adds imperceptibly to this change. The attitude of ordinary people around the world, also including Jews, is changed. The damage is lasting and probably irremediable.

The terrified face of young Muhammad Tamimi may well haunt us for a long time to come.