

## Border Crossings

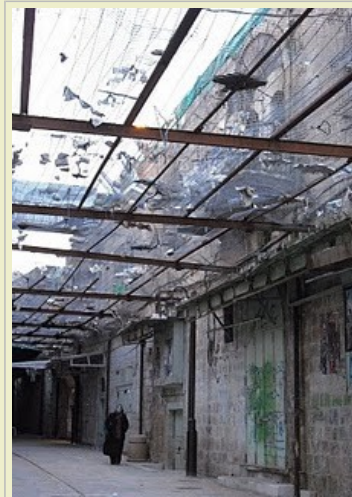
Between January and March 2010, I will spend three months in East Jerusalem as an Ecumenical Accompanier (EA). "Border Crossings," is a reference to a series of lectures that my Department at the University of Utah hosted this past fall. Three artists came to present their work, addressing issues related to linguistic and cultural borders. In Palestine/Israel, I will experience the reality and the challenges of these borders every day and share my experience with those reading my lines.

www.JerusalemShots.com

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2010

### → The streets of Hebron

Last Sunday afternoon I spent a few hours walking in Hebron's Old City with my colleagues who are based there. The stories of the market streets of Hebron have often been told: settlers living above Palestinians, constant presence of the Israeli army, checkpoints and roadblocks, and daily signs of violence. When you walk there, you are in a war zone!



A little bit of historical background:

"Since the 16th century there was a Jewish community in Hebron, living side by side with the Palestinians. In August 1929, during the British mandate period, 67 of the city's Jewish population were massacred. The British police evacuated the surviving Jewish population. After the war of 1948, Hebron came under Jordanian rule which lasted until the war of 1967 when Hebron was occupied by the Israeli army" (<http://www.tiph.org/>).

More than anywhere else, the visitor understands what occupation means and discovers its multi-layered reality. In this system, it



becomes clear as well that the army and the settlers both participate in the same exact power structure. And it is difficult to fathom the humiliation imposed on the Palestinians: "over the years, settlers in the city have routinely abused the city's Palestinian residents, sometimes using extreme violence. Throughout the second intifada, settlers have committed physical assaults, including beatings, at times with clubs, stone throwing, and hurling of refuse, sand, water, chlorine, and empty bottles. Settlers have destroyed shops and doors, committed thefts, and chopped down fruit trees. Settlers have

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  - ▼ 01/24 - 01/31 (2)
    - [The streets of Hebron](#)
    - [B\(u\)y the wall](#)
  - ▶ 01/17 - 01/24 (2)
  - ▶ 01/03 - 01/10 (3)
- ▶ 2009 (2)

### About Me



Muriel Schmid  
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I was born in Geneva (Switzerland). I studied Protestant theology at the University of Neuchatel and became a minister in the Swiss Reformed Church. Since 2004, I live in Salt Lake City and teach Religious Studies at the University of Utah.

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### Visitors



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also been involved in gunfire, attempts to run people over, poisoning of a water well, breaking into homes, spilling of hot liquid on the face of a Palestinian, and the killing of a young Palestinian girl! (<http://www.btselem.org/>).

When you walk in the streets of Hebron, detritus of all kinds rest above your head, in suspension, making visible the cage in which you are trapped. There seems then to be no solution to the problem; just a very poor attempt at managing it.



Posted by Muriel at 12:16 AM 0 comments

MONDAY, JANUARY 25, 2010

## ➔ B(u)y the wall

Since yesterday and until tomorrow, I am in Hebron for what is called a "PV" or "Placement Visit" for the non initiated. Twice during the program, we are visiting other EAPPI sites. Hebron is my first visit outside Jerusalem. I had a chance to walk around the old city and the market streets yesterday; the grids above your head are real and maybe more than anything else tell a terrible story of violence and ignorance. I will post pictures later and write more about Hebron.

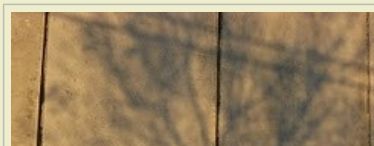


Today the weather is freezing; rain and wind made it impossible for us to venture outside. So, I'm reading the news on an Israeli site (<http://www.ynetnews.com/>) and I come across a rather astonishing link, Buy the Wall, that sells pieces of the

Israel/Palestine Separation Barrier: <http://www.buythewall.com/>. The premise of the site is that the "wall" is temporary as Israel declared when it started its construction and, once dismantled, it will be a hot item on the market! So, buy it now and secure your investment!

The Separation Barrier was approved by the government of Israel in June 2002 with the explicit purpose of controlling Palestinians entering Israel. However, according to the Israeli Human Rights organization, B'Tselem, "in setting the Barrier's route, Israeli officials almost totally ignored the severe infringement of Palestinian human rights. The route was based on extraneous considerations completely unrelated to the security of Israeli citizens. A major aim in setting the route was de facto annexation of land: when the Barrier is completed, some nine percent of the West Bank, containing 60 settlements, will be situated on the western - the 'Israeli' - side. Another reason for building the Barrier inside the West Bank was to avoid the political price to be paid if the Green Line were set as Israel's border" (<http://www.btselem.org/>).

Today, approximately 60% of the 740km of the Barrier have been built. The consequences on



- ➔ MERIP, "Palestine, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict. A Primer" (2007)
- ➔ International Quaker Working Party, "When the Rain Returns" (AFSC 2004)
- ➔ Phyllis Bennis, "Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict" (Olive Branch Press 2007)

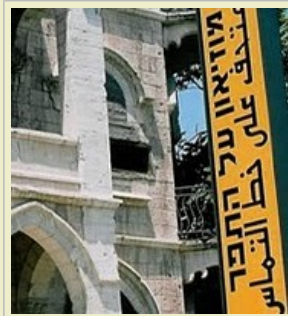
Palestinians' daily life is dramatic whereas most Israelis will never even see it. Standing by the wall, a feeling of oppression overcomes you. If only the promise of a good sale was also a promise for new unbroken horizons.



Posted by Muriel at [9:07 AM](#) [4 comments](#)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 23, 2010

### ➔ Going to the museum



Thursday evening (January 21), my team went to the opening night of a new exhibit at the Museum on the Seam (<http://www.mots.org.il/Eng/>) in Jerusalem. The name of this museum comes from the fact that the building stands right on the Green Line that used to divide Jerusalem until 1967. This location is highly symbolic: standing on the divide, the museum seeks to bridge the gap that separates cultures and people in Palestine/Israel. Its mission statement begins with the following paragraph:

"The Museum on the Seam is a socio-political contemporary art museum located in Jerusalem. The Museum in its unique way, presents art as a language with no boundaries in order to raise controversial social issues for public discussion. At the center of the changing exhibitions in the Museum stand the national, ethnic and economic seam lines in their local and universal contexts."

The current exhibit, HomeLessHome, is fascinating, raising unexpected issues regarding the occupation and its impact on the populations. The opening night was crowded, primarily with Israelis who were definitely willing to face the hidden side of their political and social reality.

Leaving the building and its beautiful setting, I tried to understand the role of art in this context. Sometimes, art represents a means of bringing a far-away reality to viewers who cannot access it otherwise; here, the reality is just on the other side of the street. In this case then, the exhibit seems to bring viewers to a reality they can observe only through aesthetic forms. What is the function of art in this case? A veil or a revelation?

Posted by Muriel at [7:35 AM](#) [1 comments](#)

MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2010

### ➔ Time flies

The days are going by fast and we don't have much time to take care of our blogs and other personal writing projects. It is going to be a challenge to keep up with everything. Yesterday and this morning, our team spent time organizing the next 3 months; it will help find time to write. I definitely need to document my recent activities; I

am taking a few days off at the end of January to visit more places in Jerusalem, go to Bethlehem, and catch up! In the meantime, I want to share two of the most sacred sites of the Old City: the Wailing Wall and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.



Crossing the plaza of the Wailing Wall seems truly unreal. How many times have I seen pictures of it? And suddenly, I am here walking on

this vast square, watching the men praying on one side, the women and children on the other, all of them following a ritual that I can only observe without being part of it. And yet, somehow, I feel part of it!

Walking on the ground of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock is a unique experience as well. I have less images of it in my mind only its golden dome dominating the Old City of Jerusalem. I am there early on a Sunday morning when non Muslims are allowed to visit the plaza. Under the early sun, the colors of the dome are amazing. I am struck by the silence of this place and the incredible craftsmanship; I cover my head.

One thing to remember however: no one can access these sites without Israeli control, the army screens everyone and forces



each visitor through metal detectors. It is hard, after all, to ignore the signs of division and military power.

Posted by Muriel at 9:43 AM [3 comments](#)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 2010

## ➔ Standing with them



Yesterday, my team crossed over to West Jerusalem to support Israeli activists in their peace efforts. We started by holding a vigil

with the Israeli group of Women in Black. Every Friday from 1pm to 2pm, a small group of women stand silent in protest of the occupation at Perez Square, a very busy intersection in the middle of West Jerusalem. We stood next to them and for an entire hour heard shouting and screaming! The level of aggression is high enough that the police comes every Friday to protect them. My admiration went to them right away: these (now) old ladies hold a vigil there every week, answering questions to anyone who wants to dialogue with them, but never shouting back! Yesterday was the actual anniversary of their movement: 22 years! And as one of them said, "we hope we won't celebrate our 23rd anniversary."

Directly after that, we joined the Friday march that goes from West Jerusalem to Sheikh Jarrah, the famous Palestinian neighborhood destined to demolition and/or taken over by settlers. It was very moving to walk with a young crowd of Israeli protesting the occupation; very hopeful. However, it is hard to ignore that the march can happen only under the strict protection of both the army and the police. Furthermore, the Palestinian homes and inhabitants of Sheikh Jarrah are in a very precarious situation; our team of EAs may well witness a series of house demolitions in the next months and/or see settlers move in.



Posted by Muriel at 8:31 AM [2 comments](#)

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