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## Small Triumphs in a Sisyphean War

Tender for a luxury development in Lifta, a Palestinian village on the western outskirts of Jerusalem, destroyed in 1948, was withdrawn by court order.

Amira Hass | Feb 08, 2012 12:59 AM

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News came this week of three individual battles against Israel's discriminatory regime that have scored gains. Bedouin from the Jahalin tribe will not be expelled to a community next to the Abu Dis dump, and their school will not be demolished. A tender for a luxury development in Lifta, a Palestinian village on the western outskirts of Jerusalem, destroyed in 1948, was withdrawn by court order. And Munther Fahmi, the Jerusalem-born owner of the bookstore in East Jerusalem's American Colony Hotel, will be allowed to remain in the city of his birth. Millions of hours of work and immeasurable amounts of endurance on the part of Palestinians has paid off.

Perhaps it was the Jahalin ecological school made of used tires, in the Khan al-Ahmar community, that pierced the thick Israeli hide and drew enough international attention to make the Israeli destruction authorities think twice. For the refugees of Lifta (who now live in Jerusalem), it was presumably their uncommon access to their ruined homes that prompted them to appeal against the damage to their heritage and its beauty. Their appeal, filed jointly with Israeli activists and organizations, led to the exposure of problems with the development tender. And the signatures of authors Amos Oz and David Grossman, as well as those of other public figures, surely sent the Interior Ministry the message that it would be misguided to deport Fahmi from his birthplace.

How tempting it is to think that these three examples contain some magic formula that could be copied to ensure the success of thousands of other battles.

But they don't. The awareness that these are exceptions to the rule tempers the already low-key celebrations. It is not yet clear whether all the Jahalin living in tent compounds on the eastern outskirts of Jerusalem will be saved from a forced move to near the dump, a plan cooked up over the past year. But the occupation authorities remain determined to commit more violations of international law and to concentrate this protected population in a single, permanent location. The affected community will be allowed to review and comment at the end of the planning process but will not be consulted during it.

Despite protests, including from Europe, the enormous expanse of Area C of the West Bank, which is under Israeli control, continues to be an Israeli laboratory for implementing sophisticated methods for the hidden deportation of Palestinians.

There are tens of thousands of Jerusalem-born Palestinians who have been stripped of their residency status in the city by heartlessness disguised as Israel's residency law. Celebrities make no special effort to defend these people's natural-born right to live in their own city. The Jerusalem District Prosecutor's Office is now accusing two of them, Mohammed Totah and Khaled Abu Arafat, of staying in the city illegally.

The outgoing Supreme Court president, Justice Dorit Beinisch, has not yet ruled on Totah and Abu Arafat's petition, and that of two other members of the Change and Reform bloc in the Palestinian Legislative Council, against the revocation of their residency status. The four were elected in elections that the United States pushed for. But Beinisch did not trouble to issue an injunction suspending their expulsion until the end of proceedings. She knew that neither the land nor the American consulate would burn in the wake of their forced departure.

Lifta has impressed itself in the Israeli consciousness as a Palestinian village. But the right to memory is presented as a security risk. The feelings of longing for and belonging to this land and the right to live in it are stamped here as exclusively Jewish.

Rabbis for Human Rights? This organization is not involved only in the battles of Lifta and the Jahalin. It takes part in dozens of other campaigns, most of them Sisyphean, to rescue people from the evil jaws of the regime of Jewish privilege. They are, unintentionally, bold and painful attempts to save "Jewish" from being a synonym in Israel for racist, lordly, hard-hearted, hypocritical, shortsighted.

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