

**THE ELECTRONIC INTIFADA**

Jenin won't forget Israel's massacre

[Ilan Pappé \(/people/ilan-pappe/\)](/people/ilan-pappe/)

[The Electronic Intifada \(/people/electronic-intifada/\)](/people/electronic-intifada/)

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Women return to the rubble of their homes in Jenin refugee camp, in the occupied West Bank, following the withdrawal of Israeli forces that assaulted the camp almost two weeks earlier, 18 April 2002. (Kael Alford / KRT/Newscom)

Fifteen years ago this month the Israeli army bombarded and assaulted the [Jenin refugee camp \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/jenin-refugee-camp\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/jenin-refugee-camp) for more than 10 days. This was part of Israel's so-called Operation Defensive Shield, during which it sent troops into the heart of six major cities in the occupied West Bank and surrounding towns and refugee camps that were ostensibly under Palestinian Authority control.

In a [report on the assault \(http://reliefweb.int/report/israel/report-secretary-general-prepared-pursuant-ga-resolution-es-1010-report-jenin-aes\)](http://reliefweb.int/report/israel/report-secretary-general-prepared-pursuant-ga-resolution-es-1010-report-jenin-aes), the United Nations concluded

that the Israeli army killed dozens of Palestinians in a camp that is just 0.4 square kilometers and hosts about 15,000 people.

After the assault, a long debate ensued about the number of casualties. In the immediate havoc that reigned in the camp, the numbers were thought to be very high.

Israel barred members of a UN commission of inquiry mandated by the Security Council from conducting an investigation, but a subsequent report compiled by the secretary-general concluded that at least 52 Palestinians were killed in Jenin refugee camp.

Almost 500 Palestinians were killed and another 1,500 injured in the course of Israel's assault across the West Bank from March to May of 2002.

However, it was not just the numbers involved that shocked the world at the time, but the brutal nature of an Israeli assault that was unprecedented even in the harsh history of the occupation.

This brutality can be best appreciated when you visit the camp. This crowded neighborhood was assaulted from the air by helicopter gunships, shelled by tanks from the hills above it and invaded by monstrous vehicles – a hybrid of a tank and bulldozer which the Israelis nicknamed Achzarit, the brutal one, that razed the houses and made the alleys into highways through which tanks could pass.

The tanks revisited the camp after the operation, usually coming in the dead of night, traumatizing children for years to come with their roar.

“Geography of disaster”

I went to the camp last week as part of a visit to Al-Quds Open University's branch in Jenin.

We rushed to the city and back from 1948 Palestine (present-day Israel), since the private company that manages the [Jalameh checkpoint \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/jalameh-checkpoint\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/jalameh-checkpoint) was to close the gates for the next few days so that Israeli Jews could celebrate Passover, while forgetting the besieged Palestinians in the West Bank.

The army imposed closure on villages and neighborhoods inside the West Bank and incarcerated millions of people in local enclaves so that Israeli settlers could move around as if this was *terra nullius* – a land without a people.

Al-Quds Open University caters for the children, among others, of political prisoners and martyrs. It is hosted in a rented building, with the hope that one day it will be moved to a proper campus – if the millions of dollars needed for its completion can be found.

More than 50,000 Palestinians use the services of the university at its branches across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in a geopolitical reality of Israeli-imposed fragmentation and control that requires the university to come to the students, as the students cannot come to the university.

Resilience and resistance can be performed in many ways, and in 2017 – unlike the armed resistance of 2002 – it is through this kind of steadfastness that the present regime in Israel is reminded that it cannot wipe out, or totally ignore, the millions it has oppressed daily since 1967.

Within this geography of disaster, there are degrees of poverty and oppression. There is a clear divide between the city of Jenin and the camp.

You know when you have left the city and entered this huge camp, which is built on the slope of a steep hill on the western side of the city. It is also very easy to see which of the houses in the camp were demolished during the 2002 massacre – they are the ones that have been rebuilt with the help of money from the Gulf.

Very few houses were left unscathed by the vicious assault in 2002. When you climb to the top of the hill, you can see the place where the Israeli tanks were positioned, raining their fire on the defenseless camp below, wreaking havoc and death, tactics all too familiar from repeated Israeli assaults on Gaza.

Clear view

However, there is something else you notice when you are on the hill. You can see the whole region stretching from Jenin, which is in the northern West Bank, down to the Mediterranean Sea. You can see through Marj Ibn Amr – the fertile region also known as the Jezreel Valley – to the city of [Haifa](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/haifa) on the coast.

The villages and towns that were there before 1948 were wiped out in the [Nakba](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/nakba) – the ethnic cleansing of Palestine by Zionist militias. Many of the people who used to live in them were driven to this area and could watch from the hill how their homes and fields turned into Jewish colonies and [Jewish National Fund](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/jewish-national-fund) “forests.”

The connection between what you see from the hill and the horrors of April 2002 is clear. It is yet another reminder of what the late scholar Patrick Wolfe articulated so well when he [noted \(http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/resources/pdfs/89.pdf\)](http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/resources/pdfs/89.pdf) that settler-colonialism is a structure, not an event.

In the case of Zionism, it is a structure of displacement and replacement, or to paraphrase Edward Said's words, substituting presence with absence. It began in 1882 with the first Zionist settlements, reached a certain peak in 1948, continued with vehemence in 1967 and is still alive and kicking today.

The attempt to break down the resistance to the displacement is what occurred in the camp 15 years ago.

Pictures of the martyrs from 2002 and since cover the walls and streets. Beneath them sits a large number of unemployed youth – Jenin refugee camp has one of the highest unemployment rates of any camp in the West Bank.

Talking to them it is clear that they are determined not to succumb to despair or apathy. Education offered by Al-Quds Open University is one way of coping with life in the camp and under oppression. But resistance is still an option.

After all, this is the area from which the most significant anti-colonialist effort by the Palestinians sprang already in the early 1930s: the rebellion led by [Izz al-Din al-Qassam \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/izz-al-din-al-qassam\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/izz-al-din-al-qassam).

It is symbolic that on this visit I met his grandson, Ahmad. We talked briefly about how his grandfather's historical image is distorted by anyone who compares him to present-day so-called jihadists. He was very far from being one.

Had the British not killed him in 1935, he would have become the Palestinian Che Guevara. He was a charismatic anti-colonialist leader operating among the people who were the first victims of Zionism in the 1930s – the displaced peasants and tenants driven out of the lands which they had cultivated for centuries.

One homeland

The geography and topography of the camp tells you something else: the [two-state solution \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/two-state-solution\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/two-state-solution) is an absurd idea.

The camp is located near the Salem checkpoint between the West Bank and present-day Israel. The drive from Jenin to Haifa by car through this crossing took me 20 minutes in previous years.

Before the Oslo accords were signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993, there was free movement of people and trade in this part of northern Palestine, which until 1948 was administered as one region.

Even after the agreement was signed – when Salem checkpoint was Jenin’s only outlet to the world – it was obvious that the whole area was part of the same homeland. The architects of Oslo wished to disrupt this historical, cultural and economic integrity and close the passage, forcing people to use the northern Jalameh checkpoint. This turned a short trip into a very long one, while Salem became a military court where to this day Palestinians are sent to jail without, or after mock, trials.

Oslo was meant to solve the eternal Zionist problem: how to have the territory without the people. The “solution” was to confine the Palestinians in enclaves while controlling their space and using brute force, as the Israelis did in Jenin in April 2002, whenever the people had enough, demanded change or fought back.

That Zionist colonial project continues, but it will be resisted in this land of Izz al-Din al-Qassam and in a camp where people do not forget and have little to lose.

The author of numerous books, Ilan Pappé is professor of history and director of the European Centre for Palestine Studies at the University of Exeter.

📌 [Jenin refugee camp \(/tags/jenin-refugee-camp\)](/tags/jenin-refugee-camp). [Jenin refugee camp massacre \(/tags/jenin-refugee-camp-massacre\)](/tags/jenin-refugee-camp-massacre). [Operation Defensive Shield \(/tags/operation-defensive-shield\)](/tags/operation-defensive-shield). [Al-Quds Open University \(/tags/al-quds-open-university\)](/tags/al-quds-open-university). [Jenin \(/tags/jenin\)](/tags/jenin). [Izz al-Din al-Qassam \(/tags/izz-al-din-al-qassam\)](/tags/izz-al-din-al-qassam)

🗨️ Comments



[The genocide of the \(/comment/58771#comment-58771\)](/comment/58771#comment-58771)

[\(/comment/58771#comment-58771\)](/comment/58771#comment-58771) Anonymous replied on Tue, 04/18/2017 -

20:26

The genocide of the Palestinians by the Zionist Israelis condoned by the SHAMEFUL rest of the world.



Shimon Peres was the first to call it a "massacre"

(/comment/58781#comment-58781)

[\(/comment/58781#comment-58781\)](#) Hanna Kawas (<http://www.cpavancouver.org/>).

replied on Wed, 04/19/2017 - 06:13

"Foreign Minister Shimon Peres is very worried about the expected international reaction as soon as the world learns the details of the tough battle in the Jenin refugee camps, where more than 100 Palestinians have already been killed in fighting with IDF forces. In private, Peres is referring to the battle as a 'massacre.'"

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/pe...> (<http://www.haaretz.com/news/peres-calls-idf-operation-in-jenin-a-massacre-1.48297>)



"Resilience and resistance (/comment/58801#comment-58801)

(/comment/58801#comment-58801) Ahmad replied on Wed, 04/19/2017 -

15:48

"Resilience and resistance can be performed in many ways, and in 2017 – unlike the armed resistance of 2002 – it is through this kind of steadfastness that the present regime in Israel is reminded that it cannot wipe out, or totally ignore, the millions it has oppressed daily since 1967."

Ilan Pappé knows best when it comes to lecturing Palestinians on how to resist Israel. They must of course give up armed resistance because we are in 2017 and in 2017 it is not fashionable to fight your occupier anymore. In 2017 symbolic resistance and symbolic "steadfastness", while the whole country is occupied, will suffice to defeat Zionism.



It's strange you read this (/comment/58811#comment-58811)

(/comment/58811#comment-58811) Ali Abunimah replied on Wed,

04/19/2017 - 16:19

It's strange you read this passage as meaning that Pappé is lecturing Palestinians on how to resist. I don't read it that way at all. All he is saying is that the resistance in 2017

looks different from 2002. It's all the more strange, since he writes very positively of Izz al-Din al-Qassam, who he likens to a Palestinian “Che Guevara.”