

THIS IS MY LAND... HEBRON

A FILM BY GIULIA AMATI & STEPHEN NATANSON

NOTE DI PRODUZIONE

*“There is no place under the occupation
that I hate more than Hebron...
It is really the place of evil”*
Gideon Levy, HAARETZ reporter

Hebron is the largest city in the middle of the occupied West Bank, 30 kilometers south of Jerusalem. It was famous throughout the Middle East as a market place where the caravans would stop between Damascus and Egypt.

Hebron is also famous as a holy city, a place of pilgrimage for the Jews, Christians and Muslims because Abraham, the forefather of the three most important monotheistic religions, is buried there.

In 1967, after the Six-Day War and Israel's dramatic military victory, 30 Israelis decided to settle in the city to reclaim what they considered an important part of the Promised Land. It was one of the first Israeli settlements and the only one right in the heart of a Palestinian city.

Hebron is now home to 160,000 Palestinians, a colony of 600 Israeli settlers who live in the city center and a garrison of more than 2,000 Israeli soldiers to defend them.

On April 4th 1968 Rabbi Moshe Levinger led a group of Jews pretending to be Swiss tourists into the Arab Park Hotel in the old city of Hebron. Two days later they seized control of the Hotel saying they have come to reestablish Hebron's historic Jewish community.

In 1970 the government agreed to allow Rabbi Levinger's group to establish a town on the outskirts of the city in an abandoned military base at Kiryat Arba.

In 1979, Levinger's wife Miriam led 40 Jewish women and children from Kiryat Arba back into the old city to take over the former Hadassah Hospital which became the first Jewish settlement in downtown Hebron.

Today in Hebron there are four Israeli settlements consisting of small clusters of buildings housing 86 families.

In 1994 Baruck Goldstein, an immigrant settler from Brooklyn shot dead 29 Palestinians praying at dawn in the Ibrahimi Mosque, in the heart of the old city of Hebron.

Fearing Palestinian retaliation, the Israeli army employed a policy to protect the settlers based on the "principle of separation." Areas around the settlements were "sterilized", meaning they were completely off-limits to Palestinians. Al Shuhada Street and the Vegetable Market, formerly the main commercial centre of Hebron were shut down and hundreds of Palestinian shopkeepers evicted.

What was a temporary measure to avoid conflict became a permanent one. Once a bustling hub of activity, the city center now resembles a ghost town.

It's a war between neighbors where the main goal is to conquer one more meter of the city, keep the enemy at bay or simply stand ones ground.

Kicking, cursing, spitting, stone throwing and abuse are part of the daily routine. Children, women and the army participate in this daily struggle.

Today Hebron is a city of violence and hate.

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Giulia Amati went to Hebron to teach a three month video course in a Media Center funded by the European Union. What she found when she got to the city was very different to what she had imagined.

Soon after her arrival she met Yehuda Shaul, an Israeli ex-soldier who conducts the “Breaking the Silence” tours of Hebron city center. Because to his experience as a soldier stationed in Hebron he clearly illustrates to tourists, diplomats and journalists the dynamics of the city under occupation.

Giulia filmed Yehuda’s tours and interviewed Palestinian families but soon realized that to fully understand the situation she needed to be able to hear the settlers point of view.

Stephen Natanson joined her to film and interview members of the Hebron settlement. Together they filmed the rest of the documentary.

Additional video came from international human rights groups working in Hebron and the B’Tselem video archive. B’Tselem is a Israeli human rights organization whose video archive was set up by Oren Yakobovich. Yakobovich invented B’Tselem’s “shooting back” project, which gave pocket camcorders to Palestinians particularly exposed to harassment by the settlers and the Army. This campaign has helped to bring to the public attention some of the more dramatic cases of injustice over the last few years.

LIVING IN HEBRON

“Life is not easy in Hebron but we get much more. We get meaning, we get the knowledge that we are doing something important. Of course for the Jewish people, for the Jewish history, for the world of God. But not only, because we are doing something very important to the whole world”.

Noam Arnon, Spokesman for Hebron settlers

“In any other country in the world they would be defined as fascists... if not worse. They are a bunch of 500 or so people whose aim in life is to drive out 160,000 Palestinians... These people who have arrived 30 or 40 years ago from Europe consider the inhabitants of Hebron, who have been there for 5,000 years, as strangers”.

Uri Avnery, Ex-member of Israeli parliament

“The first two, three weeks that we came to Hebron and we went down to the city we were all shocked. You walk on the street and you find yourself in front of graffiti that probably in Germany sounds familiar better than to us such as “ARABS TO THE GAS CHAMBERS”, “GAS THE ARABS”, “ARABS OUT” with the star of David in Hebrew in the middle. There was a group of my platoon in the beginning who thought to refuse to serve in Hebron. We were shocked, we didn’t believe what was going on”.

Yehuda Shaul, Former Israeli soldier and “Breaking the Silence” tour guide

“I don’t call him military. Yehuda Saul who leads the group is a... in any other normal country they would put him on trial for treason and hang him. But unfortunately Israel has not reached that level yet of justice”.

David Wilder, Spokesman for the Hebron settlers

“Israeli soldiers are supporting and protecting some criminal settlers who are harassing people, who are shooting at people, who are killing people, who are not allowing people to go to their homes, who are beating young Palestinian children. As a Palestinian living in Hebron I don’t want to see my children hurt, I don’t want to see my brothers and sisters being beaten by armed settlers. I think the problem is a very easy one to end but I don’t know what is stopping the Israeli Government from doing so”.

Osaid Rasheed, Palestinian resident of Hebron

“I have no doubt that if today another 200,000 Jews moved into Judea and Samaria a lot of the Arabs who are here would pick up and leave. We don’t have to throw them out. I don’t know that today I favor that. I am not looking for forced expulsion of everybody but I have a feeling that if they see masses of people coming over not to take their homes away from them but just to settle in the land here a lot of them will just leave”.

David Wilder, Spokesman for Hebron settlers

“It is their policy. They want to push us to leave. They attack us, they want to make us suffering in our life. Also destroy our economic situation, when I have a tree, when I have a life, I will protect it, I will try to live in it. But when I lose everything they think that I will leave. But one day I told them that if I see my kids, my family dead body I will never leave this house. Because my father he was dead body and he did not leave this house”.

Hani Abu Haikal, Palestinian resident of Hebron

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