

“So the tourist and the terrorist—those twin ghosts of the airports of abstraction—suffer an identical hunger for the authentic. But the authentic recedes whenever they approach it. Cameras and guns stand in the way of that moment of love which is the hidden dream of every terrorist and tourist. To their secret misery, all they can do is destroy. The tourist destroys meaning, and the terrorist destroys the tourist.”

-Hakim Bey, *Overcoming Tourism*

We're floating along doing what we do, knowing what we know, having been conditioned to operate in this American society. Escaping this country explodes these routines and rituals because I place myself among people reacting in vastly different circumstances. Traveling devastates the comfortability under which I function and fuels my imagination, opening the floodgates of possibility upon return. And to you, the reader, I hope my travels make real whatever you labeled before as “the other” or “exotic.”

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to gaza and back

**encounters and wanderings in a
world full of love and hate**



An airplane screams overhead as it approaches the runway of San Jose International Airport. Jane says quietly, "I wish it would crash into me so for once I could feel my entire body." We were all screaming – looking for stimulation to remind ourselves we are still alive in a dead world.

Two weeks ago I lay in the bed of a pickup truck on a 3-hour drive from Baltimore to New Jersey. I stared up at the blue sky and listened to the machines rumble past me on the highway. Somehow, the possibility that at any second one of these machines could send me hurling to my death didn't bother me. When the sun climbed overhead, I closed my eyes and began to think of the journey ahead. The plan: Go westward. Fly from the west coast to Germany. And, within 2 months, find a way down to the West Bank or Gaza through Eastern Europe and Istanbul and back up to Germany in time for the flight back.

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Just before going overseas, a friend told us over the phone, "Don't get killed." He paused, and then said, "Well actually, if one of you gets killed, the other will have an excellent zine to write."

To ensure the safety of individuals mentioned in this zine, all names have been changed.

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A Postscript

You can stay places for free too, and I don't mean rooftops and grassy meadows. I used the anarchist "community," but any "community" can be used in a similar fashion. For instance, if you like to collect gramophone records, then look up everyone who is in Gramophone Record Collectors International or if you are into UFOs, its pretty easy to look on the internet and find others who are into them and will put you up for free and talk your ear off about UFOs in Kiev, Marrakech, or Seoul. Whatever you are into at home, political or not, there are bound to be others also interested in the same thing half way around the world. Granted us anarchists have a tendency to take care of each other, so it makes it that much easier.



The End (or Beginning)

2 cheesy guidebooks, 36 hours of planes, 150 hours of trains, 20 border crossings, 6 full bag searches, 1 police helicopter “chase,” and several touches with death by starvation, squirrels, soldiers, Nazis, chess, and a moving train. After all that, I wonder if I brought anything back other than permanently scarred intestines and a missing chunk of my heart. Hearing the news of raids in Gaza or Nablus, I still feel helpless and detached. But...

Much of what I experienced cannot be recorded or explained. What I've learned from all this, I do not yet quite fully know or understand. It's much more than friends in faraway places, or funny, quirky moments, or the establishment or solidification of life-encompassing theories. In fact, it's none of that. It's something that defies description. It's what you learn from an experiment knowing all along the futility of drawing conclusions because the conditions will never be the same, *nor do you even want the conditions to be the same*. It's a learning of what may happen, what is possible, or better yet, *what is impossible* in any created situation that inherently and actively rejects all notions of impossibility. It's a learning that what's organic can never be tamed or contained, but only tinkered with and perturbed. Never disappointed because you never expect results, you just dream. I haven't learned how to make my dreams into realities... just my realities into dreams. It's intuitive. It's a better understanding of knowing when and how to act: how to deflect the misery of daily life, when to fall into someone's arms, when to hurl the stone...

It's not knowing what "it" is.

And not wanting to know.

It is, isn't it?

Introduction

Crazy shit was always happening to us and we were always doing crazy shit. Shit that lets you know you're actually alive and your surroundings are interactive, funny, and, best of all, unexpected. You don't have to try to make stuff happen much of the time. In fact it works best if you try *nothing*. Try *not* having a plan. Not only will shit happen to you, but you may also be compelled to do something that throws a monkey-wrench into the illusion of a system of walking corpses. Corpses may surprise you. But, most likely, you'll surprise yourself.

Crazy shit happened to me every day. A hundred times as much as recorded in the following pages. This is the kind of shit that happens to anyone on any given day. I just chose to write it down. I was also a hundred times as bored each day, despite what it may seem. In other words, I am nothing special. You can do what I did and just get the hell out of America or you can experience life in the same sort of way in the maze that is America. I realized this upon returning when I excitedly watched 2 people copulating at 4am in a south Tucson park – far more exciting than most of my experiences overseas!

Throughout my time overseas, I continually coped with my privilege of being (mostly) white, male, and financially secure. My whiteness saved my ass in several encounters with Nazis, Zionists, and fascists and allowed me to venture into places in Eastern Europe and Israel virtually unnoticed. Conversely, in Gaza and the West Bank having light skin was often annoying and sometimes nerve-racking. Being male, I could travel alone fairly easily and could experience male-only spaces (oftentimes the dominant ones). Money-wise, I bought the cheapest plane ticket I could find from the North American continent to the European one (\$450). I stole, scavenged, hid, hitchhiked, slept outside, never stayed at a hostel (except in Jerusalem), and always traveled the cheapest way possible when I did have to pay.

Upon returning from overseas and telling my good friend Jane about my various wanderings and reflections, she told me, “It all sounds like a story. I just can't relate.” I struggled with this before, during, and after my journey. And looking back, most of it now sounds like a storybook in my head. Is travel inherently tourism? How is an experience or a situation on the other side of the earth relevant to my life when I return to the States? But I refuse to equate traveling with watching a series of spectacles on television. And I refused it for the entirety of my trip. But I continue to ask myself, *is this refusal enough?*

Scatterbrained

On the train to Ljubljana, Slovenia... a million thoughts clamoring in my head. Alberto's asleep. I'm staring east watching the towering Alps roll by as we cut our way down through Austria. Thoughts of the West Bank overwhelm me. Why am I going? It's something that's seemingly disconnected from my reality and millions of Americans' reality. I want to connect it desperately. I feel something when I hear of people carrying out a struggle. I remind myself constantly that I'm not a savior or missionary or godsend. Then why the fuck am I going? I can't figure out if it's just a selfish desire to learn what a fight looks like and what I can take from it. Seems like such privileged bullshit. I'm having trouble justifying why I'm on a train heading south to a war zone. It feels wrong. It feels right, too. Palestinians themselves are calling on internationals to come assist in the struggle against Zionism. I guess I hope to help people who have asked for it.

I will take the advice my friend Jane gave me in San Jose about women. After several encounters with men while I was with Jane and Tortoise (the men had made sexual comments), I was looking for answers as to what my role is as a man in stopping that from happening or confronting it when it did. Jane said, "First off, assume a woman can defend herself. Then, be there to support her when she does." I will take this with me to refuse the role as white savior.

I want to bring the fight home. I want the struggle that goes on everyday in America to be vocalized and to take form. I'm hoping my time in the West Bank will help me figure out how to create that situation.

Our plan was to take the ferry from Athens to Haifa, but on Friday we discovered no ferries are running to Haifa or anywhere in Israel. They haven't been running all year. Our only hope for getting there now is through Jordan where Palestinian refugees cross daily. We're working our way to Istanbul and, from there, we will take a bus to Amman, Jordan.

Another justification of my travels is to see my friends Sinan and Marta in Istanbul. Sinan has promised to show me around Istanbul and arrange soccer matches full of laughter, revelry, and Sinan humor. In any case, we plan to spend several weeks in Istanbul after our trip to the West Bank and only a short time there on our way down.

The journey itself is somewhat uneventful so far. We continue to try to adjust to Eastern European mindsets. Trying not to pay for food is tough because most

Upon Returning

Gaza seems like a distant memory. Even news reports about Israeli attacks on towns I stayed in barely phase me. My outward journey served as an effective desensitizer. From Palestinian support and hospitality to the friendly neighborhood in Istanbul to the small-town comfort of Bulgaria to the meaner and meaner streets of Berlin. Travel got easier, but rougher, and somewhere along the line, taking care of people, of one another, ceased to be a part of life. The streets of Tucson are hot and dry like those in Gaza, but they remind me more of a wet and rainy Prague where I'm left to fend for myself. What I've learned about a distant land is how people live. In the face of severe repression, they *live* – maybe in response to it – but they live and they function without a state. *It's the most persuasive argument I've seen for a stateless society.*

Palestine: Groundwork of hope and love in an environment of increasing hatred. Here (Tucson): Mere pockets of hope of people trying to live and combat alienation: the grind marks embedded on the marble ledges of this modern office park, the willingness of the bus driver to talk to me, lovers on the street...



Mario and Luigi: The Welcome Home Committee

Less than 24 hours before an airplane returns me to the USA – the land of fascism and the land where I can understand conversations. Of the last 3 days, I've spent 1 night in a Leipzig squat and 2 in this Berlin squat where I sit now. By far, this is the most grueling, time-wasting, flat-out boring part of my trip. Few people seem interested to talk to me and I find myself getting much needed sleep on a mattress for 12+ hours per night. A winding down I guess. It's not that I'm treated as an outsider here, it's that I'm treated as too much of an *insider*. Like I live here. Like they see me everyday so it's no big deal to see me again. So, I sit and watch this guy in his quest to beat Super Mario Brothers 2. He's played for 2 consecutive days hitting "continue" each time he runs out of lives. He has the learning curve of a mouse who keeps choosing to get shocked instead of fed, making the same mistake over and over and getting "warped" *back* to level 5 when he's on level 8.

I suppose if I was a true literary scholar, I could end this with how this "warping back" was a proper ending to my trip. That it's only appropriate that as I return to America, I am degenerating into a life of idiocy and boredom where a video game from half the world away is more stimulating than a person from half the world away.

shops in Frankfurt were small and family-owned, so stealing seemed out of the question. Alberto was more into paying for food, but I was bored by that. So, we've been finding bigger supermarkets, and we've been eating leftovers at outdoor tourist cafes – having weird, mute interactions with Germans as they finish their meals and wait for their check.

We're both really shy and Alberto has been pushing a desire to make friends lately. Short conversations with some people lead nowhere as we quickly run out of things to talk about. Trying to find an anarchist community in Frankfurt was unsuccessful probably largely due to the shyness and un-luck in wherever we randomly picked to go on the subway map.

We got caught freeloading on the Frankfurt subway, but luckily got out of it because we just didn't understand that machines could possibly be able to dispense tickets. After a short escort to a ticket machine to be shown a demonstration on how to buy a ticket, we quickly got back on and resumed intentional stupidity shortly thereafter and on the following day (except this time with a bit more alertness).

Graffiti is the other thing we are getting used to. To write in English or not? To write in German is disastrous as Alberto tried on an earlier train using what little German he knew, "Nein Israel, Ya Palestine." Although a little better than his airplane attempt on the flight over: One hour into the 10-hour flight, Alberto scrawled on the bathroom wall, "AMERICA IS A TERRORIST CONSPIRACY." I quickly reminded him that the word "terrorist" on an airplane would not go unnoticed or unreported for the remaining 9 hours, and they very well may take the plane down early to get to the bottom of the matter. I began my anti-graffiti squad initiation that day by transforming Alberto's message into a large black blob on the bathroom wall.

German police have simply scared the shit out of us with their stature, uniforms, voices, and dogs, so we've been keeping our graffiti and shoplifting to a minimum.

Our friend of a sort-of-friend, Dephct1, has put us up at his parents' place in a hideous American neighborhood in Frankfurt filled with American G.I.s, consulate staff, and their families (and daily bomb threats). Recently back from a huge graffiti exhibition in Hamburg, Dephct1 was disgusted with the direction graffiti has headed and how it's "gone to people's heads." He's excited about the graffiti pamphlet we put together several months ago, inspired by our emphasis on the message and on our stressing of inclusiveness instead of the tag or the graffiti-super-stars-only mentality.

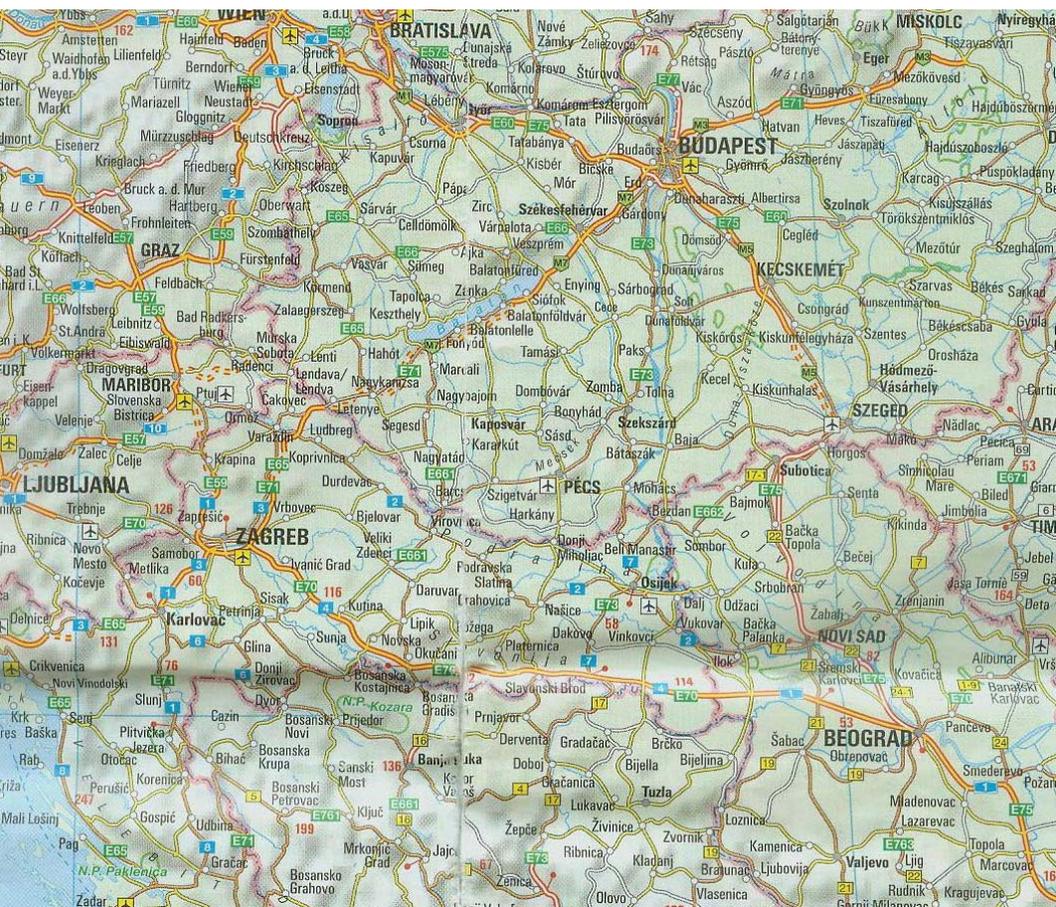
Hopes of staying on this train... *dashed* by a man with a green hat demanding a "supplement." After threats to evict us from the train 1 stop before Ljubljana, we were forced to hand over 3 dollars (despite Alberto's plea that we were fine and did not need to supplement our trip with anything.) Now this guy definitely remembers our destination, so we have to get off in Ljubljana.

It's 9pm and we'll be in Ljubljana in 45 minutes, 3 bucks poorer. We'll head for a park or a rooftop to sleep on (now having realized this making friends thing is very difficult). An old German man on the train put up quite a fight over the supplement as well. Deep on the inside, despite the language thing, we knew we were both friends with a passionate, common desire to evict the man with the green hat from the train.

It will be our first night outside, since Dephect1 had been so hospitable in Frankfurt despite his shitty parents. Last time we tried to find a park (at the airport), we realized in our cryptic English that we had propositioned 2 women to walk to the park with us. We'll probably do a lot of wandering around to ensure that sort of thing doesn't happen again.

The man with the green hat came just after the usual harassment and searchings of me and Alberto (Osama look-alike) by the customs and border police. And this is the fucking Slovenian authorities! If they doubt us, the Israelis will truly fuck with us, especially if we get a Syrian stamp on our passport.

We'll probably hitchhike in the morning after 14 hours of trains today. Never really done it beyond a 2 mile lift, so it should be interesting (especially in Slovenia and Croatia, where the tourist guidebook we have says, "Don't hitchhike in Croatia. No really, don't do it.").



blocked by the cops, we turned and headed west, trying to out-manuever the cops and get in the way of the Nazi march. Then, in a moment where I was forced to choose whether to be a spectator or participant, they ran. Better yet, we ran! Americans are afraid to run in demos, maybe its a politically correct thing in case someone is handicapped or old and out of shape. I don't know. But the Germans run. Cutting down alleyways. About 300-400 of us. Police appeared. We headed another direction. Then, realizing our defeat as cops began to box us in, several antifas with the banner shouted, "drei, zwei, ein!" and we charged. With banner in the front, it was quite a sight. CLASH! Pretty intense collision – jump-kicking a line of police through the banner. The cops managed to rip away the banner, our crowd bounced off of them, and then, the cops charged. We ran the other way only to realize we were totally boxed in. Finally we gave in and they lead us rowdy bunch back to where the concert was. Blocked in on only 3 sides now, they did what most Americans do: sit there and look puzzled. There's a fourth side! Oh well. It fizzled out and more speakers spoke on the concert stage. When a politician came up to speak, 90% of the crowd booed loudly and jeered at her to get down. Drowned out by the audience's disrespect, she grew angry and gave up. Ninety percent jeered, 5% laughed hysterically, then there was this angry guy. He argued with a communist who got real upset, causing cops to intervene. The communist got carried away upon the cops' arrival and was arrested. I found the whole thing funny, but its probably because I didn't understand a word said. All day was like that actually. I was this mysterious guy who didn't really talk to anyone and didn't chant those catchy anti-fascist anthems. I didn't understand anything people said, but I deciphered a few of the banners. It was all surreal. Too easy to be a spectator, but I felt I succeeded in participating as much as I could. So the German antifas lived up to the romanticization, except for the not masking up part and the influx in hard-line communists amongst them. They ran the streets, clashed with police, took care of each other, and came out unscathed. Other than the 5 hours of lounge time and the idiocy of giving up when you are not totally boxed in, they are brilliant.

Eight, maybe 9, days without a shower. The last 6 nights of sleep: 1 cold night on an exposed, not-so-secluded rooftop, 1 night on a train, 2 (soon to be 3) scared, on-edge nights in train stations, and 1 night in a freezing cold meadow on the outskirts of the Nazi demo town. On edge, always. These nights of wretched sleep coupled with days of nervousness and fear (and often loneliness) has taken a toll on me. I look for comfort anywhere I can. I wish I could be invited into a Palestinian home again or discover a magical room with a bed just for me. My body aches and I am tired of fighting. I want comfort. I want love. Seems harder and harder to find in this world full of hate.



Two o'clock came and a boring rally convened. Then, the march at 3 o'clock on the south side of town

(the fascists were marching on the north). Led by the "peaceful" people, the bulk of the march (80%) consisted of the disobedient, militant antifas and the communists. The DKP communist flag sickened me as I remembered what Kristi had said of the hammer and sickle. The militant antifas tried to break off once and head north, but were pushed back by a line of police and, seconds later, by the "peaceful" organizers. When the march ended, the 80% surged forward past the "peace police" and continued north. When the first intersection had 1 road

Ljubljana

Wow. A day's worth of hitchhiking has taken us 11km *and* back. Six hours on highway E70 and all we have to show for it is an 11km car ride with a Turkish guy, the gum and the Pepsi he gave us, a police helicopter assault (on my dignity), an infuriated driver, and a police escort back to Ljubljana.

We exchanged greetings with a Turkish guy and said the only word we both knew, "Zagreb." He shrugged as if he wasn't going to Zagreb but motioned us in. Eleven kilometers later he dropped us off and said "Zagreb," pointing straight ahead. He then drove off to Zagreb.

For the next 4 hours, we waited. First the thumb out, then the sign scribbled with "ZAGREB," then the sign *and* a wave. Then, when all else failed, Alberto resorted to jumping jacks.

Three hours into our long, grueling wait, the police helicopter incident began to unfold. A police chopper approached and began circling me closer and closer until it was 50 feet above the ground tilting at a severe angle. Because the chopper was obviously trying to get my attention, I could no longer resist the urge to look directly at it. When I looked up, a cop, leaning dangerously out of the chopper, furiously motioned me to get the hell off the highway. The Slovenian anti-hitchhiking chopper had won! Temporarily. Several minutes later we were back on the highway, not knowing why anymore, since hitchhiking was obviously futile.

But then, driven by an increasingly desperate desire to get a ride *by any means necessary*, Alberto developed a wonderful plan: act injured. So 10 seconds into the stunt of me helping him stay upright as he limped down the emergency lane, a car pulled over. We had won the hearts of concerned Slovenians! We grabbed our bags and bolted to the car to find a puzzled man and his equally puzzled family. His concern quickly transformed to anger upon realizing he'd been duped by 2 healthy young men. As he sped off, the threat of him reporting us to the police seemed real.

We crossed the highway and decided to walk the long 11km back to Ljubljana to take the train. Within a minute of walking back, 2 of Slovenia's finest jumped out of a squad car and a whole series of roadside questioning, followed by dumb American tourist responses, began. In the end, they gave us a ride to the Ljubljana train station. En route, they continued the questions: "Why are you going to Istanbul?" "Aren't you afraid of the terrorists in Asia?" –to which Alberto disgustingly, yet cleverly, responded, "No, we aren't afraid of the Turkish people."

Among the other questions they asked in broken English, was the most humorous: "What do you do to America?" (Upon a request for clarification, he meant "What do you do *in* America?") Initially, we had to resist the temptation to respond with a proud firm and proud, "anything we can."

We bought tickets to Zagreb and onward to Beograd and headed back to the anarchist squat we had stayed at the night before. Yes, we *had* made friends! We discovered a park with a festival of sorts less than an hour after our train rolled into Ljubljana on Saturday night. After an hour of total shyness and confusion amidst the night performances in the park, a guy asked us for a lighter. The 18-year-old guy informed us we would have no problem hitchhiking to Zagreb and even gave us directions to an "artists' squat" we could probably crash at. Then... we found 'em.

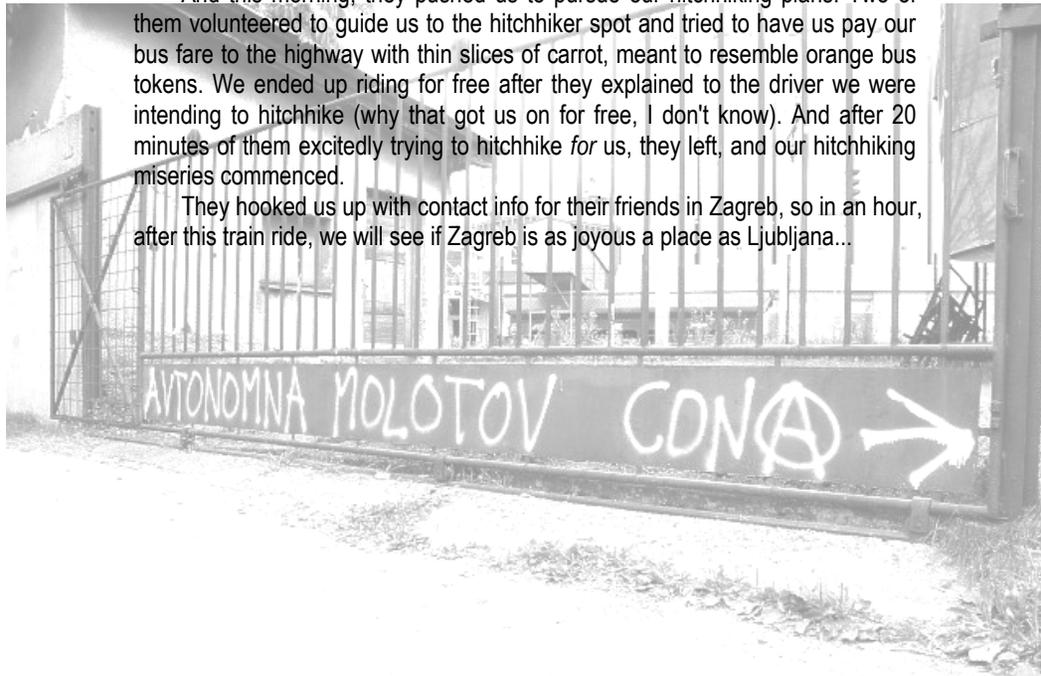
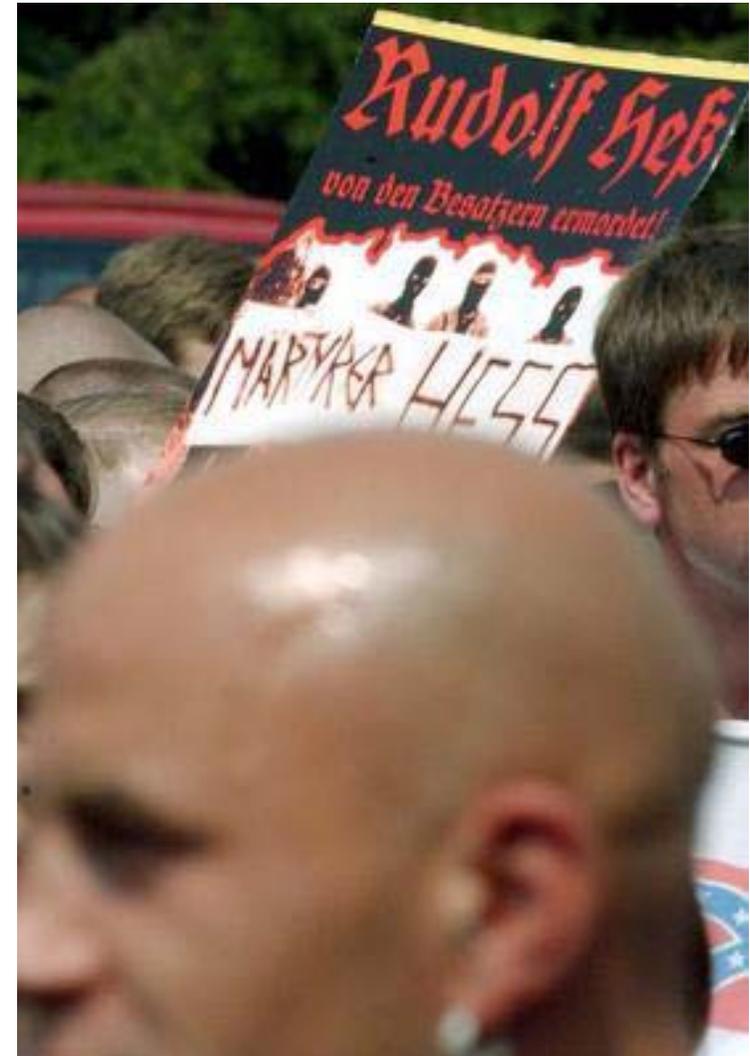
Startled by Alberto's tap on my shoulder and his saying softly, "hey! hey! anarchists!" I turned to look at whom he was pointing. Several punky looking kids and their dogs had just walked up to see the performance. Shyness disappeared and the anarchist network began to work its magic.

We spent that Saturday night roaming the streets of Ljubljana with a gang of 20 jovial anarchists, their dogs, and a noisy grocery cart full of beer, wine, juice, and a boom box. Eventually we settled down by the river and they switched on the boom box and danced the night away to everything from cheesy electronic music to punk. Five hours later, after a magical night of pure joy and surreal dancing and reveling (and Alberto falling in love with one of the women), we headed back to their squat, "Molotov," where they served us soup and bread before we crashed out.

And this morning, they pushed us to pursue our hitchhiking plans. Two of them volunteered to guide us to the hitchhiker spot and tried to have us pay our bus fare to the highway with thin slices of carrot, meant to resemble orange bus tokens. We ended up riding for free after they explained to the driver we were intending to hitchhike (why that got us on for free, I don't know). And after 20 minutes of them excitedly trying to hitchhike *for* us, they left, and our hitchhiking miseries commenced.

They hooked us up with contact info for their friends in Zagreb, so in an hour, after this train ride, we will see if Zagreb is as joyous a place as Ljubljana...

By 2 o'clock nearly 1000 people had manifested, along with tables of the AFA, DKP (Deutschland Kommunist Partei), the Socialist Party, liberal anti-globalization groups, and the PBC (Party of the Bible of Christianity or something). To my amusement, many radicals attacked this PBC table. First verbally, by telling them to go join the fascists, and then physically, by trying to take as many pamphlets as possible and then ripping them in front of their faces and throwing them out. The Christians just weren't having it. Their pamphlets on the evils of homosexuality were a hot item with the antifas, but the manner in which they took them (20 at a time, while screaming in their face and tearing them up) prompted the Christians to call over the cops. With all this lounging around time, why not attack the Christian fascists? Among their table of pamphlets also sat a pro-Israel pamphlet.



train pull off, before any sense of relief slowly began to trickle into me. I missed my train, but so be it. None of my bones were broken. Thankfully, the only physical contact between us and the Nazis had come when a Nazi spat on one of the antifas as we exited the train.

Tonight, I wandered the streets of this German city, Hof, for a couple hours. The price of internet access kept me wandering for a couple hours longer. At 4 Euros/hour, this was almost 14 times the Bulgarian rate. I felt safe on the streets knowing the Nazis were not in this town. Turkish businesses lined most of the streets, evoking a memories of several weeks back. Lots of cars blaring hip-hop. And everyone I asked about an internet cafe was kind and helpful. No cops either. Such a change from a day ago or even this afternoon's streets full of cops and hatred.

So, one more lonely night in a train station, teetering on the fine line between boredom and adventure. I was even ready to give in and do the hostel thing, but, upon investigation, Hof seems to be a hostel-less town.

The antifa demo itself was a bit odd (with a 9am meet-up time, a 3 o'clock march, and a 4:30 concert). I woke up in the meadow to the morning sun thawing out my body from the extremely frigid night before. At 9am, I walked to the town and saw lines of police vans encircling the meeting point. I skirted around and sat down 2 blocks away, careful not to wander too far off, for fear of the fascist mobilization. Ten or so people looked like they were there for the antifa demo and some others were setting up booths to sell their politics. After 2 hours, it became clear people were aiming for the 3 o'clock start time. 6 hours of nothing – designed to foster autonomous actions I think, but, in reality, just a lot of loitering.



Disco Punk Nazis

Sometimes I forget that I'm not just in a car watching my travels pass through the windshield. Last night I looked at the moon for the first time since leaving from Phoenix. I'm in a completely unfamiliar world, and then, last night, I looked at the moon. A dose of reality. A reminder that this isn't a storybook, but it's my real, 3-D life – same as it is in the States.

The train from Zagreb to Beograd took only 6 hours, but at some point in the ride, we entered a portal to a new reality. We rolled through Serbia in the dark and I sat staring at the Yugoslav landscape picturing American bombers screaming over the countryside toward Beograd devilishly planning to shower the city with bombs. My first time in a recently war-torn region, I sickly preoccupied myself with thoughts of where the nearest landmine could be.

As we entered the sprawling city of Beograd, just before crossing the Sava River, a dense, sprawling shanty town spilled from beneath the bridges and onto a large plot of land. Later we would find out that these were Gypsy squatters who lived in the slummiest of slums, were spit on and ostracized daily, and were the subject of the city's efforts to one day evict them in the name of cleaning up the city. Croatia was fairly well-off and Slovenia even more so. But Serbia, having caught much of the brunt of the Balkan Wars, was cloaked in poverty unlike anything I had ever seen.

After a long bus ride and an even longer walk through a forest, we found Maja's building. Folks in Zagreb gave us contact info for anarchists in Yugoslavia, and Maja was the first we called. Three excited, giggling teenage girls wound us through the towering, concrete-block buildings showing us the way up to her 9th floor flat. And here, we talked with Maja late into the night learning of a region fraught with a history of Tito's Eastern Bloc state socialism, fervent nationalism, and continuous nationalist and religious conflict. And a *present day* filled with political corruption, leftover feelings of nationalism and fascism, and stark poverty.

Skinheads are an everyday reality for residents of Beograd. Gypsies and gays are usual targets and what anti-fascist movement there is here, is small and rightly scared. The police allow the attacks to occur and afterward refuse to prosecute those who attack gays and gypsies. Maja told us of a video that had clearly shown a person (being chased by a mob of skinheads) run up to a police car and beg for help. The police officer remained in his car refusing to help, and

the skinheads proceeded to kick the shit out of this person. Despite the video being made public, neither the officer nor any of the skinheads were charged.

In Zagreb, a couple days before we arrived, the first ever gay parade there was attacked by 150 local skinheads. Anti-fascists had mobilized to help fend them off, but their small numbers resulted in many injuries and 1 arrest. Shortly after the parade, a group of 20 Nazis stormed the leftist internet cafe in Zagreb. While 10 Nazis waited outside in the street to lookout for cops, the Nazis inside the cafe beat up a waiter and several customers and smashed several computers. According to our new friends in Zagreb, this is nothing new. Their concert venue (a space donated by the city) was attacked a month earlier as it had its windows smashed. The space also had a history of fascists disrupting concerts and smashing speakers and other equipment.

Croatian police were catching heat from the media for kicking gypsies out of parks in a concerted effort to force them out of Zagreb. Because of this, the police phoned one of the skinhead organizations and asked them to take care of the problem.

The generosity and genuine care that the anarchists of Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Beograd have given us continues to inspire me. Maja offered us a place to crash (a bed!) and a much-needed shower (first one of the trip). We've spent today holed up in her flat, 9 stories up, overlooking the sprawl of Beograd with its towering block apartments rising out of expanses of forests. We almost didn't find her place last night as we got off the bus 2 (long) stops too early. We snaked our way through the forest for 45 minutes before stumbling into the belly of these towering apartment complexes. During our 45 minutes of exhaustive searching,



Running the Streets

Holy shit! I barely escaped an attack by a mob of Nazis. I haven't been this scared since I was nearly attacked by a pit bull as a child. No police truncheon or car crash has ever scared me to the degree I was scared today. (These have an element of control. Fascist groups have the capacity to unleash unpredictable fury and rage.) So scared it hurt to talk. So scared I trembled uncontrollably.



After the demo, some nice antifas dropped me off at the train station. I sat alone waiting for my train as several cops mulled around the platform. I was soon joined by other antifas (around 30) who walked to the station as a group. Most of them boarded the train going south, leaving 4 of us to wait for the northbound train. Four of us and 4 cops. Then came the skinheads. First only 5 of them. Then 10, then 15, smiling at us and talking shit in German. *Big motherfuckers.* And all our antifa friends had left.

After some tense moments of waiting to see which train the skinheads would ride and finding out it was ours, one of the antifa women asked a cop if any of them would ride on the train with us. He laughed, and said, "You should have thought of this earlier." Fuck you. I grew cold as the Nazis stared us down from only 15 feet away. A serious ass-kicking was imminent – a beating I had never before experienced or wanted to experience. More than ever, I wanted to close my eyes and open them to find myself 5-years-old again snuggling in the comfort of my bed. *I also could have settled for 40 or 50 antifas magically appearing.* But my bed sounded nice. The hatred was thick in the air, heavy and foreboding. The train came. And 2 cops actually, and unbelievably, boarded with us and the Nazis. And for 45 grueling minutes, I sat frozen, not able to move aside from my inadvertent trembling. One of the antifas leaned close to me and said, "Welcome to Germany." I desperately wanted out of that train. I tried laughing about it, but it just wasn't funny. When the train reached its final stop, the others were heading to Frankfurt. I wasn't. I had nowhere to go. No plans other than to be in Berlin to fly back to the States in 5 days. So, I picked Leipzig. Someone last year told me they had once lived in a squat there. This is all I knew about the place. So when it came time to catch my Leipzig-bound train, I could only watch as all the Nazis filed onto it. I watched them all get on, and then the

of hate. Still somewhat scared to venture out on the streets this afternoon, I sit here, waiting and thinking. What if they recognize me at the counter-demonstration tomorrow? How should I change my appearance for the demo and then afterwards? Do the antifas mask up or are the German laws ultra-strict against it? What do I do *after* the demo? Hopefully leave in a large group with people I'll meet. Do I stick around here a day after so the Nazis go home and get off the streets, or do I get on a bus or train as quickly as possible and get my ass to Berlin or Wiemar? What if Nazis are on my bus or train? *Where do I sleep tonight?* No money in a rich town... maybe the woods? Are they safe?

I'm flippin out. They've got me how they want me: Scared.



In Gaza, our Danish friends warned us of the German sensitivity to the Palestinian struggle, especially among anti-fascists. With a history plagued by Nazi activity, many German anti-fascists are still struggling to transcend lies of eternal Jewish innocence – trying to come to terms with whether or not brutal occupation and mass slaughter is a justified part of fleeing persecution from the same horrors. The German anti-fascist's support of Israel (as a gesture of goodwill and apology) is fraught with contradictions and an underlying racism. It is, after all, the Germans who helped drive them there.

we thought only briefly of sleeping in the woods after reminding ourselves of what we had read (however true) about undiscovered landmines and frequent thefts. Then again, the U.S. government warns us against even visiting Yugoslavia or the Palestinian territories.

So what had appeared last night to be a hectic city and time ahead in Beograd, has turned into a day of peace and quiet – sleeping late, cooking rice and squash, staring out from Maja's balcony, conversing with her, and endlessly feeding her house rabbit.

Most of the folks we meet up with seem into the whole hardcore/ grind-core/ punk scene in Eastern Europe. It seems like in a place like Beograd this is the only pocket of hope, the only outlet in a city rife with nationalistic hate and patriarchal fascism. Dado, our savior in Zagreb, is in a band (AK47) that plays gigs throughout Eastern Europe. He told us touring stories where skinheads had attacked shows. In Bucharest not too long ago, Dado tells us of a show that got cut short by an invasion of "disco punk nazis!?!?" Holy god. We can only imagine. Actually we can't even do that. What the hell are disco punk nazis??? We told him if we traveled through Romania on our way back up, we would stay alert and look out for them.

Dado was fun. He looked at the map with us as we tried to plan the rest of our journey, continually pointing to different countries on our route saying, "oh, this region's fucked up." Alberto tried to convince Dado to travel with us to Turkey where we would play soccer with Sinan and everyone else Dado could bring down.

Earlier in Ljubljana, Maja (not the Beograd Maja) told us someone would be waiting for us at the Zagreb train station when we arrived, but this wasn't the case. Upon arrival in Zagreb, we found a mall-like area where at 1am on a Sunday night/ Monday morning, bars were open and food was being served. First, Alberto engaged in a 2-minute long laughfest with a non-English speaking female store clerk over attempting to buy a phone card with euros (in a non-euro country). *I don't understand why it was so funny either, but I suspect sparks were flying in absolute defiance of the language barrier.* It was all very cute. Moments later, Alberto stared down leftovers on some guy's table. Seeing the hunger and hope in Alberto's eyes, a large Croatian fellow approached Alberto and handed him a large beef kabob sandwich. Hmm... we thought, what do 2 vegans do with a gift of a large slab of beef? The Croatian guy, sensing our hesitancy (or maybe disgust), proceeded to escort us to the food counter and offered to buy us anything on the menu. Somewhat frightened by this large fellow, but hungry as hell, we got a vegetable sandwich and soon left.

We still needed money to buy a phone card, so on the street we found a woman willing to trade currency. We gave her 1 Euro, and to our surprise, she handed us the equivalent of 4 Euros in Croatian money, insisting the whole while it was the correct exchange rate. Okay.

After a quick phone call, Dado appeared and walked us to his flat. We talked and laughed with our new friend until 4:30 in the morning, slept until 7am, then met up with his friends Suncana, Fistra, and Dodo that day. They took us to the university and gave us their student ids, allowing us access to the \$1 vegan lunch. Dodo, from a small Croatian town, went to the university in Zagreb, but missed his hometown where everything was peaceful and the threat of Nazis was nil. He was extremely encouraging and excited about our trip to Palestine and wished us the best of luck in fighting the Israeli "Defense" Forces. Fistra's English wasn't so good and it frustrated him often, but he also offered good luck wishes, as did Suncana.

So, here we are in Beograd, trying to get to Istanbul by tomorrow. We spend a day or less with all of our new friends, and it doesn't ever seem like enough. Maybe 10 days would do it justice. We've discovered a pattern in the anarchist network: People only know people one country over; so as we country hop through the Balkans, we meet people who only know the folks we met in the last country and in the next country to which we are headed. Our new contact (via Beograd Maja) in Sofia can only be emailed, and email response time would render it useless to try to meet her. Maybe it will be useful on the way back up...

"The Department of State cautions U.S. Citizens of the potential danger of travel to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY)... Serbia: No specific threats or incidents of harassment involving American citizens have been reported since the Kostunica government took office in October, 2000. However, a potential for hostility towards U.S. citizens still exists as a result of the 1999 conflict between members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Serbian forces. Ethnic tensions in the ground safety zone, a five kilometer wide zone separating Kosovo from Serbia, have provoked outbursts of violence against Serb police and military positions. Other hazards include damaged infrastructure and unexploded ordnance scattered throughout the country."

- United States Department of State Travel Warning for Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, issued February 14, 2001

On Edge

For the first time since Alberto left, I'm really regretting traveling alone. The journey from Prague to Germany has destabilized me and obliterated whatever comfort level I had earlier.

A train transfer in the Czech Republic almost took a nasty turn when I tried to jump onto a train as it was pulling out of the station. My legs tingled for hours afterward as I was frozen in thought about the wicked reality that would have been had I fallen beneath the train.

Several hours later, a 3am to 8am wait in a Czech border town train station rattled me further: a proposition for sex followed by a cracked out guy on speed aggressively offering me his switchblade.

Finally, the German train came and skirted me across the border to a quaint German town. The train was the nicest yet by 100 times (and most expensive by 20 times), and the city, obviously wealthy and untouristed, offered me the respite and serenity of the Friday morning sun. Feeling safe and levelheaded, though nonetheless sleepy having spent the short night on the train station floor, I took the 10 minute bus ride to my intended destination, Wunsiedel – the site of a Saturday morning Nazi march. I found out earlier that large numbers of anti-fascists were mobilizing to stop the march. From the U.S., I had romanticized the German AFA (Anti-Fascist Action or antifa) so I wanted to see them for myself (and support them) on the streets.

I should have waited until tomorrow morning to bus into this town. A brief stroll around the small town yielded no signs or harbingers of the actions tomorrow. No posters on the lampposts, nothing in the papers, and no one talking of it. In one bar window, there were signs. One read, "We Support Freedom and Democracy," while another read, "Wunsiedel is Brains, Not Brawn." Maybe related to the demos, maybe not.

A short nap on the grass revived me considerably after a restless, unsatisfying early morning sleep in the Czech border train station. But then, as I sat on a bench in a post-nap daze, 4 big Nazi skinheads (one on crutches, haha!) approached me. "Shit!" I thought to myself. A minute ago this was a quaint little town I enjoyed strolling through. Now it is a prowling ground for boneheads. I am about to get my head kicked in. I responded to the initial German question with an "English? English?" They looked at each other, shrugged, and walked off! So here I sit in the library. Scared. Pretty fucking scared. Stupidly, I am wearing mostly black, but they are my only remaining clothes. Going alone to an anti-fascist demonstration – bad fucking idea. Now I sit here in the library listening to the children laugh and wanting badly to be a child again – to forget this world full



Blue Power

Our plan to get to the West Bank is foiled again! With the ferry from Athens to Haifa non-functional, we had planned on heading there over land. But Syrian and Jordanian visas are expensive, and, on this late of notice, Syrian visas may be impossible to get. Furthermore, we are extremely worried now about passing through Israeli customs with a Syrian stamp on our passports, not to mention Syria will not let us back in with an Israeli stamp. For this to work, we would have to talk Israeli passport control out of stamping our passports (which *is* possible, we've read) – which would give them even more of a reason to fuck with us. So... as a last resort, we'll probably fly from Istanbul to Tel Aviv for 330 fucking dollars. A huge blow to our financial situation, but now that we're already this far, turning back would be downright idiotic.

We are "trained" out having ridden trains from Frankfurt all the way to Istanbul. The ride from Beograd to Sofia: 14 hours overnight. From Sofia to Istanbul: 15 hours overnight. 14 hours in a train will fuck with your head. Alberto began peeing out of the train compartment window, while a Bulgarian tree nearly ripped my elbow off.

Sofia was full of metalheads. Yes, metalheads. A lot of fucking metalheads. I still can't figure them out. We met this American guy at Maja's place in Beograd who was at the gay pride march in Zagreb and afterward was pursued by 50+ running skinheads. (Surprisingly, he and the several people with him found refuge behind 5 or 6 confused cops.) He said most of the anti-gay parade demonstrators were Nazis sieg-heiling a lot. He also mentioned some metalheads were with them. Alberto thinks metal is often revolutionary (he likes using Sepultura as an example), but I'm not all that convinced and I was visibly scared to interact with any of them on the streets of Sofia.

Some guy with a "Blue Power" t-shirt was on our train out of Sofia. The t-shirt had a big clenched fist superimposed on the ☸ fascist symbol. We asked this Bulgarian woman to ask him what "Blue Power" was. He responded that "Blue Power" was a football fan club. When our train pulled out of the station, we saw graffiti reading, "Blue Zone, Blue Power" with swastikas. Fascism is a reality in Eastern Europe, and the movement to stamp them out is young, weak, and small, as the gay pride march in Zagreb showed. A far cry from Western

Europe's rich history of anti-fascist struggles, and where today anti-fascists usually outnumber and overwhelm fascists at demonstrations.

Sofia is a town without graffiti (aside from the swastikas and a hammer and sickle I saw in the city center). Old women wheatpaste large poster advertisements onto street poles in the middle of the afternoon on busy city streets and old, gray, Eastern bloc buildings dwarf anyone and everyone. Sofia is obviously more complex and confused than I can imagine, and maybe more complex and confused than Bulgarians can imagine.

Four people got kicked off the train at the Turkish/Bulgarian border for having invalid or no visas or no money, reminding us just how fucked up it is that we as Americans can travel freely while Eastern Europeans can hardly travel legally outside Eastern Europe (or even within!).

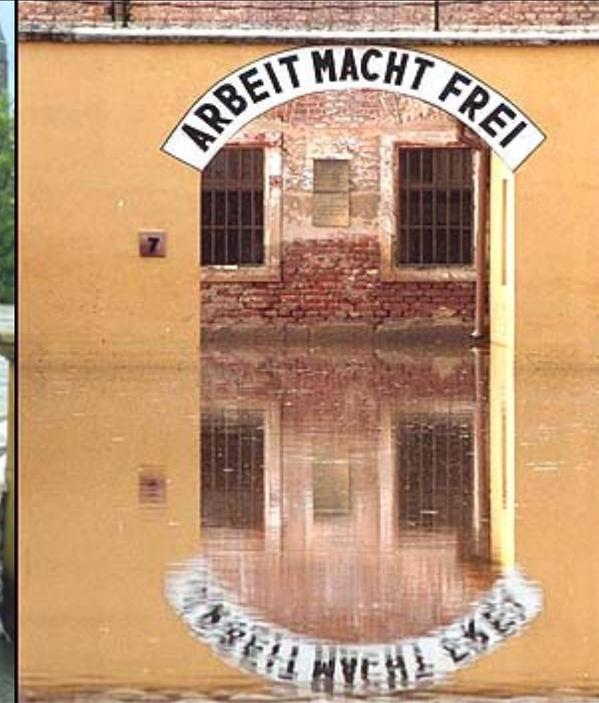
Two annoying Americans were also on the train to Istanbul doing "outreach" work for their evangelical college. Further inquiry uncovered they were "Learning how to talk to people in a post-Christian world." What the fuck? Where's the supplement guy with the green hat to kick them off the train when we need him. Shortly after hearing this, Alberto said to me rather loudly (loud enough for the evangelicals to hear), "If I spit out the window, do you think it'll hit the Christian?" I retreated to the recesses of our compartment in total disbelief and full of suppressed laughter. Alberto joined me shortly after to avoid a potential confrontation after realizing just how loudly he may have said it. We had to ride with this guy in our train for several more hours; he at least could have waited until the end to say something like that. Geez. Alberto just fails to realize the danger in stirring up trouble in closed spaces (i.e.- the graffiti in the airplane bathroom).

As our train stormed through the sunflower fields of northwestern Turkey, we waived to all the passersbys, and they excitedly waved back. Even the hotel vulture in the Istanbul train station told us good luck in finding our friend after we told him we didn't need a hotel since we were staying with a friend. So here we are in Istanbul – a plane flight away from "getting ourselves killed"...

"The Department of State warns U.S. citizens to defer travel to Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. Ongoing violence has caused numerous civilian deaths and injuries, including to some American tourists, students and residents. The potential for further terrorist acts remains high. The situation in Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank remains extremely volatile with continuing terrorist attacks, confrontations and clashes.

As a result of ongoing military activity in the West Bank and Gaza, sections of those areas have been declared closed military zones. The Government of Israel may deny entry at Ben Gurion Airport or at a land border to persons it believes might travel to "closed" areas in the West Bank or Gaza or to persons the Israeli authorities believe may sympathize with the Palestinian cause and are seeking to meet with Palestinian officials. Closed areas in the West Bank and Gaza have been subject to intense shelling and firing. In some instances, Americans have been wounded and their property damaged. Major cities in the West Bank are often placed under Israeli military curfew. All persons in areas under curfew should remain indoors or risk arrest or injury. Because of the closures and fighting, provision of medical and humanitarian care has been severely delayed in those areas... All travelers who enter or travel in Gaza or the West Bank should expect delays and difficulties at checkpoints located throughout those areas, and should exercise particular care when approaching and traveling through checkpoints. Travelers should also be aware they may not be allowed passage through the checkpoints."

- United States Department of State Travel Warning for Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, issued August 2, 2002



Misery Drowned, Dreams Afloat

City consumed by water. Police and military closed down streets everywhere. Sirens blare. Tourists gawk. And take photos. Something for the slideshow to impress the grandchildren. Trams stopped. Subway stopped. People walking all around. Confused, amazed, on edge.

The bourgeois urban district is fucked. First floors trashed. Like a riot, but no one to blame. Tank tracks carved into the streets. Broken sandbag walls, ripped up cobblestones, and trashed streets in post-riot form, but no angry black-clad petrol bomb throwers. Just water. People stare off the bridge at passing debris. No one controls what glides beneath them or slams into the supports. The raging torrent carries everything and no one knows what's next. No one. Anything can happen. The wealthy warehoused in nearby schools, the homeless still housed on the street. Abandoned, evacuated buildings lie in wait. The tides have turned. People grin at the momentary escape from the daily assault of their routine. The space transformed. People overwhelmed by the realization of the possibilities. Thousands of Czech police and military personnel on the streets: The illusion that all is under control. Nothing is under control. People smirk and laugh. Dreams of participating in the mess they observe. Anything can happen...

Fighting Fascists (I think) in Istanbul

When I asked Sinan if there were any fascist groups on the prowl in Istanbul like we had witnessed in Eastern Europe, he responded, "Of course, they are the ones in power." Little did I know, the next day I would go fascist fighting with a bunch of his friends.

We met his friends for the first time at a ferry terminal and quickly made our way to a restaurant by the water. Here, Marta quietly told us the story behind each of his friends while they talked away in Turkish, exchanging stories about attacking police lines and other such laughable adventures. Sinan called most of them "ex-leftists," which, after some time, we deduced to mean they had at one time been active in underground guerilla groups. Marta referred to the various characters as the "Trotskyist," "the student," "the street vendor," and so on: all mostly Kurds and all mostly communists (some who had once been active in the PKK- Workers' Party of Kurdistan).

The following language-heavy situation occurred all in Turkish, and only afterwards was it explained to us exactly what had happened:

We boarded the ferry to go home. On the ferry, we drank tea while a couple of Sinan's friends told jokes. A drunk guy stood up and told them to quiet down. Seconds later, he walked away to the deck of the ferry boat intending to disembark at the next terminal. This pissed off our crew. We were also getting off at the next stop, so we made our way down to the deck. A shouting argument broke out between our group and the drunk guy and his friend, and it soon escalated to a little pushing and shoving. At that point, all Alberto and I could decipher was the street vendor's declarations of "No Pasaran! No Pasaran!" (followed by the Trotskyist trying to calm him down, while Sinan and others continued to engage in the confrontation).

Afterwards, Sinan told us the drunk guy's crew were fascists picking on our group because some of us had long hair and because women were among us (in Turkey, in many spaces and late at night, women simply cannot be found). Sinan tells us the guy was confrontational because he assumed we were weak and could not defend ourselves. The Kurds stood up for us and in the shouting match,

the drunk guy shouted that he would call his people from "X" neighborhood. Sinan affirms that it is a fascist neighborhood.

We happen to spend the whole next day in this neighborhood and ran into no problems. Fascist or not, we don't know; though the evidence is weak, Sinan remains resolute. Alberto and I still find the incident humorous, though Sinan insists we should take it seriously. We find that even more humorous.

Self-Pity

All these addresses and still can't find a friend. Loneliness drags on in the maze of Prague. I tire of doing the same thing everyday, even if it is in a different city. Yesterday's excursion to Bratislava was but a mere extension of Budapest's wanderings.

In Bratislava, I was reprimanded at an English-language bookstore for looking at a book for too long. I was informed, "This is not a library!" and the book was then snatched from me and returned to the shelf. Hmmm, I thought. Fuck you.

I returned to the streets of Bratislava to decipher remnants of year-old posters desperately hugging the lampposts and to encounter, but by no means understand, the big windows in the street revealing an underworld of ancient building ruins and, one time, a bucket of bones!

Then, I surprised myself by successfully hitching a ride to Prague. A 10 minute wait generated a 50km ride to the Czech-Slovak border, and then a long, arduous 2-hour wait in the rain generated the 270km ride to Prague I was hoping for. Some older guy and his small, well-groomed dog (which he *threw* into the back seat every time it harmlessly wandered into the front seat) sped me down the highway at 180km/h (112mph!) getting me there in a sheer 1 1/2 hours.

So, after a night on a rooftop, here I sit in flood-ravaged Prague, wandering (hopelessly for non-existent squats and infoshops), hungry (having only eaten, in the past 2 days, 1 loaf of bread, some mustard, some olives, apples off a wonderful tree, and miniature plums off trees as well), dreaming (of memories and of time with family and friends), and wanting to be held in the security of someone else – longing for the touch of someone's hand on mine, for a gentle kiss behind my ear.



Into the West

I've now entered the West. I think it starts at the Romanian/Hungarian border. That's where the train drops off the old red cars and keeps the newer blue cars. Rolling through the Hungarian plains, the blue cars slowly fill up with the sound of cell phones and video games. Here to welcome me to the West on this train is a special contingent of Hungarian youth lost in all the folds of their FUBU gear and playing a loop of KRS-1 on their boom box. I'm also in a train car where my head begins to spin because of all the damn gadgets and noises – a car where people stop talking to each other.

In complete defiance of public transportation, I walked all over Budapest for 4 hours... and nothing happened. Sometimes people just don't talk to you. Sometimes you don't talk to them. Where I was told there was an international bus station, nothing but more gray buildings appeared before me. A shopping trip for a *little* bread turned sour as I was handed a 1kg loaf. And a shopping trip for water, combined with my refusal to learn every fucking language I encountered, resulted in the purchase of 1.5kg of *sparkling* water – what is the point of that stuff? So as I stroll around a drizzly, gray, Londonesque Budapest biting chunks of the mammoth bread and swigging water with bubbles, half-assedly looking for an anarchist library (of which I had no address for) in a city of 2 million while steering clear of the train station vultures, I... I... I don't know what. I don't know how to finish that sentence. That's just what I did. Like that sentence, I had no real goal; and it made me feel not depressed (as I thought it would), but happy. Simply happy.

Istanbul Moments

Sinan and Marta spent much of their time trying to secure visas to Greece, but because the process was insanely bureaucratic, it took them several days of paperwork and running around Istanbul to figure it out – the same days we were there. Sinan, feeling somewhat bad about deserting us arranged for his friend Baris to show us around and spend time with us. Of the several nights in Istanbul, we only spent one at Sinan's place. The remaining were spent with his friends. We quickly grew bored with Baris showing us around in a constant cycle of internet cafes, tea, and restaurants, and chose to venture off on our own.

While drinking tea near the waterside, Alberto encouraged a young shoe-polishing boy (maybe 10 years old) to come polish my pathetic disintegrating, smelly, tennis shoes. Despite my pleas against such a ludicrous act, the boy began. In the end, nothing was left except stained-black shoes, lots of laughter, and a kid demanding a whopping 5 dollars.

In one of the main tourist districts we sat and watched people while constantly fending off hostel owners and other such vultures. An 8 year-old girl approached us and offered us spinning tops for us to buy. We refused, but she hung around to chat with us in the language of grunts and ill communication. She borrowed a pen and paper from us and, for 10 minutes, drew this picture while we played with her tops.



One week after I left Craiova, my friends in the C.A.F. (Craiovan Anarcho Front) sent me this letter to update me on their situation.

This is an excerpt of a letter to two of my good friends back in the States. I sent it from Istanbul several days before heading south to Palestine.

Friday, July 5, 2002

[Here is] one of the few feelings ive been able to put into words. "I miss [home] in a strange way. I think its because I feel somewhat incompetent (like its hard to participate in my own life and its hard to have any effect on my surroundings) while traveling. this is not to say that I am not learning and enjoying myself, but its just that – a one-way experience where I feel everything and others dont. maybe and hopefully the west bank will be different."

isnt this just describing how tourism feels? im constantly thinking how not to be a tourist, but maybe thats what I am (I just try not to spend money!). im so far from home that what I have to offer is of little relevancy to anyone. im just a spectacle and so are they. in order to negate this horrible feeling, im trying to take something back from all this, hoping I can know how to better create my own life and trigger others to do the same. maybe this is what not knowing others' language (and them not being from america) has to offer. people grunt at me and I grunt back. its hard for communication and meaning to get watered down by big words. no one is articulate and no one tries to be. Its frustrating, but so is articulate conversation. and more often than not, articulate conversation masks more than it explains.

weve been getting hooked up with anarchists along the way, so we havent yet had a night on a rooftop or outside. we briefly thought about sleeping in the woods of serbia, but the prospect of a land mine blowing my leg off destroyed that idea. we are with sinan now and have hit a horrible roadblock in our plans, so today we bought a roundtrip ticket from Istanbul to tel aviv. we fly on sunday.

take care of yourself... love, me

Everything begone with the secret services report about the anarchist groups from romania. Probaly an order on european level and a good ocasion to justifyce the alocated money for the state secure. The campain fallows the desinformation and the manipulation of public opinion, probaly in unleash the sight of some by proportion operations agaisnt us. With the subservient press help and always looking for sensational, we are acused of anything what can be worsor: zoophilya, pedophilya, pornograpfy, diling drugs, violence... Appeared articles in the all news papers from Bucharest. The service secret report says that the anarchist movement from Romania was abolishing in january 2002, after what in september 2001 managed to stop the punk fest from Craiova, where we were planing to keep in touch with the garbages from West. The anarchist groups from Romania are not in the autorities opinion, only some alcoholic rockers, manipulated by international terrorists wich want to put in p! ractise here what they can't do in their countries. Everything seem a stupid joke, but is how serious can be. We belive that we don't do mostly nothing and at once we appeared on the first news paper page, in public opinion atention. Now are next the local news papers , from Craiova, who announce the secret services that they are wrong and the anarchists from Craiova are more active than ever.

The Food not Bombs action on 1 may and our participation at the biggest trade unions in the last 10 years, were harshly criticate, after what in that moment mass-media from Craiova was praising the actions of young activists against ignorance. If and Food not Bombs is against people, we can expect to anything from them. In the materials about the anarchists from Romania, we are mix with all the kind of sects: yogins, prehistoric christians who promovate an primitive anarcho-sindicalism, bolsheviks, etc. They used all the kinds of slogans against Romania and agaisnt God wich they attributed to us. In the forthcoming the gouvemenet prepare a law against sects, where probaly they want to frame us to. We don't know what can we do, we will continue to survive like till now. Anyway, our next actions seem to be compromised, but we hope that all this will lead to a better coloboration with the people from the other towns, maybe even the seting up ABC-Romania, even if the name seem to be compromise.

The solidarity is the power !!!



The Poverty of Craiovan Life

"Revolution is giving a food to a dog"
-Julia

On my fourth day in Craiova, Julia says to me "You are bored? Well, this is our life." Emptiness and depression are rife in a visibly apathetic population. Admittedly, it is also rife in her. This prevailing feeling of hopelessness is especially depressing to an outsider (the same feeling I got in Gaza when people are literally trapped in their country). I did sense some hope and possibility, particularly in their graffiti, in their camaraderie with friends who also are actively trying to find a way out of the mess, and in the love between Julia and Kristi.

Concerning Romania's historical roller coaster ride through communism and into capitalism, they are disgusted. Trading one form of corruption for another – one form of totalitarianism for another – is not change, they tell me. "The hammer and sickle is like a swastika for us. A symbol of totalitarianism." Expressing great frustration with the politics of Romania's older generations, they tell me, "We don't like old people." They point out the layout of the train cars – train cars designed so the only place to sit is in a compartment for six: 2 benches of 3 facing each other. It is a prime example of "forcing community," reeking of authoritarian control over daily life instead of organic self-activity.

Anarchists in the USSR, shortly before its collapse, issued this statement that I feel encompasses much of how the Craiovans feel:

"When you are a worker, you have nothing to do in everyday life with Yeltsin, Landsbergis or Gorbachev, but rather with the cashier at work who pays you little, and with the cashier at the shop who takes a lot from you, and even peeps into your passport. We worry much more about changing those relationships, than about the relationships between Yeltsin and Gorbachev, and Landsbergis."

**"The TV invite people to think free,
anyone who betray that think is harshly punished
...for us, doesn't exist the resignation,
only the death."**

-Statement from the Craiovan Anarcho Front, C.A.F.

3 days in Jerusalem

A tense plane flight preceded our expected, but still overwhelming, interrogation by Israeli customs and border police at Ben Guiron International Airport in Tel Aviv. Just before the questioning, Alberto went to the bathroom. Upon returning, he whispered to me, "I'm literally scared shitless." Three separate officials reeled through the same questions and we tried our best to convey consistent normalcy in answering in spite of Alberto's Osama-like appearance and my obviously Middle-Eastern name. *How long do you plan to stay and what do you plan on doing in Israel?* Why of course, we are tourists. For 3 weeks we plan on checking out Jerusalem's old city, Temple Mount, Mount of Olives, Yad Vashem (holocaust memorial), and Tel Aviv nightlife (we had studied the guidebook beforehand). *Do you know anyone in Israel?* No, we're just here to see the sites and stay in hostels. *Why did you decide to come to Israel at this time?* We were in Turkey already and our friend there told us Israel was beautiful. *Has he ever been to Israel?* Ummm... no... but he has friends who have.

Luckily, they bought our story just as we were about to crack. We had left behind our books, our writing, and anything else we had to suggest we were not your typical American tourists. So, when they searched our bags a second time, they still found nothing.

A little bathroom graffiti (in the most militarized airport in the world) and a bus ride later, we found ourselves on the streets of Jerusalem. A phone call to an International Solidarity Movement (ISM) coordinator landed us in East Jerusalem, where we were greeted by many helpful folks and one of those quiet, comforting pleasures in life: a police station window pierced by a stone from an earlier day's festivities.

Still asking myself what exactly I was doing in Jerusalem, I hoped to help answer that at the ISM training. After a nonviolence bludgeoning, I quickly became disillusioned with the coordinators (particularly the one from the Christian peacemakers). This only confirmed my speculation that they were all about bourgeois, liberal, tourist activism. While they pathologically preached nonviolence, they simultaneously included the statement *we support the Palestinian right for self-determination through armed struggle*. This racist contradiction infuriated me. If they really believed nonviolence was all that would work, then their support for armed struggle was support for failure and suicide.



And if they did feel that some degree of militant self-defense was necessary to bring peace, then why all the obsessive nonviolence rhetoric? Was it so all the internationals could only *appear* to be in solidarity, but actually just avoiding dirtying their hands? There was an unspoken alliance between Alberto, me, and several others who were disturbed by this. When the spent teargas canisters got passed around, we joked about when the guns were going to be passed around. We agreed not to create too much trouble in the ranks of the ISM during training and to just wait until we got into Gaza or the West Bank to figure out how we could be useful.

However, it became clear early on, this was no Spanish Civil War.

On Wednesday our affinity group (Alberto, me, and 3 Brits) chose to travel to Gaza. But shortly before we were scheduled to leave Jerusalem, a cop was shot two blocks from where we were waiting for our minibus. Pop! Pop! Dozens of Palestinians bolted past us in the opposite direction. Then came the sirens of the police and the IDF. Within two minutes, the bustling market area outside Damascus gate was under siege. Hundreds of Israeli soldiers and police officers poured from their jeeps and squad cars and flooded the streets of this Palestinian neighborhood. With automatic weapons in hand, they screamed at, shoved, and kicked anyone in their way. Being internationals and feeling foolishly invincible, we stuck around and walked toward where there was the most commotion, while Palestinian youth ran for cover indoors and shopkeepers closed up as quickly as possible. Street vendors were not as lucky. As the vendors rushed to pack up their goods, soldiers stormed through the stalls kicking over boxes of fruit and vegetables. In one case, a 12-year-old boy selling shoes near me had all his shoeboxes and shoes launched into the air and scattered in the bushes by the repeated kicks of a soldier. Peering down a side street, we saw the barrels of two soldiers guns aimed directly at us. They were providing cover for their fellow soldiers who had a Palestinian man penned on the ground and their assault rifles pressed to his head.

The kicking of fruit stands continued and several of us rushed over to help vendors pack up before all their goods could be lost. The situation deescalated as the streets, now filled with fruit and jeeps, emptied. As soldiers rummaged through bushes looking for suspects, Damascus Gate was shut down and random identification checks began. A soldier in a jeep pointed at me and belched something in Hebrew over his intercom. I turned away and walked back toward where we had been waiting for the minibus. Seconds later, a soldier grabbed my shoulder, spun me around, and asked for ID. I showed him my U.S. passport, and he apologized before scurrying off.

Disheartened and angered by the entire chain of events and upon seeing such a small act prompt immediate, unchecked martial law, I thought about how difficult resistance must be.

Confused why their male friends were shaking other males' hands but not mine, I looked to Julia who whispered, "They think you're a girl... It's okay because everyone thinks I am a boy." I thought to myself, "Well, then we must be doing something right." In all, I did a lot of sitting still while the 6 friends spoke for hours in Romanian at the cafe, but I didn't really mind. They had become my brothers and sisters. We laughed and smiled together and when it was time to say goodbye at the train station, we were all glad my train was 2 hours late.

Graffiti Awards

Best Graffiti: **Gaza**

Granted, with no cops around, it's hardly illegal to write on walls. And plus, I can't read 90% of it. But the 10% I can understand tells stories from the heart unlike any other city I've been to.

Worst Graffiti: **Sofia**

With swastikas, hammer and sickles, the infrequent sloppy tag, and nothing else left to counter the gargantuan statues of dead authoritarian men, Sofia's streets simply suck.

Most Craiovan Graffiti: **Craiova**

Slogans like "Fuck the police," "No God, No State," and "Against Fascism, Against Nazism" (all in the same handwriting) pepper the city. But that's not the best part. The letters of the semi-clandestine C.A.F. (Craiovan Anarcho Front) can be found at strategic points throughout the city: from the national theater to the main tourist square to the city courthouse to the towering Communist Bloc statues to the city legislature and, finally, to the city zoo.

Craiova, Romania

In my heartbroken slumber, I failed to realize how *helpful* the Bulgarian border police were at the ferry crossing. They hooked me up with a Bulgarian trucker headed to Craiova. After the "non-stop, 24-hour" ferry decided not to show up for 7 hours, we finally crossed the border after a night sleeping in this guy's truck. The silence continued all the way to Craiova, as he knew no English, and me, no Bulgarian. Nonetheless, a free ride, compliments of the Bulgarian border police. In Craiova, I called a number belonging to Craiovan anarchists I had picked up over the duration of my travels. Within an hour, I was on a bus with 2 punky kids on the way to their flat. I spent the next 4 days immersed in Craiovan anarchist punk subculture, or maybe it was just a fetishization of Western Punk subculture. Is it still subculture if it comes from the West? Maybe it's Western *subcultural imperialism*. In any case, I was hearing British punk music from the '80s with alarming regularity. Just how Ivo was surprised I didn't know of the best Japanese or Belgian hardcore band, and in Frankfurt, Dephct1 was surprised I didn't know of the most famous Austrian graffiti artist, the Craiovan punks were mildly surprised at my ignorance of '80s British punk bands. But they were good people. Really downright good people – 4 identical days of learning, laughter, trips to the same cafe, meeting their friends, wrestling their pit bulls, and increasing boredom. They smoked a lot of cigarettes, drank everyday, acknowledged their boredom, and blamed most of it on "police repression." They were often tailed by the police, never got their mail, harassed by the police, taken in and questioned by the police, couldn't distribute pamphlets because they "corrupted the youth," any punk show they tried to host was broken up by the cops upon them hearing the lyrics, and the laws are such that their meetings and organizations have to be approved by the State.

All in all, they were just *good* people caught up in a bad situation that they could do very little about. Like a prison, they couldn't leave Romania. Romanian jobs paid little, and outside Romania, their money was almost worthless. They are caught in a society tired of change and exhausted from the wretchedness and constant struggle that is capitalism. People were tired; they wanted out, but couldn't see a way.

A trip to the dentist costs a month and a half's pay at work, so most of them had pretty bad teeth. The jokes of Andrea's missing teeth and her trouble chewing bread were endless. She had 5 piercings in her mouth (lip and tongue) and had swallowed 4 or 5 piercings over the years. She acknowledged the wretched state of her mouth in good fashion by tattooing "hell" inside her bottom lip.

Life

When you start writing, you stop living. For the past 6 days I have written nothing of my experiences in Istanbul, Jerusalem, or Gaza. When you make it a point to write about what makes you feel alive, you cannot ever really feel alive because you become a slave to the pen and paper: trying to capture moments which cannot be captured. These moments of life are especially amazing *exactly because they cannot be captured* by anything: words, pictures, stories, or even imagination. To avoid becoming a character in your own video game, that is *to feel alive*, is to feel yourself unpredictable, unlimited, unknowing, and *undocumentable*. For 6 days I was alive, not knowing or caring about writing any of this.

Furthermore, I've discovered that reading is nothing more than watching TV, in that it kills you while you are engaged in it. (Alberto read his book as we stormed through Gaza. Amidst scenes of war and misery, Alberto was reading about scenes of war and misery.)

So maybe you should set this zine aside and go play in the rain or talk to your neighbor or throw rocks at armories and save this reading for when you're grounded, in a prison cell, at school, or at work.



console. A wound that will never heal. A pain exacerbated by knowing someone else is enduring the same pain and you will *never* share your pain.

-lonely and broken-hearted in southwest Romania.

3 days in Gaza

The minibus dropped us off at the Erez border crossing on the north end of Gaza. Our group of 20 internationals stuck with a story of us being a Christian group visiting Christian Palestinians in Gaza. After 45 minutes of passport inspections by the Israelis and no direct questioning we were granted passage into Gaza. We left the air-conditioned Israeli checkpoint station and walked the contested, heavily militarized 2km no man's land into Gaza. In the searing desert heat, we headed along the road past the sniper towers and concrete barricades until we reached a small guardhouse flying a Palestinian flag. Two armed Palestinian Authority officers jovially greeted us, inspected our passports, wrote our names down, thanked us for coming, and wished us a pleasant stay in Gaza.

An ISM coordinator met us with two taxi vans. Driving one of them, was our soon to be best friend, Dia. We stormed through Gaza in Dia's taxi, soaking up scenes from the new society we had only read about. With Dia's Arabic pop music providing the soundtrack, we flew through the streets of Gaza: walls covered in an incredible never-ending graffiti dialogue – images of Hamas militants, Che Guevara, doves superimposed on the Israeli and Palestinian flags, the cartoon character of a deceased Palestinian cartoonist (now a symbol for the Marxist PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine)), murals of fallen martyrs (from suicide bombers to children shot by sniper fire), and endless Arabic messages. In addition to the graffiti, martyr posters plastered every wall and column – posters of anyone and everyone who has died at the hand of the Israelis. Once through Gaza City, we continued to head south with the Mediterranean beach to the west and a heavily fortified Israeli settlement to the east. With Dia at the wheel, we stormed down the beautiful coast to the town of Nuseirat, a journey we would make again and again in the week to come.

We spent the next couple days, sleeping at "The Association" (some civil community space), spending time on the street with the kids and time in their houses with their families, and plotting a course of action for the water well action. The children were fantastic as were their older siblings. We simply had to walk on the street for 2 minutes before we would be invited into a house for a meal or a place to sleep. The children seemed to never stop smiling, probably because very few foreigners venture into Gaza. Kids would simply ask us, "Sharon?" and we would give a definitive thumbs down to the man that had terrorized a population. Sometimes a question of "Arafat?" would follow, and the kids would be split on whether or not he was a man worthy of a thumbs up, which I never gave. Having seen very few outsiders since the second intifada began 2 years



Inhaling Acid Fumes and Other Ways to Paralyze the Heart

Someone ripped my heart out and threw it in a tub of acid. I can feel the hole in my heart growing bigger and bigger with each passing second. I fell in love last night on the Bulgarian train. And it wasn't just one of those one-way falling-in-love events. *We fell in love with each other.* She wedged her hand through my ribs and carved a chunk out of my heart. Like a mountain near collapse after its coal interior has been excavated leaving nothing but a weak shell, I can feel the insides of my heart being hollowed out, melting away, as time passes and the realization that I will never see her again, even if I so desperately wanted to (and I can say with 100% conviction that I do), sets in. We had stupid conversations in broken English. And then we had them again, the same ones, just to have an excuse to talk to one another – to be with each other. Her words still fresh in my head. "Why are you sitting alone?" To which I answered brilliantly, "Because there is an empty seat here." And the stupid repeated question: "You are going to Berlin, yes?" On the platform after the train journey, she told me how to catch the ferry to Romania and said I had plenty of time. *I immediately left to catch the ferry.* People say and do stupid shit when they are in love. Her name was Ini (or in Bulgarian NHH) or Eenee or something like that. She is from Vidin in Bulgaria. *I like Vidin.* She knows my name and that I am from America. This is all we know of each other. Perhaps I could see her again if I went back to Vidin and sat around there asking people for Ini. I've thought about doing it. The way we looked at each other, each dumbfounded and stupefied, trying to think of anything to talk to each other about. We got off the train and I passed her once and waved. Then I had the audacity to hang around so she would have to pass me again. She told me the ferry left at midnight. It was 10:15pm. I probably should have hung around and had tea with her at some cafe or something, but I left. I fucking left! In no hurry to get to Romania, I secretly hoped she would offer me a place to sleep in Vidin because sleeping on the ferry seemed miserable. But I left. I fucking left! No exchanging of email or numbers or addresses or deep, passionate kisses, just waves and stupid smiles. If I had a bed to sleep in that night, I would have cried myself to sleep. I wouldn't be surprised if she did the same. We both wanted more interaction between each other, but were obviously too stupid to know how to say that. My own body now eats away at my heart, because it knows the hole can only grow bigger. It's falling in love and *never being able to act on it.* For all meaningful purposes, she died. Everything I ever wanted to tell her, I can't. It's a love without an end. Tears without anyone to

ago, many Palestinians were skeptical of who we were. Oftentimes the first greeting on the street would be either a Hebrew "shalom" to test us or the more direct question (or statement) "Yahoud?" ("Jew," in Arabic).

Our first night in Gaza we went to a wedding, where, supposedly, everyone knew who we were. A lone kid on a donkey cart greeted us outside with the most genuine and caring smile I have ever seen. We went upstairs to the wedding, were given fruit punch to drink, forced to dance, and then forced to leave when it was the women's turn to dance. We went outside and, over tea, talked with fellow ISMs and Palestinians about the well situation we had planned on helping with. Night fell and I wandered to the street to stare up at the stars in the dry Gazan heat trying to put my life and travels in perspective. After an hour or so of losing myself in the stars, I saw flares launched skyward from several miles away. A young Palestinian man told me the settlers shoot flares whenever they think they see something moving in the night that might be a trespasser attacking.

That night at the wedding house showed me how willing many Palestinians in Gaza are to engage with me. They are eager to talk, tell stories, ask questions, and listen. Movement in and out of Gaza has been prohibited since the second uprising (intifada) began in September of 2000: students no longer able to attend universities in the West Bank and family members no longer able to visit each other. As Dia continued to emphasize, "It is like a prison." With nowhere to go, Palestinians in Gaza can only dream of travel outside it. With Gaza approximately 40 miles long and 5 miles wide, Dia tells us dejectedly that there's only so far he can drive his taxi: "From Rafah, I drive 45 minutes and I am already at Erez. And from the beach, only 5 minutes until I am to the soldiers." To top this off, Israeli settlements dart into Gaza (see map on page 26) dragging with them the heavily bunkered settlement-only highways and their numerous military checkpoints. Thus, it is impossible to travel from Rafah to Erez without encountering a checkpoint.

At the wedding, we were introduced to "the fat man." Midway through the night, our Palestinian host announced that the fat man had an important announcement: after much thought, the fat man had decided to start the "International Club for Peace" and this would be the first night of the Club's existence. The fat man was in charge of the Association but we rarely saw him after that wedding night. We would later find out, only 3 days after its inception, the International Club for Peace was cancelled by the fat man himself. Unrelated to the ICP, we returned one night with Mohammed to find a large sign inside the association from the fat man requesting a donation for staying there. Mohammed, disgusted by the sign and its message, ripped the sign down and crammed it into the small garbage can. "The fat man. He is stupid," said Mohammed to us. "We do not want or need your money. Your being here is a large enough contribution."

All the while we were preparing for an action to help repair a Palestinian water well. The well had been nonfunctional for over 18 months, due to Israeli gunfire and tampering. The well was on Palestinian territory, but dangerously

close to the Nezarim settlement. From their watchtowers, Israeli snipers continually shot over the heads of municipal workers whenever they dared to venture out to fix the well. Our role we decided was to accompany the workers to the well, be with them while they fixed it, and walk back with them. We were to literally serve as human shields. The day before we planned to do this, we had decided to tell the IDF of our plans to fix the well so they wouldn't shoot at us. A group of 10 of us internationals walked up toward one of their barracks and demanded to speak to someone in person. A tank gun barrel followed us the entire way and the soldiers hidden in the bunker screamed at us to stop. Realizing a tank shell could be lobbed our way any second, we stopped and held our passports high in the air. A bored soldier shouted from his position "Take your clothes off!" Another shouted, "I am looking for a wife!" If the first two shouts didn't come as a shock, then the next one did: "Are you tourists?" (Yea, we're just trying to get to the beach!) After informing them of our plan and getting minimal response, we left.

The following day we walked out from behind the Palestinian sandbags into the desert heat with 4 Palestinian workers, Mohammed, and Dia. Some of the internationals held their passports high hoping to discourage warning shots from the Israelis. A half-mile later, we reached the well: lots of bullet hole damage, particularly in the gas tank, but no heavy mortar damage as some thought there might be. For a couple hours we hung out

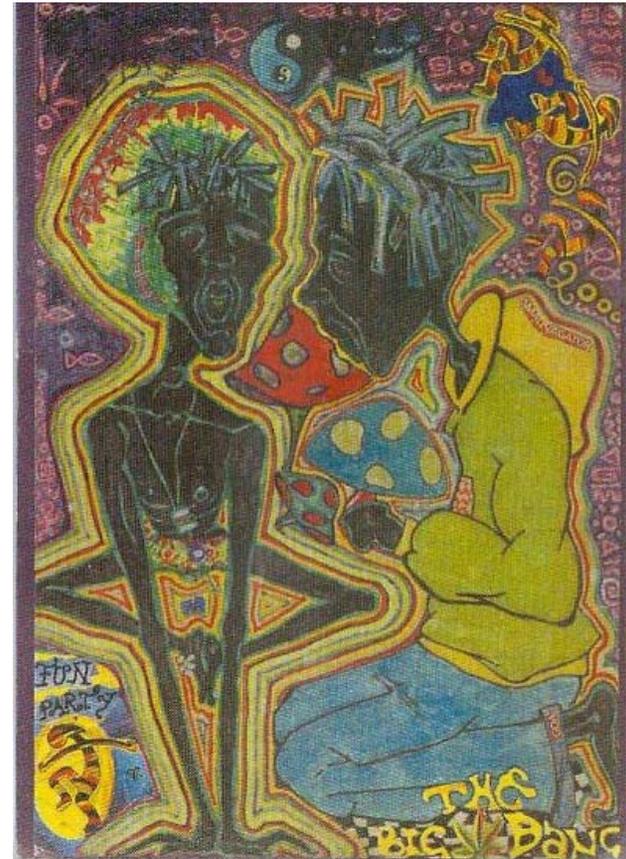


by the well eating nearby grapes, taking photos, talking to Dia, and staring at the watchtower in the distance. Kicking up a cloud of sand in its wake, a tank rumbled down from behind one of the IDF bunkers and took a position atop a dune a mere 100 yards from us. From then until the workers had finished, we again had the barrel of a tank gun zeroed in on us. Without further incident, we returned to safer ground only to find out that more work needed to be done on the well since all the tools and parts had not been brought the first time – the first (and definitely not the last) sign of the Palestinian Authority's incompetence.

streets right outside her window. And the dead rat takes priority over a dying person (Bozata).

He may snap. He may hurt himself; there is no telling. It's an ugly situation any way you look at it. What he wants out of life, I don't know, but I feel like he could have gotten it at the Big Bang. All the time in the world, a clean place to sleep, mostly free food, and he just passed his days away drinking spirits and listening to loud music. This is literally all he did aside from a little sweeping here and there. Depressing and frustrating, yet no one to blame but the creators of progress who seem to be leaving behind more and more people headed on a lonely, isolated, boring path of self-hate and self-destruction: a post-Communist, capitalist Bulgaria where people have long forgot how to take care of each other – how to pick up friends when they've fallen. More "progress" has reached here than in Palestine, but Bulgaria has so much farther to go to derail from this track of destruction and death. I have more hope for Palestine than I do for Sofia – a land full of class tensions, corruption, depression, Nazis, the mafia, false dreams of America, and isolation that fosters the conditions of hate. Everyone fighting each other *and themselves*, looking for a way out, but actually driving themselves deeper and deeper into a hole of desperation, confusion, and hatred. *And hopelessness.*

In Palestine, at least, there is hope. They haven't turned their guns on each other... yet.



Bozata

Traveling without Alberto, I find myself invisible in situations that it would be impossible to be invisible in with 2 people. After finding my way back to the Big Bang alone despite Robert's warnings of "bandits in the night," I found myself watching an argument where I couldn't understand a word being spoken. I sat in a room with Bozata and George as they argued over whether Bozata should be kicked out or allowed to stay in the Big Bang. Bozata, a loner with no or few friends, had been offered a room in the Big Bang because he had slept all winter on the streets. His friend that had gotten him a room in the Big Bang had left Sofia and ended his involvement with the Big Bang, but this left Bozata behind. They felt Bozata was just being a parasite since he had not done much work at the Big Bang and the small tasks (like watering the garden) he had been asked to help with, he had simply not done. Furthermore, especially the past week, he had been playing his music really, really loud early in the morning and late at night. Robert was particularly pissed off at this. And the final straw was the death of Bozata's mother rat in a house full of vegetarians and self-professed "animal lovers." How he killed it perplexed everyone, but *death by spirits* seems likely. Another theory is that Bozata initially acquired the rats from a laboratory where it was already infected with a deadly virus. Bizarre, but for reasons I can't quite get my head around, this was talked about as a serious possibility. So, I sat in this room as George, the gentlest and calmest of the Big Bangers, softly laid out the issues to Bozata in Bulgarian and Bozata frequently responded rather gently as well with another statement I could not understand. This continued on for 15 minutes and, because of my linguistic incapacity, I finally left the room. The argument later spilled over to other Big Bangers. One screamed at him for several minutes before storming off for the night.

No one could fully understand Bozata and where he was coming from; this was both admitted and apparent. Bozata was devastated and angry, yet surprisingly calm. He had nowhere to go and no friends for support it seemed.

Vera's bourgeois fantasies of cleanliness also worked their way into the anti-Bozata coalition, as she claimed he made the place smell. As I said before, Bozata was remarkably clean and neat. God, Vera's bourgeois fantasies of saving the environment and worshipping the earth while scolding its industries as she rides in a car, showers daily, and basically lives a bourgeois, wasteful way. She scolds industrialization while spitting on its victims simultaneously. Her (5!) Discovery channels are a more important issue than the people dying on the

Rafah

Last night felt good. We roamed the streets of Rafah for several hours. Desolate streets. Watchtowers with snipers a kilometer away, strikingly similar to what I know about the Nazi concentration camps. We were there to help. Somehow, right or wrong, I felt invincible being an American. Somewhat reluctant to venture out onto the streets at night, our Palestinian hosts finally caved into our pleas to go out on the streets with us and show us where the tanks might be.

Rafah is on the border with Egypt, and the Israelis have watchtowers along this southern border of Gaza. At all times of the day and night, bored soldiers fire at farm animals, birds, water supply tanks, and whatever else simply for kicks. And without provocation, they often fire on Palestinians both from the towers and from tanks that, most nights, drive across the border and onto the streets of southern Rafah. Shelling and gunfire throughout the night is commonplace as is the killing of Palestinians as a result of these assaults. Last night, a woman was killed and several homes near the border destroyed by an Israeli bulldozer. They don't go without a fight though. Gun battles often rage into the night when tanks begin to creep into central Rafah. I was told there is too much resistance from the people to allow tanks to enter the city center.

At dinner, I was told the cafe where we were eating is where young men come after a day of rock-throwing at the IDF-infested gate that marks the Palestinian-Egyptian border. The first talk of rock-throwing since we arrived in Gaza! With a blatant and intentional disregard for the ISM's blatantly and intentionally hypocritical, racist policy of pacifism, we asked our hosts how we could best help their communities fend off the tanks. After much hesitation, Jabril told us of the daily rock-throwing (at tanks) ritual and his participation. He told us "maybe" he would take us rock-throwing tomorrow. Several minutes later he retracted his "maybe" statement because he was worried about us and didn't want to be responsible for us if anything happened (These folks are too fucking nice). The whole idea of internationals coming over to Palestine was that we would be able to take risks Palestinians wouldn't (i.e. challenging checkpoints).

In any case, later that night, we cautiously but firmly talked Jabril and his friends into coming with us to see the tanks. He took us to the city center where snipers fire into the night down several main streets. Careful to take certain streets and not others, we made our way to Brazil (a refugee camp initially erected by Brazilian relief groups decades ago) stopping to buy a watermelon from one of the vendors who must sleep by his stand to keep watch over his

watermelons. We found no tanks, just the occasional roving band of young men, rats scurrying across the street, and no cars. A ghostly scene in high contrast to the bustling streets and markets of Rafah during the daylight hours. Upon our return back to Jabril's place, we ran into a group of 4 young men also heading in our direction. One of them handed me what I thought was a spent tank shell, but I quickly realized it was a cylinder of metal stuffed with explosives: a homemade "anti-tank bomb!" Other than the meager (often empty) guns of the PA, this was the first sign of physical resistance to the occupation I had seen.

Our hosts stayed awake all night, watching TV really loud throughout, and *really, really* loud at about 5:30am. They proceeded to drag Alberto out of bed and dangle another one of us out the 2nd floor window, getting childish kicks that only the drunk normally get. In their humorous stupor, they insisted on giving us Arabic names, falling into hysterics each time one of them named us. From here on, Alberto and I would go by Hamsa and Tariq, respectively.

Also, in my groggy, confused state in the morning, I noticed sounds of sheep screaming permeating the walls and windows of their flat. At first, I thought the sheep were more victims of last night's Israeli target practice, but after a brief explanation from our Palestinian friends and a look out the window, I learned they were merely being dragged against their will to the morning market.



Reflections in and of the Big Bang

A huge room to myself with one wall of just windows and a double-size mattress. For \$2.50/night! Each day is a little different, so I'm less and less compelled to leave, though really anxious to see other cities and lands. I dream about things from my childhood I haven't thought about (much less, remembered) in years. With increasing frequency, I dream of friends across the ocean. I think it's a symptom of homesickness. I dream of playing soccer with a team I was on 8 years ago. I dream of silly shit too – like my friend Clutch lost a remote control in this large grassy field and I went to go find it. I found about 10 remotes in the field. Probably means something ground-breakingly profound.

I've entered an entirely new phase of bowel movement: either diarrhetic constipation or constipative diarrhea. Whatever you choose to label it, I don't go to the bathroom for days on end, but when I do, it's the same old story. Hopefully this means the rodent inside me is slowly being crushed by my recovering intestines, or maybe this is the final step before a painful death. Only time will tell.

Further sanity has been unearthed in Sofia. People who run this hostel/party venue (called the "Big Bang Club") are really swell folks. Turns out Bozata is just a friend of a friend of theirs they are letting stay here because otherwise he'd be on the street. There are increasing tensions between them and Bozata. He plays his music at an earsplitting volume during odd hours. And, yesterday, one of his pet rats died. The rest of the Big Bang gang was really stumped, as was I, at how he managed to kill a rat (those creatures survived Chernobyl!).

Robert and the 2 people who own the Big Bang, George and Vera, invited me along to a trance festival. I mean, come on, a trance festival in Bulgaria! An offer of something where I had no idea what to expect. Also, I was itching to leave the Big Bang without Bozata's companionship for just 1 day. We drove an hour through the western Bulgarian countryside, mountains, and industrial towns only to make it as far as the entrance to the festival. A 6-day festival: 1 price for all 6 days. None of this "we're just here for a day" business. To top it off, they had a special (increased) price for foreigners from "wealthy" countries: \$90. Back to Sofia!

In the car, Vera pointed out 2 big concrete giants in the industrial zone and assured me that despite them looking like nuclear reactors, they were just water storage for Sofia. I don't know whether to feel reassured that there isn't a nuclear plant near the Big Bang or whether I should be really worried the water I had been drinking was being stored in an old nuclear reactor facility.

depressing, but after 3 days of intense heat and 3 months without seeing rain, it's nice for a change. And the good thing about the old block industrial buildings is their huge windows, from which I can peer out at the surreal, drizzling landscape.

All this appraisal of the setting ignores the fact that the smell of roasting meat, from a nearby food packaging facility, consistently consumes the air in the garden and the building. Robert declares with a straight face, "They are our enemies. We are vegetarian."

My brief further exploration of the city yesterday yielded more bewilderment and heightened intrigue. Beautiful women in scant clothes next to elderly women rummaging through trash bins next to old weathered men visibly marred by years of hardship. Groups of Gypsies in tattered clothing set against the backdrop of speeding Mercedeses doing their duty of quarantining men in expensive suits while hip youth are busy loitering, skating, and rollerblading on a vert ramp dwarfed by and at the base of an enormous Eastern Bloc relic of a statue depicting the glorious and gray days of Communist rule. A bit like New York City, you could say, with its extremes of poverty and wealth... minus the Stalinist art exhibition.

Bozata saying "you are free." Everywhere we went, people seemed to have an inferiority complex to America. America's superiority complex has made it down to the personal level in many countries, leaving people striving for an American myth of happiness.

Bozata continues both *to disturb me* with his anti-gypsy, racist rhetoric and his habit of asking for money to buy cigarettes and "spirits" (from a pharmacy, I think its rubbing alcohol, but it's dirt cheap) and *to win my heart over* with his persistent gentleness and care in making my stay worthwhile. He diligently calculates the money he owes me on his wrinkled piece of paper, slowly doing the addition, knowing very well he will never be able to repay me in a couple days' time. He cleans the hallway outside his room so thoroughly and slowly, feeds his pet rats before he feeds himself, and tells me with tears forming in his eyes how Bulgaria is a prison he can't leave. My heart melts.

I wish I knew how to make others fly. Until then, I'm still wingless.

**The Earth is Dying.
Stop Talking, Start Deed.**

-text of a curious banner hanging from trees in a deserted corner of a Sofia park

A Lawless Prison

With American-made bombs, fighter jets, helicopters, jeeps, tanks, guns, and bulldozers, the IDF continues to systematically decimate the entire Gaza strip. On the road south to Rafah, just outside Khan Yunis, we visited the shell of a Palestinian police station that several months earlier had been the target of IDF tanks in a concerted offensive by Sharon to destroy the existing civil structures in Gaza. The result of this offensive: a people trapped on a fragmented 200 square-mile plot of land indefinitely without a functioning governmental authority. The social relations in this lawless prison: astounding. In a land without cops (the PA is defunct and powerless), Gaza is the safest, most hospitable place I've ever been. People here take care of one another – something that cannot be said for most of the Western world's societies of isolation, alienation, and rat races. Gaza is a testimony to the triumph of the human spirit to engage in self-organization and self-activity. Granted, a part of this incredible, anarchistic behavior may be directly correlated with the need for a community to stick together under the constant threat of extermination.

Another American friend of mine in Palestine, observed:

"The situation may appear hopeless – and it's true that there is a glaring lack of clear, uncompromising leadership in Palestine that is tied to a popular base. It's not though. Palestinians have a stronger civil society than in most places I've been. They have more professionalism in running their hospitals, schools, community centers, and local municipalities than you can imagine. They are actively building their society. And they are determined in their insistence that they cannot live under military occupation any longer."

With schools in session, roads being maintained, hospitals operational, community centers and women's centers thriving, and newspapers printing, it is difficult to recognize this region as one of the poorest in the world. The graffiti on the wall tells yesterday's news through images of bomb blasts, house demolitions, and martyr memorials. The dusty, dry streets full of smiles, soccer matches, and laughter mask the misery and hopelessness so many people feel. Gaza's numerous, old, half-built, multi-story buildings shoot columns from their hollow skeletons, and from these columns, rebar lunges farther skyward – hoping the shelling will stop soon enough to realize dreams of building, just as the people of Gaza do.

Red Flags, Black Flags

Our final day in Rafah, we were guests at a Fateh (run by the Palestinian Authority) summer camp for kids. We walked in the gates and as usual the kids mobbed us, asking, "What's your name? What's your name?" The camp directors escorted us to a porch overlooking the large courtyard. Then, on a director's simple command, the kids obediently formed a semi-circle and, for the next 45 minutes, performed weird, militant performances of singing, chanting, clapping, and stomping. As we stood there watching the performances, I whispered to Alberto, "This ain't no YMCA summer camp!" We had definitely achieved the disturbing status of celebrity, perhaps even that of royalty. Mohammed convinced the two Japanese ISMs with us to play their kazoo and sing for the kids. After this short interlude, as quickly they had appeared in formation, the kids methodically dispersed into their buildings. The courtyard area was actually a soccer field surrounded by solid red, black, green, and white flags (the national colors of Palestine). As the kids kicked up dust during their performances, the black and red flags on each of the soccer goalposts fluttered proudly in the wind, though it was obviously not intended to evoke such secular revolutionary feelings.

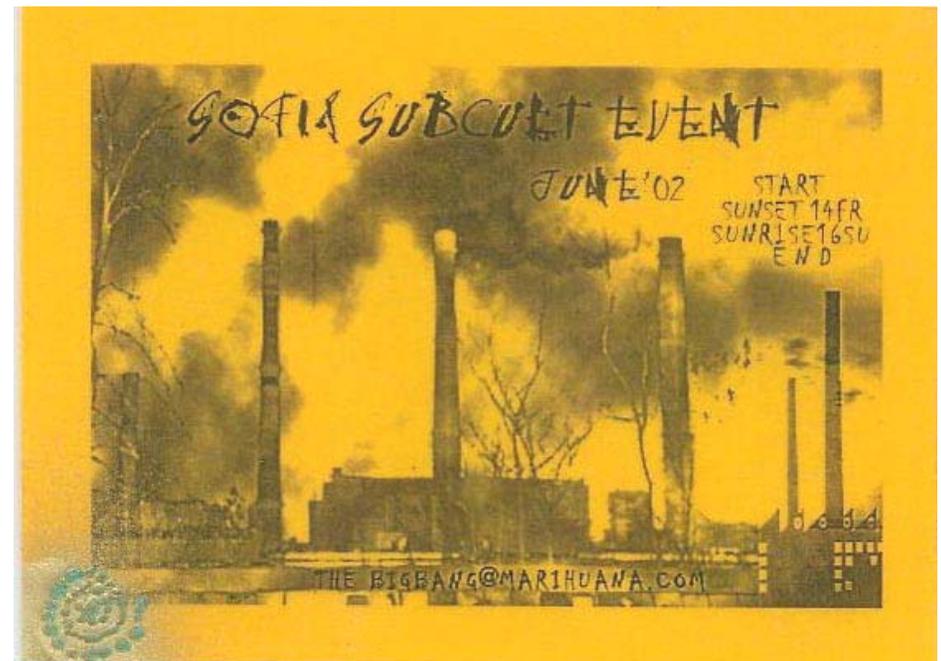
A couple days later in Gaza City, we were invited to watch a kids' soccer championship match at a miniature-sized arena. The match was great fun, but again, we were spectacularized to a repulsive degree as we were offered field-side seats while the other kids were forced to watch from the bleachers above. We had begun to notice how much of the Palestinian life we had come to know was limited to the male world. At this soccer match, hundreds of men and boys watched, while 20 or so played. The only women in the arena were the 5 women with our group. The situation worsened when some kids above began spitting down on us. Several women felt they were being targeted and grew increasingly upset.

From that point forward, I began to realize that, in many spaces, *women are nowhere!* I had felt something was a little off in the days before it finally hit home that our experience was strictly the male experience. Not only was it clear what the male experience was, but also it also showed how fucked up that experience was when women's invisibility and evasion from the male world defined so much of it. One particular incident occurred where an international ISM woman's actions slammed head on with the realm of acceptability for women in Gaza. She simply went for a walk with two men at night. One of the men was a good Palestinian friend of ours, and the other, a BBC reporter – neither of the men was

Wingless in Sofia

This hostel/subcultural party venue, set in the industrial district of Sofia, has served as quite a relief. They tend a garden here, maintain this large 4-story building, create and run a hostel on one of the floors, and occasionally throw parties here. Robert, the Austrian guy, tells me the work is oftentimes too much for the 4 people that live here. However, he enjoys the quiet and solitude of the location. No neighbors to complain about loud music, towering mountains on the not-too-distant horizon, smokestacks shooting upward from the green trees that blanket the district, desolate roads, eroding buildings, and the intricate, woven maze of large concrete pipes which surface from the earth and snake along the streets 10 meters up, before diving back toward the earth, continuing on, and then finally piercing nearby buildings only to burst forth from the building and snake onward. It is, in fact, a little cove of humanity – a respite from the fierce and sinister streets of central Sofia, an oasis of sanity in a confusing city its residents can't even seem to fathom.

The longer I stay here, the longer it seems possible to stay here. Three days of blazing, but pleasant, sunshine and then, this morning, a light, steady rain falling from a gray sky. This is how they made it look in the West: old industrial Eastern Bloc states with gray skies, smokestacks, and old Russian cars. Sounds



trees, and found ourselves at the base of an old administrative building undergoing small-scale renovations to become a youth hostel. It was remarkably clean and run by a nice Austrian guy (with anti-Nazi, anti-fascist posters on his bedroom door – a relief, to say the least). I was handed the keys to my own room for \$2.50 /night and slept for a much-needed 11 hours.

Bozata was like Bulgaria: a mess – a mess of confused people looking for someone to blame and someone to foolishly aspire to (usually America.) *Looking for a way out.* And my sleeplessness didn't help me see a foggy, befuddled situation any more clearly. *And suddenly, the notion of a disco Nazi punk does not seem all that fictional or outlandish.*

I find myself longing for the comfort of sleep on the Turkish beach, the comfort of walking down the street with some degree of confidence, knowing you won't get mugged. The comfort of someone sane to talk to. *Maybe I'll just go check my email.* Maybe I'll go to the Bulgarian beach to escape the mess of Sofia. Maybe I should just bolt up to Germany or Prague. Maybe I should just stay in the East and keep hoping to meet someone sensible like we did in Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Beograd. It seemed so easy then.

a family member. One of the Palestinian men involved with the Association saw this and angrily demanded for Mohammed to go pick her up. Mohammed, a Christian and the most liberal Palestinian we had met, reluctantly drove his car to pick her up. She rightly raised hell when she got back to the Association, telling a sympathetic Mohammed she was not a child and could make her own decisions.

Excerpt from one of Alberto's letters:

far from my earlier sense that I am entering into an overwhelming *intifada* or "shaking off" of colonization, I often get the sense that I am entering into a situation in which a people are being systematically genocided. and, what stings deepest (and is surprisingly reminiscent of the "Indian Wars" of america) is that the genocide is being carried out not only by colonial masters, but with the active and willing collaboration of a portion of the indigenous population that insists on calling their murderous concessions "leadership."

it seems clear that it will take nothing less than a brilliant, passionate and inspiring global *intifada* to rectify the present predicament. my fear is that the current threat is so great that in order to simply **stop the onslaught** of settlements and other methods of colonial decimation of humanity, we will all settle for a "solution" no less destructive, imperialistic and vicious than the "peace" brought by Oslo.

for example, a fundamentalist Islamic state of Palestine would be a horrendous failure for the prospects of self-determination in Palestine *or anywhere else.* this is being talked about and attempted as a legitimate solution to the ruthless supremacist terror of Israel and the stupid, selfish corruption of the Palestinian Authority. and, Islamic fundamentalism exists, is being put into practice as a model (by seizing state power) in other places throughout the world. it's not like we have any reason to be confused about the potential of this option.

but essentially all of the options currently presented require a great leap of faith. Said's excellent book, which I have greatly enjoyed "The End of the Peace Process" is full of calls for "citizenship" and "equal rights before the law." this also is -- theoretically -- being put into practice in places like america and South Africa. but it is an utter fiction. it just doesn't count as a real option. nothing we have experienced in america gives us reason to believe that if we just twiddled around more with the present system that it would provide "liberty and justice for all."

we need to come up with a new vision. a more complicated, brilliant and dignified vision than currently counts in the realm of "realistic."

Well, Ummm... stop it. please.

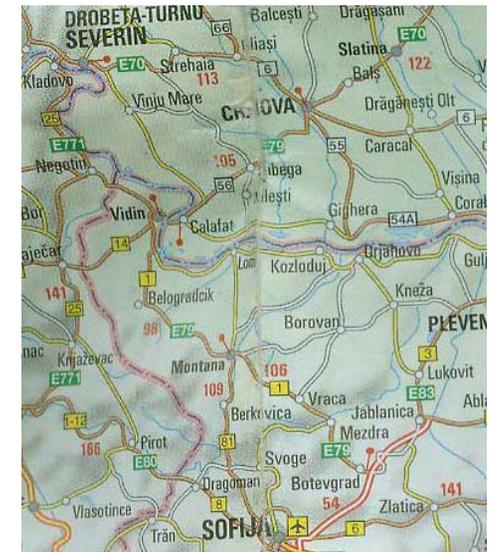
So, we went back out to the well yesterday to repair the damage the IDF had inflicted since our first trip out there. Only this time we were accompanied by a tractor pulling a tank full of gas and a big fucking bulldozer! Alberto reminded me of the possibilities of such machines in destroying military machinery and the settlements. We joked about the PA's ulterior plans of a guerilla assault on the military outposts and settlements, but then reminded ourselves what an incompetent, bureaucratic nightmare the PA is – they didn't even bring all the parts to fix the well the first day. They had also told us the whole well had been utterly demolished by tank shells. The lack of coordination made the prospects for a sneak attack entirely unrealistic.

We went out there: 20 internationals, 7 Palestinian workers, and a tractor towing a small tank of petrol. In a cloud of sand, a tank rumbled 100 meters away and took a position atop a sand dune, swinging its barrel around until aimed directly at us. Five of us went back to retrieve the bulldozer. Riding atop the bulldozer proved a rewarding experience – an experience safety laws in the U.S. would never permit! Five of us rode on the outside of the bulldozer to shield the Palestinian driver from sniper fire, and we rumbled off toward the well. Upon seeing us, the tank's gun barrel followed us all the way to the well. Its quite a thrill to ride on the exterior of a bulldozer while a tank has its bearings set on you. Above the grumbling of the bulldozer, Alberto shouted that this was *the* one thing revolutionary movements in America were missing. We reached the well and the tank stormed toward us, creaking to a halt 15 meters away, barrel still zeroed in on us. As fun as riding on a bulldozer was, the fun stopped there. Scary fuckin' situation. We held our bulletproof passports up and after a long moment of thought, the soldiers who had popped their heads out, returned to the recesses of their tank and guided it back to their old position atop the sand dune.

Today we returned to check on the well and the road the bulldozer had carved out of the sand. The well had run out of petrol, and the road was fucked... by an Israeli bulldozer. After we walked out to the well, we were greeted by screams of "we will kill you motherfucker!" from the Israeli watchtower followed by laughter.

Flirting with the Nazi Underground... or Not

Agreeing to meet Bozata was, arguably, a mistake. He was an old drunk who put me in a bus in Sofia's city center to show me around. I was too scared to ask him why he had an artsy swastika tattooed on the back of his hand. Scared shitless I was walking around with a Nazi, I was begging to somehow get out of this circumstance. I had phone numbers of others in Sofia, so I continually pestered him that I needed to get to a payphone. He continued to mumble stuff in his broken English how Sofia was "like a jungle – *dangerous*." And apparently I was supposed to be on the lookout for the evil Gypsies who take your money. His hatred of gypsies was apparent and repulsive and reinforced my speculation that he was a Nazi. "But," I thought to myself, "He was good friends with Ivo, who was Jewish. How could this be?" Afraid of asking him personally, I asked one of his friends about his tattoo. He told me it was old and not really a Nazi thing, but some artistic rendition by some '80s group (perhaps a band) called SXX or something like that. In any case, he assured me Bozata wasn't a Nazi. Bozata was a poor, desperate, confused guy who wanted a new life. "Old communism and now capitalism. The same. Both very bad." I began to see a heart in him and finally saw he truly wanted to make me happy during my stay in Sofia. He kicked trash around in the park mumbling ashamedly that Bulgaria is dirty. When the bus and trams came late, he said dejectedly that Bulgaria is fucked up. He wanted out. Failure to get in touch with the other contacts left me with him for the night. I boarded an empty city bus with him and we wound our way through the creepy, derelict streets in the city's industrial zone. We disembarked, ducked through a small patch of



swastika and SS graffiti began to surface (a surreal situation indeed: a quaint, unthreatening town blanketed in fascist graffiti). I began to feel sick, hoping against all hope to meet a sane Bulgarian.

The bus ride to Sofia tranquilized me pretty soundly for 20 minutes. Then, I suddenly awoke in a panic frantically looking around the bus for Alberto and wondering why he would get off the bus without telling me. Long periods of sleeplessness create absurd situations un-dreamable to a sober, well-rested person – situations that make the sleepless smile hysterically at their own idiocy.

Dia and the Kids

With a photograph of himself with his Mercedes taxi dangling from his rearview mirror of that same taxi, Dia drove us everywhere. Rarely would he charge us any money for the rides, despite it being his only job and knowing we had money to give him. Alberto, the three Brits, and I became real close friends with Dia by the end of our week stay in Gaza. He would genuinely enjoy learning English from us and teaching us Arabic while we rolled around Gaza hunting for an open falafel shop, going to the beach or internet cafe, or just cruising around as an excuse to spend time with each other. We drove by a shop owner shoving a live chicken headfirst into a grinder. We grimaced. Dia smiled and laughed. My name sounded like his, so he encouraged me to now go by his name. But perhaps the defining quality of Dia was the frequent exchanges of “Dia, I love you.” “Alberto, I love you.” “Tariq, I love you.” Or in Arabic, “Habibi.” And we really meant it.

Images of poking jellyfish with Dia on the beach at night, eating falafel in his taxi, and Dia fending off the hordes of kids wanting to talk to the Americans in his taxi fill my head. In one case, Dia could no longer fend the kids off, so we just sat in the van talking and fucking with the kids. We kept unstrapping their hats until they got fed up and took them off. Alberto insisted his name was Osama Bin Laden, but most of the kids laughingly refused to believe him. Some of the kids started questioning us about our religion. We said we had none and asked about their religion. They were puzzled by our answer of “no religion,” and then told us “Muslim,” and then said “Allah,” while pointing towards a cloud in the sky. I leaned over Alberto, stretched my head out the window, looked up, and then asked with a puzzled look on my face, “where?” Dia smiled and shook his head at Alberto and me.

Kids here, both the boys and girls, seem fundamental to the Palestinian struggle. There is a unique, wonderful naivety in many of the kids – refreshing when held up against all the bullshit Hamas dogmatism. Alberto and one of the Brits went for a walk one night in Nuseirat and were stoned by a group of young men before one of them came up to them and said, “We are Hamas. This is our street.” Albeit, Hamas has the most popularity amongst Palestinians because of their social welfare programs (schools, community centers, etc.) and their role in armed resistance to the eternal Israeli encroachment. But their politics is shit.

I’m increasingly fed up with greetings of “yahoud,” “shalom,” and “israel?” Do the kids really think that every fucking outsider an enemy? The adults say

they are just being kids, but the adults do it too. And stuck between the horrors of the Israeli military and settlers and the wretched Islamic vanguardism of groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad (to which many of their parents subscribe), it becomes difficult to get angry with the kids. There is no denying the incredible political awareness and energy the kids have, perhaps the greatest of anywhere in the world. As we were leaving an internet café, one of the Brits started chanting "Palestine! Palestine!" and before long, he had incited around 100 kids to chant with him.

Another endearing quality of the children was their propensity to invite us to their houses. Oftentimes I accepted the invitation, and typically what happened was a retrospectively humorous situation where we sat quietly (because of the language barrier) with their family smiling, staring, and drinking tea for insane amounts of time because every effort to leave was met with an offer of more tea.



Ivo

Bulgaria is fucking with my head. Twelve different, consecutive vehicles of transportation non-stop for 22 hours. Two hours of uncomfortable sleep in 40 hours. I got to Stara Zagora at 10am. It was beautiful: a sunny Sunday afternoon with lots of trees to serve as shade. reminded me enough of a small American town to fend off a growing homesickness – a longing for familiarity. Then... I saw the prices. Bottled water: 20 cents; loaf of bread: 20 cents; Internet: 25 cents/hour. Holy shit, an American could live here for years off very little savings.

I called this guy, Ivo, whose name was given to me in Beograd a month earlier. I didn't know him. Ivo was just some guy whose name was in a zine as a distributor of hardcore and punk music. Basically, a random, unknown contact in Bulgaria. The guy in Beograd hadn't known Ivo; I wish he had.

Ivo was a weird motherfucker. A self-described "hardcore Stalinist," he longed for the days of Eastern Bloc Bulgaria. He was an English teacher who was only 29 but looked 54. He described the situation in Bulgaria as dismal. He earned the average salary of \$80/month with a rent of \$40/month. The kids in high school fell evenly into 1 of 4 categories: those into metal music, those into punk/hardcore music, those into "black" music, and those into fascist and Nazi gangs. He talked about porno with a hidden, sexist excitement that repulsed me. He reminded me of those guys you hear about who distribute underage porn in internet chat rooms. Music was his life – punk and hardcore (anything else was "shit" except for some electronic music because the raves were full of "beautiful girls and drugs"). He talked endlessly about obscure Bulgarian, Japanese, and Belgian bands and British ones from the '60s. And he was endlessly surprised when I hadn't heard of 98% of them.

He got a giant kick out of explaining the Mormon situation in Bulgaria. He claimed (for reasons I did not believe, much less comprehend) that Mormons made pilgrimages to Bulgaria "to fuck women." With his Stalinist agenda, he would always approach them and confront them about these fucking-pilgrimages. He said the Mormons always responded with a, "What the hell?" And somehow, against all logic and reason known to me, he declared this a victory – evidence he had won the argument. *Stalinists vs. Mormons*. No thanks, I abstain.

After every third sentence, he had a goofy habit of saying matter-of-factly, "but what can you say, this is life." Bored by his increasingly stupid conversation about how into punk and hardcore he was, I prayed for us to split. He already told me he couldn't arrange a place to sleep that night for me. He decided to send me to Sofia where his friend Bozata would meet me at the bus station and put me up for the night. I agreed and we split. Stara Zagora remained beautiful until the

On the Bulgarian-Turkish Border

I forgot to eat yesterday, so I awoke on the Turkish cliffs extremely weak. I literally stumbled to a restaurant and spent a whopping \$6 on breakfast. I haven't spent that much on my last 8 meals. I was so weak, and I thought, like I did in the bathroom of that East Jerusalem hostel, that death was beckoning me. After a quick dip in the sea, I headed off to Bulgaria. Twenty-two hours, 2 ferry rides, 8 bus rides, and 1 train ride later, I'm here at the border.

An Albanian woman just handed me a candy gob made of rubber and nuts and mumbled something about me being her son. It's been a long night. A 10pm to 4:30am wait. Harsh fluorescent lights in the train station. In a sleepless stupor, the Turkish crescent and star look mysteriously similar to the hammer and sickle. The train station: depressing, confusing, yet fascinating. Turkish police and Jandarma (National Guard), in their silly uniforms, abound. And I don't understand a word of surrounding conversations in Bulgarian and Turkish (a feeling I've grown accustomed to in the past month). Deserted, yet crowded. Dark, yet flooded by buzzing fluorescent bulbs. Turkish, yet Bulgarian. Whatever that means. An invisible line causes most trains to stop, while only few dare cross it. What an absurd accomplishment of civilization – of the nation-state.

Smuggling Rodents

A nasty little rodent has been eating the insides of my stomach for the last 3 days. The first day, it crawled up to my brain and gnawed away for several hours. Completely sapped and unable to move my muscles, I laid in bed for 8 hours in the afternoon while this nasty little fucker destroyed my stomach and intestines for the entire day. Two days later, it's still in me, destroying what remains of my stomach causing my daily meal of falafel and hummus to speed right through me. Alberto ate one of those rodents too. Kind of feels unlike anything I've ever had before, so maybe I should be a little worried. I speculate it's a parasite from the little bit of well water I drank. We are out of Gaza now and back in the Jerusalem hostel.

Some Danes just returned from the West Bank town of Nablus saying how it's under siege and curfew, telling of how the tanks destroyed roads, crushing the pipes, so the sewage and drinking water lines are fucked, and people are getting dysentery with increasing frequency. They described dysentery, and it sounds strikingly similar to my stomach rodent. They also said people die from it everyday in Iraq because they don't have medicine... Shit. Nor do I.

Getting out of Gaza was a bureaucratic nightmare since we were trying to help deliver some Palestinian passports from Gaza to Jerusalem. The day we were leaving, in Gaza City, the PA told us the passports would be ready at 11am (actually, they told us earlier they would be ready the previous day). But they weren't in our hands until 4pm.

Dia taxied us to the Gaza border, and here we left behind our Japanese, British, and Danish friends (who invited us to visit Copenhagen in December to "smash their city" during the EU summit), and of course, Dia, who again requested a daily email and then weirdly acknowledged that this was not possible or desirable on my part. A simple "I will miss you Dia," and we were off into Israel proper. An hour in the Israeli border-crossing station, an hour on the roadside after our taxi broke down, and several checkpoints later, we were in Jerusalem.

Back in Jerusalem, I feel a certain sense of relief. A relief that those who live in Gaza never feel. Gaza roughed me up and I hardly realized it while it was happening. Aside from the rodent devouring my stomach, I'm feeling

overwhelmed and depressed. Realizing the situation here is worse than I thought. Gaza was suffocating. Suffocating beyond words. Our only interactions were with men. Women lived in a completely separate world – one that didn't include cafes, streets, and other public spaces (particularly at night). I grew tired of repeated conversations – "Your name?" "Where from?" "What do you think of the situation here?" – which were exacerbated and diluted by the language divide. Conversations that led nowhere for anyone created false hopes that internationals would tell the world their story and then the world would suddenly care and the Israelis would suddenly stop. *There are millions of stories like mine out there already!!!* False hope does a fairly good job at killing any hope. I want to interact with the other half of the population as well. Better yet, I just want to interact. I don't want the role of the celebrity spectacle. Nor do I want my world to be a spectacle to me. And this is all I find here. Maybe it's inherent in being half a world away from "home." Seems more and more likely that all travel to unknown places to see unknown people is tourism (regardless of any intentional efforts to reject that role). What more can I get out of this stay in Palestine besides more evidence that the situation here is fucked up?

Imaginary Lines

On his way into Israel, one ISMer, dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and bottle of booze in hand, slid right through passport control by proclaiming energetically, "I'm ready to party in Tel Aviv!" Another claimed he was in Israel to visit and compare notes with an Israeli UFO group. Yet another answered the question, "Why are you coming at this time?" with, "Well...I was searching the internet for cheap vacation spots, and there it was, Israel, the cheapest." Upon his exit, he wanted to say angrily, "You guys promised I'd be safe! There were suicide bombs and gunfire all day long. *And* there were tanks out so I couldn't even walk on the street!" Someone else wanted to smuggle an IDF bullet (as a souvenir) out through customs in his shoe. After getting our shoes searched, we can only imagine what they would have done had they found a bullet in our shoe.



Gen(eration)al Homicide

Politics, as they are known, are scary, boring, and not much fun. A beach in Bozcaada, full of lovers and kids set against the backdrop of 4 stationary Turkish warships looming on the horizon. The politics of Israel is total police state. Israelis live under constant police state measures. Kids of settlers are born into a prison – and it is their parents who convicted and sentenced them. Palestinian children are also born into a prison and their parents tried everything possible to raze its walls. Israeli domination kills life in both Israel *and* Palestine. The inevitable and necessary Palestinian resistance fucks life too. People cannot *live* when the only method to survive is armed struggle. It's ugly, and everyone blames each other. Israelis don't invite us into their homes, don't offer us food, and don't take care of each other. The Palestinians do. This is a sign of humanity, a sign of who is at fault – *who is the dehumanizing agent*. Palestinian kids play with rocks, settler kids too. Israeli kids are blinded by the reality of their own situation – treated like kings by their parents and trained to fend off the rabid subhumans. In that region of the world, *no kids live*. Indoctrination begins early. So does death. Kids are at gunpoint. So are lovers.



Land of Useless Jobs

Turkish men tend to be ultra-alert and ultra-loud, especially when they are working. This trend is detrimental to shoplifters and normal folks alike. Having to talk to a guard or pass one by before entering any business, having business workers scream at you to come inside because their food is the best or their prices the cheapest – and this is the guy's entire job! Maybe the food would be cheaper if they weren't paying for this guy's "labor." Trying to find a bus to the coast, 6 people (disguised as vultures) performed a job 1/2 a person could do. The bus trips have 2 people working on them: 1 to drive, the other to ensure you are in the right seat (because otherwise, the bus may spontaneously combust) and to squirt cologne into eagerly awaiting hands. Just drive the fucking bus! The only way these workers interact with people is when money is at stake. An annoying interaction at best because everyone actually does their job, just as people file in line to pee in the 25 cent bathroom when the woods grow a mere 10 meters away. It's as if they have become strict adherents to the idiotic old Nazi doctrine that, "work will set you free."

Delirious Self-Diagnosis

Alberto's got it too. We've established that we both ate vicious *squirrels*; and the squirrels are now eating us. I flirted with death 2 nights ago. In fact, I think I was actually dead for half an hour or so. I spent 2 hours in the middle of the night in the bathroom purging every drop of water from my body through every bodily orifice. After this, I sat semi-conscious for an hour trying to gather energy (which never came) to go drink water (from my water bottle which lie a mere 10 feet away). I finally made it to bed and by morning the squirrel had fallen asleep after a raucous night.

My friends and family told me not to get killed over here. I don't think they took into account death by rabid Gazan squirrels.

We did research on the internet, since our squirrel diagnosis, although proper, only told us how we felt, not what might happen to us or how severe our condition was. Our research ruled out dysentery, because we weren't pooping blood. We diagnosed ourselves with having contracted giardia, the vicious bacteria that tears through your intestines by the hundreds of millions and lasts from 2 weeks to 2 months (or 6 months in some cases). Giardia leaves your digestive tract marred for life. "It will never work the same again," explains one website. The only cure is antibiotics or time. This was the horrible news yesterday. Today, I have learned that self-diagnosis can sometimes mean *misdiagnosis*. I still have the squirrel, but it's a little sedated and shriveled up. Perhaps it's because Alberto got some nasty anti-rodent voodoo tea formula (a little better idea than his earlier leech suggestion – the logic being that an old school remedy would cure an old school disease like dysentery). We drank water boiled with a piece of bark, a piece of wood, and a couple acorns. But that wouldn't explain why Alberto still feels like shit.

We may return to Istanbul on Sunday since there is really no use for walking, delirious, squirrel-filled zombies in the Palestinian liberation struggle. Alberto seems to miss certain people in the U.S. so he may head back several weeks early from Istanbul. Our plans dangle in the air, and I feel idiotic spending day after day penned up in an East Jerusalem hostel listening to the constant drone of police loudspeakers and sirens and the minibus driver outside screaming "Tel Aviv! Tel Aviv!" thousands of times per day. Not to mention forking over money to this hostel for every night longer we stay. I'm ready to go – don't know where, but I want to go. Alberto still needs to be 20 feet from the bathroom at all times, so that limits our traveling capacity.

foreseeable consequence of hanging around, we scribbled a nice note in simple English and broken Turkish, placed it on the pillows and blanket, and caught a bus to the airport.

A bus ride and a hug later, Alberto left for the States.

Then... 3 weeks of no plan other than to be in Berlin to catch a plane.

I didn't want to deal with people for a while. Five weeks of hectic life dealing with, relying on, and compromising with people overwhelmed me. So, like all good modern escape artists, I went to the beach. All in all, kind of a silly plan. I just looked in the guidebook for a beach, either in western Turkey or eastern Bulgaria, that sounded like it could be deserted. I went west. Multiple bus rides, a 9pm ferry ride, a 2 hour walk in the darkest of all darks (both physically and figuratively), and a night on a treacherous slope, I woke up to spectacular white cliffs, sparkling blue water, and semi-secluded beaches. Here I am, in a replica of heaven, still a little sick, basking in the exhilaration of masturbating underwater, swimming naked, trying to hydrate myself with picked, unripe green (not yet purple) grapes, and mostly feeling lonely and homesick while trying to reconcile my privilege of being in this Mediterranean paradise.

Fundamental(Fasc)ism

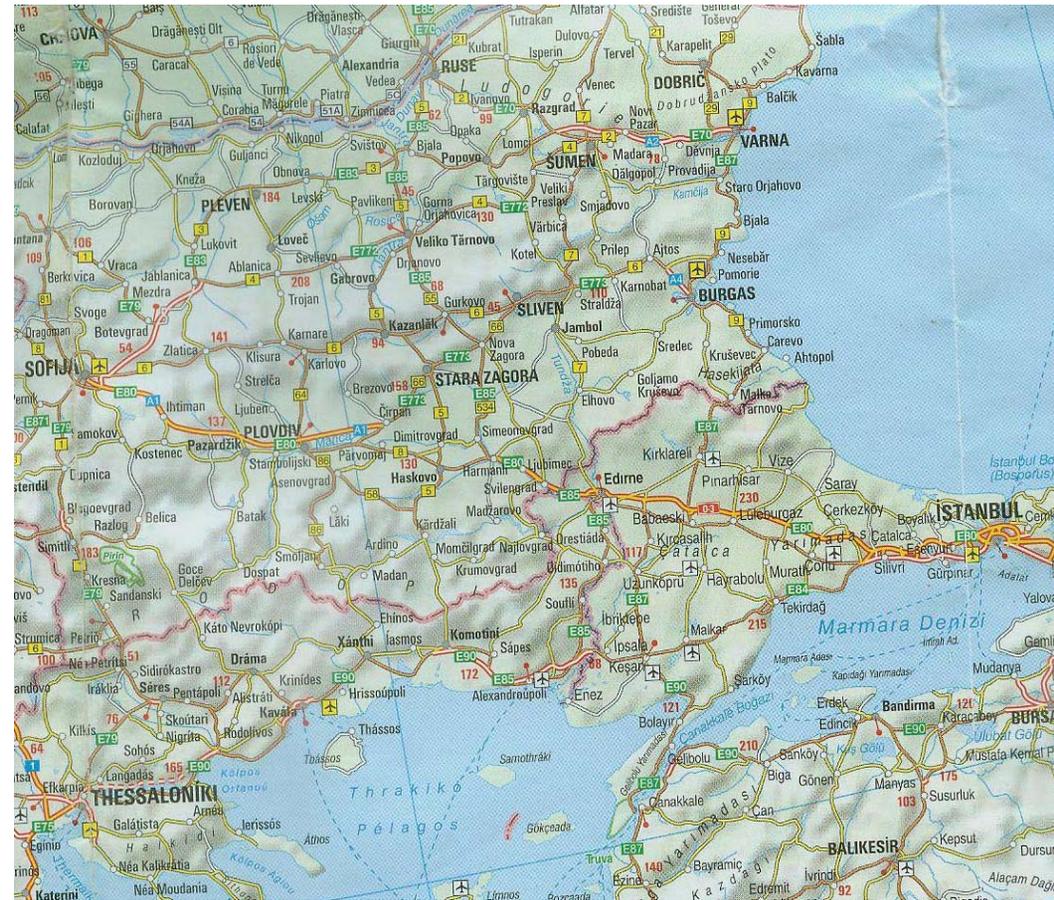
"I've seen all I want to of the theater of the absurd
The beasts, the judges, the emperor's hat,
The masks of the Age, the color of the ancient sky,
The palace dancer, the unruly armies
I want to forget them all!
I just want to remember
the dead piled high behind the curtain."

- *Ruba'iyat* by Mahmoud Darwish, national poet of Palestine

Two nights ago, the Israeli right-wing (most of Israel) marched through East Jerusalem (the Arab section of Jerusalem) after the IDF and the police forcibly cleared off the streets forcing all the shops to close early. Orthodox Jews and their families marched past us draped in Israeli flags and the occasional automatic firearm, screaming "garbage!" at the one woman we were with who was wearing a Palestinian kafia (scarf). They marched through the eerily quiet, militarized, deserted streets to down near the Al-Aqsa Mosque where they held a rally. Speakers here excitedly urged more Jews to move to East Jerusalem because it was "their city." We sat with Palestinians who watched with horror and disgust at the scene before them – a deliberate and explicit display of the Israeli state's motives. The Israelis want to push the Palestinians farther and farther into a corner. All the Israeli property laws show this same deliberate pattern.

Later that night after the rally, many orthodox Jewish youth attacked a falafel store in the Arab quarter of the Old City – strikingly similar to what I've heard goes on in Germany with fascists and neo-Nazis going into the Turkish districts and intimidating them with the hopes they will be too scared to live in Germany anymore. Or 70 years back, in the same place with the Jews. Or in the American South where Klansmen went on rampages of death and destruction hoping to scare black folks from living amongst them: vigilante groups openly allowed and supported by the state. Colombia's present-day paramilitaries also show this fascist activity in action. It's all too clear what's going on, yet all too complex a situation to figure out how the hell to get out of it – to stop it.

I feel hopeless and I've only been here for 2 weeks. Imagine living here. It's a world full of hate and hopelessness. Full of futile resistance and religious fundamentalism. It's a story of the colonized and the colonizer. The colonizer relentless, carefree, and hateful in its quest to colonize and conquer and the colonized forced to hate and strike back when pushed into a corner. *Where*



Farewell to Alberto

I have a friend who, amidst watching a close, exciting sports game, declares with eagerness, "Oh my god, this is the best game ever!" A day of Israeli airport security theater, a botched attempt at theft, and a marathon drifting session with the decreasingly vague point being to find a place to sleep was the craziest day ever. Then came the next night in Istanbul.

Up in the northern neighborhood of Istanbul, Sariyer (where we visited in order to pick up a bag we had left with Sinan), we tried to find woods to sleep in (woods that were "right up the road"). We scouted 2 abandoned houses but threw up our arms in defeat after learning pedestrian traffic simply never stops here. Then we wandered past a vacant guard house into a colossal, fenced off orchard. Alberto wanted to try asking someone if we could just camp out in the orchard. This failed instantly because of the language thing and once again we received a pointing figure insisting that we leave the premises by a wealthy man in a car. We left, intending to defy his eviction orders and return at dusk.

We walked several blocks further along the main road and sat... and sat... and sat. The joy in inadvertently becoming the spectacle, the spectator, and the participant in a situation transcends words. We sat and sat and read and sat and sat. Too lazy to get up, *we just sat there*. People looked at us. We looked at them. People talked to us (in Turkish). We talked to them (in English). With nightfall, an old man with a cane brought us water and a large blanket covered in dog hairs. A short while and a cryptic conversation later, pillows, followed by hot tea, were brought out, each by different people. Then dinner. Then watermelon. Then ice cream. Then more tea. Then a long, heated Turkish-language discussion amongst the adults ensued. While the adults convened, we giggled with the children as we, reading from our cheesy guidebook, mix and matched phrases in Turkish – the whole while, tempted to break out the phrase (which for reasons unknown, had escaped the eye of the editor of Let's Go guidebooks), "Are you a pimp?" As the families of the surrounding houses decided whether or not to house us, Alberto thought we should offer a gift of gratitude. Traveling light, the only item we could spare was a zine on "Armed Struggle in Canada." The idea for a gift was dropped. The meeting of the elders disbanded and more sitting followed as both the elders and the kids dispersed into their respective homes. We sat on our newly acquired blanket on a semi-major street, feeling astonishingly safe sleeping amongst our new, caring community, so... we slept.

In the morning, a new crowd of people gathered around us to stare and talk in Turkish – like a scene from a movie where someone regaining consciousness wakes up to find blurry heads lurking overhead. Realizing breakfast might be a

resistance is seen as ruthless terrorism; and hopelessness is labeled by the colonizer and its press as inherent evil and inferiority.

It truly seems the only way which peace can ever exist is through Israel's self-destruction – if Israelis, particularly its youth, can see through the fascist media lies and reject the colonizer role. Otherwise, a race war – a religious war – is imminent: a bloody and savage war where either the colonized will eventually be exterminated by Israel's big guns and fascist propaganda or the colonizer (which ironically, at one time faced extinction) in its entirety will be wiped out by a desperate, fed-up people. Driving the Arabs or Jews into the sea is easily predictable and probable if the Israeli state and its Zionist agenda are not subverted and destroyed by its own people. Though, again, the prospects for this are dim given the fact that Israel actively imports fascists on a daily basis.

Lament of a (potential) suicide bomber by Gordon

I wanted Paradise to welcome me

Not now

But much later in life

I wanted Paradise to welcome me

Not now

Without a child and a wife

But I say this to you

Give us F16's, tanks

The same weapons of those that oppress us

Give us the billions

The same funds of those that oppress us

Or better give us peace

Do you really think under such circumstances

I would do what I am about to do

And remember before you answer

I am no different to you



choice of buying the stolen goodies or simply putting them back. As a gesture of thanks, we bought 1 thing and got the fuck out of MMM Migros.

It was dark. We stumbled for another hour through the streets of Istanbul looking for a spot, *any spot*, to sleep – a clump of grass, a rooftop, *anything*. All we found was a city of barbed-wire fences and security guards in their pathetic little booths outside *every* business establishment, warehouse, and residency. Finally, an unguarded car garage. And it is there we spent the night on its extremely uncomfortable, severely-ribbed rooftop.

Nice Solution, But...

Last night, about 20 internationals went to Jaffa Gate to participate in a demonstration (called by the Israeli Left) against the occupation; but, *it never materialized*. So much for Israeli radicals toppling their regime.

Meanwhile, in Gaza, where we had been a mere six days earlier, Israeli fighter jets heavily bombed and destroyed a three-story apartment building, claiming to have targeted a Hamas leader. Fifteen people were killed, including 9 children.

There is no respite. Each day, the well-oiled Israeli war machine cranks onward.



Graffiti on the bombed out apartment building in Gaza

noticed an influx of soldiers, who, minutes later told us to turn around and go back. Actually, we have no idea what they said, but from their tone and gestures, we could discern that they were not inviting us to squat their new flats.

Damn... what about our gift from God (that flat to sleep in)? Makes you want to drop a lit match into God's gas tank. We evacuated the area and discovered, upon exiting the army subdivision, a posted sign declaring: "FORBIDDEN ZONE" accompanied by a spectacular stencil of a soldier brandishing a rifle. Whoops, must have overlooked that sign earlier. Ahhh! Flats for military personnel and their families. What had been the greatest discovery of the trip, and perhaps ever, *in the entire history of the world*, had soured rather quickly. Dreading the possibility of Turkish soldiers towering over us, screaming at us to wake up in the morning (but hoping against hope for a military-grade breakfast in bed), we headed out.

Two hours later, we found ourselves by the seaside filling our noses and lungs with the foul-smelling sewage that is the sea.

Three plus hours of searching for a default sleeping location: a failure. And to exacerbate the situation, my stomach and the chipmunk sparred into the night. We were desperate and tired. Everywhere we hoped to find a place to sleep sat behind a fence plastered with the now all-too-common stencil of the armed soldier. AND THEN... a gift from God (the same one whose SUV I just torched)! A GIANT, FUCKING MALL! For some strange, twisted, reason, this was a welcome sight. "Galleria" was enormous, bigger than most American malls and equally as hideous. In the mall grocery store, we bought a little food and tried to steal some more. *Tried*. With bulging pockets of dried food we exited the store. So did the security guard. We split up and he pursued Alberto. Consumed by guilt, I watched the confrontation from afar as I transferred my liberated raisins to a new plastic bag. Alberto was taken into the store and I waited for him to exit. And I waited... and waited... While naive shoppers and carefree ice-skating kids, glided around the mall, I repeatedly exclaimed to myself the profound words, "Holy shit. Holy shit." SHIT. Alberto's going to Turkish jail and he's got an airplane flight in less than 2 days. SHIT. I have no way of contacting him and no special meet-up place we both know about. An incredible day of twists and turns just took a disastrous one. Then... God reared his ugly head once more, and Alberto emerged from the jaws of MMM Migros. Upon my approach, the security guard quickly confronted me and asked us both to follow him back into the store. I thought to myself, "Damn, Alberto was bait, and I bit." But on the way to the back of the store, Alberto assured me the security guard was actually really cool – a kind of anti-authoritarian stuck in the role of authority. A short, sweet-looking guy, the conflicted security guard already had collected Alberto's passport information and warned him not to shoplift from MMM Migros again (but encouraged him to continue shopping there!). Upon his request, I emptied my pockets and opened my bag for him. Convinced Alberto was the only delinquent, he offered us the

Hostile Hostel

Sixty hours without pooping! Imodium AD effectively clogged up my parasites. Still feel weak, but the squirrel has dissolved part way (or perhaps just shrunk as it is now equally as fierce and maybe a little pissed off at the Imodium assault). Meanwhile (and what a mean while it was), Alberto has almost fully recovered. Apparently, in my walking-dead state, I failed to remember I had popped an Imodium AD that night I saw the light at the end of the tunnel (it was in the bathroom for those interested). So my "recovery" was nothing more than a temporary break (read, build-up) from my hellish condition, not the work of the miracle voodoo tree bark concoction.

Five days in a hostel is 5 days of death. A death filled with endless chess, liters upon liters of water, 20-meter walks (if energy levels permit), 12-hour nights of sleep (12 hours dreaming of chess), and days of mental instability where people morph into chess pieces.

Chess is like a video game – you see it everywhere even when you have stopped playing. For weeks after the leaving the hostel, I mentally would imagine myself in check, and used surrounding pieces (people) to protect me. Hmmm... she's a knight, so... if I moved her in front of me, this would get in the line of the bishop (that guy over there), and then I would no longer be in check... but... I have to keep my eye on the rook who could move down near me and then I'd be in check again.

What is death?

Death is a chess game (and all the mind-fucking that accompanies it), while a squirrel destroys your intestines.

I got to learn the inner workings of a hostel and the people who hang around. Like the Scottish guy with the ETA t-shirt who is traveling around and, jokingly, "starting wars wherever he goes." Or the quiet, old, white American woman with plans to move to Iraq, at a time when U.S. bombing is imminent. Or the assistant helper in the hostel, Omar, who never tires and is always either cleaning, *running* to answer the doorbell or phone, preparing the tea, or practicing his English with a non-stop "Welcome, Welcome." Khalid, the manager of the hostel, says this job is no problem for Omar because his old job required him to carry 50 kg bags around all day. Khalid, a highly intelligent and articulate Palestinian, studied

renewable energy in college and wants to start a lab of some sort to research it more. The previous manager (who was there the first few days we were in Jerusalem and later had a stroke while we were in Gaza) had been a guerilla fighter in west Jordan decades ago and was an "explosives expert." I wish Khalid the best with his "lab." And then there is Hussein, who told anti-climatic stories of bar fights with racists in England. And then, of course, there was always Alberto talking it up with anyone in the hostel about the need for armed struggle. Along with people, you also get quite intimate with the chessboard, who, after convincing you that you are not bored, proceeds to kill your brain.

In Slovenia, Alberto said (in lieu of the never-ending language barrier) that the only universal common language he could really communicate to people in was the language of sex and the language of street-fighting. Having done neither in a month's time, Alberto is eager to return to the States, where, for him, the sex is plentiful (but the street-fighting scarce). (And there is no language barrier.)



I'll have 3 weeks alone to travel from Istanbul to Berlin. plans are nonexistent. Money is dwindling. Maybe I'll spend a week camping out on a Turkish beach, maybe disappear into a forest for a while, maybe hitchhike my normal rate of 10km per day, maybe fall in love, maybe get mugged and lose all my money and my half dozen worldly possessions that fill my small backpack, maybe die, maybe have sex, maybe street-fight, or maybe just romanticize or dread what I'll maybe do. Or maybe I'll just disappear into the Massachusetts woods, find a pond, and write about civil disobedience and other bourgeois notions of resistance!

Maybe 3 weeks will become 3 years.

Stumbling Around Istanbul

Sinan and Marta ran away to Ankara to convince themselves they were being studious, so Alberto and I were on our own. We kicked off our 2 crazy days together in Istanbul by pushing an airport baggage cart until it could no longer be pushed.

Headed south to (hopefully) the beach, we pushed the cart past the loading/unloading zone with no objection from airport personnel. This is something we had picked up, fine-tuned, and were now excelling at – doing as you please with total confidence, even in the presence of heavily armed men: from skipping through Israeli checkpoints with passports safely tucked in our pockets to public transportation scams to stealthful shoplifting to overt cafeteria theft.

The small road out of the airport quickly transformed into a windy superhighway whose emergency lane soon dissolved. Looking kind of like grocery shopping on an interstate highway, we were redefining 2 of civilizations greatest feats: highways and malls. Or maybe that's just one feat: idiocy. Regardless, us 2 idiots took turns pushing the cart as cars and trucks zoomed by, some nice enough to honk. With the onset of a sharp curve and several consecutive honks, we elected to stay alive *and* not compromise the shopping/baggage cart. We lifted it over the guardrail and pressed forward in our quest to reach the sea. The off-roading adventure turned nasty with the narrowing of the track, the lopsidedness of the cart, the big fucking rocks in the path, the now busted strap on my bag, and that mysterious, lonely, bored soldier screaming at us in Turkish from his watchtower on the south side of the airport. We waved back, abandoned the cart, and continued our pilgrimage to the sea to find a place to sleep come nighttime.

Finally... a road splitting off toward the sea. we found ourselves in an eerie, but nice and new, housing development. No cars, no people, brand new, but still unfinished housing flats... with open doors and windows! We ventured in to find spacious, clean rooms and running water. Thankful for the running water I proceeded to the bathroom to learn that my 18 days of diarrhea would triumphantly surge forward to 19 days. Alberto's was long gone, but my squirrel had metamorphosed into a more sedated, but restless at times, chipmunk. Worried that someone may come around and lock all the doors at nightfall, we unlocked all the windows in this first floor flat. Fuck the beach, we were sleeping in luxury tonight! After a brief attempt to drink the tap water, followed by a minute of gagging, we headed down the road to further investigate the area and still try to reach the sea as it was only mid-afternoon. Half a mile into our walk, we

me squat in between her legs while she felt my warm mouth around her asshole and saw my hand pumping my cock, she moaned loudly. I moved my other hand to her clit and she immediately moved her hand from her clit and slid two fingers slowly into her dripping vagina. Soon afterward, she removed her hand and began smearing her juices all over the silver towel dispenser. In awe of this act, I moved from her asshole to her vagina as she bent down further. With my nose buried in her ass, my tongue lapping the lips of her cunt and rim of her vagina, and my fingers slowly fondling her clit, she moaned loudly, slapping the towel dispenser really hard. And, just as quickly as she had come in the door, she exploded on my face, vigorously and rhythmically rubbing all her juices on my chin, mouth, and nose – the whole while pounding the towel dispenser violently and screaming “Dispense! Dispense!”

I stood up a minute later and she collapsed onto the toilet. She pumped the soap dispenser, collecting a pool of bright pink soap in her hand, and turned me around. Now face-to-face with the towel dispenser, I was harder than ever. I began masturbating again with one hand resting on the smooth (but still with little dings in it) metal surface of the towel dispenser. Coated with her cunt juices, the towel dispenser felt euphoric. Just as I was about to explode, she all of a sudden slowly slid two fingers deep inside my ass. After a momentary shock, the euphoria was back and stronger than ever. I began rubbing the towel dispenser energetically as I stroked my cock. She began to move her fingers in and out of my asshole, slow at first, then faster and faster. I started to bang the towel dispenser as she had. I banged harder and harder. Then, in a transcendental state of ecstasy, I passionately and vehemently began ripping the towels from the dispenser until there was none left. Then I felt a spastic pulse from my asshole. In my violent towel dispenser frenzy, she had reached to the floor, picked up the potato skin and slipped it up my ass! My first shot of cum propelled itself square onto the gleaming, metallic face of the towel dispenser. Seeing this, she stood up, picked me off the ground, fingers still thrust deep inside me, and pressed my body against the glistening, yet mildly imperfect, towel dispenser. My cum shot all over the towel dispenser as I smeared my dick all over it. Exhausted, she pulled her fingers out of me, and we fell onto the carpet of paper towels below. The potato skin was nowhere to be found.

“It is not important that a priest at the pulpit renounces the use of a concept that he would in any case never have known how to use. Let us speak vulgarly since we’re dealing with priests: alienation is the point of departure for everything — providing that one departs from it.”
- Situationist International, 1966

Ramallah

Feeling slightly better, we decided to head into the West Bank for one week, stopping first in Ramallah for two days. Among the many people we talked with in Ramallah was a woman deeply involved in women’s rights work. After acknowledging that Palestinian liberation could not happen without women’s liberation, she spoke of the Palestinian children. Because of the nonstop Israeli assault on their daily life (through curfews, bombings, home demolitions, killings, and simple intimidation), “this generation of kids growing up now is unfortunately the most aggressive ever.”

Since the IDF did not dare venture into Gaza to enforce curfews, Ramallah was my first experience in dealing with curfews. By 5pm, the bustling streets had transformed into an eerie ghost town. I slept the first night on a balcony overlooking English graffiti reading, “A settler a day keeps the doctor away.” At 2am, the shaking of our building jolted me from my deep sleep. Two mammoth tanks rumbled and creaked slowly beneath me, tearing up the already battered road in their wake. The patrolling tanks would thunder by twice more that night. The final time, I stumbled to my feet and clumsily spit onto a tank as it passed below. Somehow, I felt like I had won.

We had grand plans for the next day. Alberto’s description of the action follows:

the first action I was involved in took place in Ramallah, in response to the Israeli bombing of Gaza on 23-7-02. we had discussed perhaps a dozen possible actions that might be bold enough to sufficiently confront the military, inspire Palestinian resistance, and bring international media attention. in the end we decided to invade an Israeli army “base” in Ramallah and paint their tanks, jeeps and APCs with slogans and buckets of red paint. the “base” was simply a building that had been seized by the Israelis to serve as a headquarters for the imposing of curfew. and, most importantly for our action, they use the space to store their vehicles whenever curfew is lifted.

the action was brilliantly designed. with the guidance of an amazing ISM organizer, every measure was taken to ensure that the action: struck as powerful a blow against the military as possible, risked as little as possible for the local Palestinian population (and the ISMers) and maximized participation from the 30 people available in Ramallah at the time. the action combined the strategic wonder of the best guerrilla actions with a nonviolent, participatory ethic that both

recognized what was possible and expressed a warmth, a hope, that militarist methods lack.

about ten of us were on the paint crew, while the other 20 or so came as a demonstration, intending to distract the military - with their raucous chanting, signs and media presence - away from stopping/detaining/arresting the paint crew. we intended to stay, at the very most, only ten minutes, and then leave secure in the understanding that the occupying forces are too scared to follow after us through enraged Palestinian neighborhoods.

as it turned out, as soon as the demonstrators entered the property, the Israelis began firing sound bombs and shooting into the air. as soon as the coordinator with the paint crew heard the first sound bomb, he started yelling "GO! GO! PAINT! PAINT!" as we all scrambled over a small stone wall and began running across the 15 meters or so of sand that separated us from the military vehicles.

we had all been very carefully prepared for the scene that we were suddenly thrust into. we knew the risks, we knew what was the likely response from the Israelis. nonetheless, the situation was far freakier, far more frightening than I expected it would be. I don't know whether I would have convinced myself to jump over the wall and thrust myself in the way of the military to deface their property if a confident and bold leader hadn't been there screaming "JUST GO! PAINT! KEEP GOING!" "IT'S ONLY SOUND!" "DON'T WORRY, IT'S IN THE AIR!" and so forth.

most of the group began on the APC nearest the stone wall, painting "MURDERERS" and "INTIFADA" (this one got aborted at IN) and splashing full buckets of red paint all over the vehicle. I ran around the back of another vehicle and, with the steadiest hand I could muster painted "GET OUT!" as the deafening sound of automatic rifle fire continued and as soldiers ran around hectically within a few feet of me. all the while, the voice in my head is saying (repeatedly, dozens of times) "they're not shooting at me, they're not shooting at me."

as soon as i'm finished I run back to the wall and watch the rest of the scene unfold. one friend has his legs swept out from under him, and is kicked and shoved by a soldier before being able to dash off towards our group. another friend is the last to the APC, and is grabbed by a soldier. but she just keeps at her work of painting a huge dollar sign on the APC, and seemingly totally ignoring the fact that her shirt is being yanked at by a man with a machine gun. when she finishes she runs back to the group.

as soon as we were done -- the whole event taking no more than 5 minutes we scale the wall and start walking back home. the demonstration crew stayed on a few minutes more to be sure that the Israelis don't follow after and to directly deliver a message to the soldiers. i'm not really much inclined to speak directly with armed oppressors about what "our message" is, but when I watched the video footage I was quite impressed by the boldness of the woman who stood before the soldier and said "I want you to know that our struggle will continue until you all withdraw. we will keep coming back until you're gone."

mirror and continued to stroke my cock. Thoughts of a previous sexual experience filled my head. I wanted badly to taste an old lover's juicy cunt. I wanted to dive headfirst into her crotch and lose myself in the maze of hair, wetness, and softness. I drove myself crazy with these thoughts as I continued to pleasure myself. Overcome, I took the baked potato and plunged my cock into it feeling the warm potato envelop my cock. I squeezed the baked potato around my cock until pieces of the potato fell to the floor. I stroked my cock vigorously with the warm potato skin, watching my pre-cum ooze onto the potato skin. Wanting more, I gripped my ass tightly with my free hand and continued to mash the potato on my dick. I took my attention away from the mirror and stared at the towel dispenser. For reasons I can't explain, it made my cock throb harder. I took my hand off my ass and reached down to put it between my legs and gently on my asshole. While I stroked my cock with a potato skin and gently fondled my ass hole, I stared at this towel dispenser. It was so silvery and smooth, and shiny, yet flawed. It had tiny dents on its smooth silver surface that wrapped around the towels within it before gently curving downward to where the towels spewed forth from its dark recesses. The exposed towel dangled from the dispenser as if screaming, "Ejaculate! Ejaculate!" But, like that paper towel, I was suspended in those moments before cumming – when it feels better to delay the cum. My legs grew weary, and I sat down on the toilet, somewhat turned on by the smell of the harsh cleaning chemicals. I looked down at my cock and saw small white chunks of potato now clinging to it. In my excitement over the towel dispenser, the potato skin, now stripped of its insides, had fallen to the floor. I began to stroke my cock again, and at that moment, the door opened! In my haste to get in the bathroom and pleasure myself, I had forgotten to lock the door. A woman began to step in before she realized what she had walked in on. Upon realizing, her eyes lit up and her mouth spewed forth an, "Oh my god! I'm so sorry!" My mind raced, and in a startled state, I replied reassuringly, "Oh no, it's okay." Halfway out the door, she paused for a split second before turning back around, and then, in a soft voice, said, "Really?" Shocked by this unexpected response, I took a second before saying, "Yea, really."

She stepped inside and closed and locked the door behind her. Not a word was to be said for the remainder of our time together in there. Not asking or caring what the white chunks on my dick were, she bent down and began stroking my cock, occasionally wrapping her lips around its head before plunging it into her mouth. She then stood up, took off her pants, leaned against the door and began furiously stroking herself. Noticing my fascination with the towel dispenser and seemingly fascinated with it as well, we both stared at the dispenser while feverishly stroking ourselves. She then began to excitedly pull the towels from the dispenser. One after another, she kept going and going until paper towels littered the floor. She stared at herself in the mirror before becoming too weak in the legs to stand up. She leaned over the sink propping one hand on the faucet head while the other continued to stroke her cunt. Seeing her ass in the air like that, I got off the toilet and somehow found room in the small bathroom to squat behind her and plunge my face into her ass. I fervently whipped my tongue around and into her dry, but warm, asshole. The smell of her cunt mixed with the smell of her ass drove me to continue stoking myself. Seeing

Hee hee.

When the idea of making a zine for the trip came up, Alberto felt like in order for it to be worthwhile (for both the author and the reader), it *must* have a steamy sex scene. "But what if it never materializes," I asked. We thought about it for a while and I finally I said, "We can just make it up; they would never know." So, in the spirit of pure self-defamation and unchecked mischief, here are the events that followed our departure from Ben Gurion International Airport...

We sat at the gate waiting for boarding to begin. I tried reading but my mind was elsewhere having just concluded an incredible 3-week stay in Palestine. Having to wake up early to catch the bus to the airport, I had not gotten much sleep. I dozed on and off before boarding began and, once boarded, I clumsily fell into my seat and resumed my much-needed nap. I awoke 5 hours later to offers of lunch, having already slept through takeoff and the first meal. Remembering my dream, I looked down, embarrassed by my erection and wondering if the flight attendant or Alberto had noticed. As I ate my lunch, I realized I was a long way off from family and friends since I was planning to spend a further 3 weeks in Eastern Europe. Having already experienced 4 weeks of increasing loneliness, I longed for an intimate, caring touch. During my nap, I had dreamed I was riding in a train with three of my previous lovers and we were taking turns kissing and touching each other. Occasionally, one of us would stand up and pinch his or her nipple against the window. The others, who were kissing and touching, watched, moaning loudly at the site of a pinched nipple on the window of the passing landscape. At this point in my dream, the flight attendant's voice woke me. So, as I ate my food, I became increasingly eager for sexual pleasure. The tray table hid my bulging erection as thoughts of previous lovers filled my head. Even my fork diving into the baked potato turned me on. I felt the blood rushing to my penis and knew I could not wait until landing.

I quickly finished my meal (all except the baked potato), trying hard not to acknowledge my desires and avoiding conversation with Alberto. I rushed to the bathroom, immediately unzipped my pants, and looked down at my inflated, throbbing cock. It had been so long since I had sex with anyone, including myself. I looked at myself in the mirror, wrapped my hand around the shaft of my penis and began sliding my hand back and forth, moaning deeply every time the head of my cock reemerged from my pumping hand. Watching myself masturbate in the mirror turned me on more, and the muscles in my cock tensed further as more blood rushed there. I took my t-shirt off and pulled my pants down to the floor, taking the leftover baked potato from my pocket. I stared at my body in the

in the aftermath of the event, there was almost no way to reconcile it in my mind. the action was a total success. the military was purely embarrassed, and their embarrassment, their vulnerability - and our defiant capacity - was broadcast throughout the world. no one was arrested, and everyone in our group accomplished what they had intended to.

we met many people in the days following that action that had seen or heard about what we had done and, in recognizing us, went to great lengths to share their gratitude. regular folks in Ramallah the next morning shook our hands and said "mabrouk, mabrouk" (which means "congratulations"). and, a Palestinian man saw one of the signs from the demonstration which said "Puerto Ricans in Solidarity With Palestine" and spent hours tracking us down and driving out to Ramallah from Jerusalem to meet us and share stories and hope about the parallel struggles for liberation from military occupation in Puerto Rico and Palestine.

Israeli tanks are said to be indestructible. But numerous times while in the Gaza strip, friends recounted a story to us. It went a little something like this:

Back in February, Palestinian militants opened fired on an armored settler bus that was driving along one of the settler-only roads in southern Gaza. The bus being bulletproof, no one was harmed. But, as planned, the "IDF" sent out tanks to respond to the attack on the settler bus. As the tanks rolled across the desert they passed over the bombs the militants had buried beforehand, and three were totally destroyed.

The story is always told with a gleeful pride in the action. I think if you had spent a couple of nights in Ramallah, trying to sleep through the terrifying sound, sight and feeling of a fucking tank pounding through the streets at 4 am, you would have some sense of why. Certainly if you had spent your whole life under military occupation you'd have a pretty clear picture in your head of the beauty of a tank being blown to bits.





We mailed most incriminating evidence out the day before, so now the post-office thugs will have to search our stuff, but we won't be there to answer their questions. Who knows, maybe they'll get a kick out of the poster of the kid pelting a tank with a rock coupled with the words "They Shall Not Pass" in Arabic. Our Puerto Rican friends, upon exiting Gaza, got their poster briefly seized by soldiers demanding to know "Which is stronger? The tank or the stone?"

We neglected to remove 3 potentially incriminating items from our bags: a small piece of my writing, a small piece of Alberto's a bit more incendiary writing, and a t-shirt emblazoned with small Palestinian flags and the words "Union of Palestinian Relief Committees." The first 2 they studied briefly, but lost interest in, and the third, by far the most glaringly obvious evidence of our mischief, they stared at blankly for a long 10 seconds, and then, to our incredible amazement, repacked it! What made this overlooking even more absurd was their in-depth fascination with Alberto's herbal pills and my dying, duct-taped pen. They stared at and fondled my pen for 5 minutes. In the meantime, they ordered Alberto's astragalus pills sent to the lab for microscopic analysis.

Our previous day's excursion to the West Jerusalem post office landed us in a part of Jerusalem that reminded us of the States. It reminded us so much of our despised homeland, that we stole something (first time in 3+ weeks). So, when the discovery of our recently acquired peanut butter spawned the loud, stern question, "Where did you get this?" we proudly answered, "In West Jerusalem" – where we do all our shopping!

After ninety minutes of interrogation, we were escorted out of hell and to our gate. Wow, what an experience! To all the friends I made that Wednesday morning in the Tel Aviv airport: fuck you.

A NOTE TO THE READER

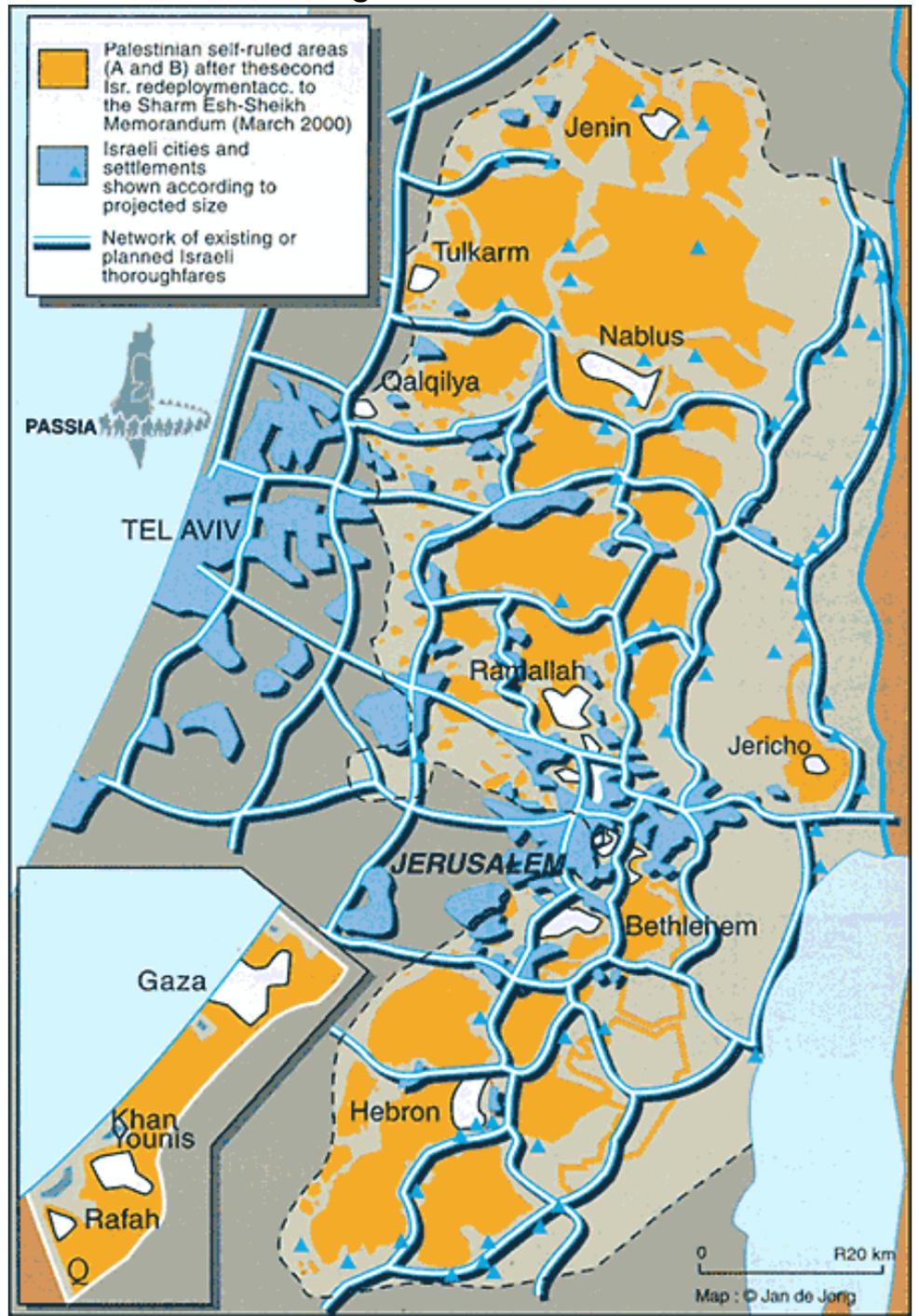
"Damn," you may be thinking, "the zine's already ended." But wait! The last half is not just filler. Just think, if you put it down now, you will miss crazy social experiments, a wild riot, an erotic sex scene, a love story, more near-death experiences, and many lonely nights.

The Fragmented West Bank

Smuggling Our Hearts Out of Hell

We reached Ben Gurion International Airport 2 hours prior to our morning flight. Outside the airport, in a scene reminiscent of the martial law atmosphere in the film, "State of Seige," Israeli soldiers pulled over our bus, boarded, checked everyone's passport, and decided to interrogate just me and Alberto. This brief interrogation paled in comparison to what was to come. Before we even reached the check-in desk, a security guard pulled us aside, checked our passports, and began the second interrogation of our morning. With Gaza entry and exit stamps on our visas, we began to recite our story we had conspired to tell beforehand. *Of course, we went to Gaza to go to the beach! What about Tel Aviv? What about Tel Aviv? Too fucking expensive!* We told them Gaza water was terrible and made us really sick, and, as a result, we spent our final 2 weeks holed up in a Jerusalem hostel recovering and doing touristy stuff. (The security guard told Alberto you could do the old city in 1 day, and that you'd be bored after a week in Jerusalem). All in all, a pretty silly "vacation" if taken for the truth.

They thought so too and pleaded with us to tell the truth. They had nothing to go on, so we stuck with our story as they writhed in their self-acknowledged ignorance trying to figure out what the hell 2 Americans were doing in Gaza. In a downward spiral of frustration, the now 7 airport security personnel began asking sillier and sillier questions: "Weren't you afraid?" "What's the name of the guy in Jerusalem who told you Gaza was a cheap alternative to Tel Aviv?" "Exactly how cheap was it?" "We are worried someone in Gaza put explosive material in your luggage. Do you have any explosives in your luggage?" Important looking security agents had now gathered nearby and were discussing us with their pawns (our original questioners) in their fascist chess game. The chief security officials pulled us into the special let's-fucking-humiliate-people room. In a perverted way, it was as if we had traveled to an exotic land and they were genuinely interested in what it was like – as a person travels to Cancun or the Seychelles and people want to hear what it was like. *Except Gaza is a mere 50 miles from where these fools live.* After gladly donating my smelly, disintegrating shoes for inspection, they (more pawns who were responsible for the dirty work) emptied our bags, glaring at every item like it was a kernel of gold. If something exploded in their faces, the pawns might die, but at least the top dog would live to tell about it. Seems like refusal to participate would be a natural impulse for these low-rung security workers. But hey, this is what fascism thrives off – the refusal to refuse. For the good of the country!



Iraq Boreen

On the highway from Ramallah to Nablus, we encountered two checkpoints. At the Ramallah checkpoint, as it seemed in most places, the IDF only had the illusion of control. If you defied them using either complete ignorance or vocal frustration, you could waltz on through without them even noticing. Only if you obeyed their every command like an idiot would the checkpoint seem in control. At the checkpoint outside Nablus, Alberto just walked by the soldiers at the checkpoint. Some ISMs, upset by Alberto's action, chastised him for potentially "aggravating the soldiers!" This served as a harbinger of things to come from these internationals. In response to their ridiculousness, he quoted rage against the machine: "Just victims of the in-house drive-by. They say 'jump,' you say 'how high?'"

Upon arriving in the mountain village Iraq Boreen (outside Nablus), everything happened really fast. We found ourselves in the midst of a tense situation, and the urgency of the situation sparked a delightful spontaneity. Alberto describes the action below:

the next action wasn't planned at all. it came about the next day, out of necessity, when we entered the village of Iraq Boreen at about seven at night. all of the men of the village had been detained for twelve hours prior to our arrival, their IDs seized and ran through computers and so forth while the men just waited, penned up in their own community center. the Zionist logic behind this was that this was a "necessary" "security" procedure carried out in response to a Palestinian attack on a bus full of settlers about a week before in nearby Imanuel. (the militant attack on the settlers wasn't a suicide operation. the armored bus was forced off the road by a bomb of some kind and as the terrified religious-fascists came off of the bus Palestinians dressed in IDF uniforms opened fire on them and killed seven. the fact that the militants got away meant that at least three nearby villages went through similiarly humiliating scenes as the one we witnessed in Iraq Boreen).

when we arrived in the village, six men were still waiting for their IDs to be returned, and one man was being held in a military jeep. there wasn't a great deal of cohesion amongst our group as to how to approach this situation. our levels of experience/willingness to engage in confrontation and our general political outlooks spanned a broad and rather uncomfortable spectrum. clumsy

collective punishment by tearing up roads and destroying sewage lines, firing randomly into Palestinian homes.

So Palestinians do not quibble over the Palestinian Authority or Hamas, civil society or state authority. Keeping the hospitals functioning, maintaining commerce in defiance of the blockade, defying curfews, running taxis over mountain paths to avoid the checkpoints: these are the daily rituals of resistance.

The majority of the Palestinians I spoke with are prepared to live side by side with the state of Israel; they are realistic about the viability of the sole nuclear power in the Middle East. And they want peace with the Israeli people. "I'm prepared to open my home to any Jew, to give him food and a place to sleep," says Brigith, whose brother was killed by Israeli soldiers, "but if he wears a military uniform, I cannot accept him as a human being."

The solution George W. Bush has proposed is entirely incompatible with a future Palestinians would accept. While an estimable number of the Palestinians we spoke to resent the autocracy and corruption of Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority, they are utterly contemptuous of U.S. and Israeli efforts to impose a new leadership on them in the name of "democracy." Furthermore, CIA-trained preventive security chiefs Jabril Rajoub and Mohammed Dahlan (the U.S. picks to assume power after a "regime change" deposing Arafat) are considered collaborators and traitors by most Palestinians with whom I spoke.

If you ask most Palestinians what they see as an outcome of this war,

they say the future will be much worse. Because of the totality of Israel's assault, the extensive network of collaborators, and the factionalization of Palestinian politics, there is hardly any cohesive vision for a national liberation struggle.

Of all the people I spoke with, Mohammed, the Hebron University student, was the most optimistic. "I think we will win because we have two things," he says. "We have this love of the land, and we have a belief in Allah. All the Israelis have is weapons."

But the most commonly voiced sentiment of the Palestinians is of siege, of defenseless anticipation, as land and homes come under threat of confiscation and demolition, while some of the most advanced weaponry on earth is arrayed against them.

"Where are the human rights?" asks the father of Bahjat Alami, a photojournalist who was killed by soldiers on March 18 as he was closing up his shop in Beit Umar. "We are surrounded, enclosed, destroyed. They try to destroy our culture. And they say we are terrorists. They say, 'We must take this home now because this is a security zone.'"

Then he adds, "The Israeli government has done a great tragedy. The birds keep flying, but someday the birds will fall from the sky." His words betray a sense of apocalyptic fatalism mixed with assurance that Allah will sort out justice someday, but offer no trace of the path forward.

As Toufic Haddad, an editor of the Jerusalem political journal *Between the Lines*, wrote recently, "These are dark times, getting darker, and no end is in sight."

jeep, shattering it. After a brief, stunned moment, a frightened soldier emerged and fired into the alley, but the boy had disappeared up a flight of steps.

On one night, in between stone-throwing skirmishes, my Palestinian hosts broke up in laughter as we watched a Palestinian boy around the age of 8 run down the street with a tray of sweets behind the retreating soldiers, hawking his wares aggressively.

Mohammed (last name withheld by request), a 22-year old student at Hebron University, says that soldiers threw him down in the street, punching and kicking him. "They kept me out in the sun for several hours. Then they say, 'Here is a mobile phone and a car.' They say, 'Come back and see us.' I tell them, 'You know where I live; you can find me anytime.' They want me to be an informer. I say, 'No, are you crazy.'"

The people of Beit Umar know that the United States is a staunch backer of Israel's war of attrition. Every Palestinian child seems to know at least two phrases in the English language: "F-16" and "Made In the U.S.A." There is a keen recognition here that George W. Bush's global campaign of militarism (bound up as it is with the profits of U.S. weapons makers, and Israel's role as a club to maintain U.S. control of the oil of the

Middle East) does not bode well for Palestinian aspirations for nationhood.

Nearly every adult I speak to wants to know what the American people think about the occupation. They stress repeatedly that they don't hate the American people, just the policies of the American government. "Why does America send Israel the planes and bombs," they ask, "when they know we have nothing to fight back with? What can we do?" There is no adequate answer.

In Nablus, the situation is much more desperate. The city, which is under almost constant curfew, is papered over with posters of suicide bombers. A young Palestinian woman, Ansam, remarks, "I have no hope about the future. Before I wanted to go to the university to study, but now there is no money and I can't even leave my house. I want to die," she continues. "I want to go to someplace better than this." One can easily imagine her face joining the collage of tattered posters of suicide bombers that clamor for attention in the empty, war-pocked streets.

Reconciliation with the state of Israel seems impossible to most people in the West Bank. The nationalist feeling is so strong because Israel's assault on Palestinian society has been total, decimating every moqota'a (Palestinian Authority administrative building) in the West Bank, imposing

Curfew by Gordon

*The only things visible
Above the rubble-ridden ground
Of this West Bank ghost city
Rubble-ridden town
Two Flags
One attached to a kite
And one attached to a tank*

consensus meetings in the street combined with tense expressions of conflicting brands of "I know what to do" to create a rather chaotic and disempowering scene for at least fifteen minutes.

while those in the group who felt - with almost a religious insistence and consistency - that the best path is non-aggression and polite, conversational interaction with occupying soldiers played their "negotiation" games, the rest of us just waited awkwardly. the only semi-enjoyable thing about these moments was the point when the Israelis pulled out their copy of the day's newspaper and recognized one of the women amongst us as the woman in a newspaper photo vandalising one of their APCs. we all sort of chuckled uncomfortably, though we had different reasons for our laughter (and for our discomfort) than the soldiers.

then the Israelis just decided it was time to go. they all loaded into their jeeps and prepared to drive off - six Palestinian IDs and one man effectively stolen. immediately a number of us decided to sit down on the road to block the jeeps from leaving. as soon as we sat down, an elderly Palestinian woman sat down amongst us, quietly and confidently. and when the Israelis couldn't intimidate us away with their horns blaring, they tried backing up. a group of folks rushed off to block the road from behind, as well. somehow in the dashing attempt, a soldier tripped and fell. he decided to take out his frustration about this accident on a young man amongst us who had lain down on the pavement to stop the jeep. the kid took a nice shot to the head from a rifle butt, before others gathered around him and the soldier backed off.



the scene continued like this for a number of minutes, with the soldiers desperately trying new escape schemes and our folks scrambling to deter them one more time. the soldiers repeatedly dragged people off the road, but since they were not cops, the ISM folks just got right back down in the middle of the street. the military was able to get out of the stalemate by using the

professional do-gooders amongst us as a means to divide the group and overcome the people who were using their bodies as roadblocks. three ISMers were diverted off the road by a professional military "negotiator" (whom we were told by the compliant faction was a really nice man who saw clearly that "things don't need to happen this way"). meanwhile the soldiers simply dragged the rest to the side of the road and drove around.

when my friend who had been dragged around quite a bit got up after the jeep had driven off he screamed right into the faces of the soldiers he saw

"FUCK YOU! FUCK YOU!" and there were, of course, more do-gooders amongst us who were quick to remind us all that "the message is *de-escalation*" and so I chimed in "yeah, but 'FUCK YOU!' is the truth." directly after this scene, the soldiers grabbed someone from our group and me and about three others circled around him and held onto his body so he couldn't be kidnapped. again, the self-appointed conscience of our group chimed in with "come on now, quit all that pushin' and shovin'. we don't need that kind of bullshit now."

I was growing more and more appalled and enraged. the "consensus" meeting that was then called really pushed me over the edge. the main discussion topic of this impromptu meeting was "who will go back to nablus and who will stay here?" I couldn't believe that the question was even being seriously considered. and, of course, it came with further reiterations of the old bullshit about "negotiation." I said, as forcefully and clearly as I could, "it is totally irresponsible to leave now. the work isn't done. the motherfuckers still have the IDs, have taken one man and still haven't gotten out of this village. let's abolish the question of who will leave tonight, and let's also abolish the role of 'negotiator.' let's create instead the role of a 'demander' that can say, simply and bluntly, 'we want the IDs back, and we want you the fuck out of this village. you are not welcome here.'"

needless to say, I didn't gain much popularity with this viewpoint. many people did decide to leave after all, and negotiators were sent to talk to the soldiers. those who left that night didn't say a word to me the whole rest of the time that I was in Palestine.

but the Palestinian response was a whole different story. in the middle of our bullshit consensus meeting, a Palestinian women interrupted, nearly in tears, to say "thank you. thank you all for everything that you've done. I would like to welcome you into my home tonight." another man came up to me and said "you are my favorite. you seem strong, like you have no fear. I like especially how you say 'FUCK YOU, MOTHERFUCKERS!' to the Israelis. I like that." it was sort of embarrassing to hear him say this, but he didn't want me to be embarrassed at all. he was genuinely pleased by what we had done. and his satisfaction with our confrontation with the Israeli army was shared by absolutely everyone that I interacted with in Iraq Boreen.

in the wake of that action, for the first time in Palestine, I felt legitimately and wholly welcomed into a community. and I felt welcomed not just because I was a foreign visitor, a sympathetic tourist, but because I had *done something* which everyone had seen and was extremely grateful for. the people were so beautiful to me in Iraq Boreen. they offered me a warmth and an openness that is unparalleled in my life, and I am extremely grateful for the time I was able to spend in that village.

The stunning mountain village of Iraq Boreen was our home for the next three nights. Atop a hill surrounded by deep valleys and slopes of olive trees, we could look out for miles on the horizon in the crisp dry air. They accommodated

work on their land to complete the plum harvest say they are shot at frequently by settlers. This, together with the policy of enclosure, which resulted in 150 tons of fruit from Beit Umar wasting as wholesale produce trucks were held up at the Tarkumiya checkpoint, has produced a demoralizing economic paralysis.

With the Palestinian Authority completely decimated and the Israeli military hostile to Palestinian farmers, residents of Beit Umar live in a Kafkaesque twilight zone of lawlessness, where Jewish settlers can seize land or shoot at them with impunity. If the Palestinians attack settlers, the military punishment will be severe. Absurdly, if the farmers want to appeal against the land confiscations, they must go before the civil administration at Kiryat Arba, a fanatically Zionist settlement outside of Hebron – infamous as the home of Baruch Goldstein, the settler from Brooklyn, N.Y. who massacred 29 Muslims at the Ibrahimi Mosque in 1994.

Most Palestinians refuse to cooperate with this insulting arrangement. "This is our land," Gazi Brighith, an electrician who works for the Beit Umar municipality, told me. "We don't need a permit to work on our land."

Another humiliation is that the Israeli military has closed the Beit Umar marketplace on Route 60, just before its completion – a project in which the municipality has invested NIS 1 million (around \$215,000). Municipal officials suspect that the military is pushing them back from

Route 60 to transform it into a settler bypass road.

It is here in the Hebron district that Israel is most aggressively expanding its illegal Jewish-only settlements. In downtown Hebron, four armed and fenced-off settlements keep Palestinians from crossing through the heart of the commercial district and constrict foot traffic into the casbah. Israeli bypass roads cut the district into roughly eight different areas. A map of the occupation shows 22 Jewish civilian settlements, with seven more under proposal, along with eight military installations.

The Israeli military is reinforcing the economic situation of enclosure and eviction with random and arbitrary violence. The military deploys through the center of town several times a week, usually just before dark, firing live ammunition and teargas. In the two operations I witnessed earlier this month, there was no fire returned from Palestinian militias.

On July 11, I watched Israeli soldiers attack Mohammed Umar Al-Titi, a Palestinian man in his 20s, punching him in the stomach and hitting him with a rifle butt as they handcuffed him. According to townspeople, he wasn't a targeted activist; he just affronted the soldiers by staying out in the street as they passed. The soldiers also shot into homes, shot out water tanks, and shot down electric lines.

The only resistance to this aggression is the fierce and irrepressible children who fling stones at the soldiers. In one incident in front of the mosque, a boy chucked a large rock onto the windshield of an army

This is a wonderful article, written by a good friend (whose 2 weeks in Palestine with the ISM ended the day my time there began) upon his return to the States.

Someday the Birds Will Fall From the Sky: Life Under Occupation in the West Bank

by Jordan Green
Jerusalem, 19 August 2002

"Many families are being killed. They're humans, saying, stop, enough killing. Where is the conscience of the world? The world is standing by with power. We only ask God to stand beside us. We don't own Apaches or F-16s. We just own our belief in God. And one day God will give us our rights and liberties."

-Father of Bahjat Alami, killed by soldiers in the West Bank town of Beit Umar

The Israeli military occupation in the West Bank is in many ways a classic low-intensity war of overwhelming weaponry and firepower on Israel's side, used in ways that appear to be cruel and arbitrary, against an indigenous population that is largely defenseless. The resistance to Israeli deployments in West Bank towns is largely limited to 10-year old children flinging stones at armored personnel carriers and army jeeps.

In Beit Umar, a Palestinian farming community outside of Hebron that boasts more tractors per capita than any other place in the West Bank, the townspeople have been spared the massive carnage of cities like Nablus, where Apache helicopters fired into a crowded marketplace earlier this month. But still, on these grape-covered hills bathed in warm

Mediterranean light, a deadly waiting game has set in.

People's attitudes here are characterized by humor and a rough-edged durability, typical of rural communities all over the world, pressured as they are by the double-edge vise of military enclosure and settler attacks that are strangling the farm economy. But in this town of 12,000 where almost every person has a story about someone who has been beaten, killed, or abducted by the military, considerations of the future are tinged with an ominous foreboding.

The people of Beit Umar keenly sense that the world's geopolitics are not tilting in their favor. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's policy of Israeli militarism and Jewish national expansion is in evidence here, where 300 dunams (the equivalent of 75 acres) of Palestinian farmland have been declared a "closed military zone," and appear to be subject to imminent annexation by the nearby Jewish settlement Karmit Zur, due to aggressive patrolling by armed settlers accompanied by a military detachment.

The military seized this land after Palestinian gunmen from neighboring Hal Houl killed two settlers in a mobile home on the outskirts of the settlement. Palestinians who try to

us in the nicest house, fed us immense portions of food (despite their food shortage), and forced us all to shower and lounge around in their jalabias.

At night we slept in a house with 400-channel satellite TV. It was all too surreal watching German television (that no one could understand) with Palestinians in this small mountain village. When naked German volleyball came on, we laughed; but not for long, as the strong Muslim self-discipline forced a channel change. We did watch Hezbollah TV's propaganda though: video of Zionist massacres set against Bush repeating, "Ariel Sharon is a man of peace." We later learned that Hezbollah TV sometimes shows live footage of guerilla offensives on the south Lebanese border with Israel.

Below, Alberto describes his thoughts and the other activities we participated in during our two days in Iraq Boreen.

when I was in Iraq Boreen the day after the round-up, my idea was to create scarecrows that would be terrorists (we decided to choose Bush and Sharon as our representations of "terrorists"). these stick-people "terrorists" could then be handed over to the Israeli authorities with a simple message: "you say you're looking for terrorists, so here you go. have them, we don't want them. but you can't have our men anymore. get the fuck out of this land. you've gotten everything you came for."

it was a simple action. maybe not even overwhelmingly creative. but it generated positive activity within the village as we all scrambled around searching for junk that could be used to make stick-people. and people seemed pleased by the message of it. unfortunately, we never got to use the scarecrows for an action, because the day we had planned to do so had to be devoted, instead, to roadblock removal. in the day that we waited to prepare for the scarecrow action, the israelis came with bulldozers and sealed off all of the access roads to Iraq Boreen and nearby Tell village.

so there we were with thirty villagers and all the shovels and buckets the villages could muster, plugging away at the removal of three fifteen-foot mounds of dirt placed in the way for no good reason at all. this is the relentless quality of Zionism.

but I think that if there is going to be an actual *Intifada* - a realization reached as the result of a hard shock or a shaking off - then we will, all of us, need to begin generating ideas and actions which soar beyond simple reaction. our efforts will need to begin to assert a new identity, a new vision of what human beings are capable of accomplishing.

maybe it will start with simple little ideas like the scarecrow action, or the painting of the tanks. and ideally, actions such as these, and even better ones, will multiply exponentially, and spread out, internationally.

the offer of Zionism is the final burial of human dignity, initiative and hope. our offer must be the creation of millions upon millions of hopeful, imaginative, autonomous ideas and realities.

anything less and we will lose.

“We Don’t Have Homeless People Here in Palestine”

Layers upon layers of martyr posters wallpaper every inch of Nablus, the largest of the West Bank cities. Like all other West Bank cities, they face daily curfews (24-hour curfews plagued 2 of our 3 days in Nablus). The Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (a self-organized collection of medical workers) gave us a tour of the picturesque valley town of Nablus. Through Balata Refugee camp, past bombed out prisons and police stations, and into the city center, the story was the same we had seen in Ramallah and Gaza.

Children defied curfew as best they could, filling the empty streets with soccer and laughter and filling the skies with homemade kites – hundreds and hundreds of them. Some were enormous, others small; some with lights (!), some tangled in phone lines, and others stuck on roofs. A couple people told us they interfered with Israeli spy planes’ reconnaissance systems. But, at the very least, kite-flying was a preservation of playfulness in a heavy atmosphere of occupation. Stores also cleverly undermined curfew by having the appearance of compliance, but functionally remaining open to those who simply tried the door. A particular 24-hour internet cafe (on the 4th floor of an office building) clandestinely stayed open by leaving the gate chained, but unlocked, and the lights off. We also participated in a vibrant daytime school children’s demonstration against curfew.

The curfew itself fucks with traditional notions of space. The space is completely transformed – elements of serenity layered with elements of danger. In contrast to the normality of the lively markets and street soccer, the quiet, occupied city allows one to possess complete control over and understanding of the space. However, these thoughts of control and understanding are entirely erroneous. *The curfew is designed so you have no control over the space.* The occasional automatic fire piercing the steadfast silence subtly and rudely reminds us of this.

The old city’s maze of alleyways, side streets, footpaths, stairways, tunnels and walls explode the mind while shaming every modern metropolis and their planners, architects, and engineers. Defying description, the labyrinth network of Nablus’ old city proves all too well that space transcends language. Space is also perhaps the best defense against foreign occupation. Despite the never-ending onslaught of curfews, air strikes, and sieges, the Israeli military has never

successfully occupied Nablus’ old city. Every IDF advance into the old city triggers intense gun battles far too costly for the Israelis to take. Even the intricate maps that Israeli military intelligence possesses and studies are no match for the intimate knowledge and love of the space Palestinians gain through living every day within the old city.

Before closing my eyes to sleep on a friend’s rooftop in Nablus’ old city, I stared up at the stars as I had in Gaza. This time, surrounded by mountains on three sides. And from these mountains, 2 Israeli military bases kept watch over the movements in our city below. Somewhat discouraged by having earlier in the day seen a large apartment window totally blocked by TV satellite dishes I thought of something Saeed (whose roof we were sleeping on) had told me. Saeed, probably the most intelligent and hopeful of the people I’ve met in Palestine, said to me earlier that night. “You have homeless people in America. Here, no one lives in the street. We don’t have homeless people here in Palestine.” Earlier that evening in the old city, Saeed pointed out a spot on the street without a cobblestone where an anti-tank mine had been placed in April to fend off the siege. And while loitering and fiddling around with a spent lighter outside his home, Saeed’s father (in his 70’s) walked by and said “Ahhh, petrol bomb;” then he emulated throwing the lighter hard onto the ground and admiring the ensuing ignition by all the lighter fluid.

In the warm night air, I closed my eyes and smiled, comforted by sleeping amongst a people who had not lost their desire to love and their will to live – who had not smothered the fire burning deep inside their hearts.

