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Expert Opinion – Shuli Hartman, Social Anthropologist

The Lifestyle of Fellahin and Shepherd Communities in Firing Zone 918

Foreword

I was commissioned by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel to provide my professional opinion with regards to the lifestyle of the residents of communities that reside in the area known as Masafer-Yatta (henceforth: the 'Yatta District').¹ This takes place in the context of the Minister of Defense's stated intention to utilize a large part of this area, known as Firing Zone 918,² as a training range where live ammunition will be used, and to evict the residents of this area for that purpose.

My report is based on my knowledge of the Fellahin shepherds' way of life in the South Hebron Hills in general, and the Yatta District in particular. Since 2006 I have visited and toured the region, and recently, between September 2011 and February 2012, even conducted a thorough study based on extended field work within one of the communities in this area.³ Furthermore, for the purpose of writing this report, I visited a number of different communities within the area known as Firing Zone 918, talked with men and women and watched them as they went about their daily routines.

Two central questions lie at the center of this report:

1. What is the way of life that characterizes the residents of the communities in the Yatta District, and in particular Firing Zone 918?
2. Is the specific area where they live essential to the continued existence of their way of life, and is their permanent residence there necessary?

Below is a summary of my answer, which I shall establish and delineate extensively throughout the report.

For about 200 years, the Yatta District, including the area designated as Firing Zone 918, has been home to communities of Fellahin shepherds whose roots lie in Yatta, but who have branched out and developed outside of Yatta, in the district. The residents of the communities who live there today, continue a long tradition of combining drylands

1 See Map Number 1 – the Yatta District

2 See Map Number 3 – marking Firing Zone 918

3 Shuli Hartman, "Like water for the thirsty... Renewable Energy Systems in Palestinian Communities in the South Hebron Hills", 2012.

http://comet-me.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Cmt_ShuliReport_Eng_F_spreads.pdf

agriculture with sheep herding. The farmland, which was inherited from their fathers, and the grazing land adjacent to it, are the foundation and the anchor of the existence and continuation of their unique lifestyle, which is sustained by rainwater cisterns for drinking, for both themselves and their herds. The soil enables their survival, the herds provide them with a livelihood, and the space, conditioned for drylands agriculture, becomes a necessary condition for this combination over the years. These three things – agricultural land in a large area, space for grazing and domestic spaces that the herds are a part of – exist in a specific area for the twelve communities considered in this review. This is the area designated as Firing Zone 918.

Working the land and raising herds of animals involves innumerable tasks spread over the course of the day and year, turning this work into an entire lifestyle. They are woven into the entirety of the residents' lives and rooted in the family, the community and the inter-communal sphere. Even though the extended family is the only social and economic base, marriages between families and inter-community relationships exist based around similar tasks and common points of interest. This is an entire fabric of life, and a way of life that enables a unique physical, social and economic existence. This takes place on the specific land designated as the Firing Zone, and the land is a prerequisite for the existence of this way of life.

Below is a short historical, political and economic overview, without which it is impossible to understand the space and its inhabitants. Following that is a description of the unique lifestyle of the residents. I will outline the spatial and social organization of the community and the dynamism that characterizes it, and review the relationships between the communities and the urban center, Yatta, and I will explore the question of the essentiality of the permanent residence of the communities in this place to their continued economic and social existence.

A. General Background

1. Historical Overview

The area known as Firing Zone 918 is in fact an organic part of a space known by the Palestinian residents as the Yatta District.⁴ Until 1948, the Yatta District consisted of the area east and south of the town of Yatta, from Tel Kriyot (Palestinian Kritin) to the south almost up until Tel Arad and to the beginning of the descent to the Dead Sea to the south-east.⁵ This area, known as Yatta's lands, was entirely under the control and use of families originating from Yatta. West of it are the lands of 'Samua', and east and south-east are lands

⁴ 'Masafer' – a rural, regional area near the town of Yatta. Shepherds and farmers would move from place to place in this area depending on the time of year, the amount of rainfall to optimize their grazing area. Offshoot villages were developed in this area adjacent to the residents' lands.

⁵ See Map number 2 – Yatta's land.

under the control of the Adullam Bedouin tribes⁶ and the control of the Kaabneh and Jahlin tribes.

The Yatta District is on the eastern ridge of the South Hebron hills, facing the Judean desert, and is actually a semi-desert area itself. Owing to the height of the ridge, there is eastward penetration of rainfall, which makes possible settlement that relies on drylands agriculture, water cisterns and grazing during parts of the year. The north-western part, which is closest to Yatta, is the highest altitude region and is both rainier and colder. The south-eastern areas are lower. They are less cold in winter and hotter in the summer, and have a more level surface that is more suitable for agriculture.⁷

Indeed, even in the first third of the 19th century, Fellahin shepherds engaging in drylands agriculture began to leave the mother village Yatta for the areas around it, and this movement continued until the end of the British Mandate period and the beginning of Jordanian rule.⁸ Families diverged as a result of natural growth and with the expansion of families, those unable to buy land in the mother village went in search of agricultural lands and grazing areas outside of the village.

Over the years, what began as a seasonal excursion and a stay of several months in the caves in the area became the main place of residence for a large portion of the families, especially the poorer ones. These families renovated and improved the caves that are found in abundance in the area.⁹ Residents relied on ancient water cisterns and dug new ones, and over the years managed to maintain a basic standard of living as a traditional, pre-consumerist society. Today we can meet families where a child, his father, his grandfather and his great-grandfather were all born, raised and some still live today around one cave, in the same small village, in this district.

Over the years the settlements in the Yatta District grew. Jinba and Mirkez (two villages inside the Firing Zone),¹⁰ which were located in the center of the district on the road leading from Jericho to Arad, developed significantly and come to form a kind of regional center. According to the testimony of community elders, prior to the 1948 War of Independence these villages were even more developed and important than Yatta. In those years in the villages, there were houses and shops made of stone, and there was even a cemetery in Mirkez, whose remains can be seen still today. It can be assumed that were it not for changes in the borders following the 1948 war, these villages would have developed into independent villages and formed an alternative to Yatta as the central villages for the communities in the region. Yet the war changed the situation dramatically. A significant

⁶ Both the Bedouins in the region of Arad and the Yatta District mention the great war between the Bedouins and the Fellahin over living space that ended with the two sides agreeing upon borders in the early 19th Century.

⁷ Most of the communities within Firing Zone 918 are found in this part of the district.

⁸ Ya'akov Habakkuk, *Life in the Hebron Mountain Caves* (Ministry of Defense, 1985). Page 26

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See Map number 3

portion of the Yatta District remained in Israeli territory, and much of the grazing areas near the town of Kritin were incorporated into Israel's new borders, meaning that the shepherds were banned from them. Jinba and Mirkez became frontier communities. They lost their centrality, their development was stunted, and they, together with the rest of the communities in the region, remained dependent on Yatta, the urban center.

2. Under Israeli Rule

The 1967 war eliminated the border created in 1949 and theoretically made it possible for Fellahin shepherds in the area to graze on lands beyond the Green Line. But the grazing lands remained closed to them as they were declared at that time to be nature reserves. Inspectors who caught shepherds in the area confiscated their herds and moved them to pens near Be'er Sheva or even more remote locations. The owners were required to pay large sums to obtain their release and had to lead them back.

These events, which in the words of the authorities were seen as law enforcement, were dramatic and traumatic for the Fellahin Palestinians and reflect differing interpretations of historical reality. For these Fellahin shepherds, these are their grazing areas, on their lands and with their water cisterns. Free movement in this space is an expression and condition of their lifestyle and a factor contributing to their ability to survive and sustain themselves as shepherds in open pastures, without access to flowing water. For the state, the land is vacant, part of it to be used seasonally for military training exercises, and part deemed nature reserves. This was decided without taking the local population into consideration, without an understanding of their needs and limitations, and without an attempt to understand their way of life.

3. Work, economy, and development

Beginning in the second half of 1968 and lasting for about 25 years, the Israeli labor market opened a new income source for residents of the region, including for families living in these villages. The vast differences in standard of living between these two societies allowed Palestinian workers to earn more than they had grown accustomed to, certainly in comparison to the income earned by raising sheep under drylands agricultural conditions. Many families sent a son or two to work in Israel while the other men and women continued to maintain the herds, work the land and sustain their rural livelihoods.

In 1993, the borders were closed, and with them the gates to employment in Israel. Residents of the area were left without other options: development plans were not prepared for them, infrastructure had not been established, neither employment nor training programs had been established, and they found themselves in a 'blind alley.' Many people tried to seek employment in Yatta and surrounding areas, usually without success, because the economy had been entirely dependent on the Israeli labor market. As a result of

this, large numbers returned to their families in Yatta in the early 1990s to work the land and engage in traditional shepherding. Others remained unemployed in Yatta.

Even today, the job market in Yatta is limited and much of the demand for work is in the field of manual labor. In recent years, work permits are allocated sparingly, without accommodation, to men over the age of 30 at the request of Israeli companies and employers. Most jobs are not permanent and the workers endure long periods of unemployment.

In the 1980s, policies restricting construction as well as strict new prohibitions on any construction in the Yatta area specifically were added to the policy of restricting the movement of shepherds. Four new settlements were established during these years, and towards the end of the 1990s an additional four outposts were erected causing even more roads and pastures to be blocked to Palestinian residents.¹¹

In November 1999 an evacuation order issued in respect of Firing Zone 918 in the 1970s was activated. Military forces, accompanied by members of the Civil Administration, expelled residents living in the region and confiscated their property. In an interim order, in March 2000, the High Court of Justice ruled that the residents must be allowed to return to the area, and prohibited the State from expelling them until a final decision had been reached in the matter. Since then, the residents have been living under a hope that the deportation proceedings will not change.

I undertook this brief overview¹² in order to make evident the context through which the lives of the residents of the Yatta District are managed, and in general in the region that is the subject of this report.

B. Fellahin shepherd communities within the Firing Zone

1. Principles of social organization

The residents living within the Firing Zone live in 12 distinct communities; within each community or small village reside a number of families related on the father's side, with varying degrees of family relation. In some parts of the community the relatives are all part of one clan,¹³ in others there are families from two or three different clans. On average there

¹¹ Residents of Tuba, for example, are forced to get to their homes in Yatta via a circuitous route from places where they do their shopping, due to the proximity of the main road to the Maon settlement. Thus, instead of a half-hour tractor trip, it takes them about two hours, at a high price.

¹² For a more detailed overview of the aspects looked at here, see Shuli Hartman, "Like water for the thirsty..." Renewable Energy Systems in Palestinian Communities in the South Hebron Hills, 2012.

http://comet-me.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Cmt_ShuliReport_Eng_F_spreads.pdf

¹³ **Family – extended family** that includes the patriarch of the family, his wife or wives, his married sons, their wives and children, and unmarried sons and daughters.

are approximately 120 men and women residing in each community, although there are communities with over 300 residents, as well as a community with a population of only 50.¹⁴ Female family members move in with their husband's family in different community when they marry, with the exception of marriages within the same community.

Each family owns a herd of sheep, which in most cases ranges from 50-100 sheep, though there are families that raise 200, 400 and even 800 sheep, with a group of adult brothers and their wives working together.

Within each community, the extended family, including the patriarch of the family, his wife or wives, his married sons, their wives and children, and his unmarried daughters and sons, make up the basic social and economic unit owning the agricultural land and the herd. The family's lifestyle and life rhythm is based around meeting the needs of the herd with the help of the land on the one hand, and meeting the needs of the family with the help of the land and the herd on the other.

The land supplies food for the herd. The agricultural land, spread over hundreds of dunams per family,¹⁵ is used for growing barley for the herd and wheat for the family members. After the harvest, the herd grazes on the land. In addition, agricultural land becomes pasture land and can supply the herd with natural food for approximately half a year.

The herd supplies milk, from which the women produce butter and cheese to be sold in Yatta, and likewise the goats, lambs, and sheep around which the family's life revolves. The tasks are numerous and therefore the family must work together to implement them, with a clear division of labor between the family members. Not all the family members belonging to the economic unit consistently work in the village. The needs change in accordance with the agricultural cycle, seasons, rainfall, lifecycle of the herd and the family lifecycle, and the family members organize and adjust their lives in light of all this.

Alongside the patriarch of the family is a son or two who work as shepherds, their wives and children, and their unmarried sisters or some of their brother's wives. All these family members work permanently to maintain the household and the herd as the permanent core who are always in the village. Within the family there is a clear gendered division of labor: the men are responsible for the public sphere, including cultivating the land, shepherding and caring for the herd, purchasing food and goods, and

Clan (*hamula* in Arabic) - a group of families descended from the same patriarchal line, with varying degrees of family relation.

¹⁴ In addition to the permanent population, land owners will arrive for the plowing season in November and December to plow and sow their lands and during rainy years, some will even move with their families to the area during the winter and spring months. Their children will enroll in the schools in Fakheit and Jinba, joining the community as permanent residents for 6-7 months.

¹⁵ Families cultivate agricultural lands that belong not only to individuals living in the village but also to family members living in the town. Many families also lease additional land from distant relatives or sometimes even from other families.

selling dairy products and livestock. The women are responsible for the domestic sphere, which the herd is a part of, including feeding the family and the herd. They welcome the shepherd who returns with the herd with the troughs full of seeds and hay; they clean, wash, rinse, and cook for all members of the family and care for the children. During the milking season they milk at dawn and dusk, and produce butter and cheese from the milk, all without running water or electricity in most of the communities.¹⁶ The family's workday begins at 5am in the summer and 6am in the winter and continues past sunset. Some families turn on generators in the evenings for two to three hours so they can use electric appliances in order to continue working during these hours. Those who have a washing machine or a butter churner turn them on during these hours.

Each family work team, which includes at least one or two shepherds and two women with children, will receive help from additional brothers who will come to the village according to the changing agricultural and herding needs, and according to the occupational alternatives with which they can supplement the income of the family and shared economic unit.

Due to severe planning restrictions on building and development in Yatta District communities, occupational alternatives cannot be made available in the villages themselves, therefore brothers who want and need to support the family economy must seek work outside of the Yatta District. They find odd jobs in manual labor in Yatta and sometimes in Israel. While these brothers work in outside jobs, they return on weekends and assist with any chores that require their help. There are also instances in which the entire economic unit relies on the herd alone. In these cases, the entire extended family raises a particularly large herd and all the brothers and their wives will work in the village in managing and maintaining the herd and the agricultural land throughout the entire year.¹⁷

2. The home – domestic space

The family lives and functions within the domestic space. The domestic space includes the people and the livestock alike. Unlike other organizational structures accepted in modern Western society, the home here is a space and not a structure; the different "rooms" within it are some distance apart from one another, and some of them are located underground. The herd is perceived and defined as part of the domestic space. The home in this sense is not perceived as something rigidly distinct from the non-human environment; it is flexible, spread out, contains elements of completely non-structured landscape, and is connected to the mythologies and experiences which a way of life generates. It should be remembered that the conceptualization of a home is culturally dependent, just as home design and architecture are. In the case of the Fellahin shepherds in the Yatta District, the architecture and design of the home also reflects the constraints imposed on the inhabitants.

¹⁶ Five of the twelve communities installed a solar energy system for basic purposes.

¹⁷ For a detailed example, see footnote 20.

The domestic space includes a tent, some of whose walls are built as a fence. It's a kind of cross between a building and a tent. It is divided into a sleeping space and a hosting space, which are separated by a wall or by fabric. A number of smaller tents are located a certain distance from the main tent. These are the "bedrooms" of the married sons.

The "living room" shared by the extended family expands and takes on its form according to the use made of it. At mealtimes everyone sits around the bowls of food and the tent takes on the appearance of a shared dining room. At the end of the meal everything is cleared away, the floor is cleaned, and it is as if there was never a meal served. When guests arrive, mattresses and pillows are laid out, tea is served and the room is the 'lounge.' When guests depart, everything is once again collected and the tent is clean and empty. In the evening, when the generator is running, the women use basic electronic appliances, the men watch television and everyone sits and watches Bedouin TV shows from Saudi Arabia. These are soap operas of Bedouin life which remind the house's residents, more than any other TV program, of their own lifestyle. Once again the mattresses are laid out, and all available family members, including young children, sit and watch, identify and dissent. Sometimes a conversation is generated by what is occurring on the screen. This lasts until an episode ends or the time allocated to run the generator ends. In many cases the children have already fallen asleep, the family members exchange a sentence or two about the following day, the young couples disperse to their sleeping tents. In the winter some of the family members bring blankets and with the older children sleep in what becomes the bedroom. In the summer months they take the mattresses outside to the 'balcony,' which is the exposed rocks outside the tent, or to the ramp which faces the sheep pen.

The niche for the cooking fire is located a certain distance from the tent (in order to avoid the smoke), and behind it the sheep pen, part of which is shaded in the summer and covered with nylon in the winter, and part of which remains open. Different families improvise different types of 'ramps' near the pen, upon which they sleep in the summer in order to guard the herd at night. At some distance, in a special building, you will find the taboun in which the local bread – choobooz – is baked.

The family caves are an inseparable part of the domestic space. In some of the villages such as Megheir Al-Abeid everyone still lives in caves, which are spacious and impressively beautiful. In most of the villages some of the families live in caves and some live in tents. The differences relate to the condition of the caves, the topography and the families' preference. Many caves are used for storage, as the dwelling of the pregnant sheep and lambs, as a wintertime kitchen and a place of refuge for the family and the herd together during particularly cold winter days.

Most of the families also have basic toilets at some distance from the sleeping tents, as well as an external storage building for their tools and for the sheep feed during the summer. Adjacent to the domestic space is a family water cistern next to a large container for purchased water, for when the cistern water runs out. At the edge of the family space are the donkey and the hiding place of the chickens, and sometimes also pigeons. The border of

the space is marked by the dogs. They are definitively not part of the family space, but rather the markers and guardians of its boundaries.

At some distance from this complex is another family's home, consisting of the same elements in a slightly different composition, according to the character of the area that is not built up and the possibilities it allows. There is much adaptation to and reliance on natural features, as with an existing rock, which is used as one of the walls. The homes are usually located on the rocky, elevated areas above the caves, which cannot be used for agriculture. At the foot and the sides of the caves lie the agricultural and grazing lands.

3. The community and the communities

The community, as previously mentioned, is made up of extended families, some of whom are related on the father's side – cousins, for example – while some are made up of families from another clan. Everyone knows everyone else, and everyone is aware of what's going on in each family. The families share a daily routine and seasonal schedule changes affect everyone the same way. There is also a sense of having a shared fate, especially in light of the threat to the continued existence of their homes. Marital ties exist between families in the same clan – marriages between cousins that greatly strengthen the connections between related families – but there are also marriages between families from different clans within the same community and between communities in the region, which express, and in turn strengthen, the connections between neighboring families in the community and between communities.

Connections between the different communities develop around shared areas of interest. Many men from the different communities in the Firing Zone go on Fridays to the only mosque in the area, located in Jinba, which is the largest community in the Yatta District. Parents from the different communities meet via the school in Fakheit where their children learn. It seems that due to the strict restrictions on accessibility to the Firing Zone and its isolated communities, certain kinds of inter-family and inter-community relations have developed on the basis of shared interests, as well as solidarity, sense of shared fate, and friendship.¹⁸ Men from neighboring communities have decided to do the threshing, plowing, and shearing of the sheep together in order to lower costs for everyone. This is one example of the development of ongoing areas of cooperation and friendships between different families from Tabban and Fakheit, which are neighboring communities. These kinds of relations do not nullify or obviate the role and strength of the extended family, and do not replace it. They are an additional structure based on the shared life in the region and the

¹⁸ When the tractor belonging to Yasser from Fakheit broke down, he asked for help from Nasser from Tabban who also has a tractor, and together with Issa, a third friend and tractor owner, took counsel and worked together to fix the tractor. Together, they succeeded in solving the problem and the cost of transporting the tractor to Yatta, which would have been an unbearable expense for Yasser. The three friends are from different families (Hamamda, Abu Sabha and Abu Abeid) and, as mentioned, also from different communities. Of course, in time of need, Nasser from Tabban would also ask Yasser or Issa for help without expecting any compensation.

local identity that has developed. The awareness of having a common fate and the circumstances of the current reality help foster this phenomenon.

4. Between Yatta and the surrounding District

The family unit falls apart after the death of the father. The herd and the land are divided among the brothers, and the families separate. From here on, there are a number of different models among the communities, in all of which the brothers prefer to continue the agricultural partnership without dividing up the land. In some of them, the herd is divided among the brothers,¹⁹ while in others, the brothers continue to have joint possession of the herd and they all work together in the village raising a large herd.²⁰ In yet others, even though the brothers continue to have joint possession of the herd, only one of them raises the herd, and the rest of the brothers pay him and help pay for the rest of the expenses while they work some or most of the time at external jobs.²¹

What all the models have in common is the shared basis of belonging to the family as a socio-economic unit, maintaining the agricultural lands without dividing them up, and the connection with the regional center of Yatta, which is essential for the proper functioning of life in the villages.

¹⁹ At Majaz, for example, there are four brothers living next to one another with their families, who continue to have joint possession of the land, but divided the herd that they inherited from their father among them, and each brother raises his own herd with his descendants. Three of the brothers have married sons who live with them, such that they themselves are heads of extended families. All of them work and live in Majaz, each with his herd. The four brothers have four additional brothers who were born and grew up in Majaz. Three of them are studying in Yatta, two of whom in higher education. One of the eight brothers lives in Yatta and only comes to work the land and live with his brothers in the winter. Despite the division of the herds, the brothers will always help one another.

²⁰ Sometimes the brothers prefer not to divide up the herd, and to have one large herd together, while dividing the work with the herd and the agricultural land between them. This is the model that exists in Tuba – eight brothers who work together as a kind of company or cooperative. All of the brothers are married, and the families have a clear division of labor for the management of the collective resource – the herd, which numbers over 800 sheep. There are no external jobs, and the entire cash flow comes from sale of lambs and sheep year-round. Some of them are responsible for the herding and day-to-day work with the herd, others for the agriculture on many hundreds of dunams of land (some of which is owned by the family, some rented), and there is one brother who travels by tractor to Yatta and back, brings food products to the family, brings straw and seeds to the herd during the dry seasons, bargains with traders and sells the milk and meat.

²¹ The brother trained and educated to be the shepherd in the family stays back to work and manage the herd for an annual payment. All of the income and expenses connected to the herd and agriculture are divided among everyone. The brothers in this case work in external jobs as temporary workers in Israel or Yatta, or alternatively, in professions that require them to live in Yatta, such as teachers, carpenters, or practical engineers. The wives of the brothers in partnership who work in Yatta or Israel join the wife of the shepherd and help with housework, maintenance of the herd and processing the dairy products. The husbands come home on weekends, and, as mentioned, in accordance with changing needs, like plowing, harvesting, cleaning out water cisterns before the rains, etc.

Even though the distance between the communities in the Firing Zone and Yatta is only about 15-20 km, the physical difficulty of accessing the communities in the Firing Zone make the journey to Yatta a long, costly operation, and make the mental and economic distance even greater. Most of the Fellahin do not have a vehicle, aside from the few who own tractors. They all have donkeys, which serve as the main mode of transportation. Ordering a vehicle to transport people costs over 100 NIS, a fantastic sum considering the budget of the shepherd and farmer families. Thus, it is clear that professionals such as teachers, practical engineers or carpenters with a steady job would decide to live in Yatta,²² and that those who work there temporarily would stay in Yatta for the work week and only return to their villages and families on weekends. A shepherd or his father goes to Yatta once every 10 days to go shopping and run various errands. The women go to Yatta only for medical treatment or family occasions (weddings or condolence visits).

In addition to the need for additional income, which causes many of the young people to leave the village, there is also the desire to get an education or provide it to children, as well as the need for medical services for the sick and the elderly who do not live in the villages. For the past four years an elementary school has been operating in the Firing Zone for children up to 7th grade, in Fakheit, and most of the children from the villages go to school there. Two years ago a school for the lower grades was also opened in Jinba, the largest of the communities.²³ The rest of the children go to school in Yatta, where they live with their mother who comes with them or an aunt who takes the place of the mother, who stays at the family's home in the village. The children return home on weekends and holidays. The Fellahin place great importance on education and boys who study receive the support of the family. At the same time, adolescents who do not succeed in their studies return to the village. Boys, if they are interested and able to manage the herd, are trained to be shepherds, and girls help with all the household work and with milking, until they are married.

Women about to give birth also travel to Yatta, because there is no way for an ambulance to travel to the communities in the surrounding district. People who fall sick are taken by tractor to a location that an ambulance can get to, and sometimes the length of the journey leads to the death of a person whose life could otherwise have been saved. Therefore, the elderly and sick people in need of daily medical treatment stay in Yatta. Thus, there is always a core group in both Yatta and the village. In the village the core group is made up of the shepherds and their families and parents, while in Yatta it is made up of the sick, the elderly, and professionals and their families. Between these two groups there is always movement of family members, their unmarried sisters, wives, and children.

²² If the residents were able to set up roads and other appropriate infrastructure in the village, some of them would certainly return to live there. In this regard, see note 23.

²³ The teachers come from A'Tawani and Yatta, and on rainy days the school does not operate because the road becomes muddy and impassable for any vehicles except for all-terrain vehicles.

Overall, it's clear that the dependence of the Yatta District and of all the communities of the Firing Zone on Yatta is not one-sided. In actuality, they are interdependent: the District is the hinterland of Yatta. Sheep traders, butchers, and shop owners are dependent on the agricultural production, sheep, and lambs of the villages; and the Fellahin shepherds, for their part, are dependent on the urban community as a market for their products, and to provide them with services and goods. Approximately 100,000 people live in Yatta, and they enable the continued existence of the surrounding district's way of life. The interdependence exists because of the differences, which complement each other. The condition for this interdependence is, in effect, the existence of each one separately – the town provides services, goods, and demand, while the rural region consumes its services and goods, and provides the milk and meat products required by its residents.

5. Constant struggle for survival

The quality of life of the agricultural shepherds has decreased over the many years of drought prior to the current rainy year, during which the purchase of water and food for the herd left many of them impoverished. (It is to be hoped that there will be more benefits than damage as a result of the current heavy rains.)²⁴ The merchants in Yatta take advantage of the shepherds' extremely limited cash flow and of the structurally low liquidity that affects most of them. The merchants sell livestock feed primarily during the summer and fall, on credit for which they charge high interest, because in those seasons the shepherds have little or no cash²⁵ (they are sometimes also required to take loans in order to purchase food for their families). In the spring, the merchants will receive the lambs and young goats which are born and the butter and cheeses that will be produced as payment against the loan. The herd owners are again left without cash. The bargaining power of the Yatta District residents, particularly in arid years, is very weak and most keep paying back loans to the same rich merchants from year to year. This is one of the reasons that land is centrally important to them. The land allows them to subsist even in conditions of cash shortage and is the basis for each year's renewal of the cycle of subsistence. Thus, before each rainy season the agricultural land is plowed and sowed with the hope of a good precipitation year. Herd owners plow their land and also lease additional lands,²⁶ because the more land they have cultivated, the more even a relatively weak harvest can provide, even if only partially, for the needs of the family and the herd. In rainy years, vegetables and summer crops are also planted in the wadis where the rainwater accumulates, primarily for the use of the family. In addition to sheep, each family also raises chickens for eggs and on rare occasions also for meat. The local bread, eggs, sheep oil,

²⁴ Last year was also not a drought year, but in terms of the distribution of rain, it was not a good year for agriculture.

²⁵ In this context, the value of the third organizational model mentioned above is apparent. This model, as explained, allows for cash flow during this period thanks to the salaries of families members working outside jobs, lowering dependence on the merchants.

²⁶ To lease 500 dunams of agricultural land for a year, the fellah will pay approximately 800 Dinars, or around 4,000 NIS.

butter, and dried cheese comprise the lion's share of the family diet. All other products are purchased in Yatta sparingly.

6. Drylands agriculture

Drylands farming is dependent on the mercy of the heavens and adjusts itself to the cycle of the seasons. The timing of the rains, their location and strength, distribution and frequency are all parameters that propel the cycle of life and determine the corresponding behavior of the fellahin shepherd who carry generations of memories of living off of nature and coping with its decrees. I will describe typical life routines and varying chores according to their occurrence throughout the year, assuming of course that the rains have been compliant. In other words, the annual calendar moves forward or backward in time in accordance with the rains, rather than dates:

The chores that do not vary are taking the sheep out to pasture, feeding the herd twice a day, in accordance with the amount and quality of the pasture, and watering it twice a day. The shepherds go out with the herd while the women prepare the feed mixture that the sheep will receive and spread it in the troughs. The manpower required to maintain a herd of 50 to 100 is one to two shepherds and at least two women who must remain in proximity to the herd each and every day throughout the year. In addition to this basic routine are the chores that vary in accordance with the season, rains and life cycle of the herd.

Around October the preparations for winter begin including strengthening pens, covering the tents with plastic, repairing the residential and storage tents in preparation for the winter rains, and renovating and concreting the residential caves and the entire living space. Siblings arrive to help with these tasks which require many helping hands.²⁷

In November, the cisterns are cleaned after the dry season in order to prepare them for the winter. Sometimes, the walls or the covers must be repaired. This is also a job that requires assistance from additional family members. After the first rain, usually in November, the plowing season begins which continues throughout November and December during which all clods of earth that are not massive rocks are turned up and then sown with the help of a donkey and wooden plow. The fellahin plow the larger fields first. As mentioned above, the land consists of hundreds of dunams belonging to the entire family, with the addition of land leased by the family from others. Sometimes, several tractor owners arrange to plow each other's land together. The smaller plots are plowed with a donkey and wooden plow, and not even one square meter of land will be passed over, even if it's next to a road, on an

²⁷ Right now, during these days of hopefully rainy winter, the fragility of the tents and plastic coverings has been revealed. Many tents and pen coverings flew away in the storm and many residents throughout the Yatta District, including those in the Firing Zone, who strengthened and refurbished and tied down their various shelter coverings, have now been left with naked tents and pens without roofs, and cannot do anything about it until the storm passes. Those who live within four walls cannot imagine the enormity of the crisis. Human beings went into the caves. Whoever has enough room for the sheep in the caves will get by. The fate of sheep left without shelter is sealed.

incline or descent – everything is plowed in an attempt to fully utilize the land and maximize yield. It is a Sisyphean task. The land is still dry, in most cases strewn with rocks, and the donkey and its owner must walk back and forth for hours and hours. The wife brings tea, sometimes even a meal, an old father comes to sit next to the plowed plot to provide moral support, and thus they work plot by plot throughout the plowing season, with sons and brothers joining in to take part in the work.

During this period, the birthing begins and drop by drop the milking season begins in late December or early January. It will last until June. The women and men have their hands full with work from morning until evening and even sometimes at night. The men handle the birthing, monitoring the newborns and their mothers, maintaining the health of the herd and protecting the young goats from predators. The women handle milking and producing cheese and butter from the milk, in addition to their routine tasks. During this period, at least one additional female family member will join the two permanent women.

In a rainy year, the grasses will already begin growing in February and the shepherds will begin relying more and more on the pasture to feed the sheep. As the barley and wheat sprout and begin to grow, the herds must be led around the fields and all the agricultural lands. In the spring, the shepherds go out at 5:30am and return home in the late afternoon with an almost-satiated herd which receives a symbolic meal as it enters the pen. This period of relying on natural pasture is what actually allows the Yatta District shepherds to subsist from their work. If they had to feed the herd with purchased food, they would not have lasted with this lifestyle. Therefore, the pasture lands are a necessity. As previously mentioned, there are extensive pasture lands within the domain of the Firing Zone - next to the extensive agricultural lands, up and down the hills, where the grass is high and food can be found in abundance during rainy years.

Prior to the harvest, in April, the entire family is once again recruited. Some of the time, the threshing is done cooperatively between neighbors. After the harvest, the herd will go to the fields that were harvested for a final period of highly nourishing grazing, which can continue until June. In addition, the herd is nourished from the barley harvested from the agricultural lands around the same time.

The hot summer months of July, August and September are relatively restful. During these months, the herd can be maintained by a small team – the hard core of one or two shepherds and two women. There is no pasture and there is not a lot of work relative to the other months, with the exception of feeding and watering the herd twice a day and taking it “out for a walk” twice a day. During this period, some of the village residents will “take a vacation” to visit their relatives in the higher areas of the District and in Yatta itself.

From this detailed description, it can be seen that for at least nine months of the year, the extended family works intensively with and around the herd on their land. Working the land satisfies the needs of the herd and together they provide for the needs of the family.

Conclusion

The residents of the twelve communities in the area designated as Firing Zone 918 continue traditions and patterns that have existed in the area over the course of many generations. They live, like their ancestors, around cave dwellings hundreds of years old, on land passed down from father to son. They are maintaining the continuity of fellahin shepherd communities dwelling in the Yatta District. Their occupation necessitates a unique way of life and is based on expertise passed on from father to son, from mother to daughter. They continue a tradition and technology that relies on drylands agriculture, and just like their ancestors, they manage to survive and continue to subsist off their lands.

As a part of this lifestyle, the land, the herd and human beings are connected together in one space. Due to the combination between the three in time and place, the residents manage, even in the face of constant confrontation with the forces of nature, and despite limitations and constraints of geopolitics, to survive and continue to support their families in the space that is their home.

In order to continue to support their families and way of life, the farming fellahin cannot do anything other than live on their agricultural and pasture land. This space is critical for the continued existence of their way of life, and their permanent residence there, as I have shown, is imperative.

In this space, an entire fabric of life developed including familial, communal, and inter-communal spaces. Blood and marital bonds, cooperation based on mutual interest, solidarity and friendship all exist in the space and weave the family and community into a single life pattern.

The connection with Yatta is also imperative. Yatta is the regional town and the district is its rural hinterland. The town provides merchandise and services, and the villages provide meat and dairy products. A considerable number of the village residents' relatives live in Yatta – those who integrated into the urban sphere and those who require its services on a daily basis. Due to its inaccessibility, despite the relative proximity, the cognitive and economic distance to Yatta is vast. The urban center and village center are inter-dependent, and this mutuality is conditional upon their being different from one another and existing separately.

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This document is an unofficial English translation. The original document in Hebrew can be found [here](#).