

# Letters from Overseas

Sherry Ann Chapman Writes from Israel/Palestine

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**“Structural violence is silent. It does not show. Television captures the direct violence and most often the violence of the powerless and the hopeless, and it is headlined as terror.”**

(Zaru, 2008, p. 62)



Jean Zaru<sup>1</sup>, a Palestinian Quaker woman, offers this insight as she writes about the impact of the Israeli government’s occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. She offers a lens for analyzing structures of injustice such as political, cultural, economic, and social structures. Through the winter of 2010–2011 as an ecumenical accompanier supported by The United Church of Canada’s Mission and Service Fund, I have gained insight into the need for global dialogue toward ending the silence about the occupation.

An example of economic structural violence is the new Jerusalem Light Rail Train (JLRT). Planning for it began in 2000. By 2020, the network is to have eight lines. Since December 2010, we, in the EAPPI Jerusalem Team, have watched trains out for test drives on the first line. We have sat in the traffic caused by the construction, particularly in Shu’afat. This is a Palestinian neighbourhood through which the JLRT will travel as it heads north and then east.

At first glance, the JLRT appears to be evidence of improved infrastructure in East Jerusalem. It has a sleek design and a street-level entry system for passengers. However, this new transportation feature is a bizarre sight amid the crumbling environment that is East Jerusalem. The Jerusalem municipality is responsible for maintaining East Jerusalem’s infrastructure; yet, despite paying into the same tax system as people from West Jerusalem, those in East Jerusalem are watching their area fall apart.

Upon closer examination, the JLRT is an ominous development. East Jerusalem is occupied, yet through the JLRT, illegal settlers are being given ease of access to central Jerusalem for work, school, and other daily activities. By creating this people-mover system, the Israeli government is proceeding with its annexation of East Jerusalem toward its goal of a united capital for the state of Israel. Such annexation is illegal under international humanitarian law.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Zaru is the Presiding Clerk of the Friends Meeting House in Ramallah and a founding member of Sabeel, an ecumenical Palestine Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem.

To build the JLRT tracks, the Israeli government expropriated Palestinian private property; in addition, public roadways and parking spaces have been taken over to reconfigure space for the JLRT tracks. With little space in which to drive and/or park, local shoppers have been less able to support local businesses. Only 3 of the 23 stops on this first JLRT line are in Palestinian areas. With the other 20 stops located in West Jerusalem, along the Green Line, and in the illegal settlements, the benefit of this new infrastructure to occupied East Jerusalem is questionable.

I perceive that the JLRT is an example of economic structural violence. Jean Zaru observes that “Violence, after all, is not only about war and weaponry. Political, cultural, economic, and social structures have been at work in a destructive way throughout our community” (Zaru, 2008, p. 61). The examples that she gives for economic structural violence include restricted freedom of movement by Israeli roadblocks and control of roads; economic marginalization and exclusion; and destruction of civil society and infrastructure. International corporate complicity in the construction of the JLRT is another dimension of economic support for the Israeli government’s occupation of East Jerusalem.

After three months of riding the bus to and from Shu’afat refugee camp, Qalandiya Checkpoint, and the Old City (all in East Jerusalem), I have noticed that structural violence is mind-bendingly subtle. Looking out the window, I have seen a diversity of people in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, age, gender, profession, and civilian/military status. Yet, East Jerusalem is not a place in which all of these people mix and mingle easily.

Jean Zaru’s perspective can help us, globally, to start talking about these silent forms of violence as much as we talk about the news headlines. In this way, we as global citizens can contribute to ending the silence and the occupation, toward a just peace.

**For more information, please see these online resources:**

Barghouti, O. (2009). Derailing Injustice: Palestinian Civil Resistance to the “Jerusalem Light Rail”. *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 38, 46-58.  
[www.jerusalemquarterly.org/ViewArticle.aspx?id=304](http://www.jerusalemquarterly.org/ViewArticle.aspx?id=304)

The Civic Coalition for Defending Palestinians’ Rights in Jerusalem. (2009). *The Jerusalem Light Rail Train: Consequences and Effect*. Jerusalem: Authors.  
[www.civiccoalition-jerusalem.org/ccdprj.ps/new/pdfs/](http://www.civiccoalition-jerusalem.org/ccdprj.ps/new/pdfs/)

Diakonia’s webpage regarding the JLRT and its violation of international humanitarian law.  
[www.diakonia.se/sa/node.asp?node=3274](http://www.diakonia.se/sa/node.asp?node=3274)

Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. [www.eappi.org](http://www.eappi.org)



Human Rights Watch. (2010, Dec.). *Separate and Unequal: Israel's Discriminatory Treatment of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*. New York: Authors. [www.hrw.org/en/reports/2010/12/19/separate-and-unequal-0](http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2010/12/19/separate-and-unequal-0)

Zaru, Jean. (2008). *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*. Foreword by Rosemary Radford Ruether. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

*To learn more, visit Sherry Ann's blogs at [EA Stories4Peace](#), [WallArt4Peace](#), and [KidsStories4Peace](#), or view [photos](#) of EAPPI work taken by United Church accompaniers.*

Sherry Ann works for The United Church of Canada as an ecumenical accompanier serving on the [World Council of Churches/Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel \(EAPPI\)](#). The views contained herein are personal and do not necessarily reflect those of her employer (The United Church of Canada) or the WCC. If you would like to publish the information contained here or disseminate it further, please first contact the EAPPI Communications and Advocacy Officer ([eappi-co@jrol.com](mailto:eappi-co@jrol.com)) for permission.

