



***"It's What We Do":
A Play About the Occupation***

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Discussion Guide

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Important information about the play

All of the soldiers' reflections, and all of what they say narrating their stories, is taken verbatim from the Breaking the Silence testimonies. The enacted scenes are stories from the testimonies, with dialogue created by the playwright. Each soldier is a composite of several from the testimonies; each represents a specific response to the occupation policies s/he enforces.

How to Use this Guide

This guide is intended to give you ideas for organizing a discussion after viewing “*It’s What We Do.*” Of course, you may already have your own ideas, better suited to your group and event. In any case, you may find ideas here to nudge your own, or may pick from among the various options presented.

Here you will find several possible formats for your discussion as well as questions and details for each format. Regardless of your approach, *please complete an online evaluation after your program* so that we can continuously improve our materials.

Evaluations

We would like all discussion leaders to fill out the evaluation on the IWWD website as soon as possible after your event. It is very short and will help us to continually revise our Discussion Guide, based on your responses. If participants in your group would like to share their responses with us (and we encourage this), ask them to submit them via the Contact link on our website (iwwdplay.org).

For the Best Discussions

- The video is 55 minutes. A good discussion will last no longer than one hour afterwards. It is a good idea to have notecards, pens or pencils for the participants, and a flipchart or whiteboard and markers.
- Allow at least 10 minutes at the end for a wrap-up. The wrap-up should include promoting ideas for action—depending on your group, from handing out the Resource Sheet to signing up for local Israeli/Palestinian (I/P) activities.
- Assign a timekeeper to keep the discussion on track.

Decide how structured you want your discussion to be, based on the knowledge background of the participants. **Open discussions** are best when the group has significant background knowledge of I/P, and relatively the same knowledge level among the participants. If you think there may be strong disagreements in your group, or a wide variance in background, it is probably best to choose a more **structured discussion** activity, as this will keep people focused.

There are three things that can derail a discussion after the screening: when someone takes too much floor time, preventing others from participating; when someone brings in factors extraneous to the play and the issues it raises; and when personal attacks occur. Generally, these problems can be prevented by having explicit ground rules at the beginning, and by providing even the most free-ranging discussions with an inclusive structure.

Ground Rules for Discussion

It is very important when discussing the play and the issues it raises that ground rules be stated at the beginning to establish respect for each speaker and for the process itself.

Suggestions:

- When critical of the ideas expressed, be careful not to attack the speaker personally.
- No interruptions.
- Establish process for calling on people. (raising hands or not)
- Establish time limit for questions/opinions. (1 minute or less? 2 - 3 minutes for response?)
- Establish priority for those who have not yet spoken.
- Encourage expressions of differing opinions. The discussion is intended to elicit difficult conversations.

You may have other ideas to add to this list, but it is preferable to keep the list short. It is a good idea to have these rules displayed on a flipchart page or elsewhere for reference during the discussion. They should first be read out loud; participants may suggest additions; and then the group should agree to abide by them.

Open Discussions

1. Guest Speakers

For larger groups, you may want to invite Palestinian and/or Israeli or Jewish speakers as panelists who can offer their thoughts on the play. Keep in mind that in such a case, there will be much less audience discussion.

2. Before and After Discussions (best for smaller groups)

Before viewing the video, ask the participants to write down answers to these questions:

- What were the main things you learned about Palestine and Israel as you were growing up?
- What are the main impressions you continue to have about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict?

After viewing the video, ask participants how the play reinforced or challenged the impressions they mentioned at the beginning. Give them a few minutes to reflect and write on this. Then ask for responses and discuss them as a group.

3. Question-based Discussions

This type of discussion is best when the group has significant background knowledge on I/P, and relatively the same knowledge level among the participants. An inclusive structure for open discussions is to first take a minute for people to think about and write down their questions on notecards. This will encourage more thoughtful questions. Then ask for as many questions as possible, writing them down on the flipchart. Have the group then vote on which questions they would like to discuss. This allows all a chance to put their questions forward, and is democratic because of the voting. You will also find that many people may have similar questions you can group together. You should take no more than 10 minutes for this opening structure. You can then have a 50-minute discussion.

If you run out of questions to discuss, you can refer to the questions provided below. It's a good idea to prioritize them ahead of time, including at least one from each of the groupings.

Questions for Discussion

The stories and scenes from the play are listed below under the **Scene Discussion Exercise**.

The Soldiers:

Keep in mind that all of the soldiers' dialogue with the Voice (when they narrate stories or reflect on their experiences) is verbatim from the Breaking the Silence (BtS) transcripts.

- The power of naming: "Israeli," "Jew," "Palestinian," and "Arab": Why might the Israeli soldiers use different identity descriptors than you would? How is naming important? How might it be helpful or harmful?
- How do the soldiers relate to real or perceived threats to the security of Jewish Israelis?
- Why listen to Israeli soldiers' perspectives? Why not just the perspectives of Palestinians?
- End of play--what do the differing soldiers' exits mean to you?

- Is it important for justice between Palestinians and Israelis that the Israeli soldiers feel remorse for what they have done? Why or why not?
- Which of the soldiers' stories is most surprising to you? (Refer to scene list in the Scene Discussion Exercise.) Why?
- Each of the three soldiers has a different way of processing the fact that s/he did something s/he thought was wrong in retrospect. Do you identify more with one of them than with the others?
- Have you ever been conscripted into a military unit? How might this affect the Israeli soldiers you see in the play?
- Why do you think Israeli soldiers want to give testimony to BtS*?
- What more would you like to know about Breaking the Silence?
- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is promoting—and the Knesset developing--a law to shut down organizations like Breaking the Silence which are critical of the Israeli military. Why do you think the Israeli government is interested in creating such a law?

Palestinians:

Because the stories are told from the soldiers' perspectives, we see only certain aspects of Palestinian lives. Considering this--

- What are the different ways Palestinians resist in the scenes? (See particularly *Erez Crossing*.)
- Destroying Palestinian agriculture: What is the difference between the IDF* destruction of olive orchards to build the Wall and the settlers vandalizing farms neighboring the settlements? (*Farmer's Olive Trees Destroyed*; *Policy of Silent Transfer**)
- What do you think of the idea that abuse of Palestinians is "normal" in Hebron? (*Kafka in Hebron*) How does the phenomenon of normalization* obscure injustices? What are other ways that the occupation may be normalized, including through media coverage and even groups working for justice in I/P?
- How might watching this play be triggering—or difficult—for Palestinians?

Settlers:

- How do you think the settlers in the play justify their actions toward Palestinians?
- Many Israelis in developed West Bank settlements see themselves as different from the settlers portrayed in the play. How do you think they are different and similar?

The Play:

- Who do you think the Voice is? What is her function in the play?
- End of play—what does the last image mean to you?
- What is the role of children in the play? If they were absent, what would be lost?
- The play gives some idea of the daily realities of occupation for many Palestinians. How would you describe the image you are given? How is this occupation different from war?
- What similarities/differences do you see between Israeli and U.S. societies?
- What similarities/differences do you see between the way Palestinians are treated in the play and the way some minorities are treated in the U.S.?
- Some have used the word "apartheid"* to describe the I/P situation. Do you think this is an accurate descriptor based on what you see and hear in the play?
- To what extent are settlers* similar to or different from Israelis living within the so-called Green Line*?

Social Justice and Religion:

- Theologian Paul Tillich described love, power, and justice as intertwined. You can't have any one of these without the other two. How do you see this articulated in the play?
- Some see the testimonies of the Breaking the Silence soldiers as confessions in which they seek to relieve themselves of their guilt. Do you agree with this? Why do you think Israeli soldiers would want to testify to BtS, from a religious perspective?
- What role does compassion play in working for justice, and do you see this in the play or not?
- What role does acknowledgement of wrongdoing have in promoting justice? Where in the play do the soldiers do this? Why would they have difficulty acknowledging this?

* See *Glossary of Terms*

Structured Discussion Exercises

If you think there may be strong disagreements in your group, or a wide variance in background, it is probably best to choose a more structured discussion activity, as this will keep people focused.

Exercises for Different Levels

1. Unpacking the Play: Appropriate for all Levels

Needed: small note cards; flip chart or board (optional)

A. For whole group discussion if group is smaller than 15 people:

Pass out note cards before the film. On the flipchart or board, write these questions, and ask the participants to respond to them after the film.

- What was the most important thing you learned from the play? Why?
- What was the most controversial aspect of the play? Why?
- What quotation, scene, or character stands out for you? Why?

After the screening, give the audience time to write down their answers and also to think about the “why” component of each. The “why” is the most important part of their answers. (5 minutes)

Then go through each question, soliciting answers, and writing down shorthand phrases to represent answers on the flipchart. There will probably be some overlap. After soliciting answers, open it up for more discussion on any one of them. Depending on how many answers you have, you may want to vote on the ones to be discussed. Allow 15 minutes for each question.

B. If the group is large (over 15 people):

- Break into small groups to encourage better discussion. For greater diversity in the groups, have people count off by 4, with all 1's in one group, all 2's in another, etc. Groups should be no bigger than 4 to allow for adequate discussion among the members. It is possible that you will have more than one group addressing a question if your audience is large enough, but this is okay.

Assign one question to each group to discuss for 15 minutes.

- Ask for one person from each group to take notes for a report back of key points at the end of the 15 minutes. Then each group “reporter” should state the key points as you write them on the board/flipchart. (15 minutes)
- For the last question, after getting ideas from the relevant small group(s), have the larger group vote on which scene, character or quotation to discuss (among those raised by the smaller group(s)). Then open it up to the larger group for a 15-minute discussion. (20 minutes)

2. Scene Discussion: Intermediate Level Exercise

If your group would like to discuss a specific scene, first replay the scene for them to view. (You can access it on the DVD.) Refer to the scenes listed below.

Possible questions for scene discussion:

- Why do the soldiers do what they do in this scene?

- How do the Palestinians respond or resist?
- What is the soldiers' response/attitude to the Palestinians in the scene? What is it after the scene (in their reflections)?
- What might be the justification of the IDF for the soldiers' actions in the scene? How might the action further the goals of the Israeli government?
- In most of the scenes, the soldiers are conflicted about what they did. Identify their conflicts in this scene.

The Stories/Scenes from the Play:

All of the scenes are stories told by the soldiers in their testimonies.

- *Running a Checkpoint*—crossing without a permit; soldier abuse
- *Kafka in Hebron*—making the absurd normal
- *Gaza Blockade*—shooting at the kids for “security”
- *Erez Crossing*—“You can’t bring anything in.”
- *Farmer’s Olive Trees Destroyed*—the Wall
- *House Search* and Vandalism
- Settlers:
 - *The Policy of Silent Transfer*--taking farmers’ land, trees, sheep
 - *The Medic*—children hurting children
 - *Price Tag*—soldiers protecting violent settlers
- *Change of Address*—house demolition as collective punishment

3. Exploring a Quote: Advanced Exercise

This exercise is best for groups that have considerable knowledge about the Israeli/Palestinian history and conflict. It offers the opportunity to be quite open-ended and creative. Responses may relate to other aspects of the play, the I/P conflict in general, analogies to U.S. society (or other global ones), or personal connections.

Needed: Note cards and flip chart

Hand out note cards at the beginning of your screening. Tell the participants to write down any quotes that stand out to them as significant in terms of the play as a whole, or the I/P situation in general.

After the screening, ask for several quotes from the group and write them on the board or flipchart. Ask each contributor to explain why the quote chosen is significant. Choose no more than 5 (possibly by voting) for a discussion with the entire group. (45 minutes)

If the group has difficulty coming up with quotes, here are some that other audience members have chosen:

“VOICE

. . . . Were any of you stationed near the Wall?

SOLDIER 2

The separation barrier--it’s for Israel’s security.

SOLDIER 1

Separation wall, separation fence, apartheid wall, security wall, security fence-

SOLDIER 2

It is for Israel’s security!

SOLDIER 3

Not exactly--

VOICE

What do you mean?

SOLDIER 3

Well, it's going around settlements, taking over a lot more of the Palestinians' land. It's an annexation wall."

"I was a part of a machine that spread a lot of devastation and fear." (Soldier 1)

"Our mission is to disrupt and harass people's lives.' That was our job description. Disrupt the lives of the people who live there, because this disrupts terrorist activity." (Soldier 1)

"In the Territories, every Palestinian is a potential terrorist." (Soldier 3)

"This was the first time I understood that everything I was told was complete bullshit. From then on, I didn't stop doing the things I did. I just stopped thinking." (Soldier 2)

"A person who gave you some trouble, who disturbed the peace at the checkpoint, who spoke to you in a certain way . . . you have to keep your authority, you have to keep it so they respect you. That's the reality of the checkpoint. " (Soldier 3)

"The settlers told me, 'We stretch the law; the law will bend according to what we do.'" (Soldier 2)

"I have to flip a switch in my brain so I can keep hating Arabs and justifying what the Jews do. But no, wait, I still can't agree with the Jews, because they started it, it's because of the settlers that we're here." (Soldier 1)

Action for Justice—Now What?

By this point, lots of opinions may have been expressed, including quite different or even antagonistic ones. Think of how to wrap up the discussion and move on to future actions, if possible.

- Acknowledge that it's been a good discussion and thank everyone one for participating...and for abiding by the ground rules.
- Suggest that everyone stand up and take a brief stretch break before starting the final part of the discussion.
- Ask for one or two-word indicators of how people are feeling about what they have seen, heard, and learned in this session (surprised, shocked, angry, depressed, energized...etc.) Or if no one speaks up, the facilitator could name some of these possibilities and ask for a show of hands.
- Ask if people feel motivated to take any next steps, either on their own or in concert with others. If so, what might they be? (Many will probably say, learn more through reading, more films, etc.)
- If no one suggests any of the bulleted options below, perhaps you could have them listed on a flipchart sheet that's not been visible till now...or hand out a flier listing them....and then ask for responses to these alternatives.

Depending on the composition of the group, there may be people who have taken some of these actions on behalf of other causes. But there may well be no one who has ever gotten so involved. You could ask for a show of hands to indicate interest in these different ideas as a means of identifying those participants who might want to meet again to discuss how to proceed.

For large gatherings, you might also list different options on separate sheets posted around the room. Ask people to write their names on sticky notes and place them on one or more option sheets in which they are interested. Because people are moving around the room, no one particularly notices individuals who choose not to "vote" for any option. Thus this method doesn't cause the embarrassment of putting people on the spot in front of their colleagues the way that raising hands does. It also enables follow up by those wishing to convene particular action teams. This works best if the event has had a sign-in sheet where people give their email addresses, so they can be contacted later.

Another idea—especially if there is not a great deal of interest expressed in follow-up activities-- is to hand each person an index card and an envelope and ask them to think of what step or steps they wanted to commit themselves to over the next few months. They write that commitment on the card, seal it in the envelope, and write their name and address on the outside. Then you can mail the envelopes back to them after the stated period of time.

Some people have placed a candle in the middle of the room and asked everyone to take a few minutes for silent meditation or thought before writing down their personal commitment. This could be introduced with a short passage of Scripture or a prayer if you are a faith community.

The important thing is to impress upon participants that we each have to make a choice to act or not to act, whether or not we choose to share it with others.

A list of possible future actions, to display or discuss:

- Building Knowledge: Hand out copies of the Resource Sheet or one of the maps available at the Resources page of our website.
- Promoting additional education in your faith-based organization or group
- Joining an Organization
- Lobbying Congress
- Spreading the Word
- Local Actions, for instance:
 - writing letters to the editor of a local paper
 - holding demonstrations or vigils locally
 - finding like-minded individuals nearby to brainstorm actions with

Don't forget the Evaluation!

Glossary of Terms

Apartheid:

1. Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition: Name given in South Africa to the segregation of the inhabitants of European descent from the non-European (Coloured or mixed, Bantu, Indian, etc.); applied also to any similar movement elsewhere; also, to other forms of racial separation (social, educational, etc.).
2. Oxford Living Dictionaries: Segregation on grounds other than race, e.g. "gender apartheid."
3. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7, Section 2h: "The crime of apartheid" means inhumane acts of a character similar to those referred to in paragraph 1, committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.

Breaking the Silence: An Israeli organization of veteran combatants who have served in the Israeli military since the start of the Second Intifada and have taken it upon themselves to expose the Israeli public to the reality of everyday life in the Occupied Territories. From the BtS website: *We endeavor to stimulate public debate about the price paid for a reality in which young soldiers face a civilian population on a daily basis, and are engaged in the control of that population's everyday life. Our work aims to bring an end to the occupation.* (See the Resources page at our website for more on Breaking the Silence.)

Checkpoints: The number of checkpoints and roadblocks fluctuates from 81 to over 500 on any given day. They can take various forms. They can be internal to the West Bank, along the Green Line (separating the State of Israel from the West Bank) inside the city of Hebron, and "flying" checkpoints and improvised roadblocks within the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The checkpoints are mainly designed to monitor Palestinian movement. (B'Tselem; see the Resources page at our website for more.)

The United Nations, in its February 2009 Humanitarian Monitor report, stated that it is becoming "apparent" that the checkpoints and obstacles, which Israeli authorities justified from the beginning of the second Intifada (September 2000) as a temporary military response to violent confrontations and attacks on Israeli civilians, are evolving into "a more permanent system of control" that is steadily reducing the space available for Palestinian growth and movement for the benefit of the increasing Israeli settler population.

Forbidden Roads, By-Pass Roads: Palestinian travel is restricted or entirely prohibited on 41 roads and sections of roads throughout the West Bank, including many of the main traffic arteries, covering a total of over 700 kilometers of roadway. Israelis can travel freely on these roads. These roads connect the settlements and large Israeli cities. (B'Tselem; see the Resources page at our website for more.)

The Green Line: This is the demarcation line set out in the 1949 Armistice Agreements between the armies of Israel and those of its neighbors (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria) after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. It served as the *de facto* border of the State of Israel from 1949 until the Six-Day War in 1967. The Green Line is often referred to as the "pre-1967 border" or the "1967 border" by many international bodies and texts, including UN General Assembly Resolutions.

IDF: The Israeli Defense Forces. The IDF is a conscripted military. All Israelis 18 or over are required to serve unless they are Arabs, orthodox Jews, or receive an exemption. Men serve 32

months, and women, two years. Reserve duty up to the ages of 40-45, depending on the soldier's status, is mandatory.

Normalization: In the sense of making what is unacceptable appear normal, as in the “normalization of violence” in some films. As applied to I/P, it refers to attempts to make the occupation policies of Israel and treatment of Palestinians appear “normal.” This can be for a variety of reasons: the occupation has been maintained for so long that it seems the normal state of things; it is to Israel's benefit to see the occupation as normal so it doesn't have to be concerned about changing it; it requires Palestinians to adjust to policies that are seen as normal, rather than unjust. Normalization is a major concern for those who want to dismantle the occupation. Even well-intentioned activists can be guilty of normalizing when they design activities or programs that don't acknowledge the power differential between the Israeli State and Palestinians; the structural injustice of the occupation itself is invisible.

The Policy of Silent Transfer: This term has been used to refer to specific Israeli government policies, such as the steady encroachment of settlements onto neighboring Palestinian farms (as in the scene in the play). It is also used to refer to the overall intent of Israeli government policies to make life so difficult for Palestinians—by taking away their livelihoods, disrupting their time (the checkpoint regimen), or requiring a multitude of permits for travel, generators, livestock, etc.—that the Palestinians will want to leave the Occupied Territories of their own accord. This policy is “silent” because there is no law explicitly stating its intent.

Price Tag Attacks: Attacks on Palestinian property perpetrated by extremist settlers, often accompanied by graffiti with the words “price tag.” (See the article by the Centre on Religion and Geopolitics, now the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, accessible on our Resources page.)

Settlements:

There are currently 131 settlements (officially established by the Israeli government, excluding Jerusalem) and 97 outposts (illegal under Israeli law), and over 400,000 settlers in the West Bank. The settlements are often well-developed urban areas, with their own schools, parks, and other infrastructure. Many of the largest surround Jerusalem and are bedroom communities. The Israeli government offers financial incentives for Israelis to live in official West Bank settlements.

The settlements began to be built after the 1967 War, when Israel annexed the West Bank, as well as other Arab territories. In addition to the financial incentives, some settlers and their supporters cite the Jewish Bible, thousands of years of Jewish history, and Israel's need for “strategic depth” as reasons for living in the West Bank. Palestinians see the settlements as so dividing the W.B. that it makes a two-state solution impossible.

See the NPR article and Peace Now page (settlement map and data) accessible from the Resources page on our website.

Settlers: Settlers are Israeli citizens subject to Israeli law living within the Occupied Palestinian Territories outside of the internationally recognized State of Israel. They now comprise roughly 600,000 Israelis (including the 200,000 in East Jerusalem), or almost 10% of Israel's 6.3 million Jewish citizens. Settlers are 13% of the W.B. population. See more information under “Settlements” above.

The Wall: A separation barrier in the West Bank or along the Green Line. Israel considers it a security barrier against terrorism, while Palestinians call it a racial segregation or apartheid

wall. At a total length of 440 miles upon completion, the border traced by the barrier is more than double the length of the Green Line, with 15% running along it or in Israel, while the remaining 85% cuts at times 11 miles deep into the West Bank. (Wikipedia)

Though Israelis claim the Wall was built to keep terrorists out, its intrusion into the West Bank actually places 35,000 Palestinians (not including those in East Jerusalem) on the Israeli side, while also capturing for Israel's use major aquifers that were part of Palestinian territory.